

ENGLISH
POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME(CBCS)
SEMESTER-3
OPTIONAL COURSE 3
POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE AND THEORY

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI
KALYANI- 741235, WEST BENGAL

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Director's Message

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Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome.

During the production-process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Sankar Kumar Ghosh, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance.

Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PGBOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt thanks is also due to the Course Writers-faculty members at the DODL, subject-experts serving at University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level of the DODL of University of Kalyani.

Their persistent and co-ordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through Distance Mode.

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Director
Directorate of Open and Distance Learning
University of Kalyani

Optional Course III

Postcolonial Literature and Theory

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OPTIONAL COURSE: 3

BLOCK I

UNIT 1 (a)

Postcolonial Poetry

What does postcolonialism signify? Is it a kind of aesthetic and theoretical response that opposes and counters the discourse inherent in colonialism? Or is it a completely new discourse whose root is extremely grounded in the assertive ideology of Colonialism? The simple answer to all these questions is difficult to address without a proper understanding of the concept of colonialism. Like Janus-faced statue both the discourses and praxis of colonialism and postcolonialism are inextricably mingled with one another. Therefore I think it is important to grasp the concept of colonialism very well before beginning any further discussion on Postcolonialism. As a theory colonialism implies the discourse of the colonizer. The politics of expansion of colonies power structure and an unquenchable thirst for expanding the domination over other races or ethnic identities can be generally called the quintessence of colonial discourse. The concept of power and the concept of “docile subject” both are integral part of the colonialist discourse. The concept of “docile subject” is being propounded by Michael Foucault. Foucault is a French theorist. By the term “docile subject” he implies the subject who is very submissive, meek, docile to the rules of the colonizers. It is the psychology of the colonizer to rule his kingdom where all his subjects are docile. Docility appears to be the key element of a colonized subject. In fact, docility turns out to be the integral part of power structure in the colony. As a counter discourse of the power the docility is needed to continue the reign of the colonial master. Postcolonial responses emerge with the intention of re-writing the ideological moorings of the colonial master. The colonial master imagines himself as the embodiment of civility. He takes upon himself “the white man’s burden” to educate and civilize the barbaric natives. According to the perspective of the colonizer before the arrival of them in the native land history was non-existent. It is stereotypical colonial assumption to perceive the pre-colonial era in a native land as a time devoid of history. Postcolonial response generates when the colonized subjects after long years silence re-writes back to the empire their stories of suffering, victimization, struggle and survival. Postcolonialism celebrates the individual identity and the struggle of each and every indigenous people who suffered much during the reigning time of the colonial master. As a theoretical practice, colonialism operates on several binaries. One of the remarkable

binaries is master slave binary. The colonial master is powerful authority and his subjects, that is, the colonized subjects are slaves. There is a gendered reading nascent in postcolonial and colonial discourse. In colonial discourse, the colonizer is the masculine subject who asserts his authority and influence and all these shape and affect the lives of the colonized subjects to a large extent. The colonized subjects are being viewed from this gendered lens as feminine subjects. They need to be docile and submissive to each and every whim of the colonizer. The postcolonial writing appears as a kind of counter discourse of colonialism. It reinforces the potentials, possibilities and the power that are nascent in the postcolonial discourse. It is a vindication of rights on part of the victimized subjects who remain under the colonial power for a long time. In this module we are going to read five poems from Indian poets' perception of postcoloniality. There before any further discussion about the poems specific reference should be mentioned about the features of postcolonial writing in general for a better understanding of the poems in your syllabus.

UNIT 1 (b)

Features of Postcolonial Poetry

Postcolonial poetry that you have in your syllabus gives you the essence of postcolonial response which comes from two notable poets from India. They are R. Parthasarathi and Jayanta Mahapatra. Both of them are postcolonial poets whose writings give expression and voice to the repressed thoughts on behalf of the postcolonial subjects. Their poetry talks about nostalgia. The postcolonial subjects are nostalgic when they reminisce back their days of the pre colonial era. When the diasporic consciousness comes in the consciousness of the postcolonial subjects it becomes a prominent feature. They are nostalgic about their homeland. In the diasporic consciousness a sense of abjection works continuously. Eminent French Feminist Julia Kristeva uses the "Theory of abjection" where one self abjects another self. It is really complicated to decide who abjects whom. May be it is the homeland who abjects the diasporic subjects or it can be the diasporic subject who abjects the homeland. In postcolonial poetry the aspect of identity is one of the important features. The concept of postcolonialism is based on the quest for identity. It is the search on part of the colonized subjects to find their identities which have been denied to them during the reigning period of the colonial masters. In fact the very practice of postcolonial writing itself is an act of asserting one's own identity. In postcolonial writing language is a major concern. The writers try to muster the language of the ruler and the very act of mustering the ruler's language

makes him “A mimic man” according to the terminology of Homi. K. Bhabha. In fact mimicry is one of the means by which the colonized subjects claim the position similar to that of the master. Mimicry itself turns out to be a form of resistance on part of the colonized subjects. The quest for language and the art of mustering the ruler’s language both of these can be viewed as the essential part of identity formation on part of the postcolonial subjects. The concept of empowerment and a sense of agency are nascent within postcolonial discourse.

UNIT 2 (a)

Jayanta Mahapatra: Life and poetry

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the eminent poets who continuously strive to voice out the muted stories of suffering agonies and victimization in the Indian soil since time immemorial. He was born on 22 October 1928 in Cuttack. He is the first Indian poet who won Sahitya academy award for writing poetry in English. He started writing in the late sixties. His poetry talks about the continuous search of the diasporic subjects for an identity. His poetic endeavour deals with the postcolonial aspects of nostalgia, suffering and a sense of assertion. In your syllabus you need to read three poems by Jayanta Mahapatra: “Myth” “Deaths in Orissa” and “Traveller”. All these three poems in your syllabus stick to their nativist ideology where the poetic voice is going to trace back the lost traditions of the indigenous people. The three poems are tinged by the postcolonial ethos from the perspective of an Indian poet.

UNIT 3 (a)

MYTH

Text of the Poem:

Years drift sluggishly through the air,
is a chanting, the long years, an incense.
Face upon face returns to the barbed horizons
of the foggy temple; here lies
a crumpled leaf, a filthy scarlet flower
out of placeless pasts, on the motionless stairs.
Old brassy bells
moulded by memories, dark, unfulfilled,
to make the year come back again
a recurring prayer.
The stairs seem endless,
lifelong,

and those peaks too, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri;
uncertain, impressive as gods.
I dare not go
into the dark, dank sanctum
where the myth shifts
swiftly from hand to hand, eye to eye.
The dried, sacrificed
flowers smile at me. I have become;
a diamond in my eye.
Vague grieving years pit against the distant peaks
like a dying butterfly
as a bearded, saffron-robed
man asks me, firmly:
Are you a Hindoo?

Analysis of the poem: The poem is preoccupied with the aspect of identity. The poetic persona goes on visiting a shrine where thousand years old histories reside. The peaks like Annapurna, Dhaulagiri all remain same. With the passage of time the only difference can be perceived by comprehending its ancient tradition. The term "Tradition" itself is a sacred word which immediately links up the grey past, the present and the future. The word tradition gives a sense of ancientness. It implies a desire to remain obedient to the age-old customs of a clan or a nation. When the postcolonial consciousness tries to redefine his history there is always an attempt to go back to the lost past. The colonial master always perceives the pre-colonial era of a nation as a historical void. According to them the history begins at the nation with the arrival of the masters. The inability of the postcolonial subjects to document their history in written form is always being viewed from a colonial lens as a symbol of their intellectual inferiority. The title of the poem "Myth" is very symbolic. The myth does exist in the cultures which are very ancient. They give fond remembrance of the ancient glory of a clan. The quest for myth in an oblique way implies the quest for self-exploration. It means the quest for self identification. In postcolonial praxis the motif of self-knowledge and self-exploration turn out to be the two most major features. The colonial masters have wiped out the history and mythology from the colony with the intention of redefining history as something which has been created in the hands of the foreign rulers. In this context it is important to remember history is a confluence of divergent temporal spans. To be placed in the history gives a firm basis on the identity of the subjects. In postcolonial discourse the subjects are denied to create their own historical discourse. Automatically their roles as active participants in the process of history had been denied. On part of the poet the quest for myth in the poem becomes a necessity as he is trying to raise his muted voice in order to tell the saga of human suffering, deprivation, and victimization in his own land. The trope of memory plays a major role in the

poem. The poet nostalgically recollects the withered a scarlet flower, a crumpled leaf, and a silence brood over the temple for a long time. There still remain motionless stair who witnesses all these stories and remain muted. The memory of the stairs is just like that of a postcolonial subject. They remember the details of suffering and deprivation yet they remain silent. There is a similarity between feminism and postcolonialism. Silence is a way of expression according to the theories of French Feminists like Julia Kristeva. Silence is a counter discourse of the feminine subjects. In postcolonialism the colonized subjects are being viewed as feminine characters whose language has been snatched away by the colonizer. As a result they speak in “Forked Tongue”. I allude to the terminology “The forked tongue” from Gloria Anzaldua’s book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. As a postcolonial subject speaks in forked tongue his language is sometimes incoherent. It lacks the good command over the language. Therefore the quest for language is a major area of critical concern in postcolonialism. Even the unsaid stories of human suffering give birth to trauma. The traumatic experiences remain beyond the scope of verbal expression. The words fail to capture the sense of trauma as a result the postcolonial subjects remain silent. The silence is replete with agony and sense of angst.

UNIT 3 (b)

Traveller

Text of the Poem:

Every evening
the bells of the temple close by
rest their easy weight on the bones;
it’s time again to wonder
what I’ll do with what I learn.
A warm vapor rises
from the darkening earth like a hope.
Somewhere, inside a room,
a girl is dying in her mother’s arms.
Elsewhere, someone
revenges himself for his broken life.
I look at people. At my little misery.
Beyond, at a jasmine’s sad sweet smile.
Movement here has purpose:
It is not cold and tired.
The deer chasing the new growth of grass.
The drum thumping against the sky.
The woman with her knees drawn to her chest.

And the wind that deceives itself
it has tellingly carried the scream of the girl
who is dying in her mother's arms.
My knowledge and my time
fail to quiet to night
unlike the flutter of birds.
I try to wear this weight lightly.
But the weight of the unknown buries me.

Analysis of the Poem: The poem "Traveller" gives an essence of travelling in the past with the zeal of discovering the histories that remain hidden beneath the memoryscape for a long time. The title of the poem is symbolic of the psychic movement in the mind of a subject having postcolonial consciousness. A postcolonial subject is a traveler who travels in the past in order to find the lost memories. His travel intends to link the lost past and the present with an intention to redefine the future.

"A warm vapor rises from the darkening earth like a hope" this particular line articulates the dilemma of choice on part of the postcolonial subjects to move back psychologically to their grey past. The aspiration to trace the buried past remains within themselves yet the hope is sometimes remain muffled with a fear of encountering the ghosts of the past whom the colonizers have buried so carefully. The poet like an objective bystander views the sufferings of his fellow beings even in the present. In his observation he comes across a girl who is dying in her mother's arm. He comes across a man who goes on lamenting about his ruined life. The motifs of death disease sickness and melancholia loom large in the poem. Each one of these tropes gives the readers a haunting reminder of the life that is remaining as a leftover after the departure of the colonizers. The life that that colonized subjects are living it is a life of regret and suffering. Yet they do aspire to live a life someday where life's movement would be like the gentle blooming of the jasmine flower which is full of beauty and promise. The simile "The jasmine's sad smile" overtly implies the entity of a postcolonial subject whose life remains unfulfilled and transient in the passage of time yet he aspires to smile knowing fully well about his short span and his own grace. The spaces in the colony after the departure of the colonizers reserve a kind of sadness and weight. It is the weight of the memory that every colonized subject is carrying carefully within their bruised hearts. The space is filled with a sad reminder of life's lost sublimity yet they still grope for a full life for themselves. The concluding two lines of the poem is extremely connotative. It points out the responsibility of the subject having postcolonial consciousness. They need to delve deep in the buried past. In their act of delving deep they may be sad, may be nostalgic,

yet they need to perform the ritual of remembrance. It is a sacred rite that they have to perform in order to pay respect to their ancient tradition and their lost ways of life which have been perished by the foreign rulers. The act of reminiscence becomes a mode of redefining their lost past and it creates a resistance against the forces of the colonial master's trick to drag their consciousness into collective amnesia by locating the history of the colony with the arrival of the colonizers.

UNIT 3(C)

Deaths in Orissa

Text of the Poem:

Faces of tree-bark and grief
hang against God's hand in the world
that cannot lift itself up to help.
In the corners of women's eyes
the rainbow breaks against the sunrise.

Nothing but the paddy's twisted throat
exposed on the crippled bleak earth,
nothing but impotence in lowered eyes,
nothing but the tightening of the muscles
in Bhagyabati's neck which her outcaste mother
would herself have liked to throttle to death,
nothing but the cries of shriveled women
cracking against the bloodied altar of Man,
nothing but the moment of fear
when they need a God who can do them some good.

Oh I am a poet who barks like a dog.
Open the window, I say, so I can breathe.
Let not my memory be like a tiger in ambush.
But there is this dangerously alive body
and only a baton or knife can tear it apart.

Analysis of the poem: The poem "Deaths in Orissa" is extremely preoccupied with the aspect of memory and its haunting reminder. The wretched conditions of the colonized subjects and the sense of loss hover over the entire narrative. The poet articulates the sense of absence, loss, and sadness in his narrative. The sense of void is getting reflected in each line of the poem. It is the sense of emptiness that defines the predicament of the colonized subjects. Their visions have been ruined; their hopes have been snatched away. The rulers from the foreign land have imposed on them their rules. Eminent postcolonial critic Franz Fanon in his

seminal work *Wretched of the Earth* focuses on the wretched condition of the colonized subjects. Dirt, filth, sickness, and disease are the constant companions in the spaces inhabited by the colonized subjects. Therefore the colonized subjects occupy a space which becomes a centre of enervation. They stuck in the limbo kind of existence after the invasion of the foreign rulers in their lands. In the poem “nothingness” becomes a recurrent motif. It gives the sense of futility and meaninglessness in the endeavours of the subjects having postcolonial consciousness after the foreign invasion. Yet the poem does change its vision towards the concluding section. The poet here becomes aware of his responsibilities as a poet who needs to voice the unsaid words of his fellow beings. As a poet he takes the responsibility of expressing the deep seated anger melancholia and utter depression which dwell within the hearts of his countrymen as an offshoot of their colonized position for a long time. The poetic voice gives expression to the silent agonies and gestures. Therefore the venture of writing poetry itself here can be treated as a potential medium of replacing the history which was written by the colonial masters in the past. The replacement of the masters’ version of history has been completed when the postcolonial voice speaks for itself.

UNIT 4 (a)

Rajagopal Parthasarathy: Life and Poetry

Rajagopal Parthasarathy is very popularly known as R. Parthasarathy. His is another powerful postcolonial voice. He asserts the identity in his poetry as a postcolonial subject who gropes continuously for self-identification after the trauma of surviving in the reigning period of the colonizers. He was born on 20 August, 1934 at Tirupparaiturai, near Tiruchchirappalli, Tamil Nadu. He is a famous critic, translator and poet. He was lecturer of English literature in Mumbai almost ten years. Later he joined as Associate Professor of English and Asian Studies at Skidmore college in Saratoga Springs, New York, United States. His famous work is *Rough Passage* which was published in 1977. His poetry is tinged with postcolonial ethos.

Exile

Text of the Poem:

As a man approaches thirty he may
take stock of himself.

Not that anything important happens.

—

At thirty the mud will have settled:

you see yourself in a mirror.

Perhaps, refuse the image as yours.

—

Makes no difference, unless

you overtake yourself. Pause for breath.

Time gave you distance: you see little else.

—

You stir, and the mirror dissolves.

Experience doesn't always make for knowledge:

you make the same mistakes.

—

Do the same things over again.

The woman you may have loved

you never married. These many years

—

you warmed yourself at her hands.

The luminous pebbles of her body

stayed your feet, else you had overflowed

—

the banks, never reached shore.

The sides of the river swell
with the least pressure of her toes.

—

All night your hand has rested
on her left breast.

In the morning when she is gone

—

you will be alone like the stone benches
in the park, and would have forgotten
her whispers in the noises of the city.

Analysis of the Poem: The poem “Exile” breathes the air of indolent romanticism, yet it adheres to the postcolonial ethos very firmly. The trope of memory here serves the postcolonial ethos very faithfully. The memory itself is a part of history. To possess historical consciousness is also another marker of power and awareness. As a postcolonial subject the poet remembers his days when he arrives at the age of thirty. He remembers his lover whom he loved yet he did not build his home with her. The lost melodies and traces of the days with her all he treasure in his memory. The poet uses the mirror as a trope in the poem. He sees his own reflection when he is past thirty. The aged face of his gives him another haunting reminder of his age. He is conscious about the ageing and the temporal flux in which he has been placed. From the very beginning the poem talks about history and a sense of historical awareness go on in this narrative. To trace the lost time and the quest for identity both are typically postcolonial features. The poet talks about mutability, transformation and new identity –all these point out his desire to redefine himself in his life when he crossed the age thirty. There is an awareness of alteration. Time here plays the major role. It does change tons of things around the poet’s life yet it does not change the memory. The trope of memory acts here as a mode of resistance against the temporal flux. The memory creates a narrative within the mind of the postcolonial subject as a result it turns out to them another mode of

empowerment. The ability to create a narrative is always being viewed as a source of power. Therefore, it becomes another mode of empowerment to the postcolonial subject. Another important trope emerges out of the poem which is the nature of memory. Memory is never ever static. It is a fluid concept. Even every recollections of the same memory does affect the memory and as a result each person has a different recollection of the same memory. The politics of memory and the proper negotiation with the memory define the personality of the self from a postcolonial lens. The sense of loss, lost love, nostalgia, and melancholia all these become very important aspects to form a postcolonial response.

UNIT 4 (b)

Homecoming

Text of the Poem:

I am no longer myself as I watch
the evening blur the traffic
to a pair of obese headlights.

I return home, tired,
my face pressed against the window
of expectation . I climb the steps

to my flat, only to trip over the mat
Outside the door. The key
goes to sleep in my palm.

I fear I have bungled again.
That last refinement of speech
terrifies me. The balloon.

Of poetry has grown red in the face
with repeated blowing. For scriptures
I, therefore, recommend

the humble newspaper: I find
My prayers occasionally answered there.
I shall, perhaps, go on.

Like this, unmindful of day
melting into the night.
My heart I have turned inside out.

Hereafter, I should be content,
I think, to go through life
with the small change of uncertainties.

Analysis of the Poem: The poem “Homecoming” articulates the essence of Diasporic consciousness. The concept of homecoming itself is a postcolonial aspect. Precisely, homecoming is Diasporic awareness. In this context, it is important to remember who is a Diasporic subject? Or what is Diaspora? Diaspora is the act of leaving one’s own homeland and the decision to dwell on in a foreign land. The person who leaves his homeland and resides at some other foreign land the person is called a Diasporic subject. The concept of home is a very intriguing concept in Diasporic consciousness. Home is a fluid concept to them. The fond recollections, dear faces and the homely things where the sense of comfort lies the Diasporic subject calls it as their home. The concept of home and the uncertainty both are related to the poem. Once a Diasporic subject leaves his home the geographical space home does change. Even psychologically home does change. They rebuild home amidst the alien people in a new land. The poem “homecoming” evokes the sense of monotony and boredom after homecoming. To a Diasporic subject homecoming is an event. It brings back the nostalgia, the sadness and the longing because, once they belong to the space. The event of homecoming always ends with a sad note. The long absence of the Diasporic subject from their homeland caused a change in the home. Therefore, after their arrival the same home undergoes through radical alteration. Therefore, such homecoming never gives birth to the utmost happiness that a Diasporic subject can expect. The changing nature of the home, and the memories associated with the home all are potential markers of the Postcolonial ethos in the poem. The title “Homecoming” has been used with an ironic intention. The departure of the Diasporic subject from home makes the home an “unheimlich” place. “Unheimlich” is a term used by Sigmund Freud. Freud uses the term in psychoanalysis to mean “unhomely” or “unfamiliar”. Therefore, over time the home becomes an uncomfortable space to the Diasporic subject. Therefore, such a homecoming always caused a sense of dissatisfaction, unhappiness and unease.

Assignments

1. Comment on the postcolonial ethos in the poems which are in your syllabus.
2. What do you mean by “Postcolonialism”?

3. Critically comment on the language and style of R. Parthasarathy with specific reference to the poems in your syllabus.
4. Critically evaluate Jayanta Mahapatra as a postcolonial poet.
5. Write an essay on the trope of memory as an important aspect in Postcolonial poetry with particular reference to the poems in your syllabus.
6. What is “unheimlich”?

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Rock Pebbles, Vol. XV No.1, January–June 2011 (a special issue on Jayanta Mahapatra) ISSN 0975-0509

BLOCK II

UNIT 5

Noontide Toll

By

Romesh Gunsekera

UNIT 5 (a): Life and Works

Romesh Gunsekera is a diasporic writer. He was born in 1945 in Colombo. His formative years were spent first in Philippines, then in England. He moved to England in 1971. His fictions are coloured by the experiences of eviction, displacement and agonies of the diasporic subjects. His personal experiences of dislocation, nostalgia and pain of leaving his homeland Sri Lanka imbue his fictional universe to a large extent. His first published collection of short stories titled *Monkfish Moon* was appeared in 1992. It articulates the agonies of displacement among Sri Lankan diasporic subjects. His second novel *Reef* was published in 1994 and it was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. He was the judge for a number of literary prizes, such as the Caine Prize for African Writing, the David Cohen Prize for Literature, the Forward Prize for Poetry. He is the winner of Booker Prize for his novel *Reef*. The major aspects of his writing are the concentration on the sufferings and consciousness of the Sri Lankan diasporic subjects. The fundamentalist ethos of the Sinhala community caused Sri Lankan civil war in 1983. After the civil war the political tension in the nation increases to an alarming level. Gunsekera's fiction delves deep in the consciousness of the Sri Lankan diasporic subjects in order to portray the human saga of displacement, nostalgia and memory. The same question of dislocation from one's own homeland and the struggle to adopt the foreign land or host land as a new home goes on posing innumerable facets in Gunsekera's oeuvre.

UNIT 6 (a)

Role of Memory in *Noontide Toll*

Romesh Gunsekera's fiction *Noontide Toll* draws an extraordinary portrait of post war Sri Lanka which is grappling with the ghosts of its troubled past. Gunsekera exhibits the predicament of the island nation Sri Lanka after the Civil Strife. He perceives the island nation in respect of its scars of Civil Strife which are visible not

only in the geographical locale of the nation but also in the psyche of its traumatized subjects. In order to grasp the process of rehabilitation in the post war Sri Lanka, the readers need to comprehend the role of memory in the narrative design of *Noontide Toll*.

The memory translates into recollection and it is believed that memory has a therapeutic power of healing. Significantly, this healing capacity of the memory is questionable to the traumatized subjects of the post war nation. They have witnessed the atrocities of the Sinhala community, the communal blood bath, holocaust of the Civil Strife, and the genocide. To such traumatized subjects memory causes fracture in their psyche. After the atrocities of the civil war when the entire nation involves in the process of rehabilitation, it is the memory of the traumatized subjects which hinder their psychic process of rehabilitation. To the survivors of the Civil War memory functions the role of witnessing. It witnesses the genocide, violence and oppression. Therefore, memory revives only the trauma of remembrance which the post war nation desperately struggles to forget That is why, the role of memory is at odds with .with the after war process of rehabilitation of the nation. Therefore, instead of annihilating the psychic trauma of the Sri Lankan subjects, the memory only intensifies the atrocities of the War. It fails to provide any therapeutic power of healing to the Sri Lankan citizens. Instead of erasing the horrible past of the civil war the memory continues to keep the horror alive. The acculturation process of the traumatized subjects is severely hindered by the memory. Indeed, it is the agonized Sri Lankan individuals that encounter the difficulties of participating in the rehabilitation process of the state. The objective memory which was foregrounded by the nation creates rupture to the psyche of the individuals.

The rehabilitation process needs negotiation with trauma which is ingrained in the psyche for witnessing the Civil Strife, bloodshed and genocide. Significantly, it is the hapless, agonized individuals like Miss Saraswati, or Dr. Ponnampalam, or Basantha who miserably failed to forget the horror of the past. The scar on the neck of Miss Saraswati or the deserted, old, dilapidated house of Doctor Ponnampalam all are graphic representations of the violence and atrocity of the Civil War. These physical wounds coalesce with their ontology. Therefore, these wounds become inseparable, and unforgettable.

The Memory turns out to be subjective memory. It is the subjective memory of the individuals that is at odds with the objective memory of the nation. This subjective memory of the individuals involves in the process of history making. Indeed, it is the unrecorded history of common people and the stories of their suffering and survival that create subjective history. This subjective history is always being suppressed by the objective historiography which was imposed and validated by the nation in order to strengthen the post-war rehabilitation process. The subjective history of common people is at odds with the objective history of the nation. To the official historiographers LTTE performs the role of a terrorist, but to the Tamil's they are freedom fighters and patriots. It is the subjective history of Doctor Ponnampalam who is concern with the destruction of his ancestral home "Palm Villa" owing to the onslaught of the Civil Strife. It is the loss and personal concern of individuals like Miss Saraswati who has lost her family. It is the agonized soul of the soldier in "Rampart" who assassins his beloved's brother who was a LTTE cadre. His dream of nuptial bond with his fiancée is perpetually nullified by the act of assassination.

The rehabilitation process of the state is an act of plunging the entire nation into collective amnesia. The process of engaging into the state's endeavour of collective amnesia is validated by the utterance of traumatic individuals like Miss Saraswati who articulates "after a war, it is best not to ask about the past." But, it is the subjective memory and trauma that work against collective amnesia by constantly reviving the past. In "Roadkill", the scar at the back of Miss Saraswati's neck symbolizes the scar that the war ingrained in the nation as well as in the psyche of the individuals. Her deliberate act of hiding the scar under the collar of her dress is symptomatic of the nation's voluntary effort of hiding the scars in the unconscious zones of the collective consciousness. But, the scar reveals its presence in the unguarded moments.

In Gunsekera's narrative *Noontide Toll*, memory involves in the process of unfreezing the muted spaces of individual psyche. Therefore, it acts as an effective medium of constructing the nation's history, but significantly it is the subjective historiography of the nation. It has to be suppressed in order to validate the official historiography which is objective in nature. The narrative maintains the structure of normalcy. It infuses a sense of order in the ambience of chaos and disorder. The narrative strategy of Gunsekera thus validates the strategy in the post war phase of

the nation who that tries to maintain normalcy by participating in the rehabilitation process. The episodes in chapters like “Scrap” or “Roadkill” delineate that the desire to maintain sense of normalcy has been done deliberately. Significantly, instead of introducing gruesome details of the war, Gunsekera introduces very subtle phrases or objective descriptions of the ruin. For example, “we are in a land where every road seems to lead to a hospital”, the scars on the neck of miss saraswati, her commando like precision for killing a rat with single blow all these visual markers of the trauma and memory. Such examples are handful in number but it strengthens the visual depiction of a nation which undergoes through the tumultuous days of inner strife. In the chapter titled “Scrap” the heaps of lorries, vans, cycles, “every kind of vehicle jumbled up and abandoned in creeks and ditches” “were like a catalogue collection of a mad museum.” The abandoned vehicles that pile up beside the roads point out the absence of the owners. It implies the absence of the lives. It becomes symbol of abandoned lives in the post-war nation. The graphic representations of the vehicles foreground the owners whose past is buried in the rehabilitation process of the nation.

Therefore, in Gunsekera’s fiction memory plays a central role in determining the personality of the individual’s in post-war Sri Lanka, because, the personality of the individuals is determined by the fact that how does the individual negotiate with the traumatic memory. Gunsekera captures the predicament of the traumatic subjects who are constantly at war with their horrible past. The proper negotiation of memory can only redeem the subjects from their limbo state of existence.

UNIT 7 (a)

Use of Language in *Noontide Toll*

Romesh Gunsekera’s narrative *Noontide Toll* belongs to the genre of Trauma narrative. It unfolds the predicament of the island nation Sri Lanka after the civil strife. The characters in the fiction like Basantha, Miss Saraswati, Doctor Ponnampalam all of them suffer from trauma. In its attempt to describe the indelible effects of trauma after the holocaust the author uses a strange normative tone through the language. It is unanimously accepted that trauma cannot be translated through the verbal gestures, that is language. The exact recollection of trauma and its authentic expression through language are beyond the scope of the language. Therefore, for an author of trauma narrative the task of conveying the sense of loss and trauma through language appear as something impossible task. Yet the author of a trauma

narrative does the same impossible task as trauma literature is preoccupied with the question of representation of trauma. Trauma literature like a tip of the iceberg captures only the most visible form of trauma in its narrative. What about the lost discourse of trauma that the language fails to capture? What the language does not capture remain beyond the scope of verbal utterances. Very significantly, these experiences are untranslatable into language. Therefore, in his trauma narrative Gunesequera takes recourse to muted zones, silences, and certain phrases that capture the sense of trauma effectively. Being a trauma narrative *Noontide Toll*, demands a cerebral engagement from readers part to comprehend the meaning in the narrative. In this fiction, the readers are also very active participant in the meaning formation. In order to analyze the linguistic aspect in the fiction I prefer to use the term “militarization of the language”. The term implies the use of language by the military personnel and also it means the type of language which is very disciplined. Gunesequera explores the full potential of the trope “militarization of language”. As a result to that the language in the fiction becomes objective, balances and it tries to maintain a normative standard in the post war tumultuous days of the nation. Indeed, the narrator’s attempt to use the normative standard in the language is a gesture. It implies the author’s forced attempt to hide the sense of disorder and chaos in the days when the nation is grappling with its haunted past. Gunesequera is an exceptionally poised and brilliant craftsman. In *Noontide Toll* he takes the lens of a sober, sophisticated bystander, where everyone is on guard of their memories of war after bombings and atrocities. The fiction turns out to be a model of simplicity in Gunesequera’s hands. Quite interestingly, this simplicity is deceptive. Every sentence is charged with a hidden meaning. The apparent simplicity of the sentence will be dismantled by the discovery of the hidden meaning which is contrary to this simplicity.

Noontide Toll deals with the aftermath of Sri Lankan civil war, which was caused due to the fundamentalist ethos of the Sinhala community. Dealing with a violent war, loss, and trauma of its subject, Gunesequera’s novel does not represent brutality and violence of war in a graphic manner. Gunesequera restrains himself from representing the graphic details of civil war. In order to do so, he employs the technique of militarization of language. Militarization of language is a technique which strategically hides the violence, brutality, and atrocities of language. As an outcome of this technique language turns out to be very dispassionate in nature. The official historiography follows the technique of militarization of language. It strategically hides loss and trauma of the survivors. This type of language enables the state to camouflage and suppress the marks of loss and death. Taking the focus away from pain and

the body of human subject militarization of language is keeping a balance with the destructive forces of war. Indeed, militarization of language is a process of hiding the reality. The gruesome reality of the civil strife is camouflaged through language. The language, like the Government authority is camouflaging the pain and trauma of the subjects. Gunsekera hides the violent, gruesome reality of war through his dispassionate narrative form and his objective language.

Indeed, he does not lay bare all. He leaves many things unsaid. The silence, the unsaid words become very significant. In order to decipher the meaning of them the readers discover the hidden violence. In his narrative he does bombard his readers with the graphic representation of violence. As *Noontide Toll* is a war narrative, Gunsekera could have used imagery conveying the sense of atrocity of the civil strife. He deliberately uses languages which carry very subtly the sense of violence and civil disorder. It actually broadens the scope of his narrative. The subtle hints and gestures in the narrative become very symbolic. The subtle hints in the narrative make the readers an active interpreter of meaning in the text. The craftsmanship of Gunsekera widens the scope of the readers' imagination.

The author purposefully guards the gruesome reality of violence in the civil strife. Thus, his language maintains a strange kind of similarity and parity with the official historiography of the nation after the post-war phase. Therefore, the aim of retaining sense of normalcy is getting prioritized. Therefore, it helps in the rehabilitation process of the survivors. Gunsekera's language maintains a kind of parity and disparity with the official history, because, he employs evasive language. It is powerful but evasive. Unlike the official historiography Gunsekera's language uses the modality of memory. Here memory performs the role of witnessing the horrors of the civil war, thus the act of remembrance becomes an oblique way of witnessing. Indeed, like a forked tongue utterance the experiences of trauma in the narrative never get addressed with its totality. In the text the muted zones, the silences, the gaps become more meaningful when the readers can be able to unpack their meanings.

Character Analysis of Vasantha: Vasantha appears as a unifying consciousness in the apparently rambling kind of narrative by Gunsekera. He is a van driver who takes passengers from various countries and he acts like their guide in their visit to Sri Lanka. He has witnessed the civil strife. Even after the war he goes on earning his livelihood as a van driver. He moves always and he wipes out his hands very frequently. These two peculiar habits of Vasantha are extremely connotative. It is connotative of his intense desire to move

on from the haunted, gory past of the nation. His habit of wiping out hands not only indicates his hygiene consciousness, but also it implies the active participation of Vasantha in the post war phase of rehabilitation. It is symbolic gesture on part of Vasantha. He imbibes the post war nation's inclination to wipe out its hands from the guilt. Indeed, Vasantha's van carries him to different sections of the nation and he passes mere comments on the transformations of the geographical space after the war. Thus, Vasantha acts like a unifying thread that connects all the disjointed experiences of suffering, loss, and deprivation in the post war nation. In fact, the eyes of Vasantha acts like a lens of camera which very minutely scrutinizes the changes in the island nation after the civil atrocities. Vasantha's words "if you are on the move, there is always hope" are connotative. It is indicative of the post war nation's strategy to move on from the violence and trauma by participating in the rehabilitation process. The entire rehabilitation process in the post war nation is an attempt to delve deep into the collective amnesia and to move on from the terrible memories of communal bloodbath and genocide.

Miss Saraswati: Miss Saraswati is another subject who suffers from trauma after the civil war phase. She started working silent. Her silence implies her agonies and embittered memories in the days of the war. Her statement as a response to Vasantha's question, "after a war, it is best not to ask about the past" is densely symbolic. Gunesekera's fiction leaves traces of the past within the gestures of the characters. Miss Saraswati was an LTTE cadre during the days of the holocaust. Her efficiency in killing the rat is suggestive of her deftness in killing people with equal ease. Her unwillingness to bury the dead past after the war is symbolic. It implies her voluntary decision of not digging up the lost past. She is absolutely a traumatic subject whose life has been affected deeply due to the war. Her past bears testimony to her suffering. Her decision not to recollect the past is a voluntary decision on part of a war-survivor. By not reminiscing the past she desperately tries to pull her consciousness into collective amnesia so that psychologically she can be liberated from the traumatic memories of the war. She is an assistant Manager in the hotel called Spice Garden Inn after the war. What she does during the days of war remains unknown to the readers. Significantly, in the chapter titled "Roadkill" her description is being given. She is being described as a very polite, courteous hotel manager. When a rat was scurrying its way through the hotel floor she kills the rat with a single blow. Her commando like precision of killing the rat strikes the readers. Vasantha asked her about her family and her childhood days. She remains.

Doctor Ponnampalam: In the chapter titled “deadhouse” we come across the character of Doctor Ponnampalam. He is a diasporic subject. Diasporic subject means someone who has left his/ her homeland, their country of origin either forcefully or voluntarily. Doctor Ponnampalam returns to his homeland after the war. In this trip he is accompanied by his son Mahen. His visit to his homeland after the war revives his trauma. He remembers all the BBC news which gives him information about the war in Sri Lanka. After sixty years his arrival at his homeland makes him morose. The familiar landscape, the house, the places all have undergone through radical alterations due to the war. Home becomes unfamiliar space where after exile the prodigal son Doctor Ponnampalam remains an uninvited, unwelcome guest. His visit to his homeland never gives him happiness, rather it intensifies his sense of non belonging. He does not belong to the place any more. The sense of belonging gives people the feeling of rootedness. When Doctor Ponnampalam realizes that his familiar homeland has been transformed into an unfamiliar place, automatically he lost the sense of homeliness. The home suddenly becomes unhomey. According to Freudian terminology, the home becomes “unheimlich” meaning an uncanny, unfamiliar, hostile place. The changed geographical scenario in the post war native brings his mind only the discomfort. To a diasporic subject, home is never a fixed, stable, geographical location. To the diasporic consciousness, home is a fluid concept which consists of fond memories and dear faces. They create home based on the aspects of familiarity, and happiness. Therefore, when Doctor Ponnampalam finds his ancestral house “palm villa” in the hands of new owner, eventually it affects his sense of rootedness and belonging.

UNIT 8(a)

Symbolism in Noontide Toll

Being a trauma narrative Gunasekera’s fiction *Noontide Toll* for the progress of the narrative sometimes dependent on symbolism. Symbols are generally very connotative. The trauma of the nation after the post-war situation, the loss, agony, and pain of the subjects all get to reflected in Gunasekera’s narrative. As I already said in my earlier discussion on trauma narrative that the exact expression of trauma remains beyond the scope of verbal language. Trauma elides all straightforward definition. Therefore, in trauma narrative the author articulates more through the imagery, symbolism, muted zones, and sudden elliptical assertion. Therefore, like other trauma narratives, *Noontide Toll* also largely dependent on symbolism for articulating the sensation of trauma and suffering. The major symbol that pervades the entire narrative is continuous allusion to rehabilitation process in the post-war

phase, the collective memory of the survivors' of the bloodshed and genocide, the unclaimed vehicles beside the road, the scar in the neck of miss Saraswati, the van of Vasantha, the peculiar habit of Vasantha's of wiping out his hands, the dilapidated house of Doctor Ponnampalam.

The rehabilitation process is a nation's strategy to wipe out the scars and horrors of the war by plunging the consciousness of the survivors' into collective amnesia. The official records and documentation always try to minimize the loss and destructive due to the war. The rehabilitation process demands from the survivors' the voluntary erasure of their subjective memories. When the survivors are forced to forget the atrocities of the civil strife through participating in the rehabilitation process, it obliquely revives their trauma and memories.

The collective memories of the people, their shared history of suffering and loss remain beyond the scope of official history. All these are unrecorded, muted stories that have been stored in the deep recesses of human psyche forever. The memories of the survivors' become their greatest enemy, whenever they strive to forget the days of the war, their memories act like a witness. It brings back their unforgettable memories of the terrible past. The memory unfreezes those muted spaces in their psyche. The unclaimed vehicles beside the roadside also carry major symbolic implications in the narrative. In the chapter titled "Scrap" Vasantha was guiding two Chinese visitors through the war ravaged zones of the nation and suddenly they encounter the paraphernalia of destruction and mess. Vasantha expressed it as:

A few minutes later, I felt we had slipped into a war movie set: the trees cleared and we saw fields packed with broken bicycles. There must have been tens of thousands of bicycles in a block half a mile long and twenty feet high. "A scrap heap of bicycles". I don't think even in Mao's China there would have been so many piled together like this.

All these are confiscated enemy vehicles. LTTE cadres used them all over the north, now they have turned into scraps. The next scene that unfolds to both the Chinese visitors mainly graveyard of buses, vans, and lorries. The unclaimed vehicles, their abandoned state all inevitably point to the one signifier: the death of their owners, the absence of lives. The inanimate vehicles densely point out the disappearance of millions of lives. Obviously the subtle symbol of abandoned vehicles signifies the abandoned ways of lives. It graphically represents the atrocities of the civil war and its horrible aftermath in the war ravaged zones of the country. The scar in the neck of

Miss Saraswati points out her unsaid stories of victimization and suffering during the days of the war. From the scar the readers can easily interpret that she might be the unfortunate victim of the war. But, very significantly, she hides the scar under the collar of her dress with minute care and precaution. The hidden scar tells the stories of her past. She was an active LTTE cadre during the days of the holocaust. She learnt the commando like precision of killing a living object from her rigorous training in LTTE group. Therefore, she kills the rat in the hotel floor with a single blow and allowed her unguarded self to appear for once in front of Vasantha. Vasantha was curious to know about her past but she paused over this question with her blank gaze in the darkness and her vague assertion: "after a war it's better not to ask about the past". Gunasekera like a brilliant craftsman leaves all the possible hints through the subtle symbols so that his readers can decode their connotations with ease and confidence. As a trauma narrative Gunasekera uses symbolic connotations to convey to his readers the untranslatable quality of the traumatic experience, because, it is believed by the trauma theorist that traumatic recollections are beyond the scope of verbal utterance, as a result to that trauma literature takes recourse to subtle imagery and symbolism to capture the sense of loss and absence. Therefore, trauma literature accepts elliptical assertions as a best way of conveying the unsaid, untranslatable nuanced aspects of the trauma. In the text, Vasantha's van acts as a potent weapon to delve deep into the scars of the post war nation. He moves with his van in the nook and corner of the island nation. It acts like a lens of a camera that captures the unforgettable scars of the civil war in the nation. Vasantha's perception acts as an objective commentary on the sense of loss and massacre. The sudden glimpses of the changed geographical scenario of the nation point out the altered condition in the post war phase. Indeed, Vasantha's van is carrying dual symbol. It simultaneously points out the massacre of the civil war and also it becomes a graphic symbol of rehabilitation process after the war in the nation. The van moves on continuously to the war ravaged zones to the normal roads. It implies the departure of the collective memories from the memories of ruin and mess to the new construction of the country in the post war phase. Vasantha's habit of wiping out his hands frequently does not simply indicate his hygiene consciousness, rather it is connotative of the post war nation's active desire to wipe out off its sense of guilt for being an active participant of this human saga of brutality and suffering. The dilapidated house of Doctor Ponnampalam also carries symbolic connotations. It foregrounds the sense of abandonment. Its inhabitants left the house due to the civil

strife. The deserted, dilapidated house of Doctor Ponnampalam actually is a reservoir of his childhood memories. When he returns to revisit his homeland the house has undergone through radical transformations, due to the civil war. In an oblique manner ,the memories associated with the house have also changed. Therefore, the abandoned house palm villa becomes a contradictory place of memories lost and found. The change of the house to some extent affected the sense of belonging in the psyche of Doctor Ponnampalam. The alteration in the physical structure of the house is also an alteration in the treasured memories of his home and homeland. Finally, the narrative ends with the suggestion that to a diasporic subject like Doctor Ponnampalam home is never a specific geographical entity that is limited to cultural boundary of the globe. Home to him is a museum of fond memories and its dear faces.

Assignments

1. Analyze the role of memory in *Noontide Toll*.
2. Describe analytically the character of Vasantha.
3. How do you justify *Noontide Toll* as a specimen of trauma narrative.
4. Comment on the symbols in *Noontide Toll*.
5. Evaluate the character of Doctor Ponnampalam as a diasporic subject.
6. Comment on the language in *Noontide Toll*.

Further Readings

Romesh Gunsekera. *Noontide Toll*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2013

For Understanding the narrative style of Romesh Gunsekera students are instructed to read other fictions by Romesh Gunsekera such as.

- Monkfish moon- 1992
- *Reef* – 1994
- *The Sandglass* – 1998
- *Heaven's Edge* – 2002
- *The Match* – 2006
- *The Prisoner of Paradise* – 2012

Block III

Postcolonial Drama

Dream on Monkey Mountain-Derek Walcott

Objectives

This section is about the celebrated West Indian poet, dramatist and thinker Derek Walcott, and more particularly about one of his plays “Dream on Monkey Mountain.” You would be looking at a brief account of Walcott’s life and work and his career which earned him the Nobel Prize in 1992 and then would concentrate on the play itself, exploring the different themes and concerns that revolve around it. This module would also contain occasional interesting facts about the playwright and the play, with some self-assessment questions to test your understanding of the play.

Unit 9(a): Introduction

First published in 1970 with some other short plays by Walcott, the collection was called *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. It was adapted, produced and broadcasted for NBC (the National Broadcasting Company in America) later in the same year. Walcott himself wrote a prologue for this edition of the plays and named it “What the Twilight Says: an Overture”, where he explains his own doubts and concerns being a postcolonial playwright indulging in the indigenous forms of theatre. He discusses the problems for an artist of a region with little in the way of truly indigenous forms, and with little national or nationalist identity. The play contains in itself most of the themes that preoccupy Walcott’s literary works in general. In “Dream on Monkey Mountain”, Walcott explores the displaced searching psyche of modern man groping for a truth, and more specifically, the hybrid individual, the mulatto, searching in vain for his roots and his sense of identity and purpose in life.

Unit 9(b): Brief Introduction to the Playwright Derek Walcott

Derek Walcott was born in St. Lucia (an island in the Caribbean Lesser Antilles) in 1930. He was born in a mixed racial household and was given an English education. After studying at St. Mary's College in St. Lucia and at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, Walcott moved to Trinidad in 1953, where he worked as a theatre and art critic. In his collection of plays *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* Walcott included some of his lesser known plays like *The Sea at Dauphin*, *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* and *Malcochon, or The Six in the Rain*. His *Collected Poems: 1948-1984* was published in 1986, and his subsequent works include numerous plays and poems including his book length poem adapted from *The Iliad*, which he named *Omeros* (1990). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992. He published a collection of verse *The Bounty* in 1997 and a special edition in 2000, of the long poem *Tiepolo's Hound*, illustrated by him. Some of his later plays are *The Haitian Trilogy* (2001) and *Walker and the Ghost Dance* (2002). ‘A Far Cry from Africa’ and ‘Sea Grapes’ are two of his most famous poems.

Unit 10(a): Stage Direction and Costume

The play has an elaborate stage direction with the prologue. A moon and a volcanic mountain are the principal backdrops, while an African drum is the most significant stage prop. The two characters that come on stage are in sharp contrast of each other. While one is the quintessential African dancer figure, while the other is a “top-hatted, frock-coated figure with white gloves”. His face is curiously painted half white and other half is left black. There is a long keening (lament) chorus is heard and the figures move their hands in a spider like way. The painted figure touches the moon and we can see the prison with the half naked felons Tigre and Souris in them. Makak is seen as an aged black man wearing an old cloth around his shoulders and carrying a jute sack. The corporal Lestrade is shown as a dressed official with the manners of an animal trainer.

In Scene i, the disc of the moon is changed as and when needed from one side to the other to how a sun and therefore, denoting daytime. Moustique is in a similar garb and he is shown to be following Makak around miming a donkey. Makak is seen to be authoritative in his gestures and in the end the dancer does a ritualistic donkey-dance and changes the sun side of the disc into moon again. The light dims to create a changing mood.

Many critics have found startling similarity in structure and imagery between Walcott's "Dream on Monkey Mountain" and Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (1932). In both the plays, there are uses of the moon as a stage prop and there are other similarities in the language of the play. Though Lorca was Spanish and was killed in 1936.

There are other critics who find similarities between this play and Eugene O Neil's *Emperor Jones* (1920).

Unit 10(b): *Dream on Monkey Mountain*: Plot Overview

Prologue

On a Caribbean Island, the morning after a full moon, a common unnamed man rampages through the marketplace in a rage. Taken in custody for drunken misdemeanor and questioning, the man gets trapped in nightmares and hallucinations. Corporal Lestrade, a mulatto official, brings in Makak and questions him very methodically. Two other black prisoners already in cells, Tigre and Souris, try to undermine the corporal as he does his duty. The corporal grows frustrated and compares them to animals. Makak does not remember who he is or what he has done and can only say that his name is Makak and he lives in the Monkey Mountain. The protagonist foregoes his legal name (which he remembers to be Felix Hobain in the end of the play) for the derogatory and implicitly racial epithet "Makak, or "Monkey." There is a change in scene, and Tigre and Souris don judge's robes and the corporal defends Makak. The corporal presents the facts of the case to the judges. He reveals that Makak claims to have had a dream in which he was told he was a descendant of African kings. After telling them he has not looked at his reflection for thirty years, Makak relates a dream in which a white woman came to him. Parts of his life are slowly disclosed.

Part I Scene 1

In scene I, Makak is found by his companion Moustique in his hut, where he claims of having seen a white woman who calls him by his real name and urges him to come home. Moustique finds some ominous and unaccounted for things like a spider with an egg stack and a white mask. Makak asks Moustique to follow him to Africa, which he does without understanding.

Part I Scene 2

In the second scene, in his hallucinations, Makak becomes a saviour of his people, the man who will revive their culture, return them to the time before colonial degradation lead them out of the cave where they see only shadows, and bring them into the light where they will see the truth. He links himself to his ancestry, proclaiming himself "the direct descendant of African kings." And he will save his race in part because he is "a healer of leprosy"; he can cure the disease that turns its victim white with decay and causes him/her to disintegrate bit by bit. The people he seeks to lead have, like Makak, lost their identity-their names, their link with a tradition. He believes that he has become a prophet and a healer and therefore, walks amongst the common people healing and tending the sick.

Part I Scene 3

In the third scene, we are back at the courthouse, where the corporal Lestrade is again presiding over the trial. Many men and women come to testify about the various miracles promised by Makak. The scene changes back to Makak's hallucinations of his role as a savior. In this dream, his one companion, Moustique, wants to exploit his power, impersonating a prophet himself, ignoring Basil, the coffin-maker who warns him he will die and enraging the people of the island. When confronted by Lestrade and the Inspector, Moustique defiantly admits that his identity. The crowd turns against him, beats him up and condemns his life. In his dying breath, he reconciles with Makak and bids him to go back to Monkey Mountain.

Part II Scene 1

In the second part of the play Scene I opens in the jail cell. In this scene, Makak, Tigre and Souris confront Lestrade for allowing the crowd to kill Moustique. Lestrade defends himself by rationalizing concepts like rights and laws, but denies the convicts any. Makak offers to bribe Lestrade with money he has hidden. Tigre and Souris hear it and try to provoke Makak in killing Lestrade and breaking from the prison. Makak stabs Lestrade in a frenzy shouting that he is a lion and that he wants blood. He urges Tigre and Souris to drink the blood to defy

the racial bias against them which calls them apes with law. Then they start for Monkey Mountain or Africa, they are not sure. Lestrade rises clutching a towel to his wound and resolves to “hunt the lion” and exits with a rifle amidst drumming and chanting.

Part II Scene 2

In the second scene, Makak with his two felon followers is back in the forest. The felons believe there are money and a new life in Monkey Mountain. But Makak still seeks a way back to Africa. The felons resolve to lose themselves in Makak’s madness to survive and later exploit him. They start rhapsodizing about Africa to please Makak. They start talking about how God is like a big white man who frightens them. They also talk about ways of going home and how they don’t know how to reach home. Tigre tries to ask Makak about his supposedly hidden money and how it might help them go home. Makak rants about him being the King of Africa and in a mock ceremony, the felons crown him. The corporal catches them but apparently loses his reason. He rants about how he is back to his roots in the forest of Monkey Mountain, not in Africa. He announces that he loved Africa of his mind, but also the African half of his heritage, and apologizes to Makak calling him the old father. Souris believes them but Tigre tries to threaten them with a gun. Basil the coffin maker distracts him, while Lestrade stabs him with a spear. They march out putting Makak in front of their procession.

Part II Scene 3

In the third scene, there is a full indigenous ritual in which Lestrade convicts Moustique for abandoning their dream. The tribes people judge the politicians and world leaders and convicts them death sentences. Makak is punished for his false dream and the apparition of a white woman from his dream is beheaded to cure him of his madness. He finally announces that he is free and takes off his ritual robes.

Epilogue

In the Epilogue, things are apparently back to normal and all of them, dead and alive are back in the prison cells. Makak remembers his name – Felix Hobain and is bailed out by a now alive Moustique. Lestrade continues his verbal fight with Tigre and Souris and sets Makak free on account of this being his first offence. Makak decides that he will return home to Monkey Mountain.

Unit 11(a): Themes and the Use of Language

The principal themes involved in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* are that of colonialism and the consequences. The aesthetic of the postcolonial world identifies with the past which generally frame their literature – the past that includes the traditions inherited together with the customs acquired from the colonial masters. Thus, in one hand, the tone of the past assumes a self-deceit as they feel that they must abuse the colonizers in their own language while on the other hand, the postcolonial writers unashamedly appropriate and reform the hybrid language as an inheritance from their colonial past.

The play explores the ways in which racism defines an unlivable identity for oppressed people, an identity which pushes toward madness. At various points, Walcott makes this theme explicit. For example, he draws the epigraph for Part one from Sartre's prologue to *The Wretched of the Earth*: as a result of "always being insulted, "the self becomes" dissociated, and the patient heads for madness" (*Dream*, 211). Or, as the coloured Corporal Lestrade puts it later, in dialogue with the sinister Basil --"figure of death" (*Dream*, 208): "My mind, my mind. What's happened to my mind?" he asks;" It was never yours, Lestrade," Basil replies (*Dream*, 297). His mind, we may infer, was never his own because it was always defined by the attributed categories of racism, because his identity was always and necessarily a matter of what he was told he was.

Walcott devotes much of the play to exploring the absolute valorization of whiteness, and the absolute devaluation of blackness, in colonial racist ideology. For example, Moustique explains: "when I was a little boy, living in darkness I, was so afraid...God was like a big white man, a big white man I was afraid of" (*Dream*, 290). But Walcott is less concerned with the details of racist ideology than with the effects of this ideology on black people. When all value is associated with whiteness, blacks almost necessarily seek to repudiate their blackness-which is impossible. As Lestrade puts it early in the play: "is this rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad" (*Dream*, 228).

Unit 11(b): Hybridity and Caribbean Identity

Radhakrishnan argues that hybridity in the Caribbean is fundamentally different from hybridity in the metropolis. He writes: “whereas metropolitan hybridity is ensconced comfortably in the heartland of both national and transnational citizenship, postcolonial hybridity is in a frustrating search for constituency and a legitimate political identity” (Radhakrishnan, 753). He argues that before we can ask questions about what kinds of change are desirable in the postcolonial world, “we need to have a prior sense of place which then gets acted on by the winds of change” (Radhakrishnan, 765). Hybridity is, as it seems, the default situation of the Caribbean. Hybridity is consistent with the Caribbean consciousness because the aesthetic of hybridity involves a starting-point of double consciousness – an experience which mirrors that of postcoloniality.

It is difficult to approach the idea of reclaiming an authentic Caribbean self (or any cultural self) in a postmodern age without meeting the claim that notions of ethnicity and national identity are socially constructed. For the West Indian, the inherited African-ness together with the perpetrated European-ness feels alien. Thus the only recourse left is to identify the self as a curious blend – a hybrid, a fluid position where they have drifted and been placed as a shifting indexical. Their identity as a hybrid culture is an acceptance of what has come to be.

Walcott emits the ages of history to record the anguish of a race foretelling possibilities in the future when “niggers everywhere could walk upright like men” (*Dream*, 254). This significant statement made by the hybrid individual Lestrade, rejecting his negritude and dissociates himself from the ‘niggers’ – “If you apes will behave like gentlemen, who knows what may happen...” (217). Through Lestrade, Walcott himself wrestles psychologically with the contradiction of being “white in mind and black in body”.

Unit 11(c): Use of Creole

Creole itself epitomizes the manner in which hybridity can operate as a mode of resistance in the Caribbean. Edouard Glissant’s writing suggests the possibility of a creative space for the carving out of a Caribbean self between languages. In this case we can say, French and Creole. This would be a space which develops as a function of postcoloniality lived between two epistemes, attempting to create the hybrid Caribbean self between them. Creole also offers us a metaphor for understanding what is authentic about a constructed cultural voice.

One immediate observation on examining the Walcott dramatic corpus is that he seems to have found Creole indispensable, though he laments all the time the difficulties in its creative appropriation. For instance, there is the problem of intelligibility across national borders. Walcott's solution has been to theatrically dilute Creole forms to arrive at a median, "using syntaxes from various dialects" to articulate a "form that would be comprehensible not only to all the people in the region that speak in that tone of voice, but to people everywhere" with a knowledge of the basic component of the particular Creole (largely English and some French, in Walcott).

“Our bodies think in one language and move in another, ... the language of exegesis is English, that the manic absurdity would be to give up thought because it is white. ... What to do then? Where to turn? How to be true? If one went in search of the African experience, carrying the luggage of a few phrases and a crude map, where would that end? We had no language for the bush and there was a conflicting grammar in the pace of our movement. ... I was with and not with them. I watched them but was not among them. ... I am bound within them.”

(Dream, 31, 37)

Unit 12(a): The Dream Narrative

The deliberate technique of the dream as representative of the unconscious is therefore a particularly ingenious and dramatic device to explore and lay bare the angst-ridden sensibilities of the hybrid individual. It allows for the obtrusion of unconscious or suppressed urges: love/hate impulses, and all other attitudes that have been shaped or distorted by isolation or the memory of ancient grievances: childhood fantasies as well as mature instincts.

Unit 12(b): Reactionary Nativism and Return to the Roots

Reactionary nativism is a rejection of colonial racist ideology which presupposes the acceptance of that ideology. Put differently, reactionary nativism is the obverse of mimeticism - mimeticism being the formation of one's identity in terms of the concepts and values ascribed to one by one's oppressors. Mimeticism is what leads to racial despair, to the

sense that one has no value, as well as to the imitation of white culture, devotion to white law and rule, white ideas and language (i.e., ideas and language which are categorized by whites as superior and as their own even when those ideas had their origin outside of Europe).

Generally, the mimic seeks the respect of his/her oppressor. But here the imitation aims at love. And just as respect is definitive only if it comes from a white person, so too is love absolute only if it comes from a white person—a white woman, in this case. Thus, for Makak and for others whose identity has been formed by racism, the white woman becomes a sort of alternative to racial despair. To be loved by a white woman—that would mean one has value (cf. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 71).

The protagonist Makak attempts to return “home”. He starts for the memory of Africa which for him is the roots of his people, his culture. He is followed by his band dreaming the same dream of reclaiming the home. They finally realize their position as the hybrid, miming and appropriating their dual inheritance, illuminating the truth of their existence:

“Like the cedars of Lebanon
...The hand of God plant me
On Monkey mountain ...
And from that height
I see you all as trees,
...A forest with no roots. (“Dream”, 248)

Unit 12(c): Character Analysis of Two of the Principal Characters in *Dream on Monkey*

Mountain

In “Dream on Monkey Mountain,” the state of hybridity is experienced by the corporal Lestrade whom Walcott presents as partly painted white and black to affirm his hybrid identity:

...From the opposite side of the stage a top-hatted, frock-coated figure with white gloves, his face halved by white make up like Baron Samedi, enters and crouches behind the dancer. (Dream on Monkey Mountain, 212)

Lestrade accuses the blacks for their “rage for whiteness which does drive niggers mad”, but like Beminger, his very mind is a “colony, an island outpost of the hypocritical white”. Lestrade manifests clearly the desires, the anguish, the desires and the psychological needs that had been echoed in the earlier works of Walcott. Makak is described by Lestrade as a “being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of its own, and one whose very dream does not distinguish God as black or white. But he himself is described by Tigre as:

Neither one thing nor the next,
Neither milk, coal, neither day nor night
Neither lion nor monkey, but a mulatto,

A foot-licking servant of marble law. Lestrade, who before his ‘conversion’, had conceived of himself as a white man. He was a corporal, “an officer of British rule” and insistently asserted that he had the “white man’s law” to uphold. With a typical colonial attitude, he took perverse pleasure in restricting and penalizing the ‘natives’: “There’s nothing quite so exciting as putting down the natives.” It is in the forest, in the heart of darkness that experiences a kind of conversion, when he is confronted by death (also a man named Basil, the cabinet maker). Then and only then, does the ‘Mulatto’ acknowledge the blackness of his identity which he had hitherto rejected:

“Too late have I loved thee, Africa of my mind, ... I jeered these because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart o the forest at the foot of Monkey Mountain. I kiss your foot O Monkey Mountain...”

Lestrade moves from one extreme to the other – almost “one death to another”. His previous hatred of the blacks is now replaced by a hatred of the whites, because his act of self-discovery is still not complete. In the scene of the apotheosis, it is he who insists that it is necessary for Makak to kill the white goddess who is “the confounder of blackness”. He tells Makak: “She is the white light that paralysed your mind.” But having himself wielded the sword of a white man, it would appear that Lestrade, in a reversal of roles, would “chop off her head” in ‘canceling out of the white blood with the black blood.’

Lestrade deploys the rhetoric of nativism in order to support westernization. He urges, "Onward, onward. Progress" and, in keeping with his idea of progress, faces Makak toward the moon in order to "go forward". And as he approaches his conversion, Lestrade cries out to "Mother Africa, Mother Earth" ("Dream", 298); as he removes his clothes in preparation for his rebirth as African, he announces, "I return to this earth, my mother" (*Dream*, 299).

Character of Makak

Makak, is the embodiment of a more instinctive, more primitive, less rational being, could be the projection of Lestrade's black self – his black alter ego; so that goaded on by Lestrade, he commits the act and kills the white goddess. Makak also repudiates any visual self-representation, any image which will remind him of his blackness. Shortly after explaining that he lives "without child, without wife," hence without links to a family and to the culture which such a family might imply, Makak explains that he has also lived without an image of himself. When Makak looks at himself, he sees what a white racist sees. His identity, his understanding of the world, his evaluation of himself and of others, all have been determined by white perceptions and white ideas which serve to support racial hierarchies.

Walcott speaks about "racial despair", by which he seems to mean the sense of complete human denigration which drives Makak mad. He links this to the sense of being "rootless," of having no connection with a tradition which gives one personal value-even of having no home, of being a stranger in a home owned by someone else, by whites. After Makak is arrested Lestrade mockingly asks him: "Where is your home? Africa?" The implication is that he has no home, no homeland. Makak replies, "Sur Morne Macaque" ("Dream", 218), which he translates as "on Monkey Mountain" ("Dream", 219), but which means something more like "on despondent Makak"-he lives, in a sense, on racial despair.

In his delusions, Makak's first project is to return to Africa, to find his home, his "roots." Africa is, in effect, that magic root which he wishes will fix him deep in the soil of a homeland. But this project is always uncertain. Unlike Souris, when Makak looked at God, he saw not "a big white man," but "blackness". As Lestrade asks, "What did the prisoner [Makak] imply? That God was neither white nor black but nothing? That God was not white but black, that he had lost his faith? Or...or...what..." (*Dream*, 225).

When Makak begins to go mad, he hallucinates the visit of a white woman who loves him. This love inspires him, seemingly returns his identity. First, he explains, "she call out my

name, my real name" (Dream, 235), thereby restoring to him his culture, the sense of ethnic and racial connection he had lost. In addition, her love gives him pride in this heritage: "She say that I come from the family of lions and kings" (Dream, 236). Further Makak accepts the colonial view of black Africans as living in a natural state, at one with the jungle. His romantic nativism tends to be a romantic naturalism related to his new self-image as the (white) lion, king of the jungle. Specifically Makak urges Souris to find himself "at home" as "One of the forest creatures" and makes himself, in the words of Souris, "Half-man, half-forest" (Dream, 290, 289).

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Assignments

1. Analyze the character of Makak.
2. Write a note on the aspect of reactionary nativism in *Magic on Monkey Mountain*.
3. Write a not on the use of Creoles in the play *Magic on Monkey Mountain*.
4. Comment on the stagecraft in the *Magic on Monkey Mountain*.
5. Write an essay commenting on Huybridity and Caribbean identity in *Magic on Monkey Mountain*.

Block IV
UNIT 13
Postcolonial Literary Theory

Unit 13 (a): Introducing Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his *Decolonising the Mind*

The *idea* of an African literature – involving the nature of its contours, legacy and priorities – has occupied the imagination of the writers of the continent for quite some time. Often, critical narratives that weigh the impact of colonialism in terms of opposing arguments find reasons to question the imperatives with which a rival's case is made. The most visible and engaging dialogue on this subject has two of Africa's great literary pioneers taking their stands at opposite ends: Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Thiong'o's career as a creative writer – he began writing in English and then switched to Gikuyu after his novel *Petals of Blood* (1977) – and his engagement with contemporary cultural and political life in Kenya is also a carefully orchestrated overture, one designed to present the argument for Africa, one which he considers the most potent and relevant. While it would be grossly unfair to read Ngugi's graph as one of political posturing, it is undeniable that he has often presented his argument for a politically relevant aesthetics within parameters that draw in the volatile circumstances of his writing. It may appear that Ngugi's rhetoric is another version of the nativist argument mounted against the oppressive ideological structures in most anti-colonial situations; it is also likely that his array of powerful and loaded illustrations *against* the intellectual apparatus is an open- and- shut case for a form of revenge historiography. The issue, especially in Ngugi's case, extends beyond these frames of either/ or arrangements in terms of an isolated ahistorical sense, for, more than anything else, it is evident that his writing has to be accounted for in the context of the various stages of cultural and social conditions that impinged upon modern Kenyan history. In his 'childhood memoir' *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngugi, for instance, recalls the early influence of the national behemoth, Jomo Kenyatta, and his hold on the Kenyan imagination. The intermingling of the nationalist priority with the recognition that the imperialist machine worked in subtle, subterranean ways thus found in the figure of Kenyatta and the idea of linguistic conditioning a circumstance Ngugi considered fit for analysis. In his formative years, these two issues – nationalism and the agency of the English language – operated within the cultural and intellectual milieu and cut deep into the recesses of the Kenyan mind.

In his novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) Ngugi dealt with the pressures exerted by the complex of political and cultural forces, impacting and influencing the young minds of Kenya at a time when the hold of the colonial apparatus was seriously threatened by nationalist ideas.

Given such a focus, especially during the 1960s and the 1970s, Ngugi's priorities as a writer oscillated between his attempts to consolidate his creative energies through the registers of the nationalist narratives that were at play on the one hand, and the desire to formulate a vision that articulated an alternative poetics that could be identified as African.

By the time *Decolonising the Mind* was published his ideas had been entrenched in the rhetorical formats that placed the national question and that of cultural imperialism within clearly determined brackets. It is perhaps the presence of such an insistently emphatic nationalist tenor that found its way into Ngugi's narrative, but, more important, the implications for an argument against linguistic imperialism were so heavily factored in that the book moves beyond the mere either/ or rhetoric to engage the complex dynamics of Kenyan culture and society. We could perhaps see how the personal becomes the political in a climate of national uncertainty, and more than the negotiation between choices, the inscription of culture is writ so large on the face of the narrative that Ngugi constructs; it becomes impossible to access the question of language in isolation. The threads of this narrative lie within the memories of a culture that begins much earlier than its formulation in *Decolonising the Mind*. Well inscribed into the fabric of Ngugi's childhood, such a memory is a kind of trapping through which the register of nationalist pride finds a new avatar; it becomes a process of reading that questions the formative structures of a Kenyan childhood and the genealogy of colonial oppression within those very roots. Presented as a personal response to the time of his own childhood, *Dreams in a Time of War* is simultaneously a cultural document, a chronicle that sets for itself the agenda of a reorientation of history. It is interesting that Ngugi locates in the structures of contemporary knowledge production the circumstances of the nation's predicament, for in this intermingling of the personal, the social and the national, the paradigms of a material culture emerge with insistent force. In spite of the fact that the markers of Kenyan culture and the educational apparatus that served to indoctrinate the imperialist ethos upon the impressionistic minds of unsuspecting new learners faced no resistance, it is fascinating to see how Ngugi reframes the matrix of language to argue his case. While the articulation of the situation in the memoir and the insistent political rhetoric in *Decolonising the Mind* are placed in generic frames that are not necessarily aligned, the point that he seeks to drive home is the same in both the texts.

Consider the following passage from his memoir where he revisits the language question and the education apparatus in which he was a participant:

“In the new Manguo school, English was still emphasized as the key to modernity, but, whereas in the Karing’ a Manguo, English and Gikuyu coexisted, now Gikuyu was frowned upon. The witch hunt for those speaking African languages in the school compound began, the consequence rising to bodily punishment in some cases. A teacher would give a piece of metal to the first student he caught speaking an African language. The culprit would pass it to the next person who repeated the infraction. This would go on the whole day, and whoever was the last to have the metal in his possession would be beaten. Sometimes the metal would be inscribed with demeaning words or phrases like ‘Call me stupid’. I saw teachers draw blood from students. Despite this we were proud of our English proficiency and eager to practice the new language outside the school compound.”

(2011: 177)

The desire to exhibit excellence to a public that would recognize their expertise as English speakers not only projects the internalization of the colonial rhetoric of cultural sophistication; more important, it reduces nation/language debate to kind of comic theatricality. As a narration of a process of learning, this episode brings the institutionalized apparatus to notice, but seated within his admission of the desire for public performance is the threat that Ngugi articulates so forcibly in *Decolonising the Mind*.

It is necessary to situate Ngugi’s argument for linguistic emancipation within the broader context of the colonial imaginary and its impact beyond the revisionist debate that seems to characterize most readings of the African interrogation of the English language in the continent. At the same time, this question has not occupied the African intellectual space in some kind of stasis, but has changed its contours as the decades following decolonization in the continent have shown, and significantly, Ngugi himself has tried to accommodate the elastic nature of the phenomenon by making space for the new politically and critically charged aesthetics that cannot quite be addressed by the nativist logic that seemed to have framed the anti- colonial discourses in the middle of the twentieth century. It is another matter that *Decolonising the Mind* argued for the need for a socially cultivated response to the question of linguistic oppression, and while the topical emphasis of the text may have

subsided a little in the cosmopolitan traffic that has moved into the fabric of contemporary Africa, the persistence of the psychic impact has acquired a more insistent character.

In this sense, the argument forwarded in *Decolonising the Mind* has established itself beyond the circumstances of its formulation, notwithstanding the topical pressures that impacted it at the time of writing. In spite of the colonial takeover of the African mind ostensibly moving to the background of contemporary politics and society, the question of orientation and articulation remains as pertinent as ever. This is remarkable because the modes of cultural orientation today can hardly be kept distant from the process of transmission that impacts the African world. Ngugi is alert to this dynamism and acknowledges as much, but at the same time his understanding of the contemporary situation is informed by a sense of the danger that indigenous languages face, more so when speakers are dwindling and the practices are threatened by institutions more powerful and attractive in what they promise and facilitate. In an interview with Angela Rodrigues taken more than two decades after the publication of *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi not only displays his alertness to the changing circumstances in a world that is more inclusive and interpenetrative than it was ever before but also shows how the nuances of an increasingly fluid global culture have not been able to blunt the language issue out of contention.

It is important that we create a model through which people might be able to improve and develop their actions. There is nothing wrong with European languages and of course there is nothing wrong with African languages either. I don't see that cultures must live in isolation. Every culture should borrow whatever is best and progressive in other cultures, including European ones. Progress comes through contact. The problem in the past was the advent of colonialism, since some cultures were dominated by others, which is not a fair exchange: domination and subjugation induced psychic submission from the part of the dominated.

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The language question in Africa, thus, occupies more than the political imagination or the dangers that accompany its institutionalization through the educational apparatus; in fact it is closely allied to the issue of 'psychic domination' Ngugi refers to earlier, an insidious mode through which the registers of a non- native culture make its way into the consciousness of the people.

At the same time, the question of language would perhaps be better approached if it is not confined to an instrumentalist perception of knowledge production. The failure of the

Western imagination to perceive the feasibility of structures other than the Enlightenment-induced reason-centric progress model is what African thinkers like Ngugi are trying to interrogate. At the heart of this contention lies the argument of Chinua Achebe, often projected as being in *opposition* to Ngugi's, that more than language, it is the overhauling of the storytelling tradition, among other things, that is under serious threat from the colonial exercise. This is a fascinating engagement where two of Africa's most perceptive minds approach the subject of colonial influence in their own distinctive ways. It may appear, as it often does, when we place these thinkers' arguments on the subject of language side by side, that there is a serious difference that shows evidence of potential reconciliation. At one level, the arguments are irreconcilable, for while Achebe's proposal for the effectiveness of the English language (or any non-African language, for that matter) as the medium of cultural transfer has found assertion in a variety of quarters, Ngugi has also pursued the need for an aesthetics that fosters the African imagination through its own linguistic structures with remarkable conviction and intensity. Yet these twin positions have a greater, larger objective ahead, and it is that concern for all things African – the mind, culture, traditions, practices and ways of living – that lies behind these thinkers' concern for the ethos of the continent they come from.

Unit 13(b): Reading *Decolonising the Mind*: the argument for an African point of view

Ngugi's opening position regarding the purpose of the book – that its aim is to foreground the debate on Africa's destiny – is structured to draw in the politics surrounding the continent's culture and history into the ambit of literary production and practice. If the insistence on the debunking of misconceptions is anything to go by, Ngugi's engagement can hardly be seen in impersonal terms; rather, it is in those spaces where his personality and situation are most vehemently invoked that his assertion and argumentative logic strike home with greater force and conviction. In the great imperialist narrative holding sway over the European imagination, the registers are enhanced by intellectuals who hail from Africa no doubt, but their allegiance to a received cultural idiom considerably distances them from their roots. This is one of the inevitable dilemmas Ngugi has to deal with throughout the book. The process and consequence of such an exercise involves the flattening of circumstances by the requirements of preset Western narratives. In elaborating the argumentative strategy adopted in this book, Ngugi makes it clear that his study is designed to consider the contest between the imperial mind and that which such an apparatus aspires to overwhelm: 'I shall look at the

African realities as they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on the one hand, and a resistance on the other' (2). The adoption of the European work- ethic and a culture of governmentality decidedly un-African in character strikes Ngugi as signal modes of domination, the challenge to which is not only extremely difficult to mount but at most times very inadequately framed. It is this internalization of a culture which has acquired local tentacles that presses home its claim over an emerging intellectual consciousness. As such, such a mind projects the imbibed set of cultural norms as the best feasible option for a continent coming into its own. At the other extreme of this orchestrated and designed move lies the resistance imperative whose character cannot be defined within the parameters of 'order' that the European imagination projects as *essential* to any credible intellectual formulation.

For Ngugi the designation of the resistance movement as one body itself may not be sustainable, yet there is no denying that questions relating to the imperialist process attest to the presence of a persistent African current that refuses to be cowed down. The problem, however, does not concern the current of resistance as such, but its capacity to overwhelm the dominant imperialist mind occupying African thought. The severe critical material serving as the bedrock of the European narratives regarding Africa makes the process of undoing the misreading all the more difficult. This is because the issue at hand is no longer one of replacement of one structure by another – it is the curative potential of imperialism that is so difficult to disengage from the rhetoric of the continent's 'essential' character. Ngugi goes on to define the far- reaching impact of imperialism on the human psyche in the following terms: 'Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today. It could even lead to holocaust' (2). How does this process penetrate into the deep recesses of a community's character? The question does not have easy answers, but Ngugi suggests that it could perhaps have something to do with 'the cultural bomb'. This concept of the cultural bomb is a telling metaphor aimed at encapsulating the dilemma confronting the African circumstance in the wake of colonization.

“The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples'

languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life.”

(3)

In effect, Ngugi reminds us, a collective inferiority complex takes over that community or people who submit to the imperialist rhetoric unquestioningly. The colonial apparatus and its deep impact over a people's mind is not easily overturned. This is because the colonial agency flattens out the multidimensional character of a country's culture, engaging instead with a set of features that appear to the colonized as viable and preferable. Such an engagement penetrates into the psyche of the people and renders their 'tradition' redundant. It is a process that the imperialist condition inevitably brings in its wake. Ngugi is not quite suggesting the need for an overhauling of the community's collective memory; rather, his examination of the people under the weight of an imperial sky is what presents interesting, fascinating insights into the ways in which cultures are threatened long after the actual presence is gone. The argument for an African response to this onslaught is not quite mounted on a platform that matches the imperialist mode of indoctrination or domination; in fact, a sense of underachievement marks these structures of doing and learning, for the competition for cultural ascendancy is not a matter of unsettling the structures of local knowledge but one of bringing the politics of the imperial condition to the surface. As Ngugi recognizes, under no circumstances can an erasure of the imperial machinery or apparatus be arranged for or considered feasible. His focus, actually, is on the cultivation of a cultural ethic that enables his fellow people to understand the implications of accepting and propagating the line bequeathed by the colonial order, a line, however locally framed and contextualized, that remains dedicated to its original purpose of imperial culture.

Decolonising the Mind is, in this sense, a search for an argumentative frame that would not only intellectually assert itself but also showcase the African cultural mind without having to compete for it.

Unit 14(a): Doing literature in the African languages: the Afro- European challenge

Ngugi's examination of the imperialist influence on the cultural and political ethos of Africa is framed through the register of language. So crucial is the role of language to the condition of Africa's destiny that the argument for an engaged debate on this must first overwhelm the

parameters that have already determined the way the knowledge question has been raised and addressed intellectually. Is this the mark of a dominant European rhetoric that refuses to relax its grip on the African imagination? In framing such a question and shifting the argumentative structure to a Western mode of articulation, Ngugi invites us to first attend upon the circumstances in which language, knowledge and identity came to be interlinked in the Africa debate from the nineteenth century onwards. It is not that Ngugi pursues a historical trajectory alone to orient his language thesis in order to suit his argument; rather, his exposition bears out the need for the interrogation of an imperialist design that has come to occupy centre stage in African politics, culture and, more crucially, policy-making. At the same time, his appeal for an involved, sustained examination of the structures of knowledge production is never posited upon a 'neutral' axis, not that there can ever be one, but he makes it quite evident that his is a political response, one that he hopes will present the psychological takeover of the African mind as unambiguously as possible. Such a position is not only interesting for the possibilities it opens up for Ngugi; it is simultaneously a strategy through which the colonial politics behind the language question finds a framework for effective articulation. If the question were to be confined merely to the rhetorical overlay that influenced and determined governmentality, the impact on the recognized African aesthetic would perhaps have been considerably less, but as Ngugi points out, that is hardly the case. The reach of this design is remarkably wide and deep-set, and more than being confined to an instrumental or functional ambit, its mark is starkly evident in the way emerging African writers came to situate themselves in the new, cultural world where the continent's tradition was being reframed and reset for international consumption. The following passage, carrying as much angst and helplessness as it does, brings to notice this crucial condition of language choice in terms of the African writer's priorities at a time when such decisions made significant difference to the way the people came to consider themselves.

“African countries, as colonies and even today as neo- colonies, came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe: English-speaking, French- speaking or Portuguese speaking African countries. Unfortunately writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic encirclement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of imperialist imposition. Even at their most radical and pro- African position in their sentiments and articulation of problems they still took it as axiomatic that the renaissance of African cultures lay in the languages of Europe.”

Is Ngugi too vehement and blunt in his framing of this language issue in the context of African literary practice? At least, such has been the argument by many of his fellow practitioners, the most celebrated of them being Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi's situation as writer and his own practice have been consistently submitted to serious scrutiny on this count. Achebe's enunciation of the issue, albeit, or seemingly, tongue-in-cheek, narrows Ngugi's logic to a kind of an overt dramatization of the subject of the colonial process in which language becomes peripheral to the condition of knowledge. For instance, in an essay titled 'Politics and Politicians of Language in African Literature' Achebe begins his thesis by placing it *against* Ngugi's argument, not only suggesting but also emphasizing that his position on the matter – that European languages are deeply embedded in the cultures of Africa, and hence articulation through them is inevitable – accommodates the complexities of the situation much better than Ngugi's, which is considerably partial. Here is Achebe on Ngugi and the politics of language in African literature:

“Ngugi's book argues passionately and dramatically that to speak of African literature in European languages is not only an absurdity but also part of a scheme of Western imperialism to hold Africa in perpetual bondage. He reviews his own position as a writer in English and decides that he can no longer continue in the treachery. So he makes public renunciation of English in a short statement at the beginning of his book. Needless to say, Ngugi applies the most severe censure to those African writers who remain accomplices of imperialism, especially Senghor and Achebe, but particularly Achebe, presumably because Senghor no longer threatens anybody!

Theatricalities aside, the difference between Ngugi and myself on the issue of indigenous or European languages for African writers is that while Ngugi *now* believes it is *either/or*, I have always thought it was *both*.”

(2010: 96–97)

As an indictment of Ngugi's argument, Achebe's reading could not have been more blunt and scathing, yet it is evident that even in his insistence on the cosmopolitan pressures that occupy the practice of writing in the contemporary world, including that emerging from Africa, the logic forwarded by Ngugi retains its value remarkably well. The frame with which Achebe circumscribes the debate, for one, does not adequately address the questions raised by Ngugi in *Decolonising the Mind*. Second, Achebe's reading is more designed to justify his own choice of language and marked by his own logic of articulating the Africa question.

Ngugi's argument, on the other hand, addresses a much- wider ambit, interrogating not just the circumstances in which the European takeover of the African mind was affected and brought about; it also offers a reading of the possibilities that have been challenged by this process. It would not do, not at least in the way Achebe does, to dismiss Ngugi's concern by a backhand sweep, and read the issue of language choice as involving both inevitability and discretion for the writer. For Ngugi, the issue of language choice by an African writer is primarily an illustration of the embeddedness that is characteristic of the psychic hold of Europe over the African mind. In other words, he does not settle the debate with this issue alone. He offers a map of the intellectual dimensions of a phenomenon whose impact stretches far beyond the writing that has emerged from the continent; it concerns the impact on cultures that have struggled to formulate its *resistance* within parameters that would make sense in a vocabulary the West is accustomed to. As such, while the criticism of Ngugi's tactics and argumentative logic has considerable bite, there is no denying the significance of his intervention in the language debate in the African context, and more so in terms of the postcolonial situation, where his reading has registered an interesting aspect of the psychic politics that governed colonial experience in the continent.

As a take- off point, the 1962 conference in Kampala, Uganda, tellingly titled 'A Conference of African Writers of English Expression' (to which he takes strong exception) presents Ngugi the perfect opportunity to ground his argument. Certain factual circumstances relating to his situation, which he elaborates upon at the beginning, are important here. The early 1960s was seen by many English- educated Africans (Ngugi himself was one) as the time when new possibilities of writing and reading were opening up for both reception and participation in worlds that moved beyond the continent. Ngugi alludes to the windfall that followed the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the interest which the conference was generated in both young, aspiring writers like Ngugi and the now- settled ones like Achebe. Under these circumstances it was only natural that the conference came to be seen as an event of seminal importance in the African literary environment. While Ngugi acknowledges the impact of this conference on the imagination of the writers and participants, he drives home his argument about the vulnerability of such assemblies as the rhetoric behind the writing can very often occupy the mainstream, rather than those issues which deserve much closer attention. For Ngugi, the question that required addressing was that of language. He contends that the language question never quite figured in the conference: it was only the paradox of furthering African life and culture through the medium of 'borrowed tongues' (Ngugi 1986: 7) that found favour in the debates.

If such prioritization of peripheral circumstances relating to the subject of African literature offered Ngugi the opportunity to take on the logic of the exercise, it also made sense to highlight the fundamental issue at the centre of the argument: that of language. After all, Ngugi argues here, how could any discussion on the articulation of culture simply bypass the centrality of language? In this context, he writes: ‘The question was never seriously asked: did what we wrote qualify as African literature? The whole area of literature and audience, and hence of language as a determinant of both the national and class audience, did not really figure: the debate was more about the subject matter and the racial origins and geographical habitation of the writer’ (6). The argument that European languages, of which English was the most potent and pervasive, would *enrich* the worldview of an emerging African mind and facilitate correspondence with the world appeared to Ngugi to be considerably ‘feeble’ (9). The reference to literatures in non- African situations and the pursuance of a thesis following the adoption of European languages for the making of literature thus do stand before Ngugi’s scathing attack on it. As Ngugi’s position is amplified further, it is evident that his matrix is not confined to the *making* of literature alone; it probes deep into the logic and sustenance of traditions that Africans have come to situate and understand as their own, and it is these cultural structures, he ardently holds, that are now under serious threat from the experience of colonialism.

Unit 14 (b): The storytelling tradition and the onslaught of imperialism

In Section III of the first chapter of *Decolonising the Mind*, ‘The Language of African Literature’, Ngugi elaborates on the process through which the storytelling tradition impacted everyday life for the different communities in Africa. Although his register is the one from which he himself drew sustenance, it is emblematic of the mode of cultural transfer that prevailed across the continent and embraced the lives and practices of the people in a variety of ways. Most African writers, including those writing in English and other European languages, have drawn on the rich repository of folklore and the oral traditions to augment and present their narratives to the world. Such exercises cannot be explained away in terms of technical insertion or narrative innovation, for they refer to ways of life whose marks are evidenced in these linguistic representations. The close and often inevitable interconnections between the folkloric resources and the narratives that have come to constitute what we today recognize as the modern African literature are thus reflective of deep-rooted cultural practices, whose forms are indigenous to the continent. In these structures of knowing and

transferring, the role played by language was seminal – for it was not just the instrument of dissemination; it was a mode of living determining the nature of the values one attached to the condition of existence. How storytelling left its mark on the responses of the listeners in African society is borne out by the following passage where Ngugi highlights the nuanced character of the process:

“There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones.

We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had suggestive power well beyond the immediate lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own.”

(11)

As a pointer to the ingrained cultural mode that storytelling functioned as in African society, this passage brings to our attention the difficulties of accommodating this experience within a European linguistic registry. For Ngugi, the process of cultural engagement was in no way dissociated from the conditions of *living*, and acts of listening and weaving stories came naturally in an environment where modes of knowledge transaction followed routes that were considerably removed from those to which the European mind was either accustomed or privy to. This distance was more than a matter of employing the imaginative resources in particular ways; it involved forms of understanding and internalization that no European language could adequately address. This seems to be at the heart of Ngugi’s contention here. It is with considerable angst that he places the matter of the English language in perspective: ‘The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. . . . English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow to it in deference’ (11). In the course of his argument Ngugi goes on to emphasize the European model of knowledge acquisition as the inevitable and natural structure for such exercises. In the changeover from

the education scheme, one in which the African child was accustomed to and had been bred upon, to a system that valued terms of culture that were imported from Europe, the colonial child lost much more than his language. The storytelling tradition to which his forefathers was accustomed to now was subjected to a deliberate form of undervaluation; its marks could be felt everywhere, in every field, argues Ngugi in his scathing thesis against this colonial imposition of an alien tongue that robbed people of their ability, not just to communicate but more significantly to knit thoughts in their own language.

The failure of the writers to perceive the politics of this linguistic invasion and its impact on the African psyche has cost the continent in a big way, in a way whose dimensions are almost immeasurable. While Ngugi recognizes that this anglicized literary development has facilitated the projection of an image of *African* culture to the rest of the world, the damage done to its mind by the imperialist rhetoric was immense. The takeover of the African mind by the European imagination has, in his view, orchestrated a fiction that is now understood by many Africans trained in the Continental process, as both valid and reasonable. One example of this is seen in the clever dissection of Africa into substructures that are then subjected to close reading in ways that explored modes of cultural practice within paradigms determined by Europe. However authentic such narrative designs may appear to be, Ngugi contends, the distance between the vernacular world and the European linguistic repository will always remain, and no literary tradition harnessed on English or other foreign languages can ever represent the complexities of African experience. Driving home this point further, Ngugi looks at the English- language literary writing as pretentious:

‘The literature it produced in European languages was given the identity of African literature as if there had never been literature in African languages. Yet by avoiding a real confrontation with the language issue, it was clearly wearing false robes of identity: it was a pretender to the throne of the mainstream of African literature’.

(22)

The issue at hand, however, is not simply, or literally rather, confined to the choice of language. What Ngugi insists relates to the determination of a tradition that would challenge the imperialist trajectory of knowledge production that has taken such deep root in Africa. The achievement of such a purpose is not an easy one and involves much more than the determination of the writer or the facilitation of cultural transmission. It is crucially linked to the ways of knowing, to the devising of ways through which the various traditions of African

peasantry are brought to the foreground. The process, Ngugi acknowledges, is both complex and daunting. It involves the recovery of registers of culture that bear African modes of living to a modern audience; more important, it is connected to the development of new paradigms of writing that would not only argue for and represent the African worldview and the African mind in all its myriad hues to an audience within the continent but also take this practice to a much- wider international reading public.

Unit 14(c): Theatrical language and the African mind

The case for an alternative mode of reception and critical engagement for the understanding of theatrical practice in Africa is made in the second section of *Decolonising the Mind*, 'The Language of African Theatre'. Ngugi charts the complex participatory dynamics that involves man, community and environment in these performances, very often making such exercises inevitable conditions for the purpose of knowledge transmission and education. Under what circumstances this process operated and affected the African mind constitutes the subject of his thesis in this section. However, Ngugi is not engaged in chronicling the historical movement of these indigenous traditions per se; rather, his objective is to demonstrate the threat faced by such practices and the need for the African people to work towards a resistance mechanism to mark its development and sustenance in an increasingly globalized environment. At one level, Ngugi's aim is to facilitate a recovery of that tradition from the morass in which it is currently placed; at another, his argument cuts deep into the damaging designs of the colonial regime, reducing it to an artefact, an almost redundant relic of very little contemporary relevance. Although his thesis is mounted on the experience of dramatic practice in Kenya, much of what he argues holds true for similar exercises across the continent. It is interesting to see how he structures the oppositional logic between the colonial and the native worldviews to showcase the distinctive character of indigenous theatre. Such a structure is driven by the imperative of projecting the dramatic practices in Africa as engagements involving the fundamental circumstances of *life* and *living* , implicating both individual and society as opposed to the staged form of representation that characterized theatre in the West. It is evident that Ngugi's argument requires him to reduce the rich heritage of European theatrical traditions to a single trajectory, to one identifiable structure through which he can *other* Africa's rich cultural repository in such simple terms. In a way, such a logic of reductive enunciation is convenient for an argument of the kind Ngugi is proposing here, for his objective is not a comparative analysis of the culturally diverse

theatrical practices in Africa and Europe but to bring to focus the damage wrought by the imposition of foreign tongues in the field of theatre. Let us consider the following elaboration of dramatic practice in Kenya and the challenges it faced from imperialism:

Drama in pre- colonial Kenya was not . . . an isolated event: it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities. It was also entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment; it was moral instruction; and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival. This drama was not performed in special building set aside for the purpose. It could take place anywhere – wherever there was an ‘empty space’, to borrow the phrase from Peter Brook. ‘The empty space’, among the people, was part of that tradition.

It was the British colonialism which destroyed that tradition. The missionaries in their proselytising zeal saw many of these traditions as works of the devil.

