

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

ENGLISH
Course Eng.: 102
(1st Semester)

Poetry:
Chaucer to the Romantics

Block : 1 & 2

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning
DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY
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ENGLISH

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This paper is designed to acquaint you with the trends and developments that have occurred in the evolution of English poetry down the ages. The paper precisely deals with the period beginning from the Age of Chaucer to the Romantics. This paper is divided into four sections—Block-I to Block-IV and these four sections are further sub-divided into eleven units. The paper is designed to make you well conversant with the development of English poetry from its beginning to the Romantic Period.

The **first Block** deals with Medieval and Renaissance poetry and is divided into two Units.

Unit-I of this Block introduces you to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*. This unit will help you to understand the beginning of English poetry by exposing you to one of the pioneers of English poetry— Geoffrey Chaucer. In fourteenth century England French literature enjoyed more acceptability among the elite class than English as it had not developed into a full fledged language in which literature can be written. Geoffrey Chaucer who imbibed in him the influences of Italian and French literature adopted English as a language for writing literature and succeeded in producing his master piece *The Canterbury Tales*. In this unit you will study *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* which would give you a fair idea about the characters portrayed in the main text and more importantly *The Prologue* would provide you with a clear picture of the fourteenth century society of England. In *The Prologue* Chaucer paints a very realistic portrayal of the social life of England in fourteenth century as he draws his characters from a diverse section of common folk of the society.

Unit-II of this Block will familiarize you with William Shakespeare; one of the most widely read dramatists and poets ever lived on this planet. You will read some of his sonnet (Sonnet No. 19, 73, 107, and 144) from his Sonnet sequence of 154 sonnets. You will be apprised of the fact that how this Italian form of short poem has undergone a number

of modifications in structure and content at the hands of Elizabethan sonneteers like Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Shakespeare. In this unit an attempt has been made to familiarize you with the poetic form of sonnet and the unique way Shakespeare treats the themes like time, beauty, death, friendship in these sonnets.

The **second Block** is about Metaphysical Poetry and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book-I and Book-II). This Block is divided into two Units—Unit –I and Unit –II. **Unit-I** deals with Metaphysical Poetry of John Donne. The prescribed poems are – “The Good Marrow”, “The Sunne Rising”, “The Canonisation”, “At the round earth's imagined corners”, and “Death be not Proud”. This Unit would not only make you well conversant with the features of Metaphysical Poetry but also acquaint you with the application of these features in the poetry of Donne. This Unit will also familiarize you with Donne's novel treatment of the theme of love and death in his poetry.

Block-II, Unit-II deals with Book-I and II of *Paradise Lost*. This Unit comprehensively discusses the background of the Age of Milton, the socio-political and religious condition of England of the age. This Unit presents a very detail discussion on the genre of epic poetry and how Milton adopts those features of epic in *Paradise Lost* to make it a classical epic.

Block-III discusses Neo-Classical Poetry. It is divided into two Units, Unit-I and II. **Unit-I** is about John Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*. This Unit includes an informed discussion on satire and its popularity during the Neo-Classic Age. The Unit makes an attempt to make you familiarize with the poetic form and technique used by Dryden in *Mac Flecknoe*. This Unit will give you the confidence to critically evaluate the poem.

Unit-II of Block-III discusses Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* (Book-IV). The discussion on *The Dunciad* presents an illustrative study on the author, the age he lived in, and the social milieu, and such other factors responsible for the production of the text. This Unit also discusses the critical aspects related to *The Dunciad* (Book-IV) like mock epic and satire in a very comprehensive manner.

Block-IV is divided into five Units. All the five Units of Block-IV discusses Romantic Poetry. **Unit-I** of this Block discusses William Blake, one of the pioneers of Romantic Movement, in English poetry. This Unit is an attempt to acquaint you with the Romantic Movement in English Poetry and to apprise you of the features of Romantic Poetry in detail. The prescribed poems of William Blake are discussed individually dealing with the textual issues. The poems are, “Holy Thursday”, “London”, and “The Tyger”.

Unit-II of Block –IV introduces you to one of the most widely read and critically acclaimed Romantic poets, William Wordsworth. The two poems *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, and *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* attempt to familiarize you with the trend of Romanticism in English poetry. The Unit presents a discussion on Wordsworth’s treatment of the theme of nature and childhood in these two poems

Unit-III of Block IV presents another comprehensive discussion on Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* (Book-XI). This Unit attempts to highlight the uniqueness of Lord Byron which makes him stand apart from his predecessors of Romantic poetry. This Unit also highlights how Lord Byron constantly waged a struggle to unshackle the authoritarian constraints against the prevailing customs of the age.

Unit-IV of Block –IV brings to you a critical discussion on P. B. Shelley and his most anthologized poem “Ode to the West Wind”. This particular poem is considered to be one of the most revolutionary poems of Shelley. This poem is critically acclaimed because of its treatment of the theme of freedom and change through revolutionary ideals. The analysis of the poem highlights the poet’s individualistic perception of social change at the same time the poem has maintained its universal appeal down the ages.

Unit-V of Block –IV discusses another significant Romantic poet of the period, John Keats. This Unit presents a critical study of the poem “Ode to the Nightingale” and also discusses the various critical issues associated with this poem. The critical study on the poem “Ode to the Nightingale” underlines Keats’ treatment of the theme of the conflict

between the real and the ideal artistic world of imagination where the poet seems to be more inclined towards the tranquil artistic world rather than the harsh world of reality.

It is advisable to the learners that while going through the Units of this paper they should make an attempt to solve the “Check Your Progress” questions as they move on. “Check Your Progress” is designed as a process of self evaluation to assess your own progress. Attempt has also been made to provide you with some additional information on the topics in the form of “Stop to Consider” boxes. These “Stop to Consider” boxes give you some more information about the subject you are reading. Do make use of them. We have added a comprehensive list of books in the form of References or Suggested readings at the end of every unit to help you to go further if you so wish. By consulting the books mentioned in the reference section you can enhance your sphere of knowledge on the given subject. Hope this Self Learning Material on Course 102 would be helpful to you in the way as we have designed it.

BLOCK-I
MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE POETRY

Unit-I

Chaucer, “Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*

Structure:

1.0 Objectives

1.1 An introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer

Check Your Progress

1.2 An introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*

Check Your Progress

1.2.1 An introduction to *The Prologue*

Check Your Progress

1.2.2 Description of various characters in *The Prologue*

Check Your Progress

1.3 Important themes

1.3.1 *The Prologue* as a cross-section of the fourteenth century
English society

1.3.2 The ecclesiastical characters in *The Prologue*

CYP

1.4 Conclusion

1.5 Reference/Suggested reading

1.6 Model questions

1.0 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are:

- To initiate the learner into the study of English literature by familiarizing them with Geoffrey Chaucer and the three literary phases of his life.
- To provide the reader with a general idea of *The Canterbury Tales*.
- To make the learner familiarize with *The Prologue* and to give a short account of the various characters in *The Prologue*
- To acquaint the learner with some of the important themes of *The Prologue*.

1.1 An Introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer can be said to be the most recognisable and arguably the most representative English writer of the medieval period. The career of Chaucer exhibits some of the general tendencies of the age, the most significant of them being the fact that English was not the only medieval language in which the writers exercised their creative resources. It was also an age where the writing was not always done by male clerics and not all literature was religious. Chaucer's own literary output is a combination of these tendencies. The poetry of Chaucer suggests many of the highlights of medieval literature. His poetry makes use of the chivalric ideal but not at the expense of a down-to-earth realism which foregrounds worldly wisdom.

For convenience, the life of Chaucer can be divided into three periods. The first, of thirty years, includes his youth and early manhood, in which time he was influenced almost exclusively by French literary models. The second period, of fifteen years, covers Chaucer's active life as diplomat and man of affairs; and in this period, the Italian influence seems stronger than the French. The third, of fifteen years, generally known as the English period, is the time of Chaucer's richest development. He lives at home, observes life closely and while the French

influence is still strong, as shown in *The Canterbury Tales*, he seems to grow more independent of foreign models and is dominated chiefly by the vigorous life of his own English people. The works of Chaucer too are roughly divided into three classes, corresponding to the three periods of his life. The best known poem of the first period is the *Romaunt of the Rose*, a translation from the French *Roman de la Rose*, the most popular poem of the Middle Ages; a graceful but exceedingly tiresome allegory of the whole course of love. Perhaps the best poem of this period is the “*De the of Blanche the Duchesse*”, better known as the “*Book of the Duchesse*”, a poem of considerable dramatic and emotional power, written after the death of Blanche, wife of Chaucer’s patron, John of Gaunt.

The chief work of the second or Italian period is *Troilus and Criseyde*, a poem of eight thousand lines. The original story was a favourite of many authors during the Middle Ages, and Shakespeare makes use of it in his *Troilus and Cressida*. The source of Chaucer’s poem is Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, “the love smitten one” but Chaucer uses his material to reflect the ideals of his own age and society, and so gives to the whole story a dramatic force and beauty which it had never known before. One of Chaucer’s unfinished poem is the “*House of Fame*”, which shows the influence of the great Italian master. Another great poem of this period is the *Legend of Good Women*.

Chaucer’s masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales* is one of the most famous works in all literature and fills the third or English period of his life. The crux of the work is to represent the wide sweep of English life by gathering a company of men together and letting each class of society tell its own favourite stories. Though this great work was never completed, Chaucer succeeded in his purpose so well in the fact that in *The Canterbury Tales*, we get a picture of the contemporary English life, its work and play, its deeds and dreams, its fun and sympathy and joy of living in a way that no other work of literature has ever equalled.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the different phases of Chaucer's literary career.

1.2 An introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* adopts the storyteller's framework exploited by the *Decameron of Boccaccio*. *The Canterbury tales* is remarkable for the way in which a wide spectrum of fourteenth century life is represented. Another aspect of the poem is that most of the pilgrims going on the journey to Canterbury come from the ecclesiastical world. In the fourteenth century and even earlier, faith played a major role in determining the direction of human life. The poem is also an example of the use of irony and satire to undercut most of the pretensions and preoccupations that are associated with the characters. The people coming from the non-religious professions also find a representation in the poem. Some of the characters that find a place in Chaucer's platform are an Oxford scholar, a manciple, the Wife of Bath, the merchant, the sailor, the cook, the miller and the reeve. Chaucer's work also introduced for the first time a note of the dramatic in medieval poetry but then his poetry exemplifies many medieval poetic codes: romance, legend saga, fabliaux, allegory, sermon and courtly love.

Geoffrey Chaucer's most celebrated but unfinished work, *The Canterbury Tales* extends to 17,000 lines in prose and verse of various metres. *The General Prologue* describes the meeting of twenty nine pilgrims in the Tabard Inn in Southwark. Opposite old London, at the southern end of London Bridge, once stood the Tabard Inn of Southwark. This Southwark served as the point of departure of all travel to the south of England, especially of those medieval pilgrimages to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury. On a spring evening, the narrator

alights at Tabard Inn and finds it occupied by a various company of people intending to go on a pilgrimage. It was the custom of the pilgrims to wait at some friendly inn until a sufficient company were gathered to make the journey pleasant and safe from robbers that might be encountered on the way. Chaucer joins this company, which includes all classes of English society, from the Oxford scholar to the drunken miller. The narrator in *The General Prologue* gives a descriptive account of twenty seven of these pilgrims including the Knight, the Squire, Yeoman, Prioress, Monk, Friar, Merchant, Clerk, the Man of Law, Franklin, Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyer, Upholsterer, Cook, Shipman, Physician, the Wife of Bath, Parson, Ploughman, Miller, Manciple, Reeve, Summoner, Pardoner and the Host. At supper, the host of the Tabard Inn in an attempt to enliven the journey suggests that the group rides together and entertain one another with stories. He decides that each of the pilgrims shall tell four tales, two while going to Canterbury and two while coming back. The host will travel with them and whoever he decides to be the best storyteller will be given a fine supper at the general expense when they all come back. The pilgrims draw lots and determine that the first tale will be told by the Knight.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss briefly the background of the action of *The Canterbury Tales*.
2. Where were the travelers going to for the pilgrimage?

1.2.1 An introduction to *The Prologue*

The Prologue introduces us to the background of the action and the pilgrims who make up the company and undergo the journey. From the number of people in the company, thirty two in all, it is evident that Chaucer intended an immense work of one hundred and twenty eight tales, which should cover the whole life and society of England. However, only twenty four tales were written, with some of the tales being incomplete, and others taken from his earlier work to fill out the general plan of *The Canterbury Tales*. Incomplete as they are, they cover a wide range, including stories of love and chivalry, of saints and legends, travels, adventures, animal fables, allegory, satires, and the coarse humour of the common people. Though all the tales but two are written in verse and abound in exquisite poetical touches, they are stories as well as poems, and Chaucer is to be regarded as our first storyteller as well as our first modern poet. In the famous Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer makes us acquainted with the various characters of the drama. The primary purpose of *The Prologue* is to show the variety of people, trades and social classes of this time period. There are pilgrims from the noble class (the Knight and the Squire), pilgrims from the middle class (the Merchant, Wife of bath, the Shipman) and some from the clergy (the Monk and the Friar). Through the variety of characters chosen by Chaucer, he shows the complexity of real characters. The characters are presented not as stereotypes but as realistic and complex people. Chaucer as a narrator describes each character objectively. These descriptions of the characters in *The Prologue* set the stage for the tales that follows. The characters that are introduced in *The Prologue*, becomes the narrator for their own tale. In this sense, that narrator (Chaucer) in *The Prologue* is introducing a variety of characters who will take their turn as narrator.

Now that we have a general idea of *The Prologue*, let us move and take a look into the description of the various characters that makes up *The Prologue of The Canterbury Tales*.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the original plan of Chaucer regarding the structure of *The Canterbury Tales* and how far did he really accomplish it?

2. What is the primary purpose of *The Prologue* ?

1.2.2 Description of the various characters in *The Prologue*

The narrator begins *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* with a vivid description of the spring season, the season in which pilgrimages took place. He gives a description of the chirping birds, the April rains and the growing flowers. It is around this time of the year when the rigour of winter has passed, that people long to go on pilgrimages. And above all, people from every shire of England choose to travel to Canterbury to visit the relics of Saint Thomas a Becket in Canterbury (who had been murdered by Henry II), to thank the martyr for helping them when they were in need and in their sickness. The narrator tells us that as he prepared to go on a pilgrimage, staying at the Tabard Inn, a great company of twenty nine travellers entered and it was decided that they would set off on their journey the next morning. The narrator declares his intent that before continuing the tale, he would mention and describe each of the members in the group.

The first character that the narrator describes in *The Prologue* is that of the Knight. The narrator describes him as the noblest of the pilgrims, embodying military prowess, loyalty, honour, faithfulness, generosity and good manners. He fought bravely in his lord's war and

had campaigned in far off lands, both Christian and heathen. The Knight was honoured everywhere for his bravery. The portrait that Chaucer paints of the Knight is an idealized one, who embodies the virtues which the medieval concept of Knighthood demanded. We are given an account of the battles that he had fought and the various expeditions that had been joined by him. The Knight is honoured and well-known, but he was also polite and modest, never having uttered an unkind word to anyone.

After giving an account of the bravery and dignity of the Knight, the narrator goes on to describe the young Squire, who is the son of the Knight. He describes the Squire as a young man of about twenty years, whose dress showed gaiety and colour. As opposed to the Knight, the Squire was dressed in bright colour, representing the very essence of youth. His clothes were embroidered red and white, and looked like a meadow of fresh flowers. Though the Squire has fought in battles with great strength and agility, he was also devoted to love. The Squire divided his time between 'love' and 'battle'. The Squire has the ability to sing and compose, dance, draw and write, and ride competently- the social conventions of a young man of his class, and loved so passionately that he had little sleep at night. He was courteous, modest and helpful and was a dutiful son, who would carve the meat before his father at the table. The Squire, thus is not just a portrait of the fourteenth century squire, but also represents the gaiety and enthusiasm of the youth.

Accompanying the Knight and the Squire, is a Yeoman or a free born servant. The Knight had no other servant with him other than the Yeoman, as he preferred to ride with only one Yeoman. The narrator describes the attire of the Yeoman, being clad in a coat and hood of green and carried with him a sheaf of bright and sharp peacock arrows. He also carried a mighty bow in his hand, and his gear and attire suggested that he was a forester.

The next character that Chaucer describes is a Prioress, named Madame Eglantine. Although the Prioress is not a part of the royal

court, she does her best to imitate its manners. She takes great care to eat her food so that no morsel would fall from her lips and wipes her lips so cleanly that no film of grease could be seen on her cup. She is charitable and compassionate towards animals and would weep if a mouse got trapped or if it were dead or bleeding. Chaucer also goes on to give a description of her appearance and dress; she carried a rosary of small coral beads about her arm, with the larger beads being green in colour. A bright brooch of gold hung upon the rosary, where an 'A' was engraved with a crown and over it was written 'Amor Vincit Omnia', meaning 'Love conquers all'. Chaucer's description of the Prioress is marked with subtle irony and satire, as it is clear that the religious order that she belongs to and the aristocratic manner that she tries to imitate are somewhat incompatible. The Prioress thus represents the ecclesiastical order, she is compassionate and genteel, but at the same time Chaucer individualises her giving her traits that is distinct to her. She was accompanied by another nun and three priests.

The second ecclesiastical character described by Chaucer is that of the Monk. The portrait of the Monk as described by Chaucer is an ironical one. The Monk loved hunting and attached no importance to religious injunctions. The Monk is aware that the rule of the monastic order discourages activities such as hunting but he dismisses such strictures as worthless. Chaucer with a hint of satire agrees with the Monk and asks that why should the Monk always engage himself in deep study and toil and labour. He describes the Monk's physical appearance and dress, whose sleeves were adorned with the finest fur in the land. The fat, bald and well dressed Monk resembles a prosperous lord. Through the character of the Monk, Chaucer satirises the religious order of the time as instead of devoting himself in spiritual consciousness, engaged in worldly pleasures.

The next character that we come across is that of the Friar, a member of the religious order, who had license to beg within a certain area. He was a jolly fellow, who had arranged numerous marriages of young women at his own cost. He had the authority to hear confessions

and assigned easy penance to people who donated money. He asserted that giving liberally to a poor friar was a sign of true repentance and instead of weeping and praying, men should give silver to the poor friars. He also made himself popular with the innkeepers and bar-maids, who could give him food and drink. He did not consider it suitable to keep acquaintance with beggars and sick lepers. He was so well-versed with begging that he made a good profit from it. The irony and satire against the religious order of his time is also evident in the characterisation of the Friar, a greedy and dishonest person.

The next character to be introduced is that of the Merchant, who would constantly speak of his profits. He was clever enough to put up an appearance of such dignity that no one realised that he was in debt.

The next pilgrim to be described is a Clerk. Chaucer's Clerk was a scholar in the true sense of the term who would devote all his time in his books rather than in worldly activities. He would rather have books of Aristotle and philosophy rather than rich robes or gold. He was entirely devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and in spite of being poor, the money received from his friends was spent in acquiring books and learning.

The next character to appear is the Man of Law. The Man of Law was a wise man who was capable of preparing flawless legal documents. The Man of Law was very busy but appeared to be busier than he actually was. The Man of Law with his legal knowledge and reputation had many a fee and robe. He was also a great purchaser of land. Thus he was an eminent barrister, but also a shrewd businessman, who used his legal knowledge for his benefit in purchasing land.

The Franklin, a wealthy landowner of the gentry class enjoyed a dignified position in society. He was an epicurean, who thought that the way to perfect happiness was through pleasure. The Franklin took pleasure in eating and drinking and providing pleasure to others through generous entertaining. He could be compared to St. Julian, the patron

of hospitality. He was the most hospitable person and entertained his guests to the choicest of foods and kept his table ready at all times.

Chaucer refers to the five guildsmen- a Haberdasher (a dealer in men's clothing and accessories), a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and an Upholsterer and groups them together to represent the flourishing trade in the age of Chaucer. Their skill and affluence is visible in the fine quality and workmanship of their belts, pouches and knives made not of brass but of silver. Chaucer says that each of them possessed enough wisdom to become an alderman in the Guildhall. And their wives very much enjoyed their new found affluence, liking to be called 'madame' as a gesture of respect and to walk ahead of other people to vigils and to have one's cloak carried by a servant. This description of the members highlights the growing importance and prosperity of the middle-classes in Chaucer's time.

The next figure to be described is that of the Cook. Chaucer describes the various dishes prepared by him and the cooking techniques. Unfortunately the Cook had a cancerous sore on his leg. Later the host confirms our suspicion that the cook did not maintain a hygienic kitchen.

The next character that we come across is that of the Shipman. Chaucer does not paint a very positive portrait of the Shipman, who had stolen many a draught of wine in his ship on the voyage from Bordeaux. He was an unscrupulous and a dishonest fellow. If he fought with anyone and had the upper hand, he threw them into the sea. However, despite his dishonesty, he was widely travelled and very skilled in calculating tides, navigating the stars and bringing the ship safely into the harbour.

The next pilgrim is the Physician, who had a good knowledge of astrology besides medicine. In addition to conventional theory of medicine, he would also rely on the position of the stars and planets to treat his patients. This description by Chaucer sheds light on the medieval belief in the influences of heavenly bodies on the health of a man. He was a perfect practitioner who knew the cause of every sickness and

gave remedies accordingly. He had his apothecaries (one who prepares and sells drugs) to send him his drugs, with whom he had worked out a financial deal. He was moderate in his diet and never ate anything unnecessary. He was wealthy enough to be able to afford expensive blue and red robes of taffeta and silk. In spite of being wealthy, he would save up most of his gold as medieval doctors used finely milled gold in their medicines. However, Chaucer is ironical in his remark as the doctor's love for wealth is emphasised in his love for gold.

The Wife of Bath is one of the most vividly portrayed pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer describes the Wife of Bath as an excellent cloth maker and very widely travelled. She would get angry if any other women go before her at the Church offering, as people went up to the altar to make the offering in the order of social rank. She had married five times, besides having many other affairs in her youth. She was a well experienced traveller and had undertaken various pilgrimages and had been thrice to Jerusalem. Her face was red in complexion and had a large gap between her two front teeth.

Chaucer paints an idealised portrait of the Parson, as someone who realised his responsibilities and had an exemplary conduct. Unlike the Friar or the Monk who failed to practice what they preached, the Parson lived a virtuous life by giving to the poor while he himself lived in poverty. The Parson sees his parishioners as his sheep and believed that if the shepherd is lazy and negligent of his duty, then the sheep would go astray. We get the impression that the Parson truly believes himself to be the caretaker of Christian souls and took his responsibility very seriously. Many priests during that time chose to take a position far away from their parish, in which their job would be to sing masses for the souls of others. This enables them to earn more money, but by rejecting this opinion the Parson showed that he was willing to sacrifice his own comfort to fulfil his duty as the 'shepherd' of the souls. Through the character of the Parson, Chaucer contrasts the piety and devotion of the clergy with the corruption of the monks and other religious characters.

The Ploughman is just as holy and virtuous as his brother, the Parson. He was an honest labourer who loved his neighbour as much as himself and loved God at all times, whether his fortune be good or bad. He would thresh, dig and make ditches on Christ's name for the sake of the poor without any complain. Chaucer paints a much idealised picture of the Ploughman, a worker having honesty and integrity.

The character that comes after the Ploughman is that of the Miller, who is far removed from the idealised portrait of the Ploughman. Chaucer describes the Miller as a muscular and powerful man who would always carry his prize in wrestling. He had a big wart right on the tip of his nose, from where stood a tuft of red hair. He was a dishonest fellow who would steal corn and overcharged his customers three times more than the actual amount payable. He also had a thumb of gold.

A Manciple is a person in charge of buying provisions for a college, an Inn of Court or a monastery. The Manciple was wise in buying provisions for whether he paid in cash or on credit, he was always very watchful in his buying and was always at an advantage. The cleverness of the Manciple is described in the last lines where Chaucer with a hint of irony remarks that the "ignorant" Manciple's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of a crowd of learned men.

A Reeve is an official supervising a landowner's estate. Chaucer gives a vivid description of the physical appearance of the Reeve, whose slender frame of his body suggests his choleric or ill-tempered nature. He was an experienced manager and there was no auditor who could get the better of him, for he knew well the yield of his seed and grain. The Reeve was a cheat who often cheated his landlord and the tenant.

The Summoner is described in vivid terms, having a red pimpled face, narrow eyes, scabby black eyebrows and children were terrified of the face. He was fond of garlic and onions and drank strong wine as red as blood. The task of a summoner was to serve warning to persons to come before the ecclesiastical court. The Summoner is a corrupt

man who would misuse his powers for money. He was expected to summon sinners before the ecclesiastical court but he would close his eyes if the sinning person bribed him with money.

He was working against his duty as someone who was expected to bring the offenders to court, he helped them to escape from the authority in return for money.

The next character to be described in *The Prologue* is that of the Pardoner, a person licensed to sell papal pardons or *Indulgences* (a remission of punishment for committing sins, a Catholic process of expiation). Chaucer describes the Pardoner as having hair as yellow as wax which hung smoothly and overspread his shoulders. He had a face so smooth that looked as if it had been recently shaved. The Pardoner also dealt in secondary trade in relics, pigs' bones and also claimed to have a piece of sail used by St. Peter. The narrator comments that he cheats people with those relics, making the people buy those things with huge amount of money. Thus the portrait puts into question not just the character of the Pardoner but also the practices that he used to earn money from people.

After giving us with a description of the characters, Chaucer gives a justification for his realism saying that he would not leave out anything however crude or coarse the language might be. For he says that when a tale is being reproduced, it should be repeated exactly the way it was. Otherwise, it would not be a faithful account.

The last character to be described in *The Prologue* is that of the Host. He describes the Host as a seemly man, who would have been fit to be a marshal in a hall. He had shining eyes and there was no man finer than him in Cheapside. He was a wise fellow who was direct and bold in his speech. He was also a merry fellow and commented that he had never seen so merry a company together at the inn that year.

Check Your Progress

1. What purpose does *The Prologue* fulfill according to you in *The Canterbury Tales*?
2. Why do you think Chaucer chose the aspect of a pilgrimage to narrate his tales in *The Canterbury Tales*?
3. Present a brief character sketch of the Knight.

1.3 Important themes

Now that we have already gone through a look into the descriptions of the various characters listed in *The Prologue*, let us move and take a look at some of the important themes and issues that arises out of *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*.

1.3.1 The representation of the fourteenth century English Society in *The Prologue*

The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales provides us with a glimpse into the fourteenth century English life. Chaucer provides us a realistic portrayal of life during his time with a myriad of characters coming in

from different walks of life. In providing us with characters from different professions such as a Physician, Pardoner, a Shipman and ecclesiastical characters, Chaucer not just typifies or stereotypes the characters but also adds distinct and realistic traits to the characters making them highly individualistic. In *The Prologue*, he makes us acquainted with the various characters. Until Chaucer's day, popular literature had been engrossed chiefly with the gods and heroes of the golden age; it had been essentially romantic. And so, it had never been attempted to study men and women as they are, to describe them so that the reader recognises them not as ideal heroes, but as real people coming from and a part of their society. Chaucer not only attempted this new way of using realism, but accomplished it so well that his characters were instantly recognised as real individuals, being true to life. The characters too attract one like a good play: the ideal Knight and his young son, the Squire, the modest Prioress with her aristocratic manners, the sporting Monk and the fat Friar, the doctor, the lovable parish priest who taught true religion to his flock, the thieving Miller leading the pilgrims to the music of his bagpipe- all these and many others come from every walk of English life, representing a wide spectrum of society with various ranks and occupations. To show this cross-section of characters, Chaucer brilliantly used this ingenuous device of having a pilgrimage, a technique which allowed him to bring together a diverse group of people. This design of bringing together different representative figures together for a pilgrimage appears to be realistic because pilgrimages to the shrines were a common feature during the age of Chaucer. In this way, Chaucer found a vehicle to bring together these diverse characters for the narration of the history and society of the time. This design of the pilgrimage also allowed him to bring together characters irrespective of their social order. On one hand we have the Knight, the highest in the social order, and on the other hand is the Ploughman, the lowest in the hierarchy. Chaucer describes his characters with great detail, from their physical appearance, to their dress and food habits.

Chaucer's age was marked by religious unrest and protest against the corruption and immortality of the churchmen. This aspect is vividly portrayed through the ecclesiastical characters in the *Prologue*. Chaucer points out the degeneration and failing through a hint of humour and satire. None of the religious characters can be said to be religious and devout such as the Monk, the Summoner, and the Pardoner. However, the figure of the Parson proves to be a contrast with his honesty and humility. Another realistic issue that Chaucer points out is through the character of the Physician. During those times, astrology was an important element used in the medical profession. Through the character of the Physician, Chaucer sheds light on the belief on the influence of heavenly bodies on one's health prevalent during those times. Chaucer also reveals the growing economic prosperity and prominence of the commoners. The flourishing trade in the age of Chaucer is represented by the five guildsmen: the Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and an Upholsterer. Even their wives were fully conscious of the prominent place in the society enjoyed by their husbands and themselves.

Chaucer thus provides us with an accurate picture of the fourteenth century life and society. He paints a realistic portrait of the social life of his time. Chaucer shows us the social and religious aspirations of fourteenth century people and the secular and religious failings that are distinctively characteristic of the society at that time. The text as can be said for any text, cannot be detached from the period of its production; it is rather an attempt to understand the late fourteenth century by seeking to articulate the particular desires and weaknesses of this time in a certain set of circumstances. Thus Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* paints life as he sees it in a realistic way. It is aptly said that *The Canterbury Tales* is the national gallery of fourteenth century England.

1.3.2 The ecclesiastical characters in *The Prologue*

Religion plays a powerful tool in influencing and shaping the

lives of the people. However during Chaucer's time, religion was seen as degenerating and corrupt in its practices. The parish clergy, thinned out by the Black Death, seemed to have suffered from a decline not only in numbers but also in quality. By the late fourteenth century, Catholic Church had become extremely wealthy. In a time of disease, plague and famine, the sight of a Church ornamented with gold seemed unfair to people and the Church's preaching seemed highly hypocritical, considering its display of wealth. Chaucer's religious belief that comes out of this is that perfection is an exclusive preserve of heaven, human weakness is inevitable and the appropriate response to this is laughter. For indeed, Chaucer presents this degeneration and corruption of the Church with a hint of humour and satire. The religious figures that Chaucer presents in the *Prologue* all deviate to some extent from what is traditionally expected of them. Chaucer presents five characters from the ecclesiastical world: the Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Parson, the Summoner and the Pardoner. The Prioress in a way represented the high minded religious lady of England of the fourteenth century. In spite of belonging to the religious order, she tries to imitate the manners of the aristocratic class. Her coming from the religious order and trying to imitate the manners of the royal court somewhat seem incompatible and Chaucer marks this with a hint of irony and humour. She is someone who longs for the innocent yet forbidden pleasures of life which is beyond the permitted religious order. Chaucer also highlights her compassionate nature especially when she weeps at the sight of a wounded mouse. Chaucer presents a satirical sketch of the Monk, who wastes his time in seeking pleasure and sport rather than living a life of discipline and spiritual consciousness. The Monk disregarded the religious text which forbade hunting and instead took pleasure in riding and hunting. Rather than living a life of austerity and devotion to the pursuit of religious knowledge, the Monk would rather spend his time and energy fulfilling his personal pleasure. Chaucer also showed the prevailing corruption through the character of the Friar. He is a hypocrite who exploits the situation to his own advantage. He misused his power

of hearing confessions by assigning penance to people who would donate him money. Chaucer also portrays the Summoner and the Pardoner in a negative light. The Summoner was thoroughly a corrupt man who would ignore his duty of bringing the offenders to court and instead would help them escape in return of money. The pardoner too was a corrupt man who would sell the relics to people for huge sum of money Chaucer thus portrays the corruption and vices of the Church through these characters. However, even in the face of widespread corruption, Chaucer does not negate the fact that there will still people who were free from the vices and were honest enough to fulfil their obligations. The Parson is an idealised conception of a parish priest. He tries to imitate the teachings of the Church and practice before preaching. He truly believed himself to be the caretaker of Christian souls and took his responsibility very seriously. Thus, Chaucer's attitude to the Church is realistic and humane and at times humorous and ironical in its portrayal.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a note on Chaucer's realism as seen in *The Canterbury Tales*?

2. Discuss the themes and issues can you come up with after making a study of *The Prologue*?

1.4 Let us sum up

Now summing up, we have seen that in *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer paints a realistic portrayal of social life in the fourteenth century. He does this by drawing his characters from diverse walks of life belonging mostly to the common class of the society. The technique of pilgrimage to bring together these particular characters is particularly interesting for it allows the various characters to come together and interact with each other coming out of their particular social class. During the fourteenth century when literature used to be written by portraying exclusively the elite and sophisticated characters drawn from the upper class of the society Chaucer makes an exception by presenting his characters drawing them from the very ordinary section of the society.

1.5 References/Suggested reading

Robinson, F.N. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford University Press. London.1974.

Coulton, G. G. . *Chaucer and His England*. Kessinger Publishing. London. 2007.

Companion to Chaucer Studies, Rev. ed., Oxford UP, 1979

1.6 Model questions

1. Comment on Chaucer's attitude to the church as seen in the portrayal of the ecclesiastical characters in *The Prologue*.
2. Write an illustrative note on the Chaucer's art of characterization from your reading of *The Prologue*.
3. Do you agree with the view that *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* is a "national gallery of fourteenth century England?"

4. Comment on Chaucer's use of humour in *The Prologue*.
5. "The characters described by Chaucer in *The Prologue* belong to the society of his times; but they are also types of the characters that appear in all ages and countries." Substantiate.

Unit II

Shakespearean Sonnets: Sonnet Nos.: 19, 73, 107, 144

Structure

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.2.1 Shakespeare: His life and his works

2.2.2 Sonnet: An Introduction

Check Your Progress-1

2.2.3 A brief description of William Shakespeare's sonnets

Check Your Progress 2

2.3 The significance of Shakespeare's sonnets

Check Your Progress 3

2.4 Sonnet 19: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

Check Your Progress 4

2.5 Sonnet 73: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

Check Your Progress 5

2.6 Sonnet 107: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

Check Your Progress 6

2.7 Sonnet 144: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

Check Your Progress 7

2.8 Let Us Sum Up

2.9. Key Words

2.10 Suggested Readings

2.11References

2.1 Objectives:

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Familiarize yourself with William Shakespeare, one of the greatest poets and playwrights that the world has ever produced.
- Familiarize yourself with the genre of sonnet as a poetic branch.
- Critically appreciate Shakespearean poetry especially his sonnets.
- Understand the concerned themes and their treatment in the prescribed sonnets.
- Appreciate the lyrical appeal and the felicity of the language, and the melody of the verse.

2.2 Introduction :

William Shakespeare (baptized on April 26, 1564 to April 23, 1616) was an English playwright, actor and poet. He is also known as the “Bard of Avon” and often addressed as England’s national poet. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, he was an important member of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men Company of theatrical players from roughly 1594 onward. Written records give little indication of the way in which Shakespeare’s professional life moulded his artistry. All that can be deduced is that, in his 20 years as a playwright, Shakespeare wrote plays that capture the complete range of human emotion and conflict.

Shakespeare’s sonnets were first printed in 1609 by George Eld for Thomas Thorpe. At least some were written earlier, for versions of 138 and 144 appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* and in 1598 Francis Mere’s *Palladis Tamia* spoke of Shakespeare’s ‘sugared sonnets’ circulating among his friends. Since the 1590s saw a great English vogue for the sonnet, initiated by Sidney’s sequence *Astrophill and Stella* , it is likely that Shakespeare wrote most of his sonnets before 1600.

While Shakespeare was regarded as the foremost dramatist of his time, evidence indicates that both he and his contemporaries looked to poetry, not playwriting, for enduring fame. Shakespeare's sonnets were composed between 1593 and 1601, though not published until 1609. That edition, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare*, consists of 154 sonnets, all written in the form of three quatrains and a couplet that is now recognized as Shakespearean. The sonnets fall into two groups: sonnets 1-126, addressed to a beloved friend, a handsome and noble young man, and sonnets 127-152, to a malignant but fascinating "Dark Lady," who the poet loves in spite of himself. Nearly all of Shakespeare's sonnets examine the inevitable decay of time and the immortalization of beauty and love in poetry.

In his poems and plays, Shakespeare invented thousands of words, often combining or contorting Latin, French, and native roots. His impressive expansion of the English language, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, includes such words as: arch-villain, birthplace, bloodsucking, courtship, dewdrop, downstairs, fanged, heartsore, hunchbacked, leapfrog, misquote, pageantry, radiance, schoolboy, stillborn, watchdog, and zany.

2.2.1. Shakespeare: His Life and His Works

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon. The son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, he was probably educated at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Stratford, where he learned Latin and a little Greek and read the Roman dramatists.

At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman seven or eight years his senior. Together they raised two daughters: Susanna, who was born in 1583, and Judith (whose twin brother died in boyhood), born in 1585.

Shakespeare as a sonneteer: It is generally agreed that most of the Shakespearean Sonnets were written in the 1590s, some printed at this time as well. Others were written or revised right before being

printed. 154 sonnets and “A Lover’s Complaint” were published by Thomas Thorpe as *Shake-Speares Sonnets* in 1609. The order, dates, and authorship of the Sonnets have been much debated with no conclusive findings. Many have claimed autobiographical details from them, including sonnet number 145 in reference to Anne. The dedication to “Mr. W.H.” is said to possibly represent the initials of the third Earl of Pembroke William Herbert, or perhaps being a reversal of Henry Wriothesly’s initials. Regardless, there have been some unfortunate projections and interpretations of modern concepts onto centuries old works that, while a grasp of contextual historical information can certainly lend to their depth and meaning, can also be enjoyed as valuable poetical works that have transcended time and been surpassed by no other.

Although the entirety of Shakespeare’s sonnets were not formally published until 1609 (and even then, they were published without the author’s knowledge), an allusion to their existence appeared eleven years earlier, in Francis Meres’ *Palladis Tamia* (1598), in which Meres commented that Shakespeare’s “sugared Sonnets” were circulating privately among the poet’s friends. Approximately a year later, William Jaggard’s miscellany, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, appeared, containing twenty poems, five of which are known to be Shakespeare’s -- two of the Dark Lady sonnets (Sonnets 138 and 144) and three poems included in the play *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Apparently these five poems were printed in Jaggard’s miscellany (a collection of writings on various subjects) without Shakespeare’s authorization.

Evoking Petrarch’s style and lyrically writing of beauty, mortality, and love with its moral anguish and worshipful adoration of a usually unattainable love, the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a young man, sonnets 127-152 to a dark lady. Ever the dramatist Shakespeare created a profound intrigue to scholars and novices alike as to the identities of these people.

Shakespeare’s sonnets are considered a continuation of the great sonnet craze that swept through the Renaissance, from Petrarch in 14-century Italy and was finally introduced in 16-century England by

Thomas Wyatt. Shakespeare's sonnets are consistent, with few exceptions, to the form of the English sonnet — the rhyme scheme, the 14 lines, and the meter. But Shakespeare's sonnets introduce such significant departures of content that they seem to be rebelling against well-worn 200 year-old traditions.

Instead of expressing worshipful love for an almost goddess-like yet unobtainable female love-object, as Petrarch, Dante, and Philip Sidney had done, Shakespeare, in contrast, introduces a young man. He also introduces the Dark Lady, who is no goddess. Shakespeare also introduces things such as lust, homoeroticism, misogyny, infidelity, and acrimony in ways that startle and also seem to open new terrain for the sonnet form.

He may have done this out of literary ambition, and a desire to burst the bonds of the old love-lorn tradition. Or he may have been inspired by biographical elements in his life. Shakespeare sonnets are studied and appreciated as “highly complex structure[s] of language and ideas”.

William Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. Each sonnet is made up of 14 lines - 3 quatrains of 4 lines each & a couplet. There are deviations from the sonnet form though - Sonnet 99 has 15 lines & Sonnet 126 is made of 7 couplets (the 7th added by the publisher). Sonnets 1 - 126, sprinkled with the language of love, are addressed to a young man - the 'Fair Youth' and Sonnets 127 - 152 have been addressed to - 'The Dark Lady' - both identities still remain a mystery.

Known throughout the world, the works of William Shakespeare have been performed in countless hamlets, villages, cities and metropolises for more than 400 years. And yet, the personal history of William Shakespeare is somewhat a mystery. There are two primary sources that provide historians with a basic outline of his life. One source is his work — the plays, poems and sonnets — and the other is official documentation such as church and court records. However, these only provide brief sketches of specific events in his life and provide little on the person who experienced those events.

2.2.2 Sonnet: An Introduction

A sonnet is a poem of a specific form which originated in Italy. Giacomo da Lentini is considered to be the father of this form of poetry. The term sonnet is derived from the Italian word 'sonetto' which means a short poem. By thirteenth century it gained a proper form and a strict rhyme scheme. An Italian sonnet is divided into two parts 'octave', consisting of the first eight lines rhyming *abbaabba* and followed by a 'sestet' consisting of the second six lines rhyming *cdecde*. It was written in iambic pentameter lines. Italian poets like Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and Guido Cavalcanti (1250-1300) were some of the earliest practitioners of this poetic form. But sonnet became a very popular poetic form at the hands of Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374).

Sonnet came into England as a result of the influence of Renaissance. Early sixteenth century poets Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, (1516/17-1547) translated Petrarchan sonnets and sonnets written by French poet Ronsard into English thereby starting a sonnet tradition in English poetry. But it was Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1580) that started the tradition of sonnet sequences in English. Sonnet sequences written by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser (*Amoretti*, 1595), Michael Drayton, and other Elizabethan poets followed in the later phase of sixteenth century. These sonneteers, with the exception of Shakespeare, followed the Petrarchan structure and generally treated the theme of the poet's love for his beloved, mostly presenting a eulogy of her beauty. However, Shakespeare not only adopted an innovative format but also changed it thematically by treating themes like time, friendship, love, jealousy and unrequited love. Shakespearean sonnet contains three quatrains followed by a concluding rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme of Shakespearean sonnet is *abab cdcd efef gg*. The other notable sonnet in English is Spenserian sonnet where one quatrain is linked to the other by a continuing rhyme: (*abab bcbc ec*)

John Donne published his *Holy Sonnets* (1617) in the seventeenth century. Milton in the latter part of that century wrote sonnets on a variety of subjects. William Wordsworth, John Keats, William Butler Yeats, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas are some of the notable practitioners of this poetic form and have contributed substantially in making sonnets popular down the ages.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe in brief the historical background of sonnet and its introduction into English literature.
2. Write an illustrative note on some of the practitioners of this poetic form in English literature.

2.2. 3 A brief description of William Shakespeare's sonnets

Without question, Shakespeare was the most popular playwright of his day, and his dramatic influence is still evident today, but the sonnet form, which was so very popular in Shakespeare's era, quickly lost its appeal. Even before Shakespeare's death in 1616 the sonnet was no longer fashionable, and for two hundred years after his death, there was little interest in either Shakespeare's sonnets, or in the sonnet form itself.

The text of Shakespeare's sonnets generally considered to be definitive is that of the 1609 edition, which was published by Thomas Thorpe, a publisher having less than a professional reputation. Thorpe's edition, titled *Shake-Speare's Sonnets: Never Before Imprinted*, is referred to today as the "Quarto," and is the basis for all modern texts of the sonnets.

The belief that the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a man and that the rest are addressed to a woman has become the prevailing contemporary view. In addition, a majority of modern critics remains sufficiently satisfied with Thorpe's 1609 ordering of those sonnets addressed to the young man, but most of them have serious reservations about the second group addressed to the woman.

Another controversy surrounding the sonnets is the dedication at the beginning of Thorpe's 1609 edition. Addressed to "Mr. W. H.," the dedication has led to a series of conjectures as to the identity of this person. The two leading candidates are Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke. As Shakespeare dedicated his long poem "Venus and Adonis" to Southampton, and because the young Earl loved poetry and drama and may well have sought out Shakespeare and offered himself as the poet's patron, many critics consider Southampton to be "Mr. W. H."

The other contender for the object of the dedication is William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. Shakespeare dedicated the First Folio of his works, published in 1623, to Pembroke and Pembroke's brother Philip. Pembroke was wealthy, notorious for his sexual exploits but averse to marriage, and a patron of literary men. Critics who believe that Mary Fitton, one of Queen Elizabeth's maids of honour, was the Dark Lady of Sonnets 12–54, are particularly convinced that Pembroke is "Mr. W. H.," for Pembroke had an affair with Fitton, who bore him a child out of wedlock; this extramarital affair is considered to parallel too closely the sexual relationship in the sonnets to be mere coincidence.

In addition to their date of composition, their correct ordering, and the object of the dedication, the other controversial issue surrounding the sonnets is the question of whether or not they are autobiographical. While contemporary criticism remains interested in the question of whether or not the sonnets are autobiographical, the sonnets, taken either wholly or individually, are first and foremost a work of literature, to be read and discussed both for their poetic quality and their narrative tale.

Their appeal rests not so much in the fact that they may shed some light on Shakespeare's life, nor even that they were written by him; rather, their greatness lies in the richness and the range of subjects found in them.

Check Your Progress- 2

1. Where was Shakespeare born?
2. In which year was William Shakespeare born?
3. When were Shakespeare's sonnets published?
4. Whom did William Shakespeare marry?

2.3 The significance of Shakespeare's sonnets

The text of Shakespeare's sonnets generally considered to be definitive is that of the 1609 edition, which was published by Thomas Thorpe, a publisher having less than a professional reputation. Thorpe's edition, titled *Shake-Speare's Sonnets: Never Before Imprinted*, is referred to today as the "Quarto," and is the basis for all modern texts of the sonnets.

Although Shakespeare's sonnets can be divided into different sections in numerous ways, the most apparent division involves Sonnets 1–126, in which the poet strikes up a relationship with a young man, and Sonnets 127–154, which are concerned with the poet's relationship with a woman, variously referred to as the Dark Lady, or as his mistress.

In the first large division, Sonnets 1–126, the poet addresses an alluring young man with whom he has struck up a relationship. In Sonnets 1–17, he tries to convince the handsome young man to marry and beget children so that the youth's incredible beauty will not die when the youth dies. Starting in Sonnet 18, when the youth appears to reject this argument for procreation, the poet glories in the young man's beauty and takes consolation in the fact that his sonnets will preserve the youth's beauty, much like the youth's children would.

By Sonnet 26, perhaps becoming more attached to the young man than he originally intended, the poet feels isolated and alone when the youth is absent. He cannot sleep. Emotionally exhausted, he becomes frustrated by what he sees as the youth's inadequate response to his affection. The estrangement between the poet and the young man continues at least through Sonnet 58 and is marked by the poet's fluctuating emotions for the youth: One moment he is completely dependent on the youth's affections, the next moment he angrily lashes out because his love for the young man is unrequited.

Despondent over the youth's treatment of him, desperately the poet views with pain and sorrow the ultimate corrosion of time, especially in relation to the young man's beauty. He seeks answers to the question of how time can be defeated and youth and beauty preserved. Philosophizing about time preoccupies the poet, who tells the young man that time and immortality cannot be conquered; however, the youth ignores the poet and seeks other friendships, including one with the poet's mistress (Sonnets 40–42) and another with a rival poet (Sonnets 79–87). Expectedly, the relationship between the youth and this new poet greatly upsets the sonnets' poet, who lashes out at the young man and then retreats into despondency, in part because he feels his poetry is lackluster and cannot compete with the new forms of poetry being written about the youth. Again, the poet fluctuates between confidence in his poetic abilities and resignation about losing the youth's friendship.

Philosophically examining what love for another person entails, the poet urges his friend not to postpone his desertion of the poet — if that is what the youth is ultimately planning. Break off the relationship now, begs the poet, “who is prepared to accept whatever fate holds. Ironically, the more the youth rejects the poet, the greater is the poet's affection for and devotion to him. No matter how vicious the young man is to the poet, the poet does not — emotionally cannot — sever the relationship. He masochistically accepts the youth's physical and emotional absence.

Finally, after enduring what he feels is much emotional abuse by the youth, the poet stops begging for his friend's affection. This first major division of sonnets ends with the poet pitifully lamenting his own role in the dissolution of his relationship with the youth.

The second, shorter grouping of Sonnets 127–154 involves the poet's sexual relationship with the Dark Lady, a married woman with whom he becomes infatuated. Similar to his friendship with the young man, this relationship fluctuates between feelings of love, hate, jealousy, and contempt. Also similar is the poet's unhealthy dependency on the woman's affections. When, after the poet and the woman begin their affair, she accepts additional lovers, at first the poet is outraged. However, as he did with the youth, the poet ultimately blames himself for the Dark Lady's abandoning him. The sonnets end with the poet admitting that he is a slave to his passion for the woman and can do nothing to curb his lust. Shakespeare turns the traditional idea of a romantic sonnet on its head in this series, however, as his Dark Lady is not an alluring beauty and does not exhibit the perfection that lovers typically ascribe to their beloved.

Check your progress 3

1. How did Shakespeare use the sonnet form?
2. What are the two major divisions of Shakespeare's sonnets?
3. Whom did Shakespeare address in the sonnets 1-126?
4. Discuss the poet's idea of beauty as reflected in the sonnets.

2.4 Sonnet 19: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

Shakespeare begins Sonnet 19 by considering how time (personified as Time, as in several of the earlier Sonnets) destroys both the mighty and the mild, the strong and the gentle: the lion's paws are blunted by time, as are the tiger's jaws, and the earth which gives life to every living thing ends up devouring every creature (because we and

other land animals end up in the ground, rotting into the earth). Even the phoenix – the mythical bird that was supposed to live forever, as it rose from its own ashes to live again – will be devoured, in the end, by time. Here we have a view of time not unlike the ‘cormorant devouring time’ described at the beginning of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

In lines 5-8, Shakespeare tells Time to do as it wants – but he urges it not to commit one particularly ‘heinous crime’. We have to wait until the third quatrain; beginning at line 9, to find out what ‘crime’ Shakespeare wants Time to refrain from committing.

In line 9, we find out: Shakespeare asks Time to refrain from carving the Fair Youth’s brow with its ‘hours’: i.e. not to let the young man’s youthful features give way to wrinkles and other signs of age. He then asks, in line 10, that Time ‘draw no lines there with thine antique pen’. This essentially rephrases what the previous line had said, but Shakespeare’s use of the word ‘lines’ – which he had previously used in several of the Sonnets to refer to his own ‘lines’ of verse – gives the word a loaded meaning here. It is as if Shakespeare, the writer of lines, is in a battle with Time, the etcher or drawer of lines, as to who can win out – and whoever wins will determine whether or not the Fair Youth will ever age and die or not. If Shakespeare wins, although the Youth will physically wither and die, his youth and beauty will be forever preserved in Shakespeare’s poems.

Lines 11-12 then continue this entreaty, with Shakespeare asking Time to leave the Fair Youth alone as it continues on its course – allow the Youth, Shakespeare urges, to remain so he may serve as a template or guide for future generations.

The concluding couplet is unusual in that it doesn’t simply wrap up the preceding argument made in the rest of the sonnet: it overturns it. You know what, Shakespeare says: forget it. Do what you want. The Youth will remain forever young in Shakespeare’s verse, which will serve to ‘immortalise’ him.

In Sonnet 19, the poet addresses Time and, using vivid animal imagery, comments on Time's normal effects on nature. The poet then commands Time not to age the young man and ends by boldly asserting that the poet's own creative talent will make the youth permanently young and beautiful. However uninspired the sonnet as a whole might seem, the imagery of animals is particularly vivid.

The sonnet's first seven lines address the ravages of nature that "Devouring Time" can wreak. Then, in line 8, the poet inserts the counter-statement, one line earlier than usual: "But I forbid thee one most heinous crime." The poet wants time to leave the young man's beauty untouched. Note that the word "lines" in line 10 unquestionably means wrinkles; in the previous sonnet, "lines" had at least three possible meanings.

Although the poet begs time not to ravish the young man's beauty, to leave it "untainted" as an example of perfection upon which all can gaze, the concluding couplet, especially line 13's beginning "Yet," underscores the poet's insecurity of what he asks for. However, nature's threatening the youth's beauty does not matter, for the poet confidently asserts that the youth will gain immortality as the subject of the sonnets. Because poetry, according to the poet, is eternal, he is confident that his poetry about the young man will ensure the youth's immortality. The youth as the physical subject of the sonnets will age and eventually die, but in the sonnets themselves he will remain young and beautiful. He can easily escape the ravages of time through his sonnets.

The sonnet consists of a series of imperatives, where time is commanded to disempower its own instruments: it must "blunt ... the lion's paws;" it must force mother earth ("her") to "devour" her children ("own sweet brood"). Time is ordered to pull ("pluck") the tiger's "keen teeth", its 'eager', its 'sharp', and its 'fierce' teeth from the jaw of a tiger. Time is required to "burn the long-liv'd phoenix, in her blood." The phoenix is a long-lived bird that is cyclically regenerated or reborn. Associated with the sun, a phoenix obtains new life by arising from the

ashes of its predecessor. As time speeds by it must vary the seasons (“make glad and sorry seasons”), which are not only cycles of nature but ups and downs of human moods.

Finally the poet denies time a singular, most grievous sin (“one most hainous crime”). It must “carve not with thy hours my love’s fair brow”. Time must allow the youth to remain “untainted” in its “course”; one meaning of “untainted” is ‘untouched’ or ‘unaffected’ by the course of time. The couplet dismisses time’s efforts (“Yet do thy worst old Time”). Whatever injuries or faults (“wrongs”) time might commit, the poet’s “love,” both his affection and the beloved, will prevail in the poet’s lines (“verse”) as ever fresh and never growing old (“ever live young”).

One of the first things to say about this poem is that it’s the first sonnet in the sequence (as it is usually ordered) that is not addressed to the Fair Youth: instead, Shakespeare addresses Time, and refers to the Fair Youth as ‘my love’. Shakespeare appears, by this stage, to have fallen for the Fair Youth and not to be above saying so. There’s a deeper intensity to his attachment here: if we want to read the Sonnets as a narrative sequence (of sorts), telling a developing story, then Shakespeare has abandoned the idea of trying to persuade the Fair Youth to marry a woman and have children, perhaps because he’s now realized he wants the Youth all for himself. Sonnet 19 represents a clear watershed in the Sonnets, and Shakespeare’s praise of the Fair Youth appears to have blossomed into something more personal and deeply felt.

Check your progress -4

1. What is Shakespeare’s sonnet 19 about?
2. What does “devouring time, blunt thou the lions paws” mean?
3. What is the most significant theme of sonnet 19?

2.5 Sonnet 73: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

The poet indicates his feeling that he has not long to live through

the imagery of the wintry bough, twilight's afterglow, and a fire's dying embers. All the images in this sonnet suggest impending death. In the first quatrain, the poet compares himself to autumn leaves, but he is unable to pinpoint their exact number, just as he cannot determine how close he is to death: "When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang / Upon those boughs which shake against the cold." In the second quatrain, he talks of "twilight" as "after the sun fadeth in the west," — a traditional metaphor for death. Death is close to the poet in this second quatrain, for he imagines death twice more, first as "black night" and then as sleep, "Death's second self." The third quatrain recalls Sonnet 45, in which the poet likened his desire for the young man to "purging fire." Now, however, his fire is but dying embers, a "deathbed" fueled by his love for the youth, "Consumed with that which it was nourished by."

Now follows the couplet addressed to the youth that makes clear the conclusion to be drawn from the preceding lines: "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong, / To love that well, which thou must leave ere long." Believing that he will soon die, the speaker invokes a series of metaphors to characterize the nature of what he perceives to be his old age. In the first quatrain, he tells the beloved that his age is like a "time of year," late autumn, when the leaves have almost completely fallen from the trees, and the weather has grown cold, and the birds have left their branches. In the second quatrain, he then says that his age is like late twilight, "As after sunset fadeth in the west," and the remaining light is slowly extinguished in the darkness, which the speaker likens to "Death's second self." In the third quatrain, the speaker compares himself to the glowing remnants of a fire, which lies "on the ashes of his youth"—that is, on the ashes of the logs that once enabled it to burn—and which will soon be consumed "by that which it was nourished by"—that is, it will be extinguished as it sinks into the ashes, which its own burning created. In the couplet, the speaker tells the young man that he must perceive these things, and that his love must be strengthened by the knowledge that he will soon be parted from the speaker when the speaker, like the fire, is extinguished by time.

Sonnet 73 takes up one of the most pressing issues of the first 126 sonnets, the speaker's anxieties regarding what he perceives to be his advanced age, and develops the theme through a sequence of metaphors each implying something different. The first quatrain, which employs the metaphor of the winter day, emphasizes the harshness and emptiness of old age. In the second quatrain, the metaphor shifts to that of twilight, and emphasizes not the chill of old age, but rather the gradual fading of the light of youth, as "black night" takes away the light "by and by". But in each of these quatrains, with each of these metaphors, the speaker fails to confront the full scope of his problem: both the metaphor of winter and the metaphor of twilight imply cycles, and impose cyclical motions upon the objects of their metaphors, whereas old age is final. Winter follows spring, but spring will follow winter just as surely; and after the twilight fades, dawn will come again. In human life, however, the fading of warmth and light is not cyclical; youth will not come again for the speaker. In the third quatrain, he must resign himself to this fact. The image of the fire consumed by the ashes of its youth is significant both for its brilliant disposition of the past—the ashes of which eventually snuff out the fire, "consumed by that which it was nourished by"—and for the fact that when the fire is extinguished, it can never be lit again. Sonnet 73 is not simply a procession of interchangeable metaphors; it is the story of the speaker slowly coming to grips with the real finality of his age and his impermanence in time.

Check Your Progress -5

1. When was Shakespeare's sonnet 73 written?
2. What message is Shakespeare trying to convey in the Sonnet 73?
3. What is the meaning of "Death's second self" in the line 8 of sonnet 73?
4. What is the theme of Sonnet 73?

2.6 Sonnet 107: An overview of this sonnet and its important aspects

Whereas the previous sonnet compared the past with the present, Sonnet 107 contrasts the present with the future. The poet's favorite theme of immortality through poetic verse dominates the sonnet. The speaker in sonnet 107 is once again affirming that spiritual immortality remains possible through his poems. The poem will stand as a monument to the speaker's love. His ability to erect such a monument remains steadfast.

The speaker insists that the poet's monuments will outlast all the sculpted stones of political leaders and war heroes. He is blessed with vision and the talent to place his love of beauty and truth in little dramas that, he is convinced, will stand the test of time.

In the first quatrain, the poet contends that his love for the young man is immortal. Although neither he nor "the prophetic soul" knows what the future holds, the poet maintains that only one thing is certain: his continuing affection for the youth, "Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom." The duration of the poet's love cannot be predicted. Nothing, he says, "Can yet the lease of my true love control." His love is not subject to time, nor controlled by uncertainty about the youth, nor by death itself. In the first quatrain of sonnet 107, the speaker declares that nothing can halt the progress of his creations, not his "own fears," nor the fears of "the wide world." That world tries to prognosticate the future while it keeps freedom of thought and wisdom of talent in check. A "dreaming" world holds in its imagination a source of squalor that would limit and denigrate the enlightened, talented artist. Historically, submission to false ideals limits art and thereby causes "forfeit to a confin'd doom."

In the second and third quatrains, the poet catalogues various images that emphasize endurance over change. These images parallel his immutable love for the youth, which he expands on when he claims that even death holds no sway over him and his sonnets: "I'll live in this poor rime, / While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes." Other people — "tribes" — may succumb to time's decay but not the poet.

The final couplet speaks of the young man's deliverance from tyranny and death by means of the sonnets, a now-familiar theme of the poet's. Antithetical images of events, changing from peaceful, stable times to turmoil and civil strife, are of no concern to the poet, who asserts, as he does elsewhere, that the young man will triumph over all that the future has to offer: "And thou in this shalt find thy monument / When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent." Poetry becomes prophecy. This poem repeats the theme of others, notably Sonnet 18 that the poem itself will survive human mortality, and both the poet and Fair Youth will achieve immortality through it. In this case all the hazards of an unpredictable future are added to the inevitability of mortality. The sonnet will, in fact, stand as a monument to the poet, who has lovingly molded his affection in his poetry. The poetry will remain even after the monuments erected to despotic rulers have been toppled.

Check Your Progress -6

1. Whom did Shakespeare address in Sonnet 107?
2. What are the major themes of Sonnet 107?
3. How does Shakespeare indicate that time can be conquered?

2.7 Sonnet 144: An overview and its important aspects

Sonnet 144 is unique in that it brings together the two main protagonists of the complete sonnet sequence, the lovely boy and the dark lady. In the sonnet, they are referred to as a man right fair and a woman coloured ill, and a kind of battle of good versus evil goes on for the speaker's soul. Several sonnets portray a conflicted relationship between the speaker, the "dark lady" and the young man. Sonnet 144 is one of the most prominent sonnets to address this conflict.

Sonnet 144 is the only sonnet that explicitly refers to both the Dark Lady and the young man, the poet's "Two loves." The poet removes himself from the love triangle and tries to consider the situation

with detachment. The humour of the previous sonnet is missing, and the poet's mood is cynical and mocking, in part because uncertainty about the relationship torments him.

Although the sonnet is unique in presenting the poet's attempt to be objective about the two other figures in the relationship, stylistically it is very similar to others in terms of setting up an antithesis between two warring elements, the youth ("comfort") and the woman ("despair"): "The better angel is a man right fair, / The worser spirit a woman, coloured ill." Symbolically, the young man and the woman represent two kinds of love battling for supremacy within the poet's own character: selfless adoration and shameful lust, respectively. However, the poet is a mere spectator now. His greatest fear, one that he cannot face, is that the young man secretly acquiesces to the woman's advances: "And whether that my angel be turned fiend / Suspect I may, yet not directly tell." Unfortunately for the poet, what the outcome of this struggle will be is uncertain: "Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt, / Till my bad angel fire my good one out." Ironically, the uncertainty about the fate of the relationship between the young man and the woman is the only certainty the poet has.

Some think the sonnets reveal what was going on in Shakespeare's private, emotional life, and represent the contents of his heart. Others claim that the sonnets are strictly literary, the speaker and characters were created by Shakespeare as he exercised his considerable talent for poetics. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between these two.

Sonnet 144 explores the relationship between three people: one good, one evil and one caught in between. As the sonnet progresses, the speaker is gradually torn and tormented because the woman (the worse spirit), is tempting the man (the better angel), away from him.

Check your progress - 7

1. In the sonnets, what views does Shakespeare express regarding the nature of true love and the miseries of misguided love ?
2. How does the poet's love for the young man differ from his love for the Dark Lady ?
3. Discuss the theme of immortality as presented in the sonnets, citing specific lines as support for your views.
4. Write an essay in which you discuss the poet's changing attitudes toward the young man.

2.8. Let us sum up

This discussion would have definitely helped to understand Shakespeare's contribution to the world of literature especially to the field of English poetry. Through this discussion an attempt has been made to provide elaborate discussions on Shakespeare as an Elizabethan poet, and most importantly Shakespeare as a sonneteer. The sonnets which have been discussed in this unit are reflections of his poetic genius and sublime thoughts. Through the sonnets the students would be able to understand the theme of beauty, the theme of time and eternity, and the theme of immortality. This theme of immortality ensures that his poems, his works would be able to survive beyond ages after ages as they can conquer time.

2.9 Key Words: Immortality, youth, beauty, time, nature, love, defeat, Dark Lady, Fair Youth.

2.10 Suggested Readings:

Pona Mahanta et al. eds. *Poems Old and New*. Macmillan, New Delhi: 2011. Print.

Eliot, T.S. *Elizabethan Essays*. Faber & Faber, London: 1934. Print.

Greer, Germaine. *Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

Abrams, M.H. & Harpham, G. G. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning. New Delhi. 2015. Print

2.11 References

Ackroyd, Peter. Shakespeare: The Biography. Vintage, London: 2006. Print.

Bentley, G.E. Shakespeare: A Biographical Handbook. Yale University, New Haven: 1961. Print.

2.12 Model questions

1. Prepare an illustrative note on sonnet tradition of Elizabethan Age with special reference to Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser.
2. Comment critically on the treatment of the theme of friendship from your reading of the prescribed Shakespearean sonnets.
3. Do you think the identity of the 'fair youth' and the 'dark lady' is necessary to the understanding of Shakespearean sonnets? Substantiate your answer with reasoned arguments.
4. Critically appreciate the Sonnet No. 144 of Shakespeare.
5. How does Shakespeare assert that art immortalizes life? Substantiate from your reading of the prescribed sonnets of Shakespeare.

BLOCK-II

Metaphysical Poetry and Milton

UNIT-I

John Donne

Poems: “The Good Marrow”, “The Sunne Rising”, “The Cannonisation”,
“At the round earth’s imagined corners”, “Death be not proud”

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 John Donne’s Life and Career

1.3 The Age of John Donne

1.4 John Donne’s Works

Check Your Progress

1.5 Donne and the Metaphysical School of Poetry: Their Assessment through the Ages

1.6 Definition of Metaphysical Poetry

Check Your Progress

1.7 John Donne’s Love Poetry

1.8 Critical analyses of Donne’s love poetry

1.8.1 The Good Morrow

Check Your Progress

1.8.2 The Sunne Rising

Check Your Progress

1.8.3 The Canonization

Check Your Progress

1.9 John Donne's Religious Poetry

Check Your Progress

1.10 Critical Analyses of John Donne's Religious Poetry

1.10.1 At the round Earth's imagined corners

Check Your Progress

1.10.2 Death be not proud

1.11 Key Words

1.12 Let us sum up

1.13 Terminal Questions

1.14 References/Further Reading

Objectives- After going through this unit, you will come to know about-

- John Donne's life, his inclinations and also form a general idea of his times
- You will also come to know about the historical evaluation of the Metaphysical School of Poetry, of which John Donne is considered to be the leading poet.
- Know about the themes of his love and religious poetry.
- Analyze the prescribed poems in the backdrop in which they were composed and in the light of the metaphysical strain which is a hallmark of Donne's poetry.

1.1 Introduction -

John Donne (1572-1631), the 17th century metaphysical poet, is one whose reputation as a poet was greatly eclipsed by damaging criticism for more than a century but with the changing aesthetics of the times, was rediscovered in the later ages, particularly in the 20th century. "He was the first poet in the world in some things" but "for not

being understood he would perish”, Ben Jonson once said of him and it is quite apt to describe him. In his own time, his poetry was highly regarded by his fellow poets and friends but that popularity was very short lived as in the subsequent ages, his poetry was severely criticized. He wrote startlingly original poetry not in terms of original themes but a fresh treatment of often-used themes by infusing certain novel ideas and concepts. In his poetry, there is a curious mixture of the highly sensual and the profoundly religious, which was not much seen before. He is free from any borrowings from the French and Italian tradition unlike the Elizabethan poets. He is also free from the use of imagery from mythology or romantic history. Rather he uses imagery from the professions, events and happenings from his own age. In a way, he can be seen as anticipating the Modernist Movement in literature which is characterized by a generous attitude to poetic subject matter and allusions from diverse sources.

1.2 John Donne’s Life and Career -

In order to have a closer understanding of Donne’s poetry, it is necessary to have some idea about his life and times. He was the third of six children, born to Catholic parents in 1572 in London, when anti-Catholicism was at its peak in England. In 1559, the Protestant Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne of England and reformed the Church. In 1563, the first edition of John Foxe’s anti-Catholic *Acts and Monuments (Book of Martyrs)* was published. Eight years after his birth i.e., in the year 1580, the Parliament passed a series of acts making the practice of Catholicism synonymous with treason. His father, John Donne, was a prosperous merchant and his mother, Elizabeth Heywood was the daughter of John Heywood, a renowned epigrammatist. Due to their strong Catholic sympathies, his mother’s family also faced religious persecution and exile. At the age of 2, his grand-uncle was hanged for being a priest. His younger brother, Henry was arrested in 1593 for harbouring a Catholic priest. He later died in Newgate prison of bubonic plague. Due to such events, it can be said that religion played a major role in Donne’s life. It led him to reconsider his Catholic faith and finally

to his conversion to Anglicanism. Donne pursued his matriculation from Oxford and also studied at Cambridge University but did not receive a degree from there as taking the degree would require taking an Oath of allegiance to the Protestant queen, Elizabeth. After that he also trained as a lawyer at Lincoln's Inn, where he was admitted in 1592. Like many young members of the Inns of Court, he led a life of profligacy. He also devoted himself to studying both law and religion at that time. Donne wrote most of his love lyrics and erotic poems during these formative years. His two major volumes of work during this time were: *Satires* and *Songs and Sonnets*. Returning from there, he spent years in the service of Sir Thomas Egerton. Donne enlisted as a volunteer in two combined military and naval expeditions: The Cadiz Expedition of 1556 and Azore Expedition of 1597. One decisive turning point of his life was when he secretly married the niece of his patron, Sir Thomas Egerton in 1601. He was imprisoned for his elopement with Anne More in 1602 and, dismissed from his service by Egerton. He was also denied Anne More's dowry. Though his married life was good, his career prospects in public service were over. He had to endure poverty for a long time. Living under the asylum of a friend, Mr. Francis Wolley, in Pyford, till 1604, Donne tried to obtain employment at court. Later he moved to his brother-in-law's place at Peckham, where his second son George was born in 1605. Next year, Donne moved with his family to Mitcham where he continued to reside till five years. Here he began to work as a lawyer, earning a very small income. In spite of such financial misery, he continued to write on theology, anti-Catholic polemics etc. He also composed love lyrics, religious poetry, complimentary and funerary verses during that time. In 1607, he took the holy orders in the Church of England. However, he continued unsuccessfully to look for secular employment. On January 23, 1615, John Donne was ordained deacon and priest. Soon he was made a Royal Chaplain at the command of the king. In 1616, Donne was made a Reader of Divinity at Lincoln's Inn and worked there till 1622. Meanwhile, he lost his wife in 1617 shortly after giving birth to their twelfth child, who was stillborn. With this loss, he turned more towards his vocation. His *Holy Sonnets* were

composed during this time. In 1621, Donne was made Dean of St. Paul's, a position he held until his death. He soon became a well-known preacher. Along with his Holy Duties, he continued with writing. In 1623, Donne became seriously ill. From his sickbed, he began contemplating on the relationship between physical and spiritual sickness. He became obsessed with the concept of death. It resulted in many writings concerning death including his private prayers, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, published in 1624. On February 25, 1631, Donne preached his own funeral sermon, "Death's Duel" and a few days later on March 31, 1631, he died.

1.3 The Age of John Donne- John Donne lived at the crossroads of Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras which was a period of sweeping political, social, and economic changes. Colonial expansion and increase of industry expanded the horizons of knowledge. The stretching of space in astronomy and geography the recognition of vast, unexplored territories by explorers like Columbus greatly influenced the creative faculty of the writers of that time. Donne, too, shows his awareness and interest in the expanding physical world by his allusions and comparisons in his poetry (he even had direct experience of the English Maritime power while sailing to the Cadiz and Azores expedition). With such rapid transformation, the old theological world was also shaking under the pressure of new scientific explanations and theories. The fracturing of the Christian unity brought about by the Protestant Reformation (a widespread challenge to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church) made alternatives in religious outlook available for the people. The medieval thinker was religious whereas the new thinker was fascinated more towards observation and experiment. Donne, living at that time was a kind of medieval thinker with a modern outlook for he did not reject the old Ptolemaic cosmology on one hand and on the other, did not confine the range of knowledge by sticking to only handed down truths.

1.4 John Donne's Works- A comprehensive list of Donne's works is provided as follows-

1. *Songs and Sonnets* (1601)
2. *Epithalamia or Marriage Songs* (like, An Epithalamion for the Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine, Epithalamion for the Earl of Somerset and so on.)
3. *Elegies*
4. *Holy Sonnets* (published two years after Donne's death in 1633)
5. *Letters to Several Personages*
6. Epicedes and Obsequies
7. *Epigrams*
8. *Satires*
9. *Infiniati Sacrum (Metempsychosis)*
10. *The Anniversaries*
11. *Latin Poems and Translations*
12. *Juvenilia : Or Certain Paradoxes and Problems*
13. *Ignatius His Conclave (1611)*
14. *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions (1624)*
15. *Sermons*

Check Your Progress

1. Give a brief idea about the religious atmosphere of the time during which John Donn lived.
2. Examine the socio political conditions of John Donne's age.

1.5 Donne and the Metaphysical School of Poetry: Their Assessment throughout the Ages

Donne is frequently said to be the originator of “Metaphysical School of Poetry.” The term “Metaphysical” was first applied in connection to the poetry of Donne by John Dryden, when in 1693, he pointed out in his *Discourses concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* that Abraham Cowley followed the same metaphysical style as Donne. Dryden used the term quite derogatorily at that time while referring to Donne’s poetry, of which Cowley was an imitator. He said:

He [Donne] affects the metaphysics, where nature only should reign. [...] In this Mr Cowley has copied him to a fault. Dryden was referring to John Donne’s amorous verses where he perplexes the minds of the “fair sex” with his thoughts about philosophy, where he should be actually aiming to engage women’s hearts with the softness of love. This uneasiness that Dryden felt over Donne’s love poetry was referred to as “metaphysical”.

Later, the term ‘Metaphysical’ was revived in the 18th century by Dr Samuel Johnson who borrowed it from Dryden. In 1779, Johnson wrote a short biography of Abraham Cowley, which was the first of a series of biographical and critical prefaces to his anthology of *Works of the English Poets*, alternatively called *The Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81). Here he elaborated the characteristics of the metaphysical style which in his opinion, was established by John Donne. Like Dryden, Samuel Johnson also used the term disparagingly. The term ‘Metaphysical’ in Johnson’s usage did not have anything to do with spirituality or a philosophical conception of the universe, rather it stood for poetry that seemed hard, abstract or bewildering. To write metaphysically for Johnson meant to write “wittily”, bringing apparently opposite things into harmony with one another. The characteristics of the Metaphysical school of poetry as perceived by Samuel Johnson are as follows-

1. Erudite poetry- Since the Metaphysical poets (Donne, Cowley, Crashaw, Vaughan, Marvell and others) were men of learning, they liked to show off their learning in their poetry by reference to diverse topics. Johnson acknowledged his admiration for Donne's erudition and considered him a man of extensive knowledge.
2. Witty elements- Johnson acknowledges the presence of wit in metaphysical poetry. He rejects the definition of wit given by Pope that wit is "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed". Enlarging the scope of wit, he says that "[wit] is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just." But the specifically metaphysical wit which he found in the metaphysical poets was a kind of "discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." In other words, this group of poets, with their ingenuity of thoughts, is rarely natural in Johnson's estimation. They exhibit a combination of dissimilar images or uncanny resemblances in apparently unlike objects (also called conceits). "The most heterogenous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions".
3. Unnatural poetry- In the enumeration of the Metaphysical poets, Johnson found a great degree of unnaturalness as the poets indulged in exhibiting artificiality instead of concealing the art, desire for originality in place of true representation of nature, stylistic carelessness and abstract conceits violently combined together. Their search for novelty, according to Johnson, disgraced all sense of decorum. "They did not much enquire whether their allusions were to things high or low, elegant or gross: whether they compared the little to the great, or the great to the little."

4. Unpoetic language- The language of poetry of the Metaphysical poets is not poetic enough. They used jagged rhyme schemes that were not regular, producing a harsh and tuneless effect. Johnson said that instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses.

Such an assessment of the poetry of Donne and his followers is based on neo-classical conventions. His poetry represents a parallel stream in the Elizabethan age in which the mainstream poetry as represented by Spenser consisted of metrical exposition. In fact, the poetry of Donne and his school is said to be occurring when the greater poetry of the Elizabethan period was in its decline.

With the coming of the Romanticists in the 19th century, Donne's reputation revived. It rose slightly with DeQuincy and Coleridge who admired him but did not popularize him. As the Romantics were themselves characterized by freedom of thought from set constraints, they could perceive beyond the apparent ruggedness a more varied rhythm and acknowledged a higher goal than metrical perfection. In the early 20th century, Herbert J.C. Grierson's text, *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the 17th Century* (1921) remains the most definitive in renewing the interest of literary interest in Donne. Grierson says, "Metaphysical poetry, in the full sense of the term, is a poetry which has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence." The characteristics of Metaphysical poetry as perceived by Grierson are as follows-

1. Intellectual character of the conceits - Grierson finds that in contrast to the simple imagery of the classical poetry, medieval Italian poetry, metaphysical conceits are often learned, and resulting from a finer psychology of the poets. He associates the "metaphysical strain" with the "more intellectual, less verbal character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans".

2. Blend of passion and thought- The Metaphysical Poets depict a blend of passion and thought, or feeling and ratiocination in their poetry which is their greatest achievement. Passionate thinking becomes metaphysical, probing and investigating the experience from which it originates. Thus the poetry becomes concerned overwhelmingly with the poet exploring the recesses of his consciousness before attempting to express their feelings (Their passionate feelings are expressed in terms of images which are intellectual in nature, drawn from the wide range of their study.)
3. Argumentative and subtle evolution of their lyrics- In metaphysical poetry, there are arguments after arguments which prove a point.

This sort of evaluation of Metaphysical poetry by Grierson in a way refutes the charges labeled by Johnson on it. Whereas Johnson pronounced the metaphysical wit as the ability of violently putting together extremely opposite images, Grierson calls it more intellectual and less verbal. Similarly, Grierson seems to defend this poetry against the charge of artificiality labeled by the 18th century critic by asserting that, there is a fusion of thought and feeling in their poetry which defies the notion of artificiality.

In 1921, another influential essay was published which contributed new insights in the reading of these Metaphysical poets. It was T.S. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets" which was first published as a review of H.J.C. Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the 17th Century* but more than a review it is a critical document that has brought about a reassessment and revival of interest in these long neglected poets.

Eliot sees in Donne and other poets of the 17th century as poets a continuation of some older tradition and thereby problematises the term "Metaphysical" itself. He says that it is difficult to define the term and explain the characteristics which differentiate Metaphysical poetry from other kinds of poetry. The bringing together of heterogeneous

ideas and compelling them into unity is a common feature of any poetry; it is even present in Dr Johnson himself. Eliot also quotes from Herbert, Cowley, Bishop King and other poets in support of his contention, and thereby proves that metaphysical poetry cannot be differentiated from other poetry as per Johnson's definition.

Eliot further points out the positive aspects of Metaphysical poetry. These were mainly two in number-

1. Unification of Sensibility- By 'sensibility', Eliot meant the faculty to unite thought and feeling. It can fuse varied and contradictory experiences into a single whole. Such unification of sensibility or the fusion of thought and feeling is feature of Metaphysical poetry. "A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility... [the poet] falls in love, or reads Spinoza and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes." After Donne and Herbert, Eliot sees a change creeping into the poetry of the later ages. The later poets lost the capacity of uniting thought and feeling. A 'dissociation of sensibility' set in. Tennyson and Browning, in Eliot's opinion, were poets in who could think and reflect, but failed to turn their thoughts into poetry. Similarly, Milton and Dryden were great poets; rendering great service to the cause of poetry, but the 'feeling' in their poems was crude and artificial.

2. Similarity with the Modern temper- The Metaphysicals, according to Eliot, is very akin in temper with the poets of the Modern Age. Modernist poets are difficult and complex, like the Metaphysicals. Again, the modern poets are very comprehensive and allusive, and use conceits very much similar to the Metaphysicals.

Eliot's criticism of Donne and his followers, not only made them regain their popularity, but also contributed much to exposition of the Metaphysical style for the modern readers. There now remains an important place in literary history for these poets.

After a brief study of the critical evaluation of “Metaphysical poetry” throughout the ages charting its trajectory of rise and inclusion into the canon of literature, we can now attempt to formulate a definition and enlist certain characteristics for the purpose of studying the prescribed poems of Donne.

1.6 Definition of Metaphysical Poetry- Metaphysical poetry can be defined as a kind of poetry which is highly intellectual in flavor and is marked by the ingenious use of conceits, images and paradoxes, all employed after thorough analysis of their emotional states or concepts in a thoughtful and organic manner, which makes the poetry both ‘witty’ and ‘serious’. It is never lengthy or descriptive but is concentrated to a limited length and has a highly dramatic opening. This poetry is written in a colloquial language and is marked by abruptness of tone and rhythm.

The main themes around which Donne wrote his metaphysical verses are – Love theme: secular poems of love which were written in the initial period of his life and Religious theme: devotional poetry which were compositions of the later period, both written with the same passion.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the views of Dryden and Dr. Johnson on metaphysical poetry.
2. Present a note on Grierson’s views of metaphysical poetry.
3. Briefly discuss Eliot’s views on metaphysical poetry.

1.7 John Donne’s love poetry-

In his Love poems, John Donne expresses a mature, almost a spiritual concept of love. At the outset of his career, Spenser had already earned glory and the Petrarchan sonneteers were in vogue in which the beloved would be idealized and her beauty celebrated in verse. Unlike them, Donne generally rejects the concept of love that emphasizes on the aesthetic aspect only. He also rejects the lofty cult of woman found in Petrarchan sonnets. Donne breaks away from the conventional sonneteers of his time not only in form but from the conventional sense

of an idealized love to a sense of love as a mysterious complex of physical desire and spiritual impulse. Written using fantastic metaphysical conceits, his love poetry is earthly and heavenly, physical and spiritual. In short, it expresses a variety of amorous experiences that are often startlingly unlike each other. A variety of images taken from contemporary happenings also abound in the poems, especially images from voyages, inventions and discoveries of new lands.

Thus, as a poet of love, Donne exhibits a wide variety of attitudes. His earlier love poems, which were a result of his profligate youth, are rather erotic and sensual. The later love poetry of Donne exhibits faith in a more sublimated version of love, which critics see as the result of his marriage with Anne More. Such love lyrics are never about the lover wooing his beloved, rather they depict the mutual feelings, the essential 'oneness' of both the lovers and the joy they experience in each other's company. The "experience of love" is based on equal urge and connection of both the lovers.

In his love poems, the metaphysical strain is evident as the intensity of his feelings is imaginatively combined with thoughts and arguments. Metaphysical conceits, paradoxes and intellectual analysis of emotions abound in his poems. A number of images from the geographical world, like the discoveries of new lands, are also found in his poetry. All these images, conceits etc, which result from an intellectual analysis of emotions, give a holistic character to the experience of love.

Sometimes, love is portrayed as a religious experience, like in the poems "The Extasie" and "The Canonization". In Medieval philosophy, "ecstasy" denotes the state of religious communion with God. Donne uses this term in order to depict his philosophy of love in which there is a spiritual union of souls, which however takes place only through the union of bodies. Similarly, in the poem "The Canonization", the love which the poet and his beloved share is so fulfilling and divine that they do not need any pilgrimage for salvation of their souls. They burn in the passion of love and are resurrected from the ashes, pure and saintly.

Donne draws upon the neo-Platonic concept of love to emphasize both physical and spiritual love as manifestations of the same impulse. This is a Renaissance concept of love which believes that love can be experienced in both physical and spiritual aspects. Love is also the basic eternal principle that underlies everything else. It is the force that binds God with the world and the man. It is the same impulse that binds one person to another. Donne uses this concept of love and hence, there is a balance between all aspects of love in his poetry.

Whatever may be the mood of his love poems, it always springs forth from a personal experience, not from any convention. The sensual and lusty, conjugal and serene- all forms of love are experienced by the poet and presented in poetic forms that defy restrictions of rhyme or metre.

1.8 Critical analysis of Donne's love poems⁵⁶

1.8.1 The Good Morrow

In the poem, "The Good Morrow" John Donne at first expresses his moment of epiphany when he found his true love, who according to him overshadows all other ladies ("beauties") whom he saw before. In wonder he asks rhetorically, what he and his beloved had been doing till they found each other. Using the metaphor of suckling babies, Donne says that perhaps they were satisfied with "suckling" simple childish pleasures. Or maybe, they were simply sleeping inside a cave like the "seven sleepers" (a reference to the Christian legend in which seven young Christian men from Ephesus hid in a cave during persecution and fell asleep for many centuries). All these earlier pleasures that he indulged in before falling in love, were just fancies. Moreover, he says that if he had desired any other beautiful girl at that time and got her, she was simply a sorry image, "a dream" of his beloved. In other words, Donne means to say that their life before they found each other was nothing substantial or fulfilling.

The second stanza shifts to a more mature, spiritual experience of love. Donne greets a good morning to his and his beloved's souls after having awakened from the sleep of an uninformed state, ignorant to the bliss of true love. They have now awakened from their 'dream' and are experiencing 'real love'. Their love for each other controls their sights from seeking other sights or pleasures. The small room in which the two lovers are staying at present becomes a miniscule containing the whole world. In the presence of each other, they do not seek the world outside. The expansion of the world map by the discovery of seas and lands is of little concern for Donne. The so-called maps may show to other people that different worlds might exist but for them, there is only one world and that is the presence of each other. Both the lovers are interested in possessing that world which is represented by her/his beloved.