(37)

The lines of opposition are clearly drawn here. The destruction of the tradition to which he refers to here, as he goes on to demonstrate in the course of the chapter, was effected not merely by the missionaries; it was subjected to both critique and ridicule through the engagement of the colonial administrative apparatus, on the one hand, and the supplantation of European models which included Shakespeare, on the other. Not that the colonial administration had a smooth sail in all of its designs, hardly so, but it is equally evident that the native modes were difficult to sustain in the context of the sophisticated and well-orchestrated onslaught unleashed by the colonial regime. The fight for the control of the Kenyan National Theatre in the 1950s and 1960s became a sticking point in the entire debate on the language question, and in spite of the rhetorical war that was waged between the adherents of English and native languages, the matter was much more complex than what it appears to be. In order to exemplify his point further, Ngugi draws on his own personal experience of composing and developing *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* – a play written in collaboration with Ngugi wa Mirii and dealing with the ‘proletarianisation of the peasantry in a neo- colonial society’ (44) – to argue that the issue at the centre of all this is language. How does one communicate the ritualistic patterns of communal life, so deeply embedded in processes of social engagement through a foreign tongue? More than a question of vocabulary or the resourcefulness of a given language, what is at stake here, in his view, is the transfer of cultural idiom. And this, he contends, cannot be done in a non- native

theatrical environment. Song and dance, two important performative functions of everyday African life, serve as agencies for Ngugi in this context. How does the African mind respond to song and dance? Are they external to the experience of living, or do these forms authenticate the essential character of an African way of looking at life? These questions occupy Ngugi as he negotiates the subject of theatrical purpose in the context of the language problem.

“Even daily speech among peasants is interspersed with song. It can be a line or two, a verse, or a whole song. What’s important is that song and dance are not just decorations; they are an integral part of that conversation, that drinking session, that ritual, that ceremony. In *Ngaahika Ndeenda* we too tried to incorporate song and dance, as part of the structure and movement of the actors. The song arises from what has gone before and it leads to what follows. The song and the dance become a continuation of the conversation and of the action.”

(45)

The emphasis on an inclusive theatre, a theatre that follows a ‘collective’ imagination – Ngugi cites Augusto Boal’s concept of ‘the theatre of the oppressed’ (57) to press his argument home – is not quite about the communication of a particular content as such. It involves the process through which a seamless, unaffected experience of community life is brought before the audience. And, undoubtedly, this is best done in a language that the community is at home in, one which makes representation *authentic* for the way it enables both identification and understanding for the audience.

Unit 14(d): Writing fiction in Africa: problems and possibilities

Fiction has been the most visible, the most impacting and the most popular of the literary forms to occupy the African aesthetic imagination in the twentieth century. In the final part of the book, Ngugi looks at the pressures and problems that have accompanied the contemporary novelist in his journey towards the fulfilment of the African dream. The Marxist trappings of Ngugi’s argumentative logic come to the fore here when he recommends Lenin’s *Imperialism* along with Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* as essential reading for anyone interested in understanding African literature. Such an orientation, where class position is brought to the centre of colonial policy, is not just a strategy associated with the reading process; it is closely aligned to the circumstances in which the novel could be or was

being produced in the continent. In Ngugi's view, the problem was both historical and cultural. When the novel form arrived in Africa, it was consolidated and rich, and it had become one of the thriving forms of literary representation in Europe. It was not possible for any African writer to either emulate or develop a practice modelled on the example that Africa offered. Then, there was the further problem of accommodating content within the matrices of the genre, much of which either demanded a more nuanced approach or called for the development of an alternative writing paradigm that emerged as distinctively African and, as yet, international. One of the telling examples of this issue, for Ngugi, can be seen in the way the African mind responds to *nature*, which is not only different from the standard European mode of evaluation, but also in the strategies the African novelist takes recourse to for the purposes of fiction. Ngugi explains the circumstances which have become part of every African's worldview and which no writer can afford to ignore: '[Nature], largely unknowable and largely hostile, could be faced through a collective response and a cohesive social order; I could be cruel in some of its practices, but also humane in its personal relations and its awareness of mutual accountability among its members. This world was reflected in the literature it produced with its mixture of animal characters, of half- man- half- beast and of human beings all intermingling and interacting in a coexistence of mutual suspicion, hostility, and cunning but also occasional moments of cooperation' (65). As an account of the genesis of the overwhelming presence of myths, stories and folk resources in the modern African novel, the preceding reading is indeed very significant; however, the objective of such an emphasis is not merely to draw out the distinctive character of the genre in its African avatar but rather to highlight the crucial role played by language in the development of an African literary tradition. How would a language unaccustomed to the ways of living in these circumstances adequately serve as the instrument of cultural transmission? In seeking to establish the fact that language and imperialism were closely tied up and had deeply impacted the nature of African literature, he considers two factors to have been of damaging influence in the growth of the African novel. The first, he suggests, was the interconnected pressure exerted by the designs of a group of missionaries whose foray into the world of the indigenous imagination was effected by the novel. Early novels that contributed to the development of the African novelistic tradition followed the didactic purpose model to its logical conclusion; it thus created a form of generic blanket across the creative terrain, preparing a roadmap for subsequent practitioners. The ideological imperatives behind such a process soon became evident, but the infiltration into the aesthetic possibilities of the genre kept its hold for a considerably long time. The second factor was the establishment and

growth of universities, more specifically the emergence of English as the coveted subject and the syllabus it followed, for herein lay the seeds of a tradition that came to see the adoption of a non- indigenous tongue as natural. At the heart of this realization rested a paradox, towards which Ngugi is quick to draw our attention to. While the novel as a form facilitated the freedom with which the new practitioner could go about his business, this liberating process also turned out to be the most challenging limitation. To overcome the pressures of the didactic model thus constituted an important task for the young writer; this was because the entire process of production was closely tied up with the imperialist strategy of knowledge transmission. Ngugi talks of his own fascination for the English language in his formative years and the pursuit of a career in this language, as opposed to the fact that his mother-tongue Gikuyu, and it was in his own language that he felt most at home. But feeling at home is one thing and working in a tongue that had its own creative and critical vocabulary was another. It is in this respect that he writes about the struggle that confronts all African novelists, he himself being embroiled in the process. It is a situation that can hardly be accessed from the outside or even considered from the perspective of the existing European model. This was because it was not possible to subscribe to the European structures of knowing and responding to experiences that carried its own distinctive cultural weight. More than the transmission of content that was technically African, the task of the novelist involved the development of a vocabulary that would reflect his worldview yet do so in a form that has strong, inevitable European roots. For the African writer bursting onto the scene in the 1960s, this was indeed a challenge of tremendous proportions, and one that has shown no signs of relenting:

But the biggest problem then, and what I think is still the biggest problem facing the growth and development of the African novel, is finding the appropriate 'fiction language', that is with fiction itself taken as a form of language, with which to effectively communicate with one's targeted audience: that is, in my case, the people I left behind.

There were two inter- related problems of 'fiction language' vis-a- vis a writer's chosen audience: his relationship to the form, to the genre itself; and his relationship to his material, that is to the reality before him. How would he handle the form? How would he handle the material before him?

(75)

How contemporary writers take up the cause of the African novel is, however, dependent on conditions that extend beyond the logic of individual choice. Modes of production, the

feasibility of translation, the success or failure of publishing houses in Africa and the growing international glare – these are some of the factors that will determine the shape of the genre in the continent.

As Ngugi brings his argument to a close in *Decolonising the Mind*, the unshackling of the imperialist hold on the African mind remains the most daunting challenge. Subsequent critical attention has veered away from the kind of direct interrogation of the colonial effect on the psyche, focussing instead on social issues to engage the complex dynamics of life experience in contemporary Africa. Yet Ngugi's argument has not lost its bite or its relevance, even as there is no denying that the circumstances in which literature is now being produced concern issues beyond the terms set for Ngugi's debate in this book.

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Assignments

1. Critically comment on the concept of Decolonizing the Mind
2. What are the problems of writing fiction in Africa and also comment on the possibilities.
3. Comment on the aspect of theatrical language as propounded by Wa Thiong' O in *Decolonizing the Mind*.

UNIT 15

Unit 15(a): Introduction to Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*

The arguments for the overthrow of colonialism, found in Frantz Fanon's bracketing of liberation and nationalism, are notions that situated the West as a confirmed antagonist, but this process also involved an act of self- definition, one through which the new nation would distinguish itself. In the context of the decolonization wave that changed the international dynamics in the twentieth century, Fanon's framing of political imperatives for the new country was perceived, and also taken to be, relevant to the task at hand. Not everyone bought the argument that he proposed, but that he was able to bring to focus the issues that a new nation faced was something on which there was wider agreement. It may appear that Fanon's emphasis on violence as a vital agency in the road to freedom is a literal call to arms, but if such an impression has accompanied more engaged readings of his political philosophy, then it sidetracks the question of culture that he holds so close to his worldview. In articulating the need for *difference* Fanon turns the Western rhetoric on its head where savagery is situated as part of the exercise which fuelled colonialism in the first place. Given the circumstances in which he presented his argument, what he demonstrates as a historiographic strategy in *The Wretched of the Earth* – that the Western nations colonized other peoples only to elevate them from the morass of savagery – this conditioning of the imperialist power structure in *A Dying Colonialism* is a reversal of terms:

“In a war of liberation, the colonial people must win, but they must do so clearly, without ‘barbarity’. The European nation that practices torture is a blighted nation, unfaithful to its history. The underdeveloped nation that practices torture thereby confirms its nature, plays the role of an underdeveloped people. If it does not wish to be morally condemned by the ‘Western nations’, an underdeveloped nation is obliged to practice fair play, even while its adversary ventures, with a clear conscience, into the unlimited exploration of the new means of terror.”

(24

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This passage from *A Dying Colonialism* opens the West/colonized space wide, but it is interesting to see how Fanon construes a politically driven ethics in distinguishing the underdeveloped countries from its advanced counterparts. Often, Fanon has been located and impressed upon the theoretical scene of postcolonial space as a champion of violence, especially in the light of his somewhat belligerent call for the exercise of power by the colonized people in the fight against imperialism. There are reasons behind such a placement, but any reduction that reads into his argumentative design only the narrative of violence

would miss out on seminal questions that Fanon has brought to bear on the contemporary critical practice. Fanon's occupation of an ascendant position in postcolonial discourse owes, to a great extent, to his earmarking of parameters that any engagement with the experience of colonialism would require. In the first place, what Fanon does more emphatically, and without ambiguity, is to open up the critical distance that exists between the colonizer and the colonized. Whereas this distinction is placed in the context of the political space in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he explores the psychological circumstances in which the black/white dichotomies are played out in the public space in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Is it the pressure of performance that conditions the world of the black man in an environment where the worldview of the white exerts itself in various ways? This is one of the questions that Fanon persistently asks in his writings that aim to unravel the psychological contours of phenomenon that is not so easily realized or understood. When he sees the function of language as a dominant determinant, one whose pressure occupies the mind of the marginalized individual, Fanon's reading of 'inferiority complex' brings together the social and the personal onto the same plane, whereby he is able to reposition the black as one who is threatened by the call of assimilation. This is a response that the black man is under immense pressure to give in to, for when one who has had the experience of having been in an urban location, he permeates the sense of this very world to his fellow people back *home*, for the 'black man who has been to the *métropole* is a demigod' (3). The pressure to display this experience and distinguish himself from his own environment and, at the same time, contest the gnawing sense of inferiority in a white world exerts great demands on the black man to perform in ways that show his ability to adjust himself. Fanon draws out these nuances with remarkable insight, positioning the complexities of the individual caught in the pull of social and psychological pressures within the context of colonial experience. This act of situating of the black individual within the twin ambits of colonialism and performative expectation is of great importance to Fanon's reading of that mind which is compelled to address questions of value beyond the world of his own making. He puts the issue quite clearly at the opening of *Black Skin, White Masks*:

“All colonized people – in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave – position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become.”

(2-3)

Yet Fanon's importance as a psychologist reading the *other* in terms of the black man's placement in the West- controlled world has seen responses that situate him in different ways. David Macey, for instance, looks at the difficulty of categorizing Fanon within the critical space where his insights are referred to for both analysis and critique. This is because Fanon does not hold the black/white divide as stark a frame as often it is made out to be; rather, as we can see in his reading of Jacques Lacan's analogy of the human subject in psychoanalytic discourse, the shift from the cultural to the personal draws up a trajectory which does not follow the conventions associated with its framing. Macey's projection of this difficulty of situating Fanon within an easily accessible disciplinary structure also sheds light on the complicated nature of the world that he took as his subject, for Fanon also revisited the spaces of those disciplines whose threads he brought to bear on his reading of colonialism. Discussing the problematic nature of Fanon's situation as an analyst in terms of the bracketing to which he has been subsequently subjected, Macey (2010) writes of the *embarrassment* he has become:

“Embarrassing to psychiatrists because he uncovers their science's contribution to one of the more unsavoury episodes in its history, embarrassing to at least some Martinicans because he is perceived as a traitor, and embarrassing to France in that he is a stubborn reminder of *un passe qui ne passe pas*, the Fanon of *Peau noire, masques blancs* is also embarrassing to cultural historians and critics in that he is so difficult to categorize. He fits uncomfortably into the category of ‘progressive psychiatrist’, though he certainly was one, but is almost as difficult to include in any history of the black ‘French minority’ and its cultural- intellectual history.”

(38)

The claims that are designed to question Fanon's method, for instance, cut through the imperialist legacy of many of the disciplines that Macey lists here as part of the discourses his writings engaged with, and more than his own situation as reader of the colonial situation, it is the exposure of the faultlines in Western knowledge production procedures that has made it so difficult to locate Fanon as a theorist within the conventions he drew upon. There can, of course, be other brackets one may have recourse to in placing Fanon, but that he can be situated as a political commentator, or psychiatrist, and more significantly as a postcolonial thinker, attests to the continuing relevance of his writings for a world mired in antagonisms

whose essential paradigm of hostility and distrust has not shown much change in an increasingly globalized environment.

Unit 15(b): The Colonial World, Violence and Political Responsiveness

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* opens with a hyperbolic expression: 'decolonization is always a violent phenomenon' (27). The context in which Fanon projects violence as the *essential* condition informing the process of colonial departure is something that unfolds in the course of the argument, but this engagement acquires significance for another reason: that, based on pronouncements like this, Fanon and, the theoretical spin-off, Fanonism are associated with a form of aggressive response that seems to operate by leveraging itself on this being not merely necessary, but almost an inevitability. How far is such an impression grounded on the examination of Fanon's analysis of colonialism? Or rather, we could ask, why does he invest so much upon the thesis of violence and its agency for the process of freedom from colonial authority? Both these questions are related, though they point towards, first, the reading of Fanon's theory of violence and, second, his mode of reading colonial experience. For a book structured into five sections followed by a brief conclusion, the considerably long first part called 'Concerning Violence' is designed not merely to initiate the terms of the discussion; it is also meant to serve as the index of critical engagement, the matrix through which Fanon examines and situates questions of resistance and freedom in the context of colonial rule. It is fascinating to see how the process of decolonization, for Fanon, involves a complete overhauling of the system that the colonial rulers had put in place, for in the acceptance of traces lies a form of agreement with all that the new nation will be fighting against.

Fanon's position, at one level, shows a strong anti-colonial current, but it would not be fair to leave it at that, for behind such an understanding we have the legacy of colonial pressure that reduced lives and cultures to conditions of abjection. At another level, however, Fanon's emphasis on the rejection of the colonial apparatus entirely emerges as a mode of political knowledge, a condition with which governance in the new nation is to be done. There is thus a two-way move behind Fanon's reading of violence in the first section of *The Wretched of the Earth*: it is a violent wringing away from the chains of colonialism, a movement by force and will that would make this history ineffective in the shaping of the nation's present, and moreover, it is a strategy for the future, one where the norms and rules of the colonial state will be rendered ineffective.

The change that Fanon sees or, rather, argues for in the postcolonial state derives from a logic of opposition, and it is this countering of the colonial machinery that requires a complete reassessment of values. It is necessary to recognize the thrust of Fanon, his argumentative focus and his insistence on the function of 'violence' in the nation that comes into being through the process of decolonization. In the very first sentence of the book, Fanon draws on the cognates of the word 'nation' thrice and emphasizes that irrespective of the nature of the designation, no new state can afford to cling on to the culture of colonialism. What he is arguing for is not merely separation from the colonial power that controlled it but an overhauling that would result in the 'whole structure being changed from the bottom up' (27). He recognizes that the 'change' being referred to cannot be a one-way process: it would impact the colonizers as well. It would alter the dynamics of international politics and relations in ways that cannot quite be placed into a formulaic straitjacket. At the centre of Fanon's proposition that violence is an inevitable corollary to the new nation's emergence in the world lies the acknowledgement of the oppositional paradigm, and it is only through a face-off of the opposed forces that decolonization can take place. It is interesting to see how Fanon locates decolonization as a *practice* that displays mutual recognition of the oppositional engagement, and one that operates not in one fell moment, but over time. In spite of the fact that the moment of freedom from colonial rule in its realized form is fixed in time, it owes much to a historical process: 'Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them' (28). How does this opposition work? And to what extent can the colonized people challenge this pressure of the colonial order? Fanon's argument is that the process of release from domination involves, among other things, the understanding that there is a problem with the mode of governance, with the way the world is seen. This 'problem' is the one that comes from the colonial worldview, and when he argues for violence being inevitable in this experience of decolonization, he is also referring to the rejection of the vision that colonialism imposed upon the natives. In other words, the new nation must challenge the political grammar of the colonial world, and for this, the native who looks forward to a postcolonial experience must be ready for a counter-response. Fanon's examination of the colonial world shows an engagement with the forms and agencies through which authority and power are exerted. This exploration of the colonial order and its structural character is aimed at demonstrating the ground where the oppositional framework between the colonizer and the native was evident in practice. And it is this analysis which

marks the reasons behind the argument that sees violence as an inevitable condition of the decolonizing process. What is the nature of the world under colonial rule? Fanon begins his examination by considering the role played by the instruments of the power elite and fixes his attention on two institutionally sanctioned agents: the policeman and the soldier. In states where governance is aimed at furthering the development of its citizens, the policeman and the soldier serve as agents of peace; they contribute to the maintenance of law and order. When it comes to the colonial world, these very personnel become symbols of fear and they are seen as figures employed for the purpose of domination. What Fanon is trying to emphasize here relates to the mode of governance in the colony where the norms undergo a complete reversal. That is why he states, quite unambiguously: 'In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go- betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression' (29). As agents of the power elite, the policeman and the soldier serve to maintain the divide between the 'settler' and the native – it is interesting to see how Fanon makes use of the terms of the colonizer and the settler depending on the scope of the example or the nature of emphasis – but they are not mere symbols; they practice a much deeply set structure that spreads across the colonial world. And it is this world that sees the native and the settler occupying positions that are starkly opposed to one another. This opposition is not one of political hierarchy alone; it is, Fanon believes, a design that runs through the very fabric of that world and impacts the various layers of existence. In arguing that these are two different worlds – that of the settler, prosperous and comfortable, and of the native, rundown and impoverished – Fanon is actually pointing towards a distinctive difference in orientation. One of the early examples that he gives in this context relates to the associations of space, the metaphor being that of the 'town', different because of its inhabitants and also because of the way things are perceived and seen. At a consistent level, then, Fanon's argument is directed towards a psychological inculcation that emerges out of the practice of colonialism, and it acknowledges the force of the apparatus that makes this philosophy of domination effective. The town of the settler 'is a well- fed town, an easy-going town; its belly is always full of good things' (30). Its opposite, the town of the native, on the other hand, is 'peopled by men of evil repute' (30). As the opposites pile up in a contrasting series of have and have- not terms, it clear that Fanon is pushing the argument to an extreme structural condition, one which follows the 'principle of reciprocal exclusivity' (30). In the context of the proposition that violence is an inevitable consequence of the native's response to colonial experience, this grounding of oppositional values is of considerable significance. Not only does such a reading situate the settler as part of a

privileged category, but it also locates the native as one whose actions are compelled to be reactionary. Why is the native always on the edge? Fanon argues that the reason for such a position owes to the settler's customization of the colonial space in a particular format, and that is where the structure of 'values' operates in a different way. For the settler, the native cannot be conditioned into the format that is brought into the colonial world because values do not apply. What the settler does is to demarcate the colonial space in terms of both the political and the cultural matrices, each informing the other: 'All values, in fact, are irrevocably poisoned and diseased as soon as they are allowed in contact with the colonized race. The customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths – above all, their myths – are the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity' (32). The focus on the distinction between the two spaces, in terms of both the imagination that guides the ruling elite and the perception that is projected as actual, is crucial to Fanon's thesis. For at the centre of the argument lies the philosophy that it is the Western model of knowledge production that is valid, and that even after decolonization has taken place, the correct method of assessing the state of progress is through the one practiced in the settler's own country. Violence, for Fanon, does not merely involve the exertion of force. In the ways in which the West imposes its cultural vision upon the colonial space, that is where violence can be seen to leave its mark: 'The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him' (33).

Unlike the system of values imported from the settler's own land, the colonial world does not offer the native much of a choice when it comes to morality. This is because the colonized people start from a situation where they can only react to what is firmly in place: the colonial apparatus that has organized everything into neat, formulaic compartments. Everything that the native had believed in or subscribed to was overwhelmed by the institutional logic of colonialism. In effect, the native has only one moral goal to pursue: the ouster of the colonizer. Fanon's pursuit of the oppositional frame where he places the settler and the native in situations of contest and confrontation does not permit the overlapping of priorities. One can ask questions of such an emphasis on this extreme structural arrangement whereby the roles can only be adversarial in nature, but Fanon's argument does not quite look at the issue as an engagement or a contest for its own sake. His focus is on the fact that the colonizer has no right or authority to impinge upon that space which is not his own. As such, any structural intervention of a political nature is a violation; it is a form of violence upon a people whose

world is altered because of such movement into their space. Essentially, then – and this is Fanon’s contention – the violation of that space, which is designated as ‘colonial’ because of the ‘foreigner’ (31) coming in, is an act of violence. It is not merely a contest between points of view, nor a matter of debate between parties arguing from different perspectives. The entry of the colonizer is a life- changing event. It affects the world of the native, resituates him in a new involuntarily cast relation with an ‘other’ and compels him to respond to a programme that he was doing well without. For Fanon, this form of entry into the ‘colony’ is an event that can only be withstood and overcome by the application of the same measure. In the context of mid- twentieth- century politics and international dynamics, the call for such a resistance model was not without identifiable reference markers on the ground, but the fast- evolving global situation in subsequent decades has invited critical responses to the framework proposed by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* . The topical aspects of Fanon’s argument, like any other contextually cushioned idea, refer to conditions that have not remained the same, but the significance of his reading of colonial practice has not diminished over time. What he is arguing for, then, if we broaden the scope of his subject, is the recognition of worlds for what they are, and irrespective of how dominant and exciting a cultural or political paradigm may be, it does not sanction its imposition upon another. Once a framework is imposed from the outside, the affected people have no alternative but to resist. Resistance or, rather, its organization into a sustained and effective process is not an easy one. The first problem that surfaces comes through in the form of the ‘colonialist bourgeoisie’, a group that draws on the mode of knowledge production of the colonizer, and strives to inject the same into the native population. The situation is aggravated because the state of the people across the colonial world is not the same. There are pockets where the native’s naivete is exploited by this group, and an internal contest of ideas is evident, where the cause of the individual is pitted against the larger good of the community. Culturally trained to carry forward the colonizer’s perspectives on knowledge and civilization, this group infiltrates into the social vacuum in the colonial world and engineers a process of seeing that is alien to this land. Fanon sees this as a self- defeating exercise: ‘The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonial intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course’ (36). The emergence of the native intellectual at the forefront on the new thought paradigm in the decolonization process is a cause for concern. For in spite of his neat rhetorical packaging of cultural resources, he does not see things outside the frame of the

colonial bourgeoisie. His siding with the colonized people does not alert him to the fundamental question, that of colonialism, and his response to the immediate situation misses that which is most relevant to the issue at hand, and, in Fanon's words, he forgets 'that the defeat of colonialism is the real object of the struggle' (38). It is evident, argues Fanon, that the native intellectual, for all his insight and acumen, is not equipped to address the problem. The crux of the problem, then, is the identification of 'truth' with the idea of nationalism. It is interesting to see how Fanon draws up the map of his argument by referring to conditions of knowledge that enables him to situate the ouster of the colonizer as an unquestionable fact. In his argument, what needs addressing is the mechanism through which the people can recognize the truth of colonial rule, not because this is what they have been tutored to feel but because this is a matter that cannot be hidden, and it is this attachment of truth as value that must be brought home to the native population. In this context, Fanon writes: 'Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behaviour: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for "them" '. This process of associating truth with the nationalist upsurge is aimed at suggesting that only the recognition of such a condition unsettles the logic of the value system that is based on the Western model of knowledge.

In the eyes of the colonizer, truth is related to his understanding of the world, and this, as Fanon has already argued, is a partial reading of the situation at hand. Does the erstwhile colonial world change with the removal of the occupier? Decolonization involves the engagement of a much wider paradigmatic shift, where the residual energies of the colonial apparatus must be dealt with. The matter is not simply confined to the physical departure of the colonizer from the occupied land. What about the mind of the native, how far has the colonizer's programme infiltrated and shaped his outlook on things? There are two simultaneous movements as the process of decolonization gets under way. The first is the contest within the colonial world between the native intellectual and those members of the population who question the validity of such thinking, and the second is the nationalist upsurge which drives the native towards the overthrow of the colonizer. While the intellectual energies are directed towards the validation of the thought regime of colonialism, the institutional machinery serves to propel the native in his quest for freedom. The exertion of the colonial machine thus works to remind the native of his oppressed status, and this is a reminder that strikes him in his face every day. 'The native', writes Fanon, 'is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor. The symbols of social order –

the police, the bugle-calls in the barracks, military parades and the waving flags – are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message “Don’t dare to budge”; rather, they cry out “Get ready to attack” ’ (41).

The colonizer preys on the cultural matrices of the native population by engaging their ‘emotional sensibility’ (44), and it is through a projection of practices that have a rich heritage that the distinction between the native and the settler is enhanced further. What Fanon argues for is also a call for awareness, for the native cannot just remain confined to the world whose roots lie in the community’s cultural past; this is because the reality of colonialism is too stark to be addressed through processes that originated to function differently. For the native, this is a kind of discovery: ‘The native discovers reality and transforms it into his plan for freedom’ (45). The priority for the native population is to direct this energy in such a way that it corners the colonizer to withdraw. At the same time, Fanon argues that there is a problem with uniformity in these matters, as all do not agree on the nature of the operation. This is due to two reasons: first, the peasantry is primarily isolated from these moves, and second, the elite that is in control of the resistance would employ rhetoric no doubt, but when it comes to action, there is a gap. The problem arises because the political parties and the intellectual elite fail to justify their aggressive vocabulary in practice. This disconnect between the precept and its realization does not quite settle down the nationalist impulse that runs through the population in the lead up to the actual decolonization. In effect, there emerges groups that are at cross-purposes: the national parties, for instances, are driven by its urban-centric philosophy, and the peasantry, not so well organized, contests the usurpation of the land through more aggressive means. How is reconciliation to be achieved under these circumstances? Fanon cites the example of Algeria to mark out the following principle, and without it being properly acknowledged, no freedom can be achieved: ‘colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence’ (48). The note here is both prescriptive and cautionary: in other words, without challenging colonialism for what it really is, ‘violence in its natural state’, no release is possible. Fanon makes violence a synonym for the colonial state, and questions have been asked as to its sustainability as an argument, more so than its viability as an option. It would be appropriate to see his views on non-violence in this context, how he situates it and what his reasons are for abandoning it; it goes without saying that he is interested in the change of order in the colonial world but believes that freedom must be wrested, and it can only be done by violence. ‘Non-violence is an attempt to settle the colonial problem’, writes Fanon, ‘around a

green baize table, before any regrettable act has been performed or irreparable gesture made, before any blood has been shed' (48). This positioning of non- violence as a mode of engagement *prior* to the advent of colonialism cancels its force as an agency of resistance. Such a framing of non- violence has resulted in Fanon being seen in antithetical terms to Gandhi, in whose hand the potency of this method was fully realized in India's fight for freedom. Fanon places non- violence in the prehistory of colonialism and does not envisage any possibility of its practice having impact on the process of decolonization. The contexts are different, no doubt, because he is referring to the African experience, and Gandhi's example was effective in India, but that is no reason for such a blanket assessment that places the logic of non- violence only in a situation of innocence. It is clear that Fanon's reading of the colonial experience is directed towards an acknowledgement of the *essential* difference between the two sides and that the relation is one of opposition. There is a logic behind the argument that in the settler and the native we have two irreconcilable categories, because with the takeover of land by the colonizer, the adversarial dimension starts operating and affecting the relationship. The experiences of decolonization have not always followed the straight oppositional frame in twentieth- century history, with each situation reflecting the complicated inter- political dynamics involved in these cases, and Fanon has come under considerable questioning for his overarching framing of the nationalism issue. Neil Lazarus, for instance, highlights the problems associated with Fanon's take on the subject, given that he is looking at a frame conditioned by the experience of immediate history, but leading through it to a process of understanding that would respond to questions beyond the given context. In an essay (titled 'Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Question of Representation in Postcolonial Theory') meant to address the nationalism question and its combative character in the Fanon argument, Lazarus observes: 'Some contemporary theorists of "postcoloniality" have attempted to build upon Fanon's denunciation of bourgeois nationalism. Yet Fanon's actual standpoint poses insuperable problems for them. One fundamental difficulty derives from the fact that far from representing an abstract repudiation of nationalism as such, Fanon's critique of bourgeois nationalist ideology is itself delivered from an alternative nationalist standpoint' (162). The accommodation of Fanon in the space of postcolonial theory has remained an exciting subject ever since the discipline emerged as a potent theoretical paradigm. This issue of seeing Fanon and his ideas as part of a chronology he did not invent nor anticipate is one that has seen considerable exchange of fire, and some of it has to do with the programmatic reading of Fanon within a predetermined bracket. If Fanon offers a position on the subject of colonial

practice, its merit derives from a logic that sustains itself. This is evident in the way Fanon takes the condition of violence, for instance, as an inevitable agency of change. Often, this emphasis has been read as a *call* alone, but behind such an insistence lies the recognition that the colonial state cannot be overwhelmed by rhetoric or narrative projection of alternative governance structures. It is in this context that he lambasts the native intellectual for his inability to position himself adequately in a situation where fence-sitting cannot engineer the colonial regime's downfall. Why is a colonial population so restive during the initiation of the decolonization process, why is it that the people see violence as the only mode of conduct? Fanon lists two reasons for this: 'The uprising of the new nation and the breaking down of colonial structures are the result of two causes: either of a violent struggle of the people in their own right, or of action on the part of surrounding colonized peoples which acts as a brake on the colonial regime in question' (55).

It is interesting to see how Fanon situates the condition of violence as a process that can surface from both internal and external factors. While the resistance movements in other colonial regimes can be a source of inspiration, and egg on the natives to aspire towards that which has been achieved elsewhere, it is the volatile situation within that makes resistance inevitable. It does not quite matter that the settler *understands* the native, for in the existing scheme of things, Fanon argues, only the overthrow of the regime will restore equilibrium. The colonial state, then, so long as the settler is in control, remains in a situation of consistent tension. The regime co-opts members from the native population to fragment and dissipate the upsurge, but, rather than assuage the resistance, such designs only enhance the resolve, and the outpouring is evident in the violent response. Somewhere along the line in his argument, Fanon seems to lose the plot in this discourse on decolonization, for in comes the analysis of Russia and Cuba as influences – 'Finally there is the well-known myth of liberating movements directed from Moscow' (58) – and the capitalism/socialism axis rears out to inject another dimension to the debate. Such reasoning does not take away from Fanon's insights into the *essential* oppositional framing of the colonizer and the colonized, but as he looks at the state of the new independent country, international politics and its structuring of governance policy forms a part of the way he charts the lines of history. Khrushchev and Castro are now key players; Fanon is at his sarcastic best when he magnifies the Russian leader: 'For what Mr Khrushchev shows the colonized countries which are looking on is that he, the mojuk, who moreover is the possessor of space-rockets, treats these miserable capitalists in the way they deserve' (61). The options for the new state, or the one on the way to independence, are limited, as from the struggle within to what the

international picture presents, it is something that cannot be settled easily. It is here that the new nation must gear up to find ways to express itself unambiguously. Expected to sit on the sidelines of unfolding history, the newly decolonized state has the choice of adopting the principle of ‘neutralism’ (65), a position of non- commitment that surprise the social and capitalist blocs. But, as the evolving political picture from the mid-twentieth century has shown, the situation is much more complicated than a question of choices before the new state.

While the situation internationally is complicated enough, there are issues within that demand the response of the native. Towards the end of the first section of *The Wretched of the Earth* titled ‘Concerning Violence’, Fanon presents a series of characteristics of violence, including an incisive reading of the subject in the international context. The ‘international’ mapping primarily covers the Eurocentric imagination and the play of wealth in the making of culture in places that have not had the experience of colonialism. Building upon the contrast between the social imperative and the capitalist engagement of resources through exploitation, Fanon highlights the instrumentality of wealth and the violence through which it buoyed the Western economy. The capitalist pressure on the economic and social structuring of ‘culture’ thus owes to a history of deception, the measure of which is yet to be fully addressed: ‘Colonialism and imperialism have not paid their score when they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories. For centuries the capitalists have behaved in the underdeveloped world like nothing more than war criminals’ (80). Once the colonial regime makes way for the new nation, the challenge does not end; the task of the nationalist involves, among other things, questions of identity, responsibility and political maturity.

Unit 16(a): The Marks of the Nation: Principles and Reality

When the colonial machinery makes way for the local government to take over the land and its resources, the first question that requires addressing is that of political order. How is the political structure of the new nation going to be like? What would the people’s perspective be on the subject of governance? These, and many other related issues, emerge alongside the nation. As Fanon points out, it is convenient to adopt a frame which has been in place, but it can end up enhancing the divide further: ‘The great mistake, the inherent defect in the majority of political parties in under- developed regions has been, following traditional lines, to approach in the first place those elements which are the most politically conscious: the working class in the towns, the skilled workers and the civil servants – that is to say, a tiny portion of the population, which hardly represents more than one per cent’ (86). The divide

that runs across the nation follows parameters that do not match – the rural space rundown by the townsfolk, for instance – and as the contest for power gets more intense, there are measures foisted that do not face the situation on the ground. Instead of considering the state of the new nation, the political parties are led by visions that are not concerned with reality:

“The political parties do not manage to organize the country districts. Instead of using existing structures and giving them a nationalist or progressive character, they mean to try and destroy living tradition in the colonial framework. They believe it lies in their power to give the initial impulse to the nation, whereas in reality the chains forged by the colonial system still weigh it down heavily. They do not go out to find the mass of the people. They do not put their theoretical knowledge to the service of the people; they only try to erect a framework around the people which follows an *a priori* schedule. . . . Even after the struggle for national freedom has succeeded, the same mistakes are made and such mistakes make for the maintenance of decentralizing and autonomist tendencies. Tribalism in the colonial phase gives way to regionalism in the national phase, and finds its expression as far as institutions are concerned in federalism.”

(90)

Fanon sees in the power tactics of the government of the new nation traces of the colonial mode, features which do not display the responsibility that the people expect. He argues that there seems to be an agreement, not a literal one, but one evident in the adoption of governance principles that marginalize those who present alternative views on the subject of progress. He cites the example of the trade union culture that permeates the nation’s space in the new independent state, with the antagonist now emerging from within. Using the term ‘lumpen proletariat’ to designate that group of people who go against the regime, Fanon sees in this formation a resistance that does not follow the rationale of accepted or recognized behaviour. And it is this development that hits at the very edifice of the structure of governance: ‘The constitution of a *lumpen proletariat* is a phenomenon which obeys its own logic, and neither the brimming activity of the missionaries nor the decrees of the central government can check its growth. This *lumpen proletariat* is like a horde of rats; you may kick them and throw stones at them, but despite your efforts they’ll go gnawing at the roots of the tree’ (103). Fanon has another name for such emergences; he calls it the ‘strategy of immediacy’ (105). There is a lot of cross- referencing and to- and- fro movements in the argument that Fanon develops in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Discussion of the nation and its

imperatives is replete with insertions that look at the ways in which the colonial regime functions and the strategies that are put in place to offset the native resistance. One of the key points to emerge in the course of the second section of the book titled 'Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses' relates to the elaboration of the processes of liberation, alongside which run views on the nature and problems of the nation. Consider the following passage, where he looks at both, the question of freedom and that phase of domination that is now in the past: 'The struggle for national liberation does not consist in spanning the gap at one stride; the drama has to be played out in all its difficulty every day, and the sufferings engendered far out-measure any endured during the colonial period' (112). What is required, in the struggle to forge the people's identity and cultural consciousness, is a movement from 'total, indiscriminating nationalism to social and economic awareness' (115) but the task is not an easy one. Mature intellectual leadership must address the issues that plague the people, wrest itself from the pressure of the colonial worldview and anticipate the conditions that demand attention. Fanon believes that there are lessons to be learned from the experience of colonialism, and that is the lesson which calls for execution of the ideal, the consummation of the dream in actionable terms. He ends the second section by emphasizing the need to draw upon the knowledge of the struggle to reframe the forward march of the new nation, where the key word is 'violence', but here it is transformed into an example for action: 'Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there's nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of trumpets' (118). It is clear that the focus of these lines is on what the *struggle* against colonialism can impart to a nation coming into being.

In the making of the nation, there are bound to be 'tragic mishaps' (119), and it is for such eventualities that the people must prepare themselves. National consciousness is accompanied with its inherent faults, not because the ideal is improper but for reasons that are related to inequality, disharmony and lack of adequate understanding. Highlighting the enormity of the problem that the new nation confronts, Fanon writes: 'National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been' (119).

All responsibility for the lack of political acumen does not lie with the colonial regime or its legacy. Fanon is unsparing in his attack on the new nation's middle class, which is steeped in a kind of 'wilful narcissism' (120). What appalls Fanon is that a segment of the power class

behaves in the fashion of middlemen, and coupled with a lack of awareness of the country's resources, policies are designed to serve interests that do not address the genuine needs of nation building. Ironic, and biting in his criticism of what he calls the 'national' bourgeoisie, Fanon sees in these actions the replication of the Western model, the very structure that decolonization was supposed to dismantle. The training of governance, thus, derived as it is from the West, only complicates the need of the new nation: 'In the colonial countries, the spirit of indulgence is dominant at the core of bourgeoisie; and this is because the national bourgeoisie identifies itself with the Western bourgeoisie, from which it has learnt its lessons' (123). In the shaping of the nation, the management of the country's resources and capital leads to an increase in the class divide within different parts of the population: Fanon delineates some of the pockets where the consolidation of human agency is centred, identifying the divide that is brought about by the adoption of strategies that are detrimental to nation building, and as the formations position themselves on different sides, there is the structuring of the landed, the national and the native along lines of opposition. In spite of the generalized tenor of Fanon's reading of the experience of colonialism, there is no doubt that his argument is drawn from the situation of the African continent, and *The Wretched of the Earth* must be approached with that in mind. As the new nation attempts to come to grips with the unfolding situation, the complicated ground situation surfaces as a great challenge. Prior to decolonization, the energy of colonized peoples was directed towards the overthrow of the foreign regime, but once freedom frees the nation, questions of governance and important policy matters demand mature leadership, vision and immense responsibility. In the context of how things appeared to him in the mid- twentieth century, Fanon did not see things moving towards the ideal with ease; rather, it was fraught with great difficulty: 'African unity, that vague formula, yet one to which the men and women of Africa were passionately attached, and whose operative value served to bring immense pressure to bear on colonialism, African unity takes off the mask, and crumbles into regionalism inside the hollow shell of nationalism itself' (128). What was a source of strength during the resistance to colonialism also holds its inconsistencies, and potential frames that can arrest the process of national consolidation involve religion and racism. And to make matters worse, the Western intellectual machinery foments the fires of unrest by capitalizing on the ineptitude of the leadership. The picture is pretty bleak. The widening divide between the people and the power elite, the distancing of the rulers from the ground and the recourse to rhetoric against the colonial past further aggravate the situation: 'There no longer exists the fruitful give- and- take from the bottom to the top and from the top to the bottom which creates and guarantees

democracy in a party. Quite on the contrary, the party has made itself into a screen between the masses and the leaders' (136–137). This disconnect is both symptom and cause of the malaise that affects the nation's functioning; there is protectionism, use of institutional force in the name of governance, flight of capital, monopolization of wealth in the hands of the few and stagnation of the economy. The few sincere and capable ones within the ruling regime find themselves marginalized in a race for individual growth and power.

Fanon looks at the condition of the new nation through an African lens as he sees the failure of the party structure and the impending collapse of the state machinery. Instead of the party operating to bridge the distance between the government and the people, it comes to serve more as an 'information service' (146), and as such, when any party member is present in public, rather than inspiring confidence, there is a sense of fear and attrition. Much of the angst that the people harbor is muted, and it is not surprising that some resort to praise to ward off any danger that the party member may inflict on them: 'The political party in many parts of Africa which are today independent is puffed up in a most dangerous way. In the presence of a member of the party, the people are silent, behave like a flock of sheep and publish panegyrics in praise of the government of the leader' (147). This is a turn of events that was not anticipated during the struggle against the colonial regime. For the nation to leave its mark upon history, the 'pitfalls' must be overcome and the onus is on the leader as well as the party, the former demonstrating by example and the party serving as the guide for the people to 'express their will' (149). Fanon sees the party taking on a more proactive role in facilitating the mind of the people, and in this pattern that he envisages, a decentralized ethos would educate the people of their rights so as to make their participation in the condition of nation making a completely interactive and involved process:

"To educate the masses does not mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people."

(159)

The pressure on the leader and its implications for governance in the new nation have continued to engage the critical mind so many years on across the political spectrum. Connections have been made between the Fanon take- on leadership and a Marxist legacy

that he is supposed to have drawn on, and it is on the basis of such pointers that his responses to authority and administration have created the space for critical debate. Vikki Bell (2010), for instance, looking at the book after half a century, sees the scope for situating Fanon thus: ‘*The Wretched* as a whole sees Fanon employ what some have regarded as a racialized Marxism, in which he considered himself, at least in parts, to be “stretching” Marxism to fit the colonial context in which racial division rather than class structures all, so that it is the sustained experience of racism that will explode in violent revolution’ (9). More than revolution or a radical revamp of the political world in Africa is not a ready-to-hand affair, and Fanon realized that very well. In considering the pitfalls of nationalism, he was also examining the dynamics of social progress, and in his attempts to situate the political in the context of the many worlds within Africa along with the different states of social movement within the continent, he draws out the problematic nature of the task at hand. That national identity and social equilibrium were not always parallel and equal conditions in a newly decolonized land was obvious to Fanon; what he also highlighted was driven by his insights into the fissures that characterized the diverse spaces of the African world. Irrespective of the traces of socialism that have been brought to light by Fanon scholars in the decades subsequent to the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*, the correspondence is not a straight one. There is no denying that Fanon was critical of the capitalist imperative that fashioned the Western response to both governance and economic empowerment, but at the same time, he did not buy the socialist argument in the inherited form. What he sought to envision was more related to an understanding within the new state, an understanding that would bear out the nuanced but important conditions that affected a particular people. For Fanon, the onus is on the leadership and the potential of the population to respond to the demands of the national culture. It is not about an absence of thought or volition, but rather related to the question of harmonizing the multiple but cross-directed political and social trajectories for an adequate response to the situations in Africa:

“The African people and indeed all under-developed peoples, contrary to common belief, very quickly build up a social and political consciousness. What can be dangerous is when they reach the stage of social consciousness before the stage of nationalism. If this happens, we find in under-developed countries fierce demands for social justice which paradoxically are allied with often primitive tribalism.” (164)

The priority of a country’s leadership is to take the people forward in a collective thrust so that the ‘nation’ identity is shaped in a representative way. For this to happen, things must fall

into place in ways that accommodate and address issues that are not confined to particular situations alone. This is a form of answerability to history in which the entire country must participate: 'The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women. The collective building up of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale' (165).

Unit 16 (b): National Culture and Roadmap to Civilization

For a nation to come into being, mere rhetoric cannot bring about the desired change. Fanon calls for a discarding of passivity, but more than that, he argues in Section IV of *The Wretched of the Earth* that it is participation of the people of Africa that will bring about actual change. 'On National Culture', as the fourth section of *The Wretched of the Earth* is titled, is, in other words, a stock taking of sorts. It is a revaluation of the situation in the African context where, though the traces of colonialism are evident in institutions and different modes of social practice, the nation cannot keep that same tune going. For 'revolution' to take place, Fanon believes, there is a great need for cognizance of the realities that confront the people. When the colonial regime is operational, the objective is to propose a kind of history that sees the culture of the native as both inferior and inconsequential. The problem is not merely one of challenging versions of the past. It is about the method of locating a culture in history and what such an engagement entails for the people of a country trying to realize its potential. What now seems commonplace – that the narrative of the West superimposed the rhetoric of a 'legitimate' culture upon an unsuspecting native population – serves as one of Fanon's take-off points here, but he is simultaneously conscious of the dangers that a completely nativist foregrounding of culture can inaugurate, and that is why we see a kind of balancing of priorities as he chalks them here. Arguing for a need to affirm the unity of a kind that would project the African mind above its individual constituencies, Fanon says that the responsibility for such an exercise is on those who are contesting the colonial worldview: 'For colonialism, this vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals – in short, the Negro's country. Colonialism's condemnation is continental in scope' (170).

When he pits the African continent as a consolidated space, Fanon is conscious of the fact that the diversity of the different groups and the ethnicities which constitute it is being demonstrated by the European mind as its weakness. This has to do with a form of

historiography that is imposed on the people, a charting of the past which places the colonizer as the initiator of 'real' history. The matters are not merely about the narratives that are foisted upon the African people by the West; it has also to do with a logic that is aimed at cancelling out the structures of knowledge transmission that have deep roots in the continent's traditions. He cautions people against the dangers involved in the rhetoric that comes with the history-making process of the colonial project, and commenting on the similarity between the Arab space and the African one, he observes: 'Colonialism has made the same effort in these regions to plant deep in the minds of the native population the idea that before the advent of colonialism their history was one which was dominated by barbarism' (171). In the formation of national culture, the challenge before the native population is immense. On the one hand, there is the native intellectual who is constantly under the threat of a culturally driven framework which is steeped in the knowledge production apparatus of the West, and on the other, there is a need to cultivate a vision that responds to the changing times and at the same time connects to the past from where the people draw the vital energies of their culture. Fanon outlines a three-phase development in the native intellectual's engagement with literary discourse, showing how the ideological pressure of the West makes it extremely difficult to wriggle out of its grip. In the first phase, the native intellectual draws inspiration from the colonial sources, and this is a period of assimilation. But soon he realizes that mere aping of a cultural past which is not his own is fraught with difficulties, and he looks inward into his own heritage, his personal and the collective memories, which 'will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism' (179). The third phase, where the native intellectual shoulders the task of awakening the conscience of the nation, is characterized by the literature of revolution, and this, in Fanon's view, is the national literature. Yet the task is not an easy one, nor is the native intellectual the pioneer he situates himself as in this revolutionary phase. What he ends up doing becomes an ostensible show of inwardness, for he is unable to unshackle the training of colonialism, and in effect, he has the formatted templates ready through which he tries to appropriate the country's culture. Such attempts not only simplify the constantly evolving contours of the culture of a country, but they also seek to fix and organize issues that resist such encapsulation. It is interesting to see how Fanon dissociates culture from the pressures of rituals and practices, for he situates the pulse of the people as a dynamic movement that does not remain confined to unalterable parameters:

"Culture has never the translucidity of custom; it abhors all simplification. In its essence it is opposed to custom, for custom is always the deterioration of

culture. The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one's own people. When a people undertakes an armed struggle or even a political struggle against a relentless colonialism, the significance of tradition changes.

(180)

The intellectual's attempts to respond to the country's cultural current are thus often in danger of 'being out of date' (181). The onus is on the intellectual, however, to carve out a mode of access through which he may justify his involvement in the nation's upsurge, and one that addresses the complexities of the exercise and not merely suffice as an outward display of cultural affiliation. The native artist, on the other hand, shows another form of disconnect, not by accommodating advances in technique but by attempting to revisit forms that cannot be seen in static or fixed terms. This is an important distinction between the artist and the intellectual, both key players in the national scene, yet, in their responses to the demands of the time, they operate in ways that complicate matters in the nationalist upsurge. Looking at the artist's backward gaze, Fanon writes: 'The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically towards the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the cast-offs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all' (181). In case of the native poet, Fanon argues for a foregrounding of the mind of the people, for it is the purpose of literature to see that the subjects and perceptions are 'transfused with light' (183). Distanced from the frame of the immediate revolutionary context where Fanon's call for literary and artistic production of a given kind was grounded, such a design could very well be targeted for being propagandist. Is literature or the arts of a particular variety, or written with a given purpose, the only worthy representative of a culture? Such a view is untenable. Yet Fanon's reading, in the context of the priorities that he outlines for a nation coming into being, shows the relevance of streamlining the cultural trajectories in ways that contribute to the evolving national culture. It is necessary to situate his idea of national culture in the context of freedom from the manacles of colonialism. In other words, for Fanon, the shaping of national culture is one of the keys in the 'fight' against colonial oppression: 'To fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible' (187).

By the concluding stage of his chapter 'On National Culture', Fanon converges the cultural imperatives of the people with the condition of freedom. And as he focusses on the situation

in Africa, Fanon distinguishes between separate national conditions but argues that the nature of colonialism that they have to combat is similar. He gives the example of different African nations in this context: 'There is no common destiny to be shared between the national cultures of Senegal and Guinea; but there *is* a common destiny between the Senegalese and the Guinean nations which are both dominated by the same French colonialism' (188). The debate on national culture, then, is conditioned by the people's assessment of contextual parameters which again are determined on the basis of a collective vision, and it is the dialogue between the heritage that the country draws its cultural resources from and the future it envisions that holds the key. Too much harping on a past that is distanced from the realities of governance and political dynamics cannot be in sync with the times; the objective of any exercise that aspires to represent the people's vision must be directed towards an understanding of situational truths. In such a context, the flow of intellectual movement, political tact, social understanding and collective wisdom must harmonize to achieve the ideal of a realizable national culture. It is in asserting this worldview that Fanon writes:

We must not therefore be content with delving into the past of a people in order to find coherent elements which will counteract colonialism's attempts to falsify and harm. We must work and fight with the same rhythm as the people to construct the future and to prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already springing up. A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature.

(188)

The process of nation building, he goes on to argue at the concluding passage of this chapter, involves 'the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values' (199). For it to take off, the focus cannot be confined to the insular logic of a country's own immediate context, but must be extended to accommodate and respond to the wider 'stage of history' (199).

With a case-study-based short section interspersing the debate on national culture and the short but succinct 'Conclusion', *The Wretched of the Earth* returns at the end to the need to de-Europeanize the African mind, to seek out alternatives to the Western models of history and knowledge-making processes, and the urgency with which he calls for such a departure in an intellectual envisioning of a postcolonial future is couched in the frame of an involved political response no African would have shied away from at the time when the appeal was made.

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Assignments

1. Write an essay on the concept of violence in *The wretched of the Earth*.
2. Assess *The wretched of the Earth* as a Postcolonial narrative.

DISCLAIMER

For writing the SLM sometimes materials have been collected from various academic sources

ENGLISH
POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME(CBCS)
SEMESTER-3
CORE COURSE 7
Victorian period in English literature

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

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Director's Message

Satisfying the varied needs of distance learners, overcoming the obstacle of distance and reaching the unreached students are the threefold functions catered by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. The onus lies on writers, editors, production professionals and other personnel involved in the process to overcome the challenges inherent to curriculum design and production of relevant Self Learning Materials (SLMs). At the University of Kalyani a dedicated team under the able guidance of the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor has invested its best efforts, professionally and in keeping with the demands of Post Graduate CBCS Programmes in Distance Mode to devise a self-sufficient curriculum for each course offered by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), University of Kalyani.

Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2017 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal.

Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome.

During the production-process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Sankar Kumar Ghosh, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance.

Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PGBOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt thanks is also due to the Course Writers-faculty members at the DODL, subject-experts serving at University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level of the DODL of University of Kalyani.

Their persistent and co-ordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through Distance Mode.

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Director
Directorate of Open and Distance Learning
University of Kalyani

Core Course VII

Victorian Period in English Literature

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BLOCK I

UNIT 1

“Lady of Shalott”

By

Alfred Lord Tennyson

1 (a): Life and Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson

Alfred Lord Tennyson is one of the predominant poetic voices in the Victorian England. Tennyson’s poetry is tinged with Victorian ethos. The valorization of the artist figure as a recluse of the society, the typical dilemma between faith and doubt in the Age, the condition of the women in the-then society and a wonderful penchant for lyricism all these feature the oeuvre of Lord Tennyson. He became poet Laureate in 1850. Tennyson was born on August 6, 1809 in Somersby, Tennyshire. His juvenile education has been completed in the Louth Grammar School where he studied from 1815 to 1820. He also received education at home from his father Reverend George Clayton Tennyson. His first remarkable poetic attempt is Poems by Two Brothers which he published in 1827 in collaboration with his brother Charles. Tennyson’s admission as a student of Trinity College caused his deep friendship with Arthur Henry Hallam and that time Tennyson became member of the intellectual community called The Apostles. Tennyson’s poem “Timbuctoo” brought his fame in 1829 and he won Chancellor’s medal for the poem. In 1830, Tennyson published his anthology titled *Chiefly Lyrical*. This anthology contains wonderful poems like “Mariana”. In 1831 the death of the poet’s father compelled him to leave the school without taking the degree. In 1832 he published second anthology titled *Poems*. This anthology includes poems like “The Lotos-Eaters”, “A Dream of Fair Woman”. The sudden death of Tennyson’s friend Arthur Henry Hallam motivated him to compose an elegy to bemoan the death of his friend and he started writing *In Memoriam*. He published it anonymously in 1850. Tennyson’s fame was mounting to such an extent that he was awarded the civilist pension of £200 a year, and he continued to receive the pension throughout his life. Tennyson’s poetry speaks for the Age. His craft is largely based on this politico-historical ideology of the Victorian Era. After the death of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam he spent time in profound silence when he bemoans the loss of his dear friend. After ten years silence from the arena of poetry he comes up with his tour de force *In Memoriam* in 1850. If he had not written any other poetic work, the world will remember him only as the poet of *In Memoriam*. He is an efficient painter who goes on painting serene pictures of idyllic beauty with his evocative words. Tennyson’s lyrical gift makes him undoubtedly a poet extending the Romantic poetic traits of lyricism.

Text of the Poem

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow

Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,

Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,

The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seër in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—

The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."

1 (b): Analysis of the Poem

“The Lady of Shalott” is a lyrical ballad composed by Tennyson in 1833. He added another revised edition in 1842. It is based on the medieval story of Donna di Scalotta which is a story of Elaine of Astolat. She has been imprisoned in a tower near Camelot. Her story excites the fancy of Tennyson to pen a poem based on the suffering, imprisonment and death of a female subject carrying larger semantic connotations of the-then Victorian society and the place of women in it. There is a beautiful painting titled “Lady of Shalott” by the pre-Raphaelite

painters. In a superficial reading the theme of the poem is the story of a woman called “Lady of Shalott”. She lives the life of a recluse in the palace near Camelot. She views the reflection of the outer world in her mirror and goes on weaving throughout her day. She is a cursed being. The curse will come on her if she stares at the world directly. All of a sudden, someday Sir Lancelot was passing by the tower of Lady of Shalott. Seeing his masculine vigour, and listening to the tunes of her music she forgets about her curse and she stares at him directly. The magic mirror has been cracked as an effect of the curse and she goes on preparing for her death. She sails towards Camelot and in her boat she has inscribed her name “Lady of Shalott”. The poem ends with her death and the ironical comment by sir Lancelot seeing her beautiful face:

"She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."

The poem unfolds the picture of an idyllic land of the unknown Lady of Shalott. The Arthurian legend and Sir Lancelot get to feature as an integral component of the story of Arthurian romance that catches the fancy of Tennyson. Indeed, the poem is loaded with hidden socio-political readings of the Victorian England and the position of the women in such a patriarchal society. The poem features the typical Victorian aspect of a conflict between faith and doubt. It addresses the question of female sexuality and the aspect of gender in its finely imagined aspect of romantic tale of medieval balladry. From the beginning the poem goes on representing the mysterious abode and the figure of Lady of Shalott. She lives in the tower where nobody lives. Her music often is ringing in the air and people get to hear her song from a distance. The mystery and sense of enigma both have been deepened around the figure of Lady of Shalott, as she is imagined to be a beautiful, cursed lady. There is a detachment between the Lady and the common folk. Her existence is only being perceived through the myths. The figure of the Lady of Shalott is a metaphor. It stands for the artist figure. Tennysonian craft goes on establishing the Victorian ideology that art and life both are having polarized existence. The artist or the author needs to be a recluse in order to focus on his creation. A paradigmatic formulation of this canonical approach is given by Walter E. Houghton and G. Robert Stange in their anthology titled *Victorian Poetry and Poetics* (1959). Both of them suggest that “the artist must remain in aloof detachment, observing life only in the mirror of the imagination, not mixing in it directly. Once the artist attempts to lead the life of ordinary men his poetic gift, it would seem, dies.” Supporting this view, thirteen years later another critic Alastair W. Thomson said, “Tennyson’s poem represents the dilemma of the introspective artist, condemned to a life of shadows, and risking destruction if he turns to

reality.”In fact, Tennyson goes on subverting the myth of the artist figure by metaphorically presenting Lady of Shalott. The act of creation is a feminine activity which Tennyson valorizes by portraying it through the figure of “Lady of Shalott”. He shows that the sense of rhythm and the continuous process of creativity remain uninterrupted when the Lady remains in her tower as an isolated being from her surroundings. The arrival of Sir Lancelot and his music both attract Lady of Shalott. She abandons her solitary life and stares back at the world directly. It is a climactic moment in the poem when the Lady is at the point of transgression. She has transgressed her boundary through her act of staring at the colourful world directly. It is a gesture on her part to participate in the world of communications that breaks her caged existence. As a result to that the curse befalls on her. She prepares for her death. The fracture of rhythm and order points out the intrusion of chaos and disorder. It is caused by her act of refusing to live her secluded life. The poem is a bold commentary on the position of women in the Victorian society and the female sexuality. The Lady of Shalott goes on weaving without looking at the outside directly. The charm and attraction of Sir Lancelot made her forgetful of her curse. It is an overt and covert expression of her sexual deprivation and allurements. According to the yardsticks of Victorian morality the feminine sexuality remains a suppressed topic or forbidden topic. The expression of such acute sexual desire by a female subject violates the Victorian societal code of morality and decency. As an outcome to that the Lady needs to die as an act of expiating her sin. Even the piece of music that is sung by Sir Lancelot is "Tirra lirra," the phrase is extremely connotative. The phrase has been taken from Autolycus's song in *The Winter's Tale*. The context from which it has been taken endows it with the connotations of a promiscuous male sexuality. The utterance gives rise to feminine rhythm and it makes its singer immediately an emasculated subject. The Lady of Shalott's sudden forgetfulness about her curse seeing Sir Lancelot is suggestive. It is suggestive of her frank articulation of her sexual desire which has been suppressed so long in her isolated existence. Tennyson's craft very faithfully remains obedient to the stereotypical notions of Victorian morality. As an outcome to that the curse befalls on the lady. She starts preparing for death. The ultimately end of her desire is suggested by her mysterious death where she looks as white as snow. Death has attributed on her unparalleled beauty. It makes her white. The colour white in this context is extremely symbolic. It is suggestive of her virginal innocence and chastity. The death makes her innocent. It removes her sin of expressing sexual desire. Even the poem goes on suggesting the frank articulation of erotic desire is unpardonable offence for a well bred Victorian lady. Therefore, she must pay for her sin. The punishment for such act of transgression is death. The poem focuses on the concept

of Victorian female body. The Lady of Shalott remains a mysterious figure whom the common people never get to see. Her existence is only being perceived through her music and stories about her. She looks like an ethereal being whose existence can only be felt but must not be comprehended fully. The stereotypical notion of Victorian idea about woman is based only a duality. The two types of women can be comprehended by the Victorian ideology: the “Angel of the House” and “A Fallen Woman”. The first category of women remain faithful to the rules of domesticity and their existence can be felt but must not be seen as they live life of a recluse, contrarily, the fallen women are the promiscuous women whom society drags into the periphery. The Lady of Shalott’s existence can be perceived as an “Angel of the house” whose existence is being felt, but she remains an invisible being from the commoners’ eyes. The typical Victorian dilemma between faith and doubt is also expressed in the poem. The scientific explorations in the Age and the Darwinian assertion that man comes from the unicellular animal amoeba strike a thud into the age old belief of human race that human beings are originated from Divine line. The typical dilemma of the Age whether to adhere to its belief in the religion or to keep faith on the new scientific developments creates a confusion. That confusion is well represented by the poetic creations in the Victorian Age. The curse that would likely to befall on Lady of Shalott and the validity of this belief both are questioned from the lens of skepticism. Therefore, the fulfilment of the curse and as a result the death of Lady of Shalott both circumscribe to the typical faith on Christian God.

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a note on Tennyson's handling of the mythology in "The Lady of Shalott".
2. Write a note on the use of imagery and symbolism in "The Lady of Shalott".
3. Comment on the aspect of female sexuality in the poem "The Lady of Shalott".

UNIT 2

Unit 2 (a): Robert Browning: Life and Works

Robert Browning was born on May 7, 1812, in Camberwell, England. His mother was an accomplished pianist and a devout evangelical Christian. His father, who worked as a bank clerk, was also an artist, scholar, antiquarian, and collector of books and pictures. His rare book collection of more than 6,000 volumes included works in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. Much of Browning's education came from his well-read father. It is believed that he was already proficient at reading and writing by the age of five. A bright

and anxious student, Browning learned Latin, Greek, and French by the time he was fourteen. From fourteen to sixteen he was educated at home, attended to by various tutors in music, drawing, dancing, and horsemanship. At the age of twelve he wrote a volume of Byronic verse entitled *Incondita*, which his parents attempted, unsuccessfully, to have published. In 1825, a cousin gave Browning a collection of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry; Browning was so taken with the book that he asked for the rest of Shelley's works for his thirteenth birthday, and declared himself a vegetarian and an atheist in emulation of the poet. Despite this early passion, he apparently wrote no poems between the ages of thirteen and twenty. In 1828, Browning enrolled at the University of London, but he soon left, anxious to read and learn at his own pace. The random nature of his education later surfaced in his writing, leading to criticism of his poems' obscurities. In 1833, Browning anonymously published his first major published work, *Pauline*, and in 1840 he published *Sordello*, which was widely regarded as a failure. He also tried his hand at drama, but his plays, including *Strafford*, which ran for five nights in 1837, and the *Bells and Pomegranates* series, were for the most part unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the techniques he developed through his dramatic monologues—especially his use of diction, rhythm, and symbol—are regarded as his most important contribution to poetry, influencing such major poets of the twentieth century as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Robert Frost. After reading Elizabeth Barrett's *Poems* (1844) and corresponding with her for a few months, Browning met her in 1845. They were married in 1846, against the wishes of Barrett's father. The couple moved to Pisa and then Florence, where they continued to write. They had a son, Robert "Pen" Browning, in 1849, the same year his *Collected Poems* was published. Elizabeth inspired Robert's collection of poems *Men and Women* (1855), which he dedicated to her. Now regarded as one of Browning's best works, the book was received with little notice at the time; its author was then primarily known as Elizabeth Barrett's husband. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861, and Robert and Pen Browning soon moved to London. Browning went on to publish *Dramatis Personae* (1864), and *The Ring and the Book* (1868–1869). The latter, based on a seventeenth-century Italian murder trial, received wide critical acclaim, finally earning a twilight of reknown and respect in Browning's career. The Browning Society was founded while he still lived, in 1881, and he was awarded honorary degrees by Oxford University in 1882 and the University of Edinburgh in 1884. Robert Browning died on the same day that his final volume of verse, *Asolando: Fancies and Facts*, was published, in 1889.

UNIT 2 (b): Robert Browning and The Dramatic Monologue

Robert Browning aspired to be a dramatist. He wrote eight dramas and all of them failed on the stage. Browning's genius was contemplating than dramatic. Its main reason was that neither Browning was so mature for writing a drama nor was his audience. Browning made a practical compromise and decided to write the drama of the soul – dramatic monologue. This drama is acted within the mind of the character. It is not projected on the stage of a theatre. So, Browning interiorized the drama. Dramatic monologue is different from a drama and a soliloquy. In drama the action is external but in dramatic monologue, the action is internal and his soul is the stage. In a soliloquy, only one character speaks to himself and there is no interference of any other character but in a monologue, one character speaks his mind and the character is listening to him, but he is not interfering in the action. Victorianism was an age of renaissance. It was an age when British colonies were being forced. British Empire was reducing to England. So people were very much disturbed. The whole of the England was in a state of crisis. There was also a restriction of the people that they could not discuss this issue with others in public places. So there was a conflict in the minds of the people and they were thinking in their minds of the people. They were thinking and talking only to themselves. Browning wanted to present all this on the stage but in this period of gloominess it was not possible for him to stage a drama. Even the intellectuals were not allowed to write on critical issues of the country. Browning thought a very clever device and decided to write dramatic monologue. This was exactly the situation of the people that they had a drama in their minds but they could not express it. So they were only talking to themselves. Browning did not directly write about England rather he picked up the same situation of Italian Renaissance, some 200 years earlier, in Italy. At that time Italy was passing through the same critical situation as it was in the England in Browning's times. In this period every Englishman was suffering from a critical situation. Every individual was thinking about the past glory of the England, there was a conflict in his mind. He was thinking about his present and past. His soul was in confusion, he was thinking about the causes of this failure, he tried to give some justifications and everyone had a sense of optimism in his mind though that might not be a false one. So we see that Browning's characters are also representing the same situation of English people and the pessimism of the age. Browning's dramatic monologue deals with the subject of failure. He takes a character who has been failed in his life. He is caught up in crisis and now tells his story of crisis and bores out his soul before us. The last rider, Fra Lippo Lippi, Bishop at his death bed and Andrea are the typical example of

this kind. Fra Lippo Lippi has been caught up in an area of prostitutes: "I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!

You need not clap your torches to my face."

The last rider has been rejected by his beloved:

"I said – Then, dearest, since 'tis so,

Since now at length my fate I know,"

Bishop is on his bed:

"Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!

Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?"

And Andrea's wife does not care for him.

"But do not let us quarrel any more,

No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:"

So, we see that Browning's characters are in a conflict, they are in a critical situation and they now try to cope up with their situation. To deal out with this situation Browning presents the whole of his case. Browning shows us the past and present of his character and how this character gets involved in this critical situation. So Browning unfolds the whole of the life of his character to make it possible to analyze the history of the character. This is Browning's technique of case-making. The stronger is the case, the interesting will be the poem. Through the technique of case-making, Browning dissects the soul of his character and this technique of soul dissection helps the reader to understand the character and clearly see why his character reaches to this critical juncture. We know that Fra was poor in his childhood and the guardian church was very strict with him. He had been suppressed adversely in his life.

"And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,

A – painting for the great man, saints and saints

And saints again. I could not paint all night –"

The last rider could not express his love to his beloved and won her.

"– And this beside, if you will not blame,

Your leave for one more last ride with me."

The bishop had been a worldly man and jealous of Gandolf.

"And so, about his tomb of mine. I fought

With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:"

Andrea deceived the French King, who was very kind to him.

"... .. God is just.

King Francis may forgive me:"

To conclude, Browning's business is to render the soul or psyche of his protagonists and so he follows the same technique as the modern impressionist. With the help of the technique of soul dissection, we clearly see the soul of the character. In his monologues, Browning constantly strikes a curiously modern note.

Unit 2 (c) : FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Fra Lippo Lippi is an 1855 dramatic monologue written by the Victorian poet Robert Browning which first appeared in his collection *Men and Women*. Throughout this poem, Browning depicts a 15th-century real-life painter, Filippo Lippi. The poem asks the question whether art should be true to life or an idealized image of life. The poem is written in blank verse, non-rhyming iambic pentameter. The poem begins as the painter and monk Lippo Lippi, also the poem's narrator, is caught by some authority figures while roving his town's red light district. As he begins, he is being physically accosted by one of the police. He accuses them of being overzealous and that he need not be punished. It is not until he name-drops "Cosimo of the Medici" (from the ruling family of Florence) as a nearby friend that he is released. He then addresses himself specifically to the band's leader, identifying himself as the famous painter and then suggesting that they are all, himself included, too quick to bow down to what authority figures suggest. Now free, he suggests that the listener allow his subordinates to wander off to their own devices. Then he tells how he had been busy the past three weeks shut up in his room, until he heard a band of merry revelers passing by and used a ladder to climb down to the streets to pursue his own fun. It was while engaged in that fun that he was caught, and he defends himself to the judgmental listener, asking "what am I a beast for?" if not to pursue his beastly appetites. It is then that Lippo begins to tell his life story. He was orphaned while still a baby and starved until his aunt gave him over to a convent. When the monks there asked if he was willing to renounce the world in service of monk-hood, Lippo was quick to agree since renouncing the world meant a steady supply of food in the convent. He quickly took to the "idleness" of a monk's life, even at eight years old, but was undistinguished in any of the studies they had him attempt.

His one talent was the ability to recreate the faces of individuals through drawings, partially because as a starving child he was given great insight into the details that distinguished one face from another and the way those faces illustrated different characteristics. Instead of studying in the convent, he devoted himself to doodles and drawings, until the Prior noticed his talent and assigned him to be the convent's artist. As the convent's artist, Lippo proceeded to paint a myriad of situations, all drawn from the real world. The common monks loved his

work since in his artistry they could recognize images from their everyday lives. However, "the Prior and the learned" do not admire Lippo's focus on realistic subjects, instead insisting that the artist's job is not to pay "homage to the perishable clay" of flesh and body, but to transcend the body and attempt to reveal the soul. They insist that he paint more saintly images, focusing on representations of praise and saintliness instead of everyday reality. Lippo protests to his listener that a painter can reveal the soul through representations of the body, since "simple beauty" is "about the best thing God invents." Lippo identifies this as the main conflict of his otherwise-privileged life: where he wants to paint things as they are, his masters insist he paint life from a moral perspective. As much as he hates it, he must acquiesce to their wishes in order to stay successful, and hence he must go after prostitutes and other unsavory activity, like the one he was caught involved in at poem's beginning. As a boy brought up poor and in love with life, he cannot so easily forget his artistic impulse to represent life as he sees it to be. He then speaks to the listener about what generations of artists owe one another and how an artist who breaks new ground must always flaunt the conventions. He mentions a painter named Hulking Tom who studies under him, who Lippo believes will further reinvent artistic practice in the way he himself has done through pursuing realism. He poses to his listener the basic question whether it is better to "paint [things] just as they are," or to try to improve upon God's creations. He suggests that even in reproducing nature, the artist has the power to help people to see objects that they have taken for granted in a new light. He grows angry thinking of how his masters ruin the purpose of art, but quickly apologizes before he might anger the policeman.

He then tells his listener about his plan to please both his masters and himself. He is planning to paint a great piece of religious art that will show God, the Madonna, and "of course a saint or two." However, in the corner of the painting, he will include a picture of himself watching the scene. He then fantasizes aloud how a "sweet angelic slip of a thing" will address him in the painting, praising his talent and authorship, until the "hothead husband" comes and forces Lippo to hide away in the painting. Lippo bids goodbye to his listener and heads back home.

UNIT2 (d): *Fra Lippo Lippi* as a Dramatic Monologue

Most of the time, in Browning's poems there is a sole speaker, for instance in "Fra Lippo Lippi", Lippo speaks to watchmen. Browning was interested in the soul of man and was concerned with human problems despite their actions or misdemeanors. His characters are both virtuous and vicious. His poems are full of incidents and shocking events. Bergman (1980) delving into Browning's monologues and the development of the soul, comments on

Browning's choice of characters by saying, Browning's supposedly greater skill at presenting failed artists and corrupt politicians becomes more understandable (and a less a component of his psyche) when we observe that the approved model for the dramatic monologue favors the depiction failure and corruption rather than saint hood and heroism which are less commonly found on the street. (773) The style of Browning's spiritual improvement is disinherited from all persons and things, with his own discrete and separate charisma. At another point, he is competent of proper intimacy with other persons. At this median point he may begin to perceive his relation to God. In the end, he sees all creatures as originating from God. At the highest of improvement, man perceives that he is not an isolated human being with his own private and typical charisma. Some critics believed the characters in Browning's poems never change. They remain the same from beginning to end. But there is contradiction in "Fra Lippo Lippi", because at the first lines of poem Lippo is a "beast": "I'm a beast I know," (II. 270) and "It's natural a poor monk / Should have his apt word to excuse himself," (III. 341-342) but then he turns into a monk. "Fra Lippo Lippi" is one of the most popular of Browning's dramatic monologues in blank verse which is written in phrases over the course of four hundred lines. The poem is based on the complicated levels on the aim of religion, art, politics, and the inadequacy of moral figures. The poem is about the philosophy and nature of art. Browning wrote the poem after reading "Fra Lippo Lippi" in Vasari's lives of the artists at the age of Renaissance paintings. Lippi was a monk and the first realist painter in 15th century Florence in the naturalist school. At the time Lippi was painting, art was concerned with religious matters and following the shadowy moral shapes rather than depicting life as it is. The poem satirizes the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the Italian Renaissance tradition of art patronage. Browning wrote the poem, when the Victorians were concerned again into the idea that art should have a moral aim. He suggests that humans try to ignore the complexity of their lives. The dilemma in painting the life as it is; thereby, disclosing its complexity through moral principles. In fact, the themes of the poem are ideas about religion, morality, lust, want, the ideal, reality, the function of art and natural beauty. Lippo was a realist painter who tried to show in several places, contemporary scenes and figures the importance of realism. He frequently reveals his love of life and believes art should instigate beauty in the hope of evoking responses from the audience, and exhibits the question of whether art should be realistic and true to life or idealistic and instructive. The poem begins when the monk explains to the couple of guards who found him itinerant in the street at midnight at an "alley's end / Where the sportive ladies leave their doors ajar" (I.

5-6) only “three streets off” (I. 16), that he lives with the member of the powerful Medici family “Cosimo of the Medici”. He identifies himself as the famous painter. Then he tells his life story. When he was an orphaned baby, his aunt takes him to a convent. In the convent, the monks asked if he was willing to leave the world and become a monk. Lippo quickly accepted since leaving the world meant a comfortable life with a supply of food in service of monkhood. There was irony when Lippo was brought to the convent. His mouth was full of bread the “good fat father” (I. 92) asked the boy if he would “quit this very miserable world?” (I. 95) from that point he would become an idle boy who would be uninterested in the lessons and studies. Lippo presents an economic man through whom Browning tries to indicate the relation between the house of “Medici” and the inescapable movement toward commercial economy. He connects to religious association for sustenance rather than spiritual nourishment, and for his worldly and economic advantage, he would acquire the “Cosimo di Medici” patronage. Then Lippo understands that his “business”: “is to paint the souls of men.” (II. 184) is possible through combining “souls” to the pursuit of mercantile life and secular world of personal subjects and concrete objects. Folk at church would read as: From good old gossips waiting to confess, / Their cribs of barrel-droppings candle-ends, / To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot, / Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there, / With the little children round him in a row, / Of admiration, half for his beard and half, / For that white anger of his victim’s on, / Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm, / Signing himself with the other because of Christ, / (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this? / After his passion of a thousand years). (II. 146-157) Susman illustrates the monk creating “religiously powerful paintings” for the commercial supporter. He says: “The portrait of Lippo shows how the entry or, in Ruskian terms, the unfortunate “fall” of the artist into the sphere of commerce generates a debilitating commoditization of male energy, both artistic and sexual.” (1992: 187). He discussed the poem in the matter of formation of male poetic in Browning’s poem, whom the characters have “creative power with sexual potency”. Lippo illustrate the “successful” artist in creating a realistic religious art of male identity. Susman (1992) believed that Browning is writing not only art history and economic history, but also, as a kind of Victorian Foucault (1973), a history of manhood, of male sexuality. In mid Victorian poetry, when the male characters escape from the surrounded place like the monastery, intimate the moment of “man-making”. Lippo’s flee from the monastery epitomize the male artist rejecting the repression of artistic, commercial, and sexual activity. For having rejected the monastery in his quest to become a mature man, he must escape from the “banking-house” (I. 99). The

imprisoned male artist must paint in the monastery saints and virgins. The continued construction of “saints and saints” advise the care about serial re-construction or mechanical reconstruction that, most particularly in Ruskin, is the note in the mid Victorian aesthetic discussion of uncertain artistic labor. Patron reminded Lippi after returning from brothel, he must “Rise up tomorrow and go work, / On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast, / With his great round stone to subdue the flesh.” (II. 72-74) Lippo becomes a new “Master” from the employ of mercantile patron; he is forced to create a product at odds with his manhood. The female is portrayed as virginal, saintly, in Lippo’s piece de resistance, but is stilled the object of the erotic male desire: “The little Lily thing, / That spoke the good word for me in the nick, / Like the Prior’s niece ... saint Lucy. I would say.” (II. 385- 387) When Lippo trip to the brothel, Browning intimate that a mercantile structure may bring about the commoditization of male want in both its erotic and artistic revelation. The “quarter-florin” (I. 28), the coin that Lippo show for admiration, symbolizes Pride in his artistic fulfillment, and it also relate money payment for uncreative art with money payment for loveless sexual relations. These trips to enclosed space are as practical for Lippo as for any Victorian businessman. In public, It represent that for the male Victorian the illicit relationship, as Susman alludes “a secret life” is essential” for the male artist, and for males in general.” (1992: 194). That has marked Lippo as the “successful” artist. Lippo was tolerated in drawing the individual’s faces. He was expert in drawing the details of different characteristics; gradually the others noticed his talent in drawings and paintings. Instead of studying in the convent, the Prior assigned him to be the convent’s artist. Lippo’s painting was about the real world and the pleasure of life. The lines: “You should not take a fellow eight years old / And make him swear to never kiss the girls.” (II. 225- 226). Emphasis is laid on pleasurable and worldly themes. When the church leaders give him the chance to paint, he is exhilarated: “Thank you! My head being crammed, the walls a blank, / Never was such prompt disembodying” (II. 143-144). He begins to paint church patrons in a realistic manner. The simple monks are amazed at Lippi’s ability to portray real people through his work. Yet “The Prior and the learned pulled a face / And stopped that in no time” (II. 174-175) were not agree to Lippo’s painting on realistic matters. They believe that the artist should paint: Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true, / [...] it’s devil’s game! / Your business is not to catch men with show, / With homage to the perishable clay, / But lift them over it, ignore it all, / Make them forget there’s such a thing as flesh, (II. 177- 183) To sublime the soul and to concentrate on the angelic and blessed images. Just as the art prohibit moral function, so the artist reads religious subjects irreverently.

Subsequently, his works do not “instigate to prayer” (316), Lippo reduces religious qualities to commonplaces: Strikes in the Prior: ‘when your meaning’s plain, / ‘It does not say to folkremember matins, / ‘Or, mind you fast next Friday! ‘Why, for this, / What need of art at all? A skull and bones, / Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what’s best, / A bell to chime the hour with, does as well. (II. 317- 322) Lippo altogether negate moral caution; restrict intensity and goodness to self – gratification. Restricting “higher things” to “the same truth” (309), that is, “simple beauty and nought else” (II. 217), he turns even religious art into ethically “careless” (II. 294), improper workmanship. Lippo indicate that “simple beauty” is “about the best thing God invents” (II. 218), which means to paint things not necessarily from a moral perspective. Lippi is intimidated that the church masters do not share his love of physical form. He is a naturalistic artist who wants to honestly exhibit what he sees around the world. For doing his extreme, he holds a mirror up to nature: A fire way to paint soul, by painting body, / So ill, the eye can’t stop here, must go further, / And can’t fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white, / When what you put for yellow’s simply black, / And any sort of meaning looks intense. When all beside itself means and looks nought. (II. 199-204). In attempting to paint as if neglecting the body and the real world, Lippi intimate that the painter is proposing only an evasive idea of soul and define his own technique of painting as actually heightening the image of the soul:” Can’t I take breath and try to add life’s flash, / And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?” (II. 213- 214). He is forced to do whatever his masters insist in order to gain food and stay successful instead of remaining hungry. In fact, he pretended to abandon the world to get bread, so he cannot express his view truly. The existence of “Hulking Tom” in the poem recommend that artists should be breakers in the society and change the world from the cliché’s painting, such as holy subjectivity instead of objective facts. Lippo’s desire is to reach to the essence of his subjectivity to instigate people to pray and accomplish their religious duties. But Lippo wants to indicate that his impulse to paint objectively does not mean the avoiding of subjective Transcendence. In lines: If you get simple beauty and nought else, / You get about the best thing God invents: / That’s somewhat: and you’ll find the soul you have missed, / Within yourself, when you return him thanks. / “Rub all out!” Well, well, there’s my life, in short, (II. 217-221). God created everything and by appreciating the God’s creation, humans should be thankful to God for having soul within them and the realist painting instigate the attention of human to the beauties of real life and God of Genesis. The master’s desire was to paint idealized creation of life, such as depiction of God and saints, creating Eve in the Garden of Eden rather than realist human absurdity. God’s works paint any one, and count it crime, / To let a truth slip. /

Don't object, "His works, / Are here already; nature is complete: / Suppose you reproduce her- (which you can't), / There's no advantage! You must bear her, then. (II. 295-299) For Lippo the spirit and soul has less value than substance and body: "the value and significance of flesh / I cannot unlearn ten minutes afterwards" (II. 268-269). But Fra Lippo's decision to "add the soul" to "flesh" represent the equality both in substance and spirit in the style of Italian painting and on the Browning's view. Lippo mocks the sermons and saints by saying: "The only good of grass is to make chaff." (II. 257), and when he says: "I always see the garden and God there / A making man's wife." (II. 266-267), trying to prove the real statement to the monk. Throughout the poem, Browning lead Fra Lippo Lippi to generate new vision of things. He glares for a moment at "The shape of things, their colors, lights and shades," (II. 284) and when he says: Do you feel thankful, ay or no?" (II. 286) persuade the auditors to manifest a spiritual power that will empower him to "Interpret God to all of you" (II. 311). The poem spread out Lippi's direct debate that realistic art brings the viewer closer to God's creation and, thus, closer to God, but Browning's indirect debate goes beyond in showing that realistic art is didactic as well. Generally, a poem delivered as though by a single imagined person and the speaker is not to be identified with the poet, but who is dramatized, usually through his or her own words. The tradition of the verse epistle may be seen to have contributed to the development of the dramatic monologue, which found one of its most accomplished exponents in Browning ('My Last Duchess', 1842; 'Caliban upon Setebos', 1864). The form was employed by many 19th and 20th century poets, including Tennyson, Hardy, Kipling, Frost, Pound, and T. S. Eliot, and several Victorian women poets found it a useful vehicle for giving voice to women's concerns and repressions (Drabble, 2000: 299). Dramatic monologue refers to a type of poetry. These poems are dramatic in the sense that they have a drama quality; that is, the poem is meant to be read to spectators. To say that the poem is a monologue means that these are the words of one speaker with no dialogue coming from any other characters. Dramatic monologue' is a generic term whose practical usefulness does not seem to have been impaired by the failure of literary historians and taxonomists to achieve consensus in its definition. (Bristow, 2005: 69) The poet portrays a mask that is different from his own personality. The subject matter is not so much important in dramatic monologues, but it is the matter of characterization. The character of the speaker and silent interlocutors in the poem are so fundamental. "In dramatic monologues, the speakers turn their designs away from us, directing their insistence to a generally skeptical listener. We hear and observe the speaker not in full face, but at an angle, through a glass darkly, relieved of the full force of his or her obsessed attention. Unlike the epic bard,

the speaker is at no great pains to persuade us” (Auerbach, 1984: 166). The characters are in depth of the society and are interfered with the problems of the society. The relationship between characters is often showed as a complete war between the speaker and the listener. Often showed as a master-slave relationship. The listener does not have a voice in the poem and cannot have his/her stage for the demonstration of the thoughts. The condition of the Victorian society is fully depicted in Browning’s dramatic monologues, such as the condition of the urban livings, violence and prostitution. “The range is from the jealous brother in “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”; the completely worldly and sensuous Bishop in “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church,” begging his illegitimate sons to build him a tomb more elegant than that of his rival, Gandolf, so he can lie in triumphant pride through the ages (after he is dead) and hear the mass, see the bread and wine consecrated, and smell the thick incense smoke, while gloating over his having won the mistress also” (Stagg, 1969:50). “The dramatic monologue celebrates self-creation, but it is a self creation enforced by the power of skepticism over the insecurity of being. Other listeners would probably dictate other poems. In its essence, the dramatic monologue asks of us neither sympathy nor judgment. Rather, it strikes home to us the impurity of our own tale telling, the ways in which our own truth has been adjusted, not to a remote and acquiescent audience, but to our intimates who do not believe us” (Auerbach, 1984: 167). The dramatic monologue seeks the power relationship between art and morality. Victorian society is often criticized of the mere morality corruption and bad condition of the women livings. The poem seeks out the controversial ideas that can be dealt with in the heart of the dramatic monologue. These controversial ideas cannot be dealt in other genres of literature. The character development is an essential stage of the dramatic monologue. Different perspectives on fixed conditions of the Victorian society and it allow the reader to enter the mind of the main character. In literature, according to the reader oriented criticism, there can be different interpretations on a fixed phenomenon. The multiplicity of perspectives is fully shown in the dramatic monologues. Medieval settings are prevalent in Browning’s poetry and it is a better way to deal with the contemporary issues of the society in the poem. The interpretation of the reader is often hard and judgmental, because you cannot hear the different voices in the heart of the poem. The speakers are not criminals, but they justify their acts, based on their viewpoints on different states of mind. The immoral acts are shown in the course of the dramatic monologue in order to invoke a moral judgment from the reader. The reader is left in the middle of the incidents to judge the characters. “The majority of dramatic monologists are not criminals or charlatans, only searchers after some transformation, whether spiritual,

professional, or personal. For all their removal from any norm, they collectively present adherence to certain patterns, constituting a confirmation of nonconformists” (Bristow, 2005: 73). One of the main problems of the Victorian society is the pressure of the male-dominated society upon the women who are held as captives, subjugated objects and considered as fallen women. Women in these kinds of poems do not have a voice and they are always silent. They are oppressed because of their natural sexuality and prostitution. Women consciousness is depicted as something unnatural and they are considered as the second sex. The idea of seeing a woman as “the other” and pose a master-slave relationship in order to hold the women as second-class citizens of the Victorian society. The male characters are the speakers of the dramatic monologues so the judgment of the readers is depended on the male-oriented society. In “the last duchess”, a powerful poem by Browning, the duke want more control over the duchess that leads to the death of the duchess. “My Last Duchess,” often considered

the outstanding dramatic monologue of the Victorian era, is the tale of a man, the Duke of Ferrara, who is firm that his wife was not suitable to his needs and respect. So he has her murdered. He expected absolute obedience from his Duchess: “...if she let/herself be lessened...” and when he was disappointed, he ordered her death. “I gave commands; /then all smiled stopped together”. In “the last duchess”, the woman is dead, but the portrait of her makes judgments among the people, who “strangers like you that pictured countenance/ the depth and passion of its earnest glance” (7-8). By looking into the painting on the wall, the face of the duchess shows that “‘twas not her husband’s presence only, called that spot of joy into the duchess’ cheek” (13-15), and this showed that the duchess was too simple or even unfaithful to the duke. What is very conspicuous is that the duke is a very powerful performer and this eases the exhibition of his character. The duchess “too soon made glad, too easily impressed; she liked whatever she looked on, and her looks went everywhere” (22-24). The duchess is punished by the domineering duke for her natural sexuality and perhaps the story is not real at all. Perhaps the mind of the duke is where all these occurrences take place. A mind that domineers a male duke to want absolute power over the duchess. “Porphyria’s Lover” is another example of violence told within dramatic monologue. It tells the tale of a woman, Porphyria, who visits her lover, as she still takes the role of a passive wife, calling to her lover, and, when he does not respond, making herself ready for him: “She put my arm about her waist,/And made her smooth white shoulder bare,/And all her yellow hair displaced/...Murmuring how she loved me...” but he chooses to murder her: “I found/A thing to do, and all her hair/In one long yellow string I wound/Three times her little throat

around/And strangled her.” He justifies his murder but explaining to the auditor that she felt no pain “No pain felt she; /I am quite sure she felt no pain” and that she now is happy “Her head, which droops upon it still:/The smiling rosy little head/ so glad it has its utmost will”. The art of persuasion of the listener through the mere justification of act is thoroughly conspicuous in the layers of the dramatic monologue. In “porphyria’s lover” the setting is very importantly described between an ancient and modern surrounding. The blurring of the tradition and modern times, that is in accordance with the fast technological improvement in the Victorian era. It seems that the speaker is mad and this madness is within the speaker’s rational self-representation. The victim is pressured by the society structures about the sexuality of a woman. She is “too weak, for all her heart’s endeavor, to set its struggling passion free from pride, and ties dissever, and give herself to me forever” (22-25). Like “the last duchess”, both speakers in two poems are trying to take control over the women by creating different class structures and divisions around them. In both “My Last Duchess” and “Porphyria’s Lover,” Browning has shown that the male in the relationship has the power to have dominance over his lover. In “My Last Duchess,” it appears to be hope, but “Porphyria’s Lover” appears to be more in line with saving the moment of dedication. Both the Duke and the lover feel that their analysis on their women is exact, and that they are the ones who should be allowed to determine if the women live or die. “Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover” and “My Last Duchess” concerned itself with female subjectivity, including and perhaps especially the modes of consciousness of women whom we do not hear speak. The speaker of “Porphyria’s Lover” not only draws his name from his intimate relationship to her but also claims that the actions he describes, including that of murdering her, are based on his apprehension of her desires, her “one wish” (Bristow, 2005: 74). The identity of the woman is depended on the male dominant whereas in the consequence the male lover takes his identity in interaction with the female. As it is shown through “porphyria’s lover” that the male partner does not have a specific name and derives his identity from the interaction with his female partner.

SUGGESTED READING

Langbaum, Robert: *Poetry of Reading*

Jack, Ian: *Browning’s Major Poetry*

Shaw, W.D.: *The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning*

Loucks, James F.: *Robert Browning’s Poetry (A Norton Critical Edition)*

ASSIGNMENT

1. Do you agree with the view that for Browning the sole interest lies in the exploration of the human mind in the dramatic monologues? Assess with a close reference to 'Fra Lippo Lippi'.
2. Do you feel that the dramatic monologue suffers from one limitation, namely a one sided view of life? Discuss with close reference to 'Fra Lippo Lippi'.
3. Comment on Browning's use of imagery in Fra Lippo Lippi

Block I

Unit3

'Goblin Market': Christina Georgina Rossetti

3 (a):Introduction to Christina Georgina Rossetti

Christina Georgina Rossetti was born in London on December 5, 1830, to Gabriele and Frances (Polidori) Rossetti. Both of her parents were of strong religious temperament. Her father was an Italian living in exile, and her mother was of Italian and English origin. The house she was born into was quite lively, playing host to visiting Italian revolutionaries and writers, but she was also subject to the teaching and religious devotion of her mother Frances. Her father Gabriele was a poet and translator, and her uncle John Polidori was Byron's physician and author of "The Vampyre."

Rossetti's home was bilingual, and all of the children in her family were artistic and scholarly. The oldest, Maria Francesca, was a Dante scholar, and her brother Gabriel Charles Dante (who would change his name to Dante Gabriel) became a poet and a painter. William Michael, the younger of the two brothers, became a critic and biographer, and later edited and published commentaries on the poems and letters of his siblings.

Christina is said to have been a very spirited child, and there are wild reports about her youthful temper. These anecdotes stand in contrast to the descriptions of the poet by her brother William in the biography he wrote, which gives us an image of a restrained, almost docile poet with self-discipline to spare. Her early childhood was punctuated by visits to her maternal grandfather's country home, which was surrounded by fruit trees and fields. Eventually, this same grandfather would move to the city and set up a printing press, which would then print Rossetti's first volume of poetry, "Verses: Dedicated to Her Mother". In 1848 she became engaged to James Collinson, one of the minor Pre-Raphaelites. His reversion to Roman Catholicism would soon end the engagement.

In 1853 Christina's father became ill, and his eyesight began to deteriorate. Christina and her mother started a day school to try and support the family, which was not sustainable. After

this episode Christina would become more and more reclusive, suffering from a recurring illness which was sometimes diagnosed as angina and sometimes tuberculosis. Her own family feared for her health starting at a young age, starting as early as 1845, and she seems to have been in a near constant state of nervous exhaustion.

The Rossetti children worshiped their mother, but Christina's relationship was especially close with her. Due in part to her bad health, her mother served as both confidant and nurse, and all of Christina's books of poetry were dedicated to her. Both women shared a clear and strong sense of spiritual devotion. Rossetti herself was influenced by the Oxford Movement, which wanted to restore a sense of Catholic Grandeur to the Anglican church, reinforcing the ritualistic elements of the Catholic service. Later in her life, Christina would write extensive commentaries on parts of the bible, and she was a strict observer of fast days and the liturgical calendar.

It is important, however, not to dwell on what is outwardly pious in the biography of Rossetti. She remained friends with her brothers her entire life. William was a free-thinking atheist, and Dante Gabriel is legendary for his sensuality. In addition, her letters show the extent of her contact with other poets and her generosity with young writers. She was also a member of a group called the 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,' formed in 1848 by her brothers. She was not allowed to attend their late night meetings, but her early poems were published by the brotherhood's journal, "The Germ."

Her first publicly printed book of poetry was "Goblin Market and Other Poems," published in 1862 to widespread acclaim and popularity. In 1866, Rossetti was again proposed to, this time by Charles Bagot Cayley, a Dante scholar and former student of her father. William, after her death, found a series of love poems in Christina's desk that suggest that she loved Cayley very deeply, although while living, she refused him because of his religious skepticism.

She continued to write and in the 1870s to work for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. She was troubled physically by neuralgia and emotionally by Dante's breakdown in 1872. The last 12 years of her life, after his death in 1882, were outwardly quiet ones. She died of cancer December 29, 1894.

3 (b): Text of the poem: "Goblin Market"

Morning and evening

Maids heard the goblins cry:
“Come buy our orchard fruits,
 Come buy, come buy:
 Apples and quinces,
 Lemons and oranges,
 Plump unpeck’d cherries,
 Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheek’d peaches,
 Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
 Crab-apples, dewberries,
 Pine-apples, blackberries,
 Apricots, strawberries;—
 All ripe together
 In summer weather,—
 Morns that pass by,
 Fair eves that fly;
 Come buy, come buy:
Our grapes fresh from the vine,
 Pomegranates full and fine,
 Dates and sharp bullaces,
 Rare pears and greengages,
 Damsons and bilberries,
 Taste them and try:
 Currants and gooseberries,
 Bright-fire-like barberries,
 Figs to fill your mouth,
 Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
 Come buy, come buy.”

 Evening by evening
 Among the brookside rushes,
 Laura bow’d her head to hear,

Lizzie veil'd her blushes:
Crouching close together
In the cooling weather,
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
"Lie close," Laura said,
Pricking up her golden head:
"We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?"
"Come buy," call the goblins
Hobbling down the glen.

"Oh," cried Lizzie, "Laura, Laura,
You should not peep at goblin men."
Lizzie cover'd up her eyes,
Cover'd close lest they should look;
Laura rear'd her glossy head,
And whisper'd like the restless brook:
"Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men.
One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,
One lugs a golden dish
Of many pounds weight.
How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Through those fruit bushes."
"No," said Lizzie, "No, no, no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us."
She thrust a dimpled finger

In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
Curious Laura chose to linger
Wondering at each merchant man.

One had a cat's face,

One whisk'd a tail,

One tramp'd at a rat's pace,

One crawl'd like a snail,

One like a wombat prowl'd obtuse and furry,

One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.

She heard a voice like voice of doves

Cooing all together:

They sounded kind and full of loves

In the pleasant weather.

Laura stretch'd her gleaming neck

Like a rush-imbedded swan,

Like a lily from the beck,

Like a moonlit poplar branch,

Like a vessel at the launch

When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen

Turn'd and troop'd the goblin men,

With their shrill repeated cry,

“Come buy, come buy.”

When they reach'd where Laura was

They stood stock still upon the moss,

Leering at each other,

Brother with queer brother;

Signalling each other,

Brother with sly brother.

One set his basket down,

One rear'd his plate;

One began to weave a crown

Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown
 (Men sell not such in any town);
 One heav'd the golden weight
 Of dish and fruit to offer her:
"Come buy, come buy," was still their cry.
 Laura stared but did not stir,
 Long'd but had no money:
The whisk-tail'd merchant bade her taste
 In tones as smooth as honey,
 The cat-faced purr'd,
 The rat-faced spoke a word
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
 One parrot-voiced and jolly
Cried "Pretty Goblin" still for "Pretty Polly;"—
 One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
 "Good folk, I have no coin;
 To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
 I have no silver either,
And all my gold is on the furze
 That shakes in windy weather
 Above the rusty heather."
"You have much gold upon your head,"
 They answer'd all together:
 "Buy from us with a golden curl."
She clipp'd a precious golden lock,
She dropp'd a tear more rare than pearl,
Then suck'd their fruit globes fair or red:
 Sweeter than honey from the rock,
 Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flow'd that juice;
 She never tasted such before,

How should it cloy with length of use?
She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
She suck'd until her lips were sore;
Then flung the emptied rinds away
But gather'd up one kernel stone,
And knew not was it night or day
As she turn'd home alone.

Lizzie met her at the gate
Full of wise upbraidings:
“Dear, you should not stay so late,
Twilight is not good for maidens;
Should not loiter in the glen
In the haunts of goblin men.
Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Pluck'd from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the noonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow.
You should not loiter so.”
“Nay, hush,” said Laura:
“Nay, hush, my sister:
I ate and ate my fill,

Yet my mouth waters still;
To-morrow night I will
Buy more;" and kiss'd her:
"Have done with sorrow;
I'll bring you plums to-morrow
Fresh on their mother twigs,
Cherries worth getting;
You cannot think what figs
My teeth have met in,
What melons icy-cold
Piled on a dish of gold
Too huge for me to hold,
What peaches with a velvet nap,
Pellucid grapes without one seed:
Odorous indeed must be the mead
Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink
With lilies at the brink,
And sugar-sweet their sap."

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtain'd bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipp'd with gold for awful kings.
Moon and stars gaz'd in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forbore to fly,
Not a bat flapp'd to and fro
Round their rest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Lock'd together in one nest.

Early in the morning
When the first cock crow'd his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
 Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows,
Air'd and set to rights the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
 Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churn'd butter, whipp'd up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sew'd;
Talk'd as modest maidens should:
 Lizzie with an open heart,
 Laura in an absent dream,
 One content, one sick in part;
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
 One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:
They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;
 Lizzie most placid in her look,
 Laura most like a leaping flame.
They drew the gurgling water from its deep;
Lizzie pluck'd purple and rich golden flags,
Then turning homeward said: "The sunset flushes
 Those furthest loftiest crags;
Come, Laura, not another maiden lags.
 No wilful squirrel wags,
 The beasts and birds are fast asleep."
But Laura loiter'd still among the rushes
 And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still
The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill;

Listening ever, but not catching
The customary cry,
“Come buy, come buy,”
With its iterated jingle
Of sugar-baited words:
Not for all her watching
Once discerning even one goblin
Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling;
Let alone the herds
That used to tramp along the glen,
In groups or single,
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, “O Laura, come;
I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look:
You should not loiter longer at this brook:
Come with me home.
The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
Each glowworm winks her spark,
Let us get home before the night grows dark:
For clouds may gather
Though this is summer weather,
Put out the lights and drench us through;
Then if we lost our way what should we do?”

Laura turn'd cold as stone
To find her sister heard that cry alone,
That goblin cry,
“Come buy our fruits, come buy.”
Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?
Must she no more such succous pasture find,
Gone deaf and blind?
Her tree of life droop'd from the root:
She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;

But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
Trudg'd home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
So crept to bed, and lay
Silent till Lizzie slept;
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
And gnash'd her teeth for baulk'd desire, and wept
As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,
Laura kept watch in vain
In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
She never caught again the goblin cry:
"Come buy, come buy;"—
She never spied the goblin men
Hawking their fruits along the glen:
But when the noon wax'd bright
Her hair grew thin and grey;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away.

One day remembering her kernel-stone
She set it by a wall that faced the south;
Dew'd it with tears, hoped for a root,
Watch'd for a waxing shoot,
But there came none;
It never saw the sun,
It never felt the trickling moisture run:
While with sunk eyes and faded mouth
She dream'd of melons, as a traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth
With shade of leaf-crown'd trees,
And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

She no more swept the house,
Tended the fowls or cows,
Fetch'd honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
Brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear
To watch her sister's cankerous care
Yet not to share.
She night and morning
Caught the goblins' cry:
"Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy;"—
Beside the brook, along the glen,
She heard the tramp of goblin men,
The yoke and stir
Poor Laura could not hear;
Long'd to buy fruit to comfort her,
But fear'd to pay too dear.
She thought of Jeanie in her grave,
Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died
In her gay prime,
In earliest winter time
With the first glazing rime,
With the first snow-fall of crisp winter time.

Till Laura dwindling
Seem'd knocking at Death's door:
Then Lizzie weigh'd no more
Better and worse;

But put a silver penny in her purse,
Kiss'd Laura, cross'd the heath with clumps of furze
At twilight, halted by the brook:
And for the first time in her life
Began to listen and look.

Laugh'd every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces,
Demure grimaces,
Cat-like and rat-like,
Ratel- and wombat-like,
Snail-paced in a hurry,
Parrot-voiced and whistler,
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chattering like magpies,
Fluttering like pigeons,
Gliding like fishes,—
Hugg'd her and kiss'd her:
Squeez'd and caress'd her:
Stretch'd up their dishes,
Panniers, and plates:
“Look at our apples
Russet and dun,
Bob at our cherries,
Bite at our peaches,
Citrons and dates,

Grapes for the asking,
Pears red with basking
Out in the sun,
Plums on their twigs;
Pluck them and suck them,
Pomegranates, figs.”—

“Good folk,” said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
“Give me much and many: —
Held out her apron,
Toss’d them her penny.
“Nay, take a seat with us,
Honour and eat with us,”
They answer’d grinning:
“Our feast is but beginning.
Night yet is early,
Warm and dew-pearly,
Wakeful and starry:
Such fruits as these
No man can carry:
Half their bloom would fly,
Half their dew would dry,
Half their flavour would pass by.
Sit down and feast with us,
Be welcome guest with us,
Cheer you and rest with us.”—
“Thank you,” said Lizzie: “But one waits
At home alone for me:
So without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and many,
Give me back my silver penny

I toss'd you for a fee."—
They began to scratch their pates,
No longer wagging, purring,
But visibly demurring,
Grunting and snarling.
One call'd her proud,
Cross-grain'd, uncivil;
Their tones wax'd loud,
Their looks were evil.
Lashing their tails
They trod and hustled her,
Elbow'd and jostled her,
Claw'd with their nails,
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,
Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,
Stamp'd upon her tender feet,
Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits
Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-vein'd stone
Lash'd by tides obstreperously,—
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea,
Sending up a golden fire,—
Like a fruit-crown'd orange-tree
White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
Like a royal virgin town
Topp'd with gilded dome and spire
Close beleaguer'd by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,
Twenty cannot make him drink.
Though the goblins cuff'd and caught her,
Coax'd and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratch'd her, pinch'd her black as ink,
Kick'd and knock'd her,
Maul'd and mock'd her,
Lizzie utter'd not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laugh'd in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syrapp'd all her face,
And lodg'd in dimples of her chin,
And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd.

At last the evil people,
Worn out by her resistance,
Flung back her penny, kick'd their fruit
Along whichever road they took,
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
Some writh'd into the ground,
Some div'd into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanish'd in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,
Lizzie went her way;
Knew not was it night or day;
Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze,
Threaded copse and dingle,
And heard her penny jingle
Bouncing in her purse,—

Its bounce was music to her ear.
She ran and ran
As if she fear'd some goblin man
Dogg'd her with gibe or curse
Or something worse:
But not one goblin scurried after,
Nor was she prick'd by fear;
The kind heart made her windy-paced
That urged her home quite out of breath with haste
And inward laughter.

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,
"Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men."

Laura started from her chair,
Flung her arms up in the air,
Clutch'd her hair:
"Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
For my sake the fruit forbidden?
Must your light like mine be hidden,
Your young life like mine be wasted,
Undone in mine undoing,
And ruin'd in my ruin,
Thirsty, canker'd, goblin-ridden?"—
She clung about her sister,

Kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her:
Tears once again
Refresh'd her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;
Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
She kiss'd and kiss'd her with a hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,
That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
She loath'd the feast:
Writhing as one possess'd she leap'd and sung,
Rent all her robe, and wrung
Her hands in lamentable haste,
And beat her breast.
Her locks stream'd like the torch
Borne by a racer at full speed,
Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
Or like an eagle when she stems the light
Straight toward the sun,
Or like a caged thing freed,
Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knock'd at her heart,
Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name:
Ah! fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense fail'd in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree

Spun about,
Like a foam-topp'd waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea,
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.
That night long Lizzie watch'd by her,
Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
Felt for her breath,
Held water to her lips, and cool'd her face
With tears and fanning leaves:
But when the first birds chirp'd about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bow'd in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Open'd of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laugh'd in the innocent old way,
Hugg'd Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
Her gleaming locks show'd not one thread of grey,
Her breath was sweet as May
And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years
Afterwards, when both were wives
With children of their own;
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
Their lives bound up in tender lives;
Laura would call the little ones
And tell them of her early prime,

Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood;
(Men sell not such in any town):
Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,
And win the fiery antidote:
Then joining hands to little hands
Would bid them cling together,
“For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.”

3 (b): Summary

Set in a fairytale world and exploring themes of temptation, sacrifice and salvation, ‘Goblin Market’ tells the story of a fraught encounter between sisters Laura and Lizzie and evil goblin merchants. When Laura exchanges a lock of her golden hair for the chance to taste the goblins’ enchanted ‘fruit forbidden’, she deteriorates until she is ‘knocking at Death’s door’. Her sister Lizzie offers to pay the goblins ‘a silver penny’ for more of their wares, which she hopes will act as an antidote to Laura’s malady. The goblins violently attack Lizzie, smearing their fruits ‘against her mouth’ in a vain attempt ‘to make her eat’. After the goblins are ‘worn out by her resistance’, Lizzie returns home, and Laura kisses the juices from her sister’s face and is restored.

3 (c): Form and Genre

On first reading ‘Goblin Market’, eminent Victorian critic John Ruskin declared that Christina Rossetti’s ‘irregular measures’ were the ‘calamity of modern poetry’ and that

she 'should exercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public like'.

Ruskin's tin eared critique unwittingly identifies one of 'Goblin Market's' greatest strengths: its experimental form. A poem whose compelling narrative is animated by a surprising lyric energy, it never conforms to a set rhyme scheme or metrical pattern. For instance, the goblin merchants' cries in the opening lines tempt not through lavish verbal description, but through form.

Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpeck'd cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheek'd peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries; –

The sing-song rhythm of alternating dactylic and trochaic feet mimics the sound of street vendors hawking their wares, while the rhyme scheme eschews traditional corresponding rhyme words in favour of the incantatory repetition of 'berries' and a seductive sibilance that hints at the fruits' dark properties. What is essentially a shopping list is transformed by the musical qualities of Rossetti's technique, anticipating Walter Pater's Aesthetic creed that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music'. Drawing on the conventions of a variety of literary genres including the gothic, fantasy, biblical, children's literature and fable, Rossetti creates a disorienting fairytale atmosphere that is simultaneously seductive and alienating.

3 (d): Context

Rossetti wrote this poem in 1859 while volunteering at the St Mary Magdalene Penitentiary for 'fallen women' in Highgate. Dedicated to the reform and rehabilitation of prostitutes, this Anglo-Catholic institution was remarkable in the period for its conviction that women who had transgressed sexually could be redeemed. Biographers and critics have argued that the

themes of temptation, sexual exchange and sisterly redemption in this poem are influenced by its poet's experience working as an 'Associate Sister' at Highgate.

The poem first appeared in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). Rossetti's skilful and original blend of sound and sense delighted critics and readers alike, although critical plaudits initially exceeded commercial sales. Its fairytale cadences led the *Spectator* to declare it 'a true children's poem', yet the paper also noted that its adult themes of temptation, transgression and redemption also appealed to a mature readership. The poem was greeted with rapturous applause when the publisher Alexander Macmillan read a manuscript version out loud to a working men's society in Cambridge. Rossetti herself was not writing for children during this period, emphatically declining to contribute to a children's book on the grounds that '*children* are not among my suggestive subjects'. Literary admirers included Algernon Charles Swinburne, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Lewis Carroll, whose *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* (1865) was partially inspired by the poem. Rossetti returned the compliment in 1874, writing a book of children's stories entitled *Speaking Likenesses*, which she hoped would imitate Carroll's success in the booming children's market.

3 (e): Interpretations

Initially received as a moral allegory about the dangers of giving in to temptation, the poem was recast by feminist classic *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) as a parable of female resistance and solidarity. By contrast, in 1973 *Playboy Magazine* presented the poem as unambiguously pornographic; the text was accompanied by a Kinuko Craft illustration of the goblin attack on Lizzie that left little to the imagination. 'Goblin Market' continues to appeal to a popular audience; it has been set to music many times and adapted as a play by Polly Pen and Peggy Harmon in New York (1986) and Nick Hedges in London (1995).

The 20th-century revival of interest in the poem opened the floodgates for Feminist, Marxist, Freudian, Queer Theory and New Historicist critiques which variously interpreted the poem as a warning about the dangers of a free-market economy, a protest against hazardous practices in 19th-century food-adulteration, a Christian tale of sacrifice and salvation, a parable of lesbian empowerment, a fable about anorexia, an expression of incestuous yearning and a tribute to the delicious oral and aural pleasures of poetry itself. 'Goblin Market' has continued to thrive in the academic marketplace. The poem continues to attract critical interpretations and artistic adaptations as colourful and diverse as the goblin

merchants' wares, challenging Christina Rossetti's surely disingenuous claim that she 'did not mean anything profound by this fairytale'.

Herbert F. Tucker's discussion of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' within the Paradigm of Victorian concepts of 'Market'

When Christina Rossetti let it fall that in "Goblin Market" she had written no parable soliciting deep exegesis but a poem to be taken just as it came, she may have meant to wave the hermeneutic white flag. In effect, she was dropping the scented handkerchief. The eldritch embroidery of "Goblin Market" has probably attracted more, and more various, commentary during the last two decades than any other poem of its time. It proves on recent examination to be a poem about communal sorority and also about patriarchal dominion; about the Christian Eucharist and also free self-actualization; about diffusive jouissance and also the therapeutic consolidation of a split soul; about anorexia nervosa, vampirism, the adulteration of foodstuffs, absinthe addiction, and the pros and cons of masturbation.

While so many critical allegories can hardly be mutually compatible, taken en masse they fortify every reader's conviction that, whatever "Goblin Market" means, it is a work instinct with sex, drugs, rock and roll, or their Victorian equivalents. Determining what these equivalents might be is a nice task for critical brokerage; lately the smart money has been placed on economics. The readings of the poem that make the most comprehensive sense of its multiplex appeal are the ones that put the *market* back in "Goblin Market," and vice versa; that ask how Rossetti's masterpiece both, critically reflects upon, and knowingly takes part in, systems of commodity exchange that during her lifetime transformed Victorian society and the terms of her calling as a writer within it. To a series of strong mercantile interpretations published by American scholars during the 1990s I propose adding what marketing practices of the later nineteenth century most conspicuously added to the victorious technologies of capitalism, the element of advertising. The seductions in—and of—"Goblin Market" were early warnings—and exploitations—of Victorian styles of market penetration that, inasmuch as they ventured to influence behavior by reorienting desire through language, had every claim on the attention of contemporary poets. This was especially true for a poet of Christina Rossetti's age: born in 1830, and cresting the prime of life in 1862 when her *Goblin Market* volume was published, she was young enough to feel the new pitch of Victorian advertisement as keyed particularly to her generation's

susceptibilities; yet she was old enough to know better, having grown up under a more naive promotional dispensation.

From this historically privileged vantage the whole story of “Goblin Market” in a sense flows, and it goes like this: Laura and Lizzie, two look-alike alliterative sisters, live together alone keeping cows, chickens, and bees in a rural neighborhood that happens to be frequented by goblin men peddling domestic and imported fruit in the open air around breakfast and supper time. The sisters are of indeterminate age: young maidens, clearly; yet old enough to be independent of any parental supervision or truant officer, to know a cautionary tale or two about those goblin costermongers, and to qualify for illustration as stunners—initially by the poet’s brother Dante Gabriel in the first edition of 1862 and then a century later in an unbowlerized, cut-to-the-chase version in *Playboy* magazine that, in case it has not come to your attention on some former occasion, has been generously represented in a recent article by Lorraine Kooistra. One evening Laura succumbs to the goblins’ mouth-watering sales pitch and, though penniless, contracts to barter a lock of her hair for all the fruit she can eat. Coming home in a night bulimic buzz, she brushes aside her sister Lizzie’s scolding with a promise to go out again the next night and get more fruit for both of them. As that next night falls, Laura finishes up her farm chores and goes out cruising for goblin. But she can’t score: frustrated at first to find no goblin on the scene, she then learns to her horror that, while Lizzie can hear the vendors as usual, she herself has gone stone-deaf to their cry.

Sick with desire, Laura wastes away to the point where Lizzie overcomes scruple and decides to act as her sister’s proxy, taking a penny in her purse and letting the goblins know she’s ready to deal. But—in a scene to which we shall return—when Lizzie orders a pennysworth of fruit on a takeout basis, the goblins insist that she feast on the spot like her sister. Lizzie declines and demands her money back, at which point the goblin team really gets down to business. They mount a hard sell that escalates from courtesy and advice to insult and threat, cresting at length in the apotheosis of sales force: resorting to outright personal violence, they become pushers indeed, crushing fruit against her mouth—which will not open, however, either to protest or to taste—and drizzling juice down her chin and neck. Finally the goblins take no for an answer, reject the penny, and vanish underground or into thin air. Lizzie races home in an afterglow of ecstatic renunciation (remember, it’s a Victorian poem) and invites Laura to “Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices ... Eat me, drink me, love me”.

Aghast at Lizzie's apparent sacrifice, yet obedient to an addict's need, Laura ingests the pulpy juice, only to have it work as a homeopathic antidote kicking her into a high-speed delirium, from which she recovers Completely Cured. An epilogue fast-forwards to later years: both sisters now being married, Laura makes a habit of summoning her daughters and nieces—nephews, sons, and husbands somehow need not apply—to hear her tale of trespass, waste, and redemption and to learn its lesson that “there is no friend like a sister”.

Few readers have been entirely at ease with this overdetermined final scene of instruction. But a convenient back door opens into the poem when we consider the mode of that instruction, which is overwhelmingly oral: “Laura would *call* the little ones / And *tell* them,” “Would *talk* about the haunted glen,” and so forth. The substance of this oral transmission is manifestly the same as that of the five hundred-line poem we have just been reading, whose antically irregular rhymes breathe a nursery air, and whose supple, frisky metrics practically have to be sounded out, in the mind's ear if not aloud, in order to catch their distinctive, spontaneous music. To be sure, the ambiguous position of the epilogue, coming after the story it depends on yet also operatively commands, makes it impossible to equate the third-person narrative voice with Laura's. Besides, as an oral storyteller Laura has a bardic license to tell her oft-told tale different ways at different sittings, in contrast to the fixity of the one printed text before us.

At least one hopes she tinkers a bit with her vocabulary: to imagine the circle of little ones puzzling over terms in the text like *pellucid*, *purloin*, *obstreperously*, and *succous pasture*, a thesaurist's periphrasis for *juicy food*—to imagine the kids reacting to this gilt-edged diction is to shake off the spell of a naive orality. It is to recall, that is, how Rossetti, like other Victorian pioneers in children's literature, was at work in a compromised mode that owed its charm to the ways it played reading against listening. The text as a whole invites us to imagine such a performance as publisher Alexander Macmillan staged when he read out “Goblin Market,” shortly before publication, to a skeptical yet eventually enthralled “working-man's society,” or again, such a performance as the poet herself apparently conducted when reading aloud to fallen women at the shelter in Highgate where she volunteered. The text invites us not just to *read it*, but to *read it to ourselves*, to let it talk us into a mode of virtual orality. And virtual orality, I shall argue, has everything to do with the economic thematics of Rossetti's story.

Much of my argument will be found implied, by the reading ear, in the poem's opening lines:

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
“Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy...”

The phrase “Come buy” recurs more than a dozen times in “Goblin Market” as the “iterated jingle” (253) of a straightforward sales pitch. Yet a vigilant virtual orality has to wonder how to take it. How is the imagined listener to know what the reader so plainly sees, that “buy” has a letter *u* in the middle of it—to know that the goblins are not freely offering something (Do come by our orchard some time) but rather selling something for a price? The listener *in the poem* knows what’s up, right away and beyond any doubt: the first thing said by either of the maids who hear the goblins cry is that “We must not buy their fruits” (43). That our country maids thus know just what they are hearing is as sure a sign as any in the poem that they are conscious denizens of a market economy, where the way to come by a nice piece of fruit is to come and buy it; where “Come buy” betokens not hospitality but trade. The verbal confusion here is all ours, the virtual listeners’; this happens, I submit, because Rossetti wants us to read verbal confusion as cultural confusion. Embedded (or endeared, as John Keats might say) within the reigning order of contract and purchase, she invites us to recognize an older order of invitation and gift, which mercantilism has on one hand superseded as clearly as literacy has superseded orality, yet which on the other hand mercantilism has less abolished than engrossed, for rhetorical purposes, as a hidden persuader. About this kind of subliminal promotion Rossetti’s market-wise maids seem clueless: Lizzie means to reinforce her sister’s “We must not buy” when she declares, “Their *offers* should not charm us, / Their evil gifts would harm us” (65–66; my emphases); but the way her declaration confounds purchase with donation, confounds the bought with the given (via the ambiguously *offered*), would do a politician proud. And this confusion discloses something about the promotional strategy that underwrites the goblins’ deceptively straightforward “Come buy.”

Winston Weathers’ discussion on Sisterhood and Self

Christina confesses herself, in her allegory, “A Royal Princess,” a great awareness of self.

All my walls are lost in mirrors, whereupon I trace
Self to right hand, self to left hand, self in every place,
Self-same solitary figure, self-same seeking face.

And in these lines she confesses not only an awareness of self, but of fragmented self, for the phrase, “self to right hand, self to left hand,” suggests the dichotomy of personality into

differing, if not antithetical, forces. These forces of the self Christina allegorizes in her poems dealing with sisterhood. The various sisters which appear in her work are the mythic characters in her psychological drama, and such poems as *Goblin Market*, “A Triad,” “The Queen of Hearts,” “Sister Maude,” “Noble Sisters,” and many others provide her commentary on the varying actions and interactions which occur within the inner being. Time and time again, Christina brings two sisters together—sometimes three—in moments of crises, letting them debate with one another, struggle with one another, in mythic action that illustrates both a subtle understanding of self on Christina’s part and a tragic realization of fragmentation that belies the calm, serene exterior that Christina presented to the world. Not recounting real experience, not revealing homosexual predilections, the sister poems are simply Christina’s discussion of psychological truths which she witnessed in herself and which are universally significant in that all our personalities are subject to an analysis into parts, whether we call those parts “the brothers and sisters of our soul” or, with Freud, the ego, superego, and id.

The prototypal poem in Christina’s myth of the self is, of course, *Goblin Market*. In this early and most famous poem, Christina creates her essential characters—Laura and Lizzie— and moves them through a drama that leads from innocence and integration to sickness and fragmentation back to a newer and more mature balance, represented in part by the marriage of the sisters and their assumption of marital responsibility. One need not identify the two sisters and the goblins too precisely in order to recognize the resolution that occurs. That the two sisters are aspects of one self is evident when they are described as being “like two blossoms on one stem” and “locked together in one nest,” yet that they are different from one another is evident in their very actions. Laura, whose “restraint is gone” and Lizzie, who is “full of wise upholdings,” respond in their different ways to the goblins who parade before them. The goblins, obviously, are some state of mind, some mental experience that is both attractive and destructive, both exotic and visionary at the same time it is immensely real. One would not go too far astray, it seems, to recognize in the goblins and their wares a kind of imaginative, fanciful, visionary—even hallucinatory—state of mind that is escape from reality, beautiful escape at the same time it is intellectually destructive. To see in the goblins simply the sexual or the sensuous is to limit their role in Christina’s myth and limit their function. No doubt sex and sensuality are there, but other mysterious regions of the mind and of the self also exist that lure one to psychological death. The whole fairy-tale machinery, the animal shapes of the goblins suggest what a bizarre nature the goblin experience was to Christina herself and suggest whole inexplicable areas of detachment from reality.

Such Nietzschean terms as Apollonian and Dionysian may help us understand the fundamental drama of *Goblin Market*. The different phases of human nature which Laura and Lizzie represent are similar to those Nietzsche recognized, principally in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as eternal polarities of self, the one, the Dionysian, leading to tragedy, the other, the Apollonian, leading to survival. The Dionysian aspect of self is pulled strongly toward the whole ritualistic fulfillment that Laura experiences with the goblins, while the Apollonian self holds back from the make-believe, the visionary and ritualistic “reality” in preference for a more logically-oriented reality, a more objective, exterior world. Not that Lizzie is unaware of the goblins and that potential state of mind. The whole self is aware of the goblins. But whereas one part of self surrenders to illusion and an essentially intensional accommodation to life, the other part of self struggles to maintain a distance from the deep, archetypal, even primordial freedom and makes, in turn, an essentially extensional accommodation to existence.

Laura comes near her death in surrendering to a myth that can be imagined from afar but which cannot be accepted as a replacement for reality. Stepping into that state of mind which the goblins represent, Laura finds herself in that pathological state which modern psychiatry has dealt with so extensively and which is, indeed, a deep illness. All of Laura’s symptoms following her purchase of the goblin fruit are those of the mentally ill. Withdrawing from reality into that illusion of the goblins, Laura finds herself in that pitiful trap of having lost contact with one reality only to find its supposed replacement to be air and vacancy. Lizzie, the remaining fragment of the whole self, must now struggle to integrate again, to become one whole person again, and to do this she must face up to the very illusory state of mind—the goblin market—that is the “snake pit” for Laura. In sound psychiatric fashion, Lizzie re-enacts the goblin experience, meets it face to face in a kind of therapeutic recognition, without actually succumbing to it, and by doing so is able to pull Laura back from the brink.

Assignments

1. Critically appreciate the poem “Goblin Market” as an expression of repressed sexuality.
2. Comment on Victorian societal ethos as reflected in the poem.
3. Illustrate the concept of sisterhood as represented in the poem “Goblin Market.”

UNIT 4 (a): Introduction to the Poetry of G.M. Hopkins

Introduction to the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins chronologically belongs to the Victorian era, but for his innovative poetic theory and his novelty in his oeuvre made him one of the precursors of the modern poetry in English language. He was born on 28 July, 1844 at Stratford in England. He was the eldest of nine children to Manley and Catherine Hopkins. Since his infancy Hopkins was deeply influenced by the rich cultural heritage and academic ambience in his family. All of his siblings were deeply moved by art and religion. Hopkins's father was the founder of marine insurance firm. He also worked as Church Warden at St. John-at-Hampstead. The poet's parents nurture fondness for verses and religion. Hopkins's father as a poet published few works. Among them remarkable works are *A Philosopher's Stone and Other Poems* (1843), *Pietas Metrica* (1849). The poet's mother Catherine (Smith) Hopkins was the daughter of a renowned physician in London. Catherine (Smith) Hopkins loved to read poetry, religious discourse and German Philosophy. The fondness for reading that exist in the poet's parents percolated in the tender mind of G.M. Hopkins. In his infantile days he wanted to be an illustrator and painter. He was admitted to study classics at Balliol College, Oxford. He studied there from 1863-1867. During his Oxford days he befriended Robert Bridges. In later times Robert Bridges has been elected as poet laureate in England. The friendship with Bridges actually gives G.M. Hopkins recognition as one of the celebrated poets of the Victorian era. His fame came posthumously but without the initiative of Robert Bridges to publish the poetry of G.M. Hopkins the world may not be able to welcome one of the celebrated poets of the Victorian England. In 1866 July Hopkins first expressed his desire to be a Roman Catholic priest. With this intention he travelled to Birmingham in September in 1866 to consult Henry Newman. Later in 1868 he converted to Jesuit priest. Hopkins's poetry operates on a strange binary. His vocation as a Jesuit priest and his passion of writing poetry both appear contradictory. The poetic self of Hopkins's suffered to a large extent due to his engagement in the craft of poetry. As a poet he should observe the world and its variegated colours. But as a priest he must maintain his indifference towards the world of beauty and colour. The priestly self of Hopkins wants to be adhered to the life of celibacy and renunciation. On the other hand, the poetic self of Hopkins demands an active engagement in the world of beauty and colour and out of this engagement comes his poetry which mirrors the variegated colours of the world.

4 (b): Windhover

Text of the Poem:

To Christ Our Lord

I caught this morning's minion, kingdom

Of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn

Falcon, in his riding

Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and

Striding

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling

Wing

In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,

As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding

Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding

Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume,

Here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my Chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down

sillion

Shine. And blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,

Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Analysis of the Poem:

The poem "The Windhover" was composed in May, 1877. It was slightly revised by the poet in the following year. Hopkins considered the poem as the best poem that he ever penned. Being a Jesuit priest he was well aware of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. The windhover is a bird. The poet in an approbatory tone goes on describing the beauty and physical prowess of the bird Windhover. It is being called as "morning's minion" or morning's favourite person. He also calls the bird "dauphin" or the crowned prince of the kingdom of daylight. The variegated colours of the dawn are reflected on the wings of the bird. It enhances the beauty of the bird. The bird is a strange combination of beauty and valour. Like a powerful rider it rides in the air.

The beauty and strength of the bird make it a unique creature who is flawless and divine. The bird is the metaphor for Christ or the Holy Bird according to Biblical allusion. The poem is composed in sprung rhythm. It is an innovative rhyme scheme invented by G.M. Hopkins. In this rhyme the number of accents in a line is counted but the number of the syllables does not matter. As a result the reader needs to spring from tonally one accented syllable to another. Therefore, it is called sprung rhythm. The sprung rhythm obviously is a masculine rhythm. Hopkins's poetry takes its genesis from the poet's minute observatory power. The conflict in Hopkins's poetic endeavour is between the poetic self and the priestly self, between the self obsessed with the variegated beauty of the world and the self struggling to adjust the life of a celibate and a recluse. Hopkins being a Jesuit priest adheres to two Jesuit mottoes: "ad majorem dei gloriam" and "laus deo simpler". The first one means "glory be to God" for creating this beautiful universe and the second tenet implies "praise God". Hopkins's poetic theory is influenced by these two Jesuit tenets to a large extent. Here in "The Windhover" he bestows his praise on God by praising his creation, that is, the bird. The poem employs both the Jesuit mottoes of praising God and acknowledging divine glory. In Hopkins's poetry God appears to be a powerful Father figure. In front of such divine presence the devotee is a humble, supplicant subject.

Assignments

1. Critically Analyze the poem "The Windhover".
2. Mention two Jesuit mottoes in the poem "The Windhover".
3. Critically comment on the imagery in the poem "The Windhover".

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Block II

Unit 5

Mrs. Warren's Profession

By

George Bernard Shaw

5 (a): Objectives

Critical responses to Shaw as a dramatist in general and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in particular have been widely divergent. If some have seen him, in the line of his friend and fellow dramatist Sean O'Casey as one "who will be remembered for ever... for his rare and surprising gifts and for the gallant way he used them" (Sean O'Casey, *The Green Crow*, 1957, p. 189), others are more inclined to share Raymond Williams's observations : "Shaw's dynamic as a dramatist has now largely weakened, and it is difficult to believe that it ought, as a major force, to survive the period of which he was a victim. Respect for ability to laugh at a great deal of persistent nonsense will certainly endure; and respect for his great wit and for his skill in forensic and burlesque which made the willingness literary fact. But the emotional inadequacy of his plays is increasingly obvious... He withered the tangible life of experience in the pursuit of the fantasy of pure intelligence and pure force, and even these, as we look back at them, seem no more than conventional gestures." (R. Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, London : Penguin, 1973, rpt. 1983, pp. 290-1) The present discussion also tries to keep in mind the different responses generated by the play while attempting to make a study of some of its salient aspects. It is obvious that the limited scope cannot do justice to *all* the issues that the play invites attention to and therefore makes a process of selection and exclusion inevitable. While the selection of the 'important' issues rather than some others is necessarily one of personal preferences, it also tries to look at the play from the perspective or point of view of the students. The present discussion only tries to throw some light on the play from certain perspectives, and that too, in a limited and essentially inadequate fashion. This should be supplemented by further reading of at least some of the seminal books available on the play in particular and on Shaw's dramaturgy in general, some of which have been suggested in the appended Reading List.

George Bernard Shaw's first attempt at creative literary work resulted in the production of five unsuccessful novels between 1879 and 1883. In 1891 appeared his book of dramatic criticism. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. His theatre criticism, of course, started much earlier, in the form of reviews, and the first play he attempted in 1885, *Widowers' Houses*, was completed in 1892. The play dealt with the contemporary social evil of the London slums. It was also the first example of what came to be known at the time as the 'new drama'. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* was one of the most important forces that produced the 'new drama' a movement that was identified with J. T. Grain's Independent Theatre. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was written in 1893 and it dealt with the new dramatic vein of engagement with contemporary social problems-with the evil of prostitution. Shaw himself said that the composition of the play was aimed at drawing "attention to the truth that prostitution was caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together."

But an intensive reading of the play reveals that despite Shaw's claim and the title, prostitution as such does not hold the centrestage of action of the play. Rather it is used as an instrument, a point of departure, to enact the battle of personalities of a prostitute mother, Mrs. Warren, and her enlightened, spiritually independent, intellectual daughter, Vivie. The Victorian middle class educated women's desire for greater freedom and equality with men in the public sphere, in the era of the emergence of feminist consciousness in England, thus, plays an equally important role in determining the development of the play. The conflict of the domestic and the public spheres in the New Woman's life, in the form of a dilemma between love and other emotional associations on the one hand and unsentimental professional rigour on the other, represents the troubled atmosphere of an era in transition. The play, thus, should be read less as an account of a personal encounter between two central characters, than as one deeply embedded in the contemporary socio-cultural-ideological turmoil.

George Bernard Shaw, one of the greatest Irish playwrights to have written in English, was born to George Carr Shaw—first an official in the Dublin law courts and then an unsuccessful corn merchant—and Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly, daughter of an English landowner, on 26 July 1856. Shaw had a very unhappy childhood with an addicted to liquor irresponsible father and a mother who he later described as a ‘shocking bad mother’ (letter to T. D. O’Bolger, Feb. 1916, Bernard Shaw : *Collected Letters* Vol. 3, Ed. Dan H. Laurence, New York : Viking, 1988, p. 364) and ‘the worst mother conceivable’. (Preface to *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw : Shaw’s Music 1876-1890*, Vol. I, Ed. Dan H. Laurence, London : Max Reinhardt, 1981, p. 31) Shaw and his siblings were brought up primarily by servants who were no less detestable. The early experience of maternal neglect and lack of affection have been considered by critics as the root of his mother-fixation that surfaces in various forms in his representation of mother figures in plays like *Major Barbara* (Lady Britomart), *You Never Can Tell* (Mrs. Clandon), *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (Mrs. Warren). Of course, to be fair to Elizabeth, Shaw acquired his ear for music from his mother and the formative experiences helped in the growth of an independent mind and an original outlook on life.

After a stint as a clerk and a cashier in a land agent’s office in Dublin, he left for London in April 1876 where he took up journalism and music criticism in the *Star*, an evening daily. As a music critic and a theatre reviewer, he wrote essays of high quality for *Saturday Review*, a weekly periodical, and that’s how he embarked upon a professional writing career. His ear for music made the otherwise idea-based dramatic dialogues aesthetically pleasing and not tedious, the finest example being the third Act of *Man and Superman*.

During his stay in London he was introduced to political ideas, joined political societies and attended public meetings. His conversion to socialism has been traced back to his attending of a lecture by the American economist Henry George in September 1884. While his early experience of poverty and deprivation paved the way of his conversion, he almost immediately joined the newly founded Fabian Society, who advocated a slow and evolutionary change, and not a violent and revolutionary one, from capitalism and socialism. The Fabians had a powerful influence on the British social and

political life in the next few decades. Shaw's initial faith in strong Parliamentary and legislative measures as a way of ensuring equality was replaced by a conviction in the necessity of righteous and women who were not merely good. His unconventional way of thinking helped him interrogate the validity not only of the existing socio-political-economic institutions, but also of the way institutional Christian religion was practised. But his ideological convictions—which he relentlessly kept claiming to have been based on reason and rationality—had at times such an air of rigidity about them that they often smacked of fanaticism. It is the puritanical and the quasi-religious tinge of his character—for instance, his sense of the sacredness of life, forsaking of meat, alcohol and tobacco and so on—along with this rigidity of ideas, that has earned him the criticism of ambivalence. Indeed, in some of his creations—notably in the present play—the coexistence of his advocacy of the unromantic and the practical and a tacit endorsement of the romantic and the idealistic is remarkable.

Shaw wrote as many as five unsuccessful novels between 1879 and 1883 and his first play, started in 1885 and finished in 1892 was called *Widower's Houses*. He was one of the first dramatists in England to have taken up serious socio-political-religious problems that involved the life of the majority as subjects of his plays and the Norwegian playwright Henric Ibsen was a particular influence. His ideas of an intellectual, thought-provoking theatre, attempt at social reform through drama preceded certain similar ideas put forward by Bertolt Brecht in Germany in the 1930s and '40s. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925. Some of the most successful of his fifty plays—apart from *Back to Methuselah* (1922), which he considered as his masterpiece—are *Man and Superman* (1905), *Saint Joan* (1923) and *The Apple Cart* (1929), his last play. But his contributions are no less significant in his non-dramatic compositions, which are primarily discourses on contemporary socio-political problems. He died in 1950.

6 (a): Date, Source and Early Staging Details

In a letter to *The Daily Chronicle* on 28 April 1898 Shaw explained the source of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* :

Miss Janet Achurch mentioned to me a novel by some
French writer ['Yvette' by Guy de Maupassant] as having

a dramatisable story in it...In the following autumn I was the guest of a lady [Beatrice Webb] of very distinguished ability... she suggested that I should put on the stage a real modern lady of the governing class—not the sort of thing that the theatrical and critical authorities imagine such a lady to be. I did so; and the result was Miss Vivie Warren... Mrs. Warren herself was my version of the heroine of the romance narrated by Miss Achurch. The tremendously effective scene... in which she justifies herself, is only the paraphrase of a scene in a novel of my own, *Cashel Byron's Profession* (hence the title, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*), in which a prize-fighter shows how he was driven into the ring exactly as Mrs. Warren was driven into the streets.

Shaw took up the writing of the play in the summer of 1893—after another Unpleasant Play, *Widower's Houses*—to be staged in the Independent Theatre. The theme of the drama, prostitution, was taboo in the Victorian England as a dramatic subject. “There can be no doubt”, Maurice Valency argues, “that Shaw was aware when he undertook *Mrs. Warren's Profession* that the Queen's Reader of Plays would forbid its production, but evidently he hoped his play would provoke a controversy which would bring to public attention not only the social aspects of prostitution but also the question of censoring. Both aspects of the matter were fully exploited in the preface to the published play.” (M. Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet*, New York : OUP, 1973, p. 92) The play was expectedly banned by the Lord Chamberlain, the official theatre censor of Britain, before being performed for the first time in a private show at London's New Lyric Club on 5 January 1902, with Harley Granville-Barker, the distinguished actor-manager, as Frank. The first public performance of the play took place in New York in 1905. Of course it took another twenty years for the ban to be lifted in England where the play was for the first time publicly staged on 27 July 1925, when feminist consciousness was at an advanced stage and women had experienced the danger of working in munition factories during World War I. By that time it was no more considered ‘indecent’ and had sixty-eight consecutive performances. The play was published for the first time in the volume

Plays Unpleasant along with two other plays. *The Philanderer* and *Widowers' Houses*.

6 (b): Shaw and the Play of Ideas

The title of the first volume of Shaw's dramatic works, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898), suggested a disavowal of the conventional broad generic division of tragedy and comedy. Shaw was primarily concerned in making fundamental social criticism through his creative works. A sense of injustice in various conventional norms, ideas and institutions, which he could personally connect with because of a perennial feeling of personal deprivation and injustice, led him to make his plays a powerful instrument for proposing changes in society. His familiarity with the works of Henry George and Karl Marx only strengthened his identification with the marginal sections of the society. The economic and other forms of exploitation in the contemporary English society often were objects of his logical analysis, ironic and satiric treatment and pleasant fun. As a dramatist he sought to combine entertainment and criticism. Criticism, for Shaw, "may say things which many would like to say but dare not, and indeed for want of skill could not even if they durst. Its iconoclasms, seditions, and blasphemies, if well turned, tickle those whom they shock; so that the critic adds the privilege of the court jester to that of the confessor." (B. Shaw, *Collected Works*, Voll. VII, New York : Ayot St. Lawrence, 1930-32, p. v) Shaw's plays are often conveyers of his own ideas, a practice that makes for their distinction from naturalist plays. Naturalist works were supposed to be impartial and dispassionate which spoke for themselves. *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, so far as represents Shaw's own ideas about prostitution, women's condition and so on, deviates significantly from the naturalist practice.

Unit 7

7 (a): The Play as an Anti-Sentimental Piece

One of the prominent themes of the play is prostitution, presented through the character of Mrs. Warren, whose relationship with her Cambridge-educated mathematician daughter Vivie constitutes the fiber of the play. Vivie is horrified to discover that a substantial part of her mother's fortune was made out of prostitution and subsequently managing whorehouses. But prostitution here is seen not as a moral weakness in the protagonist, but as caused by the discriminatory material life of the contemporary British society. Prostitution, instead of being interpreted moral depravity at

the individual level, is explained in terms of the collective material reality of the exploitation of the majority by the minority. The conventional sentimental approach to moral dispositions and human behaviour is thus replaced by the Marxist-socialist tendency to understand individual character as embedded in the fundamental economic relations that shape socio-cultural life. Prostitution is thus stripped off the sentimental-idealistic idea of human character as having a universal a-priori essence that transcends the social-material life of the collective.

Seen from this perspective, it is not Mrs. Warren, but the social system that compels her to take up the career of a prostitute, that becomes Shaw's object of attack. But, at the same time, Mrs. Warren is criticized by Vivie for her use of prostitution not only as a means of survival, but also as a way to solvency. Vivie becomes the spokesperson of Shaw whose puritan and romantic self stands in the way of the feminist understanding of Mrs. Warren's agency in choosing the patriarchal weapon of women's exploitation as the instrument of material uplift. The playwright, in understanding the compulsion of Mrs. Warren's, does not glorify the profession itself. His attitude to the world's oldest profession is unsentimental to the extent that he underlines the conditioned but repulsive nature of it. While the people who are forced to take to it are seen as victims rather than objects of criticism, the human degradation and commodification that it implies makes it detestable. Of course Shaw fails to handle the complexity of the situation with dexterity, and the result is an ambivalence in the characterization of Mrs. Warren.

Vivie's understanding of her mother's character represents the middle-class Victorian sentimental attitude towards prostitution. Her detestation of her mother's career is not only a consciousness against exploitation of labour, but also a disgust for the particular nature of that labour. This is why she is not as much scandalised—as she is after discovering the source of sustenance of her mother—when she comes to know about George Croft's exploitation of young girls in a paint factory. Vivie's sentimental morality is thus subjected to evaluation. What replaces her sense of morality is, of course, a different morality, a more flexible morality based on pragmatic rationality. For Shaw, a good literary work is one “in which morality is original and readymade”, a moral system he found worked out by Ibsen. (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in *Collected Works*, Vol. XIX, p. 130) A flexible and situationally defined morality is contrasted with Vivie's rigid

and sentimental idealism. Vivie, like Trench in *Widowers' Houses*, is a romantic idealist, though in a different way. But keeping Shaw's own ambivalence in mind, it is difficult to reach a conclusion as to how far Vivie's idealism is endorsed (or questioned) by the playwright. The confusion is marked in Maurice Valency's assertion that Vivie "acted according to the strictest standards of morality. Vivie's story was certainly not sentimental, but it was certainly not unromantic." (p. 102)

7 (b): Female Subjectivity and 'the New Woman'

The late nineteenth century in England was marked by an awakening in the domain of feminist consciousness. In her seminal book *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter talks about three phases in the development of feminist consciousness in Europe : the 'Feminine' (1840-1880), the 'Feminist' (1880-1920) and the 'Female' (since 1920). In the Feminine phase, according to Showalter, women's literary activities were aimed at equaling the male intellectual achievements, while in the Feminist phase, an era marked by intense movement for female suffrage, women try to come out of the stereotypes of femininity created and sustained by the long history of patriarchy. The novels of Elizabeth Gaskell and Frances Trollope, for instance, try to relocate individual/personal senses of injustice against the background of collective gender-based marginalisation and exploitation. The idea of the 'New Woman' emerged as an alternative to the patriarchal dream of the traditional, stereotypical, 'feminine', domesticity-bound woman. The New Woman sought to challenge the binary of private/public and to assert her equal right and ability in handling education, career, intellectual achievements and all other spheres traditionally conceived of as the male forte. The right and absolute control over one's body, sexuality, desires and choice was seen as a basic component of the independence that marked the changed, confident woman, who conceptualized the Amazon Utopias in the 1890s. The Amazon Utopias were fantastically conceived perfect female societies set in an England and America of the future, and tried to propose alternatives to male government, male laws and other such patriarchal institutions.

The character of Vivie Warren, created in the early 1890s, is marked by the emblematic features of the newly emerging consciousness of the New Woman. In fact, on a deeper analysis, the character acts as a site of the enactment of the conflicts and confusions in an ambivalent consciousness in transition. In such situation the character

tries but fails to shake off the burden of a patriarchal heritage completely, while making some important advancement towards that direction. Vivie is a self-confident, Cambridge-educated woman for whom professional success and ambition is a 'natural' choice. Shaw's introductory remarks on Vivie in the play represents a financially secure, professionally sincere and hard-working middle class woman, in complete control over her surroundings : 'A big canvas umbrella, stuck in the ground, keeps the sun off the hammock, in which a young lady is reading and making notes, her head towards the cottage and her feet towards the gate. In front of the hammock, and within reach of her hand, is a common kitchen chair, with a pile of serious-looking books and a supply of writing paper on it. Her interactions with the male characters in the play speak of her self-confidence and an authority that is the hallmark of the New Woman. In fact it is Vivie's relationship and intellectual battle with her mother that constitute the central conflict of the drama, with the male characters playing only supporting and peripheral roles. This is a woman-centric drama in which the problem, crisis and the resolution of that crisis—in whatever form—are created, analysed and provided by women.

In fact, Shaw's foregrounding of the newly defined female subjectivity takes as its medium not only the modern, enlightened Vivie, but also her mother, Mrs. Warren. Her acceptance of prostitution as a profession was not one of choice, but one of compulsion, imposed upon her by the material injustice of a male-governed society. But subsequently she acquires the ability to exploit the source of her exploitation-prostitution itself—towards material comfort, rise in the social scale and an assurance of a socially more 'honourable' life for her daughter. The whole structure of patriarchal domination—as active in the profession of prostitution itself—in thus toppled upside down, with Mrs. Warren now using it to fulfill her own ambitions. The playwright tries to see the profession from an unromantic, practical angle. It is however, arguable, how much he succeeds in that direction. Mrs. Warren's 'success' out of her vocation clearly stands out as the material conquest of the enterprising woman in a patriarchal world that seeks to marginalize and exploit women physically and psycho-logically. Mrs. Warren's victory, seen from this unromantic perspective, is the victory of the New Woman in the public domain. She is the sole proprietor of her body and sexuality, and decides freely to use them for her own purposes.

And yet, her desperate endeavours to strike back at the patriarchal society with its own weapons—the exploitation of female body and sexuality—faces the greatest challenge, ironically, from none other than her daughter herself. Vivie understand the compulsion of her mother’s choice of prostitution as a profession, but fails to comprehend the logic of her willful exploitation of it into financial security. This is because, like her creator, she still has a strain of traditional puritan morality left to her. The conventional morality that teaches to interpret the female body as a site of purity, sacredness and inviolable codes of conduct, actually springs from the institutional patriarchal desire to control and possess that bodyscape and female sexuality. Such patriarchal norms, which try to impose its authority over the dynamics of female sexuality, fail to interpret prostitution as a possible source of female power over men. It is precisely this patriarchal morality and puritanism, that Vivie has internalized, that leads to her absolute renunciation of sexuality at the end of the play. Her failure to understand her mother’s independent appropriation of sexual norms, together with the sudden revelation that her amorous relationship with Frank verged on incest, leads to her repugnance of love and sexuality, when she has become a “woman of business, permanently single, and permanently unromantic.” This ‘desexualisation’ of Vivie is clearly a weakness in Shaw’s conceptualization of the New Woman. With all her education, authority, single-mindedness and professional focus, she remains trapped within the patriarchal norms that the New Woman sought to subvert. She fails to achieve the degree of independence of spirit and selfhood that her mother has achieved through hard struggle. Vivie embodies the confusions and ambivalence that intrigued Shaw’s mind, or, generally speaking, the wider English intelligentsia, at the turn of the century.

8 (a): Male Characters

: There are four male characters in the play—Praed, Frank, George Crofts and Reverend Samuel Gardener. Praed and Crofts are friends of Mrs. Warren while Frank, the son of the local clergyman Reverend Gardener, has a love-relationship with Vivie. Praed is a genuinely good-hearted and romantic individual who has a streak of innocent sentimentality in him. While he is a keen believer in the age-old values of romance, beauty, culture, exoticism he is also practical in his dispositions. But the problem is that the synthesis of the two fundamentally contradictory impulses—practical rationality and romanticism—in him is not quite convincing. He sounds plausible and natural in

moments of aesthetic inspiration, but turns into the playwright's mouthpiece the moment he tries to be rational and analytical. Shaw uses him as his spokesperson, when, for instance, he intends to present certain ideas that often sound abrupt. Such utterances as the following fail to convince the reader/viewer as an original thought of Praed : "When I was young age, young men and women were afraid of each other : there was no good fellowship. Nothing real. Only gallantry copied out of novels, and as vulgar and affected as it could be. Maidenly reserve! Gentlemanly chivalry! Always saying no when you meant yes! Simple purgatory for shy and sincere souls." (Act I) It is this very Praed who reacts sentimentally to the break up of Vivie and Frank in the fourth Act, on which Frank remarks: "Good old Praddy! Ever chivalrous! But you mistake : it's not the moral aspect of the case : it's the money aspect."

Such contradictions in characterization do not occur in the case of Frank, who is a much more consistent individual in his attitude to life and relationship with Vivie. Frank is mainly an instrument for foregrounding the emotional aspect of Vivie's character, which is otherwise business-like and serious. He is also an important source of wit and genial humour in a play that is so full of serious ideas. His dealings with his father and Mrs. Warren have a breezy lightness and youthful vivacity that complement the seriousness of Vivie. His humour, apart from providing comic relief in a thoroughly idea-based play, also acts as a source of bitter irony or even satire directed at the misconceptions of Vivie and Praed, or the more serious weaknesses of reverend Gardener and Crofts.

Sir George Crofts is the only truly reprehensible figure in the play. He is out and out a businessman for whom everything—from human body to human emotions—is a potential commodity. Much older—almost a father figure—than Vivie, he desperately pursues her with the serious conviction that his wealth can buy her love. Such materialist approach stands him in complete contrast to Frank, the real suitor of Vivie. However, when he is sternly refused, he does not hesitate to avenge his failure by destroying her relationship with Frank by spilling the bin of the identity of her probable father. Like a hardcore capitalist investor that he is, he can go to any extreme to protect his interest or fulfill his ambition. In his position vis-à-vis Vivie, he is a contrast of Frank, while in his relationship with Mrs. Warner, he is contrasted with the good-hearted Praed. Of course, by spilling out some secrets and through his overtly practical attitude to life, he helps to clarify certain misconceptions in Vivie and to make her the unromantic woman that she is at the end of the play.

Good or bad, all these three male characters in the play have an individuality

of their own which the other male character, Reverend Gardener, lacks. The local priest is reduced to a pretentious simpleton. If the character of Crofts represents the socialist Shaw's detestation

8 (b): Shaw's Style and Language in the Play

Shaw was yet to reach the state of perfection and maturity as a dramatist while writing his Unpleasant Plays, including *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. The younger Shaw was more inclined towards giving theatrical shape to the ideas that occupied his mind than to allow the ideas to emerge naturally from his theatrical representation. The content, rather than the form or the style was of primary importance to him. He worked within the long realist tradition of the nineteenth century and despite his well-known admiration for Ibsen, did not incorporate naturalist experimentations in his plays. In 1895, two years after writing *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, he wrote that 'the highest genius...is always intensely utilitarian.' (*Shaw on Theatre*, Ed. E. J. West, New York, 1958, p. 68) Stylistic experimentation, thus, was secondary to him at this stage to representation of ideas in a straightforward form that would easily drive home the points he wanted to make. Hence his characters often emerge as his spokespersons or types. Vivie, for an instance, was described by Shaw's friend and critic William Archer as "Shaw in petticoats" (Sally Peters, *Bernard Shaw : The Ascent of the Superman*, New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1986, p. 141). His characters are often instruments for imparting messages and to that extent they deviate from reality and often seem to be romantic and idealistic in intention. This creates the fundamental conflict in the play between the intended thematic anti-romanticism and realism and practised idealism in characterization.

His use of language is also moulded by the purpose of communicating ideas to the audience in a thoughtful and argumentative manner. Since ideas are presented in a dialectically, through debates and exchange of opinions—in the present play, for instance, between Mrs. Warren and Vivie, Vivie and Crofts, Vivie and Frank—rational intellectualism substantially constitutes the stylistic fiber of the play. Such debates and exercises in intellectualism could lead to monotony in the reception of the play but for Shaw's adroit use of diction and his extensive application of subtle wit, humour, satire and irony as instruments of characterization or thematic representation. His early upbringing in a musical atmosphere resulted in his sense of beauty in diction which otherwise would pass of as the language of a pamphlet or a rationally developed

discourse. Expressions are curt and marked by precision; humour is often wry, in commensurability with the discursive nature of the style. The anti-sentimentality in theme and the compatible fast and smart progression of the plot, a non-digressive structure show the dramatist fast developing into the mature artist of the Pleasant plays.

Suggested Readings

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Assignments

1. Discuss *Mrs. Warren's Profession* as an Unpleasant play of ideas.

2. Analyse *Mrs. Warren's Profession* as an anti-sentimental play. How far is it anti-romantic? Discuss with close reference to the text.
3. Comment on Shaw's presentation of the New Woman in the play.
4. Shaw fails to understand prostitution and sexuality in a completely rational manner. Comment.
5. Comment on the style, language and characterization in the play.
6. What Shaw intends in the play is a revaluation of traditional values and conventional morality. Do you agree? Justify your answer.

Block III

Unit 9

Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte

9 (a): Objectives

The objective is to find out why *Wuthering Heights* is a classic text and why it has a secure position in the canon of English literature.

Wuthering Heights, when it was published in 1847, sold very poorly and received only a few reviews. Both the texts of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* were denounced as coarse, immoral and subversive. *Wuthering Heights* was condemned as being far too shocking and inappropriate for Victorian readers because of the depiction of passionate unruly love and of cruelty. Even Charlotte Brontë wrote in a preface to the book shortly after Emily Brontë's death: "Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know. I scarcely think it is." Now, however, Emily Brontë is revered as one of the finest writers of the nineteenth century.

Salient features of *Wuthering Heights* include :

- 1 The Gothic tradition of the late eighteenth century.
- 2 The non-linear narrative structure involving multiple points of view.
- 3 The influence of German Romantics and Lord Byron.
- 4 Social realism

9 (b): Life and Works of Emily Bronte

Emily Jane Brontë was born at Thornton in Yorkshire on 30th July 1818 to Patrick and Maria Brontë. She was the sister of literary geniuses Charlotte Brontë and Anne Brontë and was the fifth of six children. Two years after her birth, her father was appointed a perpetual curate of Haworth, an isolated village on the moors. Maria Brontë died of cancer shortly after Emily's third birthday. Maria's sister, Elizabeth Branwell came to live as a housekeeper in her sister's

family after her death. Both of Emily Brontë's parents had literary leanings; her mother published one essay, and her father wrote four books and tried his hand in poetry too. In childhood, after the death of their mother, the three sisters and their brother Patrick Branwell began creating imaginary lands (Angria, Gondal, Gaaldine, Oceania), which featured in stories that they wrote. Emily and Anne, the youngest created the enchanted world of Gondal together.

In 1824, the four Brontë daughters were sent to the Cowan Bridge School, a school for daughters of poor clergymen. The conditions were harsh and an epidemic soon broke out which took the lives of Maria and Elizabeth. Charlotte was also taken ill, and she and Emily were sent home to Haworth. About this time, Branwell, the only boy in the family, received a box of twelve wooden soldiers. The children began to write stories about them and called them the "Young Men" plays. In 1835, Charlotte was appointed a teacher at Roe Head school and Emily joined her as a student. She, however, became violently homesick just after three months and could not stand being away from her beloved moors and she returned home and Anne joined the school in her stead. In September 1838 Emily commenced work in a teaching job at Miss Patchett's Ladies Academy at Law Hill School near-Halifax. The working hours stretched from 6 am to 11 pm, with just half an hour's break, and just after the first term, her health broke under the grueling stress and she returned home in around April 1839. In 1842, Charlotte forced Emily to join a school in Brussels. Emily did well and impressed her teachers with her clear, smooth writing style but here too she made no friends and went back home soon.

Emily collaborated with Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne on plays and tales that developed into the "Glass Town" saga. By 1834, Emily and Anne were thoroughly engrossed in writing their personal saga involving two imaginary islands in the north and south Pacific-Gondal and Gaaldine. Emily had been writing poetry all this time, mostly on Gondal, and in the autumn of 1845, Charlotte found them and read them obviously without her permission. She then approached her sister and urged her to publish the works. Emily was furious at first, and then Anne interceded, giving her own Gondal poems to Charlotte and the three soon made peace. She edited the poems to take away the Gondal flavour and Emily agreed to the publication of Poems in 1846. Interestingly, to evade contemporary prejudice against female writers, the

Brontë sisters adopted androgynous first names retaining the initial letter of their first names, Charlotte became Currer Bell, Anne became Acton Bell, and Emily became Ellis Bell.

In 1846, about the time Charlotte finished writing *The Professor*, Emily finished *Wuthering Heights*. In 1847, Emily published her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, again under her pseudonym Ellis Bell, as two volumes of a three volume set, the last being *Agnes Grey* by Anne. *Wuthering Heights* subsequently became an English literary classic.

In 1848, Branwell became addicted to drugs and alcohol and he died in September 1848 at the age of thirty. Because of Branwell's death, Charlotte succumbed to a psychosomatic illness and Emily too caught a cold at his funeral which forced her to be confined to the home. By October, Emily's death declined further, and it became obvious to the family that she was suffering from consumption. She frustrated the entire family however by her refusal to take any advice about her health and to pay heed to doctors or medicine. On 19th December 1848 she finally collapsed, saying, "If you will send for a doctor, I will see him now." She died early that afternoon, aged thirty.

Charlotte referred to her sister as a "baby god," and always mourned the loss of what Emily might have produced had she lived longer. Yet, there is a possibility that Charlotte destroyed an uncompleted second novel of Emily's. After all, *Wuthering Heights* was almost universally condemned as being far too shocking for readers and fearing that the subject of her second novel might do harm to Emily's reputation she took this drastic step. Charlotte always felt that there were certain sensitive subjects which should not be dealt with in novels, and it's possible that Emily had started working with one of those subjects, causing Charlotte to fear even nastier reviews than the ones she received for *Wuthering Heights*. In 1850, Charlotte edited and published *Wuthering Heights* under Emily's real name. In the biographical note to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë attributed to her sister "a secret power and fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero."

Lockwood describes in his diary his initial days as a tenant at Thrushcross Grange, an isolated manor. Shortly after arriving at the Grange, he pays a visit to the landlord, Mr. Heathcliff, a man living in a manor called Wuthering Heights. During the visit, Heathcliff seems distrustful of Lockwood and leaves him alone in a room with a group of snarling dogs. Lockwood is saved from the dogs by a pleasant housekeeper. Lockwood is extremely angry, but eventually takes to his taciturn host when he returns and plans to visit again.

Summary : Chapter II

Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights again after a few days walking, arriving just as a light snow begins to fall. He knocks, no one lets him in, and Joseph, an old servant shouts from the barn that Heathcliff is not in the house. Eventually an uncouth looking young man lets him in, and Lockwood goes into a sitting room where he finds a young and beautiful girl. Assuming she is Heathcliff's wife, he tries to make conversation, but is met with a rude response. Heathcliff arrives and corrects Lockwood by saying that she is his daughter-in-law. Lockwood again assumes that the young man who let him in must be Heathcliff's son but Heathcliff corrects him again stating that the youth Hareton Earnshaw is not his son, and that the girl is the widow of Heathcliff's deceased son. Lockwood is forced to stay at Wuthering Heights and the housekeeper, Zillah leads him to bed.

Summary : Chapter III

Zillah leads Lockwood to a room from which Heathcliff has forbidden all visitors. He notices that someone has scratched words into the paint on the ledge by the bed. Three names are inscribed there repeatedly : Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, and Catherine Heathcliff. He also finds a diary written approximately twenty-five years earlier. Apparently the diary belonged to Catherine Earnshaw, and Lockwood reads an entry that describes a day at Wuthering Heights shortly after her father died, describing the cruelties of her older brother Hindley towards Heathcliff and herself.

Lockwood falls asleep and experiences nightmares. The cone from a fir branch begins to tap on his window. Lockwood attempts to break off the branch by forcing his hand through the window but instead of a branch, a cold ghostly hand seizes his own, and a voice, stating

that she is Catherine Linton demands to be let in. To free himself, Lockwood rubs her wrist on the broken glass until blood covers the bed sheets. Freeing his hand, Lockwood tries to cover the hole in the window with a pile of books but they begin to fall, and he cries out in terror. Heathcliff rushes into the room and as Lockwood flees from the room, Heathcliff cries out to Catherine, begging her to return and begins to sob uncontrollably. There are no signs of the ghost anymore. In the morning, Heathcliff treats his daughter-in-law unkindly. He later escorts Lockwood home and the servants are overjoyed. Lockwood retreats into his study.

Summary : Chapter IV

Lockwood's housekeeper, Ellen (Nelly) Dean, brings him his supper and he bids her sit and tell him the history of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights. She first explains the family relationships, stating that the young and beautiful Catherine whom Lockwood met at Wuthering Heights is the daughter of Ellen's first mistress at Wuthering Heights - Catherine and that Hareton Earnshaw is young Catherine's cousin, the nephew of the first Catherine. The first Catherine was the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw, the late owner of Wuthering Heights. Now young Catherine is the last of the Lintons who owned the Orange, and Hareton is the last of the Earnshaws.

Ellen tells the story of her early years at Wuthering Heights, growing up along with the Earnshaw children, Hindley and Catherine. Her story runs thus. When Catherine and Hindley are young children, Mr. Earnshaw takes a trip to Liverpool and returns home with a scrawny orphan whom they christen "Heathcliff" after a son who died in infancy. Mr. Earnshaw announces that Heathcliff will be raised as a member of the family. Both the children resent Heathcliff at first, but Catherine quickly grows to love him and soon they became inseparable, and Hindley continues to treat Heathcliff cruelly along with Mrs. Earnshaw who dies only two years after Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights.

Summary : Chapter V

Time passes, and Mr. Earnshaw grows frail and weak. Disgusted by the conflict between Heathcliff and Hindley, he sends Hindley away to college. Joseph with his fanatical religious beliefs exerts more and more influence over his master as he nears his death. Soon Mr. Earnshaw dies and Catherine and Heathcliff turn to Joseph's version of heaven for some

comfort while awaiting the return of Hindley, the new master of Wuthering Heights.

Summary : Chapter VI

Hindley returns just in time to Wuthering Heights for Mr. Earnshaw's funeral with a wife - a simpering, silly woman named Frances. Hindley immediately begins to take his revenge on Heathcliff, forbidding him further education and reducing his status to that of a common labourer. But, whenever Heathcliff is free from his responsibilities Catherine goes off onto the moors with him to play.

One evening, Heathcliff and Catherine disappear and the furious Hindley orders that the doors be bolted and that the children not be allowed into the house. Ellen waits for them however. Heathcliff returns alone. He tells her that he and Catherine went over to Thrushcross Grange to spy on Mr. Linton's children, Edgar and Isabella. The guard dog of the Lintons chased them and bit Catherine's ankle and she was taken inside Thrushcross Grange by a servant. The following day, Mr. Linton pays a visit to Wuthering Heights and upbraids Hindley for his mismanagement of his sister. After Mr. Linton leaves, the humiliated Hindley sternly tells Heathcliff that he may have no further contact with Catherine.

Summary : Chapter VII

Catherine recuperates for five weeks at the Grange. Mrs. Linton educates Catherine in social manners and turns her into a lady. Catherine returns to Wuthering Heights at Christmastime. Hindley asks Heathcliff to greet Catherine "like the other servants," And Catherine finds him dirty now in comparison with herself and the Linton children. Heathcliff with wounded pride declares his intention to be "good" and Ellen helps him to wash himself and put on suitable clothes. Hindley orders that Heathcliff be locked in the attic until the end of dinner because this was the condition Mrs. Linton's imposed before sending her children over. However, before the boy can be locked away Edgar makes a comment about Heathcliff's hair making Heathcliff fling hot apple sauce in his face. After dinner Catherine goes up to see him and as Ellen brings him supper Heathcliff confides to Ellen that he intends to avenge himself on Hindley.

Summary : Chapter VIII

Ellen continues her story but skips ahead a bit. Frances gives birth to a baby boy, Hareton, but she dies soon. Hindley begins to drink excessively and also behaves abusively toward his servants and toward Heathcliff. Catherine continues to spend time with Edgar Linton, being a perfect lady with him. However, when she is with Heathcliff, she acts wild. One afternoon, when Hindley is away, Heathcliff expresses his wish not to work in the fields and spend the day with Catherine but she tells him that Edgar and Isabella are planning to visit. Heathcliff expresses resentment about the amount of time she spends with Edgar only to hear that he is ignorant and dull. At that moment, Edgar enters alone, and Heathcliff storms out.

Catherine acts petulant. Edgar is appalled by her unladylike behaviour and Catherine boxes his ears too. Edgar leaves and lured by her wild beauty comes in again. Catherine and Edgar confess their love for one another. Hindley returns in a foul temper, and Edgar leaves.

Summary : Chapter IX

Hindley bolts in and seizes little Hareton before Ellen has hidden him and he accidentally drops Hareton over the banister and Heathcliff catches him at the foot of the stairs.

Later that evening, Catherine meets Ellen in the kitchen and confides to her that Edgar has asked her to marry him, and that she has accepted. Heathcliff hears the conversation unnoticed - hears Catherine tell Ellen that she cannot marry Heathcliff because Hindley has cast him so low that marrying him now would be degrading herself. Heathcliff withdraws and fails to hear Catherine say that she loves him more than anything else in the world.

That night, Heathcliff runs away from Wuthering Heights. Catherine spends the night outdoors in the rain, sobbing for Heathcliff. She catches a fever and is taken to Thrushcross Grange to recuperate. However, both Mr. and Mrs. Linton catch the infection and die of it. Three years later, Catherine and Edgar marry. Ellen is taken to Thrushcross Grange to serve Catherine and Hareton is left in the care of his drunken father and Joseph.

Summary : Chapter X

Lockwood becomes sick after his traumatic experience at Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff pays him a visit. Ellen continues with her tale at Lockwood's request. About six months after Catherine's marriage to Edgar Linton, Heathcliff returns home, surprising Ellen at Thrushcross Grange. Catherine is overjoyed and Edgar feels awkward and jealous. Heathcliff looks polished and gentlemanly but his eyes look somewhat savage. He surprises everyone by saying that Hindley has invited him to stay at Wuthering Heights after he came across Hindley in a card game with his rough friends. Heathcliff joined them in the gambling and impressed by his wealth Hindley asked him to return.

Catherine and Isabella begin to visit Wuthering Heights quite often and Heathcliff too calls at the Grange. Isabella begins to fall in love with Heathcliff. Ellen suspects that he harbours evil intentions.

Summary : Chapter XI

Ellen travels to Wuthering Heights to talk with Hindley, but is shocked to find little Hareton cursing; she learns that Heathcliff has taught him to curse and has forbidden the curate to give the boy any education. The next day, at the Grange, Ellen observes Heathcliff embracing Isabella. In the kitchen, Catherine confronts Heathcliff and offers to convince Edgar to permit his marriage with Isabella only if Heathcliff truly loves her. Heathcliff delves into their past declaring that Catherine has wronged him by marrying Edgar, and that he intends to take revenge. Ellen informs Edgar of this unpleasantly, and Edgar and Heathcliff fight. Catherine locks herself in a room and refuses to eat for two days and Edgar warns Isabella that if she pursues Heathcliff, he will cast her out of the Linton family.

Summary : Chapter XII

Catherine becomes hysterical, she raves and rants about her childhood with Heathcliff on the moors, and speaks obsessively about death. Catherine says that even though she will die, her spirit will never be at rest until she can be with Heathcliff. Edgar is shocked to find her so frail. That very night, Isabella and Heathcliff elope. Furious, Edgar declares that Isabella is now his sister only in name stating that he won't disown her; it is she who has

disowned him.

Summary : Chapter XIII

Edgar and Ellen spend two months nursing Catherine through her illness and she discovers that she is pregnant. Six weeks after Isabella and Heathcliff's marriage, Isabella sends a letter to Edgar begging his forgiveness and then she writes to Ellen, describing her horrible experiences at Wuthering Heights and the unkind behaviour of Hindley, Joseph, and Hareton. She also states that Heathcliff who has now assumed the position of power at Wuthering Heights has vowed to punish her in her brother's stead.

Summary : Chapter XIV

Ellen visits Isabella at her request. When Ellen arrives, Heathcliff urges her for news of Catherine and asks if he may come see her. Ellen refuses and Heathcliff threatens that he will hold Ellen a prisoner at Wuthering Heights and go alone. Ellen however agrees to carry a letter from Heathcliff to Catherine.

Summary : Chapter XV

After four days, as Edgar leaves for church, Ellen gives Heathcliff's letter to Catherine. Surprisingly Heathcliff himself enters the room. The two have a dramatic, emotionally charged conversation during which Catherine claims that both Heathcliff and Edgar have broken her heart and that she cannot bear dying while Heathcliff remains alive. She begs forgiveness. He says that he can forgive her for the pain she has caused him, but that he can never forgive her for the pain that she has caused herself. The church service over, Edgar reaches the house, but Catherine pleads with Heathcliff not to leave. As Edgar hurries toward Catherine's room. Ellen screams, and Catherine collapses. Heathcliff catches her, and forces her into Edgar's arms pleading Edgar to see to her weak condition.

Summary : Chapter XVI

At midnight, Catherine gives birth to a daughter two months prematurely and dies within two hours of giving birth. Ellen informs Heathcliff who curses Catherine for the pain

she has caused him, and pleads with her spirit to haunt him for the rest of his life. Edgar keeps a vigil over Catherine's body. At one point when Edgar leaves, Ellen permits Heathcliff a moment alone with the body. Afterwards, Ellen finds that he has opened the locket around her neck and replaced a lock of Edgar's hair with a lock of his own. Ellen entwines Edgar's lock around Heathcliff's, and leaves them both in the locket.

Hindley is invited to Catherine's funeral but does not come. While Isabella is not invited at all. Catherine is not buried in the Einton tomb nor by the graves of her relatives. Instead, Edgar orders that she be buried in a corner of the churchyard overlooking the moors that she loved so much.

Summary : Chapter XVII

Isabella arrives at Thrushcross Grange soon and reports to Ellen that the conflict between Hindley and Heathcliff has become violent. Isabella soon leaves for London, where she gives birth to Heathcliff's son, Linton about whom Heathcliff doesn't bother. Isabella corresponds with Ellen for the next twelve years and then dies.

Six months after Catherine's death, Hindley dies. Ellen returns to Wuthering Heights to see to the funeral arrangements, and to bring young Hareton to Thrushcross Grange. She is shocked to learn that Hindley died deeply in debt brought about by gambling egged on by Heathcliff and that Heathcliff now owns Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff does not allow Hareton to go to Thrushcross Grange with Ellen, saying that he plans to raise him on his own and also says that he plans to bring back his son Linton sometime. Hareton, who should have lived as the finest gentleman in the area, is reduced to working for his keep at Wuthering Heights.

Summary : Chapter XVIII

Young Catherine or Cathy grows up at Thrushcross Grange, and at thirteen she is a beautiful, intelligent girl, but often strong-willed and temperamental like her mother. Her father raises her without any knowledge of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff, or Hareton. She longs to visit the fairy caves at Penistone Crag, but Edgar refuses to permit. He receives word one day that Isabella is dying and he hurries to London to take charge of young Linton.

While he is gone, Cathy escapes. On her way she stops at Wuthering Heights, where she meets Hareton and they spend a delightful day playing near the crags. Ellen tells Cathy that Hareton is not the son of the master of Wuthering Heights and that he is Cathy's cousin. Cathy agrees not to mention the incident to her father.

Summary : Chapter XIX

Edgar brings young Linton to the Grange, and Cathy is disappointed to find her cousin a pale and weak person. Soon Joseph appears, saying that Heathcliff is determined to take possession of his son. Edgar promises that he will bring Linton to Wuthering Heights the following day.

Summary : Chapter XX

Ellen receives orders to escort the boy to Wuthering Heights in the morning. When they arrive Heathcliff does not even pretend to love his son: he calls his mother a slut, and he says that Linton is his property. Linton pleads with Ellen not to leave him with his father, but Ellen mounts her horse and rides away hurriedly.

Summary : Chapter XXI

Cathy feels sad over her cousin's sudden departure from Thrushcross Grange. Ellen learns from the housekeeper at Wuthering Heights that Heathcliff loathes his frail, sickly and whining son. One day, when young Cathy is sixteen, she and Ellen are out bird-hunting on the moors. Ellen finds Cathy conversing with Heathcliff and Hareton. Heathcliff tells her that Hareton is not his son but that he does have a son back at the house whom Cathy understands to be his cousin Linton. At Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff tells Ellen that he hopes Cathy and his son will be married someday. Cathy is disgusted with both cousins - because Linton is too sickly and because Hareton is too uncouth. At Thrushcross Grange the next day, Cathy tells her father about her visit and demands to know why he has kept her relatives secret. Edgar gently implores her not to have any contact with Linton, but Cathy begins to exchange letters with him. Ellen discovers the correspondence and destroys Linton's letters and she also sends a note to Wuthering Heights requesting that Linton discontinue the correspondence but all without telling Edgar.

Summary : Chapter XXII

Edgar becomes frail and weak. One winter day suddenly Heathcliff appears, telling Cathy that it was cruel of her to break off her correspondence with Linton. He accuses her of playing with Linton's affections, and he urges her to visit Linton while he is away the following week. He claims that Linton may be dying of a broken heart which Cathy believes.

Summary : Chapter XXIII

The following morning, Cathy and Ellen ride in the rain to Wuthering Heights, where they find Linton whining. He tells Cathy about the possibility of marriage and annoyed Cathy shoves his chair in a fit of temper. Linton begins to cough and wants her to nurse him back to health. Back at the grange. Cathy nurses both her father and Ellen who has caught a cold in the rain and at night she begins clandestine visits to be with Linton.

Summary : Chapter XXIV

After Ellen recovers, Cathy tells her the story of her visits to Wuthering Heights, including one incident in which Harcon proved to her that he could read a name inscribed above the manor's entrance - his own name, carved by a distant ancestor but he couldn't read the date and that prompted her to call him stupid. Enraged, Hareton interrupted her visit with Linton and was repentant but Cathy ignored both and came home only to be blamed by Linton for his humiliation when she visited him next. Cathy told Linton she would never visit him again for which he was contrite. After she has heard Cathy's story. Ellen reveals the girl's secret to Edgar. Edgar forbids her from visiting Linton again, but he agrees to invite Linton to come to Thrushcross Grange.

Summary : Chapter XXV

Ellen speculates for a time before carrying on with the story that Lockwood might fall in love with the beautiful young Cathy. Her story continues. Cathy agrees to abide by her father's wishes and stops sneaking out to visit Linton. But Linton never visits the Grange. Edgar says that he would allow her to marry Linton if it makes her happy knowing fully well that it would ensure that Heathcliff would eventually inherit Thrushcross Grange. Eventually,

Edgar agrees to allow Cathy to meet Linton, not at Wuthering Heights, but on the moors.

Summary : Chapter XXVI

Cathy and Ellen ride to their meeting with Linton but they do not find him in the spot decided because he has not ventured far from Wuthering Heights. He appears frail and weak and nervous too but he insists that his health is improving.

Summary : Chapter XXVII

Edgar grows more frail. Worried for him, young Cathy only reluctantly meets the nervous Linton who confesses that he is courting her only at his father's bidding and also displays a fear of rejection. Heathcliff arrives and says to Ellen that he worries that Linton will die before Edgar. Heathcliff asks Cathy and Ellen to walk back to Wuthering Heights and out of fear she agrees. At Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff locks them in and refuses to let go of Cathy till she has married Linton. Ellen is imprisoned for five days guarded by Hareton.

Summary : Chapter XXVIII

Zillah the housekeeper frees Ellen. She searches through the house until she finds Linton, who tells her that Cathy who is now married to him is locked away in another room. Linton gleefully states that all of Cathy's possessions are now his, as Edgar is on the verge of dying. Ellen hurries back to Thrushcross Grange. Here, she tells the dying Edgar that Cathy is safe and will soon be home. She sends a group of men to Wuthering Heights to bring Cathy back but they fail. Edgar plans to change his will, placing Cathy's inheritance in the hands of trustees and thus saving it from Heathcliff. He summons Mr. Green, his lawyer, to the Grange. Cathy comes to her father who dies soon, believing that his daughter is happily married to Linton. Shortly after Edgar's death, Mr. Green arrives, and all servants are dismissed except Ellen. He tries to have Edgar buried in the chapel, but at Ellen's insistence that he obey Edgar's will, he is buried in the churchyard next to his wife.

Summary : Chapter XXIX

Heathcliff appears at Thrushcross Grange shortly after the funeral in order to take

Cathy back to Wuthering Heights. He tells her that he has punished Linton for having helped her escape and declares that she will have to work for her keep at Wuthering Heights. Cathy angrily retorts that she and Linton love each other and pities him because he has no one to love him.

Heathcliff tells Ellen his bizarre deed. While the sexton was digging Edgar's grave the previous day, Heathcliff asked him to open Cathy's coffin to look at her face. Moreover, he says that he forced the sexton to remove one whole side of her coffin - the side away from Edgar - and that he would slate in his will that the corresponding side of his coffin be removed, so that he and Cathy might mingle in the earth. He also tells her that Cathy's ghost has tormented him every night for the last eighteen years.

Summary : Chapter XXX

Zillah tells Ellen that Heathcliff refused to allow anyone at Wuthering Heights to be kind or helpful to Cathy after her arrival, and that Cathy tended to Linton by herself until the day he died and that after his death she's become aloof from everybody. Ellen tells Lockwood that she wishes to keep Cathy with her in her own collage or get her re-married.

Lockwood listens to the whole story from Ellen. He writes in his diary that wishes to spend the next six months in London and wishes that Heathcliff look for another tenant for the Grange.

Summary : Chapter XXXI

Lockwood, true to his word, travels to Wuthering Heights to terminate his tenancy at the Grange. He brings Cathy a note from Ellen which Hareton first snatches and men hands over lo her when she cries. Hareton, it is learnt has been striving for an education, and is still mocked at by Cathy so much so that he tosses the books to the fire.

Heathcliff returns and he notes that Hareton has begun lo resemble his aunt Cathy so much that he can hardly bear to look at him. Lockwood passes a cheerless meal with Heathcliff and Hareton, and then departs. As he leaves, he muses how nice it would have been if young Cathy

had fallen in love with him and left Wuthering Heights for a more pleasant environment.

Summary : Chapter XXXII

About six months later Lockwood writes in his diary that he has travelled again to the moors. There, he tries to pay a visit to Ellen at Thrushcross Grange but hears that she has moved back to Wuthering Heights and has taken the place of Zillah.

The story continues again. One day, Hareton accidentally shoots himself and is forced to remain indoors. Cathy bickers but only for a while and then gives Hareton a book, promising to teach him to read and never to mock him again. Ellen says that the two young people are gradually falling in love and beginning to trust one another.

Summary : Chapter XXXIII

The next morning at breakfast Cathy gives Hareton a book and she and Heathcliff become embroiled in an argument over her inheritance and her relationship with Hareton. Heathcliff seizes her and nearly strikes her but looking at her face, he suddenly lets her go, having seen something in her eyes that reminds him of her mother. Moreover, Ellen says that Heathcliff has confided to her that he no longer has the desire to carry out his revenge on Cathy and Hareton.

Summary : Chapter XXXIV

As time passes, Heathcliff retreats more and more into himself and also eats too little. A few days later he spends the entire night walking and returns in a strangely ebullient mood. He tells Ellen that the previous night he stood on the threshold of hell but now he has had a sight of heaven. He refuses all food and insists that he be left alone. Then Heathcliff begins to interact with Cathy's apparition. Soon, Ellen finds him dead. She tells Lockwood that he has been buried with nothing but "Heathcliff" written on the tombstone and that young Cathy and Hareton shall soon marry. They will wed on New Year's Day and move to Thrushcross Grange.

The young lovers now return to the house from outside and as Lockwood leaves, he

finds Catherine in her attempts to educate Hareton further and that too gently. He finds his way through the wild moors to the churchyard, where he discovers the graves of Edgar, Catherine, and Heathcliff. Villagers claim that they have seen Heathcliff's ghost wandering about with a second spirit, but Lockwood wonders how anyone could imagine unquiet slumbers for the people who lie under such quiet earth.

UNIT 10

10 (a): Plot and Narrative Structure

The incidents in *Wuthering Heights* stretch over a period of a little more than thirty years. The whole action spanning these three decades is presented as eye-witness narrations by people who have played some part in the actions. The narration is non-linear and involves the use of several flashbacks but in spite of the time-shifts the narrative structure remains unbroken throughout. The dramatic narrative structure is unified and though the two prime narrations do not run parallel to each other they are closely related and intricately interspersed.

Lockwood's diary acts as the outer framework of the plot. He soon becomes the recipient of Ellen's story, her eye witness accounts of the residents of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*. Ellen, in turn, becomes the recipient of further tertiary narratives which she presents - those of Heathcliff (Chapters VI and XXIX), Isabella (Chapters XIII and XVII), Cathy (Chapter XXIV) and Zillah (Chapter XXX). Readers are thus presented with various points of view. Since all the narrators are somewhat participants too, the perspectives of the readers keep on changing too. Just like Lockwood, the reader is also drawn into the vortex of tumultuous events. Since each narrative takes place within the action the reader also cannot ever stand completely outside the story. Thus when the reader judges the actions of the characters, he/she does so from within, not as a detached outsider.

Lockwood's narrative does not just provide the outer and larger framework, it also provides the readers with an objective attitude. The smaller personal narratives along with Catherine's diary give the readers direct glimpses into the lives of the character. These together make the readers plunge into further recesses within. Auerbach says that these personal narratives appear out of the darkness of an unilluminated past. Though they always remain in the background, yet they remain vibrant.

Brontë's technique of narration is dramatic and abrupt. She engages the readers through the reactions of her narrators and she also confronts the readers with sharply described scenes where every physical object takes on a life of its own along with the human beings. She manages with exquisite finesse to arouse a complete re-living of the past. This past resonates and interacts with the present which makes the plot of *Wuthering Heights* close knit drama, the co-mingling of the parts - the past and the present - make up a unified single whole.

10 (b): Genre

Wuthering Heights is largely concerned with the romance between Catherine and Heathcliff but it is not primarily a romance novel. Arnold Kettle calls it a 'symbolic' novel. The novel gives the readers a realistic picture of life in the early 19th century. The concerns - social and moral - are those of Victorian society. The novel deals with conflicts present in nineteenth century capitalist society - the standards set by the ruling gentry and the rebellion of workers against them. Marriage in this novel is connected with money and property rights and social security and we must remember that there was no Married Women's Property Act in those days. Heathcliff the outsider, the adopted son reduced to a labourer, eventually beats both the Earnshaws and the Lintons with their own weapons of money and arranged marriages. It is clear that the author had a sound knowledge of the Inheritance Acts, the Wills Acts and the Law of Entails.