In the third stanza of the poem, the poet continues speaking about their bonding of love. As the lovers look into each other's eyes, they both see their own reflection in the eye of the other, which can be seen as a proof of the completeness they feel in each other's presence. Moreover they can see the purity of their hearts reflected in each other's eyes. Using a metaphor, Donne says that their two faces are like the two geographical hemispheres, albeit better ones than those hemispheres. Both represent extremes, like the first one with sharp northwards inclination remains extremely cold and the second one, with a declining west is the point where the sun sets. The coldness of the Northern Hemisphere represents indifference and lack of warmth whereas the declining west represents decay and death. Their love, however, is free from these extremes of directions and thereby it is free from decay and death. According to a certain philosophy, when two things mix unequally, there is a possibility of the things becoming weak and eventually dying, but their love is not like any mixture that can be slackened. The durability of a thing depends on the homogeneity of the mixture of elements. Thus, their love, which is a harmonious entity, is immortal and not subject to decay.

Critical Comments- As with any metaphysical poem of Donne, this poem abounds in imagery from a variety of sources- pastoral scenes (“country pleasures”), Christian legend (“seven sleepers” den), contemporary happenings (map- making and sea discoveries) etc. The geographical imagery of map-makers discovering and demarcating new lands are used as a contrast to the world of love, which is more validating for these lovers. Their world of love is a microcosm for the entire physical world and it is more important than the geographical world. These images are intellectual and at the same time they are intricately woven with the emotional situation, which is about describing the greatness of love. The unmediated, uncontaminated and balanced nature of their love being compared to a world shorn off from the extremes of North and West hemispheres is an example of conceit used in this poem.

Check Your Progress

1. Critically appreciate the poem “The Good Marrow”.

1.8.2 The Sunne Rising

“The Sunne Rising” is another love poem in which Donne expresses his vexation at the sun for having disturbed him and his beloved in the morning. It is an aubade (a morning love song) albeit, it does not greet the arrival of dawn rather it laments the separation of lovers in the morning. Critics are of the opinion that the poem is dedicated to his wife Anne More, like all his sincere love poems. In a chiding tone, he asks the sun, an old fool, unruly sun why he comes through the windows and curtains to pay them an unwanted visit. Donne says that the time spent by the lovers in the company of each other do not depend on the markers of objective time, like the diurnal motions of the sun. It is no business of the impudent sun to disturb them; rather it is his business to rebuke late school boys and peevish apprentices. It is also his duty to inform court- hunters that the king would go hunting in the morning or the ‘country ants’ to collect grains from granaries with the approach of morning.

In the 2nd stanza, Donne challenges the might of the sun telling him that he shouldn't pride himself on possessing strong beams which according to Donne, can be averted only with the blink of his eye. However, he will not wink even for a moment in order not to lose sight of his beloved. He then asks the sun to stay and have a look at his beloved's eyes, and then tell him the next day if both the Indies, noted for their spices and gold mines (referring to East and West Indies) are there where he left them or are present in his bed chamber. By this he seems to imply that his beloved is more valuable than the combined wealth of both these lands. Moreover, Donne says that if the sun looks around for the kings whom he saw seated on their thrones the previous day, he would not find them there but all of them "here in one bed" by which he means that he and his beloved represent all the kings in the world.

In the final stanza of the poem, the poet again makes an exaggerated comparison between his beloved and all the states and himself to all the princes of the world, besides whom there is nothing else. Princes are just said to be playing out their roles. All the honour of the world is also just an imitation when compared to these lovers' kingdom and all wealth only a pursuit of transforming base metals into gold. ('alchemy'). Donne then compares the Sun's state of being alone to their blissful togetherness: it is only half as happy as they are. Moreover, he asks the aged, celibate sun to warm that world which is now condensed into the bed-chamber of Donne and his beloved. By shining on the lovers, Donne says, its duty of shining on the world will be accomplished. In the final conceit, he compares the bed as the centre around which the sun must revolve and the walls of the bed-chamber as the sphere or axis within which it will revolve.

Critical Comments-Both these poems are aubades and mature love poems of Donne. But the treatment of the dawn is different in both. In the earlier poem "The Good Morrow", the daylight with which the title is associated (even if the setting may not be actual dawn) refers to a sort of new consciousness for the lovers who were sleeping in the dark

without knowing the bliss of true love. The poem welcomes the enlightened state as represented by the morning and that is why, the poet greets a warm good morrow to their “sleeping souls”.

In the poem, “The Sun Rising” however, the real dawn is treated with contempt. The sun that marks the new dawn is seen as a sort of intruder into the lovers’ privacy. It has disturbed and barred the poet from enjoying a few more moments with his beloved. That is why, he is full of scorn for the sun in the earlier part and the later part of the poem is dedicated to describing how the poet and his beloved represent the parameters of the entire world within which the sun should direct its course.

Like the earlier poem, here also feeling is mixed with thought. In glorifying his beloved, the poet displays his learning and wit. She is compared to both the Indias, and all the states which are conceits used to express the poet’s sense of fulfillment (almost a kind of material prosperity) in being with his beloved. There is a striking parallel between emotional and material wealth, between love and other possessions which might seem paradoxical but it reinforces the main argument of celebrating the fulfilling nature of love. Extending this conceit, the poet says that if the sun shines on these lovers, in a sense, it would be shining on the whole world. The bed then becomes the sun’s central axis and the walls its sphere or orbit.

Check Your Progress

1. What is an aubade?
2. How does Donne react to sun rising in this poem?

1.8.3 The Canonization

The next poem, “The Canonization” also celebrates the experience of spiritual love to the extent of comparing the lover to a saint, beatified in love. In the first stanza, the poet asks his friend not to forbid him from making love to his beloved. The instinct of love is so

deeply imbibed in him that it cannot be cured by anyone's expositions against love; just like paralysis or diseases of gout, baldness and age-related ailments cannot be cured easily. He would rather want his friend to acquire wealth instead of advising him or cultivate his mind by learning some arts. He may undertake a course of study or get a position at the king's court. He may even get the opportunity to watch the real face of the king as a courtier. These are some of the pursuits which the poet lists for his friend to engage himself in rather than discouraging him from making love to his beloved.

In the next stanza, the poet provides justification for his stance of being in love by claiming that he has harmed nobody by being in love. He asks a few rhetorical questions to arrive at the point that his love is harmless- like whom he has injured by his love, or which merchant's ships his sighs have made to sink. Similarly, his tears have not caused any floods nor has the heat of his passion added any more number to the persons who died in plague.

The soldiers continue to fight wars and lawyers remain busy with their lawsuits as he and his beloved love each other. In short, normal life goes on quite unaffected by his being in love.

In the third stanza, the poet invites his friend to call him whatever he likes but whatever they are now; they are result of their love. They could be called two tiny flies or candles consumed in their own flames but they die at their own cost. The poet then uses the symbols of the eagle and the dove, which represent violence and gentleness respectively, to characterize themselves as lovers. They can be both extremely strong and passionate, or extremely gentle to each other. The poet quickly shifts from the earthly symbols of love, burnt in their own passion to a more transcendent symbol of the phoenix (the bird that gets burnt and rises from its own ashes). The phoenix symbolizes immortality and transcendence of earthly barriers. Just like the phoenix which gets burnt but does not die, their love for each other will not die even after they die as ordinary carnal lovers. It also symbolizes the transcendence of bodily barriers. As they are so united in love in a moment of transcendence,

the combined soul (without any distinction of sex) can be compared to that bird itself: "So to one neutral thing both sexes fit". However, they will again be born from the ashes as fleshly lovers and the process will go on. Their love is so pure that it will remain the same after rebirth. It is not subject to change. Like the mysterious Phoenix, they will also prove mysterious lovers and command respect. Donne here speaks of the renewal of physical passion in such a manner that suggests religious mystery.

The 4th stanza of the poem sees the lovers glorifying their act of dying for love. Even if love cannot assure them of immortality, they will die for love. And again, if their legend is not worthy for tombs and monuments, it will at least be fit for poetry. The story of their love may not be recorded in chronicles but it will be preserved in sonnets just like ashes of great personalities are preserved in ornamental urns or tombs spread in an area of half acre. All will sing hymns in their memory and thus, they will be canonized or achieve saintly martyrdom for devotion to their love.

The poem ends with the fond hope of the poet/speaker that posterity will remember them as reverend lovers who found pilgrimage in each other. For them love was peace-giving rather than virulent passion which defines love in the present moment. They contracted the whole world in the glasses of each other's eyes. In a parenthesis, the lenses of their eyes are compared to mirrors or spies through which they could have a vision of the entire world. They could also view entire countries, towns and courts in each other's eyes. Thus people will hold these lovers in high esteem and pray them to mould their love in the saintly lovers' pattern. At the end of the poem, the speaker even proposes an invocation that can be addressed to him and his beloved after they have achieved sainthood.

Critical Comments

In this poem, Donne treats physical love as something divine. The lover and the saint which are poles apart are brought into comparison. Moreover, the title "The Canonization" which has religious

associations is here wittingly used to suggest the induction of lovers into sainthood. The title and the content of the poem imply a striking paradox as the title denotes canonization of a saint while the content denotes sexuality. But the paradox here helps us to understand the central meaning of the poem which is that love and sexuality are essential to spiritual union and such spiritual union only makes saints. Both saints and lovers are alike in the sense that they have both renounced the world, one for the sake of God and the other for the sake of love.

Many conceits or apparently disharmonious associations make the poem a truly metaphysical one. For example, the comparison of lovers to 'flies' (which could be suggesting the unruly passion for mating) and 'tapers' (candles burnt up in their own heat), The 'Eagle' and 'Dove' and the simultaneous death and resurrection of the lovers to the mythical bird 'phoenix'. These are heterogeneous even contrary ideas: while flies, tapers, the dove (female coyness) and eagle (male strength) represent erotic imagery of all consuming passion the phoenix represents a positive imagery associated with immortality. Reference to the phoenix sums up the poet's views on the ultimate union of souls. True love compels the union of man and woman in so complete a manner (purging them of their distinctness as man and woman) that they now become almost free from death, and like that bird they will resurrect again and again (to enjoy the bliss of sensual love in a recurring manner).

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the poem "The Canonization".
2. How has Donne treated the theme of love in this poem?

1.9 John Donne's Religious Poetry-

John Donne's religious poetry also exhibits the same metaphysical strain the same intensity of feeling as his secular love poetry. Like his love poems, his religious poems also result from his personal experiences, and not from a desire to preach morality. Donne's

crisis of faith in the Catholic religion and his conversion to Anglicanism has a major influence in his religious poems. The conflict between the old and the new faith is a recurring theme in his poetry (“A Hymn to God the Father”). Moreover, a note of self introspection is also evident in his poetry. Donne seems very much conscious of his sins. He repents for his past follies and prays to God for His mercy and compassion. His *Holy Sonnets* particularly are the poems in which he repents for his misdeeds and begs for forgiveness. The poems are written in a confessional style that lays bare the intense anxiety and despair that he goes through when he is in deep repentance.

In his *Holy Sonnets* or *Divine Meditations* Donne shows a keen awareness of human imperfection and unlike the unblemished Christ, the human soul, is believed as inescapably spotted. However, his belief in the power of true repentance for the redemption of the soul becomes prominent towards the end.

In his religious poems, Donne also glorifies God and exhibits his deep devotion to the supreme Lord. However, his devotion is driven by the fear of death and ultimate judgment.

For example, Donne’s sonnet on the Day of Last Judgment “At the round earth’s imagined corners”, the poet very skillfully draws up images of that day to compose the scene before the mind’s eye. Angels are called up arise to blow their trumpets and go back to their bodies so that the process of the Last Judgment can be commenced. As his meditations on the Day of Judgment proceed, Donne becomes aware of the magnitude of his sins. The poem moves from a vision about the dreadful future to the present moment. He asks God to “let them sleep” and “me mourn a space”, in other words to postpone the Day of Judgment so that he can atone for his sins.

During the 17th century, two theories about predestination (a belief that human being was divinely predestined to Heaven or Hell) were prevalent: ‘supralapsarianism’ (or ‘High Calvinism’) and ‘infralapsarianism’. Supralapsarianism believed that God’s decree of

predestination was completely irrespective of human sinfulness. God had an eternal plan to redeem some select humans and to condemn all others before the Fall (which is also God's decree). In this view of God appears to be an arbitrary tyrant who created the world and the human beings only in order to damn them. Another theory, 'infralapsarianism', believes that God's decree of predestination came after the decree of Fall of Man and those humans who were saved, were saved in spite of their sins by God's mercy. Donne seems to lend support to the second view of predestination in his poems as he exhibits his deep faith in God's generosity and mercy that can be achieved by true repentance.

Ruminations about death also constitute a vital aspect of his sonnets, from which the sonnets derive their creative energy. Donne had to suffer the loss of many a near and dear one in his life (the death of his father, his brother Henry, wife Anne More and his five children) which cast a melancholic spell on him. His religious sonnets stand as a testimony to the phase of Donne's life when his mind was preoccupied with thoughts of death. The losses which Donne faced created an uncertainty in his mind and he soon became "engaged in anxious contemplating of his own mortality." Therefore, thoughts about the overpowering and scary antagonist of human life constitute an important subject of his poetry.

Donne's obsession with death can also be seen against the backdrop of Renaissance England during which death was a brute fact of life. The infant mortality rates were high, deadly plague and epidemics like typhus, smallpox and cholera were also on the rise. Death was an inevitable and all-pervasive fact of life. It was a familiar presence in an unhygienic and disease-ridden world.

Thus, many factors were responsible for Donne's preoccupation of death. It also occupied other poets, thinkers and philosophers of that time. Anyway, Donne's treatment of death in his poetry gives expression to his various contradictory thoughts about death: death as a gateway to eternal life, death as a short sleep, death as extremely fearful, death as a comforter of wearied spirits and so on.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the concept of predestination.

1.10. Critical analysis of Donne's Religious Poetry

1.10.1. At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners

The poem "At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners" is a religious poem of Donne which exhibits his deep Catholic faith. It also depicts Donne's fear of God's punishment and the resultant inner conflict that he goes through. It is included within the *Holy Sonnets* which mark the religious turn of Donne's writings. The poet here envisions the Day of Judgment on which all the souls will have to present an account of their lives before God. In the space of the octave (first 8 lines), the poet at first invokes the angels to blow their trumpets at the round earth's imagined corners, and to arise from their death in innumerable numbers. He then asks them to go back to their bodies, all of whose deaths were caused by factors like war, famine, old age, diseases and oppression of tyrannical rulers or factors like depression, operation of laws or by accident. These souls will now have the opportunity to meet God and therefore, will be granted immunity from death.

In lines 9-14 (the sestet part of the sonnet), the poet prays to God to let the angels sleep a little longer i.e., to postpone the Day of Judgment in order to give him some time to repent for his sins. He believes that it would be too late for him to ask for forgiveness when they will all be standing before God. Therefore, he makes an earnest request to God when he is still an earthly being to teach him how to repent. In the end, the poet underscores the value of true repentance by saying that it is as powerful in securing the salvation of the soul as the shedding of Christ's blood in attaining pardon for humanity's sins.

Critical Comments- This sonnet is the 7th one in the *Holy Sonnets* sequence. The poem has a highly dramatic beginning (Donne summoning up the Angels to arise and prepare for the Judgment Day)

and a very interesting title that introduces a paradox. The Scriptures believe the universe to be a geocentric system and the earth to be flat. However, Donne in spite of being a devout Christian does not take the Scriptures literally but symbolically and wittily suggests that, the four corners are imaginary. He was quite aware about the recent developments in science as he was a contemporary of Galileo, who challenged the geocentric notion of universe.

The poem's beginning like its title is equally fascinating. It conjures up the scene of the final Day of Judgment by a momentary shift to a completely different time and space. Moreover, the Angels are directly being addressed to which shows the sublimity to which Donne can soar in writing his religious verses. Moreover, in the sestet part of the sonnet, a sort of direct communion with God is being held in which he prays Him to teach the lesson of true repentance.

The poem's metaphysical qualities are its clever use of paradox (in the title), its contemplation of a prophetic event, which is itself a metaphysical subject (something beyond nature or the physical world), dramatic beginning, and depiction of knowledge of contemporary happenings.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the poem.

1.10.2. Death Be Not Proud

The next poem, i.e. "Death Be Not Proud" is another religious sonnet by Donne, included in the *Holy Sonnets*. Structurally, the poem resembles the earlier sonnet as it is also composed of two parts, the octave and the sestet, signaling two different strands of thought. The poem, on the whole, demonstrates the poet's faith in another Christian doctrine: that is the immortality of the soul after death.

He begins by refuting the idea that death is mighty and fearful as it is generally believed to be. Personifying Death, Donne says that He has no right to be proud on the fact that it is powerful enough to kill

people for those whom Death thinks to have overpowered are not actually dead. So, Death cannot kill him either. He then compares rest and sleep to Death because they resemble the sleep induced by Death. From rest and sleep, which are but temporary phases, there follows pleasure. So the poet's argument is that greater pleasure must be produced by Death. Therefore, the virtuous persons choose to die sooner as Death would provide rest to their weary bones and salvation to their souls.

In the sestet part of the sonnet, the poet catalogues a list of things which have power over Death. Death is shown to be a passive agent rather than an active force capable of operating on its own. It is called a slave to "fate, chance, kings, and desperate men". Fate or destiny has a major role in deciding the time and occasion of death. Similarly, death also comes through accidents. Moreover, it is caused by the cruel dictates of rulers and actions of criminals. Even poison, war and sickness act as tools of death. Compared with death, Opium and other narcotics can induce a sleep-like state which is a quite gentle, less painful method of sleeping. So why does Death swell with pride? Death can make us sleep but for a very short period of time as there is an after-life waiting for us beyond death. In fact, Death is just the gateway to that eternal life. Thus, the root source of death's arrogance, that it can kill us, is demolished. It is Death which dies at last, facilitating our souls' permanent independence from bodily constraints.

Critical Comments- "Death be Not Proud" is the Sonnet 10 in the *Holy Sonnets* sequence. In this poem, Donne seeks to shatter the age-old notion of death as an ultimate tyrant, but the poem, in a way, becomes a manifestation of his own fear and instability. Like any mortal human being, the poet also cannot escape the fear of death, a very powerful antagonist, and that is why he convinces himself with arguments contrary to the power of Death. It is his belief that Death can liberate us and immortalize us. It is an essential and recurring phenomenon. As long as there is life, death will accompany it, in order to end the temporary phase of physical life and give way to an eternal spiritual life. So both life and death are inextricably linked. Seen in this perspective, the line "Death thou shalt die" becomes problematic. If Death dies, there will be no question of liberation of human beings, not only for the virtuous but also for the sinners. Like a typical metaphysical poem, this poem

also structures out to be a long argument to prove a point- which is the impotency of death. Very logically, Donne compares Death with other kinds of intoxicants which also seduce the mind to sleep. In this way, Death becomes a welcome guest rather than an unwelcome visitor. The poem also argues that there are many things that hold sway over death (decrees of kings, fate, chance etc) due to which death becomes a slave. The arguments are so constructed as to reveal the metaphysical wit of Donne, by which a skilful comparison of Death to other things is facilitated.

As regards the structure of the sonnet, it follows the Petrarchan model of constituting an octave and a sestet part, the latter breaking away from the former and signifying a slight shift in the main argument of the poem. (In this case, the sestet involves a more vigorous attack on the power of Death than the octave part by dwelling on the futility of Death in the end.)

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the treatment of the theme of death in the poem.

1.11 Key words-

1. Metaphysical Conceit- The metaphysical conceit can be defined as a far- fetched or elaborate comparison between two dissimilar objects, on the basis of some apt and striking parallel discovered between the objects by the poet. The conceit, like Coleridge's 'Imagination' conveys a unified experience of balancing or reconciliation of opposites, and making of a new whole.
2. Metaphysical Wit- It can be defined as an intellectual keenness and skill through which the writer discovers the resemblances between unlike objects.
3. Petrarchan sonnet form-It is a sonnet form popularized by Petrarch, consisting of an octave (8 lines) and a sestet (6 lines).

1.12 Let Us Sum Up

After a study of John Donne's poems, we can conclude that the poems have multifarious aspects to look into. As representative

metaphysical poems of Donne, they open up a vast reservoir of allusions to different fields of knowledge, stimulate the intellect and also stir up various emotional states. It is seen that Donne's poems are an expression of a unified sensibility, in which emotions are amalgamated with thoughts, which gives an intellectual and scholastic character to his poems. The poem becomes a sort of organization, an artistic pattern of emotions that are expressed in a controlled manner bringing up argument after argument. Thus, a keen intellectual analysis of emotions and experiences is seen in the plethora of scholastic images that are deployed in the poem. Moreover, the thoughts in the poem are presented in a series of images that depicts the dramatic imagination of the poet, transmuting thoughts into sensuousness or experiences into an elaborate contemplative treatment in his writings.

1.13 Terminal Questions

2. Critically analyze the metaphysical quality of "Unification of Sensibility" in John Donne's love poems prescribed in your syllabus.
3. Examine how the criticism of Metaphysical poetry throughout the ages underwent change under different literary conventions before finally being incorporated into the canons of English literature.
4. Attempt a critical appreciation of the following poems.
 - a. At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners
 - b. Death Be Not Proud

1.14 References/Further Reading

Guibbory, Achsah. *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*. Cambridge, UK:

Cambridge University Press, 2006

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BLOCK-II, UNIT-II
***PARADISE LOST* (Book-I, II)**

John Milton

Section- I

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Introducing the Life and Times of John Milton

1.2.1 *Paradise Lost* and John Milton: An Introduction

1.2.2 How to Approach the Reading of *Paradise Lost*

1.2.3 Glossary

1.3 Check Your Progress

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

1.5 Glossary

1.6 Suggested Readings

1.7 References

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (1.3)

1.0 Objectives

This unit would acquaint you with the following aspects of *Paradise Lost*:

- ❖ *Compose* a broad context for the work John Milton put into *Paradise Lost*.
- ❖ *List* out the ways you can approach the study of epic poetry.

- ❖ *Practice* some of the finer details through the Check Your Progress section and the Glossary of important terms.
- ❖ By the end of the unit, you will be able to *discuss* and *describe* the relevance of *Paradise Lost* for the student of English Literature.

1.1 Introduction

At the start, the aim of this unit is to make you familiar with the various contexts related to John Milton and *Paradise Lost*. In this way, you will be able to begin to relate better to the significant references that Milton makes in *Paradise Lost*. The reason we shall do this is to help you place Milton within the larger tradition and canon of English literature. There is an added benefit in contextualising the age immediately before and after in which John Milton was writing – in the introduction it was mentioned that this age is one of the most significant in terms of the development and evolution of English Literature. Hence, a working knowledge of the historical context serves multiple writers from the time and will help you become familiarised with the time-period and its deep influences on the literature of the time. For this purpose, these contexts will be presented in as general a manner as possible, in a language that is aimed at helping you think, read, and write about these times in a critical way.

1.2 Introducing the Life and Times of John Milton

Dear learner, we begin this journey into a study of the first two books of John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* by first considering its importance and the poet's relevance in this day and age. Each historical epoch, from ancient times, has been marked by significant political, social, and cultural events. In English history, the period of time from the reign of Queen Elizabeth I when the leading luminaries of English Literature such as William Shakespeare and John Donne were writing to the time of the Restoration when John Milton was its representative poet, is considered by many to be one of the most significant periods of time in English history. There occurred sweeping social, religious and

political changes that would shape the course of English history for centuries to come. The British East India Company was just beginning its foray into the riches and mystique of the East, exploration into the New World was about to commence, and the fledgling Anglican Church established by monarchical will was contending with competing religious orders such as the Catholics, the Scottish Presbyterians, and its own Puritan movement, within and from outside England.

In the sphere of literature and the arts, some would say this period of less than a hundred years was the highest point of literary creativity and expression. Drama and theatre flourished with the works of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and John Webster being enacted and widely popular but theatre declined during the time of civil war and rebellious uprisings. Poetry was daring and experimental with the metaphysical poets such as Donne, Andrew Marvell and George Herbert popularising the shorter forms of poetry, but this was limited to manuscript form distributed among an established network of mutual admirers. The age of political pamphleteering and the assertion of an “English” political philosophy as well as the advent of scientific thought was beginning to take shape through the works of Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes. Within this same time, there was a movement towards the expression of a popular will that would see a king rebelled against, removed, and executed. The consequences of this would be heavily influential in the writing of the time. Puritanism would also shape English culture toward spiritual, rather than worldly, concerns.

All such concerns can be traced in John Milton’s poetical works but more prominently in the work considered the finest example of an epic poem in the English language, in the tradition of the Greek epics, *Paradise Lost*. The relevance of John Milton lies in his enduring contribution to the scope and range of English Literature, as well as the fact that poetry as a published form was gaining relevance among an increasingly literate public, which after the Elizabethan age was suffering cultural indifference at the hands of religious idealism. More than three hundred and fifty years ago, near London, a blind and almost destitute

John Milton embarked on a very special task. He was very close to realising the vision of his literary destiny – the publication of the English epic. Most other ancient epics we now know cannot be easily attributed or reduced to a single authorship, such as Homer’s *Iliad*. Most epic poems are the result of the conglomeration of differing versions passed down through the generations via an oral (either spoken or sung or both) tradition. This is not the case with Milton’s work of course. It is an awe-inspiring work precisely because it comes from a single author, who was blind by the time he completed the work. Theme-wise, *Paradise Lost*, at its core, is a representation of the highest qualities we look for in human beings.

Sheer perseverance in the face of tremendous difficulties, hard work, sincerity to stick to the task, all with an accepting and balanced mind-set – these qualities set John Milton apart, not only as a writer, but as a creator. When we think of John Milton now, we often do so in anecdotal terms, especially in relation to the blindness that he suffered toward the end of his life. How would we respond to such a crippling and difficult event in our own life? How would we deal with such an occurrence? One would assume that for a writer, blindness would severely hamper not only his or her creative output, but would generally cause one to feel at the very least, quite depressed. You might have heard of the determination and spirit of Helen Keller who overcame her severe physical disabilities to become a source of inspiration for thousands around the world. We who are “normal”, very often, take for granted our physical abilities and features. Imagine being born with the ability to see, hear, smell, feel, move, and then suddenly losing any one of these faculties. It is a testament to John Milton’s deep learning and understanding as well as the sheer capacity of his character that his response to his blindness was, at its heart, creative. We must remember that Milton’s greatest achievement, the English epic *Paradise Lost*, was composed while he was blind. Many learners may recall Milton’s famous sonnet ‘On His Blindness’ which formulates his spiritual response to his blindness, and conveys to the reader a dignified acceptance of his

circumstances. It is this spirit of perseverance and will that guides *Paradise Lost*. It is this same spirit that we shall also try to connect with in our approach to the study and understanding of this grand and epic English poem. In this sense, dear student, that John Milton's life itself constitutes a field of interest worth studying, and connecting to the aim and ethos of *Paradise Lost*. Milton chose a career in writing, despite his parents' wish that he take up the religious vocation and become a priest. It is through his writing that Milton, using the talent he was blessed with, chose to respond to the important, epoch-changing events during his lifetime, and it is also through his writing that Milton chose to come to terms with many of the personal losses that he faced in life. At this juncture, there are some important questions for you to consider: how do we know that Milton was affected/inspired by the events of his life? How do we know that his writing is deeply personal?

One only has to look at the most popular and well known of his works, both poems and prose tracts. One of the first poems he composed reflects his spiritual and religious upbringing: 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity'. He was close to his parents most of his life and dedicated a poem 'Ad Patrem' to his father, arguably the most ardent patron of Milton's career and scholarship. When a good friend, Edward King, was lost at sea, Milton, while still at college, composed the outstanding pastoral elegy, 'Lycidas'. He wrote social tracts on the necessity of divorce due to incompatibilities between husband and wife, most likely inspired from his own marital troubles with a young wife. He composed a political treatise defending the freedom of expression in *Areopagitica*. His sonnet, 'On His Blindness', as we have already discussed, discusses the loss of sight and the challenge to one's faith in life. These and other works show us that Milton's experience of the events of his life had an effect on his writing, and shaped his literary mind.

As we continue to unravel the story and style of *Paradise Lost*, we shall see how in this epic poem too, Milton's personal experiences and deep learning shape the way he has presented the material. Milton was a very learned man, spending the majority of his younger days

studying the classical styles, religious history, philosophies of antiquity, and languages, among other things. The highlight of his education included a trip to Europe, particularly Italy, to interact and learn further and also to secure his commitment to the literary calling. How do we understand the world? Most times, we seek simplicity of explanation and simplicity of understanding. It is easier to think about things in clear-cut, black-and-white ways. Good versus evil, God versus the devil, day versus night, order versus chaos, and so on. It is comforting to think that things can be classified in such ways.

1.2.1 *Paradise Lost* and John Milton: An Introduction

In the same way, we might want to approach the study of *Paradise Lost*. We might feel it is easier to think of the themes along such categories. However, Milton calls on you to think of these categories in a more complex and troubled way. In a sense, studying Milton will make you more mindful of the need to think deeply and critically about things that seem, on the surface, fairly simplistic. The ultimate purpose of the epic poem might itself sound simple as far as the stated aim is concerned, as Milton explains in the prologue of Book I, which shall be explained in a later section, but the presentation of the subject matter allows the student to rethink and explore the notions of good and evil in a more complex and fulfilling manner than simply declaring the denizens of hell as morally corrupt or simply evil, or the Fall of Adam and Eve as simply the result of weakness and foolishness.

1.2.2 How to Approach the Reading of *Paradise Lost*

If you have already started reading, or are about to embark on the study of *Paradise Lost*, the first question that might pop into your head is, quite naturally, why are we still studying Milton? What is the relevance of John Milton, and *Paradise Lost*, in this day and age? Are we wasting our time in trying to understand writing styles and themes from so long ago? The short and most obvious answer is, it's up to you to decide through your readings and your research. For all the platitudes and praise you might come across in your research into *Paradise Lost*,

you have to remember that this was not always the case. Big names in English Literature, over the centuries, such as Samuel Johnson, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis have put forth their own questions with regards the relevance of John Milton in the study of English Literature in general. As noted by Professor Seth Lerer, Johnson was “[d]ismissive of Milton and his poem” and “said of *Paradise Lost*, ‘none wished it longer.’” Eliot was of the view that Milton’s style displayed a “dissociation of sensibility” which basically means that the style of writing mismatched its themes and content. Leavis criticised Milton for being overly rhetorical, that is, he used a language that was trying to create an effect rather than impart any useful information. But here, it is important to stop and ponder: have you ever tried writing something? Have you ever tried to put pen to paper in an effort to compose something?

Writing, as you might have experienced, can be intensely personal as much as it is technical and formal. It emanates from what you have seen, heard, what you have learned previously, what you value, desire, feel, or need. It is, as you might now express, not only an exercise of your intellect, but your emotions, your mood, your influences, your experience, and your own aims and goals. In the same way, John Milton’s writing reveals more than just words on a page. His writing becomes representative of the deeply personal experiences of someone keenly aware of the conditions and contexts of his time. He was a writer of his age, and his writing represented the changes he saw, observed, and even lived, in his society, his political history and his economic circumstances. Are there any other contexts you can think of that might be important in the act of writing? In this sense, you might find it very interesting to learn of the history of England at the time through the lens of literature. The historical context around Milton spans three very important reigns – the Elizabethan, the Jacobean and the Caroline ages, followed by the Interregnum and the Restoration.

These important milestones in English literary history is very crucial not only to know more about Milton and *Paradise Lost* but also other very important writers, dramatists and poets of the time including

the likes of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and John Donne, to name a few. We also know that Milton wrote different kinds of things at different times in his life – poetry, prose, critical pamphlets. His writing was personal as well as political, but most of all, he tried to maintain a closeness to his ideas on how a spiritual life may be lived and expressed. Remember, we are now going into the details of Milton’s day and age, as well as details around his life. This will help you understand better the issues and questions that emerge from the study of *Paradise Lost*. At the same time, a number of technical terms you have already come across, such as epic, antiquity, contexts – all these terms will be explained in due course so as to help you begin to connect the different sections. So, we shall cover, as best as possible and within the scope of this Block, Milton’s day and age (which is also the larger context that influenced Milton’s approach to his writing); Milton’s life (which he expressed readily in his writing); the reasons why *Paradise Lost* was written in the style of an epic; and lastly, the story of the first two books of the epic poem, which although a small segment of the twelve books that make up *Paradise Lost*, are crucial as they introduce to you and other readers the spiritual and literary goal of John Milton.

1.3 Check Your Progress

1. With regards to John Milton’s historical context, tick against the right option the correct order of the monarchs that ruled in England at the time:

- (A) James I-Elizabeth I-Charles II-Charles I
- (B) Elizabeth I-James I-Charles-II-Charles I
- (C) Elizabeth I-Charles I-James I-Charles II
- (D) Elizabeth I-James I-Charles I-Charles II

2. Can you name some of the other works or poems composed by John Milton as mentioned as examples thus far? Try to name at least three using the following fill in the blanks method:

- (A) ‘Ad _____’

(B) 'Lyc_____'

(C) '_____ Blindness'

3. Try to match the term or phrase with the appropriate meaning:

- (A) Paradise 1. Significant event in history
- (B) Epoch 2. Referring to ancient or classical times
- (C) Presbyterian 3. Where Adam and Eve lived before their disobedience
- (D) Antiquity 4. The Western Churches of Scotland and the Netherlands

(A) _____

(B) _____

(C) _____

(D) _____

4. You might know someone in your life who is faced by difficult circumstances and physical disabilities. Try to place yourself in their shoes. How would you respond to being differently abled? Imagine a response as best as you can.

5. Helen Keller's is an inspiring story. It would be very useful to read a little about her life and her struggles to help you understand the difficulties faced by differently-abled men and women.

6. What does the term antiquity refer to? How much do you know about Greek and Roman culture and literary traditions?

7. Can you name some epics from our country?

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

So far, dear learner, we have just started to warm up to the idea of studying John Milton and *Paradise Lost*. We have considered that it is important to have some knowledge of the life and times to which John Milton belonged to in order to develop a deeper understanding of his work. Therefore, a short introduction of the age in which Milton wrote and composed has been started, and shall be continuously touched upon to help you develop a critical appreciation of the epic poem itself – why did Milton write in the style he did? Why did he pick the particular kinds of themes? What was he writing in response to? And so on. These questions shall be addressed as we progress through the coming units, the process of which, this unit hopes, has been initiated. By the end of the Block, you are going to be familiar with not only John Milton and *Paradise Lost*, but some important moments of English literary.

1.5 Glossary

Some of the key terms and phrases touched upon so far, and a short explanation of their meaning and importance:

Epic poem – Very simply, an epic is a long poem, usually relating themes of great importance, such as war and heroism.

Antiquity – This word relates to the ancient past, especially the period of time with regards the classical (primarily Greek and Roman) and other human civilizations before the Middle Ages in Europe.

Paradise – Generally means an ideal or idyllic place or state, a heavenly place. In the context of this study, it refers explicitly to the Garden of Eden, or the place where the first man and woman (from the story in the Bible) Adam and Eve stayed in before the Fall (their disobedience of God) in the biblical account of Creation.

Epoch – This word refers to a particular period of time in history or a person's life, generally very significant in human history.

Anglican Church – This church was started by King Henry VIII, who

was the King of England from 1509 until his death in 1547. Henry was the second Tudor monarch, succeeding his father, Henry VII and he founded the Anglican Communion which was the group of Christian Churches derived from or related to the Church of England, including the Episcopal Church in the United States and other national, provincial, and independent Churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the head-bishop of the Church of England.

Puritanism – This refers to the beliefs or principles of a group of English Protestants of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship, which differed from the ritual worship prevalent at the time.

Catholic Church – It is the part of the Christian Church which acknowledges the Pope (in the Vatican) as its head, especially as it has developed since the Reformation. It is the largest Christian Church, dominant particularly in South America and southern Europe. Roman Catholicism sharply differs from Protestantism in the importance it grants to tradition, ritual, and the authority of the Pope as successor to the founder of the Christian Churches. the Apostle Saint Peter.

Presbyterian – This refers to a form of Protestant Church government, which was especially prominent in Scotland, in which the Church is locally administered by the minister with a group of elected elders of equal rank. Regionally and nationally it is governed by representative courts of ministers and elders. Presbyterianism was first introduced in Geneva by the Church reformer John Calvin, in 1541, in the belief that it best represented the pattern of the early church of Saint Peter. There are now many Presbyterian Churches (often called Reformed Churches) worldwide, notably in Scotland and the Netherlands and in countries with which they have historic links (including the United States and Northern Ireland).

Protestant – The word Protestant refers to any member or follower of any of the Western Christian Churches that are separate or broke away from the Roman Catholic Church (recall, it is the Church that believes in the headship of the Pope) in accordance with the principles of the Reformation, including the Anglican, the Presbyterian, and the Lutheran Churches. Protestants are named so following the declaration (or protest) of Martin Luther and his supporters who rejected the authority of the papacy, both religious and political, and find authority in the text of the Bible.

Hellen Keller – Helen Keller was born in 1880 and died in 1968. She was an American writer, social reformer, and academic and her full name was Helen Adams Keller. Blind and deaf from the age of nineteen months, she learned how to read, write, type, and speak with the help of a tutor. She went on to champion the cause of blind and deaf people throughout the world and still serves as a figure of inspiration for many who struggle with the issues of being different abled.

Differently abled – The term ‘Differently abled’ was first proposed in the 1980s as an alternative to the words ‘disabled’, ‘handicapped’, ‘physically challenged’ and other such terms. It was suggested on the grounds that it gave a more positive meaning and so avoided discrimination towards people with disabilities. The term itself has been criticised for being patronising and condescending, but has gained usage over the years. Try to find out what is the acceptable term now, especially when needed for use in the public context.

1.6 Suggested Readings

The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume I: “The Early Seventeenth Century (1603-1660)”.

Edward Phillips, *The Life of Milton*.

Samuel Johnson, *The Life of Milton*.

Seth Lerer, *The Life and Writings of John Milton*.

1.7 References

John Milton: Paradise Lost. Ed. Barbara K. Lewalski. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2007. Print. *Milton's Paradise Lost*. Illustrated by Gustave Doré. Ed. Robert Vaughan. London: Cassell,

Petter and Galpin, 1879. From www.archives.dickinson.edu. Archives & Special Collections at Dickinson College: John Milton's Paradise Lost by Gustave Doré, 2017. Web. <<http://archives.dickinson.edu/digitized-resources/johnmilton%E2%80%99s-paradise-lost-gustave-dor%C3%A9>>.

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Milton, John. “Paradise Lost, Second Edition (1674).” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. Vol I. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006. 1831-2055. Print.

Lerer, Seth. “The Life and Writings of John Milton.” *The Great Courses: Teaching That Engages the Mind*. Virginia: The Teaching Company, 1999. Print.

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (1.3)

1. (D) Elizabeth I-James I-Charles I-Charles II.
2. (A) ‘Ad Patrem’.
(B) ‘Lycidas’.
(C) ‘On His Blindness’.
3. (A) 3.
(B) 1.
(C) 4.
(D) 2.

4. The answer depends on your own experience or research. Try to answer it honestly.
5. See Section 1.3 Keywords.
6. See Section 1.3 again.
7. See Unit II, Sub-section 1.2.1. You may also mention the *Ramayana*, one of the two great Sanskrit epics of India.

Section- II

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 The Age of John Milton

2.2.1 A Word on Milton's Life

2.3 Beginnings of Milton's Life and Career

2.3.1 Glossary A

2.3.2 Check Your Progress

2.3.3 The Early and Mid-Seventeenth Century: A Brief Historical Background to John Milton's Time

2.3.4 Politics and Religion

2.3.5 Glossary B

2.3.6 Check Your Progress

2.3.7 Culture and Literature

2.3.8 Glossary C

2.3.9 Check Your Progress

2.4 Let Us Sum Up

2.5 Answers to Check Your Progress (2.3.2; 2.3.6; 2.3.9)

2.0 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- ❖ *Discuss and describe, broadly, the age of John Milton.*
- ❖ *Compose a short biographical study on John Milton's early life and career.*

- ❖ *List* out some of the important social, political and historical moments of the age.
- ❖ *Use* the unit to increase your vocabulary related to the time and to the poet.

2.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this unit remains to help the student of English Literature understand two things - first, the life and times of one of the most influential and important English poets, John Milton, which in itself is highly interesting. Second, how his life and his art melded into a culmination of years of arduous and dedicated scholarship, including the mastery of a number of languages, travels to the European mainland that honed and affirmed Milton's creative genius, his principled stand and hopes for the people of England in their politics, and the overcoming of deep personal losses and material as well as physical disabilities. The material for Book I and Book II of *Paradise Lost* is grounded in such a background and just as the epic scale of the poem links to a broader rumination about life and man's place in the cosmos, so does the fact that Milton, and for that matter all human beings, are invited to consider their place in such a complex and rich setting. The main aim, so to speak, of this unit is to dive into the details around one of the greatest exponents of the English language, and to rediscover an interest in the link between ourselves and the bigger questions in life. There are glossaries interspersed between the sections in this unit rather than at the end so as to aid your study and vocabulary around the topics of the unit.

2.2 The Age of John Milton

Let us try to imagine the context and the time of John Milton's life and literary career. Milton's political and religious beliefs very often put him at odds with those in authority. England itself was in a precarious political position after the death of Elizabeth I. Culturally, England was also somewhat a late bloomer compared to the Renaissance heights

achieved in Europe, especially the Italian kingdoms. By the time of the Anglican religious reformation, England was slowly starting to become the dominant power in the world, owing to its naval prowess and exploratory and colonial zeal. John Milton is regarded as one of the preeminent poets of the English language. He was born, lived, and wrote in an age when England itself was at a one of its most important political and religious crossroads. The upheavals witnessed during this time find ample expression in his poetry and political pamphleteering. It is a testimony to the unprecedented passion and genius of John Milton that much of the work acknowledged as his best also emerged when the poet himself was facing some of the most challenging circumstances in which to compose anything of merit.

Decried and even arrested and fined for having the reputation of being anti-royalist, progressively going blind till he completely lost his sight, having lost his only property in the Great Fire of London, having suffered the loss of not one but two wives and a child - lesser mortals would have yielded to far less. It is in the knowledge of this that one has to approach the highly allusive poetical style of John Milton. It is also through one begins to understand that his poetry stands as a high point in not only the narrow view of the English canon and political history, but the sheer display of human perseverance. Milton's influence on the later poets of English literature cannot never be fully appreciated but it is well documented the regard some of the brightest names had for him, both personally and for his art, including luminaries from a wide range of 'ages' and poetical art such as Andrew Marvell, John Dryden, and William Wordsworth.

2.2.1 A Word on Milton's Life

We live in a time of unprecedented political flux, and news of the barbaric extent of humanfallibilities is never far from our horizon. Similarly, the poetry amidst the chaos of seventeenth century England is a reminder of the vast hope that can be derived from seemingly hopeless times and the power of language to not only create but also mediate our reality. Language is indeed a mirror of reality in Milton's

society, but it also is an exercise of conscience in a time fraught with challenges and difficulties. Additionally, the parts of the epic treated in of themselves as necessarily different from other styles or sources, focus more on language, the style and the overarching themes that emanate from the studying of an undertaking of this magnitude. This epic is 'modern' in the sense of carrying forward this most esteemed poetic form from the Greeks and the Romans, in a language that heralds its flexibility of form and intuition. And it is also along these lines that we shall trace the theological, political, aesthetic and personal details of John Milton's art.

It is interesting to note that we know a great deal more about Milton's life than about most of his immediate predecessors and successors including the likes of William Shakespeare. This knowledge greatly informs the reading of his poetry, which in turn highlights almost autobiographical elements. Of course, even if we go into the details of Milton's life, we have to note that this was a life spent in pursuit of the higher ideals of knowledge and wisdom, and the dealing with deep philosophical and existential questions and conundrums. Far from taking away or distracting from the form and content of his poetry, this adds a rich depth of meaning to Milton's works. Another added complexity is that *Paradise Lost* in many ways can be seen as a result of years of writing, learning, and dedicated service to the nation, and so it is very useful to pay attention to the details of the poet's life and experiences. While the arguments against such a reading are well-known in academia, there is also a case to be made that such a reading is more to draw in the interest of the student than to just present needless biographical details. Milton's sincerity, if one may call it that, to his art, is not just an afterthought but the basis of what it means to write about life. On this note, Milton's was a remarkable life, consisting of an extraordinary assemblage of experiences, with high-points that cannot help but be read as providential, and lows that make it seem he was inordinately the victim of both fate and circumstance. While the full extent of his life and times will hardly be justly conveyed within the scope of the following

units, a review of the available literature reveals the usefulness of touching upon certain key events and historical records. There are many instances where the details of his life we shall find, has formed the subject matter of Milton's works. Milton wrote of subjects as varied as political disillusionment and the role of government in relation to individual freedom, to deeply personal poems directly linked to his experiences including death of close relations, friends, his blindness, and the existential confusion that arises from such events. These are referenced in each of the units, interspersed among the introduction to the importance of the epic in English Literary history as well as the introduction, in particular, to *Paradise Lost*.

For your ease, the entire unit will strive to keep John Milton's life and times as simple as possible, while reserving the bulk of the critical analysis for the introduction to the epic poem and *Paradise Lost*, and the subject matter and themes of Books I and II. The concluding part shall attempt to link the poem to the larger literary landscape, particularly the rest of the Books of *Paradise Lost*. This will complete the literary aspects of this Block. Again, at suitable junctions, there shall be a short review of what has been learned and studied, a sort of practice of the material that is being dealt with in view of making the material as relevant as possible to possible questions in examinations and research. The ultimate aim of the material remains the development of not only the interest of the reader in view of the more formal aspects of life, but also to try and impart some of the enjoyment that is to be found in the difficulty of this subject matter. In learning to criticise, understand, grapple with, and finally acknowledge, even if just in passing, the power and excellence of *Paradise Lost*, through this very rudimentary analysis of just the first two books, it would be a testament to the very real life concerns of one of the greatest sons of the gift of poetry.

2.3 Beginnings of Milton's Life and Career

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, in London. He came from, by the standards of the day, a well-to-do family with father

John Milton, Sr., a scrivener (one who may be variedly described as an investor, with proficient knowledge of the law, a notary, as well as money lender) and a musician of some repute in his time. The Milton family would all be involved in music and John Milton himself was accomplished in at least two instruments. An appreciation of music is the first clue to the kind of poetry that Milton was to achieve excellence in - epics, after all, were designed to be sung, in ancient times, by the *rhapsode*. A poetic career, in these our days, hardly makes sense with the modern anxiety and new media having completely overtaken older forms of expression, especially literary. As students of literature, we would be hard-pressed to forget that poetry was perhaps one of the most intimate as well as political of literary exercises for a long time, in many of the kingdoms of the world, not only in England. For all their sheer diversity of origin, the epics of humanity, from the *Gilgamesh*, to the *Mahabharata*, to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, to Virgil's *Aeneid*, to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, to the Japanese *Heike monogatari*, are all poetic in form, meant to be recited and sung and performed for the larger audience to bear witness to.

It is this form, one of the oldest forms of expression primarily because it is intimately related to the essence of myth-making and story-telling, that John Milton seamlessly links at a time when one nary had the time for longer forms of writing. That may be said to be case now as well, for our penchant for quick, bite-sized and fast-track reception of information. That the epic was not only successful but very popular is a testament to John Milton's allure as a poet and the very real subject matter of his poetry. In the beginning, John Milton was educated at home, and with the Renaissance at its zenith in Europe, the humanities and arts were flourishing. Tutored at home, Milton's childhood was marked by extensive learning that was matched by his thirst for his studies. John Milton learnt how to read, write and speak, with adeptness, Greek, Latin, Italian, and even Hebrew. Not only Hebrew, by many accounts, he learnt Aramaic and Syriac as well, the ancient biblical languages. It is not surprising that Milton would go on to combine

religious themes with humanistic design and style, incorporating the best of his deep knowledge of languages and Christian learning. In fact, it was the wish of his parents that Milton take up holy orders and serve in the Anglican church.

No doubt Milton would have excelled in this or any other calling given the high level of education that he had received and took interest in. By the end of Milton's life, he was known not only in England as one of the greatest poets of the soil, but in Europe, especially for his treatises in Latin that defended the English kingdom from the slander and threat of its European counterparts. He also visited noted personalities in his travels in Europe, which not only widened his worldview, but also helped him to realise his love for the people of his country. This great education and wide-ranging interaction is all the more remarkable considering the momentous time he lived in – the public execution of a King, civil war, the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the Great Plague, the Great Fire of London, the triumphant return of the monarchy which heralded the downturn in his fortunes.

But oddly, it is in the most challenging part of Milton's life, when he had little financial security, suffered public defamation, had children to take care of, and the onset of a fastprogressing blindness, it is at this time that Milton yielded to the world the greatest of his works. Perhaps it is not surprising that genius such as his would be predisposed to art as a means of making sense of a deteriorating personal and public life. The delicate condition of the religious and social fabric of England made it an extremely volatile environment to live and survive in, least of all compose epic poetry. Hence, the first part of this unit will try to delineate a brief history of the time right before and during Milton's life. This background that will hopefully add to the interest around his poetry given that much of the subject matter is directly inspired and alludes to many of the happenings of the age. Some of the greatest themes of what it means to be human are delved into in the epic scale of *Paradise Lost* - disobedience, sin, retribution, rebellion, hope, redemption, love, anger, failure, pride - these are themes that transcend time. Human experience,

a complex and complicated miasma of deeply personal thoughts and dreams, abject disappointments, frail hopes, all highly individual and subjective, is pitted against a grand background of a cosmic scale. The question of selfish motivation, egotism and narrowness of mind comes to be adequately shaped and represented, especially through the figure of the main character of Books I and II, Satan.

2.3.1 Glossary A

The aim of the keywords, dear learner, is not only to aid your understanding of the section that precedes it but to also help you improve your English language vocabulary. You are requested to go through the following as carefully and as slowly as possible, as many times as possible to continue building your practice and use of the words into your answers, and in your life in general. The names of some key personalities of the age are also included as well as some of the most important events of the time.

Dominant – In this context, having influence or power over others; it also indicates a suppression of others in order to maintain power and status.

Pamphleteering – The writing of pamphlets, especially ones which are of a political and controversial nature.

Great Fire of London – A huge and highly destructive fire which destroyed around thirteen thousand houses over four hundred acres of London between 2nd and 6th September 1666. The fire is said to have started in a bakery in Pudding Lane.

Andrew Marvell – One of the English metaphysical poets, best known during his lifetime for his verse satires and pamphlets attacking the corruption of Charles II and his ministers; he was also a friend and ardent supporter of John Milton, and was one of the persons to arrange for the money that was to be paid as a fine to have Milton released from prison. Most of Marvell's poetry was published posthumously and was not recognized until the 20th century and include notable poems such as 'To His Coy Mistress' and 'Bermudas'.

John Dryden – One of the best-known English poets, critics, and playwrights of the Augustan Age. His works include the popular *Marriage à la mode* (comedy, 1673), *All for Love* (a tragedy based on William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1678), and *Absalom and Achitophel* (verse satire in heroic couplets, 1681).

William Wordsworth – You may already be very familiar with the name William Wordsworth, arguably the best known of the Romantic poets. Much of his work was inspired by visits and stays in the Lake District. His *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), which was composed with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and includes the famous poem 'Tintern Abbey', is a landmark in Romanticism. He was appointed Poet Laureate in the year 1843.

Hone – To give greater sharpness, refinement, perfection.

Affirm – To uphold, defend, confirm the validity; to support with conviction, emphatically, or publicly.

Rumination – The process of thinking deeply and carefully about something.

Fallibilities – The tendency or propensity to make mistakes.

Overarching – Encompassing or very comprehensive.

Existential – The conditions of existence; related to the philosophical approach which emphasises the existence of the individual as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through one's action or will.

Conundrum – Difficult and confusing problems or questions.

Providential – A favourable occurrence, event or time; God's blessings.

Disillusionment – One's disappointment stemming from the discovery that something is not as good as one thought it to be; also, to realise that a belief one has held has turned out to be false.

Rudimentary – Basic or founding principles.

Rhapsode – In ancient Greece, the person who recited the poems; the function of the rhapsode was to sing out the tale of great deeds and adventures, often adding to the epic tales.

Myth – In this context, this word refers to traditional stories, especially those concerning the early history of people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.

Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac – The Semitic family of languages, including Arabic; most of the Abrahamic religious texts were written in these languages in ancient times.

Holy Orders – Becoming an ordained or appointed member of the clergy, that is, the priestly members of the Church.

The Great Plague – A highly serious outbreak of bubonic plague (transmitted by rat fleas) in England in 1665–6, in which about one fifth of the population of London died.

Oliver Cromwell – The English general and statesman, who became the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth 1653–8, after leading the victorious Parliamentary forces (or Roundheads) in the English Civil War, against the forces of Charles I. He styled himself Lord Protector and refused Parliament's offer of the Crown in 1657. His rule was notable for its puritan reforms in the Church of England. He was briefly succeeded by his son Richard (1626–1712), who was forced into exile in 1659.

Delve – Research into something, go deeper into the matter.

Egotism – In this context, when one is excessively or obsessively arrogant, conceited or absorbed in oneself or one's own interests.

2.3.2 Check Your Progress

Dear Learner, we have again journeyed deeper into the world of John Milton, both the actual historical one, and the one that he has written about in *Paradise Lost*. As we begin sincerely to go into the details, it is important to review our knowledge on some of the words/

terms/phrases used so far. Try to identify and tick correctly the most suitable meaning for the following words/terms/phrases:

(A) Allusion

1. A deceptive appearance or impression.
2. The kind of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing.
3. Using words beginning with the same sound or letter.
4. An indirect or passing reference, calling something to mind without direct/explicit reference.

(B) Renaissance

1. A search of or survey for something.
2. Radical social change brought about violently.
3. A renewed interest or revival of something.
4. Scientific thought.

(C) Scrivener

1. An employee of the Church.
2. A notary, scribe, or clerk, who also lent money on interest.
3. A royal servant in the Court.
4. A sailor who mans the oars.

(D) Theology

1. The study of religious beliefs.
2. The study of human beings.
3. The study of themes in poetry.
4. The study of art and painting.

2.3.3 The Early and Mid-Seventeenth Century: A Brief Historical Background to John

Milton's Time

The first half of the seventeenth century, in England, marks the beginnings of a volatile period. The relative stability and longevity of the rule of Queen Elizabeth I was to spiral into a political confusion which would deeply impact English history. A student of English Literature will have noted that political and religious conflict has in history had violent consequences. The ascension to the throne of James I immediately after the death in 1603 of the Anglican Church's most celebrated monarch Queen Elizabeth I was sure to foster deep seated and long-lasting conflict within England. Competing political groups aligned along religious lines and often resorted to militant means to either dominate or attempt to direct the political narrative and psyche of the people of England. The Gunpowder plot of 1605 is an example of such a clash, where extremists sought to blow up Parliament as well as the king. This first decade of the seventeenth century marks the realisation of the imperial and colonial aspirations of the British, with its first permanent colony being set up in Jamestown (named after the King), Virginia, in 1607, and the British East India Company landing in Surat in 1608.

2.3.4 Politics and Religion

Many students of English literary history may already be familiar with the history of the period, but in order to better understand John Milton and his magnum opus in the context of the time, a recap of the political history, the general literature of the age and the culture of what is known as the Jacobean and Caroline periods will help concretise not only knowledge of *Paradise Lost*, but learning about the age in general. It is also helpful to demystify some of the popular terms that have somewhat remained vague, but are easily explained by looking at the history of the time. For example, James I, the King of England who inherited the throne after the childless (remember, Queen Elizabeth I never officially married) Queen was actually James Stuart (or James VI) of the Scottish throne. It is from his name (following the

nomenclature of 'Elizabethan' after Queen Elizabeth I) that the term 'Jacobean' (from the ecclesiastical Latin 'Jacobus' which denotes James) is derived. Similarly, the 'Caroline' age from his successor, Charles I (from the Latin 'Carolus' which is equivalent to Charles) and later, Charles II following the restoration of the monarchy. It is important to note that for official history and the purposes of the Court, as well as many of the religious sermons of the age were conducted and written in Latin and Greek.

Hence, much of the naming processes acknowledge this. Think of Latin as the de facto 'official' religious language of the era while English, still evolving and developing as the colloquial language although Chaucer and Spenser would herald its use in literature designed for the higher strata of society, and which Shakespeare would concretise. 'English' literature was at its golden age. One must remember that in a time when there were no voting rights and no way to definitely choose one's leaders, successions to thrones were notoriously violent and confusing affairs. There were coups, conspiracies, wars, shifting loyalties, alliances of convenience - ascending the throne of England (or any throne for that matter, Mughal history is replete with wars between brothers for the throne) was a task not everyone could undertake. Shakespeare's plays such as *King Lear* reveals this "problem" very well. So, when James I took over the throne without much violence, his reign was welcomed with relief. Additionally, the fact that he had ready heirs eased fears of the problem of succession. In the context of literature, much like his illustrious predecessor, James I also showed interest in the arts, himself composing poetry and writing treatises. However, as is always the case with seats of power, there was one could say a dark cloud looming that threatened to overshadow any silver lining. James I was after all from Scotland, for the English, a different country with its own line of monarchs, its own church, very different customs and traditions, and different social and political institutions. The institution of 'Parliament' (with the 'House of Lords' and the 'House of Commons', from which we have derived our system of the Rajya

Sabha and Lok Sabha) where the common people would at least have some say in matters of power and governance was more an English institution than Scottish. England had a balance of power between its Kings and Queens and the other nobility (ever since the 'Magna Carta' - the charter of 1215 that devolved some of the powers of the throne to the barons, seen by many as the first instance of democratic power-sharing in English history and the seminal instance of constitutional practice). Parliament at the time was summoned as an advisory body to aid the ruler on decisions of importance. In fact, many crucial aspects of administration such as taxation could not be decided upon without the consent of Parliament. In England, authority in matters of taxation lay with the House of Commons. In England's feudal system, many of the members of the Houses of Lords and Commons continued to command their own armed men and exercised vast control over land and resources. Thus, the King had to rule in cooperation with Parliament rather than opposition. John Milton and others, as we shall see in the later sections, would face the challenge of mediating the power struggles primarily between these two entities. The Scots, on the other hand, concentrated the authority of the country in the hands

of the monarchs, and this can be seen in the treatises of James I, who advocated for a strong, almost authoritarian rule, demanding the complete obedience of his subjects. It was James I who most emphatically proclaimed the 'divine' right of the monarchy to the throne. Why then, you may ask, did England choose a King from a foreign land.

It is simply because James I and Elizabeth both belonged to the same noble house - the Tudors. And it was expected that it would be for the good of England to maintain a semblance of continuity of the royal bloodline. In any case, the societal order was rigidly hierarchical and it was in the interest of the Crown to maintain this order, even through violence. The accepted social order placed the king over the nobles (many of whom comprised the Parliament), the nobles over the landed-gentry, gentry over yeomen, and yeomen over common labourers. This order replicated the divine order of God at the highest position, over the Archangels and angels, angels over humans. Unlike Elizabeth who was widely popular, James I did not inspire the same love and affection the people had for the Queen, and soon there was a hankering for the 'old' ways. Again, a student of literary history must note that Elizabeth actually took pains to make herself available to her people. It was an effort that James I took for granted. As the *Norton Anthology* notes, "The relationship between the monarch and his people and the relationship between England and Scotland would be sources of friction throughout James's reign" ("The Early Seventeenth Century" 1236). While Queen Elizabeth I approved of the colonial excursions of the British East India Company, it was James I who first envisioned a unified 'British empire' which also included unifying the English and the Scots. This, of course, was not an easy task as the English themselves were wary of the Scots. In 1625, James I died leaving his son Charles I to succeed him and the tensions that had begun with his father remained, and intensified. Remember the delicate balance of power between Parliament and the Monarch already mentioned the previous paragraph.

Charles I would completely negate such a relation in attempting to rule without summoning the Houses of Lords and Commons for nearly a decade. This discrepancy was seen by many in England as an attempt to seize all power unto the throne and the Lords would summon their banners and rise up in arms against the King. Hence, in 1642, England witnessed a bloody and protracted Civil War which would climax with the defeat and execution by beheading of Charles I in 1649. Given the popular awareness of the belief of divine right of rule, the fact that an anointed king could be tried, convicted and executed by his subjects was to have immense impact on the nation. The relationship between the ruler and ruled was to be marked by tension for some years to come. As we have already seen in our discussion on the problems of succession, it was not easy in 1649 to find a replacement for the recently deposed and killed King. Many in Europe viewed the situation in England with consternation at what was termed as regicide, the murder of a rightful ruler. In such a climate, there was no option but to defer to the rule of Parliament, headed by the general of parliamentary forces that defeated the King, Oliver Cromwell. Unfortunately, the 'Lord Protector' would "rule" as autocratically as the King. This atmosphere of uncertainty as to the rightful ruler for England led to what is called the "Interregnum". This period of uncertainty would swing popular sympathy toward the monarchy. Even after Cromwell's death, the situation regarding the Crown was far from settled and ultimately, in 1660, Parliament itself invited the eldest son of Charles I from exile to succeed the throne, which he did as Charles II thus ushering in the Caroline Age.

At this juncture, it is important to appeal to students to keep in mind that the rise and fall of English Kings and Queens does not always neatly parallel the so-called ages of English Literary history. However, they remain useful markers in denoting the age and its historical, cultural, political, social, and of course, literary significance. History, like literature, remains a continuous and undifferentiated process but for the common delineations made available for the sake of clarity. Many of the most famous names during the Elizabethan age are also the names that grace the literary landscape of the ensuing Jacobean period. The

likes of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, Walter Raleigh, and John Donne “belong”, so-to-speak, to both ages. “Nonetheless,” the *Norton Anthology* reminds us, “recognizing the years 1603—60 as a period sharpens our awareness of some important political, intellectual, cultural, and stylistic currents that bear directly upon literary production” (1236). The seventeenth century marks the reaffirmation of several cultural trends and movements that began much earlier. In the same vein, earlier conflicts too continued to re-emerge, especially with regards the religious reformations of the sixteenth century. With rich resources coming in from the colonies and trade increasing, England’s agrarian economy was bolstered. Its naval prowess would emerge definitively and England, particularly London, was becoming an economic, cultural and literary hub. Manufacture and increased agricultural production were also driven by individual innovation and increasing self-sufficiency.

The fifteenth century invention of the printing press would make the availability of books widespread and literacy as well as literature became, increasingly, cultural and social facts rather than exceptions. A wider audience meant that authorship could be pursued successfully as a career, though still dependent on the patronage of the wealthy and the powerful just as they depended on writers to shape the popular narrative. It is not insignificant that John Milton, though financially distraught, was able to successfully publish to popular reception *Paradise Lost*. Given the obvious theological influences in the epic poem, an understanding of the religious differences of the time would help in unlocking the deep-seated relation between religion and social/political order. Indeed, the legitimacy of a king’s rule was often the subject of theological as much as political debate. The link between religion and politics was more obvious and explicit at the time. Christian kings all over Europe, in some way or the other, were linked to the Roman Catholic order. The Protestant Reformation (from the word ‘protest’) against some of the practices of the Roman Catholic churches stemmed primarily from a theological issue which would later assume political and religious

significance. However, it is important to note that there were several “protests” led by different figures and theological considerations. In the sixteenth century, the teachings of Martin Luther would mark the beginnings of the reformation, and others such as John Calvin would cement the zest for reform in the workings of Christian doctrine.

The Church of England, another counter-Catholic order was established by Henry VIII following his failure to receive approval from the head of the Catholic church to annul his marriage. English consciousness straddled loyalty to King and country and loyalty to the larger Christian identity, dominated by the Roman Catholic mandate. The religious and socio-political conflicts of England at the time can be traced largely to this fissure. During the rule of Queen Elizabeth I, a compromise was sought, seeing as it was detrimental to have internal conflict over theological issues. This attempt to solve the divide resulted in the advocacy of a common religious practice that would suit both Catholics and the Church of England (also known as the Anglican church) as well as other Protestant groups. A ‘Book of Common Prayer’ to be used for church services “was carefully chosen to be open to several interpretations and acceptable to both Protestant- and Catholic-leaning subjects” (*Norton Anthology* 1238). Happily, for the royals, this was seen as an acceptable compromise but conflicts would continue to influence the course of the seventeenth century. It is significant that James I, son of a Catholic queen who had been raised in the reformed tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism was acceptable to all groups. Even so, other groups continued to campaign for and resist the emergence of the Church of England. Catholics wanted a return to the authority of the Pope in Rome. Puritans, as they were known, were a group from the Church of England (and followers of the teachings of John Calvin) who wanted to press on with complete reform in church policies, practices and rituals.

They advocated a Church government that would completely remove the influence of the “foreign” Papal order. The Presbyterians advocated for the separation of church from the authority of the state.

This disparate religious atmosphere would foster strong-handed reactions from the royalty with many perceived as disloyal to the King or Queen arrested, tried and executed in order to stamp out militant and reactionary elements that could threaten the legitimacy and position of the monarch. Recall the “Gunpowder Plot” of 1605, which was designed to eliminate much of the ruling class of England thus opening the country up to a takeover by a “Catholic” power (France, Spain and other kingdoms were staunchly Catholic). That it failed was seen as a divine approval of the Church of England. This also hastened the suspicion around Catholics and other church groups other than the Church of England. The reign of James I would see a coming together of these cultural, religious and technological in a significant landmark in Christian history: the publication of the King James’ Bible, a newly commissioned translation of the Bible. When James I died in 1625, the political and religious climate was still unpredictable. The heir-apparent had been Henry, who was more Protestant than his father but he died of typhoid fever in 1612. The heir to James I became his second son, Prince Charles, who would rule without the sense of moderation and diplomacy espoused by Queen Elizabeth I and James I. He would dissolve Parliament thrice, thus positioning the monarchy in direct opposition to a powerful and assertive Parliament. The authority he exercised was seen as a “personal rule” and alienated many powerful individuals from the monarchy.

Here is where the importance of power-sharing and cooperation comes to light. It was Parliament that had control over the approval of taxes in the country. Over the course of his reign, Charles was to suffer increasing alienation from not only powerful individuals, but from the people of England in general who suspected latent Catholic loyalties and the Puritans (among whom would be counted John Milton) especially did not approve of his religious appointments. In fact, much of *Paradise Lost* can also be read as a direct commentary on the religious and political situation of mid-seventeenth century England. Christian theology stressed heavily on the concept of faith, without which all works are ultimately meaningless. With the betrayal in the Garden of

Eden, Adam (who can also be read as representative of the weaknesses of mankind in general) was fallen into sin and the event termed the 'Fall'. It was believed, especially in Puritan belief, that without the help of God, there could be no faith. Additionally, the Puritans believed strongly in the notion of predestination - that it was even before one was born that whether one's soul could be redeemed was determined. William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the head of the Church of England was appointed by Charles and he veered sharply from Puritan beliefs. He believed that one could be redeemed by good works, charity, generosity to the church, and ritual devotion. This difference in views further alienated the King and his appointees from the members of Parliament, who represented the pulse of the majority. It was not long that Charles' religious and nationalistic policies forced him into conflict with the Presbyterian Scots. The financial difficulties of the court were compounded by not being able to raise taxes without the approval of Parliament. It was not long before Charles had to call for Parliament, but the split suffered between the ruler and ruled was already set and would eventually lead to revolution.

2.3.5 Glossary B

The Gunpowder Plot – This was a conspiracy by a small group of Catholic extremists to blow up King James I and his Parliament on 5th November, 1605. The uncovering and foiling of the plot is commemorated every year by the traditional searching of the vaults before the opening of each session of Parliament, and by the lighting of public bonfires and fireworks, with the burning of an effigy of Guy Fawkes, one of the conspirators, as the chief event. This happens annually on 5th November in England.

Jacobean – Related to the rule of James I of England.

Caroline – Related to the rule of Charles I and Charles II.

King Lear – A legendary king of Britain, and the central figure in William Shakespeare's tragedy by the same name.

House of Lords – In the United Kingdom, the higher chamber of Parliament, composed of peers and bishops.

House of Commons – In the United Kingdom, the lower chamber of Parliament composed of publicly elected members.

Rajya Sabha – The upper house of the Parliament of India.

Lok Sabha – The lower house of the Parliament of India.

Civil War – A war between the people or citizens of the same country.

Martin Luther – He was a German Protestant theologian, and the principal figure of the German Reformation. His teachings attempted to bring about reform in a Church that was steeped in traditionalism, and what was viewed as theological inconsistencies.

Heir – A person entitled to the rank or property or title of another on that person's death, usually in the case of the monarchy, the eldest son.

Alienated – To become estranged, isolated; to feel a lack of sympathy or hostility.

Revolution – In this context, the violent overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system; or, a dramatic and wide-reaching change in conditions or attitudes.

2.3.6 Check Your Progress

Dear Learner, we are now deep into the context and history of England around the time John Milton was born and lived. Many of the terms used may seem alien and unfamiliar. But do not worry. The key is to keep using these words and terms and getting used to them as part of your English literary vocabulary. At this point, we shall again try to develop your knowledge of the age by reviewing your understanding so far.

1. Try to match the correct meaning/reference to the word/term/phrase:

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| (A) | The attempt to get rid of the Anglican King and Parliament. | 1. James I |
|-----|---|------------|

- (B) The first man to disobey God in the Garden of Eden. 2. Magnum opus of Eden.
- (C) Was actually from Scotland and became King of England as well. 3. Adam
- (D) The most important work of an artist or writer. 4. Gunpowder plot of 1605

2. Choose the correct option:

(A) The Archbishop of Canterbury appointed by Charles I was

1. Thomas Beckett
2. John Milton
3. William Laud
4. Oliver Cromwell

(B) The general of the Parliamentary forces who fought against Charles I was

1. Dante
2. Oliver Cromwell
3. John Donne
4. James I

(C) The meaning of the word Parliament is

1. Rule by a Queen.
2. Rule by non-royal government.
3. A term denoting a body of lawmakers consisting of the head of a state, the upper house and lower house.
4. A collection of military-men who fight for civil society.

2.3.7 Culture and Literature

All things in the world, it was popularly believed by many, were

composed of the elemental powers of air, fire, water and earth. It is not surprising that such a worldview would inform the way a person's physical and mental makeup would be viewed. If the world was composed of air, water, fire and earth, similarly, a human being was constituted by the four bodily elements (or humours) - blood, bile, choler and phlegm. The medical view of the day promulgated a balance of these humours in order to achieve good health and temperance. Such a Hippocratic view was to remain entrenched in the culture and imagination of the day, and would also be reflected in English Literature. One might recall here Ben Jonson's 1598 *Every Man In His Humour*. There was a preponderance in the age to prefer seriousness and melancholy (which would be attributed to an excess of black bile if one were to go by the medical beliefs of the day), and writers, dramatists, and poets reflected such a mood, in their creations as well. Thus, one would view Shakespeare's Ophelia in *Hamlet* or Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Milton's principal figure in the poem "Il Penseroso" is the "seriousminded one" as the title makes clear. English scientific and cultural thought (though it might seem disingenuous now to refer to the two in the same sentence) were heavily influenced by classical Greek and Roman teachings and thought. The Ptolemaic model of the universe was the accepted norm, with the earth's centrality in the universe slotting in neatly with the theological vision of the age. The universal elements - the sun, the stars, the moon, all provided the inspiration for poetic imagery even if their relation to the earth was starting to be questioned by the increasing interest and study of astronomical phenomena.

In Europe, the scientific theories of Copernicus and Galileo were upsetting the dominant religious views. Even so, writers "such as John Donne, Robert Burton, and Ben Jonson often invoked an inherited body of concepts even though they were aware that those concepts were being questioned or displaced" (*Norton Anthology* 1241-42). Scientific observation and experimentation would begin to shake the foundation of old beliefs and values. This old order of religion, the monarchical structure, and the superstitions of the common-folk would feel the challenge of science. Recall the focus placed on bodily humours as the

only explanation for the ills and ails of the body and mind - William Harvey's discovery of the circulatory system dismantled this long-standing pseudo-medical view. The notion of the earth as the centre of the created universe? Galileo's telescopes would prove otherwise. An acknowledgement of such radical and lasting changes would come from John Milton himself, who claimed to have met Galileo, and who, in *Paradise Lost*, would use cosmology to convey complex poetic shifts. The advent of the printing press made it easier to circulate and distribute written work, although poets and dramatists of the time still depended on handwritten and copied manuscripts. This itself indicates that the process of writing was not the easiest vocation to pursue, or reproduce, often necessitating the patronage of the rich and powerful. In turn, poets would compose lines of praises for their patrons and portray them in larger than life ways. This ensured that the patronage would continue and help secure some financial security for the poet. Having a patron who was wealthy and with status also increased the status of the poet. Shakespeare's *King Lear* was a favourite of James I primarily because it showed the failure of trying to divide one's kingdom into parts. Jonson and Donne both had a powerful patroness in the Countess of Bedford, Lucy Russell. In turn, the wealthy were expected to reward and pay homage to their literary dependents for their service and their skill. A mixture of fear of the written word and suspicion over it drove the royals to institute strict controls over printed publications.

This was the beginning of censorship. This was originally started by Henry VIII in order to protect the fledgling Anglican Church. The king did so by granting the sole license for printing to the London Stationer's Company, forming a monopoly on all printing. In return, all texts were to be submitted for scrutiny and censorship before their publication and release into the public. This also ensured that it was the publisher, rather than the author, that retained the rights over the printed material and copyright laws were still more than a century away. There was no concept of a royalty (a payment made to writers/authors/poets/dramatists for their work). The university presses in the meantime were more concerned with the printing of scholarly and religious material.

Theatre companies like the King's Men continued to play an important cultural role under James I and Charles I, continuing the literary blossoming that had begun under Queen Elizabeth I. Although theatre companies under the royal auspices and patronage continued to earn regular income (ensuring that writing could at least begin to be considered a profession of note), individual poets continued to depend on manuscripts and their patrons for financial support.

Incidentally, it was John Milton who was the first writer to be paid a kind of royalty, receiving five pounds as first payment for *Paradise Lost*, and subsequently, another five pounds after each of the three imprints were published. Under Queen Elizabeth I, as we are beginning to understand, different kinds of writing styles were promoted. Political tracts, treatises, devotional meditation, poetry, drama, even prosaic writings make a strong reappearance. The system of patronage became prevalent, and writing became as much a social and political institution as it was literary, creative, or imaginative. Writers dependent on their patrons during the Jacobean and Caroline ages were rewarded for their services and their homages to their patrons. For example, the poet Andrew Marvell, who was an ardent friend and supporter of John Milton, admired and wrote brightly about Oliver Cromwell. It was Marvell's intervention during the Restoration that saved John Milton from possible incarceration, and the latter was let off, albeit with quite a ruinous fine. Marvell supported Milton's politics and poetry and even wrote the preface to the second edition of *Paradise Lost*. Thus, during the political and social upheavals of Restoration England, especially in London, there was a close association between writers among themselves as there was between them and their patrons, usually people in positions of power and authority, including the king himself.

This system of readership and patronage ensured that writing could be taken up as a serious profession, and writers themselves began enjoying a measure of social and political prestige and status. It is also worth noting that England's colonial ambitions and newfound riches abroad was slowly changing and shifting the social dynamic in England

itself. There was a rising militia and trading class that would become the new middle class in England - the tensions between the traditional institutions of the nobility and landed gentry and this new trading class would change and shape the relations between different hierarchical positions. Social relations were becoming commercial and increasingly displacing the old feudal structure of master-slave, landlord-tenant, and king-courtier-commoner. These changes were also reflected in changes in the kinds of writing favoured and distributed among the limited but discerning reading populace. The styles of writing favoured during Elizabethan times such as long allegories with a mythological background, sonnet sequences (as favoured by Shakespeare) and pastoral poems and elegies (such as Milton's 'Lycidas') were now being displaced, during Jacobean times, in favour of shorter, wittier styles of poetry. Lofty and elevated stylised writing was giving way to the more realistic and witty colloquial language. Writers such as John Donne, Ben Jonson and George Herbert led the way in advocating these literary shifts. The Jacobean era also saw the rise of prose writing such as the familiar essay, and also saw an increase in translated works emerging from other parts of Europe. Try to recall again, by referencing the keywords of the previous section, the meaning of the word Jacobean, and additionally, the meaning of the word Caroline. When Charles I ascended the throne of England, literary tastes and fashions again underwent a shift. The Caroline age saw the system of patronage intensify and grow, with the king himself (and his Queen, Henrietta Maria) ardent collectors of art. Renaissance values such as chivalry, virtue and love of beauty were at their height. This ethos, espoused by the royal couple, was certainly at odds with the Puritan and protestant anti-establishment temperament gaining popularity among the people of England. This is another reason the rift between the people and the monarch grew. You must remember, the people were led by different lords who also had their own interests in mind. See below, the word 'Feudalism' will shed more light on this social structure.

2.3.8 Glossary C

As always, we shall take a short detour to study closely the keywords, terms and phrases covered so far. This practice of going back to the terms will help you remember the words.

Promulgate – Announce, make widely known.

Hippocrates – Considered the Father of Medicine and Medical Science, Hippocrates was a Greek physician.

Ben Jonson – A renowned English poet and playwright. His play *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) established the ‘comedy of humours’, whereby each character is dominated by a particular obsession or personality. He became the first Poet Laureate in the modern sense and his other notable works include *Volpone* (1606) and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614).

Preponderance – Of greater importance, more emphasis.

Ophelia (*Hamlet*) – A major character in the play *Hamlet*, the legendary prince of Denmark and the hero of the tragedy by William Shakespeare.

Shylock (*The Merchant of Venice*) – The Jewish moneylender in William Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*, who lends money to another character Antonio but demands in return a pound of Antonio’s own flesh should the debt not be repaid on time.

Melancholy – Deep sadness, depression, or feeling of seriousness; in the context of the age of John Milton, was considered a virtuous temperament which matched the Puritan outlook.

William Harvey – He was an English physician, and the discoverer of the circulation of the blood in the human body.

John Donne – An English poet and preacher who, as a metaphysical poet, is most famous for his satires, elegies (c.1590–9) and his unconventionally themed love poems. He also wrote religious poems and, as dean of Saint Paul’s from 1621 onwards, was one of the well-known preachers of his age.

Pseudo – Not genuine, a sham or scam; false.

Printing Press – A machine for printing text or pictures from type or plates; Johannes Gutenberg was the first in Europe to print using movable type and was the first to use a press and by 1455, he produced what later became known as the Gutenberg Bible.

Patronage – Giving financial or other support to a person, organisation, or cause.

Censorship – The prohibition or suppression of parts of or the whole book, film, news, and other published material. This was done so as to control the information being passed on to the public.

Royalty – In this context, a sum or amount paid to an author or composer for each copy of a book sold or for each public performance of a work.

Gentry – People of a good social position comprising the class of people just below the nobility in position and birth. This is the class of people who also upheld the valued and expected social behaviour of the ‘Gentleman’ and the ‘Lady’.

Feudalism – It was the dominant social system in medieval Europe, where the nobility held lands from the King or Queen in exchange for military service. The peasants were tenanted in these lands and were obliged to live on their lord’s land and give him homage, labour, and a share of the produce in exchange for military protection.

2.3.9 Check Your Progress

Dear Learner, at this juncture we again stop awhile to test your understanding and conception of the age of John Milton. Your patience and careful reading is now starting to yield results as you are increasingly able to identify many of the words, terms or phrases associated with the literary and socio-political history of seventeenth century England. Let us proceed once again in the manner adopted so far. As we approach the end of the unit, the hope is that you will be able to *define* many of the new terms you have come across, and to do so will require practice.

Choose the correct option:

(A) The Hippocratic view of the human body denoted that

1. The body is made up of the elements of air, water, fire, earth.
2. That the human body is part hippopotamus.
3. The human body is composed primarily of four humours – blood, bile, choler and phlegm.
4. The human body is divine.

(B) Ptolemy was Greek astronomer and geographer who believed that

1. The sun is the centre of the universe.
2. The earth is the centre of the cosmos.
3. The human body is made up of stardust.
4. The earth revolves around the sun.

(C) Copernicus was a Polish astronomer who proposed that

1. The sun was a square object.
2. The planets were held by golden chains to the sun.
3. The planets orbited the sun in perfect circles.
4. The sun orbited the planets.

(D) Galileo was

1. A planet discovered by Ptolemy.
2. An Italian astronomer and physicist.
3. A religious reformer.
4. A student of John Milton.

Try to match the correct meaning/reference to the word/term/phrase:

(A) Patronage 1. The age of King Charles I and Charles II

(B) Prosaic 2. A poem of fourteen lines

- (C) Sonnet 3. The act of giving financial or other support to a person, organization, or cause
- (D) Caroline 4. Using style or language which is not poetic

2.3 Let Us Sum Up

The contextual background related in the sections above has been written with the hope of giving you a fairly good idea of the age of John Milton. The purpose is to help you not only relate better to John Milton and *Paradise Lost*, but to aide your understanding of some of the most important writers from the time, including William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne and Andrew Marvell.

2.4 Answers to Check Your Progress (2.3.2; 2.3.6; 2.3.9)

2.3.2

- (A) 4.
(B) 3.
(C) 2.
(D) 1.

2.3.6

1. (A) 4.
(B) 3.
(C) 1.
(D) 2.
2. (A) 3.
(B) 2.
(C) 3.

2.3.9

- (A) 3.
(B) 2.
(C) 3.
(D) 2.

Section- III

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Milton Begins His Literary Journey

3.3 Attempting an Understanding of John Milton's Approach to *Paradise Lost*

3.3.1 Check Your Progress

3.3.2 Style and Structure of *Paradise Lost*

3.3.3 Check Your Progress

3.3.4 Some Features of the Epic: The Prologue and Invocation

3.3.5 Check Your Progress

3.4 Introduction to Book I

3.4.1 Check Your Progress

3.5 Introduction to Book II

3.5.1 Check Your Progress

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

3.7 Glossary

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.3.5; 3.4.1; 3.5.1)

3.0 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- ❖ *Enumerate* in a paragraph the details of Milton's writing career.
- ❖ *Discuss* the features of *Paradise Lost*.
- ❖ *Discuss* in brief the features of epic poetry in the Western tradition.

- ❖ Write out an introduction to Book I and Book II.
- ❖ Describe the broad context of Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*.

3.1 Introduction

This unit will aim to make you familiar with the literary tradition of the epic as well as the historical context that prompted Milton to compose his *Paradise Lost*. In this way, you will become more familiar with not only *Paradise Lost*, but the English literary tradition in general and its relation to ancient influences and sources. We shall continue to pursue a review of your understanding of the literary concepts and historical context as the unit progresses.

3.2 Milton Begins His Literary Journey

It was during his time in Cambridge that John Milton first attempted composing an epic, in Latin, and this was related to the event of the Gunpowder plot (recall, the historical context in the earlier section). The poet was by then familiar with Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* as well as the earlier English longform poetic narratives such as Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Finally, in Italy, Milton was made privy to the eclectic works of Giovanni Batista, the Marquis of Manso and the biographer of Torquato Tasso, who was the author of the epic *Jerusalem Delivered*. From the time of Homer, the epic was primarily a form that dealt with a hero or group of heroes, and their quest to achieve some kind of goal, which would entail heroic and sometimes fantastic feats, deeds, and adventures. This goal, in turn, would encapsulate the values, beliefs, history, culture, fears as well as ideals of the time and would accord a sense of destiny to the historical moment being portrayed, which in turn, adds a semblance of depth of meaning as well as splendour to the otherwise arcane and indifferent march of time. Sometime later, Milton also expressed interest in composing an epic poem in English about the legend of King Arthur.

Already, from an account of Milton's vast scholarship and interest, we can see that a number of sources, influences, and inspiration have gone into the composing of *Paradise Lost* and there is much

historical, social, and spiritual significance to be garnered from the epic poem. From the eclectic mix of influences one can also discern the variety of forms that Milton had interest in. In this case of course, it is important to distinguish between the epic and poetic narratives that are simply long. A long poem can have as its subject a heroic figure and his deeds and actions, but what differentiates an epic form this is the sheer magnitude, scope, range as well as grandiose style of the epic. The language would be elevated and for Greek and Roman poets, the method of heightening ordinary language lay in the adoption and use of what is known as metres, and in the case of the epic, hexameters, lines of verse consisting of six metrical feet. This is also known as the “Heroic Verse” and renders the heroic narrative as tapping into a divine source, rather than relying solely on the voice of men. Epics are serious in their subject matter, involving events and matters of national and cosmic importance (such as war, and heroism in war) that would have a profound impact on the culture and life of the people.

The length of the epic could also encapsulate a number of other forms such as lyric, elegy, narrative, satire, debate, monologue, and within its overall framework, there could be used a number of allegories, similes and metaphors. Again, whereas during Homeric times it was the bards and *rhapsodes* who sung out the oral tradition of the epic, by the time of Milton, the absence of singers, bards and *rhapsodes* necessitated considering the epic poem from the point of view of being read, rather than orally transmitted. Epics traditionally also began with the invocation of a divine source of inspiration and the narrative usually ensued in *media res* (literally, in the middle of things). This in fact enhanced the style of the epic poem, allowing the author to consider a heightened approach to the language and the action, and a more straightforward formal structure. The Homeric epics, given their magnitude and style, are called primary epics, and were originally recited by bards that often involved ritual-like presentation. But the oral and bardic traditions were no longer in practice by the time of John Milton and this is the reason why epics after Homer are known as secondary epics.