Heathcliff has been sometimes referred to as a Byronic hero. The childhood relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, one must remember was a brother-sister relationship. After all, Heathcliff was adopted and christened with the name of a son who died in infancy. Catherine Earnshaw's declaration, "I am Heathcliff" is a time honored Christian-Romantic version of the union of two souls. Catherine and Heathcliff are romantics for whom Christianity has lapsed. She invokes a romantic heresy, the religion of love and they are basically represented all through the text as twin souls. This is reminiscent of the brother-sister-couples in Byron's epics.

The novel contains many gothic and supernatural elements too. Gothic fiction places heavy emphasis on atmospheric, using the setting and diction to build suspense and a sense of unease in the reader. The tumult of the elements in *Wuthering Heights* is associated with the

tumult of supernatural forces. Gothic fiction includes the supernatural, family curses, mystery, and madness and they sometimes include a romantic plot or subplot, particularly in the Victorian era and the 20th century. The mystery of Heathcliff's parentage is never solved and he is described by Hindley as an 'imp of Satan' (IV), and by the end of the novel Ellen Dean also harbours notions that Heathcliff may be some hideous ghoul or vampire. Plus Heathcliff is shown to snarl in unison with the hounds in the beginning of the novel. The much dreaded and unseen presence of Satan is also alluded to at several points in the novel and it is noted that 'no clergyman will undertake the duties of pastor', (III) at the local chapel, which has fallen into dereliction.

Ghosts feature too in *Wuthering Heights*. At the beginning of the novel. Lockwood has a horrible nightmare - a vision of Catherine (the elder) as a child, appearing at the window of her old chamber at Wuthering Heights, begging to be allowed in. To Heathcliff the story has credibility. Added to this he tells Ellen that Catherine's spirit has tormented him since she the day she died and moreover when he dies it is noted that the window of his room was left open, again raising the possibility that Catherine returned to him at the moment of his death. After Heathcliff dies, Ellen Dean reports that various superstitious villagers have claimed to see the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff roaming the moors, although in the closing line of the novel Lockwood disregards the idea that there can be "unquiet slumbers for those sleepers in that quiet earth."

10 (c): The Two Houses: Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange

The two houses Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange symbolise contrasting values which add poignancy to the plot. Lockwood explains the meaning of 'wuthering' saying that it is a local provincial adjective which describes "the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (1). Thus the reader gets to know at the outset that the house Wuthering Heights is exposed to the power of the wind and it is the home of all elemental forces and that it combats natural forces with a fortress like strength. The novel evokes a sharp contrast between the world within and the world outside. The protagonists are repeatedly subjected to the sun, rain, hailstorms, fierce winds and the other elemental forces. The tumultuous raging of these elements is associated with tumultuous passions and with supernatural forces. J. Hillis Miller is of the opinion that these spiritual powers are immanent in nature and identified with its secret life. Brontë expresses all of this with an ancient and primitive symbol - that of the wind. At Thrushcross Orange the weather is diluted, soft and

gentle but at the Heights the weather remains harsh. Simultaneously, The inmates of Wuthering Heights are wild and uncontrolled. The Grange unlike the Heights turns out to be a haven of luxury whose dwellers are pampered and closely guarded too. Nature is viewed as a picturesque world, as something removed from human life by the occupants of the Grange.

The two houses symbolise two ways of life, rather two different ways of living and two kinds of reality. According to Dorothy Van Ghent, if Wuthering Heights stands for ungenerate reality of natural energies, Thrushcross Grange stands for a restrictive reality of civilized manners. Wuthering Heights is fortress like, perilously close to the wild elements and a bastion against them and Thrushcross Orange stands in a sheltered park crouched in the lap of a beautiful valley. Catherine's attitude to nature changes when she switches residence after getting married to Edgar. Again, her real nature resurfaces when Heathcliff returns with the values of the Heights. The ghost Catherine laments that she was lost in the moors - the pathos in the story arises precisely from this conflict, the conflict of the wild moors symbolised by the Heights with comfort and civilised life symbolised by the Orange. The way she describes the relationship to the two men Heathcliff and Edgar further enhances this point. She says : "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods : time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath : a source of little visible delight, but necessary." (IX) The exposed wilderness of unrefined nature thus becomes the bedrock under the cultivated soil of human society and the protagonists constantly try to synthesize these contradictory forces.

A Brief Study of the Major Characters

11 (a) Protagonists-Heathcliff and Catherine

The action and plot of *Wuthering Heights* centred around the love between Catherine and Heathcliff. Arnold Kettle states that it is a story which has four stages. The first part, ending in the visit of Heathcliff and Catherine to Thrushcross Orange, deals with the establishing of a special relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff and of their common rebellion against Hindley and his regime in *Wuthering Heights*. The second part is concerned with Catherine's betrayal of Heathcliff culminating in her death. The third part deals with Heathcliff's degeneration and revenge. The final section, deals with the change that comes over Heathcliff and his death.

John Hagan says that one of Emily Brontë's major achievements is to keep the reader's sympathy alive for both Catherine and Heathcliff. Their love may have been immoral by genteel Victorian standards but the author keeps the readers' empathy alive for both.

The mental affinity of Catherine and Heathcliff commences with rebellion. The rebellion has certain concrete reasons. We, the readers, are told by Ellen that Heathcliff was a waif from the Liverpool slums but he was brought by Mr. Earnshaw to Wuthering Heights to be raised as a son. He was named after a son who died in infancy. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Hindley begins to insult the boy and reduces him to serfdom. It is against this degradation that Catherine and Heathcliff rebel. Hindley and his wife leave Heathcliff and Catherine under the tutelage of Joseph and their first act of rebellion is shown by throwing books (meant to induce piety), into the fire. Catherine and Heathcliff first fight against the tyranny that Hindley imposes.

The next part of the novel deals with Catherine's betrayal. Taken in by the values of Thrushcross Grange, she decides to say yes to Edgar's proposal of marriage. She reveals to Ellen her understanding that in the present situation, it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff now and she says that she wants to marry Edgar because he will be rich, and she would like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood. Yet we find in her a clear understanding of the nature of her relationship to the two men. Catherine says :

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods : time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind : not as a pleasure, any more man I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. (IX)

The love relationship between Heathcliff and Cathy (who were meant to be brought up together as brother and sister) is reminiscent of the brother-sister-couples in Byron's epics (together with the idea of a romantic shared identity as expressed in the impassioned declaration "I am Heathcliff"). This is an affinity which goes beyond all social understanding. Catherine refers to their being one. She becomes his double, his reflection, his doppelganger.

Completely effacing her self, she becomes he. After all three die, she remains buried with Edgar on one side and Heathcliff on the other, reminding the reader once again of her divided loyalties.

Heathcliff runs away hearing only half of what Catherine says. Ashamed and humiliated to hear that for Catherine, marrying him would be degradation for herself, he runs away to make himself presentable and worthy of his love. Like Pip in *Great Expectations*, humiliated by the girl he loves, he seeks to transform himself into a gentleman. He returns with the desired transformation without any “marks of [his] former degradation” (X) but a trifle too late after three years - only to discover to his dismay that Catherine is already married to Edgar.

Seduced by comforts in middle class bourgeois life, for purely social reasons Catherine marries Edgar however, denying her true self and this causes a spiritual death. After Heathcliff returns, mysteriously rich, he beats the Earnshaws and the Lintons at their own game. Interestingly, Hindley welcomes him back to the Heights because of his money and new social standing which is obviously above his own. Soon he reduces Hindley to drunken impotency. The social conflict is re-emphasized as Heathcliff visits the Grange. Edgar is unwilling to receive Heathcliff with warmth for obvious reasons, but Catherine also emphasizes his lower social status. She asks Ellen to set two tables: “...one for your master and Miss Isabella, being gentry, the other for Heathcliff and myself, being the lower orders”. (X)

Catherine’s real nature re-surfaces with his return and as the two become united, she reveals nothing but contempt for the values that Thrushcross Grange and the Lintons have to offer her. Catherine in fact, becomes increasingly perverse and petulant. Catherine foolishly presumes that she can persuade her husband to tolerate Heathcliff’s presence in her life and when Isabella’s infatuation for him is revealed, she again foolishly presumes that if Heathcliff is married and settled, then Edgar and she would sink back into a happy state of marital bliss again. But, nonetheless, she shows a perfect understanding of his character, his growing avariciousness. When she comes to know about her infatuation for him, she tells Isabella that Heathcliff is paying attention to her just because he is eyeing her wealth : “he’d be quite capable of marrying your fortune and expectations : avarice is growing with him a besetting sin....” (X) Heathcliff who returned to “settle his score” (X) with Hindley conceives of yet

another idea of avenging himself not just on Hindley Earnshaw but also Edgar Linton, both of whom have instrumented his separation from Catherine. He soon asks Catherine, “She’s her brother’s heir, is she not?” Making clear what his real intentions behind the eventual elopement are. Heathcliff at this point of the novel, perpetrates his first act of revenge - marriage to Isabella, understanding her girlish attraction for him. Interestingly, John Hagan reminds us that Heathcliff develops his plan of revenge against the two houses of his enemies only after they put themselves in his power by their own volition.

Heathcliff reveals a moral contempt for Edgar and his professed love for Catherine, his sense of “duly and humanity”, “pity and charity” (XIV). Catherine’s fire and passion gives way to pathetic lamentations. She remembers the first time she was forced by Hindley to sleep in a bed alone and separated from Heathcliff. She goes back to her childhood frolicking with Heathcliff on the moors in her delirium and the last seven years of her life become a blank. Her feverish bewilderments lead her to a frenzy of tearing the pillow with her teeth. As wife to Edgar Linton, as the lady of Thrushcross Grange, she says that she feels like “the wife of a stranger” she says : “an exile, and outcast” (XII). Catherine professes never to rest until Heathcliff joins her even if she is buried twelve feet deep. She develops brain fever and dies, unable to bear her misery. As Heathcliff confronts the dying Catherine, instead of offering words of comfort, he makes a brutal analysis of what she has done to herself and to him.

“You teach me now how cruel you’ve been - cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry; and wring out my kisses and tears : they’ll blight you - they’ll damn you. You loved me - then what right had you to leave me? What right -answer me for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart you have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. So much the worse for me that I am strong. Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you - oh, God! Would you like to live with your soul in the grave?” (XV)

Arnold Kettle states rightly that this is one of the harshest passages in all literature and also one of the most moving. Heathcliff gives her a full and honest understanding of the relationship they might have enjoyed had she not given in to her poor fancy for Edgar. There

is no hope in comfort or compromise and so he gives her a full understanding of the tragic waste that her betrayal has caused.

Then Heathcliff continues the revenge he has begun with his marriage to Isabella and he refers to his emotions as a “moral teething” (XIV). The expression itself shows that he has degenerated

into a monstrous being. Yet, after Isabella has revealed to the reader his cruelty towards her, Brontë shows Heathcliff mourning for the dead Catherine in a manner that is profound and heart wrenching. Just as Catherine had said that she couldn't even rest under the earth alone, Heathcliff evokes Catherine's spirit and asks her to haunt him. He also surreptitiously visits Catherine's body and replaces the lock of Edgar's hair from her locket with his own, an act that couldn't have been committed by a heartless monster.

He continues to torment Hindley, Isabella, Linton and Catherine Linton (Cathy) - what he does to each of them is cruel and inhuman and steadily he is shown to achieve new depths of degradation and sadism. In spite of what he does his feelings for Catherine make us readers give him our sympathetic understanding. The weapons he uses against both the families are actually their own weapons. He systematically degrades Hareton to illiteracy and servility just as Hindley has done to him. His comment is worth noting : “I want the triumph of seeing my descendent fairly lord their estates! My child hiring their children to till their father's lands for wages.” (XX) The agony he must have experienced as a child and as a youth because of his low birth and lack of pedigree and money which lost him his love are revealed. All of these show Heathcliff as inhuman but at the same time the reader understands why he is inhuman. The reader gets to understand the deep and complex issues behind his cruel acts.

What makes him human once more is the change that comes over him as he watches the love between Catherine Linton and Hareton. Hareton who seemed to him a personification of his own youth achieves something that he couldn't - love. In this change and his slow wait for death, he again achieves human dignity. In him and in Catherine we find tragic sufferers who are turned to inhuman beings because of intolerable grief and frustration.

11 (b): Brief Study of the Character of Edgar Linton

Edgar Linton serves as a foil to Heathcliff. He is born into the gentry and becomes a well-bred gentleman. He is graceful, well-mannered and a thoroughbred Victorian gentleman and all these qualities serve as stark contrasts to Heathcliff's cruelty, sadism and savagery. At times he shows himself a coward. For example at one point, he clearly shows his fear of fighting Heathcliff for which he gets taunted by Catherine.

As a mark of his civilized and cultured disposition, the character of Edgar is constantly associated with books and his library. When Heathcliff comes and disrupts his household, he finds solace in the library. Ellen tells Catherine that he is continually in the library because "he has no other soicity". For Edgar however, books turn out to be an excuse for weakness of character too. Ellen tells the reader that Edgar "shut himself up among books which he never opened" (XII). Thus Edgar's apparent resignation shows shallowness of feeling. Amidst domestic strife, when Catherine hears that her husband is 'among his books' she impassionedly cries out : "What in the name of all that he feels has he to do with books, when I am dying" (XII). And after she recovers Edgar Linton tries to nurse her back and bring her back to normalcy by providing her with books.

The refined gentleman turns out to be a poor protector of his wife as well as his daughter. He lives as a helpless, impotent and weak man and dies a feeble death too with the naive belief that his daughter is safe and is happily married.

11 (c): Brief Study of the Character of Isabella

Isabella, like her brother, represents culture and civilization, both in her refinement and in her weakness. If Edgar serves as a foil to Heathcliff, she serves as a foil to Catherine. The only mistake she commits in her life is to fall in love with Heathcliff. Catherine warns her of his growing avariciousness and also warns her about his real nature, telling her that Heathcliff is : "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone..... he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man..... I know he couldn't love a Linton; and yet he'd be quite capable of marrying your fortune and expectations : avarice is growing with him a besetting sin....." (X) Isabella however interprets

the warning as jealousy. For this mistake, she pays with her life. Edgar disowns any kinship with her and she dies unforgiven by her brother. Both Hindley and Edgar actually do something to incur the wrath and revenge-motif in Heathcliff but Isabella suffers without having harmed or having hurt Heathcliff in any way. She turns out to be the weakest and the meekest of all the people who suffer in Heathcliff's hands. Her affections remain unreciprocated by her husband and through Isabella, the reader gets to know the nadir of Heathcliff's degeneration.

Unit 12

12 (a): Brief Study of the Character of Catherine Linton

Catherine Linton or Cathy grows up a beautiful and spirited girl and till the time she is thirteen, she has a very cloistered existence, brought up in her father's care and without any inkling about any kind of vice or amorality in human beings. From her mother she inherits her fire and passion but from her father she inherits warmth and compassion.

She is also one of Heathcliff's victims. Cathy is forced into a marriage with Heathcliff's son Linton so that he can seize the Grange through his son's inheritance. The entire household ill-treats her and Heathcliff also destroys her books so that she can't have any access to any kind of refinement and education any more. She too, like her father, views books as a civilizing force. Cathy discovers some volumes in the kitchen which Hareton helps her to reach and though Cathy doesn't thank him, he feels 'gratified that she had accepted his assistance' (XXX). As Hareton steals Cathy's library, she responds with rage stating that without her books and learning she would 'sink into a dunce....' with the implication, like him (XXXI). The insulted Hareton throws the books into the fire just as his aunt had done. At the end however, Lockwood finds Cathy and Hareton united as lovers. Ellen tells him how the intimacy 'this commenced grew rapidly' (XXXII). She eventually with her patience and understanding she transforms Hareton into a gentleman.

Moreover, it is because of Cathy that the change in attitude comes over Heathcliff. She makes a scathing remark to Heathcliff stating that in spite of his social standing and power, he is unfortunate because he has no one to love him. Heathcliff watching love grow between Cathy and Hareton, slackens his desire to avenge himself and that brings the novel to a proper conclusion.

12 (b): Brief Study of the Character of Hareton

Hareton turns out to be one of the characters who is unfortunate right from birth. After his mother dies at childbirth, his father takes to drinking out of grief and it is Heathcliff who controls his life right from infancy. Like Isabella, Hareton is a victim who does not do anything to deserve such harsh treatment. Retaliating the treatment he had received from Hindley, Heathcliff denies Hareton education makes him work in the fields like a common labourer. Hareton remains imbued with a pristine innocence and develops an emotional attachment to his worst enemy, the man who instruments his degradation - namely Heathcliff.

Things begin to change however after Cathy enters his life. Cathy refuses any attempt of intimacy because of his lack of learning and good breeding. As Cathy begins to visit Linton, Hareton somehow comprehends that she avoids his company because he has no learning. His trying to impress her with the statement that he can read the name inscribed above the manor's entrance, his own name which he shared with a distant ancestor who carved it, is pathetic indeed.

Cathy snubs him by calling him stupid, pointing out to him that he can't read the date. His attempts at interrupting Cathy's intimacy with Linton only shows his deep and growing desire for her. After her marriage to Linton, as Heathcliff destroys Cathy's books, Hareton too joins him. He seizes some volumes she has found and she shows her disgust towards him by stating : "Those books, both prose and verse, were consecrated to me by other associations; and I hate to see them debased and profaned in his mouth!" (XXXI)

Eventually his desire to acquire education gradually brings Cathy and Hareton together. The uncultivated feelings of the fundamentally good-natured Hareton of the old Earnshaw stock are refined and polished with Cathy's educating him with tales and poetry. The last glimpse that Lockwood has is of them as lovers poring over a book together. Along with Cathy, he becomes responsible for Heathcliff's eventual defeat in spirit.

12 (c): Study of the Characters Ellen (Nelly) Dean and Lockwood

Nelly or Ellen Dean primarily serves the role of narrator along with Lockwood. Lockwood as narrator provides the outer framework of the story and plot. His is the voice of a detached, objective and sceptic human being. Lockwood as a normal conventional Victorian gentleman goes to Wuthering Heights expecting that he will witness normal

middle-class life. Instead he finds the house seething with hatred and horror. As an outsider, he fails to fully understand the complex happenings that he witnesses in Wuthering Heights. While Lockwood is an outsider to Wuthering Heights and to Thrushcross Grange, Ellen is an 'insider' who has witnessed most of the upheavals of passion that have occurred in these two houses.

Ellen's detailed recounting of the events has a breathless energy involved which gives rise to an effect of immediacy - considering the fact that the events she describes spans more than three decades. Her account makes the past come alive and she provides Lockwood and the readers with a sense of actuality. Her narration is precise and concrete. The reader is drawn into a vortex of excitement as Ellen concentrates attention on each movement and gesture and the vehemence of the speeches uttered by the characters along with concentrating on the action. She has a conventional and religious attitude towards life which is of course, 'normal' yet her normalcy has no effect whatsoever on the lives of the protagonists because as a person who is inferior in the social hierarchy she fails to influence them in any way by her scepticism and common sense.

Since she knows the characters since childhood, having grown up alongside Hindley Catherine and Heathcliff and having nursed Cathy, her rendering of the events, some of which are irreligious and amoral also helps the reader to be empathetic. Since she makes the readers familiar with all of them, readers also fail to be too harsh in their moral judgements.

Conclusion

Ellen Dean defines her narrative as "The history of Mr. Heathcliff". Thus Heathcliff's history and his motivations form the core issue of any study of Wuthering Heights. The story revolves around his savagery, his brutality, his sadism and the reader constantly tries to find the reason behind it all. Emily Brontë makes the reader understand that all his cruelty springs from his thwarted love affair. His actions become inseparable from his futile yearning. His reduces Hareton to a common labourer denying him education -just as Hindley reduced him and Hareton becomes a replica of his own earlier self. Cathy's initial rejection and later acceptance of Hareton mirror her mother Catherine's actions. However, Cathy and Hareton

are but poor shadows of Catherine and Heathcliff. Klingopulos remarks that they are similar to them but different people and lesser people, people conceived on a less intense and passionate scale than the first generation lovers. But they symbolise the continuity of life and human aspirations. Eventually, as he becomes aware that Cathy has inherited her defiant nature from her mother and that Cathy and Hareton's love have something of the same quality that Catherine and he shared, he ceases to be vengeful any more.

It is not just Heathcliff who changes out of frustration. Hindley turns from a tyrant and Heathcliff's persecutor to a drunkard and a gambler because of his intense grief that is caused because of Frances's death. Catherine becomes self-destructive when she realises how happy she might have been had she not chosen the incompatible Edgar as husband and waited a little more for Heathcliff to return. Her daughter Cathy too shows violence when she is trapped into a marriage with Linton. The housekeeper Zillah says : ".....the more hurt she gets, the more venomous she grows" (XXX). We as readers are made to understand that none of these characters, Heathcliff included, are evil or cruel by nature. They become so out of provocation and more so out of intense grief. Neither do we condone, nor do we just condemn - and herein lies the expertise of the novelist in her exquisite handling of the text of *Wuthering Heights*.

Suggested Reading

Allott, Miriam Ed. *Wuthering Heights : A Selection of Critical Essays (Casebook)* (Paperback) New York : Palgrave Macmillan; 2nd Rev Ed edition, 1992.

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Goodridge, J. F. *Emily Bronte : Wuthering Heights*. London : Edward Arnold, 1964.

Gregor, Ian Ed. and Compiled. *Twentieth Century Views of the Brontes : A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 1970.

Kettle, Arnold. *An Introduction to the English Novel*. London & New York : Hutchinson's University Library [1951-53]

Sale, William M. Jr., Cornell University. Emeritus, and Richard J. Dunn, University of Washington Ed. *Emily Brontë Wuthering Heights Third Edition*. New York : Norton, 1990.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. *The English Novel : Form and Function*. New York : Rinehart, 1953.

Vogler, Thomas A Ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Wuthering Heights : a Collection of Critical Essays* by David Daiches. Albert Guerard, Mark Schorer, Derek Traversi, Dorothy Van Ghent, Virginia Woolf, and 10 Others (Paperback). New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 1968.

Assignments

EssayType

1. What are the characteristics of each of Catherine's relationships with the two men? Compare Catherine's love for Heathcliff with her love for Edgar.
2. Discuss revenge as a motif in *Wuthering Heights*.
3. Is Heathcliff a hero or a villain?
4. *Wuthering Heights* has both similarities and contrasts between the first and the second generation of characters. Elucidate.
5. What role does social class play in *Wuthering Heights*?
6. Write a short essay on the significance of the moors and the two houses in *Wuthering Heights*.

7. Discuss the narrative structure of Wuthering Heights. Are the narrators trustworthy? What roles do the personalities of the narrators play in the way the story is told? What is the effect of filtering Heathcliff and Catherine's story through narrators' accounts?

Short Answer Type

1. How does Heathcliff first enter the Earnshaw family? How does each of the members of the Earnshaw family respond?
2. How do Heathcliff and Catherine, first see the Linton family and how do they react? Explain the significance of the reaction of each.
3. How does Catherine's abiding love of the moors help us to understand her character?
4. Analyze the scene of Catherine's last meeting with Heathcliff just before her death. What is the significance of this scene?
5. Is the daughter Cathy a 'better' woman than her mother Catherine? If yes, explain why you think so.
6. Why do you think Heathcliff loses the desire to avenge himself any further? What brings about this change?
7. Comment on the Gothic elements in Wuthering Heights.
8. Write short notes on any one :
 - (a) Cathy
 - (b) Hareton
 - (c) Isabella
 - (d) Edgar

(e) Hindley

Block IV

Unit 13

Culture and Anarchy: Matthew Arnold

13 (a): A Brief Introduction to Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

Matthew Arnold was an English poet and cultural critic, whose work remains amongst the best known of 19th century British poetry. Though he wrote on a variety of subjects, he is best known for his themes of nature, modern society, and moral instruction.

Arnold was born to Thomas and Mary Pensworth Arnold in Laleham, England. When Matthew was young, Thomas was named headmaster of the famed Rugby School, and moved his family to Rugby, England to take residence. In 1836, Arnold was sent to Winchester College, but eventually returned to the Rugby School, where he studied under his father. He won multiple prizes there, for English essay writing and for Latin and English poetry.

Arnold had a distinguished career as a student and professional. In 1841, he began studying at Balliol College, Oxford on an open scholarship. His father died in 1842 of heart disease, and his family then moved permanently to their vacation home, Fox How. He graduated Oxford with a 2nd class honors degree in Literae Humaniores, or what we now know as Classics. He went on to teach briefly at Rugby, then was elected Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. In 1847, he was named Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne, Lord President of the Council. After being appointed in 1851 as an inspector of schools, Arnold married Frances Lucy and had six children.

However, Arnold's greatest work was as a writer. Though he published his his first book of poetry, *The Strayed Reveler*, in 1849, his literary career really took off in 1852, when he

began to publish more poetry volumes. His second volume included a verse drama, *Empedocles on Etna*, though he garnered the most attention for the poetry which he continued to write until his death. Additionally, Arnold was well known as a cultural critic, publishing volumes like *Culture and Anarchy*, in 1869. Today, his work as critic is as well-known as his poetry is.

Throughout this phase of his life, Arnold found great success as a writer. He was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857, and re-elected in 1862. Further, he toured both the United States and Canada on the lecture circuit. In 1883, he was elected as a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Arnold died suddenly in 1888 of heart failure, while rushing to catch a tram. His work has remained popular and loved since his death.

13 (b): The Victorian Social Scene

Since Arnold is one of the representative writers of the Victorian era, it may be essential and relevant to know something about the age itself. Chronologically and historically the Victorian period was an age of contradictions. It was a time of refinement and vulgarity, of sophistication and obscenity, of affluence and poverty, of spiritual enrichment and moral decay. These strange contradictions are pointed out by the Victorian men of letters and social historians.

G.K. Chesterton in his book *The Victorian Age in Literature* refers to Carlyle as a man who saw and Arnold as a “man who knew”. What Chesterton possibly means is that Arnold as a social thinker has succeeded in feeling the pulse of the age in which he appeared and lived as a writer. Arnold’s intimate relation to contemporary society is revealed in two different ways. On the one hand he records through his writings the social changes and developments of the period and on the other, quite unfailingly, he criticizes the limitations, simultaneously moral, spiritual and cultural, of his contemporaries. Arnold’s social writings make a critical survey of the contemporary time and in his articles included in *Culture and Anarchy* and *Mixed Essays* he reveals the problems, the morally anarchical situations vitiating the social and moral atmosphere of Victorian England. It is imperative that we should have a fair knowledge of the Victorian period before we go through the essays in *Culture and Anarchy*.

Chronologically and historically, the Victorian period started around the year 1830 and ended in 1880, although the twilight glow of Victorianism persisted till the first decade of the 20th

century. The major part of the Victorian period from 1830 to 1870 may be noted as a time of constitutional and parliamentary reforms and a rapid industrialization of society, which ended in the gradual waning of the political powers and dominance of the feudal lords. According to the economic historians of the time, it was also a period of coal and iron. Throughout England the iron and mining industries continued to flourish much to the benefit of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. It was also the age of cotton and England continued to thrive as a major economic power by exporting industrial products to the colonies. The development of England as a major economic force and the extension of British imperialism are related to each other. At the political level England's home politics was still dominated by parliamentary democracy. Victorian morality and moral ethos were still dominated by Utilitarianism, Altruism and Evangelicalism. Utilitarianism, basically an economic and philosophical movement, was much liked by the new industrial bourgeoisie. It was also liked by the philanthropists and reformists who liked the principle of maximum good of the maximum number. The principles of Evangelicalism and Altruism instructed the Victorian mind to be serious and sincere, respectable, decent and conscious of the social and community welfare.

Side by side the reign of Queen Victoria suffered the moral and spiritual decadence on account of the extreme involvement in materialism, pursuit of mean mercenary motive and excessive class consciousness at times. The spiritual decadence, the vulgarization of taste, the restrictions imposed by utilitarianism are discussed by the social thinkers of the period including John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and John Carlyle. According to Herbert F Tucker these writers may be called the sage writers because they not only criticized the negative aspects of the Victorian period but also acted like prophets, prophesying the future. It goes to the credit of Matthew Arnold that he, along with Carlyle and Ruskin, shows his extreme awareness of the social developments both positive and negative and turns out to be the first ever writer of and commentator on the meaning and definition of 'culture', its purposefulness in an age of materialism. *Culture and Anarchy* is therefore a text which has its importance for two reasons (i) it gives us some idea about the time of which the book was the product and on the other (ii) in this text Arnold suggests definite remedies for the malady of the time. It is significant to note that *Culture and Anarchy* is not merely a Victorian text but it has its relevance even to our own time—a time which is consumerist, money-oriented and at times strangely apathetic towards the question of social welfare.

Arnold's role as a social philosopher and one of the sage writers of the period has been appreciated by the critics like J. D. Jump, Lionell Trilling and Arnold Hauser.

The opinions and views of these critics will be either quoted or referred to in course of our discussion on *Culture and Anarchy*. The critics of Arnold are generally of the opinion that in his writings on social matters and problems Arnold has constantly projected himself as a prophet who can not only visualise the future but at the same time feels dismayed at the growing decay and decadence of his contemporary time. It has already been suggested that Arnold is the incisive critic of the limitations of his time. He has pointed out how the moral and spiritual progress of his own generation has been impeded and obstructed by materialism and the outward progress of the nation. Arnold the sad Jeremiah of the Victorian period finds that the situations prevailing in the life of his contemporaries is nothing hopeful, but really precarious. Arnold's view of life as it is elaborated in *Culture and Anarchy* has been suggestively foregrounded in 'Obermann poems', in *The Scholar Gypsy* and perhaps in his most famous poem *Dover Beach*. According to Stephen Coote (*The Penguin short History of English Literature*) the following lines in *Dover Beach*

“On a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight, Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

may be considered as “terrifying statements showing a godless Victorian wasteland and a central Victorian moral dilemma.” This absence of faith, the moral restlessness, the spiritual confusion and decay are recurringly pointed out by Arnold in his poems and prose works. *Culture and Anarchy* is therefore a specific prose composition by Arnold in which he introduces himself as a social philosopher almost in the manner of Carlyle and Ruskin. But the significance of *Culture and Anarchy* as a critique of Victorianism may be attributed to several other factors. The title of this prosework in this connection may be, taken into consideration. The title, suggests Arnold's idea about culture, vis-a-vis his idea of anarchy. According to Lionel Trilling the title of the book might have been modified as *Culture or Anarchy*. That is, Arnold supposes two extreme polarities of 'culture' and 'anarchy' as contraries to each other. He seems to be asking his generation about its preference and he points out that the men and women of his own generation have been totally oblivious of the meaning of 'culture', its multiple significations and its impact on human mind and

sensibility. In the essays in *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold functions in two different ways. First, he attempts to establish himself as an apostle of 'culture' and secondly, he projects himself as a critic of his time. For example, Arnold criticises the class division of the Victorian society into 'Barbarians', 'Philistines' and 'Populace' and he shows their hostility towards one another, the limitations in their attitude to life, and their general apathy towards the welfare of the society. As a social philosopher Arnold suggests that the maladies of the society may be removed only by the cultivation of certain ethical and abiding values in individual characters and in social body. Arnold moralises on the social issues of his time; he suggests remedial measures to cure the society of these evils and he recommends the Hellenic and Hebraic values to be taken up, grasped and realised, by his contemporaries. Arnold Hauser in his book *The Social History of Art* (Volume IV) has paid rather a left-handed compliment to Arnold's ideas as a social philosopher. He has observed that, notwithstanding Arnold's earnestness, sincerity and genuine conviction, his recommendations to remove 'anarchy', at times, appear to be too vague. In this respect, Arnold is in no way different from the other bourgeoisie thinkers and social philosophers of his own time including Carlyle, Ruskin and Cardinal Newman. In spite of the idealistic abstraction in his thought process and attitude to life Arnold remains a strong believer in classical values, the abiding values of the ancient Greek world. His sense of mourning for the unaccepted values of classical period is poeticised in his famous statement in *Dover Beach*:

that the sea of Faith was at the full

but now we can only hear 'its long melancholy withdrawing roar'.

It is evident that here Arnold laments the loss of Faith. This is according to Arnold constitutes the problem of 'anarchy' of which 'culture' is an anodyne thus mutually 'culture' does not stand independent of 'anarchy' just as the nature of anarchy may be qualified and defined in relation to 'culture'. Arnold's ideas about 'culture', his observations on the class divisions of Victorian society his advocacy for Hellenism and Hebraism and his criticism of the indiscriminate use of democracy are registered in different articles of *Culture and Anarchy*. We may now discuss one by one each of the articles in *Culture and Anarchy*. In our task of analysing the essays the attention of the students will be drawn to the core ideas of different essays of in *Culture and Anarchy*, the significance of some almost proverbial sentences and lastly, on Arnold's style of writing.

UNIT 14

14 (a): Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*: Its Aims and Objectives

Before we take up the essays for their close analysis, it may be appropriate to focus on some of the important statements made by Arnold in his 'Preface' to *Culture and Anarchy*. In his arguments incorporated in the 'Preface' Arnold describes his aims and objectives to write *Culture and Anarchy*. He declares "the whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as a great help out of our present difficulties, culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock motions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which mix up for the mischief of following them mechanically. "(Preface, *Culture and Anarchy* Pg-VI). In the 'Preface', Arnold also defines the basic paradigm of culture which is "the inward operation" constituting "the very life and essence of culture." In the 'Preface', Arnold is critical of the Victorian tendency to worship machinery and he directly observes that the civilisation which is going the mechanical way is bereft of moral and spiritual substance. That is why he recommends culture as the direct antidote to anarchy. These basic arguments of Arnold, recorded in the 'Preface' are to be studied carefully in order to understand different articles which comprise the anthology *Culture and Anarchy*. There are altogether six articles. They are serially

- (i) Sweetness and Light
- (ii) Doing As one Likes
- (iii) Barbarians, Philistines, Populace
- (iv) Hebraism and Hellenism
- (v) Porro Unum Est Necessarium
- (vi) Our Liberal Practitioners.

14 (b): A Brief Discussion on Arnold's 'Sweetness and Light'

The title is borrowed from Swift's prose satire *Battle of the Books*. In this satire the Spider and the Bee in one corner of a library quarrel with each other. The Spider who boasts of the

mechanism with which he builds his web is contrasted with the Bee who stands for study, judgement, ability to distinguish one thing from another. The Bee claims that he brings home honey and wax. According to Swift, the Spider represents the jealous and venomous modern writers, while the Bee stands for the ancient writers with some permanent and abiding values. In Swift's book the Bee finally claims that he is the repository of "sweetness and light". The title of the article is therefore allusive, but as it is applied by Arnold with reference to Victorian moral and social ethos, it also turns out to be suggestive. The title therefore may have a more extended meaning; it may signify the sweetness of temper and enlightenment of sensibility and Arnold considers these two as the basic paradigm of culture. In 'Sweetness and Light' Arnold goes out to define culture. He announces that culture does not mean the open and shameless exhibition of scholarship and learning, as he writes, "the culture which is supposed to plume itself on the mattering of Greek and Latin is a culture which is begotten by nothing so intellectual as curiosity. Arnold is critical of the Victorian idea of culture as a symptom of

"social and class distinction separating its holder, like a badge or a title from other people who have not got it."

According to Arnold culture has its origin in curiosity which is a term to mean "a scientific passion for seeing things as they are, and a desire after the things of mind." (Page-44). A man of culture therefore requires clarity of vision; he should be aware of human misery; he should have the grand aspiration to make the world better and happier. Arnold's definition of culture is on the one hand a psychic and moral phenomenon and on the other it is societal in its interest. Its distinguishing features are the scientific passion for truth and rationality and the passion of doing good to society. After having discussed these basic paradigms of culture Arnold relates it to religion. According to him, culture "places human perfection in an internal condition." (Page-47). It constantly reminds people that the kingdom of God always lives within them. Culture, Arnold suggests, teaches man that human life is a prolonged quest for perfection : "not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming." (Page-48). Culture ensures the continual expansion of the human mind, the unstoppable development of human feelings and sensibilities. It never ends in material possession. It has nothing to do with the external circumstances of life. It is in Arnold's opinion "a study of perfection". Arnold's definition of culture in the present article has its echo in one of the statements in the 'Preface', "Culture, which is the study of perfection, leads us...to conceive of true human perfection as a *harmonious* perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a general perfection, developing all parts of our society."

After having defined the attributes of culture and its relation to society and religion, Arnold continues to criticise the materialistic tendency of the contemporary time. He points out how the society to which he belongs considers external development more important and meaningful than the progress, uplift and elevation of mind and spirit. Like Carlyle, Arnold feels much aggrieved at the mean mercenary motive of his own generation. He feels dismayed to find that the civilization of the Victorian period has become 'mechanical' and 'material'. There is insistence on the utilitarian idea that individuals are more important than community. The inflexibility in thoughts and ideas, "the inaptitude for seeing more than one side of a thing" (Page-49) runs contrary to Arnold's idea of culture as a state of perfection, a harmonious expansion of mind and spirit.

Arnold observes that, since "faith in machinery" is, the "besetting danger" for Victorians, they have become totally and callously indifferent to the meaning of culture, and its impact on the growth and expansion of human mind. Arnold realises that this faith in machinery has reached an absurd state of existence. With sarcastic eloquence Arnold poses the following questions to the men of his time : "What is freedom but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? What is wealth but machinery? What are, even, religious organisations but machinery?" (Page-50)

For the debasement of values and for the devaluation of culture it is the Philistines [Arnold's personal and individualistic way of referring to the contemporary middle class] who are responsible. Arnold says that population explosion is the other factor that creates the anarchic condition of England. Arnold accuses the British Philistines of smugness and self complacency and in one of the sarcastic statements he writes "as if the British Philistine would have only to present himself before the Great Judge with his twelve children in order to be received among the sheep as a matter of right!" (Page-52) Arnold does accuse some of his contemporaries of irresponsibility and it is these persons who contribute to the devaluation of culture. According to Arnold, culture is never an abstract idea; it raises the question of humanisation of man in society. It has the society implication because the great men of culture disseminate the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time among the members of the society in general. In order to create an atmosphere of sweetness and light men of cultures should remove the social barriers, class distinctions and unification of people at different levels. In the essay '*Sweetness and Light*' we thus find the following ideas : (i) the meaning of culture (ii) the need/necessity and relevance of culture in a materialistic society (iii) the definition of anarchy and its opposition to culture and (iv) the essentiality of culture

as an anodyne to anarchy. The opening essay thus amply illustrates and justifies the main title of the book and it introduces Arnold as an apostle of culture. It may be pointed out that Arnold's idea of 'culture' to a great extent is supported/sustained by his humanistic reading and scholarship by his broad based ideological principles and by his faith in classical values particularly the values of ancient Greece and Rome. Perhaps Arnold's idea of culture has its origin in his close familiarity with classical language and literature but a Victorian as he is, Arnold does not fail to interrelate culture with society and religion. His discussion has the solidity of its own and the definition of culture itself is never self contradictory but uniform, consistent, sublime and great.

UNIT 15

15 (a): A Brief Discussion on Arnold's 'Barbarians, Philistines, Populace'

The most important essay in *Culture and Anarchy* is obviously 'Barbarians, Philistines, Populace'. The particular essay introduces Arnold as a thinker who is aware of this class-stratification of Victorian society. Before we discuss what Arnold thinks and feels about Barbarians, Philistines and Populace, we are to know primarily the sections of people who are identified by Arnold in such a manner. Barbarians refer to the English aristocrats. 'Philistines' refers to the English middle class and the Populace is the term associated with the English working class. Arnold calls the aristocrats the Barbarians because they represent the outdated values of the feudal society. The middle class people are called the Philistines (the word is borrowed from *The Book of Judges*, from *The Bible*) because they are instrumental in subverting the meaning of culture. The working class people are called populace because in an industrialised society they represent the marginalised section of the populace. Arnold's deliberations on these important classes of the society may be incisive and penetrating, but they are at the same time digressive, discursive and often repetitive. In the present article Arnold makes some meaningful statements on the characteristic lacunae of these three classes. He writes about smugness and self-complacency of the contemporary middle class. This is the characteristic limitation of the said class, mentioned by Dickens as "Podsnappery" in *Our Mutual Friend* and by Carlyle on two occasions, in *Past and Present* and in his better-known and more popular pamphlet, titled 'Chartism'. Thus he writes : ".....The idea of self-transformation, of growing towards some measure of sweetness and light not yet reached, is evidently at clean variance with the perfect self-satisfaction current in my class, the middle class....." (Page-99). Arnold mentions some other negative attributes in the character of middle-class people. They are, for example, "the enemy of the children of

light or servants of the idea.”

(Page-101). Inflexibility of temper, orthodoxy of ideas and insularity of vision constitute the basics of their attitude to life. It is the new Philistines who make their preferential choice of the “machinery of business, chapels, tea-meetings”.....to the pursuit of sweetness and light. To the middle-class people, it is the surfatorial ambience of wealth and property rather than the spiritual glory and moral perfection that matters much. ‘Philistinism is the term with which the Arnoldian middle class can be easily described. But whatever be the characteristic limitations of the middle class people, Arnold however appreciates them for their seriousness, and earnestness of purpose which to a great extent redeem their class character.

Arnold’s observations on Barbarians and Populace are equally interesting incisive and finely interpretative. To begin with, we may refer to the Barbarians, that is, the English aristocrats. Arnold calls them Barbarians not because they are barbaric and uncivilized, but because their ancestry is rooted in the remote and feudal past Arnold admits that England as a nation owes much to the Barbarians, since, as Arnold observes, they were the repository of high culture. They “reinvigorated and renewed our worn-out Europe.” (Page-102).

Arnold pays compliment to the authentic ethical values, cherished by the Barbarians, the high aesthetic tastes they fondly treasured with them. Arnold writes, “The chivalry of the Barbarians, with its characteristics of high spirit, choice manners, and distinguished bearing.....” (Page-103). But unfortunately the so-called culture of English aristocrats is external/outward rather than internal or inward because it consists mainly of gifts and graces, looks and manners, accomplishments and prowess. Thus inspite of the ambience and glamour in their life-style, the aristocrats fail to promote the causes of sweetness and light. It is in this respect that Arnold and Carlyle differ from each other. The latter believed in the power and ‘heroism’ of rejuvenated aristocracy, while the former maintained his conviction that aristocracy would never be the controlling power of the society. Arnold believes that there is something common between the Barbarians (the aristocracy) and the Philistines (the middle class), which is “their natural inaccessibility, as children of the established fact, to ideas.” Both remain the common “enemy of the children of light or servant of the idea.” (Page-101).

After having discussed the characteristic qualities and the class character of the Barbarians and the Philistines, Arnold turns his attention to the working class. The birth of the working

class was natural in a society which was rapidly undergoing the process of industrialisation. The condition of the working class in contemporary Victorian society was far from being happy. The industrial cities like Manchester and Liverpool had the large number of working class population, who used to live in slums in a filthy and unhygienic condition. The pathetic conditions in which the working class was bound to live was described by Dickens in his novels *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* by Engels in his famous writing *The Condition of the Working class in England* and by Carlyle in *Chartism*. In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold uses the term 'populace' to refer to the working class. Arnold is fully aware of the working class life of deprivation and depravity. He writes of the working class "which, raw and half-developed, has long lain half-hidden amidst its poverty and squalor....." (Page-105). Arnold divides the working class into three groups. The leading members and trade unionists of this class consider themselves of equal standing with the middle class, and Arnold accuses them of instigating the more ignorant section to a state of anarchy. There is, however, an enlightened section of the working class who follow the path of the middle class. The members of this section consider machinery, an industrial machinery as pre-eminently powerful, and they do not pursue the inward perfection which is the most important paradigm of culture. The last group of the working class are in the midst of ignorance, poverty, deprivation and exploitation. Arnold, the moralist, does not support the moral derelictions of the working class—particularly their addiction to gin and beer drinking.

In the present article Arnold observes that for creating the anarchical state in the society the Barbarians, Philistines and Populace are equally responsible. To counteract the situation Arnold proposes the establishment of reason and rationality. Arnold criticises the unhappy excess of democratic rights, 'doing as one likes', as he calls it in one of his essays in *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold feels the need of a powerful and authoritative state which is a collective expression of the nation and which will embody the principles of right reason and best self.

15 (b): A Brief Discussion on Arnold's 'Hebraism and Hellenism'

Of all the articles, included in *Culture and Anarchy* 'Hebraism and Hellenism' is perhaps the shortest one. The basic theoretical arguments of the article are based on two ideas. They are (i) "This fundamental ground is our (Englishmen's) preference of doing to thinking." (ii) Bishop Wilson's observations : ".....never go against the best light you have" and further, ".....take care that your light be not darkness." (Page-129). In 'Hebraism and Hellenism' Arnold attempts to re-define the terms 'Hellenism and Hebraism' as direct anodyne to the

cultural decadence and moral decay of his contemporaries. Almost like Bacon, Arnold makes two pithy and precise statements when he defines Hebraism and Hellenism—"The governing idea of Hellenism is *Spontaneity of expression*; that of Hebraism, *strictness of conscience*." (Page-132). Arnold in his own characteristic style brings out the distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism. On this, Lionell Trilling observes : "Hebraism is concerned primarily with conduct and with obedience to a law of conduct, whereas Hellenism is concerned primarily with seeing things as they are—with spontaneity of consciousness." (Page-257). The ultimate goal of both Hebraism and Hellenism remains the same—the perfection of man—his inward development, the gradual advancement to a state of culture. Arnold also brings out the distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism; as Lionell Trilling has suggested : "Hebraism is concerned primarily with conduct and with obedience to a law of conduct.....whereas Hellenism is concerned primarily with seeing things as they are—with spontaneity of consciousness." (Trilling, p. 257). The points of argument, forwarded by Trilling, are further extended as he writes; 'where Hellenism is chiefly occupied with the beauty and rationality of the ideal and tends to keep difficulties out of view. Hebraism lacks this sunny optimism, and marked by the sense of sin, pessimistic of perfection, asks whether man is indeed "a gentle and simple being, showing the traces of a noble and divine nature; or an unhappy hired captive, labouring with groanings that cannot be uttered to free himself from the body of this death." The contrast finally ensures the distinction between rationalism and Christianity.

In spite of Arnold's difference in attitude to the ideas underlying Hebraism and Hellenism, Arnold recommends both as antidotes to the moral crisis, spiritual decadence, dilemma and confusion prevailing in contemporary England. For Arnold the immediate result of the doctrine of one thing needful is the value given to personal liberty by the keepers and administrators of democracy. Arnold situates all these maladies of mind and spirit in the context of some social and political disturbances. These are the destruction of the Hyde Park railings; the Home Secretary in tears before the deputation; the Aldermanic Colonel Wilson refraining from the use of the city militia upon a mob of "roughs;" the labour disturbances in Manchester; the vituperative Mr. Murphy who had the power and the willingness to move his Nonconformist audience to bloody riot and whom the police would not stop. Arnold discovers in all these incidents the signs of anarchy springing from the mechanical treatment of the idea of personal liberty.

16 (a): Synopses of the other three articles

The three other articles in *Culture and Anarchy* are ‘Doing As One Likes’, ‘Porro Unum Est Necessarium’ and ‘Our Liberal Practitioners’. It is desirable that I should refer to the above-mentioned three as constituting singular group of articles because in each of the articles Arnold attempts to diagnose the root causes of social and moral ailments of the Victorian period. He reiterates what he means by anarchy—a word which etymologically means ‘the absence of government’. It is obvious that Arnold does not use the word in its original, etymological connotation. In the article ‘Doing As One Likes’ Arnold is critical of the misuse of democratic rights by common people. That is why almost at the very beginning of the article, he raises a number of questions regarding the indiscriminate use of democratic rights by common people, the members of the working class and trade unionists. With genuine feelings of anger and discontent, he questions his own generation. “But what if rough and coarse action, ill-calculated action, action with insufficient light, is, and has for a long time been, our bane? What if our urgent want how is, not to act at any price, but rather to lay in a stock of light for our difficulties?” (Page-73). Arnold demonstrates his dislike for “the assertion of personal liberty.” He bemoans that the Englishmen have no idea of the ‘State’ which, according to Arnold, is “the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals.” Arnold suggests that the three different classes of the society are too individualistic and they are forgetful of the common interests of the society. He opposes the riotous agitations of the working class. He considers the middle class as socially irresponsible and he criticizes aristocracy for its self-oriented thoughts and activities. It is quite unfortunate that none of them think of the general welfare of the society; none of them focus their attention on the enlightenment of spirit, the cultivation of “Sweetness and light” which are the essential requisites of culture.

In the two other essays ‘Porro Unum Est Necessarium’ which is taken from *The Gospel of St. Luke* Chapter X, 11.41-2, and which bears the meaning of ‘But one thing is needful’ and ‘Our Liberal Practitioners’ Arnold is, however, repetitive in his ideas. He writes about the unhealthy excess of democratic rights, the so-called liberalism of the politicians and trade union leaders, the sufferings and exploitation, perpetrated by the industrial and commercial middle class (‘Philistines’) on the working class (populace); the state of anarchy prevailing everywhere in England and the recommendation of cultures as an effective anodyne to cure the social body of its malady.

In the chapter, entitled 'conclusion' Arnold sums up all the ideas, discussed throughout *Culture and Anarchy* and lastly he raises his accusing finger against the Barbarians and Philistines who have failed to perform their social commitments. He writes in the concluding chapter : "So that, for the sake of the present, but far more for the sake of the future, the lovers of culture are unswervingly and with a good conscience the opposers of anarchy. And not as the Barbarians and Philistines, whose honesty and whose sense of humour make them shrink, as we have seen, for treating the State as too serious a thing, and from giving it too much power'—for indeed' the only state they know of and think they administer, is the expression of their ordinary self." Arnold accuses the Barbarians and Philistines of generating disruptive forces in the society : ".....Our Secretaries of State let the Park railing be broken down, and our Philistine Alderman-Colonels let the London roughs rob and beat the bystanders." (pp. 204-205)

16 (b): Matthew Arnold's Prose Style

Matthew Arnold together with Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and Cardinal Newman is one of the leading non-fictional prose writers of Victorian period. Like his three equally famous contemporaries he was committed to analysing social, economic, political, religious, philosophical and literary problems. Arnold had also the intention to familiarise his own generation with the spirit of his time. Accordingly, Arnold should make his prose easy and lucid, clear, precise and easily comprehensible. It is true that Arnold's prose in his literary criticism at times tends to be abstract, vague and therefore, not much appealing to the general readers. His critical and literary writings are more for meant elitist group of readers than for the average, educated Englishmen of his own time. But *Culture and Anarchy* as a text, or more particularly, as a specimen of Victorian sage writings is intended for the comparatively common readers. Consequently, there was an urgency on part of Arnold to make his prose more simple, and less complex, more precise and less elaborate. To textually illustrate the statements, the reference may be given to the opening paragraph of 'Sweetness and Light' : "The disparagers of culture make its motive curiosity; sometimes, indeed, they make its motive more exclusiveness and vanity. The culture which is supposed to plume itself on a smattering of Greek and Latin is a culture which is begotten by nothing so intellectual as curiosity." (p. 43) Later on, in the same article he writes, "Population, again, and bodily health and vigour, are things which are nowhere treated in such an unintelligent, misleading, exaggerated way as in England." (p. 52)

The engrossing charm and variety which characterise Arnold's prose style is nowhere better discernible than in *Culture and Anarchy*. The title itself is a brilliant example of the antonymic use of language. Arnold can be colloquial or conversational, ironic and sarcastic at the same time. His prose style tends to be colloquial when we read a passage like this : "Culture says : consider these people then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice; look at them attentively observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouths..." (p. 52). The prose style is qualitatively different from that of Carlyle and Ruskin. The unnecessary elaboration of ideas; the flamboyance of high rhetoric and the emphatic oratorical outbursts, characteristic of Carlyle ('Heroes and Hero Worship') and Ruskin ('Unto the Last') are happily missing here, much to the relief and comprehensibility of the readers.

Arnold is ironic and sarcastic when either he criticises the British Philistines or ridicules the Englishmen's shallow and superficial idea of 'greatness'. The following excerpts from the text may be illustrative of this aspect in Arnold's prose style:

".....as if the British Philistine would have only to present himself before the Great Judge with his twelve children in order to be received among the sheep as a matter of right!" (p. 52)

Again, "Our coal, thousand of people were saying, is the real basis of our national greatness; if our coal runs short, there is an end of the greatness of England." (p. 51).

In the essay 'Doing As One Likes' he mocks at the Philistinian notion of culture, which, he rightly and appropriately comments, is shallow :

".....this gentleman (i.e. An American gentleman of Arnold's time), taking the bull by the horns, proposes that we should for the future call industrialism culture, and the industrialists the men of culture, and then of course there can be no longer any misapprehension about their true character..."

Arnold's prose style sometimes reflects the seriousness of tone and the earnestness of his purpose. In the essay 'Hebraism and Hellenism' the sentences read as grave, sublime as

those in the Bible. The sentences, quote below, seem to have the melody and cadence of Scriptural statements:

- (i) “Hebraism and Hellenism—between these two points of influence moves our world.” (p. 130).
- (ii) “That partaking of the divine life which both Hellenism and Hebraism, as we have said, fix as their crowning aim.....” (p. 134).

Linda H. Peterson has pointed out that the sage writers of the Victorian period have employed some common rhetorical strategies in their prose writings, the purpose being to sound prophetic in their essays and articles (Herbert Tucker [ed.] p. 376). The use of aphorism and metaphor is also too common. The references may be given to Arnold’s definitions of culture, and his encapsulated description of Hebraism and Hellenism.

- (i) “Culture is the love of perfection : it is a study of perfection,” (p. 45)
- (ii) “The Governing idea of Hellenism is *spontaneity of conscience*; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience.” (p. 132).

According to Linda H. Peterson, “Such aphorisms evoked the prestige of wisdom writing, as seminally found in the Book of Proverbs of Ecclesiastes : they gave sage writers a vehicle for clarifying and condensing thought and simultaneously challenged readers to ponder the multiple, profound ramifications of the sage’s words”. (Tucker 377)

16 (c):Summing Up

I may now draw a conclusion to my deliberation on *Culture and Anarchy*. The core ideas of Arnold’s book concern the concept of culture as opposed to anarchy. It is obvious that Arnold does not use the word ‘anarchy’ in its political connotation, since the political implication of the word is ‘the chaotic condition due to the absence of government, or of any legal authority’ Arnold gives an altogether different meaning to the word. In his opinion it means ‘moral confusion’, ‘spiritual dilemma’, the decay and decadence of taste. Arnold intends to situate culture as a binary opposite to anarchy. Culture has nothing to do with the external behaviour, the flamboyant and superficial social habits, the progress of machinery,

or the monetary affluence. It is related to the improved, and elevated state of mind. It is, as Arnold repeatedly claims, is the study and pursuit of perfection. It is the liberation of the self. It implies the healthy expansion of mind and spirit. Culture is also societal because true culture can neither germinate nor bloom without the general welfare of the society and community. That is why, culture and anarchy has the relationship of opposition. There is no question of preference, or the question of choice between two opposites. Culture means order and discipline, anarchy means disorder and indiscipline. Thus the title of Arnold's book is quite appropriate. It should always read *Culture and Anarchy*, but not *Culture or Anarchy*.

Suggested Readings

1. Matthew Arnold : *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge University Press, 1960).
 2. Lionel Trilling : *Matthew Arnold*, OUP, London, 1950.
 3. Raymond Williams : *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Columbia University Press, NY. 1958.
 4. Herbert F. Tucker (ed.) : *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
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Assignments

Essay type questions

1. Do you think that the title *Culture and Anarchy* may be replaced by 'Culture or Anarchy'? Discuss with close reference to the text.
2. Examine the distinctive features of Arnold's prose style with reference to *Culture and Anarchy*.
3. In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold is intensely critical of his own age. Do you accept this view? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Reproduce in your own words Arnold's observations on the characteristic limitations of Barbarians, Philistines and Populace.
5. How does Arnold define Hebraism and Hellenism? What does he say about their

common goal'? Answer with illustrative references to the text.

Short-answer type questions

1. Break up the allusion contained in the phrase 'Sweetness and Light'.
2. Give the English meaning of 'Parro Unum Est Necessarium'.
3. Explain the following :
 - (a) Culture is "the study and pursuit of perfection."
 - (b) 'The governing idea of Hellenism in *spontaneity of consciousness*, that of Hebraism
Strictness of conscience.'
 - (c) Hellenism is of Indo-European growth, Hebraism is of semitic growth.
4. Break up the allusion contained in the word 'Philistines'. Who amongst Arnold's contemporaries were considered so, and why?
5. Why does Arnold address the Victorian aristocracy as 'Barbarians'?
6. Mention some of the 'riots' which broke out in Arnold's time.

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ENGLISH
POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME(CBCS)
SEMESTER-3
CORE COURSE 8
Twentieth century Poetry and Drama

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
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Director's Message

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Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome.

During the production-process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Sankar Kumar Ghosh, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance.

Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PGBOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt thanks is also due to the Course Writers-faculty members at the DODL, subject-experts serving at University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level of the DODL of University of Kalyani.

Their persistent and co-ordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through Distance Mode.

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Directorate of Open and Distance Learning
University of Kalyani

Core Course VIII

Twentieth Century Poetry and Drama

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Block I

Unit I

T.S. Eliot-The Wasteland

T.S. Eliot-Life and Works

Thomas Stearns Eliot (26 Sept. 1888-4 Jan. 1965) was born in St. Louis, Missouri, the son of Henry Ware Eliot, president of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company, and Charlotte Champe Stearns, a former teacher, and an energetic social worker. Eliot was the youngest of seven children, born when his parents were prosperous and secure in their mid-forties. Afflicted with a congenital double hernia, he was in the constant care of his mother and five elder sisters. His paternal grandfather founded the Unitarian church in St. Louis and soon became a pillar of the then southwestern city's religious and civic life. Eliot knew both the city's muddy streets and its exclusive drawing rooms. He attended Smith Academy in St. Louis until he was sixteen. In 1905 he departed for a year at Milton Academy outside of Boston, a preparatory to follow his elder brother Henry to Harvard.

Among his teachers at Harvard, Eliot was drawn to the moralizing of Irving Babbitt and the stylish skepticism of George Santayana, both of whom reinforced his distaste for the reform-minded, progressive university. In December 1908 a book Eliot found in the Harvard Union library changed his life. Arthur Symonds's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1895) introduced him to the poetry of Jules Laforgue, and Laforgue's combination of ironic elegance and psychological nuance gave his juvenile literary efforts a voice. By 1909-1910 his poetic vocation had been confirmed. In autumn 1910 he went on to undertake a postgraduate year in Paris. Eliot attended Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France and was temporarily converted to Bergson's philosophical interest in the progressive evolution of consciousness. Eliot also drifted toward the politically conservative (monarchist), neoclassical, and Catholic writing of Charles Maurras. Warring opposites, these ideas worked together to foster a professional interest in philosophy and propelled Eliot back to a doctoral program at Harvard the next year. In 1910 and 1911 Eliot copied into a leather notebook the poems that would establish his reputation: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," "La Figlia Che Piange," "Preludes," and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." Combining some of the robustness of Robert Browning's monologues with the incantatory elegance of symbolist verse, and compacting

Laforgue's poetry of alienation with the moral earnestness of what Eliot once called "Boston doubt," these poems explore the subtleties of the unconscious with a caustic wit. Their effect was both unique and compelling, and their assurance staggered his contemporaries who marveled at "how sharp and complete and sui generis the whole thing was, from the outset. The wholeness is there, from the very beginning."

In 1911 Eliot was as preoccupied with ideas as with literature. A student in what has been called the golden age of Harvard philosophy, he worked amid a group that included Santayana, William James, the visiting Bertrand Russell, and Josiah Royce. He also deepened his reading in anthropology and religion, and took almost as many courses in Sanskrit and Hindu thought as he did in philosophy. By 1914, when he left on a travelling fellowship to Europe, he had persuaded a number of Harvard philosophers to regard him as a potential colleague. In August he was in London with Aiken and by September Aiken had shown Eliot's manuscript poems to Pound. Pound called on Eliot in late September and wrote to Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry* magazine that Eliot had "actually trained himself and modernized himself *on his own*." The two initiated a collaboration that would change Anglo-American poetry. In early spring 1915 Eliot was introduced to Vivien Haigh-Wood. Eliot was drawn instantly to Vivien's exceptional frankness and was charmed by her family's Hampstead polish. Abandoning his habitual tentativeness with women, in June 1915 he married Vivien. His parents were shocked over Vivien's history of emotional and physical problems. The marriage nearly caused a family break, but it also indelibly marked the beginning of Eliot's English life. Vivien refused to cross the Atlantic in wartime, and Eliot took his place in literary London. They had no children. To placate his parents, Eliot laboured on with his Ph.D. thesis, "Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley." He finished it in April 1916, but did not receive his degree because he was reluctant to undertake the trip to Massachusetts required for his dissertation defense. He became assistant editor of the avant-garde magazine *the Egoist* and in spring 1917 he found steady employment in the foreign section of Lloyds Bank, where he evaluated a broad range of continental documents. The job gave him the security he needed to turn back to poetry.

In 1917 he received an enormous boost from the publication of his first book, *Prufrock and Other Observations*. In 1920 he collected a second slim volume of verse, *Poems*, and a volume of criticism, *The Sacred Wood*. Both displayed a winning combination of erudition and jazzy bravura, and both were built upon the discipline of a decade of philosophical seriousness.

The years of Eliot's literary maturation were accompanied by increasing family worries. Eliot's father died in January 1919, producing a sense of guilt in the son who had hoped he would have time to heal the bad feelings caused by his marriage and emigration. At the same time Vivien's emotional and physical health deteriorated. The financial and emotional strain of her condition took its toll. In 1921 Eliot suffered a nervous collapse and, on his physician's advice, took a three-month's rest cure, first on the coast at Margate and then at Lausanne, Switzerland. During this period he completed a long poem he had been working on since 1919. Assembled out of dramatic vignettes based on Eliot's London life, *The Waste Land's* extraordinary intensity stems from a fusing of diverse materials into a rhythmic whole of great skill. A poem suffused with the contemporary horror of life, it was received by the postwar generation as a rallying cry over its sense of disillusionment.

In 1922, Eliot had an offer from Lady Rothermere, wife of the publisher of the *Daily Mail*, to edit a high-profile literary journal. The first number of the *Criterion* appeared in October 1922. Like *The Waste Land*, it took the whole of European culture in its sight. The *Criterion's* editorial voice placed Eliot at the center of London literary circle. Geoffrey Faber, of the new publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer (later Faber and Faber), saw the advantages of Eliot's dual expertise in business and letters and recruited him as literary editor. At about the same time, Eliot turned to the Anglican Church. In June 1927 Eliot baptised into the Church of England.

A furor grew in November 1927 when Eliot took British citizenship, and again in 1928 when he collected a group of politically conservative essays, entitled *For Lancelot Andrewes*, prefacing them with a declaration that he considered himself a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion." Eliot's poetry now addressed explicitly religious situations. In the late 1920s he published a series of shorter poems in Faber's Ariel series - short pieces issued in pamphlet form with striking modern covers. These included "Journey of the Magi" (1927), "A Song for Simeon" (1928), "Animula" (1929), "Marina" (1930), and "Triumphal March" (1931). Steeped in Eliot's study of Dante and the late Shakespeare, all of them meditate on spiritual growth and anticipate the longer and more celebrated *Ash-Wednesday* (1930). "Journey of the Magi" and "A Song for Simeon" are exercises in dramatic monologue, and fulfil Eliot's desire, pronounced since 1922, to exchange the symbolist fluidity of the psychological lyric for a more traditional dramatic form.

Eliot spent much of the last half of his career writing one kind of drama or another, and attempting to reach a larger and more varied audience. As early as 1923 he had written parts of an experimental and striking jazz play, *Sweeney*. In early 1934 he composed a church pageant with accompanying choruses entitled *The Rock*. Almost immediately following these performances, Bishop Bell commissioned a church drama having to do with Canterbury Cathedral, which, as *Murder in the Cathedral*, was performed at Canterbury in June 1935. Though Eliot based *The Family Reunion* on the plot of Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, he designed it to tell a story of Christian redemption. After the war Eliot, fashioned more popular combinations of the same elements to much greater success. *The Cocktail Party*, modernizing Euripides's *Alcestis*, opened to a warm critical reception in August 1949. Eliot's last two plays, *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958) fared less well. Eliot's reputation as a poet and man of letters far outstripped his theatrical success. As early as 1926 he delivered the prestigious Clark Lectures at Cambridge University, followed in 1932-1933 by the Norton Lectures at Harvard, and just. In 1948 Eliot received the Nobel Prize for literature.

After 1925 Eliot's marriage steadily deteriorated. During the tenure of his Norton year at Harvard in 1932, he separated from Vivien, but did not consider divorce because of his Anglican

beliefs. He also reestablished communication with Emily Hale. Out of his thinking of "what might have been," associated with their visit to an abandoned great house, Eliot composed "Burnt Norton," published as the last poem in his *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936). With its combination of symbolist indirection and meditative gravity, "Burnt Norton" gave Eliot a model for another decade of major verse. In 1939, the *Criterion*, which had occupied itself with the deepening political crisis of Europe, ceased publication. During the Blitz, Eliot served as an air-raid warden, but spent long weekends with friends in the country. In these circumstances, he wrote three more poems, each more somber than the last, and called the collection "Four Quartets"

After the war, Eliot turned entirely to his plays and to literary essays. After Vivien died in January 1947, Eliot led a protected life as a flat mate of the critic John Hayward. In January 1957

he married Valerie Fletcher and attained a contentedness that had eluded him all his life. He died in 1965 at London and, according to his own instructions; his ashes were interred in the church of St. Michael's in East Coker. A commemorative plaque on the church wall bears his

chosen epitaph— lines chosen from *Four Quartets* : “In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning.”

1 (b): Eliot and the Contemporary Literary Scene

Poetry tends in every age to confine itself to the ideas that the age considers essentially poetic.

When the conditions change, if the poet does not change his material and form, the sensitive minds are barred out of poetry. The predicament of a modernist poet has been exactly in understanding what the voice of his time was. Several essential changes occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in every walk of life. Art could not remain untouched by them. Politically there is the increasing challenge to Capital by Labour, no longer prepared to accept a completely subordinate role. Socially this was paralleled in the efforts of other dominated groups to improve their status: the feminists are a striking example. The weakening of the idea of subordination in the more open, flexible and competitive situation and the increased social mobility meant that the old simple verities no longer seemed true. Accepting ones place, loyalty to authority, unquestioning obedience, began to break down; patriotism, doing ones duty, even Christianity, seemed questionable ideals. Man’s understanding of himself was changing. Anthropology was probing the roots of religion : James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* appeared in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1915. Philosophers like Nietzsche and Bergson had already emphasized the importance of instinct rather than reason. Psychologists like Freud and Jung were showing the power and significance of the unconscious. Scientific explanations were becoming more subtle and harder for the layman to understand. Put in the most simplified terms, it can be said that the world of 1910 was much more complex than the orderly world presented in Victorian literature. The war of 1914- 18 dramatically crystallized and hastened the changes. The new poetry that the modernists attempted to write could not follow the existing English models. The poets from whom they sought to learn this new art were the Continental writers - Rimbaud, Mallarme, Laforgue and Baudelaire. The new poetry which came into being in and around 1910 was a complex and demanding art.

What it meant was that the modern western world was less sure of its values than most previous cultures; relativism and subjectivism were facts of every day experience. Not only did the modernist artist find himself confronted with the infinite complexity of reality, he also saw that his medium itself was part of the problem. Spender writes, ‘The quality, which is

called modern, shows in the realized sensibility of style and form more than in the subject matter.' If experience was felt enormous in complexity, it followed, that traditional modes of representation were inadequate to render it. Again, this change in social orientation led to an insistence on economy and concentration: poetry was not to be made easy for the relaxed general reader. The repudiation of tidy logical exposition in poetry often brought with it a constant laconic juxtaposition of ideas rather than an ordering of them in a banally lucid exposition.

Various experiments in method characterized the development of modernism. The emphasis was on fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed 'systems', 'types' and 'absolutes' that lived on from the earlier years of the century.

A sense of flux, of continuum, of the running together of things in ways often contrary to the dictates of simple common sense seemed help understanding certain bewildering and otherwise

inexplicable phenomena of cotemporary life. Chronological method of narration was replaced by what is called 'spatial form'; the unity of the work was sought in 'the entire pattern of internal references' or in the principle of 'reflexive reference.' The reader was asked to follow not a story but to discern a pattern.

The defining characteristic of Modernism was its insistence that the mind is subjected to this wholly new kind of stress. Poetry became a mode of intolerable wrestle with words and meanings, hauling and straining, a racking of the mind's power of comprehension. The more traditional definitions of poetry - 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling', 'the best words in the best order' - were impatiently dismissed. Not only literature but also all art of the period seemed to be intent on stretching the mind beyond the very limits of human understanding.

The modern aim was essentially the re-invention of reality : re-presentation of the shapes and forces of a new world, and also of the modern sensibility. Eliot wrote in his review of *Ulysses* when it first appeared that 'It has the importance of a scientific discovery.' He admired the parallel of the Homeric myth as a wonderful inventive device for conveying the chaos and anarchy of modern life, which Joyce set as the foil of a heroic age. Already with the French impressionists, this double aspect of the modern trend - that the thing observed is changed, and the observer also is changed began to appear. It also suggests the way in which the eye, conscious of the mechanism of vision, sees light. The mode of perceiving itself becomes an object of perception, and is included as part of the thing perceived in a work of art.

Modern art literature then is acutely aware of the problems of art, projecting an unremitting self-consciousness. Evidence of this may be seen in the energy and variety of the criticism that

accompanied and presumably assisted the development of modernist literature. The aim of this

criticism was to introduce the new ideas about art rather than to apply the accepted standards.

In

criticism the emphasis had been given falls on the inclusiveness of the sensibility expressed in art.

The modernist poets seemed to be the extreme cases of exaggerated subjectivity. Some of them were busy criticizing the society, others plunged into the abyss of personal and fundamentally incommunicable experiences. What is common in all the modernist poets is that they felt themselves exiles in an unrefined world with their exceptionally refined sensibility. They did not know how to resolve their predicament.

UNIT 2

2 (a): Critical Summary of 'The Wasteland'

The Title

The basic symbol of the wasteland is introduced right in the title of the poem. Eliot acknowledged his debt to Miss Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and J. G. Frazer's *The*

Golden Bough for the title and the structure of his poem. In the legends treated by Miss Weston,

the land has been blighted by a curse. The crops do not grow; the animals cannot procreate in this cursed land. The plight of the land is manifested in the king of the land, the Fisher King, who has been rendered impotent either by maiming or sickness. The curse can only be removed by the appearance of a knight who would answer correctly the meanings of different symbols that he is shown in a castle. The physical paralysis can be easily taken as a symbol of spiritual sterility that

Eliot presents in the poem.

The Epigraph

The passage in the epigraph is taken from the Roman playwright Petronius' play *Satyricon*. The words are spoken by a character, Trimalchio, drunkenly boasting to surpass his companions in stories of wonder. The passage can be paraphrased as :

‘For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when

the boys said to her, “Sibyl, what do you want?” She answered, “I want to die?”

In Greek mythology and literature the Sibyls are the women of prophetic power. The Sibyl at Cumae had asked Apollo to grant her as many years of life as the sand that she held in her hands, but she foolishly forgot to ask for eternal youth. Consequently as she aged her prophetic powers declined.

Sibyl becomes a powerful symbol of sterility and imprisonment in *The Waste Land*. The people

inhabiting Eliot's mental and physical landscape suffer similar fate. Eliot had originally chosen a passage from Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1899) for the epigraph. There the protagonist of the novel, Marlow, speculates on the last thoughts of Kurtz:

“Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that

supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath – “The horror! The horror!””

Ezra Pound rejected the original epigraph as not 'weighty' enough for the poem. Eliot, however, thought it to be more 'appropriate' and 'elucidative'. The passage from Conrad would have

been more effective to represent the horror of 'The Waste Land' caused by the 'improper' desire of its inhabitants.

This section begins with presentation of the attractiveness of death, or the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the wasteland live. Men are afraid to live in reality. They do not want the awareness of pain and suffering, nor the burden of consciousness. The anxiety about change, growth and sexuality is immediately followed by a description of rapid movement. The apparent joy and dynamism of the tour ends in boredom and loneliness. In fact it is the memory of futility in the past experiences that instigates the desire for the stability of death. The experience recorded here is of an aimless tour of Europe and the indulgence in trivial activities as casual 'talking' and 'drinking coffee'. The confusion is further intensified with the German quotation meaning 'I am not

Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am a real German.' The quotation is derived from a conversation of Countess Marie Larisch, the niece and confidante of Austrian Empress, Elizabeth. The remark of the countess recalls the violent breaking up of Europe which serves as a symbol for disintegration.

The reverie is resumed with the question; "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish?" Soon the perceiving consciousness answers what men no longer know in a world thoroughly secularized. The lines seem to parody the certainties of the biblical prophets. Eliot's note refers to Ezekiel ii, 1 where God gave him the mission of preaching God's words to the rebellious people of Israel. The notes also refer to Ecclesiastes xii, 5 where the preacher reminds men of the vanity of life and exhorts them to remember God in the days of youth. The inhabitants of the wasteland seem to have forgotten the warnings of the scripture. Consequently they suffer absolute meaninglessness and the abject fear of death. Had they understood the words of the prophet the same suffering would have given their life and death a significance. In the episode of the hyacinth garden a different kind of death is described. The hyacinth garden presents a death which may be called life at its greatest intensity. The episode begins with

a quotation from a song in Act I of Richard Wagner's opera, *Tristan and Isolde*. The opera is based on a medieval romance. Tristan brings Isolde from Ireland to Cornwall where she is to marry his old Uncle. But onboard the ship Tristan and Isolde fall in love by drinking a love potion. After reaching Cornwall they meet in a garden at the castle and their love is discovered. Tristan is wounded on a bank of flowers before he is taken to Brittany by one of his friends where he awaits Isolde. When she finally comes, he breathes his last in her arms. The German quotation from Wagner's opera is from a song being sung by a jubilant young sailor, meaning my Irish girl where are you lingering? Though the song is not meant for Isolde, she thinks it does and breaks into a rage. She wishes the ship to sink rather than continue the voyage. The whole episode serves as a tragic irony of the fate that waits Tristan and Isolde. The quotation invokes the whole drama in "The Waste Land" and acts as an epigraph to the hyacinth garden section. While looking at the hyacinth girl coming back from the garden it seemed to the protagonist that his eyes failed, 'I was neither/Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, /Looking into the heart of light, the silence.'

The Hyacinth garden episode forms the nucleus of 'The Burial of the Dead'. It is fraught with irreconcilable contradictions. It records an experience of intense passion as well as of the annihilation of ordinary consciousness. It almost achieves the state of a mystical awareness. The episode is followed immediately by a German line from Wagner's opera

meaning 'Empty and wide the sea'. This line is the answer given to Tristram by a watcher, who reports that the ship carrying Isolde is nowhere to be seen. The line initially seems to echo the feeling in the last line of the hyacinth passage. The two quotations from the opera that frame the ecstasy-of-love passage take on a new meaning in the altered context. In the first quotation love is happy, in the second love is absent implying that love is not possible in the wasteland.

The passage on Madame Sosostris and her fortune telling directs attention to both the corruption in the practice as well as to the limited intellect of the inhabitants of the wasteland. Jessie Weston has shown in her book how the Tarot cards were originally used to determine the event of highest importance to the people, the rising of the waters. Madame Sosostris engages it to vulgar fortune telling. She represents a vulgar civilization. But the symbols of the Tarot pack have remained unchanged. The various characters are still inscribed on the cards and the famous clairvoyante really reads the future of the wasteland inhabitants, though she does not know it. She has no perception of the spiritual dimension that the cards foresee. She finds that the card of her client is that of the drowned Phoenician soldier, and she warns against death by water, little knowing as the other inhabitants of the wasteland that the only way to everlasting life can be through death itself. The Phoenician soldier also refers to the fertility god, an image well explored in part IV of the poem. She cannot find the 'Hanged god' in her pack, which Eliot's note equates with the figure of Christ. There is a sea of difference between what Madame sees and what the images actually mean. The images seem to be explained in their real sense in the other parts of the poem thus connecting the apparently isolated sections into one whole.

After the Madame Sosostris episode, Eliot proceeds to show the sterility and unreality of the wasteland by associating it with Baudelaire's *fourmillante cite* and with Dante's Limbo. In his notes to the poem Eliot refers to 'Les Septs Vieillards' by Charles Baudelaire, quoting the opening lines, 'swarming city, city full of dreams,/Where in broad daylight the spectre stops the passer-by'. Eliot also refers to Dante, *Inferno* iii, 55-57: 'so long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone so many'. This is Dante's reaction when in the outskirts of hell, he sees and recognizes the wretched souls, displeasing to God and to His enemies alike, who lived without infamy and praise, choosing neither good nor evil and therefore rejected in both Heaven and Hell. They have 'no hope of death', and they 'never were alive.' Eliot draws a parallel between London, the centre of world trade and Limbo. The workers walking towards the business capital are called inhabitants of Limbo because they have lost their feelings which might have given them to a more wholesome

existence. And the city is 'unreal' not only because it lacks the real life of passion, but because it does not even realize that it lacks it. It is a picture of Ennui that Baudelaire speaks of, in a poem which is as much the model for this last part of Part I as Dante's Limbo. The wastelanders like Baudelaire are not only possessed by every sin and evil, they are also inert with boredom, apathy and despair.

The reference to Stetson stresses again the connection between the modern London of the poem and Dante's hell. After the statement, 'I could never have believed death had undone so many', follows the words 'After I had distinguished some among them, I saw and knew the shade of him who made, through cowardice, the great refusal'. The protagonist, like Dante, sees among the inhabitants of the wasteland one whom he recognizes. Mylae is the name of a battle fought between the Romans and Carthaginians in the Punic wars. It is plain that in making the protagonist address his friend as someone he met in the Punic wars and not in the Great War, Eliot points out that all wars are the same in destroying the victor and vanquished both. 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden' refers to Webster's Play, *The White Devil*, V. iv. But Eliot's changing the animal from wolf naturally hostile to man to dog trusted for its loyalty, is significant. The corpse in the poem definitely refers to the ritual of burying the gods made of earth and corn in fertility rites with the hope of good harvest. But the burial of the dead now is a sterile planting - without hope. The warning to 'keep the dog far hence' refers to the Humanitarian philosophies who discount the supernatural and spiritual aspects in life thereby promote a secular world view. The concluding lines from Baudelaire complete the universalizing Stetson in every man, including the poet and his readers. In calling Stetson 'hypocrite' Eliot makes a sharp comment on the secular world view, where the ideas that are promoted cannot bring hope and peace. This disunity between what is felt and what is proclaimed is one of the essential features of secular culture.

A Game of Chess

The second part of the poem illustrates the abstractions that are stated in the first part. The two scenes taken from two diametrically opposite social settings may be apparently contradictory but essentially both validate the same fact about the wasteland, the loss of meaning. There is pointed reference to Shakespeare's *Cleopatra* in the first lines of the section. Whereas Cleopatra in Shakespearean play is described as the one whom 'Age cannot whither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety' the life of the woman in 'A Game of Chess' is staled. Cleopatra represents the pinnaue that love can reach. She who could throw away an empire for love. In

contrast, to the woman in the poem love simply does not exist. The art works that fill the room are characterized

as 'other withered : stumps of time'. Such a sudden change in the description of sculptures and

paintings from the magnificent to the insignificant only reflects the condition of the inhabitants of the wasteland, who cannot participate in the grandeurs of the past. The reference to the myth of Philomela is particularly significant in the context.

The painting, another item of inert art objects in the room, is 'As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene'. Here there is a natural music expressing evil and suffering, as well as a compelling need for release from it. However, the dead sensibility of the wastelanders cannot read transcendence through suffering in the 'inviolable voice'. It is changed to 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.

The rape of Philomela also refers to the story in the Grail legends, which tells how the rich Fisher King remained unaware when certain maidens who used to frequent the shrine were raped and their golden cups were taken away from them. The curse on the land followed from this act.

Miss Weston suggests that such a story symbolizes the old mysteries that were openly highlighted in the past but were later forced into secrecy. Seduction and violation of a woman's chastity also

make good symbols of secularization. The wasteland is largely a result of scientific skepticism and secular attitude. John Crowe Ransom in his *God Without Hope*, points out very neatly that love is the aesthetic of sex; lust is the science. Love implies a deferring of the satisfaction of desire; it implies even a certain amount of asceticism and ritual; lust drives forward urgently to immediate extirpation of the desire. However, lust only defeats itself. Thus the painting of the change of Philomel by the barbarous king is a fitting commentary on the scene it ornaments.

The theme of life, which is death, is stated specifically in the conversation between the man and woman where all communication seems to fail. The woman asks 'Are you alive, or not?' She

also asks 'Is there nothing in your head?' These people in the wasteland know nothing, see nothing and do not even live. Not only that life is meaningless in the wasteland, even death is sterile - 'I think we are in rats' alley/ Where the dead men have löst their bones'. To highlight the sterility of death in wasteland this line is followed by remembrance of another death 'Those were pearls that were his eyes'. The song from *Tempest* describes a death which is an

opening into a rich and strange realm, a death which is another birth. This can be connected to the image of the drowned or buried god that was thrown into water or buried deep in the earth only to be revived as a symbol of fertility and growth.

The second part of the section presents yet another picture of spiritual emptiness but this time the social scale is different. The monologue in this part presents a mind which simply records a flux of incidents and emotions, all on the surface, living only in the present moment. The past just bears withered stumps of time and though 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME' may remind a reader of the warning of 'Time's winged chariot hurrying near', it is beyond the comprehension of the speaker.

The conversation ends with a quotation from Ophelia's speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that serves as a sharp contrast to the lover in wasteland. The refined sensibility of Ophelia turning mad ; Hamlet's refusal is opposite to the insensibility of Lil. The contrast of the cockney 'Ta ta. Goodnight.

Goodnight' with 'Goodnight, ladies' from Ophelia also juxtaposes the superior psychological conflict in *Hamlet* with that of trivial maneuvers in sexual game as displayed in the pub in *The Waste Land*. Both the parts of "A Game of Chess" show the passionlessness and insensibility in a totally secularized world where every thing is looked at from the individual self-centred perspective. Eliot had originally planned to entitle this section 'In the Cage'. It would not only have served to maintain an explicit continuity with the epigraph but also would have highlighted the imprisonment of the inhabitants of the wasteland to their own self. The present title diagnoses the problem of the wasteland. Eliot's notes refer to Thomas Middleton's play (i) *Women Beware* (ii) *Women* as the source for the title. In the play Bianca is seduced by a duke, while in the foreground the duke's accomplice plays a game of chess with Bianca's mother-in-law to hold her attention. Every move on the board corresponds to the steps of forcible seduction of Bianca. The title suggests that the relationship between sexes the secularized world is akin to a game of chess where meanings are assigned by arbitrary conventions alone. Men and women look at each other as adversaries and all are concerned with moves and counter-moves to outmanoeuvre each other. Both the scenes show the desolation of men and women when the conventional outward show of love ceases to be meaningful. It also manifests the predicament of sensibility which cannot cope with such a state, and as a consequence no longer knows what it feels, nor feels what it knows. But this also involves the recognition that the individual sensibility is a product and expression of a common culture. It is the failure to recognize the common culture that makes the couples confined to their individual prison house. In setting this plight of the wasteland couples

against the myths and literary allusions of the past and the poet tries to diagnose the cause of the despondency of the present and seek a cure.

The Fire Sermon

The title refers to the sermon preached by Buddha on the purification of desire, fires of passion, hatred and infatuation. The fire refers to the sterile burning of lust. The third part of *The Waste Land* opens with a divided feeling, the Prothalamian scene of Spenser altered with harsh realism. The leafy boughs that provided shelter during the summer are now broken as summer is over and the leaves have fallen. The lines also imply loss of something valuable. In the Old Testament 'tent' refers to the tabernacle that housed the sacred Commandments. In the Prothalamian there is a scene of Thames with nymphs and their paramours strewing flowers on the stream to honour a bridal. In place of the beautiful imagined creatures of Spenser, the paramours in Eliot's poem are 'the loitering heirs of city directors', and for the nymphs, several of them are described through out the section. The contrast between the Spensarian scene and the present sordidness is jarring. The sordidness is reinforced with linking Thames with Leman. The allusion refers to the Isrealites' longing for their homeland during Babylonian captivity. Leman can also mean one who is loved illicitly. The biblical reference thus makes overt the despair and alienation one feels in the wasteland. At the same time there is a yearning for a different world.

The sordid scene is followed by the picture of Fisher King, the maimed and impotent king of the Grail legends. The image of the Fisher King is already well developed in the poem. 'A Game of Chess' had shown the rape of maidens as the cause of the king's maiming and impotency. This part which shows the fires of lust as one of the characteristic features of the inhabitants of the wasteland further builds the image. The physical impotency easily becomes a symbol of the spiritual paralysis that the wasteland suffers. The spiritual impotency is fully exposed in the reference to Ferdinand mourning his father's death in the *Tempest* just before Ariel sings of the miraculous sea-change that his father has undergone. The musings show the consciousness of death and loss that preoccupies the wasteland inhabitants. The death is a sterile one from which no life emerges. Here, in fact there is a repetition of images from the previous part thus linking the two parts if not sequentially at least in the continuity of concern. This section also has reference to the myth of Diana and Acteon. In his notes on lines 197-198, Eliot refers to John Day's *Parliament of Bees* that refers to the horns of hunting that bring Acteon to Diana. The allusion to this myth intensifies the consequence of lust in the wasteland. It refers to the futile burning of the inhabitants of the wasteland in the fire of

their own lust as Acteon transformed into a stag was hunted by his own hounds. The bathing of Diana with her nymphs is changed to 'O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter/ And on her daughter/ They wash their feet in soda water'.

Horns of hunting are replaced to modern automobile sounds that do not bring an Acteon to Diana, the goddess of chastity, but bring Sweeney a vulgar bourgeois to not so chaste Mrs. Porter. There is also a washing of feet in the Maundy ritual in the Grail legends, when Parsifal the hero passes successfully the temptations of flesh. The children singing on the occasion express the ecstasy of his passing from the earthly to the immortal life. The song heard here instead, are broken fragments of swallow and nightingale intensifying the failure to experience the rites of transformation in the wasteland.

This failure to experience spiritual rejuvenation finds further reaffirmation in the lacerating parody that follows the incoherent song. Mr. Eugenides is the one-eyed merchant mentioned by Madame Sosostriis in part I, though she was unable to see what he carried on his back. The function of the Syrian merchants, as commented by Jessie Weston was to bring the ancient mysteries in the grail legends. But the Smyrna merchant carries only pocket full of currants in the wasteland

predominated by lust. The representatives of ancient cults, the tarot divining Madame Sosostriis and the currant carrying Mr. Eugenides, both reflect the decay and degradation of mystery. Mr. Eugenides ought to have invited the protagonist to some esoteric cult of spiritual rejuvenation; instead he invites him to a cult of homosexuality. The new cult does not promise a richer life, but ironically, sterility.

The incident between the typist and the carbuncular young man is a picture of 'love' so exclusively and practically pursued that it is not love at all. The evening hour, which in Sappho's

poem brings rest to all and brings the sailor home, brings the typist to her travesty of home and the carbuncular young man to her. The meeting of the lovers ends not in peace but in sterile burning.

Tiresias sees this objectively. He does not suffer a sense of loss that has been evident in the reference to Ferdinand a little earlier in the poem. The typist and the young carbuncular man, as presented by Tiresias are a complete opposite to the lovers in the hyacinth garden in part I. Without passion, ecstasy or anguish, the spectacle of love makes the whole event more depressing and disgusting. It is to be marked that the episode is seen dispassionately, without pity, sympathy or disgust. The detachment is that of a voyeur, seeing from outside the window. He sees only what he already knows and has foresuffered. Thus the aspect of

imprisonment within one's own dead mind, a theme introduced in part II is again reiterated here.

It is significant that Eliot has chosen the eighteenth century poets for the style of describing the typist episode. The description of the evening closely follows Gray and Collins. There is explicit allusion to Goldsmith's song in the description of the typist after her lover has departed. Such

allusions go a long way to expose the utter breakdown of the traditional values in the wasteland.

Eliot in his essays has time and again reiterated that the poets of the eighteenth century had 'lost that hold on human values, that firm grip on human experience which is a formidable achievement of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets'.