3.3 Attempting an Understanding of John Milton's Approach to *Paradise Lost*

John Milton would have most probably approached the epic form with the aforementioned ideas in mind. Even so, it would not have been a simple matter of following the template and scale of an *Iliad*, an *Odyssey*, or an *Aeneid*, firstly because they were composed in different languages, and secondly, because the subject matter is what is central to the epic. Milton had originally planned to compose an epic on the Arthurian legend, but over time, from the earlier Latin poems to the time of his blindness, Milton would have experienced a number of changes, many of which others would have seen as profound setbacks. Reversal of fortune, the loss of loved ones including two wives and two children, the loss of prestige and reputation, and the erosion of the idea of seeing a just and moral Christian nation form from the ruins of the rebellion against an unpopular monarch, all would have contributed to the latent themes and notions of *Paradise Lost*.

Milton had started out an idealist young man with tremendous nationalistic pride which would give way to one who has been tempered by more than trying circumstances. What becomes clear is that the figure of Arthur simply could not contain the scope and grandeur of Milton's poetic vision. Further, Milton was guided by a deep spiritual devotion that would only be adequately expressed by the presentation of a Christian hero that would befit the Christian English epic. This would contrast the "Hero's old/ Arming to Battel" (Book I, 552- 53) in a way that also serves to underscore the differences between the epics of old and this new, almost spiritual undertaking. Milton's view of the epic subject matter, that which he learned over years at Saint Paul's and later at Cambridge, had shifted. War and battle and the heroic depiction seemed unimportant compared to the spiritual destiny of poetical form and content. In fact, in *Paradise Lost*, the perpetrators of war are those who wish to cause violence against the spiritual order: "Against the Throne and Monarchy of God/ Rais'd impious War in Heav'n and Battel proud/ With vain attempt" (Book I, 42-44). By the time Milton composed

Paradise Lost toward the end of his life, his religious conviction would guide the subject matter as well as his use of epic convention.

3.3.1 Check Your Progress

1. Who wrote the *Fairie Queene*?

(A) Dante Alighieri

(B) Ovid

(C) Homer

(D) Edmund Spenser

2. Can you name some of the works or poems that might have inspired as well as influenced John Milton's *Paradise Lost*? Try to name at least three using the following fill in the blanks method:

(A) 'Il _____'

(B) '_____yssey'

(C) '_____ ' by Virgil

3. Attempt a short description of the definition of an epic?

4. Can you name some of the influences and sources of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*?

3.3.2 Style and Structure of *Paradise Lost*

Because John Milton was using the English language and not Greek or Latin, he chose not to write in a fixed way. He basically chose not to use any fixed metre, defined as the rhythm of a poem, determined by the number and length of feet in a line, and usually denoted by stressed and unstressed sounds in a syllabled word ('hard' sounding letters in the alphabet such as 'p', 't' with 'soft' sounding letters such as 'a', 'e' – for example, the word 'hexameter' can be divided into 'hex'- 'a'- 'me'- 'ter', a collection of four syllables; this system helps in determining pronunciation and phonetical quality). A hexameter or rhyme containing six metrical feet was the verse form used in most epics. Since Milton did not follow this convention and this veered from the epic poetic form of Homer and Virgil, *Paradise Lost* is still an epic considering its heightened style and magnitude. The English language in poetic form in this sense is suited to the use of what has been termed as blank verse – unrhymed sentence constructions of iambic pentameter – a line of verse with five metrical feet, each foot consisting of one short (or unstressed) syllable followed by one long (or stressed) syllable. The iambic pentameter has been proven as offering the closest poetic representation of the English language without sacrificing the natural inflections and tones of the language. By focussing on the divine intervention in the grand scheme of things, Milton also chose to elevate a different kind of heroism, one borne of love and mercy, rather than

direct action in war. In a sense, *Paradise Lost* is a new kind of epic not of war and heroic feats but of the moral convictions that ultimately yield a spiritual destiny. In terms of the structure of the epic poem, *Paradise Lost* is composed of twelve sections or 'Books', each book preceded by an argument, or summary, which preface the action of the corresponding book. These arguments serve as a kind of guidepost that were composed and added by Milton on the request of readers who were looking for some kind of literary guide to the poem itself. Many of the books are also appended by a prologue.

3.3.3 Check Your Progress

Dear Learner, we are now entering a domain that has a few technical terms related to poetry that are important. Though these terms sound confusing, they are very simply explained without the need to go into unnecessary detail.

Try to identify and tick correctly the most suitable meaning for the following words/terms/phrases:

(A) Poetic Metre

1. The number of lines in a poem.
2. The rhythm of a poem, where each line has a certain metrical length.
3. Using words beginning with the same sound or letter.
4. The size of the font of the poem.

(B) Hexameter

1. Pertaining to poetic metre of six metrical feet.
2. Pertaining to poetic metre of seven metrical feet.
3. A unit of magic.
4. The length of all epic poems.

(C) Iambic Pentameter

1. A poem of five lines.
2. A Greek unit of music.
3. A line of verse with five metrical feet, each consisting of one short (or unstressed) syllable followed by one long (or stressed) syllable.
4. A scale used in physics.

(D) Prologue

1. Refers to a separate concluding section to a literary, dramatic, or musical work.
2. Refers to a separate introductory section of a literary, dramatic, or musical work.
3. Refers to a preference for dialogue.
4. Refers to the manner in which poetry is introduced.

3.3.4 Some Features of the Epic: The Prologue and Invocation

The prologue in Book I references the direct purpose of the book – to recount the fall of man and justify God’s ways to man. Here Milton writes that the central concern of the poem is to consider the disobedience of man and the consequences of that disobedience. The prologue is concluded with the poet saying he will justify God’s ways to man. Another epic convention which Milton brings out in Paradise Lost is the traditional task of invoking the Muse, in this case, the classical Muse, Urania, who he refers to as the “Heav’nly Muse” which immediately indicates the spiritual nature of his work. The Muse is in fact drawn out to be a source of inspiration from Mt. Sinai, the holy mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. There is implied in the stated purpose of the prologue that Milton is not only concerned about the disobedience of the first of men, Adam, but ‘Man’s’ disobedience of God’s plan and will in general.

This demonstrates a concern for all ages, a sort of grandness of purpose not yet attempted by English poetry. The prologue also specifies that the subject will focus on the “one greater Man” (Book I, 4) who will save all others from the first disobedience. The invocation in the prologue also specifies the justification of the way of God, before men, and is reminiscent of the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 12, verses 12-13 wherein: “For neither is there any god besides thee, whose care is for all men, to whom thou shouldst prove that thou hast not judged unjustly...” Such justification is the entire basis for the Christian epic that emerges in *Paradise Lost*. The stated goal in justifying the actions of the divine as just pre-empts any sense of false modesty in the undertaking by the poet. The autobiographical sense of the epic also emerges when Milton makes reference to his blindness when he writes: “What in me is dark/ Illumin, what is low raise and support;/ That to the highth of this great Argument” (Book I, 22-24). Even though Book I begins with Satan and a fleshing out of his character, in the invocation and prologue itself there is no mention of the fallen creatures, nor is any overt aura lent to the status of the disgraced angels.

3.3.5 Check Your Progress

1. Who does Milton invoke as the Muse in the Prologue to Book I?
(A) Athena.
(B) Homer.
(C) Zeus.
(D) Urania.
2. Give a short definition of the convention of presenting a Prologue before each section of *Paradise Lost*.

3. What is the Invocation of *Paradise Lost* and who or what is invoked?

3.4 Introduction to Book I of *Paradise Lost*

After the prologue and the invocation of the Muse, in keeping with the epic convention of beginning in the middle of the action, Book I begins with the scene where Satan and the other treacherous angels find themselves waking to a lake of fire, having been cast down to hell following their defeat. Satan is first seen lying in the pit of Hell and though this is a great religious epic, this beginning section focuses on Satan, presents him and his cohorts first, and in many ways makes him the “hero” of the poem, which certainly deviates from the expectations of the epic. Milton would obviously does not want his readers to empathise with the fallen angels, yet Satan is constructed as an attractive character, whose struggle and persistence can be seen as admirable qualities. This is where the ironic element of the epic comes to the fore. Whatever it is that Satan schemes and plans, it is clearly lost on him the futility of his spite. In hell, the fallen are lying on their backs, chained within the fiery lake. Satan, in this scene, is presented as a larger than life figure, literally. He is portrayed as gigantic, and still retaining some of the aura of having been the most beautiful and greatest of all the angels of Heaven. Having been the angel closest to God, Lucifer’s fall is also the most disgraceful, and as the epic poem progresses, the reader will become acutely aware of the physical changes that Satan undergoes, which in a way highlight the extent of the consequences of his actions.

Not only his character but also parallel to this, his appearance grows worse.

3.4.1 Check Your Progress

1. Where is Satan at the beginning of Book I?

- (A) Heaven.
- (B) In a lake of fire.
- (C) In an abyss.
- (D) In Purgatory.

Choose the correct option:

(A) In Book I, Satan is portrayed as

- 1. Ugly and little.
- 2. Serpent-like.
- 3. Titanic.
- 4. A beautiful angel.

(B) The meaning of the word irony is

- 1. It denotes the opposite word.
- 2. It denotes the opposite meaning.
- 3. It denotes a similar word.
- 4. It denotes a similar meaning.

3.5 Introduction to Book II of *Paradise Lost*

‘The Argument’ which prologues Book II lays out the scene that is to ensue. Satan has assumed the de facto leadership of the new

and horrible dominion of hell. Seated on a throne, much like an Eastern potentate, he addresses – holds a “Consultation” – with the assembled devils. They deliberate on the course of action which they plan to follow. Four of the fallen angels, now devils, speak in turn, in a bid to convince the others of the efficacy and purpose of their respective plans. Moloch, Belial, Mammon, and then finally, Beelzebub – speaking on behalf of Satan – speak to the assembled. Each speaker represents a different attitude and their varying temperaments also displays a depth to the notion of hell and the demonic which deviates from the traditional black and white notions of good and evil. Each of the speakers proffers a different take and solution to their current predicament in hell, and considering that they were ignominiously defeated, they are eager to respond. Each perspective gives the student the chance to understand the nuances of kind of evil being schemed against the Creator.

3.5.1 Check Your Progress

Choose the correct option:

(A) The Argument of Book II relates that a certain activity occurs in hell among the fallen angels which is a kind of

1. Conflict.
2. Consultation.
3. Parliament.
4. Argument.

(B) Choose the correct order in which each of the fallen angels speaks:

1. Moloch-Mammon-Belial-Beelzebub.
2. Mammon-Moloch-Beelzebub-Moloch.
3. Moloch-Beelzebub-Mammon-Belial.
4. Moloch-Belial-Mammon,-Beelzebub.

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

This unit was designed to help initiate your journey into the subject matter of *Paradise Lost*, but in a way that would slowly draw you into the idea and content of the English epic. This almost introductory unit hopes to help you warm-up to the study of John Milton and the first two books of *Paradise Lost*, with the ability to begin writing, describing and discussing some of the finer details of the tradition of epic writing.

3.7 Glossary

In the spirit of the previous units and sections, the keywords here shall continue to try and make you familiar with the terms and words, historical events and figures closely associated with John Milton's life and his work, *Paradise Lost*.

Homer – The most famous Greek epic poet from the eight century BCE. He is traditionally held to be the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, though modern scholarship has revealed the place of the Homeric poems as the continuation of an oral tradition. Homer is regarded in Europe as the greatest poet, and his poems are constantly used as a model and source of inspiration by others.

Virgil – A Roman poet who wrote three major works: the *Eclogues*, which are a collection of ten pastoral poems; the *Georgics*, a didactic poem on farming; and the *Aeneid*. Virgil is seminal figure of Latin epic writing and along with Ovid, considered as the greatest of the writers in Europe after the Greeks.

Dante Alighieri – An Italian poet who lived from 1265 to 1321. He wrote *The Divine Comedy*, an epic poem describing his spiritual journey through Hell and Purgatory and finally to Paradise, in which a major theme is his love for Beatrice Portinari.

Edmund Spenser – Sixteenth century English poet best known for his allegorical romance *The Faerie Queene* (1590; 1596), which celebrates the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and is written in the Spenserian stanza.

Semblance – Resemblance; outward appearance.

King Arthur – A legendary king of Britain, historically perhaps a 5th or 6th century Roman- British general. The stories of his life, the adventures and exploits of his knights, and the Round Table of his court at Camelot was developed by many writers, including Sir Thomas Mallory in his *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1483).

Differentiate – To identify differences between two or more things or people.

Heroic Verse – A type of verse used for epic or heroic subjects, such as the hexameter, iambic pentameter, or alexandrine.

Cosmic – Relating to the universe or cosmos, which differentiates the subject matter from the earthly; the word also implies matters of great importance that imparts on the human condition considerations that are more than logical or practical.

Treachery – Betrayal.

Futility – Uselessness, hopelessness; meaningless or pointless.

De Facto – Holding a position of authority, whether by right or not.

Consultation – The process of formally discussing something.

Proffers – To put forward something (argument or proposal, usually) for others' approval.

Nuance – Subtle difference.

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.3.5; 3.4.1; 3.5.1)

3.3.1

1. (D)
2. (A) 'Iliad'
(B) 'Odyssey'
(C) 'Aeneid' by Virgil

3. See section 3.2.

4. See section 3.3

3.3.3

(A) 2.

(B) 1.

(C) 3.

(D) 2.

3.2.5

1. (D)

2. See section 3.3.4.

3. Again, see section 3.3.4.

3.4.1

1. (B)

(A) 3.

(B) 2.

3.5.1

(A) 2.

(B) 4.

Section- IV

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 *Paradise Lost* Book I: The Fall of the Angels

4.2.1 Check Your Progress

4.3 *Paradise Lost* Book II: The Debate in Hell

4.3.1 Check Your Progress

4.4 Let Us Sum Up

4.5 Glossary

4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (4.2.1; 4.3.1)

4.0 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- ❖ *Describe* in detail the subject matter of Book I, chiefly, the fall of the angels.
- ❖ *Describe* in detail the subject matter of Book II, namely, the debate or “Consultation” in hell.
- ❖ *Writing* a detailed answer on what Books I and II contain.
- ❖ *Defining* some of the terms, phrases or words associated with the first two books.

4.1 Introduction

In this unit, dear learner, we shall continue to analyse and draw out the theme and content of Book I and Book II of *Paradise Lost*, which shall cover the main section of this Block. Slowly, the details of the first two books shall become clearer. The aim of the reading of the first two books is to make you competent in relating as well as explaining this introductory part of the epic poem. The Check Your Progress

sections of this unit will test your understanding of the story of the first two books. The aim is to continue to reinforce your knowledge of the text.

4.2 *Paradise Lost* Book I: The Fall of the Angels

In Book I, the classical link is also established when Milton compares Lucifer, now Satan, to the “Earth-born” “Titanian” (Book I, 198) or that “Sea-Beast/ Leviathan...” (200-01). These creatures “warr’d” during the great battles of legend and myth, and in the epic context, are a befitting reminder of the fallen creatures of yore. Lucifer, arrogant and full of jealousy and pride, dared rally an unholy consort of angels to wage war against God, and has been soundly defeated and struck down to the fires of hell. He has become Satan, the “Arch-Enemy” (Book I, 81). Satan finds himself lying next to Beelzebub, his second in command and unofficial mouthpiece. In the “horrid silence” (Book I, 83) Satan comments on how Beelzebub has been transformed from an angel “Cloth’d with transcendent brightness” (Book I, 86) to a creature “fall’n” and “chang’d” (Book I, 84), made worse by the punishment of God for the treachery of their rebellion.

Even so, Satan announces his intention to carry on the struggle against God, declaring in the callous fashion that is to become the hallmark of the character: “Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce... Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n” (Book I, 261; 263). Through sheer effort, even gargantuan will, Satan manages to free himself from his shackles and raise himself from the fiery lake and fly to the shore, a barren plain, followed by Beelzebub. He calls for the other fallen angels to raise themselves as well, He call’d so loud, that all the hollow Deep/ Of Hell resounded...” (Book I, 314-15) and they begin to assemble at the shores of the lake of fire. Satan’s status as a war-monger is reaffirmed when Milton writes that the other fallen angels “to thir Generals Voyce they soon obeyd/ Innumerable...” (Book I, 337-38). And following another epic tradition of listing out the names of the heroes involved in the feats of war and the heat of battle, here in Book I is listed out the unholy compatriots of Satan as they come and

join him one by one: Moloch, Baalim, Ashtaroth, Astoreth, Dagon, Rimmon, Osiris, Isis, Orus, Belial, Azazel, Mammon, among others. Each fallen angel, with their names struck from the “Books of Life” (Book I, 363) and “blotted out and ras’d” (362), is now accorded a devilish name, and each is introduced with a kind of background and formal cataloguing. This listing out of the fallen creatures parodies the Homeric tradition of listing out the names of ships and heroes in the second book of the *Iliad*. The numerous gods of different pagan religions are also listed out and numbered among the rebellious angels, which is why names such as Osiris, Isis and Baal stand out, originally part of ancient systems of belief before the advent of Christianity. This intentional inversion of the use of the cataloguing of names also differentiates the English epic from its classical predecessors, and while it accords in the characters of Satan and the other rebellious angels somewhat of a persona, it is done to highlight their character flaws and weaknesses, the opposite of what Homer might have intended in the heroic epic. Even though they have been defeated, and they are “Abject and lost” (Book I, 312), Satan tries to rally his supporters. He tells them that all is not lost and tries to inspire them into a renewed zeal for rebellion “against the house of God” (Book I, 470). They assume to have agency in their escape and their place in hell, but Milton very early on makes it very clear that it is only through God’s power alone that they are even allowed to do this. This theme of the ultimate authority of the Creator is not new in Milton’s works. In an early Latin composition on the Gunpowder Plot, *In Quintum Novembris*, Satan appears as a principal character, which anticipates the kind of subject matter Milton would take on in *Paradise Lost*. In this Latin poem, just like in *Paradise Lost*, Satan calls for a council of devils and at the end of the poem, God laughs at the futility of these creatures, paralleling the events that would occur in the epic poem. The aura of power and struggle that the character of Satan emanates is all but illusory, and fleeting. His agency to act, almost independently, derives from God alone, and it is clear that his struggle against the divine has already been lost. To many readers, the struggle may seem heroic, almost valiant, but it is borne of an envy and

treachery. As the fallen attempt to shape hell into a place of awe and power, they fail to see that it is only mercy that enables them such agency and that God grants Satan and the other fallen angels the power to act for God's purposes alone, and not theirs. This gathering of the fallen is impressive and their number large enough to constitute a kind of army, but they are all painfully aware of their very recent defeat. Satan rallies his army of devils and exhorts them to continue to "War then" (Book I, 661) and they respond, like soldiers, with "the din of war,/ Hurling defiance toward the Vault of Heav'n" (668-69). This depiction of the cohort of hell in a militarised fashion exposes the fait accompli of the rebellion, it is an attempted but failed coup. The call to arms inspires the fallen and under Mammon's direction, they begin work on the establishment of a capital city for hell. There is an irony in the civilisational drive displayed by the fallen angels, and that their constructions are derived from materials and resources already displays the ephemeral quality of their efforts. Unlike the conception of hell as a fiery and ever-burning place, Milton's construction of hell offers more nuance and variability. Hell is presented as a place that has some physiographical features, hills, mountains and plains provide the relief in the landscape and minerals such as gems provide the resources for the founding of a city. The architect in charge of these operations is Mulciber, and under his guidance, they begin construction of a great tower that comes to represent, symbolically, the lofty ambitions and pride of the devil populace. This capital city is named "Pandemonium"- "the Palace of Satan... suddenly built out of the Deep" (Book I, "The Argument", 19-20). Pandemonium, a word which is attributed to have been created by John Milton, literally means, "all demons" from 'pan' meaning "all" and 'demonium' meaning "demons". Hell literally becomes the place and origin of all demons and the word itself, in common usage, has come to represent confusion and chaos, accompanied by the flurry and noise of such a disorder. The devil army, blindly following the instructions of their "General" Satan are depicted as a swarm of bees, mindlessly flying in unison to the beat of war and rebellion". When the work is completed and the capital is ready, they gather in a pseudo-

council, under the falsity of empowerment, but it is Satan's designs that will be obeyed eventually.

4.2.1 Check Your Progress

Dear Learner, the goal now is to test your knowledge of some of the important details from the epic poem itself. The following section will aim to do that so as to help you remember parts of the epic poem in a way that aids your answers and reading of the text.

As always, identify and tick-mark correctly the most suitable meaning for the following words/terms/phrases:

(A) Object

1. A kind of object.
2. A rejection.
3. A condition or situation that is degrading and without dignity.
4. The feeling of loneliness.

(B) Rebellion

1. Pertaining to making a speech among one's peers.
2. The act or process of resisting authority, control, or convention, sometimes to the extent of taking up arms.
3. To sing and dance.
4. The act of building from raw materials.

(C) Pandemonium

1. A place or situation of utter chaos and confusion.
2. A musical procession.
3. A type of building.
4. A unit of noise.

(D) Satan, in the beginning of Book I, is described as a

1. Serpent.
2. Cherub.
3. Constructor.
4. Titan.

4.3 *Paradise Lost* Book II: The Debate in Hell

The process of “Consultation” begins between the fallen angels as to what to do next. Predictably, the first speaker Moloch advocates all-out war with Heaven and wishes for the battle to continue. Belial, representative of the kind of unscrupulous cunning that an overt dependency on the faculty of reason might engender proposes that they do nothing. Mammon, as he was responsible for the building of the tower of Pandemonium in hell suggests that they consolidate the conditions of their hellish empire. He believes that hell might not be so bad if all the fallen angels band together to improve the living conditions of their damnation. It is at this juncture that Beelzebub speaks up, and unbeknown to the other devils, he speaks out Satan’s plan. Beelzebub proposes that all efforts should be focussed on corrupting the newest creation of God - man. This plan is agreed upon. Each of the speakers among the four fallen angels who spoke reveals the differing characteristics and type of evil being portrayed.

Moloch, the first speaker, represents the impulsive and unthinking man of action, who leads before looking, but to the detriment of others. He is not very adept at the art of speaking but would rather fight as that is the skill he relies upon for expressing himself. He advocates the continuation of conflict against Heaven and this violence is the very antithesis of the Christian teachings of forgiveness and passivity. The action suggested by Moloch also contrasts the almost pacifist temperament adopted by Milton himself, especially with regards his blindness and the turn of fortunes suffered toward the end of his life. Unthinking and impulsive actions betray a lack of control and

represents a kind of evil that is based on domination and violence. As a foil, the next speaker that Milton presents is Belial, a kind of sophistic character skilled in oration and possessing intellect. His ways of speaking and behaving is designed to veil, to mask, to obfuscate, confuse and deceive. Belial puts forth the argument that the devils should do nothing, and especially at all costs, avoid war and action. Belial speaks in a way that anticipates and pre-empt the objections that might arise from Moloch's more direct approach to the predicament they are facing. In terms of the perspective of evil, Belial uses his skillful speech to veil what amounts to cowardly inactivity, aimed at surviving the conflict with Heaven. In this case, intellect and reason are used for purposes that are less than sincere. Here the student must become aware of the differences in the kind of evil being portrayed by Milton. Even though Belial uses his reason to defraud the other listener's, his sin is not as acute or deliberate as Satan's use of Beelzebub to get his way in the so-called council. In fact, Belial is portrayed by Milton as handsome and fair, an outward appearance of gentility that belies the true evil within. That is why Belial is described as using "words cloath'd in reasons garb/ Counsell'd ignoble ease, and peaceful sloath" (Book II, 226-27).

This superficial use of reason is the worst kind of intellect that can be deployed to perpetrate fraud. Following Belial's speech, the more sedate and materialistic Mammon delivers his views. He tries to scale down the cosmic sense of battle advocated by Moloch and the donothing attitude of Belial by seeming to offer a practical solution. He argues for the development of hell into a place that can be made habitable and perhaps even comfortable by the efforts of the devil horde. The gem and mineral wealth of hell appeals to this civilisational sense put forth by Mammon, but it pales the unholy angst of the fallen. This sin exhibited by Mammon represents that of greed and appetite, the need to hoard and consolidate one's material status. The bible makes it very clear that one cannot serve both God and Mammon is indicative of the material distractions that can erode one's spiritual life. In the midst of the arguments that highlight brute force, sly intellect and greedy materialism,

Beelzebub rises to speak. He puts forth the argument that God can be attacked by attacking his creation - man. This is in actuality Satan's argument, but the facade of a council is maintained in order to solidify his hold over the minion horde of hell. Satan had intended this plan all along and thus the council is waylaid as a sham by Milton - revealing the true nature of evil that serves only its own interests.

This plan also allows Satan a chance to venture out of hell. Satan is the arch-enemy of goodness and he does not stop short of defrauding his fallen compatriots or overriding their arguments and views. The treachery that Satan and the fallen angels perpetrate against Heaven is compounded by this act, and displays how low the once mighty angel has fallen. Though there is the semblance of equality of voice and representation for the devils, it is actually Satan's plan that is finally approved and acted upon, further stamping the authority of Satan in the dominion of hell. Satan decides to undertake this task of corrupting the new world and the new creation upon himself, and sets forth from hell to look for this new universe. As he nears the gates of hell, he encounters Sin, his daughter, who was born from the deep jealousy and hatred Lucifer had for the Son of God. Sin is described thus: a being whose upper torso is that of a beautiful woman's and the lower half is serpent-like. All around her waist are the hellish barking dogs, born out of the evil and incestuous rape of Sin by her son, Death. Death is a phantom-like creature, the result of the union between Satan and Sin. Satan persuades Sin to yield the gates of Hell to the world outside, which she does, but she is unable to close the gates again. From here, Satan ventures into the realm of Chaos and Night, which occupy the void that separates Heaven from Hell. From Chaos, Satan is able to garner that the newly created earth is suspended from Heaven by a golden chain, and he immediately makes his way there in order to explore this new realm, and also devise a way to corrupt the creations of God.

As Satan traverses the void, he strikes a path from hell to earth and along this path, Sin and Death construct a broad highway. The second book of *Paradise Lost* is structurally divided into two large sections.

The first section contains the debate, the “Consultation” among the devils on the course of action to be undertaken. This also recalls, in the epic tradition of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, the assemblies of heroes, and the counsel they held with regards to the actions to be undertaken, and also as a means to expound and relate the tales of the actions already undertaken or underway. Autobiographically, this debate also recalls the many meetings that Milton himself might have attended in his lifetime in his official capacities. Towards the end of his life, Milton was more or less bereft of patronage and political favour. This situation makes it all the more remarkable that he composed, finished and published *Paradise Lost*. The second part deals with the journey Satan makes from hell to earth, followed by his progeny, Sin and Death. This second section serves as an extended allegory. Satan embarks upon the searching for earth and man with the devils left behind to continue exploring hell. This brings the story of the creation of the world into contact with the formation of evil in the world.

An allegory is a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one. In literary works, allegories function to symbolise the plot, characters and action as pointing to meaning beyond the immediate narrative. At the gates of hell Satan finds his progeny, Sin and her son Death. Sin was formed when Lucifer, in Heaven, felt envy for Jesus, the Son of God. Sin sprang forth from Satan’s head which symbolises the way sin can originate in one’s thoughts. In turn, Death is born of the unnatural union between Satan and his daughter Sin. Even worse, Death rapes his mother Sin from which are born the hellhounds that lay about Sin’s waist. Sin, the daughter of Satan, is the allegory for the sin of jealousy, which led to Lucifer’s pride.

The concept of sin is literally manifested as a character, Sin, and sin in union with evil can only lead to dominion over life, in short, death. This serves to explain in the cosmic workings of the epic how sin and death came to emerge in the universe. As Satan leaves hell for earth, he paves the way for them to enter the realm of men, to corrupt

the creation of God with the evil that has led to his own downfall. Thus, it is Satan who brings sin and death into the world. Satan's journey into the void where he encounters Chaos and Night also marks the conjunction between darkness and evil, serving as an allegory to show that wherever a place is bereft of the light of Heaven, evil lurks. Hell is separated from Heaven by the void, far away, alienated, distant, from the love and mercy of God, both figuratively and literally. The companions of the void, Chaos and Night encourage Satan's attempt to traverse the distance. In one way, Satan becomes an explorer, a pioneer who goes boldly out into the frontiers. In another way, his insidious intent signifies how the danger of corruption and the vulnerability of man to evil also emerges from the very presence of evil, Satan. The broad highway that Sin and Death pave is in a way readied for the men who falter from the light of Heaven.

4.3.1 Check Your Progress

1. Who suggests that they wait and watch rather than continue their war against Heaven?
 - (A) Mulciber.
 - (B) Belial.
 - (C) Mammon.
 - (D) Beelzebub.

2. Which of the fallen angels leads the construction work undertaken in hell ?
 - (A) Lucifer.
 - (B) Pandemonium.
 - (C) Mammon.
 - (D) Moloch.

3. How does Satan fool the other fallen angels?

4. *Paradise Lost* begins in the middle of the action following the epic convention? What are some of the things that happen in the first book of the epic poem ?

4.4 Let Us Sum Up

Dear learner, your progress so far is excellently poised, and the hope for now is that you are beginning to get familiarised with the details of both Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*. The epic begins, as has been noted, in the middle of the action (as per the epic conventions from the time of the Greek writers) and relates the details of hell and its primary occupant, Satan.

4.5 Glossary

Classical – A little more specific than the word ‘Antiquity’ if you remember from the previous section. This word is related to ancient Greek or Latin literature, art, or culture.

Titan – In this context, a person or thing of very great intelligence, strength, or importance; also, the term is related to the older gods who preceded the Olympians and were the children of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth).

Leviathan – In this context, a thing that is very large or powerful. In terms of the general usage of the word, it also refers to a gigantic sea monster.

Innumerable – Uncountable, or too many to be counted or numbered.

Parody – An imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic, humorous or satirical effect.

Exhort – Strongly insist, urge or encourage someone to do something.

Fait Accompli – A thing that has already been decided before those affected hear about it, leaving them with no option but to accept it or to do it.

Impulsive – Acting without thinking, doing something without thinking.

Passivity – Acceptance, without reaction or response, of whatever happens; a not entirely dissimilar attitude is encouraged by the concept and belief of *Ahimsa* or non-violence.

Pre-empt – Taking action in order to prevent something from happening.

Gentility – Respectable or polite manners.

Habitable – Suitable conditions for living.

Waylaid – Interrupt or stop.

Phantom – a ghost-like figure.

Persuade – Convince or induce someone to do something based on a reasoned argument.

Figuratively – Metaphorically.

Literally – Exact sense or meaning.

4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (4.2.1; 4.3.1)

4.2.1

(A) 3.

(B) 2.

(C) 1.

(D) 4.

4.3.1

1. (B)

2. (C)

3 See section 4.3.

4. See section 4.2.

Section- V

Structure

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

5.2 *Paradise Lost*: A Reader's Perspective

5.2.1 Check Your Progress

5.3 *Paradise Lost*: A Learner's Analysis

5.3.1 Check Your Progress

5.4 *Paradise Lost*: The Other Books, A Short Summary

5.5 Let Us Sum Up

5.6 Glossary

5.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (5.2.1; 5.3.1)

5.0 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- ❖ *Analyse* Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*.
- ❖ *List* out the reasons of pre-eminence of the epic form in English literary tradition.
- ❖ *Discuss* the story of *Paradise Lost* in a comprehensive manner.

5.1 Introduction

This final unit aims to present an analysis of *Paradise Lost* as a whole in as simple a manner as possible. The second objective is to present an analysis of the first two books derived from readings of the literature around the subject. Again, the aim is to present the material in a way that will help you understand the beginnings of *Paradise Lost* in a fruitful way. The analysis will also highlight some of the issues

raised by readers and scholars over some of the characteristics of the epic poem as worked on in *Paradise Lost*. Finally, a short summary of the entirety of the epic will help you anticipate the other Books that are to come in the study of *Paradise Lost*. This will also help you to contextualise the first two books in a better way.

5.2 *Paradise Lost*: A Reader's Perspective

Paradise Lost, in effect, is about humankind, and the redemption of humankind from the self-imposed alienation and isolation, suffered as the consequence of disobedience and sin. While a working knowledge of the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis might greatly add to the student's background knowledge of the origins and inspiration of John Milton's epic retelling, the following summary shall cover as quickly and as extant as possible the narrative that the epic poem portrays. *Paradise Lost* retells the origins and story of Adam and Eve, the beloved creations of God, who blesses them with dominion over paradise on earth, namely, the Garden of Eden. This is the same story one would find in the opening part of the Book of Genesis, and presents the close and irrevocable bond between God and humankind. This bond is of course challenged by the manipulative and jealous Satan, who is of course, representative of the first disobedience and treachery. Satan was originally one of the brightest angels in the heavenly pantheon. Called Lucifer, his pride and ambition led him and his faction of angels into conflict with their Creator, and following a war against God, they fall into hell. It is Satan's aim to corrupt the creation of God, including Adam and Eve, and in a bid to exact revenge, Satan in the guise of a serpent tempts Eve into partaking of the forbidden fruit, thus sparking the disobedience and downfall of humankind.

Paradise Lost follows from the narrative departure and presents in great and vivid detail the machinations of Satan and his lowly followers, the complicity of Adam and Eve in their downfall, and the Glory and Mercy of God in promising a Saviour to redeem the fallen status of humankind. The epic poem begins, as you can recall, in hell, where Satan and his fallen ilk are smarting from defeat in the war they

waged against God and righteousness. They construct an insidious palace called Pandemonium, a place of chaos and confusion. Here, they hold council to decide whether or not to return to battle. There is a listing of the various devils of hell in this sequence, who each insist on different courses of action. However, Satan has been planning his own course of action all along. Satan takes it upon himself to first explore a new world that has been prophesied to be created. This is the still to be created earth. As he journeys from Pandemonium to the gates of hell, Satan encounters his daughter Sin and her son, Death. They fling open the gates of hell for him and he traverses the realm of chaos and Night that separates the newly formed universe and earth from hell. As he moves toward the new universe, Sin and Death follow, constructing a wide highway. God, in seeing Satan move towards the newly formed world foretells the disobedience and fall of humankind. His Son, Messiah, who sits at the right hand, offers to save humankind from Satan, Sin and Death, thereby offering salvation and redemption. Satan flies to the sun where he tricks Uriel, an angel, into showing him the way to man's home. The fallen angel gains entry into the Garden of Eden, where he finds Adam and Eve, and just as he had been jealous of the Messiah, he becomes jealous of these creations of God.

He undertakes to cause their corruption and fall. He overhears them speak of God's commandment not to partake of the forbidden fruit. In the meantime, Uriel warns Gabriel and his angels of the presence of Satan in the Garden of Eden. These angels of God are guardians of Paradise and they apprehend Satan and banish him from Eden. God sends the angel Raphael to warn Adam and Eve about Satan and his nefarious nature. Raphael recounts how Lucifer's jealousy against the Son of God caused him to declare war against God and Heaven, and how the Son, the Messiah, cast him and his followers down to hell. Raphael also recounts for the new man and woman how they were created so that they could one day take the place of the fallen angels in Heaven. Not to be outdone, Satan returns to earth and to Eden in the guise of a serpent, and it is in this form that he manages to seduce Eve into partaking

of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, thereby sealing the first disobedience of humankind. Adam, resigned to join Eve in her fate also eats of the fruit. Their innocence is immediately and irreparably lost and they suddenly become very aware of their nakedness. Their disobedience opens the path for Sin and Death to enter Paradise. Confused, ashamed and saddened, Adam and Eve grow angry at each other. The Son of God descends to earth and in a manifestation of the Immense Mercy, stays the sentence of death upon them. For this corruption of innocence, Satan and his followers are punished, turned into serpents. Adam is reconciled with Eve and God sends the angel Michael to reveal to Adam the consequences of his sin and to banish the pair from the immortal life of Paradise. However, in this lowest moment of despair and loss of hope, there is the revelation of the future coming of the Saviour of mankind, and it is this hope that ultimately crowns the message of *Paradise Lost*. Here it is important to note how man's disobedience is different from Satan's. While the couple's disobedience is the result of a failure to obey, Satan's disobedience is a consequence of his refusal to obey.

5.2.1 Check Your Progress

Dear Learner, *Paradise Lost* has been summarised in the above section, and revisited in greater detail at a later section. This kind of repetition is to reinforce your understanding of the epic and help you recollect the story related through the poem. Again, we shall test the knowledge you have gained so far. You are already familiar by now as to how the following exercises shall proceed. All the best! Identify and tick-mark correctly the most suitable meaning for the following words/terms/phrases:

(A) Disobedience

1. The act of obeying angrily.
2. The failure or refusal to obey rules or someone in authority.
3. A commandment.
4. Satan's name in hell.

(B) Satan's first disguise is as a

1. A Cherub.
2. A Snake.
3. A man.
4. A woman.

(C) The angel guarding the sun is named

1. Gabriel.
2. Abdiel.
3. Uriel.
4. Michael.

(D) The angel in charge of guarding the Garden of Eden is named

1. Adam.
2. Gabriel.
3. Raphael.
4. Cherub.

5.3 *Paradise Lost*: A Learner's Analysis

Paradise Lost remains a vast, rich and epic poem with tremendous depth of meaning. A reader or a student can approach the poem from a number of avenues that are not immediately apparent. Some of the ways that may be used by the student to approach the sheer length as well as the compact and varied themes in the epic are listed out in the following sections, so as to serve as guideposts for future readings as well as readings of the other Books. The scope of *Paradise Lost* as an epic has already been listed out. The following section will focus on some of the key features of *Paradise Lost* in general, which may serve to help the student formulate a capable reading of the epic. One of the most important literary features of *Paradise Lost* remains the use of

similes. The simile, in simple terms, is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, to impart a kind of dramatic effect, and is used to make a description more lucid, emphatic or vivid. This comparison, usually of unrelated things effectively calls the attention and holds the attention of the intended audience or reader. The use of similes is a major feature of the style of *Paradise Lost* and is used extensively as a means of conveying criticism and commentary. Given Milton's extensive scholarship and his vast knowledge of languages, histories, cultures as well as people, the similes deployed in *Paradise Lost* are quite esoteric and encyclopaedic.

It is not easy to engage with the text without some knowledge of the history of Milton's age as well as the kind of classical scholarship undertaken during the time. Another key feature of *Paradise Lost* is the use of an epic style which employs several unfamiliar words and word constructions (such as the word 'Pandemonium'). This gives the impression of great, almost cosmic importance to the poetic narrative while also serving to highlight the creative order of the poem. Milton uses a number of archaic terms and references as a way to link the new English epic to its classical as well as biblical predecessors and the narrative evokes a sense of timelessness to the proceedings, which might have been stunted had the poem relied majorly on a colloquial literary sensibility. Many of the names of the fallen angels are direct references to historical and ancient figures and places. The tone of the epic also adopts a kind of prophetic vision-making. This contrast between an ancient and esoteric subject matter and a highly stylised prophetic tone creates a tension of style that holds the attention of the reader as to what the outcome of such cosmic actions such as the rebellion of angels might be. This tension also unifies the fantastic with the logical, and the emotional with the spiritual. The reader cannot help but become invested in the construction of meaning that is of cosmic and universal importance. By using this knowledge of the past, Milton also manages to impart a biblical depth to the sense of time and space being portrayed in the epic and creates a scriptural past that melds easily with the classical and

pagan references of the epic. Besides being a political commentary and spiritual exploration, *Paradise Lost* is also a literary manifestation of the creative values espoused by the poet and his age. The epic has a number of allusions to the literary greats of the time such as Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser, besides the obvious link to the great writers of antiquity such as Homer and Virgil.

While *Paradise Lost* may read like a historical tract in its subject matter, it also contains many allusions and references to the politics and national life of Milton's time. In this way, it is a rich source of the major events that shaped seventeenth century England. References to the Interregnum of Oliver Cromwell are easily deduced from the poem. The overarching theme of the reneging of the divine order by jealous and treacherous upstarts resonates the political climate that besieged England at the time, and which the section on the historical context deals with in detail. The grand scale of the subject matter with themes such as the fall and redemption of man encompasses a wider sense of history and the place of man in the cosmos is as much a concern as the particulars of his actions and his setting. Another important aspect of *Paradise Lost* is the incorporation of many of the personal experiences of the poet himself. These autobiographical instances reveal the depth of emotional and personal investment of the author in the creation of this English epic. While it may be useful to study these elements in depth, it is also useful to remember that the epic itself caters to far greater concerns. That the reader sees the narrative unfold through a multitude of characters - from Satan, to the angels, to Adam and Eve - presents the different impulses, natures as well as desires of cosmic order. The rhetoric of *Paradise Lost* affords a multiplicity of meaning, and the use of similes, by characters such as Satan implies the range and scope of expression possible in a world of "free will" and yet all this seems fleeting and ephemeral unless held together by a divine force, represented by the Heavenly Author, God. Indeed, the epic poem invites a range of responses and readings and this adds to the richness and depth of meaning that the epic encapsulates.

5.3.1 Check Your Progress

1. Who is Satan jealous of in Heaven?

- (A) Adam and Eve.
- (B) The Son of God.
- (C) Michael.
- (D) Gabriel.

2. Can you name some of the angels of Heaven mentioned in *Paradise Lost*? Try to name at least three using the following fill in the blanks method:

- (A) 'Raph_____'
- (B) 'Ur_____'
- (C) 'Ga_____'

3. How is Satan's disobedience different from Adam and Eve's disobedience?

2. *Paradise Lost* ends on a hopeful note? Can you tell what this hope is?

5.4 *Paradise Lost*: The Other Books. A Short Summary

Book III begins with God seeing Satan fly towards the newly created world and foretells that the fallen one's evil mission of tempting man into disobeying God will succeed. God also explains His purpose of love; grace and mercy that man will be blessed with, but declares that justice must also be served. His Son, the Messiah, who sits at His right hand, freely offers to sacrifice himself for the sake of man's salvation and redemption, causing the heavenly angels to celebrate this unconditional love in songs of praise. In the meantime, Satan reaches upon the periphery of the new creation, where he searches for an opening to the universe within. He flies to the sun which is guarded by an angel named Uriel. Satan disguises himself as a cherub, and pretends to have come to praise God's new creation. He manages to trick Uriel into showing him the way to man's home, the Garden of Eden. After this, Book IV begins where we see Satan alight upon a vantage point, Mt. Niphates. For a moment, Satan experiences disillusionment, but steeling himself proceeds to put his evil plans into action. He gains access to the secret entrance of the Garden of Eden, also known as Paradise. For a moment, he is filled with awe at the beauty of this world. Soon, he comes upon Adam and Eve, and gazing at them in their blissful state, he is filled with a spiteful jealousy.

Satan overhears them speak about God's commandment that they should not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, under penalty of death, and thereby plots to cause them to transgress this commandment. Meanwhile, Uriel becomes suspicious and warns Gabriel and his angels, who are charged with guarding the gate of the Garden of Eden, of the presence of Satan. That same evening, two scouts are sent by Gabriel who find Satan whispering into the ear of Eve as she sleeps next to her husband. The scouts capture Satan and bring him to Gabriel who immediately proceeds to banish him from Eden. God sends the angel Raphael to warn the innocent couple of their enemy. The angel arrives and shares a meal with them, and then tells them the history of Lucifer's fall and how he became Satan: how envy against the Son of

God led him to incite all the angels under his charge to rebel against God, and how one angel, Abdiel, resisted and remained faithful to God. This provides the background of the story of Satan and provides the reader the events that took place before the happenings of Book I and Book II. Book VI continues Raphael's story of the battle between the angels of Heaven and the fallen angels. Raphael narrates how the angel Michael was sent at the head of the faithful angels into battle against Satan and his army of the fallen.

They are soon overcome. Defeated, wounded and thrown into confusion, Satan and his fellow rebels beat a retreat. At night, they invent weapons to aid them in their battle. These weapons are like cannons. The following day, during the second battle, these nefarious weapons are used against the army of heaven and Michael and his angels are so enraged by the devilish weaponry that they uproot the very mountains and hurl them at Satan's minions.

The war rages on into the third day and that is when God sends the Messiah, his Son, to end the war. The Messiah, borne on a flaming chariot, drives the fallen angels out of heaven and down into hell. Book VII has Raphael narrate to Adam how God sent his Son to create a new world and new beings to replace the fallen angels. At this point, the six days of creation which constitute the beginning of the Book of Genesis of the Bible are described. In Book VIII, the voice and perspective of the newly created being, man, is heard. Adam wishes to extend Raphael's visit to them in the Garden of Eden. He recounts for Raphael the memories of his own creation, and his first impressions of the world and all its creations, as well as his meeting with and marriage to Eve. Before leaving, Raphael repeats his warning to Adam. Book IX sees Satan return to the Garden of Eden, this time disguised as a serpent. The next morning, as Adam and Eve go about their day's work, Eve suggests that they go in separate directions. Adam hesitates to do so, but agrees. It is during this time that the serpent finds Eve alone, and approaches her. She is at first surprised to find that the creature can speak, and is soon incited by him to take a bite of the fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Adam is horrified when he finds out what she has done, but decides to join in her fate rather than suffer loneliness without her. He too eats of the fruit. After they eat the fruit, they are filled with lust for each other and lay together, falling into a restless sleep. When they wake up, they become aware of their nakedness and are filled with shame. They scramble to cover themselves with leaves and in the midst of their confusion and emotional distress, start to blame each other. The Fall is complete. Book X sees the guardian angels return to Heaven, saddened by man's failure and disobedience. The Son of God descends to the world to judge the sinners but in His mercy, he delays their punishment of death. In His pity, he clothes Adam and Eve and hopes that during the delay of their punishment, they will work to regain God's favour. Satan's evil spawn, Sin and Death sense his success in the new world and they set out over their broad highway to extend it over Chaos in order to make their passage to earth easier. Satan encounters them on his way back to hell and is filled with wonder at this great structure. Arriving in Pandemonium, Satan boasts of his success to the gathered fallen at corrupting God's creation. But they cannot applaud or praise him for they are turned into snakes, the punishment from heaven for the deed of Satan. The angels of God are instructed as to the changes that must occur in the world due to the fall of man. Adam laments his fallen state and the miserable conditions that await the human race.

He rebukes Eve for trying to console him in his grief, but she endures in winning his forgiveness. She suggests that they commit suicide, but Adam reminds her of God's promise that her seed should wreak vengeance upon the serpent. More importantly, they must seek to make peace with God, having disobeyed Him and having sinned against Him. In Book XI, the angel Michael is sent by God to banish Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Michael does as instructed but also reveals to Adam the future consequences of his sin. The news that they are to be thrown out of Paradise causes Eve to grieve in tears. Michael takes Adam atop a hill where he is shown a vision of what will happen in the world till the Great Flood that will sweep away the sinful

world. Book XII continues the angel Michael's prophetic vision, but the epic poem ends on a hopeful note with the vision of the coming Messiah, who shall be born a human being in order to fulfil the promise of redeeming mankind from sin and death. Adam is comforted by this revelation and resolves to be obedient for the rest of his life. He comes down the hill along with Michael and gently awakens Eve from her sleep. The two reconfirm their marital vows and allegiance to each other as husband and wife. A flaming sword is placed at the gates of the Garden of Eden to bar their entry into Paradise, and Adam and Eve are turned away, sad but hopeful, from their home. Thus ends the epic, *Paradise Lost*. There is some amount of hope invested in the concluding section of the epic.

5.5 Let Us Sum Up

This unit aims at giving you a bird's eye perspective of the entire epic and to also flesh out the themes, issues and ideas of Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*. Your progress into the world and works of John Milton has well and truly begun and we hope that the next set of Blocks will continue to explicate, in your favour, *Paradise Lost*. Do continue to test your knowledge and follow-up your readings on the subject as well as the poet.

5.6 Glossary

Redemption – Being saved or saving someone from evil, sin, or error.

Pantheon – The collective of gods of a particular religion.

Machination – A plot or scheme.

Forbidden – Banned or not allowed.

Banish – A punishment by sending someone away from a particular place, region, or country.

Guise – External appearance or form.

Irreparably – Impossible to repair.

Tremendous – Great intensity or amount.

Predecessor – A person who held a job or office before the current person.

Multiplicity – Many; variety.

Ephemeral – Not lasting.

Encapsulates – Contains or encloses.

Unconditional – Without any conditions or expectations.

5.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (5.2.1; 5.3.1)

5.2.1

(A) 2.

(B) 1.

(C) 3.

(D) 2.

5.3.1

1. (B)

2. (A) ‘Raphael’

(B) ‘Uriel’

(C) ‘Gabriel’

3. See last part of section 5.2.

4. See the last part of section 5.4.

5.8 Recommended Readings

Zunder, William, ed. *Paradise Lost: John Milton*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961. Kean, Margaret. *John Milton’s Paradise Lost: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Teskey, Gordon, ed. *Paradise Lost: 3rd Edition (Norton Critical Edition)*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2005.

5.9 Suggested Essay Type Questions

1. Do you think Adam and Eve were driven by a sense of reason before committing the sin of disobedience? Substantiate your answer with reasoned arguments.
2. How would you react to an assessment of Milton as an anti-feminist from his portrayal of the character of Eve in *Paradise Lost* (Book-I/II)?
3. Compare and contrast the character of Satan with that of the other fallen angels. What makes the character of Satan stand out from the crowd? Discuss from your reading of Book-I and II of *Paradise Lost*
4. Are the alterations Milton carried out in the text of *Paradise Lost*, (Book-I/II) from the *Bible* justified? Give a reasoned answer from your reading of the Book-I/II of *Paradise Lost*.
5. Do you consider Satan a tragic hero? Substantiate.

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BLOCK-III

Neo-Classical Poets

UNIT-I

Title: 'Mac Flecknoe' - John Dryden

STRUCTURE

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 About the Poet: John Dryden

1.2.1 His Life

1.2.2 His Works

Check Your Progress

1.3 About the Poem: 'Mac Flecknoe'

1.3.1 Context of the Poem

1.4 Summary of the Poem

1.5 Critical appreciation of the Poem

Check Your Progress

1.6 Let us Sum Up

Answer Keys

Possible Questions

Key Words

References

Suggested Readings

1.0 Objectives:

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

- * *identify* John Dryden as the prominent literary figure of the Restoration Age
- * *discuss* the major satirical poems of Dryden
- * *summarize* the poem under study
- * *describe* its poetic form and technique
- * *appraise* the poem critically

1.1 Introduction:

While in the preceding unit you learnt about the great Puritan poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I & II, in this unit you will be acquainted with a poem written by John Dryden. Dryden was an influential English poet, literary critic, translator and playwright who dominated the literary life of Restoration England to such a point that the period came to be known in literary circles as the Age of Dryden. Sir Walter Scott called him "Glorious John". He served as the first official Poet Laureate of England.

The Age of Dryden or the Restoration Age roughly spans the period from the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to the year 1700. The restoration of Charles II to the English throne marked the end of the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell.

The Restoration literature of the time signifies a sudden break with the older values. Its subject and style took on a new spirit, aim and attitude. It became classical or neoclassical as against the romanticism of the Elizabethans. The poetic form best suited to the age was the satire, which gained immense development during this period. Wit was inherent in satire and the heroic couplet became the natural medium of intellectual expression in the age. The works of Dryden best represents the spirit of the age.

Before going to read about his poem, it is necessary to know briefly about the life of John Dryden and his works.

1.2 About the Poet: John Dryden (1631-1700)

1.2.1 His Life

John Dryden was born on August 9, 1631 in the village of Aldwinkle in Northamptonshire. His family were prosperous people, who brought him up in the strict Puritan faith. He was educated at the famous Westminster School under the headmaster, Richard Busby, who influenced Dryden with his great knowledge of the classics apart from the ancient or classical Greek and Roman poets, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton and Spenser. He later went to Trinity College, Cambridge. He made excellent use of his opportunities and studied eagerly, becoming one of the best educated men of his age, especially in the classics. He became friendly with Sir Robert Howard after the Restoration, and married Howard's sister in 1663. The marriage was not very happy. By 1660, he had gained command over his poetical powers.

Dryden's literary career can be roughly divided into three periods- (i) The dramatic period lasting till 1680 (ii) the period of his greatest works going upto 1690 (iii) the period of translations and miscellaneous production. With the accession of James II in 1685 to the English throne, Dryden became a Roman Catholic. To his new beliefs he adhered steadfastly, even when in 1688 the Glorious Revolution brought certain disaster to such public men as adhered to Roman Catholicism. After the Glorious Revolution, however, his popularity declined. He lost his posts of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal. The Laureateship was conferred on Shadwell, his most rancorous foe. And Dryden retired with dignity to sustain his last years with his literary labours. Dryden died in May 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

1.2.2 His Works

Dryden began his life's work with poetry; he concluded it with poetry; and the years between are starred with the brightness of his

greater poems. As early as February 1664 Pepys records in his diary that he met “Mr. Dryden, the poet”; and he remained “Mr. Dryden, the poet” till the day of his death. (Albert, 158). It is therefore as a poet that we chiefly know Dryden. The important satirical works of Dryden are ‘Absalom and Achitophel’, ‘The Medal’, ‘Mac Flecknoe’ and a contribution of 200 lines to Nahum Tate’s ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ Part II. All his satires usually show artistic control and urbanity of manner. Since in this unit we are going to discuss ‘Mac Flecknoe’, one of Dryden’s satirical poems, a brief idea of some of his other major poems will help you in understanding his poetic talent. His first published poem of any consequence was ‘Heroic Stanzas on the Death of the Protector Oliver Cromwell’ (1659). It was a tribute to the Puritan leader. It is a striking manifestation of Dryden’s directness, and show a certain angular force and metrical skill. The poem is written in praise of Cromwell. It is the greatness of England that has been venerated in the person of the Protector. ‘Astrea Redux’ (1660) celebrates the restoration of Charles II to the throne. It shows the progress of Dryden’s poetical craftsmanship. It represents Dryden’s change of political affiliations. Sonorous and dignified phrases are used and it indicates Dryden’s potential mastery over the heroic couplet. His poem ‘Annus Mirabilis’ (1667) marks the end of the first phase of his poetical career. It primarily treats two historical events of the year 1666: the English naval victory over the Dutch fleet, and the horrors of the Great Fire in London. Written in quatrains, it shows flexibility and ease in verse form as well as vigour and striking imagery. It sometimes however reveals a weakness for fantastic conceits.

Dryden’s allegorical satire ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ (1681) resulted from political and personal controversies of the day. It is on the Whig attempt of the Earl of Shaftesbury to set up the Duke of York, a Roman Catholic, as the successor of Charles II. Dryden appears as the chief champion of his monarch and patron, Charles II. The poem reveals the poet’s amazing range and force as a satirist, his mastery over the heroic couplet, and his powers of reasoning in verse. The

excellence of the work lies mainly in the numerous portraits, which show Dryden's keen insight into human nature. The poem is regarded as the greatest political verse satire in English. In 'Absalom and Achitophel' Part II (1686) Dryden contributed a violent attack on Shadwell, giving him the name of Og. The main part of the work was composed by Nahum Tate.

'The Medal' (1682) is a satire against sedition. It is much shorter and graver than 'Absalom and Achitophel' and its versification also is less lively than that of the latter. It is partly bitter invective against Shaftesbury. The poem also argues about the unfitness of Republican institutions of England.

'Religio Laici' (1682) or the 'Religion of a Layman' shows Dryden's powers of reasoning in verse at their best. While his other satires were inspired by the political controversies of the time, this long narrative poem resulted from the religious controversies. It is a spirited defence of the Church of England. Another major poem of Dryden, 'The Hind and the Panther' (1687) is an allegorical defence of the Roman Catholic faith, and a reversal of Dryden's religious beliefs. The poem is remarkable for the poet's handling of the heroic couplet and expository skill.

Translations of classical authors such as Ovid, Boccaccio and Virgil were made by Dryden after the Glorious Revolution in 1688. He translated Virgil in 1697. He also adapted Chaucer to contemporary taste. His translations and fables particularly *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700) were greatly popular.

Though Dryden's genius lay chiefly in satiric and narrative poetry, his lyrical poetry also is of considerable importance. 'A Song for St. Cecilia's Day' (1687), 'Alexander's Feast' (1697) and 'Ode to Anne Killigrew' (1686) show Dryden's sense of music and capacity for a varied and powerful style.

Dryden was a versatile genius and a prolific writer. He began his career as a dramatist with a comedy of manners- *The Wild Gallant*

(1663), which was not a stage success. However, he went on to write several successful plays. Dryden popularized the heroic play, a type of tragedy written in heroic couplets, that is, iambic pentameter. This type of play deals with the themes of love and honour. The most successful heroic play written by Dryden was *The Conquest of Granada* (1670). Another tragedy, *All For Love* (1677), was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. It was his best play among his blank verse tragedies. In it characters are better drawn than in his other plays and the style is dignified and restrained.

As a literary critic, Dryden discussed theoretical as well as practical matters and the classical and contemporary poets and dramatists. His *Essay on Dramatic Poesie* (1668) is a major piece of literary criticism in the language. It is a realistic evaluation of Shakespeare and other Elizabethans. Direct and fluent in style, Dryden shows keen critical perception. His *The Essay on Satire* (1693) is a preface to the translation of Juvenal. It gives Dryden's views on satire. *The Essay on Epic Poetry* was written in 1698. His *Preface to Fables* (1700) shows his foresight and critical judgement in his estimate of Chaucer. Dryden's prose, indeed, marks a definite progress in the development of the medium in English. It is easy, fluent and never stilted. It is the first example of modern English prose.

Dryden's place among authors is due partly to his great influence on the succeeding age of classicism. Briefly, this influence may be summed up by noting the three new elements which he brought into our literature. These are: (1) the establishment of the heroic couplet as the fashion for satiric, didactic and descriptive poetry; (2) his development of a direct prose style we still cultivate; and (3) his development of the art of literary criticism in his essays and in the numerous prefaces to his poems. This is certainly a large work for one man to accomplish, and Dryden is worthy of honour, though comparatively little of what he wrote is now found on our bookshelves. (Long, 249)

STOP TO CONSIDER

● *Satire*: It is a literary form which searches out the faults of individuals or institutions in order to hold them up to ridicule. In other words, satire is a literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Dryden considered the true end of satire to be the amendment of vices by correction. But without humour, satire is invective, that is, it becomes violent and abusive. Satire may be (i) personal, and (ii) impersonal. Personal satire is against individuals and impersonal satire is aimed at types. Dryden is a master of the classical form of satire. He shows the influence of classical writers of Rome like Horace and Juvenal. Dryden combines the urbane laughter of Horace with the vigorous contempt of Juvenal in his satire.

● *Puritan*: A member of a group of English Protestants that arose in the 16th century within the Church of England, demanding the simplification of doctrine and worship, and greater strictness in religious discipline: during part of the 17th century the Puritans became a powerful political party.

● *Poet Laureate*: an eminent poet appointed as a member of the British royal household.

● *Historiographer Royal*: It is the title of an appointment as official chronicler or historian of a court or monarch. It was initially particularly associated with the French monarchy, where the post existed from at least 1550, but in the later 16th and 17th centuries became common throughout Europe.

● *Glorious Revolution*: The 1688 Revolution, often referred to as the ‘Glorious Revolution of 1688’, ended the reign of James II and ushered in the reign of William III and Mary II.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Which period of English literary history is known as the Restoration Period or the Age of Dryden?
(A) 1800 to 1850 (B) 1702 to 1760

(C) 1660 to 1700 (D) 1558 to 1603

2. Historical events often influence literature. Which of the following did not occur during the Restoration period?

(A) Charles II was restored to the throne (B) The French Revolution (C) The Great Fire of London (D) The Exclusion Bill Crisis

3. Heroic couplet is a pair of:

(A) Unrhyming iambic pentameter lines (B) Rhyming iambic pentameter lines (C) Rhyming iambic hexameter (D) Unrhyming iambic hexameter

4. Write a brief note on some of Dryden's satirical poems. (75 words)

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1.3 About the Poem: 'Mac Flecknoe'

1.3.1 Context of the Poem

'Mac Flecknoe' (full title: 'Mac Flecknoe, or A Satire Upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T.S.')

is a highly entertaining verse mock-heroic satire written by John Dryden. It is a direct attack on Thomas Shadwell, another prominent poet of the time. The context or the historical background to 'Mac Flecknoe' goes back to the publication of 'Absalom and Achitophel' in which Dryden had attacked the Earl of Shaftesbury as an enemy and traitor to the nation. Shaftesbury, though arrested and sent to the Tower, was later acquitted of charges of treason, and his supporters struck a medal in his honour. Dryden then wrote the satire, 'The Medal', against Shaftesbury. It provoked a reply, 'The Medal of John Bayes', by Thomas Shadwell. Dryden was not a man to meekly accept the insult and he published 'Mac Flecknoe' as a retaliation. Dryden and Shadwell had once been on friendly terms though they had argued

with each other on literary matters. It is not clear how personal animosity set in between them, leading to literary attacks on one another. Whatever the circumstances, Dryden's retort to Shadwell is witty and comical. It is not only a satire on Shadwell but also ridicules all literary dunces.

1.4 Summary of the Poem

After enjoying for a long time the reputation of being the ruler in the realms of absolute nonsense, the old monarch of the Kingdom of Dullness, Flecknoe, like Augustus Caesar, realised that his life would soon come to an end as everything was liable to decay. (Ll. 1-6)

He had many sons from whom he had to choose his successor. He chose Shadwell to succeed him as he was a fit successor who would continually wage an unceasing war with wit. By it the poet meant that Flecknoe's son would be continually possessed with nonsense. Of all his sons, Flecknoe selected Shadwell because he was mature in dullness from his early years. He was confirmed in full stupidity. His other sons did sometime deviate into sense but Shadwell never wrote anything sensible even by chance. He belonged to the class of dull authors like Heywood and Shirley. Even Flecknoe himself was no more than a prelude to the empire of Shadwell. His stupidity was so limitless that John Singleton, a noted actor and bandmaster decided to give up the role of Villerius. All these facts sufficiently proved his foolishness and stamped him as the fittest heir of his father. (Ll. 7-63)

Flecknoe made arrangements for the coronation ceremony of Shadwell. An infamous place outside the walls of London was chosen as the site. Near the place stood a nursery where raw actors were instructed in the art of acting. The atmosphere was morally unwholesome and no great play, tragedy or comedy, was ever enacted there. The unthinking audience with blank minds, who attended the theatre, applauded only crude performances. This place was chosen for the

coronation as it had been prophesied sometime before that a great Emperor of Dullness would rule there.

The news of Shadwell's coronation spread far and wide. A vast gathering came to witness the ceremony. The path to the royal throne was strewn with torn and loose fragments of worthless poems, particularly of Shadwell himself. The path over which the emperor of Dunces was to pass was not covered with Persian carpets but with torn out pages of poems written by worthless poets, Heywood, Shirley and Ogilby and it was almost blocked by the large mass of Shadwell's own productions.. Flecknoe sat high on a throne consisting of a pile of books written by himself. Shadwell sat on his right with dullness writ large on his face. Shadwell was anointed by Flecknoe himself. In his left hand Shadwell held not the globe or the orb, that is, a small globe with a symbol of royal power, but a large mug of powerful ale. In his right hand he held Flecknoe's book, *Love's Kingdom*. Immediately after the ceremony was over, a dozen aged owls were seen flying on Shadwell's left. The admiring crowd greeted it as an auspicious omen. (Ll. 64-127)

Flecknoe then stood up and visualised the great future of Mac Flecknoe. He wished that his son Shadwell should reign over a vast stretch of territory from Ireland to the distant Barbados. He advised him not to depend on anybody except his stupid brain. By being natural, he would produce the best. He should never bother his head over success or reputation. He should also not imitate others but follow his own dull brain. Wit, rhetoric and sense should be eternally exiled from his literary domain and his characters should fully reveal the barrenness of his mind. He should not claim any literary kinship with Ben Jonson though he did have a corpulent body like him. He should write feeble verses. His tragedies as well as comedies should be purely ineffective. His satires too should not have any force. He should only attempt

anagrams. Anything better than acrostics, he was incapable of writing. (Ll. 128-210) The last words of Flecknoe could not be heard because he was dragged down by a trap-door laid by two characters- Bruce and Longville, of Shadwell's play.

Flecknoe's woolen robe was carried upwards and fell on Shadwell and thus endowed him with double measure of the dullness and stupidity of his old father. (Ll. 211- 217)

1.5 Critical appreciation of the Poem

'Mac Flecknoe' was published in 1682, but was written by Dryden in 1678. 'Mac Flecknoe' means 'the son of Flecknoe'. The choice of the name is not very difficult to understand. Richard Flecknoe, Shadwell's literary father in the poem, was in real life a Catholic priest and a versifier. Andrew Marvell had satirized him playfully in 'Flecknoe, an English Priest in Rome'. The wits of the day generally regarded Flecknoe as an object of ridicule. By the time Dryden chose him to be the father of the Prince of Dullness, he had come to symbolize the would-be poet of poor ability. But in the context of 'Mac Flecknoe', the father's talents in dullness, though great, are not to be unique. The son is greater in the field of dullness than the father. Flecknoe, accordingly, is only the prophet-precursor of the true epitome of unrelieved ignorance and stupidity- Mac Flecknoe, his son.

'Mac Flecknoe' is an allegorical verse satire. Dryden has used a fictitious base to carry his satiric meaning. The dominant idea is the orderly and appropriate succession to the throne, indicating not only a continuation of the excellent dullness of the previous reign, but its increase- for Shadwell gets "double portion of his father's art". Flecknoe in abdicating his kingship, chooses Shadwell as successor from among his sons, for he alone "stands confirmed in full stupidity." Flecknoe's speeches in praise of his son's talents reveal the hidden meaning of Dryden. The hero is a fool and he fittingly vows to wage eternal war on sense, wit and intelligence at his coronation. The end comes with the

aged Flecknoe disappearing through a trap-door, after bestowing his mantle on Shadwell. The religious imagery which punctuates the poem, for instance, Flecknoe being compared to John the Baptist, and his mantle being compared to Elijah's, lends it a rich allegorical overtone. Through the means of allegory, Dryden gains an effective satirical medium.

'Mac Flecknoe' is a personal satire or a lampoon against Shadwell. Allegorical devices are used to lend added point to the satire which is mainly directed towards Thomas Shadwell. Shadwell is attacked for being a literary dunce- indeed, the perfection of stupidity. He is represented as a dull poetaster who lacks wit, sense and intelligence. Others might allow a dim ray of intelligence into the darkness of nonsense, but not so Shadwell. "His rising fogs prevail upon the day." Shadwell is a grand failure in music as well as poetry and drama. He is great in tautology, anagrams and acrostics. His tragedies evoke laughter, his comedies causes sleep and his satires are tame and flat, and are devoid of any sting. He shares with Ben Jonson his corpulence alone but is most unlike that illustrious Elizabethan in sense and wit. He is thus fit to rule over the realm of Nonsense. Shadwell is thus castigated in no uncertain terms and held up to ridicule with more than a shade of unfairness. Shadwell, in fact, was not as bad a writer as Dryden makes him out to be. In truth, we cannot deny that personal motives underlie the satire in 'Mac Flecknoe'.

'Mac Flecknoe' is not merely a personal lampoon, but also general satire against bad art. While it is true that personal animosity probably led Dryden to castigate Shadwell so mercilessly in Mac Flecknoe, we also note that he satirises only the literary qualities of his rival. The full title of the poem says: 'Mac Flecknoe, or A Satire Upon the True-Blue- Protestant Poet, T.S.' It misleads one into thinking that Shadwell's religious opinions may be attacked. But the poem, however, deals exclusively with Shadwell as a master of dull writing. It does not make any reference to Shadwell's personal life or morals. Thus, though personal motives are not to be completely overruled, the poem is also to be seen in a wider context rather than as a vindictive personal lampoon. It certainly involves personal satire, but through the personal element,

Dryden moves to the general sphere. This movement from particular to general and vice versa gives to the poem a quality of universal significance.

The general theme of the satire is bad writing and low literary taste and standards. It is evoked through the particular satire against Shadwell. Shadwell is the representative of all poetasters, who lack genius and skill and are fit only for acrostics and the realm of Nonsense. The general aspect of the satire is closely intermingled with the personal element. The site of Shadwell's coronation is described not merely to ridicule Shadwell particularly, but also to expose the literary standards and the debased values of the society of those times. Dryden retaliated so successfully against a literary rival on personal grounds that we remember Shadwell merely as the Prince of Fools in 'Mac Flecknoe'. But at the same time, Dryden also satirised contemporary deterioration of literary taste. Through Shadwell, Dryden attacks all the would-be poets who lacked real talent.

The most entertaining aspect of 'Mac Flecknoe' is its mock-heroic technique. The satire, both in its personal and general nature, becomes poignant through the mock-heroic technique followed by Dryden. Its mock-heroic framing, which suggested Pope's 'Dunciad', has largely contributed to the poem's popularity, so long after its topical allusions have been lost and forgotten. In the mock-heroic form, as the name suggests, we have epic solemnity in manner but a contrasting triviality of theme. 'Mac Flecknoe' deals with a coronation-by-itself a grand and solemn matter, but then there it is the coronation of the monarch of Dullness. The mock-heroic tone is obvious. The mock-heroic verse is enjoyable for its sheer comedy and fun. There is little bitterness and plenty of spontaneous humour. All the satiric devices in 'Mac Flecknoe' are related to its mock-heroic frame and are used with consummate skill by the poet.

All epic conventions are parodied for comic and satiric effect. Part of the mock-epic technique is Dryden's consummate skill in using

noble terms for his victim in order to deflate him. Comparison with legendary heroes and Biblical personages and incidents serve to reduce the victim to the lowest level. Shadwell is elevated to the state of Arion and Elisha but only to come crashing down to own a trembling lute and a mantle of dullness. The mockheroic method is employed to suggest the heavy, gross figure of Shadwell cutting his way down the silver Thames to alight among brothel houses and a Nursery where young actors are trained. A stupendous welcome awaits the stately hero. Stacks of dusty books and pages of forgotten authors, pave the way. Ruined booksellers and stationers line the way forming a guard of honour. The marks of royalty in the realm of Nonsense are a “mighty mug of potent ale” and Flecknoe’s “*Love’s Kingdom*”.

The whole speech of Flecknoe with its prophetic tone and high-flown appreciation of Shadwell’s works and talents, evokes laughter because of its mock-heroic technique. The praise is for supreme dullness and the prophecy is that Shadwell is the supreme master of that realm. The mock-heroic technique involving deceptive politeness, deflating images, ludicrous setting, caricature and sarcasm makes the poem delightful and witty, even while giving it a devastating satiric power. ‘Mac Flecknoe’ has thus been termed Dryden’s greatest mockheroic fantasy.

Allied with the form of mock-heroic is Dryden’s use of the heroic couplet in ‘Mac Flecknoe’. The verse-form is pre-eminently suited to the satiric as well as the mock-heroic design. It lends itself to the device of inflating the victim in one line only to be followed by deflation in the next. Dryden’s genius is established in this poem by his use of the heroic couplet in a flexible and appropriate manner. He made it a perfect medium for pouring out his magnificent abuse. It helps in being politely offensive.

‘Mac Flecknoe’ was certainly motivated by personal enmity. But Dryden enlarged its scope to include satire on contemporary literary taste and bad poets in general. However, if it were merely topical, its appeal would have vanished long ago. If it appeals to us today, it is because of the delightful use of the mock-heroic technique with the accompanying

comic overtones, and the remarkable pen-picture of Shadwell.

STOP TO CONSIDER

- ‘Mac Flecknoe, or A Satire Upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T.S.’: The T.S. of the full title of Dryden’s poem ‘Mac Flecknoe’ signifies Thomas Shadwell, the subject of the poem. ‘Blue’ suggests a Tory, for Shadwell was earlier a Tory supporter, though he later on joined the Whigs.
- *Mock-heroic*: A mock-heroic or mock-epic is distinguished as that type of parody which imitates, in a sustained way, both the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre, but applies it to narrate at length a commonplace or trivial subject matter. Alexander Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’ is one of the finest examples of mock-heroic poem.
- *Heroic Couplet*: A heroic couplet is a rhyming couplet, or pair of lines with end rhymes in iambic pentameter, meaning there are five iambic ‘feet’ on each line. The heroic couplet traditionally appears in long, narrative poems called epics, but it can also be used in mock epics that parody the ‘heroic’ tone of epic poetry. It was much used by Chaucer and the poets of the 17th and 18th centuries such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope etc.
- *Lampoon*: A short satirical work, or a passage in a longer work, which describes the appearance and character of a particular person in a way that makes that person ridiculous. It employs caricature, which in a verbal description exaggerates or distorts, for comic effect, a person’s distinctive physical features or personality traits.
- *Allegory*: An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agent and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the “literal,” or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification.
- *Whigs and the Tories*: As political labels, the terms derive

from the factional conflict of the Exclusion Crisis (1679-81), Whigs being supporters of Exclusion (of the Catholic James, Duke of York, brother of the king and next in line for the English throne) and Tories being their Royalist opponents.

Check Your Progress-2

1. *Mac Flecknoe* is a/an:
(A) comedy (B) allegorical satire (C) lyric (D) elegy
2. Of all his sons, Flecknoe selected Shadwell because:
(A) he was mighty and powerful (B) he was sensible
(C) he was bold and courageous (D) he was confirmed in full stupidity
3. The main idea of Pope's *The Dunciad* was taken from:
(A) Absalom and Achitophel (B) *Mac Flecknoe*
(C) The Medal (D) An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot
4. Describe the Coronation Scene of *Mac Flecknoe*. (75 words)

.....
.....
.....

1.6 Let us Sum Up

In this unit we discussed the poem 'Mac Flecknoe' which illustrates the supreme satirical genius of John Dryden. At the very beginning, you were acquainted with the life and works of John Dryden. After it, you read about the historical background, the leading thoughts along with a critical assessment of the poem 'Mac Flecknoe'. You have also familiarized yourself with the poetic form and technique used by Dryden in 'Mac Flecknoe'. Hence you will be able to

evaluate the poem in its totality. Keeping in mind the subject-matter of the poem, you can go through some of Dryden's other verse satires and his contemporaries to develop further your concept about the mock-heroic verse satire.

ANSWER KEYS

Check Your Progress-1

- 1.(C)
- 2.(B)
- 3.(B)
4. See section 1.2.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1.(B)
- 160
- 2.(D)
- 3.(B)
4. See section 1.4

Possible Questions

1. Describe *Mac Flecknoe* as a personal satire against Thomas Shadwell.
2. Explain *Mac Flecknoe* as a mock-heroic poem.
3. Discuss Dryden's handling of the heroic couplet, indicating its effectiveness as a medium of poetical satire in *Mac Flecknoe*.
4. Write a critical appreciation of *Mac Flecknoe*.

Key Words

- *Flecknoe*: Richard Flecknoe was an Irish Roman Catholic priest. Dryden refers to him as a dull writer.
- *Augustus*: Augustus was a nephew of Julius Caesar and was adopted by him. After Julius Caesar's death, a triumvirate consisting of Augustus, Antony and Lepidus was formed. Here, Dryden compares Flecknoe to Augustus, because he was made the ruler of the realm of Nonsense, while he was young, just as Augustus was forced by Caesar's assassination to give up his studies and plunge into politics. Augustus ruled Rome for more than forty years. Flecknoe also governed his domain of dullness for a similarly long period.
- *Mac Flecknoe*: Son of Flecknoe; 'Mac' stands for son.
- *Sh-*: Shadwell. The dash is a conventional device for stopping short of actually naming the victim of a lampoon, while indicating the identity. „*h Heywood and Shirley*: Thomas Heywood (1573-1641) and James Shirley (1596-1666) were prolific writers. Both the dramatists were outmoded in Restoration times. They are referred to as Shadwell's literary ancestors.
- *Ogilby*: John Ogilby, a voluminous hack-writer who translated Homer and Virgil.
- *Tautology*: unnecessary repetition.
- *Arion*: Greek poet and musician.
- *Singleton*: an eminent musical performer of the time.
- *Villierius*: Villierius is a leading character, a band master, in D'avenant's opera *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656). Through his reference the poet intends to ridicule Shadwell's incompetency even in the humble capacity of band master.
- *Love's Kingdom*: a pastoral tragic-comedy by Flecknoe.

- *Bruce and Longville*: These are two dull characters in Shadwell's play *The Virtuoso*.
- *Mantle*: cloak. The reference is to a Biblical story of the Old Testament. When Elijah was about to be borne up to heaven, his mantle or cloak fell on the shoulders of Elisha, as he wished. Elisha was thus inspired by the spirit of Elijah. The comparison is subtly ironic. Flecknoe, unlike Elijah, sinks downwards. It is his coarse, woolen cloak which is carried upwards by a wind which came from inside the earth. The cloak falls to Shadwell's share, and it brought him double his father's art, that is, the inspiration to write twice as dull and stupid works as Flecknoe. Dryden satiric powers are very well embodied in these lines.

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BLOCK-III, UNIT-II

Alexander Pope

The Dunciad, Book IV

Content

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1.0. Objectives:

This Unit will familiarize you with the following aspects of Pope's *The Dunciad*, (Book IV)

- Pope as a pedant and his pedantry.
- Pope's life and his works
- The central idea of *The Dunciad* (Book IV)
- Critical aspects associated with the poem

1.1. 0. Introduction:

1.1.1. Life and works of Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

Alexander Pope was born at Lombard Street, in London on 21st May 1688. His parents, Alexander Pope , Senior and mother Edith Turner, were both Catholics. Being a Catholic Pope had suffered discrimination all through his life in protestant majority England. Catholics in England during that period were barred from teaching, attending a university for pursuing higher education, voting, or holding any public office of importance by the Church of England. This discriminatory practice of the Church of England affected Pope's early education in a very serious way. He was taught to read by his aunt, and went to various Catholic schools which were though illegal yet tolerated. In some areas. He further suffered religious persecution at the hands of the Protestants which forced his family to shift to Popeswood in Binfield, Berkshire because of strong anti catholic sentiments in London. His formal education could not proceed any further because of religious discrimination and persecution. So he started reading classical literature of satirist Horace, and Juvenal, and poets like Homer and Virgil along with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and John Dryden.

Pope published his first poem "Pastorals" in May 1709 followed by "An Essay on Criticism" in May 1711. He became a founder member of the Scriblerus Club along with other prominent literary figures of the period. He contributed regularly to *The Guardian* and *The Spectator*. Later he translated Homer's *Illiad* (1715-20) and *Odessey* (1726). In 1712 he published one of his most important works of satire *Rape of the Lock*, a mock epic. Between 1732 and 1734 he published *Essay on Man*, a philosophical poem. *An Epistle to Doctor Arbuthnot* was published in 1738. Pope died on 30th May 1744 in Twickenham, England. The position of Alexander Pope in English literature has been a matter of debate among literary historians. Some rate him as the true successor of John Dryden whereas some others term him as a venomous, short tempered, and short tempered. However, both these assessments seem to have some truth in them. But one should differentiate between

the man and the poet while making an objective evaluation of Alexander Pope. As a poet he pursued perfection with an obsessive mind and can be termed almost as a classical poet in English literature. It is an accepted fact that his vision has limitations and he lacks the philosophical depth of a Wordsworth or Milton, but he upholds a moral perception rather than a vision in his poetry.

As a satirist Pope was most effective. He mocks at the fashionable society of eighteenth century England in *Rape of the Lock*. In *The Dunciad* he satirizes dullness in general and the contemporary dunces in particular. Dr. Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets* states “If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?” Pope was a poet with uncommon genius and extraordinary poetic talent.

Check Your Progress

1. Why is the position of Pope in English literature a matter of debate?

1.1.2 Background of *The Dunciad*

The 1728 version of the *Dunciad* was published anonymously in three books. In this edition of *The Dunciad* Lewis Theobald was the hero. The second version *Dunciad Variorum* was published again anonymously in 1729 in three books. A *New Dunciad* was published in 1742 with an addition of a fourth book, *The Dunciad in Four Books*. In the fourth book a new hero Colly Cibber was introduced.

The Dunciad was originally conceived as an onslaught on dullness and pedantry by the members of Scriblerus Club, which was an informal association of literary persons based in London. This club emerged as a literary body in 18th century. The members of this club were prominent literary figures of the age. The core group of this club consisted of persons like Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope. The other

members of this club were John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John, and Thomas Parnell. This club was established in 1714 and continued to function till 1745. The character of Martinus Scriblerus was created collectively by this group. The character of Martinus Scriblerus used to be the spokesperson in the satirical writings of the members of this group. The club's main aim was to satirize the abuses of learning and this aim was achieved through the publication of *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (written during 1713-14 and published in 1741).

Pope was hired by publisher Jacob Tonson to edit Shakespeare's plays which he did and published an edited version of Shakespeare in 1725. In this edition Pope arbitrarily excluded and added sentences to Shakespeare's plays. He shifted 1560 lines from Shakespeare's plays to footnotes. In 1726 Lewis Theobald published a pamphlet highlighting the arbitrariness and errors of Pope in his edition of Shakespeare titled *Shakespeare Restored*. (The full title of Theobald's edition was *Shakespeare restored, or, A specimen of the many errors, as well committed, as unamended, by Mr. Pope : in his late edition of this poet. Designed not only to correct the said edition, but to restore the true reading of Shakespeare in all the editions ever yet published*). This pamphlet caused considerable damage to Pope's literary reputation. His being a member of minority Catholic religion further compounded the matter. His physical deformity added on to his inferiority complex. The only alternative left for him was to counter attack Theobald through literature and redeem his literary stature. This became the main motive of Pope behind writing *The Dunciad*.

Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* is considered a masterpiece of eighteenth century satirical writing. *The Dunciad* was constructed keeping in mind Homer's the *Illiad*. A parody of pedantic scholarship, *The Dunciad* is an attack on Pope's literary foes who in some way or the other affected him. With reference to a number of literary and non-literary figures Pope begins and ends his poem. The poem was dedicated to Jonathan Swift another writer of merit during Pope's time. The poem's pedantic nature and multiple references sometimes create difficulty for the reader to comprehend the meaning of the poem. Thus, Pope has

added notes for various editions to explain the references and allusions but which were not enough. Emerging from a feud on Shakespeare against Lewis Theobald, Pope constructed and planned out *The Dunciad*. Though it has four books in total, all about dullness, *The Dunciad*, Book IV can be treated separately from the three previous books. Originally it was incorporated as a concluding part of *The Dunciad*. The aim of this work was total obliteration of sense from the whole of England where only dullness prevails, according to Pope. Pope portrays several characters and satirizes institutions and also brings in the socio-cultural and religious milieu in the this work.

1.1.2. Alexander Pope and the Eighteenth Century

This section attempts to familiarize the reader with Alexander Pope and the time in which he lived, demarcating the society from several facets of life. It will also speak about the literary developments that took shape during the period

1.1.3 Age of Pope/ Augustan Age/Neo-Classical Period

This section will give you an idea of the age Alexander Pope was writing in and also familiarize you with various aspects of this particular age and its literary trends. This section will give you an overview of the time Pope lived. Augustan Age or popularly known as the Age of Pope brings in several developments into English literature during the eighteenth century. Unaware of the forthcoming Industrial Revolution and its concerns thereon, it was an age filled with a balance and reasonableness. Unlike the preceding ages where poetry ruled, prose was predominant in this period. The beginning of novel can be traced to eighteenth century. Pamphlets, newspapers, magazines etc. started to bloom during this period. Poetry was considered inadequate/narrow and as such prose and fiction bloomed. Realism and refinement of literary output was quite a feature like the preceding period— Age of Dryden. Along with a satirical thrust was seen developing in a rapid pace, bringing in a tinge of politics into literature. This satirical bent in literature is actually an offshoot of the rivalry between the Whigs and Tories who for their political motives used writers to write upon such satirical

comments/notes/prose on their enemies; and they are also priced or rewarded for the same. Though Alexander Pope is away from such political agenda, he too used it in his own style.

The early part of eighteenth century witnessed a drastic change from the Restoration age. This age drifted itself to some kind of moral regeneration which was found missing in the preceding age. Eighteenth century writers and poets looked more towards the classics, instead of imitating their immediate predecessors like Shakespeare, Bacon and others. Instead the writers and poets of this period showed leanings towards the classics like Virgil, Horace and Homer.

Known as the Age of Reason and prose this age did not produce any great amount of substantial poetry.

However, whatever poetry was produced during this age, it mainly focused on life and its surroundings. It has a very conspicuous satiric and didactic thrust. Satire remained as the predominant form of poetry in this age. Specific public and literary figures are made the subject of ridicule and were mocked at. Certain distrust and a critical taste prevailed replacing the romantic ideals. The poets of this age did not recline on Chaucer, Spenser or Shakespeare rather they looked up to the classical poets like Homer, Horace and Virgil. Along with this poetry catered to love of form and superficial décor. There was no place for nature or simplicity and artificiality became all pervasive. The age considered limited in its character and focused on the literature of the town. Nevertheless, the period witnessed a development in satire and heroic couplet, developing prose style to a certain excellence and in the later part prepared a space for the birth of English novel.