However, Eliot's claim that Tiresias acts as a unifying consciousness in the cacophony of voices in the Waste Land does not hold much validity. 'What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem', but his way of seeing it needs scrutiny. Tiresias sees but does not feel, he has objective knowledge of how sexual act ends but his knowledge is dissociated from the soul suffering in such an experience. He observes without love, passion or pathos. As such he is the representative figure of the dead heart of the wasteland. Even in Greek or Latin sources Tiresias is never the protagonist but one who knows what others have done and must suffer. What he sees and says is a crucial turning point for Odysseus or Oedipus; but the action is never his own. Even as a seer he does not suffer what he sees as does Cassandra. Whereas other prophets are possessed by the gods, Tiresias is always himself; he never undergoes any significant transformation. The consciousness of *The Waste Land* must either pass beyond Tiresias' way of seeing things or simply perish. The song of the Thames daughters that follows Tiresias' monologue opens up other possibilities of experiencing *The Waste Land* and seeking release from it. A new development begins in the poem at this point. There is a striking development in the music of the verse. The music now heard is 'The pleasant whinnying of mandoline'. The city is no longer unreal; the anguish is dissipated and answered by the music. Instead of the antiphony with which Tiresias' opens, there is now a harmony between the mandoline, the fishermen's charter and the 'Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold'. The reference to fishermen and the church is significant here. Fish has always been a symbol of life and church the refuge of the tired souls. It is as if the discord of the wasteland could be resolved in accepting the shelter of church and in the revival of the ancient mysteries. With the Thames-daughter's song the change is complete. It is a purely lyrical and subjective vision as opposed to the objective understanding of Tiresias

or Ferdinand earlier in the poem. The scenes are now recreated with intense particularity. Though there is allusion to Marlow's description of Thames in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, it has no explicit narrator. Even though there are intellectual associations there is no analytic wit or irony to divide the mind or build up lacerating parodies. Elizabeth, Cleopatra, Mrs. Porter all contrast and coalesce without the disgust explicit in the earlier parts. Both the functions of contrasting the Cleopatra aspect of Elizabeth with the sordidness of lust in the wasteland, and of equating Elizabeth with the typist as love is sterile for both of them, are performed in the second song. The third Thames' daughter's song depicts yet another sordid 'love' affair. The words have a tone of finality that characterize the souls in Dante's the Inferno or in the Purgatorio. There is no illusion or evasion; no rationalizing or sentimentalizing; the clear honest voice of self-recognition in the lines is rarely heard in Eliot's poetry so far. There is no doubt that the Thames daughters are there in the wasteland. They are really suffering the failure and breakdown of sensual passion. There is sympathy for them as felt by Dante for certain souls in the Inferno or the Purgatorio. This sympathy rises from the fact that the Thames' daughters present a universal predicament. The songs express a common condition in ordinary language. The pub monologue in 'A Game of Chess' with its cockney diction was mere mimicry. Here common language is made to produce its own poetry. The process of simplifying what was so far complicated in the experience of the wasteland is marked in the difference between the alienated blankness of 'Nothing again nothing' in part II and the direct acknowledgement in 'I can connect/Nothing with nothing'. The complete acceptance of frustration, failure, desolation and mortality is essential before an escape from it is to be sought. The truth about wasteland has been affirmed but there is need of an active and creative suffering to replace the passive acceptance of the Thames' Daughters. The Thames' daughters' song is followed by quotations from St. Augustine and Buddha to end the Fire Sermon'. Eliot stated that 'The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and

western asceticism as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident'. The positive

action needed to get released from the horrors of wasteland is asceticism. Both Augustine and Buddha had used the image of fire to symbolize lust. In the wasteland the secular mind freed from all restraint, cultivating experience for experience's sake, burn in the sterile fire of lust not in the 'hard and gemlike flame'. Augustine's "to Carthage then I came where raged a cauldron of unholy lust," reinforced by Buddha's denunciation of sensual life as burning of fires confirms Tiresias' vision of the Unreal City, but in Augustine's call—"O Lord Thou pluckest me out" the fire of mortality is transformed into the fire of Purgatory to which one submits voluntarily to get the soul out of sins through severe penance and penitence. The fragments from Augustine and Buddha prepare us for the final part of the Waste Land. Death by Water makes this transition smooth.

Death by Water

In his notes, Eliot states that the 'merchant ...melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples.' The death by water seems to be the death described in Ariel's song in the *Tempest* where the drowning brought sea change in the characters so that Ariel could claim 'those were pearls that were his eyes'. Death by water is the final image of water associated with mortality, but the death in this section of *The Waste Land* takes a different tone; 'A current under the sea/Picked his bones in whispers' is different from the description of death as 'bones cast in little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year' in the earlier section of the poem. The death in this section is no more a nightmare. The Phlebas the Phoenician unites all the previous personages of the poem. Stetson, Mr. Eugenides, Ferdinand and Tiresias all melt into the Phoenician sailor and are drowned with him. The irony in Madame Sosostris' warning of death by water is finally exposed here. The death here is no longer something to be feared but is welcomed as a release and relief from the horror of wasteland.

It is death that actually brings life. The drowned Phoenician soldier recalls the drowned gods of the fertility cults. Jessie Weston tells of the ritual at Alexandria, where each year the head of the god was thrown into the water amidst mourning; the head was carried by currents to Babylon where it was taken out of water and exhibited as a symbol of rebirth of the god. In this section though the death by water is not shown to bring about a rebirth, but only a reminder of human mortality as the drowned sailor moves back in time through the stages of his old age and youth, yet the syntactic

connections of the lines and the rhythmic pairs suggest a gentle acceptance of change and death as opposed to the anxiety about death and change as in the earlier parts of the poem. Though the drowned sailor enters the whirlpool of his memories of youth and age, the unwanted life is being dissolved; he forgets about 'profit and loss'. The nightmarish experience of death in life is now being experienced as a purging away of the disturbing negative feelings. The death is accepted and suffered. The last section has a warning for both the 'Gentile and the Jews' who want to turn their wheel of fortune by their own hand. The warning is that unless they join the Phoenician sailor in his surrender and acceptance, there is no escape from the horrors of self deception in their life in the wasteland. The death by water thus is a Christian baptism where water symbolizes the purging of the old self, and ushers in a spiritual rebirth. To be Christian is to accept the imperfectness of life and suffer for all sin and offences so that the peace can ultimately be attained. This is exactly what takes place in "What the Thunder Said", the concluding part of *the Waste Land*.

What the Thunder Said

In a letter to Bertrand Russell, Eliot wrote that this part was 'not only the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all'. The way out of *the waste land* is not a romantic dream, but a voluntarily acceptance of suffering to purge it as the 'souls in purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer for purgation'. It is like suffering the 'passion' of Christ that will ultimately bring redemptive love capable of giving peace.

It is to be noted that the cacophony of voices of different personages get united in a new voice, that of 'we', a voice that is at once personal and inclusive. In the previous sections there were four or five voices speaking different states of mind, here all the voices are change themselves into a common voice as in a song or incantation. The lyrical voice express a shared state of suffering, united by the intensity and depth of feeling. With the recognition of a common culture, the suffering loses its sting and leads on to mutual love and sympathy to speak or sing so inclusively means to enter the realm of an intensified or more developed form of consciousness. 'What the Thunder Said' begins with reference to events of Christ's betrayal, Passion and Crucifixion. The images, 'torchlight red on sweaty faces' and 'frosty silence in the gardens' evoke the image of Christ. The 'agony in stony places' refers to Golgotha, Gethsemane or the forty days of fast in the desert. In the presence of Christ the

thunder of spring is charged with reverberations that are not mere natural forces. There is also reference to the angels who told the disciples 'why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but risen', when the disciples did not find the body of Christ in the sepulchre. It is here that the poem first accepts that those inhabiting the wasteland are deprived of divine presence. But such awareness does not lead to hopelessness or anxiety. That the perceiving consciousness is no more perturbed is also reflected in the simplicity and straight forwardness of the images. The calm acceptance is also born by the smooth rhythm in these lines.

The suffering has not ceased but there is peaceful, patient acceptance of it. This is brought out by the contrast of the prophet's song in part I of the poem to the song of water dripping in part V. While there was only objective observation of the fear and sterility in part I the present song

expresses immediate experience, urgent and intense. The repeated words and images present a

frustration that has reached the state of hallucination. The voice in its hallucinated trance realizes

water dripping and has a sensation of refreshment. But soon the fact is realised that there is no water. Eliot thought that these were the only 'good lines in *The Waste Land*' and the rest were ephemeral. Eliot's vision does not come in a flash but is the result of great labour and suffering. It is a moment when the truth is realized.

The questioning passage marks a further development of the mind. There is unbroken rhythm in these lines and the question is framed in a formal order. Though Eliot in his notes refers to an

account of an Arctic traveller who experienced such hallucinations in moments of intense pain, there is enough evidence in literature to suggest another meaning. There is clear evocation of the

experience of the two Disciples of Christ who were travelling to Emmaus when they encountered

Resurrected Christ. In Dante's *Vita Nuova*, love accompanies the poet as an unknown co-traveller.

The questioning thus is very different from the hysterical questions of the nervous lady in 'A Game of Chess'. The unknown company is made distinct in the description 'wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded'; he is sensed but not seen and there is genuine desire to seek answer to the question of who the traveller is. The presence of the other is more distinct than the water dripping song of the hermit thrush in the preceding passage. Once the subjection to suffering

is accepted, one is able to sense a force beyond nature, though not yet able to comprehend it completely.

What follows is an exploration of the horrors that are already known. There is an echo of Christ's warning to the women lamenting at his being taken to be crucified. He told them to weep for themselves and not for him, implying that the source of sorrow needs to be recognized. The hooded hordes may be the 'crowds of people walking in a ring'; they may also be the crowds that crossed the London Bridge, they might be even an invading army or displaced people or the pilgrims.

They represent the pattern of suffering common to all mankind. All the cities become one city and the falling towers of the cities, representing destruction is accepted as a fact without the characteristic anxiety in other parts of the poem. All human plights become 'Unreal', no longer in denunciatory terms, but in simple acceptance of facts. In the calm acceptance of universal suffering and the inevitability of mutability, suffering turns to a purgatory. The patient suffering itself can give the 'rite de passage' out of the horrors of this worldly existence.

The perceiving consciousness recalls the sufferings of earlier parts, which were the hopeless sufferings of Hell. Eliot in writing these lines may have been inspired by the painting of Hieronymus Bosch, the fifteenth century Dutch artist. Eliot may have drawn directly from Bosch's panel entitled 'Hell' which depicts a bat like creature, with dull human features, crawling with tits head down a rocky wall. The paintings were essentially religious allegories of the nightmarish visions of hell. This passage recreates the bizarre and nightmarish world of Bosch's paintings as it compares the sufferings in the wasteland to that in the paintings. However, these lines are written in a gentle rhythm with assonances, alliterations and even rhymes. Moreover, these lines are written in past tense. This indicates that after one has understood the real meaning of suffering, such a hellish nightmare does not have any effect.

Having gone through purgatorial suffering and the horrors of hell, has to confront the ultimate truth, the path of deliverance from all sufferings. The Chapel here is the Chapel Perilous of the Grail legend, where after having passed through his ordeals, the knight had to confront the questions to rejuvenate the wasteland. The Chapel has been described as empty in the legend. There could also be a reference to the tomb of Christ that was found to be empty by his Disciples before they were told that Christ is Resurrected. Such moments are intense and beyond the ordinary. All fears vanish; the dry bones no longer evoke horror and there is no anguish over the wind blowing over the dry grass. There is great expectancy in the moment. The cock, the bird of dawn may be a symbol of resurrection here. It can also be the

charmed voice that dispels all evil of the night and heralds day break. The lightening flash of truth descends and washes all guilt and suffering.

There is now a sudden shift of location from the unreal cities of Europe to the tropical plains of India where the sunken Ganga and withered vegetation wait for rain clouds to come and enliven them. It is after the patience has been adequately tested that the thunder finally speaks the words of wisdom. What the thunder says is 'DA'. The reference is to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, where

the creator says the same word to his threefold offsprings - the gods, the humans and the demons

who interpret the word in three different ways according to their own dispositions. The interpretations as given, by the sacred book are 'Control yourselves, give alms and be compassionate'. Eliot changes the order for his own purpose to '*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*' meaning 'Give, Sympathize, Control'. It is in surrender that life attains value. Surrender may be a virtual death, but it is in the death ones ego that one finds fulfillment. The moment of surrender in the Hyacinth garden episode now finds an affirmation: 'By this, and this only, we have existed'. To be free from being imprisoned within itself as we see the personages in Part II and Part III, the mind needs to sympathize with the other. The poem alludes to Shakespeare's Coriolanus who was banished from Rome for his arrogance and contempt for people. Though he had to die a pitiable death, it was only after he sympathized with his mother, wife and son to save the people from imminent annihilation. Coriolanus serves as a reminder to all about how dire could be the consequence of lack of sympathy. It is sympathizing alone that can and rescue the mind from its own prison. The last instruction of the thunder is control. Control stands for ascetic self abstinence, which is self-control of very high order. It is in self-control that the intellect, 'the hand expert with sail and oar' can make the 'heart' obedient and refrain from sins.

The poem breaks off into a bunch of fragments. There is acceptance of mortality and thus of weakness. At the same time the nursery rhyme pattern mocks the pride and sense of importance

of the builders of great cities and bridges. Reference to Aquitaine perhaps suggests that even such beautiful love songs produced by the troubadour poets of the region could not survive destruction during the crusades. It is in such a background of waste and aridity that the mind is to set its lands in order, is to recover its spiritual integrity. One needs to be like Hieronymo, Kyd's hero in Spanish Tragedy. Though a prototype of Hamlet, Hieronymo did carry out his revenge with resource and resolution. The perceiving consciousness in the poem is to be

resolved and draw resource from the instructions of the thunder—‘*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*’. It is only such a resolution that can promise him *Shantih* - a peace that surpasses all suffering.

2 (b): Significance of the Title

Eliot had originally intended to entitle the poem, ‘He Do the Police in different voices’. It is a quotation from Charles Dicken’s novel, *Our Mutual Friend*. Old Betty Higden boasts of her adopted son Sloppy’s accomplishments : ‘Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices’. This title would have been sufficient to focus the variety of voices and styles introduced in the poem. It would have also drawn reader’s attention to the use of parody in the poem.

For the present title, ‘The Waste Land’, Eliot acknowledged his debt to Jessie Weston’s book *From Ritual to Romance*. The book attempts to explain the evolution of religious beliefs by studying the legend of the Holy Grail. Grail was the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper with his disciples before crucifixion. According to the legend, Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Christ, caught the blood from Christ’s wound in the Grail and brought it to Glastonbury in the west of England. The legend says that the Grail was lost as a consequence of some immoral activity in the kingdom. The loss of the Grail turned the fertile lands barren; all beings were inflicted by infertility. The fertility could be restored only if a noble knight answered correctly some questions at the Perilous Chapel, where he would go only after suffering great ordeals. The legend could easily be read as a symbol for loss of spiritual wisdom and a subsequent search to get it back.

B. C. Southam suggested the possibility of the title being taken from St. *Augustine’s Confessions*. In Book II of the *Confessions* St. Augustine writes, ‘I wandered, O my God, too much astray from Thee my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to myself a wasteland’. Such a reference for the title makes the theme of loss of spiritual wisdom explicit in the poem. Whichever be the source of the title, the suggestions are very clear. The title anticipates the major themes in the poem. The Waste Land is a poem depicting spiritual, intellectual and emotionally arid condition of an individual or a people living in a secular world, and a search for answers to the distress.

‘The Fire Sermon’ opens with description of the Prothalamian scene of Spenser. The leafy boughs that provided shelter during the summer are now broken as summer is over and the leaves have fallen. The lines imply loss of something valuable. In the Old Testament ‘tent’ refers to the tabernacle that housed the sacred Commandments. In the Prothalamian there is a

scene of Thames with nymphs and their paramours strewing flowers on the stream to honour a bridal. In place of the beautiful creatures of Spenser, the paramours in *The Waste Land* given to sensual indulgence and arrogance. The note of loss and sordidness is reinforced with linking Thames with Leman. The allusion refers to the Isrealites' longing for their homeland during Babylonian captivity. The biblical reference also describes the despair and alienation one feels in exile. The spiritual impotency is also expressed in the reference to Ferdinand mourning his father's death in the *Tempest* miraculous. The musings reflect the consciousness of death and loss that preoccupies the wasteland inhabitants. The image of Fisher King, the maimed and impotent king of the Grail legends, follows the sordid scene. esoteric cult of spiritual rejuvenation; instead he invites him to the cult of homosexuality. The new cult only promises sterility. The painting depicting the rape of Philomela is an inert object in the room. Though it is 'As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene', the dead sensibility of the wastelanders cannot read transcendence through suffering. The 'inviolable voice' of the nightingale is changed to 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears. It draw no lesson or spiritual sustenance from the past.

In the second part 'The Game of Chess' presents yet another picture of spiritual emptiness. The monologue in this part presents a mind, which is simply a flux of incident and emotion, living only in the present moment. The past is simply withered stumps of time and though the 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME' may remind a reader of the warning of 'Time's winged chariot hurrying near' it is beyond the apprehension of the speaker. The conversation ends with a quotation from Ophelia's speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that serves as a sharp contrast to the lover in wasteland. The sterile sensibility finds a strong expression in Tiresias' narration of the two lovers in the spiritually arid cityscape. The incident between the typist and the carbuncular young man is a picture of 'love' so exclusively and practically pursued that it is not love at all. The meeting of the lovers ends not in peace but in sterile burning. John Crowe Ransom (*God Without Hope*), points out that Love is the aesthetic of sex; lust is the science. Love implies a differing of the satisfaction of desire; it implies even a certain amount old asceticism and ritual, lust drives forward urgently to immediate extirpation of the desire. However, lust only defeats itself. The typist and the young carbuncular man, as presented by Tiresias authenticate the idea.

The world devoid of love relationship between sexes is akin to a game of chess where meanings are assigned by arbitrary conventions alone. Both scenes in 'The Game of Chess' show the predicament of men and women in the secularized world, who cannot cope with the state and

as a consequence break down and no longer know what they feel, nor feel what they know.

The

couples cannot transcend their individual prison house. In setting the plight of the wasteland couples in relation to the myths and literary allusions of the past the poet tries to diagnose the cause and seek a cure of the present sickness.

In a world where there is no passion, sensibility and hope, life is more like death. The epigraph

very effectively presents this the theme of death-in-life existence, the primary theme in *The Waste Land*. In Greek mythology the Sibyl at Cumae had asked Apollo to grant her as many years of life as the sand she held in her hands, but foolishly forgot to ask for eternal youth. Consequently as she aged her prophetic powers declined. The stupidity of the Sibyl launched her into a life where her only wish was to die. The theme is repeated in the very opening line of the poem. The opening lines of poem present the attractiveness of death, or the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the wasteland live. Men are afraid to live in reality. They do not want the awareness of pain and suffering, Consequently they prefer oblivion from the burden of consciousness. This desire of death is immediately followed by a description of rapid movement and change in the immediate past experience. The apparent joy and dynamism of the European tour ends in boredom and loneliness. The confusion is further intensified with the German quotation meaning: 'I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am a real German.' The quotation, derived from a conversation of Countess Marie Larisch, the niece and confidante of Austrian Empress, Elizabeth recalls the violent breaking up of Europe, which serves as a symbol for disintegration of all certainties in a thoroughly secularized world. In fact it is the memory of futility in past experiences that instigates the desire for the stability of death.

To show the sterility of the wasteland Eliot associates it with Baudelaire's *fourmillante cite* and

with Dante's Limbo. In his notes to the poem Eliot refers to 'Les Septs Vieillards' by Charles Fisher King was unaware that certain maidens who used to frequent the shrine were raped and their golden cups were taken away from them. The curse on the land followed from this act.

Spiritually inactive, the inhabitants of the wasteland do not draw sustenance from the past traditions anymore. 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish? Men no longer know the answers to these questions in a thoroughly secularized

world. The lines seem to parody the certainties that were known by the biblical prophets. Eliot's note refers to Ezekiel

ii, 1 where God gave him the mission of preaching God's words to the rebellious people of Israel.

The notes also refer to Ecclesiastes xii, 5 where the preacher reminds men of the vanity of life and exhorts them to remember God in the days of youth. The inhabitants of the wasteland seem to have forgotten the warnings of the scripture. Had they understood the words of the prophet, their suffering would have given their life and death great significance.

The tarot divining Madame Sosostriis in part I as well as the currant carrying Mr. Eugenides in part II, both pictures the decay and degradation of ancient mystery cults. The Tarot cards were originally used to determine the event of the highest importance to the people, the rising of the waters. Madame Sosostriis engages the cards in merely vulgar fortune telling. The function of the Syrian merchants was to bring the ancient mysteries of the grail legends. But the Smyrna merchant carries only pocket full of currants. Mr. Eugenides ought to have invited the protagonist to some Baudelaire, quoting the opening lines, 'swarming city, city full of dreams,/Where in broad daylight the spectre stops the passer-by'. Eliot also refers to Dante, *Inferno* iii, 55-57: 'so long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone so many'. This is Dante's reaction when in the outskirts of hell, he sees and recognizes the wretched souls, displeasing to God and to His enemies alike, who lived choosing neither good nor evil and therefore had been rejected from both Heaven and Hell. They had 'no hope of death', and they 'never were alive.' Eliot draws a parallel between London and Limbo. The workers walking towards the business capital of the world are called inhabitants of Limbo because they have lost their feelings, which might have given them a wholesome existence. And the city is 'unreal' not only because it lacks the real life of passion, but also because it does not even realize that it lacks it. The wastelanders are not only possessed by every sin and evil, they are also inert with boredom, apathy and despair.

Even death seems to have lost all significance in the wasteland. The corpse in the poem definitely refers to the ritual of burying the gods made of earth and corn in fertility rites with the

hope of good harvest. But the burial of the dead now is a sterile planting—without hope. The warning to 'keep the dog far hence' refers to the Humanitarian philosophies that discount the supernatural and spiritual aspects in man. In a world where meanings are ascribed only by arbitrary and empty conventions, communication is bound to fail. These people in the wasteland know nothing, see nothing. Not only that life is meaningless in this wasteland,

even death is sterile—‘I think we are in rats’ alley/ Where the dead men have lost their bones’. This line is followed by the remembrance of another death, ‘Those were pearls that were his eyes’. The song from *Tempest* describes a death, which is an opening into a rich and strange realm, another birth. This can be connected to the image of the god thrown into water only to be revived as a symbol of fertility and growth.

If hope is to be restored, a fresh and different set of beliefs and realities are needed. Just as the noble knight underwent great ordeal to confront the questions at the Perilous Chapel, the modern consciousness has to undergo a journey to restore fertility. The song of the Thames daughters opens up other possibilities of experiencing this world and being rescued from “it. There is a striking development in the music of the verse, which begins a process of profound transformation. The music now heard is ‘The pleasant whinning of mandoline’. The clear honest voice of self-recognition in the lines is rarely heard. The waste land inhabitants are aware of the suffering. There is sympathy as felt by Dante for certain souls in the Inferno or in the Purgatory. The advance can be marked in the difference between the alienated blankness of ‘Nothing again nothing’ in part II and the direct acknowledgement in ‘I can connect/ Nothing with nothing’. The complete acceptance of frustration, failure desolation and mortality is essential before lessation of suffering is sought the truth about wasteland has been affirmed but there is need of an active and creative suffering.

‘Death by water’ is the final image of water associated with mortality in the poem. ‘A current under the sea/Picked his bones in whispers’ is different from the description of death as ‘bones cast in little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat’s foot only, year to year’ in earlier section of the poem. Phlebas the Phoenician unites all the previous personages of the poem. Stetson, Mr. Eugenides, Ferdinand and Tiresias all melt into the Phoenician sailor and are drowned with him. The irony in Madame Sosostris’ warning of death by water is finally exposed here. The death here is no longer something to be feared but is welcome as a release from the horror of wasteland. It is a death that actually brings life. The drowned Phoenician soldier recalls the drowned gods of the fertility cults. Though the drowned sailor enters the whirlpool of his memories of youth and age, the unwanted life is dissolved. he forgets about ‘profit and loss’. The nightmarish experience of death in life is now being experienced as a purging away of the disturbing negative feelings. The death is accepted and suffered. There is warning for those who want to turn the wheel of fortune by their own hand. The warning is that unless they join the Phoenician sailor in his surrender there is no escape form the horrors of self-deception in the wasteland. The death by water thus is a Christian baptism where water symbolizes the purging of the old self and ushers in a spiritual rebirth.

The way out of this waste is not any romantic. The suffering is like suffering the 'passion' of Christ that will ultimately bring redemptive love capable of giving peace. In 'What the Thunder Said' the cacophony of different voices gets united in a new voice, at once personal and inclusive. The individual voices become one in a song or incantation. With the recognition of this common culture, the suffering loses its sting and leads on to mutual love and sympathy. To speak or sing so inclusively means to enter the realm of what is recognized as more developed form of consciousness.

After intensely feeling the sterility of the landscape the voice in its hallucinated trance realizes

the reviving impart of water and almost has a sensation of refreshment. This is the dream like experience of a man at the brink of collapse but soon the fact that there is no water returns, though it is no more associated with the hopelessness of the previous sections. There is evocation of the experience of two Disciples of Christ who were travelling to Emmaus when they encountered Resurrected Christ. It is wondering at an experience that is real and felt. The presence of the other is more distinct than the water dripping song of the hermit thrush in the hallucination passage. One is able to sense a force beyond nature, though not yet able to comprehend it completely. Further, in the calm acceptance of universal suffering and inevitability of mutability, one finds all cities, all human plights 'Unreal', no longer in denunciatory terms. The patient suffering itself gives the 'rite de passage' out of the horrors of this worldly existence. It is in the Chapel Perilous of the Grail legends, where after having passed through his ordeals, the knight had to confront the questions to rejuvenate the wasteland. The tomb of Christ was found empty by his Disciples before they were told that Christ was Resurrected. Such moments are intense. The dry bones no longer evoke horror and there is no anguish over the wind blowing over dry grass.

There is great expectancy in the moment. There is now a shift of location from the unreal cities of Europe to the tropical plains of India where the sunken Ganga and withered vegetation wait for the rain clouds to come. The thunder finally speaks the words of wisdom. What the thunder says is 'DA'. In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad the creator says the same word to his threefold offsprings - the gods, the humans and the demons who interpret the word in three different ways according to their own dispositions, 'control yourselves, give alms and be compassionate'. Eliot changes the order to '*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*' meaning 'Give, Sympathize, Control'. It is in surrender that life attains value. The mind needs to sympathize with other. In spite of self-transcendence, sympathy is necessary to break the indestructible barriers between one human being and another. Coriolanus serves as a

reminder to all about how dire the consequence of lack of sympathy could be. The last instruction of the thunder is control. There is an affirmation of Buddha's denunciation of sensual life as well as of Augustine's call - 'O Lord Thou pluckest me out'. Control stands for ascetic self-abstinence, which is self-control of very high order which the intellect, 'the hand expert with sail and oar' can make the 'heart' obedient and refrain from sins.

The nursery rhyme pattern of the ending lines evidently mocks the pride and sense of importance of all the proud builders of great cities and bridges. It is in such a background of waste and aridity that the mind is set to recover its spiritual integrity. The perceiving consciousness in the poem draws sustenance from the instructions of the thunder — '*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*'. It is only such a resolution that can promise *Shantih* peace. The legend of the Holy Grail not only narrates the cause of infertility but also gives hope of recovery. Eliot's poem finds a solution to the torments suffered in the wasteland, but to make the solution effective it requires hard and sustained effort that became the theme Eliot's poems that followed *The Waste Land*.

UNIT 3

3 (a): Artistic Unity in 'The Waste Land'

The Waste Land diagnoses the disease of modern mind and seeks the means of remedy. It was

almost necessary to have a complex structure to express the complex theme. The variety of sources ranging from scriptures, myths legends to romances, past literature and autobiographical writings to be fused into one poem was an extremely challenging task. Another difficulty was to fuse the plurality of voices in which the poem speaks. Eliot wanted to spread the poem through four issues of *Dial* and even thought of splitting the poem into two in *The Criterion*. However, the poem does have a definite organization and structure. Every individual part of the poem is organized neatly both in terms of structure and theme.

All the parts make a complete whole. The title performs a vital role in holding the parts together and the epigraph presents the psychological state that dominates the poem. The basic method of

structuring the first three parts is to have an image at the centre with the other images symmetrically set around. The fourth part serves as a transition between the turmoil of the first three and the peace of the last part. The fifth part of the poem is a summary of the first four. It works out the answers to the problems raised in the first three. Though the poem does

not resolve the problems, prescription for cure is laid down. The initial plurality of voices is unified into one voice, and the several allusions only express the same situation. The unity of *The Waste Land* is like the musical unity of an orchestra where different instruments play the same theme in variety of tones and finally unites to present the crescendo. In 'The Burial of the dead' the episode of the hyacinth garden seems to be the central image around which all other images are symmetrically arranged. If the earlier parts presenting life devoid of meaning, which is death, the hyacinth garden presents a death, which may be called life at its greatest intensity. While looking at the hyacinth girl coming back from the garden it seemed to the protagonist that his eyes failed, 'I was neither/Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, /Looking into the heart of light, the silence.' The lines are too rich in meaning. It is a moment of intense passion.

It almost achieves the state of a mystical awareness. These lines stand in sharp contrast to the meaning conveyed by the images preceding as well as following it. The images preceding the episode display the various horrible aspects of life in the wasteland, the death-in-life as well as staticity, sterility and fear. This section begins by showing the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the wasteland live. There is anxiety about change, growth and sexuality. This desire is immediately followed by a description of rapid movement and change that ends essentially in boredom and loneliness. The certainties that were known by the biblical prophets are long forgotten by men in a thoroughly secularized world.

The inhabitants of the wasteland seem to have forgotten the warnings of the scripture. The passage on Madame Sosostris and her fortune telling directs attention to both corruptions of traditions as well as the limited intellect of the inhabitants of the wasteland. The Tarot cards were originally used to determine the event of highest importance to the people, the rising of the waters. Madame Sosostris engages the cards to vulgar fortune telling. Madame Sosostris passage contributes to the unity of the poem. Various images that recur in the Tarot card appear in different parts of the poem, but their meanings are not the same as interpreted by the famous clairvoyante. Eliot proceeds to show the sterility and unreality of the wasteland by associating it with Baudelaire's *fourmillante*. cite and with Dante's Limbo. 'So long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone so many'. This is Dante's reaction when in the outskirts of hell, he sees and recognizes the wretched souls. The workers walking towards the business capital of the world are called inhabitants of Limbo because they have lost their passion. The wastelanders like Baudelaire are not only possessed by every sin and evil, they are also inert with boredom, apathy and despair. The second part of

the poem illustrates the abstractions that are stated in the first part. The theme of life which is death is stated specifically in the conversation between the man and woman where all communication seems to fail. Not only the life is meaningless in this wasteland, even death is sterile - 'I think we are in rats' alley/ Where the dead men have lost their bones'. This line is followed by remembrance of another death. 'Those were pearls that were his eyes'. The nervous woman's monologue is the nucleus of the second part as it were. It is presented between two scenes taken from two diametrically opposite social settings that are apparently contrasting but essentially validate the same fact about the wasteland, loss of meaning.

The art works that fill the room are characterized as 'other withered stumps of time'.
Allusions

to Cleopatra and Pope's Belinda only accentuate the difference of the present woman from the

famous heroines of past literature. The lady neither has the grandeur of Cleopatra nor the innocent folly of Belinda. The second part of the section presents yet another picture of spiritual emptiness but this time the social scale is different. The monologue in this part presents a mind, which simply records a flux of incident and emotion, all on the surface, living only in the present moment. The conversation ends with a quotation from Ophelia's speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* indicating her refined sensibility, which is in sharp contrast to the insensible Lil. Both the parts of A Game of Chess show the passionlessness and insensibility in a totally secularized world where every thing is looked at from individual self-centred position. Eliot had originally planned to entitle this section as 'In the Cage'. But the present title not only describes but also diagnoses the problem of the wasteland. Eliot's notes refer to Thomas Middleton's play *Women Beware Women* as the source for the title. In the play every move on the board corresponds to the steps of forcible seduction of Bianca. The title suggests that the relationship between sexes in the secularized world is akin to a game of chess where meanings are assigned by arbitrary conventions alone.

In 'The Fire Sermon', Tiresias's account of the sexual act between two lovers is at the centre. Eliot claimed that Tiresias acts, as a unifying consciousness in the cacophony of voices in *The Waste Land*, 'What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem'. The incident between the typist and the carbuncular young man is a picture of 'love' so exclusively and practically pursued that it is not love at all. The meeting of the lovers ends not in peace but in sterile burning. Tiresias sees this objectively. The typist and the young carbuncular man, as presented by Tiresias are a complete opposite to the lovers that were presented in the hyacinth garden in part I. Here there is neither ecstasy nor anguish. The aspects of wasteland

introduced in the poem; sterility, insensitivity, self imprisonment and absence of love; are all presented together in this episode. The images in this section, from the beginning till the incident narrated by Tiresias describe the passionless lust indulged in by the inhabitants of the wasteland. There is no fulfillment here but only sterility and disgust. The section opens in a divided feeling, the Prothalamian scene of Spenser alternated with harsh realism. The leafy boughs that provided shelter during the summer is now broken. The lines imply loss of something valuable. In the Prothalamian there is a scene of Thames with nymphs and their paramours strewing flowers on the stream to honour a bridal. In the Wasteland the paramours are 'the loitering heirs of city directors'. The note of loss and sordidness is reinforced linking Thames with Leman. The allusion refers to the Israelites' longing for their homeland during Babylonian captivity. The biblical reference thus describes the despair and alienation one feels in wasteland.

The physical impotency of the Fisher King easily becomes a symbol of the spiritual paralysis that the wastelanders suffer. The spiritual impotency is more exposed in the reference to Ferdinand mourning his father's death in the *Tempest*. The musings show the consciousness of death and loss that preoccupies the wasteland inhabitants. Here, in fact there is a repetition of images from the previous part thus linking the parts if not sequentially at least in continuity of concern. Mr. Eugenides is the one-eyed merchant mentioned by Madame Sosostris in part I, though she was unable to see what he carried on his back. The representatives of ancient cults whether the tarot divining Madame Sosostris or the currant carrying Mr. Eugenides, both make evident the decay and degradation of ancient mystery cults. Mr. Eugenides ought to have invited the protagonist to some esoteric cult of spiritual rejuvenation; instead he invites him to the cult of homosexuality. With the song of the Thames daughters a new development begins in the poem. The music of the verse begins a process of profound transformation. In the music, 'The pleasant whinnying of mandoline', the anguish is dissipated and answered by the new music. Instead of the antiphony with which 'Fire Sermon' opens, there is now a harmony between the mandoline, the fishermen's chatter and the 'Inexplicable splendour Ionian white and gold. The reference to fishmen and the church is significant here. Fish has always been a symbol of life and church the refuge of the tired soul. It is as if the discord of the wasteland could be resolved in accepting the shelter of church and revival of ancient mysteries. The complete acceptance of frustration, failure, desolation and mortality is essential before a release from it is sought. The positive move can be asceticism. Both Augustine and Buddha had used the image of fire to symbolize. The mind cultivating experience for experience's sake burns in sterile fire of lust. Buddha's denunciation of

sensual life as burning of fires confirms Tiresias' vision of the Unreal City, and in Augustine's call - 'O Lord Thou pluckest me out'. The fire is transformed into the fires of Purgatory to which one must submit voluntarily to get the soul cleansed of sins through severe penance and penitence.

Death by water is the final image of water associated with mortality in the poem but death in this section of wasteland takes a different tone. 'A current under the sea/Picked his bones in

whispers' is different from the description of death as 'bones cast in little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year'.

Phlebas the Phoenician unites all the previous personages of the poem. Stetson, Mr. Eugenides,

Ferdinand and Tiresias all melt into the Phoenician sailor and are drowned with him. The irony in Madame Sosostris' warning of death by water is finally exposed here. The death here is but welcomed as a release from the horror of wasteland. It is death that actually brings life. The drowned Phoenician soldier recalls the drowned gods of the fertility cults. As the drowned sailor moves back in time through the stages of his old age and youth, the syntactic connections of the lines and the rhythmic pairs suggest a gentle acceptance of change and death as opposed to the anxiety about death and change in the earlier parts of the poem. In a letter to Bertrand Russell, Eliot wrote that 'What the Thunder Said' was 'not only the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all'. In the previous sections there were four or five voices speaking different states of mind, here all the voices are changed into a common voice in a song or incantation expressing a shared state of suffering, and depth of feeling. The images, 'torchlight red on sweaty faces' and 'frosty silence in the gardens' evoke the figure of Christ. The 'agony in stony places' refers to Golgotha, Gethsemane or the forty days of fast in the desert. There is also reference to the angels who told the disciples 'why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but risen'. It is here that the poem first accepts that those inhabiting the wasteland embrace the suffering with patience.

The suffering is so intense that it causes hallucinations. The questioning passage marks a further development of the mind. There is clear evocation of the experience of two Disciples of

Christ who were travelling to Emmaus when they encountered Resurrected Christ. The unknown

company is made distinct in the description 'wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded'; he is sensed but

not seen and there is genuine desire to seek the answer. Once the suffering has become complete,

the one is able to sense a force beyond nature, though not yet able to comprehend it completely.

There is echo of Christ's warning the women to weep for themselves and not for him, implying that the source of their sorrow and failures is to be recognized. The hooded hordes may

be the 'crowds of people walking in a ring'; they may also be the crowds that crossed the London

Bridge, they might be even an invading army or displaced people or even pilgrims, but they are no more perceived with horror or disgust. They represent the universal pattern of suffering. All cities, all human plights become 'Unreal', in simple acceptance of facts. The calm acceptance of universal suffering and inevitability of mutability itself gives the 'rite de passage' out of the horrors of this worldly existence to the path of deliverance from all sufferings. The Chapel here is the Chapel

Perilous of the Grail legends, where after having passed through his ordeals, the knight had to confront the questions to rejuvenate the wasteland. There is also a reference to the tomb of Christ

that was found to be empty by his Disciples before they were told that Christ is Resurrected. There is great expectancy in the moment. The cock, the bird of dawning is a symbol of resurrection here, the charmed voice that dispels all evil of night and heralds daybreak. The moment of revelation requires dispelling of all ordinary concerns before the lightening flash of truth descends and washes all guilt and suffering. The thunder finally speaks the words of wisdom. What the thunder says is 'DA'.

In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad the creator says the same word to his threefold offsprings-the gods, the humans and the demons who interpret the word in three different ways according to their own dispositions, 'Control yourselves, give alms and be compassionate'. Eliot changes the order to '*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*' meaning 'Give, Sympathize, Control'. It is through the surrender of one's ego that life attains value. Surrender to such a degree might be a virtual death. The moment of surrender in the Hyacinth garden episode now finds an affirmation: 'By this, and this only, we have existed'. For the consciousness to be free, it needs to sympathize with others to break the indestructible barriers between one human being and another.

Coriolanus serves as a reminder to all about how dire could be the consequence of lack of sympathy. The last instruction of the thunder is control. Control may also stand for ascetic self-abstinence, which is self-control of very high order. The poem breaks off into a bunch of fragments. At the same time the poem mocks the pride and sense of importance of all the proud builders of great cities and bridges. In other words the transformed mind can see that failure is a common plight. It is in such a background of waste and aridity that the mind is set to recover its spiritual integrity. The perceiving consciousness in the poem draws sustenance resource from the instructions of the thunder — ‘*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*’ and it is only such a resolution that can promise him *Shantih*, peace.

Thus we find that the apparently separate parts of the poem are interconnected to make *The Waste Land* one poem. The poem lacks organic unity but it presents a higher sense of order. In his critical writings, Eliot often talked about unity of sentiment. A poem is to appeal more to sensibility than to intellect. The images in *Wasteland* directly appeal to sensibility and feelings, creating powerful and immediate effect. The content and form are intrinsically related. This gives the poem an autonomy that characterizes all immortal works of art.

UNIT 4

4 (a): Use of Myth and Allusions

I.A. Richards remarked that allusions in *The Waste Land* are a device for compression, for the poem is equivalent in content to an epic. Without this device twelve books would have been

needed. The poem is a description of the horrors experienced in a secularized world and prescribes the means to overcome it. It is natural that such a theme would require a vast expanse where religion, philosophy, history, politics, literature and culture in general would surface as reference points. Allusions from myths, scriptures, literary works, autobiographical writings and several other sources perform significant role in expressing the meaning and holding the structure of the poem. Allusions from a variety of contexts and historical epochs are juxtaposed, as in a collage, to create a remarkable effect. In his notes to the poem Eliot acknowledged his debt to Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* not only for the material he used but also for the structure of the poem. The title of the poem is taken from the legend of the Holy Grail, a myth explored in both these works. According to the legend, Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Christ, caught the blood from Christ’s wound in the Grail and brought it to Glastonbury in the west of England. The legend says that the Grail was lost as a consequence of some immoral activity in the

kingdom. The loss of the Grail turned the fertile lands barren all beings were inflicted by infertility.

The fertility could be restored only if a noble knight answered correctly some questions at the Perilous Chapel, where he would go only after suffering great ordeals. The legend could easily be read as a symbol for loss of wisdom and a subsequent search to recover it. The first three parts

of the poem explores the cause of sterility in the modern wasteland the last two parts depict the

process to escape the horrors. Reference to the legend of the Holy Grail can be found interspersed through out the poem.

The poem has several allusions to the Christian Scriprures. Every allusion is treated differently

to focus different meanings. In 'Burial of the Dead' there are references to the prophetic Books from the Bible. 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish?' Eliot's note refers to Ezekiel ii, 1 where God gave him the mission of preaching God's words to the rebellious people of Israel. The notes also refer to Ecclesiastes xii, 5 where the preacher reminds men of the vanity of life and exhorts them to remember God in the days of youth. The lines seem to parody the certainties that were known by the biblical prophets. The inhabitants of the wasteland seem to have forgotten the warnings of the scripture. Whereas, the Biblical allusions in 'What the Thunder Said' bring out hope in purgatorial suffering. 'What the Thunder Said' in the poem begins with reference to events of Christ's betrayal, Passion and Crucifixion. The images, 'torchlight red on sweaty faces' and 'frosty silence in the gardens' evoke the figure of Christ. The 'agony in stony places' refers to Golgotha, Gethsemane or the forty days of fast in the desert. In the presence of Christ the thunder of spring was charged with reverberations that are not mere natural forces. After the intense purgatorial sufferings the mind can a better understanding of the experienced world. To depict the experience Eliot alludes to the experience of two Disciples of Christ who were travelling to Emmaus when they encountered Resurrected Christ.

Allusions in The Waste Land often serve as important commentary on the prevalent condition The autobiographical line from a conversation of Countess Marie Larisch, the niece and confidante of Austrian Empress, Elizabeth, 'I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am a real German.' recalls the violent breaking up of Europé, which serves as a symbol for disintegration of all certainties in the Waste Land. Again, Eliot refers to Dante, Inferno iii, 55-57: 'so long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone so

many'. This is Dante's reaction when in the outskirts of hell, he sees and recognizes the wretched souls, choosing neither good nor evil and therefore rejected from both Heaven and Hell. With reference to Dante, Eliot draws a parallel between London, the centre of world trade and Limbo. The workers walking towards the business capital of the world are called inhabitants of Limbo because they have lost their passion; they have lost their feelings. Further in bringing the context of the Punic wars in the poem Eliot makes a comment on the conditions of the wasteland. Mylae is the name of a battle fought between the Romans and Carthaginians in the Punic wars. In making the protagonist address his friend as someone he met in the Punic wars. Eliot points out that all wars are the same in destroying the victor and vanquished both.

On other occasions allusions highlight the meaning by contrast with the lines written in the poem. There is pointed reference to Shakespeare's Cleopatra in the first lines of 'The Game of Chess'. Whereas Cleopatra in Shakespearean play is described as one whom 'Age cannot whither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety' the life of the woman in 'A Game of Chess' is staled. Cleopatra represents the pinnacle that love can reach, one who could throw away an empire for love in contrast to the woman in the poem for whom love simply does not exist. Not only that life is meaningless in the wasteland, even death is sterile—'I think we are in rats' alley/ Where the dead men have lost their bones'. This line is followed by remembrance of another death, 'Those were pearls that were his eyes'. The song from *Tempest* describes a death that is another birth. The quotation from Ophelia's speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at the end of the second part of 'The Game of Chess' serves as a sharp contrast to the lover in wasteland. The refined Ophelia turning mad at Hamlet's refusal is opposite to the insensible Lil. The contrast of the cockney 'Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight' with 'Goodnight, ladies' from Ophelia's speech also highlights the trivial maneuvers in sexual game as displayed in the pub in the *Waste Land*.

On several occasions allusions from several contexts are juxtaposed and the composite of these contexts create a powerful effect. The third part of *Waste Land* opens with the Prothalamian scene of Spenser alternating with harsh realism. The leafy boughs that provided shelter during the summer is now broken as summer is over and the leaves have fallen. The lines also imply loss of something valuable. In the Old Testament 'tent' refers to the tabernacle that housed the sacred Commandments now lost. The combination of these two references powerfully builds up the theme of past beauty and comfort lost in the present. In his notes on lines 197-198, Eliot refers to John Day's *Parliament of Bees* that refers to the horns of hunting brought brings Acteon to Diana. The allusion to this myth intensifies the

consequence of lust in the wasteland. The inhabitants of the wasteland burn in the fire of their own lust just as Acteon transformed into a stag was hunted by his own hounds. The bathing of Diana with her nymphs has become 'O the moon shone bright on

Mrs. Porter/ And on her daughter/ They wash their feet in soda water'. Horns of hunting have changed to modern automobile sounds that do not bring an Acteon to Diana, Sweeney a vulgar

bourgeois, to not so chaste Mrs. Porter. There is also reference to the washing of feet in the Maundy ritual in the Grail legends where Parsifal the chaste hero passed successfully the temptations of flesh.

The children singing on the occasion express the ecstasy of his passing from the worldly to immortal life. The song heard here instead, are broken fragments of swallow and nightingale intensifying the failure to experience spiritual transformation in the wasteland. Allusions also combine to intensify expectations for the moment when the ultimate truth is spoken by the thunder in the last part of the poem. The Chapel here is the Chapel Perilous of the Grail legends, where after having passed through his ordeals, the knight had to confront the questions to rejuvenate the wasteland. The Chapel has been described as empty in the legends. There could also be a reference to the tomb of Christ that was found to be empty by his Disciples before they were told that Christ is Resurrected. The moment of revelation requires garnering of all courage, dispelling of all concerns before the lightening flash of truth descends and washes all guilt and suffering.

Regarding the selection of allusions used for several functions in the poem, allusions from sixteenth century plays, Eliot's one of the favourite ages, always seems to represent positive elements in the positive negative binary. Be it the quotations from Shakespearean plays or from Spenser, the sixteenth century literature represents faith, beauty and certainty as against the represents modern sordidness. Eliot has chosen the style of the eighteenth century poets for describing the typist episode. The description of evening closely follows Gray and Collins. There is explicit allusion to Goldsmith's song in the description of the typist after her lover has departed. Such allusions go a long way to expose the utter breakdown of traditional human values in the wasteland. Eliot in his essays time and again reiterated that the poets of the eighteenth century had 'lost that hold on human values, that firm grip on human experience which is a formidable achievement of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets'. Thus the past does not exist as a unified entity in The Waste Land. Tradition in the poem is not passively inherited but subjectively constructed. The poet interprets the past in his selection, arrangement, and treatment of allusions, styles and genres. Also the tradition in the poem is

not restricted merely to the allusions from canonical modern European writings, but also includes scriptures from India as well from the ancient European classical text along with French and German lines spread throughout the poem.

It is significant that both the epigraph and the conclusion are in alien languages. The passage in the epigraph is taken from Roman playwright Petronius' play *Satyricon*. A character, Trimalchio, trying to surpass his other companions in stories of wonder, speaks the words. The lines refer to the Sibyl at Cumae who had asked Apollo to grant her as many years of life as the sand that she held in her hands, but foolishly she forgot to ask for eternal youth. Consequently as she aged her prophetic powers declined. Sibyl becomes a powerful symbol of sterility and imprisonment that the people inhabiting Eliot's wasteland suffer from. It is the injudicious choice that has brought failure and frustration, which is even worse than death. What the thunder says is 'DA'. Here is a reference to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, where the creator says the same word to his threefold offsprings-the gods, the humans and the demons who interpret the word in three different ways according to their own dispositions. The interpretations as given by the sacred book are 'Control yourselves, give alms and be compassionate'. Eliot changes the order to '*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*' meaning 'Give, Sympathize, Control'. As Hieronymo, in *Spanish Tragedy* carried out his revenge with resource and resolution, the perceiving consciousness in the poem is resolved to and draws resource from the instructions of the thunder—'*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata*' and it is only such a resolution that can promise *Shantih* - a peace that surpasses all the emotional and intellectual turmoil of the wasteland. The allusions, thus, bring different historical epochs, cultural contexts, and states of consciousness into a close orbit. The wasteland described in the poem cannot be a phenomena of a particular age or culture. It is a state of mind that has rejected faith and its spiritual fertility can be restored only if the instructions in the scriptures are once again followed, faith is once again made alive.

Suggested Readings

1. Jain, Manju, A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot (1992, New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1998)
2. Southam, B. C., A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot (London : Faber and Faber, 1981)
3. Bloom, Harold (ed), T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land (New York. Chelsea House, 2007)
4. Moody, A. D., Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1979, 1997)

5. Moody, A. D. (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994, 1997)
6. Rajan, B. (ed), *T. S. Eliot. A Study of His Writings, by Several Hands* (London : Dennis Dobson, 1947)
7. Smith Grover, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays : A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1956)

Assignments

Essay Type

1. Do you think *The Waste Land* has unity of form and content? Discuss.
2. Consider the significance of the various allusions play in *The Waste Land*?
3. Discuss whether *The Waste Land* is an appropriate title of the poem.
4. *The Waste Land* describes a journey but the end is invisible. Discuss.
5. *The Waste Land* is a critique of the Modern Western civilization. Comment on the observation.

Short Answer Type

1. Comment on the allusion from Wagner's opera, 'Tristram and Isoide' in 'The Burial of the dead'.
2. Bring out the significance of the allusions from Dante and Baudelaire in the last part of 'The Burial of the Dead'.
3. Explain the significance of the sub-title 'A Game of Chess'.
4. Comment on the significance of the allusion to the legend of Philomela in the poem.
5. Bring out the relevance of the epigraph in *The Waste Land*.
6. What role does Tiresias play in the poem ?
7. Which ancient ritual is alluded to in the 'Death by Water'? What does it signify?
8. Comment on the use of the Sanskrit chanting at the end of the poem.

Block II
Unit 5
The Poetry of W.B. Yeats

5 (a): Introduction to W.B. Yeats

William Butler Yeats, (born June 13, 1865, Sandymount, Dublin, Ireland—died January 28, 1939, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, France), Irish poet, dramatist, and prose writer, one of the greatest English-language poets of the 20th century. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats, was a barrister who eventually became a portrait painter. His mother, formerly Susan Pollexfen, was the daughter of a prosperous merchant in Sligo, in western Ireland. Through both parents Yeats (pronounced "Yates") claimed kinship with various Anglo-Irish Protestant families who are mentioned in his work. Normally, Yeats would have been expected to identify with his Protestant tradition—which represented a powerful minority among Ireland's predominantly Roman Catholic population—but he did not. Indeed, he was separated from both historical traditions available to him in Ireland—from the Roman Catholics, because he could not share their faith, and from the Protestants, because he felt repelled by their concern for material success. Yeats's best hope, he felt, was to cultivate a tradition more profound than either the Catholic or the Protestant—the tradition of a hidden Ireland that existed largely in the anthropological evidence of its surviving customs, beliefs, and holy places, more pagan than Christian.

In 1867, when Yeats was only two, his family moved to London, but he spent much of his boyhood and school holidays in Sligo with his grandparents. This country—its scenery, folklore, and supernatural legend—would colour Yeats's work and form the setting of many of his poems. In 1880 his family moved back to Dublin, where he attended the high school. In 1883 he attended the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, where the most important part of his education was in meeting other poets and artists.

Meanwhile, Yeats was beginning to write: his first publication, two brief lyrics, appeared in the *Dublin University Review* in 1885. When the family moved back to London in 1887, Yeats took up the life of a professional writer. He joined the Theosophical Society, whose mysticism appealed to him because it was a form of imaginative life far removed from the workaday world. The age of science was repellent to Yeats; he was a visionary, and he insisted upon surrounding himself with poetic images. He began a study of the prophetic books of William Blake, and this enterprise brought him into contact with other visionary traditions, such as the Platonic, the Neoplatonic, the Swedenborgian, and the alchemical.

Yeats was already a proud young man, and his pride required him to rely on his own taste and his sense of artistic style. He was not boastful, but spiritual arrogance came easily to him. His early poems, collected in *The Wanderings of Oisín, and Other Poems* (1889), are the work of an aesthete, often beautiful but always rarefied, a soul's cry for release from circumstance.

Yeats quickly became involved in the literary life of London. He became friends with William Morris and W.E. Henley, and he was a cofounder of the Rhymers' Club, whose members included his friends Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symonds. In 1889 Yeats met Maud Gonne, an Irish beauty, ardent and brilliant. From that moment, as he wrote, "the troubling of my life began." He fell in love with her, but his love was hopeless. Maud Gonne liked and admired

him, but she was not in love with him. Her passion was lavished upon Ireland; she was an Irish patriot, a rebel, and a rhetorician, commanding in voice and in person. When Yeats joined in the Irish nationalist cause, he did so partly from conviction, but mostly for love of Maud. When Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was first performed in Dublin in 1902, she played the title role. It was during this period that Yeats came under the influence of John O'Leary, a charismatic leader of the Fenians, a secret society of Irish nationalists.

After the rapid decline and death of the controversial Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891, Yeats felt that Irish political life lost its significance. The vacuum left by politics might be filled, he felt, by literature, art, poetry, drama, and legend. The *Celtic Twilight* (1893), a volume of essays, was Yeats's first effort toward this end, but progress was slow until 1898, when he met Augusta Lady Gregory, an aristocrat who was to become a playwright and his close friend. She was already collecting old stories, the lore of the west of Ireland. Yeats found that this lore chimed with his feeling for ancient ritual, for pagan beliefs never entirely destroyed by Christianity. He felt that if he could treat it in a strict and high style, he would create a genuine poetry while, in personal terms, moving toward his own identity. From 1898, Yeats spent his summers at Lady Gregory's home, Coole Park, County Galway, and he eventually purchased a ruined Norman castle called Thoor Ballylee in the neighbourhood. Under the name of the Tower, this structure would become a dominant symbol in many of his latest and best poems.

In 1899 Yeats asked Maud Gonne to marry him, but she declined. Four years later she married Major John MacBride, an Irish soldier who shared her feeling for Ireland and her hatred of English oppression: he was one of the rebels later executed by the British government for their part in the Easter Rising of 1916. Meanwhile, Yeats devoted himself to literature and drama, believing that poems and plays would engender a national unity capable of transfiguring the Irish nation. He (along with Lady Gregory and others) was one of the originators of the Irish Literary Theatre, which gave its first performance in Dublin in 1899 with Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen*. To the end of his life Yeats remained a director of this theatre, which became the Abbey Theatre in 1904. In the crucial period from 1899 to 1907, he managed the theatre's affairs, encouraged its playwrights (notably John Millington Synge), and contributed many of his own plays. Among the latter that became part of the Abbey Theatre's repertoire are *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The Hour Glass* (1903), *The King's Threshold* (1904), *On Baile's Strand* (1905), and *Deirdre* (1907).

Yeats published several volumes of poetry during this period, notably *Poems* (1895) and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), which are typical of his early verse in their dreamlike atmosphere and their use of Irish folklore and legend. But in the collections *In the Seven Woods* (1903) and *The Green Helmet* (1910), Yeats slowly discarded the Pre-Raphaelite colours and rhythms of his early verse and purged it of certain Celtic and esoteric influences. The years from 1909 to 1914 mark a decisive change in his poetry. The otherworldly, ecstatic atmosphere of the early lyrics has cleared, and the poems in *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (1914) show a tightening and hardening of his verse line, a more sparse and resonant imagery, and a new directness with which Yeats confronts reality and its imperfections.

In 1917 Yeats published *The Wild Swans at Coole*. From then onward he reached and maintained the height of his achievement—a renewal of inspiration and a perfecting of technique that are almost without parallel in the history of English poetry. *The Tower* (1928), named after the castle he owned and had restored, is the work of a fully accomplished artist; in it, the experience of a lifetime is brought to perfection of form. Still, some of Yeats's greatest verse was written subsequently, appearing in *The Winding Stair* (1929). The poems in both of these works use, as their dominant subjects and symbols, the Easter Rising and the Irish civil war; Yeats's own tower; the Byzantine Empire and its mosaics; Plato, Plotinus, and Porphyry; and the author's interest in contemporary psychical research. Yeats explained his own philosophy in the prose work *A Vision* (1925, revised version 1937); this meditation upon the relation between imagination, history, and the occult remains indispensable to serious students of Yeats despite its obscurities.

In 1913 Yeats spent some months at Stone Cottage, Sussex, with the American poet Ezra Pound acting as his secretary. Pound was then editing translations of the *nō* plays of Japan, and Yeats was greatly excited by them. The *nō* drama provided a framework of drama designed for a small audience of initiates, a stylized, intimate drama capable of fully using the resources offered by masks, mime, dance, and song and conveying—in contrast to the public theatre—Yeats's own recondite symbolism. Yeats devised what he considered an equivalent of the *nō* drama in such plays as *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921), *At the Hawk's Well* (first performed 1916), and several others.

In 1917 Yeats asked Iseult Gonne, Maud Gonne's daughter, to marry him. She refused. Some weeks later he proposed to Miss George Hyde-Lees and was accepted; they were married in 1917. A daughter, Anne Butler Yeats, was born in 1919, and a son, William Michael Yeats, in 1921.

In 1922, on the foundation of the Irish Free State, Yeats accepted an invitation to become a member of the new Irish Senate: he served for six years. In 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Now a celebrated figure, he was indisputably one of the most significant modern poets. In 1936 his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892–1935*, a gathering of the poems he loved, was published. Still working on his last plays, he completed *The Herne's Egg*, his most raucous work, in 1938. Yeats's last two verse collections, *New Poems and Last Poems and Two Plays*, appeared in 1938 and 1939 respectively. In these books many of his previous themes are gathered up and rehandled, with an immense technical range; the aged poet was using ballad rhythms and dialogue structure with undiminished energy as he approached his 75th year.

Yeats died in January 1939 while abroad. Final arrangements for his burial in Ireland could not be made, so he was buried at Roquebrune, France. The intention of having his body buried in Sligo was thwarted when World War II began in the autumn of 1939. In 1948 his body was finally taken back to Sligo and buried in a little Protestant churchyard at Drumcliffe, as he specified in "Under Ben Bulbin," in his *Last Poems*, under his own epitaph: "Cast a cold eye/On life, on death./Horseman, pass by!"

Had Yeats ceased to write at age 40, he would probably now be valued as a minor poet writing in a dying Pre-Raphaelite tradition that had drawn renewed beauty and poignancy for a time from the Celtic revival. There is no precedent in literary history for a poet who produces his greatest work between the ages of 50 and 75. Yeats's work of this period takes its strength from his long and dedicated apprenticeship to poetry; from his experiments in a wide range of forms of poetry, drama, and prose; and from his spiritual growth and his gradual acquisition of personal wisdom, which he incorporated into the framework of his own mythology.

Yeats's mythology, from which arises the distilled symbolism of his great period, is not always easy to understand, nor did Yeats intend its full meaning to be immediately apparent to those unfamiliar with his thought and the tradition in which he worked. His own cyclic view of history suggested to him a recurrence and convergence of images, so that they become multiplied and enriched; and this progressive enrichment may be traced throughout his work. Among Yeats's dominant images are Leda and the Swan; Helen and the burning of Troy; the Tower in its many forms; the sun and moon; the burning house; cave, thorn tree, and well; eagle, heron, sea gull, and hawk; blind man, lame man, and beggar; unicorn and phoenix; and horse, hound, and boar. Yet these traditional images are continually validated by their alignment with Yeats's own personal experience, and it is this that gives them their

peculiarly vital quality. In Yeats's verse they are often shaped into a strong and proud rhetoric and into the many poetic tones of which he was the master. All are informed by the two qualities which Yeats valued and which he retained into old age—passion and joy.

Leda and the Swan'-W.B. Yeats

One of W. B. Yeats' most widely anthologized poems, 'Leda and the Swan' was published initially in the literary magazine *The Dial*. The following year it was included in Yeats' 1924 collection of poems titled *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems*.

Leda in Mythology

Leda was the daughter of King Thestius of Pleuron in Aetolia. She was married to the King of Sparta, Tyndareus. Leda was famously seduced by Zeus when the king of the Olympian gods took the form of a swan. The result of this union, which occurred on the banks of the River Eurotas, was an egg from which the beautiful Helen and Polydeuces were born. The second twin son, Pollux, was born to Leda's husband Tyndareus on the very same night the egg hatched. This explains why one of the twins was considered mortal and the other immortal, but some writers, notably Homer and Pindar, have the twins daily share the boon of immortality.

Treatment of the Mythological Leda and the Swan by Leonardo da Vinci:

Leonardo was very absorbed with the theme of Leda during the time he was working on Mona Lisa and while in Milan he made many sketches of the swans in the moat around the Castello. The picture was described by Cassiano del Pozzo in 1625; at this stage it was in the royal collection in Fontainebleau: "A standing figure of Leda almost entirely naked, with the swan at her and two eggs, from whose broken shells come forth four babies, This work, although somewhat dry in style, is exquisitely finished.

The poem 'Leda and the Swan' by William Butler Yeats takes the form of a sonnet, divided into 3 quatrains and a concluding couplet. Through this sonnet form the poet presents the violent sexual act between the beautiful woman Leda and the God Zeus in the disguise of a swan, which ravishes and impregnates Leda.

5 (b): Text of Leda and The Swan

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still

Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Analysis of the Poem:

The poem begins by describing the violent activity of the swan, which delves “a sudden blow” to the inadvertent Leda, who had been taking her bath in a pool. The swan arrives out of nowhere and indulges in a struggle to take control of her body. The attempt is utterly physical and awkward since the swan being a bird has body structure incongruent with that of a human being. Leda must have been caught unawares by the unforeseen activity of the bird. The image of the bird as violent rapist and Leda as the sufferer is built up through the use of words and phrases such as “sudden blow”, “wings beating still”, ”staggering girl”, “nape caught in his bill” and “helpless breast” depict the poignancy of the situation before our eyes sufficiently. The densely packed expressions convey profound meanings, besides suggesting deeper implications borne out in the 2nd stanza.

In the 2nd stanza, the helplessness of Leda is brought out even further. The physical force of Zeus in the disguise of a swan starts telling on her physical as well as psychological resistance. Leda is terrified at this sudden onslaught and shudders at the “vague” suggestion of rape (grotesquely by a non-human creature). But at the same time, understanding that her resistance might come to naught, she considers the possibility of physical union-which

arouses her senses, suggested by the “loosening” of her thighs. The “rush” of the white feathery creature on Leda’s soft flesh makes her heart beat faster than usual—due to the physical exertion caused by the attempt to resist the impending rape as well as the beginning of sexual arousal. The change in attitude from hostile opposition to curious compliance is mildly hinted by the poet here.

The following stanza—the 3rd of the poem, conjures before the eyes of the reader the image of consummation in the sexual act, by referring to “shudder in the loins”, leading to the procreation of Helen, for whom the historical Battle of Troy would be fought in a later age. The fall of the boundary wall of Troy, the burning of its “roof and tower” might suggest the onset of the destruction that would result from the mating process between the human and the divine. Clytemnestra—another daughter born to Leda later on, was married to Agamemnon. Upon returning from the Trojan War to his own country, Agamemnon was murdered by Clytemnestra, since he had traded his own daughter to the Gods to get favorable winds in return. Yeats logically extends the act of union between the Swan and Leda to its consequence; the birth of Helen and Clytemnestra were results of the sexual act and by extension their birth and development led to marriage and the catastrophe that followed in each case. The third stanza, beginning with consummation of the sexual encounter, leads on to the impending catastrophe in the lives of those who are born out of this act of physical union. Here Yeats hints at the mysterious paradox of copulation and procreation—“the overpowering strength of a moment engenders events whose meaning will become clear only in their result in time” (Leo Spitzer).

The concluding couplet ends with a rhetorical question—did the human participant in the sexual act, Leda, share the knowledge of the powerful events of history that were to follow from her copulation with Zeus? Yeats’ powerful imagination mingles Zeus’ knowledge of destiny as God with his Divine power, leading to the aforementioned question: is transference of powerful knowledge possible, from the Divine to the human? Though Zeus grabbed Leda with violent passion during the sexual encounter, the consummation is followed by his slackening of interest, borne out by the indifference of his beak, which had so long held her tight, but now “let her drop”. Regarding the concluding couplet of the poem, Professor Anna Hatcher draws our attention to the use of ‘put on’ by Yeats points out the triumphant passage in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians, I, 5:51-54:

Behold! I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must *put on* incorruption, and this mortal shall have *put on* immortality.”

The rhetorical question that concludes ‘Leda and the Swan’ seems to suggest that the sexual act is tragic after all—though two beings (one human, the other divine) participate in it, there is no transference of immortal knowledge from the Swan (Zeus in disguise) to Leda. On the contrary, Leda merely functions as a channel through which the forces of history are made to pass. She has neither the foreknowledge of what shall be, nor any agency of altering its course. But she is the one who suffers the onslaught.

5 (c): Sailing to Byzantium

(published in the 1928-collection titled *The Tower*)

I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another’s arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Yeats's two arch-canonical poems on the capital city of the Byzantine Empire, "Sailing to Byzantium" and 'Byzantium' are the exquisite crystallization of his persistent longing for spiritual redemption through the timelessness of art. Yeats equated the architecture of Byzantium during the reign of Justinian (527–65) with "the Sacred City in the Apocalypse of St. John" and conceived the city as the reification of the harmonies of the 15th lunar phase of the millennial cycle, the "phase of complete beauty" and 'Unity of Being' Simultaneously, Byzantium belonged to the eighth phase of the 2,000-year era that began with the birth of Christ and represents what Hazard Adams calls "the supreme antithetical moment of a Millennium that belongs to a primary Era". In 'A Vision' Byzantium is the pretext for Yeats's most vivid and comprehensive evocation of culture under the full moon. If given the chance to spend a month in the antique world, Yeats says, he would choose to visit Byzantium just before Justinian opened St. Sophia in and closed the Platonic academy: "I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers— though not, it may be,

poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract—spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. They could copy out of old Gospel books those pictures that seemed as sacred as the text, and yet weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building, picture, pattern, metalwork of rail and lamp, seem but a single image. “Sailing to Byzantium” is Yeats’s most overt and audacious attempt to imagine himself reborn within the holy moonlight of the 15th lunar phase. As so often in Yeats, the template is the romantic quest of Shelley’s ‘Alastor’ (1816), but Yeats recognizes, as the Alastor-poet does not, that all journeys are metaphors of self-transformation or preparations for self-transformation. There is nothing to discover or embrace beyond the self’s readiness, its welled intensity, its ability to imagine the terms of its new beginning. Byzantium, then, is less a place than a condition of triumph into which the imagination enters when it has finally thrown off all sense of its own limitation. The poem opens with a valediction to the realm of “sensual music” that decisively severs the attachment so carefully preserved in ‘To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time’ For all the bluffness of the poem’s opening gambit—“That is no country for old men”—the poem quickly assumes an immense pathos and complexity of motive. It is neither possible nor desirable to join in the sensual music of the natural world, and yet the vision of the young “in one another’s arms,” of the natural world in its summer revelry of birth, life, and death, is so irresistibly vibrant that Yeats half confesses to making a virtue of necessity. “Sensual music” and the “Birds in the trees . . . at their song” have their answering image in the following stanza and in the final lines of the poem, while the “salmon-falls” and “mackerel-crowded seas” await the transfiguration of the final lines of “Byzantium,” in which the sea becomes the image of eternity and the dolphin the image of a breasting transcendence. “Caught” suggests that the cycle of birth and death has the aspect of a snare. It is precisely this capture that Yeats claims to have resisted or outgrown, tutored by the example of “Monuments of unageing intellect” (‘The Tower’, lines 157-159).

In the second stanza, Yeats figures himself as a “tattered coat upon a stick,” a version of the “comfortable kind of old scarecrow” imaged in ‘Among School Children’ a poem likewise dating from 1926. The self as scarecrow creates a deliberate contrast with the fleshiness depicted in the first stanza, and this emphatic decrepitude makes all the more surprising and dramatic the sudden revelation of reserves of imaginative energy and spiritual

ambition. The vestments of decrepitude are incidental and can be thrown off: the soul need only “clap its hands and sing.” Unlike the melodists of the first stanza, whose song is “sensual”—a matter of untutored bodily inspiration—the soul of the “aged man” sings the more ineluctably for having schooled itself in “monuments of its own magnificence.” In the cross-texture of the poem, “monuments of its own magnificence” obviously modifies “monuments of unageing intellect.” The suggestion seems to be that the soul contains within itself the image of what it might become, is itself the vessel of unageing intellect. Thus schooled—disciplined—readied—Yeats has “sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium,” where the individual energy may achieve its climax by joining itself to a larger social and historical energy, an emphasis that explains Yeats’s own attempts to wed himself to coterie, class, and nation. At the same time the journey to Byzantium is the geographical allegory of an approach to an internal threshold.

The poem’s third stanza plunges into the maelstrom of purification and self-transformation. Yeats calls to the “sages standing in God’s holy fire, / As in the gold mosaic of a wall. . . .” The simile suggests that the worldly realization of the holy fire, the closest correlative of its disciplined intensity, is the kind of art that belongs to an *antithetical* tradition come to greatness, as in Byzantium. Yeats would have the holy sages “perne in a gyre,” which is to say, surround him, baffle him, gather him into the kind of centripetal unity of the self that he attributes to the dancer in “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes.” It may be that as the sages “perne in a gyre” time itself is sped to transcendental stasis, again as in “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” (“Mind moved yet seemed to stop / As ’twere a spinning-top”). It may also be that the gyre—the geometrical representation of the cycles of history and personality that are the gear-work of the philosophy of *A Vision* (see “The Gyres”)—is invoked as a figure of ultimate reality. Yeats would have the sages consume his heart, which is “sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal” (cf. “The Tower,” lines 3–4). “Fastened,” hinting at a metaphor of strap or harness, accentuates the inessential relation between inner and outer reality.

“God’s holy fire” is the purgatorial fire so pervasive in Yeats’s thought. The “holy fire” withers everything that is not of eternal spirit or substance, which explains the injunction of the soul to the heart in “Vacillation,” “Look on that fire, salvation walks within.” Yeats touches on the same recognition in ‘Blood and the Moon’, in which he speaks of “Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire”, and in ‘My Table’ in which he equates the fire of the forge and the “aching heart” as crucibles of “changeless art.” As the sword assumes eternal form by the intensity of fire in “My Table,” so the soul in “Sailing to

Byzantium.” The purgatorial fire also has inevitable associations with the “athanor,” the furnace used by alchemists in their related attempt to transmute the perishable into imperishable, dross into gold. In “Rosa Alchemica”, Yeats explains, in terms relevant to ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, that the doctrine of the Alchemists was “no merely chemical phantasy, but a philosophy they applied to the world, to the elements and to man himself; and that they sought to fashion gold out of common metals merely as part of an universal transmutation of all things into some divine and imperishable substance”. The story ends in an ecstatic, reality-baffling dance, likewise joined by mosaical divinities, that anticipates the whirling, transcendental intensity by which the sages of “Sailing to Byzantium” gather Yeats into the “artifice of eternity.” The purgatorial fire and the dance, then, are differing manifestations of the same transformational energy.

In the fourth stanza, Yeats imagines himself remade of just the “imperishable substance” that the alchemists sought, declaring, “Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing. . . .” Having “read somewhere that in the Emperor’s palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang”—in fact having read this in Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and *The Cambridge Medieval History*—Yeats chooses to become a bird of hammered gold singing to “lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come”. Thus he is at once freed from the decay of the

body, the strictures of time, and the defilement of a popular audience, and a clean sweep is made of his most persistent grievances. The inspiration of these most famous lines has inevitably been the subject of much critical discussion. Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” (1820) and Shelley’s “To a Sky- Lark” (1820) are likely precedents. In both poems, the bird represents liberation, bodily and artistic, from the mire of mortality. George Bornstein notes as well an echo of Shelley’s *Hellas* (1822), in which Hassan describes the sage Ahasuerus: “[From] his eye looks forth / A life of unconsumed thought which pierces / The present, and the past, and the to-come”. G. Wilson Knight instances the “enchanted” bird (“eyes of fire, his beak of gold, / All else of amethyst!”) of Coleridge’s play *Zapolyta*. T. R. Henn cites Marvell’s “The Garden”: “Casting

the Bodies Vest aside, / My Soul into the Boughs does glide: / There like a Bird it sits and sings, / And, till prepared for longer flight / Waves in its Plumes the various light”. John Stallworthy draws attention to Blake’s Introduction to *Songs of Experience* (1794): ‘Hear the voice of the bard, / Who present, past and future sees’. Harold Bloom sees something similar in Blake’s *Jerusalem*: ““I see the past, present & future, existing all at once” To this long list

of possible influences might be added Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813), in which the Fairy tells Ianthe, "Spirit, come! / This is thine high reward:—the past shall rise; / Thou shalt behold the present; I will teach / The secrets of the future".

The golden bird is also preceded in Yeats's own earliest work, indicating the long gestation of the image. In 'The Wanderings of Oisín' Yeats describes "painted birds" that keep "time with their bright wings and feet" as the "Immortals" sing of the ordeal of time. He describes also a "storm of birds in the Asian trees" that join the waves in murmuring "Unjust, unjust" at the spectacle of the world's evanescence. The birds of 'Oisín' thus seem both to mark and to protest

the passing of time. There are slews of related images in Yeats's subsequent work. Particularly relevant are 'At Algeciras-A Meditation Upon Death', with its cattle-birds gathered in "the rich midnight of the garden trees"; 'My Table', which ends with the apocalyptic scream of Juno's peacock; *The Shadowy Waters* with its souls fleeing in the form of man-headed birds; and 'Solomon and the Witch', with its vatic cockerel. The image of the golden bird, violently *antithetical* rather than serenely transcendent, is reprised in "Byzantium."

Yeats's preoccupation with Byzantium was inspired, as A. Norman Jeffares notes, by W. G. Holme's *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905), O. M. Dalton's *Byzantine Art and Archeology* (1911), and Eugénie Strong's *Apotheosis and After Life: Three Lectures on Certain Phases of Art and Religion in the Roman Empire* (1915) Yeats was also inspired by his exposure to Byzantine mosaics during his May 1907 visit to Ravenna with Lady Gregory and Robert Gregory and during his January 1925 visit to Monreale, Sicily, with Ezra Pound and his wife Dorothy.

5 (d): Byzantium-W.B. Yeats

(published in the 1933 collection titled *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*)

The unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
After great cathedral gong;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades' bobbin bound, in mummy-cloth
 May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
 Breathless mouths may summon;
 I hail the superhuman;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the starlit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
 Where blood-begotten spirits come
 And all complexities of fury leave,
 Dying into a dance,
 An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.
Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
 The golden smithies of the Emperor!
 Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,

That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

In its chiseled perfection of language, “Byzantium” is one of Yeats’s indubitable masterpieces; in the lucidity of its agonized vista, it is his most ineluctable vision; in its comprehensive structure of idea, it is arguably his foremost statement. Helen Vendler calls the poem “Yeats’s greatest single triumph,” adding that in “Byzantium” the “sense of agonizing balance between opposites which was his primary poetic intuition receives its most acute rendering”. Yeats began the poem in the spring of 1930 while recovering from a month long bout of Malta fever at Rapallo. An April 30, 1930, diary entry records the germ of the poem: “Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium.

A walking mummy. Flames at the street corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour, offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to Paradise.” Yeats adds, “These subjects have been in my head for some time, especially the last”. Yeats sent a draft of “Byzantium” to T. Sturge Moore on October 4, 1930, and explained that the poem was prompted by Moore’s criticism of ‘Sailing to Byzantium’: “You objected to the last verse of *Sailing to Byzantium* because a bird made by a goldsmith was just as natural as anything else. That showed me that the idea needed exposition. Gongs were used in the Byzantine church”.

The late millennial setting of “Byzantium” importantly distinguishes it from “Sailing to Byzantium.” Where the latter poem belongs to the unity of the sixth century (Phase 15 of the millennial cycle), the former finds in the apocalyptic disintegration of this unity the energy of a fiercer creation and more vexed salvation. This moment mattered particularly because it preceded the second Christian millennium as it likewise rounded to a rough close In the waning days of Byzantium, then, Yeats found the image of his own era and a context in which to play out his own metaphysics. Taking a different view, Vendler calls “Byzantium” Yeats’s “most authoritative poetic word on Phase 15”.

The scene opens upon Byzantium. Night has fallen, but there is no sense of rest or resolution. The “images of day” recede, but they remain “unpurged”; the night cannot, as in the normal order of things, release the tension of the day. The “Emperor’s drunken soldiery,” like the unheeding falcon in “The Second Coming,” at once implies social disorder and loose menace, while the implication of coarse revelry suggests the breakdown of the refinement pictured in the final stanza of “Sailing to Byzantium.” The allusion to soldiers may also play on the

memory of the Anglo-Irish War and the horror related in the first section of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' ("a drunken soldiery / Can leave the mother murdered at her door") and in "Reprisals". The sounds of the night likewise recede as the evening deepens into silence. The song of the "night-walkers"—prostitutes presumably, spiritual counterparts to the drunken soldiers—follows upon the echo of the "great cathedral gong". The two "songs" signify the fundamental antithesis of all experience and reality, the opposition, in the terms of 'The Dialogue of Self and Soul', between earth and heaven, sword and tower, ditch and stair, human and inhuman. The stanza's final four lines make explicit this tension in the very fabric of things: "A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains / All that man is, / All mere complexities, / The fury and the mire of human veins." Vendler comments, "The dome may be starlit (at Phase 1) or moonlit (at Phase 15); the perfect objective and the perfect subjective are alike independent of 'the fury and the mire of human veins'".

The second and third stanzas respectively represent the two means—the esoteric and the artistic—by which passion delivers humanity from the antitheses of mortality. In the second stanza, a figure neither man nor shade, neither living nor dead, but "superhuman," presents itself to the visionary eye. In explanation of the mystery of this transcendence, Yeats offers that "Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth / May unwind the winding path. . . ." In this instance, "to unwind" means "to unspool" (in keeping with "bobbin") but also "to straighten"; it is to say that beyond living or natural confines the "winding path"—the vacillation treated in the first stanza—resolves into unity. In explanation of his own ability to summon such a figure, Yeats plays complicatedly upon the word "breath": "breathless mouths" may summon mouths with "no breath," that is, in moments of "excited reverie" ('A Prayer For My Daughter'). we are able to beckon to mysteries beyond life; as the third stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" establishes, our own ecstasy is the medium of our communion with eternity. In its imagery of wound mummy-cloth the stanza echoes 'All Souls' Night' and it may be that Yeats achieves something of the vision to which he commits himself in the final stanza of the poem ("Nothing can stay my glance / Until that glance run in the world's despite / To where the damned have howled away their hearts, / And where the blessed dance . . .").

The third stanza is counterpart to the second. As the second envisions neither man nor shade, but the image of the superhuman, so the third envisions neither bird nor "golden handiwork," but a "miracle" that belongs neither to life nor to art, though produced by the artist. The bird upon its "star-lit golden bough" can like the "cocks of Hades crow," which, remembering

figures the bird as an apocalyptic agent. In keeping with this agency, the bird can “by the moon embittered, scorn aloud / In glory of changeless metal / Common bird or petal / And all complexities of mire or blood.” In its scorn of mire or blood, the bird is akin to the dome of the first stanza, but while the dome is “moonlit” the bird is “by the moon embittered”: it rebels against the temporal cycle of the moon (or perhaps against everything that does not share in the purity of the moon) and refuses everything but its own perfection. Its scorn, conceivably, is the energy of its own apocalyptic annunciation.

The fourth stanza arrives at midnight, the witching hour, as in “All Souls’ Night.” The streets flicker with uncanny flames equatable with the “holy fire” postulated in the third stanza of “Sailing to Byzantium.” The flames are begotten of themselves (the self-born mockers of ‘Among School-Children’) and thus being entirely to the unity of their own energy or passion. The flames draw “blood-begotten spirits” as if irresistible in their intensity or in their promise of deliverance. In the purgatorial fire these spirits are shrived of “all complexities of fury,” of everything that belongs to the order of nature (“Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire,” Yeats writes in ‘Blood and the Moon’) Dance, trance, and flame, the triple metaphors of the stanza, are expressions of the same deepening into the unity of the self that is the essential rebirth and the essential salvation, a conception variously explored in the final stanza of “Among School Children,” in the second section of ‘The Double Vision of Michael Robartes’ and in the third stanza of ‘Sailing to Byzantium’. The “agony of flame” cannot “sing a sleeve” because it is purely internal, a conflagration of the soul. Richard Ellmann draws attention to an unpublished note to *A Vision* that seems to flesh out the mysteries of the stanza:” At first we are subject to destiny [...] but the point in Zodiac where the whirl becomes a sphere once reached we may escape from the constraint of our nature and from that of external things, entering upon a state where all fuel has become flame, where there is nothing but the state itself, nothing to constrain it or end it. We attain it always in the creation or enjoyment of a work of art, but that moment though eternal in the Daimon passes from us because it is not an attainment of our whole being. Philosophy has always explained its moment of moments in much the same way; nothing can be added to it, nothing taken away; that all progressions are full of illusion, that everything is born there like a ship in full sail”.

Out of the fourth stanza’s maelstrom of death and rebirth comes a vision of salvation inspired by Raphael’s statue of “the Dolphin carrying one of the Holy Innocents to Heaven,” as Yeats wrote to Moore on October 8, 1930. Spirits straddle the dolphins in symbolic expression of

their victory over mire and blood or perhaps in their sublimation of the energy of mire and blood (the dolphin similarly appears as the chariot of departed souls in ‘News for the Delphic Oracle’). Inclining at the close to a conception of art as the organized expression of the transcendent agony described in the previous stanza, the poem shifts terms and ends with a declaration of aesthetic faith. The image of the dolphins breasting the flood metamorphoses into the image of imperial smithies breaking the flood, which is to say, disciplining and transcending the tumultuous accident of nature. The image of the imperial smithies—a slightly retrograde image out of “Sailing to Byzantium”—in turn gives way to the more acute epitomization of art in the image of the marble dancing floor breaking “bitter furies of complexity,” which better encompasses the paradox of discipline and freedom, calculation and spontaneity, that is the mystery of all high expression. The poem’s final lines, massive in their compression of idea, explain these furies of complexity as the infinite ramification of image by which the self-conscious mind or the world or the ‘Anima Mundi’ baffles baffles and overwhelms the attempt at redemptive intensity. These furies have their image in that “dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea,” an image that seems to encompass all of natural life. That the sea is “dolphin-torn” and “gong-tormented”—momentarily disturbed by our sexual or religious or artistic aspiration but not altered in its massive and inscrutable inertia—implies that the serene finality of “Sailing to Byzantium” is misplaced; that the struggle to “break the flood” is the impossibility by which we rouse ourselves to miracle.

5 (e): Coole and Ballylee, 1931

‘Coole and Ballylee, 1931’ is the second poem by Yeats where the poet pays his homage to Lady Gregory and Coole Park. Coole Park was once the family home of Lady Augusta Gregory-dramatist, folklorist and co-founder of the Abbey Theatre with Edward Martyn. It was a favorite haunt of William Butler Yeats .In the early 20th century, Coole Park was the site of many significant episodes to feature in the Irish Literary Revival. Yeats, Sean O’ Casey, George Bernard Shaw, John Millington Synge and many others came to experience the magic of the locale. They and many others carved their initials on the Autograph Tree which stands on the grounds of Coole Park. Although the house no longer stands, one can still appreciate the surroundings that drew all the luminaries to this area.

Under my window-ledge the waters race,
Otters below and moor-hens on the top,
Run for a mile undimmed in Heaven's face
Then darkening through 'dark' Raftery's 'cellar' drop,
Run underground, rise in a rocky place
In Coole demesne, and there to finish up
Spread to a lake and drop into a hole.
What's water but the generated soul?

Upon the border of that lake's a wood
Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun,
And in a copse of beeches there I stood,
For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on
And all the rant's a mirror of my mood:
At sudden thunder of the mounting swan
I turned about and looked where branches break
The glittering reaches of the flooded lake.

Another emblem there! That stormy white
But seems a concentration of the sky;
And, like the soul, it sails into the sight
And in the morning's gone, no man knows why;
And is so lovely that it sets to right
What knowledge or its lack had set awry,
So arrogantly pure, a child might think
It can be murdered with a spot of ink.

Sound of a stick upon the floor, a sound
From somebody that toils from chair to chair;
Beloved books that famous hands have bound,
Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere;
Great rooms where travelled men and children found
Content or joy; a last inheritor
Where none has reigned that lacked a name and fame

Or out of folly into folly came.

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,
And every bride's ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
We shift about -- all that great glory spent --
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent.

We were the last romantics -- chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

A couple of years earlier, Yeats had composed another poem commemorated to Lady Gregory and Coole Park, titled 'Coole Park 1929'. In that earlier poem Yeats dwelt more on the great house and its mistress, whereas in the latter-'Coole and Ballylee, 1931' he elegizes everything the house and its mistress had come to stand for. Yeats concludes the latter poem with a dark vision of the trajectory of history. Although he doesn't mention his theory of the 'gyres' of history explicitly in this poem, it underlies the framework of the last stanza. Like Yeats' other poem 'A Prayer for My Daughter', the present poem also deals with the ideal of permanence of place and 'traditional sanctity and loveliness'.

In a radio broadcast of October 29, 1937, W.B. Yeats introduced the poem in his own terms:

"From my twenty-seventh year until a few years ago all my public activities were associated with a famous country house in County Galway. In that house my dear friend, that woman of genius, Lady Gregory, gathered from time to time all men of

talent, all profound men, in the intellectual life of modern Ireland. I have a house three or four miles from where her gate was, a mediaeval tower whose winding stair I am too old to climb.

The river that passed my window sank into the earth in a round pool which the blind, or dark, poet Raftery called a cellar, then rose again and fell into a lake in Lady Gregory's park. The poem I am about to read was written shortly before Lady Gregory's death. It is typical of most of my recent poems, intricate in metaphor, the swan and water both emblems of the soul, not at all a dream, like my earlier poems, but a criticism of life".

The first stanza of 'Coole Park and Ballylee' begins with the description of an enchanting landscape-under the moonlit sky the waters flow on, with aquatic animals as well as avians frolicking around. Yeats describes the course of the stream further down from his house, as they enter a hole in the ground, flow underground for a considerable distance, before re-emerging back to the surface, taking the form of a lake at Coole Park. The rhetorical question: "What's water but the generated soul?" echoes the Neoplatonic Philosopher Porphyry's theory that "all souls come to be born of water", including the "generation of images in the mind". The stream that Yeats describes in this stanza runs, submerges, spreads and drops, similar to Man's passage through youth, crisis, maturity and death. Yeats alludes to Raftery-the blind Gaelic poet. Earlier in 1899 he had made a passing reference to the same, mentioning 'Raftery's cellar'-which is a poetic way of referring to the underground flow of the stream.

The lake carries Yeats's thought to the surrounding wood, where he remembers standing amid dry sticks under a "wintry sun." Mirroring Yeats's mood, nature had "pulled her tragic buskin¹ on". The moment is full of passionate contradiction: even as woods and sun betoken death, the reaches of the lake are "glittering," a word that consistently carries transcendental implications in Yeats. While the poet looks on, mesmerized, a swan suddenly takes flight. "Another emblem there!" Yeats cries, reminding that everything in the poem is emblematic, that the world itself, or everything that matters in the world, is a collage of emblems whose source is the 'Anima Mundi'². The 'swan', in this instance, symbolizes inspiration,

¹ High, thick-soled boot worn by actors in tragic drama in ancient Athens

² Anima Mundi refers to the 'world soul'. According to several systems of thought, it is an intrinsic connection between all living things on the planet, which relates to the world in much the same way as the soul is connected to the human body

simultaneously fleeting and susceptible. In a 1902 contribution to the theatrical periodical *Samhain*, W.B. Yeats referred to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's novel *M. Triboulat Bonhomet*, stating: "Did not M. Triboulat Bonhomet discover that one spot of ink would kill a swan?" where the 'spot of ink' refers to the writing process.

In the following stanza, Yeats finally comes to a poignant description of the house—once the seat of several remarkable gatherings and incidents, under the supervision of its magnanimous owner Lady Augusta Gregory. Sadly, at the moment of Yeats' composing this poem, he notices that Lady Gregory has been reduced to a mere shadow of her former self on account of old age and disease. All she can manage now is hobble from chair to chair, supporting her body on a walking stick. The two stanzas devoted to Coole compress the vanished glory of the place. Here is the "inherited glory of the rich," in the phrase of "Ancestral Houses"—books, pictures, rooms, trees, and gardens, all bound by the traditions of the family and sustained over generations by clear eyes and firm hands ("alliances" says as much). Modernity, in contrast, knows nothing of the strength by which traditions are held together and made to endure ("We shift about—all that great glory spent—/ Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent"). The emphasis on permanency of place—notable in both the first and last lines of the fifth stanza—is recurrent in Yeats' poems such as 'In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen', 'In Memory of My Daughter', etc. In the lines "We shift about—all that great glory spent—/ Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent"—the plural 'We' is to be understood as partnership of Yeats and Lady Gregory, as well as all those who gathered about them in that great house and contributed to their enterprise.

'Coole Park 1929' particularly mentioned Douglas Hyde, J.M. Synge, Hugh Lane and John Shawe Taylor as sharers in the heyday of Coole. According to Yeats, "We were the last romantics—chose for theme / Traditional sanctity and loveliness; / Whatever's written in what poets name / The book of the people" writes Yeats, in what may be his most clarion statement of purpose. The romantic tradition coming to an end may be that of the high romantic poets, chiefly Blake and Shelley who dominated Yeats's youthful imagination, but more likely, as suggested by the combined resonance of tradition, sanctity, loveliness, and rootedness, he means the tradition that he had come to identify with the Irish Georgians lionized in "Blood and the Moon" and "The Seven Sages," and that he had epitomized in the former poem:

"The strength that gives our blood and state magnanimity of its own desire;
Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire."

The emphasis on the “book of the people” reiterates the understanding of “The Seven Sages” and looks forward to the understanding of ‘The Municipal Gallery Revisited’ that strength comes from contact with the soil. The phrase “book of the people” fittingly comes from Raftery. In his essay “Literature and the Living Voice” (1906), Yeats writes that the “minstrel never dramatised anybody but himself. It was impossible, from the nature of the words the poet had put into his mouth, or that he had made for himself, that he should speak as another person. He will go no nearer to drama than we do in daily speech, and he will not allow you for any long time to forget himself. Our own Raftery will stop the tale to cry, ‘This is what I, Raftery, wrote down in the book of the people’; or, ‘I, myself, Raftery, went to bed without supper that night’ ”

But, as Yeats goes on to say-

“...all is changed, “that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.”

Like his early poems such as ‘At Galway Races’, ‘In Memory of Major Robert Gregory’ and ‘Under Ben Bulbin’, the horseman symbolizes the combination of passion, strength, and ceremony that Yeats attributes to the tradition that he and Lady Gregory bring to an end. That the horse is “mounted in that saddle Homer rode” suggests the idiosyncrasy of the word “romantic,” for, as now becomes clear, Yeats has in mind nothing less than the “great song” (“The Nineteenth Century and After”) of Western civilization itself, which is “romantic” only in the general sense that its essence is passionate and questing. The saddle, however, is empty: Homeric strength has given way. In a revision of the third stanza, the swan drifts upon “a darkening flood”— the swan a vision of twilight grace, an image of Coole and its traditions, of the West and its traditions, the flood a version of the “blood-dimmed tide” that signals the apocalypse in ‘The Second Coming’. In an interview published in 1931, Yeats explained the historical conception that informs the poem’s final stanza. “We are in our Hellenistic Age,” Yeats told his interlocutor. “I think we have seen the best of European literature. We may have a Virgil ahead of us, but certainly not a Homer. The romantic age is over—and by romantic I mean the expression of personality and passion”.