1.1.4 Alexander Pope and his works:

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) a representative poet of his age, despite of his physical deformity he attained great heights in literature. His extensive range of knowledge and intelligence established him as a great writer, both in prose and poetry. His acquaintance with Joseph

Addison, Richard Steele, and Jonathan Swift let him procure the best from them and he gained fame as such. He even translated Homer through which he amassed a great amount of wealth. Along with this, he also edited Shakespeare's works, a vain attempt, which later became an issue for the critics. The ambiguity about Pope arises when some of his biographers call him "good and exceedingly lovable man" and some call him the opposite. Pope was not one to escape from the circle of enemies, like his bodily deformity to many he was deformed in the mind and thus attacked and critiqued Pope's works. But, Pope has his own way of dealing with his enemies; he answers their attacks with his works. He is much vindictive in replying them with a satirical picture of his enemies.

Pope took poetry to a different level when prose was the predominant form of literature of this age. Pope was encouraged to write poetry by some older writers such as William Wycherley and William Congreve. It was by reading them that Pope developed a critical bent mind. He completely dominated and represented the period. Pope followed Dryden in his works in very many ways.

Pope is also considered an unchallenged master of heroic couplet. He gave a different brilliance to it in his own way. In his hands heroic couplet achieved a different stratum. Pope paused after every couplet. He placed in them a different witty, but artificial sense. He can excel in maintaining such technicalities in his works. Due to this Pope is even criticized for being too superficial having no depth of human emotion or the natural world. Pope is said to be limited in the smart society in his works. Somewhere Pope's worth is questioned if he is a great technician/satirist/critique/ a poet of man devoid of human love and external nature.

Important works of Pope

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, The Rape of the Lock, The Illiad, The Dunciad, Windsor Forest, Pastorals, To Lord Bathurst, Messiah: A Sacred Eclogues, Ode on St. Cecilia's Day, Ode on Solitude, Of the Use of Riches, The Dying Christian to his Soul, Of the Knowledge and

Characters of Men, Of the Characters of Women, Moral Essays, An Essay on Man, Essay on Criticism, Imitations of Horace

Check your progress:

- Discuss the development of literature during the Eighteenth Century.
- Assess Alexander Pope as an Eighteenth Century writer.
- Alexander Pope is considered to be the representative poet of his age. Discuss.

1.2.1. *The Dunciad*: A Study

This section will familiarize you with the various critical aspects of the poem *The Dunciad*. Besides this unit will specifically try to give you an idea of Book IV of *The Dunciad* and the critical aspects associated with it.

1.2.2: *The Dunciad*: An overview

Pope's *The Dunciad* can be considered his best satire on a scholar or a pedant. Here Pope engaged in a spiteful attack on Lewis Theobald, Colly Cibber and other literary enemies of his. There are four versions of Pope's *The Dunciad*. The first version of *The Dunciad* was published in 1728 was a satire on pedantry in three books where Pope attacked Theobald; the next edition of *The Dunciad* which was a bit enlarged was published in 1729, titled, *Dunciad Variorum*, including a mock scholarly preface by "Martin-Scriblers". In the third edition published in 1742, a fourth book was attached to the previous three, named *The New Dunciad*. In the final and the fourth edition, the complete *Dunciad* now published in four books came out in 1743; here there was a revision of all the four books and a revised commentary was added. Pope took Colly Cibber as the target of his satire for this final edition.

The Dunciad can be considered mock-heroic narrative poem identical in style to Dryden's "MacFlecknoe" (1682) which was published

almost fifty years before it. The poem is basically an attack on Pope's literary rivals, the ones who tried to critique his works. Pope took all of them as one and tried to wage a literary war with them. He considered his literary rivals and critics as his sworn enemies and grouped them together as his general enemy termed 'Dullness' which reduces the world to dullness, chaos, infertility in literature and darkness all over.

This personal malice in the shape of *The Dunciad* even earned Pope much reputation in the literary field. Lewis Theobald and Colley Cibber are more remembered due to Pope's featuring them in his works than for their own worth. Whereas, Pope's worth is evident in the works he mastered, and filled it with perfection and permanence. But with all his worthiness, Pope was criticized for his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1725. Pope somehow could not afford to give the finesse to this work, he lacked the necessary traits to edit upon Shakespeare and this was taken as an opportunity to hit on otherwise popular Pope by other Shakespearian critics, Lewis Theobald being one of them. Lewis Theobald being a Shakespearian scholar attacked Pope's version of Shakespeare in his *Shakespeare Restored (or a Specimen of many Errors as well committed as unamended by Mr. Pope in his late edition of this Poet)* (1726). But Pope is not one to remain silent to such literary criticism. The criticism of Theobald compounded the already complex matters for Pope. He has been a victim of religious persecution because of his Catholicism, his physical deformity has created an inferior complex in him, he considered himself a social outcast in a predominant Protestant England, so he took to literature as his only solace of life. Theobald's attack has shaken the foundations of his literary fame, his only hope in life. In the backdrop of this, Pope created *The Dunciad* which became a masterpiece of a satire in English literature.

Pope attempted to destroy the fame of Theobald as a Shakespearian scholar in *The Dunciad*. Theobald's criticism of Pope turned upside down on himself in *The Dunciad* where Pope made him sit in the throne of dullness. But Theobald was not made to sit in the throne of dullness alone; Pope replaced him with Colley Cibber. Pope

clubbed a lot of minor writers in this way as a general school of dullness ruling the literary world. All these were the writers who in some way or the other created tensions in Pope's life. *The Dunciad* served two purposes for Pope—one, it showcased his wit and talent and his literary creativity and, two, his skill in using literature as a weapon to settle scores with his enemies. *The Dunciad* reveals the latent power of satire lying hidden in Pope; he takes satire to a different level, a stinging wit in *The Dunciad*. *The Dunciad* turns out to be a keen and short answer to all the lapses levied on Pope. The poem aims to showcase the rule of dull poets or 'dunces'. The poem was first intended in 1728 to become the conclusion for a volume of *Miscellanies* by Jonathan Swift and Pope. But later the poem did not become a part of the said volume and Pope substituted it with a prose satire, "Peri Bathous: or, the Art of Sinking in Poetry" where too Pope attacked his literary enemies. Mock-heroic in style the poem celebrates dunces, the so called pedants or fools in the poem. Theobald, the prime target of Pope's attack in the poem, is praised for his bad poetry which is not only dull but also monotonous. In the 1742-43 version, Theobald was replaced with Colley Cibber as the hero of *The Dunciad*.

In Book I, II, III of *The Dunciad* we find Pope venting out his anger and frustration to bestow the crown of dullness on Theobald and Colly Cibber and great many people who once or the other became target of his anger and became his sworn enemies.

1.2.3. *The Dunciad*, Book IV

The final version of *The Dunciad* known as "The New Dunciad" (1743) has an 'argument' in the beginning of Book IV, where Pope with enough lucidity states that the plan of his poem. He describes how the Goddess is preparing to destroy order and science upon earth and substitute it with the "Kingdom of the Dull":

He shews the Goddess coming in her Majesty, to destroy Order and Science, and to substitute the Kingdom of the Dull upon earth. How she leads captive the Sciences, and silenceth the

Muses; and what they be who succeed in their stead. All her Children by a wonderful attraction, are drawn about her; and bear along with them divers others, who promote her Empire by connivance, weal resistance, or discouragement of Arts; such as Half-wits, tasteless Admirers, vain Pretenders, the Flatterers of Dunces, or the Patrons of them.

Similarly the poem ends with the victory of Dullness and the eventual fall of the civilization. Pope succeeds in giving a tragic ending to the poem and drifts from the satiric realm of explaining the fall. He involves himself fully to give in detail every angle to ridicule his enemies, and it seems in doing so he enjoys to the fullest. He in high spirits unveils the malice in the works of the dunces.

Book IV of *The Dunciad* can be treated as a separate unit. It is longer than the other three sections of the poem. It can be read as an individual part of the whole poem because it has a proper beginning and an end; in structure and tone too it is entirely different. This book tries to show a totally opposite view of England where everything is lying in chaos and dullness has pervaded over it. It is going to become a “dull and venal a new World to mold”. In the tableau Pope constructed, he skilfully describes how dullness enters and her throne; how Science is chained, logic is bound and wit is exiled in entirety, how morality is bound by two cords, rhetoric tied, Muses bound in tenfold chains guarded by Flattery and Envy. But Mathematics is free because she thinks it is too insane to be bound. Then Pope goes on to say that even Chesterfield cannot abstain himself from seeing this, who once opposed the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737 and now on seeing the Muses chained nor can he do anything, and for Colley Cibber the hero of dullness, Pope makes him sleep in the lap of Dulness. Pope made Cibber sleep because he had played no part in the actions circumscribed in Book II; in Book III he was in deep slumber, as such he needs to sleep in Book IV too.

Amongst the audience Pope keeps a harlot who makes her entry “with mincing steps, small voice, and languid eye”. There is also an opera arranged where Fame blows her trumpet. Pope tries to classify

three categories of dunces, first one is naturally dull, secondly, one who disagrees to be called a dunce, but is and finally one who supports dunces either by giving money or by downgrading the worth of genuine writers.

Pope creates a dramatic atmosphere where the three categories of dunces envelop the whole ambience besides Dulness' throne. The first category of dullness, Pope says, is drawn towards her as bees to a queen bee. The second category orbits around her and tries a lot to move out of it but to no avail. The final category comes to Dulness as a comet does.

Pope tries to classify several literary rivals of his in these three categories. In the third category Pope places one Sir Thomas Hanmer who was a Shakespeare editor and published his edition of Shakespeare himself. Hanmer does it with all extravagance he could and publishes it in a grand manner. But his ornate edition could not last long because another editor named Benson did it in a more classy way by using John Milton and his glories. On finding this, Hanmer proceeds to take back his edition but could not. Queen Dulness orders her subjects to follow Benson and fasten their names to works by famous and worthy statues of writers and their works and consider them as their trophies: "So by each Bard an Alderman shall sit."

Pope goes to bring to the context of dunces, one Mr. Richard Busby, an English Anglican priest, who was also a head master of Westminster School and was famous for giving corporeal punishment to his pupils, was seen as a blood-thirsty criminal. Pope brought the ghost of Dr. Busby to stage and said he was first to come forward and speak with Dulness and tell her that he is her true champion because he can convert geniuses to fools.

Queen Dulness administers the theory of governing wrong over: "The RIGHT DIVINE of KINGS to govern wrong" and further says that the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford do the same. Pope brought in Cambridge and Oxford in the realm of dunces because Oxford

University in 1703 expelled John Locke's theory and logic, that is, he was censured and his "Essay on Human Understanding" was banned. Pope on finding such worth being disregarded brought Oxford and Cambridge under the school of dunces. Pope also attacked Oxford because it failed to award William Warburton for the degree of Doctor of Divinity between 1741-43. Due to this, Pope himself refused the honour of Doctor of Law.

Pope by drawing in figures like Richard Bentley, a professor of Trinity College, Cambridge and making him wear a Quaker's hat ridicules or mocks such geniuses. Through Bentley, Pope attacks the worth of such universities. Pope makes Bentley tell Dulness that he and his comrades are her true followers because they had "made Horace dull and humbled Milton's strains" and will be her enduring follower who can turn anything upside down. He goes on to compete with Issac Barrow or Francis Atterbury, the former a Theologian, and Mathematician and latter a bishop and politician, and make his stand stiff under Dulness.

Bentley could not stay for long because the others in line, a whore, a pupil and a French Governor come forward to put forth their views in front of Dulness. Pope, by keeping these three in the same track is again attacking the French Governor, who cannot be heard by Queen Dulness because of the loud and shrill French horn. Pope here concocts a tale where he made the pupil tell the story of the French Governor. He was an Englishman having gone to school and college but learnt nothing, travelled Europe's length and breadth, Paris and Rome but gathered only vice and returned finally to England with a pregnant nun following whose child is the present pupil narrating the tale. The nun turned to a prostitute and the Governor now to avoid any punishment is going to join the parliament. On hearing the story Dulness decides to embrace all three and frees them from the "Sense of Shame".

Next in line to Dulness is an idle lord who cries in pain because of sitting in an easy chair. Then, comes an Italian Dominican friar,

scholar, and historian, Annius da Viterbo. He is a forger of Roman coins and Virgil's manuscripts and wants all the dunces to give them his skills on forgery and asks them to value false Roman coins and manuscripts above their own lifestyle and clothing. He tries to please Dulness by making her subjects learn to boast the skills of dulness and doltishness. Philosophers like Crousaz and Burgersdyck are seen as huge dray-horses. Pope turned the Cambridge University into a second Grub Street. Pope in a way charges public school and universities with bringing in or fostering dulness. These charges against these universities might have emanated from Pope's personal dislike for them.

Emerging from a Shakespearian criticism *The Dunciad* turned into a single handed literary war where Pope savagely critiqued his enemies. From the day it was first published according to Richard Savage, the opponent of Pope tried to stop the sale of the poem in bookshops. Pope ends Book IV in a very sinister way where Arts and Science move into oblivion. But despite the attempt, the poem turned out to be a masterpiece. The aesthetic debate that continues in the poem from the beginning to end is a masterpiece in itself. Pope by waging a single handed war against the English literary tradition questions the culture and tradition of Europe. He in a way to satiate his anger brings in the whole of Europe to his fingers. In spite of all these, Pope has still his skillful and fantastic recreation and reconstruction to offer to the English literary tradition. Pope's motive was successful in breaking the ground for his enemies. With so many inter-textualities Pope entrapped his opponents. He turns *The Dunciad* into an allegorical battlefield, where "There marched the bard and blockhead, side by side,/who rhym'd for hire, and patroniz'd for pride."

All these linking of political, social and educational spheres seem to spring from Pope's personal disgust with the system prevalent in England during the eighteenth century. Pope categorized his enemies as learned dunces or pedant dull heads.

1.2.4. Critical Discussion

Pope announced publicly in his final note on *Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue II* before writing Book IV of *The Dunciad* that he has “resolution to publish no more.... a sort of Protest against the insuperable corruption and depravity of manners, which he had been so unhappy as to live to see.” But neither his fear of prosecution nor anything else could stop him from going on with Book IV. Rather Book IV declares the final version of all the previous books. Though some critics consider Pope a deviant amongst the others, one who disregards the popular and polite culture of his time and predicts for Europe a steep decline, Pope could not be budged from his place of an eminent literary critic.

On his work and specifically himself, Pope has announced an eternal war from the literary culture of his time and may be the following years. *The Dunciad* provokes strong reactions and questions the literary tradition of the eighteenth century.

Pope tries to give the ending of *The Dunciad* a mock-apocalyptic look which is the reversal of the creation of the Universe as described in *Paradise Lost*,

Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos! is restor'd;

Light dies before thy uncreating word:

Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;

And Universal Darkness buries All.

Apart from being a mock-epic and a poem on dunces in the literary tradition, *The Dunciad* has many more hidden issues to trace. Within satire and parody where Pope condemns his literary rivals, he also silently overlaps a male ideology over his use of female characters. Pope was also known to castigate women writers for being irrational and incapable of writing anything worthy. He even went to the extent of making a lady, Queen of Dulness sit in the throne. All the ill-heads

are made to sit at the pedestal of the Queen Dulness, and as such are considered illogical, disordered, and uneducated. Queen Dulness is an exemplar of his underlying discrimination between male and female characters in general. Pope also talks about Handel's masculine music being replaced in Ireland because now the dunces only enjoyed effeminized opera full of castratos. Pope tries to feminize anything distasteful and unworthy. Even in the previous three books Pope sketched several woman characters and tried to draw a parallel between the feminine and the so called dunces or disordered.

To its first reader, *The Dunciad* may seem to be in similar light like *Paradise Lost* or, *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, because Pope's work has Miltonic resonances and style of Dryden. Several similarities of epic, satire can be paralleled with Dryden and Milton, but despite all these *The Dunciad* has a glory of its own.

Check your progress:

- Write a note on Dulness and the way Pope satirizes it.
- Comment on the apocalyptic ending of the poem.
- Discuss the hidden issues of gender implicit in Book IV.
- How has Pope clubbed socio-political and religious life of England with his literary scholarship? Discuss.

1.2.5. Let us sum up

The Dunciad, Book IV in its dense and controversial structure laid several writers' life and style unveiled. The Shakespeare controversy which triggered Pope to write, along with his personal strife with the society, let him go through many pages to savagely attack his literary foes. Discontent and perturbed with the political, social, religious, educational and literary system and society he was living in, Pope gave vent to his long buried anger and frustration in the form of *The Dunciad*. Crowning Dulness and making a row of her followers, Pope succeeds in showcasing the frivolities present in his contemporary writers.

Drawing his attacks in several fields from religion, to educational institutions of repute to litterateurs, Pope marches ahead like a master of all. Book IV which acted as an amalgamation of all the previous books is intense and filled with all that Pope wanted to say.

1.2.6. Glossary:

- Mock-epic: satirizes or parodies a person or a system in a literary style, giving it the grandeur of an epic in a frivolous way to ridicule it.
- Satire: humorously exposing and critiquing a person or society or a system in an exaggerated manner, in a scholarly style.
- Dunces: a stupid or a very slow-witted learner.
- Science: any kind of knowledge

1.2.7. Suggested Model Questions:

1. Comment on the argument of Book IV.
2. How has Pope used satire as a mode to contest his literary rivals? Give few examples from the text to elucidate your answer.
3. Pope has brought a personal war to a literary forum. Discuss.
4. What are the mock-heroic elements of Book IV?
5. Who is Dulness? What does Pope mean by it? How is Dulness received in the beginning of the poem by other characters?
6. How is religion, politics and education connected in the poem?

1.2.8 References and suggested readings:

1. Pope, Alexander. *The Poems of Alexander Pope*. John Butt, ed. Yale UP: New Haven,
2. Pope, Alexander. *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*. Aubrey Williams, ed. Houghton Mifflin: New York, 1969.

3. Mack, Maynard. *Alexander Pope: A Life* W. W. Norton: New York, 1985.

4. Lynch, Jack. *The Dunciad*, Book-IV. Jack Lynch, ed. <http://www.blackmask.com>

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BLOCK-IV
Romantic Poetry
Unit-I
WILLIAM BLAKE
Poems: “Holy Thursday”, “London”, “The Tyger”,

Structure-

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: Defining Romanticism
- 1.2 The Romantic Age (1798-1832)
 - 1.2.1 Romanticism as a Movement
 - 1.2.2 Socio-Historical and Political Context
 - 1.2.3 Characteristics of Romantic Poetry
- 1.3 William Blake - The Poet
 - 1.3.1 Life and Works
 - 1.3.2 *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*
 - 1.3.3 Major Themes in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*
 - 1.3.4 Blake’s “Holy Thursday” (*Songs of Innocence*)-
Explanation and Analysis
 - 1.3.5 Blake’s “London”- Explanation and Analysis
 - 1.3.6 Blake’s “The Tyger”- Explanation and Analysis
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Key Words
- 1.6 Suggested Readings

1.7 Possible Answers to CYP

1.8 Model Questions

1.0 Objectives

In this unit an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the background of Romantic literature, with special emphasis on Romantic poetry. The unit will also highlight the chief trends and movements of the age which will help you to understand and contextualize the poetry of the age within the larger scenario. A thorough reading of the unit will help you to-

- Examine the socio-historical and political background of the Romantic Age

- Acquire a clear understanding of Romantic literature
- Identify the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry
- Familiarize yourself with William Blake and his poetry
- Analyze Blake's poems, "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*), "London" (*Songs of Experience*) and "The Tyger" (*Songs of Experience*)

1.1 Introduction:

Defining Romanticism:

Romanticism was a broad movement in the history of European and American consciousness which rebelled against the triumph of the European Enlightenment. It is also a comprehensive term for the larger number of tendencies towards change observable in European literature in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Romantic Movement is traditionally seen as starting roughly around 1780. However, the term Romantic period more exactly denotes the span between the year 1798, the year in which William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge published the collection of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, and 1832, the year in which the novelist Sir Walter Scott died, and the other main writers of the earlier century were either dead or no longer productive, and the first Reform Bill was passed in Parliament.

As a historical phase of literature, English Romanticism extends from Blake's earliest poems up to the beginning of the 1830's, though these dates are arbitrary. According to other critics Romanticism as a literary period in England, from the American Rebellion through the First Reform Bill of 1832, has to be defined as a High Romantic Age. Romanticism manifested at somewhat varied times in Britain, America, France, Germany and Italy.

1.2 The Romantic Age (1798-1832):

This period extends from the war with the colonies, following the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the accession of Victoria in 1837. During the first part of the period especially, England was in a continual turmoil, produced by political and economic agitation at home, and by the long wars that covered two continents and the wide sea between them. The mighty changes resulting from these two causes have given this period the name of the Age of Revolution. The storm center of all the turmoil in England and abroad was the French Revolution, which had a profound influence on the life and literature of all Europe. On the Continent the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo (1815) apparently checked the progress of liberty, which had started with the French Revolution, but in England the case was reversed. The agitation for popular liberty, which at one time threatened a revolution, went steadily forward till it resulted in the final triumph of democracy, in the Reform Bill of 1832, and in a number of exceedingly important reforms, such as the extension of manhood suffrage, the removal of the last unjust restrictions against Catholics, the establishment of a national system of schools, followed by a rapid increase in popular education, and the abolition of slavery in all English colonies (1833). To this added the changes produced by the discovery of steam and the invention of machinery, which rapidly changed England from an agricultural to a manufacturing nation, introduced the factory system, and caused this period to be known as the Age of Industrial Revolution.

1.2.1 Romanticism as a Movement:

In the most basic sense, Romanticism, which is loosely identified as spanning the years of 1783-1830, can be distinguished from the preceding period called the Enlightenment by observing that the one elevated the role of spirit, soul, instinct, and emotion, while the other advocated a cool, detached scientific approach to most human endeavours and dilemmas. In short, Romanticism in literature was a rejection of many of the values and movements such as the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution held as paramount. Romanticism, initiated by the English poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, as well as Blake, Keats, Shelley, was concentrated primarily in the creative expressions of literature and the arts. However, the philosophy and sentiment characteristic of the Romanticism movement would spread throughout Europe and would ultimately impact not only the arts and humanities, but the society at large, permanently changing the ways in which human emotions, relationships, and institutions were viewed, understood, and artistically and otherwise reflected. The Enlightenment was the name given to the period that preceded the Romantic Age, and it is in understanding the key features of the Enlightenment that one can best understand how the characteristics of Romanticism came to be, and how they differed so radically from those of the industrialized era. The Enlightenment had developed and championed logic and reason above all other qualities and there was little room in this worldview for the emotionbased nature that would define Romanticism. According the Enlightenment view, people and their relationships, roles, institutions, and indeed, their whole societies, could be understood best if organized and approached with a scientific perspective.

During this time in the history of the romanticism movement in literature, it was believed that objectivity was not only desirable, but also achievable. Subjective emotions, contemplation of nature, and the creative impulse felt by individuals were all of far lesser importance than building the physical and commercial infrastructure of a country

that had new resources, techniques, and capital with which to experiment. The literary products of the period reflected the priorities and values of the time, focusing mainly on political and economic themes. Philosophical writings similarly reflected the mechanistic preoccupations of the age and dealt more so than ever with the individual human experience as well as personal thoughts.

Romanticism, then, emerged as a reaction against what was perceived to be a cultural climate that had been lacking in spontaneity, creativity, and individuality. Indeed, some of the earliest and most profound writings of the Romantic period were not the poems themselves, but manifestos and discourses on the nature of human beings and creative expression, such as Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, and Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. In these three exemplary prose pieces, the Romantic poets promote their vision of what poetry, and by extension, society, should be. Their vision was quite distinct from that of the Enlightenment, and in these pieces, the major characteristics of Romanticism were developed and disseminated. One of these characteristics, as articulated by Wordsworth in the *Preface* was the belief that "ordinary things were worth writing about and should be presented to the mind in an unusual way". The Romantics believed that through close attention, the most ordinary, quotidian objects, emotions, and experiences could be elevated to the extraordinary.

Another characteristic of Romanticism, as expressed by Shelley in his *Defence*, was the belief that emotions and relationships were not just important, but were the very currency of life. Rather than functioning as a cog in a wheel, mechanically and unaware of the other parts comprising the whole machine, Shelley argued that: "The great secret of mortals is love and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own". While some of the

Romantics were more inwardly focused than the kind of engagement that Shelley called for so passionately in his *Defence*, they tended to agree on the major characteristics of Romanticism: the valuation of intensely felt emotion, the importance of creative expression, and the possibility of transcending ordinary experience, which was referred to as achieving a state of sublimity.

Romanticism was, above all, an experimental project of self and social quest, a quest for intense experiences that were felt deeply, a quest for connection, a quest for transcendence, and a quest to know the self—and, by extension, others—more profoundly. The quest did not occur, nor could it have occurred, by creating a plan to achieve it. Rather, it was through constant observation and alertness, and the devotion of attention to the most minute and seemingly unimportant details of daily life, that the self, and therefore society, had the possibility of transmuting itself into something greater. Bloom and Trilling refer to Romanticism as a “health-restoring revival of the instinctual life”. Rather than trust in machines, industry, and scientifically-based progress, Romanticism encouraged people to look inward, trusting themselves and their own intuition. Romantics also directed their own and others’ attention to nature, where all organic processes could be observed, celebrated, and from which lessons could be learned. Through these shifts in focus, the Romantics argued, it would become possible for people to know themselves and the world better and more fully.

Whereas the preceding age of Enlightenment had promised that reason, logic, and scientific processes would lead to knowledge, success, and a better society, the Romantics challenged that notion, and changed the equation. It was no longer necessary to follow traditional formulae; rather, new literary forms and new modes of expression could be created. “The major Romantic questers,” write Bloom and Trilling, “offered through their own examples the possibility of “engaging in the extraordinary enterprise of seeking to rebeget their own selves, as though through the imagination a man might hope to become his own father, or at least his own heroic precursor”. Perhaps Romanticism was adopted

so quickly and on such a widespread scale across Europe and then, not long after, to America, because it was an antidote to the hyper-accelerated period of change that the Industrial Revolutions had ushered in during the previous epoch. Given that the Industrial Revolution had caused such dramatic shifts in all aspects of society, changing the ways that people thought, felt, worked, and related with one another, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesize that such a shift in paradigm and in practice created a sort of cognitive dissonance. Such dissonance might only have been possible to resolve by embracing the backlash that Romanticism represented to the Enlightenment ideas and ideals. Whereas the Enlightenment could be interpreted as having drained the creativity and spontaneity out of life, making tasks and relationships predictable through mechanization, Romanticism offered the hope of restoration through small and unexpected pleasures. Romanticism invited people to dream again, to imagine, to give in to flights of fancy, to explore the border between conscious experience and unconscious dreams and desires.

These ideals of Romanticism, first articulated by the English poets, spread to other artistic genres, including music and the visual arts, as well as to other countries. For those countries which had not yet coalesced in terms of their own national identity, the Romanticism offered a creative framework for defining and expressing what was unique to that region, for Romanticism was inherently creative and imaginative, inviting its adherents to envision possibilities that might never have been entertained before. As a result, the value of the individual, of the arts, and of emotional expression, was able to regain a place in thought and practice, tempering the logic-bound tendencies of science with the shifting philosophies of emotion. As Bloom and Trilling observe, the contributions of the Romantics remain valuable and relevant in contemporary life.

1.2.2 Socio-Historical and Political Context:

Romanticism was the greatest literary movement in the period from 1770-1840. It meant the shift of sensibility in art and literature,

and was based on interdependence of Man and Nature. It was a style in European art, literature and music that emphasized the importance of feeling, emotion and imagination rather than reason or thought. The Romantic Period of literature came into being in direct reaction against a variety of ideas and historical happenings taking place in England and Europe at that time. These happenings include the Napoleonic Wars and their following painful economic downfalls- the union with Ireland; the political movement known as Chartism, which helped to improve social recognition and conditions of the lower classes; the passage of the Reform Bill which suppressed slavery in the British Colonies, curbed monopolies, lessened poverty, liberalized marriage laws, and expanded educational facilities for the lower classes; it both accepted and despised the current philosophy of utilitarianism, a view in which the usefulness of everything, including the individual was based on how beneficial it was to society. Finally, the most important factor to impact a change in both thought and literature was that of the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution brought about vast changes in the English society. It helped to create both great fortunes and great hardship. Within a short time England went from being a country of small villages with independent craftsmen to a country of huge factories run by sweat shops full of men, women, and children who lived in overcrowded and dangerous city slums. An industrial England was being born in pain and suffering. The presence of a developing democracy, the ugliness of the sudden growth of cities, the prevalence of human pain, the obvious presence of the “profit motive” all helped to characterize what was in many respects “the best of times..... the worst of times.” In England the Romantic authors were individuals with many contrary views. But all of them were against immoral luxuries of the world, against injustice and inequality of the society, against suffering and human selfishness. The political context of the beginning of the Romantic Period is the French Revolution in 1789, the focus of which was to create political and social freedom, equality and brotherhood. The intention was to abolish the power of the ruling classes and create democracy. These ideas were prevalent in America where the Declaration of Independence

had been signed already in 1776. In England political reform gradually developed after some minor disturbances, but without a direct revolution, and in 1832 The Reform Act was passed with the intention of increasing parliamentary representation and reducing corruption.

At the end of the 18th century manual labour and draught-animal power had come to be replaced by machine-based production. This development started in the textile industry, but quickly spread to other areas of production. As the development of the railway engine introduced the production of trains, and as factories came to be built away from agricultural centres, people began to move from agricultural areas to towns and cities. Thousands of people moving from country to town between 1750 and 1850 changed England from a society based mainly on farming to a society where urban slums were now visible in many cities. Working conditions were grim: people worked up to sixteen hours a day, and the pay was miserable. Added to this were inhuman working conditions and child labour. The consequence was, however, that by 1800 England was the most industrialized country in the world, and exports had risen by 500% since 1700. But even if the per capita income increased as a consequence of industrialization, all family members had to work for families to survive.

Poverty among the urban population was great, and insufficient housing was common. In 1785 the pre-Romantic poet William Cowper wrote in *The Task* “that God made the country, and man-made the town”. The Romantics were enthusiastic about nature and especially appreciated areas in nature which had not been touched by human intervention. Simple rural life, which had not been influenced or ruined by the Industrial Revolution and in which man still lived in harmony with nature, was seen as ideal. Parallel to this, childhood was considered a pure period in life characterized by freedom and not distorted by adult norms and conventions. This idea spread after the publication in 1798 of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and is reflected in much Romantic poetry. A key idea in *Lyrical Ballads* was to speak for the ordinary people about other people

in a language which could be understood by everybody. The Romantics focused on the individual's right to imagine and to articulate his emotions and deal with everyday life. In this connection, the task of the poet to express the ideas and feelings experienced by people became important. This can be seen as a reaction to the previous Age of Reason when the general and the rational had played a dominant part.

1.2.3 Characteristics of Romantic Poetry:

- i) Initially the Romantic Movement emerged as a revolt against the neoclassical school of poetry in the 18th century, when the doctrines of the classical school of Pope of correctness, adherence to set rules, and intellectual mindset were dominant in English literature. Any departure from these ideals by a poet raised not only quite a few eyebrows but also invited scathing criticism. The upper-class lifestyle, its foppish and petty details, and the criticism of all these found a vivid expression in the 18th-century literature. The diction and meter were suitable for the purpose. Heroic couplet was revered like anything. But towards the close of this age, the precursors of Romanticism like Grey, Collins, Black and Burns had struck a note of revolt against all these. Through their poetry, they paved the way for the *Lyrical Ballads*.
- ii) Imagination, emotion, and freedom are certainly the focal points of romanticism. Any list of particular characteristics of the literature of romanticism includes subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism, spontaneity, freedom from rules, solitary life rather than life in society, the beliefs that imagination is superior to reason and devotion to beauty, love of and worship of nature, and fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the middle ages. Romanticism which started around 1795, at the very core of its centre, weighed upon the scale of feelings, imagination, expressiveness and ingenuity of the individuals. At the same time, it also emphasized novelty in art as against the emphasis

upon reason, tradition and craftsmanship during the previous era, and brought about one of the most fundamental changes in outlook in literature, music and the arts. In it, Wordsworth redefined poetic diction, which defied the 18th century poetic diction. The object of poetry and the poets' fascination also changed drastically. Unlike the 18th-century poetry, the Romantic poetry and the Romantic poets looked up to nature, common man, his emotions and the elemental simplicities of life. The characteristics of Romanticism or the Romantic poetry were in stark contrast with the 18th century.

But, the most significant expression of a Romantic commitment for English literature found its expression in the year 1798 in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth wherein he purposefully maintains his own definition of poetry that states that all good poetry is essentially the impulsive overflow of innermost feelings which are bound to be very powerful. Although Wordsworth qualifies this assertion by suggesting that the poet is a reflective man who recollects his emotion in great leisure and composure, the emphasis on spontaneity, on feeling, and the use of the term overflow mark sharp diversions from the earlier ideals of judgment and restraint.

- iii) One of the essentials of Romanticism is the faith in the natural goodness of man; the idea that man in a natural state would behave well but he is in the shackles of worldly tasks and is caught up and confounded when in the civilization. The barbarous is grand, childhood is exceptional and the emotions enthused by both the philosophies take the heart to the new undiscovered avenues. The new literature initially reflected the political turmoil of the period very effectively. But when everything subsided and peace prevailed, strangely enough the literature produced the most imaginative and creative spirit of the writers of the period. That is the spirit of the age that saw everything good in man.

- iv) The Romantics often expressed the Faustian aspirations in their desire to identify with a spiritual force after the sublime and the wonderful. Committed to change, flux rather than stasis, they longed to believe that man is perfectible, that moral as well as mechanical progress is possible. Although the burst of hope and enthusiasm that marked the early stages of the French Revolution was soon subdued, its echoes lingered through much of the 19th century and even survived in the 20th century.
- v) Romanticism is concerned with the individual more than with society. The individual consciousness and especially the individual imagination are especially fascinating for the Romantics. Description of the Melancholy spirit and anything related to it was quite the buzz word and favourite theme for the Romantic poets, and altered states of consciousness were often sought after in order to enhance one's creative potential. There was an immediate demotion of the importance and power of reason, clearly a reaction against the enlightenment mode of thinking.

Nevertheless, writers gradually became more devoted in social causes as the period moved forward. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, English society was undergoing the most severe paradigm shifts it had seen in living memory. The response of many early Romantics was to yearn for an idealized, simpler past. In particular, English Romantic poets had a strong connection with medievalism and mythology. The tales of King Arthur were especially resonant to their imaginations. On top of this, there was a clearly mystical quality to Romantic writing that sets it apart from other literary periods. Of course, not every Romantic poet or novelist displayed all, or even most of these traits all the time.

- vi) On the more formal level, Romanticism witnessed a steady loosening of the rules of artistic expression that were pervasive

during earlier times. The Neoclassical Period of the eighteenth century included very strict expectations regarding the structure and content of poetry. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, experimentation with new styles and subjects became much more acceptable. The high-flown language of the previous generation's poets was replaced with more natural rhythm.

- vii) In terms of poetic form, rhymed stanzas were slowly giving way to blank verse, an unrhymed but still rhythmic style of poetry. The purpose of blank verse was to heighten conversational speech to the level of austere beauty. Some criticized the new style as mundane, yet the innovation soon became the preferred style. One of the most popular themes of Romantic poetry was country life, otherwise known as pastoral poetry. Mythological and fantastic settings were also employed to great effect by many of the Romantic poets.
- viii) Romanticism denotes a spirit, which dared to see man and nature in a different light than that of the 18th-century doctrine conscious mindset. It is not just an outbreak, which occurs in 1798 with the publication of William Wordsworth's and S. T. Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*. It is a gradual culmination of that very revolutionary attitude towards 18th century literary canons which was all the time growing in the last few decades of the 18th century. Political upheavals like the French Revolution and a general all pervasive instinct throughout Europe to break free from the old bondages added fuel to the flames of Romanticism in literature.
- ix) Romanticism celebrates the free spirit, and high ideals like beauty and love. It directs the poet's sensibility towards the natural landscape. Romanticism has been explained in terms of the unprecedented significance attached to imagination. It is about the delicate emotions that wrote the poet's heart. It is also an outcry for freedom from the existent socio-political

forces that strangle the free spirit of an individual. It is, time and again, referred to as a cult of beauty seeking to express and savour beauty in the elemental simplicities of life symbolizing a spirit of revolt and a hankering for the establishment of the new canons.

- x) Romantic poetry also illustrates a huge shift in the sensibility. The poets of the romantic period underline the spirit of revolt against the canons of poetic composition. They reveal the singular significance attached to imagination. It not only acquired paramount importance but it was also for the first time reflected upon and discussed in great detail by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*. From there on, poetry, written in the romantic strain, celebrates the powers of imagination. Romantic poetry registers the replacement of dry intellect by emotion. The locale and object of poetry also underwent drastic changes.
- xi) The poetry of the romantic period picks up ordinary incidents from country life and natural surroundings what is usually called the pastoral poetry which savours the beauties of nature and also draws highly philosophical truths from nature as well. The most significant characteristic of Romantic poetry has been its concern for and interest in the ordinary forms of life. This too contrasts with the exclusionist nature of the figurative literature which was urban and courtly. The old legends, ballads and tales of folklore spring back to life in the hands of a Romantic poet. His personal experiences and emotions also form an integral part of the Romantic poetry. It usually contains reverberations of an outcry for individual freedom.
- xii) The poetry of Romantic period had been in direct contact with the canons of poetic composition cultivated by 18th century neoclassical poets and therefore a note of rebellion is the backbone of its temperament. In the 18th century, poetry was governed by set rules and correctness of the metre. Any

deviation from that meant invitation to bitter criticism from the guiding light of such a theory of poetic composition like Pope. Whereas the Romantic spirit thundered against anything and everything that which sought to curb the free play of their imagination and emotions.

- xiii) Romantic poetry clamours against the social authority too. It seeks a change of outlook in the way society perceives everything. Byron had a grudge against society. He satirized bourgeois life. He created heroes like Cain and Don Juan who broke the rules of conventional morality. Shelley was a great rebel against society. He believed that an original world would come up in future. He was not in favour of the kings and the priests. It was infatuated with a revolutionary zeal and his soul burnt with rage at the sight of so much unhappiness around him. One of the reasons of this spirit of revolt was the restrictions imposed on individuals. Rigid tradition, whether social or literary, infuriated the Romantic poets. They worshipped freedom and equality in society and free play of imagination and emotion in literature.
- xiv) The poets of the romantic era wrote poems with legends, ballads and hymns interwoven in them beautifully and communicated their perception of a thing or situation in a captivating manner. Their revolt was at times conveyed in such an attractive garb -suggestively and symbolically with the help of the above mentioned devices. They stood for aspirations and dreams of a new world, a better society and a more beautiful perception of future hence the old and the worn out had to make space to usher in the new outlook and sensibility. In order to create all this, they struck a note of revolt against the existing order.
- xv) The 18th-century poetry was predominantly governed by reason and intellect. The Romantic poetry established the

significance of imagination and emotion well by firmly practising those ideals and also advocating them. The Romantic poets strove to express the emotional intensity that their hearts were forever steeped in.

For such an expression, intellect and reason are of no avail. Imagination and emotion aptly gained paramount importance. Nature ignited their imagination and inspired high ideals like beauty, love and compassion for fellow human beings. In the natural surroundings, the incidents from the life of common man stirred powerful feelings in them, which moved them to utterances in the form of these melodious poems. Their imaginative powers were the chief gift for the wonderful poetic composition. Romantic poetry gains the aura and the appeal owing to the world, which the imagination of a poet succeeds in creating.

- xvi) The poems of the Romantic poets are highly subjective and seek to express their innermost emotions. These emotions need an attractive garb which imagination invents in the form of tales that alludes to locales of history and to legends. The incident, which inspires these feelings in the poet, is usually a common one like moonlit sky, listening to a bird, or seasons like Spring and Autumn. But the imagination waves a beautiful tale around it and the poet's emotions get a powerful expression through all this. Hence in the Romantic poetry intellect and reason are subdued, and imagination and emotion take dominant and front positions. The predominance of imagination and emotion impart a force of fascination, which are pre-requisites of the poetic composition of highest order. They are fittingly employed to suit the Romantic temper and the ideals of the Romantic Movement like love and beauty.
- xvii) The Romantic poetry celebrates the elemental simplicities of life. It drew inspiration from nature and from the life, which it surrounds. The 18th century poetry was concerned with

clubs and coffee houses, drawing rooms, and the social and political life of London. The Romantic poets took poetry to the lap of nature.

The other reason for such a vital role of nature in Romantic poetry is the fact that it is governed by imagination and emotion which gets stirred by natural surroundings. Any natural phenomena and objects like chirping of birds, various activities associated with the seasons, flowers and green fields act as stimuli for the innermost recesses of the poet's mind. His imagination along with other powers of poetic composition weaves this experience into a tale, which results in a beautiful poem.

xviii) Nature is ideally suited to the Romantic temper since it does not harbor any prejudice against anything or anyone. It bestows equality and freedom on everyone. It is always in a festive mood. It's an oasis of beauty in a world, which is getting increasingly uglier. It is the treasure house of all the wisdom of the world. It strikes an ethereal code in the depths of the Romantic poet's heart for all these reasons. He finds life worthwhile if spent at the lap of nature. He recounts and relates the incidents from the life of a layman in his poems. Thus, nature is the inspiration of the Romantic poets and provides them with a locale and the tranquility of mind so that truth can flash upon the inward eye. The Romantic poet savours the elemental simplicities of life and his poetry is deeply imbued with his reflections on those elemental simplicities.

xix) In Romantic poetry, emphasis is laid on the freedom of an individual. The Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley were against depleted traditions of the society out of a conviction that such traditions and customs strangle the freedom of an individual. They revolted in such an impatient manner in order to convey their intense craving for liberty. The society

perceives progress in material terms, whereas the progress for the Romantic poets is the inner progress of their soul. For it, the poet needs freedom from bondage of all sorts. Thus poetic composition of loftier sensibility and of fresher outlook towards life can be conceived. The Romantic sensibility also stood for freedom of expression which they thought highly of and in the manner they deemed fit. Such freedom of expression paves the way for the communication of the subjective experiences and their view points on the condition of the fellow human beings.

- xx) The poet draws heavily on his personal experience and its fitting expression which he gives with the help of natural phenomena and objects as well as through the legends and ballads. But all this does not hide his subjective interpretation of the objective realities of life. Thus, a note of subjectivity is heard in almost all poems, which are steeped in Romantic spirit. Even translations were done freely that continued even after the romantic revival and there are many notable translations done from many languages. Noted among them was Arthur Waley who exercised a considerable influence on the development of English poetry through his brilliant and poetic translations from the Chinese.
- xxi) Romantic poets expressed an intense fondness for nature and beauty which it is replete with. His eyes light up at the sight of a beautiful maiden, a flower or moonlit sky. He savours every bit of beauty that is perceptible through senses. He pounces on every potential source of beauty, though it may be the leaves fallen in autumn, or a not so beautiful flower like the daffodil. But his adoration of beauty is so magically creative that his imagination gets stimulated, and he is inspired to give vent to his delightful perception of one beauty or another. He paints beauty, wants to create a beautiful borderless world and wants the world to get transformed into

a beautiful place to live in. He finds beauty in the most ordinary things and phenomena of day to day life like night, flowers, birds and frost. This finesse for the perception of beauty leads him to its fuller experience and consequently to its final creation in the form of a beautiful poem.

xxii) Besides the above more or less common features of the romantic poetry, there are certain qualities of the poetry of the romantic revival which are possessed by particular poets. Supernaturalism is an outstanding romantic quality. It gives to certain poems an atmosphere by virtue of which the romantic poetry is often called 'the renaissance of wonder'. Coleridge is the greatest master of supernaturalism. His supernaturalism in *The Ancient Mariner* is psychological, refined and suggestive. Scott too writes supernatural poetry though his supernaturalism is rather crude. Keats gives supernatural touches to some of his poems. His poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* has a supernatural atmosphere.

References to distant lands and past ages, particularly the Middle Ages, are also romantic. Keats loved the Middle Ages for their passion, chivalry and art.

xxiii) The Romantic poet is weary of the petty acrimonies that the world is unfortunately rife with. He rebels against an unhappy reality that a beautiful world is turning into an ugly place because of the growing hatred and narrow-minded outlook. Such a mindset keeps the world away from love- the richest treasure on the earth. The Romantic poets also firmly held that only love could set right whatever is out of joint. The Romantic temper is constituted largely of this higher conception of love. The Romantic poetry, thus, celebrates and devoutly worships the high ideals of beauty and love in the poems themselves beautiful and lovable.

xxiv) Some Romantic poets felt chafed with the tyranny, immorality and ugliness of the materialistic life of their age. To avoid this life of dissatisfaction, they sought, through their poetry, an escape from all these into a world of beauty and joy which their imagination had created. Even apart from this, the other reason for an escape to the Middle Ages is that the essential qualities of the Romantic temper like love for beauty, curiosity, imagination and worship of nature required a different world from their own. At times, they tried to weave their own experiences into an alluring garb of a legend, or a Ballad. Such an attempt is an expression of their emotional intensity as well as a truly artistic creation with all such elements like wonder, natural beauty and unlikely locales. The Middle Ages, serving as the background and inspiration, proved romanticism to be what Watts- Dunton called 'the Renaissance of Wonder'. They sometimes attach mystical aura to ordinary things. The distant land of the ancient past makes it easy for the poet to inculcate a few supernatural elements. In all, the Middle Ages replete with legends and ballads bestow the Romantic poet with the raw material and an opportunity for the free play of his powers of poetic composition.

xxv) Music and melody are essential elements in Romantic poetry. It aims at touching the heart rather than the hand celebrating nature with all its beauties and allures. Since it is abounding in all this, an expression containing nature is bound to be steeped every inch in music and melody. Moreover, Romantic poetry springs from the depths of the poet's heart, so it is fittingly brimful with music and melody. The spontaneous overflow, which the poet registers in the form of a poem, becomes all the more forceful with the resonance of music and melody. Music and melody also reflect the unrestrained free play of imagination and emotion. Poetry filled with reason and intellect can hardly be conducive to music and melody.

Check Your Progress-1

1. In which year did William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge publish the collection of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads*?
2. In which year was the first Reform Bill passed in British Parliament?
3. What did the Enlightenment develop and champion above all?
4. What did the Romantics focus on?
5. Name a few characteristics of romantic poetry.

1.3 William Blake - The Poet:

1.3.1 Life and Works:

William Blake was a 19th century writer and artist who is regarded as a seminal figure of the Romantic Age. His writings have influenced countless writers and artists through the ages, and he has been deemed both a major poet and an original thinker. Born in 1757 in London, England, William Blake began writing at an early age and claimed to have had his first vision, of a tree full of angels, at the age of ten. He studied engraving and grew to love Gothic art, which he incorporated into his own unique works. A misunderstood poet, artist and visionary throughout much of his life, Blake found admirers late in life and has been vastly influential since his death in 1827.

William Blake was born on November 28, 1757, in the Soho district of London, England. He only briefly attended school, being chiefly educated at home by his mother. The Bible had an early and profound influence on Blake, and it would remain a lifetime source of inspiration, coloring his life and works with intense spirituality. At an early age, Blake began experiencing visions, and his friend and journalist Henry Crabb Robinson wrote that Blake saw God's head appear in a

window when he was four years old. He also allegedly saw the prophet Ezekiel under a tree and had a vision of “a tree filled with angels.” Blake’s visions would have a lasting effect on the art and writings that he produced.

Blake’s artistic ability became evident in his youth, and by age ten, he was enrolled at Henry Pars’s drawing school, where he sketched the human figure by copying from plaster casts of ancient statues. At age fourteen, he apprenticed with an engraver. Blake’s master was the engraver to the London Society of Antiquaries, and Blake was sent to Westminster Abbey to make drawings of tombs and monuments, where his lifelong love of gothic art was seeded. Also around this time, Blake began collecting prints of artists who had fallen out of vogue at the time, including Durer, Raphael and Michelangelo. In the catalog for an exhibition of his own work in 1809, nearly forty years later, in fact, Blake would lambast artists “who endeavour to raise up a style against Rafael, Michelangelo, and the Antique.” He also rejected 18th century literary trends, preferring the Elizabethans (Shakespeare, Jonson and Spenser) and ancient ballads instead.

In 1779, at the age of twenty one, Blake completed his seven-year apprenticeship and became a journeyman copy engraver, working on projects for book and print publishers. Also preparing himself for a career as a painter, that same year, he was admitted to the Royal Academy of Art’s Schools of Design, where he began exhibiting his own works in 1780. Blake’s artistic energies branched out at this point, and he privately published his *Poetical Sketches* (1783), a collection of poems that he had written over the previous fourteen years. In August 1782, Blake married Catherine Sophia Boucher, who was illiterate. Blake taught her how to read, write, draw and color (his designs and prints). He also helped her to experience visions, as he did. Catherine believed explicitly in her husband’s visions and his genius, and supported him in everything he did, right up to his death forty five years later.

One of the most traumatic events of William Blake’s life occurred in 1787, when his beloved brother, Robert, died from

tuberculosis at the age of twenty four. At the moment of Robert's death, Blake allegedly saw his spirit ascend through the ceiling, joyously; the moment, which entered into Blake's psyche, greatly influenced his later poetry. The following year, Robert appeared to Blake in a vision and presented him with a new method of printing his works, which Blake called "illuminated printing." Once incorporated, this method allowed Blake to control every aspect of the production of his art.

In 1804, Blake began to write and illustrate *Jerusalem* (1804-20), his most ambitious work to date. He also began showing more work at exhibitions (including *Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims* and *Satan Calling Up His Legions*), but these works were met with silence, and the one published review was absurdly negative; the reviewer called the exhibit a display of "nonsense, unintelligibility and egregious vanity," and referred to Blake as "an unfortunate lunatic." Blake was devastated by the review and lack of attention to his works, and, subsequently, he withdrew more and more from any attempt at success. From 1809 to 1818, he engraved few plates (there is no record of Blake producing any commercial engravings from 1806 to 1813). He also sank deeper into poverty, obscurity and paranoia.

In 1819, however, Blake began sketching a series of "visionary heads," claiming that the historical and imaginary figures that he depicted actually appeared and sat for him. By 1825, Blake had sketched more than hundred of them, including those of Solomon and Merlin the magician and those included in "The Man Who Built the Pyramids" and "Harold Killed at the Battle of Hastings"; along with the most famous visionary head, that included in Blake's "The Ghost of a Flea." Remaining artistically busy, between 1823 and 1825, Blake engraved twenty one designs for an illustrated Book of Job (from the Bible) and Dante's *Inferno*. In 1824, he began a series of one hundred two watercolor illustrations of Dante—a project that would be cut short by Blake's death in 1827.

Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), is a

collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III's treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it, in 1794, with *Songs of Experience*. Some readers interpret *Songs of Innocence* in a straightforward fashion, considering it primarily a children's book, but others have found hints at parody or critique in its seemingly naive and simple lyrics. Both books of *Songs* were printed in an illustrated format reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts. The text and illustrations were printed from copper plates, and each picture was finished by hand in watercolors.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of 18th century neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. He declared in one poem, "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's." Works such as "The French Revolution" (1791), "America, a Prophecy" (1793), "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793), and "Europe, a Prophecy" (1794) express his opposition to the English monarchy, and to 18th century political and social tyranny in general. Theological tyranny is the subject of *The Book of Urizen* (1794). In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), he satirized oppressive authority in church and state, as well as the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted his interest.

In 1800 Blake moved to the seacoast town of Felpham, where he lived and worked until 1803 under the patronage of William Hayley. He taught himself Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian, so that he could read classical works in their original language. In Felpham he experienced profound spiritual insights that prepared him for his mature work, the great visionary epics written and etched between about 1804 and 1820. *Milton* (1804-08), *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1797; rewritten after 1800), and *Jerusalem* (1804-20) have neither traditional plot,

characters, rhyme, nor meter. They envision a new and higher kind of innocence, the human spirit triumphant over reason.

Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by common people, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. In 1808 he exhibited some of his watercolors at the Royal Academy, and in May of 1809 he exhibited his works at his brother James's house. Some of those who saw the exhibit praised Blake's artistry, but others thought the paintings "hideous" and more than a few called him insane. Blake's poetry was not well known by the general public, but he was mentioned in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1816. [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#), who had been lent a copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, considered Blake a "man of Genius," and [Wordsworth](#) made his own copies of several songs. Charles Lamb sent a copy of "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence* to James Montgomery for his *Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boys' Album* (1824), and Robert Southey (who, like Wordsworth, considered Blake insane) attended Blake's exhibition and included the "Mad Song" from *Poetical Sketches* in his miscellany, *The Doctor* (1834-1837).

Blake's final years, spent in great poverty, were cheered by the admiring friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves "the Ancients." In 1818 he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. It was Linnell who, in 1825, commissioned him to design illustrations for [Dante's Divine Comedy](#), the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

Major Works:

All Religions Are One (1788) ,*America, a Prophecy* (1793) ,*Europe, a Prophecy* (1794) ,*For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793) ,*For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (1820) ,*Poetical Sketches* (1783) ,*Songs of Experience* (1794) ,*Songs of Innocence* (1789) ,*The Book of*

Ahania (1795), The Book of Los (1795), The First Book of Urizen (1794), The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790), The Song of Los (1795), There Is No Natural Religion (1788), Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793)

Check Your Progress

1. When and where was William Blake born?
2. At what age did William Blake have his first vision?
3. When was Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* published?
4. In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), what does Blake satirize?
5. When were Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* published?
6. Name a few major themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.

1.3.2 Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience:

Introduction

William Blake published his second collection of poetry, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789. He published it with the accompanying illustrative plates, a feat accomplished through an engraving and illustrating process of his own design. The publication of *Songs of Innocence* began his series of *Illuminated Books*, in which Blake combined text and visual artwork to achieve his poetic effect. Blake always intended the poems of *Songs of Innocence* to be accompanied by their respective illustrations, making analysis of the texts alone problematic at times.

Being ostensibly about the naivety and simplicity of innocent youth, *Songs of Innocence* is not merely a collection of verses for children. Several of the poems include an ironic tone, and some, such as *The Chimney Sweeper*, imply sharp criticism of the society of Blake's time. Although clearly intended as a celebration of children and of their

unadulterated enjoyment of the world around them, *Songs of Innocence* is also a warning to adult readers. Innocence has been lost not simply through aging, but because the forces of culture have allowed a hope-crushing society to flourish, sometimes at the direct expense of children's souls.

Songs of Experience followed five years later, bound with a reprinting and slight revision of *Songs of Innocence*. *Songs of Experience* has never been printed separately from the former volume, and Blake intended it as a companion piece to the earlier work. The same method of engraving plates to illustrate the poems is used in *Songs of Experience*. *Songs of Experience* allows Blake to be more direct in his criticism of society. He attacks church leaders, wealthy socialites, and cruel parents with equal vehemence. Blake also uses *Songs of Experience* to further develop his own personal theological system, which was portrayed as mostly very traditional in *Songs of Innocence*. In *Songs of Experience*, Blake questions how we know that God exists, whether a God who allows poor children to suffer and be exploited is in fact, good, and whether love can exist as an abstract concept apart from human interaction. Blake also hints at his belief in "free love" in this volume, suggesting that he would like to dismantle the institution of marriage along with all other artificial restrictions on human freedom.

Innocence and disillusionment are the two important themes in the poetry of William Blake while symbolism and mystic element remain the prime means of disclosing the ideas and beliefs of the poet. In *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Blake is "showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul". The poet has actually projected "innocence" and "experience" as contrary while projecting the evolution of man from one state of being, innocence, to another i.e. disillusionment. The *Songs of Innocence* is a state of childhood and "protected innocence" though this state is not immune to fallibility. The *Songs of Experience* depicts the moral, social and political corruption as well as tyranny of the Church and the state. If "Innocence" is the joyful period of felicity and heaven then "Experience" is the state

of “fallen beings”. The *Songs of Innocence* understand the world with the innocent state of being, a child. It is strange that while man is “immature” and growing, he is able to discern the truths of existence so easily. The *Songs of Experience* reflect the corrupted state of being, “the fallen man”. It is the condition of man when he has been corrupted by the vices and evils of this world. Experience is the stage of man when originality is lost and the mere imprints of the world are mirrored as mean and tyrant. Experience is often regarded as a “dark forest in which man finds himself alone”. This shows the decay and loss of human values. It appears to be a tale of man’s cruelty and corrupted reason which resulted in drawing him away from God.

Taken as a whole, Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* offer a romanticized yet carefully thought out view of nature, God, society, and religion from a variety of perspectives, ultimately demanding that the reader choose the view he or she finds most compelling from among the myriad voices of the poems.

Analysis

Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* juxtapose the innocent, pastoral world of childhood against an adult world of corruption and repression; while such poems as *The Lamb* represent a meek virtue, poems like *The Tyger* exhibit opposing, darker forces. Thus the collection as a whole explores the value and limitations of two different perspectives on the world. Many of the poems fall into pairs, so that the same situation or problem is seen through the lens of innocence first and then experience. Blake does not identify himself wholly with either view. Most of the poems are dramatic that is, in the voice of a speaker other than the poet himself. Blake stands outside innocence and experience, in a distanced position from which he hopes to be able to recognize and correct the fallacies of both. In particular, he pits himself against despotic authority, restrictive morality, sexual repression, and institutionalized religion. His great insight is into the way these separate modes of control work together to squelch what is most holy in human beings. The *Songs of Innocence* dramatize the naive hopes and fears

that inform the lives of children and trace their transformation as the child grows into adulthood. Some of the poems are written from the perspective of children, while others are about children as seen from an adult perspective. Many of the poems draw attention to the positive aspects of natural human understanding prior to the corruption and distortion of experience. Others take a more critical stance toward innocent purity: for example, while Blake draws touching portraits of the emotional power of rudimentary Christian values, he also exposes Christianity's capacity for promoting injustice and cruelty.

The *Songs of Experience* work via parallels and contrasts to lament the ways in which the harsh experiences of adult life destroy what is good in innocence, while also articulating the weaknesses of the innocent perspective (*The Tyger*, for example, attempts to account for real, negative forces in the universe, which innocence fails to confront). These latter poems treat sexual morality in terms of the repressive effects of jealousy, shame, and secrecy, all of which corrupt the ingenuousness of innocent love. With regard to religion, they are less concerned with the character of individual faith than with the institution of the Church, its role in politics, and its effects on society and the individual mind. Experience thus adds a layer to innocence that darkens its hopeful vision while compensating for some of its blindness.

The style of the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* is simple and direct, but the language and the rhythms are painstakingly crafted, and the ideas they explore are often deceptively complex. Many of the poems are narrative in style, while others, like *The Sick Rose* and *The Divine Image*, make their arguments through symbolism or by means of abstract concepts. Some of Blake's favourite rhetorical techniques are personification and the reworking of Biblical symbolism and language. Blake frequently employs the familiar meters of ballads, nursery rhymes, and hymns, applying them to his own, often unorthodox conceptions. This combination of the traditional with the unfamiliar is consonant with Blake's perpetual interest in reconsidering and reframing the assumptions of human thought and social behavior.

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the contrasting perspectives presented in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.

1.3.3 Major Themes in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*:

i) The Destruction of Innocence

Throughout both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Blake repeatedly addresses the destruction of childlike innocence, and in many cases of children's lives, by a society designed to use people for its own selfish ends. Blake romanticizes the children of his poems, only to place them in situations common to his day, in which they find their simple faith in parents or God challenged by harsh conditions. *Songs of Experience* is an attempt to denounce the cruel society that harms the human soul in such terrible ways, but it also calls the reader back to innocence, through Imagination, in an effort to redeem a fallen world. *

ii) Redemption

Throughout his works, Blake frequently refers to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. While he alludes to the atoning act of Christ Crucified, more often Blake focuses on the Incarnation, the taking on of human form by the divine Creator, as the source of redemption for both human beings and nature. He emphasizes that Christ "became a little child" just as men and women need to return to a state of childlike grace in order to restore the innocence lost to the social machinery of a cruel world.

iii) Religious Hypocrisy

In such poems as *Holy Thursday* and *The Little Vagabond*, Blake critiques the religious leaders of his day for their abuse of spiritual authority. The men who should be shepherds to their

flocks are in fact reinforcing a political and economic system that turns children into short-lived chimney sweepers and that represses love and creative expression in adults. Blake has no patience with clergy who would assuage their own or their earthly patrons' guilt by parading poor children through a church on Ascension Day, as in *Holy Thursday* from both sections, and he reserves most of his sharpest verse for these men.

iv) Imagination over Reason

Blake is a strong proponent of the value of human creativity, or Imagination, over materialistic rationalism, or Reason. As a poet and artist, Blake sees the power of art in its various forms to raise the human spirit above its earth-bound mire. He also sees the soul-killing materialism of his day, which uses rational thought as an excuse to perpetuate crimes against the innocent via societal and religious norms. *Songs of Experience* in particular decries Reason's hold over Imagination, and it uses several ironic poems to undermine the alleged superiority of rationalism.

v) Nature as the Purest State of Man

Like many of his contemporary Romantic poets, Blake sees in the natural world an idyllic universe that can influence human beings in a positive manner. Many of his poems, such as *Spring*, celebrate the beauty and fecundity of nature, while others, such as *London*, deride the sterile mechanism of urban society. Blake's characters are happiest when they are surrounded by natural beauty and following their natural instincts. They are most oppressed when they are trapped in social or religious institutions or are subject to the horrors of urban living.

vi) The Flaws of Earthly Parents

One recurring motif in both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* is the failure of human parents to properly nurture their children. The *Little Boy Lost* is abandoned by his earthly

father, yet rescued by his Heavenly Father. The parents of *The Little Vagabond* weep in vain as their son is burned alive for heresy. Both mother and father seem frustrated by their child's temperament in *Infant Sorrow*. This recurring motif allows Blake to emphasize the frailty of human communities, in which the roles of mother and father are defined by society rather than by natural instincts, and to emphasize the supremacy of Nature and of divine care in the form of God the Father.

vii) Social Reform

While much of Blake's poetry focuses on leaving behind the material world in favour of a more perfect spiritual nature, his poetry nonetheless offers realistic and socially conscious critiques of existing situations. Both of his *Chimney Sweeper* poems highlight the abuse of children by parents and employers as they are forced into hazardous, and potentially fatal, situations for the sake of earning money. Both *Holy Thursday* poems decry the overt display of the poor as a spectacle of absolution for the wealthy and affluent. *The Human Abstract* points out that our virtues are predicated on the existence of human suffering. Although Blake is certainly more spiritual than practical minded, the seeds of social reform can be seen in the philosophy underlying his verses. Innocence is a state of man that must be preserved, not destroyed, and the social systems that seek to destroy innocence must be changed or eliminated.

1.3.4 Blake's "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*)- Explanation and Analysis:

'Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey headed beadles walk'd before with wands as white as snow
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seem'd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

Summary of “Holy Thursday”:

The poem describes the annual Holy Thursday (Ascension Day) service in St Paul's Cathedral for the poor children of the London charity schools. The children enter the cathedral in strict order 'walking two and two' behind the beadles (wardens). The children sit and sing, and their voices rise up to heaven far above their aged guardians. The poem ends with a moral: have pity on those less fortunate than yourself, as they include angelic boys and girls like those described here.

In the first stanza, the poet says "Twas on a Holy Thursday" which means it was Holy Thursday and only on that particular day the orphans with their 'innocent faces clean' were walking 'two and two' (i.e. in an order) 'in red and blue and green' attire which depicts that they were provided with bright and colourful clothes. But the poet is not cherishing the scene. Ironically phrases like 'innocent faces clean, 'walking two and two' and in 'red and blue and green' depict something that is hidden from our eyes. Their faces are clean and they are given bright coloured attire in order to serve these things as a visual aid to appeal for the money from people who have come to the occasion. Hence these decorations are not for the benefit of the orphans but for the profit of the charity officials. In the third line, the poet says that 'Grey-headed beadles' was walking before the orphans having 'wands as white as snow'. Their head is grey meaning that they are old guardians and they are holding the sticks to command the orphans. Their command makes

the children walk 'In two and two'. The poet compares their walking with the flow of Thames River. It should be noted that in the third line, the motion of 'Grey-headed beadles' is in past (walk'd before) but in the fourth line, as they reach the Church, their motion becomes present. Thus their motion is dynamic that changes from snow to flow.

In the second stanza, the poet explains the singing of the orphans in St. Paul's Church. The poet compares the gathering of orphans to the flowers of London. But this comparison is again ironic. In one sense the gathering seems to be as beautiful as flowers, but in the other sense this charm and beauty of clean faces and bright attire are short-lived similarly as the life of a flower is short. After the ceremony, they will be taken into their actual condition, which is, most probably, miserable. This makes the poet cry 'O'. They are sitting in groups. Their faces are glowing. But the poet adds the phrase 'all their own' which signifies that this glow on their face is not by because of the efforts of the guardians, but is a divine glow that brightens their faces. Thus they are angels who are glowing with divine light. They are singing together and are as innocent as a lamb. The phrase 'multitudes of lambs' symbolizes Christ with his lambs who was quite fond of children. Hence orphans are the lambs who are sitting before Christ. They are quite large in number and are raising their innocent hands to prayer.

In the third stanza, the poet transforms the 'radiant angelic companies' into Holy ghosts that are swirling 'like a mighty wind'. Thus we find the concept of Transcendentalism here. Their songs fill with holy and dedicated prayers that are thundering and reaching to 'the seats of heaven'. And along with them, the old and wise experienced men are sitting who are showing off the sense of commitment by getting moved after seeing the miserable condition of these orphans and thus giving charity in large amounts. But the poet, being unsatisfied with them raises several rhetoric questions like- Why such behaviour remains confined to this particular day? Why does society not pay charity to orphans on other days? Don't we have any responsibility regarding these suffering children? Will people treat a child beggar who comes to their door, in

the same way as they are behaving today? Hence “Holy Thursday” is a highly satirical poem that criticizes the society for its apathetic treatment of orphans.

Check Your Progress

1. Justify the significance of the title “Holy Thursday”.
2. Explain the meaning of the expression ‘multitudes of lambs’.

Critical Analysis

“Holy Thursday” has three stanzas, each consisting of two rhyming couplets. The singsong quality of the AABB rhyme, usually a sign of innocence in these poems, belies the thinly veiled subtext of the poem regarding the exploitation of the innocent by those who are, ultimately, their moral and spiritual inferiors. As always, Blake favours the innocent children even as he despises the system which enslaves or abuses them. The ‘wise guardians of the poor,’ the children’s patrons, are seated ‘beneath them.’ Even though the gratitude may be forced upon the children, their innocence, which is stated twice outright in the poem, trumps the self-serving nature of the spectacle.

Blake closes with the warning to ‘cherish pity; lest you drive and angel from your door,’ a statement that seems out of place on the surface. When compared to the Biblical account of the angels’ visit to Lot in the city of Sodom, however, the driving away of an angel at the door becomes a more sobering image. Lot, alone of all the denizens of Sodom, offered the angels, who were disguised as travelers, hospitality in a city full of dangers for the unwary visitor. His pity for his guests results in his own family’s rescue from the destruction about to strike the wicked city. Similarly, the reader is encouraged to ‘cherish pity’ even in the midst of a sin-stricken and cynical system that would use a parade of poor children as a show of public virtue.

The poem is based on the contrast between the ‘innocent faces’ of the children and the authority of the ‘grey headed beadles’ and the other ‘aged men’ who act as their guardians. Although the children are

made to enter the cathedral in regimented order, their angelic innocence overcomes all the constraints put upon them by the authority – they even make the ‘red and blue and green’ of their school uniforms look like ‘flowers of London town’. As the boys and girls raise their hands and their voices to heaven, the narrator imagines them rising up to heaven too, just as Christ himself did on Ascension Day. In the poet’s vision they leave their ‘wise Guardians’ beneath them and become angels – which is why the last line tells us to ‘cherish pity’ and remember our duty to the poor. Although the triple repetition of ‘multitude(s)’ notes how many thousands of children live in poverty in London, the emphasis in this poem is on the ‘radiance’ which they bring to the church – they are ‘multitudes of lambs’.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the poet highlight the exploitation of the poor by the men in power in the poem ‘Holy Thursday’?
2. Bring out the contrast between innocence and authority in the poem ‘Holy Thursday’.

1.3.5 Blake’s “London”- Explanation and Analysis:

“London” (*Songs of Experience*)

I wander thro’ each charter’d street,
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry

Every blackning Church appalls,
 And the hapless Soldiers sigh
 Runs in blood down Palace walls
 But most thro' midnight streets I hear
 How the youthful Harlots curse
 Blasts the new-born Infants tear
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

Summary of “London” (*Songs of Experience*)

William Blake touched upon a wide range of subjects in his poetry that makes him one of the most versatile poets of English literature. His two poems ‘London’, along with ‘The Tyger’, possibly remain as the most anthologized of all his poems. ‘London’ was first published in 1794 in his volume *Songs of Experience*, which was written to offer the flipside to the positive, transcendent message present in Blake’s earlier volume *Songs of Innocence*. The narrator wanders through the London city and finds even the streets and the river suffering under political oppression. Every person he comes across, he sees signs of misery and lack of courage. In fact, the narrator does not just see the misery of the chimney-sweeper, the soldier, the prostitute or the baby; he also hears it in their cries, sighs, curses and tears. He visualizes the cry of the chimney-sweeper covering the churches like a pall draped over a coffin, and the last breath of the dying soldier running like blood down the walls of the royal palace. In the depths of night the ‘Harlot’s curse’ blinds the new-born baby and turns love itself into a disease-infested shortcut to death.

Blake presents a graphic picture of human suffering while wandering through the streets of London: signs of misery and weakness can be discerned on everyone’s face, it seems. Every man’s voice – even the cry of every infant, a child who has not even learnt to talk yet – conveys this sense of oppression. It is as if everyone is being kept in slavery, but the

manacles (shackle/chain) they wear are not literal ones, but mental – ‘mind-forg’d’ – ones. Somehow, they are even more powerful, since they take for granted that the oppressed and the downtrodden is unlikely to ever rise up and challenge this tyranny they are subjected to.

The third stanza sees two institutions associated with wealth and grandeur – the Church and the Palace – invaded by the corrupt realities of Blake’s London: a world in which industrialization leads to small children being exploited and maltreated through their employment as chimney-sweepers, and in which ‘hapless’ (i.e. unlucky) soldiers sent off to fight spill their blood for uncaring kings. ‘Appals’ in this stanza is a word which summarizes the sense of shock at the role of the church in perpetuating this practice of slavery. The Church is literally turned into the colour of a pall (black) by the sooty breath of the chimneysweepers, but palls are associated with funerals, summoning the premature deaths of so many children who died from injury or ill-health while performing the job of a cleaning the chimneys. The word ‘appals’ also carries a more familiar meaning ‘shock’.

But the fourth and final stanza suggests that the most pervasive and frequently heard sound on London streets is the sound of a young mother – who is also a prostitute – cursing her newborn infant’s crying and ‘blighting with plagues the Marriage hearse’. That final image – the oxymoron of the ‘Marriage hearse’ (hearse is for funerals, not weddings) – appears to mean that the young unmarried mother’s unwanted child, and the misery of both mother and infant alike, is the final nail in the coffin of the idea of marriage as a sacred union which is associated not only with bliss but with blessing. A ‘curse’, of course, can merely be a loud cry, but the word carries a ring of profanity at all times.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the observations the speaker of the poem makes in the first stanza.
2. Discuss the plight of the chimney sweepers in London city as described in the poem.

Critical Analysis

In the poem, William Blake is principally describes a very corrupt society dominated by sheer materialism. In such a society there is a yawning gap between the upper and the working-class sections. Blake highlights this negative aspect of the society in this poem. It is written from a very negative perspective where people exist in a dark and oppressive world, suffering the consequences of corruption of those in positions of power. The problem is that they do not realize this is happening to them. Looking at the prevailing injustices which has resulted in causing misery to a large section of people Blake rejects the idea of an ideologically perfect place or a utopian society. He wants to make people aware of this misery and suffering of a section of the society surrounding them.

In the first quatrain, the poet makes a presentation of his observations while moving around in the streets of London. He feels in the streets of London an air of fear and repression. The adjective 'chartered' hints at legal and geographical connotation. The speaker is moving in a rigidly mapped and restrictive area which has made the speaker suffocated. The repetition of the word 'mark' in third and fourth line like the word 'chartered' in first and second line; refers to some sort of a restriction of language, the medium, the speaker feels. As the speaker of the poem moves forward, he observes the faces of the people passing by. He sees a mark of melancholy on everyone's face. There is a sense of weariness in them all. He presents them as people who are weak and burdened by the weight of an inexplicable anxiety. This description of the London Street sets up an atmosphere of pessimism and gloom. There seems to be a very profound sense of sadness in the tone of the speaker when he describes the scene of the street full of sad people.

If the first stanza of the poem sets a tone of melancholy, the second stanza further reinforces the air of gloom by providing some more incisive observations of the speaker. The speaker in these lines forms a view of desperation hearing at the cry of the infant and the cry of the grown up. He hears the "mind forg'd manacles" which reiterates

the idea of lack of freedom and a general sense of fear prevailing in the society. The use of the word 'ban' (legal restriction) reinforces the idea of restriction on the free flow of ideas. The people of the society have shackled themselves by creating abstract restrictive ideas closing their minds to any innovative thought. The use of the words like 'chartered', 'ban' and 'manacles' make a direct reference to the restrictive nature of the society which in turn contributes to the overall gloomy picture of the streets the speaker is describing.

Making a further incisive observation the speaker in the third stanza highlights the inequality that existed in the society. There is a deprived and downtrodden class which suffered silently.

Nobody takes notice of their suffering and sacrifices. The two representative occupations of sacrifice and suffering are the chimney sweeper and the soldier—one engaged in a hazardous task and the other lays down his life for the country. Since the general people of the society fail to see this reality of inequality because they wear the shackles that have limited their thinking. The speaker presents a very sympathetic picture of the chimney sweeper class, one of the poorest of the poor to take up such a hazardous occupation. These helpless chimney sweepers die prematurely as a result of working in soot and dirt. After making a scathing attack on the apathetic attitude of the society towards the poor and the exploited the speaker turns his attention to the other evil war. The soldiers are subjected to inhuman barbarity just to protect the ruling class. The soldiers' blood spills and gets smeared on the walls of the palace, where the royalty lives.

In the fourth and final stanza the speaker highlights the moral degradation of the society where innocence has been completely ignored. The 'youthful Harlot' is a representation of poverty and moral corruption. The cause of the curse of the young prostitution is the new born infant. The mother instead of comforting the baby is cursing it as the baby has become a new burden on her. The crying infant is an image of the loss of innocence. It also reflects the heartlessness of the mother. The speaker comments on the institution of marriage and its growing irrelevance in

a society gradually getting morally degraded and culturally perverted. So the use of the expression 'marriage hearse'. 'Hearse' is a word which is associated with death and by using such a word with marriage the speaker attempts to demean the institution of marriage.

Check Your Progress

1. Make a list of the observations of the speaker made in the poem.
2. Discuss the ironical use of the word 'hearse' in the fourth stanza.

1.3.6 Blake's "The Tyger"- Explanation and Analysis:

"Tyger" (Songs of Experience)

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Summary of “Tyger” (*Songs of Experience*)

“The Tiger” (also and originally spelled “The Tyger”) by William Blake was published in 1794 as part of his collection of poetry entitled *Songs of Experience*. “The Tiger” is the sister poem to “The Lamb” (from “Songs of Innocence”). While “The Lamb” brings attention to innocence, “The Tiger” presents a duality between aesthetic beauty and primal ferocity. Blake believes that to see one, the hand that created “The Lamb”, one must also see the other, the hand that created “The Tiger”. Rather than believing in the war between good and evil or heaven and hell, Blake thought that every man must first see and then resolve the contraries of existence and of life.

This poem asks a question: who could have dared to make (‘frame’) a beast as terrifying as the tiger? It then goes on to liken the making of a tiger to the dangerous process of fashioning molten metal from the furnace with hammer and anvil. In the fifth verse the poet asks the question: ‘Did he smile his work to see? Did he who made the Lamb make thee?’ Blake implies that it was God who made both the gentle lamb and the ferocious tiger, but that he may regret having created so fierce a beast as the latter. The concluding verse of the poem is identical to the opening verse, giving the poem itself ‘symmetry’.

The poem is set in a harsh but nevertheless awe-inspiring world. In this world, the Tiger’s bright eyes lurk out of the dark forests. This is also the world in which the tiger was actually created by a God whose

work was similar to that of a blacksmith with his anvil and his furnace. The scariest moment that the poet imagines is the moment at which the tiger comes to life. However, in the fifth stanza only, the setting shifts to heaven where the stars have stopped their war in order to behold the tiger after its creation and God himself is happy with his work.

The poem consists of six stanzas of four lines each. In the first stanza, the poet sees the tiger and it seems to be glowing in the deep forests where it is roaming in the night time.

Then he directly addresses the tiger and speaks to it. He says that its huge dimensions are bound to scare everyone who lays eyes on it. He is sure that no mortal being could have created such a fear-inducing creature.

In the second stanza, the poet continues talking to the tiger. He says that when the tiger's eyes glint, they appear to have a fire raging within them. He wonders aloud where such a fire could have been created – whether in the sea or the sky. At this point, the poet seems to have decided in favour of the sky as opposed to the sea being the birth place of the fire in the tiger's eyes, and so he asks what kind of wings the creator of the tiger had that he could hope to reach the high altitude where the fire was formed. He also asks how strong the hands of the tiger's maker had to be that he was able to grasp the fire and bring it under his control.

In the third stanza, the poet imagines the tiger's maker manipulating the ligaments of the tiger's body with his own hands. He then asks how much force his shoulders would have to hold to be able to do that. He also asks what skillful technique would have to be adopted to accomplish this task. The poet also imagines the moment at which the tiger finally came alive with its beating heart, and wonders how powerful the maker's hands and feet would have to be in order to not be intimidated by the beast.

In the fourth stanza, the poet imagines the creator of the tiger to have been a blacksmith. He imagines that the body of the tiger was made in metal with such implements as the hammer and the chain. He

also imagines that the brain of the tiger must have been made in the heated temperatures of a furnace. It must have been a terrible sight to watch the tiger being created, and so it must have been a very powerful fist that could grab the tiger in its grasp.

In the fifth stanza, we find a proof of this assumption. The poet imagines that after God had brought the tiger to life, the stars in heaven (who had been engaged in a battle at the time) relinquished their weapons. They were so overwhelmed at the sight of the tiger that they started to weep. The poet wonders whether God had been pleased with his creation of the tiger, and smiled. He also wonders whether it was the same God who had made both the tiger and the lamb.

The sixth and final stanza is composed of almost the same words as the first stanza. Only the last line is slightly changed. Instead of asking who could have created the fearsome tiger, the poet asks who would have dared to do so. God creates the tiger not just because he can, but also because he has been able to take a chance in doing so. Why God has created such a scary being is a question that continues to baffle human beings.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the significance of the title “The Tyger”.
2. Discuss how the tiger is contrasted with the lamb in the poem.

Critical Analysis

The *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were intended by Blake to show ‘the two contrary states of the human soul’. “The Tyger” is the contrary poem to “The Lamb” in the *Songs of Innocence*. “The Lamb” is about a kindly God who ‘calls himself a Lamb’ and is himself meek and mild. The tiger, by contrast, is a terrifying animal ‘burning’ with fire in its eyes. The poet therefore finds it hard to believe that the same God who created the gentle lamb would also make the dreadful and ferocious tiger. If the lamb represents Divine love, what

might the tiger represent? Some commentators think it represents the anger of God, some think it represents the aggressive, war-mongering spirit of mankind, others think it represents man's imagination and creative urges. The tiger itself is a symbol for the fierce forces in the soul that are necessary to break the bonds of experience. The tiger also stands for a divine spirit that will not be subdued by restrictions, but will arise against established rules and conventions. The poem consists of a series of questions that are never fully answered, circling round us in just the same way as a tiger stalks its prey. Even at the end no answer is given: the last verse just sends us back to the same question with which the poem began.

“The Tyger” is a highly symbolic poem based on Blake's personal philosophy of spiritual and intellectual revolution by individuals. The speaker in the poem is puzzled at the sight of a tiger in the night, and he asks it a series of questions about its fierce appearance and about the creator who made it. But the context and everything in it must be interpreted according to Blake's philosophy of symbolic myths about human life, society and spiritual revolution. It is also a romantic poem to some extent written by the pre-romantic William Blake. The ‘Tyger’ is a symbolic animal which represents the fierce force in the human soul. It is created in the fire of imagination by God who has a supreme imagination, spirituality and ideals. The anvil, chain, hammer, furnace and fire are parts of the imaginative artist's powerful means of creation. The imaginative artist is synonymous with the creator. The man with a revolutionary spirit can use such powers to fight against the evils of experience.

The god creating the tiger can be interpreted as any of these creative agents which inspire common men to free their minds, hearts and souls from the chains of social falsities the king, the priest, the landlord and their systems that eat up the individual's potentials. The creator has strong shoulders (energy) as well as art (skills), and dread feet and hand. His courage is supreme, too. His creation is fierce, almost daunting himself. So must be man's spirit and imagination, or the poet's. The forest is the symbol of corrupted social conventions and that tries

to suppress the good human potentials. In the poem night stands for ignorance, out of which the forest of false social institutions is made.

Check Your Progress

7. What does Blake's "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*) describe?
8. What does Blake compare the walking of the poor children of the London charity schools with?
9. What does the phrase 'multitudes of lambs' symbolize?
10. What does Blake see when he wanders through London streets?
11. How does Blake visualize the cry of the chimney-sweep and the dying soldier in the poem "London"?
12. What are the two institutions that Blake mentions in the third stanza of "London"?
13. "The Tiger" is the sister poem to which poem by Blake?
14. What does Blake compare the making of a tiger to in the poem "The Tyger"?
15. What does the tiger symbolize?

1.4 Let Us Sum Up:

This unit has made an attempt to acquaint you with the background of Romantic literature, with special emphasis on Romantic poetry. The unit has also highlighted the chief trends and movements of the age which will help you to understand and contextualize the poetry of the age within the larger scenario. A thorough reading of the unit will help you to examine the socio-historical and political background of the Romantic Age. The unit will help you to acquire a clear understanding of Romantic literature and identify the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry. Moreover, the unit will give you a clear knowledge of William Blake and his poetry. Finally the unit has given a detailed analysis of Blake's poems, "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*), "London" (*Songs of Experience*) and "The Tyger" (*Songs of Experience*).

1.5 Key Words:

- Romanticism
- Romantic Poetry
- French Revolution
- Industrial Revolution
- Enlightenment
- *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*
- Neoclassical School of Poetry
- Imagination, emotion, and freedom
- Nature
- Subjectivity
- Innocence and Experience
- Social Reform

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1.7 Possible Answers to CYP:

Check Your Progress-1 Answers:

1. 1798
2. 1832
3. The Enlightenment developed and championed logic and reason above all other qualities.
4. The Romantics focused on the individual's right to imagine and to articulate his emotions and deal with everyday life.
5. i.) A revolt against the neoclassical school of poetry of the 18th century.
ii.) Imagination, emotion, and freedom are the focal points of Romanticism.
iii.) Romanticism is concerned with the individual more than with society.

- iv.) The poems of the Romantic poets are highly subjective and seek to express their innermost emotions.
- v.) Romantic poets expressed an intense fondness for nature and beauty which it is replete with.

Check Your Progress-2 Answers:

- i.) William Blake was born on November 28, 1757, in the Soho district of London, England.
- ii.) William Blake claimed to have had his first vision, of a tree full of angels, at the age of ten.
- iii.) Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches*, a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models, was published in 1783.
- iv.) In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), Blake satirized the oppressive authority in church and state.
- v.) Blake published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it with *Songs of Experience* in 1794.
- vi.) A few major Themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are:
 - a.) The Destruction of Innocence
 - b.) Redemption
 - c.) Religious Hypocrisy
 - d.) Imagination over Reason
 - e.) Nature as the Purest State of Man
 - f.) The Flaws of Earthly Parents
 - g.) Social Reform

- vii.) Blake's "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*) describes the annual Holy Thursday (Ascension Day) service in St Paul's Cathedral for the poor children of the London charity schools.
- viii.) Blake compares the walking of the poor children of the London charity schools with the flow of Thames River.
- ix.) The phrase 'multitudes of lambs' symbolizes Christ with his lambs who was quite fond of children.
- x.) When Blake wanders through London streets he finds the streets and the river suffering under political oppression. In everyone he passes, he sees signs of misery and moral weakness.
- xi.) Blake visualizes the cry of the chimney-sweep covering the churches like a pall draped over a coffin, and the last breath of the dying soldier running like blood down the walls of the royal palace.
- xii.) The two institutions that Blake mentions in the third stanza of "London" are the Church and the Palace – invaded by the corrupt realities of Blake's London.
- xiii.) "The Tiger" is the sister poem to which Blake's "The Lamb" (from "Songs of Innocence").
- xiv.) Blake compares the making of a tiger to the dangerous process of fashioning molten metal from the furnace with hammer and anvil.
- xv.) The tiger symbolizes the fierce forces in the soul that are necessary to break the bonds of experience.