Further Readings

A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats-A. Norman Jeffares. Palgrave Macmillan, 1968.

Critical Companion to William Butler Yeats-David A. Ross. Facts on File, 2009.

The Cambridge Introduction to W.B. Yeats-David Holderman. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Writing of W.B. Yeats-Kathleen Raine. Barnes and Noble, 1990.

Yeats' Poetic Codes-Nicholas Grene. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Yeats: The Man and the Masks-Richard Ellmann. W.W. Norton and Company, 1960.

The Thought of W.B. Yeats-Brian Arkins. Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2010.

The Yeats Reader: A Portable Compendium of Poetry, Drama and Prose-Richard J. Finneran. Scribner, 2002.

Assignments

1. Write a note commenting on W.B. Yeats's treatment of mythology with reference to the poems in your syllabus.
2. What is Leda myth?
3. Critically comment on the orientalist aspect in the poems "Byzantium" and "Sailing to Byzantium".
4. Critically appreciate the poem "Coole and Ballylee, 1931".

Unit6

The Poetry of Philip Larkin

6 (a): Philip Larkin-An Introduction:

Philip Larkin was born on 9 August 1922 at Coventry. His education till the age of 8 was at home, following which he went on to attend Coventry's King Henry VIII Junior and Senior Schools in succession. He then attended St John's College, Oxford before getting admission at Oxford University in 1940. It was here he was introduced to the writer Kingsley Amis who saw Larkin's early works and encouraged him to cultivate his taste for ridicule and irreverence. Amis, Larkin and other university friends formed a group they dubbed "The Seven". In June 1950 Larkin was appointed sub-librarian at The Queen's University of Belfast, a post he took up that September. In 1955 Larkin became University Librarian at the University of Hull, a post he held until his death. Professor R.L. Brett, who was chairman of the library committee that appointed him and a friend, wrote, "At first I was impressed with the time he spent in his office, arriving early and leaving late. It was only later that I realised that his office was also his study where he spent hours on his private writing as well as the work of the library. Then he would return home and on a good many evenings start writing again." Of the city itself Larkin commented: "I never thought about Hull until I was here. Having got here, it suits me in many ways. It is a little on the edge of things, I think even its natives would say that. I rather like being on the edge of things. One doesn't really go anywhere by design, you know, you put in for jobs and move about, you know, I've lived in other places." One of Larkin's colleagues at Hull said he became a great figure in post-war British librarianship. Under his tutelage, it became the first library in Europe to install a GEAC system. He was awarded a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, for two academic terms, allowing him to consult Oxford's Bodleian Library. In the 1973-1974 period Larkin became an Honorary Fellow of St John's College, Oxford, and was awarded honorary degrees by Warwick, St Andrews and Sussex universities. He died from cancer in the year 1985.

Works of Philip Larkin

From his mid-teens Larkin "wrote ceaselessly", producing both poetry, initially modelled on Eliot and W. H. Auden, and fiction: he wrote five full-length novels, each of which he destroyed shortly after completion. While he was at Oxford University he had a poem

published for the first time: "Ultimatum" in *The Listener*. Around this time he developed a pseudonymous alter ego for his prose, Brunette Coleman. Under this name he wrote two novellas, *Trouble at Willow Gables* and *Michaelmas Term at St Brides*. After these works Larkin started his first published novel *Jill*. Around the time that *Jill* was being prepared for publication, Caton inquired of Larkin if he also wrote poetry. This resulted in the publication, three months before *Jill*, of *The North Ship* (1945), a collection of poems written between 1942 and 1944 which showed the increasing influence of Yeats. Immediately after completing *Jill*, Larkin started work on the novel *A Girl in Winter* (1947), completing it in 1945. This was published by Faber and Faber and was well received, *The Sunday Times* calling it "an exquisite performance and nearly flawless".

The bulk of poems included in his next collection-*The Less Deceived* (1955) were composed during his stay at Belfast. At first the volume attracted little attention, but in December it was included in *The Times'* list of Books of the Year. In 1963 Faber and Faber reissued *Jill*, with the addition of a long introduction by Larkin that included much information about his time at Oxford University and his friendship with Kingsley Amis. This acted as a prelude to the release the following year (1964) of *The Whitsun Weddings*, the volume which cemented his reputation; almost immediately after its publication he was granted a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Literature. In the years that followed Larkin wrote several of his most famous poems, followed in the 1970s by a series of longer and more sober poems, including "The Building" and "The Old Fools". All of these appeared in Larkin's final collection, *High Windows*, which was published in June 1974. Its more direct use of language meant that it did not meet with uniform praise. For some critics it represents a falling-off from his previous two books, yet it contains a number of his much-loved pieces, including "This Be The Verse" and "The Explosion", as well as the title poem. "Annus Mirabilis". Later in 1974 he started work on his final major published poem, "Aubade". It was completed in 1977 and published in 23 December issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*.

Larkin was a notable critic of modernism in contemporary art and literature. His skepticism is at its most nuanced and illuminating in *Required Writing*, a collection of his book reviews and essays and at its most inflamed and polemical in his introduction to his collected jazz reviews, *All What Jazz*, drawn from the 126 record-review columns he wrote for *The Daily Telegraph* between 1961 and 1971, which contains an attack on modern jazz that widens into a wholesale critique of modernism in the arts.

6 (b): Ambulances

Ambulances' was completed in January 1961 and published in Philip Larkin's third major collection, *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964).

Closed like confessionals, they thread
Loud noons of cities, giving back
None of the glances they absorb.
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,
They come to rest at any kerb:
All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,
Or women coming from the shops
Past smells of different dinners, see
A wild white face that overtops
Red stretcher-blankets momentarily
As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness
That lies just under all we do,
And for a second get it whole,
So permanent and blank and true.
The fastened doors recede. Poor soul,
They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air
May go the sudden shut of loss
Round something nearly at an end,
And what cohered in it across
The years, the unique random blend
Of families and fashions, there

At last begin to loosen. Far
From the exchange of love to lie
Unreachable inside a room
The traffic parts to let go by
Brings closer what is left to come,
And dulls to distance all we are.

'Ambulances' is a 30-line poem divided into 5 stanzas. The poet begins with an arresting description, likening ambulances to 'closed confessionals'. The ambulance-a vehicle for carrying sick/injured patients to treatment facilities, reminds the poet of the small wooden cubicle inside the church, where the priest sits to hear confessions. Moving through streets and localities without partaking in their share of grief or joy, the ambulance is a world in itself. It is fuelled by one sole purpose-to transport the sick/injured to a medical facility at the earliest, irrespective of the mood or emotions of the people around, the weather or other variables. In this single-mindedness of purpose, Larkin finds a similarity with the confession box, designed to extract truths too deep for society to stomach; they are ones which require divine cure utilizing mediation by the clergy. While passing through a certain locality, an ambulance invariably attracts the attention of people around towards itself. But being single-mindedly devoted to its own task, the ambulance neither stops for them, nor casts a glance back at them. Describing the ambulances further, Larkin presents before the readers a picture of ambulances-"light glossy grey". Historical data suggests that ambulances run by the British Ambulance Society in the 1960s were characteristically of this colour. Used in a connotative sense, the 'grey' colour further insinuates death-which lurks dangerously close to the patient carried by the ambulance to the medical facility; ill health and death might visit any household, thus bringing the ambulance "to rest at any kerb". Moreover, death is the singular inevitability that will unavoidably visit each household, each individual in due time.

The arrival of an ambulance alerts the residents of that locality immediately-be it children "strewn on steps or road", or women returning from the markets-the arrival of an ambulance puts one and all at alert. The ambulance traverses alleys lined by houses where people are busy with their motley lives (suggested by "smells of different dinners"). But the arrival of the ambulance breaks their apathy and they all stare at the vehicle-which is so much more than just a vehicle. All they can see is just a glance of the stricken person-often his/her unnaturally white, flushed visage while the rest of the person's body is covered in stretcher-cloth of red hue.

As the body of the immobile person is hurriedly brought and loaded inside the vehicle, the people-indifferent to the fate of others not so long ago, are moved by an epiphanic realization. Death is lurking around each and everyone of us at all times. Though we remain largely indifferent to this grim reality, we are reminded of the ticking clock and our gradual proximity to the end with every passing moment. As people gaze at the stricken fellow, they let a sigh of sympathy at his/her plight. But Larkin says that even while people express their sympathy, moved by this feeling-“permanent and blank and true”, at the plight of others, they are more worried about their own impending fortune. The feeling of helplessness that underlies this dreary realization is underlain by a paralyzing fear. Also observable is the indistinct ‘whisper’ uttered by the bystanders, in sharp contrast to the loud and clear siren, which announces the arrival of the ambulance.

As the person is carried away hurriedly by the ambulance, what is left behind is a heavy sense of loss-a premonition that the bonds of love and memories which strung the members of a family together for a lifetime are on the verge of being torn asunder. The bystanders contemplate this profound, impending transformation both subjectively and objectively. While on the one hand the family standing thus on the verge of irreparable loss may be imagined as any family and thus looked upon objectively. But simultaneously the sick person might be a near and dear one, the family might be one’s own, thus forcing the bystander to adopt a perspective which is no longer detached by emotional.

As the person requiring medical attention is placed inside the ambulance is ready to leave. Sounding its siren once again, the ambulance makes its way across the city. Its arrival creates the sensation of reverence and sympathy among the traffic, which “parts”, letting the ambulance pass. All this while, the sick person lies inside the ambulance-immobile and (more often than not) unconscious, unaware of the gaze of people all around. The poet depicts the helpless person as one who lies beyond the power of love to restore, depending solely on medical treatment. Always in the prayers of the family members, the stricken individual nears the medical facility, which is the destination the ambulance is headed towards. However, it may ironically be the death-bed of the person concerned. Therefore, as the traffic parts and the ambulance hastens towards its destination, the patient’s chances of survival increase. But simultaneously he is brought nearer to “what is left to come”; an ambiguous phrase, “what is left to come” may suggest both polarities of probability-impending death, or cure and temporary return to normalcy. The last line of the poem describes how apathy takes over our consciousness once the stricken person has vanished from our sight for some time. While the

ambulance carrying him/her had reminded us of the inevitability of our own old age and death, we go back to lead our narrow, contented daily lives inside the tightly woven cocoons of habit and necessity, once the incident has receded to the back of our minds with passing time. But the consciousness of the life's limitation is one of the pillars of our existence, defining who we are and what we become. As this key consciousness vanishes, we are reduced to mere captives of habit, waiting to be cut off by the Grim Reaper sooner or later.

'At Grass' was a part of Philip Larkin's 1955 collection of poems titled *The Less Deceived*.

6 (c) : At Grass

The eye can hardly pick them out
From the cold shade they shelter in,
Till wind distresses tail and main;
Then one crops grass, and moves about
- The other seeming to look on -
And stands anonymous again

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
Two dozen distances surficed
To fable them : faint afternoons
Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
Whereby their names were artficed
To inlay faded, classic Junes -

Silks at the start : against the sky
Numbers and parasols : outside,
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
And littered grass : then the long cry
Hanging unhushed till it subside
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?
They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.
Summer by summer all stole away,

The starting-gates, the crowd and cries -
All but the unmolested meadows.
Almanacked, their names live; they

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a fieldglass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophecies :
Only the grooms, and the grooms boy,
With bridles in the evening come.

This piece begins in the middle of a pastoral scene. The speaker is looking out into a pasture and noting how the creatures standing there are hard to see. In the first two lines it is doubtful what exactly the speaker is looking at, but with the mention “tail and main”- two features generally attributed to horses, it becomes clear what exactly the speaker is looking at.

It is not until the wind blows around their hair that they become truly noticeable. The horses make a number of small movements. They are apparently at peace in the pasture, and have no real desire to do anything else other than “crop...grass” and “move...about.” This is all they really seem to do at this point, move from one spot to another before standing “anonymous again.”

Although the horses seem to be quite ordinary now, the speaker reminds us that they had been so much more in the past. “Fifteen year ago” to be precise, they were race horses. Their lives were much different then and their past activities have left their names fabled. The speaker vaguely outlines what the races were like, with “Cups and Stakes and Handicaps.” Eventually the names of these particular horses “were artifice / To inlay faded.” They were well known for that period of time when they were of service. But when they could no more be put to use they were discarded and mostly forgotten.

The third stanza comprises of several other bits of memory. These are the ones which, according to the speaker horses might remember about the past. These include a glimpse of the sky, the eagerly-awaited moment for the race to begin, and all the people looking on with breathless expectation. The speaker takes note of the “parasols” carried by women and the huge numbers of “empty cars” outside the racetrack. Everyone watched when these horses competed. He concludes this stanza with the image of the crowd cheering on the race. The sound hung over the track “unhushed” until the race was over.

In the fourth stanza the speaker wonders over what the horses actually remember of the past and what impact it has on their lives nowadays. At first he thinks that perhaps they are “plague[d]” by the memories as a human would be. Maybe the thoughts of past fame flit around the horses’ minds like flies around their ears— unceasing and eventually annoying. The speaker quickly changes his mind about this line of thought. He does not actually believe the horses are bothered by the lives they used to live. They are able to shake off the past and live in the present. They are much more concerned with the natural world around them. “Summer by summer” has gone by and “stolen away” the sounds of the crowds cheering. The only thing that’s left is what they have now, the “unmolested meadows.” Their names have been “Almanacked,” or filed away and allowed to live on far from the horses themselves.

The speaker emphasizes this fact by stating that the horses have managed to “slip...their names.” They’ve shrugged off their fame and are now able to “stand at ease” away from the crowds. He presents this as being an entirely good change in their circumstances and interprets all their actions in support of this particular conclusion.

He sees them move and it concludes that it “must be” with “joy.” They have a much greater freedom now than they’ve ever known before. There are no “stop-watch prophecies” or rules and obligations. Now the only people they interact with are the “grooms, and the groom’s boy.” They come in the evening with “bridles” to guide the horses back to the barn for the night. Although the horses are not completely free, the speaker clearly sees the transition from the racetrack to the pasture as a marked improvement.

One of his best-loved poems, ‘Church Going’ was part of Philip Larkin’s collection of poems titled *The Less Deceived*.

6 (d): Church Going

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;

And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long.
Hatless, I take off My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new –
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce 'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches will fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show, Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort will go on In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure.
I wonder who Will be the last, the very last, to seek

This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these - for which was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

The poem begins with the speaker describing, through initial action phrases, his entering into a place. In the first two lines it is unclear to the reader where exactly this speaker is and what is so important about making sure, “there’s nothing going on.” The reader might ask, what is this place that it needs to be empty for one to enter? What could have been “going on?”

The speaker checks to make sure the structure is clear and steps inside. He mentions the fact that the door closes with a “thud” behind him. It is both sealing him into the space, and keeping the exterior world out.

If one had not assumed the identity of the structure from the title, the next line makes known to the reader that the speaker is exploring a church. Immediately it becomes clear why the space needed to be empty so that he could explore inside it. There is an important word mentioned in this section which changes the feeling of the poem, “Another.” This is not the first time that he has entered into an abandoned, or simply empty, church.

The speaker glances around and notices all the items that are consistent throughout all the churches that he has visited. There are books, and sets, and “stone.” He is unsurprised by these sights. He also takes in the fact that there is some “brass and stuff / Up at the holy end.” This mundane way of referring to the altar at the front of the church says a lot about the speaker. He does not hold any reverence or respect for the space he is in.

Amongst all the physical things he notices, he also feels an “unignorable silence” that is overwhelming in the space. It seems to the speaker that the church has been absent of people for quite a long time.

The speaker moves “forward” to the front of the church and “run[s]” his hand over the pews. Once he has made it to the front he looks around and notices what seem to be complete repairs and restorations done to the roof. This is a curious fact about the space as it is so devoid of people. There is no one there to ask why this is the case.

The speaker continues his journey through this religious space and takes to reading from the Bible. He speaks a few “large-scale verses” in an increased volume, spreading the words around the space. His projected voice comes back to him in an echo.

This ends his tour of the church and he departs after leaving an “Irish sixpence,” an incredibly small amount of money, in the donation box. He comes to the conclusion that this place was not worth visiting.

The speaker seems to have some kind of inner conflict about his attraction to churches. He knows, and knew, that there would not be anything new inside, but he stopped anyway. This is not unusually for him. He “often” does it and winds up in this same mental space. The man is frequently entering into the churches, searching through their religious objects, and then leaving unsatisfied. He does not yet know what he is looking for but is always left with one specific question.

He is curious about what the church will be like, or what the human race will utilize all the churches for, when the very last believer is gone. When they have fallen “completely out of use” will they be avoided “as unlucky places?” Or will the “sheep” have full rein over their interiors?

In the fourth stanza the speaker continues his contemplation of what the churches will become when all the religiously devoted have passed on. One idea the speaker has about the fate of these place is the continued existence of their power. He considers the possibility that in the future people will still come to them for a variety of spiritual reason. Mothers might bring their children to “touch a particular stone” for luck, or perhaps people will come to see the dead “walking.”

He knows that “Power of some sort will go on” even if the traditional religious context is lost. The “superstition” he knows will surround the place “must die” as well. One day, even the “disbelief” of the superstitions will be lost. All that the building will be is “Grass...brambles, buttress, sky.” It will be no more than its walls.

As time passes this conglomeration of architectural elements will fall further into disrepair. It will become “less recognizable” as the days more forward until its original purpose is completely unknown.

The speaker embraces a new question in this stanza. He is considering who the very last believer, or pilgrim, or seeker of true will be who enters the building. Will this person even comprehend where he or she is? What, he wonders, will this man or woman think as the final remainder of a dead religion?

The last person, he assumes, will be “one of the crew” who knows what a “rood-loft” is. This is a reference to what is more commonly known as a rood screen. It is a feature of late medieval church architecture that was situated between the chancel and nave at the front of the church.

In the final lines of this stanza the speaker contemplates who this person is. Will they be a “Christmas-addict” or someone who is there solely to seek out “organ-pipes and myrrh,” and all the religious ephemera of the church? Lastly, he considers the option that the seeker will be as he is, someone who is “uninformed” and unclear on the purpose of religion.

As the poem begins to conclude the speaker continues his prospective description of who the last visitor of the church will be. This person might be as he is, curious about the place because of its long-lasting nature. It has “held unsplit” for so long, one might wonder what has allowed it to survive. The onlooker might think on further in the same vain as he, wondering what the “frosty barn is worth” and how, without knowing its worth, it can please one to “stand in silence here.”

The final stanza of the piece returns to the speaker’s own thoughts, he has finished contemplating what could be, and resumes his own present musings. Up until this point the reader might be under the impression that the speaker holds no real regard for religion, or the

true structure of the church. This is quickly dismissed with the first line of this stanza. He states that the church is, "A serious house on serious earth." It has a true and worthy purpose and should not be made fun of. It is a place where all the "compulsions" or impulses of human beings meet.

Here, the truth of human existence is "recognized" and celebrated. The fact of this, he thinks, should not ever become "obsolete." It is important enough to be remembered forever. The church will "forever" bring out a "hunger" in one that cannot be discovered through any other means. The discovery of "serious[ness]" will remain with one until the end. A man or woman who has rediscovered something in themselves, will take it with them to "this ground." They will return to the churchyard and the place where "so many dead lie round."

The poem 'Next, Please' was published in the 1964 collection of poems by Philip Larkin titled *Whitsun Weddings*.

6 (e): Next, Please

Always too eager for the future, we
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.
Something is always approaching; every day
Till then we say,

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,
Refusing to make haste!

Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,
Each rope distinct,

Flagged, and the figurehead wit golden tits
Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
No sooner present than it turns to past.
Right to the last

We think each one will heave to and unload
All good into our lives, all we are owed
For waiting so devoutly and so long.

But we are wrong:

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.

"Next Please" opens with a statement of the emotional concept with which it is concerned:

Always too eager for the future,
We Pick up bad habits of expectancy.
Something is always approaching; every day
Till then, we say.

-and a parable begins, the poet grasping the arm of the reader on a rocky headland, looking out to sea. He is not referring to the habit of expecting things per se, but rather how we act, based on our expectations. Larkin states that "Something is always approaching" as a way of confirming that there is something to expect, and allowing the reader to discern precisely what about expecting things he is referring to; expecting a specific event to happen does not give an excuse for expecting extravagant consequences to come along with the event. Larkin shows that these expectations are built upon pretenses that have not been proven, but are merely of the nature of speculation. The poem goes on to elaborate the concept through a metaphor. Life's events are seen as a line of approaching ships. Watching from a bluff the

tiny, clear

the sparkling armada of promises

-long awaited, ready to unload their cargoes into the lives of poet and reader. (Larkin uses the words 'we' and 'our' throughout.) Larkin uses the word bluff to show that the foundation from which one looks to the future is not solid ground; it is pure speculation. The thing forgotten (death) lies as the hidden groundwork for all other expectations; an armada can be recognized as something associated with war, and the main outcome of war is death. This is a parable, consciously overblown and made ridiculous, description replacing purpose, but it is done, for a purpose of the poet's own:

though nothing balks

Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,

Each rope distinct,

Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits

Arching our way

-But, however distinct, these vessels and their cargoes are illusory. Yet we deserve all that they do not bring, the poet says. They owe us because we have waited: we should be rewarded for our patience. In the event, of course, there is no such thing as reward. At its root is the unspoken assertion that what is desired takes on the form of a metaphor, shimmering but unreal, while that which happens is intellectually ungraspable, real, and inescapable.

The words “flagged” and “figurehead” represent the idealization of the future that is not based upon a solid fact; the ideal is just a pleasant way that man “[arches his] way”, or envisions his path, into the certainty of death. Each time a situation presents itself to man, he is inclined to believe that all the best will come from it.

The image of our watching for the future is similar to someone who watches for ships from a cliff. When we watch, the ships approach like hope, but growing clearer all the time. So there is no stop for our hopes and wishes. This in itself is a gift from God to continue and never stop. The wishes are sparkling beautifully in our mind's portrayal eyes. When we are disappointed, we try again and start imagining our desires dreamily.

Oliver Boyd believes that: “In the poem, the ships are glittering sailing vessels, with ornamented figure-heads - the objects of our desires are always more attractive before they are realized. When they are realized they begin to pale; the ships reach us, but do not anchor. They turn, and recede once more into the distance.”

Larkin is making the point that our hopes are never fulfilled, but that, when they are fulfilled, the fulfillment is only temporary. Here Larkin uses the sparkling ships for our coloured wishes. These wishes fill our hearts with happiness and we eagerly watch for the ships to come near to fulfill our desire. Along our ages and when young, we hurry to reach our aim but only

“But we are wrong;”

Here the author strikes down any hope that man has for the happier tomorrow. And it is here that the works emotionally and metaphysically diverge. In Larkin's poem, comedy is dropped like a mask to reveal what he sees as the future truth. A kind of portal becomes apparent:

“Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back

a huge and birdless silence.

In her wake no waters breed or break.”

Death itself comes, at the end, in the form of a metaphor. There is a delicate craftsmanship in this poem. All aspects of meaning and ornament are carefully counterpoised. Under the humour is an emotion that is saved from being terror only by its orderliness; and, beneath that, the fear of the end of order cannot be spoken, because it is mute. Only one ship is seeking us, death itself.

When we become old and the wishes will no longer seem sparkling and the reality unfolds itself like a black sailed ship which is the only factual symptom. Thus, death will be waiting for us but this time our feeling is just the opposite.

Larkin warns all human beings to be modest in their wishes and not exceed the normal limit. Larkin uses a very simple language to denote the meaning he wants to convey: The theme of wish and disappointment moves in a cycle without a stop. As usual Larkin sticks to the systematic rhymes as AA BB but the theme is about disillusionment after waiting for a long time. The run on lines of poetry (enjambments) continue as if a driver were very quick and wanted to reach his aim but the conclusion of this poem contrasts strongly with the rest of the poem.

Suggested Readings

Philip Larkin: The Critics Debate-An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism-Stephen Regan. Macmillan, 1992.

Out of Reach: The Poetry of Philip Larkin-Andrew Swarbrick. Macmillan, 1995.

Philip Larkin: The Man and His Work-Dale Salwak (ed). Macmillan, 1989.

Philip Larkin and His Audiences-Gillian Steinberg. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Philip Larkin: The Poet's Plight-James Booth. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Philip Larkin- Art and Self: Five Studies- M.W. Rowe (ed). Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Assignments

1. Critically analyze the poem “Church Going.”
2. Critically comment on the poem “Ambulances”.

Unit7

Poetry of W.H. Auden

7 (a): Introduction to W.H. Auden

Wynstan Hugh Auden was born into a middle class family in York in 1907. His father was a medical officer with extensive interests outside his profession. The family soon moved to Birmingham. Auden was given a typical middle class education. He went to Gresham School in Holt, Norfolkshire and later joined Christ Church in Oxford. His early poems were written in imitation of Hardy. But he soon changed his allegiance to T.S. Eliot whom he began considering as the only modern poet worth emulating. His friendship with Stephen Spender and his links with other members of the ‘Pylon School’ can be dated from his undergraduate days. On going down from Oxford he spent a holiday in pre-Hitler Germany and did a stint in school teaching. He worked for a period in documentary films. In 1930 his first volume of poems appeared followed by *The Orators* (1932). He drove an ambulance and served as stretcher bearer on the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War. He married Erika, Thomas Mann’s daughter, in 1935. A few months before the outbreak of the Second World War, he settled down in the US. This event marked an entirely new phase in the life and poetic career of W.H. Auden. “The shift broadly speaking, is from active to contemplative”. Also, it is a shift from corporate to lonely. The new Auden has ceased to advocate practical intervention in the world’s affairs; henceforth his main message will be that what we do matters less than what we are”.

In the thirties, Auden identified himself with Marxist ideology, “inspired chiefly by his irgent search for spiritual order and moral responsibility” (Richard Hoggart). To this period belong three plays he wrote in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood: *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, *The Ascent of F6*, *On the Frontier*. In the poems written during the thirties we detect the epigrammatic line and the conversational style. A new interest in religion became apparent in his poetry from the early forties. “If Freud and Marx were the most striking and typical intellectual influences in the thirties, then those of the forties were Kierkegaard and

Niebuhr". His 1941 book titled New Year Letter includes a long title poem with a joyful invocation to God and the sonnet sequence 'The Quest'. A Christmas oratorio, For the Time Being (1945) contains a commentary on The Tempest.

The Enchanted Flood (1951) contains his most sustained collection of critical prose. Other important collections of essays include The Dyer's Hand (1963), Forewords and Afterwords (1973) and Secondary Worlds (1968).

In 1956, Auden was elected Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford, a post which he held for five years. He died at Oxford in September, 1973.

The most significant poet of the century after T.S. Eliot, Auden's versatility is remarkable. A spokesman of the scientific culture, a leader of second generation modernism, creator of operatic libretti, a devotee and author of light verse, Auden is the most extraordinary literary phenomenon to appear in recent decades.

Written in 1952, 'The Shield of Achilles' was included in his volume of poetry of the same name, which was published in 1955. The volume won the National Book Award in 1956.

7 (b): The Shield of Achilles

She looked over his shoulder
For vines and olive trees,
Marble well-governed cities
And ships upon untamed seas,
But there on the shining metal
His hands had put instead
An artificial wilderness
And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.
Out of the air a voice without a face

Proved by statistics that some cause was just
In tones as dry and level as the place:
No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
Column by column in a cloud of dust
They marched away enduring a belief
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

She looked over his shoulder
For ritual pieties,
White flower-garlanded heifers,
Libation and sacrifice,
But there on the shining metal
Where the altar should have been,
She saw by his flickering forge-light
Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
And sentries sweated for the day was hot:
A crowd of ordinary decent folk
Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
As three pale figures were led forth and bound
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The mass and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weighs the same
Lay in the hands of others; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came:
What their foes like to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.

She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
But there on the shining shield

His hands had set no dancing-floor
But a weed-choked field.
A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept.
The thin-lipped armorer,
Hephaestos, hobbled away,
Thetis of the shining breasts
Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
Who would not live long.

The title of the poem is derived from an episode in Homer's Iliad. Imagining that he had been slighted by Agamemnon, Achilles sulked in his tent. Finally he let his friend Patroclus enter the combat in his borrowed armour, thinking that the Trojans would mistake him for Achilles and run away. But Patroclus was killed by Hector who despoiled him of his armour. Thetis, Achilles' mother, appeared to him in a dream and promised to return the next morning with a splendid set of armour from Hephaestos (or Vulcan), the god of metal-work. At her request Hephaestos made a large and powerful shield adorned all over, with designs of the celestial bodies, beautiful cities full of people, wedding and banquet scenes, a beleaguered and embattled city with the spirit of death hovering over it, peaceful pastures, vineyards, farms and dancing scenes.

Auden imagines Thetis looking over the shoulder of the divine smith as he fashioned the shield expecting to see vines, olive trees, ritual pieties and dancing scenes, but what is revealed to her is the wilderness of modern society where totalitarian rulers order the multitude about, and bored bureaucrats watch a scene resembling the Crucifixion and a juvenile delinquent prone to violence and hatred pelts a passing bird with stones. The divine artificer is a symbol of the poet, while his shield stands for art or poetry. What is depicted on the shield is the state of our culture. Thetis has a role analogous to the public. "The 'Shield' is

a totally unvarnished, direct, non-ironic statement...it shows us Auden speaking without any reservations or distancing: it uses the brief and poignant fable as a means of voicing the poet's deepest convictions about the human condition." The clarity, simplicity and order of the diction lend the poem an air of dignified assurance and authority. The images assume a symbolic, at times, allegorical valuation.

The first stanza sees the poet juxtaposing the delectable experiences and the harsh reality in the cultural wasteland. In the second stanza he depicts the menace of war caused by the ruthless ambition of power-hungry despots. In lieu of a community inhabiting a moral world in the shadow of the eternal, in stanzas IV, V and VI we have a ritual parody of the Crucifixion as bored bureaucrats watch three pale figures being led forth to be killed. In the final two stanzas a weed-choked field is what the artist can predict for modern man's destiny. The representative figure of our times is a juvenile delinquent devoid of pity and compassion. Like the short-lived Achilles the poet is apprehensive of the man's future and feels that he may not long survive.

Auden's poem is replete with images of the absence of hope and meaning in modern life, and these images are made all the more poignant for their juxtaposition with the vibrance of the classical imagery of the Iliad. The world Auden describes in "The Shield of Achilles" is a horrific one, one bereft of inner meaning and whose only catalyst is the posturing of figures of authority. The environment is, as Auden describes, a "plain without a feature, bare and brown, / No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood, / Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down" (9-11). A featureless expanse physically and metaphorically, it is an environment in which the individual is a pointless being without any singular meaning. In essence, it is a world in which the individual has been crushed under the weight and enormity of life itself. The narrative of the poem describes a modern variation of the human race that can no longer be reduced to single individuals; it is, rather, an "unintelligible multitude" that is, at best, less a body of human beings than a statistical anomaly (Auden, 13). Their world is one defined by the absence of personal meaning, and they have become so degraded that they have taken to silently occupying their space as a "million eyes, a million boots in line, / [w]ithout expression, waiting for a sign," seeking not for personal revelations but for any sign of authority (14-15).

It is a form of life far removed from the vibrance and singular personal experience that defines the classical imagery of the Iliad, which Auden references in his description of

Hephaestus's creation of Achilles' shield. The world that Thetis inhabits is one that stands in sharp contrast to Auden's modern environment, being defined in Auden's verse by the sheer brilliance of its construction, one in which "vines and olive trees" and "[m]arble well-governed cities" are prominent features (2-3). As Thetis watches Hephaestus fashion her son's shield, she imagines futilely that the imagery he crafts upon it will reflect her world's magnificence, its "ritual pieties, / [w]hite flower-garlanded heifers," and "[l]ibation and sacrifice" - for her, unlike the masses of modern life, there is no question as to life's hope and inherent worth (Auden, 24-26). Thetis's world is the antithesis of the cruel, impersonal world that Auden describes. Robert Pack explores this in his article "The Idea in the Mirror: Reflections on the Consciousness of Consciousness," stating that Auden uses the Homeric, mythical vision of life to provide a sharp contrast with the mundane, scientific reality that modern people live in, one in which the individual cannot appeal to personal or social meaning (61). Rendered against the fantastic imagery of Homer, the meaninglessness of that modern life is made all the more stark and unmerciful.

Such as in Homer's epic, Auden's poem also alludes to brutal fits of warfare and mindless slaughter resulting from the stagnant torpor of modern life, which he equates with his version of the shield of Achilles. In the modern world Auden depicts in the poem, the masses march blindly to conflict, being roused by ethereal voices of authority to take up any number of meaningless, supposedly just causes. In the words of Auden,

No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
Column by column in a cloud of dust
They marched away enduring a belief

Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief (19-21).

They do not question the bizarre situation that compels them to fight, and thus they willfully partake in militaristic actions against whatever other masses they are exhorted to destroy. As such, their world is propagated with horrifying events resulting from their acts and those of their enemies, such as the binding of "three pale figures ... [t]o three posts driven upright in the ground," an event that Auden describes in rather Biblical imagery (36-37). These occurrences do not trouble the masses, however; rather, they are simply taken as reality. This mindless acceptance is hardly surprising, given the futility and hopelessness of the world they exist in. Humanity in Auden's modern world has actually ceased to be, as life has left them stunted; as the poem mentions, they "lost their pride / And died as [individuals] before their bodies died" (43-44).

The stagnation of their life has destroyed them, and it is that stagnation that Auden so potently equates with the shield Hephaestus fashions for Achilles. As the article "Hephaestus' World: The Shield" by Eva Brann notes, the desolation of Hephaestus's shield is thoroughly modern in its imagery (42). Unlike the shield constructed in the Iliad, which is defined by its beauty and wonder, the eponymous shield of the poem is adorned with cruel, unbroken expanses of nothingness, featuring only an "artificial wilderness / [a]nd a sky like lead" (Auden 7-8). The base monotony of the shield is unrelieved by expanses of Thetis's lush greenery and seas; indeed, its only truly distinguishing feature is the harsh horizon between land and sky, a line which is, according to the article "The Poet and the Postwar City," largely meaningless in the "irrational wildernesses of metallic artifice" (Pearsall). Like modern life, the shield is stagnant, deadened, and featureless; it is cruel in its ambiguity and lack of meaning, and that absence of hope is the very essence that drives the people of Auden's poem to commit acts of horror in the hope of pleasing ethereal authorities.

At the heart of Auden's poem is a critique of the social realities that generate people willing to engage in such bloodshed, and Auden makes magnificent use of Thetis's harsh realization to illustrate the unanticipated consequences arising from false and immoral values. The unbridled cruelty and horror of the modern world Auden describes is best detailed in a passage from the poem about an unnamed boy's perception of reality:

That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept (56-59).

The boy, like most others of his world, lives in an atmosphere that is beyond hellish; it is illogical and viciously arbitrary. Auden's modern world has not only anesthetized its inhabitants on an individualistic and creative scale, but it has also destroyed any moral sensation that might have stayed their hand from committing acts of atrocity. Without the barest perception of a world that might abhor strife and violence, humanity has become simply unable to conceive of a reason not to propagate both. When the masses of Auden's world seek to please ethereal voices of authority, they do so likely hoping that they will find some sense of meaning. Because of their conditioning, however, although they do not aspire to become murderers, they become so nonetheless.

Their harsh epiphany is echoed by Thetis, who finds that the shield she has so desperately sought in order to protect her son is adorned not with images of beauty but of meaningless monotony. Like the inhabitants of Auden's modern world, Thetis is a product of her environment, which, although quite different from that of the harsh, impersonal modern masses, is just as misleading and deadening. Her world is that of classical Homeric virtue and beauty - great cities of wonders, religious rites that pervade life and grant it meaning, and an individualistic need for glory. That glistening fantasy obscures hard social realities, however; it does not show the privations of the poor or the dying wounded of the battlefield, choosing instead to celebrate pleasant imagery such as "athletes at their games" and "[m]en and women in a dance" (Auden 46-47). That world shapes her entire being, and as John Lucas comments in his essay "Auden's politics: power, authority, and the individual," what Thetis truly wishes is that Hephaestus will honor her distorted, "heroic" view of reality (162). What she finds in his shield, however, is a symbol of the futility of her son's life, of the hopeless future of "[i]ron-hearted man-slaying Achilles / [w]ho would not live long" (Auden, 66-67). The shield's barren visage reminds her of that stark truth, which is, in its inevitability and hopelessness, quite akin to the desolation of the hideous world Auden describes. Her perception, like that of the anesthetized masses, is ultimately proven misguided, and it leads to consequences that will define not only her life but that of her son's.

Such realizations lie at the center of "The Shield of Achilles," Auden's harsh juxtaposition of classical vitality and wonder and the hopelessness, warfare, and cruel social realities of modern life. In Hephaestus's shield, Auden depicts lives irreparably damaged by an absence of meaning, and ultimately driven to violence in the vain hope of achieving it. The cruel logic that runs throughout the poem is that of modern life, of wars motivated by the thinnest of justifications and lives defined not by their expression but by their lack thereof. In many ways, the poem is the realization of Auden's hell and humanity's reality, and its relevance has only deepened as the very fabric of life becomes continually more absurd. By contrasting the quiet horror of existence and warfare with the splendor and beauty of Thetis's hopes for Hephaestus's creation, Auden makes a damning observation of the darker aspects of an impersonal, amoral modern world. For Auden, dispirited by World War II and the loss of any remaining innocence he might have had about the motivations of humanity, "The Shield of Achilles" was not only a magnificent artistic achievement, but the startling articulation of a hope dispelled. If Thetis is left in anguished realization at the end of the poem, so too is the reader.

Suggested Readings

The Making of the Auden Canon-J.W. Beach. University of Minnesota Press, 1957.

The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden-John G. Blair. Princeton University Press, 1965.

A Reader's Guide to W.H. Auden-John Fuller. Thames and Hudson, 1970.

Changes of Heart: A Study of the Poetry of W.H. Auden-Gerald Nelson. University of California Press, 1971.

The Poetry of W.H. Auden- Monroe K. Spears. Oxford University Press, 1963.

Assignments

1. Critically comment on the poem "Shield of Achilles".

Block II

Unit 8

The Poetry of Ted Hughes

8(a): Introduction to Ted Hughes

One of the giants of 20th century British poetry, Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, Yorkshire in 1930. After serving as in the Royal Air Force, Hughes attended Cambridge, where he studied archeology and anthropology, taking a special interest in myths and legends. In 1956 he met and married the American poet Sylvia Plath, who encouraged him to submit his manuscript to a first book contest run by The Poetry Center. Awarded first prize by judges Marianne Moore, W.H. Auden, and Stephen Spender, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) secured Hughes's reputation as a poet of international stature. According to poet and critic Robert B. Shaw, "Hughes's poetry signaled a dramatic departure from the prevailing modes of the period. The stereotypical poem of the time was determined not to risk too much: politely domestic in its subject matter, understated and mildly ironic in style. By contrast, Hughes marshaled a language of nearly Shakespearean resonance to explore themes which were mythic and elemental." Hughes's long career included unprecedented best-selling volumes such as *Lupercal* (1960), *Crow* (1970), *Selected Poems 1957-1981* (1982), and *The*

Birthday Letters (1998), as well as many beloved children's books, including *The Iron Man* (1968). With Seamus Heaney, he edited the popular anthologies *The Rattle Bag* (1982) and *The School Bag* (1997). Named executor of Plath's literary estate, he edited several volumes of her work. Hughes also translated works from Classical authors, including Ovid and Aeschylus. An incredibly prolific poet, translator, editor, and children's book author, Hughes was appointed Poet Laureate in 1984, a post he held until his death. Among his many awards, he was appointed to the Order of Merit, one of Britain's highest honors.

The rural landscape of Hughes's youth in Yorkshire exerted a lasting influence on his work. To read Hughes's poetry is to enter a world dominated by nature, especially by animals. This holds true for nearly all of his books, from *The Hawk in the Rain* to *Wolfwatching* (1989) and *Moortown Diary* (1989), two of his late collections. Hughes's love of animals was one of the catalysts in his decision to become a poet. According to London Times contributor Thomas Nye, Hughes once confessed "that he began writing poems in adolescence, when it dawned upon him that his earlier passion for hunting animals in his native Yorkshire ended either in the possession of a dead animal, or at best a trapped one. He wanted to capture not just live animals, but the aliveness of animals in their natural state: their wildness, their quiddity, the fox-ness of the fox and the crow-ness of the crow." However, Hughes's interest in animals was generally less naturalistic than symbolic. Using figures such as "Crow" to approximate a mythic everyman, Hughes's work speaks to his concern with poetry's vatic, even shamanic powers. Working in sequences and lists, Hughes frequently uncovered a kind of autochthonous, yet literary, English language. According to Peter Davison in the New York Times, "While inhabiting the bodies of creatures, mostly male, Hughes clambers back down the evolutionary chain. He searches deep into the riddles of language, too, those that precede any given tongue, language that reeks of the forest or even the jungle. Such poems often contain a touch—or more than a touch—of melodrama, of the brutal tragedies of Seneca that Hughes adapted for the modern stage."

Hughes's posthumous publications include *Selected Poems 1957-1994* (2002), an updated and expanded version of the original 1982 edition, and *Letters of Ted Hughes* (2008), which were edited by Christopher Reid and showcase Hughes's voluminous correspondence. According to David Orr in the New York Times, Hughes's "letters are immediately interesting and accessible to third parties to whom they aren't addressed... Hughes can turn out a memorable description (biographies of Plath are 'a perpetual smoldering in the cellar for us. There's always one or two smoking away'), and his offhand observations about poetry

can be startlingly perceptive.” The publication of Hughes’s *Collected Poems* (2003) provided new insights into Hughes’s writing process. Sean O’Brien in the *Guardian* noted, “Hughes conducted more than one life as a poet.” Publishing both single volumes with Faber, Hughes also released a huge amount of work through small presses and magazines. These poems were frequently not collected, and it seems Hughes thought of his small-press efforts as experiments to see if the poems deserved placement in collections. O’Brien continued: “Clearly [Hughes] needed to be writing all the time, and many of the hitherto uncollected poems have the provisional air of resting for a moment before being taken to completion—except that half the time completion didn’t occur and wasn’t even the issue... as far as the complete body of work went, Hughes seems to have been more interested in process than outcome.”

Though Hughes is now unequivocally recognized as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, his reputation as a poet during his lifetime was perhaps unfairly framed by two events: the suicide of Plath in 1963, and, in 1969, the suicide of the woman he left Plath for, Assia Wevill, who also took the life of their young daughter, Shura. As Plath’s executor, Hughes’s decision to destroy her final diary and his refusal of publication rights to her poems irked many in the literary community. Plath was taken up by some as a symbol of suppressed female genius in the decade after her suicide, and in this scenario Hughes was often cast as the villain. His readings were disrupted by cries of “murderer!” and his surname, which appears on Plath’s gravestone, was repeatedly defaced. Hughes’s unpopular decisions regarding Plath’s writings, over which he had total control after her death, were often in service of his definition of privacy; he also refused to discuss his marriage to Plath after her death. Thus it was with great surprise that, in 1998, the literary world received Hughes’s quite intimate portrait of Plath in the form of *Birthday Letters*, a collection of prose poems covering every aspect of his relationship with his first wife. The collection received both critical praise and censure; Hughes’s desire to break the silence around Plath’s death was welcomed, even as the poems themselves were scrutinized. Yet despite reservations, Katha Pollitt wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that Hughes’s tone, “emotional, direct, regretful, entranced—pervades the book’s strongest poems, which are quiet and thoughtful and conversational. Plath is always ‘you’—as though an old man were leafing through an album with a ghost.”

Though marked by a period of pain and controversy in the 1960s, Hughes’s later life was spent writing and farming. He married Carol Orchard in 1970, and the couple lived on a small

farm in Devon until his death. His forays into translations, essays, and criticism were noted for their intelligence and range. Hughes continued writing and publishing poems until his death, from cancer, on October 28, 1998. A memorial to Hughes in the famed Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey was unveiled in 2011.

'The Thought Fox' was part of Ted Hughes' 1957 collection of poems titled *The Hawk in the Rain*.

_ 8 (b): The Thought Fox

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
 Something else is alive
 Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:
 Something more near
 Though deeper within darkness
 Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
 A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
 And again now, and now, and now

 Sets neat prints into the snow
 Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
 Of a body that is bold to come

 Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
 Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,

The page is printed.

Analysis of the Poem:

'The Thought-Fox' has a special place among Ted Hughes's early poems. It is at least partly a poem about writing poetry – one might say about poetic inspiration. In his collection of radio talks, *Poetry in the Making*, he wrote that he composed it after writing nothing for a year. So we might see the fox as representing the renewal of the poet's imaginative powers. In *Poetry in the Making* he also writes that 'The Thought-Fox' was 'the first "animal" poem I ever wrote'. When he read it in public he used to introduce it by telling the audience about a dream he had had two years before writing it, when studying English at Cambridge. He believed that academic study of literature stifled his creativity, and in the dream a burnt and bloody fox, the size of a man with human hands, entered his room, put a bloody hand on the essay he was writing and said, "Stop this – you are destroying us." When he wrote 'The Thought-Fox', he may not have been thinking about this dream at all, but it is significant that he later made the connection.

Much later in life Hughes said that by the time he went to university he had constructed a 'sacred canon' of the poets who were most important to him. Three of these poets are echoed in the first stanza of 'The Thought-Fox':

I imagine this midnight moment's forest.
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

The most obvious echo is the 'forest of the night' in which William Blake's 'Tyger' burns bright. In Hughes's imaginary forest, too, lives a predatory animal, if a less awesome one from a human point of view. The most obvious poetic effect of the first line is the alliteration of the letter 'm', which echoes the most famous poem of a second of Hughes's 'sacred canon', Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'The Windhover': 'I caught this morning morning's minion'. Again the opening line introduces a symbolic animal, the kestrel whose 'hurl and gliding' embodies the rhythm of Hopkins's poetry, and which in this case symbolises not merely the poetic imagination but Jesus Christ himself. The situation that Hughes evokes, the

poet sitting alone at night, imagining what is going on outside his room, recalls that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in one of his greatest poems, 'Frost at Midnight'. Coleridge imagines the 'secret ministry, / Unhelped by any wind' of the frost, which contributes to the 'solitude' and 'strange / And extreme silentness' that favour his 'Abstruser musings'. This is a classic image of the Romantic poet, deeply in tune with the natural world, but alone with his thoughts. Hughes embraces this image of the poet, not only in 'The Thought-Fox' but throughout his work.

The densely poetic opening line is followed by the simple statement, 'Something else is alive': the brevity of the line reinforces the uncertainty of the statement to create a sense of expectation and mystery: the first stirring of what will become the poem. Apart from this 'Something' the only things in the poet's world are 'the clock's loneliness' and the 'blank page where my fingers move'. 'The clock's loneliness' is a classic example of the 'transferred epithet': literally it is the poet, not the clock, who is lonely. But the ticking of the clock, emphasising second by second time passing and nothing happening, intensifies the loneliness. This is a special kind of loneliness: not so much the absence of other people as the poet's alienation from his own creative powers: his 'fingers move' but the page remains blank. This feeling about the mechanical passage of time was powerfully expressed by another writer Hughes admired, D H Lawrence: 'The terrible bondage of this tick-tack of time, this twitching of the hands of the clock, this eternal repetition of hours and days. Hughes is about to be rescued from the tyranny of clock-time and enter another realm:

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness.

The poem has a pattern of half-rhymes which, in every other stanza, alternate. In this stanza the rhymes form couplets. This combines with the brevity of the second line to make the half-rhyme 'near' come much sooner than expected, emphasise the nearness and echo the mystery of the poem's similarly abbreviated second line. But it is a paradoxical nearness: nearer than a star but 'deeper within darkness'. It is an inner depth, but unimaginably distant from the conscious mind. The animal emerging from such an inner depth and darkness is a trope that recurs in Hughes's poetry: in, for example, 'the dream / Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed, / That rose slowly towards me, watching' of 'Pike' and the 'depth darkness' from

which the 'Ghost Crabs' emerge

This 'Something' is identified as a fox in the third stanza, and the following 12 lines give us a paradoxically vivid impression of the creature moving in the snowbound forest. Paradoxically because this brilliantly realised fox is at the same time something that inhabits the inner darkness of the poet's mind. The fox emerges in parts: nose, eyes, prints, shadow. It is never described as a whole, but we as readers form a whole impression of it. The language of this section of the poem is perfectly accomplished: the way that 'delicately' the nose 'touches twig, leaf', the quietness and brevity of the repeated 't' sound echoing the delicacy of the touch, and the omitted 'and' between 'twig' and 'leaf' gives us one moment swiftly following another, preparing for the 'now, / And again now, and now, and now' in which the poet's time – and the reader's – is no longer the empty time of the clock ticking but a mesmerised absorption in the present, such as one has when intently observing a wild animal. Perhaps the most brilliantly accomplished lines in the poem are:

warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come
Across clearings.

The fox is both wary and bold. This contradiction is handled by projecting the wariness on to the shadow. Hughes doesn't explicitly say that the shadow is broken by the terrain over which the fox is passing – this is an unstated metaphor for the wariness. 'Shadow lags by stump and in hollow' has a heavy, lumbering, front-loaded rhythm that is transformed into the light, skipping rhythm of 'Of a body that is bold to come' and the leap across the stanza-break.

The fifth stanza is entirely devoted to the fox's eye. This organ features perhaps more often than any other in Hughes's poetry, especially about predatory animals. It is prominent in 'The Hawk in the Rain', 'The Jaguar', 'Esther's Tomcat', 'Hawk Roosting', 'Cat and Mouse', 'Thrushes' and 'Pike'. The eye stands for the whole fox, 'Coming about its own business'. This is what all wild animals are doing, regardless of the feelings humans might have about them, but this line's deeper meaning concerns the fox's symbolic role as representative of the poet's hidden self, the self from which his poetry comes, the 'deeper darkness' that he can access only by escaping from the mechanical world of clock-time.

In these three stanzas the fox has been evoked by touch and vision (not, however, by sound – the only sound in the poem is the ticking of the clock) and the final stanza opens with a third sense, ‘a sudden sharp hot stink of fox’. Rarely do we come so close to a wild animal that we can smell it, so there is a startling intimacy about this line, and a reinforcement of the sense that the inner self is rarely accessed – as rarely as the stink of a fox. In the last two lines we are suddenly returned to the world of the ticking clock, as if from a waking dream. The final line, ‘The page is printed’, is the only one where Hughes’s judgement might be questioned. Apart from the two words at the start, ‘I imagine’, the poet has represented himself as entirely passive. Agency is handed over to the fox which ‘sets neat prints into the snow’ as if composing the poem. In *Poetry in the Making* he claims to have written the poem ‘in a few minutes’, reinforcing the Romantic notion (like Coleridge claiming to have transcribed ‘Kubla Khan’ from a dream) of the poet visited by inspiration. I suspect it was only the first draft that was written in a couple of minutes – all of his poems went through numerous drafts.[6] Nevertheless, the poem is a representation of such an inspired process. When the poet awakens, as it were, he finds the ‘page is printed’ – the ‘neat prints’ that the fox of his vision set into the snow are there in reality, rather as if he had woken from his dream of the burnt fox and found a bloody handprint on his essay. But the pun on the printed page and footprints of the fox is the one point at which the poem seems merely ‘clever’ and contrived – the only slight let-down in an otherwise totally convincing account of the marriage of inner and outer worlds.

Suggested Reading

Ted Hughes as Shepherd of Being-Craig Robinson. Palgrave Macmillan, 1989.

Ted Hughes and Trauma: Burning the Foxes-Danny O’ Connor. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons-Joanny Moulin. Routledge, 2005.

The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes- Keith Sagar. Liverpool University Press, 2006.

The Challenge of Ted Hughes- Keith Sagar. St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

Ted Hughes, Nature and Culture-Neil Roberts, Mark Wormald and Terry Gifford. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet- Yvonne Reddick. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Assignments

1. Critically comment on the animal imagery in the poem "Thought Fox" .
2. Critically appreciate the poem "Thoght-Fox".

BLOCK III

UNIT 9

Waiting For Godot

By

Samuel Beckett

9 (a): Life and Works of Samuel Beckett

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on 13 April, 1906 at Foxrock, Dublin. His father was William Frank Beckett, a quantity surveyor and his mother Marie Jones Roe was a nurse by profession. Beckett's family members were members of the Anglican Church of Ireland. Beckett's early education was taken place at Dublin. He was a student of Dublin University. Beckett studies French, Italian and English at Trinity College, Dublin. At Trinity college Beckett's teacher was A.A. Luce who introduced young Beckett with the works of Henri Bergson. Beckett was largely influenced by the concept of time as propounded by Bergson. Beckett can be considered as one of the masters in the genre of absurd drama which flourished after the atrocities of the World War II. The massacre and brutality in the World War II caused a rupture in the thought pattern of the humans. The logic, reason and the belief on the human potentials have undergone through radical alterations. The myth of Christian benevolent God has completely done away with. Therefore, absurd drama gives the essence of pessimism. It portrays a bleak vision of the future of humanity where the faith on the myth of benevolent Christian God has completely erased. Absurd drama captures the post-World War II atrocities of the world and the prevalence of irrationality and chaos. As a result this new genre gives focus on the language and stage setting. The linear development of the storyline and time frame have been disrupted. The minimalist tendency has been expressed in the settings and stage decoration. Very significantly the characters have been placed amidst the vast backdrop of the meaningless, chaos, and disorder. The disorder in the external atmosphere has extended into the minds of the characters as a result the characters become the byproduct of the time. They imbibe the eccentricity and chaotic tendency. The language also undergoes in the hands of the playwrights a radical alterations. The speech does not

demand prime focus instead the dramatist like a dumb spectator takes recourse to silence, repetitive gestures and monosyllabic words. The silence speaks much in the absurd drama. The silence of the playwright in the drama is connotative of the silence of human rationality in the post War phase in the World. Beckett's most remarkable works are:

Murphy (1938)

Molloy(1951)

Malone Dies (1951)

The Unnamable (1953)

Waiting for Godot (1953)

Watt (1953)

Endgame (1957)

Krapp's Last Tape (1958)

How It is (1960)

Happy Days (1960)

Samuel Beckett own the Nobel prize in literature in 1969. Beckett's writing career can be divided into three categories: Early, Middle, and the later phases. In the early phase of his writing he was deeply moved by the style of the Irish master James Joyce. In his writings of this early phase the style is much like Joycean. The early period is stretched till the end of the World War II in 1945. The second phase is called middle phase of his writing. The time frame of the priod can be located from 1945-1960. This period is marked by the most remarkable creations of Beckett where we can find mature works by the Author. The later phase of his writing career can be marked as the years between 1960 to the year of his death which is 1989. In the later phase of his writings there is a growing focus on the minimalist approach. Here his expressions and thought both become compact and pithy. In 1969 he penned *Breath*. The play titled *Breath* has only thirty five seconds duration and it has no characters. *Not I* and *Catastrophe* both are also remarkable examples of Beckettian penchant for compact expression in the later phase of his writing. The play *Waiting for Godot* has been composed by Beckett in French as *En attendant Godot*. Beckett adds the subtitle in his

English translation of the play *Waiting for Godot* : “A Tragicomedy in two acts”. The French text was penned between October 1948 to January 1949.

9 (b): Synopsis of the Play

Act I

The play has an outdoor setting. The two major characters are Vladimir and Estragon. Vladimir is philosophical by nature and Estragon is a weary soul. The sense of unease is first conveyed in the play through the Character of Estragon who is unable to remove his boots from his aching feet and utters “ Nothing to be done”. The term “nothing” rings the note of emptiness in the entire play from the beginning to the end. It is the stark realization of the socio-political situation in the post-War phase and also it is the sense of atrophy. The play goes on with the sense of weariness and monotony. Estragon wants to leave the place but Vladimir gives him reminder of their promised meeting with an unknown person called Godot who is suppose to meet them under the dead tree. The leafless dead tree becomes a prominent symbol in the play. It is symbolic of the decay atrophy and loss of faith and optimism in the post-War phase. Even the Christian mythology sometimes believes that the tree of life is ever green because it signals the interminable flow of life on Earth. The tree is dead means the life giving force is already dead. So there is the sense of loss and emptiness. The dead tree is symbolic of death. It is not only death in very physical sense but also it is death in a spiritual sense. The existence of Christian benevolent God has been done away with in the play from the skeptic gaze of the playwright. God has mockingly being addressed as Gogot. The character Godot never comes in the play. Vladimir and Estragon go on waiting for him and they go on speculating about their conversations with the person Godot; but very significantly the person Godot never turns up. The promised meeting with Godot thus becomes a futile plan. The person Godot can be comprehended as an unreliable and unpredictable character who is basically whimsical. Therefore Beckett’s aim of disdaining the myth of Benevolent Father God has been fulfilled. The unpredictable nature and whimsical behaviour of Godot in the play both directly comment on the nature of Christian God. Like Godot this God is incapable of saving the human race from such brutality and irrationality. In between two new characters appear on stage Lucky and Pozzo. Lucky is a slave around his neck a rope was tied with. His terrible cry heralds his entry. Pozzo is his master who deliberately maltreats him. Pozzo drinks wine and having chicken but he reluctantly throws the bones in the ground giving Lucky nothing. Seeing his selfish behaviour Vladimir

criticizes Pozzo . Pozzo reveals his plan of selling Lucky . Estragon tries to sympathize Lucky but Lucky kicks him. Then Pozzo broods over his long relationship with Lucky. In such a situation Lucky starts a monologue which is about theology but gradually his talk takes shape of gibberish and nonsensical words and verbosity. Finally he had to stop for the intervention of Vladimir. Then Lucky and Pozzo left the stage. After their departure from the stage Vladimir and Estragon contemplate on the fact whether in reality they have met Lucky and Pozzo or not. In between the boy comes and delivers the message that Godot will not come today. May be he can meet them “ but surely tomorrow”.

Act II

Act II deals with Vladimir and Estragon initially. They want to be entertained so Vladimir sings a song about the death of a dog but he forgets the lyric. The bare denuded tree now looks like a leafy tree and Vladimir and Estragon go on counting their experience. The change in their circumstances does affect their memory. They are unable to differentiate between their memories. They find themselves to be placed in a circular motion of experience where psychologically they return back to the same point from where exactly they have started their psychic explorations. Now Lucky and Pozzo come on the stage but this time their roles have been reversed. Lucky now dominates Pozzo and he holds the rope around the neck of Pozzo. Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is dumb. Pozzo has lost his sense of time and memory also. As a result he cannot recollect his meeting with Estragon and Vladimir at yesterday. After the departure of Lucky and Pozzo the same sense of timelessness and forgetfulness embrace Vladimir and Estragon. A boy comes with the message that Godot will not come this evening but he will surely come tomorrow. Both Vladimir and Estragon think whether it is the same boy whom they met at yesterday or it is the brother of the boy. But they ask him further about the arrival time of Godot tomorrow. From their talk it becomes evident that both of them will go on waiting for Godot and if the person Godot does not arrive they will commit suicide.

UNIT 10

10 (a): Significance of Godot in *Waiting for Godot*

Samuel Beckett in an innovative way with the unconventional plot and setting in his play *Waiting for Godot* intends to dramatize to put it in his own words “ the irrational state of unknowingness wherein we exist”. The interpretability of the ever-absent eponymous figure

Godot has always been the most crucial point of critical concern. But the notion of Godot, by virtue of its being indefinite and indefinable has always eluded all attempts of readers and critics to prioritize any specific and fixed meaning pertaining to the word. Even Beckett himself, on being asked by M. Alan Schneider, the first American director of his play, who or what Godot stands for, replied, “if I knew, I would have said so in the play.” If this statement is to be taken for granted as an honest and unambiguous confession, it has to be admitted that there is no possibility to privilege and validate any one single meaning of Godot. Therefore this word stands for aporia which deliberately creates the slippage of meaning in the narrative. It resists any generic or ideological oversimplification.

However, the title of the original French version of the play, *En attendant godot*, seems to privilege the significance of the act of waiting rather than that of the object being awaited, since this title means in English “while waiting for godot”. Slightly different as the title is, *Waiting for Godot* too illustrates the happenings during the time awaiting the arrival of godot. In this respect the importance or function of godot, at the most primary level, seems to be in manifesting what Eugene Ionesco calls “the outward projection onto the stage of an inner world”. In the context of the play the act of waiting for godot’s arrival exposes the fear, anxiety and scepticism of Vladimir and Estragon. It also creates an ambience of despair, futility, nihilism, and self-deceiving hope which permeates throughout the play so as to emphasize the stark absurdity of human existence and human enterprise. By the very absence godot functions as an effective device in the absurdist drama “to reveal the irrationality of the human condition and the illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure”(Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of Absurd.*)

Godot can be defined as an omnipotent “signified” due to whose absence all the speeches and actions in the play appear to be wanting their value as ‘signifiers’, and consequently, incongruous and meaningless. A. Maria Minich Brewer observes,

Signs degenerate and fall apart in space and time because their signification, which is assigned to godot, is lacking.... godot’s absence is the absence of a center (a signified) that would guarantee that a character’s speech could coincide with the actions he performs(‘Performing Theory’, *Theatre Journal* 1985)

Hence in the realm of such an absurdist play, godot is far beyond the notion of a character with a particular assigned role to perform. As Beckett seems to be revealing, godot exists in the complexities and predicaments of human psyche as an elusive concept of meaning or

rationality or “good faith”- which entices human beings with the lure of restoring peace, dissolving all dichotomies and confusions. In the logocentric human culture godot may be epitomize all the preconceived ideas, codes and standards on whose basis the society measures and defines everything, or at least tries to do so. By dramatizing the impact of the absence of such a set of ethos, embodied in the name of godot, Beckett shows the unendurable but inescapable misery and crisis of human existence in some way. Godot may be also stand for death---- by which human beings can at least evade boredom and frustration of meaningless existence, even though they do not succeeded in reaching the meaning. It may be for this that Vladimir and Estragon want to hang themselves. But the absence of godot negates even the possibility and hope of escape through death.

It is a sharp irony that while everything else is lacking signification due to the absence of godot the set of values, meanings, and definitive codes, the meaning of godot itself resists own definition like a “self-defeating mask”. To quote Lawrence Graver:

Godot can hardly be considered a figure in a realistic narrative, or even in a coherent allegory, both of which have been subverted or exploded at every point.... godot has become a concept- an idea of promise and expectation- of that for which people aware of the absence of coherent meaning in their lives wait in the hope that it will restore significance to their existence”.

The Cambridge Guide to Waiting for Godot.

There is, however, no denying of the fact that the most instant concept godot alludes to is that of God- both by the phonemic similarity and by the frequent references of the saviour. Vladimir and Estragon hope that their anxiety and boredom will cease with the arrival of Godot, as people hope for salvation by divine grace. There is also such direct hint as godot’s being a white bearded person who keeps goats and sheep- which connotes to God the father as he is figured in popular Christian imagination.

The bilingual semantic amelioration of the word godot gives way to several associations of ideas. A good number of common French words beginning with ‘g-o-d’ has some connection to the theme, as well as the incoherent array of allusions, of Beckett’s play. ‘Godillot’ in French means ‘shapeless old shoe’, and ‘godasses’ are military boots. ‘Godallier’ is to go pub-crawling’, and ‘goddam’ is French slang for an ‘Englishman’. ‘Godot’ the name of a popular cagnac , means in French ‘a bowl’ or ‘a mug’; in a different sense ‘godot’ also means

the small receptacles filled with combustible materials and wicks to light the street lamps. Such diminutive connotations of Godot imply that its existence “is indeed everywhere in the physical and spiritual world, but is of disputed etymology”, for which it “can never be made manifest in one entity and has no fixed meaning”. Besides in French, to add the suffix ‘-ot’ to a word functions to add a certain diminutive but endearing connotation to that word. Hence, to coin the name ‘godot’ is to invest a figure who may be regarded as a ‘little God’ with an implied note of fond familiarity. Beckett might have deliberately coined this word in order to problematize any sort of semantic fixation of such an idea of whose meaning he himself had not been quite sure. If Godot is to be considered God, it refers to so powerless and useless a God that he is unable to ascertain his own identity effectively, not to speak of saving those who are expecting him to do so. Godot is even as much degraded as to be confused with Pozzo.

Therefore in his tour de force *Waiting for Godot* Samuel Beckett represents a powerful symbol which is also present in the narrative as a character. Thus the weight of the implications of the character of Godot has redoubled. Godot finally becomes the major symbol which is connotative of uncertainty of the post-war socio-political scenario in Europe. Besides Godot also stands for the lost sense of reason and logic and sanity –all these remain absent in the post-war world. The absence of Godot also implies by default the absence of rationality and sanity.

10 (b): Character Analysis

The play *Waiting for Godot* basically deals with Six characters. Though at the beginning of the discussions on the play I mention that absurd drama goes on experimenting with the traditional concept of plot and character. Therefore the full fledged development of the characters we cannot witness in the plays by the dramatists who are practising the genre of absurd drama. The same thing happens in case of Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. The six characters in the play are: Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, Pozzo, Godot, and the boy who acts as a messenger of Godot.

Vladimir: At the beginning of the play Vladimir occupies the stage. He is philosophical by nature and he is represented as the companion of Estragon. Both of them came to the place under the denuded tree to wait for a promised meeting with a person called Godot. The person Godot never comes and so is the waiting period of both Vladimir and Estragon never gets over. They stuck in the eternal punishment like Sisyphus. In his seminal work "Myth of Sisyphus" (1942) Albert Camus talks about the predicament of modern man who stuck in a Sisyphus like condition. Sisyphus is a mythic figure who was punished by zeus eternally to take the stone on top of the mountain and the stone will roll down thus he is stuck in his eternal punishment. Camus views Sisyphus as an absurd hero who lives life remaining stuck in the same meaningless task.

Estragon: Estragon is another character whose life is stuck in the absurdity of life where the very meaning of existence has been nullified. The sense of unease and hostility of the universe both are well captured by the trivial act of Estragon's effort to remove his shoes from his aching feet. His inability to do so simply indicates the oddities of life against which the protagonists of absurd drama are helpless victims.

Lucky: Lucky appears on stage first time as a slave around whose neck a rope was tied. He remains docile and his master Pozzo maltreats him. Finally when Pozzo asks him to entertain Both Vladimir and Estragon then he starts a talk which is about theology. Suddenly his words degenerates into verbosity and meaninglessness. The debasing quality of his talk is extremely

symbolic. It symbolizes the destruction of the sense of order, meaning, and a definite purpose of human life after the atrocities of the World War II. Lucky's role gets reversed in the second act of the play. He becomes the master of his former master Pozzo. The role reversal also signifies the arbitrary nature of human condition which is devoid of any logical or rational explanation.

Pozzo: Pozzo in the first act appears as master who dominates and maltreats Lucky. He wants to sell Lucky and his maltreatment of Lucky infuriates Vladimir. The role of Pozzo gets reversed in the second act when he becomes the slave of Lucky. In the second act very significant transformations happened. Pozzo becomes blind and he loses the sense of time. Pozzo's blindness is symbolic. It is connotative of degeneration, darkness, and pessimism in the world where ultimate "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful". Pozzo's memory also getting affected in the second act where he cannot recollect whether he meets Vladimir and Estragon or not. The memory and sense of time both he lost. These two vital faculties of human minds Pozzo loses. Sense of time and memory both exist when someone is living. The sign of life is best reflected by the two faculties. After death there remains timeless sphere. Death also destroys the sense of memory capacity as in popular mythology it is believed that after death the souls cross the river Lethe as a result they lose their memories of life and past. Therefore Pozzo's sense of timelessness and his sense of amnesia both are metaphoric of his death-in-life existence.

Boy: The boy appears in both the acts. He is basically the messenger from the person called Godot who comes to deliver the news that this evening godot will not come he will come surely tomorrow. The boy again appears in act two where he repeats the same words. The repetitive gestures and monotony of modernist condition of living is best captured by the boy's words. Even his role is very dull without any element of excitement. The numbing effect of drudgery and dullness of life are best represented by the character of the boy.

Godot: Godot is the eponymous hero in the play. He is supposed to come and meet Vladimir and Estragon. He never comes but both Vladimir and Estragon go on believing that he will come surely. The binary between absence and presence certainty and uncertainty both are well conveyed by the character of Godot. He remains absent in the entire play but his presence is more vividly felt by his absence. He is the logos in the text around which every single movement and gesture is directed to. He may be a parody of Christian God, may be the

absence of human rationality and sanity. He can also be all the positive forces of life therefore his perpetual absence from life makes the living beings lifeless husks.

UNIT 11

11 (a): Critical Observations on *Waiting for Godot*

Hugh Kenner wisely observes that, in *Waiting for Godot*, bowler hats “are removed for thinking but replaced for speaking.” Such accurate observation is truly Beckettian, even as was Lyndon Johnson’s reflection that Gerald Ford was the one person in Washington who could not walk and chew gum at the same time. Beckett’s tramps, like President Ford, keep to one activity at a time. Entropy is all around them and within them, since they inhabit, they are, that cosmological emptiness the Gnostics named as the *kenoma*. Of the name *Godot*, Beckett remarked, “and besides, there is a true Godot, a cycling racer named Godot, so you see, the possibilities are rather endless.” Actually, Beckett seems to have meant Godet, the director of the Tour de France, but even the mistake is Beckettian and reminds us of a grand precursor text, Alfred Jarry’s “The Passion Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race,” with its superb start: “Barabbas, slated to race, was scratched.” Nobody is scratched in *Waiting for Godot*, but nobody gets started either. I take it that “Godot” is an emblem for “recognition,” and I thereby accept Deirdre Bair’s tentative suggestion that the play was written while Beckett waited for recognition, for his novels to be received and appreciated, within the canon. A man waiting for recognition is more likely than ever to be obsessed that his feet should hurt continually and perhaps to be provoked also to the memory that his own father invariably wore a bowler hat and a black coat. A play that moves from “Nothing to be done” (referring to a recalcitrantboot) on to “Yes, let’s go,” after which they do not move, charmingly does not progress at all. Time, the enemy above all others for the Gnostics, is the adversary in *Waiting for Godot*, as it was in Beckett’s *Proust*. That would be a minor truism, if the play was not set in the world made not by Plato’s Demiurge but by the Demiurge of Valentinus, for whom time is hardly the moving image of eternity: When the Demiurge further wanted to imitate also the boundless, eternal, infinite, and timeless nature of the Abyss, but could not express its immutable eternity, being as he was a fruit of defect, he embodied their eternity in times, epochs, and great numbers of years, under the delusion

that by the quantity of times he could represent their infinity. Thus truth escaped him and he followed the lie. Blake's way of saying this was to remind us that in equivocal worlds up and down were equivocal. Estragon's way is: "Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?" Lucky's way is the most Gnostic, since how could the *kenoma* be described any better than this? the earth in the great cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in the great cold alas alas in the year of their Lord six hundred and something the air the earth the sea the earth abode of stones in the great deeps the great cold on sea on land and in the air I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis the facts are there but time will tell I resume alas alas on on in short in fine on on abode of stones who can doubt it I resume but not so fast I resume the skull fading fading fading and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown. Description that is also lament—that is the only lyricism possible for the Gnostic, ancient or modern, Valentinus or Schopenhauer, Beckett or Shelley: Art thou pale for weariness Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth, Wandering companionless

Among the stars that have a different birth—

And ever changing, like a joyless eye

That finds no object worth its constancy?

Shelley's fragment carefully assigns the stars to a different birth, shared with our imaginations, a birth that precedes the Creation-Fall that gave us the cosmos of *Waiting for Godot*. When the moon rises, Estragon contemplates

it in a Shelleyan mode: "Pale for weariness . . . of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us." This negative epiphany, closing act 1, is answered by another extraordinary Shelleyan allusion, soon after the start of act 2:

VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.

ESTRAGON: It's so we won't hear.

VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like sand.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: They all speak at once.

ESTRAGON: Each one to itself.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: Rather they whisper.

ESTRAGON: They rustle.

VLADIMIR: They murmur.

ESTRAGON: They rustle.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: What do they say?

ESTRAGON: They talk about their lives.

VLADIMIR: To have lived is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON: They have to talk about it.

VLADIMIR: To be dead is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON: It is not sufficient.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: They make a noise like feathers.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like ashes.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

Long silence.

VLADIMIR: Say something!

It is the ultimate, dark transumption of Shelley's fiction of the leaves in the apocalyptic "Ode to the West Wind." Involuntary Gnostics, Estragon and Vladimir are beyond apocalypse, beyond any hope for this world. A tree may bud overnight, but this is not so much like an early miracle (as Kenner says) as it is "another of your nightmares" (as Estragon says). The reentry of the blinded Pozzo, now reduced to crying "Help!" is the drama's most poignant moment, even as its most dreadful negation is shouted by blind Pozzo in his fury, after Vladimir asks a temporal question once too often: POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.

Pozzo, originally enough of a brute to be a Demiurge himself, is now another wanderer in the darkness of the *kenoma*. Estragon's dreadful question,

as to whether Pozzo may not have been Godot, is answered negatively by Vladimir but with something less than perfect confidence. Despite the boy's later testimony, I suspect that the tragicomedy centers precisely there: In the possible identity of Godot and Pozzo, in the unhappy intimation that the Demiurge is not only the god of this world, the spirit of Schopenhauer's will to live, but the only god that can be uncovered anywhere, even anywhere out of this world.

Unit 12 (a) *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurd Drama

Samuel Beckett's masterpiece *Waiting For Godot* breathes the essence of absurdist philosophy. After the atrocities of the World War II the belief in benevolent Christian God has completely shattered. Therefore, the time was ripe enough to question the horror of the War from a humanist lens. As a consequence to this question finally no reliable answer comes up that could soothe the agonized psyche of the people after the booldbath of the World War II. As a corollary to that the absurd drama appears as a demand of the time when the playwrights in their arts try to redefine the agony and loss of the war in the backdrop of the bewildered human psyche. As a result absurd drama takes its essence from the seminal work of Martin Esslin in 1961 titled *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Esslin's book gives three major ideas related to the concept of absurd:

1. The experience or sensation of the absurd is unforeseen and is sudden and wretched because nothing ordains it. The feeling of the absurd arises out of the most petty, banal everyday circumstances.
2. The experience of the absurd is very deeply personal and it is impossible to communicate. As a result in absurd plays language is a major area of critical discussion. The plays capture the failure of language to convey the
3. Life goes on easily until when the experience of the absurd leads to uneasiness. "Before encountering the absurd, man lives his daily life with aims, a concern for the future or finding justification...." Man has a bondage of principles, values, aims ,prejudices functions and expectations until the experiences the absurd. "But after the absurd, all is disrupted."

The experience of absurdity is not exactly the sense of the irrationality of the outer world. Nor is it the sense of "human nostalgia" alone. In fact, the absurdity comprises

of the link or confrontation between the irrationality of the outer world, the sequence of events surrounding one's life, and the nostalgia, the desire of the human consciousness for clarity of meaning. Albert Camus said, "the absurd is basically a divorcement". It separates the man from the the world around him , and the man, after the awareness of absurdity, perceives the world as a somewhat alien place. The absurd implies the very shock of consciousness "discovery" of the meaninglessness and purposelessness of all human motives, values, and desires. This shock separates the conscious self from the irrational world. Camus considered the man with the conscious discovery of absurdity to be like a body without a soul- "the soul has disappeared from this inert body which no blow can any longer affect. This elementary and definitive side of the adventure is the feeling of the absurd." Being thus alienated from the world the absurd subject does not any more feel involvement with the everyday experiences; and besides, the feeling of absurdity implies a certain replacement of "quanlity" of experiences with "quantity". If we consider all these above mentioned features as essential for absurd plays then if we try to trace all the features in *Waiting for Godot* we will find most of them over there.

First of all, Beckett's play continuously talks about the sensation of unease and creeping horror as all of his characters are placed against the vast backdrop of the meaningless universe. Here ultimately nothing happens. The sense of nothingness echoes a note of emptiness. The entire play talks about vacuity; it is vacuity of human expectations and human faith. The play captures the sense of a bizarre universe where ultimately nothing happens. The meaningless is an all pervasive feeling against which all human potentials have been crippled. There Vladimir and Estragon both are victims of such a situation. Their predicament is worse as they have no choice but to reside in this meaninglessness.

The feeling of absurdity is an inexpressible one as a result to that in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* we can see how minutely Beckett has focused on portraying the sense of failure of language. The verbal language fails to convey properly they sensation of meaningless and existential angst from which each and every character of the absurd fiction is suffering. The language fails to communicate the sensation of bewilderment and depression of the absurd man. Therefore absurd drama takes recourse to the silence and mute gestures to convey the sensations of the loss and atrophy. The language proves to be the insufficient medium for articulating the sense

of loss. In *Waiting for Godot* silence becomes eloquent. It speaks much. It conveys the sense of futility and the unanswerable quality of the bizarre universe where all the characters of the absurd fiction do reside. The unfamiliar alien place of the universe questions remain unanswered. The characters in the play raise questions ; they want their questions to be addressed but finally no answer comes up with a proper solution. The hostility of the universe and the victimhood of all characters who reside here give the sense of awe.

Assignments

1. Critically comment on the significance of the character Godot in the play.
2. Critically evaluate *Waiting for Godot* as an absurd drama.
3. Comment on the characters of Lucky, Pozzo, Vladimir, and Estragon.
4. Critically comment on the aspect of language in the play *Waiting for Godot*.
5. Write a note on the symbolism in the play *Waiting for Godot*.

Suggested Readings

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Block III

UNIT 13

Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party*

13 (a): Objectives

This unit introduces you to the post-second-World-War British dramatist Harold Pinter and his ‘comedy of menace’, *The Birthday Party* (1958). At the end of your study of this unit, you will be able to :

- i) recognize the ways in which Pinter uses a sparse setting, minimal action, significant pauses in dialogue to suggest an unknown menace or violence;
- ii) probe how in Pinter’s play the individual is threatened by unidentified power mechanics;
- iii) interpret Pinter’s play as a specimen of the Absurd Drama.

13 (b): Short Biographical Sketch of Harold Pinter

The son of Jewish tailor, Harold Pinter was born in Hackney, East London on October 10, 1930 and educated at Hackney Downs Grammar School. In 1948 he entered the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). His schooling in dramatic art continued through the Central School of Speech and Drama. His earliest writing was poetry, which he published in various periodicals before the age of twenty. On leaving the drama college, he worked as a professional actor, mainly in repertory companies, under the stage name David Baron. Pinter’s early plays include *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumb Waiter* (1958) and *A Slight Ache* (1959), and are influenced by Samuel Beckett and Kafka in the depiction of individuals who eke out their precarious existence in a strangely incomprehensible world. Pinter’s first major success, however, came with *The Caretaker* (1960), in which a tramp is taken in by two brothers to live in a junk-filled room in their house to work as their caretaker. The play shows the shifting relationships of power between the three, accompanied by varying degrees of

intimidation. Critics began to perceive Pinter as the creator of the ‘comedy of menace’ with a prevailing atmosphere of potential violence. With *The Caretaker*, Pinter developed his characteristic style and theme, and was accepted as a major dramatist of the 20th century. *The Caretaker* was followed by *The Lover* (1962), *The Homecoming* (1965), *Old Times* (1971), *No Man’s Land* (1975), and *A Kind of Alaska* (1982). The last mentioned play was inspired by Dr. Oliver Sacks’ book *Awakenings*. Pinter’s work often focuses on themes of sexual obsession, jealousy, family tensions, and mental breakdown. Pinter continued to write through the sixties, seventies and eighties. In the 1980s his well-known plays were *One for the Road* (1984), and *Mountain Language* (1988). His last notable plays include *Party Time* (1991), *The New World Order* (1991), *Moonlight* (1993), and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996). Pinter worked extensively in television and radio, and wrote the screenplays for L P Hartley’s *The Go-Between* (1969), John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenants Woman* (1982), Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1987), and Ian McEwan’s *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990). His poetry and prose appeared in a collected edition in 1978. He has been the associate director of the National Theatre, London 1973-83, and director of the United British Artists since 1983. Since 1988, Pinter has also been the editor and publisher of the Greville Press, Warwick. Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, 2005 for his *The Birthday Party*. The following selected works of Pinter are indicative of his prolific

13 (c) : Selected works:

The Room, 1957; *The Birthday Party*, 1958; *Pieces of Eight*, 1959; *The Caretaker*, 1959; *The Dumb Walter*, 1960; *A Night Out*, 1960; *The Dwarfs*, 1960; *Night School*, 1961; *The Collection*, 1961; *One To Another*, 1961; *A Slight Ache and Other Plays*, 1961; *The Pumpkin Eaters*, 1963; *The Lover*, 1963; *The Servant*, 1963; *The Pumpkin Eater*, 1964; *The Homecoming*, 1965; *Tea Party*, 1965; *The Quiller Memorandum*, 1966; *The Party and Other Plays*, 1967; *Accident*, 1967; *New Poems*, 1997 (ed.); *Poems*, 1968; *Mac*, 1968; *Landscape*, 1968; *Silence*, 1969; *Night*, 1969; *Old Times*, 1971; *The Go-Between*, 1971; *Monologue*, 1973; *The Proust Screenplay*, 1977; *No Man’s Land*, 1975; *The Last Tycoon*, 1976; *Betrayal*, 1978; *I Know the Place*, 1979; *The Hothouse*, 1980; *Family Voices*, 1981; *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, 1981; *A Kind of Alaska*, 1982; *The French Lieutenant’s Woman and Other Screenplays*, 1982; *Other Places*, 1982; *Victoria Station*, 1982; *The Big One*, 1983; *Players*, 1983 ; *One for the Road*, 1984; *Players*, 1985; *Turtle Diary*, 1985; *100 Poems* by

100 Poets, 1986; (ed. with A. Astbury, G. Godberi) : Mountain Language, 1988; Heat of the Day, 1989; Reunion, 1989; The Comfort of Strangers and Other Screenplays, 1990; The Comfort of Strangers, 1990; Victory, 1990; The Handmaid's Tale, 1990; The Dwarfs, 1990; Complete Works, 1990; Party Time, 1991; Plays, 1991; The Trial, 1991; Ten Early Poems, 1992; Moonlight, 1993; Pinter At Sixty, 1993; 99 Poems in Translation, 1994.

UNIT 14

14 (a): Introduction to His Plays

In 1957, the year he wrote *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, Harold Pinter finished *The Birthday Party*. His first full-length play, *The Birthday Party*, was first performed by Bristol University's drama department in 1957 and produced by Michael Codron and David Hall on 28 April, 1958 at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge. The play, which closed with hostile reviews after one week, dealt in Kafkaesque manner with an apparently ordinary man who is threatened by strangers for an unknown reason. He tries to escape from their clutch but is hunted down. Although most reviewers were hostile, Pinter produced in rapid succession the body of work which made him the master of 'the comedy of menace'. "I find critics on the whole a pretty unnecessary bunch of people", Pinter said decades later in an interview. "We don't need critics to tell the audiences what to think."

However, the respected critic Harold Hobson recognized a significant voice in *The Birthday Party*, observing that its author 'possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London.'

Pinter's plays are ambivalent in their plots, presentation of characters, and endings, but they are works of undeniable power and originality. They typically begin with a pair of characters whose stereotyped relations and role-playing are disrupted by the entrance of a stranger; the audience sees the psychic stability of the couple break down as their fears, envy, aversion, sexual preoccupation, and loneliness emerge from beneath a facade of bizarre yet commonplace conversations. In *The Caretaker*, for instance, a wheedling, garrulous old tramp comes to live with two neurotic brothers, one of whom underwent electro-shock therapy as a mental patient. The tramp's attempts to establish himself in the household upset the precarious balance of the brothers' lives, and they end up evicting him. *The Homecoming* focuses on the return to his London home of a university professor who brings his wife to meet his brothers and father. The woman's presence exposes a tangle of range and confused

sexuality in this all-male household. But in the end she decides to stay with the father and his two sons after having accepted their sexual overtures without protest from her detached husband. Dialogue is of central importance in Pinter's plays and is perhaps the key to his originality.

His characters' colloquial speech consists of disjointed and oddly ambivalent conversations which are punctuated by resonant silences. The characters' speeches, hesitations, and pauses reveal not only their own alienation and the difficulties they suffer in communicating with one another but also multiple layers of meaning forming a subtext beneath the most innocuous statements.

In addition to works for the stage, Pinter wrote radio and television dramas and a number of successful screenplays. Among the latter are those for three films directed by Joseph Losey, *The Servant* (1963), *Accident* (1967), and *The Go-Between* (1971), as well as ones for *The Last Tycoon* (1974), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), and the screen version of Pinter's play *Betrayal* (1982).

Harold Pinter grew up during one of the most devastating periods of British history. Born in 1930, he was evacuated twice during the Second World War. He was in London's East End through the most ruthless bombing campaigns of the Blitz. "The condition of being bombed has never left me," Pinter later said. As a teenager he saw streets mauled by bombs, watched his backyard garden go up in flames, and suffered endless nights in complete darkness. "The blackout...left a sharp memory," Pinter recalled to his biographer, Michael Billington. "You lived in a world in which in winter after five o'clock it was totally black...with chinks of light flashing on the horizon...It was also a world that was highly sexual...there was a sexual desperation about the place. People really felt their lives could end tomorrow." The memory of those pitch-black nights would resurface years later in *The Birthday Party*, a play in which a game of blind man's buff turns into a disorienting, violent, sexually frenzied nightmare. A play of blindness and blackouts, *The Birthday Party* keeps its characters and its audience in the dark. Did Stanley defect from an organization? Did he abscond from an asylum? Does he know Goldberg and McCann? Are these outsiders figments of Stanley's imagination? Are they personifications, as some critics have suggested, of the Judeo-Christian tradition come to reintegrate a renegade into polite society? Where have they come from? Where are they going? Pinter denied Peter Wood's request for clarification, and answered his questions by posing a more frightening one of his own: "Couldn't we all find ourselves in Stanley's

position at any given moment?” Stanley gives voice to the horror of the unknown, the existential angst of a modern man.

The war and its ravages sharpened Pinter’s political awareness. In October 1948, in the middle of the Berlin Airlift, he was called into National Service. Pinter immediately reacted as a conscientious objector. “I was aware of the suffering and of the horror of war,” he reminisces, “and by no means was I going to subscribe to keeping it going.” He was summoned before two military tribunals and had to go through two civil trials. The degrading experiences gave him a distaste for governmental bureaucracy. An outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and the Middle East, Pinter withstood pressure to conform to the militant-bureaucratic browbeat. At the end of *The Birthday Party*, as Goldberg and McCann drag Stanley away, Petey tells him, “Stan, don’t let them tell you what to do!” In a 1988 interview with Mel Gussow, Pinter reflected, “All Petey says is one of the most important lines I’ve ever written...I’ve lived that line all my damn life.”

Like a few other Pinter plays, *The Birthday Party* was inspired by the dramatist’s personal experience. In 1954, he stayed at a filthy boarding house while on tour as an actor in the seaside town of Eastbourne. In the digs he met an overbearing landlady and her solitary lodger – the prototypes for Meg and Stanley. “I said to the man one day, ‘What are you doing here?’ ” remember Pinter. “And he said, ‘Oh well I used to be...I’m a pianist. I used to play in the concert-party here and I gave that up’.....And when I asked why he stayed, he said, ‘There’s no where else to go.’

That remark stayed with me and, three years later, the image was still there and.....this idea came to me about two men coming down to get him.” Hemingway’s short story, *The Killers* gave Pinter models for his two hit men. Like many of his early works, the play is steeped in ambiguity and mystery. Before the rehearsals for the 1958 London premiere began, the director Peter Wood asked the twenty-seven-year-old playwright for clarification. “We agreed,” Pinter responded, “the hierarchy, the Establishment, the arbiters, the socio-religious monster arrive to effect alteration and censure upon a member of the club who has discarded responsibility...towards himself and others.” But the playwright refused to make any kind of moral judgments about his characters or to write an explanatory note that would specify the menace that pervades the play. The uncertainty and doubt that Pinter sustains throughout *The Birthday Party* confused London’s critics in 1958. Harold Hobson was one of the few who recognized and praised Pinter’s use of ambiguity as a dramatic device. “The fact that no one

can say precisely what it is about,” Hobson wrote, “or give the address from which the intruding Goldberg and McCann come, or say precisely why it is that Stanley is so frightened by them is, of course, one of its greatest merits. It is exactly in this vagueness that its spine-chilling quality lies.”

Critics began to perceive Pinter as the creator of the absurd situations with a prevailing atmosphere of unrealized, potential violence. In *The Caretaker*, Pinter developed his characteristic style - mundane and yet shocking dialogue; long, scripted pauses, known as the ‘Pinter Pause’ and widely used in contemporary theatre; and a blend of naturalism and the surreal. *The Caretaker* became a theatrical success in 1960 establishing his fame as a major dramatist. The opening performance of *The Homecoming* in London in 1965 elicited Penelope Gilliatt’s praise that Pinter was ‘a man in total command of his talent.’ The theatrical staple of Pinter-play is the cluster of conventions and components that characterize the ‘well-made repertory’ play of the 1950s. The essentials of such plays are : characters in modern work-a-day dress; a typical domestic interior in small-town provincial England; plain and bland speech with ironic and suggestive understatements and pauses; familiar domestic relationships and all that owes to the naturalist tradition in drama since Henrik Ibsen. Pinter spoke of his options:

Whenever I write for the stage I merely see the stage I’ve been used to...

I always think of the normal picture-frame which I used as an actor.

He spent a few years of acting in repertory theatre before beginning to write for the stage.

14 (b): The Setting of the Play

Many of Pinter’s plays are about a room - and what happens outside is unknown and dangerous. The outer world is ready to intrude into the room that stands for the refuge of the individual from the danger of the outside in its warmth, comfort, companionship or togetherness forming the basis of an individual’s identity.

Act One of *The Birthday Party* opens with the stage direction - 'The living room of a house in a seaside town.' As the curtain goes up, the two house-keepers / hosts appear talking between them, with pauses and short questions followed by silence and affirmations :

Meg. Is that you, Petey?

Pause.

Petey, is that you?

Pause.

Petey?

Petey. What?

Meg. Is that you?

Petey. Yes, It's me.

It is typical of Pinter's opening, with words drooling out or bubbling forth in the casual comedy of everyday. These are words between two people in a room - words across which two people share their intimacies, creating a context for the unfolding drama of the strangers' intrusion into their private space. Pinter himself spoke of this form as the most pure for the theatre. The opening sequences of all his early plays begin with a comic exchange between two characters. In *The Room*, Rose speaks for five pages without interruption about the comfort and joy of her home of her silent husband. *The Birthday Party* also begins with a comic, domestic situation. The simplicity of Meg's language reveals a generally sympathetic character, an affectionate, old innkeeper.