1.8 Model Questions:

- a.) Discuss the political, social, economic and other factors responsible for the Romantic Movement.

- b.) Explain the salient features of Romanticism and Romantic poetry.
- c.) Discuss Blake's use of symbols and imagery in the poems, and cite one example.
- d.) Discuss the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* as "Contrary states of the Human Soul."
- e.) Consider Blake as a precursor of the Romantic Movement.
- f.) Comment on Blake as a social critic.
- g.) How does Blake portray nature? How does the conception of nature differ in the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*?
- h.) How does Blake portray childhood in his poems?

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BLOCK-IV

UNIT-II

Block IV, Unit 2

William Wordsworth's 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' & 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge'

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 An Introduction to William Wordsworth

1.2 Dominant Characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry

Check Your Progress

1.3 An Introduction to the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

1.3.1 Analysis of the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

1.3.2 Structure of the poem

1.3.3 Seeing the city in a new light: An important theme in the poem

Check Your Progress

1.4 An introduction to the poem 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'

1.4.1 An analysis of the poem

1.4.2 Structure of the poem

1.4.3 Wordsworth's concept of childhood and immortality of the soul

1.4.4 The changing conception of nature

Check Your Progress

1.5 Conclusion

1.6 Glossary

1.7 Suggested readings

Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' and 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge'

1.0 Objectives:

The objectives of this unit are:

- To introduce Wordsworth as a poet to the learner and take a look at some of his characteristics as a Romantic poet.
- To provide an in-depth analysis of his prescribed poems, 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' and 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality'.
- To acquaint the learner with some of the important themes of the prescribed poems.

1.1 An introduction to William Wordsworth.

In the previous unit, you have studied William Blake with special emphasis on the prescribed poems, and in this unit, you shall study another Romantic poet William Wordsworth and make a detailed analysis of the two prescribed poems, "Ode on Imitations of Immortality" and "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge".

Wordsworth was born in 1770 at Cockermouth, England. His mother died when he was an eight year old child, an experience which shapes much of his later work. He attended the Hawkshead Grammar School, where he was more attracted to the unroofed school of nature and where his love for poetry was firmly established. He learned more eagerly from the natural world around him, which finds a record in *The Prelude*. The second period of his life begins with his university course

at Cambridge. Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of his life at Cambridge was his fellowship with the young political enthusiasts and his trips to France, an experience which shaped much of his poetry and his political sensibilities. He returned to Paris in 1792, just after the September massacres, and the sights and stories which greeted him there, shook his faith in the dominant political doctrine. With his sister Dorothy, he settled in a little cottage in Dorset. Having met Coleridge, they moved to a house in Somersetshire. It was there that the two poets took the series of walks, the fruit of which was to be the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The two poets formed the deliberate purpose to make literature “adapted to interest mankind permanently”, which they declared classic poetry would never do. This volume of work is epoch-making, for it is the prelude to the Romantic Movement proper. The spirit of the work is reflected in two poems of this remarkable volume, ‘The Rime of the Ancient mariner’ is Coleridge’s masterpiece and ‘Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey’, which expresses Wordsworth’s poetical creed, is one of the most significant poems. While the poems themselves are some of the most influential in Western literature, it is the preface to the second edition published in 1800, which remains one of the most important testaments to a poet’s view on his craft. In the preface, he sets out his theory of poetry where he declares his preference for “incidents and situations from common life” and written in “the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation”. His work *The Prelude*, which was completed in 1805, but was published after his death, is a record of Wordsworth’s development as a poet.

1.2 Dominant characteristics of Wordsworth’s poetry

After taking a glimpse into the life of Wordsworth, let us now take a look into some of the dominant traits found in his poems. In keeping with the dominant theme of Romanticism, Wordsworth’s dealings with nature are his chief glory as a poet. He is sensitive to every subtle change in the world around him. No other poet has found such abundant beauty in the common world. In his treatment of nature, he is not content merely to describe and rejoice, but tries to see more

deeply and penetrates to the heart of things, to find a deeper and profound meaning. It is the life of nature that is recognised; Wordsworth gives us the very life and the impression of some personal living spirit that meets and accompanies the man who goes amidst nature. Wordsworth also emphasises the moral influence of nature. He considers nature as a moral teacher, a mother, as an elevating influence. He believed that nature deeply influences the human character.

In Wordsworth's philosophy of human life, we find several doctrines, which rests upon the conception that man is not apart from nature. In childhood, man is sensitive to all natural influences; he is an epitome of the gladness and beauty of the world. He explains this gladness by the fact that the child comes from the Creator of nature, due to which the child shares an intimate connection with nature. This kinship with nature and God is what glorifies childhood and ought to extend through a man's whole life and ennoble it. This is the teaching of "Tintern Abbey", where the best part of our life is shown to be the result of natural influences. Wordsworth believes that, society and the external world tends to weaken humanity; and so a return to the simple life is the only way out of the pitiable condition of human life. The truth of humanity, that is the common life, is the only subject of permanent literary interest according to Wordsworth. One of the central doctrines of Romanticism, interest in common life was spread across his works such as "Michael", "The Solitary Reaper", "To a Highland Girl" etc. Wordsworth's themes are the joys and sorrows of the common people and their everyday life.

Wordsworth adds a mystic element to this philosophy of life, which is the result of his own belief that in every natural object there is a reflection of a living God. Nature is transfused by a Spirit, and man is also a reflection of the divine Spirit. This mystic conception of man is seen in "Intimations of Immortality", in which Wordsworth adds to his spiritual interpretation of nature and man the alluring doctrine of pre-existence. This makes human life a continuous and immortal thing, without end or beginning.

Wordsworth's lyrical gift finds an expression in his sonnets, the most complicated and repository of the lyrical forms. Wordsworth's use of the Petrarchan sonnet was very striking. He re-established the supremacy of the Petrarchan sonnet over the Shakespearian one, which had been eclipsed in popularity during the Elizabethan age. Some of his sonnets are patriotic, others express their passion for liberty, and others such as "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", deal with nature.

Check Your Progress

1. In which work of Wordsworth, do we find an autobiographical account of his approach to poetry?
2. Write a short note on Wordsworth's treatment of nature in his poetry.

1.3 An introduction to the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

In the previous section, we have had a basic idea of the characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry and now, we shall go to a detailed analysis of the prescribed poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'. Wordsworth's sonnet 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge', September 3, 1802 falls in the category of Momentary Poems. The poet is describing what he sees, thinks and feels on a specific day at a specific moment. The poem was written about an experience that took place on July 31st, 1802 during a trip to France with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. The setting of the poem is London as seen from the Westminster Bridge, which connects the south bank of the Thames River with Westminster on the north bank. Wordsworth's inspiration for the poem was the view that he witnessed from the Westminster Bridge on the morning of July 31, 1802, when most of the residents were not yet out of their homes and the factories had not yet stoked their fires and polluted the air with smoke. He and his sister Dorothy were crossing the bridge in a coach taking them to a boat for a trip across the English Channel to France. Dorothy's journals provide an interesting counterpoint to Wordsworth's poetry, as she notes in her journal about the "various troubles and

disasters “that they went through. In her diary, Dorothy wrote:

After various troubles and disasters, we left London on Saturday morning at about half past 5 or 6, the 31st of July.... We mounted the Dover Coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke, and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light, that there was even something like the purity of one of Nature's own grand spectacles. (Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*)

Wordsworth often used Dorothy's journals as a material for poems and Dorothy had accompanied Wordsworth on this trip. He therefore had both his sister's journal and his own memory as sources for this poem. Looking back in the brilliant morning sunlight at the sleeping city of London, the poet composed this Petrarchan sonnet in a tone peaceful and serene.

1.3.1 Analysis of the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

The poet records his impressions of the scene at early dawn when no mechanized activity is going on and the air is clean and devoid of smoke. He is touched by the beauty and splendour of the city. There is nothing more beautiful than the scene visible from the Westminster Bridge early in the morning. Only those whose souls are dull would not be touched by the awe-inspiring scene; the greatness is majestic. The sight from the bridge is “touching in its majesty” (3), a phrase that is intriguing as it suggests both intimacy and grandeur. So the view from the Westminster Bridge combines both these elements. He presents a panorama of London. All objects natural or otherwise are now visible because of the glitter of the morning sun which spreads over the entire landscape. Never has the poet witnessed such beauty which the splendour of the sun radiates over the valley, rocks or hill. Not only is the scene enchanting, but also the peace and the calm which the scene has on the mind of the poet. In such an atmosphere, even the houses seem asleep and all is still.

The speaker personifies London as he says that the beauty of the morning spreads over the city just as a dress covers a body. He then goes on to give a catalogue of man-made structures visible from the Westminster Bridge, “Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples” (6). This seems paradoxical as the garment worn by the city is the bright and glittering sunshine that does not conceal or protect but emphasizes the bare beauty. Despite being all crowded together, the speaker gives an impression of spaciousness when he notes that the ships and towers are open onto the fields of London and the sky. London in its early morning purity seems to the speaker, one with the silent beauty and peace of nature. During the day, London is cut off from the green fields and the blue sky but the city during the morning is ‘smokeless’ enabling the speaker to have a clear and uninterrupted view of the beauty around him.

The sestet starts with another personification of that of the sun and the river. The verb ‘steep’ in the opening of the sestet can include a variety of definitions such as cleansing, bathing or imbuing. The personified morning sun performs this action on the “valley, rock or hill”. The speaker compares the morning sunlight falling on the city to the sunlight falling on the rocks or hills and says that the view of the city in front of him surpasses all other things. He had never seen such beauty and calmness in the valleys, rocks or hills. The view of the city in the morning and the Thames gliding at “his own sweet will” (12) induces in the speaker a sense of calm and peace. So quiet is the atmosphere that the otherwise bustling city seems to be asleep.

1.3.2 Structure of the poem:

‘Composed Upon Westminster Bridge’ is a lyric poem in the form of a sonnet. Wordsworth’s poem is a Petrarchan sonnet. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of an eight line stanza (octave) and a six line stanza (sestet). The first stanza presents a theme or problem, and the second stanza develops the theme or suggests a solution to the problem. It is, of course, characteristic of Wordsworth that he should use the formal division of the sonnet in accordance with his celebrated references to poetry as taking ‘its origin from emotion recollected in

tranquillity' and requiring long and profound thought or meditation on 'powerful feelings'. As in other poems of his, we are first given the emotional experience and then his thoughtful meditation upon it. But, in 'Westminster Bridge', he makes use of the formal division of the sonnet by presenting the experience, in the main, through the octave, largely reserving the sestet to present his meditation on the experience. Yet his handling of the sonnet form here is managed with an unobtrusive ease and grace perhaps unequalled in his poetry. The sestet begins like the octave with a general statement about the unique beauty of the scene, thus providing a careful and symmetrical parallel in both form and content:

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour,
valley, rock or hill. Though the statement is general, it is expressed in more specific and concrete manner than "Earth has not anything to show more fair" (1). This degree of specific visual quality, in the first two lines of the sestet, helps to link the sestet smoothly to the experience, expressed in concrete visual terms with which the octave was concluded. There are other factors in the sestet which helps to bind it to the octave. The details of the city skyline, "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples" (6), find a parallel in the features of the natural landscape, "valley, rock or hill" (10), features which like those of the city skyline, cause the eye to rise and fall, in a somewhat similar pattern as it traces their sequence. The element of personification introduced in the fourth and fifth lines of the poem is developed throughout the entire sestet, "his first splendour", "his own sweet will", "houses seem asleep" and "mighty heart". The visual experience communicated in the octave, the sensations and emotions aroused by the unique and extreme beauty of the city scene, now deepens into the most profound meditative feeling while the poet at the same time, reflects thoughtfully upon his experience: "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep" (11). Now, let us take a look into the rhyme scheme and meter of the poem. The rhyme scheme of 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' and other Petrarchan sonnets is, first stanza (octave): abba abba; second stanza (sestet): cd,

cd, cd. The meter of the poem is iambic pentameter, with ten syllables per line.

Earth has | not an| -y thing| to show| more fair

Dull would| he be| of soul| who could| pass by

1.3.3 Seeing the city in a new light: An important theme in the poem

Wordsworth beautifully brings out the sense of contrast between the commercial aspect of the city and the peace and tranquillity that prevails during the morning in the city. His projection of the city, the crowded skyline of “Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples” (6), all clearly the work of man’s hand, sums up the manifold significance of London as a centre of commerce, political power, religion and culture. His use of the phrase “mighty heart” conveys the power of the metropolitan centre of a nation and an empire, along whose arteries are pumped the vital life blood of commerce (ships), political cohesion (towers), religion (domes, temples) and culture (theatres). Yet, the image implies much more than this. Surprisingly, Wordsworth, the poet of nature tells us that his most sublime experience of the rarest beauty was not in the contemplation of a natural landscape, but in the contemplation of the city. This element of paradox is what Cleanth Brooks, in his reading of Wordsworth sees as the most valuable part of the poem. And this does account for the extreme degree of calm that he experiences. On the contrary, the city in *The Prelude* remains as an antithesis to all that Wordsworth loves and values. In the opening lines of *The Prelude* he escapes from the oppression of the city to feel the breath of a heaven-sent and inspiring wind. When Wordsworth returns to the subject of the city describing his residence in London, it is mainly either to convey the bustling activity and spectacle in the streets and theatres, law courts and Parliament, of the metropolis, or to dwell upon the isolation and the vice, the confusion and oppressive purposelessness of urban life. It is however this sonnet which brilliantly proclaims Wordsworth’s fully articulated acceptance of the city into the grand scheme of things. He perceives the city to be assimilated into the natural

universe which is seen to encompass it. The city's man-made fabrications are said to "lie/ open unto the fields and to the sky". It is infused with sunlight, and its fabricated skyline comes to be contemplated in terms of related memories of natural landscape and silhouette. Furthermore, the city stands upon the river, which expresses a fundamental, natural, and spontaneous volition beyond that of the instruments of commerce riding upon its waters: "The river glideth at his own sweet will" (12). Yet here, too, the city is in an intimate relationship with the grander natural world which encloses it. Again, the choice of the image, 'mighty heart', proclaims the city to be no mechanical fabrication but a living organism and a part of the larger world of nature. It is this assimilation into the natural universe of what might be supposed the most unexpected source of sublime beauty, which provided the ultimate revelation of a universe of spiritual loveliness, whole and entire. The calm that he experiences, Wordsworth perceives it first in the contemplated scene, then discovers it as his most profound feeling: "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep" (11). The poet finds in this scene of serene and sublime beauty a perfect inward calm, a complete reassurance that beauty is everywhere. Thus the city is not introduced in its negative aspect, but is inserted in natural scenery. The city, in its morning calmness and silence, does not clash with nature but rather, becomes a part of it. An important aspect of the poem is Wordsworth's expression of the sense of harmony which exists between the natural surroundings of the city and the city itself in its ideal aspect in the morning light. In the morning, there is an equilibrium between the city and its natural surroundings, when the city has not yet become contaminated by the commercial and industrial activities. Wordsworth's sonnet has certain significant differences from the account in Dorothy's journal. In the sonnet, we find the single word 'ships' instead of the 'multitude of little boats' of the journal entry, and instead of the reference to St. Paul's, we find "towers, domes, theatres and temples". Thus Wordsworth has condensed and generalized the multitude of little boats to ships, and he has amplified the reference to St. Paul's into a list of such imposing edifices as towers, domes, theatres, and temples. These changes represent a great

enrichment in the connotative values of the words and are contributory to the grandeur of tone for which Wordsworth is striving.

In addition, the moment of sunrise and the view from a bridge over the river, may not be without significance, as the experience revealed in 'Westminster Bridge' is the archetypal occasion of spiritual illumination and transition.

Check Your Progress

1. Give some of the examples of personification used in the poem.
2. Write a short note on the image of the city in the morning light, as projected in the poem.
3. 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' is a:
 - a) Petrarchan sonnet
 - b) Spenserian sonnet
 - c) Shakespearian Sonnet

1.4 An introduction to the poem 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'

'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', published in *Poems, In Two Volumes* (1807) is a poem about Wordsworth's connection to nature and his struggle to understand humanity's failure to recognise the value of the natural world. The poem is also elegiac in the sense that it is about the loss of the vision of childhood. The poem is characterised by a strong sense of duality: even though the world around the speaker is beautiful and serene, there is a hovering sense of grief owing to the lost glory of childhood. Wordsworth ponders upon the fact that time has stripped away much of nature's glory, depriving him of the wild spontaneity that he exhibited as a child. The poem sums up Wordsworth's philosophy of childhood, where he believes that upon being born, human beings move from a perfect and idealized state into an imperfect earth. Children retain some of the memory of the former glory and purity but as they grow older, the memory fades along with the solemn and joyous relationship to nature. However the memory of childhood can offer a solace, for it enables man to see through the veil of external reality, making him realise that

this is just a mere illusion. Moreover, as human being matures, he gains a more humane and sober approach to nature, in a way compensating for the loss of the earlier vision of childhood.

1.4.1 An analysis of the poem

The ode can be divided into three sections. The first four stanzas are bounded by the common theme of the loss of the divine vision that the child was born with. The second section which consists of stanzas V to VIII, deals with the glorification of childhood. The poet equates the child with the philosopher and a prophet. The section also attempts to explain the process of this loss of the vision of childhood. The final three stanzas are about the compensation for the loss of the vision of childhood. Even though the initial vision fades away, another experience and vision is gained, that of a philosophical vision, which enables him to sympathise with his fellow men and be conscious of the most ordinary objects of nature. The poem starts by reminiscing a time when all of nature seemed heavenly and dreamlike to him. Even the most common objects in nature seemed divine and “apparelled in celestial light” (4). However the poet laments the fact that now that he has grown up, he fails to see that celestial light upon nature which he had seen as a child. The poet still sees the rainbow and the lovely rose, the moon still shines in the cloudless sky and yet something is different, something is lost. That glorious and dreamlike quality with which nature was invested has now departed from the earth. The poet feels a sense of grief listening to the songs of the birds and watching the frisking lambs. However he gathers himself and resolves not to be depressed, for that would dampen the spirit of the season. While reflecting on nature with a newly gained understanding, he feels that the earth is gay once again. The speaker continues to be a part of the joy of the season, saying that it would be unfair for him to be sullen when “Earth herself is adorning” (43). However, when he looks upon a tree and a field, the feeling of loss again engulfs him. In the first four stanzas, are the poet’s attempts to regain the vision of nature that he

had as a child. Amidst the momentary joy, the loss of the divine glory and vision that he had as a child is what pre-dominates the section. The fifth stanza, gives an expression of the poet's belief of the pre-existence and immortality of the human soul. The stanza starts with one of Wordsworth's most famous lines:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.... (Stanza-V, Lines 58-63)

He goes on to say that before the birth, human beings dwell in a more purer realm, that of the heaven. As infants, we retain some of the memory of heaven, which enables us to experience nature's glory more clearly. But as we grow older, that connection becomes fainter as we get tied up in societal norms, conventions and interests of our earthly existence. In the next stanza, the poet notes that the moment we come to earth, everything conspires to help us forget the divine realm from which we had come. Almost like a mother, the earth by offering different pleasures and comforts, lures the child away from the imperial palace, heaven. The speaker then sees a six year old child playing and imagines the rest of his life. The child is seen in his own world, living in imagination and in harmony with the world of nature around him, he is even annoyed by his mother's kisses. The child learns from his experiences, but he spends most of his time on imitation, and it seems to the speaker as if his whole life will essentially be endless imitation. In stanza VIII, the poet addresses the child as a philosopher and a prophet who understands the highest truths of life, which often evades the grownups. The child always struggles to grow up, acting and imitating, without understanding the burden. The poet laments as soon the child will grow up, get tied up in the social norms and codes, and lose his divine vision.

In stanza IX, the poet feels flood of joy when he realises that even though he has lost the glorious vision of childhood, yet something of that glory and divine vision, do stays with us. And it is this vision,

which lets us in a way, to connect with the lost state of innocence. The poet states that the state of childhood is blessed with happiness, freedom, the innocent faith and hope that flutter in the child's breasts. He feels a sense of gratefulness not because of these things which are most worthy of praise and gratefulness, but rather for the doubt that engulfs his mind regarding the external objects of the world. The shadowy recollections of our childhood life are what enable us to question the outward things. And it is in this state of doubt, that we can see beyond the veil of the external world and realise the ultimate truth of life. In these moments of truth when we see beyond the illusion and compare this to the past glory of childhood, man feels guilty. The poet is grateful to the period of childhood, because the truths woken in the period can never be perished by society and adulthood. Thus in these tranquil moments, our souls can have a sight of the immortal sea, from which we have come into this world. In a state of joy, he urges the birds to sing and all the creatures to participate in the "gladness of the May" (175). Though nothing can bring back the radiance with which the child viewed nature, though the state of childhood cannot be back, yet he will not grieve. He will rather bask in the glory of what remains behind, in the faith of immortality of the soul and what the mature years have given him, which is a philosophic mind.

In the final stanza, the poet says that he now has no more of that vision of the past with which he had viewed his childhood; rather he now has a different experience and a different outlook with which he approaches nature. His perception of nature is now more sober and philosophical which has compensated the loss of his childhood vision. This makes him love nature and appreciate natural beauty all the more for now even the simplest of objects in nature can stir him to thought. He can perceive something noble even in the most common objects of nature. He now is not just fascinated by the outward beauty but has a deeper insight and understanding when the simplest of flowers can give rise to thoughts that are "too deep for tears" (204).

1.4.2 Structure of the poem:

The poem is in the form of a Pindaric ode. Consisting of eleven stanzas, the poem is an irregular ode as the length of the lines and stanzas, and the metre varies throughout the poem. The poem is mainly written in iambic meter. The changing length of the lines, rhyme and style is in sync with the changing ideas developed throughout the poem. The narration of the poem is in the style of an interior monologue. The poem combines aspects of Coleridge's Conversation poems, religious sentiments of the Bible and aspects of elegy. The poem is an ode, that is, it contains celebration of its subject, but the celebration is also mixed with questioning which hinders the continuity of the poem. Now let us take a look into some of the important themes of the poem.

1.4.3 Wordsworth's concept of childhood and immortality of the soul:

In childhood man is sensitive as a wind harp to all natural influences. Wordsworth explains this sensitiveness to nature by the doctrine that the child comes straight from the Creator of nature. Wordsworth sums up his philosophy of childhood in the poem. His conception of childhood expressed in the poem may possibly be indebted to the poet Vaughan, who more than a century before, had proclaimed in "The Retreat" the same doctrine. Each poem opens with a description of the world as it appears in beauty to the child. Then, as the child grows up to manhood, there comes the gradual absorption of the spirit in the consideration of the material things of life, though the memories of childhood occur frequently, when things appeared in "the glory and freshness of a dream" (5). However though the poems are similar in their substance, they differ a little in their conclusions. Wordsworth is grateful for the trace of the childhood vision that still remains, and that nature, with all its beauties, still means much to him. Vaughan's poetry however, gives us the hope of returning again to the joy of childhood.

Wordsworth in the poem idealizes the state of childhood, as the child remains closer to the glorious and divine realm which is the heaven.

The natural instincts and the pleasures of childhood are the true standards of a man's happiness in his life. The poet expresses his belief of the pre-existence of the human soul. In the poet's view, the child has a more sublime vision because the child has come from heaven. The child is spiritually superior to the adult because he has not yet become caught up in the worldly pleasures. The childhood vision, however fades away as he matures into an adult and gets caught up in the societal conventions. Wordsworth refers growing older as the "prison house" of the youth. The poem provides an example of the proximity and estrangement which he observes in the stages of childhood and adulthood. Wordsworth addresses the child as a "seer", "Mighty prophet" and a philosopher who knows and understands the deep truths of life as he has a vision of the divine glory. The poet notes that a fragment of the childhood vision is retained in the adult. Childhood becomes the psychological and emotional foundation of adulthood, but that state becomes unreachable for the speaker.

Certain critics are of the opinion that Wordsworth provides an ahistorical and apolitical conception of childhood, which is in contrast to Blake's deeply contextualized conception of childhood. He depoliticizes the child by making the child universal, rather than specific to a particular historical moment. The Wordsworthian child is the product of the adult's nostalgia and memory as much as he or she is the product of nature. In Wordsworth's view, the child's divine vision is what enables the child to enjoy the beauty of nature in a way that adults are not capable of doing so. Thus, the notion of childhood is dealt with by the Romantic poets in various ways, so as to make it one of the central themes of Romantic poetry.

1.4.4 The changing conception of nature:

The poem clearly conveys a changing attitude towards nature as the poet moves from childhood to maturity. This change is evident in the first stanza itself, when the poet laments the loss of the divine vision which had enabled him to view nature in different light in his

childhood. All natural objects appeared dreamlike as if they had been clothed in “celestial light”. However, as the child grows up, this dreamlike quality and the divine vision too fades away. He gives out the reason for this loss, stating that the child carries the vivid memory and glorious vision of the heaven, the perfect and ideal realm from which he had come. This enables him to perceive nature with a sublime vision. However, as the child grows up, the earthly pleasures and comforts lure him away and he loses that divine vision. As an adult the poet is aware of the beauty of the natural world, but he can no longer approach it the way he had done as a child. This loss is however compensated by achieving a different approach to nature, that which is marked by sobriety. He gains a more philosophical outlook towards nature in his mature years which enables him to sympathise with his fellow men and approach even the most ordinary objects of nature with a profound understanding.

Check Your Progress

1. To which poet, is Wordsworth’s philosophy of childhood in the poem ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality’ indebted to?
2. In the poem ‘Ode on the Intimations of Immortality’, what compensates the loss of the childhood vision?
3. In which volume was the poem ‘Ode on the Intimations of Immortality’ published?

1.5. Conclusion

Now summing up, we have seen that in the “Intimations of Immortality”, Wordsworth gives an expression of the loss of the childhood vision and the growth of the philosophical self. “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge”, on the other hand, highlights a different aspect of the city. The poem moves away from the usual images of the city, its commercial and material aspects and instead considers the city as a part of the natural world. The city, basking in the morning sunlight, in its quiet and peaceful state, provided a sense of calm and peace to the poet that is deeper than any that he has ever felt.

Thus, this unit introduced us to the poet William Wordsworth and specifically with two of his poems namely, 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' and 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'. Now, in the next unit, we will be introduced to Lord Byron, with an indepth analysis of *Don Juan*, Canto XI.

1.6 Glossary

Upon Westminster Bridge

Westminster Bridge: is a road-and-foot-traffic bridge over the River Thames in London, linking Westminster on the west side and Lambeth on the east side.

Majesty: grandeur, splendour

Smokeless air: clean and clear atmosphere

Steep: bathe

Glideth: flows

Still: motionless, passive

Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

A time: early childhood

Apparelled: clothed

Tabor: a small drum like musical instrument

Earth: foster mother

Fretted: vexed, confused

Sallies: outbursts of affectionate feelings

1.7 Suggested Readings

Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the Life of the English Speaking World*. New Delhi: AITBS Publishers, 2003.

Bowra, C. M. *The Romantic Imagination*. London: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Web References:

Sucksmith, Harvey Peter. "Ultimate Affirmation: A Critical Analysis of Wordsworth's Sonnet, 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge', and the Image of the City in 'The Prelude'".

The Yearbook of English Studies 6 (1976): 113-119.

Hartung, Charles V. "Wordsworth on Westminster Bridge: Paradox or Harmony". *College English* 13.4 (1952): 201-203.

1.8 Suggested Essay Type Questions

1. Present a note on the form of the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"
2. Critically discuss Wordsworth's concept of childhood and immortality of soul as articulated in "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood".
3. Nature and human life are inseparably interrelated in the poetry of Wordsworth. Discuss.
4. Present a critical evaluation of the treatment of the concept of nature in the prescribed two poems of William Wordsworth.
5. How does Wordsworth treat the subject of nature in the context of growing urbanization in the poem "Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge"?
6. Write a critical essay on the treatment of Man in the prescribed poem of William Wordsworth.

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BLOCK IV: UNIT- III

LORD BYRON'S *DON JUAN*

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Lord Byron: A brief biographical sketch and a note on his major poetical works

3.2.1 His Life

3.2.2 His Works

3.3 *Don Juan*: The Poem

3.3.1 An overview of the development of story in the earlier cantos of the poem

3.4 Critical Appreciation of *Don Juan* Canto XI

3.5 Character Analysis of Don Juan

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

3.7 Key Words

3.8 Terminal Questions

3.9 References/Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Have a glimpse of Lord Byron's life and his major poetical works
- Formulate an idea about the development of story in the earlier cantos of *Don Juan*
- Critically appreciate *Don Juan*, Canto 11

- Know about the type of ‘heroes’ Byron created, famously called ‘Byronic Heroes’
- Assess the character of Don Juan

3.1 INTRODUCTION

George Gordon Lord Byron conventionally clubbed together along with Keats and Shelley as the second generation of English Romantic poets, was the most famous and the largest selling poet in the first decades of the 19th century. This second generation of Romantic poets differed from the ‘Lake Poets’ in the sense that their writings were inspired more by modern day issues such as politics and were more socially driven. Instead of glorifying nature, they preferred to record their resentment as liberal revolutionaries by staying within the society itself. Such issues are reflected in Byron’s writings as well. His poetry is informed not by nature or by the contemplation of nature, but by public life and recent history, by British politics and by the feverish European nationalisms stirred by the French Revolution. Byron assumed the public role of a commentator on his times. He was at once a social critic and an object of criticism, a brooding misanthrope and an icon of fashion. In addition, Byron was a scornful critique of the philosophical affectations of his contemporaries, stressing wit and common sense as against imagination.

3.2 LORD BYRON: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND A NOTE ON HIS

MAJOR POETICAL WORKS-

3.2.1 His Life - George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) was born in London to Catherine Gordon of Gight, an impoverished Scottish heiress and Captain John Byron, a scoundrel and a fortune-hunting widower, who squandered away his wife’s money and even left her. He was raised by his mother and a Presbyterian nurse, who imbibed in him a strong fascination for Calvinist doctrines of innate evil and predestination. As a child, Byron went on to become a very good swimmer in spite of the

natural deformity of his left foot that he was born with. He also became a free boxer at thirteen. However, he lived a life of debauchery of a young lord alternatively between Cambridge and London. All his life, Byron cultivated the somber, romantic and passionate side of his disposition, which later became known by a byword, 'Byronic'. Byron's invariable motive seems to have been self dramatization and therefore, his 'Byronic' temperament is what he imparted to his male protagonists also. In 1816, Byron was dishonourably exiled from England after his affair with his half-sister, Augusta was discovered. He never returned to England again. He spent his last eight years abroad, largely in Italy, where he became associated with Shelley who had a lasting influence on him. Byron now changed into a disillusioned man who recognized his true character, and who, though cynical and pessimistic, was at least honest in his unhappy outlook on society.

3.2.2 His Works- Byron's first major achievement was his savage critique on the literary culture of his time, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), a satirical poem in the style of Pope, which lampooned even Wordsworth and Coleridge - dismissing them all in the phrase 'the scribbling crew'. It was followed by the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), a poem based on his travels which made him immensely popular. His wanderings on the Continent during his exile are chronicled in the third (1816) and fourth (1818) cantos of *Child Harold*. The poem is about travelling, and mixes a response to what he sees in the external world with his responses to his internal world. Byron refers to himself as a 'wanderer, or 'roamer', and 'restless', and compares himself to a bird that was always kept in a cage by society. Many people think that it is the best example of Byron as a quintessentially Romantic poet, melancholy, brooding and alone. During these years on the Continent, Byron also composed some of his longer poems viz., *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816) and *Mazeppa* (1819) and his dramas *Manfred* and *Cain*. His Turkish tales like *The Corsair*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *Lara* and *The Giaour* are influenced by the age's interest in non-European cultures and histories or the 'Orient'. Byron also composed a large

number of lyrics, most of them mediocre in quality; and he added several great satirical poems, the most notable of which are *Beppo* (1819), *The Vision of Judgement* (1822), directed mainly against Robert Southey, and, the longest of all, *Don Juan*.

Check Your Progress -1

1. To which generation of Romantic poets does Byron belong ?
2. What are the main issues in Byron's writings ?
3. Why was Byron exiled from England ?

3.3 DON JUAN: THE POEM

Byron began to write *Don Juan* in July 1818 and the poem had never finished until he died in 1824. It was issued in portions just as he composed it. Until his death, Byron used the poem as the channel of expression for his past experiences, for miscellaneous pictures of society and human life as he observed it. It was a poem without a plan, and that is why, it was very well suited for the purpose. The poem consists of sixteen cantos and an unfinished seventeenth canto. It is written in ottava rima, an eight line stanza, and the rhyme scheme is "ABABABCC".

Don Juan was intended as a satire on abuses of the 'present states of society'. It is a long, digressive satire on the hypocrisies of high society, the false glory associated with war, politics, contemporary poets etc. It is based on the legend of Spanish of Don Juan, a habitual seducer of women but Byron here reverses the tradition by turning Juan into an inexperienced youth who is rather seduced by various women, instead of seducing them. On 25 December 1822, having finished twelve cantos, Byron wrote to John Murray, his publisher, giving a sober and cogent statement of his purpose behind his writing of the poem that-Don Juan would be known by and by, for what it was intended i.e, a satire on abuses of the present states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice. For that, Byron claimed it could be now and then voluptuous but that was inevitable.

However, its scope is wider than that of political and social satire. In this poem, all of Byron's conceptions of liberty, personal, moral, political and Intellectual - meet in a grand symphony. This liberty is not the mere desire of a young aristocrat to shake off restraint; it is liberty of the mind, a release of creative energy, freedom from the slavery of the stock response and the conventional attitude.

Don Juan is written in the form of a vast monologue, in the course of which a story gets told. But quite a number of digressions like the writer's observations on different aspects of society interrupt the main narrative. In his digressions, Byron speaks about whatever most concerns him at that moment. Byron here assumes a playful persona of a showman-narrator but he often abandons him and speaks in his own person, not as a fictional "editor" but as a human being, who feels deeply about some facet of life or who has some honest doubts about the world and himself.

Basically, it is a sort of picaresque novel in verse. The protagonist, as in the picaresque novel, has many wanderings and adventures in many countries which is the pivotal theme of the poem. In fact, according to John Addington Symonds, Juan's biography is the thread on which Byron hangs descriptions, episodes, satirical digressions, and reflective passages.

The poem begins with a Dedication and Preface in which Byron speaks out against his contemporary rivals Southey and Wordsworth who according to Byron had sold themselves to the King. They had become a part of the Establishment. Byron feels that they wrote only to become the most celebrated poets of their age, but only posterity will decide whether one can achieve poetic immortality or not.

The narrative of *Don Juan* begins not in *medias res*, as is expected in traditional epics, but with the birth of Don Juan. Though cast in an epic form, *Don Juan* systematically attacks the major conventions of epic poetry as set forth by neoclassic criticism. The action of an epic poem was expected to be one, entire, and great; the

action of this poem is of a purely episodic nature. The epic hero should be virtuous and constant to some great design; whereas it is seen that Don Juan is the average man, drifting with every circumstances. The poem is in fact classed as a mock-epic. A mock-epic poem adopts the elaborate form and ceremonious style of the epic genre, but applies it to narrate a commonplace subject matter. Moreover, the heroic figure is not a worthy one. Similarly, in Don Juan also, the protagonist is rather passive and lacks the seriousness of an Epic hero.

3.3.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STORY IN THE EARLIER

CANTOS (CANTOS I TO X) OF THE POEM

Don Juan can be divided into two quite sharply distinguished sections, Cantos I through IX which present a series of picaresque adventures, and the remaining dealing with Juan's English experiences.

Canto 1 deals with the birth and early life of the protagonist. Born in Seville, Spain to Don Jose and a widow named Inez, Juan is brought up by his mother in great austerity: Half of his days were passed at church and the other between his tutors, confessor and mother. This recalls Byron's own upbringing by his mother and the Presbyterian nurse. When Don Juan is sixteen years old, a young friend of his mother, named Donna Julia, married to a man of fifty, Don Alfonso, falls in love with him. One night Don Alfonso sees them in a compromising situation and, as a result, Julia is put into a nunnery whereas Juan is sent to travel through European countries by his mother. In this Canto, Byron's revolt against the social barriers of marriage is conspicuous. He seems to advocate the idea that marriage without love cannot be sustained for long. And hence, socially sanctioned marriage alone cannot guarantee peace in conjugal life.

In the second Canto, Juan embarks in Cadiz, Spain with his tutor, Pedrillo. Here begins Juan's picaresque adventures to many places. His ship wrecks and some of the crew and passengers, including Juan, have to survive for some days in a boat. Byron makes a long description

of their woes and Juan's courage during that peril. In fact, the ship wreck scenes abound with the most vivid and realistic scenes in the poem. Beginning to starve, the survivors decide that someone must be sacrificed and the lot falls on Juan's tutor. They had previously eaten Juan's dog, a gift from his father. Nevertheless, Juan refuses to eat his tutor and his decision will prove wise, for all the ones who ate him die of indigestion. The few who survived drowned because they could not swim.

Don Juan bears some of the personality traits of the writer. So, just like Byron, he is portrayed as a good swimmer. Having swum to the shore, Juan he is rescued by a young lady, called Haidee and her maid. He is kept in a cave and Haidee and her maid Zoe bring him clothes and food daily. They are on a Greek Island and Haidee, the only child of a rich pirate and slave-trader keeps Juan in secret lest her father should sell him. The two soon fall in love. Haidee's heart is completely lost to Juan and Byron describes their love in paradisiacal scenery, conforming to the romantic taste love and nature.

The third and fourth cantos describe what ensues after Haidee's father Lambro comes home unexpectedly. Since a report spread on the island avouched Lambro's death Haidee, his sole heir, lived in her father's house together with Juan who play the master's role. When Lambro arrives what he sees makes him furious, people eating, dancing and singing in his gardens while Haidee and Juan eat richly in his house. He asks one of the musicians the reason for the festivity and the answer is that the master of the island is dead and his heir and her lover were then ruling all the affairs. Lambro enters the house through a private and secret gate and getting close to Haidee's room observe the couple without being noticed. Waking up at the sight of her father, Haidee confesses her guilt and begs Lambro's pardon, but in vain. Juan is sent to sea, wounded and chained, as a slave. Haidee becomes very sick. She gets mad and for twelve days and nights she doesn't sleep and finally dies. Meanwhile Juan finds himself on a boat with Italian slaves.

Cantos V and VI contain descriptions of the slave market and Juan's experiences in the Sultana's court. They arrive in the Dardanelles

from where they will be sent to the slave market in Constantinople. There they are exhibited in order to be purchased. A black eunuch buys Juan and another fellow, an Englishman, and takes them to the sultan's Palace. There the eunuch makes Juan dress like a woman and introduces him to the sultana. She had seen him on the market and, having found him attractive, had told Baba, the eunuch, to buy him. Gulbeyaz, the sultana, wants Juan's love and asks him if he can love. Still remembering Haidee, Juan gets very angry and answers that he would not serve a Sultana's sensual fantasy. The Sultana felt extremely insulted. Baba tried to dissuade her from her revenging purposes, but in vain. He then helped Juan and his friend to escape from the Sultana's power and palace. These Cantos depict Byron's interest in the Oriental lands and culture.

In Cantos VII and VIII, again there is a change of locale. Leaving the palace, the two friends find themselves in a battlefield. The Russians are besieging Ismail and Juan and Johnson surrender to the Russians and fight together with them. In this part Byron invokes Homer in order to relate the battle that is going to happen between Russians and Turks. In this narration, Byron poetically conveys all his horror and aversion for the atrocities of war. The Russians triumph, the Sultan and his five sons die stoically. Juan saves a ten-year old girl from some wild Tartars, named Leila, and because of his bravery is praised and taken to Russia. He had vowed to take care of Leila forever and so he takes her to Russia with him.

In the ninth and tenth cantos, Don Juan's experiences in the Russian queen, Catherine's court are detailed. He had been sent there as a messenger with the news of the surrender of mail. In Russia, Catharine II, who was forty-eight years old (according to Byron) falls in love with Juan and takes him as her favourite. Suddenly he gets sick due to the cold climate and the doctor recommends a change of climate. Catherine sends him to Britain on a political mission. He and Leila go through Poland, Germany, Holland and finally arrive in England.

Check Your Progress-2

1. How will you read Byron's work *Don Juan* in the light of some of his autobiographical elements or personal choices?
2. In what ways is *Don Juan* a variation on the Epic form?
3. Narrate the incidents in Juan's life prior to his arrival in London.

3.4 CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF *DON JUAN* CANTO XI

The English experiences of the protagonist form the core of Canto 11 which continues till the last unfinished canto. However, there is little action in this part of the poem and a great deal of satirizing. The poem exposes many deficiencies of the society in which Byron lived. The knowledge and experience of the travelled, observant man of the world, the vivacity and cleverness of the writer, the firm grasp of actualities and clear vision of a social critic— all these qualities of Byron seem to merge in the creation of *Don Juan*.

Canto XI of this poem was written in October 1822 Juan arrives in London and observes the society around him. However, the Canto doesn't begin directly with a description about Juan. Rather it begins with Byron's vehement satire on and distrust of metaphysical discussions. In the garb of the unnamed narrative voice, he dismisses George Berkeley, an Anglican Bishop's ideas on the supremacy of spirit over matter. In Stanza V, Byron implies the world to be so overwhelmingly a province of matter, that metaphysics will bring little light to its problems. He is completely opposed to the idea that external reality exists only in man's mind and that is why he leaves off any further discussion on the subject. This kind of satire on religious or metaphysical matters recalls his distaste for any kind of philosophic idealism- Platonic, Coleridgean etc which is also dealt in other cantos of the poem like Canto 1 where he describes Plato as "a bore, a charlatan, a coxcomb" serving no good for the people.

After this digression, Byron moves on to his original subject i.e., Don Juan's adventures in the new city. Juan first views London

from Shooter's Hill. Initially, he was very naïve and was greatly enthusiastic to know about the city. Walking behind his carriage, he is "lost in wonder of a great nation". He praises the beauty, honesty and freedom that prevail in the city but little did he know about the hidden perils. There was a gang of highway robbers lay hidden nearby, one of whom launched an attack on Don Juan. He was threatened to pay money or lose his life. Juan finally killed the man in self-defense. This was the kind of welcome Juan received in the city of London. He passed through south-east London after killing poor Tom. In Stanza VIII, Juan describes London streets "ferment in full activity", bustling with "the creak of wheels" and the "busy hum of cities". In this stanza, Byron sets up the idea of London as Hell, which he dilates upon for the rest of the canto. He moved through the city and found London as no substitute for Eden which soon deepens into the corollary that it is more an adequate substitute for Hell. Stanza XXII continues Byron's distaste for other aspects of city life like the crush and squalor of English transport, whether urban or rural.

In his description of Poor Tom, Byron gives us a real picture of the Underworld as mainly satirical of the Great world of soldiers and politicians, who have failed to eliminate the menace of highway robbery. The robbery attempt depicts that one of England's disadvantages is that a gentleman may be "exposed to lose his life as well as breeches" due to these robbers. The robbery scene, in which Juan encounters Tom, Byron introduces the reader with the "slang", the type of language used by the Underworld. He anticipated Tom's idiom when he recorded that the robber was wounded in his "pudding" (11.13.4), and after Tom expires, Byron adopts this idiom himself, writing that the dead man was once a kiddy upon town, A thorough varmint, and a real swell, Full flash, all fancy, until fairly diddled, His pockets first, and then his body riddled. (11. 17. 5). Juan passes through south-east London after killing Poor Tom, and is approaching Westminster Bridge via Greenwich, Newington and Kennington, places referred to as "all other tons" in Stanza XX. 'Tons' also implies "exclusive idiom" and Byron is

commencing his further satire on London as a place of both petty and tyrannical elitism.

Byron also lists the names of several places that Juan passes through giving us a vivid picture of the city of London at that time. The Poets' Corner in Westminster, the Priory and Hospital of St. Mary Bethlehem, The Mansion House i.e. the official residence of Lord Mayor, King's Bench Prison, the west end of Pall Mall, one of the most desirable streets in London at that time- all find mention in the narration of the unnamed narrative voice which describes Juan's sojourn through the city. In Stanza XXIX, the narrator culminates his description of the different places and comes back to Juan-

Don Juan, our young diplomatic sinner, Pursu'd his path, and drove
past some hotels,

St. James's Palace and St. James's 'Hells.' (11.21.6)

'Hells' here stand for gaming houses or gambling dens nearby Pall Mall and St. James's street, suggestive again of the vices that abounded in the great city. Later, Don Juan who was young, handsome and accomplished excites the curiosity of the governing classes. His manners, elegance, politeness everything indicated a person of high rank. So, he is received into the English court with the usual wonder and admiration at his "looks, dress and mien".

The women in the poem *Don Juan* are many and varied, but the common factor is that they also have great admiration for and Juan want to initiate a relationship with him. In this Canto too, Juan becomes an object of romantic interest among married and unmarried women-

He was a bachelor, which is a matter
Of import both to virgin and to bride,
The Former's hymeneal hopes to flatter;
And (should she not hold fast by love or pride)
'Tis also of some moment to the latter: (11.46.1)

Women admired his dress and mothers of unmarried daughters looking

for prospective husbands inquired about his income: which betrays the materialistic bent of mind of the people. This forms a subject of mocking satire by Byron. He also ridicules the 'Bluestockings', the name for female intellectuals who are only interested in a superficial parade of learning. They wanted to engage in literary discussions with Juan who scarcely knew how to answer them. However, he made his way out of such discussions quite smoothly with a "A modest confidence and calm assurance" (11. 52. 2)

Byron also satirises the politicians and the hypocrisies of the aristocratic society. Real political power in England is defined as lying with the bureaucrats and bankers- who manipulate the politicians. They are criticized in Stanza XXXV where they are compared to hawks of prey pouncing upon a 'woodland songster'. There is self-interest, manipulation and hypocrisy in them because they are interested in men of Juan's class only for what they can get out of them.

Through his use of digression in this Canto, Byron also passes comments on some of his contemporary poets like his tutor John Jackson, "the greatest living poet" (11. 55.1), who had to defend his title three times in eight years. He also mentions about Sir Walter, Moore, Campbell, George Crowly, Henry Hart Milman, Wordsworth, Coleridge etc. - poets who lived a few years before Byron or some who were his contemporaries, in order to stress the fact that no one possesses the judgment to tell know who, from his own generation, will gain poetic immortality. In this Canto itself, there is Byron's famous comment on Keats who he says was "kill'd off by one critic". This refers to the real incident of Keats' death which is believed to have occurred after a despairingly harsh review on his *Endymion* was published in The Quarterly Review. Keats was driven into consumption and eventually he died.

After summing up this digression, Byron resumes his narration of his hero's activities in London city. Juan spends his time in a superficial manner in the company of the aristocratic society: living among poets and the Bluestockings, pursuing business in the mornings:

lunching, lounging and boxing in the afternoons and dining and dancing in the evenings. All these point toward an artificial and expensive life style of the London elites. London had become a debased version of Eden in that everything about it became very artificial. It was no longer a place with no genuine virtue but only an appearance of virtue.

Finally in stanzas LXXVI-LXXXV, Byron looks back over a period of eight years, and in five stanzas beginning with the word “Where”, he asks what has become of various persons, some of them are well known in history, others known to Byron himself. He laments the loss of eminent figures like Napoleon, Queen Caroline referred to as the “unhappy Queen”, Samuel Whitbread, a Whig politician and many others. He celebrates them but now all have changed, not for the better, or have died. Again in the stanzas beginning with “I have seen”, he speaks about other changes that have occurred, none of them good.

In stanza LXXXVI of the poem, Byron gives an advice to Don Juan to not become complacent. He tells Juan to seize the day and make the most out of each day. In a satiric tone, Byron even adds that Juan should be hypocritical and cautious and “be not what you seem, but what you always see.” (11.86.7). By this, he seems to be implying that hypocrisy and deceit are the important qualities for surviving in a morally degenerated society like London. However, towards the end Byron again shelves the narration about Don Juan and muses on how he will continue Juan story in his upcoming cantos. The Canto ends with Byron’s strong declaration of practicing free thought in whatever he undertakes to write further. He will never be subservient to the dictates of the governing agencies. Being quite a revolutionary, Byron pronounces-

By those who love to say that white is black,

So much the better! – I may stand alone,

But would not change my free thoughts for a throne. (11. 90. 6)

Check Your Progress 3

1. Comment on the beginning of Canto XI of *Don Juan*.
2. What were Juan's initial thoughts on arriving in London?
Examine how such impressions underwent a change in course of his entourage.
3. Attempt a critical analysis of *Don Juan Canto XI*.

3.5 CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF DON JUAN

Don Juan is in many ways a different version of the traditional epic heroes. In fact, he is more akin to the "Byronic" conception of heroes- a male personality which is a brooding, solitary, somewhat misanthropic figure, defying nature and hiding past secrets, mainly of a sexual nature. While traditional literary heroes are usually marked by their valour, commitment to righteous political and social causes, honesty, courage etc., Byron's heroes are defined by rather different character traits, many of which are partially or even entirely opposed to standard definitions of heroism. These heroes tend to have the following personality traits of cynicism, absolute disrespect for authority, past trauma, intelligence, dark humor, self- mysteriousness, sexual attractiveness and a sense of being exiled or outcast both physically and emotionally from the larger social world. Byronic heroes can be understood as being rather akin, then, to anti-heroes. They are often committed not to action on behalf of typically noble causes of "good," but, instead, to the cause of their own self-interest, or to combating prevailing and oppressive social and political establishments.

These heroes were in fact modeled on Byron's own nature. He was singularly handsome due to which accounted for his popularity among women and men too. He led a very dissipated life, due to which he even had to face exile. He had a disposition for travel, adventure and freedom and an utter distaste for outmoded social conventions and restraints from the Government. Byronic heroes are therefore repetitions of Byron himself as they personify many characteristic traits of the writer himself.

Don Juan can also be considered a typical Byronic hero in the sense that he is handsome, attractive and adventurous. He is also a very popular among women. His sexual precariousness is another distinctive feature which makes him different from other heroes. At a young age of sixteen, he becomes involved in a relationship with an older woman named Donna Julia. When his illicit love is discovered, he flees. Thus, he fulfills one more requirement of a Byronic hero i.e., in the past, he has committed a sexual misdeed which needs to be kept under wraps. He follows his mother's wish to undertake a sea voyage in different countries of Europe. Moreover, Juan has relationships with many other women thereafter which highlight his promiscuity. In the English cantos after Canto XI also, we find him involved in relationships with Lady Amundeville, Duchess of Fitz Fulke who carnally desire him. However, all the women in his life belong to high rank and it is they who first pursue Juan and make him enmeshed in some uncontrollable situation. In this way, Byron turns the traditional Don Juan legend upside down in which Juan is notorious as the archwomanizer. Though an erotic lover, his hero is more the pursued rather than the pursuer.

Byron here tells us about the vicissitudes of a young hero in order to criticize the rank and corruption prevailing in the society. His Don Juan does not consciously reject social values and conventions; instead he becomes trapped in the hypocritical codes of the society. There is also no genuine love to be found in such a debased and corrupted European society. Byron's Juan is somehow passive because he does not tell his own story but his story is used as the main device employed by Byron to expose the hollowness and deficiencies of the age and society he lived in. Don Juan is indeed the protagonist whose futile struggles to find love, value and beauty in an artificial and corrupt civilization helped Byron achieve his goal of satirizing many aspects of his contemporary society.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you must have come to know about the kind of poetry Byron wrote. He was one of the leading poets

of the Romantic Movement but his outlook differed from that of his predecessors, mainly the first generation of English Romantic poets. His popularity rests on many poems like *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, which are well known for the creation of a brand of heroes called Byronic heroes, known for their revolutionary and defiant tendencies. In fact, much of Byron's poetry can be read in the light of his revolt for social customs and authoritarian constraints. In the poem *Don Juan* also, he attacked the conventional social set-up with much vehemence. Byron's constant search for freedom and anti-Establishment notions in his poetry distinguish him as one of the greatest Romantic poets.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Canto- It is a form of division of long poems, especially the epic. Several such poems are divided into Cantos like *The Divine Comedy* and *Don Juan*.

Ottava Rima- It is a stanza form containing eight lines and rhyming *abababcc*. Originally used for long poems on heroic themes, but later appropriated to mock-heroic works.

Don Juan- A legendary fictional pleasure- seeker and womanizer. He was first given literary personality through by Tirso de Molina in his tragic drama *El burlador de Sevilla*.

3.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does Byron satirize the London society of his time in his poem *Don Juan* Canto XI?
2. Critically analyze the character of Don Juan.
3. Write a note on the style of narration of *Don Juan*

3.9 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READING

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BLOCK-IV UNIT-IV

P.B. SHELLEY’S “ODE TO THE WEST WIND”

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1.0 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be familiarized with

- The features of the Romantic Poetry
- Ode as a form of poetry
- Life and works of P. B. Shelley
- Critical evaluation of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier three Units you have studied Medieval, Renaissance and also Metaphysical poetry. You have also studied Milton’s *Paradise*

Lost. In this Unit you will be familiarized with one of the most prominent Romantic poets of English literature namely P. B. Shelley. In the first unit, we will talk about the romantic period and the kind of poetry written during that period. This unit discusses the nature of ode as a type of poetry and the life and works of the poet P. B. Shelley with special reference to the poem “Ode to the West Wind”. This unit also throws light upon the theme, structure and criticism of the particular poem. An analysis of the literary criticism of the poem has been given at the end of the unit.

Since you have already been familiarized with the background and features of Romantic Poetry in the comprehensive discussion given in Block-IV Unit-I there is no need to repeat the same things twice. So this discussion will focus on the poem “Ode to the West Wind”.

1.2. Ode: An Introduction

Before beginning a discussion on this poem it is essential to make you familiarize with this particular form of poetry called ode. The concerned poem “Ode to the West Wind” is an ode in form. As both the poems in this unit are written in this form, you may have an interest in learning about the features of an ode in brief.

1.2.1. What is an ode?

Ode is defined as “a long lyric poem that is serious in subject and treatment, elevated in style, and elaborate in its stanzaic structure.” (Abrams, M. H. and Harpham, G. Galt: *A Glossary of Literary Terms*) According to this definition, an ode is (a) a lyric poem; (b) a serious poem in its treatment of the subject; (c) it is elevated in style; and (d) elaborate in its stanzaic structure. In other words, an ode is a very exalted form of poetry written on lofty themes. It is written in a serious and sublime manner on a serious subject. Odes are usually written as very long poems consisting of a succession of elaborate stanzas in lines of varying length and meter. The term ‘ode’ comes from the Greek word *oide* or *aoide*, which was derived from the Greek word ‘aeidein’, meaning “to sing.”

1.2.2. Origin of ode

Odes originated in the Greek dramas. The Greek classical poet Pindar (517–438 BC) established this type of narrative in verse. He modelled his odes on the typical style of the songs by the Chorus in the ancient Greek dramas. His stanzas were highly complicated. He patterned his stanzas in three different sets:

- i) *Strophe*, the chorus chanted this while moving in a dance form to the left.
- ii) *Antistrophe*, the chorus chanted this while moving in a dance form to the right.
- iii) *Epode*, The chorus uttered this while standing in a silent mode neither moving to the left nor to the right.

1.2.3. Types of ode

Odes have taken varied forms on the basis of the requirements and developments of trends in the recent times. The following odes suggest the growth and development of odes in literature:

- i) The Regular ode: The regular odes are also known as Pindaric odes. These odes closely imitate Pindar in all forms while patterning all the strophies and antistrophes in one form and all the epodes in another form. Ben Jonson introduced this type of ode in English through his ode “To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison” (1629). The Pindaric odes were written with an aim to admire or, glorify a personality or an event.
- ii) The Irregular ode: This ode stood in stark contrast to the Pindaric ode. Abraham Cowley introduced this ode in 1656. Cowley imitated the Pindaric style but disregarded the structure. He arranged each stanza on its own pattern with variables in the length, number and the rhyme scheme. This type of ode allows freedom to the writer to shift the structure according to its subject and mood.

iii) The Horatian Ode: The term Horatian itself refers to the style of writing odes by the Roman poet Horace. Horatian odes are quiet, peaceful, meditative and colloquial. In this regard, they are different from the Pindaric odes. They are simple and even shorter than the Pindaric ones. They are homostrophic in meaning, they are written in a single repeated stanza form. John Keats's "Ode to Autumn" is an example of this kind.

Pindaric odes are generally written in glorification or as eulogy of a person or an event. Under the influence of Pindaric odes at the earliest stage in English literature, odes were generally written with an aim to glorify the life of persons. For instance, John Dryden's "To the Pious Memory of the Accomplish'd Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew (1686) eulogizes the person Anne Killigrew, (1660 to 1685) a British poet. Similarly, Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty" reflects the intimacy and the philosophical dimension of an ode. The following stanza explores all the possible features of an ode:

Serene will be our days and bright
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an erring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed;
Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need. (Line 17-24)

In this stanza, the poet develops the idea that love and joy ought to exist with duty which will make the moments pleasurable. The stanza establishes ode as meditative and passionate with vigour and freshness in terms of its representation.

The romantic odes are intensely subjective revelations of one's life. It aims at resolving the dilemma of one's both eternal and external crisis of life and behaviour.

Check Your Progress

Q.1. Answer the following in one sentence only:

a) Define an Ode.

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b) Write briefly on the origin of odes?

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c) Who is associated with the introduction of Regular or, Pindaric form of ode in English?

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d) Which English poet is responsible for the introduction of irregular form of ode in English?

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e) Mention an example of Horatian odes in English.

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Q.2. Attempt the following questions in brief:

a) What are the essential characteristics of an ode?

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b) What is the basic difference between the Pindaric ode and the Irregular ode?

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c) Write a short note on the nature of English romantic odes.

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1.3. 0. P.B. Shelley: Life and Poetry

Before going to study Shelley’s poetry it is necessary to collect some information about his life. So in this section, an account of Shelley’s life and his poetic career is discussed in detail.

The learners are expected to be well aware of the basic features of Shelley’s poetry in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the prescribed poem.

1.3.1. Life of Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in 1792 in Sussex. He was educated at Eton and Oxford. It is quite an interesting fact about his early days that he developed great eccentricity of character earlier. His interests were quite different from that of his contemporaries. He often visited the graveyards, studied alchemy and read fanciful fiction. He was expelled from Oxford with Hogg in 1811 for publishing a pamphlet entitled “The Necessity of Atheism”. He became disturbed but more than that he became restless and he eloped with Harriet Westbrook and married her in Edinburgh. But it turned out to be an unhappy marriage. In the year 1812 his angry outlook and his revolutionary psyche compelled him to fight for the liberation of the Irish people. In the same year William Godwin became an acquaintance of this spirited young man. But again his restlessness worked as the reason behind his elopement with Godwin’s daughter Mary. The relationship existed for long and finally attained settlement after the suicidal death of Harriet in 1816. In 1818 he settled in Italy, never to return to England. Rome’s lyrical nature intoxicated Shelley’s passion of writing. All his masterpiece

writings were the result of this phase. But fortune never made Shelley remain happy for long. He was drowned at sea near Leghorn in 1822.

1.3.2. Shelley's Literary Career

Shelley's earliest poetic work was *Queen Mab* (1813) which was immature and was attacked due to his crude atheism. Then came *Alastor, the Spirit of Solitude* (1816) which is written in blank verse projecting the poet's quest for ideal poetry. Shelley produced his master poems after his return to Italy where he published *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-20). The poem deals with the character of Prometheus who defied the gods and hence suffered in due course of time. It was followed by a family drama entitled *The Cenci* (1819) in bleak style. In the light of fantastical imagination, Keats wrote *The Witch of Atlas* (1820-24) and *Epipsychidion* (1821) which carry Shelley's highest imaginative power. It was followed by *Adonais* (1821) which was an elegy upon the death of his friend Keats. It is written in Spenserian stanza. Shelley earned his popularity for his shorter pieces also which included *To a Skylark*, *The cloud* etc. His odes and the shortest lyrics are the unparalleled masterpieces of English literature. In the same year, Shelley wrote his essay to be worth-mentioning entitled "The Defense of Poetry" (1840). In this essay Shelley establishes himself as a true Romantic poet although different from the contemporaries.

1.3.3. Features of Shelley's poetry

Shelly is considered to be one of the most significant poets of the romantic era. His poetry is somewhat different from that of his contemporaries. His character as a revolutionary person always finds expression in his poems. His faith upon atheism runs through the vein of his poetry to a great extent. Shelley's poetry possesses a number of characteristics as indicated below:

- a) **Revolutionary ideal:** Shelly developed a revolutionary character from his early childhood. His interest in atheism and politics generated in him a strong appeal towards the change in the realm of the society. Shelly came up as a rebel against oppression and

led the struggle to bring happiness in society. In “Ode to the West Wind” he identifies himself with the spirit of the West Wind which is the symbol of change. The following lines explore Shelley’s admiration of the spirit of revolution as both destructive and creative: Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O real.

- b) **Lyrical spirit:** Shelley is remembered as one of the chief poets possessing the highest lyrical power amongst the romantic poets. His expression of the highest emotional ecstasy, as in the lyrics of *Prometheus Unbound* stands unparalleled in English poetry. In one of the sweetest addresses to the Skylark in the poem ‘To a Skylark’,

this lyrical gift is to be seen:

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.

He is well versed in the expression of the moods of depression as well as delight at the same time with equal force and liveliness.

The following stanza in the name of the Spirit of Delight is a reflection of this power of the poet:

I love Love, though he has wings

And like light can flee

But above all other things,

Spirit, I love thee.

Thou art love and life! O come,

Make once more my heart thy home.

- c) **Nature:** Shelley intellectualizes nature in his poems. His nature is embalmed with the supernatural shadows and fairies. The natural objects remain not just simple objects in his poems. They become transfigured objects of the poet’s philosophy as well as

his personal modes of being. In this aspect, he is different from the contemporaries. Nature does not merely run first into his ideas, but his ideas furnish the natural world with perfection. The following lines establish Shelley's intellectual and philosophical approach to nature :

When the lamp is scattered
The light in the dust lies dead-
When the cloud is scattered
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken
Sweet tones are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.

It is obvious that Shelley's portrayal of nature is endowed with the ideas he obtains from his life's experiences as well as his philosophy. Therefore, his poems are somewhat critical in the sense that an abstract world is always present in his imagination which perplexes his natural observation of the world. But again, his indebtedness to the world of nature as a tranquil world of imagination and peacefulness is also evident to a great extent in his poetry.

- d) **Symbolism:** Shelley is a powerful symbolist poet. He uses similes and metaphors in his poetry in a very unique way. His symbols are drawn from the world of nature and life. His symbols are often ambiguous and complex. They refer to the poet's spiritual as well as the intellectual existence. For instance, the symbol of the west wind brings in the typical Shelleyan hero who possesses a strong power to fight against the odds and limitations of the society. Symbols like Death, Hell, Hearth etc. are abstract yet of universal appeal. The natural symbols are evocative of Shelley's personal ideas and expressions. They are forceful and typical of the Shelleyan spirit to a great extent.

e) **Intellectual curiosity of Shelley:** Shelley's intellect finds significant place in his poetry. The influence of William Godwin and others is very pronounced in his poems. The "atheist Shelley" and his enduring prophetic vision captures almost all types of imagery in his poetry. His humanitarian ideas are reflected in his poems. They expose the idealistic philosophy of the poet. Shelley's "To a Skylark" is an example of the representation of way Shelley philosophizes life and the character of human beings. The following lines from the poem suggest the same.

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.

f) **The prophetic vision:** Shelley considered the poet to be the most legitimate but unacknowledged legislator of the world. In his words, a poet should serve the purpose of the society in true sense. The poet with his sincerity should reflect the diversified forces of life distinctively. Shelley had a vision that society will remain changed under different circumstances. The vision to bring in a revolutionary change in the society is evident in the last lines of "Ode to the West Wind":

"O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Prophetic works like "Alastor", or the Spirit of Solitude, "The Revolt of Islam", *Prometheus Unbound* and other similar lyrics establish Shelly as a strong visionary poet whose revolutionary psyche gets projected in the realm of his poems.

g) **Shelley's Theory of poetry:** According to Shelley, the poet is the Nightingale who sits in the darkness and sings its own solitude with sweetness. This is the reason why Shelley celebrates each and every darker theme of life with an easiness and sweet sensation.

Shelley remarks in his essay “A Defense of Poetry”:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change....

It reveals the fact that poetry to Shelley was a medium to bring certain changes in the reader’s mind creating a sort of consciousness with an addition of beauty and powerful imagination. To Shelley, imagination is the most powerful way to deal with the life and its elements. His argumentative narrative and his continual rhapsodizing make his poems somewhat baffling and tedious but his imagination is superb and his ideas are powerful and effective upon the mankind.

Thus, we can say that Shelley is mainly a revolutionary poet whose vision of change and revolution make his poetry alive amongst his readers. His intimate portrayal of life and its objects lack Keats’s sensuousness but possess the warmth and meditative quality of Wordsworth. In a sense, he is a successful romantic poet with a strong imaginative faculty and a powerful philosophy with force and delicacy.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. Answer the following questions:

a) What was Shelley’s first poetic work?

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b) For which work was Shelley expelled from Oxford?

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c) Mention Shelley’s elegy upon Keats’s death.

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Q.3. Answer the following:

a) Write a short note on Shelley's personal despair.

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b) Was Shelley an atheist? Elaborate.

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c) How was Shelley's revolutionary character formed?

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d) Trace the major features of Shelley's poetry.

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e) What do you think to be the most influential factors in Shelley's poetry?

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f) Write a short note on symbolism in Shelley's poetry.

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g) Elaborate on the theme of revolution in Shelley’s Poetry.

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1.4.0. Ode to the West Wind

Let us now study Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”, a poem that reflects the Shelleyan poetic mode and also attempt to find out the romantic features, as well as the literary form and techniques in

the poem. It would be easier for the learners to be well familiarized with the previous sections of the unit to understand the poem in the light of the romantic poetry.

1.4.1. **Background of the poem**

The poem was written in the year 1819. It was composed in a forest near Florence on a tempestuous evening. The poet, in one of his own notes to the poem, describes the real situations under which the poem was written. According to the poet, the poem was conceived in a wood near Florence on a day when he was walking alongside the banks of Arno and he perceived the tempestuous wind as collecting the vapours. It was the sunset time during which the poet witnessed a violent tempest of hail and rain accompanied by thunder and heavy lighting which was peculiar to the cisalpine regions. The poem is the consequence of the poet's confrontation with these moments on that day.

1.4.2. **Theme of the Poem**

The poem thematizes certain aspects of life and the society to a great extent. The poem is centred round one single moment in the realm of nature which was observed by the poet himself. The Poem celebrates a number of themes as follows:

a) **Nature:** The poem establishes the character of the west wind through the poet's imagination. The west wind plays an important role in the poem as both the "destroyer and the preserver". The poet addresses the west wind on a stormy night with an appeal to give him the power of mind to bring changes in the world. Thus, the poem reflects the intensity of love of the poet towards nature from where he wants to extract the power of living and revolution. The poet mentions the seasons and the changes that the wind brings in every season in the poem with exuberant force and vigour.

b) **Revolution:** The poem introduces us to the typical Shelleyan hero who is actually a rebel against oppression in the society. The vision of the poet is to bring happiness in the midst of human beings. Shelley imagines himself to be the wind cutting across the skies and sometimes

across the ocean or, the volcanic island. The poet wants to get merged with the fierce spirit and makes a modest appeal to make him the Wind's 'lyre'.

c) **Power of creation:** The poem celebrates the power of creation of a poet which he mentions in his *A Defense of Poetry*. Here he establishes the historic role of the poet as "the unacknowledged legislator of mankind". The spirit of the wind is imagined as the power of the poet. The poet makes an appeal to the west wind to gift him the power of prophecy which he makes at the end of the poem.

d) **Social change:** Shelley was highly indebted to the ideals of Jean Jacques Rousseau and William Godwin whose social ideals could not accept but the cyclical changes in the society. The poet's will to accept the new ideas in place of the old ones make him a follower of new democratic ideals of change in the world. Shelley's optimism about an ideal society is very conspicuous in the concluding lines of the poem:

O Wind, if winter comes

Can spring be far behind?

1.4.3. Analysis of the poem

The poem begins with a note of despair with an address to the West Wind by the poet. To him, the wind appears as wild now. He considers this natural phenomenon as the "breath of Autumn's being" which suggests the time as originated in the heart of Autumn. The poet finds out the creative existence of the spirit in the wind. He celebrates the significance of the wind in the midst of the wood where he is walking at present. The heroic presence of the wind carries away all the dead leaves from the tree. The simile of a ghost fleeing makes the atmosphere gothic. It reminds us of Shelley's interest in the Gothic elements in literature. The fallen leaves assuming different colours from yellow to red remind the poet of the deadly diseases and poverty in the heart of the society. It is the same wild west wind which fills the wintered ground with winged seeds like a chariot carrying the traveler at its back. The

poet compares the winged seeds to the corpses within the graves which lie underground for long until the personified wind with her sister Spring calls upon new birth with fresh colours and mesmerizing fragrance under the blue sky. The poem gains a pastoral look at the moment where the blooming buds are compared to the flock of sheep driven by the earth-loving shepherds.

The last two lines of the first stanza of the poem brings in the characterization of the west wind by the poet both as the destroyer and the preserver. It reminds us of Shelley's interest in Hindu mythology the knowledge of which he received from the works of Sir William Jones and Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810). In the Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva is the Destroyer and Lord Vishnu, the Preserver. The poem points out the fact that the wind continued both the function of destruction and creation and hence could easily be compared to the mythological figures.

The second stanza of the poem is a poetical account of the effect of the wind on the sky. At this point Shelley draws a parallel between the dead leaves of the earlier stanza and the flying clouds in this stanza. The image of the intermingling of clouds and waters of the Mediterranean sea create a similar image in the mind of the poet that is, of the intertwining branches attached to each other during a heavy storm. The West Wind scatters the clouds all over the sky which are like loose hairs of the Maenads. Maenads are those drunken women with loose hair in Florentine sculpture. In Greek mythology, Maenad is the Greek god of wine. In this context, the West Wind brings in the sad music of autumn which is called the 'dying year'. As the poet approaches the near winter and literally the dying year on that stormy night, the sky covered with black clouds is resembled with a dome covering a tomb. The poet is certain about the fact that the atmosphere will be filled with elements like black rain, fire and hail bursts. His exclamation is an outburst of fear and his readiness to accept the crucial time and its revelations.

The third stanza describes the effect of the west wind upon the blue sea. The water levels in the sea are disturbed by the west wind. Shelley adopts a prophetic visionary mode which sees the destruction of the beautiful islands and the pathetic image of the submersion of old palaces and ancient towers under the waters of the Bay of Naples. Even the Atlantic Ocean fails to escape from its attack. The evergreen vegetational plants at the bottom of the sea accept calmly the indefatigable force of the west wind.

The fourth stanza of the poem presents a self portrait of the poet himself. The poem attains its maturity with a blend of the poet's supreme imagery and the forceful thought. The poet identifies himself with the entire natural phenomenon as he has already mentioned in the previous stanzas. He imagines himself to be the rain, the leaves, the swift clouds, the whirling wave and wants to get engaged in the act of expanding the strength of the west wind all around. Shelley's strong appeal to the west wind is reflective of his gathering of all lost spirits to the spirited mind. The following lines express the poet's earnest endeavour and his appeal to get mingled with the powerful

west wind:

Oh! Lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

The final stanza of the poem repeats the same appeal of the poet to the west wind to make him his lyre which will play entralling musical notes during the passing of the wind through the harp. The poet aims at a modification of his individuality through the awakening of nature and its fierce force. Therefore he worships the west wind to drive all the dead thoughts like withered leaves which will erase all sorts of despair and anxiety from his disturbed mind. The poet plays the role of a prophet here at the end who shares his faith upon the cyclical significance of nature. He appeals to the west wind to carry his prophecy and the poem ends in a rhetorical mode:

“O Wind,

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

Thus, the whole poem is to be considered a strong romantic revelation of the poet’s intense and passionate fervour to reclaim his power and interest in changing the world with indebtedness to the role of nature. It is subjective yet universal in its appeal.

Check Your progress

Q.1. Answer the following questions:

a) In which year was the poem “Ode to the West Wind” written?

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b) What does the West Wind symbolize in the poem?

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c) What is the rhetorical question that Shelley mentions at the end of this poem?

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d) In what context does the poet refer to Maenad in the poem?

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Q.2. Attempt the following questions critically:

a) Write a short note on the theme of “Ode to the West Wind”.

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b) How is the West Wind personified in the poem?

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c) Why does the poet refer to the Greek mythology in the poem? Explain.

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d) How does the poet celebrate the rush of the wind artistically?
Elaborate.

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e) Critically illustrate the symbolic implications of the West Wind in
the poem.

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1.5.4 Style and techniques in the poem

The poem is written in the Italian terza rima, a stanza of tercets . Each line is interlinked to the other in the tercet in a rhyme order like a b a / b c b/ c d c / d e d / e e / . The whole poem comprises of five stanzas , each having fourteen line . Each stanza is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four sets of three lines and the second division is a rhyming couplet which draws a concluding remark upon the theme of each stanza. The whole poem apostrophizes the central character in the entire narrative i.e. the west wind. The poem moves along with the rush of the wind which the poet feels entirely in his body and mind.

The poem is set in a visionary mode and hence the images are far-fetching and they are capable of conveying a wide range of meanings. For instance, the natural images like the colourful leaves, the winged seeds, the clarion, tangled boughs, blue surface etc are meaningful and powerful to certain extent. Different figures of speech can be identified in the poem as follows:

a) **Symbolism**: Shelley is chiefly a symbolist. In his poems, he uses multiple numbers of symbols which are often complex and not distinct. The lack of sustain in his symbols often creates confusions in the minds of the readers. Shelley uses the symbol of ‘dead leaves’ many times in the poem. ‘Dead leaves’ imply the unused thoughts in the poet’s brain. Even the ‘West Wind’ brings in a symbolic note in the poem. It symbolizes the creative and the destructive spirit of revolution simultaneously. Its spirit is human and sometimes that of a wild animal. The poet’s imagination is larger than life and for this reason, the poet is able to embody a lager figure in the symbolic west wind.

b) **Simile** : The poem uses certain similes which are elaborate and vivid

viz., “Like ghosts from an enchanter fleein”,

“Each like a corpse within its grave”,

“Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air” etc. etc.

c) **Imagery:** The poet uses a number of images in the realm of the poem. They are derived from extended views of the poet. A number of funeral images are there in the poem. Images like ‘corpse’, ‘grave’, ‘sepulchre’, ‘ashes’ etc. refer to the phase of decay and death of thoughts in the poet’s mind. On the contrary, the poem consists of images which suggest changes in nature and society. Images like ‘the winged seeds’, ‘dream earth’, ‘blue Mediterranean’, ‘crystalline streams’, etc. refer to the poet’s faith upon knowledge and the evitable change behind revolution.

d) **Personification in the poem:** The ‘West Wind’ itself is a personified object in the realm of this poem. It is a common element and a central characteristic of romantic poetry to personify the natural objects as human beings with human qualities. Shelley personifies all the seasons in the poem. For instance, ‘Spring with her clarion’, the ‘breath of Autumn’s being’ ‘the blue Mediterranean’ with his ‘crystalline streams’ etc. are reflective of the poet’s strong desire to capture in human body and mind the spirit of the gentle and wild nature.

e) **Apostrophe:** Apostrophe is an address to a character or, an abstract object in the realm of poetry. In a sense, the whole ode can be considered to be an apostrophe where the addressee is the west wind. The poet for many times evokes this wind in the phrase “O wild West Wind’ or, in the utterance ‘O Wind’. The poet proclaims the spirit with the cry ‘O hear!’ which is full of vigour and restless pain in his body.

f) **Metaphors:** Shelley uses a number of metaphors in the realm of this poem. The metaphors are suggestive of Shelley’s excellent mastery over thought and imagination. At the beginning of the poem, Shelley uses the metaphor which is natural. He compares the west wind to the breath of Autumn which is a personified object in the poem as evident in the

following line:

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,

In another context, Shelley uses an extended metaphor i.e. the 'Dirge/ of the dying year'. Here, the poet compares the west wind to the kind of mournful song as the autumn brings itself in its character. Shelley's forceful imagination works upon his thought and diction together. In another example, Shelley uses the image of a charioteer to refer to the elemental rush of the wind as evident in the following expression:

O thou,

Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed /The winged seeds.....

Thus, the poet makes an elaborate use of extended metaphors to connote the motion of the wind and its character with a mere resemblance with human action. It seems as if the entire world rushes in the spirit of freedom with it everywhere.

g) **Poetic diction:** Shelley's poetic diction is full of profound and subtle imagery to be portrayed in the wake of solid and vital words and their arrangement. Shelley's wise selection of words attains maturity through the sustained power of description. A radiant loveliness strikes the eyes of the readers through his composition. Just look at the following lines:

Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead

Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing

Yellow, and black, and pale and hectic red

Pestilence-stricken multitudes...

In the above lines, you will see how Shelley has selected the words. The names of the colours have been uttered with a complete sense of observation and easiness and especially with pauses as indicated by the punctuations. It seems as if we are living in a world wherefrom the words are simply amazing us with an elaborate specification of objects from variegated arenas. The buoyancy and the grace is also attained by the dramatic mode which flows in the vein of these lines. The words

like 'chariotest', 'winged seeds', 'decaying leaves' etc. are reflective of Shelley's imaginative height and sacrifice in full sense to the rich poetic vitality.

1.4.5. Criticism

P. B. Shelley has been subjected to wider criticism to a great extent. He has had to face even rigorous criticism for his poems. Many attacked his poetry for the abundance of atheism, his unnecessary dealing with morality and idealism without sufficient reason. Therefore, critics like Arnold and Leslie Stephens considered his poetry full of 'unreal' elements at their height. New critics like F. R. Leavis found another reason to criticize his poetry. In the words of Leavis, Shelley's grasp upon reality is weaker than that of his contemporaries. His emotions were of high level and his imagery was elusive to a great extent. Another critic and poet T. S. Eliot denied Shelley's beliefs as reflected in his poem. In the lecture 'Shelley and Keats', delivered by Eliot on 17 February 1933, remarked in the following words:

The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be ideas of adolescence. I find his ideas repellent; and the difficulty of separating Shelley from his ideas and beliefs is still greater than with Wordsworth. And the biographical interest which Shelley has always excited makes it difficult to read the poetry without remembering the man: and the man was humourless, pedantic, self-centred, and sometimes almost a black guard. (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 1964)

In another essay "The Music of Poetry" in 1942, Eliot refers to Shelley: It is not from rules, or by cold-blooded imitation of style, that we learn to write: we learn by imitation indeed, but by a deeper imitation than is achieved by analysis of style. When we imitated Shelley, it was not so much from a desire to write as he did, as from an invasion of the adolescent self by Shelley, which made Shelley's way, for the time, the only way in which to write. (*The Music of Poetry*, 1942)

But above all, his consistency and rich musical quality remained admirable to the critics. One of the twentieth century critics, Earl Wasserman, praised Shelley for his ability to recreate myth throughout his poems. But Shelley was not keen to mind the sort of criticism all through his life and went on to maintain persistency in his attitudes towards the prophetic role of the poet.

1.4.6. Significance

P. B. Shelley is considered to be one of the foremost poets of the romantic era of English literature. His contribution as a powerful poet voicing the romantic ideals of change and worshipping nature is substantial to English literature in general and English poetry in particular. The lack of humour and sufficient reasoning with abundance of repetitions in terms of ideas and pathos has resulted in severe criticism of the poet. But the poem like “Ode to the West Wind” stands unique in terms of composition with his powerful diction and syntax. It does not only reflect the idea of change which is inevitable but also points out the fact that nature is a better teacher than any other human experience. The poem evokes the romantic sensibility of the poet as well as the universal appeal that a true romantic poet makes. Thus, the poem is of higher significance in the realm of English poetry.

Check Your Progress

1. Answer to the following questions:

a) What does the West Wind personify in the poem?

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b) What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

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c) What was F. R. Leavis’ remark upon Shelley’s poetry?

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Q.2. Attempt answers to the following questions:

a) Critically assess the figures of speech as used in “Ode to the West Wind”.

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b) Comment upon Shelly’s poetic diction.

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c) Prepare a note on the structure of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”.

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1.6. Let us sum up:

P. B. Shelley is considered to be one of the significant poets of the romantic era. His poems like “Ode to the West Wind” stand unique in terms of composition with his powerful diction and syntax. The poems do not only reflect the idea of change which is inevitable but also point out the fact that nature can also be considered as a teacher. This particular poem evokes the romantic sensibility of freedom and change through the adoption of revolutionary ideals. Although the poem presents the poet’s individualistic perception of social change it does have a universal appeal. Thus, the poem is of higher significance in the realm of English literature. Its theme and style reminds us of the individualism of Shelley and more than that the depth of Shelley’s knowledge and the flight of his mature imagination.

1.7 . Keywords

1.4 pestilence-stricken multitudes: The poet compares the fallen leaves to the existing poverty, disease in the society.

1.14. Destroyer and Preserver: These titles are derived from Hindu mythology where Shiva is the Destroyer and Vishnu is the preserver.

1.21. Maenad: a priestess of Bacchus, the Greek God of wine.

1.23. Dirge: a mournful song.

1.32. Pumic isle: Rocks or islands created by volcanic lava which are known as 'pumice'

1.32. Biae's bay: a fashionable resort in the Bay of Naples .

1.37. Atlantic's level powers.....clams: The effect of the West Wind upon waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

Apostrophe: A figure of speech which is an address to a character or, an abstract thing.

Terza Rhyme: A kind of Metrical composition which consists of triplets especially in iambic pentameter.

1.8 Suggested Readings

Baker C. H. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press. Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP,1950.

Forman, Harry Buxton ed. *Prose Works of Percy Bysse Shelley*. 4 vols. London, 1880.

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Fogle, R.H. *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley*. University of North Carolina Press,1949.

Greenblatt, Stephen et al. Ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.,9th Edition,Paperback,2012.

King-Hele Desmond: *Shelley, his thought and Work*. Macmillan,1962.

Possible answers to CYP

Q.1. a) What does the West Wind personify in the poem?

Ans: The West Wind personifies the poet himself. The rebel within the poet is referred to by the west Wind in the poem.

Q.2.C. Prepare a note on the structure of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”. Ans: The poem is written in the Italian terza rima, a stanza of tercets . Each line is interlinked to the other in the tercet in a rhyme order like a b a / b c b/ c d c / d e d / e e . The whole poem consists of five stanzas , each having fourteen line . each stanza is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four sets of three lines and the second division is a rhyming couplet which draws a concluding reamark upon the theme of each stanza. The whole poem apostrophizes the central character in the entire narrative i.e. the west wind.

1.9 References

Albert, Edward: History of English Literature.OUP,1923.

Baker C. H. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press. Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP,1950.

Sanders, Andrew: The Short Oxford History of English Literature.OUP,1994.

1.10 Model Questions

Q.1. Discuss Shelley as a romantic poet.

Q.2. Discuss the use of symbols in Shelley's poetry.

Q.3. How do you consider “Ode to the West Wind” to be a typical Shelleyan poem? Elucidate.

Q.4. Make a critical note on Shelley's revolutionary ideals as evident in Ode to the West Wind.

Q.5. Critically discuss Shelley's philosophy behind the poem “Ode to the West Wind”.

Q.6 Do you think that “Ode to the West Wind” is an expression of the poet's identification with himself? Discuss.

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BLOCK-IV UNIT-V

JOHN KEATS'S "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE"

1.0 Objectives

1.1 .0 Introduction

1.1. John Keats: Life and Poetry

1.1.1. Life of Keats

1.1.2. Keats's Poetry

1.1.3. Features of Keats's Poetry

1.1.4. Significance

Check Your Progress 1

1.2. Ode to the Nightingale

1.2.1. Background of the Poem

1.2.2. Themes of the Poem

1.2.3. Analysis of the Poem

Check Your Progress 2

1.2.4. Style and Techniques in the Poem

1.2.5. Criticism of the Poem

1.2.6. Significance

Check Your Progress 2

1.3. Let us sum up

1.4. Keywords

1.5. Suggested Readings

Possible answers to CYP

References

Model Questions

OBJECTIVE

After reading this unit you will be acquainted with the following

- Life and works of John Keats
- Features of Keats' poetry
- Critical aspects of the poem "Ode to a Nightingale"

1.1.0. INTRODUCTION

John Keats, one of the frontline Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, is known for pursuing perfection in the use of vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal and conveying a philosophical message through his poems. Within his short span of life (1795-1821) he wrote many excellent odes, sonnets and narrative poems which stand comparable with the best of poetry of any age. Keats was essentially a poet of beauty. His love of beauty is conspicuous in his entire range of poetry. In the earlier phase of his poetic career he was fascinated by the physical beauty and in the later phase his perception of beauty underwent a change. He became more attracted towards the spiritual and intellectual beauty of his subjects. He was greatly influenced by the mythical tales of the middle ages and most of his poems have the theme influenced by medieval poetry. He also loved Grecian or Hellenic ideals and used them profusely in his poetry. Out of all the Romantic poets, if Wordsworth was a poet and political thinker; Coleridge was a metaphysician; Shelley was a reformer and an idealist, then Keats was just a poet and nothing else as the whole of his vital energy went into shaping his art.

1.1.1. Life of Keats

Born in London in 1795, Keats was the eldest child in the family of Thomas Keats and Frances Keats. His father was an established stable keeper. The death of his parents in between 1804 and 1810 left Keats and his two brothers and a sister alone in the caretaking of the grandmother and two guardians. At the age of fifteen, Keats was apprenticed to a surgeon and gained his license after a period in Guy's

Hospital, he never practised medicine. At that time, his poetical bent was growing in him. His acquaintance with his former schoolmaster's son Charles Cowden Clarke increased the interest to a great extent. He fell under the spell of Spenser who was introduced to him by Clarke. In the year 1813 Keats composed his early verse in constant inspiration and imitation of Spenser. Within a short span of time, he fell under the influence of another radical poet called Leigh Hunt who was the poet and the editor of *The Examiner*. His first independent volume of verse was published in 1817. *The Poems*, although of little merit including "On First looking into Chapman's Homer", "Sleep and Poetry" etc. explore Keats's indebtedness to Spenser and especially to Leigh Hunt. At that time, Keats was highly disturbed by his family problems. He spent most of his times in 1818 nursing his brother Tom who was a patient of tuberculosis. In London in the same year he became acquainted with Fanny Brawne and soon fell in love with her. But his financial circumstances did not allow him the opportunity to marry Fanny. In 1820, he himself got infected with tuberculosis. His health started to fail and frustration in love further compounded his problems. He was forced to leave London and go to Italy in search of health and died in Rome on 23rd February in 1821 at a young age of twenty five.

1.1.2. Keats's poetry

Keats started writing poetry at a very young age of seventeen. At this young was he made himself familiar with the works of Spenser and other such poets of the past. Keeping aside his interest in medical sciences, he embraced poetry. He was well read in many poetic geniuses in English like Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser and Chaucer. The contemporary poets from Wordsworth to Shelley were the source of inspiration to this emerging poet. His earliest manifestation was his "An Imitation of Spenser" in 1814 at the age of nineteen. His first volume of verse was *Poems* (1817) which included poems like "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", "Sleep and Poetry" and other miscellaneous poems of little merit. They show the Spenserian influence upon the poet along with his more immediate indebtedness to Leigh Hunt. He

published his next volume of poems *Endymion* in 1818. This was of somewhat different quality but immature in quality. *Endymion* fell under severe controversies from the literary reviewers and critics. His association with the radical school of poetry led by Leigh Hunt was considered to be the reason behind this. *Endymion* is believed to be partly based upon Drayton's "The Man in the Moon" and Fletcher's "The Faithful Shepherdess". This is a tale of a youth who was kissed by the moon-goddess on the summit of Mount Latmos. The poem is immature in terms of theme and its phrasing. But it perfectly reveals the Keatsian sensibility and the rich flowery tale in a typical Keatsian diction with ornaments of the mythical landscapes. Some of his works are "Isabella or , the Pot of Basil" (1818) written in ottava rima and an imitation of Boccaccio; *Hyperion* (left incomplete) which is based upon *Paradise Lost* in terms of theme and style which deals with the epic conflicts between the older and the younger races of gods; "The Eve of St. Agnes" (1819), full of Spenserian archaisms and a tale of the elopement of two lovers; "Lamia" (1819) an imitation of Robert Burton's "The Anatomy of Melancholy" etc. There is no doubt about the fact that Keats's greatness lies more on his shorter pieces, especially his odes. His great odes are- "To a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "On Melancholy", "Ode to Autumn", "Ode to Psyche" etc. all were written in 1819. All are composed in the same structure i.e. in ten line stanzas with Shakespearian quatrain and the Petrarchan sestet. His odes are unforgettable in English literature for the reflection of Keatsian mannerisms and its flawless perfection and grace. The serenity and the philosophy which he puts in the realm of his odes establish them among some of the greatest odes in English literature. The following is an example of his flawless representation of the autumn season in artistic form and simplicity:

Season of mists and mellowed fruitfulness
Close-bosom friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run

To bend with apples the mossed cottage trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells.
(Ode to Autumn)

His sonnets are also significant creations in the hands of a perfect artist and a true lover of art and beauty. He wrote sixty-one sonnets which bear the influence of Shakespeare to Spenser and Milton. Sonnets like "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", "When I have fears that I may Cease to be" are the thoughtful ideas of Keatsian magic and splendour.

1.1.3. Features of Keats's poetry

John Keats was one of the most passionate young poets of the romantic era. His poetry was in the truest sense an evocation of the beauty to be found everywhere in the world. His poetry facilitates the idea of perfection in nature. His lyrics are the unforgettable little gems of English romantic poetry. A few characteristics of his poetry are taken for discussion below.

- a) **Sensuousness:** Keats's preoccupation with the sensuous beauty of nature prevails in his poems to a great extent. The five senses viz., the sense of sight, sense of smell, sense of touch, sense of taste, and finally the sense of hearing could be found in his poetry. For instance, it was the sense of sight which inspired him to observe the Grecian urn with his eye of imagination. Similarly, his sense of hearing developed in the poet's psyche an intense feeling for the Nightingale's song. In this context, Arthur Campton Rickett remarks: "Where Wordsworth spiritualises, and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express her

through the senses: the colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsing music; these are the things which stir him to his depths; there is not a mood of earth he does not love, not a season that will not cheer and inspire him". His rich sensuous touch provides a world of imagination untouched by any other poet in the era.

- b) **Nature:** Keats was very passionate about nature and treated it as an important subject matter of his poetry. His subject matters are drawn from the various aspects of nature. His poetry is a landscape full of almost all the natural objects which he could view through his senses. In the "Ode to a Nightingale", the poet successfully creates a profound and delicate picture of nature in the form of the songbird Nightingale. His "Ode to Autumn" celebrates the same natural process which transforms the colour and the fragrance of each season. The images are colourful and rich in imagination. Through "organic sensibility" and calmness of response avoiding the intellectual subtlety of Shelley and Wordsworth, Keats conceptualizes nature through his senses with no core philosophy and spiritual charm like a mystic. On the contrary, he was highly interested in the momentary pleasures of nature and her beauty all around.
- c) **Love of Beauty:** Keats is remarkable as the lover and a true worshipper of beauty. His poetry reflects well his chief concern for beauty i.e. "with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration." Through the senses Keats perceived both the ideal as well as the sensuous beauty in nature. He believed in a true coexistence of beauty and truth in each creation. In *Hyperion* he celebrates wisely the theme of eternal beauty. In "Ode on a Grecian Urn", the poet celebrates the same theme of beauty as an accompaniment of truth:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty
That's all that ye should know on earth.

- d) **Hellenism:** The word Hellenism refers to things associated with the ancient culture of Greece. Keats was deeply influenced by Homer after reading the translation *Iliad* by Chapman. His interest in Greek sculptures had a far-reaching influence in his poetry. His reading of Virgil's *Aeneid* made him fall in love with Greek art and sculpture. His imagination of the Grecian Urn was modelled on the basis of this knowledge of Greek art and mythology. The sight of the marbles in the British museum found expression in his poems. In true sense, Keats was able to imagine a Greek city in his poetry through a set of images created and arranged well in the realm of the poem. It is quite surprising that although Keats had little knowledge of Greek and Latin, his poetry could widely establish the fact that he was utterly moved and stirred by the Greek spirit.
- e) **Negative Capability:** In a letter written in December 1817, Keats introduced this literary quality which is evident in his own poems to a great extent. Through negative capability, Keats pointed out to the moment "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after facts and reason". In other words, Keats suggests that a great poet must possess the faculty of negation of the personal feelings and emotions. To him, Shakespeare possessed this feature enormously. Keats maintained this fact also in his poems. His poetry was impersonal to a larger extent. His poems stayed aloof from excessive self-revelations and were highly indebted to universal figures and truths in an ordinary mode of existence.
- f) **Keats's Theory of Poetry:** John Keats was a true romantic poet in the sense that he existed for the sake of poetry which is eternal in nature. He once marked in one of his letters: "I

can't exist without poetry- without eternal poetry-half the day will not do-the whole of it." His craving for spontaneous creation was another guiding principle behind his poetry. He marked: "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to the tree it had not better come at all." He insisted upon the subject of poetry which should be interesting, pure and unobtrusive. In his own words, "Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul and doesn't startle it or, amaze it itself—but with its subject." Hence, his subject matters were drawn from different fields of life and nature which were not simply amazing but meaningful in truest sense.

- g) **Keats's consciousness and perfection:** Keats was a true and perfect artist. His craftsmanship contained a speed which was derived from the poets like Leigh Hunt, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. His poetry was rich and sensible in melodic beauty with restraint and a delicacy of the senses. Matthew Arnold mentioned that Keats resembled Shakespeare in "rounded perfection and felicity of phrase". The list of sensuous epithets in his poetry viz., "dewy wine", "unravished bride" etc. enrich his poetic diction with exuberance and colour. In his odes while dealing with ideas, he could easily establish himself as a consummate artist portraying concrete life and everyday sensations.

1.1.4. Significance

Keats is a true romantic poet. He bears higher significance in English literature. His poetry is rich in his portraits of beauty and art and excels in high sensuousness in theme and perception. The poetry of Keats is characterized by his love for beauty, his faith upon poetic imagination and his interest in Greek art and sculpture. His artistic craftsmanship always seemed to pursue perfection and maturity. Within the short span of his life, Keats contributed a lot to the growth of romantic poetry in England with utter romantic sensibility and vision of spontaneity to deal with subjects selected from different fields.

Check your Progress: 1

Q.1. Answer to the following questions in one sentence:

a) Who introduced John Keats to Spenser at the early stage in his life?

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b) What do you mean by “Hellenism”?

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c) Name the radical poet who influenced Keats at the early stage of his life.

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d) Where did Keats introduce the concept of ‘Negative Capability’?

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e) Upon which work of Burton is Keats’s *Lamia* based ?

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Q.2. Answer the following in brief:

a) Define the notion of ‘Negative Capability’.

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b) Write a short note on Keats's theory of poetry.

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c) How did Greek art and sculpture influence Keats most in his poems?

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d) What do you mean by Keats's sensuousness ?

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e) What are the subjects of Keats's poetry? Give examples.

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f) Was Keats a true romantic poet? Exemplify.

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1.2. 0. Ode to a Nightingale

“Ode to a Nightingale” is one of the finest lyrics in English romantic poetry. In this section, we shall make an analysis of the theme and the style of the poem. Besides, you will be well acquainted with the background of the poem which will help you to familiarize yourself with the various critical aspects associated with this poem.

1.2.1. Background of the poem

The poem is written in the year 1819. It is set in a spring evening in Hampstead when he first hears the Nightingale’s song. According to one of his friends Charles Brown with whom he shared a house at Hampstead, Keats noticed the nest of a nightingale in a spring evening in 1819. On another morning in the same year, Keats devoted a few hours to brood over the nightingale’s song .The poem was dated the same by the poet as ‘May 1819’ which is similar to the dates of composition of his other odes “Ode on Melancholy”, and “Ode on a Grecian Urn”.

1.2.2. Themes of the poem:

Keats’s “Ode to the Nightingale” is a well-elaborated evocation of the romantic thoughts and feelings of the poet. Throughout the poem, Keats expresses his concern for his living with the nature’s subtlety and his personal imagination. The poem is basically set around the following themes:

- a) **Transitoriness of Human life:** Like the other odes of Keats, this ode also celebrates the theme of the transitoriness of human life and its ephemerality of happiness. The poet wants to fly into a state of complete forgetfulness in the nightingale's own world, but life's calling disturbs him and brings back to his reality. His willingness to accept this creature of nature as immortal remains an excuse for the restoration of peace in human life.
- b) **Conflict between the ideal and the real:** The ode portrays the conflict between the imaginative world where the nightingale's song is transfigured into an unfamiliar ideal object and the actual world which follows Keats as a mere shadow of the past. The poet cannot find an escape from this world and hence is situated in between the space of unfulfilled desire and his infinite fantastical world.

1.2.3. Analysis of the poem

The poem begins on a note of despair and complete forgetfulness. The speaker feels himself moved by an excess of pain when he drinks "poison" or "opium". Suddenly he hears the song of the nightingale singing in a full throated voice filling the atmosphere with unbridled happiness. He compares the nightingale to the nymph (dryad) which lives in the trees. The poet celebrates the space which the nightingale bears independently singing in a full throated voice and filling the surrounding with sweet melody of its song signifies the state of bliss as enjoyed by the nightingale.

In the second stanza, the poet is seen in constant search for wine. He wants to drink old wine kept in underground storage that tastes of countryside flowers. He wants to listen to the troubadour love song of southern France and drink from the 'Hippocrene', a fountain in Mount Hellicon associated with the Muses, to get poetic inspiration. Being drunk and intoxicated he wants to leave this world unseen and lose himself in the blissful and ideal world of the nightingale. The act of

drinking wine finds an important place in this poem. Keats mentions:

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim;

He wants to fade away in the dark forest but like other people on earth who drink in order to forget the real world.

The third stanza of the poem is an intimate portrayal of the miseries and the pathetic states of a person's life on earth. Human beings sitting and groaning, the last gray hairs, the pale look of a young, the thin spectre etc. are the images loaded with sorrow and pain which the poet witnessed through his eyes at the early stage of his life when he saw his brother Tom dying from tuberculosis. All these kind of weariness and despair, both physical and mental have not been seen by the poet amidst the nature's lustrous beauty. But the mortal life on the earth says something else.

The fourth stanza of the poem reveals the poet's intense love towards nature and his readiness to intermingle with the nightingale's song. Like the Elizabethan poets, Keats wants to fly on the wings of poetry to delve into the realm of supreme imagination wherefrom he would not be able to perceive the pain of life on earth. The poet is determined here at this point at living in that world of fantasy leaving aside the real world. He reminds us of Bacchus, the Roman God of wine, who is usually depicted in paintings with a chariot drawn by leopards. But, Keats's faith abandons mythical imagination and leads towards poetic imagination. His warmth and devotion is to be noticed in the first lines of the stanza:

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy.....

Through sensuousness Keats creates the bower of the nightingale. The Moon sits on the throne in the tender night surrounded by the Queen-Moon's dazzling fays. But again he is dissatisfied by the appearance of earth where there is not a single ray of light.

The fifth stanza of the poem celebrates the theme of darkness. The poet mentions that he is not able to notice the kind of flowers at his feet as well as the soft incense upon the boughs. On the contrary, he is surprised at the powerful act of nature even in darkness. The poet reveals his wonder saying that nature endows upon each creature of nature with an unleashed delicacy. The poet mentions about the grass, the thicket, the white hawthorn and the eglantine. The poet expresses his astonishment upon the way nature conceals the fast-fading violets among leaves and the way it welcomes the spirit of musk-roses, the earliest blooming flowers of the mid May. The summer evening is filled with the soft murmur of flying insects. The sixth stanza of the poem is the poet's evocation of death. He calls upon the darkness, the "darkling" of the bird at night. According to the poet, he called death many times in softness but now he has changed his kind eternally. Now he rejoices upon death:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain..

The poet seems to be gathering spirit within himself while referring to the nightingale. Amidst the enveloping darkness the nightingale sings. It symbolizes the sacrifice and the attempts made by the great poets in the world to write poems despite all types of difficulties and darkness in their lives. Keats's personal life is a reflection of this fact. In this sense, the nightingale can be said to be symbolic of the great poets to a certain extent.

The next stanza of the poem deals with the resemblance of nightingale's song with historical lessons and figures. The bird's immortality is cherished by the poet at the outset:

Thou was not born for death, immortal bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;

The nightingale's song appears to the poet somewhat historical. The voice as heard by him that night draws certain similarity with the song heard by the ancient emperors and clowns. The poet John Keats

refers to the Maobite woman in the Book of Ruth in the *Bible* who has had to leave her motherland to accompany her mother-in-law after her husband's death. The nightingale's song gets resonated in the poet's heart with a striking note of such historical and mythical characters. Even the same kind of song is found by the poet amidst his all-time favourite romances. The magic castles, the pictures of perilous seas and the fairy lands have been recreated by the poet under the charming spell of the nightingale's song. This is probably the reason for the poet to convert the nightingale's individual song in to a universal one.

The concluding stanza of the poem begins in the last word that probably the poet has unconsciously spelled. It starts with a description of the word "forlorn". It indicates the phase of abandonment after the completion of the dream. At this point, the poet seems to be quite helpless in expression and loss. The return from dream to reality is in fact a kind of great loss for the poet.

Forlorn; the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self.

The poet is helpless bidding adieu to the world of fancy. The poet recovers his consciousness and drops the flight of imagination upon the real sides of nature. The fantasy has now moved upon the meadows and the nearby hills. The poet is left with a question unanswered which seems to be a rhetorical one. The poem ends with the question that explains the very theme of the poem i.e. the dwelling between reality and the ideal:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music-do I wake or sleep?

Check Your Progress 2

Q.1 Answer to the following questions in one sentence:

a) In which year was Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" written?

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c) What was Charles Brown's remark upon the composition of "Ode to a Nightingale"?

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d) Where does the poet refer to the troubadour love song in the poem?

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e) Why does Keats mention the Book of Ruth in the poem?

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f) Name the Roman God who is mentioned in the poem.

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Q.2. Answer the following questions in brief:

a) Under what circumstances was the "Ode to a Nightingale" written?

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b) Trace Keats's treatment of the theme of nature in the poem.

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c) How does the poet describe the personal despair in the poem?

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d) Do you consider the Nightingale’s song historical? If yes, how?

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e) Write a short note on Keats’s imagination as evident in the poem.

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1.2.4. Style and Techniques in the poem

Keats has written almost all the odes in the same stanzaic structure which includes a quatrain of Shakespearean sonnet to be accompanied by a sestet of a Petrarchan type of sonnet except a few odes where he adds an extra line at the end. Unlike the other odes, Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” is divided into eight stanzas with ten lines in each of them. The rhyme scheme of the poem is a b a b c d e c d e. The metrical pattern is variable to a large extent which is evident in a single stanza. The first seven lines in a stanza with the last two lines follow the iambic pentameter whereas the eighth line follows a different one i.e. a trimetric pattern. The poem is written with the help of a number of techniques. They can be pointed out below:

- a) **Oxymoron:** An oxymoron is a figure of speech which invokes two contradictory or to say quite antagonistic words together to imply ambiguity in the poem. Keats uses an oxymoron i.e. “numbness pains” in the first line of the poem which suggests an excess of pain. The oxymoron “plaintive anthem” refers to the poet’s state of mind which is an intermixture of both pain and happiness in their extremity.

- b) **Allusion:** Allusion in a poem refers to a figure or an event outside the text. This particular ode uses a number of allusions. For instance, Keats alludes to the river of forgetfulness i.e. Lethe in Greek mythology to complement his state of mind with a broader outlook. In another instance, the poet alludes to Hippocrene, the fountain in Mount Helicon. The poet also alludes to the Book of Ruth in the *Bible* to point out the Moabite woman. The aim behind the use of these allusions is to intensify his personal despair with a universal appeal.
- c) **Personification:** The poet personifies Death, the Moon, the beauty, the drink etc. in the poem. The following lines show the way Keats personifies death:

And for a time

I have been held in love with easeful Death,

Called him soft times in many a mused rhyme...

In another context, the poet personifies the fountain Hippocrene as “blushful Hippocrene”. Besides, the beauty has been personified with the addition of “lustrous eyes”. Throughout the personified figures, Keats draws a parallel between the world of nature and mortal man.

- d) **Onomatopoeia:** Keats’s sensuous observation preserves for the readers a number of delicate terms which carry a sound at their back. For instance, the word “murmurous” implies the passionate fervour of the poet whose sadness gets revealed in a musical pattern.
- e) **Consonance:** Keats’s musical stanzas prefer consonance to a great extent. The consonance in “beaded bubbles winking at the brim” expresses the vigour and the poet’s interest in the effect the syllables bring in the poem. They are musical, lyrical and above all melodious in true sense.

- f) **Alliteration:** The poem consists of alliterations to a larger extent. For instance, Keats uses alliteration in “self-same song”. It suggests Keats’s consciousness and indebtedness to the central subject which he deals with depth, breadth and persistency.
- g) **Imagery:** Odes are often considered to be the finest portraits of images by the poets. Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” is no exception. It is full of images which are vivid, delicate and strong. The images are drawn from various fields including the mythological as well as natural. For instance, the imagery of ‘hemlock’, ‘Flora’, of ‘Dryad’, ‘Bacchus’ and ‘Ruth’ are suggestive of Keats’s interest in the chivalric tone of legend and myth. The image of ‘walking dream’ is derived from the world of mundane reality. All the images are melodious, lyrical and mature in expression. Thus, it can be said that Keats’s existence as a perfect artist gets revealed in the odes. They are magnificent in terms of theme and narrative presentation. The syntax is well adequate and charmed one in rhythm and metrical arrangement of order. The selection of words in diction is sensuous and melodic. The poetic diction is to a great extent Shakespearean in terms of powerfully crafted adjectives like ‘light winged’, ‘Dryad’, ‘purple-stained mouth’, ‘embalmed darkness’, ‘fast-fading violets’ and such others. They are colourful and musical in temperament which is typically Keatsian.

1.2.5. Criticism

Keats is admired by almost all the critics for his melodic beauty and his rich poetic imagination. But his association with the Cockney school was also responsible for the bitter criticism of his poetry from many critics. “Ode to a Nightingale” received wide acclaim from the critics and the readers. It is often considered by the 18th and the 19th century critics as the finest ode in English romantic poetry. Robert Bridges considered it to be Keats’ best ode but due to the abundance of artificial embellishments in the poem, he could not find perfection in the poem. Many critics have found a balanced blend of reality and imagination in the poem. Above all, the poem has become one of the finest lyrics in English romantic poetry.

1.2.6 Significance

‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is one of the finest odes in English literature. In this finely written ode Keats describes how the song of the nightingale affected his subjective consciousness and also made him realize the insurmountable gulf between the real world of a man and the ideal world of art. Critics from Rudyard Kipling to F. R. Leavis admire this ode simply because it treats this question of real and ideal in a very subtle way. It is to be numbered as a rich poetic expression of Keats’s subtle imagery and his strong romantic appeal.

Check Your Progress 3

Q.1. Answer the following questions in one sentence only:

a) In what context does Keats allude to the Lethe?

.....

Q.2. Answer the following in brief:

a) Write a short note on Keats’s use of imagery with special reference to “Ode to a Nightingale”.

.....

.....

.....

.....

b) How does Keats personify Hippocrene in the poem?

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.....

.....

c) Write a short note on criticism of Keats's poetry.

.....

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.....

.....

d) What are the figures of speech as used in this Ode? Elucidate with examples.

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.3. Let us sum up

John Keats is considered to be one of the foremost romantic poets of his age. His poetry is melodic and rich in artistic imagination. Keats's sensuousness is revealed in the realm of his poetry. "Ode to a Nightingale" is one of his finest lyrics. It celebrates the conflict between the real world and the ideal artistic world of imagination. The poem establishes the fact that reality surpasses beyond the world of ideal beauty and high imagination. But again, the quest for ideal beauty and peacefulness in the world of nature which the poet imagines in his poetic world gets flawless expression in the poem. The musical arrangement of words and the poet's mythical knowledge make the poem an embodiment of Keats's powerful sensibility and his philosophy.

1.4. Keywords

1.2. hemlock: a poison.

1.3. Lethe: the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology.

1.7 Dryad: a tree spirit.

1.13 Flora: Goddess of flowers and spring

1.16 Hippocrene: A Fountain in Mount Helicon.

1.32 Bacchus: The Roman God of wine.

1.60 requiem: a mournful song.

1.66 Ruth: The Moabite woman in the Book of Ruth in the Bible.

Onomatopoeia: a figure of speech which means to play with words which contain musical notes.

Consonance: Repetition of consonant sounds in a line.

Alliteration: Repetition of sounds in a line.

1.5.Suggested Readings

Aske, Martin. *Keats and Hellenism: An Essay*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.

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Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP, 1950.

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn*. Harcourt Bwce and World, N.Y. 1947.

Gitings, Robert. *John Keats*. London: Heinemann, 1968.

Possible answers to CYP

Q.1. In what context does Keats allude to the Lethe?

Ans: Keats alludes to the Lethe in the context of his forgetfulness of this world.

The poet wants to forget the world like the Lethe in Greek mythology which is known as the river of forgetfulness.

2. c) Write a short note on criticism of Keats's poetry.

Ans: Keats is admired by almost all the critics for his melodic beauty and his rich poetic imagination. It is often considered by the 18th and the 19th century critics as the finest ode in English romantic poetry. Robert Bridges considered it to be Keats's best ode but due to the abundance of artificial embellishments in the poem, he could not find perfection in the poems. Many critics have found a balanced blend of reality and imagination in the poems of Keats. Above all, the poem has become one of the finest lyrics in English romantic poetry. But again, Keats's melodic qualities make his poems to be the most successful lyrics in English literature.

1.6 References

Bari, Shahidha Kazi. *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations*. London: Routledge, 2011.

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Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP, 1950.

Fogle, R.H. *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley*. University of North Carolina Press, 1949.

Greenblatt, Stephen et al. Ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th Edition, Paperback, 2012.

1.7 Model Questions

- Q.1. Write a short note on Keats's sensuousness.
- Q.2. How does the poem "Ode to a Nightingale" reflect Keats's love for beauty?
- Q.3. Make an assessment of John Keats as a romantic poet with special reference to "Ode to a Nightingale".
- Q.4. Is "Ode to a Nightingale" the self-revelation of the poet? Elucidate.
- Q.5. Prepare a critical note on the imaginative qualities of John Keats and his poetry with special reference to "Ode to a Niggthingale".

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BLOCK-III

Neo-Classical Poets

UNIT-I

Title: 'Mac Flecknoe' - John Dryden

STRUCTURE

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 About the Poet: John Dryden

1.2.1 His Life

1.2.2 His Works

Check Your Progress

1.3 About the Poem: 'Mac Flecknoe'

1.3.1 Context of the Poem

1.4 Summary of the Poem

1.5 Critical appreciation of the Poem

Check Your Progress

1.6 Let us Sum Up

Answer Keys

Possible Questions

Key Words

References

Suggested Readings

1.0 Objectives:

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

- * *identify* John Dryden as the prominent literary figure of the Restoration Age
- * *discuss* the major satirical poems of Dryden
- * *summarize* the poem under study
- * *describe* its poetic form and technique
- * *appraise* the poem critically

1.1 Introduction:

While in the preceding unit you learnt about the great Puritan poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I & II, in this unit you will be acquainted with a poem written by John Dryden. Dryden was an influential English poet, literary critic, translator and playwright who dominated the literary life of Restoration England to such a point that the period came to be known in literary circles as the Age of Dryden. Sir Walter Scott called him "Glorious John". He served as the first official Poet Laureate of England.

The Age of Dryden or the Restoration Age roughly spans the period from the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to the year 1700. The restoration of Charles II to the English throne marked the end of the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell.

The Restoration literature of the time signifies a sudden break with the older values. Its subject and style took on a new spirit, aim and attitude. It became classical or neoclassical as against the romanticism of the Elizabethans. The poetic form best suited to the age was the satire, which gained immense development during this period. Wit was inherent in satire and the heroic couplet became the natural medium of intellectual expression in the age. The works of Dryden best represents the spirit of the age.

Before going to read about his poem, it is necessary to know briefly about the life of John Dryden and his works.

1.2 About the Poet: John Dryden (1631-1700)

1.2.1 His Life

John Dryden was born on August 9, 1631 in the village of Aldwinkle in Northamptonshire. His family were prosperous people, who brought him up in the strict Puritan faith. He was educated at the famous Westminster School under the headmaster, Richard Busby, who influenced Dryden with his great knowledge of the classics apart from the ancient or classical Greek and Roman poets, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton and Spenser. He later went to Trinity College, Cambridge. He made excellent use of his opportunities and studied eagerly, becoming one of the best educated men of his age, especially in the classics. He became friendly with Sir Robert Howard after the Restoration, and married Howard's sister in 1663. The marriage was not very happy. By 1660, he had gained command over his poetical powers.

Dryden's literary career can be roughly divided into three periods- (i) The dramatic period lasting till 1680 (ii) the period of his greatest works going upto 1690 (iii) the period of translations and miscellaneous production. With the accession of James II in 1685 to the English throne, Dryden became a Roman Catholic. To his new beliefs he adhered steadfastly, even when in 1688 the Glorious Revolution brought certain disaster to such public men as adhered to Roman Catholicism. After the Glorious Revolution, however, his popularity declined. He lost his posts of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal. The Laureateship was conferred on Shadwell, his most rancorous foe. And Dryden retired with dignity to sustain his last years with his literary labours. Dryden died in May 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

1.2.2 His Works

Dryden began his life's work with poetry; he concluded it with poetry; and the years between are starred with the brightness of his

greater poems. As early as February 1664 Pepys records in his diary that he met “Mr. Dryden, the poet”; and he remained “Mr. Dryden, the poet” till the day of his death. (Albert, 158). It is therefore as a poet that we chiefly know Dryden. The important satirical works of Dryden are ‘Absalom and Achitophel’, ‘The Medal’, ‘Mac Flecknoe’ and a contribution of 200 lines to Nahum Tate’s ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ Part II. All his satires usually show artistic control and urbanity of manner. Since in this unit we are going to discuss ‘Mac Flecknoe’, one of Dryden’s satirical poems, a brief idea of some of his other major poems will help you in understanding his poetic talent. His first published poem of any consequence was ‘Heroic Stanzas on the Death of the Protector Oliver Cromwell’ (1659). It was a tribute to the Puritan leader. It is a striking manifestation of Dryden’s directness, and show a certain angular force and metrical skill. The poem is written in praise of Cromwell. It is the greatness of England that has been venerated in the person of the Protector. ‘Astrea Redux’ (1660) celebrates the restoration of Charles II to the throne. It shows the progress of Dryden’s poetical craftsmanship. It represents Dryden’s change of political affiliations. Sonorous and dignified phrases are used and it indicates Dryden’s potential mastery over the heroic couplet. His poem ‘Annus Mirabilis’ (1667) marks the end of the first phase of his poetical career. It primarily treats two historical events of the year 1666: the English naval victory over the Dutch fleet, and the horrors of the Great Fire in London. Written in quatrains, it shows flexibility and ease in verse form as well as vigour and striking imagery. It sometimes however reveals a weakness for fantastic conceits.

Dryden’s allegorical satire ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ (1681) resulted from political and personal controversies of the day. It is on the Whig attempt of the Earl of Shaftesbury to set up the Duke of York, a Roman Catholic, as the successor of Charles II. Dryden appears as the chief champion of his monarch and patron, Charles II. The poem reveals the poet’s amazing range and force as a satirist, his mastery over the heroic couplet, and his powers of reasoning in verse. The

excellence of the work lies mainly in the numerous portraits, which show Dryden's keen insight into human nature. The poem is regarded as the greatest political verse satire in English. In 'Absalom and Achitophel' Part II (1686) Dryden contributed a violent attack on Shadwell, giving him the name of Og. The main part of the work was composed by Nahum Tate.

'The Medal' (1682) is a satire against sedition. It is much shorter and graver than 'Absalom and Achitophel' and its versification also is less lively than that of the latter. It is partly bitter invective against Shaftesbury. The poem also argues about the unfitness of Republican institutions of England.

'Religio Laici' (1682) or the 'Religion of a Layman' shows Dryden's powers of reasoning in verse at their best. While his other satires were inspired by the political controversies of the time, this long narrative poem resulted from the religious controversies. It is a spirited defence of the Church of England. Another major poem of Dryden, 'The Hind and the Panther' (1687) is an allegorical defence of the Roman Catholic faith, and a reversal of Dryden's religious beliefs. The poem is remarkable for the poet's handling of the heroic couplet and expository skill.

Translations of classical authors such as Ovid, Boccaccio and Virgil were made by Dryden after the Glorious Revolution in 1688. He translated Virgil in 1697. He also adapted Chaucer to contemporary taste. His translations and fables particularly *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700) were greatly popular.

Though Dryden's genius lay chiefly in satiric and narrative poetry, his lyrical poetry also is of considerable importance. 'A Song for St. Cecilia's Day' (1687), 'Alexander's Feast' (1697) and 'Ode to Anne Killigrew' (1686) show Dryden's sense of music and capacity for a varied and powerful style.

Dryden was a versatile genius and a prolific writer. He began his career as a dramatist with a comedy of manners- *The Wild Gallant*

(1663), which was not a stage success. However, he went on to write several successful plays. Dryden popularized the heroic play, a type of tragedy written in heroic couplets, that is, iambic pentameter. This type of play deals with the themes of love and honour. The most successful heroic play written by Dryden was *The Conquest of Granada* (1670). Another tragedy, *All For Love* (1677), was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. It was his best play among his blank verse tragedies. In it characters are better drawn than in his other plays and the style is dignified and restrained.

As a literary critic, Dryden discussed theoretical as well as practical matters and the classical and contemporary poets and dramatists. His *Essay on Dramatic Poesie* (1668) is a major piece of literary criticism in the language. It is a realistic evaluation of Shakespeare and other Elizabethans. Direct and fluent in style, Dryden shows keen critical perception. His *The Essay on Satire* (1693) is a preface to the translation of Juvenal. It gives Dryden's views on satire. *The Essay on Epic Poetry* was written in 1698. His *Preface to Fables* (1700) shows his foresight and critical judgement in his estimate of Chaucer. Dryden's prose, indeed, marks a definite progress in the development of the medium in English. It is easy, fluent and never stilted. It is the first example of modern English prose.

Dryden's place among authors is due partly to his great influence on the succeeding age of classicism. Briefly, this influence may be summed up by noting the three new elements which he brought into our literature. These are: (1) the establishment of the heroic couplet as the fashion for satiric, didactic and descriptive poetry; (2) his development of a direct prose style we still cultivate; and (3) his development of the art of literary criticism in his essays and in the numerous prefaces to his poems. This is certainly a large work for one man to accomplish, and Dryden is worthy of honour, though comparatively little of what he wrote is now found on our bookshelves. (Long, 249)

STOP TO CONSIDER

● *Satire*: It is a literary form which searches out the faults of individuals or institutions in order to hold them up to ridicule. In other words, satire is a literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Dryden considered the true end of satire to be the amendment of vices by correction. But without humour, satire is invective, that is, it becomes violent and abusive. Satire may be (i) personal, and (ii) impersonal. Personal satire is against individuals and impersonal satire is aimed at types. Dryden is a master of the classical form of satire. He shows the influence of classical writers of Rome like Horace and Juvenal. Dryden combines the urbane laughter of Horace with the vigorous contempt of Juvenal in his satire.

● *Puritan*: A member of a group of English Protestants that arose in the 16th century within the Church of England, demanding the simplification of doctrine and worship, and greater strictness in religious discipline: during part of the 17th century the Puritans became a powerful political party.

● *Poet Laureate*: an eminent poet appointed as a member of the British royal household.

● *Historiographer Royal*: It is the title of an appointment as official chronicler or historian of a court or monarch. It was initially particularly associated with the French monarchy, where the post existed from at least 1550, but in the later 16th and 17th centuries became common throughout Europe.

● *Glorious Revolution*: The 1688 Revolution, often referred to as the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688', ended the reign of James II and ushered in the reign of William III and Mary II.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Which period of English literary history is known as the Restoration Period or the Age of Dryden?

- (A) 1800 to 1850 (B) 1702 to 1760
- (C) 1660 to 1700 (D) 1558 to 1603

2. Historical events often influence literature. Which of the following did not occur during the Restoration period?
 - (A) Charles II was restored to the throne (B) The French Revolution (C) The Great Fire of London (D) The Exclusion Bill Crisis

 3. Heroic couplet is a pair of:
 - (A) Unrhyming iambic pentameter lines (B) Rhyming iambic pentameter lines (C) Rhyming iambic hexameter (D) Unrhyming iambic hexameter

 4. Write a brief note on some of Dryden’s satirical poems. (75 words)
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-
-

1.3 About the Poem: ‘Mac Flecknoe’

1.3.1 Context of the Poem

‘Mac Flecknoe’ (full title: ‘Mac Flecknoe, or A Satire Upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T.S.’) is a highly entertaining verse mock-heroic satire written by John Dryden. It is a direct attack on Thomas Shadwell, another prominent poet of the time. The context or the historical background to ‘Mac Flecknoe’ goes back to the publication of ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ in which Dryden had attacked the Earl of Shaftesbury as an enemy and traitor to the nation. Shaftesbury, though arrested and sent to the Tower, was later acquitted of charges of treason, and his supporters struck a medal in his honour. Dryden then wrote the satire, ‘The Medal’, against Shaftesbury. It provoked a reply, ‘The Medal of John Bayes’, by Thomas Shadwell. Dryden was not a man to meekly

accept the insult and he published 'Mac Flecknoe' as a retaliation. Dryden and Shadwell had once been on friendly terms though they had argued with each other on literary matters. It is not clear how personal animosity set in between them, leading to literary attacks on one another. Whatever the circumstances, Dryden's retort to Shadwell is witty and comical. It is not only a satire on Shadwell but also ridicules all literary dunces.

1.4 Summary of the Poem

After enjoying for a long time the reputation of being the ruler in the realms of absolute nonsense, the old monarch of the Kingdom of Dullness, Flecknoe, like Augustus Caesar, realised that his life would soon come to an end as everything was liable to decay. (Ll. 1-6)

He had many sons from whom he had to choose his successor. He chose Shadwell to succeed him as he was a fit successor who would continually wage an unceasing war with wit. By it the poet meant that Flecknoe's son would be continually possessed with nonsense. Of all his sons, Flecknoe selected Shadwell because he was mature in dullness from his early years. He was confirmed in full stupidity. His other sons did sometime deviate into sense but Shadwell never wrote anything sensible even by chance. He belonged to the class of dull authors like Heywood and Shirley. Even Flecknoe himself was no more than a prelude to the empire of Shadwell. His stupidity was so limitless that John Singleton, a noted actor and bandmaster decided to give up the role of Villerius. All these facts sufficiently proved his foolishness and stamped him as the fittest heir of his father. (Ll. 7-63)

Flecknoe made arrangements for the coronation ceremony of Shadwell. An infamous place outside the walls of London was chosen as the site. Near the place stood a nursery where raw actors were instructed in the art of acting. The atmosphere was morally unwholesome and no great play,

tragedy or comedy, was ever enacted there. The unthinking audience with blank minds, who attended the theatre, applauded only crude performances. This place was chosen for the coronation as it had been prophesied sometime before that a great Emperor of Dullness would rule there.

The news of Shadwell's coronation spread far and wide. A vast gathering came to witness the ceremony. The path to the royal throne was strewn with torn and loose fragments of worthless poems, particularly of Shadwell himself. The path over which the emperor of Dunces was to pass was not covered with Persian carpets but with torn out pages of poems written by worthless poets, Heywood, Shirley and Ogilby and it was almost blocked by the large mass of Shadwell's own productions.. Flecknoe sat high on a throne consisting of a pile of books written by himself. Shadwell sat on his right with dullness writ large on his face. Shadwell was anointed by Flecknoe himself. In his left hand Shadwell held not the globe or the orb, that is, a small globe with a symbol of royal power, but a large mug of powerful ale. In his right hand he held Flecknoe's book, *Love's Kingdom*. Immediately after the ceremony was over, a dozen aged owls were seen flying on Shadwell's left. The admiring crowd greeted it as an auspicious omen. (Ll. 64-127)

Flecknoe then stood up and visualised the great future of Mac Flecknoe. He wished that his son Shadwell should reign over a vast stretch of territory from Ireland to the distant Barbados. He advised him not to depend on anybody except his stupid brain. By being natural, he would produce the best. He should never bother his head over success or reputation. He should also not imitate others but follow his own dull brain. Wit, rhetoric and sense should be eternally exiled from his literary domain and his characters should fully reveal the barrenness of his mind. He should not claim any literary kinship with Ben Jonson though he

did have a corpulent body like him. He should write feeble verses. His tragedies as well as comedies should be purely ineffective. His satires too should not have any force. He should only attempt anagrams. Anything better than acrostics, he was incapable of writing. (Ll. 128-210) The last words of Flecknoe could not be heard because he was dragged down by a trap-door laid by two characters- Bruce and Longville, of Shadwell's play.

Flecknoe's woolen robe was carried upwards and fell on Shadwell and thus endowed him with double measure of the dullness and stupidity of his old father. (Ll. 211- 217)

1.5 Critical appreciation of the Poem

'Mac Flecknoe' was published in 1682, but was written by Dryden in 1678. 'Mac Flecknoe' means 'the son of Flecknoe'. The choice of the name is not very difficult to understand. Richard Flecknoe, Shadwell's literary father in the poem, was in real life a Catholic priest and a versifier. Andrew Marvell had satirized him playfully in 'Flecknoe, an English Priest in Rome'. The wits of the day generally regarded Flecknoe as an object of ridicule. By the time Dryden chose him to be the father of the Prince of Dullness, he had come to symbolize the would-be poet of poor ability. But in the context of 'Mac Flecknoe', the father's talents in dullness, though great, are not to be unique. The son is greater in the field of dullness than the father. Flecknoe, accordingly, is only the prophet-precursor of the true epitome of unrelieved ignorance and stupidity- Mac Flecknoe, his son.

'Mac Flecknoe' is an allegorical verse satire. Dryden has used a fictitious base to carry his satiric meaning. The dominant idea is the orderly and appropriate succession to the throne, indicating not only a continuation of the excellent dullness of the previous reign, but its increase- for Shadwell gets "double portion of his father's art". Flecknoe in abdicating his kingship, chooses Shadwell as successor from among his sons, for he alone "stands confirmed in full stupidity." Flecknoe's

speeches in praise of his son's talents reveal the hidden meaning of Dryden. The hero is a fool and he fittingly vows to wage eternal war on sense, wit and intelligence at his coronation. The end comes with the aged Flecknoe disappearing through a trap-door, after bestowing his mantle on Shadwell. The religious imagery which punctuates the poem, for instance, Flecknoe being compared to John the Baptist, and his mantle being compared to Elijah's, lends it a rich allegorical overtone. Through the means of allegory, Dryden gains an effective satirical medium.

'Mac Flecknoe' is a personal satire or a lampoon against Shadwell. Allegorical devices are used to lend added point to the satire which is mainly directed towards Thomas Shadwell. Shadwell is attacked for being a literary dunce- indeed, the perfection of stupidity. He is represented as a dull poetaster who lacks wit, sense and intelligence. Others might allow a dim ray of intelligence into the darkness of nonsense, but not so Shadwell. "His rising fogs prevail upon the day." Shadwell is a grand failure in music as well as poetry and drama. He is great in tautology, anagrams and acrostics. His tragedies evoke laughter, his comedies causes sleep and his satires are tame and flat, and are devoid of any sting. He shares with Ben Jonson his corpulence alone but is most unlike that illustrious Elizabethan in sense and wit. He is thus fit to rule over the realm of Nonsense. Shadwell is thus castigated in no uncertain terms and held up to ridicule with more than a shade of unfairness. Shadwell, in fact, was not as bad a writer as Dryden makes him out to be. In truth, we cannot deny that personal motives underlie the satire in 'Mac Flecknoe'.

'Mac Flecknoe' is not merely a personal lampoon, but also general satire against bad art. While it is true that personal animosity probably led Dryden to castigate Shadwell so mercilessly in Mac Flecknoe, we also note that he satirises only the literary qualities of his rival. The full title of the poem says: 'Mac Flecknoe, or A Satire Upon the True-Blue- Protestant Poet, T.S.' It misleads one into thinking that Shadwell's religious opinions may be attacked. But the poem, however, deals exclusively with Shadwell as a master of dull writing. It does not make any reference to Shadwell's personal life or morals. Thus, though

personal motives are not to be completely overruled, the poem is also to be seen in a wider context rather than as a vindictive personal lampoon. It certainly involves personal satire, but through the personal element, Dryden moves to the general sphere. This movement from particular to general and vice versa gives to the poem a quality of universal significance.

The general theme of the satire is bad writing and low literary taste and standards. It is evoked through the particular satire against Shadwell. Shadwell is the representative of all poetasters, who lack genius and skill and are fit only for acrostics and the realm of Nonsense. The general aspect of the satire is closely intermingled with the personal element. The site of Shadwell's coronation is described not merely to ridicule Shadwell particularly, but also to expose the literary standards and the debased values of the society of those times. Dryden retaliated so successfully against a literary rival on personal grounds that we remember Shadwell merely as the Prince of Fools in 'Mac Flecknoe'. But at the same time, Dryden also satirised contemporary deterioration of literary taste. Through Shadwell, Dryden attacks all the would-be poets who lacked real talent.

The most entertaining aspect of 'Mac Flecknoe' is its mock-heroic technique. The satire, both in its personal and general nature, becomes poignant through the mock-heroic technique followed by Dryden. Its mock-heroic framing, which suggested Pope's 'Dunciad', has largely contributed to the poem's popularity, so long after its topical allusions have been lost and forgotten. In the mock-heroic form, as the name suggests, we have epic solemnity in manner but a contrasting triviality of theme. 'Mac Flecknoe' deals with a coronation-by itself a grand and solemn matter, but then there it is the coronation of the monarch of Dullness. The mock-heroic tone is obvious. The mock-heroic verse is enjoyable for its sheer comedy and fun. There is little bitterness and plenty of spontaneous humour. All the satiric devices in 'Mac Flecknoe' are related to its mock-heroic frame and are used with consummate skill by the poet.

All epic conventions are parodied for comic and satiric effect. Part of the mock-epic technique is Dryden's consummate skill in using noble terms for his victim in order to deflate him. Comparison with legendary heroes and Biblical personages and incidents serve to reduce the victim to the lowest level. Shadwell is elevated to the state of Arion and Elisha but only to come crashing down to own a trembling lute and a mantle of dullness. The mockheroic method is employed to suggest the heavy, gross figure of Shadwell cutting his way down the silver Thames to alight among brothel houses and a Nursery where young actors are trained. A stupendous welcome awaits the stately hero. Stacks of dusty books and pages of forgotten authors, pave the way. Ruined booksellers and stationers line the way forming a guard of honour. The marks of royalty in the realm of Nonsense are a "mighty mug of potent ale" and Flecknoe's "*Love's Kingdom*".

The whole speech of Flecknoe with its prophetic tone and high-flown appreciation of Shadwell's works and talents, evokes laughter because of its mock-heroic technique. The praise is for supreme dullness and the prophecy is that Shadwell is the supreme master of that realm. The mock-heroic technique involving deceptive politeness, deflating images, ludicrous setting, caricature and sarcasm makes the poem delightful and witty, even while giving it a devastating satiric power. 'Mac Flecknoe' has thus been termed Dryden's greatest mockheroic fantasy.

Allied with the form of mock-heroic is Dryden's use of the heroic couplet in 'Mac Flecknoe'. The verse-form is pre-eminently suited to the satiric as well as the mock-heroic design. It lends itself to the device of inflating the victim in one line only to be followed by deflation in the next. Dryden's genius is established in this poem by his use of the heroic couplet in a flexible and appropriate manner. He made it a perfect medium for pouring out his magnificent abuse. It helps in being politely offensive.

'Mac Flecknoe' was certainly motivated by personal enmity. But Dryden enlarged its scope to include satire on contemporary literary taste and bad poets in general. However, if it were merely topical, its

appeal would have vanished long ago. If it appeals to us today, it is because of the delightful use of the mock-heroic technique with the accompanying comic overtones, and the remarkable pen-picture of Shadwell.

STOP TO CONSIDER

- ‘Mac Flecknoe, or A Satire Upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T.S.’: The T.S. of the full title of Dryden’s poem ‘Mac Flecknoe’ signifies Thomas Shadwell, the subject of the poem. ‘Blue’ suggests a Tory, for Shadwell was earlier a Tory supporter, though he later on joined the Whigs.
- *Mock-heroic*: A mock-heroic or mock-epic is distinguished as that type of parody which imitates, in a sustained way, both the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre, but applies it to narrate at length a commonplace or trivial subject matter. Alexander Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’ is one of the finest examples of mock-heroic poem.
- *Heroic Couplet*: A heroic couplet is a rhyming couplet, or pair of lines with end rhymes in iambic pentameter, meaning there are five iambic ‘feet’ on each line. The heroic couplet traditionally appears in long, narrative poems called epics, but it can also be used in mock epics that parody the ‘heroic’ tone of epic poetry. It was much used by Chaucer and the poets of the 17th and 18th centuries such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope etc.
- *Lampoon*: A short satirical work, or a passage in a longer work, which describes the appearance and character of a particular person in a way that makes that person ridiculous. It employs caricature, which in a verbal description exaggerates or distorts, for comic effect, a person’s distinctive physical features or personality traits.
- *Allegory*: An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agent and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the “literal,” or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification.

- *Whigs and the Tories*: As political labels, the terms derive from the factional conflict of the Exclusion Crisis (1679-81), Whigs being supporters of Exclusion (of the Catholic James, Duke of York, brother of the king and next in line for the English throne) and Tories being their Royalist opponents.

Check Your Progress-2

1. *Mac Flecknoe* is a/an:
(A) comedy (B) allegorical satire (C) lyric (D) elegy
2. Of all his sons, Flecknoe selected Shadwell because:
(A) he was mighty and powerful (B) he was sensible
(C) he was bold and courageous (D) he was confirmed in full stupidity
3. The main idea of Pope’s *The Dunciad* was taken from:
(A) Absalom and Achitophel (B) Mac Flecknoe
(C) The Medal (D) An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot
4. Describe the Coronation Scene of *Mac Flecknoe*. (75 words)
.....
.....
.....

1.6Let us Sum Up

In this unit we discussed the poem ‘Mac Flecknoe’ which illustrates the supreme satirical genius of John Dryden. At the very beginning, you were acquainted with the life and works of John Dryden. After it, you read about the historical background, the leading thoughts along with a critical assessment of the poem ‘Mac Flecknoe’ .You have also familiarized yourself with the poetic form and technique used

by Dryden in 'Mac Flecknoe'. Hence you will be able to evaluate the poem in its totality. Keeping in mind the subject-matter of the poem, you can go through some of Dryden's other verse satires and his contemporaries to develop further your concept about the mock-heroic verse satire.

ANSWER KEYS

Check Your Progress-1

- 1.(C)
- 2.(B)
- 3.(B)
4. See section 1.2.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1.(B)
- 160
- 2.(D)
- 3.(B)
4. See section 1.4

Possible Questions

1. Describe *Mac Flecknoe* as a personal satire against Thomas Shadwell.
2. Explain *Mac Flecknoe* as a mock-heroic poem.
3. Discuss Dryden's handling of the heroic couplet, indicating its effectiveness as a medium of poetical satire in *Mac Flecknoe*.
4. Write a critical appreciation of *Mac Flecknoe*.

Key Words

- *Flecknoe*: Richard Flecknoe was an Irish Roman Catholic priest. Dryden refers to him as a dull writer.
- *Augustus*: Augustus was a nephew of Julius Caesar and was adopted by him. After Julius Caesar's death, a triumvirate consisting of Augustus, Antony and Lepidus was formed. Here, Dryden compares Flecknoe to Augustus, because he was made the ruler of the realm of Nonsense, while he was young, just as Augustus was forced by Caesar's assassination to give up his studies and plunge into politics. Augustus ruled Rome for more than forty years. Flecknoe also governed his domain of dullness for a similarly long period.
- *Mac Flecnoe*: Son of Flecknoe; 'Mac' stands for son.
- *Sh-*: Shadwell. The dash is a conventional device for stopping short of actually naming the victim of a lampoon, while indicating the identity. „*h Heywood and Shirley*: Thomas Heywood (1573-1641) and James Shirley (1596-1666) were prolific writers. Both the dramatists were outmoded in Restoration times. They are referred to as Shadwell's literary ancestors.
- *Ogilby*: John Ogilby, a voluminous hack-writer who translated Homer and Virgil.
- *Tautology*: unnecessary repetition.
- *Arion*: Greek poet and musician.
- *Singleton*: an eminent musical performer of the time.
- *Villierius*: Villierius is a leading character, a band master, in D'avenant's opera *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656). Through his reference the poet intends to ridicule Shadwell's incompetency even in the humble capacity of band master.

- *Love's Kingdom*: a pastoral tragic-comedy by Flecknoe.
- *Bruce and Longville*: These are two dull characters in Shadwell's play *The Virtuoso*.
- *Mantle*: cloak. The reference is to a Biblical story of the Old Testament. When Elijah was about to be borne up to heaven, his mantle or cloak fell on the shoulders of Elisha, as he wished. Elisha was thus inspired by the spirit of Elijah. The comparison is subtly ironic. Flecknoe, unlike Elijah, sinks downwards. It is his coarse, woolen cloak which is carried upwards by a wind which came from inside the earth. The cloak falls to Shadwell's share, and it brought him double his father's art, that is, the inspiration to write twice as dull and stupid works as Flecknoe. Dryden satiric powers are very well embodied in these lines.

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BLOCK-III, UNIT-II

Alexander Pope

***The Dunciad*, Book IV**

Content

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1.0. Objectives:

This Unit will familiarize you with the following aspects of Pope's *The Dunciad*, (Book IV)

- Pope as a pedant and his pedantry.
- Pope's life and his works
- The central idea of *The Dunciad* (Book IV)
- Critical aspects associated with the poem

1.1. 0. Introduction:

1.1.1. Life and works of Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

Alexander Pope was born at Lombard Street, in London on 21st May 1688. His parents, Alexander Pope , Senior and mother Edith Turner, were both Catholics. Being a Catholic Pope had suffered discrimination all through his life in protestant majority England. Catholics in England during that period were barred from teaching, attending a university for pursuing higher education, voting, or holding any public office of importance by the Church of England. This discriminatory practice of the Church of England affected Pope's early education in a very serious way. He was taught to read by his aunt, and went to various Catholic schools which were though illegal yet tolerated. In some areas. He further suffered religious persecution at the hands of the Protestants which forced his family to shift to Popeswood in Binfield, Berkshire because of strong anti catholic sentiments in London. His formal education could not proceed any further because of religious discrimination and persecution. So he started reading classical literature of satirist Horace, and Juvenal, and poets like Homer and Virgil along with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and John Dryden.

Pope published his first poem "Pastorals" in May 1709 followed by "An Essay on Criticism" in May 1711. He became a founder member of the Scriblerus Club along with other prominent literary figures of the period. He contributed regularly to *The Guardian* and *The Spectator*. Later he translated Homer's *Illiad* (1715-20) and *Odessey* (1726). In 1712 he published one of his most important works of satire *Rape of the Lock*, a mock epic. Between 1732 and 1734 he published *Essay on Man*, a philosophical poem. *An Epistle to Doctor Arbuthnot* was published in 1738. Pope died on 30th May 1744 in Twickenham, England. The position of Alexander Pope in English literature has been a matter of debate among literary historians. Some rate him as the true successor of John Dryden whereas some others term him as a venomous, short tempered, and short tempered. However, both these assessments seem to have some truth in them. But one should differentiate between

the man and the poet while making an objective evaluation of Alexander Pope. As a poet he pursued perfection with an obsessive mind and can be termed almost as a classical poet in English literature. It is an accepted fact that his vision has limitations and he lacks the philosophical depth of a Wordsworth or Milton, but he upholds a moral perception rather than a vision in his poetry.

As a satirist Pope was most effective. He mocks at the fashionable society of eighteenth century England in *Rape of the Lock*. In *The Dunciad* he satirizes dullness in general and the contemporary dunces in particular. Dr. Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets* states “If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?” Pope was a poet with uncommon genius and extraordinary poetic talent.

Check Your Progress

1. Why is the position of Pope in English literature a matter of debate?

1.1.2 Background of *The Dunciad*

The 1728 version of the *Dunciad* was published anonymously in three books. In this edition of *The Dunciad* Lewis Theobald was the hero. The second version *Dunciad Variorum* was published again anonymously in 1729 in three books. A *New Dunciad* was published in 1742 with an addition of a fourth book, *The Dunciad in Four Books*. In the fourth book a new hero Colly Cibber was introduced.

The Dunciad was originally conceived as an onslaught on dullness and pedantry by the members of Scriblerus Club, which was an informal association of literary persons based in London. This club emerged as a literary body in 18th century. The members of this club were prominent literary figures of the age. The core group of this club consisted of persons like Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope. The other

members of this club were John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John, and Thomas Parnell. This club was established in 1714 and continued to function till 1745. The character of Martinus Scriblerus was created collectively by this group. The character of Martinus Scriblerus used to be the spokesperson in the satirical writings of the members of this group. The club's main aim was to satirize the abuses of learning and this aim was achieved through the publication of *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (written during 1713-14 and published in 1741).

Pope was hired by publisher Jacob Tonson to edit Shakespeare's plays which he did and published an edited version of Shakespeare in 1725. In this edition Pope arbitrarily excluded and added sentences to Shakespeare's plays. He shifted 1560 lines from Shakespeare's plays to footnotes. In 1726 Lewis Theobald published a pamphlet highlighting the arbitrariness and errors of Pope in his edition of Shakespeare titled *Shakespeare Restored*. (The full title of Theobald's edition was *Shakespeare restored, or, A specimen of the many errors, as well committed, as unamended, by Mr. Pope: in his late edition of this poet. Designed not only to correct the said edition, but to restore the true reading of Shakespeare in all the editions ever yet published*). This pamphlet caused considerable damage to Pope's literary reputation. His being a member of minority Catholic religion further compounded the matter. His physical deformity added on to his inferiority complex. The only alternative left for him was to counter attack Theobald through literature and redeem his literary stature. This became the main motive of Pope behind writing *The Dunciad*.

Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* is considered a masterpiece of eighteenth century satirical writing. *The Dunciad* was constructed keeping in mind Homer's the *Illiad*. A parody of pedantic scholarship, *The Dunciad* is an attack on Pope's literary foes who in some way or the other affected him. With reference to a number of literary and non-literary figures Pope begins and ends his poem. The poem was dedicated to Jonathan Swift another writer of merit during Pope's time. The poem's pedantic nature and multiple references sometimes create difficulty for the reader to comprehend the meaning of the poem. Thus, Pope has

added notes for various editions to explain the references and allusions but which were not enough. Emerging from a feud on Shakespeare against Lewis Theobald, Pope constructed and planned out *The Dunciad*. Though it has four books in total, all about dullness, *The Dunciad*, Book IV can be treated separately from the three previous books. Originally it was incorporated as a concluding part of *The Dunciad*. The aim of this work was total obliteration of sense from the whole of England where only dullness prevails, according to Pope. Pope portrays several characters and satirizes institutions and also brings in the socio-cultural and religious milieu in this work.

1.1.2. Alexander Pope and the Eighteenth Century

This section attempts to familiarize the reader with Alexander Pope and the time in which he lived, demarcating the society from several facets of life. It will also speak about the literary developments that took shape during the period

1.1.3 Age of Pope/ Augustan Age/Neo-Classical Period

This section will give you an idea of the age Alexander Pope was writing in and also familiarize you with various aspects of this particular age and its literary trends. This section will give you an overview of the time Pope lived. Augustan Age or popularly known as the Age of Pope brings in several developments into English literature during the eighteenth century. Unaware of the forthcoming Industrial Revolution and its concerns thereon, it was an age filled with a balance and reasonableness. Unlike the preceding ages where poetry ruled, prose was predominant in this period. The beginning of novel can be traced to eighteenth century. Pamphlets, newspapers, magazines etc. started to bloom during this period. Poetry was considered inadequate/narrow and as such prose and fiction bloomed. Realism and refinement of literary output was quite a feature like the preceding period— Age of Dryden. Along with a satirical thrust was seen developing in a rapid pace, bringing in a tinge of politics into literature. This satirical bent in literature is actually an offshoot of the rivalry between the Whigs and Tories who

for their political motives used writers to write upon such satirical comments/notes/prose on their enemies; and they are also priced or rewarded for the same. Though Alexander Pope is away from such political agenda, he too used it in his own style.

The early part of eighteenth century witnessed a drastic change from the Restoration age. This age drifted itself to some kind of moral regeneration which was found missing in the preceding age. Eighteenth century writers and poets looked more towards the classics, instead of imitating their immediate predecessors like Shakespeare, Bacon and others. Instead the writers and poets of this period showed leanings towards the classics like Virgil, Horace and Homer.

Known as the Age of Reason and prose this age did not produce any great amount of substantial poetry.

However, whatever poetry was produced during this age, it mainly focused on life and its surroundings. It has a very conspicuous satiric and didactic thrust. Satire remained as the predominant form of poetry in this age. Specific public and literary figures are made the subject of ridicule and were mocked at. Certain distrust and a critical taste prevailed replacing the romantic ideals. The poets of this age did not recline on Chaucer, Spenser or Shakespeare rather they looked up to the classical poets like Homer, Horace and Virgil. Along with this poetry catered to love of form and superficial décor. There was no place for nature or simplicity and artificiality became all pervasive. The age considered limited in its character and focused on the literature of the town. Nevertheless, the period witnessed a development in satire and heroic couplet, developing prose style to a certain excellence and in the later part prepared a space for the birth of English novel.

1.1.4 Alexander Pope and his works:

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) a representative poet of his age, despite of his physical deformity he attained great heights in literature. His extensive range of knowledge and intelligence established him as a great writer, both in prose and poetry. His acquaintance with Joseph

Addison, Richard Steele, and Jonathan Swift let him procure the best from them and he gained fame as such. He even translated Homer through which he amassed a great amount of wealth. Along with this, he also edited Shakespeare's works, a vain attempt, which later became an issue for the critics. The ambiguity about Pope arises when some of his biographers call him "good and exceedingly lovable man" and some call him the opposite. Pope was not one to escape from the circle of enemies, like his bodily deformity to many he was deformed in the mind and thus attacked and critiqued Pope's works. But, Pope has his own way of dealing with his enemies; he answers their attacks with his works. He is much vindictive in replying them with a satirical picture of his enemies.

Pope took poetry to a different level when prose was the predominant form of literature of this age. Pope was encouraged to write poetry by some older writers such as William Wycherley and William Congreve. It was by reading them that Pope developed a critical bent mind. He completely dominated and represented the period. Pope followed Dryden in his works in very many ways.

Pope is also considered an unchallenged master of heroic couplet. He gave a different brilliance to it in his own way. In his hands heroic couplet achieved a different stratum. Pope paused after every couplet. He placed in them a different witty, but artificial sense. He can excel in maintaining such technicalities in his works. Due to this Pope is even criticized for being too superficial having no depth of human emotion or the natural world. Pope is said to be limited in the smart society in his works. Somewhere Pope's worth is questioned if he is a great technician/satirist/critique/ a poet of man devoid of human love and external nature.

Important works of Pope

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, The Rape of the Lock, The Illiad, The Dunciad, Windsor Forest, Pastorals, To Lord Bathurst, Messiah: A Sacred Eclogues, Ode on St. Cecilia's Day, Ode on Solitude, Of the

Use of Riches, The Dying Christian to his Soul, Of the Knowledge and Characters of Men, Of the Characters of Women, Moral Essays, An Essay on Man, Essay on Criticism, Imitations of Horace

Check your progress:

- Discuss the development of literature during the Eighteenth Century.
- Assess Alexander Pope as an Eighteenth Century writer.
- Alexander Pope is considered to be the representative poet of his age. Discuss.

1.2.1. *The Dunciad*: A Study

This section will familiarize you with the various critical aspects of the poem *The Dunciad*. Besides this unit will specifically try to give you an idea of Book IV of *The Dunciad* and the critical aspects associated with it.

1.2.2: *The Dunciad*: An overview

Pope's *The Dunciad* can be considered his best satire on a scholar or a pedant. Here Pope engaged in a spiteful attack on Lewis Theobald, Colly Cibber and other literary enemies of his. There are four versions of Pope's *The Dunciad*. The first version of *The Dunciad* was published in 1728 was a satire on pedantry in three books where Pope attacked Theobald; the next edition of *The Dunciad* which was a bit enlarged was published in 1729, titled, *Dunciad Variorum*, including a mock scholarly preface by "Martin-Scriblers". In the third edition published in 1742, a fourth book was attached to the previous three, named *The New Dunciad*. In the final and the fourth edition, the complete *Dunciad* now published in four books came out in 1743; here there was a revision of all the four books and a revised commentary was added. Pope took Colly Cibber as the target of his satire for this final edition.

The Dunciad can be considered mock-heroic narrative poem

identical in style to Dryden's "MacFlecknoe" (1682) which was published almost fifty years before it. The poem is basically an attack on Pope's literary rivals, the ones who tried to critique his works. Pope took all of them as one and tried to wage a literary war with them. He considered his literary rivals and critics as his sworn enemies and grouped them together as his general enemy termed 'Dullness' which reduces the world to dullness, chaos, infertility in literature and darkness all over.

This personal malice in the shape of *The Dunciad* even earned Pope much reputation in the literary field. Lewis Theobald and Colly Cibber are more remembered due to Pope's featuring them in his works than for their own worth. Whereas, Pope's worth is evident in the works he mastered, and filled it with perfection and permanence. But with all his worthiness, Pope was criticized for his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1725. Pope somehow could not afford to give the finesse to this work, he lacked the necessary traits to edit upon Shakespeare and this was taken as an opportunity to hit on otherwise popular Pope by other Shakespearian critics, Lewis Theobald being one of them. Lewis Theobald being a Shakespearian scholar attacked Pope's version of Shakespeare in his *Shakespeare Restored (or a Specimen of many Errors as well committed as unamended by Mr. Pope in his late edition of this Poet)* (1726). But Pope is not one to remain silent to such literary criticism. The criticism of Theobald compounded the already complex matters for Pope. He has been a victim of religious persecution because of his Catholicism, his physical deformity has created an inferior complex in him, he considered himself a social outcast in a predominant Protestant England, so he took to literature as his only solace of life. Theobald's attack has shaken the foundations of his literary fame, his only hope in life. In the backdrop of this, Pope created *The Dunciad* which became a masterpiece of a satire in English literature.

Pope attempted to destroy the fame of Theobald as a Shakespearian scholar in *The Dunciad*. Theobald's criticism of Pope turned upside down on himself in *The Dunciad* where Pope made him sit in the throne of dullness. But Theobald was not made to sit in the

throne of dullness alone; Pope replaced him with Colley Cibber. Pope clubbed a lot of minor writers in this way as a general school of dullness ruling the literary world. All these were the writers who in some way or the other created tensions in Pope's life. *The Dunciad* served two purposes for Pope—one, it showcased his wit and talent and his literary creativity and, two, his skill in using literature as a weapon to settle scores with his enemies. *The Dunciad* reveals the latent power of satire lying hidden in Pope; he takes satire to a different level, a stinging wit in *The Dunciad*. *The Dunciad* turns out to be a keen and short answer to all the lapses levied on Pope. The poem aims to showcase the rule of dull poets or 'dunces'. The poem was first intended in 1728 to become the conclusion for a volume of *Miscellanies* by Jonathan Swift and Pope. But later the poem did not become a part of the said volume and Pope substituted it with a prose satire, "Peri Bathous: or, the Art of Sinking in Poetry" where too Pope attacked his literary enemies. Mock-heroic in style the poem celebrates dunces, the so called pedants or fools in the poem. Theobald, the prime target of Pope's attack in the poem, is praised for his bad poetry which is not only dull but also monotonous. In the 1742-43 version, Theobald was replaced with Colley Cibber as the hero of *The Dunciad*.

In Book I, II, III of *The Dunciad* we find Pope venting out his anger and frustration to bestow the crown of dullness on Theobald and Colly Cibber and great many people who once or the other became target of his anger and became his sworn enemies.

1.2.3. *The Dunciad*, Book IV

The final version of *The Dunciad* known as "The New Dunciad" (1743) has an 'argument' in the beginning of Book IV, where Pope with enough lucidity states that the plan of his poem. He describes how the Goddess is preparing to destroy order and science upon earth and substitute it with the "Kingdom of the Dull":

He shews the Goddess coming in her Majesty, to destroy Order and Science, and to substitute the Kingdom of the Dull upon

earth. How she leads captive the Sciences, and silenceth the Muses; and what they be who succeed in their stead. All her Children by a wonderful attraction, are drawn about her; and bear along with them divers others, who promote her Empire by connivance, weal resistance, or discouragement of Arts; such as Half-wits, tasteless Admirers, vain Pretenders, the Flatterers of Dunces, or the Patrons of them.

Similarly the poem ends with the victory of Dullness and the eventual fall of the civilization. Pope succeeds in giving a tragic ending to the poem and drifts from the satiric realm of explaining the fall. He involves himself fully to give in detail every angle to ridicule his enemies, and it seems in doing so he enjoys to the fullest. He in high spirits unveils the malice in the works of the dunces.

Book IV of *The Dunciad* can be treated as a separate unit. It is longer than the other three sections of the poem. It can be read as an individual part of the whole poem because it has a proper beginning and an end; in structure and tone too it is entirely different. This book tries to show a totally opposite view of England where everything is lying in chaos and dullness has pervaded over it. It is going to become a “dull and venal a new World to mold”. In the tableau Pope constructed, he skilfully describes how dullness enters and her throne; how Science is chained, logic is bound and wit is exiled in entirety, how morality is bound by two cords, rhetoric tied, Muses bound in tenfold chains guarded by Flattery and Envy. But Mathematics is free because she thinks it is too insane to be bound. Then Pope goes on to say that even Chesterfield cannot abstain himself from seeing this, who once opposed the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737 and now on seeing the Muses chained nor can he do anything, and for Colley Cibber the hero of dullness, Pope makes him sleep in the lap of Dulness. Pope made Cibber sleep because he had played no part in the actions circumscribed in Book II; in Book III he was in deep slumber, as such he needs to sleep in Book IV too.

Amongst the audience Pope keeps a harlot who makes her entry “with mincing steps, small voice, and languid eye”. There is also an

opera arranged where Fame blows her trumpet. Pope tries to classify three categories of dunces, first one is naturally dull, secondly, one who disagrees to be called a dunce, but is and finally one who supports dunces either by giving money or by downgrading the worth of genuine writers.

Pope creates a dramatic atmosphere where the three categories of dunces envelop the whole ambience besides Dulness' throne. The first category of dullness, Pope says, is drawn towards her as bees to a queen bee. The second category orbits around her and tries a lot to move out of it but to no avail. The final category comes to Dulness as a comet does.

Pope tries to classify several literary rivals of his in these three categories. In the third category Pope places one Sir Thomas Hanmer who was a Shakespeare editor and published his edition of Shakespeare himself. Hanmer does it with all extravagance he could and publishes it in a grand manner. But his ornate edition could not last long because another editor named Benson did it in a more classy way by using John Milton and his glories. On finding this, Hanmer proceeds to take back his edition but could not. Queen Dulness orders her subjects to follow Benson and fasten their names to works by famous and worthy statues of writers and their works and consider them as their trophies: "So by each Bard an Alderman shall sit."

Pope goes to bring to the context of dunces, one Mr. Richard Busby, an English Anglican priest, who was also a head master of Westminster School and was famous for giving corporeal punishment to his pupils, was seen as a blood-thirsty criminal. Pope brought the ghost of Dr. Busby to stage and said he was first to come forward and speak with Dulness and tell her that he is her true champion because he can convert geniuses to fools.

Queen Dulness administers the theory of governing wrong over: "The RIGHT DIVINE of KINGS to govern wrong" and further says that the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford do the same. Pope brought in Cambridge and Oxford in the realm of dunces because Oxford

University in 1703 expelled John Locke's theory and logic, that is, he was censured and his "Essay on Human Understanding" was banned. Pope on finding such worth being disregarded brought Oxford and Cambridge under the school of dunces. Pope also attacked Oxford because it failed to award William Warburton for the degree of Doctor of Divinity between 1741-43. Due to this, Pope himself refused the honour of Doctor of Law.

Pope by drawing in figures like Richard Bentley, a professor of Trinity College, Cambridge and making him wear a Quaker's hat ridicules or mocks such geniuses. Through Bentley, Pope attacks the worth of such universities. Pope makes Bentley tell Dulness that he and his comrades are her true followers because they had "made Horace dull and humbled Milton's strains" and will be her enduring follower who can turn anything upside down. He goes on to compete with Issac Barrow or Francis Atterbury, the former a Theologian, and Mathematician and latter a bishop and politician, and make his stand stiff under Dulness.

Bentley could not stay for long because the others in line, a whore, a pupil and a French Governor come forward to put forth their views in front of Dulness. Pope, by keeping these three in the same track is again attacking the French Governor, who cannot be heard by Queen Dulness because of the loud and shrill French horn. Pope here concocts a tale where he made the pupil tell the story of the French Governor. He was an Englishman having gone to school and college but learnt nothing, travelled Europe's length and breadth, Paris and Rome but gathered only vice and returned finally to England with a pregnant nun following whose child is the present pupil narrating the tale. The nun turned to a prostitute and the Governor now to avoid any punishment is going to join the parliament. On hearing the story Dulness decides to embrace all three and frees them from the "Sense of Shame".

Next in line to Dulness is an idle lord who cries in pain because of sitting in an easy chair. Then, comes an Italian Dominican friar,

scholar, and historian, Annius da Viterbo. He is a forger of Roman coins and Virgil's manuscripts and wants all the dunces to give them his skills on forgery and asks them to value false Roman coins and manuscripts above their own lifestyle and clothing. He tries to please Dulness by making her subjects learn to boast the skills of dulness and doltishness. Philosophers like Crousaz and Burgersdyck are seen as huge dray-horses. Pope turned the Cambridge University into a second Grub Street. Pope in a way charges public school and universities with bringing in or fostering dulness. These charges against these universities might have emanated from Pope's personal dislike for them.

Emerging from a Shakespearian criticism *The Dunciad* turned into a single handed literary war where Pope savagely critiqued his enemies. From the day it was first published according to Richard Savage, the opponent of Pope tried to stop the sale of the poem in bookshops. Pope ends Book IV in a very sinister way where Arts and Science move into oblivion. But despite the attempt, the poem turned out to be a masterpiece. The aesthetic debate that continues in the poem from the beginning to end is a masterpiece in itself. Pope by waging a single handed war against the English literary tradition questions the culture and tradition of Europe. He in a way to satiate his anger brings in the whole of Europe to his fingers. In spite of all these, Pope has still his skillful and fantastic recreation and reconstruction to offer to the English literary tradition. Pope's motive was successful in breaking the ground for his enemies. With so many inter-textualities Pope entrapped his opponents. He turns *The Dunciad* into an allegorical battlefield, where "There marched the bard and blockhead, side by side,/who rhym'd for hire, and patroniz'd for pride."

All these linking of political, social and educational spheres seem to spring from Pope's personal disgust with the system prevalent in England during the eighteenth century. Pope categorized his enemies as learned dunces or pedant dull heads.

1.2.4. Critical Discussion

Pope announced publicly in his final note on *Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue II* before writing Book IV of *The Dunciad* that he has “resolution to publish no more.... a sort of Protest against the insuperable corruption and depravity of manners, which he had been so unhappy as to live to see.” But neither his fear of prosecution nor anything else could stop him from going on with Book IV. Rather Book IV declares the final version of all the previous books. Though some critics consider Pope a deviant amongst the others, one who disregards the popular and polite culture of his time and predicts for Europe a steep decline, Pope could not be budged from his place of an eminent literary critic.

On his work and specifically himself, Pope has announced an eternal war from the literary culture of his time and may be the following years. *The Dunciad* provokes strong reactions and questions the literary tradition of the eighteenth century.

Pope tries to give the ending of *The Dunciad* a mock-apocalyptic look which is the reversal of the creation of the Universe as described in *Paradise Lost*,

Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos! is restor'd;

Light dies before thy uncreating word:

Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;

And Universal Darkness buries All.

Apart from being a mock-epic and a poem on dunces in the literary tradition, *The Dunciad* has many more hidden issues to trace. Within satire and parody where Pope condemns his literary rivals, he also silently overlaps a male ideology over his use of female characters. Pope was also known to castigate women writers for being irrational and incapable of writing anything worthy. He even went to the extent of making a lady, Queen of Dulness sit in the throne. All the ill-heads are made to sit at the pedestal of the Queen Dulness, and as such are

considered illogical, disordered, and uneducated. Queen Dulness is an exemplar of his underlying discrimination between male and female characters in general. Pope also talks about Handel's masculine music being replaced in Ireland because now the dunces only enjoyed effeminized opera full of castratos. Pope tries to feminize anything distasteful and unworthy. Even in the previous three books Pope sketched several woman characters and tried to draw a parallel between the feminine and the so called dunces or disordered.

To its first reader, *The Dunciad* may seem to be in similar light like *Paradise Lost* or, *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, because Pope's work has Miltonic resonances and style of Dryden. Several similarities of epic, satire can be paralleled with Dryden and Milton, but despite all these *The Dunciad* has a glory of its own.

Check your progress:

- Write a note on Dulness and the way Pope satirizes it.
- Comment on the apocalyptic ending of the poem.
- Discuss the hidden issues of gender implicit in Book IV.
- How has Pope clubbed socio-political and religious life of England with his literary scholarship? Discuss.

1.2.5. Let us sum up

The Dunciad, Book IV in its dense and controversial structure laid several writers' life and style unveiled. The Shakespeare controversy which triggered Pope to write, along with his personal strife with the society, let him go through many pages to savagely attack his literary foes. Discontent and perturbed with the political, social, religious, educational and literary system and society he was living in, Pope gave vent to his long buried anger and frustration in the form of *The Dunciad*. Crowning Dulness and making a row of her followers, Pope succeeds in showcasing the frivolities present in his contemporary writers. Drawing his attacks in several fields from religion, to educational institutions of repute to litterateurs, Pope marches ahead like a master of all. Book IV which acted as an amalgamation of all the previous books is intense and filled with all that Pope wanted to say.

1.2.6. Glossary:

- Mock-epic: satirizes or parodies a person or a system in a literary style, giving it the grandeur of an epic in a frivolous way to ridicule it.
- Satire: humorously exposing and critiquing a person or society or a system in an exaggerated manner, in a scholarly style.
- Dunces: a stupid or a very slow-witted learner.
- Science: any kind of knowledge

1.2.7. Suggested Model Questions:

1. Comment on the argument of Book IV.
2. How has Pope used satire as a mode to contest his literary rivals? Give few examples from the text to elucidate your answer.
3. Pope has brought a personal war to a literary forum. Discuss.
4. What are the mock-heroic elements of Book IV?
5. Who is Dulness? What does Pope mean by it? How is Dulness received in the beginning of the poem by other characters?
6. How is religion, politics and education connected in the poem?

1.2.8 References and suggested readings:

1. Pope, Alexander. *The Poems of Alexander Pope*. John Butt, ed. Yale UP: New Haven,
2. Pope, Alexander. *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*. Aubrey Williams, ed. Houghton Mifflin: New York, 1969.
3. Mack, Maynard. *Alexander Pope: A Life* W. W. Norton: New York, 1985.
4. Lynch, Jack. *The Dunciad, Book-IV*. Jack Lynch, ed. <http://www.blackmask.com>

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BLOCK-IV
Romantic Poetry
Unit-I
WILLIAM BLAKE
Poems: “Holy Thursday”, “London”, “The Tyger”,

Structure-

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: Defining Romanticism
- 1.2 The Romantic Age (1798-1832)
 - 1.2.1 Romanticism as a Movement
 - 1.2.2 Socio-Historical and Political Context
 - 1.2.3 Characteristics of Romantic Poetry
- 1.3 William Blake - The Poet
 - 1.3.1 Life and Works
 - 1.3.2 *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*
 - 1.3.3 Major Themes in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*
 - 1.3.4 Blake’s “Holy Thursday” (*Songs of Innocence*)- Explanation and Analysis
 - 1.3.5 Blake’s “London”- Explanation and Analysis
 - 1.3.6 Blake’s “The Tyger”- Explanation and Analysis
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Key Words
- 1.6 Suggested Readings
- 1.7 Possible Answers to CYP
- 1.8 Model Questions

1.0 Objectives

In this unit an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the background of Romantic literature, with special emphasis on Romantic poetry. The unit will also highlight the chief trends and movements of the age which will help you to understand and contextualize the poetry of the age within the larger scenario. A thorough reading of the unit will help you to-

- Examine the socio-historical and political background of the Romantic Age

- Acquire a clear understanding of Romantic literature
- Identify the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry
- Familiarize yourself with William Blake and his poetry
- Analyze Blake's poems, "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*), "London" (*Songs of Experience*) and "The Tyger" (*Songs of Experience*)

1.1 Introduction:

Defining Romanticism:

Romanticism was a broad movement in the history of European and American consciousness which rebelled against the triumph of the European Enlightenment. It is also a comprehensive term for the larger number of tendencies towards change observable in European literature in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Romantic Movement is traditionally seen as starting roughly around 1780. However, the term Romantic period more exactly denotes the span between the year 1798, the year in which William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge published the collection of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, and 1832, the year in which the novelist Sir Walter Scott died, and the other main writers of the earlier century were either dead or no longer productive, and the first Reform Bill was passed in Parliament. As a historical phase of literature, English Romanticism extends from Blake's earliest poems up to the beginning of the 1830's, though these dates are arbitrary. According to other critics Romanticism as a literary

period in England, from the American Rebellion through the First Reform Bill of 1832, has to be defined as a High Romantic Age. Romanticism manifested at somewhat varied times in Britain, America, France, Germany and Italy.

1.2 The Romantic Age (1798-1832):

This period extends from the war with the colonies, following the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the accession of Victoria in 1837. During the first part of the period especially, England was in a continual turmoil, produced by political and economic agitation at home, and by the long wars that covered two continents and the wide sea between them. The mighty changes resulting from these two causes have given this period the name of the Age of Revolution. The storm center of all the turmoil in England and abroad was the French Revolution, which had a profound influence on the life and literature of all Europe. On the Continent the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo (1815) apparently checked the progress of liberty, which had started with the French Revolution, but in England the case was reversed. The agitation for popular liberty, which at one time threatened a revolution, went steadily forward till it resulted in the final triumph of democracy, in the Reform Bill of 1832, and in a number of exceedingly important reforms, such as the extension of manhood suffrage, the removal of the last unjust restrictions against Catholics, the establishment of a national system of schools, followed by a rapid increase in popular education, and the abolition of slavery in all English colonies (1833). To this added the changes produced by the discovery of steam and the invention of machinery, which rapidly changed England from an agricultural to a manufacturing nation, introduced the factory system, and caused this period to be known as the Age of Industrial Revolution.

1.2.1 Romanticism as a Movement:

In the most basic sense, Romanticism, which is loosely identified as spanning the years of 1783-1830, can be distinguished from the

preceding period called the Enlightenment by observing that the one elevated the role of spirit, soul, instinct, and emotion, while the other advocated a cool, detached scientific approach to most human endeavours and dilemmas. In short, Romanticism in literature was a rejection of many of the values and movements such as the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution held as paramount. Romanticism, initiated by the English poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, as well as Blake, Keats, Shelley, was concentrated primarily in the creative expressions of literature and the arts. However, the philosophy and sentiment characteristic of the Romanticism movement would spread throughout Europe and would ultimately impact not only the arts and humanities, but the society at large, permanently changing the ways in which human emotions, relationships, and institutions were viewed, understood, and artistically and otherwise reflected. The Enlightenment was the name given to the period that preceded the Romantic Age, and it is in understanding the key features of the Enlightenment that one can best understand how the characteristics of Romanticism came to be, and how they differed so radically from those of the industrialized era. The Enlightenment had developed and championed logic and reason above all other qualities and there was little room in this worldview for the emotionbased nature that would define Romanticism. According the Enlightenment view, people and their relationships, roles, institutions, and indeed, their whole societies, could be understood best if organized and approached with a scientific perspective.

During this time in the history of the romanticism movement in literature, it was believed that objectivity was not only desirable, but also achievable. Subjective emotions, contemplation of nature, and the creative impulse felt by individuals were all of far lesser importance than building the physical and commercial infrastructure of a country that had new resources, techniques, and capital with which to experiment. The literary products of the period reflected the priorities and values of the time, focusing mainly on political and economic

themes. Philosophical writings similarly reflected the mechanistic preoccupations of the age and dealt more so than ever with the individual human experience as well as personal thoughts.

Romanticism, then, emerged as a reaction against what was perceived to be a cultural climate that had been lacking in spontaneity, creativity, and individuality. Indeed, some of the earliest and most profound writings of the Romantic period were not the poems themselves, but manifestos and discourses on the nature of human beings and creative expression, such as Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, and Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. In these three exemplary prose pieces, the Romantic poets promote their vision of what poetry, and by extension, society, should be. Their vision was quite distinct from that of the Enlightenment, and in these pieces, the major characteristics of Romanticism were developed and disseminated. One of these characteristics, as articulated by Wordsworth in the *Preface* was the belief that "ordinary things were worth writing about and should be presented to the mind in an unusual way". The Romantics believed that through close attention, the most ordinary, quotidian objects, emotions, and experiences could be elevated to the extraordinary.