For Pinter, one room, a few characters, a door, and the fear of what will come through the door are all that is necessary for a good play. His own observation was:

Two people in a room - I am dealing a great deal of the time with this image of two people in a room. The curtain goes up on the stage, and I see it as a very potent question : What is going to happen to those two people in the room? Is someone going to open the door and come in?

The room has a door that suggests it may lead up to the intrusion of a stranger or of strange outside forces into shared privacy of characters. Dramatic interest thickens with the intrusion,

first apprehended and then invariably materialized in the course of the play. Actions in *The Birthday Party*,

The Caretaker and *The Homecoming* share a common *motif*: the invasion of a private space by strangers. Even his later plays such as *Old Times* and *No Man's Land* do not eschew the *motif* of threatened privacy. The shrinkage of private space by professional obligations or large external forces links Pinter's play to the modernist theme of individual's anonymity the over-riding socio-economic-political systems. Intrusion into an individual's private life also signals the loneliness of the individual. Pinter's major plays are, indeed, usually set in a single room, whose occupants are threatened by forces or people whose precise intentions neither the characters nor the audience can define.

UNIT 15

15 (a): Characterization

Characterization in Pinter's play does not conform to conventional moral standards and psychological definitions. This makes it difficult to define or pinpoint his characters as good or bad, flat or round characters. Nor is it relevant for his characters to be socially identified or located. The paramount question of personal insecurity, of threatened privacy puts up a veil of mystery around his characters. They take to silence, evasion, linguistic games and artifices to protect themselves.

They do all this wishing to be 'not known', and to be holed up in protective isolation. So the conventional character study of individual identity is problematic in Pinter's play. His individual character achieves a universal dimension as a nameless entity, and then is lost in an overbearing system, in the post-war actualities of life and its defacement. Significantly, Pinter's *dramatis personae* bear only the age and sex of the characters, and nothing more than their names that can be anybody's. The ongoing drama itself unfolds how the characters relate to each other or one another in the stress of their threatened personal life. Whatever little they relate, they do it within the family as a unit fraught with the looming possibility of its disintegration by the large, unknown (so far the stage allows for inference) forces of the society. Caught in this predicament, the characters present themselves as indefinable 'monads' in a hierarchy of power without ever being individuals in the real sense of term.

In *The Birthday Party* through Stanley the theme of the 'individual' being bullied and overshadowed by a superior external force, whether of a secret political / religious organization or of an asylum, is explored. It is explored through the clash between Stanley's awed silence, and the bluster of the overweening system represented by Goldberg and McCann. If Stanley is metaphorically related to the motif of threatened privacy, Goldberg and McCann represent the voice and power of the hierarchy poised to abrogate the individual. Between them, Meg and Petey make the base of the family. They create an ambience of parent-child relationship in the boarding house, although cannot hold back Stanley from being swamped into the large exploitative system. As characters, Meg and Petey are the metaphors of family life which can no longer sustain its components, that is, the individuals. Goldberg and McCann are personifications of the dark, intrusive forces that oppress and dislocate the family, which is structured between Stanley the boarder behaving the child and Meg and Petey, the old couple behaving the parents to him, thus providing a private space of family affection in their boarding house. boarding house, although cannot hold back Stanley from being swamped into the large exploitative system. As characters, Meg and Petey are the metaphors of family life which can no longer sustain its components, that is, the individuals. Goldberg and McCann are personifications of the dark, intrusive forces that oppress and dislocate the family, which is structured between Stanley the boarder behaving the child and Meg and Petey, the old couple behaving the parents to him, thus providing a private space of family affection in their boarding house.

15 (b): Language

Pinter employs in *The Birthday Party* an elliptical style which often leaves the audience guessing about the motivations, thoughts and feelings of his characters. It is an absurdist family drama in which much of what goes on is between the lines and in the audience's own imagination.

Pinter departs from the conventional theatrical dialogue and speech pattern, forfeiting the audience's

expectation that characters are syntactically articulate and finished in their conversation. Mr. Kidd in

The Room says about Riley, 'he won't indulge in any conversation.' The reticence of Riley is shared

more or less by other characters of Pinter. They speak less to mean more about their crises and

anxieties. Dialogue is of central importance in Pinter's plays and is perhaps the key to his originality.

His characters' colloquial speech consists of disjointed and oddly ambivalent conversations, punctuated by resonant silences. The characters' speech, hesitations, and pauses reveal not only their own alienation but also several under-layers of meaning. The style that Pinter adopts for his stage is not artificial or affected, either. A little stylized, it gains 'a tape-recorder accuracy' in the exactitude of barbed articulation, significant pauses, suggestive silence, ejaculative catches, elliptical statements and understatements. At points, long discourses/speeches cut in, to accentuate the significance of silence, or to break the monotony of too-frequent pauses. Self-consciously, Pinter invents his own language for the stage. His remark about the kind of theatrical language close to everyday speech idiom and least infected with the wordiness of English stage, say the Shavian drama, is apposite here:

One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.....I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming.

"Pinter's dialogue is as tightly - perhaps more tightly - controlled than verse," Martin Esslin writes in *The People Wound* (1970).

Every syllable, every inflection, the succession of long and short sounds, words and sentences, is calculated to nicety. And precisely the repetitiousness, the discontinuity, the circularity of ordinary vernacular speech are here used as formal elements with which

the poet can compose his linguistic ballet.

Pinter's plays are noted for their use of silence to increase tension, understatement, and cryptic small talk. Equally recognizable are exposure the 'Pinteresque' themes - nameless menace, erotic fantasy, obsession jealousy, family hatred and mental disturbance in terms of wordless language. At points, Pinter's language takes on the significance of music in its suggestiveness and resonance.

I don't know how music can influence writing, but it has been very important for me, both jazz and classical music. I feel a sense of music continually in writing, which is a different matter from having been influenced by it. (Harold Pinter in *Playwrights at Work*, ed. by George Plimpton, 2000).

15 (c): What *The Birthday Party* is About and What Pinter Says About It

The Birthday Party revolves around the lodger Stanley who has been at the boarding house for a year and appears to be in some kind of danger. The danger is not specified, only suggested by the surprise appearance of two menacing men, Goldberg and his partner McCann.

The Birthday Party is one of the great black comedies of the twentieth century. It is a puzzling comedy in which Pinter explores the menace of the unknown with the breakdown of communication, cryptic small talk and use of pauses. A classic of the modern theatre, *The Birthday Party* promises to shock, amuse and leave the audience puzzled about the final effects. The action is set in a dilapidated boardinghouse owned by Petey Boles and his wife, Meg. Stanley Weber is a boarder who has been in hiding for the past year. Stanley Webber, the pianist, is the only lodger in Meg and Petey Boles' seaside boarding house. One morning, while Meg and Stanley are bantering over breakfast, Meg mentions that two visitors are coming to stay for the night. Stanley immediately grows apprehensive, sensing imminent danger. His fears are confirmed when Goldberg and McCann arrive.

Meg announces that it is Stanley's birthday, and even though Stanley insists it is not, Goldberg demands a celebration. An affair ensues between Lulu, the girl next door and Goldberg, making for an unusual evening of humour, mystery and menace. After a few

glasses of drinks and a game of blindman's buff, Stanley's birthday party turns into a nightmare. Goldberg and McCann drag Stanley off to an upstairs room, and by morning he is rendered mute. Pinter refuses to provide rational justification for the actions of Goldberg and McCann, but offers existential glimpses of the bizarre or terrible moments in people's lives, warped by the terrorizing forces of politics religion state. Pinter himself provides a clue to the mechanics of power and menace embedded in the types of Goldberg and his henchman, McCann.

believe that there are extremely powerful people in apartments in capital cities in all countries who are actually controlling events that are happening on the street in a number of very subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways. But they don't really bother to talk about it, because they know it's happening and they know they have power. (Harold Pinter in an interview with Mireia Aragay and Ramon Simo from the **Universitat de Barcelona** in 1996.)

All through the play there is a looming shadow of the imperilled individual who has opted out of an unnamed mammoth system. The real theme of the play is this nameless danger or a painfully understated sense of it. Pinter conjures, by the principle of the unsaid, an apprehension of a nameless menace haunting the individual and his human values:

To join an organization whose main purpose is mass-murder, whose conception of the true human values is absolutely nil, speeding on the utter degradation of a prematurely fatigued man, and whose result and indeed ambition is to destory the world's very, very precious life, is completely beyond my human understanding and moral conception. (From Harold Pinter's *Conscientious Objector Speech*, written when he was nineteen.)

Pinter recognizes the universality of his theme which is endemic to the existential impulse of modern living:

I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance. If you press me for a definition, I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism. (Pinter in "Writing for Myself.")

About the theatrical situation of his play, Pinter remarks:

*Given a man in a room, he will sooner or later receive a visitor.....There is no guarantee, however, that he will possess a visiting card, with detailed information as to his last place of residence, last job, next job, number of dependents, etc. Nor, for the comfort of all, an identity card, nor a label on his chest. The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate. A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression. (Pinter in his programme note for *The Caretaker*.)*

Another comment of Pinter is the apposite :

*I knew perfectly well that *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*, in my understanding then, were to do with states of affairs which could certainly be termed political, without any questions.And Goldberg and McCann, I knew who they were and what they were up to. (Interview with Mel Gussow in 1993.)*

Commenting on Stanley's tormentors, Pinter makes more pertinent comments, time and again:

*Goldberg and McCann? Dying, rotting, scabrous, the decayed spiders, the flower of our society. They know their way around. Our mentors. Our ancestry. (Pinter in a letter to Peter Wood, the director of the London premiere production of *The Birthday Party*). I suppose that Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* are regarded as an evil pair. But I'm very fond of them. (Interview with Mel Gussow in 1971). I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to*

ourselves. Communication is too alarming. (Harold Pinter at the National Student Drama Festival, Bristol, 1962.)

Pinter evaluates the technique by which he wrings the suspense and possibility of drama out of an atmosphere charged with meaningful silence and menace :

I start off with people, who come into a particular situation. I certainly don't write from any kind of abstract idea. And I wouldn't know a symbol if I saw one.I take a chance on the audience. (Ibid.)

Indeed, *The Birthday Party* experiments boldly with language, form and theatricality. The experiment has made it a seminal drama of the twentieth century. Pinter's originality as a playwright is best illustrated by his unexpected blend of brutality and comedy. Humour entices the audience into Pinter's world. But his humour is deceptive. Much of Stanley's dialogue gives the impression of deception. The arrival of Goldberg and McCann heightens the menace. They too seem to be operating within a web of deception. Goldberg gives us several alternate first names, which confuse even his partner. Despite a private conversation between the pair, the only information we ever glean is that they are here to do a "job". We begin to understand the nature of the job only when they encounter Stanley. Goldberg and McCann's interrogation of Stanley exemplifies the blend of comedy and violence until the latter shatters the former. Stanley is the victim of verbal abuse that seeks to intimidate and subjugate. Through the tongue-lashing Goldberg and McCann strip him of his individuality and control him. The torture reaches the peaks when the questions the pair ask are the most absurd:

Goldberg : Why did the chicken cross the road?

Stanley : He wanted. ...

McCann : He doesn't know. He doesn't know which came first!

Goldberg : Which came first?

McCann : Chicken? Egg? Which came first?

Goldberg and McCann : Which came first? Which came first? Which came first?

Stanley screams.

Goldberg and McCann go threatening Stanley but the source of his undoing lies in the power of language, not in physical violence. Goldberg and McCann's verbal assault is fashioned around the degradation of meaning which in turn, defeats Stanley. The loss of self-possession is hardly a comic matter, yet Pinter's approach is not altogether serious. Instead, he undercuts the surface comedy with a brutality of language. Pinter enfolds within the layers of silence,

ambiguity and understatement the disparate emotions in an effort to put the audience into discomfort. The final effect of the Pinter play is an awareness of unrealized danger to our survival as individuals centred in the family.

UNIT 16

16 (a): The Menace of the Unknown: *The Birthday Party* as ‘Comedy of Menace’ and a Specimen of ‘Absurd Drama’

In 1958 Irving Wardle applied the term ‘comedy of menace’ to *The Birthday Party*, a term coined by David Campton in 1957 as a terminological definition of his one-act plays collectively called *The Lunatic View*. The phrase ‘comedy of menace’, often applied to his early plays such as *The Birthday Party*, *The Room* and *A Slight Ache* suggests that although these plays are **funny**, they are also frightening or menacing in a vague and indefinable way. Even as they make us laugh, the audience is left uncomfortable, vaguely guessing about the motivations and dramatic consequences of the actions on stage. Rankling at the back of their mind is, however, a creeping awareness of the protagonist’s insecurity vis-à-vis the unknown forces of society and perhaps politics, too. Pinter’s own comment is:

more often than not the speech only seems to be funny-the man in question is actually fighting a battle for his life.

The atmosphere of menace is created by sudden, unexpected drop from a comic surface to an uncanny and underlying seriousness. By this technique the audience is made aware that the comedy is only a surface layer. The sudden outbreaks of violence (usually verbal) in the play confirm this and leave the audience unsure of what will come next. Just as Stanley (or Meg) is the main vehicle for comedy in the play, so is he the main vehicle for the presentation of fear. The room or house represents only a fragile sense of security from the outside world. The menace in the form of Goldberg and McCann represents the intrusion of a hostile outside force. The general setting of the play is naturalistic and mundane. However, one of Pinter’s greatest skills is his ability to make an apparently normal and trivial object, like a toy drum, appear strange and threatening. Pinter can invoke an atmosphere of menace from ordinary everyday objects and events, and one way in which this is done is by combining two apparently opposed moods, such as terror and amusement. Much of *The Birthday Party* is both frightening and funny. Stanley is destroyed by a torrent of words and blusters from Goldberg. Such serious accusations as “*He’s killed his wife*” are pressed against trivial and

ludicrous one like “*Why do you pick your nose?*” This creates the simultaneous effect of bathos and comedy.

The “sitting down” sequence in which the two hit men grill Stanley into awed silence and submission is equally funny but threatening. Stanley’s cheating in the game is comical and terrifying, because the audience is aware that much more is at stake than what appears on the surface. The subtext of silence as understood by the audience provides one source of menace. It is the audience’s awareness that trivial actions often conceal thoughts and events of much larger significance. The audience may even feel a sense of guilt at their own laughter - as if forced into it against their will.

Another technique that Pinter uses to create an atmosphere of menace is to *cast doubt* on almost everything in the play. One method of doing this is to have a character make a clear and definite statement and then have him flatly deny it later on. The nature of reality here is confused

- the audience no longer know what is or is not true, and out of this comes an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty. Pinter does not give any background information about the characters in *The Birthday Party*. This means the characters are not fixed to any particular place or time. Stanley does not belong to anyone or anywhere, he has no family and is therefore a ‘fair game’. Questions about the identities of the characters remain unanswered. Are Goldberg and McCann emissaries of some secret organization that Stanley has betrayed? Or are they male nurses sent out to bring him back to an asylum from which he has escaped? Or are they agents from another world? The questions are never answered.

Meg is grotesque and funny. She dances and looks stupid in her party frock. Petey is tongue-tied

and silent, his emotions and thoughts remain unexpressed. The terror that grips Stanley cuts into

their consciousness. The menace of the unknown affects the old couple in as much as it destroys

their role-playing as indulgent parents to the child Stanley in the carefully created ambience of home and family. In all this Pinter effectively blends the comic overtones and the latent brutality of his language. Comedy and menace coalesce also at the level of dramatic situation.

Pinter says:

Everything is funny until the horror of the human situation rises to the surface! Life is funny because it is based on illusions and self-deceptions, like Stanley’s dream of a

world tour as a pianist, because it is built out of pretence. In our present-day world, everything is uncertain, there is no fixed point, we are surrounded by the unknown. This unknown occurs in my plays. There is a kind of horror about and I think that this horror and absurdity (comedy) go together.

The realism that Pinter presents in *The Birthday Party* is different from that in John Osborne's

'kitchen sink' drama. Osborne creates an identity for the working class or lower middle class youth in his plays. He confines his setting to a working class drawing room or a middleclass flat as he does in *Look Back in Anger*. In line with the Theatre of the Absurd, a term coined by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name, Pinter goes beyond domestic-social realism to portray the essential absurdity of human existence. Esslin cites Ionesco to explain the absurdity of man's life as it has no purpose to live:

Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.

The Theatre of the Absurd presents, in terms of stage language, imagery and the destiny of the characters, the theme of the irrational impersonal forces that govern man's life in a purposeless

universe. It is a heightened realism or rather naturalism ahead of social realism. Pinter's characters are placed and lost in an absurd situation. What happens to them, happens without purpose and without any answer to 'why and to what end' that can be made out of the play. Therefore, they

are insecure. And from this haunting sense of insecurity arises the comedy of menace. In such a

comedy, stage décor and materials can be sparse. What is needed is to project the characters against

a pervading sense of their insecurity and of the fragility of their identities. For the stage-setting all

that is required, is a room with a door. Perhaps the most menacing presence in this simple setting

is that of the door. It is a door that at one point of time would let in the invading forces of the unknown outside - the large world of mammoth powers, of politics or of any social institution. The room symbolizes security and shelter. Rose in *The Room* says, it is a place 'where you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance, you can come home, you're all

right.' In Pinter's play the room is constantly under the imminent danger of being opened to the menace of the unknown intruding.

The presence of the powerful, dehumanizing external menace is Kafkaesque, as in *The Trial*, but Pinter is somewhat different from Kafka. The agents of the danger rather the danger itself appear more sinister on the stage of Pinter. In *The Birthday Party* the fear of the intruding outsiders comes true with Goldberg and McCann penetrating the security of the room and reaching for their prey,

Stanley. In the first as Stanley comes down to breakfast and Meg strikes a playful conversation with the teasing undertones of a mistress, the shadow of the unknown visitors seems to crouch and creep into the fragile warmth of home in the boarding-house. Meg calls it 'a very good boarding house for visitors'. With a frightened question 'Visitors' Stanley seeks to console himself that it has one visitor only.

Meg : How many?

Stanley : One.

Meg : Who?

Stanley : Me! I'm your visitor.

Meg : You're a liar. This house is on the list.

'.....on the list' at once prepares for what is to follow : the intrusion of visitors. Later, Meg's 'I'm expecting them' and 'Two gentlemen...if they could come and stay for a couple of nights'

confirm the apprehension. Stanley's 'What?' expresses a shocked reaction that, from this moment onwards, will build up an atmosphere of fear and suspense. Stanley's memory of piano-playing is symptomatic of withdrawal and recoil from the fearful outside. In such a turn of situation, simple objects take on surrealistic and symbolic significances. Stanley refers to the 'van' in which they have come and the wheelbarrow they have got in that van. The 'van' in which they have come and the wheelbarrow they have got in that van. The 'van' and the 'wheelbarrow' represent a hearse and a coffin. They may further symbolize the destruction of Stanley's selfhood. It is the vagueness and unknowability of the two gentlemen's purpose, where they have come from and where they will take Stanley, which creates the fear-haunted suspense. Stanley's 'What two gentlemen?' and 'Who are they?' remain unanswered. What stand out from this aura of mystery and fear are the looming facts

that they have come and they will hunt Stanley out of his home in the boarding house - facts that send ripples of the fear of uncertainty across the stage and the audience.

Pinter's play does not evolve along a linear sequence between the brackets of a 'beginning' and a 'closure'. It has a sense of void, an out-of-space quality in its opening and closing in the middle of a story. This adds to the menace of the unknown. Within its unenclosed form and with a paucity of dramatic actions and speech, *The Birthday Party* explores no unitary theme. Goldberg and McCann, a Jew and an Irishman, arrive at the boarding house. Disguised as businessmen, they appear from almost nowhere. Acting as inquisitors they reduce Stanley to dumbness and finally abduct him away on the pretext of taking him to Monty. They act out their assignment through Stanley's birthday celebration and the game of blind man's buff. This movement from the comic to the non-comical subverts the surface comic appeals and makes for more serious issues in the subtext.

One such issue that crops up alongside the menace of the door and outsiders is that of 'dominance'. In his short story *The Examination* Pinter presents the theme of dominance by verbal power. The narrator is overpowered by Kullu's words and has to forego his room which was once Kullu's room. It may be interpreted as *the theme of dominance by spatial dislocation with the power of words*. In *The Birthday Party* the articulate Goldberg and his introvert, obedient partner McCann dominate the situation by forcing a birthday party for their victim. Strangely, everybody except Stanley asserts that it is his birthday. In the given situation Stanley's birthday celebration takes on an ironic ambivalence or double meaning. It is not only the anniversary day of his birth, but a day of his new birth. He is divested of his individual identity and given a new birth by Goldberg and McCann. Comedy and menace mingle here mischievously. The birthday celebration brings in a happy mood. Meg and Lulu are carried away by this mood and fail to notice the change that has come over Stanley. Stanley's attempt to throttle Meg at the end of the second act, while the game of blind man's buff is in full swing, is an automatic defence reaction of the victim. In Stanley's case it is refracted on to Meg. Pinter's description of Stanley's attempt to throttle Meg is charged with an ominous ambiguity:

Stanley rises. He begins to move towards Meg, dragging the drum on his foot. He reaches her and stops. His hands move towards her and they reach her throat. He begins to strangle her. McCann and Goldberg rush forward and throw him off.

Pinter presents other themes like the conflict between individual creativity and social demand.

Stanley wanted to be a pianist but is given a drum to beat. The drum is symbolic as it silences the voice or music of the pianist. It symbolizes the subversion of the individual by an overmastering societal force.

16 (b): Significance of the Room and Stanley's Life in it

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is set in a boarding house, and as such draws attention to the discourse of host and guest, server and served, visitor and resident, within the perspective

of a room. Pinter explores how the serving bonds between the two are constructed, and often subverted. Frequently, the most convenient route for finding a character's place in the hierarchy is to closely examine the way he/she places himself / herself in the daily chores. The chores of eating and drinking in particular are offered by Pinter in varied forms throughout the play as significant windows in this respect.

Stanley, the central character of *The Birthday Party* is characterized as a broken man who seemingly has no option left for him to leave the refuge that he took by choice. At first a guest in

the house, he has become a fixture there, and consequently loses his agency in the relationship

between *those who serve* and *those who are served*. The initial action of the play sets up an ambiguity for the audience about what role Stanley assumes and plays in Meg and Petey's home. This ambiguity is first hinted at in Meg's conversation with Petey about the announcement of a child's birth in the newspaper, which she ends with the line "I'd much rather have a little a little boy". In retrospect, this comment is construed as a prelude to the way the presumably childless Meg dotes on Stanley.

Taken with the dialogue and actions that follow, it is to assume that Stanley is her son. In the lines that follow, Stanley continues to be characterized more as an obstinate child who refuses to get up in the morning than as a paying customer. The image of Meg standing over Stanley as he lies in his bed, refusing to leave until she is satisfied that he has finished all of his tea undercuts the information that the couple are running a business. "Stan! Stanny! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down ... I'm going to count three!" is Pinter's

subsequent and overt restatement that the relationship between Meg and Stanley is not one of hostess and boarder but of child and parent. This underlying motif of mother-child relationship is centred at and symbolized by the setting of the boarding-house room throughout the play.

If we believe Stanley's word (which the unsanitary condition of the kitchen in the film production of 1968 supports), Meg serves spoiled milk with cornflakes as the 'first course' of breakfast, and once again expects it to be eaten before Stanley can set about his morning routine.

It is not until Stanley attempts to assert his position as Meg's customer by threatening to have his

breakfast at a competing establishment ("one of those smart hotels on the front") that he is taken

for a guest/boarder in spite of Meg's play at being the overbearing mother. Despite Stanley's posturing and threats about taking his lodging elsewhere, he remains at the boarding house. The way he is served remains fundamentally unchanged and the audience begins to realize the implications of his being caged. The room as the locale of actions in the play serves to focus on and symbolize Stanley's engagement within a fragile motherly protection.

Petey's breakfast experience is quite different from that of Stanley and is used as a contrast.

When Petey returns home from work, Meg is ready with a plate of cornflakes for him to eat as he

reads his newspaper. She looks to him as the patriarch of the house and makes her best effort to

have Petey tell her about his workday and the current events from the paper that she would find

interesting. The milk poured on his cornflakes is the same (sour) milk that Stanley will later use, but Petey is unflustered and eats his breakfast. The difference between the two lies in their choice ; Petey chooses to come home for breakfast, and chooses to eat the plate of questionable cornflakes. He maintains his agency by coming and going as his own priorities dictate, which supersedes other concerns. He is not trapped like Stanley. Petey has created a niche for himself within the household in which he can remain aloof and individuated. In a sense he is ultimately responsible for the boarding house, but he allows Meg to act as his agent and relies on her in matters of management.

In the first act of the play, Meg serves as the overbearing hostess for any resident of the

house. She is free, within certain boundaries, to adopt and discard roles for herself as suits her. Even Petey remains subject to her decisions on matters of cuisine and day-to-day management of the boarding house. The first half of Act I illustrates this dynamic role of Meg. Meg is responsible for preparing breakfast for Petey and Stanley every morning and the menu is of her own choice. The first item on her house-keeping agenda, is to bring tea to Stanley in his room; Meg “always take[s] him up his cup of tea”. At least on this particular day (as per Meg and Petey’s discussion of Stanley’s sleeping habits) she brings Stanley his tea — not at a time when he requests it, but rather at a movement which she deems appropriate. Meg also chooses the time at which Stanley eats his breakfast. Petey’s comments about the fried bread lead us to believe that breakfast is usually composed of the same dishes. (Pinter’s film production of *The Birthday Party* takes this one step further by implying not only that the menu is recycled from one day to the next, but sometimes the food itself may be reused, as is the case with the tea.)

Meg delights in playing the boarding house matron; for both men she repeats the ruse of “I’ll bet you don’t know what it is” before serving the fried bread and insists on serving their food through the hatch connecting the dining room to the kitchen even though there are only two other people eating breakfast. Meg takes advantage of meal-times to change her roles between *caretaker of the business*, in which she is a service provider for guests like Stanley, and his *mother figure*, which shifts her to a position of authority. Refusing to eat his cornflakes is an affront to Meg’s power in this situation. Since Stanley (unlike Petey) is ultimately constrained within her walls, his act of protest carries no weight. So Meg either bears with or ignores it without any repercussion.

Pinter allows Meg one more role to act out on occasion, that of the belle of the house; the proprietress. In this relationship Stanley exerts his power to rebuff her clumsy advances, but as this is only a posture she takes when she chooses, her freedom to dominate the relationship remains intact. Stanley’s second attempt to assert his agency as the served comes after Petey leaves and Stanley picks up the paper that Petey has left behind. Sitting at the table, reading the paper, the boarder resembles Petey, but unlike Petey, Stanley is not being catered to as he reads. Meg provides Stanley with tea that he complains is cold and like gravy, and when he notices that she has taken it back to the kitchen, Stanley rails “Who gave you the right to take away my tea?” Stanley realizes that he is being denied his expected rights as tenant, but cannot reclaim the rights. As he is recollects his mysterious past and the force that has robbed him of his identity, he is forced to face the fact that he is in a position where he has little control over his life. It is during his speech about the concert that the first notes of menace

enter *The Birthday Party*. When Meg mentions that two gentlemen will be staying at the house, Stanley's fear of losing his self-identity to a larger, outside force, becomes palpable. "Who gave you the right to take away my tea?" implies more than his present lack of agency; it is a sequence where he realises how Meg has forced him (and probably not for the first time) to see the pattern of lost agency in his life. This scene ends when Meg leaves to run errands; she goes for shopping in order to prepare for the new guests. This only reinforces the contrast between what is considered service for Stanley and what is necessary for the *other* guests.

The first act establishes a context for the reader to understand the breakdown of expected roles within the boarding house. Pinter uses the second act to work through the subversion of another set of institutionalized relationships between people : in a birthday party. The second act

shows the way power relationships within the boarding house can be shifted and subverted when

a character like Goldberg intrudes into the scene.

From his first appearance on stage, **Goldberg** is a force entirely contrary to Stanley. Goldberg

moves about with ease in the outside world, boldly asserts his authority even where it is not justified. When Goldberg suggests to Meg that it would be proper for her to hold a birthday party for Stanley, it sounds to Meg not as a command from an unknown power structure. With no attention to his status as a stranger, Goldberg quickly assumes the position of host for the party, offering further suggestions on who should attend and what should be served. Goldberg confidently leads McCann with the demeanour of a master patiently instructing him and indulging his apprenticeship. Stanley receives Goldberg as the embodiment of all that he cannot control in dealing with the, world, an effect which Goldberg carefully and effectively enhances through each scene. The way each character reacts to this new, overpowering presence in the house highlights their varied ways of responding to power relationships.

Meg, whose position of authority Goldberg has clearly usurped, accepts the situation gracefully and uncomplainingly falls back on **two of her other roles** for relating with Stanley and the household in general : **the mother figure and the belle**. The longer Goldberg remains in the house, the less sway Meg-as-mother has over him. Until the end of Act II, Meg acts the part of the belle without respite. The impact of this is dramatic; rather than insisting on control over Stanley's schedule, Meg lets her visitors handle when he will be expected to attend his birthday party. Instead

of serving Stanley and her other guests, Meg, acting the belle, allows herself to be ‘the served’ in

the evening and even delights in it. When Goldberg ceremonially offers her the floor — an important

responsibility — Meg presents herself as a bashful **belle** dominated by Goldberg. Meg is able to

survive this shift in authority because she locates a different niche to be comfortable with.

Stanley is far less prepared to cope with Goldberg’s presence. In the light of his past experiences and faced with Meg’s inability to preserve her authority within moments of Goldberg’s arrival, Stanley sees Goldberg as a dark, menacing power that intrudes into his engaged life under the protective mother-figure of Meg. Stanley is terrified of a man who not only his own force of personality, but seems to have McCann, Meg, and increasingly Lulu in his sway. Though the audience takes the side of Stanley, there is little hope that he will be able to resist whatever dark purpose Goldberg has come to fulfil. For Stanley, the birthday party marks the total subversion of the host and guest relationship that has never worked in his favour since his arrival at the boarding house. While Goldberg, acts host of the party, Stanley, the resident guest of the establishment *and the man who the party is meant to celebrate*, is rendered *completely powerless*. He is even robbed of his dignity as a man.

McCann holds a position somewhere in between the one assumed by Meg and the one forced upon Stanley. While he is, like them, in the shadow of the Goldberg monolith, three factors pertaining to his background seem to let him hold some ground of his own. The most overt is his position as Goldberg’s partner; this allows him to exert authority over other people *by proxy* — he is not merely himself but a representative of Goldberg. McCann is a former priest. His priesthood is referred to by Goldberg to explain his position that he has to be Goldberg’s partner despite his antagonism with Goldberg’s Jewish ancestry. However as a former priest McCann still enjoys and retains the natural power associated with religious leaders. The implication is that he deserves a measure of respect regardless of his present situation. The third element of McCann’s background is that McCann comes from Ireland an element that gives him an identity despite his incorporation in a monolithic power structure whose voice is Goldberg. The only lime Goldberg relents to another’s preference during the party is to allow-McCann his Irish whiskey instead of the Scotch, which he wants to be purchased for everyone else. The drinks that Goldberg chooses for the party guests are just as much a part of the ritual of the birthday party as Meg’s recycled breakfast menu is of daily life in the boarding house.

16 (c): Treatment of Language in *The Birthday Party*

Like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is filled with the eloquence of subtext or meaningful silence in a self-subversively comical way. Pinter avoids the conventional

wordiness of dramatic dialogue. His characters do not develop through intimacies of conversation. They are not individuated by speech or any particularities, historical and social, for the matter. They appear in a sort of space-time continuum with very little of identifiable/identifying speech formulation. As a result, Pinter's play betrays no textual authority of meaning. The subtextual salience creates a sort of fluid frame in which characters can be looked at differently, and a plurality of suggestions jostle. Pinter's linguistic strategy creates multivalence chiefly around the character of Stanley who is at the centre of all the actions and speeches of the play. Relationships among the different characters of the play remain also vague for the lack of textual explication. A kind of menacing incertitude looms over the play. Stanley is the principal participant in this ambience of nameless menace and uncertainty. It is mainly through his linguistic strategy that Pinter conjures up a dumb but keenly perceptible sense of fear around Stanley and projects it onto other characters.

At the outset the language of conversation between Meg and Petey in the casual comedy of a breakfast scene in their living room sets a deceptive tone. It is the tone of shared intimacy and

homeliness in which Stanley, though a boarder, is incorporated as a member. But this tone is fractured by the subsequent sequence-the arrival of the two visitors - McCann and Goldberg, and

Stanley's voiceless submission to them. The chatter of Stanley in his playful exchanges with Meg is ultimately silenced by the bluster of Goldberg. Pinter's play is an interweave of silence and verbal savagery. Much of the suggested theme of the play hinges on this interwoven pattern of the said and the unsaid. At first, Meg and Petey hold a sort of ritual on the birthday of Stanley in their conversation that suggests an inconsequential life-style. Their speech, stylized in repetition, creates a pattern of almost Victorian smugness, a feeling of comfort which would not last:

Meg : What time did you go out this morning, Petey ?

Petey : Same time as usual.

Meg : Was it dark ?

Petey : No, it was light.

Their conversation prepares for the anticipation of the absentee, Stanley :

Meg : Is Stanley up yet ?

Petey : I don't know. Is he ?

Meg : I don't know. I haven't seen him down yet.

The tone of intimacy is ironically threatened by their shared intuition about Stanley- 'I don't know'. It anticipates the fact that they will never know what happens to Stanley being taken out by the agents of an unknown outside force - Goldberg and McCann. The very mention of the two men wanting a room confirms at this stage the sub-text of uncertainty: 'They might turn up today. Can you do it?' After the entry of the two, the gap between the surface texture and the deep structure of meaning is subtly made palpable:

Meg : That's very nice.

Goldberg : You 're right. How often do you meet someone it's a pleasure to meet?

McCann : Never.

Short, curt responses suggest other than formal cordiality. Thereafter, Goldberg engages in a series of comical adulations of Meg with sweet words that ring hollow : 'Madam, you'll look like a tulip.' Contrasted with the verbal savagery of Goldberg in his interrogation of Stanley these pleasing words appear a deliberate word-trap to draw out the naive Meg. When Stanley is no longer Meg's boy sleeping into late morning and cajoled by a cup of tea but thoroughly muted by the bullying Goldberg, Meg's words betray a strange intuition that contrasts with her earlier naivety : 'I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not gone away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him....' The tone of a personal charter is changed. A sort of resignation to the unknown fate of her boy Stanley breath through her prophetic words. Petey does not tell Meg that Stanley has been taken away. Nor does Meg know what has happened and will happen to Stanley. All that she has is her memory of 'a lovely party last night' where she played the role of the 'belle of the ball'. Her last words 'I know I was' are suggestive of the possibility that Meg creates a personal fantasy to escape the stress of losing Stanley. But she does not know for certain if Stanley is löst to the tentacles of a nameless super-power.

The language that Pinter employs to dramatise Meg-Stanley relationship is highly ambivalent

and ironical. An interplay of maternal affection and a teasing sexuality hovers over it. Certain words, for example, 'succulent' take on an oblique sexual undertone. In Act One their conversation is at once comic and sexually resonant :

Stanley : You 're a bad wife.

Meg : I'm not. Who said I am?

Stanley : Not to make your husband a cup of tea. Terrible.

Language creates a self-subversive pattern of mother-son and man-woman relationships rolled

into one. At times Stanley speaks like a nagging child : 'I need a new room!' At others, he controls Meg by the threat of leaving - an adult's threat of abdicating the mistress. The security that Stanley enjoys in Meg's company appears fragile from the very beginning. Stanley has threatened Meg with a wheel-barrow in a van. Now Stanley is threatened by the two visitors. The unreal fear of Meg is converted to the real fear of Stanley.

Stanley-Lulu episode also creates a sub-text of fear. and guilt, at least for Stanley. Lulu has called him in a comic vein : 'you're a bit of a washout.' Stanley makes a verbal bluster : 'I always stand on the table when she sweeps the floor.' Like Meg Lulu does not know the crisis of Stanley.

She speaks unknowingly the truth of Stanley's incapacity to go anywhere on his sweet will or to

settle anything for himself. The destiny of Stanley is to be consumed by forces beyond himself.

Lulu's speech suggests this destiny of Stanley unconsciously but prophetically.

Language between Goldberg and McCann provides a contrast between 'assertion' and 'nervousness'. Both suggest fear and uncertainty. Goldberg's verbal violence and McCann's brooding quietness deepen, by contrast, the impression of menace that has a slow but unmistakable infiltration into the atmosphere of the play. Significantly Goldberg's reminiscence of his family, his lost and happy childhood creates our sympathy for him. Here again Pinter's language is ironic and ambivalent.

Are the victimizers themselves the victims? Are the two huntsmen themselves dominated by the same nameless authority that empowers them to drag out Stanley from his private nook? In Act Two the combined verbal assault on Stanley in two separate 'dialogues' points to Stanley's situation : a victim trapped by the power of words. In retrospect, Goldberg and McCann might be the victims of the same power that their words as sign-makers carry on behalf of an extrapersonal authority. The string of interrogatives and the so-called 'dead-pan

replies' compounded by 'voices from the back' posit an undefined power against which Stanley's pleading for innocence and the celebration of his birthday are nullified. His birthday may also be his re-initiation into a monolithic culture that destroys the possibility of an individual's self-identity.

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Assignments

1. Show how Pinter explores the menace of the unknown with minimal action, a simple setting, small talk and suggestive pauses.
2. In Pinter's play violence is always a possibility. How is this possibility explored?
3. Consider the significance of the room in Pinter's play.
4. In Pinter's play characters are without specific background or whereabouts. Why?
5. The mechanics of power destroy the individual. How far is this true of Stanley?
6. Consider the complex nature of Meg-Stanley relationship.
7. How far are Goldberg and McCann necessary to the development of theme in *The Birthday Party*?
8. How significant is the birthday celebration of Stanley in *The Birthday Party*?
9. Do you consider *The Birthday Party* a specimen of the Absurd Drama?

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ENGLISH
POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME(CBCS)
SEMESTER-3
CORE COURSE 9
Literary Criticism till the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
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SEPTEMBER 2019

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, University of Kalyani.

Published by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning,

University of Kalyani, Kalyani-741235, West Bengal.

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Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2017 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal.

Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome.

During the production-process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Sankar Kumar Ghosh, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance.

Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PGBOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt thanks is also due to the Course Writers-faculty members at the DODL, subject-experts serving at University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level of the DODL of University of Kalyani.

Their persistent and co-ordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through Distance Mode.

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University of Kalyani

Core Course IX

Literary Criticism upto the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Core Course IX

Literary Criticism till the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

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Literary Criticism Up to the end of the Nineteenth Century

Block I

Ancient Literary Criticism

UNIT 1

Unit 1 (a): Brief Introduction to Aristotle

Aristotle (the name means ‘ the best purpose’) was a philosopher and polymath from Greece. His father Nicomachus was the personal physician to King Amyntas of Macedon. Aristotle moved to Plato’s Academy while he was 18. Aristotle’s teacher was Plato, and Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander the Great. Aristotle married Pythias and she bore him a daughter, whom they also named Pythias. Aristotle was invited by Philip II of Macedon to become the tutor to his son Alexander in 343 BC. Aristotle was appointed as the head of the royal academy of Macedon. By 335 BC, Aristotle had returned to Athens, establishing his own school there known as the Lyceum. Aristotle conducted courses at the school for the next twelve years. His wife Pythias died during this period and Aristotle got involved with Herpyllis of Stagira, who bore him a son whom he named after his father, Nicomachus. Towards the end of Aristotle’s life, there was a break between him and Alexander. Following Alexander's death, anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens was rekindled. In 322 BC, the political issues made Aristotle flee to his mother's family estate in Chalcis. He died in Euboea of natural causes. He had left a will later that same year, in which he asked to be buried next to his wife.

Aristotle composed most of his works between 335 and 323 BC, while he was in Athens. He had amazing passion for learning and possessed marvelous knowledge on multi discipline. As he learnt, he made significant contributions in the form of treatise to those disciplines. His most important treatises include *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *De Anima (On the Soul)* and *Poetics*. He studied anatomy, astronomy, embryology, geography, geology, meteorology, physics and zoology, education, foreign customs, literature and poetry, and in philosophy, he wrote on aesthetics, ethics, government, metaphysics, politics, economics,

psychology, rhetoric and theology. It is believed that his works if compiled can be considered as a virtual Encyclopedia of Greek knowledge. Aristotle is considered as the first genuine Scientist.

1 (b): Introduction to *The Poetics*

What does the word 'Poetics' denote? Poetics means the science of poetry. In *Poetics* Aristotle is discussing and analyzing the concepts and art of creating poetry. The exact origins of Aristotle's *Poetics* are not known, but researchers believe that it was composed around 330 BCE and was preserved primarily as the notes by Aristotle's students. Despite the objections, praises and controversies, the *Poetics* has been the central document in the study of aesthetics and literature for centuries, especially during the Renaissance; and in today's scholarly circles. One who studies *Poetics* will marvel at the profound insights in the text content that attempts to explain the basic problem of art. Aristotle here defines art and also suggests the criteria for evaluating the quality of the given work of art. Though Aristotle is argumentative in tone in *Poetics* refuting the ideas of his teacher Plato's theory of art, the tone of the *Poetics* reflects the true spirit of Aristotle's attempts to explain the anatomy of poetry and its value to the human society. With the 'empirical evidence' and concrete argument he dismisses Plato's concept of art, and establishes that the art is useful and good. Hence the *Poetics* is widely acclaimed as one of Aristotle's most demanding but rewarding texts offering profound returns to the diligent reader.

Poetics is the surviving earliest work of Aristotle on his Dramatic Theory and his philosophical perception of the Literary theory. In the 26 chaptered treatise on Poetry, Aristotle dedicates the first three chapters for a scientific analysis of poetry examining the constituent parts of poetry and drawing conclusions from those observations. Next, he remarks that all of these kinds of poetry are mimetic, or imitative, but there are significant differences between them. *Poetics* discusses the different kinds of poetry, the structure of a good poem, and the division of a poem into its component parts. For him Poetry is an act of imitation, but it is different from the mere mimicking of the sound. Poet is a creator, and he creates something new through imitation. The act of imitation becomes successful based on the nature of imitation. The poet may imitate things as they are, as they are guessed to be or as they are ought to be. He defines poetry as a 'medium of imitation' that seeks to represent or duplicate life through character, emotion, or action.

Aristotle defines poetry very broadly, including epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and even some kinds of music. According to Aristotle, tragedy came from the efforts of poets to present men as 'nobler,' or 'better' than they are in real life. Comedy, on the other hand, shows a 'lower type' of person, and reveals humans to be worse than they are in average. Epic poetry, on the other hand, imitates 'noble' men like tragedy, but only has one type of meter - unlike tragedy, which can have several - and is narrative in form. The surviving part of *Poetics* includes the discussions on Tragedy & Epic Poetry. Tragedy is the most refined version of poetry dealing with lofty matters, whereas Comedy is the most refined version of poetry dealing with the base matters. His discussions on Comedy are lost and nothing is available, whereas the discussions on Tragedy constitute the major part of the surviving *Poetics*.

Unit 1 (c): Aristotle's Analysis of Poetry: What is Poetry?

Aristotle makes a scientific approach to the study of poetry in *Poetics*. Just like the study of any other natural phenomenon, Aristotle observes, analyses with tentative hypothesis, draws conclusions and then gives recommendations on the art of creating poetry. He believes the concept of mimesis as the basics of poetry or art.

He believes that the two reasons for the emergence of poetry are the human instinct to imitate things, and the instinct for rhythm and harmony. With these basic ideas Aristotle defines poetry as a medium of imitation – poetry imitates life through its rhythm, language and harmony; but according to Aristotle, this is not a mere representation of life or a mimicking act. He respects poet as a creator and the poet represents life through his sublime skill of observation. A poet observes life as a first person in a subjective way, or as a third person in an objective way or taking another personality watches the events as an observer. The poetry that emerges can be grouped into any one of the following: It may be the imitation of noble action or good men in action termed as tragedy / Epic poetry, or it can be the imitation of mean action or low men in action; and it is called satire or comedy. Just like a painter using paint, a sculptor using stone, the poet uses language, rhythm and harmony as separate elements or in combination to create his art form called poetry.

Unit 1 (d): Poetry as Medium of Imitation

Imitation is the innate instinct of every human being. This power of imitation is not only for entertainment but for learning also. A newly born child learns its primary lessons through imitation – imitating its parents or people or animals in the immediate environment. The child imitates the sounds that it hears, and then it starts imitating the actions. As the child grows up it starts imitating various aspects of life around it. Thus imitation becomes the basic instinct of human beings. An artist's primary motivation to represent or capture life in the form of his artistic product is the outcome of the act of imitation. Poetry is an art form, and it is an art of duplicating or representing life. Thus Aristotle defines Poetry as a medium of imitation – imitation of action.

The term 'Action' carries many specifications as Aristotle uses the word. For him the action of men which act as the object of imitation should be chosen one capable of accomplishing some lofty purposes. Action by anybody cannot be selected. The poet should be alert to distinguish and select the noble action, refers only to what is deliberately chosen, and capable of finding completion in the achievement of some purpose. It is the imaginative and creative skills that enable the poet to keep his eye on a lofty action that deserves worthy attention. The chosen action will be different from the stereotypes around us. And then the poet with his creative, imaginative and intellectual mind must refine and reshape them to presentable form in a new attire embellished with the poet's language and imagination. Thus the imitation becomes the reproduction of the existing thing using the poet's art for us to enjoy. This powerful kind of human communication and the product produced through imitation become the representation of human life with all the universal elements. Whatever is reproduced by the poet is first perceived by an imaginative mind. It is this process of perception during imitation that results the so called sublime art form poetry. The perception takes place through all the five senses or through selective senses. It is the intellect that enables a person to perceive something that others haven't seen in the object of imitation. Intelligence and imagination work together here for the complete reproduction and representation of men in action through imitation. Apart from the common actions, the sublime poets imitate repentance, forgiveness etc. the actions far remote to human eye or ear. It requires the deeper skills and powers of human mind to recognize and appreciate what the poet has presented before us. So the mere phrase *imitation of an action* is packed with meaning, and how the image of such a thing might be perceived. Aristotle gives an aesthetic meaning to the term 'imitation'. He is very much fascinated by this imitative quality of human

nature explores the methods, significance, and consequences of this imitation of life. Aristotle concludes that art's imitative tendencies are expressed in one of three ways: a poet attempts to portray our world as it is, as we think it is, or as it ought to be. Through imitation of life he means a literal copy of this universal. Through imitation poet represents life either through action or character or emotion or through objects. According to Aristotle Poetry includes epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and music (specifically of flute, and lyre). What differentiates these kinds of poetry is the nature of their 'imitation.'

Aristotle defines Poetry, the art of duplicating or representing life as a medium of imitation. Through imitation poet represents life either through action or character or emotion or through objects. Depending on the type of imitation the emerging product can be either an Epic poem or a Satire or music. The artistic product of a poet differs based on the mode, object and medium of Imitation.

Aristotle calls poetry as 'art'. "Art" is the translation of the Greek word *techne* and is closely related to "artifice" and "artificial." So Art for Aristotle is anything that is made by human beings as opposed to being found in nature. Thus, poetry, painting, and sculpture count as "art," but so do chairs, horseshoes, and sandals. Either one of it if painted, it becomes an imitation, the representation of the real one. Here Aristotle differentiates Poetry and Philosophy. Philosophy is the presentation of ideas whereas poetry is the imitation of real life. While a person watches the imitation of an action on the stage, he is capable of understanding that what he observes or reads are not real but fictional and closer to reality. Thus tragedy deals with humans who will speak and act in the same way how real humans would have spoken and acted in the similar context in real life.

UNIT 2

Unit 2 (a): Nature of Imitation

Medium of imitation: A poet may represent life through rhythm, language or harmony. Music and dance are examples for imitation of life through rhythm and harmony. Dancing imitates character, emotion and action through rhythmical movements; whereas verse poetry is an example for imitation of life through language.

Object of Imitation: The major object of imitation is men in action. Art imitates life by presenting men as better than they are in life with sublime qualities, or as true to life as they are or as worse than they are with low morals. It is the real skill of the poet to represent men different from what they are, and at the same time to be true to life.

Mode of Imitation: The mode or nature of imitation depends upon the poet's creativity. A poet can represent life through narration in which he takes another personality and watches the events in life as an observer. In some cases the poet can duplicate life by speaking about it in his own person – as the first person. In another situation a poet can represent life by presenting all its characters as living and moving before us as a third person narrator. When the represented life or the universal elements created as literal copy gives joy to man since he loves watching the likeness or the better status because he identifies himself with that copy. While watching the representation of men in worse form, the reader or viewer feels happy at the awareness that it is not him.

The poet imitates in action and language; sometimes the poet imitates in a wrong way resulting a factual error. This may be knowingly or accidental. If the error is due to the incorrect imitation by the poet, it affects the essential aspect of the work, and it can damage the whole work. The errors in the peripheral aspects do not affect the work. The various aspect of an artistic work like controversy on the artistic correctness, morally hurtful aspects, irrational and contradictory elements etc. are often questioned by the critics; but Aristotle dismisses all these aspects and highlights that the most important aspect of an art that matters is its goal in imitating reality as it is, as it thought to be or as it ought to be. If an error occurs in this act of imitation, it affects the whole work.

Unit 2 (b): Types of Poetry

Poetry or art is a product of mimesis. Aristotle defines Poetry as a medium of imitation, and the type of poetry is decided based on the object and nature of imitation. Imitation is of two directions: one is the imitation of men of noble qualities in action and the second one is the imitation of men of lower qualities in action. The first one is named as Epic poetry and the second one is called the Satire. The Epic poetry gives pleasure to the reader as it depicts men as

better than they are. Here the reader identifies himself with the character and feels better; where as in Satire, the reader laughs or enjoys the fun at the defects or the ridiculousness of the character and the reader feels the happiness that it is not he. Hence the satire was also termed as Comedy.

Unit 2 (c): Epic Poetry

Epic poetry is the mimesis in verse told in a narrative form. Epic poetry, on the other hand, is a purely narrative medium and as such is limited only by the imagination of the poet and listener. Because we have no help in visualizing events, the epic poet can more easily recount the improbable without disturbing us. Aristotle refers to the episode in the *Iliad* where Achilles chases Hector three times around the walls of Troy. Homer makes no mention of the rest of the Greek army, which presumably must have been sitting idly by, watching the chase. Such a picture would immediately seem ridiculous if presented on stage, but because Homer can focus exclusively on the characters of Achilles and Hector, we are liable not to notice this absurdity.

The larger-than-life qualities of epic poetry are also brought about by the heroic meter. This contrived and elevated meter further removes the characters in the story from realistic portrayal, their extraordinary speech meshing well with their extraordinary deeds. By contrast, tragedy employs an iambic meter that closely resembles the rhythms of everyday speech.

Epic poetry is also termed as tragedy because of the numerous similarities between epic poetry and tragedy. Epic poem imitates men of noble action as in the case of tragedy. Both Epic poetry and tragedy maintain unity of plot and the object of mimesis is similar subject matter. Both of them can be either simple or complex; and they may deal with a character or with suffering. Like tragedy, epic poetry consists all the six components of tragedy including *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*.

Though the unity of plot is maintained in both, the plot in epic poem can be more explosive since its presentation is not confined to the stage. So it can have more complexity and the events can jump from back and front as it doesn't have the limitations of the stage. Homer is well known for his epic poems and Aristotle has greater appreciation for Homer. Homer's epic poem is the finest

example for the study of Aristotle's theories of epic poetry. Homer maintains the unity of plot in *Illiad* which focuses on a particular story or event. It doesn't go to many details or explanations of everything that happened during that social or historical context. In *Illiad* Homer makes the characters and actions tell the story keeping his voice low and highlighting the norms of narration. The unique quality of an epic poem is its ability to present the exaggerated events in a believable manner which is not possible in a tragedy since it becomes less convincing while performed. *Iiiiad* is a fine example for it. Homer is further admired for his amazing skill for paralogism, that is the ability to make the illogical and faulty arguments believable.

Tragedy and epic poetry are meant to be imitations of great deeds, noble heroes, and tragic suffering, the main difference being that tragedy conveys all this by means of action, while epic poetry does so by means of language alone. Their difference is mainly depending upon the medium of expression. Since Epic poetry uses language for expression, the content can be lengthier, more complex with many fantastic events and different incidents happening simultaneously at different places and also jumping forth and back. Here the reader's imagination is enough for the appreciation. In the case of tragedy, the expression being through action and it has to be performed in front of the people, the poet has to focus on the credibility aspect and the possibility of performance. However, epic poetry can be longer than tragedy, and because it is not performed, it can deal with more fantastic actions with a much wider scope. By contrast, tragedy can be more focused and takes advantage of the devices of music and spectacle.

Epic poetry and tragedy are also written in different meters. Though epic poetry and tragedy have many similarities and a few dissimilarities, Aristotle declares tragedy as the superior art form than epic poetry.

Though the object of imitation is the same in both Epic poetry and the Tragedy, Epic poetry differs from tragedy in the following aspects: it is in verse form, it admits only one form of meter and it is in narrative form. Besides, action in Epic poetry has no time limit whereas tragedy is usually confined to a single day. Rarely it exceeds the time limit. An epic poem does not use song or spectacle to achieve its cathartic effect and epics often cannot be presented at a single sitting, whereas tragedies are usually able to be seen in a single viewing. Finally, the 'heroic measure' of epic poetry is hexameter, where tragedy uses different forms of meter to achieve the

rhythms of speech by different characters. Epic poetry should be narrated in heroic meter, while tragedy is normally spoken in iambic meter.

All the elements of epic poem are present in tragedy whereas all the elements of tragedy are not present in Epic poem. Critics considered Epic poetry as the supreme form of art, but for Aristotle tragedy is the supreme form of art because according to him tragedy as well as Epic poetry can entertain the readers in their written form, but the dimension of performing the tragedy on the stage as a drama of spectacle and music is a unique quality of tragedy that enables the viewers to appreciate the whole in one sitting. Contemporary critics considered that tragedy is for the audience of low status whereas epic poetry was for the civilized audience. The inferior audience of the tragedy had only to watch the gestures of the performers whereas the cultivated audience of the epic poetry had to comprehend the narrative form in the epic through their imagination. But Aristotle defending poetry establishes the superiority of tragedy over epic poetry proving that tragedy has everything that an epic poem has; in addition it has the spectacle and music that make the audience enjoy and appreciate tragedy providing an indulgent pleasure for the audience. Tragedy, then, despite the arguments of other critics, is the higher art for Aristotle.

Unit 2 (d): Aristotle's description of Comedy and Satire

Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type, not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain.

The successive changes through which Tragedy passed, and the authors of these changes, are well known, whereas Comedy has had no history, because it was not at first treated seriously. It was late before the Archon granted a comic chorus to a poet; the performers were till then voluntary. Comedy had already taken definite shape when comic poets, distinctively so called, are heard of. Who furnished it with masks, or prologues, or increased the number of actors,-- these and other similar details remain unknown. As for the plot, it came originally from Sicily; but of Athenian writers Crates was the first who, abandoning the 'iambic' or lampooning form, generalised his themes and plots.

Epic poetry agrees with Tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type. They differ, in that Epic poetry admits but one kind of metre, and is narrative in form. They differ, again, in their length: for Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit; whereas the Epic action has no limits of time. This, then, is a second point of difference; though at first the same freedom was admitted in Tragedy as in Epic poetry.

Conclusion:

The first chapters of *Poetics* deal with Aristotle's concepts, definitions and views on the art of creating poetry. It is a rich source of valid observations with strong justifications about the creation of successful poetry. There was lot of criticism on Aristotle's definition of the art of poetry as a product of imitation; but for him 'imitation' was not a mere mimicking of life. When he talked about imitation of action, he meant it to be the chosen action which is complete and results in the achievement of a purpose. He has proved the aesthetic meaning of the term 'imitation' and he makes the creation of art closer to life, or rather life itself through the concept of imitation of life with the universal elements. Aristotle even authentically evaluates the success of a literary work. According to him the true success of a literary work is as per its success at imitating the world. If the imitation is carried out with integrity, the work will be acclaimed for its great success despite the other minor drawbacks. Finally Aristotle concludes that a work of art should be judged aesthetically, not scientifically.

Thus in the first three chapters of *Poetics*, Aristotle dissects poetry and examines their constituent parts to draw some general sense of what poetry is and how it works. Through scientific methods and careful observations, he assumes theories to explain his observations. His laws about the working of poetry remain a great source of learning and the *Poetics* seeks to uncover these laws. The *Poetics* is concluded with the answer to two major criticisms against poetry. First question is what makes a 'good' poetry and a 'bad' poetry. Here Aristotle highlights the major purpose of the poet in his imitation of life. If the objective is to imitate life as it is, as people think it is or as it ought to be. Depending on these imitative purposes, the quality of the work can be assessed

with suitable criteria. Aristotle gives the example of a poet who wants to imitate life as it ought to be, and the other one who wants to imitate life as it is. The relaxation measures in representing accuracy in the first case is more whereas the latter case has lot of limitations. So depending on the objective, the evaluation criteria also differ. Similarly the impact of error in imitation also affects the quality taking into consideration that the error must be in the essential objective of the poem, that is the nature of imitation. Casual errors in the peripheral aspects will not affect the essence of the poem. The next question that Aristotle answers is the superiority of tragedy over epic poetry.

Aristotle finishes or concludes the *Poetics* abruptly with the satisfaction of sharing his arguments and observations in an authentic way.

Assignments

1. Write a note on Aristotle's description of comedy and Satire.
2. Critically analyze Aristotle's concept of Epic Poetry.
3. Write a note on "poetry as medium of imitation" as perceived by Aristotle.

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BLOCK II

UNIT 3

On the Sublime

By

Longinus

Unit 3 (a): Introduction to Longinus and his *On the Sublime*

After the period of the early principate, there were two broad intellectual currents that emerged during the first four centuries. The first of these was known as the Second Sophistic (27 BC–AD 410), named after a new generation of Sophists and rhetoricians who took for their model the classical language and style of Attic Greece. The second was the philosophy of Neo-Platonism, whose prime exponent was Plotinus.

The major rhetorical treatise of this period was written in Greek: entitled *peri hupsous* or *On the Sublime*, it is conventionally attributed to “Longinus,” and dates from the first or second century AD. It was the most influential rhetorical text through much of the period of the Second Sophistic, and has subsequently exerted a pronounced influence on literary criticism since the seventeenth century, somewhat against the grain of the classical heritage derived from Aristotle and Horace. It has fascinated critics of the modern period on account of its treatment of the sublime as a quality of the soul or spirit rather than as a matter of mere technique. In the later classical period and the Middle Ages, the treatise appeared to be little known. It was initially published during the Renaissance by Robortelli in 1554. It was subsequently translated into Latin in 1572 and then into English by John Hall in 1652. In modern times the concept of the sublime owed its resurgence to a translation in 1674 by Nicolas Boileau, the most important figure of French neoclassicism. The sublime became an important element in the broad Romantic reaction in Europe against neoclassicism as well as in the newly rising domain of aesthetics in the work of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant.

There is only one surviving manuscript of *On the Sublime*, with a third of the text missing, and it is not known for certain who the author was. The manuscript bears the name “Dionysius Longinus,” which led ancient scholars to ascribe the work to either Dionysius of Halicarnassus or a third-century rhetorician, Cassius Longinus. Modern scholars have been more inclined to date the manuscript to the first or second century.

The author must certainly have been a rhetorician and his essay is personal in tone, addressed to Postumius Terentianus, his friend and one of his Roman students. At the beginning of his text, Longinus proposes to write a systematic treatise on the sublime, whereby he will both define his subject and relay the means of understanding it. He offers an initial definition, stating that the sublime consists “in a consummate excellence and distinction of language, and . . . this alone gave to the greatest poets and historians their pre-eminence . . . For the effect of genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves.” Longinus adds that “what inspires wonder casts a spell upon us and is always superior to what is merely convincing and pleasing” (I.3–4). The difference between such inspiration and conviction, as he explains, relates to power and control: we can control our reasoning but the sublime exerts a power which we cannot resist (I.4). Longinus distinguishes dramatically between other compositional skills and the sublime. Inventive skill and appropriate use of facts, for example, are expressed through an entire composition. But the sublime, he says, appears like a bolt of lightning, scattering everything before it and revealing the power of the speaker “at a single stroke.” Longinus appeals to experience to confirm the truth of these claims (I.4). Like Horace before him, Longinus now enters the long-raging debate as to whether art comes from innate genius or from conscious application of methodology and rules.

His answer echoes the compromise offered by Horace. Longinus argues that nature is indeed the prime cause of all production but that the operations of genius cannot be wholly random and unsystematic, and need the “good judgment” supplied by the rules of art (II.2–3). At this point two pages of the manuscript are missing; when the text resumes, we find Longinus giving examples, taken from various poets, of the faults which an artist can fall into when reaching for grandeur. The first fault is “tumidity” when the artist or poet aims too high and, instead of achieving ecstasy, merely lapses into “folly,” producing effects which are overblown or bombastic. Tumidity “comes of trying to outdo the sublime.” Longinus identifies the opposite

fault, “puerility,” as the most ignoble of faults. He defines it as “the academic attitude, where over-elaboration ends in frigid failure” (III.3–4). When writers try too hard to please or to be exquisite, says Longinus, they fall into affectation. A third fault is what the first-century rhetorician Theodorus called “Parenthyron.”² Longinus explains that this term refers to “emotion misplaced and pointless where none is needed or unrestrained where restraint is required.” Emotion which is not warranted by the subject is “purely subjective” and hence is not shared by the audience (III.5).

After proceeding to offer several examples of frigidity, Longinus reaches a generalization which sounds strangely familiar to us: “all these improprieties in literature,” he urges, “are weeds sprung from the same seed, namely that passion for novel ideas which is the prevalent craze of the present day” (IV.5). His real point, however, is that virtues and vices spring from the same sources: it is the very pursuit of beauty, sublimity, agreeable phrasing, and exaggeration – in short, the very pursuit of an elevated style – which can result in the faults earlier described (IV.5).

How can the poet avoid these faults? The first thing he needs is a “clear knowledge and appreciation” of what is truly sublime. Yet such knowledge does not come easily; like all literary judgment, it must be the fruit of ripe experience (IV.6). Longinus’ subsequent definition of the sublime indeed appeals to experience in a manner later echoed by Arnold, Leavis, and others. The true sublime, Longinus tells us, “elevates us” so that “uplifted with a sense of proud possession, we are filled with joyful pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard.” Such genuine sublimity is to be distinguished from a mere “outward show of grandeur” which turns out to be “empty bombast” (VII.1–3). The true sublime will produce a lasting and repeated effect on “a man of sense, well-versed in literature”; this effect will be irresistible and the memory of it will be “stubborn and indelible.” As with Arnold and Leavis, Longinus’ view of greatness in literature appears to be an *affective* one: we judge it by its emotional effects on the reader or listener (the Latin *affectus* as a noun means “disposition” or “state,” and as a verb, “affected by”). Also anticipating these much later critics, he posits an ideal listener as a man of culture and sensibility. Longinus broadens his definition to say that the “truly beautiful and sublime . . . pleases all people at all times” (VII.4). By this, he appears to mean all “qualified” people of various periods and tastes: when there is enduring consensus among a community of

cultured listeners, this is evidence of the truly sublime nature of a literary work. In a broad sense, Longinus also anticipates various consensual theories ranging from those of Edmund Burke to reader-response critics.

UNIT 4

Unit 4 (a): Sources of the Sublime and its various Features

In an important passage, Longinus cites five “genuine sources” of the sublime: (1) the command of “full-blooded” or robust ideas (sometimes expressed by translators as “grandeur of thought”); (2) the inspiration of “vehement emotion”; (3) the proper construction of figures – both figures of thought and figures of speech; (4) nobility of phrase, which includes diction and the use of metaphor; and (5) the general effect of dignity and elevation. This general effect, Longinus tells us, embraces the previous four elements. Longinus intends, so he claims, to consider these elements systematically but he sometimes digresses. To begin with, he argues, as against a previous writer on the sublime, Cecilius, that sublimity is not identical with emotion or always dependent upon it. Certain emotions can be mean or base and many sublime passages exhibit no emotion (VIII.1–2). Returning now to the first source of the sublime, the command of solid or weighty ideas, Longinus refers to this faculty as “natural genius,” affirming that it is a gift of nature rather than something acquired; this facility, he says, plays a greater part in sublimity than the other sources. His examples of sublimity here are intended to express what might be viewed as his fundamental position: citing Homer, he reflects that “a great style is the natural outcome of weighty thoughts, and sublime sayings naturally fall to men of spirit” (IX.1–3). At this point, six further pages of the manuscript are missing; when the text resumes, Longinus cites two passages from the *Iliad*.

One of these attains sublimity, he says, because it “magnifies the powers of heaven [the gods]” and the other falls short because it is “irreligious” and shows “no sense of what is fitting” (IX.5–7). Those passages in Homer are sublime “which represent the divine nature in its true attributes, pure, majestic, and unique” (IX.8). Interestingly, Longinus also cites early passages from the Old Testament (“Let there be light”) as expressing “a worthy conception of divine power” (IX.9). In these passages Longinus seems to find sublimity in the expression of profound and appropriate religious sentiment which displays a sense of decorum and which justly marks the relation of

divine and human. Great writers, then, achieve sublimity through their grandeur of thought, by expressing a vision of the universe that is morally and theologically elevated. It is not clear, however, how these qualities of sublimity could fall under the five “sources” initially listed by Longinus; one might conjecture that they could answer to either the demand for “weighty” ideas or “the general effect of dignity.”

In a famous passage on Homer, Longinus draws some further inferences: Homer shows us, he claims, that “as genius ebbs, it is the love of romance that characterizes old age.” The *Iliad*, composed in the heyday of Homer’s genius, is alive with dramatic action; it is marked by “consistent sublimity” that resides in the “sustained energy” of the poem which is “brimful of images drawn from real life.” In contrast, as is characteristic of old age, narrative predominates in the *Odyssey*, which is a mere “epilogue” to the *Iliad*. In the later poem, the “grandeur remains without the intensity.” In the ebbing tide of his genius, Homer “wanders in the incredible regions of romance,” and indeed “reality is worsted by romance” in the *Odyssey* (IX.12–14). Longinus here appears to add two further dimensions to his conception of the sublime: firstly, it is associated with dramatic action rather than narrative; and secondly, it is firmly rooted in reality as opposed to romance. Another inference made by Longinus is that “with the decline of their emotional power great writers and poets give way to character study.” Homer’s character sketches in the *Odyssey*, says Longinus, follow the style of the “comedy of character” (IX.15). Again, we might ask whether these attributes of sublimity are related to the five “sources” of the sublime. It may be that dramatic action is associated by Longinus with “vehement emotion” and that realism is the medium for the expression of “solid” or “robust” ideas: clearly, for Longinus, the fanciful nature of romance represents a departure from such solidity.

Longinus adds a further factor to his notion of sublimity: the power of combining certain elements appropriately into an organic whole (X.1). Citing examples from Sappho and Homer, he suggests that these writers have organized “all the main points by order of merit . . . , allowing nothing affected or undignified or pedantic to intervene” so as to produce the effect of sublimity by means of an “ordered and . . . coherent structure” (X.7). Closely connected with, but distinct from, this power of combination, says Longinus, is the device of “amplification”: whenever the subject matter admits of fresh starts and halting places, phrases can be multiplied with increasing force, using exaggeration, emphasis on arguments or events, or by careful assemblage of facts or

feelings (XI.1–2). However, Longinus departs from previous definitions which equate amplification with sublimity. Sublimity, he suggests, “lies in elevation” and is found “in a single idea,” whereas amplification lies in quantity and redundance. Amplification consists “in accumulating all the aspects and topics inherent in the subject and thus strengthening the argument by dwelling upon it. Therein it differs from proof, which demonstrates the required point” (XII.1–3).⁴ In illustration of this difference between sublimity and amplification, Longinus cites the rhetorical styles of Demosthenes and Cicero: the former has a sublime power of rhetoric which “scatters everything before him” like a flash of lightning while the latter, using amplification, is like “a widespread conflagration” devouring all around it (XII.4). What also emerges from Longinus’ comments here is that, while sublimity and amplification are mutually distinct, they both differ from formal argument in that they employ alternative means of persuasion: sublimity strikes the hearer and possesses him whereas amplification ponders over an argument, bringing it out in various guises.

There is another road which leads to sublimity, remarks Longinus, and it is Plato who lights up this path for us: the path of imitation of great historians and poets of the past. Just as the priestess of Apollo is inspired by the divine power of this god, so too a writer can be inspired by the “natural genius of those old writers” (XIII.2–3). Plato himself borrowed profusely from Homer. And such borrowing, Longinus reassures, is not theft but “rather like taking an impression from fine characters . . . moulded figures” (XIII.4). Moreover, Longinus sees the process of influence not as passive and static but as an active endeavor of the contemporary writer to vie with the ancient poets. Such was Plato’s relationship with Homer: one of striving “to contest the prize.” Longinus adds that “even to be worsted by our forerunners is not without glory” (XIII.4). He (and the Hellenistic tradition behind his insights here) also anticipates Arnold’s “touchstone” theory of tradition whereby we measure contemporary works against a set of acknowledged classics: when we are attempting to achieve sublimity, urges Longinus, we should ask ourselves how Homer or Plato or Demosthenes would have pursued this task. We must also ask ourselves how such great writers would have responded to our own work: “Great indeed is the ordeal, if we propose such a jury and audience as this to listen to our own utterances.” Longinus adds that we should also bear in mind the judgment of posterity; if we refuse to say anything which “exceeds the comprehension” of our own time, our conceptions will be “blind” and “half-formed” (XIV.1–3). In these important passages, Longinus articulates a conservative concept of tradition which

proved to have lasting influence: not only Arnold, but also Eliot, Leavis, and earlier writers such as Pope (and, before Longinus, the Alexandrian scholars) formulated similar prescriptions whereby a contemporary writer's greatness could be measured only in relation to standards set by an acknowledged canon of great writers. Nonetheless, Longinus' own formulation allows for creative strife between past and present writers, acknowledging that present authors can in principle achieve sublimity. In this, he anticipates more liberal attitudes toward tradition such as that enshrined in Harold Bloom's notion of the "anxiety of influence" whereby an author "misreads" previous writers so as to stake out for himself an area of originality.

Unit 4 (b): Sublime and Imagination

If imitation is one path to the sublime, another path is through the highway of imagination. In delineating this path, Longinus anticipates many discussions of this topic by the Romantics. He observes that "Weight, grandeur, and energy" (i.e., the basic components of the sublime) are largely produced by the use of images. He states the prevailing use of the term "Imagination": it is applied to "passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience" (XV.1-2). However, whereas the Romantics tended to see imagination primarily or exclusively as a characteristic of poetry, Longinus distinguishes between the use of imagination in poetry and in prose or oratory. In both of these, the aim is to excite the audience's emotions and to present things vividly. What distinguishes them is that the deployment of imagination in poetry "shows a romantic exaggeration, far exceeding the limits of credibility, whereas the most perfect effect of imagination in oratory is always one of reality and truth" (XV.2, 8). In contrast with many modern critical theories which see no sharp division between poetry and prose, Longinus is skeptical of the attempts of "modern" orators in his day to transgress these boundaries: certain orators, he observes, make their speech poetical, deviating "into all sorts of impossibilities." The appropriate use of imagination in rhetoric, says Longinus, "is to introduce a great deal of vigour and emotion into one's speeches, but when combined with argumentative treatment it not only convinces the audience, it positively masters them" (XV.8-9). In such cases, he explains, the imaginative conceptions of the speaker far surpass "mere persuasion": "our attention is drawn from the reasoning to the enthralling effect of the imagination, and the technique is concealed in a halo of brilliance" (XV.11-12). Hence, while reason is by no means dispensable in argument, it

is clear that imagination is seen as a higher power. So far, Longinus has analyzed three sources of sublimity: natural genius, imitation, and imagination. He now moves to a further source, the use of figures. The first example he offers here is the use of an oath or what Longinus terms an “apostrophe” in a speech by Demosthenes. This renowned speaker advocated a policy of war for the Athenians to resist domination by Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great: “You were not wrong, men of Athens, in undertaking that struggle for the freedom of Greece . . . no, by those who bore the brunt at Marathon.” In using this oath, asserts Longinus, Demosthenes transforms his argument “into a passage of transcendent sublimity and emotion.” The use of this figure allows the speaker “to carry the audience away with him” and to convince the defeated Athenians that they should no longer view the defeat at Chaeronea as a disaster (XVI.2–3). While once again, in the example given above, Longinus shows how an argument can be rendered more powerful and persuasive by figurative rather than purely rational means, he cautions his reader that there is a general suspicion toward the “unconscionable use” of figures. A judge, for example, or a king, might feel offended or manipulated by the figurative strategies of a skilled speaker, in which case he will become hostile to the actual reasoning of the speech. Hence Longinus recommends that a figure is most effective when it is unnoticed: it can be appropriately obscured by sublimity and a powerful effect on the emotions. Demosthenes’ use of the oath is cited as an example of this covert procedure: the figure is concealed “by its very brilliance.”

What is sublime and emotionally moving, urges Longinus, is closer to our hearts and always strikes us before we even realize that figures are being used. Longinus cites a number of other important figures. One of these is the figure of rhetorical “question and answer, which involves the audience emotionally” (XVIII.1–2). Another figure which conveys apparently genuine and vehement emotion is inversion of the order of words, phrases, or sentences. Such inversion mimics the actual use of language by people in situations of fear, worry, or anger. The best prose writers, says Longinus, use inversions to “imitate nature and achieve the same effect. For art is only perfect when it looks like nature and Nature succeeds only by concealing art about her person” (XXII.1). Such inversion, which alters the natural sequence of words and phrases, gives the effect of improvisation, allowing the audience to share the excitement of the situation (XXII.3–4).

Other figures cited by Longinus are accumulation, variation, and climax: these figures range over changes of case, tense, person, number, and gender. Such changes can produce a “sublime and emotional effect.” What all of these figures help us to see, according to Longinus, is that emotion is an important element in the sublime. What is emphasized in Longinus’ treatment of them is the ability of language to take control suddenly – and irrationally – over the emotions, the power of language when used in unusual combinations, when it is forced to deviate from a conventionally anticipated structure. It is small wonder that Longinus falls outside of the classical tradition and provided so much inspiration for Romantic views of art. Indeed, his view that a powerful passage cannot be paraphrased without loss has become part of the thinking of the whole modern era about poetry, from the Romantics through the New Criticism. Moreover, in appealing to numerous examples, Longinus illustrates the rhetorical practice of close textual reading; such close attention to the text as a verbal structure was not the monopoly of modern formalists and New Critics but had been part of the repertoire of rhetoric for centuries.

Longinus now moves to other aspects of what he had earlier cited as the fourth source of the sublime, nobility of diction, thought, and metaphor. He is in no doubt that all orators and historians aim at the use of appropriate diction as “their supreme object.” It is fine diction which gives the style “grandeur, beauty, a classical flavor . . . and endues the facts as it were with a living voice.” Again, he warns that majestic diction is to be reserved for stately and important situations (XXX.1–2).⁵ Metaphors are especially useful in treating commonplace subjects and descriptions: figurative writing has a natural grandeur and metaphors contribute to sublimity (XXXII.5–6).

Longinus raises a long-debated question: “Which is better in poetry and in prose, grandeur with a few flaws or correct composition of mediocre quality, yet entirely sound and impeccable?” A related question, he remarks, is whether literary value should be accorded to the largest number of merits or to the merits that are intrinsically great (XXXIII.1–2). Predictably, Longinus’ own position is that great excellence, even if it is not uniformly sustained, should always be valued more highly: perfect precision risks being trivial; mediocre natures take no risks; genius and divine inspiration will not easily fall under any rule (XXXIII.2–5). Hypereides, explains Longinus, has more merits than Demosthenes; nonetheless his speeches “lack grandeur; they are dispassionate, born of sober sense, and do not trouble the peace of the audience.” Demosthenes,

in contrast, “seems to dumbfound the world’s orators with his thunder and lightning. You could sooner open your eyes to the descent of a thunderbolt than face unwinking his repeated outbursts of emotion” (XXXIV.4). Perhaps here it becomes clearer than anywhere else in Longinus’ text how, faced with an audience immediately embroiled in a given political situation, a speaker could not attain maximum persuasive power merely by deploying reason and an abstractly convincing argument or even by producing a speech which was technically perfect. All of this could be mobilized into persuasive power only if the audience could be “disturbed,” only if its emotions were first kindled as if by a bolt of lightning and then fanned by the technical virtues of the speech.

Longinus’ next passage effectively presents the metaphysical assumptions underlying his entire text. It is a passage which clearly anticipates the aesthetics of Kant and many of the Romantics. “Nature,” he says, has distinguished us over other creatures, and has

“from the first breathed into our hearts an unconquerable passion for whatever is great and more divine than ourselves. Thus within the scope of human enterprise there lie such powers of contemplation and thought that even the whole universe cannot satisfy them, but our ideas often pass beyond the limits that enring us. Look at life from all sides and see how in all things the extraordinary, the great, the beautiful stand supreme, and you will soon realize the object of our creation The little fire we kindle for ourselves keeps clear and steady, yet we do not therefore regard it with more amazement than the fires of Heaven, which are often darkened, or think it more wonderful than the craters of Etna in eruption, hurling up rocks and whole hills from their depths and sometimes shooting forth rivers of that pure Titanic fire . . . what is useful and indeed necessary is cheap enough; it is always the unusual which wins our wonder.” (XXXV.2–5)

Hence Longinus’ stress on emotion as a vital element of the sublime does not rest on a simple appeal to the heart over abstract reasoning but is an intrinsic expression of his view of the purpose of humankind. This purpose, far from according with a classical recognition of our finitude and proper place in the cosmic scheme, is to strive beyond our own human nature toward the divine; and this striving is accomplished on the wings of “unconquerable passion.” Longinus subsequently says that sublimity lifts men “near the mighty mind of God” (XXXVI.1).

All of these dispositions anticipate the Romantics; also like the Romantics, Longinus superordinates the “wonderful” and sublime over that which is merely “useful” and “necessary.” This seemingly simple opposition and prioritization is an index of a broad shift away from a classical worldview: whereas Aristotle actually prescribed necessity and probability, universality and typicality, as the bases for poetry’s engagement with the world, Longinus advocates precisely what deviates from such universality. It is an aesthetic premised not on what is central to human experience but precisely on what escapes such centrality, on what stands as rare at the pinnacle of experience and is expressible only by genius. When we appeal to emotion through the achievement of sublimity in writing, we appeal to that which relates us primally to our highest purpose in life, the recognition through nature of the limitless potential of our own being.

Indeed, Longinus refers to Homer, Demosthenes, and Plato as “demi-gods” who, redeeming their other faults through “a single touch of sublimity,” are justly revered by posterity. The more compromising conclusion at which Longinus arrives is that since technical correctness is due to art and the height of excellence is achieved by genius, “it is proper that art should always assist Nature. Their co-operation may thus result in perfection” (XXXVI.3–6).

Longinus now turns to the final source of sublimity, “the arrangement of the words themselves in a certain order” (XXXIX.1). Melody, he says, is a natural instrument of persuasion and pleasure; it is also a means of achieving grandeur and emotion. Composition, he proceeds, is “a kind of melody in words – words which are part of man’s nature and reach not his ears only but his very soul” such that the speaker’s actual emotion is brought into the hearts of his hearers (XXXIX.1–3). Citing as an example two lines of a speech by Demosthenes, Longinus explains in detail how the effect of sublimity is produced as much by the melody – resting on dactyls, the “noblest of rhythms” – as by the thought (XXXIX.4).

More fundamental than anything else in the production of sublimity is the composition or arrangement of the various elements of a passage into a unified, single system. Longinus advocates an artistic organicism, using an analogy which has subsequently served countless writers: just as with the members of the human body, so it is with the elements of sublimity: “None of the members has any value by itself apart from the others, yet one with another they all constitute a perfect organism” (XL.1). Some phrases may actually be vulgar or commonplace;

but in their appropriate place they may contribute to the overall sublimity of a passage (XL.3). Longinus makes a distinction here between “extreme conciseness” which “cripples the sense” and “true brevity” which “goes straight to the point.” On the other hand, prolix passages are “lifeless” (XLII.1–2). Trivial or commonplace words and phrases can also debase a passage, says Longinus (XLIII.1–2): “the proper course is to suit the words to the dignity of the subject and thus imitate Nature, the artist that created man” (XLIII.5). These prescriptions for art were not undermined until the advent of realism in the latter nineteenth century.

The final surviving part of the manuscript is perhaps the most revealing of Longinus’ world view and how his notions of literature grew out of his clearly negative assessment of his own era. Many scholars have cautioned that the purpose of Longinus’ entire manuscript is simply to produce a practical treatise on style, and that his use of the word “sublime” refers to no more than an elevated or lofty style. While it is true that Longinus’ treatment of sublimity is far more general than that of modern critics who viewed it as a distinct aesthetic category, that treatment is nonetheless grounded in circumstances exhibiting certain important parallels with those behind many Romantic aesthetics.

As with many of the preceding sections, Longinus addresses this last section to Terentianus, relating to him a “problem” which characterizes their era: “in this age of ours we find natures that are supremely persuasive and suited for public life, shrewd and versatile and especially rich in literary charm, yet really sublime and transcendent natures are no longer, or only very rarely, now produced. Such a world-wide dearth of literature besets our times” (XLIV.1–2). The problem seems to be that while there are some writers who possess technical competence, truly great or sublime literature is no longer being produced. Longinus purports to offer two explanations of this phenomenon, the first by an acquaintance of his, a philosopher; the second, his own. The philosopher challenges what he calls the “hackneyed” explanation that true genius

flourishes only in a democracy. Rather, he seems to suggest, democracy in his time has

degenerated into an “equitable slavery” in which “we seem to be schooled from childhood.”

We never drink, says the philosopher, from “the fairest and most fertile source of literature, which is freedom.” Consequently, he argues, we are prone to servile ways and flattery. Just as prison confines and stunts the body, so all slavery, however equitable, “might well be described

as a cage for the human soul, a common prison.” The philosopher remarks that, while in such circumstances slaves can be granted some faculties, “no slave ever becomes an orator” (XLIV.3–6) for he does not have the habit of speaking freely.

Longinus appears to dispute such an explanation. The real source of mediocrity in literary composition he locates in the “love of money, that insatiable sickness from which we all now suffer, and the love of pleasure,” both of which “enslave us.” After wealth is thus made a “god,” there follow in its wake other vices: extravagance, swagger, conceit, luxury, insolence, disorder, and shamelessness. The result of this process is that “men no longer then look upwards . . . their greatness of soul wastes away from inanition and is no longer their ideal, since they value that part of them which is mortal and consumes away, and neglect the development of their immortal souls.” Given that “we have sold our souls for profit at any price,” Longinus asks, can we expect that “there is left a single free and unbribed judge of the things that are great and last to all eternity?” Finally, in a passage whose import extends readily to our own world of mass consumerism, he states: “what spends the spirit of the present generation is the apathy in which all but a few of us pass our lives, only exerting ourselves . . . for the sake of getting praise or pleasure out of it, never from the honourable and admirable motive of doing good to the world” (XLIV.6–11). Some scholars, such as G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, have found Longinus’ reply “bitterly disappointing” on the grounds that it almost ignores the philosopher’s substantial comments and that it merely rehearses commonplaces of Stoic thought, attributing the prevailing frivolity and general ethical malaise to greed and the pursuit of pleasure. Ste. Croix also disputes the conventional scholarly assumption that, in talking of a degeneration from democracy to slavery, the philosopher is referring to the transformation of the Roman republic into an empire ruled by one man. He points out that, typically of Greek works of this period, Longinus’ text is almost exclusively concerned with Greek literature, and reveals almost no interest in Roman letters. As such, it makes no sense to claim that the institution of the principate somehow debilitated Greek literature, which was hardly affected by changes in the Roman form of government. A far better case can be made, argues Ste. Croix, “for saying that Greek literature, apart from Homer and the early poets, did indeed rise and fall with *demokratia* – in the original and proper sense!” In other words, the sentiment about literary decline originated with the Greeks, who realized that Greek literature had flourished most under democracy.

However we view it, the worldview expressed in Longinus' account is quite clear in its system of values: the soul over the body, the immortal, permanent, and selfless over the perishable, transient, and self-interested. The world view is Stoic and Platonic – even Neo-Platonic – but also somewhat Christian in its emphasis. In an argument which is now perhaps controverted by many scholars, O. B. Hardison fascinatingly suggested that Longinus' text, if its author was indeed a pupil of Plotinus as some scholars have claimed, “illustrates the late classical Neo-platonic aesthetic which also appears to have encouraged late classical Asianism.” What is interesting about this speculation is Hardison's correlative insight that this Asianism was the closest approximation to a theory of art for art's sake during this period, and that it took not only literary form but also a “flowering of epideictic oratory.” This tendency toward artistic autonomy was stimulated by rhetorical rather than poetic theory.

Whether we accept or dispute Hardison's insight, the parallels between Longinus' worldview and those of the Romantics are clear. Moreover, if we view Longinus' influence as moving in a broadly “aesthetic” direction toward notions of relative artistic autonomy, we can see that the debate between classicism and Romanticism was played out not only from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries but also in the Hellenistic world itself and in the early Roman Empire (as in the Stoic, moral, and educational tenor of Vergil's epic as opposed to the more aesthetic and individualistic flavor of Ovid's poems). Indeed, Longinus' explanation of the dearth of sublimity in his world is remarkably close to Shelley's condemnation of the modern capitalist world where the principle of utility and profit is opposed to the selfless principles of poetry.

We find here, inasmuch as we can judge from an incomplete manuscript, the true motives for Longinus' need to explain the sublime, and his stress on emotion as the avenue to the fulfillment of our higher nature whereas mere reason, as in Shelley's view, is constrained within the realm of pragmatic interests.

In the light of the context sketched above, Longinus' preoccupation with the sublime might be seen as a call for spiritual reorientation, a movement away from rationality and merely technical competence, itself a reflex of materialist and pragmatic thinking, toward acknowledgment of a profounder and more authentic strain in human nature that, through its exercise of emotion and imagination, sees itself not in isolation but as part of a vaster and divine scheme. This call has

been repeated endlessly in numerous guises in various literary periods. The themes raised by Longinus, and much of his mode of treating them, persist into our own day, in the realms of literature, politics, law, and the media: the idea that poetry or indeed prose can emotionally transport, rather than merely persuade, a listener; the idea of organic unity and totality; the nature of imitation; the connection between reason and imagination, reason and emotion, beauty and utility, art and genius, art and nature; and, most importantly, a recognition of the power of language – founded on grandeur of thought and the skillful use of figures – to attain sublimity, thereby transforming our perception of the world.

Assignments

1. Critically comment on Longinus's concept of the sublime.
2. Critically comment on the relationship between sublime and imagination.

Further Reading

Bloom, Harold (1983). Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-503354-0.

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Martin Fritz, Vom Erhabenen. Der Traktat 'Peri Hypsous' und seine ästhetisch-religiöse Renaissance im 18. Jahrhundert (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

Units 5

Unit 5 (a): Horace: *Ars Poetica* or ‘The Art of Poetry’

influence of Horace’s *Ars poetica*, composed toward the end of his life, has been vast, exceeding the influence of Plato, and in many periods, even that of Aristotle. Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus) is known primarily as a poet, a composer of odes, satires, and epistles. In the realm of literary criticism, he has conventionally been associated with the notions that “a poem is like a painting,” that poetry should “teach and delight,” as well as the idea that poetry is a craft which requires labor. Horace’s text was initially known as “Epistle to the Pisones” and the title *Ars poetica* is first found in Quintilian; the text actually takes the form of an informal letter from an established poet giving advice to the would-be poets of the wealthy Piso family in Rome. Though the *Ars poetica* is technically a work of literary-critical and rhetorical theory, it is itself written as a poem, a fact which dictates its structure and rhythm. The *Ars* is the first-known poem about poetics, and such a poetic expression of literary-critical principles was imitated by several men of letters, including the medieval writer Geoffrey de Vinsauf, the Renaissance writer Pierre de Ronsard, the neoclassical poets Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux and Alexander Pope, the Romantic poet Lord Byron, and twentieth-century poets such as Wallace Stevens. The influence of Horace’s critical tenets, expressed primarily in *Ars poetica* but also in some of his letters such as the “Epistle to Florus” and the “Epistle to Augustus,” has been even more extensive and continuous.

Horace’s life intersected poignantly with the turbulent events of Roman history and politics in the first century bc. Born the son of a freedman (a freed slave), he was educated at Rome then Athens. It was during his lifetime that Rome was transformed from an oligarchic republic, ruled by the senate and elected consuls, to an empire ruled by one man, Octavian (later known as Augustus). Initially, Horace’s sympathies were with the republicans Brutus and Cassius who had assassinated Julius Caesar, fearing that he had ambitions of becoming emperor. Horace fought

with Brutus and Cassius against Caesar's nephew Octavian and Mark Antony at the battle of Philippi in 42 BC. The republicans were defeated, after which yet another civil war broke out, this time between Octavian and Mark Antony who allied himself with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. Octavian's resounding victory at the battle of Actium left him the sole ruler of the Roman world; he was given the title Augustus and revered as a god. Horace, however, was fortunate. Granted a pardon for his part in opposing Octavian, he was introduced by the poet Vergil to Gaius Maecenas, an extremely wealthy patron of the arts. Eventually, Horace enjoyed the patronage of the emperor himself. Nonetheless, it is arguable that Horace's loyalties remained somewhat mixed.

In assessing the temper of Horace's work and worldview, we need to know something about the prevailing intellectual and literary attitudes in the Roman world of his day. The most pervasive philosophical perspective was that of Stoicism, whose emphasis on duty, discipline, political and civic involvement, as well as an acceptance of one's place in the cosmic scheme, seemed peculiarly well adapted to the needs of the Romans, absorbed as they were in military conquest, political administration, and legal reform. Indeed, Roman Stoicism was imbued with a more practical orientation than its Hellenistic forebears, though it still preached that inner contentment based on acceptance of the universal order should be the primary goal of human beings. Stoic philosophy had some impact on Horace's worldview as expressed in his *Odes*, though the major Roman Stoic philosophers, such as Seneca (4 BC–AD 65), Epictetus (ca. AD 60–120), and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180) all wrote after Horace's death. Other philosophical attitudes alive in Horace's day included Epicureanism and Skepticism; elements of both philosophies, especially the former, profoundly inform his poems and his literary criticism. While Horace's attitudes cannot be described as hedonistic, he acknowledges the fulfillment afforded by private pleasures and a quiet withdrawal from public cares; his work betrays an ironic skepticism concerning the ideals of empire and conventional religion.