Another characteristic of Romanticism, as expressed by Shelley in his *Defence*, was the belief that emotions and relationships were not just important, but were the very currency of life. Rather than functioning as a cog in a wheel, mechanically and unaware of the other parts comprising the whole machine, Shelley argued that: "The great secret of mortals is love and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own". While some of the Romantics were more inwardly focused than the kind of engagement that Shelley called for so passionately in his *Defence*, they tended to agree on the major characteristics of Romanticism: the valuation of

intensely felt emotion, the importance of creative expression, and the possibility of transcending ordinary experience, which was referred to as achieving a state of sublimity.

Romanticism was, above all, an experimental project of self and social quest, a quest for intense experiences that were felt deeply, a quest for connection, a quest for transcendence, and a quest to know the self—and, by extension, others—more profoundly. The quest did not occur, nor could it have occurred, by creating a plan to achieve it. Rather, it was through constant observation and alertness, and the devotion of attention to the most minute and seemingly unimportant details of daily life, that the self, and therefore society, had the possibility of transmuting itself into something greater. Bloom and Trilling refer to Romanticism as a “health-restoring revival of the instinctual life”. Rather than trust in machines, industry, and scientifically-based progress, Romanticism encouraged people to look inward, trusting themselves and their own intuition. Romantics also directed their own and others’ attention to nature, where all organic processes could be observed, celebrated, and from which lessons could be learned. Through these shifts in focus, the Romantics argued, it would become possible for people to know themselves and the world better and more fully.

Whereas the preceding age of Enlightenment had promised that reason, logic, and scientific processes would lead to knowledge, success, and a better society, the Romantics challenged that notion, and changed the equation. It was no longer necessary to follow traditional formulae; rather, new literary forms and new modes of expression could be created. “The major Romantic questers,” write Bloom and Trilling, “offered through their own examples the possibility of “engaging in the extraordinary enterprise of seeking to rebeget their own selves, as though through the imagination a man might hope to become his own father, or at least his own heroic precursor”. Perhaps Romanticism was adopted so quickly and on such a widespread scale across Europe and then, not long after, to America, because it was an antidote to the hyper-accelerated period of change that the Industrial Revolutions had ushered

in during the previous epoch. Given that the Industrial Revolution had caused such dramatic shifts in all aspects of society, changing the ways that people thought, felt, worked, and related with one another, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesize that such a shift in paradigm and in practice created a sort of cognitive dissonance. Such dissonance might only have been possible to resolve by embracing the backlash that Romanticism represented to the Enlightenment ideas and ideals. Whereas the Enlightenment could be interpreted as having drained the creativity and spontaneity out of life, making tasks and relationships predictable through mechanization, Romanticism offered the hope of restoration through small and unexpected pleasures. Romanticism invited people to dream again, to imagine, to give in to flights of fancy, to explore the border between conscious experience and unconscious dreams and desires.

These ideals of Romanticism, first articulated by the English poets, spread to other artistic genres, including music and the visual arts, as well as to other countries. For those countries which had not yet coalesced in terms of their own national identity, the Romanticism offered a creative framework for defining and expressing what was unique to that region, for Romanticism was inherently creative and imaginative, inviting its adherents to envision possibilities that might never have been entertained before. As a result, the value of the individual, of the arts, and of emotional expression, was able to regain a place in thought and practice, tempering the logic-bound tendencies of science with the shifting philosophies of emotion. As Bloom and Trilling observe, the contributions of the Romantics remain valuable and relevant in contemporary life.

1.2.2 Socio-Historical and Political Context:

Romanticism was the greatest literary movement in the period from 1770-1840. It meant the shift of sensibility in art and literature, and was based on interdependence of Man and Nature. It was a style in European art, literature and music that emphasized the importance of feeling, emotion and imagination rather than reason or thought. The

Romantic Period of literature came into being in direct reaction against a variety of ideas and historical happenings taking place in England and Europe at that time. These happenings include the Napoleonic Wars and their following painful economic downfalls- the union with Ireland; the political movement known as Chartism, which helped to improve social recognition and conditions of the lower classes; the passage of the Reform Bill which suppressed slavery in the British Colonies, curbed monopolies, lessened poverty, liberalized marriage laws, and expanded educational facilities for the lower classes; it both accepted and despised the current philosophy of utilitarianism, a view in which the usefulness of everything, including the individual was based on how beneficial it was to society. Finally, the most important factor to impact a change in both thought and literature was that of the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution brought about vast changes in the English society. It helped to create both great fortunes and great hardship. Within a short time England went from being a country of small villages with independent craftsmen to a country of huge factories run by sweat shops full of men, women, and children who lived in overcrowded and dangerous city slums. An industrial England was being born in pain and suffering. The presence of a developing democracy, the ugliness of the sudden growth of cities, the prevalence of human pain, the obvious presence of the “profit motive” all helped to characterize what was in many respects “the best of times..... the worst of times.” In England the Romantic authors were individuals with many contrary views. But all of them were against immoral luxuries of the world, against injustice and inequality of the society, against suffering and human selfishness. The political context of the beginning of the Romantic Period is the French Revolution in 1789, the focus of which was to create political and social freedom, equality and brotherhood. The intention was to abolish the power of the ruling classes and create democracy. These ideas were prevalent in America where the Declaration of Independence had been signed already in 1776. In England political reform gradually developed after some minor disturbances, but without a direct revolution,

and in 1832 The Reform Act was passed with the intention of increasing parliamentary representation and reducing corruption.

At the end of the 18th century manual labour and draught-animal power had come to be replaced by machine-based production. This development started in the textile industry, but quickly spread to other areas of production. As the development of the railway engine introduced the production of trains, and as factories came to be built away from agricultural centres, people began to move from agricultural areas to towns and cities. Thousands of people moving from country to town between 1750 and 1850 changed England from a society based mainly on farming to a society where urban slums were now visible in many cities. Working conditions were grim: people worked up to sixteen hours a day, and the pay was miserable. Added to this were inhuman working conditions and child labour. The consequence was, however, that by 1800 England was the most industrialized country in the world, and exports had risen by 500% since 1700. But even if the per capita income increased as a consequence of industrialization, all family members had to work for families to survive.

Poverty among the urban population was great, and insufficient housing was common. In 1785 the pre-Romantic poet William Cowper wrote in *The Task* “that God made the country, and man-made the town”. The Romantics were enthusiastic about nature and especially appreciated areas in nature which had not been touched by human intervention. Simple rural life, which had not been influenced or ruined by the Industrial Revolution and in which man still lived in harmony with nature, was seen as ideal. Parallel to this, childhood was considered a pure period in life characterized by freedom and not distorted by adult norms and conventions. This idea spread after the publication in 1798 of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and is reflected in much Romantic poetry. A key idea in *Lyrical Ballads* was to speak for the ordinary people about other people in a language which could be understood by everybody. The Romantics focused on the individual’s right to imagine and to articulate his emotions

and deal with everyday life. In this connection, the task of the poet to express the ideas and feelings experienced by people became important. This can be seen as a reaction to the previous Age of Reason when the general and the rational had played a dominant part.

1.2.3 Characteristics of Romantic Poetry:

- i) Initially the Romantic Movement emerged as a revolt against the neoclassical school of poetry in the 18th century, when the doctrines of the classical school of Pope of correctness, adherence to set rules, and intellectual mindset were dominant in English literature. Any departure from these ideals by a poet raised not only quite a few eyebrows but also invited scathing criticism. The upper-class lifestyle, its foppish and petty details, and the criticism of all these found a vivid expression in the 18th-century literature. The diction and meter were suitable for the purpose. Heroic couplet was revered like anything. But towards the close of this age, the precursors of Romanticism like Grey, Collins, Black and Burns had struck a note of revolt against all these. Through their poetry, they paved the way for the *Lyrical Ballads*.
- ii) Imagination, emotion, and freedom are certainly the focal points of romanticism. Any list of particular characteristics of the literature of romanticism includes subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism, spontaneity, freedom from rules, solitary life rather than life in society, the beliefs that imagination is superior to reason and devotion to beauty, love of and worship of nature, and fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the middle ages. Romanticism which started around 1795, at the very core of its centre, weighed upon the scale of feelings, imagination, expressiveness and ingenuity of the individuals. At the same time, it also emphasized novelty in art as against the emphasis upon reason, tradition and craftsmanship during the previous era, and brought about one of the most fundamental changes

in outlook in literature, music and the arts. In it, Wordsworth redefined poetic diction, which defied the 18th century poetic diction. The object of poetry and the poets' fascination also changed drastically. Unlike the 18th-century poetry, the Romantic poetry and the Romantic poets looked up to nature, common man, his emotions and the elemental simplicities of life. The characteristics of Romanticism or the Romantic poetry were in stark contrast with the 18th century.

But, the most significant expression of a Romantic commitment for English literature found its expression in the year 1798 in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth wherein he purposefully maintains his own definition of poetry that states that all good poetry is essentially the impulsive overflow of innermost feelings which are bound to be very powerful. Although Wordsworth qualifies this assertion by suggesting that the poet is a reflective man who recollects his emotion in great leisure and composure, the emphasis on spontaneity, on feeling, and the use of the term overflow mark sharp diversions from the earlier ideals of judgment and restraint.

- iii) One of the essentials of Romanticism is the faith in the natural goodness of man; the idea that man in a natural state would behave well but he is in the shackles of worldly tasks and is caught up and confounded when in the civilization. The barbarous is grand, childhood is exceptional and the emotions enthused by both the philosophies take the heart to the new undiscovered avenues. The new literature initially reflected the political turmoil of the period very effectively. But when everything subsided and peace prevailed, strangely enough the literature produced the most imaginative and creative spirit of the writers of the period. That is the spirit of the age that saw everything good in man.
- iv) The Romantics often expressed the Faustian aspirations in their desire to identify with a spiritual force after the sublime

and the wonderful. Committed to change, flux rather than stasis, they longed to believe that man is perfectible, that moral as well as mechanical progress is possible. Although the burst of hope and enthusiasm that marked the early stages of the French Revolution was soon subdued, its echoes lingered through much of the 19th century and even survived in the 20th century.

- v) Romanticism is concerned with the individual more than with society. The individual consciousness and especially the individual imagination are especially fascinating for the Romantics. Description of the Melancholy spirit and anything related to it was quite the buzz word and favourite theme for the Romantic poets, and altered states of consciousness were often sought after in order to enhance one's creative potential. There was an immediate demotion of the importance and power of reason, clearly a reaction against the enlightenment mode of thinking.

Nevertheless, writers gradually became more devoted in social causes as the period moved forward. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, English society was undergoing the most severe paradigm shifts it had seen in living memory. The response of many early Romantics was to yearn for an idealized, simpler past. In particular, English Romantic poets had a strong connection with medievalism and mythology. The tales of King Arthur were especially resonant to their imaginations. On top of this, there was a clearly mystical quality to Romantic writing that sets it apart from other literary periods. Of course, not every Romantic poet or novelist displayed all, or even most of these traits all the time.

- vi) On the more formal level, Romanticism witnessed a steady loosening of the rules of artistic expression that were pervasive during earlier times. The Neoclassical Period of the eighteenth century included very strict expectations regarding the

structure and content of poetry. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, experimentation with new styles and subjects became much more acceptable. The high-flown language of the previous generation's poets was replaced with more natural rhythm.

- vii) In terms of poetic form, rhymed stanzas were slowly giving way to blank verse, an unrhymed but still rhythmic style of poetry. The purpose of blank verse was to heighten conversational speech to the level of austere beauty. Some criticized the new style as mundane, yet the innovation soon became the preferred style. One of the most popular themes of Romantic poetry was country life, otherwise known as pastoral poetry. Mythological and fantastic settings were also employed to great effect by many of the Romantic poets.
- viii) Romanticism denotes a spirit, which dared to see man and nature in a different light than that of the 18th-century doctrine conscious mindset. It is not just an outbreak, which occurs in 1798 with the publication of William Wordsworth's and S. T. Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*. It is a gradual culmination of that very revolutionary attitude towards 18th century literary canons which was all the time growing in the last few decades of the 18th century. Political upheavals like the French Revolution and a general all pervasive instinct throughout Europe to break free from the old bondages added fuel to the flames of Romanticism in literature.
- ix) Romanticism celebrates the free spirit, and high ideals like beauty and love. It directs the poet's sensibility towards the natural landscape. Romanticism has been explained in terms of the unprecedented significance attached to imagination. It is about the delicate emotions that wrote the poet's heart. It is also an outcry for freedom from the existent socio-political forces that strangle the free spirit of an individual. It is, time and again, referred to as a cult of beauty seeking to express

and savour beauty in the elemental simplicities of life symbolizing a spirit of revolt and a hankering for the establishment of the new canons.

- x) Romantic poetry also illustrates a huge shift in the sensibility. The poets of the romantic period underline the spirit of revolt against the canons of poetic composition. They reveal the singular significance attached to imagination. It not only acquired paramount importance but it was also for the first time reflected upon and discussed in great detail by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*. From there on, poetry, written in the romantic strain, celebrates the powers of imagination. Romantic poetry registers the replacement of dry intellect by emotion. The locale and object of poetry also underwent drastic changes.
- xi) The poetry of the romantic period picks up ordinary incidents from country life and natural surroundings what is usually called the pastoral poetry which savours the beauties of nature and also draws highly philosophical truths from nature as well. The most significant characteristic of Romantic poetry has been its concern for and interest in the ordinary forms of life. This too contrasts with the exclusionist nature of the figurative literature which was urban and courtly. The old legends, ballads and tales of folklore spring back to life in the hands of a Romantic poet. His personal experiences and emotions also form an integral part of the Romantic poetry. It usually contains reverberations of an outcry for individual freedom.
- xii) The poetry of Romantic period had been in direct contact with the canons of poetic composition cultivated by 18th century neoclassical poets and therefore a note of rebellion is the backbone of its temperament. In the 18th century, poetry was governed by set rules and correctness of the metre. Any deviation from that meant invitation to bitter criticism from the guiding light of such a theory of poetic composition like

Pope. Whereas the Romantic spirit thundered against anything and everything that which sought to curb the free play of their imagination and emotions.

- xiii) Romantic poetry clamours against the social authority too. It seeks a change of outlook in the way society perceives everything. Byron had a grudge against society. He satirized bourgeois life. He created heroes like Cain and Don Juan who broke the rules of conventional morality. Shelley was a great rebel against society. He believed that an original world would come up in future. He was not in favour of the kings and the priests. It was infatuated with a revolutionary zeal and his soul burnt with rage at the sight of so much unhappiness around him. One of the reasons of this spirit of revolt was the restrictions imposed on individuals. Rigid tradition, whether social or literary, infuriated the Romantic poets. They worshipped freedom and equality in society and free play of imagination and emotion in literature.
- xiv) The poets of the romantic era wrote poems with legends, ballads and hymns interwoven in them beautifully and communicated their perception of a thing or situation in a captivating manner. Their revolt was at times conveyed in such an attractive garb -suggestively and symbolically with the help of the above mentioned devices. They stood for aspirations and dreams of a new world, a better society and a more beautiful perception of future hence the old and the worn out had to make space to usher in the new outlook and sensibility. In order to create all this, they struck a note of revolt against the existing order.
- xv) The 18th-century poetry was predominantly governed by reason and intellect. The Romantic poetry established the significance of imagination and emotion well by firmly practising those ideals and also advocating them. The

Romantic poets strove to express the emotional intensity that their hearts were forever steeped in.

For such an expression, intellect and reason are of no avail. Imagination and emotion aptly gained paramount importance. Nature ignited their imagination and inspired high ideals like beauty, love and compassion for fellow human beings. In the natural surroundings, the incidents from the life of common man stirred powerful feelings in them, which moved them to utterances in the form of these melodious poems. Their imaginative powers were the chief gift for the wonderful poetic composition. Romantic poetry gains the aura and the appeal owing to the world, which the imagination of a poet succeeds in creating.

- xvi) The poems of the Romantic poets are highly subjective and seek to express their innermost emotions. These emotions need an attractive garb which imagination invents in the form of tales that alludes to locales of history and to legends. The incident, which inspires these feelings in the poet, is usually a common one like moonlit sky, listening to a bird, or seasons like Spring and Autumn. But the imagination waves a beautiful tale around it and the poet's emotions get a powerful expression through all this. Hence in the Romantic poetry intellect and reason are subdued, and imagination and emotion take dominant and front positions. The predominance of imagination and emotion impart a force of fascination, which are pre-requisites of the poetic composition of highest order. They are fittingly employed to suit the Romantic temper and the ideals of the Romantic Movement like love and beauty.
- xvii) The Romantic poetry celebrates the elemental simplicities of life. It drew inspiration from nature and from the life, which it surrounds. The 18th century poetry was concerned with clubs and coffee houses, drawing rooms, and the social and political life of London. The Romantic poets took poetry to the lap of nature.

The other reason for such a vital role of nature in Romantic poetry is the fact that it is governed by imagination and emotion which gets stirred by natural surroundings. Any natural phenomena and objects like chirping of birds, various activities associated with the seasons, flowers and green fields act as stimuli for the innermost recesses of the poet's mind. His imagination along with other powers of poetic composition weaves this experience into a tale, which results in a beautiful poem.

xviii) Nature is ideally suited to the Romantic temper since it does not harbor any prejudice against anything or anyone. It bestows equality and freedom on everyone. It is always in a festive mood. It's an oasis of beauty in a world, which is getting increasingly uglier. It is the treasure house of all the wisdom of the world. It strikes an ethereal code in the deaths of the Romantic poet's heart for all these reasons. He finds life worthwhile if spent at the lap of nature. He recounts and relates the incidents from the life of a layman in his poems. Thus, nature is the inspiration of the Romantic poets and provides them with a locale and the tranquility of mind so that truth can flash upon the inward eye. The Romantic poet savours the elemental simplicities of life and his poetry is deeply imbued with his reflections on those elemental simplicities.

xix) In Romantic poetry, emphasis is laid on the freedom of an individual. The Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley were against depleted traditions of the society out of a conviction that such traditions and customs strangle the freedom of an individual. They revolted in such an impatient manner in order to convey their intense craving for liberty. The society perceives progress in material terms, whereas the progress for the Romantic poets is the inner progress of their soul. For it, the poet needs freedom from bondage of all sorts. Thus

poetic composition of loftier sensibility and of fresher outlook towards life can be conceived. The Romantic sensibility also stood for freedom of expression which they thought highly of and in the manner they deemed fit. Such freedom of expression paves the way for the communication of the subjective experiences and their view points on the condition of the fellow human beings.

xx) The poet draws heavily on his personal experience and its fitting expression which he gives with the help of natural phenomena and objects as well as through the legends and ballads. But all this does not hide his subjective interpretation of the objective realities of life. Thus, a note of subjectivity is heard in almost all poems, which are steeped in Romantic spirit. Even translations were done freely that continued even after the romantic revival and there are many notable translations done from many languages. Noted among them was Arthur Waley who exercised a considerable influence on the development of English poetry through his brilliant and poetic translations from the Chinese.

xxi) Romantic poets expressed an intense fondness for nature and beauty which it is replete with. His eyes light up at the sight of a beautiful maiden, a flower or moonlit sky. He savours every bit of beauty that is perceptible through senses. He pounces on every potential source of beauty, though it may be the leaves fallen in autumn, or a not so beautiful flower like the daffodil. But his adoration of beauty is so magically creative that his imagination gets stimulated, and he is inspired to give vent to his delightful perception of one beauty or another. He paints beauty, wants to create a beautiful borderless world and wants the world to get transformed into a beautiful place to live in. He finds beauty in the most ordinary things and phenomena of day to day life like night, flowers, birds and frost. This finesse for the perception of beauty leads

him to its fuller experience and consequently to its final creation in the form of a beautiful poem.

xxii) Besides the above more or less common features of the romantic poetry, there are certain qualities of the poetry of the romantic revival which are possessed by particular poets. Supernaturalism is an outstanding romantic quality. It gives to certain poems an atmosphere by virtue of which the romantic poetry is often called 'the renaissance of wonder'. Coleridge is the greatest master of supernaturalism. His supernaturalism in *The Ancient Mariner* is psychological, refined and suggestive. Scott too writes supernatural poetry though his supernaturalism is rather crude. Keats gives supernatural touches to some of his poems. His poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* has a supernatural atmosphere.

References to distant lands and past ages, particularly the Middle Ages, are also romantic. Keats loved the Middle Ages for their passion, chivalry and art.

xxiii) The Romantic poet is weary of the petty acrimonies that the world is unfortunately rife with. He rebels against an unhappy reality that a beautiful world is turning into an ugly place because of the growing hatred and narrow-minded outlook. Such a mindset keeps the world away from love- the richest treasure on the earth. The Romantic poets also firmly held that only love could set right whatever is out of joint. The Romantic temper is constituted largely of this higher conception of love. The Romantic poetry, thus, celebrates and devoutly worships the high ideals of beauty and love in the poems themselves beautiful and lovable.

xxiv) Some Romantic poets felt chafed with the tyranny, immorality and ugliness of the materialistic life of their age. To avoid this life of dissatisfaction, they sought, through their poetry, an escape from all these into a world of beauty and

joy which their imagination had created. Even apart from this, the other reason for an escape to the Middle Ages is that the essential qualities of the Romantic temper like love for beauty, curiosity, imagination and worship of nature required a different world from their own. At times, they tried to weave their own experiences into an alluring garb of a legend, or a Ballad. Such an attempt is an expression of their emotional intensity as well as a truly artistic creation with all such elements like wonder, natural beauty and unlikely locales. The Middle Ages, serving as the background and inspiration, proved romanticism to be what Watts- Dunton called 'the Renaissance of Wonder'. They sometimes attach mystical aura to ordinary things. The distant land of the ancient past makes it easy for the poet to inculcate a few supernatural elements. In all, the Middle Ages replete with legends and ballads bestow the Romantic poet with the raw material and an opportunity for the free play of his powers of poetic composition.

xxv) Music and melody are essential elements in Romantic poetry.

It aims at touching the heart rather than the hand celebrating nature with all its beauties and allures. Since it is abounding in all this, an expression containing nature is bound to be steeped every inch in music and melody. Moreover, Romantic poetry springs from the depths of the poet's heart, so it is fittingly brimful with music and melody. The spontaneous overflow, which the poet registers in the form of a poem, becomes all the more forceful with the resonance of music and melody. Music and melody also reflect the unrestrained free play of imagination and emotion. Poetry filled with reason and intellect can hardly be conducive to music and melody.

Check Your Progress-1

1. In which year did William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge publish the collection of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads*?
2. In which year was the first Reform Bill passed in British Parliament?
3. What did the Enlightenment develop and champion above all?
4. What did the Romantics focus on?
5. Name a few characteristics of romantic poetry.

1.3 William Blake - The Poet:

1.3.1 Life and Works:

William Blake was a 19th century writer and artist who is regarded as a seminal figure of the Romantic Age. His writings have influenced countless writers and artists through the ages, and he has been deemed both a major poet and an original thinker. Born in 1757 in London, England, William Blake began writing at an early age and claimed to have had his first vision, of a tree full of angels, at the age of ten. He studied engraving and grew to love Gothic art, which he incorporated into his own unique works. A misunderstood poet, artist and visionary throughout much of his life, Blake found admirers late in life and has been vastly influential since his death in 1827.

William Blake was born on November 28, 1757, in the Soho district of London, England. He only briefly attended school, being chiefly educated at home by his mother. The Bible had an early and profound influence on Blake, and it would remain a lifetime source of inspiration, coloring his life and works with intense spirituality. At an early age, Blake began experiencing visions, and his friend and journalist Henry Crabb Robinson wrote that Blake saw God's head appear in a window when he was four years old. He also allegedly saw the prophet

Ezekiel under a tree and had a vision of “a tree filled with angels.” Blake’s visions would have a lasting effect on the art and writings that he produced.

Blake’s artistic ability became evident in his youth, and by age ten, he was enrolled at Henry Pars’s drawing school, where he sketched the human figure by copying from plaster casts of ancient statues. At age fourteen, he apprenticed with an engraver. Blake’s master was the engraver to the London Society of Antiquaries, and Blake was sent to Westminster Abbey to make drawings of tombs and monuments, where his lifelong love of gothic art was seeded. Also around this time, Blake began collecting prints of artists who had fallen out of vogue at the time, including Durer, Raphael and Michelangelo. In the catalog for an exhibition of his own work in 1809, nearly forty years later, in fact, Blake would lambast artists “who endeavour to raise up a style against Rafael, Michelangelo, and the Antique.” He also rejected 18th century literary trends, preferring the Elizabethans (Shakespeare, Jonson and Spenser) and ancient ballads instead.

In 1779, at the age of twenty one, Blake completed his seven-year apprenticeship and became a journeyman copy engraver, working on projects for book and print publishers. Also preparing himself for a career as a painter, that same year, he was admitted to the Royal Academy of Art’s Schools of Design, where he began exhibiting his own works in 1780. Blake’s artistic energies branched out at this point, and he privately published his *Poetical Sketches* (1783), a collection of poems that he had written over the previous fourteen years. In August 1782, Blake married Catherine Sophia Boucher, who was illiterate. Blake taught her how to read, write, draw and color (his designs and prints). He also helped her to experience visions, as he did. Catherine believed explicitly in her husband’s visions and his genius, and supported him in everything he did, right up to his death forty five years later.

One of the most traumatic events of William Blake’s life occurred in 1787, when his beloved brother, Robert, died from tuberculosis at the age of twenty four. At the moment of Robert’s death,

Blake allegedly saw his spirit ascend through the ceiling, joyously; the moment, which entered into Blake's psyche, greatly influenced his later poetry. The following year, Robert appeared to Blake in a vision and presented him with a new method of printing his works, which Blake called "illuminated printing." Once incorporated, this method allowed Blake to control every aspect of the production of his art.

In 1804, Blake began to write and illustrate *Jerusalem* (1804-20), his most ambitious work to date. He also began showing more work at exhibitions (including *Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims* and *Satan Calling Up His Legions*), but these works were met with silence, and the one published review was absurdly negative; the reviewer called the exhibit a display of "nonsense, unintelligibleness and egregious vanity," and referred to Blake as "an unfortunate lunatic." Blake was devastated by the review and lack of attention to his works, and, subsequently, he withdrew more and more from any attempt at success. From 1809 to 1818, he engraved few plates (there is no record of Blake producing any commercial engravings from 1806 to 1813). He also sank deeper into poverty, obscurity and paranoia.

In 1819, however, Blake began sketching a series of "visionary heads," claiming that the historical and imaginary figures that he depicted actually appeared and sat for him. By 1825, Blake had sketched more than hundred of them, including those of Solomon and Merlin the magician and those included in "The Man Who Built the Pyramids" and "Harold Killed at the Battle of Hastings"; along with the most famous visionary head, that included in Blake's "The Ghost of a Flea." Remaining artistically busy, between 1823 and 1825, Blake engraved twenty one designs for an illustrated Book of Job (from the Bible) and Dante's *Inferno*. In 1824, he began a series of one hundred two watercolor illustrations of Dante—a project that would be cut short by Blake's death in 1827.

Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III's treatment of

the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it, in 1794, with *Songs of Experience*. Some readers interpret *Songs of Innocence* in a straightforward fashion, considering it primarily a children's book, but others have found hints at parody or critique in its seemingly naive and simple lyrics. Both books of *Songs* were printed in an illustrated format reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts. The text and illustrations were printed from copper plates, and each picture was finished by hand in watercolors.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of 18th century neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. He declared in one poem, "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's." Works such as "The French Revolution" (1791), "America, a Prophecy" (1793), "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793), and "Europe, a Prophecy" (1794) express his opposition to the English monarchy, and to 18th century political and social tyranny in general. Theological tyranny is the subject of *The Book of Urizen* (1794). In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), he satirized oppressive authority in church and state, as well as the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted his interest.

In 1800 Blake moved to the seacoast town of Felpham, where he lived and worked until 1803 under the patronage of William Hayley. He taught himself Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian, so that he could read classical works in their original language. In Felpham he experienced profound spiritual insights that prepared him for his mature work, the great visionary epics written and etched between about 1804 and 1820. *Milton* (1804-08), *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1797; rewritten after 1800), and *Jerusalem* (1804-20) have neither traditional plot, characters, rhyme, nor meter. They envision a new and higher kind of innocence, the human spirit triumphant over reason.

Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by common people, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. In 1808 he exhibited some of his watercolors at the Royal Academy, and in May of 1809 he exhibited his works at his brother James's house. Some of those who saw the exhibit praised Blake's artistry, but others thought the paintings "hideous" and more than a few called him insane. Blake's poetry was not well known by the general public, but he was mentioned in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1816. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had been lent a copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, considered Blake a "man of Genius," and Wordsworth made his own copies of several songs. Charles Lamb sent a copy of "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence* to James Montgomery for his *Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boys' Album* (1824), and Robert Southey (who, like Wordsworth, considered Blake insane) attended Blake's exhibition and included the "Mad Song" from *Poetical Sketches* in his miscellany, *The Doctor* (1834-1837).

Blake's final years, spent in great poverty, were cheered by the admiring friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves "the Ancients." In 1818 he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. It was Linnell who, in 1825, commissioned him to design illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

Major Works:

All Religions Are One (1788) ,*America, a Prophecy* (1793) ,*Europe, a Prophecy* (1794) ,*For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793) ,*For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (1820) ,*Poetical Sketches* (1783) ,*Songs of Experience* (1794) ,*Songs of Innocence* (1789) ,*The Book of Ahania* (1795) ,*The Book of Los* (1795) ,*The First Book of Urizen* (1794) ,*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) ,*The Song of Los* (1795) ,

There Is No Natural Religion (1788), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793)

Check Your Progress

1. When and where was William Blake born?
2. At what age did William Blake have his first vision?
3. When was Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* published?
4. In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), what does Blake satirize?
5. When were Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* published?
6. Name a few major themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.

1.3.2 *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*:

Introduction

William Blake published his second collection of poetry, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789. He published it with the accompanying illustrative plates, a feat accomplished through an engraving and illustrating process of his own design. The publication of *Songs of Innocence* began his series of *Illuminated Books*, in which Blake combined text and visual artwork to achieve his poetic effect. Blake always intended the poems of *Songs of Innocence* to be accompanied by their respective illustrations, making analysis of the texts alone problematic at times.

Being ostensibly about the naivety and simplicity of innocent youth, *Songs of Innocence* is not merely a collection of verses for children. Several of the poems include an ironic tone, and some, such as *The Chimney Sweeper*, imply sharp criticism of the society of Blake's time. Although clearly intended as a celebration of children and of their unadulterated enjoyment of the world around them, *Songs of Innocence*

is also a warning to adult readers. Innocence has been lost not simply through aging, but because the forces of culture have allowed a hope-crushing society to flourish, sometimes at the direct expense of children's souls.

Songs of Experience followed five years later, bound with a reprinting and slight revision of *Songs of Innocence*. *Songs of Experience* has never been printed separately from the former volume, and Blake intended it as a companion piece to the earlier work. The same method of engraving plates to illustrate the poems is used in *Songs of Experience*. *Songs of Experience* allows Blake to be more direct in his criticism of society. He attacks church leaders, wealthy socialites, and cruel parents with equal vehemence. Blake also uses *Songs of Experience* to further develop his own personal theological system, which was portrayed as mostly very traditional in *Songs of Innocence*. In *Songs of Experience*, Blake questions how we know that God exists, whether a God who allows poor children to suffer and be exploited is in fact, good, and whether love can exist as an abstract concept apart from human interaction. Blake also hints at his belief in "free love" in this volume, suggesting that he would like to dismantle the institution of marriage along with all other artificial restrictions on human freedom.

Innocence and disillusionment are the two important themes in the poetry of William Blake while symbolism and mystic element remain the prime means of disclosing the ideas and beliefs of the poet. In *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Blake is "showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul". The poet has actually projected "innocence" and "experience" as contrary while projecting the evolution of man from one state of being, innocence, to another i.e. disillusionment. The *Songs of Innocence* is a state of childhood and "protected innocence" though this state is not immune to fallibility. The *Songs of Experience* depicts the moral, social and political corruption as well as tyranny of the Church and the state. If "Innocence" is the joyful period of felicity and heaven then "Experience" is the state of "fallen beings". The *Songs of Innocence* understand the world with

the innocent state of being, a child. It is strange that while man is “immature” and growing, he is able to discern the truths of existence so easily. The *Songs of Experience* reflect the corrupted state of being, “the fallen man”. It is the condition of man when he has been corrupted by the vices and evils of this world. Experience is the stage of man when originality is lost and the mere imprints of the world are mirrored as mean and tyrant. Experience is often regarded as a “dark forest in which man finds himself alone”. This shows the decay and loss of human values. It appears to be a tale of man’s cruelty and corrupted reason which resulted in drawing him away from God.

Taken as a whole, Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* offer a romanticized yet carefully thought out view of nature, God, society, and religion from a variety of perspectives, ultimately demanding that the reader choose the view he or she finds most compelling from among the myriad voices of the poems.

Analysis

Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* juxtapose the innocent, pastoral world of childhood against an adult world of corruption and repression; while such poems as *The Lamb* represent a meek virtue, poems like *The Tyger* exhibit opposing, darker forces. Thus the collection as a whole explores the value and limitations of two different perspectives on the world. Many of the poems fall into pairs, so that the same situation or problem is seen through the lens of innocence first and then experience. Blake does not identify himself wholly with either view. Most of the poems are dramatic that is, in the voice of a speaker other than the poet himself. Blake stands outside innocence and experience, in a distanced position from which he hopes to be able to recognize and correct the fallacies of both. In particular, he pits himself against despotic authority, restrictive morality, sexual repression, and institutionalized religion. His great insight is into the way these separate modes of control work together to squelch what is most holy in human beings. The *Songs of Innocence* dramatize the naive hopes and fears that inform the lives of children and trace their transformation as the child grows into adulthood. Some of the poems

are written from the perspective of children, while others are about children as seen from an adult perspective. Many of the poems draw attention to the positive aspects of natural human understanding prior to the corruption and distortion of experience. Others take a more critical stance toward innocent purity: for example, while Blake draws touching portraits of the emotional power of rudimentary Christian values, he also exposes Christianity's capacity for promoting injustice and cruelty.

The *Songs of Experience* work via parallels and contrasts to lament the ways in which the harsh experiences of adult life destroy what is good in innocence, while also articulating the weaknesses of the innocent perspective (*The Tyger*, for example, attempts to account for real, negative forces in the universe, which innocence fails to confront). These latter poems treat sexual morality in terms of the repressive effects of jealousy, shame, and secrecy, all of which corrupt the ingenuousness of innocent love. With regard to religion, they are less concerned with the character of individual faith than with the institution of the Church, its role in politics, and its effects on society and the individual mind. Experience thus adds a layer to innocence that darkens its hopeful vision while compensating for some of its blindness.

The style of the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* is simple and direct, but the language and the rhythms are painstakingly crafted, and the ideas they explore are often deceptively complex. Many of the poems are narrative in style, while others, like *The Sick Rose* and *The Divine Image*, make their arguments through symbolism or by means of abstract concepts. Some of Blake's favourite rhetorical techniques are personification and the reworking of Biblical symbolism and language. Blake frequently employs the familiar meters of ballads, nursery rhymes, and hymns, applying them to his own, often unorthodox conceptions. This combination of the traditional with the unfamiliar is consonant with Blake's perpetual interest in reconsidering and reframing the assumptions of human thought and social behavior.

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the contrasting perspectives presented in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.

1.3.3 Major Themes in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*:

i) **The Destruction of Innocence**

Throughout both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Blake repeatedly addresses the destruction of childlike innocence, and in many cases of children's lives, by a society designed to use people for its own selfish ends. Blake romanticizes the children of his poems, only to place them in situations common to his day, in which they find their simple faith in parents or God challenged by harsh conditions. *Songs of Experience* is an attempt to denounce the cruel society that harms the human soul in such terrible ways, but it also calls the reader back to innocence, through Imagination, in an effort to redeem a fallen world. *

ii) **Redemption**

Throughout his works, Blake frequently refers to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. While he alludes to the atoning act of Christ Crucified, more often Blake focuses on the Incarnation, the taking on of human form by the divine Creator, as the source of redemption for both human beings and nature. He emphasizes that Christ "became a little child" just as men and women need to return to a state of childlike grace in order to restore the innocence lost to the social machinery of a cruel world.

iii) **Religious Hypocrisy**

In such poems as *Holy Thursday* and *The Little Vagabond*, Blake critiques the religious leaders of his day for their abuse of spiritual authority. The men who should be shepherds to their flocks are in fact reinforcing a political and economic system that turns children into short-lived chimney sweepers and that represses love and creative expression in adults. Blake has no patience with clergy who would assuage their own or their earthly patrons' guilt by parading poor children through a church on Ascension Day, as in *Holy Thursday* from both sections, and

he reserves most of his sharpest verse for these men.

iv) Imagination over Reason

Blake is a strong proponent of the value of human creativity, or Imagination, over materialistic rationalism, or Reason. As a poet and artist, Blake sees the power of art in its various forms to raise the human spirit above its earth-bound mire. He also sees the soul-killing materialism of his day, which uses rational thought as an excuse to perpetuate crimes against the innocent via societal and religious norms. *Songs of Experience* in particular decries Reason's hold over Imagination, and it uses several ironic poems to undermine the alleged superiority of rationalism.

v) Nature as the Purest State of Man

Like many of his contemporary Romantic poets, Blake sees in the natural world an idyllic universe that can influence human beings in a positive manner. Many of his poems, such as *Spring*, celebrate the beauty and fecundity of nature, while others, such as *London*, deride the sterile mechanism of urban society. Blake's characters are happiest when they are surrounded by natural beauty and following their natural instincts. They are most oppressed when they are trapped in social or religious institutions or are subject to the horrors of urban living.

vi) The Flaws of Earthly Parents

One recurring motif in both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* is the failure of human parents to properly nurture their children. The *Little Boy Lost* is abandoned by his earthly father, yet rescued by his Heavenly Father. The parents of *The Little Vagabond* weep in vain as their son is burned alive for heresy. Both mother and father seem frustrated by their child's temperament in *Infant Sorrow*. This recurring motif allows Blake to emphasize the frailty of human communities, in which the roles of mother and father are defined by society rather than by

natural instincts, and to emphasize the supremacy of Nature and of divine care in the form of God the Father.

vii) Social Reform

While much of Blake's poetry focuses on leaving behind the material world in favour of a more perfect spiritual nature, his poetry nonetheless offers realistic and socially conscious critiques of existing situations. Both of his *Chimney Sweeper* poems highlight the abuse of children by parents and employers as they are forced into hazardous, and potentially fatal, situations for the sake of earning money. Both *Holy Thursday* poems decry the overt display of the poor as a spectacle of absolution for the wealthy and affluent. *The Human Abstract* points out that our virtues are predicated on the existence of human suffering. Although Blake is certainly more spiritual than practical minded, the seeds of social reform can be seen in the philosophy underlying his verses. Innocence is a state of man that must be preserved, not destroyed, and the social systems that seek to destroy innocence must be changed or eliminated.

1.3.4 Blake's "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*)- Explanation and Analysis:

'Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey headed beadles walk'd before with wands as white as snow
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seem'd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

Summary of “Holy Thursday”:

The poem describes the annual Holy Thursday (Ascension Day) service in St Paul’s Cathedral for the poor children of the London charity schools. The children enter the cathedral in strict order ‘walking two and two’ behind the beadles (wardens). The children sit and sing, and their voices rise up to heaven far above their aged guardians. The poem ends with a moral: have pity on those less fortunate than yourself, as they include angelic boys and girls like those described here.

In the first stanza, the poet says “Twas on a Holy Thursday’ which means it was Holy Thursday and only on that particular day the orphans with their ‘innocent faces clean’ were walking ‘two and two’ (i.e. in an order) ‘in red and blue and green’ attire which depicts that they were provided with bright and colourful clothes. But the poet is not cherishing the scene. Ironically phrases like ‘innocent faces clean,’ ‘walking two and two’ and in ‘red and blue and green’ depict something that is hidden from our eyes. Their faces are clean and they are given bright coloured attire in order to serve these things as a visual aid to appeal for the money from people who have come to the occasion. Hence these decorations are not for the benefit of the orphans but for the profit of the charity officials. In the third line, the poet says that ‘Grey-headed beadles’ was walking before the orphans having ‘wands as white as snow’. Their head is grey meaning that they are old guardians and they are holding the sticks to command the orphans. Their command makes the children walk ‘In two and two’. The poet compares their walking with the flow of Thames River. It should be noted that in the third line, the motion of ‘Grey-headed beadles’ is in past (walk’d before) but in the fourth line, as they reach the Church, their motion becomes present. Thus their motion is dynamic that changes from snow to flow.

In the second stanza, the poet explains the singing of the orphans in St. Paul’s Church. The poet compares the gathering of orphans to the flowers of London. But this comparison is again ironic. In one sense the gathering seems to be as beautiful as flowers, but in the other sense this charm and beauty of clean faces and bright attire are short-lived

similarly as the life of a flower is short. After the ceremony, they will be taken into their actual condition, which is, most probably, miserable. This makes the poet cry 'O'. They are sitting in groups. Their faces are glowing. But the poet adds the phrase 'all their own' which signifies that this glow on their face is not by because of the efforts of the guardians, but is a divine glow that brightens their faces. Thus they are angels who are glowing with divine light. They are singing together and are as innocent as a lamb. The phrase 'multitudes of lambs' symbolizes Christ with his lambs who was quite fond of children. Hence orphans are the lambs who are sitting before Christ. They are quite large in number and are raising their innocent hands to prayer.

In the third stanza, the poet transforms the 'radiant angelic companies' into Holy ghosts that are swirling 'like a mighty wind'. Thus we find the concept of Transcendentalism here. Their songs fill with holy and dedicated prayers that are thundering and reaching to 'the seats of heaven'. And along with them, the old and wise experienced men are sitting who are showing off the sense of commitment by getting moved after seeing the miserable condition of these orphans and thus giving charity in large amounts. But the poet, being unsatisfied with them raises several rhetoric questions like- Why such behaviour remains confined to this particular day? Why does society not pay charity to orphans on other days? Don't we have any responsibility regarding these suffering children? Will people treat a child beggar who comes to their door, in the same way as they are behaving today? Hence "Holy Thursday" is a highly satirical poem that criticizes the society for its apathetic treatment of orphans.

Check Your Progress

1. Justify the significance of the title "Holy Thursday".
2. Explain the meaning of the expression 'multitudes of lambs'.

Critical Analysis

"Holy Thursday" has three stanzas, each consisting of two

rhyming couplets. The singsong quality of the AABB rhyme, usually a sign of innocence in these poems, belies the thinly veiled subtext of the poem regarding the exploitation of the innocent by those who are, ultimately, their moral and spiritual inferiors. As always, Blake favours the innocent children even as he despises the system which enslaves or abuses them. The 'wise guardians of the poor,' the children's patrons, are seated 'beneath them.' Even though the gratitude may be forced upon the children, their innocence, which is stated twice outright in the poem, trumps the self-serving nature of the spectacle.

Blake closes with the warning to 'cherish pity; lest you drive and angel from your door,' a statement that seems out of place on the surface. When compared to the Biblical account of the angels' visit to Lot in the city of Sodom, however, the driving away of an angel at the door becomes a more sobering image. Lot, alone of all the denizens of Sodom, offered the angels, who were disguised as travelers, hospitality in a city full of dangers for the unwary visitor. His pity for his guests results in his own family's rescue from the destruction about to strike the wicked city. Similarly, the reader is encouraged to 'cherish pity' even in the midst of a sin-stricken and cynical system that would use a parade of poor children as a show of public virtue.

The poem is based on the contrast between the 'innocent faces' of the children and the authority of the 'grey headed beadles' and the other 'aged men' who act as their guardians. Although the children are made to enter the cathedral in regimented order, their angelic innocence overcomes all the constraints put upon them by the authority – they even make the 'red and blue and green' of their school uniforms look like 'flowers of London town'. As the boys and girls raise their hands and their voices to heaven, the narrator imagines them rising up to heaven too, just as Christ himself did on Ascension Day. In the poet's vision they leave their 'wise Guardians' beneath them and become angels – which is why the last line tells us to 'cherish pity' and remember our duty to the poor. Although the triple repetition of 'multitude(s)' notes how many thousands of children live in poverty in London, the emphasis

in this poem is on the 'radiance' which they bring to the church – they are 'multitudes of lambs'.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the poet highlight the exploitation of the poor by the men in power in the poem 'Holy Thursday'?
2. Bring out the contrast between innocence and authority in the poem 'Holy Thursday'.

1.3.5 Blake's "London"- Explanation and Analysis:

"London" (*Songs of Experience*)

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

Summary of “London” (*Songs of Experience*)

William Blake touched upon a wide range of subjects in his poetry that makes him one of the most versatile poets of English literature. His two poems ‘London’, along with ‘The Tyger’, possibly remain as the most anthologized of all his poems. ‘London’ was first published in 1794 in his volume *Songs of Experience*, which was written to offer the flipside to the positive, transcendent message present in Blake’s earlier volume *Songs of Innocence*. The narrator wanders through the London city and finds even the streets and the river suffering under political oppression. Every person he comes across, he sees signs of misery and lack of courage. In fact, the narrator does not just see the misery of the chimneysweeper, the soldier, the prostitute or the baby; he also hears it in their cries, sighs, curses and tears. He visualizes the cry of the chimney-sweeper covering the churches like a pall draped over a coffin, and the last breath of the dying soldier running like blood down the walls of the royal palace. In the depths of night the ‘Harlot’s curse’ blinds the new-born baby and turns love itself into a disease-infested shortcut to death.

Blake presents a graphic picture of human suffering while wandering through the streets of London: signs of misery and weakness can be discerned on everyone’s face, it seems. Every man’s voice – even the cry of every infant, a child who has not even learnt to talk yet – conveys this sense of oppression. It is as if everyone is being kept in slavery, but the manacles (shackle/chain) they wear are not literal ones, but mental – ‘mind-forg’d’ – ones. Somehow, they are even more powerful, since they take for granted that the oppressed and the downtrodden is unlikely to ever rise up and challenge this tyranny they are subjected to.

The third stanza sees two institutions associated with wealth and grandeur – the Church and the Palace – invaded by the corrupt realities of Blake’s London: a world in which industrialization leads to small children being exploited and maltreated through their employment as chimney-sweepers, and in which ‘hapless’ (i.e. unlucky) soldiers sent off to fight spill their blood for uncaring kings. ‘Appals’ in this

stanza is a word which summarizes the sense of shock at the role of the church in perpetuating this practice of slavery. The Church is literally turned into the colour of a pall (black) by the sooty breath of the chimneysweepers, but palls are associated with funerals, summoning the premature deaths of so many children who died from injury or ill-health while performing the job of a cleaning the chimneys. The word ‘appals’ also carries a more familiar meaning ‘shock’.

But the fourth and final stanza suggests that the most pervasive and frequently heard sound on London streets is the sound of a young mother – who is also a prostitute – cursing her newborn infant’s crying and ‘blighting with plagues the Marriage hearse’. That final image – the oxymoron of the ‘Marriage hearse’ (hearse is for funerals, not weddings) – appears to mean that the young unmarried mother’s unwanted child, and the misery of both mother and infant alike, is the final nail in the coffin of the idea of marriage as a sacred union which is associated not only with bliss but with blessing. A ‘curse’, of course, can merely be a loud cry, but the word carries a ring of profanity at all times.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the observations the speaker of the poem makes in the first stanza.
2. Discuss the plight of the chimney sweepers in London city as described in the poem.

Critical Analysis

In the poem, William Blake is principally describes a very corrupt society dominated by sheer materialism. In such a society there is a yawning gap between the upper and the working-class sections. Blake highlights this negative aspect of the society in this poem. It is written from a very negative perspective where people exist in a dark and oppressive world, suffering the consequences of corruption of those in positions of power. The problem is that they do not realize this is happening to them. Looking at the prevailing injustices which has resulted in causing misery to a large section of people Blake rejects the

idea of an ideologically perfect place or a utopian society. He wants to make people aware of this misery and suffering of a section of the society surrounding them.

In the first quatrain, the poet makes a presentation of his observations while moving around in the streets of London. He feels in the streets of London an air of fear and repression. The adjective 'chartered' hints at legal and geographical connotation. The speaker is moving in a rigidly mapped and restrictive area which has made the speaker suffocated. The repetition of the word 'mark' in third and fourth line like the word 'chartered' in first and second line; refers to some sort of a restriction of language, the medium, the speaker feels. As the speaker of the poem moves forward, he observes the faces of the people passing by. He sees a mark of melancholy on everyone's face. There is a sense of weariness in them all. He presents them as people who are weak and burdened by the weight of an inexplicable anxiety. This description of the London Street sets up an atmosphere of pessimism and gloom. There seems to be a very profound sense of sadness in the tone of the speaker when he describes the scene of the street full of sad people.

If the first stanza of the poem sets a tone of melancholy, the second stanza further reinforces the air of gloom by providing some more incisive observations of the speaker. The speaker in these lines forms a view of desperation hearing at the cry of the infant and the cry of the grown up. He hears the "mind forg'd manacles" which reiterates the idea of lack of freedom and a general sense of fear prevailing in the society. The use of the word 'ban' (legal restriction) reinforces the idea of restriction on the free flow of ideas. The people of the society have shackled themselves by creating abstract restrictive ideas closing their minds to any innovative thought. The use of the words like 'chartered', 'ban' and 'manacles' make a direct reference to the restrictive nature of the society which in turn contributes to the overall gloomy picture of the streets the speaker is describing.

Making a further incisive observation the speaker in the third stanza highlights the inequality that existed in the society. There is a deprived and downtrodden class which suffered silently.

Nobody takes notice of their suffering and sacrifices. The two representative occupations of sacrifice and suffering are the chimney sweeper and the soldier—one engaged in a hazardous task and the other lays down his life for the country. Since the general people of the society fail to see this reality of inequality because they wear the shackles that have limited their thinking. The speaker presents a very sympathetic picture of the chimney sweeper class, one of the poorest of the poor to take up such a hazardous occupation. These helpless chimney sweepers die prematurely as a result of working in soot and dirt. After making a scathing attack on the apathetic attitude of the society towards the poor and the exploited the speaker turns his attention to the other evil war. The soldiers are subjected to inhuman barbarity just to protect the ruling class. The soldiers' blood spills and gets smeared on the walls of the palace, where the royalty lives.

In the fourth and final stanza the speaker highlights the moral degradation of the society where innocence has been completely ignored. The 'youthful Harlot' is a representation of poverty and moral corruption. The cause of the curse of the young prostitution is the new born infant. The mother instead of comforting the baby is cursing it as the baby has become a new burden on her. The crying infant is an image of the loss of innocence. It also reflects the heartlessness of the mother. The speaker comments on the institution of marriage and its growing irrelevance in a society gradually getting morally degraded and culturally perverted. So the use of the expression 'marriage hearse'. 'Hearse' is a word which is associated with death and by using such a word with marriage the speaker attempts to demean the institution of marriage.

Check Your Progress

1. Make a list of the observations of the speaker made in the poem.
2. Discuss the ironical use of the word 'hearse' in the fourth stanza.

1.3.6 Blake's "The Tyger"- Explanation and Analysis:

"Tyger" (Songs of Experience)

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Summary of "Tyger" (*Songs of Experience*)

“The Tiger” (also and originally spelled “The Tyger”) by William Blake was published in 1794 as part of his collection of poetry entitled *Songs of Experience*. “The Tiger” is the sister poem to “The Lamb” (from “Songs of Innocence”). While “The Lamb” brings attention to innocence, “The Tiger” presents a duality between aesthetic beauty and primal ferocity. Blake believes that to see one, the hand that created “The Lamb”, one must also see the other, the hand that created “The Tiger”. Rather than believing in the war between good and evil or heaven and hell, Blake thought that every man must first see and then resolve the contraries of existence and of life.

This poem asks a question: who could have dared to make (‘frame’) a beast as terrifying as the tiger? It then goes on to liken the making of a tiger to the dangerous process of fashioning molten metal from the furnace with hammer and anvil. In the fifth verse the poet asks the question: ‘Did he smile his work to see? Did he who made the Lamb make thee?’ Blake implies that it was God who made both the gentle lamb and the ferocious tiger, but that he may regret having created so fierce a beast as the latter. The concluding verse of the poem is identical to the opening verse, giving the poem itself ‘symmetry’.

The poem is set in a harsh but nevertheless awe-inspiring world. In this world, the Tiger’s bright eyes lurk out of the dark forests. This is also the world in which the tiger was actually created by a God whose work was similar to that of a blacksmith with his anvil and his furnace. The scariest moment that the poet imagines is the moment at which the tiger comes to life. However, in the fifth stanza only, the setting shifts to heaven where the stars have stopped their war in order to behold the tiger after its creation and God himself is happy with his work.

The poem consists of six stanzas of four lines each. In the first stanza, the poet sees the tiger and it seems to be glowing in the deep forests where it is roaming in the night time.

Then he directly addresses the tiger and speaks to it. He says that its huge dimensions are bound to scare everyone who lays eyes on it. He is sure that no mortal being could have created such a fear-inducing creature.

In the second stanza, the poet continues talking to the tiger. He says that when the tiger's eyes glint, they appear to have a fire raging within them. He wonders aloud where such a fire could have been created – whether in the sea or the sky. At this point, the poet seems to have decided in favour of the sky as opposed to the sea being the birth place of the fire in the tiger's eyes, and so he asks what kind of wings the creator of the tiger had that he could hope to reach the high altitude where the fire was formed. He also asks how strong the hands of the tiger's maker had to be that he was able to grasp the fire and bring it under his control.

In the third stanza, the poet imagines the tiger's maker manipulating the ligaments of the tiger's body with his own hands. He then asks how much force his shoulders would have to hold to be able to do that. He also asks what skillful technique would have to be adopted to accomplish this task. The poet also imagines the moment at which the tiger finally came alive with its beating heart, and wonders how powerful the maker's hands and feet would have to be in order to not be intimidated by the beast.

In the fourth stanza, the poet imagines the creator of the tiger to have been a blacksmith. He imagines that the body of the tiger was made in metal with such implements as the hammer and the chain. He also imagines that the brain of the tiger must have been made in the heated temperatures of a furnace. It must have been a terrible sight to watch the tiger being created, and so it must have been a very powerful fist that could grab the tiger in its grasp.

In the fifth stanza, we find a proof of this assumption. The poet imagines that after God had brought the tiger to life, the stars in heaven (who had been engaged in a battle at the time) relinquished their weapons. They were so overwhelmed at the sight of the tiger that they started to weep. The poet wonders whether God had been pleased with his creation of the tiger, and smiled. He also wonders whether it was the same God who had made both the tiger and the lamb.

The sixth and final stanza is composed of almost the same words as the first stanza. Only the last line is slightly changed. Instead of asking who could have created the fearsome tiger, the poet asks who would have dared to do so. God creates the tiger not just because he can, but also because he has been able to take a chance in doing so. Why God has created such a scary being is a question that continues to baffle human beings.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the significance of the title “The Tyger”.
2. Discuss how the tiger is contrasted with the lamb in the poem.

Critical Analysis

The *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were intended by Blake to show ‘the two contrary states of the human soul’. “The Tyger” is the contrary poem to “The Lamb” in the *Songs of Innocence*. “The Lamb” is about a kindly God who ‘calls himself a Lamb’ and is himself meek and mild. The tiger, by contrast, is a terrifying animal ‘burning’ with fire in its eyes. The poet therefore finds it hard to believe that the same God who created the gentle lamb would also make the dreadful and ferocious tiger. If the lamb represents Divine love, what might the tiger represent? Some commentators think it represents the anger of God, some think it represents the aggressive, war-mongering spirit of mankind, others think it represents man’s imagination and creative urges. The tiger itself is a symbol for the fierce forces in the soul that are necessary to break the bonds of experience. The tiger also stands for a divine spirit that will not be subdued by restrictions, but will arise against established rules and conventions. The poem consists of a series of questions that are never fully answered, circling round us in just the same way as a tiger stalks its prey. Even at the end no answer is given: the last verse just sends us back to the same question with which the poem began.

“The Tyger” is a highly symbolic poem based on Blake’s personal philosophy of spiritual and intellectual revolution by individuals. The speaker in the poem is puzzled at the sight of a tiger in the night, and he asks it a series of questions about its fierce appearance and about the creator who made it. But the context and everything in it must be interpreted according to Blake’s philosophy of symbolic myths about human life, society and spiritual revolution. It is also a romantic poem to some extent written by the pre-romantic William Blake. The ‘Tyger’ is a symbolic animal which represents the fierce force in the human soul. It is created in the fire of imagination by God who has a supreme imagination, spirituality and ideals. The anvil, chain, hammer, furnace and fire are parts of the imaginative artist’s powerful means of creation. The imaginative artist is synonymous with the creator. The man with a revolutionary spirit can use such powers to fight against the evils of experience.

The god creating the tiger can be interpreted as any of these creative agents which inspire common men to free their minds, hearts and souls from the chains of social falsities the king, the priest, the landlord and their systems that eat up the individual’s potentials. The creator has strong shoulders (energy) as well as art (skills), and dread feet and hand. His courage is supreme, too. His creation is fierce, almost daunting himself. So must be man’s spirit and imagination, or the poet’s. The forest is the symbol of corrupted social conventions and that tries to suppress the good human potentials. In the poem night stands for ignorance, out of which the forest of false social institutions is made.

Check Your Progress

7. What does Blake’s “Holy Thursday” (*Songs of Innocence*) describe?
8. What does Blake compare the walking of the poor children of the London charity schools with?
9. What does the phrase ‘multitudes of lambs’ symbolize?
10. What does Blake see when he wanders through London streets?

11. How does Blake visualize the cry of the chimney-sweep and the dying soldier in the poem “London”?
12. What are the two institutions that Blake mentions in the third stanza of “London”?
13. “The Tiger” is the sister poem to which poem by Blake?
14. What does Blake compare the making of a tiger to in the poem “The Tyger”?
15. What does the tiger symbolize?

1.4 Let Us Sum Up:

This unit has made an attempt to acquaint you with the background of Romantic literature, with special emphasis on Romantic poetry. The unit has also highlighted the chief trends and movements of the age which will help you to understand and contextualize the poetry of the age within the larger scenario. A thorough reading of the unit will help you to examine the socio-historical and political background of the Romantic Age. The unit will help you to acquire a clear understanding of Romantic literature and identify the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry. Moreover, the unit will give you a clear knowledge of William Blake and his poetry. Finally the unit has given a detailed analysis of Blake’s poems, “Holy Thursday” (*Songs of Innocence*), “London” (*Songs of Experience*) and “The Tyger” (*Songs of Experience*).

1.5 Key Words:

- Romanticism
- Romantic Poetry
- French Revolution
- Industrial Revolution
- Enlightenment
- *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*
- Neoclassical School of Poetry

- Imagination, emotion, and freedom
- Nature
- Subjectivity
- Innocence and Experience
- Social Reform

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1.7 Possible Answers to CYP:

Check Your Progress-1 Answers:

1. 1798
2. 1832
3. The Enlightenment developed and championed logic and reason above all other qualities.
4. The Romantics focused on the individual's right to imagine and to articulate his emotions and deal with everyday life.
5. i.) A revolt against the neoclassical school of poetry of the 18th century.
ii.) Imagination, emotion, and freedom are the focal points of Romanticism.
iii.) Romanticism is concerned with the individual more than with society.
iv.) The poems of the Romantic poets are highly subjective and seek to express their innermost emotions.
v.) Romantic poets expressed an intense fondness for nature and beauty which it is replete with.

Check Your Progress-2 Answers:

- i.) William Blake was born on November 28, 1757, in the Soho district of London, England.
- ii.) William Blake claimed to have had his first vision, of a tree full of angels, at the age of ten.
- iii.) Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches*, a collection

of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models, was published in 1783.

- iv.) In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), Blake satirized the oppressive authority in church and state.
- v.) Blake published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it with *Songs of Experience* in 1794.
- vi.) A few major Themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are:
 - a.) The Destruction of Innocence
 - b.) Redemption
 - c.) Religious Hypocrisy
 - d.) Imagination over Reason
 - e.) Nature as the Purest State of Man
 - f.) The Flaws of Earthly Parents
 - g.) Social Reform
- vii.) Blake's "Holy Thursday" (*Songs of Innocence*) describes the annual Holy Thursday (Ascension Day) service in St Paul's Cathedral for the poor children of the London charity schools.
- viii.) Blake compares the walking of the poor children of the London charity schools with the flow of Thames River.
- ix.) The phrase 'multitudes of lambs' symbolizes Christ with his lambs who was quite fond of children.
- x.) When Blake wanders through London streets he finds the streets and the river suffering under political oppression. In everyone he passes, he sees signs of misery and moral weakness.

- xi.) Blake visualizes the cry of the chimney-sweep covering the churches like a pall draped over a coffin, and the last breath of the dying soldier running like blood down the walls of the royal palace.
- xii.) The two institutions that Blake mentions in the third stanza of “London” are the Church and the Palace – invaded by the corrupt realities of Blake’s London.
- xiii.) “The Tiger” is the sister poem to which Blake’s “The Lamb” (from “Songs of Innocence“).
- xiv.) Blake compares the making of a tiger to the dangerous process of fashioning molten metal from the furnace with hammer and anvil.
- xv.) The tiger symbolizes the fierce forces in the soul that are necessary to break the bonds of experience.

1.8 Model Questions:

- a.) Discuss the political, social, economic and other factors responsible for the Romantic Movement.
- b.) Explain the salient features of Romanticism and Romantic poetry.
- c.) Discuss Blake’s use of symbols and imagery in the poems, and cite one example.
- d.) Discuss the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* as “Contrary states of the Human Soul.”
- e.) Consider Blake as a precursor of the Romantic Movement.
- f.) Comment on Blake as a social critic.
- g.) How does Blake portray nature? How does the conception of nature differ in the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*?
- h.) How does Blake portray childhood in his poems?

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BLOCK-IV

UNIT-II

Block IV, Unit 2

William Wordsworth's 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' & 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge'

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 An Introduction to William Wordsworth

1.2 Dominant Characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry

Check Your Progress

1.3 An Introduction to the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

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Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' and 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge'

1.0 Objectives:

The objectives of this unit are:

- To introduce Wordsworth as a poet to the learner and take a look at some of his characteristics as a Romantic poet.
- To provide an in-depth analysis of his prescribed poems, 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' and 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality'.
- To acquaint the learner with some of the important themes of the prescribed poems.

1.1 An introduction to William Wordsworth.

In the previous unit, you have studied William Blake with special emphasis on the prescribed poems, and in this unit, you shall study another Romantic poet William Wordsworth and make a detailed analysis of the two prescribed poems, "Ode on Imitations of Immortality" and "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge".

Wordsworth was born in 1770 at Cockermouth, England. His mother died when he was an eight year old child, an experience which shapes much of his later work. He attended the Hawkshead Grammar School, where he was more attracted to the unroofed school of nature and where his love for poetry was firmly established. He learned more eagerly from the natural world around him, which finds a record in *The Prelude*. The second period of his life begins with his university course at Cambridge. Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of his life at

Cambridge was his fellowship with the young political enthusiasts and his trips to France, an experience which shaped much of his poetry and his political sensibilities. He returned to Paris in 1792, just after the September massacres, and the sights and stories which greeted him there, shook his faith in the dominant political doctrine. With his sister Dorothy, he settled in a little cottage in Dorset. Having met Coleridge, they moved to a house in Somersetshire. It was there that the two poets took the series of walks, the fruit of which was to be the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The two poets formed the deliberate purpose to make literature “adapted to interest mankind permanently”, which they declared classic poetry would never do. This volume of work is epoch-making, for it is the prelude to the Romantic Movement proper. The spirit of the work is reflected in two poems of this remarkable volume, ‘The Rime of the Ancient mariner’ is Coleridge’s masterpiece and ‘Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey’, which expresses Wordsworth’s poetical creed, is one of the most significant poems. While the poems themselves are some of the most influential in Western literature, it is the preface to the second edition published in 1800, which remains one of the most important testaments to a poet’s view on his craft. In the preface, he sets out his theory of poetry where he declares his preference for “incidents and situations from common life” and written in “the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation”. His work *The Prelude*, which was completed in 1805, but was published after his death, is a record of Wordsworth’s development as a poet.

1.2 Dominant characteristics of Wordsworth’s poetry

After taking a glimpse into the life of Wordsworth, let us now take a look into some of the dominant traits found in his poems. In keeping with the dominant theme of Romanticism, Wordsworth’s dealings with nature are his chief glory as a poet. He is sensitive to every subtle change in the world around him. No other poet has found such abundant beauty in the common world. In his treatment of nature, he is not content merely to describe and rejoice, but tries to see more deeply and penetrates to the heart of things, to find a deeper and profound

meaning. It is the life of nature that is recognised; Wordsworth gives us the very life and the impression of some personal living spirit that meets and accompanies the man who goes amidst nature. Wordsworth also emphasises the moral influence of nature. He considers nature as a moral teacher, a mother, as an elevating influence. He believed that nature deeply influences the human character.

In Wordsworth's philosophy of human life, we find several doctrines, which rests upon the conception that man is not apart from nature. In childhood, man is sensitive to all natural influences; he is an epitome of the gladness and beauty of the world. He explains this gladness by the fact that the child comes from the Creator of nature, due to which the child shares an intimate connection with nature. This kinship with nature and God is what glorifies childhood and ought to extend through a man's whole life and ennoble it. This is the teaching of "Tintern Abbey", where the best part of our life is shown to be the result of natural influences. Wordsworth believes that, society and the external world tends to weaken humanity; and so a return to the simple life is the only way out of the pitiable condition of human life. The truth of humanity, that is the common life, is the only subject of permanent literary interest according to Wordsworth. One of the central doctrines of Romanticism, interest in common life was spread across his works such as "Michael", "The Solitary Reaper", "To a Highland Girl" etc. Wordsworth's themes are the joys and sorrows of the common people and their everyday life.

Wordsworth adds a mystic element to this philosophy of life, which is the result of his own belief that in every natural object there is a reflection of a living God. Nature is transfused by a Spirit, and man is also a reflection of the divine Spirit. This mystic conception of man is seen in "Intimations of Immortality", in which Wordsworth adds to his spiritual interpretation of nature and man the alluring doctrine of pre-existence. This makes human life a continuous and immortal thing, without end or beginning.

Wordsworth's lyrical gift finds an expression in his sonnets, the most complicated and repository of the lyrical forms. Wordsworth's use of the Petrarchan sonnet was very striking. He re-established the supremacy of the Petrarchan sonnet over the Shakespearian one, which had been eclipsed in popularity during the Elizabethan age. Some of his sonnets are patriotic, others express their passion for liberty, and others such as "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", deal with nature.

Check Your Progress

1. In which work of Wordsworth, do we find an autobiographical account of his approach to poetry?
2. Write a short note on Wordsworth's treatment of nature in his poetry.

1.3 An introduction to the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

In the previous section, we have had a basic idea of the characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry and now, we shall go to a detailed analysis of the prescribed poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'. Wordsworth's sonnet 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge', September 3, 1802 falls in the category of Momentary Poems. The poet is describing what he sees, thinks and feels on a specific day at a specific moment. The poem was written about an experience that took place on July 31st, 1802 during a trip to France with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. The setting of the poem is London as seen from the Westminster Bridge, which connects the south bank of the Thames River with Westminster on the north bank. Wordsworth's inspiration for the poem was the view that he witnessed from the Westminster Bridge on the morning of July 31, 1802, when most of the residents were not yet out of their homes and the factories had not yet stoked their fires and polluted the air with smoke. He and his sister Dorothy were crossing the bridge in a coach taking them to a boat for a trip across the English Channel to France. Dorothy's journals provide an interesting counterpoint to Wordsworth's poetry, as she notes in her journal about the "various troubles and disasters" that they went through. In her diary, Dorothy wrote:

After various troubles and disasters, we left London on Saturday morning at about half past 5 or 6, the 31st of July.... We mounted the Dover Coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke, and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light, that there was even something like the purity of one of Nature's own grand spectacles. (Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*)

Wordsworth often used Dorothy's journals as a material for poems and Dorothy had accompanied Wordsworth on this trip. He therefore had both his sister's journal and his own memory as sources for this poem. Looking back in the brilliant morning sunlight at the sleeping city of London, the poet composed this Petrarchan sonnet in a tone peaceful and serene.

1.3.1 Analysis of the poem 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

The poet records his impressions of the scene at early dawn when no mechanized activity is going on and the air is clean and devoid of smoke. He is touched by the beauty and splendour of the city. There is nothing more beautiful than the scene visible from the Westminster Bridge early in the morning. Only those whose souls are dull would not be touched by the awe-inspiring scene; the greatness is majestic. The sight from the bridge is "touching in its majesty" (3), a phrase that is intriguing as it suggests both intimacy and grandeur. So the view from the Westminster Bridge combines both these elements. He presents a panorama of London. All objects natural or otherwise are now visible because of the glitter of the morning sun which spreads over the entire landscape. Never has the poet witnessed such beauty which the splendour of the sun radiates over the valley, rocks or hill. Not only is the scene enchanting, but also the peace and the calm which the scene has on the mind of the poet. In such an atmosphere, even the houses seem asleep and all is still.

The speaker personifies London as he says that the beauty of the morning spreads over the city just as a dress covers a body. He then goes on to give a catalogue of man-made structures visible from the

Westminster Bridge, “Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples” (6). This seems paradoxical as the garment worn by the city is the bright and glittering sunshine that does not conceal or protect but emphasizes the bare beauty. Despite being all crowded together, the speaker gives an impression of spaciousness when he notes that the ships and towers are open onto the fields of London and the sky. London in its early morning purity seems to the speaker, one with the silent beauty and peace of nature. During the day, London is cut off from the green fields and the blue sky but the city during the morning is ‘smokeless’ enabling the speaker to have a clear and uninterrupted view of the beauty around him.

The sestet starts with another personification of that of the sun and the river. The verb ‘steep’ in the opening of the sestet can include a variety of definitions such as cleansing, bathing or imbuing. The personified morning sun performs this action on the “valley, rock or hill”. The speaker compares the morning sunlight falling on the city to the sunlight falling on the rocks or hills and says that the view of the city in front of him surpasses all other things. He had never seen such beauty and calmness in the valleys, rocks or hills. The view of the city in the morning and the Thames gliding at “his own sweet will” (12) induces in the speaker a sense of calm and peace. So quiet is the atmosphere that the otherwise bustling city seems to be asleep.

1.3.2 Structure of the poem:

‘Composed Upon Westminster Bridge’ is a lyric poem in the form of a sonnet. Wordsworth’s poem is a Petrarchan sonnet. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of an eight line stanza (octave) and a six line stanza (sestet). The first stanza presents a theme or problem, and the second stanza develops the theme or suggests a solution to the problem. It is, of course, characteristic of Wordsworth that he should use the formal division of the sonnet in accordance with his celebrated references to poetry as taking ‘its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity’ and requiring long and profound thought or meditation on ‘powerful feelings’. As in other poems of his, we are first given the emotional experience and then his thoughtful meditation upon it. But,

in 'Westminster Bridge', he makes use of the formal division of the sonnet by presenting the experience, in the main, through the octave, largely reserving the sestet to present his meditation on the experience. Yet his handling of the sonnet form here is managed with an unobtrusive ease and grace perhaps unequalled in his poetry. The sestet begins like the octave with a general statement about the unique beauty of the scene, thus providing a careful and symmetrical parallel in both form and content:

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour,
valley, rock or hill. Though the statement is general, it is expressed in more specific and concrete manner than "Earth has not anything to show more fair" (1). This degree of specific visual quality, in the first two lines of the sestet, helps to link the sestet smoothly to the experience, expressed in concrete visual terms with which the octave was concluded. There are other factors in the sestet which helps to bind it to the octave. The details of the city skyline, "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples" (6), find a parallel in the features of the natural landscape, "valley, rock or hill" (10), features which like those of the city skyline, cause the eye to rise and fall, in a somewhat similar pattern as it traces their sequence. The element of personification introduced in the fourth and fifth lines of the poem is developed throughout the entire sestet, "his first splendour", "his own sweet will", "houses seem asleep" and "mighty heart". The visual experience communicated in the octave, the sensations and emotions aroused by the unique and extreme beauty of the city scene, now deepens into the most profound meditative feeling while the poet at the same time, reflects thoughtfully upon his experience: "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep" (11). Now, let us take a look into the rhyme scheme and meter of the poem. The rhyme scheme of 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' and other Petrarchan sonnets is, first stanza (octave): abba abba; second stanza (sestet): cd, cd, cd. The meter of the poem is iambic pentameter, with ten syllables per line.

Earth has | not an| -y thing| to show| more fair

Dull would| he be| of soul| who could| pass by

1.3.3 Seeing the city in a new light: An important theme in the poem

Wordsworth beautifully brings out the sense of contrast between the commercial aspect of the city and the peace and tranquillity that prevails during the morning in the city. His projection of the city, the crowded skyline of “Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples” (6), all clearly the work of man’s hand, sums up the manifold significance of London as a centre of commerce, political power, religion and culture. His use of the phrase “mighty heart” conveys the power of the metropolitan centre of a nation and an empire, along whose arteries are pumped the vital life blood of commerce (ships), political cohesion (towers), religion (domes, temples) and culture (theatres). Yet, the image implies much more than this. Surprisingly, Wordsworth, the poet of nature tells us that his most sublime experience of the rarest beauty was not in the contemplation of a natural landscape, but in the contemplation of the city. This element of paradox is what Cleanth Brooks, in his reading of Wordsworth sees as the most valuable part of the poem. And this does account for the extreme degree of calm that he experiences. On the contrary, the city in *The Prelude* remains as an antithesis to all that Wordsworth loves and values. In the opening lines of *The Prelude* he escapes from the oppression of the city to feel the breath of a heaven-sent and inspiring wind. When Wordsworth returns to the subject of the city describing his residence in London, it is mainly either to convey the bustling activity and spectacle in the streets and theatres, law courts and Parliament, of the metropolis, or to dwell upon the isolation and the vice, the confusion and oppressive purposelessness of urban life. It is however this sonnet which brilliantly proclaims Wordsworth’s fully articulated acceptance of the city into the grand scheme of things. He perceives the city to be assimilated into the natural universe which is seen to encompass it. The city’s man-made fabrications are said to “lie/ open unto the fields and to the sky”. It is infused with sunlight, and its fabricated skyline comes to be contemplated in terms of related memories of natural landscape and silhouette. Furthermore, the city stands upon the river, which expresses a fundamental, natural,

and spontaneous volition beyond that of the instruments of commerce riding upon its waters: "The river glideth at his own sweet will" (12). Yet here, too, the city is in an intimate relationship with the grander natural world which encloses it. Again, the choice of the image, 'mighty heart', proclaims the city to be no mechanical fabrication but a living organism and a part of the larger world of nature. It is this assimilation into the natural universe of what might be supposed the most unexpected source of sublime beauty, which provided the ultimate revelation of a universe of spiritual loveliness, whole and entire. The calm that he experiences, Wordsworth perceives it first in the contemplated scene, then discovers it as his most profound feeling: "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep" (11). The poet finds in this scene of serene and sublime beauty a perfect inward calm, a complete reassurance that beauty is everywhere. Thus the city is not introduced in its negative aspect, but is inserted in natural scenery. The city, in its morning calmness and silence, does not clash with nature but rather, becomes a part of it. An important aspect of the poem is Wordsworth's expression of the sense of harmony which exists between the natural surroundings of the city and the city itself in its ideal aspect in the morning light. In the morning, there is an equilibrium between the city and its natural surroundings, when the city has not yet become contaminated by the commercial and industrial activities. Wordsworth's sonnet has certain significant differences from the account in Dorothy's journal. In the sonnet, we find the single word 'ships' instead of the 'multitude of little boats' of the journal entry, and instead of the reference to St. Paul's, we find "towers, domes, theatres and temples". Thus Wordsworth has condensed and generalized the multitude of little boats to ships, and he has amplified the reference to St. Paul's into a list of such imposing edifices as towers, domes, theatres, and temples. These changes represent a great enrichment in the connotative values of the words and are contributory to the grandeur of tone for which Wordsworth is striving.

In addition, the moment of sunrise and the view from a bridge over the river, may not be without significance, as the experience revealed in 'Westminster Bridge' is the archetypal occasion of spiritual illumination and transition.

Check Your Progress

1. Give some of the examples of personification used in the poem.
2. Write a short note on the image of the city in the morning light, as projected in the poem.
3. 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' is a:
 - a) Petrarchan sonnet b) Spenserian sonnet c) Shakespearian Sonnet

1.4 An introduction to the poem 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'

'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', published in *Poems, In Two Volumes* (1807) is a poem about Wordsworth's connection to nature and his struggle to understand humanity's failure to recognise the value of the natural world. The poem is also elegiac in the sense that it is about the loss of the vision of childhood. The poem is characterised by a strong sense of duality: even though the world around the speaker is beautiful and serene, there is a hovering sense of grief owing to the lost glory of childhood. Wordsworth ponders upon the fact that time has stripped away much of nature's glory, depriving him of the wild spontaneity that he exhibited as a child. The poem sums up Wordsworth's philosophy of childhood, where he believes that upon being born, human beings move from a perfect and idealized state into an imperfect earth. Children retain some of the memory of the former glory and purity but as they grow older, the memory fades along with the solemn and joyous relationship to nature. However the memory of childhood can offer a solace, for it enables man to see through the veil of external reality, making him realise that this is just a mere illusion. Moreover, as human being matures, he gains a more humane and sober approach to nature, in a way compensating for the loss of the earlier vision of childhood.

1.4.1 An analysis of the poem

The ode can be divided into three sections. The first four stanzas are bounded by the common theme of the loss of the divine vision that

the child was born with. The second section which consists of stanzas V to VIII, deals with the glorification of childhood. The poet equates the child with the philosopher and a prophet. The section also attempts to explain the process of this loss of the vision of childhood. The final three stanzas are about the compensation for the loss of the vision of childhood. Even though the initial vision fades away, another experience and vision is gained, that of a philosophical vision, which enables him to sympathise with his fellow men and be conscious of the most ordinary objects of nature. The poem starts by reminiscing a time when all of nature seemed heavenly and dreamlike to him. Even the most common objects in nature seemed divine and “apparelled in celestial light” (4). However the poet laments the fact that now that he has grown up, he fails to see that celestial light upon nature which he had seen as a child. The poet still sees the rainbow and the lovely rose, the moon still shines in the cloudless sky and yet something is different, something is lost. That glorious and dreamlike quality with which nature was invested has now departed from the earth. The poet feels a sense of grief listening to the songs of the birds and watching the frisking lambs. However he gathers himself and resolves not to be depressed, for that would dampen the spirit of the season. While reflecting on nature with a newly gained understanding, he feels that the earth is gay once again. The speaker continues to be a part of the joy of the season, saying that it would be unfair for him to be sullen when “Earth herself is adorning” (43). However, when he looks upon a tree and a field, the feeling of loss again engulfs him. In the first four stanzas, are the poet’s attempts to regain the vision of nature that he had as a child. Amidst the momentary joy, the loss of the divine glory and vision that he had as a child is what pre-dominates the section. The fifth stanza, gives an expression of the poet’s belief of the pre-existence and immortality of the human soul. The stanza starts with one of Wordsworth’s most famous lines:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.... (Stanza-V, Lines 58-63)

He goes on to say that before the birth, human beings dwell in a more purer realm, that of the heaven. As infants, we retain some of the memory of heaven, which enables us to experience nature's glory more clearly. But as we grow older, that connection becomes fainter as we get tied up in societal norms, conventions and interests of our earthly existence. In the next stanza, the poet notes that the moment we come to earth, everything conspires to help us forget the divine realm from which we had come. Almost like a mother, the earth by offering different pleasures and comforts, lures the child away from the imperial palace, heaven. The speaker then sees a six year old child playing and imagines the rest of his life. The child is seen in his own world, living in imagination and in harmony with the world of nature around him, he is even annoyed by his mother's kisses. The child learns from his experiences, but he spends most of his time on imitation, and it seems to the speaker as if his whole life will essentially be endless imitation. In stanza VIII, the poet addresses the child as a philosopher and a prophet who understands the highest truths of life, which often evades the grownups. The child always struggles to grow up, acting and imitating, without understanding the burden. The poet laments as soon the child will grow up, get tied up in the social norms and codes, and lose his divine vision.

In stanza IX, the poet feels flood of joy when he realises that even though he has lost the glorious vision of childhood, yet something of that glory and divine vision, do stays with us. And it is this vision, which lets us in a way, to connect with the lost state of innocence. The poet states that the state of childhood is blessed with happiness, freedom, the innocent faith and hope that flutter in the child's breasts. He feels a sense of gratefulness not because of these things which are most worthy of praise and gratefulness, but rather for the doubt that engulfs his mind regarding the external objects of the world. The shadowy recollections of our childhood life are what enable us to question the outward things. And it is in this state of doubt, that we can see beyond the veil of the

external world and realise the ultimate truth of life. In these moments of truth when we see beyond the illusion and compare this to the past glory of childhood, man feels guilty. The poet is grateful to the period of childhood, because the truths woken in the period can never be perished by society and adulthood. Thus in these tranquil moments, our souls can have a sight of the immortal sea, from which we have come into this world. In a state of joy, he urges the birds to sing and all the creatures to participate in the “gladness of the May” (175). Though nothing can bring back the radiance with which the child viewed nature, though the state of childhood cannot be back, yet he will not grieve. He will rather bask in the glory of what remains behind, in the faith of immortality of the soul and what the mature years have given him, which is a philosophic mind.

In the final stanza, the poet says that he now has no more of that vision of the past with which he had viewed his childhood; rather he now has a different experience and a different outlook with which he approaches nature. His perception of nature is now more sober and philosophical which has compensated the loss of his childhood vision. This makes him love nature and appreciate natural beauty all the more for now even the simplest of objects in nature can stir him to thought. He can perceive something noble even in the most common objects of nature. He now is not just fascinated by the outward beauty but has a deeper insight and understanding when the simplest of flowers can give rise to thoughts that are “too deep for tears” (204).

1.4.2 Structure of the poem:

The poem is in the form of a Pindaric ode. Consisting of eleven stanzas, the poem is an irregular ode as the length of the lines and stanzas, and the metre varies throughout the poem. The poem is mainly written in iambic meter. The changing length of the lines, rhyme and style is in sync with the changing ideas developed throughout the poem. The narration of the poem is in the style of an interior monologue. The poem combines aspects of Coleridge’s Conversation poems, religious sentiments of the Bible and aspects of elegy. The poem is an ode, that is, it contains celebration of its subject, but the celebration is also mixed

with questioning which hinders the continuity of the poem. Now let us take a look into some of the important themes of the poem.

1.4.3 Wordsworth's concept of childhood and immortality of the soul:

In childhood man is sensitive as a wind harp to all natural influences. Wordsworth explains this sensitiveness to nature by the doctrine that the child comes straight from the Creator of nature. Wordsworth sums up his philosophy of childhood in the poem. His conception of childhood expressed in the poem may possibly be indebted to the poet Vaughan, who more than a century before, had proclaimed in "The Retreat" the same doctrine. Each poem opens with a description of the world as it appears in beauty to the child. Then, as the child grows up to manhood, there comes the gradual absorption of the spirit in the consideration of the material things of life, though the memories of childhood occur frequently, when things appeared in "the glory and freshness of a dream" (5). However though the poems are similar in their substance, they differ a little in their conclusions. Wordsworth is grateful for the trace of the childhood vision that still remains, and that nature, with all its beauties, still means much to him. Vaughan's poetry however, gives us the hope of returning again to the joy of childhood.

Wordsworth in the poem idealizes the state of childhood, as the child remains closer to the glorious and divine realm which is the heaven. The natural instincts and the pleasures of childhood are the true standards of a man's happiness in his life. The poet expresses his belief of the pre-existence of the human soul. In the poet's view, the child has a more sublime vision because the child has come from heaven. The child is spiritually superior to the adult because he has not yet become caught up in the worldly pleasures. The childhood vision, however fades away as he matures into an adult and gets caught up in the societal conventions. Wordsworth refers growing older as the "prison house" of the youth. The poem provides an example of the proximity and estrangement which he observes in the stages of childhood and adulthood. Wordsworth addresses the child as a "seer", "Mighty prophet" and a philosopher who knows and understands the deep truths of life as he has a vision of

the divine glory. The poet notes that a fragment of the childhood vision is retained in the adult. Childhood becomes the psychological and emotional foundation of adulthood, but that state becomes unreachable for the speaker.

Certain critics are of the opinion that Wordsworth provides an ahistorical and apolitical conception of childhood, which is in contrast to Blake's deeply contextualized conception of childhood. He depoliticizes the child by making the child universal, rather than specific to a particular historical moment. The Wordsworthian child is the product of the adult's nostalgia and memory as much as he or she is the product of nature. In Wordsworth's view, the child's divine vision is what enables the child to enjoy the beauty of nature in a way that adults are not capable of doing so. Thus, the notion of childhood is dealt with by the Romantic poets in various ways, so as to make it one of the central themes of Romantic poetry.

1.4.4 The changing conception of nature:

The poem clearly conveys a changing attitude towards nature as the poet moves from childhood to maturity. This change is evident in the first stanza itself, when the poet laments the loss of the divine vision which had enabled him to view nature in different light in his childhood. All natural objects appeared dreamlike as if they had been clothed in "celestial light". However, as the child grows up, this dreamlike quality and the divine vision too fades away. He gives out the reason for this loss, stating that the child carries the vivid memory and glorious vision of the heaven, the perfect and ideal realm from which he had come. This enables him to perceive nature with a sublime vision. However, as the child grows up, the earthly pleasures and comforts lure him away and he loses that divine vision. As an adult the poet is aware of the beauty of the natural world, but he can no longer approach it the way he had done as a child. This loss is however compensated by achieving a different approach to nature, that which is marked by sobriety. He gains a more philosophical outlook towards nature in his mature years which enables him to sympathise with his fellow men and approach even the most ordinary objects of nature with a profound understanding.

Check Your Progress

1. To which poet, is Wordsworth's philosophy of childhood in the poem 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' indebted to?
2. In the poem 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality', what compensates the loss of the childhood vision?
3. In which volume was the poem 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' published?

1.5. Conclusion

Now summing up, we have seen that in the "Intimations of Immortality", Wordsworth gives an expression of the loss of the childhood vision and the growth of the philosophical self. "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", on the other hand, highlights a different aspect of the city. The poem moves away from the usual images of the city, its commercial and material aspects and instead considers the city as a part of the natural world. The city, basking in the morning sunlight, in its quiet and peaceful state, provided a sense of calm and peace to the poet that is deeper than any that he has ever felt.

Thus, this unit introduced us to the poet William Wordsworth and specifically with two of his poems namely, 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' and 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'. Now, in the next unit, we will be introduced to Lord Byron, with an indepth analysis of *Don Juan*, Canto XI.

1.6 Glossary

Upon Westminster Bridge

Westminster Bridge: is a road-and-foot-traffic bridge over the River Thames in London, linking Westminster on the west side and Lambeth on the east side.

Majesty: grandeur, splendour

Smokeless air: clean and clear atmosphere

Steep: bathe

Glideth: flows

Still: motionless, passive

Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

A time: early childhood

Apparelled: clothed

Tabor: a small drum like musical instrument

Earth: foster mother

Fretted: vexed, confused

Sallies: outbursts of affectionate feelings

1.7 Suggested Readings

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1.8 Suggested Essay Type Questions

1. Present a note on the form of the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"
2. Critically discuss Wordsworth's concept of childhood and immortality of soul as articulated in "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood".

3. Nature and human life are inseparably interrelated in the poetry of Wordsworth. Discuss.
4. Present a critical evaluation of the treatment of the concept of nature in the prescribed two poems of William Wordsworth.
5. How does Wordsworth treat the subject of nature in the context of growing urbanization in the poem “Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge”?
6. Write a critical essay on the treatment of Man in the prescribed poem of William Wordsworth.

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BLOCK IV: UNIT- III

LORD BYRON'S *DON JUAN*

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Lord Byron: A brief biographical sketch and a note on his major poetical works

3.2.1 His Life

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3.3 *Don Juan*: The Poem

3.3.1 An overview of the development of story in the earlier cantos of the poem

3.4 Critical Appreciation of *Don Juan* Canto XI

3.5 Character Analysis of Don Juan

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

3.7 Key Words

3.8 Terminal Questions

3.9 References/Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Have a glimpse of Lord Byron's life and his major poetical works
- Formulate an idea about the development of story in the earlier cantos of *Don Juan*
- Critically appreciate *Don Juan*, Canto 11
- Know about the type of 'heroes' Byron created, famously called 'Byronic Heroes'
- Assess the character of Don Juan

3.1 INTRODUCTION

George Gordon Lord Byron conventionally clubbed together along with Keats and Shelley as the second generation of English Romantic poets, was the most famous and the largest selling poet in the first decades of the 19th century. This second generation of Romantic poets differed from the 'Lake Poets' in the sense that their writings were inspired more by modern day issues such as politics and were more socially driven. Instead of glorifying nature, they preferred to record their resentment as liberal revolutionaries by staying within the society itself. Such issues are reflected in Byron's writings as well. His poetry is informed not by nature or by the contemplation of nature, but by public life and recent history, by British politics and by the feverish European nationalisms stirred by the French Revolution. Byron assumed the public role of a commentator on his times. He was at once a social critic and an object of criticism, a brooding misanthrope and an icon of fashion. In addition, Byron was a scornful critique of the philosophical affectations of his contemporaries, stressing wit and common sense as against imagination.

3.2 LORD BYRON: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND A NOTE ON HIS

MAJOR POETICAL WORKS-

3.2.1 His Life - George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) was born in London to Catherine Gordon of Gight, an impoverished Scottish heiress and Captain John Byron, a scoundrel and a fortune-hunting widower, who squandered away his wife's money and even left her. He was raised by his mother and a Presbyterian nurse, who imbibed in him a strong fascination for Calvinist doctrines of innate evil and predestination. As a child, Byron went on to become a very good swimmer in spite of the natural deformity of his left foot that he was born with. He also became a free boxer at thirteen. However, he lived a life of debauchery of a young lord alternatively between Cambridge and London. All his life, Byron cultivated the somber, romantic and passionate side of his disposition, which later became known by a byword, 'Byronic'. Byron's invariable motive seems to have been self dramatization and therefore, his 'Byronic' temperament is what he imparted to his male protagonists also. In 1816, Byron was dishonourably

exiled from England after his affair with his half-sister, Augusta was discovered. He never returned to England again. He spent his last eight years abroad, largely in Italy, where he became associated with Shelley who had a lasting influence on him. Byron now changed into a disillusioned man who recognized his true character, and who, though cynical and pessimistic, was at least honest in his unhappy outlook on society.

3.2.2 His Works- Byron's first major achievement was his savage critique on the literary culture of his time, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), a satirical poem in the style of Pope, which lampooned even Wordsworth and Coleridge - dismissing them all in the phrase 'the scribbling crew'. It was followed by the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), a poem based on his travels which made him immensely popular. His wanderings on the Continent during his exile are chronicled in the third (1816) and fourth (1818) cantos of *Child Harold*. The poem is about travelling, and mixes a response to what he sees in the external world with his responses to his internal world. Byron refers to himself as a 'wanderer, or 'roamer', and 'restless', and compares himself to a bird that was always kept in a cage by society. Many people think that it is the best example of Byron as a quintessentially Romantic poet, melancholy, brooding and alone. During these years on the Continent, Byron also composed some of his longer poems viz., *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816) and *Mazeppa* (1819) and his dramas *Manfred* and *Cain*. His Turkish tales like *The Corsair*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *Lara* and *The Giaour* are influenced by the age's interest in non-European cultures and histories or the 'Orient'. Byron also composed a large number of lyrics, most of them mediocre in quality; and he added several great satirical poems, the most notable of which are *Beppo* (1819), *The Vision of Judgement* (1822), directed mainly against Robert Southey, and, the longest of all, *Don Juan*.

Check Your Progress -1

1. To which generation of Romantic poets does Byron belong ?
2. What are the main issues in Byron's writings ?
3. Why was Byron exited from England ?

3.3 DON JUAN: THE POEM

Byron began to write *Don Juan* in July 1818 and the poem had never finished until he died in 1824. It was issued in portions just as he composed it. Until his death, Byron used the poem as the channel of expression for his past experiences, for miscellaneous pictures of society and human life as he observed it. It was a poem without a plan, and that is why, it was very well suited for the purpose. The poem consists of sixteen cantos and an unfinished seventeenth canto. It is written in ottava rima, an eight line stanza, and the rhyme scheme is “ABABABCC”.

Don Juan was intended as a satire on abuses of the ‘present states of society’. It is a long, digressive satire on the hypocrisies of high society, the false glory associated with war, politics, contemporary poets etc. It is based on the legend of Spanish of Don Juan, a habitual seducer of women but Byron here reverses the tradition by turning Juan into an inexperienced youth who is rather seduced by various women, instead of seducing them. On 25 December 1822, having finished twelve cantos, Byron wrote to John Murray, his publisher, giving a sober and cogent statement of his purpose behind his writing of the poem that-Don Juan would be known by and by, for what it was intended i.e, a satire on abuses of the present states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice. For that, Byron claimed it could be now and then voluptuous but that was inevitable.

However, its scope is wider than that of political and social satire. In this poem, all of Byron’s conceptions of liberty, personal, moral, political and Intellectual - meet in a grand symphony. This liberty is not the mere desire of a young aristocrat to shake off restraint; it is liberty of the mind, a release of creative energy, freedom from the slavery of the stock response and the conventional attitude.

Don Juan is written in the form of a vast monologue, in the course of which a story gets told. But quite a number of digressions like the writer’s observations on different aspects of society interrupt the main narrative. In his digressions, Byron speaks about whatever most concerns him at that moment. Byron here assumes a playful persona of a showman-narrator but he often abandons him and speaks in his own person, not as a fictional “editor” but as a human being, who feels deeply about some facet of life or who has some honest doubts about the world and himself.

Basically, it is a sort of picaresque novel in verse. The protagonist, as in the picaresque novel, has many wanderings and adventures in many countries which is the pivotal theme of the poem. In fact, according to John Addington Symonds, Juan's biography is the thread on which Byron hangs descriptions, episodes, satirical digressions, and reflective passages.

The poem begins with a Dedication and Preface in which Byron speaks out against his contemporary rivals Southey and Wordsworth who according to Byron had sold themselves to the King. They had become a part of the Establishment. Byron feels that they wrote only to become the most celebrated poets of their age, but only posterity will decide whether one can achieve poetic immortality or not.

The narrative of *Don Juan* begins not in *medias res*, as is expected in traditional epics, but with the birth of Don Juan. Though cast in an epic form, *Don Juan* systematically attacks the major conventions of epic poetry as set forth by neoclassic criticism. The action of an epic poem was expected to be one, entire, and great; the action of this poem is of a purely episodic nature. The epic hero should be virtuous and constant to some great design; whereas it is seen that Don Juan is the average man, drifting with every circumstances. The poem is in fact classed as a mock-epic. A mock-epic poem adopts the elaborate form and ceremonious style of the epic genre, but applies it to narrate a commonplace subject matter. Moreover, the heroic figure is not a worthy one. Similarly, in *Don Juan* also, the protagonist is rather passive and lacks the seriousness of an Epic hero.

3.3.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STORY IN THE EARLIER

CANTOS (CANTOS I TO X) OF THE POEM

Don Juan can be divided into two quite sharply distinguished sections, Cantos I through IX which present a series of picaresque adventures, and the remaining dealing with Juan's English experiences.

Canto 1 deals with the birth and early life of the protagonist. Born in Seville, Spain to Don Jose and a widow named Inez, Juan is brought up by his mother in great austerity: Half of his days were passed at church and the other between his tutors, confessor and mother. This

recalls Byron's own upbringing by his mother and the Presbyterian nurse. When Don Juan is sixteen years old, a young friend of his mother, named Donna Julia, married to a man of fifty, Don Alfonso, falls in love with him. One night Don Alfonso sees them in a compromising situation and, as a result, Julia is put into a nunnery whereas Juan is sent to travel through European countries by his mother. In this Canto, Byron's revolt against the social barriers of marriage is conspicuous. He seems to advocate the idea that marriage without love cannot be sustained for long. And hence, socially sanctioned marriage alone cannot guarantee peace in conjugal life.

In the second Canto, Juan embarks in Cadiz, Spain with his tutor, Pedrillo. Here begins Juan's picaresque adventures to many places. His ship wrecks and some of the crew and passengers, including Juan, have to survive for some days in a boat. Byron makes a long description of their woes and Juan's courage during that peril. In fact, the ship wreck scenes abound with the most vivid and realistic scenes in the poem. Beginning to starve, the survivors decide that someone must be sacrificed and the lot falls on Juan's tutor. They had previously eaten Juan's dog, a gift from his father. Nevertheless, Juan refuses to eat his tutor and his decision will prove wise, for all the ones who ate him die of indigestion. The few who survived drowned because they could not swim.

Don Juan bears some of the personality traits of the writer. So, just like Byron, he is portrayed as a good swimmer. Having swum to the shore, Juan he is rescued by a young lady, called Haidee and her maid. He is kept in a cave and Haidee and her maid Zoe bring him clothes and food daily. They are on a Greek Island and Haidee, the only child of a rich pirate and slave-trader keeps Juan in secret lest her father should sell him. The two soon fall in love. Haidee's heart is completely lost to Juan and Byron describes their love in paradisiacal scenery, conforming to the romantic taste love and nature.

The third and fourth cantos describe what ensues after Haidee's father Lambro comes home unexpectedly. Since a report spread on the island avouched Lambro's death Haidee, his sole heir, lived in her father's house together with Juan who play the master's role. When Lambro arrives what he sees makes him furious, people eating, dancing and singing in his gardens while Haidee and Juan eat richly in his house. He asks one of the musicians the reason for the festivity and the answer

is that the master of the island is dead and his heir and her lover were then ruling all the affairs. Lambro enters the house through a private and secret gate and getting close to Haidee's room observe the couple without being noticed. Waking up at the sight of her father, Haidee confesses her guilt and begs Lambro's pardon, but in vain. Juan is sent to sea, wounded and chained, as a slave. Haidee becomes very sick. She gets mad and for twelve days and nights she doesn't sleep and finally dies. Meanwhile Juan finds himself on a boat with Italian slaves.

Cantos V and VI contain descriptions of the slave market and Juan's experiences in the Sultana's court. They arrive in the Dardanelles from where they will be sent to the slave market in Constantinople. There they are exhibited in order to be purchased. A black eunuch buys Juan and another fellow, an Englishman, and takes them to the sultan's Palace. There the eunuch makes Juan dress like a woman and introduces him to the sultana. She had seen him on the market and, having found him attractive, had told Baba, the eunuch, to buy him. Gulbeyaz, the sultana, wants Juan's love and asks him if he can love. Still remembering Haidee, Juan gets very angry and answers that he would not serve a Sultana's sensual fantasy. The Sultana felt extremely insulted. Baba tried to dissuade her from her revenging purposes, but in vain. He then helped Juan and his friend to escape from the Sultana's power and palace. These Cantos depict Byron's interest in the Oriental lands and culture.

In Cantos VII and VIII, again there is a change of locale. Leaving the palace, the two friends find themselves in a battlefield. The Russians are besieging Ismail and Juan and Johnson surrender to the Russians and fight together with them. In this part Byron invokes Homer in order to relate the battle that is going to happen between Russians and Turks. In this narration, Byron poetically conveys all his horror and aversion for the atrocities of war. The Russians triumph, the Sultan and his five sons die stoically. Juan saves a ten-year old girl from some wild Tartars, named Leila, and because of his bravery is praised and taken to Russia. He had vowed to take care of Leila forever and so he takes her to Russia with him.

In the ninth and tenth cantos, Don Juan's experiences in the Russian queen, Catherine's court are detailed. He had been sent there as a messenger with the news of the surrender of mail. In Russia, Catharine II, who was forty-eight years old (according to Byron) falls in love

with Juan and takes him as her favourite. Suddenly he gets sick due to the cold climate and the doctor recommends a change of climate. Catherine sends him to Britain on a political mission. He and Leila go through Poland, Germany, Holland and finally arrive in England.

Check Your Progress-2

1. How will you read Byron's work *Don Juan* in the light of some of his autobiographical elements or personal choices?
2. In what ways is *Don Juan* a variation on the Epic form?
3. Narrate the incidents in Juan's life prior to his arrival in London.

3.4 CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF *DON JUAN* CANTO XI

The English experiences of the protagonist form the core of Canto 11 which continues till the last unfinished canto. However, there is little action in this part of the poem and a great deal of satirizing. The poem exposes many deficiencies of the society in which Byron lived. The knowledge and experience of the travelled, observant man of the world, the vivacity and cleverness of the writer, the firm grasp of actualities and clear vision of a social critic— all these qualities of Byron seem to merge in the creation of *Don Juan*.

Canto XI of this poem was written in October 1822 Juan arrives in London and observes the society around him. However, the Canto doesn't begin directly with a description about Juan. Rather it begins with Byron's vehement satire on and distrust of metaphysical discussions. In the garb of the unnamed narrative voice, he dismisses George Berkeley, an Anglican Bishop's ideas on the supremacy of spirit over matter. In Stanza V, Byron implies the world to be so overwhelmingly a province of matter, that metaphysics will bring little light to its problems. He is completely opposed to the idea that external reality exists only in man's mind and that is why he leaves off any further discussion on the subject. This kind of satire on religious or metaphysical matters recalls his distaste for any kind of philosophic idealism- Platonic, Coleridgean etc which is also dealt in other cantos of the poem like Canto 1 where he describes Plato as "a bore, a charlatan, a coxcomb" serving no good for the people.

After this digression, Byron moves on to his original subject i.e., Don Juan's adventures in the new city. Juan first views London from Shooter's Hill. Initially, he was very naïve and was greatly enthusiastic to know about the city. Walking behind his carriage, he is "lost in wonder of a great nation". He praises the beauty, honesty and freedom that prevail in the city but little did he know about the hidden perils. There was a gang of highway robbers lay hidden nearby, one of whom launched an attack on Don Juan. He was threatened to pay money or lose his life. Juan finally killed the man in self-defense. This was the kind of welcome Juan received in the city of London. He passed through south-east London after killing poor Tom. In Stanza VIII, Juan describes London streets "ferment in full activity", bustling with "the creak of wheels" and the "busy hum of cities". In this stanza, Byron sets up the idea of London as Hell, which he dilates upon for the rest of the canto. He moved through the city and found London as no substitute for Eden which soon deepens into the corollary that it is more an adequate substitute for Hell. Stanza XXII continues Byron's distaste for other aspects of city life like the crush and squalor of English transport, whether urban or rural.

In his description of Poor Tom, Byron gives us a real picture of the Underworld as mainly satirical of the Great world of soldiers and politicians, who have failed to eliminate the menace of highway robbery. The robbery attempt depicts that one of England's disadvantages is that a gentleman may be "exposed to lose his life as well as breeches" due to these robbers. The robbery scene, in which Juan encounters Tom, Byron introduces the reader with the "slang", the type of language used by the Underworld. He anticipated Tom's idiom when he recorded that the robber was wounded in his "pudding" (11.13.4), and after Tom expires, Byron adopts this idiom himself, writing that the dead man was once a kiddy upon town, A thorough varmint, and a real swell, Full flash, all fancy, until fairly diddled, His pockets first, and then his body riddled. (11. 17. 5). Juan passes through south-east London after killing Poor Tom, and is approaching Westminster Bridge via Greenwich, Newington and Kennington, places referred to as "all other tons" in Stanza XX. 'Tons' also implies "exclusive idiom" and Byron is commencing his further satire on London as a place of both petty and tyrannical elitism.

Byron also lists the names of several places that Juan passes through giving us a vivid picture of the city of London at that time. The Poets' Corner in Westminster, the Priory and Hospital of St. Mary Bethlehem, The Mansion House i.e. the official residence of Lord Mayor, King's Bench Prison, the west end of Pall Mall, one of the most desirable streets in London at that time- all find mention in the narration of the unnamed narrative voice which describes Juan's sojourn through the city. In Stanza XXIX, the narrator culminates his description of the different places and comes back to Juan-

Don Juan, our young diplomatic sinner, Pursu'd his path, and drove
past some hotels,

St. James's Palace and St. James's 'Hells.' (11.21.6)

'Hells' here stand for gaming houses or gambling dens nearby Pall Mall and St. James's street, suggestive again of the vices that abounded in the great city. Later, Don Juan who was young, handsome and accomplished excites the curiosity of the governing classes. His manners, elegance, politeness everything indicated a person of high rank. So, he is received into the English court with the usual wonder and admiration at his "looks, dress and mien".

The women in the poem *Don Juan* are many and varied, but the common factor is that they also have great admiration for and Juan want to initiate a relationship with him. In this Canto too, Juan becomes an object of romantic interest among married and unmarried women-

He was a bachelor, which is a matter
Of import both to virgin and to bride,
The Former's hymeneal hopes to flatter;
And (should she not hold fast by love or pride)
'Tis also of some moment to the latter: (11.46.1)

Women admired his dress and mothers of unmarried daughters looking for prospective husbands inquired about his income: which betrays the materialistic bent of mind of the people. This forms a subject of mocking satire by Byron. He also ridicules the 'Bluestockings', the name for female intellectuals who are only interested in a superficial parade of learning. They wanted to engage in literary discussions with Juan who scarcely knew how to answer them. However, he made his way out of

such discussions quite smoothly with a “A modest confidence and calm assurance” (11. 52. 2)

Byron also satirises the politicians and the hypocrisies of the aristocratic society. Real political power in England is defined as lying with the bureaucrats and bankers- who manipulate the politicians. They are criticized in Stanza XXXV where they are compared to hawks of prey pouncing upon a ‘woodland songster’. There is self-interest, manipulation and hypocrisy in them because they are interested in men of Juan’s class only for what they can get out of them.

Through his use of digression in this Canto, Byron also passes comments on some of his contemporary poets like his tutor John Jackson, “the greatest living poet” (11. 55.1), who had to defend his title three times in eight years. He also mentions about Sir Walter, Moore, Campbell, George Crowly, Henry Hart Milman, Wordsworth, Coleridge etc. - poets who lived a few years before Byron or some who were his contemporaries, in order to stress the fact that no one possesses the judgment to tell know who, from his own generation, will gain poetic immortality. In this Canto itself, there is Byron’s famous comment on Keats who he says was “kill’d off by one critic”. This refers to the real incident of Keats’ death which is believed to have occurred after a despairingly harsh review on his *Endymion* was published in The Quarterly Review. Keats was driven into consumption and eventually he died.

After summing up this digression, Byron resumes his narration of his hero’s activities in London city. Juan spends his time in a superficial manner in the company of the aristocratic society: living among poets and the Bluestockings, pursuing business in the mornings: lunching, lounging and boxing in the afternoons and dining and dancing in the evenings. All these point toward an artificial and expensive life style of the London elites. London had become a debased version of Eden in that everything about it became very artificial. It was no longer a place with no genuine virtue but only an appearance of virtue.

Finally in stanzas LXXVI-LXXXV, Byron looks back over a period of eight years, and in five stanzas beginning with the word “Where”, he asks what has become of various persons, some of them are well known in history, others known to Byron himself. He laments

the loss of eminent figures like Napoleon, Queen Caroline referred to as the “unhappy Queen”, Samuel Whitbread, a Whig politician and many others. He celebrates them but now all have changed, not for the better, or have died. Again in the stanzas beginning with “I have seen”, he speaks about other changes that have occurred, none of them good.

In stanza LXXXVI of the poem, Byron gives an advice to Don Juan to not become complacent. He tells Juan to seize the day and make the most out of each day. In a satiric tone, Byron even adds that Juan should be hypocritical and cautious and “be not what you seem, but what you always see.” (11.86.7). By this, he seems to be implying that hypocrisy and deceit are the important qualities for surviving in a morally degenerated society like London. However, towards the end Byron again shelves the narration about Don Juan and muses on how he will continue Juan story in his upcoming cantos. The Canto ends with Byron’s strong declaration of practicing free thought in whatever he undertakes to write further. He will never be subservient to the dictates of the governing agencies. Being quite a revolutionary, Byron pronounces-

By those who love to say that white is black,
So much the better! – I may stand alone,
But would not change my free thoughts for a throne. (11. 90. 6)

Check Your Progress 3

1. Comment on the beginning of Canto XI of *Don Juan*.
2. What were Juan’s initial thoughts on arriving in London?
Examine how such impressions underwent a change in course of his entourage.
3. Attempt a critical analysis of *Don Juan Canto XI*.

3.5 CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF DON JUAN

Don Juan is in many ways a different version of the traditional epic heroes. In fact, he is more akin to the “Byronic” conception of heroes- a male personality which is a brooding, solitary, somewhat misanthropic figure, defying nature and hiding past secrets, mainly of a sexual nature. While traditional literary heroes are usually marked by

their valour, commitment to righteous political and social causes, honesty, courage etc., Byron's heroes are defined by rather different character traits, many of which are partially or even entirely opposed to standard definitions of heroism. These heroes tend to have the following personality traits of cynicism, absolute disrespect for authority, past trauma, intelligence, dark humor, self-mysteriousness, sexual attractiveness and a sense of being exiled or outcast both physically and emotionally from the larger social world. Byronic heroes can be understood as being rather akin, then, to anti-heroes. They are often committed not to action on behalf of typically noble causes of "good," but, instead, to the cause of their own self-interest, or to combating prevailing and oppressive social and political establishments.

These heroes were in fact modeled on Byron's own nature. He was singularly handsome due to which accounted for his popularity among women and men too. He led a very dissipated life, due to which he even had to face exile. He had a disposition for travel, adventure and freedom and an utter distaste for outmoded social conventions and restraints from the Government. Byronic heroes are therefore repetitions of Byron himself as they personify many characteristic traits of the writer himself.

Don Juan can also be considered a typical Byronic hero in the sense that he is handsome, attractive and adventurous. He is also a very popular among women. His sexual precariousness is another distinctive feature which makes him different from other heroes. At a young age of sixteen, he becomes involved in a relationship with an older woman named Donna Julia. When his illicit love is discovered, he flees. Thus, he fulfills one more requirement of a Byronic hero i.e., in the past, he has committed a sexual misdeed which needs to be kept under wraps. He follows his mother's wish to undertake a sea voyage in different countries of Europe. Moreover, Juan has relationships with many other women thereafter which highlight his promiscuity. In the English cantos after Canto XI also, we find him involved in relationships with Lady Amundeville, Duchess of Fitz Fulke who carnally desire him. However, all the women in his life belong to high rank and it is they who first pursue Juan and make him enmeshed in some uncontrollable situation. In this way, Byron turns the traditional Don Juan legend upside down in which Juan is notorious as the archwomanizer. Though an erotic lover, his hero is more the pursued rather than the pursuer.

Byron here tells us about the vicissitudes of a young hero in order to criticize the rank and corruption prevailing in the society. His Don Juan does not consciously reject social values and conventions; instead he becomes trapped in the hypocritical codes of the society. There is also no genuine love to be found in such a debased and corrupted European society. Byron's Juan is somehow passive because he does not tell his own story but his story is used as the main device employed by Byron to expose the hollowness and deficiencies of the age and society he lived in. Don Juan is the indeed the protagonist whose futile struggles to find love, value and beauty in an artificial and corrupt civilization helped Byron achieve his goal of satirizing many aspects of his contemporary society.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you must have come to know about the kind of poetry Byron wrote. He was one of the leading poets of the Romantic Movement but his outlook differed from that of his predecessors, mainly the first generation of English Romantic poets. His popularity rests on many poems like *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, which are well known for the creation of a brand of heroes called Byronic heroes, known for their revolutionary and defiant tendencies. In fact, much of Byron's poetry can be read in the light of his revolt for social customs and authoritarian constraints. In the poem *Don Juan* also, he attacked the conventional social set-up with much vehemence. Byron's constant search for freedom and anti-Establishment notions in his poetry distinguish him as one of the greatest Romantic poets.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Canto- It is a form of division of long poems, especially the epic. Several such poems are divided into Cantos like *The Divine Comedy* and *Don Juan*.

Ottava Rima- It is a stanza form containing eight lines and rhyming *abababcc*. Originally used for long poems on heroic themes, but later appropriated to mock-heroic works.

Don Juan- A legendary fictional pleasure- seeker and womanizer. He was first given literary personality through by Tirso de Molina in his tragic drama *El burlador de Sevilla*.

3.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does Byron satirize the London society of his time in his poem *Don Juan* Canto XI?
2. Critically analyze the character of Don Juan.
3. Write a note on the style of narration of *Don Juan*

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BLOCK-IV UNIT-IV
P.B. SHELLEY'S "ODE TO THE WEST WIND"

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Model Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be familiarized with

- The features of the Romantic Poetry
- Ode as a form of poetry
- Life and works of P. B. Shelley
- Critical evaluation of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier three Units you have studied Medieval, Renaissance and also Metaphysical poetry. You have also studied Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In this Unit you will be familiarized with one of the most prominent Romantic poets of English literature namely P. B. Shelley. In the first unit, we will talk about the romantic period and the kind of poetry written during that period. This unit discusses the nature of ode as a type of poetry and the life and works of the poet P. B. Shelley with special reference to the poem “Ode to the West Wind”. This unit also throws light upon the theme, structure and criticism of the particular poem. An analysis of the literary criticism of the poem has been given at the end of the unit.

Since you have already been familiarized with the background and features of Romantic Poetry in the comprehensive discussion given in Block-IV Unit-I there is no need to repeat the same things twice. So this discussion will focus on the poem “Ode to the West Wind”.

1.2. Ode: An Introduction

Before beginning a discussion on this poem it is essential to make you familiarize with this particular form of poetry called ode. The concerned poem “Ode to the West Wind” is an ode in form. As both the poems in this unit are written in this form, you may have an interest in learning about the features of an ode in brief.

1.2.1. What is an ode?

Ode is defined as “a long lyric poem that is serious in subject and treatment, elevated in style, and elaborate in its stanzaic structure.” (Abrams, M. H. and Harpham, G. Galt: *A Glossary of Literary Terms*) According to this definition, an ode is (a) a lyric poem; (b) a serious poem in its treatment of the subject; (c) it is elevated in style; and (d) elaborate in its stanzaic structure. In other words, an ode is a very exalted form of poetry written on lofty themes. It is written in a serious and sublime manner on a serious subject. Odes are usually written as very long poems consisting of a succession of elaborate stanzas in lines of varying length and meter. The term ‘ode’ comes from the Greek word *oide* or *aoide*, which was derived from the Greek word ‘aeidein’, meaning “to sing.”

1.2.2. Origin of ode

Odes originated in the Greek dramas. The Greek classical poet Pindar (517–438 BC) established this type of narrative in verse. He modelled his odes on the typical style of the songs by the Chorus in the ancient Greek dramas. His stanzas were highly complicated. He patterned his stanzas in three different sets:

- i) *Strophe*, the chorus chanted this while moving in a dance form to the left.
- ii) *Antistrophe*, the chorus chanted this while moving in a dance form to the right.
- iii) *Epode*, The chorus uttered this while standing in a silent mode neither moving to the left nor to the right.

1.2.3. Types of ode

Odes have taken varied forms on the basis of the requirements and developments of trends in the recent times. The following odes suggest the growth and development of odes in literature:

- i) **The Regular ode:** The regular odes are also known as Pindaric odes. These odes closely imitate Pindar in all forms while patterning all the strophies and antistrophes in one form and all the epodes in another form. Ben Johnson introduced this type of ode in English through his ode “To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison” (1629). The Pindaric odes were written with an aim to admire or, glorify a personality or an event.
- ii) **The Irregular ode:** This ode stood in stark contrast to the Pindaric ode. Abraham Cowley introduced this ode in 1656. Cowley imitated the Pindaric style but disregarded the structure. He arranged each stanza on its own pattern with variables in the length, number and the rhyme scheme. This type of ode allows freedom to the writer to shift the structure according to its subject and mood.
- iii) **The Horatian Ode:** The term Horatian itself refers to the style of writing odes by the Roman poet Horace. Horatian odes are quiet, peaceful, meditative and colloquial. In this regard, they are different from the Pindaric odes. They are simple and even shorter than the Pindaric ones. They are homostrophic in meaning, they are written in a single repeated stanza form. John Keats’s “Ode to Autumn” is an example of this kind.

Pindaric odes are generally written in glorification or as eulogy of a person or an event. Under the influence of Pindaric odes at the earliest stage in English literature, odes were generally written with an aim to glorify the life of persons. For instance, John Dryden’s “To the Pious Memory of the Accomplish’d Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew (1686) eulogizes the person Anne Killigrew, (1660 to 1685) a British poet. Similarly, Wordsworth’s “Ode to Duty” reflects the intimacy and the philosophical dimension of an ode. The following stanza explores all the possible features of an ode:

Serene will be our days and bright
 And happy will our nature be,
 When love is an erring light,
 And joy its own security.
 And they a blissful course may hold
 Even now, who, not unwisely bold,

Live in the spirit of this creed;
Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need. (Line 17-24)

In this stanza, the poet develops the idea that love and joy ought to exist with duty which will make the moments pleasurable. The stanza establishes ode as meditative and passionate with vigour and freshness in terms of its representation.

The romantic odes are intensely subjective revelations of one's life. It aims at resolving the dilemma of one's both eternal and external crisis of life and behaviour.

Check Your Progress

Q.1. Answer the following in one sentence only:

a) Define an Ode.

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b) Write briefly on the origin of odes?

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c) Who is associated with the introduction of Regular or, Pindaric form of ode in English?

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d) Which English poet is responsible for the introduction of irregular form of ode in English?

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e) Mention an example of Horatian odes in English.

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Q.2. Attempt the following questions in brief:

a) What are the essential characteristics of an ode?

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b) What is the basic difference between the Pindaric ode and the Irregular ode?

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c) Write a short note on the nature of English romantic odes.

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1.3. 0. P.B. Shelley: Life and Poetry

Before going to study Shelley’s poetry it is necessary to collect some information about his life. So in this section, an account of Shelley’s life and his poetic career is discussed in detail.

The learners are expected to be well aware of the basic features of Shelley’s poetry in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the prescribed poem.

1.3.1. Life of Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in 1792 in Sussex. He was educated at Eton and Oxford. It is quite an interesting fact about his early days that he developed great eccentricity of character earlier. His interests were quite different from that of his contemporaries. He often visited the graveyards, studied alchemy and read fanciful fiction. He was expelled from Oxford with Hogg in 1811 for publishing a pamphlet entitled “The Necessity of Atheism”. He became disturbed but more than that he became restless and he eloped with Harriet Westbrook and married her in Edinburgh. But it turned out to be an unhappy marriage. In the year 1812 his angry outlook and his revolutionary psyche compelled him to fight for the liberation of the Irish people. In the same year William Godwin became an acquaintance of this spirited young man. But again his restlessness worked as the reason behind his

elopement with Godwin's daughter Mary. The relationship existed for long and finally attained settlement after the suicidal death of Harriet in 1816. In 1818 he settled in Italy, never to return to England. Rome's lyrical nature intoxicated Shelley's passion of writing. All his masterpiece writings were the result of this phase. But fortune never made Shelley remain happy for long. He was drowned at sea near Leghorn in 1822.

1.3.2. Shelley's Literary Career

Shelley's earliest poetic work was *Queen Mab* (1813) which was immature and was attacked due to his crude atheism. Then came *Alastor, the Spirit of Solitude* (1816) which is written in blank verse projecting the poet's quest for ideal poetry. Shelley produced his master poems after his return to Italy where he published *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-20). The poem deals with the character of Prometheus who defied the gods and hence suffered in due course of time. It was followed by a family drama entitled *The Cenci* (1819) in bleak style. In the light of fantastical imagination, Keats wrote *The Witch of Atlas* (1820-24) and *Epipsychidion* (1821) which carry Shelley's highest imaginative power. It was followed by *Adonais* (1821) which was an elegy upon the death of his friend Keats. It is written in Spenserian stanza. Shelley earned his popularity for his shorter pieces also which included *To a Skylark*, *The cloud* etc. His odes and the shortest lyrics are the unparalleled masterpieces of English literature. In the same year, Shelley wrote his essay to be worth-mentioning entitled "The Defense of Poetry" (1840). In this essay Shelley establishes himself as a true Romantic poet although different from the contemporaries.

1.3.3. Features of Shelley's poetry

Shelley is considered to be one of the most significant poets of the romantic era. His poetry is somewhat different from that of his contemporaries. His character as a revolutionary person always finds expression in his poems. His faith upon atheism runs through the vein of his poetry to a great extent. Shelley's poetry possesses a number of characteristics as indicated below:

- a) **Revolutionary ideal:** Shelly developed a revolutionary character from his early childhood. His interest in atheism and politics generated in him a strong appeal towards the change in the realm of the society. Shelly came up as a rebel against oppression and

led the struggle to bring happiness in society. In “Ode to the West Wind” he identifies himself with the spirit of the West Wind which is the symbol of change. The following lines explore Shelley’s admiration of the spirit of revolution as both destructive and creative: Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O real.

- b) **Lyrical spirit:** Shelley is remembered as one of the chief poets possessing the highest lyrical power amongst the romantic poets. His expression of the highest emotional ecstasy, as in the lyrics of *Prometheus Unbound* stands unparalleled in English poetry. In one of the sweetest addresses to the Skylark in the poem ‘To a Skylark’,

this lyrical gift is to be seen:

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.

He is well versed in the expression of the moods of depression as well as delight at the same time with equal force and liveliness. The following stanza in the name of the Spirit of Delight is a reflection of this power of the poet:

I love Love, though he has wings
And like light can flee
But above all other things,
Spirit, I love thee.
Thou art love and life! O come,
Make once more my heart thy home.

- c) **Nature:** Shelley intellectualizes nature in his poems. His nature is embalmed with the supernatural shadows and fairies. The natural objects remain not just simple objects in his poems. They become transfigured objects of the poet’s philosophy as well as his personal modes of being. In this aspect, he is different from the contemporaries. Nature does not merely run first into his ideas, but his ideas furnish the natural world with perfection. The following lines establish Shelley’s intellectual and philosophical

approach to nature :

When the lamp is scattered
The light in the dust lies dead-
When the cloud is scattered
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken
Sweet tones are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.

It is obvious that Shelley's portrayal of nature is endowed with the ideas he obtains from his life's experiences as well as his philosophy. Therefore, his poems are somewhat critical in the sense that an abstract world is always present in his imagination which perplexes his natural observation of the world. But again, his indebtedness to the world of nature as a tranquil world of imagination and peacefulness is also evident to a great extent in his poetry.

- d) **Symbolism:** Shelley is a powerful symbolist poet. He uses similes and metaphors in his poetry in a very unique way. His symbols are drawn from the world of nature and life. His symbols are often ambiguous and complex. They refer to the poet's spiritual as well as the intellectual existence. For instance, the symbol of the west wind brings in the typical Shelleyan hero who possesses a strong power to fight against the odds and limitations of the society. Symbols like Death, Hell, Hearth etc. are abstract yet of universal appeal. The natural symbols are evocative of Shelley's personal ideas and expressions. They are forceful and typical of the Shelleyan spirit to a great extent.
- e) **Intellectual curiosity of Shelley:** Shelley's intellect finds significant place in his poetry. The influence of William Godwin and others is very pronounced in his poems. The "atheist Shelley" and his enduring prophetic vision captures almost all types of imagery in his poetry. His humanitarian ideas are reflected in his poems. They expose the idealistic philosophy of the poet. Shelley's "To a Skylark" is an example of the representation of way Shelley philosophizes life and the character of human beings. The following lines from the poem suggest the same.

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.

- f) **The prophetic vision:** Shelley considered the poet to be the most legitimate but unacknowledged legislator of the world. In his words, a poet should serve the purpose of the society in true sense. The poet with his sincerity should reflect the diversified forces of life distinctively. Shelley had a vision that society will remain changed under different circumstances. The vision to bring in a revolutionary change in the society is evident in the last lines of “Ode to the West Wind”:

“O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

Prophetic works like “Alastor”, or the Spirit of Solitude, “The Revolt of Islam”, *Prometheus Unbound* and other similar lyrics establish Shelly as a strong visionary poet whose revolutionary psyche gets projected in the realm of his poems.

- g) **Shelley’s Theory of poetry:** According to Shelley, the poet is the Nightingale who sits in the darkness and sings its own solitude with sweetness. This is the reason why Shelley celebrates each and every darker theme of life with an easiness and sweet sensation.

Shelley remarks in his essay “A Defense of Poetry”:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change....

It reveals the fact that poetry to Shelley was a medium to bring certain changes in the reader’s mind creating a sort of consciousness with an addition of beauty and powerful imagination. To Shelley, imagination is the most powerful way to deal with the life and its elements. His argumentative narrative and his continual rhapsodizing make his poems somewhat baffling and tedious but his imagination is superb and his ideas are powerful and effective upon the mankind.

Thus, we can say that Shelley is mainly a revolutionary poet whose vision of change and revolution make his poetry alive amongst his readers. His intimate portrayal of life and its objects lack Keats's sensuousness but possess the warmth and meditative quality of Wordsworth. In a sense, he is a successful romantic poet with a strong imaginative faculty and a powerful philosophy with force and delicacy.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. Answer the following questions:

a) What was Shelley's first poetic work?

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b) For which work was Shelley expelled from Oxford?

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c) Mention Shelley's elegy upon Keats's death.

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Q.3. Answer the following:

a) Write a short note on Shelley's personal despair.

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b) Was Shelley an atheist? Elaborate.

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c) How was Shelley's revolutionary character formed?

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d) Trace the major features of Shelley's poetry.

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e) What do you think to be the most influential factors in Shelley's poetry?

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f) Write a short note on symbolism in Shelley's poetry.

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g) Elaborate on the theme of revolution in Shelley's Poetry.

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1.4.0. Ode to the West Wind

Let us now study Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind", a poem that reflects the Shelleyan poetic mode and also attempt to find out the romantic features, as well as the literary form and techniques in the poem. It would be easier for the learners to be well familiarized with the previous sections of the unit to understand the poem in the light of the romantic poetry.

1.4.1. Background of the poem

The poem was written in the year 1819. It was composed in a forest near Florence on a tempestuous evening. The poet, in one of his own notes to the poem, describes the real situations under which the poem was written. According to the poet, the poem was conceived in a wood near Florence on a day when he was walking alongside the banks of Arno and he perceived the tempestuous wind as collecting the vapours. It was the sunset time during which the poet witnessed a violent tempest of hail and rain accompanied by thunder and heavy lighting which was peculiar to the cisalpine regions. The poem is the consequence of the poet's confrontation with these moments on that day.

1.4.2. Theme of the Poem

The poem thematizes certain aspects of life and the society to a great extent. The poem is centred round one single moment in the realm of nature which was observed by the poet himself. The Poem celebrates a number of themes as follows:

a) Nature: The poem establishes the character of the west wind through the poet's imagination. The west wind plays an important role in the poem as both the "destroyer and the preserver". The poet addresses the west wind on a stormy night with an appeal to give him the power of mind to bring changes in the world. Thus, the poem reflects the intensity of love of the poet towards nature from where he wants to extract the power of living and revolution. The poet mentions the seasons and the changes that the wind brings in every season in the poem with exuberant force and vigour.

b) Revolution: The poem introduces us to the typical Shelleyan hero who is actually a rebel against oppression in the society. The vision of the poet is to bring happiness in the midst of human beings. Shelley

imagines himself to be the wind cutting across the skies and sometimes across the ocean or, the volcanic island. The poet wants to get merged with the fierce spirit and makes a modest appeal to make him the Wind's 'lyre'.

c) Power of creation: The poem celebrates the power of creation of a poet which he mentions in his *A Defense of Poetry*. Here he establishes the historic role of the poet as "the unacknowledged legislator of mankind". The spirit of the wind is imagined as the power of the poet. The poet makes an appeal to the west wind to gift him the power of prophecy which he makes at the end of the poem.

d) Social change: Shelley was highly indebted to the ideals of Jean Jacques Rousseau and William Godwin whose social ideals could not accept but the cyclical changes in the society. The poet's will to accept the new ideas in place of the old ones make him a follower of new democratic ideals of change in the world. Shelley's optimism about an ideal society is very conspicuous in the concluding lines of the poem:

O Wind, if winter comes

Can spring be far behind?

1.4.3. Analysis of the poem

The poem begins with a note of despair with an address to the West Wind by the poet. To him, the wind appears as wild now. He considers this natural phenomenon as the "breath of Autumn's being" which suggests the time as originated in the heart of Autumn. The poet finds out the creative existence of the spirit in the wind. He celebrates the significance of the wind in the midst of the wood where he is walking at present. The heroic presence of the wind carries away all the dead leaves from the tree. The simile of a ghost fleeing makes the atmosphere gothic. It reminds us of Shelley's interest in the Gothic elements in literature. The fallen leaves assuming different colours from yellow to red remind the poet of the deadly diseases and poverty in the heart of the society. It is the same wild west wind which fills the wintered ground with winged seeds like a chariot carrying the traveler at its back. The poet compares the winged seeds to the corpses within the graves which lie underground for long until the personified wind with her sister Spring calls upon new birth with fresh colours and mesmerizing fragrance under the blue sky. The poem gains a pastoral look at the moment where the blooming buds are compared to the flock of sheep driven by the earth-loving shepherds.

The last two lines of the first stanza of the poem brings in the characterization of the west wind by the poet both as the destroyer and the preserver. It reminds us of Shelley's interest in Hindu mythology the knowledge of which he received from the works of Sir William Jones and Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810). In the Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva is the Destroyer and Lord Vishnu, the Preserver. The poem points out the fact that the wind continued both the function of destruction and creation and hence could easily be compared to the mythological figures.

The second stanza of the poem is a poetical account of the effect of the wind on the sky. At this point Shelley draws a parallel between the dead leaves of the earlier stanza and the flying clouds in this stanza. The image of the intermingling of clouds and waters of the Mediterranean sea create a similar image in the mind of the poet that is, of the intertwining branches attached to each other during a heavy storm. The West Wind scatters the clouds all over the sky which are like loose hairs of the Maenads. Maenads are those drunken women with loose hair in Florentine sculpture. In Greek mythology, Maenad is the Greek god of wine. In this context, the West Wind brings in the sad music of autumn which is called the 'dying year'. As the poet approaches the near winter and literally the dying year on that stormy night, the sky covered with black clouds is resembled with a dome covering a tomb. The poet is certain about the fact that the atmosphere will be filled with elements like black rain, fire and hail bursts. His exclamation is an outburst of fear and his readiness to accept the crucial time and its revelations.

The third stanza describes the effect of the west wind upon the blue sea. The water levels in the sea are disturbed by the west wind. Shelley adopts a prophetic visionary mode which sees the destruction of the beautiful islands and the pathetic image of the submersion of old palaces and ancient towers under the waters of the Bay of Naples. Even the Atlantic Ocean fails to escape from its attack. The evergreen vegetational plants at the bottom of the sea accept calmly the indefatigable force of the west wind.

The fourth stanza of the poem presents a self portrait of the poet himself. The poem attains its maturity with a blend of the poet's supreme imagery and the forceful thought. The poet identifies himself with the entire natural phenomenon as he has already mentioned in the previous

stanzas. He imagines himself to be the rain, the leaves, the swift clouds, the whirling wave and wants to get engaged in the act of expanding the strength of the west wind all around. Shelley's strong appeal to the west wind is reflective of his gathering of all lost spirits to the spirited mind. The following lines express the poet's earnest endeavour and his appeal to get mingled with the powerful west wind:

Oh! Lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

The final stanza of the poem repeats the same appeal of the poet to the west wind to make him his lyre which will play entrancing musical notes during the passing of the wind through the harp. The poet aims at a modification of his individuality through the awakening of nature and its fierce force. Therefore he worships the west wind to drive all the dead thoughts like withered leaves which will erase all sorts of despair and anxiety from his disturbed mind. The poet plays the role of a prophet here at the end who shares his faith upon the cyclical significance of nature. He appeals to the west wind to carry his prophecy and the poem ends in a rhetorical mode:

“O Wind,
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

Thus, the whole poem is to be considered a strong romantic revelation of the poet's intense and passionate fervour to reclaim his power and interest in changing the world with indebtedness to the role of nature. It is subjective yet universal in its appeal.

Check Your progress

Q.1. Answer the following questions:

a) In which year was the poem “Ode to the West Wind” written?

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b) What does the West Wind symbolize in the poem?

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c) What is the rhetorical question that Shelley mentions at the end of this poem?

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d) In what context does the poet refer to Maenad in the poem?

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Q.2. Attempt the following questions critically:

a) Write a short note on the theme of “Ode to the West Wind”.

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b) How is the West Wind personified in the poem?

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c) Why does the poet refer to the Greek mythology in the poem? Explain.

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d) How does the poet celebrate the rush of the wind artistically?
Elaborate.

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e) Critically illustrate the symbolic implications of the West Wind in
the poem.

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1.5.4 Style and techniques in the poem

The poem is written in the Italian terza rima, a stanza of tercets . Each line is interlinked to the other in the tercet in a rhyme order like a b a / b c b / c d c / d e d / e e / . The whole poem comprises of five stanzas , each having fourteen line . Each stanza is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four sets of three lines and the second division is a rhyming couplet which draws a concluding remark upon the theme of each stanza. The whole poem apostrophizes the central character in the entire narrative i.e. the west wind. The poem moves along with the rush of the wind which the poet feels entirely in his body and mind.

The poem is set in a visionary mode and hence the images are far-fetching and they are capable of conveying a wide range of meanings. For instance, the natural images like the colourful leaves, the winged seeds, the clarion, tangled boughs, blue surface etc are meaningful and powerful to certain extent. Different figures of speech can be identified in the poem as follows:

a) Symbolism: Shelley is chiefly a symbolist. In his poems, he uses multiple numbers of symbols which are often complex and not distinct. The lack of sustain in his symbols often creates confusions in the minds of the readers. Shelley uses the symbol of ‘dead leaves’ many times in the poem. ‘Dead leaves’ imply the unused thoughts in the poet’s brain. Even the ‘West Wind’ brings in a symbolic note in the poem. It symbolizes the creative and the destructive spirit of revolution simultaneously. Its spirit is human and sometimes that of a wild animal. The poet’s imagination is larger than life and for this reason, the poet is able to embody a lager figure in the symbolic west wind.

b) Simile : The poem uses certain similes which are elaborate and vivid viz., “Like ghosts from an enchanter fleein”,
“Each like a corpse within its grave”,
“Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air” etc. etc.

c) Imagery: The poet uses a number of images in the realm of the

poem. They are derived from extended views of the poet. A number of funeral images are there in the poem. Images like 'corpse', 'grave', 'sepulchre', 'ashes' etc. refer to the phase of decay and death of thoughts in the poet's mind. On the contrary, the poem consists of images which suggest changes in nature and society. Images like 'the winged seeds', 'dream earth', 'blue Mediterranean', 'crystalline streams', etc. refer to the poet's faith upon knowledge and the evitable change behind revolution.

d) Personification in the poem: The 'West Wind' itself is a personified object in the realm of this poem. It is a common element and a central characteristic of romantic poetry to personify the natural objects as human beings with human qualities. Shelley personifies all the seasons in the poem. For instance, 'Spring with her clarion', the 'breath of Autumn's being' 'the blue Mediterranean' with his 'crystalline streams' etc. are reflective of the poet's strong desire to capture in human body and mind the spirit of the gentle and wild nature.

e) Apostrophe: Apostrophe is an address to a character or, an abstract object in the realm of poetry. In a sense, the whole ode can be considered to be an apostrophe where the addressee is the west wind. The poet for many times evokes this wind in the phrase "O wild West Wind" or, in the utterance 'O Wind'. The poet proclaims the spirit with the cry 'O hear!' which is full of vigour and restless pain in his body.

f) Metaphors: Shelley uses a number of metaphors in the realm of this poem. The metaphors are suggestive of Shelley's excellent mastery over thought and imagination. At the beginning of the poem, Shelley uses the metaphor which is natural. He compares the west wind to the breath of Autumn which is a personified object in the poem as evident in the following line:

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,

In another context, Shelley uses an extended metaphor i.e. the 'Dirge/ of the dying year'. Here, the poet compares the west wind to the kind of mournful song as the autumn brings itself in its character. Shelley's forceful imagination works upon his thought and diction together. In another example, Shelley uses the image of a charioteer to refer to the elemental rush of the wind as evident in the following expression:

O thou,

Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed /The winged seeds.....

Thus, the poet makes an elaborate use of extended metaphors to connote the motion of the wind and its character with a mere resemblance with human action. It seems as if the entire world rushes in the spirit of freedom with it everywhere.

g) Poetic diction: Shelley's poetic diction is full of profound and subtle imagery to be portrayed in the wake of solid and vital words and their arrangement. Shelley's wise selection of words attains maturity through the sustained power of description. A radiant loveliness strikes the eyes of the readers through his composition. Just look at the following lines:

Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing
Yellow, and black, and pale and hectic red
Pestilence-stricken multitudes...

In the above lines, you will see how Shelley has selected the words. The names of the colours have been uttered with a complete sense of observation and easiness and especially with pauses as indicated by the punctuations. It seems as if we are living in a world wherefrom the words are simply amazing us with an elaborate specification of objects from variegated arenas. The buoyancy and the grace is also attained by the dramatic mode which flows in the vein of these lines. The words like 'chariotest', 'winged seeds', 'decaying leaves' etc. are reflective of Shelley's imaginative height and sacrifice in full sense to the rich poetic vitality.

1.4.5. Criticism

P. B. Shelley has been subjected to wider criticism to a great extent. He has had to face even rigorous criticism for his poems. Many attacked his poetry for the abundance of atheism, his unnecessary dealing with morality and idealism without sufficient reason. Therefore, critics like Arnold and Leslie Stephens considered his poetry full of 'unreal' elements at their height. New critics like F. R. Leavis found another reason to criticize his poetry. In the words of Leavis, Shelley's grasp upon reality is weaker than that of his contemporaries. His emotions were of high level and his imagery was elusive to a great extent. Another critic and poet T. S. Eliot denied Shelley's beliefs as reflected in his poem. In the lecture 'Shelley and Keats', delivered by Eliot on 17

February 1933, remarked in the following words:

The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be ideas of adolescence. I find his ideas repellent; and the difficulty of separating Shelley from his ideas and beliefs is still greater than with Wordsworth. And the biographical interest which Shelley has always excited makes it difficult to read the poetry without remembering the man: and the man was humourless, pedantic, self-centred, and sometimes almost a black guard. (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 1964)

In another essay “The Music of Poetry” in 1942, Eliot refers to Shelley: It is not from rules, or by cold-blooded imitation of style, that we learn to write: we learn by imitation indeed, but by a deeper imitation than is achieved by analysis of style. When we imitated Shelley, it was not so much from a desire to write as he did, as from an invasion of the adolescent self by Shelley, which made Shelley’s way, for the time, the only way in which to write. (*The Music of Poetry*, 1942)

But above all, his consistency and rich musical quality remained admirable to the critics. One of the twentieth century critics, Earl Wasserman, praised Shelley for his ability to recreate myth throughout his poems. But Shelley was not keen to mind the sort of criticism all through his life and went on to maintain persistency in his attitudes towards the prophetic role of the poet.

1.4.6. Significance

P. B. Shelley is considered to be one of the foremost poets of the romantic era of English literature. His contribution as a powerful poet voicing the romantic ideals of change and worshipping nature is substantial to English literature in general and English poetry in particular. The lack of humour and sufficient reasoning with abundance of repetitions in terms of ideas and pathos has resulted in severe criticism of the poet. But the poem like “Ode to the West Wind” stands unique in terms of composition with his powerful diction and syntax. It does not only reflect the idea of change which is inevitable but also points out the fact that nature is a better teacher than any other human experience. The poem evokes the romantic sensibility of the poet as well as the universal appeal that a true romantic poet makes. Thus, the poem is of higher significance in the realm of English poetry.

Check Your Progress

1. Answer to the following questions:

a) What does the West Wind personify in the poem?

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b) What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

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c) What was F. R. Leavis' remark upon Shelley's poetry?

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Q.2. Attempt answers to the following questions:

a) Critically assess the figures of speech as used in "Ode to the West Wind".

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b) Comment upon Shelly's poetic diction.

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c) Prepare a note on the structure of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”.

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1.6. Let us sum up:

P. B. Shelley is considered to be one of the significant poets of the romantic era. His poems like “Ode to the West Wind” stand unique in terms of composition with his powerful diction and syntax. The poems do not only reflect the idea of change which is inevitable but also point out the fact that nature can also be considered as a teacher. This particular poem evokes the romantic sensibility of freedom and change through the adoption of revolutionary ideals. Although the poem presents the poet’s individualistic perception of social change it does have a universal appeal. Thus, the poem is of higher significance in the realm of English literature. Its theme and style reminds us of the individualism of Shelley and more than that the depth of Shelley’s knowledge and the flight of his mature imagination.

1.7 . Keywords

1.4 pestilence-stricken multitudes: The poet compares the fallen leaves to the existing poverty, disease in the society.

1.14. Destroyer and Preserver: These titles are derived from Hindu mythology where Shiva is the Destroyer and Vishnu is the preserver.

1.21. Maenad: a priestess of Bacchus, the Greek God of wine.

1.23. Dirge: a mournful song.

1.32. Punic isle: Rocks or islands created by volcanic lava which are known as 'pumice'

1.32. Biae's bay: a fashionable resort in the Bay of Naples .

1.37. Atlantic's level powers.....clams: The effect of the West Wind upon waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

Apostrophe: A figure of speech which is an address to a character or, an abstract thing.

Terza Rhyme: A kind of Metrical composition which consists of triplets especially in iambic pentameter.

1.8 Suggested Readings

Baker C. H. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press. Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP,1950.

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Fogle, R.H. *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley*. University of North Carolina Press,1949.

Greenblatt, Stephen et al. Ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.,9th Edition,Paperback,2012.

King-Hele Desmond: *Shelley, his thought and Work*. Macmillan,1962.
Possible answers to CYP

Q.1. a) What does the West Wind personify in the poem?

Ans: The West Wind personifies the poet himself. The rebel within the poet is referred to by the west Wind in the poem.

Q.2.C. Prepare a note on the structure of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”. Ans: The poem is written in the Italian terza rima, a stanza of tercets . Each line is interlinked to the other in the tercet in a rhyme order like a b a / b c b/ c d c / d e d / e e . The whole poem consists of five stanzas , each having fourteen line . each stanza is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four sets of three lines and the second division is a rhyming couplet which draws a concluding remark upon the theme of each stanza. The whole poem apostrophizes the central character in the entire narrative i.e. the west wind.

1.9 References

Albert, Edward: History of English Literature.OUP,1923.

Baker C. H. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press. Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP,1950.

Sanders, Andrew: The Short Oxford History of English Literature.OUP,1994.

1.10 Model Questions

Q.1. Discuss Shelley as a romantic poet.

Q.2. Discuss the use of symbols in Shelley's poetry.

Q.3. How do you consider “Ode to the West Wind” to be a typical Shelleyan poem? Elucidate.

Q.4. Make a critical note on Shelley's revolutionary ideals as evident in Ode to the West Wind.

Q.5. Critically discuss Shelley's philosophy behind the poem “Ode to the West Wind”.

Q.6 Do you think that “Ode to the West Wind” is an expression of the poet's identification with himself? Discuss.

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BLOCK-IV UNIT-V

JOHN KEATS'S "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE"

1.0 Objectives

1.1 .0 Introduction

1.1. John Keats: Life and Poetry

1.1.1. Life of Keats

1.1.2. Keats's Poetry

1.1.3. Features of Keats's Poetry

1.1.4. Significance

Check Your Progress 1

1.2. Ode to the Nightingale

1.2.1. Background of the Poem

1.2.2. Themes of the Poem

1.2.3. Analysis of the Poem

Check Your Progress 2

1.2.4. Style and Techniques in the Poem

1.2.5. Criticism of the Poem

1.2.6. Significance

Check Your Progress 2

1.3. Let us sum up

1.4. Keywords

1.5. Suggested Readings

Possible answers to CYP

References

Model Questions

OBJECTIVE

After reading this unit you will be acquainted with the following

- Life and works of John Keats
- Features of Keats' poetry
- Critical aspects of the poem "Ode to a Nightingale"

1.1.0. INTRODUCTION

John Keats, one of the frontline Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, is known for pursuing perfection in the use of vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal and conveying a philosophical message through his poems. Within his short span of life (1795-1821) he wrote many excellent odes, sonnets and narrative poems which stand comparable with the best of poetry of any age. Keats was essentially a poet of beauty. His love of beauty is conspicuous in his entire range of poetry. In the earlier phase of his poetic career he was fascinated by the physical beauty and in the later phase his perception of beauty underwent a change. He became more attracted towards the spiritual and intellectual beauty of his subjects. He was greatly influenced by the mythical tales of the middle ages and most of his poems have the theme influenced by medieval poetry. He also loved Grecian or Hellenic ideals and used them profusely in his poetry. Out of all the Romantic poets, if Wordsworth was a poet and political thinker; Coleridge was a metaphysician; Shelley was a reformer and an idealist, then Keats was just a poet and nothing else as the whole of his vital energy went into shaping his art.

1.1.1. Life of Keats

Born in London in 1795, Keats was the eldest child in the family of Thomas Keats and Frances Keats. His father was an established stable keeper. The death of his parents in between 1804 and 1810 left Keats and his two brothers and a sister alone in the caretaking of the grandmother and two guardians. At the age of fifteen, Keats was apprenticed to a surgeon and gained his license after a period in Guy's Hospital, he never practised medicine. At that time, his poetical bent was growing in him. His acquaintance with his former schoolmaster's son Charles Cowden Clarke increased the interest to a great extent. He fell under the spell of Spenser who was introduced to him by Clarke. In the year 1813 Keats composed his early verse in constant inspiration

and imitation of Spenser. Within a short span of time, he fell under the influence of another radical poet called Leigh Hunt who was the poet and the editor of *The Examiner*. His first independent volume of verse was published in 1817. *The Poems*, although of little merit including “On First looking into Chapman’s Homer”, “Sleep and Poetry” etc. explore Keats’s indebtedness to Spenser and especially to Leigh Hunt. At that time, Keats was highly disturbed by his family problems. He spent most of his times in 1818 nursing his brother Tom who was a patient of tuberculosis. In London in the same year he became acquainted with Fanny Brawne and soon fell in love with her. But his financial circumstances did not allow him the opportunity to marry Fanny. In 1820, he himself got infected with tuberculosis. His health started to fail and frustration in love further compounded his problems. He was forced to leave London and go to Italy in search of health and died in Rome on 23rd February in 1821 at a young age of twenty five.

1.1.2. Keats’s poetry

Keats started writing poetry at a very young age of seventeen. At this young age he made himself familiar with the works of Spenser and other such poets of the past. Keeping aside his interest in medical sciences, he embraced poetry. He was well read in many poetic geniuses in English like Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser and Chaucer. The contemporary poets from Wordsworth to Shelley were the source of inspiration to this emerging poet. His earliest manifestation was his “An Imitation of Spenser” in 1814 at the age of nineteen. His first volume of verse was *Poems* (1817) which included poems like “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”, “Sleep and Poetry” and other miscellaneous poems of little merit. They show the Spenserian influence upon the poet along with his more immediate indebtedness to Leigh Hunt. He published his next volume of poems *Endymion* in 1818. This was of somewhat different quality but immature in quality. *Endymion* fell under severe controversies from the literary reviewers and critics. His association with the radical school of poetry led by Leigh Hunt was considered to be the reason behind this. *Endymion* is believed to be partly based upon Drayton’s “The Man in the Moon” and Fletcher’s “The Faithful Shepherdess”. This is a tale of a youth who was kissed by the moon-goddess on the summit of Mount Latmos. The poem is immature in terms of theme and its phrasing. But it perfectly reveals

the Keatsian sensibility and the rich flowery tale in a typical Keatsian diction with ornaments of the mythical landscapes. Some of his works are “Isabella or , the Pot of Basil” (1818) written in ottava rima and an imitation of Boccaccio; *Hyperion* (left incomplete) which is based upon *Paradise Lost* in terms of theme and style which deals with the epic conflicts between the older and the younger races of gods; “The Eve of St. Agnes” (1819), full of Spenserian archaisms and a tale of the elopement of two lovers; “Lamia” (1819) an imitation of Robert Burton’s “The Anatomy of Melancholy” etc. There is no doubt about the fact that Keats’s greatness lies more on his shorter pieces, especially his odes. His great odes are- “To a Nightingale”, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, “On Melancholy”, “Ode to Autumn”, “Ode to Psyche” etc. all were written in 1819. All are composed in the same structure i.e. in ten line stanzas with Shakespearian quatrain and the Petrarchan sestet. His odes are unforgettable in English literature for the reflection of Keatsian mannerisms and its flawless perfection and grace. The serenity and the philosophy which he puts in the realm of his odes establish them among some of the greatest odes in English literature. The following is an example of his flawless representation of the autumn season in artistic form and simplicity:

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

His sonnets are also significant creations in the hands of a perfect artist and a true lover of art and beauty. He wrote sixty-one sonnets which bear the influence of Shakespeare to Spenser and Milton. Sonnets like “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”, “When I have fears that I may Cease to be” are the thoughtful ideas of Keatsian magic and splendour.

1.1.3. Features of Keats's poetry

John Keats was one of the most passionate young poets of the romantic era. His poetry was in the truest sense an evocation of the beauty to be found everywhere in the world. His poetry facilitates the idea of perfection in nature. His lyrics are the unforgettable little gems of English romantic poetry. A few characteristics of his poetry are taken for discussion below.

- a) **Sensuousness:** Keats's preoccupation with the sensuous beauty of nature prevails in his poems to a great extent. The five senses viz., the sense of sight, sense of smell, sense of touch, sense of taste, and finally the sense of hearing could be found in his poetry .for instance, it was the sense of sight which inspired him to observe the Grecian urn with his eye of imagination. Similarly, his sense of hearing developed in the poet's psyche an intense feeling for the Nightingale's song. In this context, Arthur Campton Rickett remarks: "Where Wordsworth spiritualises, and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express her through the senses: the colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsing music; these are the things which stir him to his depths; there is not a mood of earth he does not love, not a season that will not cheer and inspire him". His rich sensuous touch provides a world of imagination untouched by any other poet in the era.
- b) **Nature:** Keats was very passionate about nature and treated it as an important subject matter of his poetry. His subject matters are drawn from the various aspects of nature. His poetry is a landscape full of almost all the natural objects which he could view through his senses. In the "Ode to a Nightingale", the poet successfully creates a profound and delicate picture of nature in the form of the songbird Nightingale. His "Ode to Autumn" celebrates the same natural process which transforms the colour and the fragrance of each season. The images are colourful and rich in imagination. Through "organic sensibility" and calmness of response avoiding the intellectual subtlety of Shelley and Wordsworth, Keats conceptualizes nature through his senses

with no core philosophy and spiritual charm like a mystic. On the contrary, he was highly interested in the momentary pleasures of nature and her beauty all around.

- c) **Love of Beauty:** Keats is remarkable as the lover and a true worshipper of beauty. His poetry reflects well his chief concern for beauty i.e. “with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration.” Through the senses Keats perceived both the ideal as well as the sensuous beauty in nature. He believed in a true coexistence of beauty and truth in each creation. In *Hyperion* he celebrates wisely the theme of eternal beauty. In “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, the poet celebrates the same theme of beauty as an accompaniment of truth:
Beauty is truth, truth beauty
That’s all that ye should know on earth.
- d) **Hellenism:** The word Hellenism refers to things associated with the ancient culture of Greece. Keats was deeply influenced by Homer after reading the translation *Iliad* by Chapman. His interest in Greek sculptures had a far-reaching influence in his poetry. His reading of Virgil’s *Aeneid* made him fall in love with Greek art and sculpture. His imagination of the Grecian Urn was modelled on the basis of this knowledge of Greek art and mythology. The sight of the marbles in the British museum found expression in his poems. In true sense, Keats was able to imagine a Greek city in his poetry through a set of images created and arranged well in the realm of the poem. It is quite surprising that although Keats had little knowledge of Greek and Latin, his poetry could widely establish the fact that he was utterly moved and stirred by the Greek spirit.
- e) **Negative Capability:** In a letter written in December 1817, Keats introduced this literary quality which is evident in his own poems to a great extent. Through negative capability, Keats pointed out to the moment “when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after facts and reason”. In other words, Keats suggests that a great poet must possess the faculty of

negation of the personal feelings and emotions. To him, Shakespeare possessed this feature enormously. Keats maintained this fact also in his poems. His poetry was impersonal to a larger extent. His poems stayed aloof from excessive self-revelations and were highly indebted to universal figures and truths in an ordinary mode of existence.

- f) **Keats's Theory of Poetry:** John Keats was a true romantic poet in the sense that he existed for the sake of poetry which is eternal in nature. He once marked in one of his letters: "I can't exist without poetry- without eternal poetry-half the day will not do-the whole of it." His craving for spontaneous creation was another guiding principle behind his poetry. He marked: "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to the tree it had not better come at all." He insisted upon the subject of poetry which should be interesting, pure and unobtrusive. In his own words, "Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul and doesn't startle it or, amaze it itself –but with its subject." Hence, his subject matters were drawn from different fields of life and nature which were not simply amazing but meaningful in truest sense.
- g) **Keats's consciousness and perfection:** Keats was a true and perfect artist. His craftsmanship contained a speed which was derived from the poets like Leigh Hunt, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. His poetry was rich and sensible in melodic beauty with restraint and a delicacy of the senses. Matthew Arnold mentioned that Keats resembled Shakespeare in "rounded perfection and felicity of phrase". The list of sensuous epithets in his poetry viz., "dewy wine", "unravished bride" etc. enrich his poetic diction with exuberance and colour. In his odes while dealing with ideas, he could easily establish himself as a consummate artist portraying concrete life and everyday sensations.

1.1.4. Significance

Keats is a true romantic poet. He bears higher significance in English literature. His poetry is rich in his portraits of beauty and art

and excels in high sensuousness in theme and perception. The poetry of Keats is characterized by his love for beauty, his faith upon poetic imagination and his interest in Greek art and sculpture. His artistic craftsmanship always seemed to pursue perfection and maturity. Within the short span of his life, Keats contributed a lot to the growth of romantic poetry in England with utter romantic sensibility and vision of spontaneity to deal with subjects selected from different fields.

Check your Progress: 1

Q.1. Answer to the following questions in one sentence:

a) Who introduced John Keats to Spenser at the early stage in his life?

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b) What do you mean by “Hellenism”?

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c) Name the radical poet who influenced Keats at the early stage of his life.

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d) Where did Keats introduce the concept of ‘Negative Capability’?

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e) Upon which work of Burton is Keats’s *Lamia* based ?

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Q.2. Answer the following in brief:

a) Define the notion of ‘Negative Capability’.

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b) Write a short note on Keats's theory of poetry.

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c) How did Greek art and sculpture influence Keats most in his poems?

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d) What do you mean by Keats's sensuousness ?

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e) What are the subjects of Keats's poetry? Give examples.

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f) Was Keats a true romantic poet? Exemplify.

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1.2. 0. Ode to a Nightingale

“Ode to a Nightingale” is one of the finest lyrics in English romantic poetry. In this section, we shall make an analysis of the theme and the style of the poem. Besides, you will be well acquainted with the background of the poem which will help you to familiarize yourself with the various critical aspects associated with this poem.

1.2.1. Background of the poem

The poem is written in the year 1819. It is set in a spring evening in Hampstead when he first hears the Nightingale’s song. According to one of his friends Charles Brown with whom he shared a house at Hampstead, Keats noticed the nest of a nightingale in a spring evening in 1819. On another morning in the same year, Keats devoted a few hours to brood over the nightingale’s song .The poem was dated the same by the poet as ‘May 1819’ which is similar to the dates of composition of his other odes “Ode on Melancholy”, and “Ode on a Grecian Urn”.

1.2.2. Themes of the poem:

Keats’s “Ode to the Nightingale” is a well-elaborated evocation of the romantic thoughts and feelings of the poet. Throughout the poem, Keats expresses his concern for his living with the nature’s subtlety and his personal imagination. The poem is basically set around the following themes:

- a) **Transitoriness of Human life:** Like the other odes of Keats, this ode also celebrates the theme of the transitoriness of human life and its ephemerality of happiness. The poet wants to fly into a state of complete forgetfulness in the nightingale’s own world, but life’s calling disturbs him and brings back to his reality. His willingness to accept this creature of nature as immortal remains an excuse for the restoration of peace in human life.

- b) **Conflict between the ideal and the real:** The ode portrays the conflict between the imaginative world where the nightingale's song is transfigured into an unfamiliar ideal object and the actual world which follows Keats as a mere shadow of the past. The poet cannot find an escape from this world and hence is situated in between the space of unfulfilled desire and his infinite fantastical world.

1.2.3. Analysis of the poem

The poem begins on a note of despair and complete forgetfulness. The speaker feels himself moved by an excess of pain when he drinks "poison" or "opium". Suddenly he hears the song of the nightingale singing in a full throated voice filling the atmosphere with unbridled happiness. He compares the nightingale to the nymph (dryad) which lives in the trees. The poet celebrates the space which the nightingale bears independently singing in a full throated voice and filling the surrounding with sweet melody of its song signifies the state of bliss as enjoyed by the nightingale.

In the second stanza, the poet is seen in constant search for wine. He wants to drink old wine kept in underground storage that tastes of countryside flowers. He wants to listen to the troubadour love song of southern France and drink from the 'Hippocrene', a fountain in Mount Helicon associated with the Muses, to get poetic inspiration. Being drunk and intoxicated he wants to leave this world unseen and lose himself in the blissful and ideal world of the nightingale. The act of drinking wine finds an important place in this poem. Keats mentions:

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim;

He wants to fade away in the dark forest but like other people on earth who drink in order to forget the real world.

The third stanza of the poem is an intimate portrayal of the miseries and the pathetic states of a person's life on earth. Human beings sitting and groaning, the last gray hairs, the pale look of a young, the thin spectre etc. are the images loaded with sorrow and pain which the poet witnessed through his eyes at the early stage of his life when he saw his brother Tom dying from tuberculosis. All these kind of weariness

and despair, both physical and mental have not been seen by the poet amidst the nature's lustrous beauty. But the mortal life on the earth says something else.

The fourth stanza of the poem reveals the poet's intense love towards nature and his readiness to intermingle with the nightingale's song. Like the Elizabethan poets, Keats wants to fly on the wings of poetry to delve into the realm of supreme imagination wherefrom he would not be able to perceive the pain of life on earth. The poet is determined here at this point at living in that world of fantasy leaving aside the real world. He reminds us of Bacchus, the Roman God of wine, who is usually depicted in paintings with a chariot drawn by leopards. But, Keats's faith abandons mythical imagination and leads towards poetic imagination. His warmth and devotion is to be noticed in the first lines of the stanza:

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy.....

Through sensuousness Keats creates the bower of the nightingale. The Moon sits on the throne in the tender night surrounded by the Queen-Moon's dazzling fays. But again he is dissatisfied by the appearance of earth where there is not a single ray of light.

The fifth stanza of the poem celebrates the theme of darkness. The poet mentions that he is not able to notice the kind of flowers at his feet as well as the soft incense upon the boughs. On the contrary, he is surprised at the powerful act of nature even in darkness. The poet reveals his wonder saying that nature endows upon each creature of nature with an unleashed delicacy. The poet mentions about the grass, the thicket, the white hawthorn and the eglantine. The poet expresses his astonishment upon the way nature conceals the fast-fading violets among leaves and the way it welcomes the spirit of musk-roses, the earliest blooming flowers of the mid May. The summer evening is filled with the soft murmur of flying insects. The sixth stanza of the poem is the poet's evocation of death. He calls upon the darkness, the "darkling" of the bird at night. According to the poet, he called death many times in softness but now he has changed his kind eternally. Now he rejoices upon death:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain..

The poet seems to be gathering spirit within himself while referring to the nightingale. Amidst the enveloping darkness the nightingale sings. It symbolizes the sacrifice and the attempts made by the great poets in the world to write poems despite all types of difficulties and darkness in their lives. Keats's personal life is a reflection of this fact. In this sense, the nightingale can be said to be symbolic of the great poets to a certain extent.

The next stanza of the poem deals with the resemblance of nightingale's song with historical lessons and figures. The bird's immortality is cherished by the poet at the outset:

Thou was not born for death, immortal bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;

The nightingale's song appears to the poet somewhat historical. The voice as heard by him that night draws certain similarity with the song heard by the ancient emperors and clowns. The poet John Keats refers to the Maobite woman in the Book of Ruth in the *Bible* who has had to leave her motherland to accompany her mother-in-law after her husband's death. The nightingale's song gets resonated in the poet's heart with a striking note of such historical and mythical characters. Even the same kind of song is found by the poet amidst his all-time favourite romances. The magic castles, the pictures of perilous seas and the fairy lands have been recreated by the poet under the charming spell of the nightingale's song. This is probably the reason for the poet to convert the nightingale's individual song into a universal one.

The concluding stanza of the poem begins in the last word that probably the poet has unconsciously spelled. It starts with a description of the word "forlorn". It indicates the phase of abandonment after the completion of the dream. At this point, the poet seems to be quite helpless in expression and loss. The return from dream to reality is in fact a kind of great loss for the poet.

Forlorn; the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self.

The poet is helpless bidding adieu to the world of fancy. The

poet recovers his consciousness and drops the flight of imagination upon the real sides of nature. The fantasy has now moved upon the meadows and the nearby hills. The poet is left with a question unanswered which seems to be a rhetorical one. The poem ends with the question that explains the very theme of the poem i.e. the dwelling between reality and the ideal:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music-do I wake or sleep?

Check Your Progress 2

Q.1 Answer to the following questions in one sentence:

a) In which year was Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" written?

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c) What was Charles Brown's remark upon the composition of "Ode to a Nightingale"?

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d) Where does the poet refer to the troubadour love song in the poem?

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e) Why does Keats mention the Book of Ruth in the poem?

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f) Name the Roman God who is mentioned in the poem.

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Q.2. Answer the following questions in brief:

a) Under what circumstances was the "Ode to a Nightingale" written?

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b) Trace Keats's treatment of the theme of nature in the poem.

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c) How does the poet describe the personal despair in the poem?

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d) Do you consider the Nightingale's song historical? If yes, how?

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e) Write a short note on Keats's imagination as evident in the poem.

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1.2.4. Style and Techniques in the poem

Keats has written almost all the odes in the same stanzaic structure which includes a quatrain of Shakespearean sonnet to be accompanied by a sestet of a Petrarchan type of sonnet except a few odes where he adds an extra line at the end. Unlike the other odes, Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is divided into eight stanzas with ten lines in each of them. The rhyme scheme of the poem is a b a b c d e c d e. The metrical pattern is variable to a large extent which is evident in a single

stanza. The first seven lines in a stanza with the last two lines follow the iambic pentameter whereas the eight lines follows a different one i.e. a trimetric pattern. The poem is written with the help of a number of techniques. They can be pointed out below:

- a) **Oxymoron:** An oxymoron is a figure of speech which invokes two contradictory or to say quite antagonistic words together to imply ambiguity in the poem. Keats uses an oxymoron i.e. “numbness pains” in the first line of the poem which suggests an excess of pain. The oxymoron “plaintive anthem” refers to the poet’s state of mind which is an intermixture of both pain and happiness in their extremity.
- b) **Allusion:** Allusion in a poem refers to a figure or an event outside the text. This particular ode uses a number of allusions. For instance, Keats alludes to the river of forgetfulness i.e. Lethe in Greek mythology to complement his state of mind with a broader outlook. In another instance, the poet alludes to Hippocrene, the fountain in Mount Helicon. The poet also alludes to the Book of Ruth in the *Bible* to point out the Moabite woman. The aim behind the use of these allusions is to intensify his personal despair with a universal appeal.
- c) **Personification:** The poet personifies Death, the Moon, the beauty, the drink etc. in the poem. The following lines show the way Keats personifies death:

And for a time

I have been held in love with easeful Death,

Called him soft times in many a mused rhyme...

In another context, the poet personifies the fountain Hippocrene as “blushful Hippocrene”. Besides, the beauty has been personified with the addition of “lustrous eyes”. Throughout the personified figures, Keats draws a parallel between the world of nature and mortal man.

- d) **Onomatopoeia:** Keats’s sensuous observation preserves for the readers a number of delicate terms which carry a sound at their back. For instance, the word “murmurous” implies the passionate

fervour of the poet whose sadness gets revealed in a musical pattern.

- e) **Consonance:** Keats's musical stanzas prefer consonance to a great extent. The consonance in "beaded bubbles winking at the brim" expresses the vigour and the poet's interest in the effect the syllables bring in the poem. They are musical, lyrical and above all melodious in true sense.
- f) **Alliteration:** The poem consists of alliterations to a larger extent. For instance, Keats uses alliteration in "self-same song". It suggests Keats's consciousness and indebtedness to the central subject which he deals with depth, breadth and persistency.
- g) **Imagery:** Odes are often considered to be the finest portraits of images by the poets. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is no exception. It is full of images which are vivid, delicate and strong. The images are drawn from various fields including the mythological as well as natural. For instance, the imagery of 'hemlock', 'Flora', of 'Dryad', 'Bacchus' and 'Ruth' are suggestive of Keats's interest in the chivalric tone of legend and myth. The image of 'walking dream' is derived from the world of mundane reality. All the images are melodious, lyrical and mature in expression. Thus, it can be said that Keats's existence as a perfect artist gets revealed in the odes. They are magnificent in terms of theme and narrative presentation. The syntax is well adequate and charmed one in rhythm and metrical arrangement of order. The selection of words in diction is sensuous and melodic. The poetic diction is to a great extent Shakespearean in terms of powerfully crafted adjectives like 'light winged 'Dryad, 'purple-stained mouth' 'embalmed darkness' 'fast-fading violets' and such others. They are colourful and musical in temperament which is typically Keatsian.

1.2.5. Criticism

Keats is admired by almost all the critics for his melodic beauty and his rich poetic imagination. But his association with the Cockney school was also responsible for the bitter criticism of his poetry from many critics. "Ode to a Nightingale" received wide acclaim from the critics and the readers. It is often considered by the 18th and the 19th century critics as the finest ode in English romantic poetry. Robert Bridges considered it to be Keats' best ode but due to the abundance of artificial embellishments in the

poem, he could not find perfection in the poem. Many critics have found a balanced blend of reality and imagination in the poem. Above all, the poem has become one of the finest lyrics in English romantic poetry.

1.2.6 Significance

‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is one of the finest odes in English literature. In this finely written ode Keats describes how the song of the nightingale affected his subjective consciousness and also made him realize the insurmountable gulf between the real world of a man and the ideal world of art. Critics from Rudyard Kipling to F. R. Leavis admire this ode simply because it treats this question of real and ideal in a very subtle way. It is to be numbered as a rich poetic expression of Keats’s subtle imagery and his strong romantic appeal.

Check Your Progress 3

Q.1. Answer the following questions in one sentence only:

a) In what context does Keats allude to the Lethe?

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Q.2. Answer the following in brief:

a) Write a short note on Keats’s use of imagery with special reference to “Ode to a Nightingale”.

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b) How does Keats personify Hippocrene in the poem?

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c) Write a short note on criticism of Keats's poetry.

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d) What are the figures of speech as used in this Ode? Elucidate with examples.

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1.3. Let us sum up

John Keats is considered to be one of the foremost romantic poets of his age. His poetry is melodic and rich in artistic imagination. Keats's sensuousness is revealed in the realm of his poetry. "Ode to a Nightingale" is one of his finest lyrics. It celebrates the conflict between the real world and the ideal artistic world of imagination. The poem establishes the fact that reality surpasses beyond the world of ideal beauty and high imagination. But again, the quest for ideal beauty and peacefulness in the world of nature which the poet imagines in his poetic world gets flawless expression in the poem. The musical arrangement of words and the poet's mythical knowledge make the poem an embodiment of Keats's powerful sensibility and his philosophy.

1.4. Keywords

- 1.2. hemlock: a poison.
- 1.3. Lethe: the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology.
- 1.7 Dryad: a tree spirit.
- 1.13 Flora: Goddess of flowers and spring
- 1.16 Hippocrene: A Fountain in Mount Helicon.

1.32 Bacchus: The Roman God of wine.

1.60 requiem: a mournful song.

1.66 Ruth: The Moabite woman in the Book of Ruth in the Bible.

Onomatopoeia: a figure of speech which means to play with words which contain musical notes.

Consonance: Repetition of consonant sounds in a line.

Alliteration: Repetition of sounds in a line.

1.5.Suggested Readings

Aske, Martin. *Keats and Hellenism: An Essay*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.

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Bowra, Maurice: *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP, 1950.

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn*. Harcourt Brace and World, N.Y. 1947.

Gitings, Robert. *John Keats*. London: Heinemann, 1968.

Possible answers to CYP

Q.1. In what context does Keats allude to the Lethe?

Ans: Keats alludes to the Lethe in the context of his forgetfulness of this world.

The poet wants to forget the world like the Lethe in Greek mythology which is known as the river of forgetfulness.

2. c) Write a short note on criticism of Keats's poetry.

Ans: Keats is admired by almost all the critics for his melodic beauty and his rich poetic imagination. It is often considered by the 18th and the 19th century critics as the finest ode in English romantic poetry. Robert Bridges considered it to be Keats's best ode but due to the abundance of artificial embellishments in the poem, he could not find perfection in the poems. Many critics have found a balanced blend of reality and imagination in the poems of Keats. Above all, the poem has become one of the finest lyrics in English romantic poetry. But again, Keats's melodic qualities make his poems to be the most successful lyrics in English literature.

1.6 References

Bari, Shahidha Kazi. *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations*. London: Routledge, 2011.

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1.7 Model Questions

Q.1. Write a short note on Keats's sensuousness.

Q.2. How does the poem "Ode to a Nightingale" reflect Keats's love for beauty?

Q.3. Make an assessment of John Keats as a romantic poet with special reference to "Ode to a Nightingale".

Q.4. Is "Ode to a Nightingale" the self-revelation of the poet? Elucidate.

Q.5. Prepare a critical note on the imaginative qualities of John Keats and his poetry with special reference to "Ode to a Nightingale".

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