Indeed, Horace's philosophical and poetic vision is thrown into sharper relief when placed alongside the work of his contemporaries. The greatest poet of his age was Vergil (70–19 bc), whose epic poem the *Aeneid* is founded on Stoic ideals such as *pietas*, duty, self-discipline, and sacrifice of individual interests for the sake of a larger cause. All of these qualities are expressed in its hero Aeneas, who must undergo severe hardships, who must forego his personal happiness

and the love of Queen Dido, for the larger purpose of the founding of Rome. The *Aeneid* as a whole is intended to glorify and celebrate the Roman Empire, and in particular the reign of Augustus. Against this overtly political poetic enterprise, the political ambivalence of Horace's poetry and literary criticism emerges in a clearer light. Our view of Horace is sharpened even further when we consider the writings of the other major poet of this era, Ovid (ca. 43 bc–ad 17), whose works such as the *Ars amoris* led to his banishment by Augustus. Ovid, evidently influenced by the Cynics and Skeptics, expressed the decadent and seamy – even steamy – side of Roman life, grounded in individualism and self-interest rather than public duty or piety. His *Metamorphoses* – depicting, for example, Zeus as rapacious, deceitful, and embroiled in petty quarrels with his wife Hera – appears to be the very antithesis of Vergil's *Aeneid*, perhaps an anti-epic revealing the true motivation of empire as rapacious, ephemeral, and founded on subjective self interest rather than noble ideals and historical destiny. Horace's work lies somewhere between these two poles of outright affiliation with, and undisguised cynicism toward, the entire political and religious register of imperial ideals.

Scholars such as Doreen C. Innes have remarked a pervasive general feature of both Greek and Latin literature: poets had a highly self-conscious attitude toward their place in the literary tradition. After the period of the great Alexandrian scholars and poets, the Greek canon of writers was rigidly established. As such, writers tended to imitate previous authors and to achieve originality within this traditional framework. Hence, poets such as Vergil, Ovid, and Horace accepted the Greek theory of imitation while striving for originality in a Roman context (*CHLC*, V.I, 246–247). For example, Vergil's *Aeneid* echoes many of the devices and strategies used in the Homeric epics while infusing new themes such as historical destiny and new ideals such as duty. The aesthetic framework of the Augustan poets was inherited from Alexandrian writers such as Callimachus who justified a movement away from the writing of epic and the magniloquent praising of famous deeds toward smaller genres and a focus on technical polish. This legacy also included a debate between genius (*ingenium*) and technique (*ars*) as the proper basis of poetry. The ideal of “art for art's sake” had been espoused by some Alexandrian writers such as Zenodotus, Eratosthenes, and Aristarchus (*CHLC*, V.I, 205, 248–252). This also was a question among the Augustans: should poetry primarily give pleasure or should this pleasure subserve a social, moral, and educational function?

Horace's apparently desultory treatment of these and other issues might be organized under certain broad headings: (1) the relation of a writer to his work, his knowledge of tradition, and his own ability; (2) characteristics of the *Ars poetica* as a verbal structure, such as unity, propriety, and arrangement; (3) the moral and social functions of poetry, such as establishing a repository of conventional wisdom, providing moral examples through characterization, and promoting civic virtue and sensibility, as well as affording pleasure; (4) the contribution of an audience to the composition of poetry, viewed both as an art and as a commodity; (5) an awareness of literary history and historical change in language and genre. These are the largely conventional themes that preoccupy Horace's text, to appreciate which we must consider his poetry as well as key elements of his political circumstances.

Although the letter was an acknowledged Roman literary genre, the highly personalized form of Horace's text disclaims any intention of writing a "technical" treatise in the sense of Aristotle. Some of Horace's richest insights take the form of asides and almost accidental digressions, and the entire piece is casual in tone. Horace's "principles" are drawn from experience, not theory.

Rome in Horace's day was a vast metropolis of three quarters of a million people; it was also a center of artistic patronage, crawling with poets. Horace closes his letter with an image of the mad poet as a leech that sucks the blood out of its audience: "if he once catches you, he holds tight and kills you with his recitation, a leech that will not release the skin till gorged with blood."¹ Horace's immediate point here is that the poet should rely on learning and art rather than on untutored inspiration, which is indistinguishable from madness. But this ending is also an index of Horace's skepticism toward would-be poets. Such an ending impels us to go back and read the text again, on another level.

These levels of interpretation effectively destabilize each other. In book X of the *Republic*, Plato had viewed poetry not as a self-subsistent entity but as an imitation of reality: indeed, it was to be judged by its distance from reality. Aristotle had considered poetry worthy to be studied as a sphere in its own right but had introduced subjective elements of the audience's response into his definition of tragedy, which was thereby partly "affective" (producing certain effects). But this was merely a pseudo-subjectivity: it assumed that members of an (hypothetical) audience would respond in a uniform way. With Horace, however, the definition of art contains a genuine subjective element, in terms of both author and audience. To begin with, the writer's materials

are not pre-given but must be selected according to his capacity: “When you are writing, choose a subject that matches your powers, and test again and again what weight your shoulders will take and what they won’t take” (*AP*, 38–40). In a striking image of reciprocity, Horace views the reader’s response as part of the existence of the poem: “As you find the human face breaks into a smile when others smile, so it weeps when others weep: if you wish me to weep, you must first express suffering yourself” (*AP*, 102–103). Talking of drama, Horace reinforces his point: “Here is what the public and I are both looking for” (*AP*, 153). Not only, then, is the audience the ultimate criterion of genuine artistry, but also literature is intrinsically dialogic: the presumed response of a particular audience guides its “creation.” The audience that Horace has in mind is no abstract entity. He is keenly aware of its changing moods and historical shifts of taste. Interestingly, Horace embeds this changeability firmly within the substratum of language. He considers it to be perfectly in order for a poet to “render a known word novel” and even to “mint” words: “when words advance in age, they pass away, and others born but lately, like the young, flourish and thrive” (*AP*, 48, 60–62). In talking of both changes in the composition of audiences and the need for growth in language, Horace displays historical self-consciousness and awareness of literary history as integral elements in literary criticism.

A prominent and influential principle expressed in Horace’s text is the then standard rhetorical principle of “decorum,” which calls for a “proper” relationship between form and content, expression and thought, style and subject matter, diction and character. Like many modern theorists, Horace’s notion of “form” encompasses language itself, and he seems to think that there is an intrinsic or internal connection between form and content; in other words, the content cannot somehow be prior to or independent of the form as implied in Pope’s view of language as the external “dress of thought.” Neither can the content and thought be prior to language. This is why Horace can talk of the old order of words passing away, as well as of words acquiring a new meaning. When he speaks of “minting” words, this seems to entail language being extended through increasing recognition of its inadequacy.

This brings us to the other side of Horace’s ambivalence as regards the “objective” status of literature. Having insisted on the *ontological* contribution of the reader or audience to what is termed “literature,” he describes recent changes in the make-up of the audience itself. Once, he says, the audience for a play was “a public . . . easily counted, not too large, sparing in their

ways, pure in their habits, modest in their attitude.” But as Rome began to expand her territories and cities encompassed a greater variety of populace, “more and more freedoms were granted in meter and music” (*AP*, 205–207, 211). This enlargement and “corruption” of the audience dictate directly what is permissible and desirable on stage. But if the audience now lacks “taste,” where does this leave Horace’s characterizations of *good* literature? Horace frankly admits that often a “play that is . . . properly characterized, though lacking charm and without profundity or art, draws the public more strongly and holds its attention better than verses deficient in substance and tuneful trivialities” (*AP*, 319–322). Horace here effectively reverses Aristotle’s priority of plot over characterization; for Horace, who rejects the Alexandrian attitude of “art for art’s sake,” and insists on the moral function of literature, the depiction of good character is indispensable. Indeed, this function should be effected in drama partly by the chorus which, says Horace, “should favor the good, give friendly advice, restrain the enraged, approve those who scruple to do wrong; it should praise the delights of a modest table, the bracing influence of justice and laws and the leisure afforded by peace; it should . . . offer supplication and prayer to the gods that fortune return to the unhappy and leave the proud” (*AP*, 196–201). Horace here states a comprehensive moral vision, embracing many aspects of life, from the formation of character by restraining negative emotions, through appreciation of social and political achievements to religious sentiment. And yet this vision is so commonplace that, coming from Horace’s pen, it could be ironic. If a poet is to convey character with propriety, he must learn “the duties owed to country and friends, the affection fit for parent, brother, and guest, the proper business of senator and judge, the part to be played by a general sent to war” (*AP*, 312–315). As against Plato, who had regarded the poet as necessarily distorting reality by offering a mere imitation of it, Horace insists that the “principal fountainhead of writing correctly is wisdom” (*AP*, 309) and he sees poetry as a repository of social and religious wisdom (*AP*, 396–407). In the depiction of character, the poet must be aware of the various characteristics of men from childhood, youth, manhood to old age (this repertoire of the ages of man is taken from rhetoric) (*AP*, 158–174). Hence, the poet’s work must be based on knowledge; not bookish knowledge but a detailed empirical knowledge derived from acute observation of numerous situations in actual life. In other words, Horace demands a high degree of realism from the poet, as expressed in this statement: “My instruction would be to examine the model of human life and manners as an informed copyist and to elicit from it a speech that lives” (*AP*, 317–318). This appears to be a

relatively modern sentiment, urging (as Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot were to do much later) that the poet use a language that “lives” as opposed to language derived from the stockpiles of rhetoric and previous poetic usage. Horace insists that poets invent on the basis of the “common resource” of “what is known” so that others can relate (*AP*, 240–243). Here again, the response of the listener or audience is integral to the very process of composition.

It is symptomatic of Horace’s pragmatic approach to poetry that he repeatedly alludes to the “role” of wealth in the production of literature. On the one hand he can say that like “a crier gathering a crowd to buy goods, a poet, who is rich in property, rich in money put out at interest, is inviting people to come and flatter him for gain” (*AP*, 419–421). And, echoing Plato, he derides a situation where poetry alone of all the professions can be practiced without knowledge and with impunity: “a person who has no idea how to compose verses nevertheless dares to. Why shouldn’t he? He is free and well-born” (*AP*, 382–383). Yet, this derision goes hand in hand with Horace’s sincere advice on how to succeed in the midst of this sorry state of affairs:

“a poet has matched every demand if he mingles the useful with the pleasant [*miscuit utile dulci*], by charming and, not less, advising the reader; that is a book that earns money for the *Sosii* [publishers]; a book that crosses the sea and, making its writer known, forecasts a long life for him.”
(*AP*, 342–346)

This matching “every demand” carries the thrust of Horace’s approach to literature, which views aesthetics as a practical combination. It’s not just that literature is written well or badly and subsequently sells better or worse. The recipe for its financial success is already inscribed in its aesthetic function (in which is inscribed its moral function), literature being a commodity in both aesthetic and monetary respects. Horace’s call for literature to be socially useful as well as pleasing was vastly influential; as was his insistence that a poem not only charm the reader but also offer moral advice.

In reminding the would-be poet of his obligations – such as self-knowledge or knowledge of his own abilities – Horace stresses the amount of labor required for composing good poetry. Part of this labor is seeking out valid criticism of his work from sincere and qualified people. Horace admonishes the poet to store his work away for nine years. He warns that, once a poem is

published, the words used by the poet will forever become public property, part of a language inescapably social: “it will be permissible to destroy what you have not published: the voice once sent forth cannot return” [nescit vox missa reverti] (AP, 386–390). Horace’s imagery here, using vox (voice) instead of, say, liber (book), could be read as implying that the act of publication effects a disembodiment of voice: once personalized, in the form of speech, it now leaves the author forever to become entwined in the huge network of presupposition and openness to alternative meaning known as “writing.” Indeed, Horace’s argument seems strikingly modern in rejecting an author’s intention as the sole determinant or ultimate criterion of a poem’s meaning. The poem’s meaning is determined by its situation within larger structures of signification which lie beyond the poet’s control.

But what has Horace, in this “classic,” really told us about art and literature? Effectively, he has merely reiterated the then customary notion of literature as a compromise of pleasing and instructing. Even his deprecation of poetry as a “game” is conventional. And his emphasis on poetry as an act of labor, as effort (ars) rather than innate creativity (ingenium), was hardly original: a controversy had long been raging concerning these.² Even here, Horace traverses a safe via media: “I do not see of what value is application [studium] without abundant talent or of what value is genius [ingenium] when uncultivated” (AP, 409–410). It’s true that Horace made an advance in terms of the persistence with which he insisted on poetry as an act of labor. Moreover, beyond these traditional concerns, Horace advocates a loose concept of poetic unity, whereby the various parts of a poem should be appropriately arranged. Horace, after all, had opened the *Ars poetica* with a grotesque image of what the artist should avoid: a human head attached to a horse’s neck, covered with “a variety of feathers on limbs assembled from any and everywhere” (AP, 1–2). Horace also shared in a new concern with literary history, and downplayed the distinctions between genres such as tragedy and comedy (CHLC, V.I, 258, 261–262). It is arguable that what is original is Horace’s blending of conventional and newer attitudes. It may, indeed, be his lack of originality, his ability to give striking poetic and epigrammatic expression to a body of accumulated wisdom or “common sense,” the critic speaking with the authority of a poet, that ensured the classic status of his text.

Whatever the case, it is clear that so much recycling of traditional attitudes has a partial basis in Horace’s political circumstances. Once a republican, having fought on the side of Brutus against

Antony and Octavian, Horace gradually moved toward acceptance of the divine status of the new emperor Octavian, now Augustus. Though till late in life Augustus cherished a liberal stance toward men of letters, poets provided one platform for the propagation of his programs of religious, cultural, and agricultural reform. The complexity of Horace's shifting allegiance is recorded in his poems which, like most Roman literary texts, were highly self-conscious artifacts. We can perhaps read the *Ars poetica* as a distilled form of this poetic self-consciousness, as well as a rationalization of conventional poetic practice. This rationalization is based partly in Horace's vision of poetic and political disharmony.

The same ambiguities and hesitations which plague the *Ars* pervade the poems to an even more striking extent. And it seems to be precisely this series of hesitations, *aporiai* if you will, with its modern emphasis on individualized creation and its withdrawal from political or aesthetic commitment, which distinguishes Horace's work from anything written by Aristotle, Vergil, or later writers such as Longinus. It is the indelible writing of himself, his personal background, into his poetic significance which, ironically, is universalizable. Many of Horace's odes are concerned with death, a common enough theme; what is relatively peculiar to him is that his (conventional) endeavor to transcend death, his refusal to accept death as an absolute limitation on meaning and language, is indissolubly tied to his acute consciousness of his humble origin. The issue of "origins" lies at the heart of Horace's political ambivalence which, in turn, underpins his polyvalent aesthetic stance. Despite Juvenal's cynical remark that "When Horace cried 'Rejoice!' / His stomach was comfortably full,"³ Horace tends to see his art as something aligned with poverty rather than riches. He appears almost obsessed with his mediocre subsistence. (We might share Juvenal's cynicism on the ground that Horace's "modest" house was actually a twenty-four-room mansion with three bathing pools, though this was indeed modest compared with the vast possessions of many of the senatorial class.) In the *Ars*, Horace had erected a sharp opposition between a business mentality and the frame of mind conducive to writing poetry: "do you think that when once this . . . anxiety about property has stained the mind, we can hope for the composition of poems?" (*AP*, 330–331). The same opposition informs the poems, not merely in the form of passing disgruntlement but as part of the worldview controlling them. Horace's views of poetry are ostensibly entirely practical in their motives and devoid of metaphysical, political, or religious implications. He is more concerned with the immediate labor behind poetry as a craft. But those broader concerns, deflected into the status of

formal phenomena in Horace's verse, lurk underneath the guise of philosophical, political, and financial indifference.

Horace's equivocation toward Augustus is well known. In some odes, such as II.12, he disclaims any ability to sing of Caesar's exploits. This, says Horace with typical irony, would require "plain prose."⁴ By the fifth ode of book IV (i.e., after being commissioned by Augustus to compose the *Carmen saeculare*), he seems to accept Caesar's rule as secure and prosperous. But underlying this chronological movement from equivocation to allegiance is a more subtle emotional development; more subtle because less overtly political, but political nonetheless. Horace's apparent recalcitrance from politics is couched in a quasi-religious and aesthetic language, decked with the ornaments of Roman mythology and ethics. But his devotion to the Muses and the gods is half-hearted: even where he self-corrects his earlier "illusions" (perhaps "inspired" by Augustus' renovation of religious pieties), as in *Odes*, I.34:

I, who have never been
A generous or keen
Friend of the gods, must now confess
Myself professor in pure foolishness . . .

It seems that his "devotion" to these external powers is channeled largely through his manipulation of them: "I am the Muses' priest" (*Odes*, III.1). Certain insights of Hegel on the Roman Empire cast an interesting light on Horace's situation here. In *The Philosophy of History* Hegel characterizes Roman religion as "an instrument in the power of the devotee; it is taken possession of by the individual, who seeks his private objects and interests; whereas the truly Divine possesses on the contrary a concrete power in itself." Yet when Horace speaks of his verse as an immortal monument, this is not mere self-aggrandizement, boasting that somehow he alone will survive death. It is equally an assertion that life's most important and durable gifts are those unconstrained by immediate political circumstances or contingencies of religious and ethical practice. Hence the monument is as much political as aesthetic, affirming as an ultimate value the withdrawal from temporal affairs, a withdrawal that is enshrined in and defines subjectivity. This cherishing of the private over the public is a symptom of Horace's refusal to

see the meaning of subjectivity as dispersed through the objective forms of Roman law and duty. In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel drew a famous analogy between the later Roman Empire and the modern bourgeois state. In these societies, individuality is abstract; valued only in terms of property and possessions, it has no real content. Hegel says that in this period, any true ethical spirit perishes in the condition of “right” or “law”; the “Unhappy Consciousness” is the “tragic fate of the certainty of self that aims to be absolute.”⁶ Horace inhabits a world where this kenosis or emptying of subjectivity has already begun. He himself laments the passing of earlier generations with hardier morals and a less decadent approach to life (*Odes*, III.6).

Horace’s inconsistency is almost systematic. He pays lip service to the gods, the Muses, and the administrative exploits of Augustus Caesar. But it’s the vacuum in subjectivity, as later noted by Hegel, which he longs to fill. Even the themes of conquest and government are assessed in the deflected form of their implications for subjectivity:

Govern your appetites: thereby you’ll rule more
Than if you merged Libya with distant Gades . . .

(*Odes*, II.2)

In the same poem Horace warns against greed which, “when indulged, grows like the savage dropsy.” Moreover, conquest has its limitations: “the swift years . . . Old age and death . . . no one conquers” (*Odes*, II.14). Horace insists that death’s lake will be crossed by both “Rulers of kingdoms” and “needy peasants” alike. And even piety will not avert this end. These apprehensions eventually ripen into a blatant questioning of the very notion of conquest:

Why do we aim so high, when time must foil our
Brave archery? Why hanker after countries
Heated by foreign suns? What exile ever
Fled his own mind?

(*Odes*, II.16)

It's worth recalling here a point argued effectively by Perry Anderson: since the economy of the entire Roman world depended on the slave mode of production, systematized on a massive scale and involving a rupture between labor and the intellectual-political activities of free citizens, the empire was stagnant in technological terms and only through geographical conquest could it maintain itself. Anderson's point derives of course from Marx, who had noted that in the Roman Empire all productive work was vilified as slave labor: "the labor of the free was under a moral ban." What incentives could slaves have to increase their efficiency by technological or economic advances?

The only route for expansion was a "lateral" one of military conquest, which in turn yielded more wealth and more slave labor. As Anderson has it, "Classical civilization was . . . inherently *colonial* in character" (*PF*, 26–28). From this point of view, Horace's text can be read as questioning the very foundation of Roman civilization. Given his inclination to the "inward" in the midst of a brutal Roman world where inwardness, where the content of human subjectivity, had little significance, could we read Horace's attitudes as subversive? They certainly invert conventional Roman values and the Roman emphasis on public duty; it is only poetry, in Horace's eyes, which can conquer death (*Odes*, IV.8). And poetry is of its essence private; Horace at one stage mockingly writes a poem about being asked to compose a poem. He asserts his own scheme of values: simple living, a mind free from envy, and devotion to his Muses.

UNIT 6

Horace and His Concept of Poetry

Ironically, although Horace is generally against the idea of private property, looking back as he does to an age where there was "Small private wealth, large communal property" (*Odes*, II.15), he is all for this principle in the realm of poetry, as he states in the *Ars*: "A subject in the public domain you will have the right to make your own, if you do not keep slavishly to the beaten track" [*publica materies privati iuris erit, si / non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem*] (*AP*, 131–132). Once again, Horace is concerned to redefine the connection between *publicus* and *privatus*. His insight here may go deeper than at first appears. His opposition to the principle of "private property" is not simply a reaction against the social imbalance of wealth or even the financial rat-race (a favorite point of commentators on Horace). The notion of "private property"

is closely tied to the *nature* of the individual. Talking of the Roman legal system, Perry Anderson affirms that the “great, decisive accomplishment of the new Roman law was . . . its invention of the concept of ‘absolute property’ ” (*PF*, 66). This had also been affirmed by Hegel, whose treatment of its implications for subjectivity is illuminating. Hegel is altogether cynical of the concept of private right. He argues that in the figure of the emperor, whose will was absolute, “isolated subjectivity . . . gained a perfectly unlimited realization.” And this one, capricious, monstrous will presided over a bland equality of subjects: “Individuals were perfectly equal . . . and without any political right . . . Private Right developed and perfected this equality . . . the principle of abstract Subjectivity . . . now realizes itself as Personality in the recognition of Private Right.” The point here is that, as Hegel goes on to say, “Private Right is . . . *ipso facto*, a nullity, an ignoring of the personality.”

For Hegel, the principle of private right is a symptom of the *necessary* collapse of the Roman republic: there is no object (spiritual or political) beyond the objects dictated by individual greed and caprice. We needn’t assert that Horace was thinking in Hegelian terms in order to believe that he too was aware of private right as an index of moral and spiritual disintegration, of the absence of a genuine subjectivity measurable in human, rather than merely abstract legal, terms. And, for all the emphasis he places on the need for literature to satisfy an audience, his withdrawal into a reconstituted subjectivity encompasses his aesthetics. He tends to regard himself as a recluse, preferring to satisfy the poetic standards of a chosen few. He assumes the posture of *recusatio*, refusing to attempt any epic praise of imperial and public deeds (*CHLC*, V.I, 251). The inky cloak of scholarly elitism fits him with a conventional smugness: “I bar the gross crowd. Give me reverent silence. / I am the Muses’ priest” (*Odes*, III.1). Horace’s religion, of course, is poetry. This securing of a heaven of invention, a haven of privacy in the midst of a callously public world, this refilling of the substantive emptiness of “privacy,” amounts to a redefinition of values, as well as of the essentially “human.” This redefinition does carry a subversive potential.

But, in common with much deconstructive criticism, this withholding of political complicity is an isolated gesture, with no contextualizing framework of practice to render it politically meaningful or effective. What exactly is the “human” into which Horace retreats? To begin with, it entails in the *Ars* an essentialism whereby human nature is fixed: “nature forms us within from

the start to every set of fortune” (*AP*, 108). This goes hand in hand with an abstract view of the determinants of social changes: “The years as they come bring many advantages with them and take as many away as they withdraw” (*AP*, 175–176). This is almost on a par with Derrida’s attribution of the historical growth of various philosophical oppositions to one indifferent cause: “the movement of *différance*.” Moreover, Horace seems to view “truth” and “beauty” as unproblematic concepts.

Again, Horace’s reaction against the present is too often couched in praise of the past. The virtues he commends are unequivocally classical: which isn’t intrinsically culpable except that these virtues are unashamedly associated with peace of mind and avoidance of hazard:

auream quisquis mediocritatem

diligit tutus . . .

All who love safety make their prize

The golden mean and hate extremes . . .

(*Odes*, II.10)

Although, unlike the translation given above, Horace’s Latin does not include the word “extreme,” his lines imply an Aristotelian hypostatization of the concept “extreme”: as with Aristotle, the mean is defined in negative terms, by what it is not. The “extreme” is treated as an entity in itself, held up as something to be avoided. This could be read as a concerted peripheralization of what is viewed as unconventional or threatening to the established order. But we should also recall that for Aristotle the “mean” was a moral *end* in itself. Horace’s reduction of it to the status of a mere *means* toward attaining the privileged end of “safety” is even more conservative than Aristotle’s formulation. Aristotle had at least qualified his definition of moral virtue, which consists “essentially in the observance of the mean *relative to us*” (my emphasis).

Moreover, it is not just safety which Horace cherishes. All his “riches,” the things he craves, such as good health, peace of mind, and poetry (*Odes*, I.31), derive from his lack of commitment even to non-commitment. These lines have a self-betraying twist:

As wealth grows, worry grows, and thirst for more wealth.

Splendid Maecenas (splendid yet still a knight),

Have I not done right in ducking low to keep

My headpiece out of sight?

(*Odes*, III.16)

By “ducking low,” by refusing to raise his head, Horace is referring to his shrinking from material ambition and greed. But he has ducked low in another sense: politically his head was indeed out of sight. His work makes radical gestures but they remain just that, gestures. Horace is often held up as a bold spokesman for the Roman republican ideals he saw crumbling all around him. While there can be no doubt of Horace’s powerful poetic gifts of satire, subtlety, and concision, that is a perspective which mirrors the history of Horace criticism, which has made the *Ars* a classic, more than it does the actual narratives of the Augustan state.

Two such narratives occur in the writings of Tacitus and Suetonius. These surely tell us that no assessment of Horace’s views can be undertaken without some political perspective as to the nature of Augustus’ rule. Suetonius portrays Augustus as evolving from an earlier, ruthless and fickle character into a clement and benevolent ruler “assiduous in his administration of justice.” Suetonius emphasizes that the senate even insisted on Augustus’ absolute authority. Ironically, Tacitus, who has invoked the censure of left-wing historians for his “quietist” expression of the worldview of the Roman senatorial class, offers a more cynical account. There was no opposition to imperial rule, says Tacitus, because “the boldest spirits had fallen in battle . . . while the remaining nobles . . . preferred the safety of the present to the dangerous past.” Would this be an apt description of Horace’s mentality? Horace, as the son of a freedman, was hardly “noble.” Nor, having fled the field at the battle of Philippi, was he one of the “boldest spirits” even before Octavian’s rule was consolidated. Tacitus seemingly laments the passing of republican ideals, urging that in the new order “there was not a vestige left of the old sound morality” (*Tacitus*, 5–11). And yet, despite certain comments suggesting that “liberty” and “sovereignty” are incompatible (*Tacitus*, 678), Tacitus begins his *History* by saying that after “the conflict at Actium, . . . it became essential to peace, that all power should be centered in one man” (*Tacitus*, 419). Nonetheless, in his history of Agricola, Tacitus makes a British chieftain describe to his

troops the Roman imperial enterprise as follows: “To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude [wilderness] and call it peace” (*Tacitus*, 695).

That the principate was necessary to peace is a common enough view. It is accepted by Hegel, and even Perry Anderson writes that the “Roman monarchy of Augustus . . . punctually arrived when its hour struck” (*PF*, 70). But our problem remains: if this view was genuinely accepted by Horace, why his equivocation? And why was his criticism so tempered? One solution would be to say, with R. M. Ogilvie, that in contrast with other renowned poets of his day, Horace lacked the social standing (something he was ever conscious of) to make authoritative pronouncements, and had no real prospect of a political career. In support of this, we might adduce Cicero’s statement that certain political offices are “reserved to men of ancient family or to men of wealth.” But Cicero, like Ovid and Propertius, took risks. What better evidence is there for this than Plutarch’s description of Antony’s soldiers cutting off Cicero’s head and hands for his writing of the *Philippics*? Or Ovid’s banishment to a dreary outpost, never revoked? Moreover, Suetonius states that some of Augustus’ decrees, such as his marriage laws, aroused open opposition. His views were often impugned openly in the senate, without retribution. In the sphere of literature, “Augustus gave all possible encouragement to intellectuals.” He was, however, chiefly interested in moral precepts in literature and “expressed contempt for both innovators and archaizers . . . and would attack them with great violence: especially his dear friend Maecenas.” How vulnerable, then, was Horace, that other “dear friend” of Maecenas? It’s a favorite line of Horace commentators to say that his poems “avoid the appearance of systematic argument.” In doing this, does Horace avoid systematic argument itself? Perhaps the baby went out with the bathwater – in all three of his bathing pools.

But let us not be unduly harsh. Many historians agree that, all said and done, the republic in its final phase was already rotten: individual self-aggrandizement had already replaced loyalty to the state. Hence we have the individual (rather than state-sanctioned) military exploits of Caesar and Crassus. The republic had been, in any case, only a nominal democracy, actual power residing with unbroken continuity in the aristocratic class. The imperial administration, moreover, kept intact the basic legal framework of the republic, especially its economic laws. The primary change was that the will of a monarch replaced that of an oligarchy. Both during and after the republic, the will of the citizen in practice counted for little. This is reflected in the prevailing

philosophies of the time: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Epicureanism. It was Epicureanism more than Stoicism which claimed Horace's lifelong allegiance, a school of thought which was cynical of the gods and which discouraged social and political involvement. No doubt a poet in Horace's equivocal position found here a platform for his own non-involvement. But again, Hegel's views here are illuminating. He suggests that the purpose of *all* of these philosophies was the same: to render the soul indifferent to the real world. They were all a "counsel of despair to a world which no longer possessed anything stable."

Marx says much the same thing: "the Epicurean, [and the] Stoic philosophy was the boon of its time; thus, when the universal sun has gone down, the moth seeks the lamplight of the private individual."¹⁹ A common saying of the Epicurean sect was that "tyrants for all their violence could not destroy the internal happiness of the wise man." Hence, although we can sympathize with Horace's position, we should bear in mind that his potentially subversive withdrawals into subjectivity, like his prescriptions in the *Ars poetica*, were not original but merely commonplaces of his day. His originality was exclusively on the level of form, and it is here that he merits undoubted praise. It seems that Augustus has been universally praised for bringing "order" to the Roman state. Within this scheme of thinking, Horace's text is indeed marked by the merits and limitations of ambivalence. But it took a thinker of Marx's historical acuity to assert blandly that the "order" of Rome "was worse than the worst disorder." The emperors had simply regularized the republican exploitation of the provinces, resulting eventually in "universal impoverishment" throughout the empire. Perhaps we should give the last word to Engels:

"Old Horace reminds me in places of Heine, who learned so much from him and who was also *au fond* quite as much a scoundrel *politice*. Imagine this honest man, who challenges the *vultus instantis tyranni* [the threatening face of a tyrant] and grovels before Augustus. Apart from this, the foul-mouthed old so and so is still very lovable."

What greater, and more honest, tribute could Horace ask for?

Assignments

1. Critically evaluate *Ars Poetica* as a commentary on poetry and its classical perspective.

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The dating of the poem is uncertain. Different sources give various dates ranging from 19–10 BC. The date 19 BC is given by *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, p. 74.

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Units 7

7 (a): Introduction to Samuel Johnson: His life and Works

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Samuel Johnson, the son of Michael, a bookseller, was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire, on September 18, 1709. At an early age, he contracted a tubercular infection from his nurse that left him physically handicapped with bad eyesight and partial deafness. Later, a bout of smallpox left him with facial scars. In spite of his handicaps, he was determined to be independent and did not accept help from others. He was unable to play regular sports but made up by learning other skills: boxing, swimming, leaping and sliding on frozen lakes and ponds. He first went to Lichfield grammar schools and later to Stourbridge. At both schools, he was acknowledged as a leader, both by his teachers and his fellow-students. After a gap of two years, he went to Pembroke College, Oxford University and studied there for thirteen months but had to leave in 1729 because of financial difficulties. He was fiercely independent and refused any kind of charity. While at Oxford, he had only one pair of torn shoes with his toes coming through and one night, a man placed a pair of new shoes in front of his room and when Johnson found them the next morning, he threw them away in anger and wounded pride. Once out of Oxford, he went into depression for nearly two years and fearing that he might become insane, even contemplated suicide. At this time, he also developed a compulsive tic that remained with him for the rest of his life.

In 1732, Johnson went to Birmingham. Here the Porters helped him get out of his depression and regain his self-confidence. Elizabeth Porter appreciated and cared for Johnson and in 1735, after the death of her husband, she married Johnson, twenty years his senior. In the same year,

Johnson published his first book, a translation. With the financial support of his wife, Johnson opened a private school and David Garrick, who later became a famous actor of the day, was one of his pupils here. However, the school venture was not a success and he and Elizabeth moved to London in 1737. In London, he earned a meagre livelihood, working as translator and writer. While at Litchfield and London, he wrote his tragedy *Irene*. He wrote regularly for the *Gentleman's Magazine* and contributed prefaces, short biographies, essays, reviews, and poems. His poem, *London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal*, published in May 1738, made his reputation. Pope pronounced that the author of this poem would become famous. In 1744, Johnson wrote *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage, Son of the Earl Rivers*, a revealing life account of his mysterious friend, Richard Savage. Today this is recognized as a significant milestone in the art of writing "critical biography".

The year, 1745 proved a literary turning point in Johnson's life. He published a pamphlet on *Macbeth* that won him Warburton's praise, which he valued highly, because it came at a time when he most needed it. At this time, he also began thinking about publishing an English Dictionary. In 1746, he signed an agreement with a group of publishers, accepting a payment of 1575 pounds. The Italians published a dictionary in 1612, which took them 20 years to prepare. The French dictionary published in 1694, engaged 40 scholars, who took 55 years to prepare it and then another 18 years to revise it. The Oxford English Dictionary, which was a collaborative work of more than 70 scholars, took nearly 70 years to complete. Johnson planned to complete his ambitious project in three years but it took him nearly eight years to complete. This in itself was a remarkable achievement. The dictionary was published in 1755. His financial condition improved once Johnson received 1,575 pounds for the project.

In 1749, Johnson published his much-acclaimed poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes: The Tenth Satire of Juvenal". In the following years, he wrote a large number of essays for his journal *The Rambler*. In 1759, Johnson published his brilliant work *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. In October 1765, Johnson's last great work, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, which had been delayed for so long, was published. The last period of Johnson's life was spent in the company of his friends, especially the Thrales and James Boswell. On 17 June 1783, Johnson suffered a stroke. He made great efforts to overcome it, but was also plagued by various other ailments. He died quietly on 13 December 1784. On his death, his friend William Gerard

Hamilton, Member of Parliament, paid a great tribute to him saying that Johnson had left a chasm that no man could fill. His friend and admirer Boswell later went on to write *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, which presents Johnson as an extraordinary man.

UNIT 8

8 (a): 'Preface to Shakespeare'

In 1756, Johnson published his *Proposal for printing by subscription, the Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare, corrected and illustrated by Samuel Johnson*. Once the subscription was advertised, he received a large sum of money personally. He foolhardily promised to bring out the work in a year's time but unable to bring it out at the promised time, he came under scathing attacks, especially by the poet Charles Churchill. The upbraiding in verse by Churchill made him restart work on his edition of Shakespeare. It was finally published in eight volumes, octavo size in 1765, and nine years after the publication of the *Proposal*.

The collection has a *Preface* (72 pages in Johnson's first edition), which is acknowledged as the best part of the edition and considered a great piece of neo-classical literary criticism. The *Preface* enumerates Shakespeare's "excellencies" as well as his "defects. His biographer and friend Boswell states: "A blind indiscriminate admiration of Shakespeare had exposed the British nation to the ridicule of foreigners. Johnson, by candidly admitting the faults of his poet, had the more credit in bestowing on him deserved and indisputable praise"(Boswell 491).

The *Preface* has two sections: one dealing with Johnson's critical analysis of Shakespeare as a dramatist, and the other part dealing with an explication of the editorial methods used by Johnson in his Edition of Shakespeare. Johnson begins the *Preface* by asserting that people cherish the works of writers who are dead and neglect the modern. Johnson partly agrees with the 18th century critics that antiquity be honored, especially in the arts, as opposed to the sciences because the only test that can be applied to them is that of "length of duration and continuance of esteem"(3). He states that if a writer is venerated by posterity, it is a proof of his excellence and he cites the example of Homer. He says the ancients are to be honored not merely because they are ancient but because the truths that they present have stood the test of time. He then applies this criterion to Shakespeare: Shakespeare "may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit" (5).

In his analysis of Shakespeare, Johnson adopts a multidimensional approach. He examines the bard's works from different angles and presents him as timeless and universal, but he also presents him as a product of his age and time. As a neo-classicist, he tries to maintain a structural balance of praise and blame for Shakespeare. He adopts an “*ahistorical* and a *historical*” approach to our understanding of Shakespeare (Desai 5). He tries to make a distinction between the appeal of Shakespeare to his contemporaries and to future generations. He says that since times and customs have changed, the depiction of the particular manners of Shakespeare's age, are no longer of interest to contemporary audiences. In his opinion, Shakespeare continues to be admired not for depicting the customs and manners of his own age but for the representation of universal truths: “Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature” (7).

Unit 8 (b): Shakespeare, a Poet of Nature

In the first part of the *Preface* Johnson praises Shakespeare as “a poet of Nature”, who “holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life”: all his characters be they Romans, Danes or kings represent general human passions and principles common to all humans (8). In Johnson's view, Shakespeare's scenes are populated “only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion” (13). Another merit he finds in Shakespeare is that though Shakespeare's characters depict universal human passions, yet they are distinctly individualized. He also appreciates Shakespeare for not focusing only on the passion of love but dealing with different kinds of passion exhibited by humankind. He refutes the charge levelled against Shakespeare by critics that Shakespeare represents noble characters of different nations as buffoons and drunkards. He considers these charges ‘petty cavils of petty minds’. He says Shakespeare “always makes nature predominate over accident; and that if he preserves the essential character, he is not very careful about the accidental distinctions” (15). He clinches his argument by saying: “a poet overlooks the casual distinctions of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with a figure, neglects the tapestry” (15). He concludes with a metaphorical tribute to Shakespeare: “The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets; passes by the adamant of Shakespeare” (29).

He views Shakespeare's plays as neither tragedies nor comedies but as just representations “exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and

sorrow”(17). While the ancients concentrated on producing either comedy or tragedy and no Greek or Roman author attempted to do both, Shakespeare possessed the genius to do both in the same composition. His mingled drama violated the rules of dramatic writing but for Johnson realism supersedes the claim of rules: “there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature....The end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing” (20). He further states that “mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alterations of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life” (20). Johnson considers this mingling justified as Shakespeare’s plays both “instruct and delight”. Nor does he feel that the mixing of tragic and comic scenes in any way diminish or weaken the passions the dramatist aims at representing on the other hand he feels that variety contributes to pleasure.

Unit 8 (c): Shakespeare: A Genius in Portraying the Comic Spirit

Johnson considers Shakespeare a genius in writing comedy. He agrees with Rhymer that Shakespeare possessed a natural flair for comedy. He thinks Shakespeare had to toil hard for the tragic scenes but the comic scenes appear to be written with great spontaneity: “His tragedy seems to be skill. His comedy to be instinct” (28). He asserts that Shakespeare obtained his comic dialogues from the common intercourse of life and therefore their appeal has not diminished over time.

Shakespeare’s Faults

After his praise of Shakespeare, Johnson goes on to point out the faults of Shakespeare. Johnson distinguishes between art and life. He says the audience is always aware that they are watching a fictionalized representation and can enjoy tragedy only for this reason, although the enjoyment is directly proportional to the realism with which the characters are depicted.

As a true neo-classicist, Johnson is extremely didactic in his approach to Shakespeare. He believes that however true to life an artist proposes to be, the creative artist may not sacrifice “virtue to convenience”. Johnson thinks Shakespeare is more concerned about pleasing than

instructing. In the eyes of Johnson, Shakespeare lacks a clear and distinct moral purpose and sometimes seems to write without any moral purpose at all. He disapproves of Shakespeare on moral grounds: “he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his person’s indifferently through right and wrong and at the close dismisses them without further care and leaves their examples to operate by chance” (33). This “barbarity” Johnson cannot pardon for he believes that it is always the duty of the writer “to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place” (33). In this connection, in his notes on *King Lear*, he condemns Shakespeare for sacrificing the virtue of Cordelias: “Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles” (Johnson in Desai 155). He goes on to say:

“A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life; but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue.” (155)

Johnson also finds faults with Shakespeare’s plots and thinks they are loosely formed and not pursued with diligence. He finds this reflected in Shakespeare’s neglect to utilize the opportunities that come his way to instruct and delight. Additionally, he adds that Shakespeare seems not to labour enough towards the ending of his plays such that “his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented” (35). He also finds Shakespeare guilty of violating chronology and verisimilitude relating to time and place for “ he gives to one age or nation , without scruple, the customs, institutions and opinions of another”(36). He criticizes Shakespeare for making Hector quote Aristotle in *Troilus and Cressida* and also critiques him for combining the love of Theseus and Hippolyta with that of the Gothic mythology of Fairies.

Although Johnson lauds Shakespeare’s skill in writing comic scenes, yet he does not gloss over the faults. He finds Shakespeare’s language coarse and the jests gross in many comic dialogues. He comments that the gentlemen and ladies indulging in these coarse exchanges appear to be no different than the clowns. Johnson cannot excuse Shakespeare even if this coarseness was

prevalent in Shakespeare's time, for he thinks that as a poet he should have known better. The meanness, tediousness and obscurity in Shakespeare's tragedies Johnson considers the undesirable effect of excessive labor. He finds Shakespeare's narration often verbose and prolix, full of verbiage and unnecessary repetition. He also accuses Shakespeare of not matching his words to the occasion. His set speeches he finds "cold and weak" and designed by Shakespeare to show his knowledge but resented by the reader. At times, he finds Shakespeare's language high sounding and not appropriate to the sentiment or the thought he wishes to express.

"Repeatedly Johnson finds Shakespeare's tragic scenes marred by a sudden drop in emotional temperature caused by some infelicity of language – a pun, a conceit, a hyperbole" (Desai 77). Johnson directs a scathing attack on Shakespeare's fondness for a quibble. He describes Shakespeare's love for a quibble through various amusing analogies. He says a quibble was to him "the golden apple for which he will stoop from his elevation" or "the fatal Cleopatra for which he was willing to lose the world and was content to lose it" (44). Desai remarks: "had Shakespeare been a lesser poet, Johnson's expectations would have been proportionately modest. But with Shakespeare the potential is always so great; the fulfillment sometimes inadequate. In short, Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare's tragic scenes is born out of his admiration for him" (Desai 77).

Unit 8 (d): Shakespeare's Violation of the Unities

Shakespeare violated the law of the unities of time and place established and recognized by both dramatists and critics. 18th century critics considered this violation a defect in Shakespeare. Johnson disagrees and thinks it is possible to defend Shakespeare on this account. He argues that the Histories by virtue of their very nature need to keep changing time and place and additionally since they are neither comedies nor tragedies, they remain outside the purview of violation. He believes that Shakespeare, apart from the Histories, maintains the unity of action and follows the Aristotelian rules. His plots have a beginning, middle and an end and the plot also moves slowly but surely towards an end that meets the expectations of the reader. Johnson acknowledges that Shakespeare does neglect to follow the unities of time and place that have been held in high esteem since the time of Corneille, but according to him, the rules are not founded on tenable

principles. His critical analysis reveals their irrelevance. He says that the critics insist on the observance of the unities of time and place, as they believe it contributes to dramatic credibility. They hold that the audience would find it difficult to believe in an action spread over many months and years when the actual stage performance lasts only three hours. In addition, since the audience is seated in the same place for the duration of the play, their belief would be strained if one action takes place in Alexandria and the other in Rome. To refute these arguments Johnson states that all art is artifice and that the audience too is aware of this. His argument is that if the audience sitting in a theatre in London can believe in the reality of the first act taking place in Alexandria, then they can very well imagine the second act taking place in another country. By the same logic, the spectators can imagine the lapse of months or years between acts. However, he argues the audience is not totally incredulous; rather, the audience is, as would be stated later by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in a “willing suspension of disbelief”. Johnson states that tragic actions would not give pleasure if the audience thought that it was all happening in reality on stage. The real source of pleasure lies in the fact that the enactment brings realities to mind.

Shakespeare and Elizabethan England

In Johnson’s analysis of Elizabethan England, England emerges as a nation “just emerging from barbarity” where “literature was yet confined to professed scholars, or to men and women of high rank” and the general public was raised on popular romances (65). Johnson states that very often Shakespeare uses these familiar and popular romance sources as the building blocks for his plays so that the not-so-learned spectators could easily follow the story.

In the absence of any established facts about Shakespeare’s learning, Johnson believes that Shakespeare did not know French and Italian and that what he borrowed from foreign sources was borrowed from English translations of foreign works. Johnson asserts that since English literature was yet in its infancy in Elizabethan England, Shakespeare had no English models of drama or poetry to follow - neither character nor dialogue was yet understood. Therefore, Johnson considers Shakespeare a pioneer who introduced character and dialogue into drama. He attributes Shakespeare’s excellence not so much to learning but to his own genius. Repeatedly, Johnson stresses the fact that Shakespeare’s natural genius was aided by his close personal

observation and experience of life. Johnson states that Shakespeare's extraordinary presentation of human nature and character could not have come from reading psychology because no psychology books were available at this time, but emerged from his talent of observing life, as Shakespeare's knowledge of the inanimate world was as wide and exact as that of human beings. Johnson considers Shakespeare, a pioneer. He says:

“Shakespeare is always original; nothing is derived from the works of other writers. He is comparable only to Homer in his invention.

Shakespeare is the pioneer of English drama - the originator of the form, the characters, the language and the performances.

Shakespeare was the first playwright to establish the harmony of blank verse and to discover the qualities of the English language for smoothness and harmony.”

Shakespeare was the first successful playwright whose tragedies as well as comedies were successful and gave appropriate pleasure.”

Shakespeare's Texts

The rest of the *Preface* concentrates on the lack of availability of authentic texts, Shakespeare's carelessness in not getting his plays published, the various emendations made by critics since the time of Shakespeare until Johnson's own time, and his own editorial methods.

Unit 8 (e)

Background to the Publication of Johnson's Edition of Shakespeare

Most of Shakespeare's plays were published almost seven years after his death. Johnson is critical about Shakespeare's indifference to getting his plays published and for writing for immediate profit and pleasure. He says that not only did Shakespeare not care to leave authentic versions of his plays for posterity; rather, even the few that were published in his lifetime did not get his attention and scrutiny. As a result, corrupted texts with alterations and additions based on conjecture survived and created confusion and obscurity. He feels other causes too contributed to

the corruption of the texts: (a) the printing method (b) the use of copiers(c) the mutilation of speeches by actors who wished to shorten them and (d) Shakespeare's own ungrammatical style of writing.

The fourth Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published in 1685. A number of editions of Shakespeare were published between 1709, Johnson's year of birth and 1765, the year of publication of Johnson's edition. The following editions were printed between 1709 and 1765:

Nicolas Rowe, First Edition, 1709: "Rowe divided the play into acts and scenes, modernized the spellings, marked the entrances and exits of characters, and prefixed a list of dramatis personae to each play; in short , he made the text of Shakespeare more intelligible and attractive to eighteenth-century readers than it was before"(Desai 27). He also added a formal biography of Shakespeare that Johnson retained for his edition although he was unhappy with its style.

Alexander Pope's Edition, 1725:Further mutilation of the text as Pope made copious arbitrary emendations.

Lewis Theobald's Edition, 1734: Unlike his predecessors, did not use the unreliable fourth Folio as his text. He based his texts on the Quartos and the first Folio.

Sir Thomas Hamner's Edition, 1744: Was of little value.

Warburton's Edition, 1747: Was not of much significance.

Johnson's Editorial Method

Johnson had access to all the above given editions while writing his own edition. In the *Preface*, he acknowledges his debt to his predecessors and includes all their Prefaces. In a way, Johnson is to be credited with bringing out a variorum edition of Shakespeare's plays. Johnson not only commented on the merits and faults of the earlier emendatory critics but also included the different versions of lines and passages of the available texts and the subsequent emendations along with his own notes and emendations. Johnson states that his edition of Shakespeare's plays carries three kinds of notes (a) illustrative: to explain difficulties (b) judicial: to comment on "faults and beauties" (c) emendatory: to correct corruptions in the text. He acknowledges that he

exercised restraint in making the emendations and was “neither superfluously copious nor scrupulously reserved” (131). Johnson states that he has been successful in shedding light on some obscure passages and made them more understandable to the readers. However, with great humility he accepts that there are many others passages that he himself was unable to understand and leaves their interpretation to posterity. Johnson also states that he treads the middle ground between “presumption and timidity” by trusting in those publishers “who had a copy before their eyes” and also avoids too much conjectural criticism (142).

Johnson’s Advice to the Readers and his Achievements

Johnson advises the readers to enjoy the complete play first without interruption and without thinking about the obscurities. Only when the pleasure of novelty ceases should the reader turn to his notes to understand and appreciate individual lines and passages and get more enjoyment. Johnson exhorts the readers to form their own judgement about Shakespeare’s plays. He thinks notes are “necessary evils” and proclaims that he wishes to serve only as a guide and instructor. He cautions the readers not to go by his judgement of praise or condemnation, as his judgement might be flawed. He also humbly acknowledges that his work is not perfect.

Johnson ends his *Preface* by once again acknowledging Shakespeare’s greatness and dismissing the views of those who did not find him learned by stating that “he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature” and that he possessed the “largest and most comprehensive soul”(160).

Johnson’s Achievement

Johnson’s *Preface* to Shakespeare, even by modern standards is an exemplary piece of literary criticism although it does have its limitations. Johnson boldly went against the grain of his time in defending Shakespeare for not following the unities of time and place and for mingling tragic and comic elements. He considered the text superior to any rules and his judgement depended on how the text affected him and not on whether it followed the rules or not. Johnson can also be credited with giving critics the comparative and historical basis of criticism. Many of his

judgements of Shakespeare are so insightful that modern generations can only repeat his judgments on Shakespeare's universality and in-depth understanding of human nature. Johnson's editorial method though deficient by modern standards was yet way above that of the earlier editors and editors of his own time. The restraint he exercised in making emendations is indeed creditable. Many of Johnson's pronouncements on Shakespeare reflect neo-classical beliefs, with which many today do not agree, especially the insistence on moral rectitude. Johnson has also come under criticism for preferring Shakespeare's comedies to his tragedies. However, his achievements outdo his shortcomings and the greatest proof of his greatness is that his age is often called The Age of Johnson.

Assignments

1. Comment on the Johnson's achievements.
2. Write a note on Johnson's editorial method.
3. Write a note on Shakespeare and The Elizabethan England.

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BLOCK III

Unit 9

William Wordsworth: Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

Unit 9 (a): Introduction

Wordsworth's *Preface* not only heralded a new type of poetry, but also laid the foundations of many Romantic ideas and assumptions about poetry. More significantly, it is a uniquely original combination of prescriptive poetic theory and poetic practice. Long and influential discussions on poetry had been written in the immediately preceding period, the neoclassical eighteenth century but none of these theoretical essays had sought to prove their theories by citing original poetic compositions. As we are going to see, Wordsworth's indebtedness to eighteenth century literary theories as well as to earlier critical theories must be recognized, but equally significant is his originality. This originality lies, according to some critics, in the "programmatically spirit" of Wordsworth. After Wordsworth, it became difficult to base criticism on abstract rules which were supposed to be self-evidently true. In this respect Wordsworth may be said to have replaced the classical critical tradition by a fresh spirit of enquiry that has been compared with that of Aristotle in his *Poetics*. "Wordsworth restores Aristotle's stress upon the importance of practice and makes the rules once more grow out of the usage". As examples of this approach we may refer to Wordsworth's ideas regarding the subject matter and language of poetry. In the neo-classical eighteenth century the general belief was that poetry must deal with some conventional topics. Wordsworth, on the other hand, asserted that poetry could be written on any subject in which the human mind was interested. This belief is today so common that the radical nature of Wordsworth's assertion may not be immediately obvious. Secondly, Wordsworth challenged the neoclassical view that poetry should be written in a special kind of language, full of conventional poeticisms, and as distinct from the common language of people as possible. Wordsworth, while emphasizing the experimental nature of his own poetry, confidently claimed that the real language of man, devoid of all artificial figures of speech and unnatural expressions, is the source of his own poetic idiom, since poets are not angelic creatures, but human beings who write for other human beings. Both these claims of Wordsworth

are largely vindicated by his own poetic practice.

9 (b): The Preface as a Romantic Manifesto

The *Preface* is often taken as the first important critical document that marks a clear break with the neo-classical eighteenth century. Wordsworth's rejection of eighteenth century poetic diction, his identification of the language of poetry with that of prose, and his endeavour to write poetry in a selection of the real language of men are three of the most far-reaching concepts in Romantic poetic theory. Wordsworth's plea for naturalism in poetic language is combined with "emotionalism", as seen in his definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and as taking its origin in "emotion recollected in tranquillity". These are the leading aspects of Wordsworth's theory as outlined in the final revised version of the *Preface*. These ideas proved historically important, though in some of his later criticism, such as the three *Essays on Epitaphs* and in his correspondence, Wordsworth modified these ideas considerably. The principal ideas in the Preface may not have any particular appeal to our time but to dismiss those as of no consequence would betray a total ignorance of romantic literary criticism.

Wordsworth's objection to poetic diction and his strong advocacy of the real language of people signalled the arrival of a new kind of poetry. At the end of the eighteenth century the poetic devices of the tradition beginning with Dryden had become outworn stereotypes. Wordsworth was the first Romantic to realise that this diction, heavily dependent on personifications, periphrases and Latinate phraseology, was, to use Wordsworth's own adjectives, "vicious", "adulterated", "distorted", "glossy", "unfeeling", while he felt that his own new poetic style was "natural". Wordsworth's rejection of neo-classical poetic diction is based on numerous and heterogeneous reasons. First of all, he rejects poetic diction in the sense of a fixed sanctified vocabulary which excludes any expression it considers low, or trivial, or vulgar. Secondly, he objects to particular stylistic devices, such as personification, periphrasis, Latinisms, and grammatical licences; to syntactical features like inversions and antitheses, and to forms and structures which are readymade, sanctified by use. All these objections were to be repeated later by other Romantics. To put it simply, Wordsworth and the other Romantics were rejecting the eighteenth century poet Thomas Gray's notion that "The language of the age can never be the language of poetry" and that English poetry had a language "peculiar to itself".

However, Wordsworth also suffers from the limitations inevitable in the case of any extreme reaction against past practices. Thus his use of the word “language” is so imprecise that it invited Coleridge’s criticism of his own poetic practice as failing often to live up to his ideal. Moreover, Wordsworth himself uses many devices against which he raised his voice. The almost Miltonic sonority of his blank verse in a poem like “Tintern Abbey” is as far removed from the ordinary speech of the rustics as it is possible to imagine. Wordsworth, of course, speaks of a “selection of the real language of men” and admits that there are “impurities” in the language of rustics which have to be removed before it can be used in poetry.

As M. H. Abrams has shown, it is possible to trace in Wordsworth’s theory of poetry vestiges of some eighteenth-century beliefs and ideas. Like eighteenth-century primitivists such as Blair and Kames, he maintains that “the earliest poets wrote naturally, feeling powerfully, in a figurative language”. Some other traces of eighteenth-century belief in Wordsworth’s poetic theory will be pointed out later. We are not surprised therefore to find that Wordsworth’s criticism of the Augustan critical tradition is by no means indiscriminate. But his insistence on humble and rustic life as the proper subject matter of poetry and on the real language of people as its proper language is unwavering and in conformity with the ideals of the French Revolution, especially Rousseau’s call to go back to nature. The revolutionary ideals inspired Wordsworth and the other Romantics not only to find dignity in the lives of common people but also to assert the equality of human beings. But there is also a contradiction between Wordsworth’s stated aim of describing the lives and manners of humble and rustic people, that is, people belonging to a class different from his own, and his definition of poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and as taking its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. In respect of his choice of subject matter Wordsworth is actually following the mimetic theory of art, which can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle; but in the way he defines poetry, Wordsworth adheres to an expressive poetics. While the mimetic view of poetry is a legacy of eighteenth century aesthetics, the expressive notion of poetry is typically Romantic and found an echo in later Romantic theories of poetry. Wordsworth’s description of the poet as “a man speaking to men” and of poetry as shedding natural and human tears is also an important ingredient of Romantic aesthetics.

Lyrical Ballads was published in 1798, which has been described as the best known publication date in the history of English literature. The first edition of the volume of poems, written by Wordsworth and Coleridge, carried as a foreword only a brief “Advertisement” defending his “experiments” in a new kind of poetry. This “Advertisement” was enlarged into a “Preface”, which was first published in the 1800 colition of *Lyrical Ballads*. This critical document was considerably enlarged in 1802, chiefly by the addition of a long passage best known for its discussion of the question, “What is a poet ?” The Appendix on poetic diction was also added in 1802, and this enlarged version was reprinted in 1805. The *Preface* is generally known as containing solely Wordsworth’s views, but Coleridge claimed that it was “half as child” of his brain too. Nevertheless, Coleridge claimed in 1802 that there was “a radical difference in our opinions” regarding poetry, and he criticised Wordsworth’s poetic theory in greater detail later in his *Biographia Literaria*. It has, however, been shown by some recent scholars that Coleridge was actively involved in the formulation of most of the leading ideas in the *Preface*. Coleridge said that the *Preface* arose “out of conversations so frequent that with exceptions, either of us could positively say which started any particular thought.” In view of all this it is difficult to accept without any kind of reservation Coleridge’s claim that he had radically different opinions about poetry from the beginning.

Even if Coleridge was not willing to admit later the extent of his collaboration with Wordsworth in the composition of the *Preface*, the fact remains that there was a fundamental difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge regarding the nature of poetry and is language. As M. H. Abrams has shown, Wordsworth essentially opposes “nature”, in various senses, to “art”, but Coleridge believes that this opposition cannot be sustained. In Coleridge’s opinion, great poems are “natural” only in the sense that they follow poetic devices and conventions which are “the defining characteristics of art” (Abrams). In Coleridge’s own words, the greatest poetry reconciles the opposites of nature and art, and “while it blends and harmorizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature”. More specifically, Coleridge disagrees with Wordsworth regarding the latter’s assertion that the language of poetry and that of prose are essentially the same, that poetry is best written in the language of rustics and that metre is not essential to poetry.

Since one of Wordsworth's major aims in the *Preface* is to reject poetic diction, we must try to understand what constitutes this kind of diction. The phrase itself came to acquire considerable importance in English literature as a result of Wordsworth's misgivings about it expressed in the *Preface*. In itself, the phrase does not necessarily have an unsavoury connotation, but Wordsworth consistently uses it in the *Preface* in the sense of a false diction of poetry. He proudly asserts, "There is little in [*Lyrical Ballads*] of what is usually called poetic diction." Like Wordsworth, many writers believe that "poetic diction" means artificial language full of archaic expressions, circumlocution, personifications and other devices which are not found in ordinary everyday language. But there are many others who believe that "poetic diction" means the specifically poetic words and expressions which heighten the imaginative appeal of poetry. In the Appendix added to the 'Preface' by Wordsworth in 1802, he gives his views on "what is usually called Poetic Diction". The basic assumptions in this Appendix are commonplaces in eighteenth century primitivistic theories of poetry, as pointed out by M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. According to Abrams, "It was standard procedure in Wordsworth's day, when characterizing poetry, to refer to its conjectured origin in the passionate, and therefore, naturally rhythmical and figurative, outcomes of primitive men. This belief displaced Aristotle's assumption that poetry developed from man's instinct to imitate, as well as the pragmatic opinion that poetry was invented by stages to make their civil and moral teachings more palatable and more memorable."

When Wordsworth identifies a particular vocabulary and word-order as poetic diction, he thinks primarily of the minor eighteenth century poets who imitated Milton, and poets like Erasmus Darwin and the Della Cruscans (a short-lived school of sentimental poetry, founded by Robert Merry). More generally, he thinks of the widespread agreement among poets and critics that there should be a clear distinction between the language of prose and that of poetry, corresponding to a distinction between "poetical" and "non-poetical" subjects. All topics were not considered worthy of poetic treatment, nor was it considered proper to use any kind of language for poetry. The general belief in the neo-classical eighteenth century was that different poetic genres, such as elegy, ode, epic, required different kinds of language. We can now identify the various aspects of the poetic diction which Wordsworth attacks. First of all, there is the tendency to use stock adjective-noun combinations, as in the following phrases : "the fair fields,"

“the radiant sky”, “the verdant meadow.” In his *Essay on Criticism*, Pope satirizes the common — common in bad poems — habit of using predictable and stereotyped phrases : “Where’er you hear the cooling western breeze/In the next line it flutters through the trees.” Secondly, poetic diction liberally uses periphrases, calling common, everyday things by most uncommon names, because of a mistaken belief that common words spoil the dignity of serious poetry. In much eighteenth century poetry sheep are referred to as “the fleecy flock” and birds are called “the feathered tribe.” Sometimes periphrasis is carried too far, as when a spade is called “the implement rectangular / That turneth up the soil.” The third aspect of poetic diction is the use of learned, archaic words, including Latinisms (Latinized words). These are very common in Milton’s poetry, especially *Paradise Lost*, in which the subject often calls for an elevated diction. But when imitated by bad poets, these expressions appear stilted and artificial. Milton often used Latinized constructions, inverting the normal word-order, because he wanted to achieve the magnificence and remoteness from everyday reality which, in his view, his epic subject demanded. In the same way, when Milton used the periphrasis “optic glass” to refer to Galileo’s telescope, he was not using poetic diction, but a common term used in his day. But the poets who wrote in a pseudo-Miltonic diction did not have that kind of justification. Wordsworth singles out personification as yet another aspect of poetic diction, along with other artificial figures of speech, as we shall see later.

In order to show how ambiguous the term “poetic diction” is and how difficult it is to know which specific expressions can be called “gaudy and inane” (Wordsworth’s own adjectives), we may think of Wordsworth’s own practice in a poem like “Tintern Abbey.” In that poem, written in sonorous Miltonic blank verse rather than the natural language of human beings, we find adjective-noun combinations like “beauteous forms,” “corporeal frame”, “gloomy wood”. Perhaps Geoffrey Tillotson is right when he says that the passionate attack made by Wordsworth on eighteenth-century poetic diction is all the more passionate because the eighteenth-century is in his blood and “will not be expelled.”

9 (d): The Proper Subject Matter of Poetry according to Wordsworth

Almost all of Wordsworth’s objectives as a poet as stated by himself in the *Preface*, can be subsumed under a broad category : permanence. Permanence was regarded as an important

criterion of a work of art by neo-classical critics who generally argued that the classics are great because they have survived the test of time. It is on this consideration that Dr. Johnson calls Shakespeare a classic. However, Wordsworth's aim is different : he wants for his poetry a subject matter and a language that will have permanent appeal. This standard of permanence is for Wordsworth of much wider application than to literature alone; it is closely related to his idea of the permanence of 'nature', in several senses of the word.

Wordsworth first looks for permanence in the subject matter of poetry. After declaring that he has chosen low and rustic life as his subject-matter, he justifies his choice on the following grounds. First, it is in that kind of life that "the essential passions of the heart" find a better soil in which to attain maturity, are less restrained, and find expression in a simpler language. Secondly, in that condition of life "our elementary feelings" are found in a simpler state, and hence can be studied more accurately and communicated more powerfully. Thirdly, the manners of rural life are determined by those essential feelings, can be better understood because of the nature of rural occupations, "and are more durable". Finally, it is in rural life that the passions of men are incorporated with the "permanent forms of nature". As the use of the comparative degree indicates, Wordsworth throughout contrasts the rustics with the sophisticated inhabitants of the city. Compared with them, the rustic appears to Wordsworth as a "pure archetype of human greatness", to use the poet's own words in *The Excursion*. The rustic is for Wordsworth the ideal human being, in a Platonic sense, as well as a pure person, in a chemical sense. The rustic's language is preferred by the poet because it is "a more permanent and far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets". Wordsworth's argument can be summed up in this manner : the rustic is an ideal man and speaks an ideal language. It may be, and has been, doubted whether the rustics of late eighteenth-century England were really such ideal people. But Wordsworth proceeds "by assertion and analogy, not by way of the sociological evidence which the argument requires", as W.J.B. Owen puts it.

There are very important political reasons for Wordsworth's interest in low and rustic life and his assertion that essential humanity can be found only there. Though usually seen as a poet of nature, Wordsworth always regarded his true subject matter as the study of mankind. In his own life Wordsworth had experienced injustice at the hands of the aristocracy. He was increasingly convinced, even before the outbreak of the French Revolution (1789), that injustice was inherent in English society. This belief prompted him as a poet to deal with victims

of social injustice, such as vagrants, rural paupers and the dispossessed, as well as other marginalised groups. In poems like “The Convict”, “The Female Vagrant” and “The Thorn”, Wordsworth is concerned with victims of social injustice. The late eighteenth century was an age of social and economic upheaval, brought about by such developments as increasing industrialisation, the rapid increase in the population of the cities, the system of land enclosure increasingly resorted to by large estates. These factors, linked with the spread of poverty, gave birth to a radical political spirit among the middle classes. The French Revolution was inspired by the ideals of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, and Wordsworth, who was in France during the outbreak of the Revolution, believed passionately in these ideals in his youth. His contemporary, William Hazlitt, described the “levelling” idealism that prompted the *Lyrical Ballads* : “It partakes of and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age : the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse ... is a levelling one” (*The Spirit of the Age*). Wordsworth’s preference for humble and rustic life as the subject matter of poetry was also motivated by a primitiveness derived from rural culture. He argues that he chose humble life as the subject of his poetry because he believes that such a primordial existence is able to preserve the basic elemental feelings of mankind. Wordsworth mentions in the *Preface* the “increasing accumulation of men in cities” as an important reason for increasing sensationalism and vulgarisation in English national life. In Wordsworth’s perception, rural life and values were not contaminated by the horrors of urban and industrial values encroaching upon people’s lives and enslaving their minds. One of Wordsworth’s own poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*, “The Idiot Boy”, depicts most of the positive values that Wordsworth claims to find in rustic life. In this poem, Betty sends her mentally challenged son for doctor and the son gets lost. The essential passion depicted in the poem is the “material passion”. Betty Foy’s motherly feelings are obviously not “under restraint”, as they might have been in the case of a sophisticated urban woman. Betty’s feelings are “simple” because they are unmixed with any sense of shame that might have affected a more self-conscious mother whose treatment of her mentally challenged son in public would have been more restrained or inhibited. Wordsworth himself told an admirer of his poetry, John Wilson, that feelings of shame often induce “gentlefolks” to dispose of imbecile children. Finally, Betty’s language, simple and uninhibited, expresses forcibly her obsessive love for her imbecile son.

9 (e): Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Language

As we have seen, Wordsworth's claim in the *Preface* that he has "taken as much pains to avoid ... as others ordinarily take to produce" what he calls "poetic diction" amounts to a declaration that poetry would henceforth be written in a new kind of language. This declaration is one of the things which make the *Preface* a crucial programmatic statement of Romanticism. The term "poetic diction" refers to the kind of linguistic stylisation which was prescribed as the ornamental language, appropriate for poetry, by traditional rhetorical doctrine, from ancient classical times to the eighteenth century. As a recent critic has commented, Wordsworth's insistence throughout the *Preface* on the "real language of men" as the proper stylistic paradigm of poetry amounts to a radical dissociation of poetry from the prescriptions of rhetorical doctrine. Coleridge criticised Wordsworth's theory of poetic language, but his assertion in *Biographia Literaria* that "whatever lines can be translated into other words of the same language...either in sense or in association... are so far vicious in their diction", implies a rejection of poetic diction. This rejection of poetic diction is not unique to Wordsworth and Coleridge; they illustrate a widespread attitude characteristic of Romanticism generally.

We have already seen what "poetic diction" is; it remains now to examine the reasons for Wordsworth's choice of "the language really used by men" in preference to poetic diction. The kind of theory to which Wordsworth's ideas are opposed is found in a letter written to his son by an eminent eighteenth-century patron of letters, Lord Chesterfield. In that letter Lord Chesterfield draws a distinction between the language of prose and that of poetry. Prose, according to him, is the language of common conversation, while poetry is "a more noble and sublime way of expressing one's thoughts" : "In prose you would say, 'the beginning of the morning' or 'the break of day', but that would not do in verse; and you must rather say 'Aurora spread her rosy mantle'. Aurora, you know, is the Goddess of the morning. This is what is called poetical diction". But this idea of making the language of poetry ornamental is foreign to Wordsworth's view of the ideal poetic language. Wordsworth rejects figurative embellishments because he wants to use the natural language of man. In sharp contrast to Chesterfield's view that the language of prose is necessarily different from that of poetry Wordsworth asserts that there is no essential difference "between the language of prose and metrical composition." The lines quoted from Chesterfield's letter will give us a valuable perspective on Wordsworth's theory of

poetic language. Wordsworth says that poetry should be written in “a selection of the real language of men”, that this language is far more philosophical and permanent than poetic diction, and that the language of prose and that of poetry are identical. In the Appendix on poetic diction Wordsworth maintains that the earliest poets wrote from passion excited by real events and therefore even their figurative expressions were natural; but poetic diction takes over when figures of speech are used which are not justified by real passion. About the language of his own poetry, Wordsworth claims that it is “a selection of real language of men.” But he is careful to add that if the poet’s subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures.” Wordsworth thus concedes that the real language of men, when it expresses passion, employs metaphors and figures. Though it appears to contradict the earlier assertion that the real language of men uses “simple and unelaborated expressions”, this view is actually common-place in some eighteenth and nineteenth-century poetic theories which are derived from primitivistic theories of language and literature.

Wordsworth goes on to identify the real language of men with the language of rustics. Regarding the subject matter of his poetry Wordsworth has already expressed his preference for humble and rustic life, thinking of the rustic as “a kind of spiritual athlete” regarding the language of his poetry, he appears to imply that the rustic is also “a kind of linguistic athlete” (the words are used by Owen). In both subject and language Wordsworth wants to return to basic and permanent features of thinking, feeling and speaking. As we have seen, if the rustic is an ideal person, his language must also be ideal, according to Wordsworth. But Wordsworth also insists on a “selection” of this language, and he later uses the word “purification”, by which he means the “real defects”, the “lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust”. In this connection Wordsworth also shows that he is aware of the ungrammatical constructions and provincialisms that are often found in the language of rustics. In the fragmentary *Recluse*, written a few years after the *Preface*, Wordsworth admits that —

“That shepherd's voice, it may have reached mine ear
Debased and under profanation, made
The ready organ of articulate sounds
From ribaldry, impiety, or wrath, Issuing when shame hath ceased to check the brawls

Of some abused Festivity--so be it.

I came not dreaming of unruffled life, Untainted manners; born among the hills,

Bred also there, I wanted not a scale

To regulate my hopes; pleased with the good”

In the same poem he expresses the conviction that in the language of the rustics there is:

“An art, a music, a strain of words

That shall be life, the unacknowledged voice of life. Shall

Speak of what is done among the fields. Done truly

There, or felt, of solid good

And real evil, yet be sweet withal.”

10 (a): The Language of Prose

For Wordsworth this language of permanent appeal is at first the language really used by men, then the language of rustics, and finally, as we are going to see now, the language of prose. Wordsworth makes no attempt to define the language of prose, merely saying that it has to be “well written” prose. We gather from the context that prose is the language of rustics as well as a selection of the language really used by men. Wordsworth does not offer any example of good prose either. What he offers is a definition by negatives. First of all, the language of prose avoids personifications of any kind. Secondly, it contains very little of poetic diction. Poetic diction includes “phrases and figures of speech” which have been mistakenly regarded by many as “the common inheritance of poets.” The language of prose also avoids expressions “which have been foolishly repeated by bad poets”, but such expressions may be said to belong to the category of poetic diction. Though often suspicious and uneasy about them, Wordsworth allows that “personifications of abstract ideas” are permissible when they are “prompted by passion”. Wordsworth’s objection to personifications and poetic diction arises out of his belief that these elements do not “make any regular or natural part” of “the language of men”. But Wordsworth seems to be aware that a language is not properly defined simply by negatives and therefore proceeds to define the language of prose in positive terms.

Wordsworth admits that it is not easy to define the language of prose in positive terms, and therefore resorts to generalities. He says that he has always, in his own poetic practice,

“endeavoured to look steadily at my subject”. But then he adds a point which amounts to yet another negative, saying that in his poems “there is little falsehood of description.” His next point, though not negative, is somewhat vague : “my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance.” Wordsworth eventually offers a kind of solution to the difficulties faced by him in defining a permanent language of prose : if we extract from the coventionally poetic language of poetry all the so-called poeticisms, we are left with what is essentially the language of prose. In examining this critical position of Wordsworth’s, we shall consider, respectively, the possible source of Wordsworth’s observations, the validity of these observations, and their critical value. Regarding the source of Wordsworth’s ideas two works have been cited by scholars as significant. One is the first prose Interlude to Erasmus Darwin’s *Loves of the Plants*. (Erasmus Darwin, an eighteenth-century physician and botanist, wrote poetry with the avowed intention of enlisting “imagination under the banner of Science.” He embodied the botanical system in the long poem, *Loves of the Plants*.) The subject of the Interlude is the “essential difference” between prose and poetry. One major difference is that poetry contains very few words expressing abstract ideas, while prose abounds in them. The reason for this, according to Darwin, is that the poet appeals principally to the eye while the prose-writer uses abstract terms. Since the poet wants to create a visual impact, he uses personifications and “Allegories” because these figures of speech bring the objects before the eye; poetry even expresses sentiments in the language of vision. Darwin thus asserts that personification is a stylistic feature which specifically belongs to poetry.

The second work which Wordsworth undoubtedly had in mind is an article entitled “Is verse Essential to Poetry ?” which was written by William Enfield and published in *The Monthly Magazine* for July 1796. The article was written with the purpose of showing that the term “poetry” can be applied to what we may call “poetic prose”, and that the term should not be confined to works in verse. Though Wordsworth’s aim is completely different, a superficial resemblance between Enfield’s arguments and those of Wordsworth have been found. An extract from this article, cited by Owen will show the resemblance between the two views:

“The character of poetry, which may seem most to require that it be limited to verse, is its appropriate diction. It will be admitted that metaphorical language, being more impressive than general terms, is best suited to poetry. That excited state of mind, which poetry supposes, naturally prompts a figurative style. But the language of fancy,

sentiment and passion is not peculiar to verse. Whatever is the natural and proper expression of any conception or feeling in metre or rhyme, is its natural and proper expression in prose If the artificial diction of modern poetry would be improper, on similar occasions, in prose, it is equally improper in verse.”

Enfield recognizes a kind of imaginatively heightened diction as proper to both prose and poetry, and asserts that artificial diction is not necessary in either prose or verse. According to him, one does not need the licence of metre to use the figurative language of passion in prose as well as in verse. But Wordsworth’s point is different : in his view, it is possible, even desirable, to use the language of prose in verse in order to express real passion. Besides, Enfield adds the qualification that the prose he has in mind is “metaphorical” and “figurative”, in fact “poetic”. Wordsworth has no use for this argument. Thus both Erasmus Darwin’s views on the essential difference between prose and poetry and Enfield’s equation of verse and “poetic prose” serve as points of departure for Wordsworth when he says that “there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition”.

Ever since Coleridge challenged the equation of the language of poetry and that of prose, Wordsworth’s assertion has been repeatedly criticised. Coleridge was surprised that Wordsworth, who had a poetic style only less individual and distinctive than that of Shakespeare and Milton, should have argued for a common language for prose and poetry. But one way of defending Wordsworth’s view is to point out that the greatest poets in the English language have achieved their most remarkable poetic effects by incorporating the rhythms of actual speech in their metrical language. However, let us first try to understand Wordsworth’s argument in the light of the example he himself cites. Wordsworth chooses a sonnet written by Thomas Gray, “Sonnet on the death of Richard West”, as an example of poetic diction. The choice of Gray is entirely appropriate, because it was he who, as we have seen, observed that “The language of the age can never be the language of poetry.” Wordsworth has himself italicized some lines of the sonnet as being equally appropriate to prose and poetry. These are the italicized lines : “A different object do these eyes require;/My lonely anguish melts no heart bit mine;/And in my breast the imperfect joys expire;/... I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,/And weep the more because I weep in vain”. The language of these lines, according to Wordsworth, does not differ from prose except in respect of rhyme and in the use of the adjective “fruitless” (in the last of the quoted lines) for the more natural adverb “fruitlessly”. Wordsworth’s example is aptly chosen because Gray’s

sonnet, though prompted by real passion, contains many examples of poetic diction : “reddening Phoebus” instead of “the sun” in the second line; “lifts his golden fire” instead of “rises” in the same line: “amorous descant” in place of “love song”, “green attire” in place of “green grass” and so on. Accordingly, only five lines (quoted earlier) of the entire sonnet receive Wordsworth’s approval for being no different from the language of prose. The lines meet Wordsworth’s approval because they do not contain personifications, Latinisms (except in “fruitless”), periphrases (e.g. “reddening Phoebms”, “green attire” in the other lines) and poeticisms as in “lonely anguish” in the second line of the sonnet. But apart from such details, one other aspect of the sonnet may be taken to provide a further clue to what Wordsworth means by “the language of prose”. The italicized lines have the quality of understatement : they do not even once mention the fact of death which must have deeply affected the poet. Such understatement, or statement deliberately shorn of so-called poetic expressions, characterises many of Wordsworth’s own most famous lines. The line most frequently cited in this connection is the one in ‘Michael’. “And never lifted up a single stone”; there is nothing obviously poetic in this line, and yet it conveys as effectively as possible the whole tragedy of a poem which is more than 500 lines long. It must also be pointed out, however, that it is possible to find in Wordsworth’s own poetry many “prosaisms”. The following lines from Book VI of *The Prelude* have often been cited as an example of language that can hardly be called poetry:

“Through those delightful pathways we advanced, Two
Days, and still in presence of the Lake, which winding
Up among the Alps, now changed slowly its lovely
Countenance, and put on
A sterner character.”

As Coleridge pointed out in another connection, the words are appropriate to prose, “but are not suitable to metrical composition”. The lines have been criticised by a more recent critic as written in the jargon of a guide-book for tourists. Coleridge made another important point in his refutation of Wordsworth’s position: the word-order in poetry must often necessarily differ from that in prose. Nevertheless, with the line from ‘Michael’ in mind, we can say that “the language of prose” in Wordsworth’s sense of the phrase may be taken to refer to those many lines of his poetry which suggest the pathetic without wallowing in pathos, the awful without the awe. Such understatement has even been called Wordsworth’s most characteristic device of rhetoric. One

may thus conclude that the validity of Wordsworth's equation of the language of prose with the language of poetry is dependent on our agreeing with his view that a poetic diction is undersirable and also transitory in its appeal. But the equation is not acceptable as a critical doctrine, or even as a statement of Wordsworth's habitual poetic practice. Wordsworth neither gives, nor could he have given, any definition of prose. For one thing, there are so many kinds of prose even in a single literary period that the term "language of prose" is bound to appear vague and imprecise. Moreover, the language of prose, like the language of poetry, can never be stable : it varies according to function, taste and age. The usefulness of Wordsworth's equation of the language of prose and that of poetry is limited to the recognition that poetry is best written in a language devoid of conventional poetic devices. We may go further and suggest that Wordsworth's search for a permanent and universal language of poetry was destined to be futile, because a living language undergoes change and therefore can never be stable or permanent like Latin, which is a dead language and therefore fixed and stable. If it were not so, Wordsworth himself would not have felt the need to "modernize" Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale*. Moreover, it is not possible even for an English-speaking moderately educated reader to read Shakespeare or Milton without a linguistic gloss. A permanent poetic language is an impossibility because it has to ignore the processes of growth and change from which no living language is immune.

10 (b): Wordsworth's Idea of a Poet

A question arising naturally from Wordsworth's confident equation of the language of prose with the language of poetry is : why does he himself use in his poetry metre, which makes the most obvious distinction between prose and poetry ? In the *Preface* of 1800, Wordsworth proceeds to answer this question and offer a justification of metre immediately after making that equation. But in the *Preface* of 1802, which is the text you shall be reading, this justification is postponed in order to accommodate a long and eloquent description of the role and function of a poet. Since this description is justly celebrated as a passage containing many of Wordsworth's fundamental perceptions regarding the nature of the poet and of poetry, we are now going to examine the passage in some detail.

What is meant by a Poet? What is a Poet?

These questions are raised by Wordsworth himself as he launches into a grand and

eloquent description of the poet and his role. This description of the dignity and nature of the office and character of a poet was characterised by Coleridge as “very grand, and of a sort of Verulamian power and majesty”. “Verulamian” means “in the manner of Bacon’s prose”, a manner that is usually described as “majestic” but “constrained.” Wordsworth first emphasizes the essential humanity of the poet : “He is a man speaking to men”. This assertion of the poet’s ordinary humanity is significant when placed against the tendency to regard the poet as exalted far above ordinary humanity and therefore requiring an elevated language in which to communicate with his readers (see Lord Chesterfield’s letter to his son). By stressing the poet’s ordinariness Wordsworth would appear to bring him down to the level of common humanity and to suggest that the difference between a poet and an ordinary human being is one of degree, not one of kind. But then he goes on to enumerate so many unusual and extraordinary abilities which the poet must possess that it might appear to some that the difference is in effect one of kind. (I hope most of you would question Wordsworth’s easy assumption that the poet is a *man* speaking to *men*.) The qualities which the poet must possess, according to Wordsworth, are awesome. Compared with the men to whom he speaks, the poet has more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm, a greater knowledge of human nature, a more comprehensive soul, and a mind that is exquisitely fitted to the universe. The phrase “comprehensive soul” is especially important, for it reminds us of Dryden’s famous tribute to Shakespeare as a poet having “the largest and most comprehensive soul.” The poet has also the ability to conjure up passions in himself which resemble those produced by real events. He has a greater readiness and power to express what he feels. This last quality of the poet seems to be based on the first century AD Roman teacher of rhetoric, Quintilian’s, account of the successful orator, who is susceptible to experiences “whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes.”

Wordsworth consistently affirms that the poet, since he deals with general truth, ought not to “break in upon the sanctity and truth of his pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments.”

The poet, according to him, is constantly in touch with the general truth. Wordsworth’s account of the “general truth” is nominally based upon Aristotle’s famous passage in the *Poetics*: “Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing.” What Aristotle actually says in Chapter IX of the *Poetics* is that poetry is “a more philosophical and a higher thing than history.” The inaccuracy is due to

the fact that Wordsworth, as he himself admits, has been “told” of Aristotle’s remarks and has not read the treatise himself. In comparing the poet with the historian or the biographer Wordsworth again uses Aristotle’s terms, but his observation that the poet’s is the easier task is not Aristotelian at all. Moreover, Wordsworth’s emphasis on the pleasure felt and conveyed by the poet is much more pronounced than Aristotle’s. Wordsworth claims that the pleasure-giving function of poetry is consistent with an important principle of the universe. “This necessity of producing pleasure,” he says, is far from being “a degradation of the poet’s art.” The poet’s ability to give pleasure is an indirect acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe and a homage paid to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which a human being “knows, and feels, and lives, and moves.” Michael Mason rightly draws attention to the second part of Wordsworth’s remark: “that the aesthetic element in literature reflects an inalienable law of the human organism, to the effect that we are always in some sense in a condition of pleasure.” Otherwise, in Wordsworth’s view, we cannot become active and sentient beings. Mason also points out that Wordsworth’s thinking here is indebted to the eighteenth century theologian and psychologist, David Hartley. Hartley combines theology and psychology in his argument that the predominating influence of pleasure in our life is an indication that in our mental life we do not suffer the consequences of the Fall of Man. In short, poetic pleasure is an echo of something in the pattern of the universe and of human life. We should also notice in this connection the kind of inspired language which Wordsworth uses. This language, especially when Wordsworth speaks of the grand elementary principle of pleasure in which a human being “knows, and feels, and lives, and moves”, has been called by Lionel Trilling “bold to the point of being shocking”, because it “controverts” the Bible (Acts 17 : 28) which says that “in him [Christ] we live, and move, and have our being.” Wordsworth no doubt also has Milton in mind when he speaks of “the native and naked dignity of man” to which poetry is a homage. In *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, Adam and Eve are described in these words : “with native honour clad/In naked majesty seemed lords of all.” Wordsworth has earlier quoted from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Book I, while emphasising poetry’s intimate concern with common humanity : poetry sheds “no tears such as Angels weep,” but natural and human tears.

Wordsworth’s emphasis on pleasure is, as Mason has observed, represents a startling transformation of stock aesthetic and psychological ideas. A common critical notion in the eighteenth century was that the aim of giving pleasure distinguished poetry from other kinds of

writing. However, this goal was associated, as in Richard Hurd's 'A Dissertation on the Idea of Universal Poetry', with the ornamental, stylized and fanciful elements in poetry, while imitation was usually located in the prosaic aspects of poetic discourse. "Wordsworth reveres this scheme boldly, making pleasure not only mimetic, but mimetic of a profound and inalienable part of human nature". Since Wordsworth's views on poetic diction, personification and figurative language generally are very different from those discussed by Hurd, whose "Disertation" was published in 1766, it is not surprising that the sources of poetic pleasure are located by Wordsworth in the real language of men. Wordsworth considers only metre and rhyme as admissible sources of poetic pleasure and rejects the other conventional attributes of poetry as artificial. In relating poetic pleasure to human nature Wordsworth also enlarges an orthodox eighteenth-century psychological theory, namely, the idea that "self-love" is the basis of our actions and beliefs. The idea can be found in John Dennis, John Locke, and David Hartley. Hartley, while denying that the "desire of happiness" controls our actions, believed that our motives are prompted by simple sensations that always have a pleasurable or painful aspect.

10 (c):Wordsworth's Theory of Metre

After this long discussion of the poet's role and function, Wordsworth comes to the question which arises naturally out of his assertion that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition : "why, professing these opinions, have I written in verse ?" Wordsworth's answer to this question takes the form of a full-fledged theory of metre which calls for detailed examination. First of all, Wordsworth concedes that metre is not an essential component of poetry, that it is only a "superadded charm". But he rightly anticipates that he might be accused of inconsistency in advocating the use of such an artificial device as metre in poetry which uses the real language of men. Wordsworth tries to obviate this apparent inconsistency by using the same argument with which he justifies the use of natural language in poetry — universal and permanent appeal. The usefulness of metre as a device for heightening the pleasure of poetry is proved by "the concurring testimony of ages" and by "the consent of all nations." Wordsworth then deals with the charge that since rhyme and metre make it obvious that poetry is not prose, with what logic does he argue that the languages of prose and poetry are identical ? Wordsworth thinks that metrical form does not remove the language of poetry from

that of prose, because “the distinction of metre is regular and uniform.” In other words, verse does differ from prose, but the difference is due to a constant factor. Since metre is a constant factor, it can be ignored in the discussion of what is subject to in poetry, namely, its language. It is possible to write metrically regular and rhymed verse in “poetic diction” or “the language of prose.” The choice of metre, according to Wordsworth, has no logical bearing on the poet’s choice of language : the choice is in fact determined by other factors.

Wordsworth then proceeds to consider the advantages of metre. The absence of metre, he contends, will give a shock to the reader who has come to associate it with poetry. Many poems, for example, medieval ballads, though written on humbler subjects and in a language far more naked and simple than what we find in *Lyrical Ballads*, have given pleasure to generations of readers, presumably because they are composed in metrical language. In the “overbalance of pleasure” which such poems arouse in the reader’s mind, metre plays a major role. Secondly, because of its “regularity.” metre can “temper and restrain” the passion or the excitement which poetry often arouses in the mind. Another quality of metre, according to Wordsworth, is its “normality” which has the effect of cancelling the “unusual and irregular state of the mind” which is produced by poetry. Wordsworth attributes this quality to metre mainly for two reasons : metre is in itself something regular; and by association, it is connected with “a less excited state.” Moreover, the pleasure that metre by itself is capable of giving reduces in large measure the excessive pain that is often produced by moving descriptions of passion. There obviously is poetry which does not contain such moving descriptions of passion, poetry which is lighter in vein, but even in the case of such poetry metre has an important role to play in enhancing the reader’s pleasure. More significantly, the very artificiality of metre, the fact that it is not a natural part of language, has an important bearing on the effect of poetry. The language which Wordsworth recommends for poetry is the real language of man; thus its predominant characteristic is naturalness or reality. Metre, on the other hand, has a tendency “to divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition.” It tends to produce in the reader’s mind “an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely.” The presence of metre is a constant reminder to the reader that the poem in question is a work of art, that put in real language, he is reading a poem and not an actual report of real life.

A striking parallel to this view of Wordsworth's can be found in eighteenth-century critical theory. In the *Preface* to his great edition of Shakespeare, Dr. Samuel Johnson while defending Shakespeare from the orthodox neo-classical critics' charge that the dramatist did not observe the so-called unities of time, place and action, observes that the delight which we derive from tragedy arises "out of our consciousness of fiction." As he puts it, "Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind." Wordsworth's view is that in poetry dealing with passion the presence of metre ensures that the reader does not commit the mistake of taking the poet's imitation for reality. This argument of Wordsworth, however, is liable to be interpreted in a way wholly unintended by the poet-critic. It can be said that it metre has the effect of increasing the consciousness of poetry's fictionality, an artificial poetic diction should also be able to produce a similar effect. But the whole point of Wordsworth's argument is that metre, when used in poetry written in the real language of men, produces a desirable effect of contrast. The contrast arises out of the simultaneous perception of the realism of the poet's language and the artificiality of the metrical form. But if both the language of poetry and the element of metre are artificial, the contrast will disappear. Wordsworth then invokes an aesthetic principle to justify this contrast between "nature" and "art" in the language and metrical form of the poetry he wants to promote : "the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude." The language which Wordsworth proposes to use in his poetry is "similar" to that of real life; but the presence of metre makes it "dissimilar." The aesthetic principle used by Wordsworth as part of his argument is actually a commonplace of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory.

Wordsworth uses two other arguments to defend his use of metre. The first argument relates to the role of metre in accentuating or reducing passion. Wordsworth says that sometimes metre can "impart passion to the words," thereby contributing to the total effect of "pleasure" created by poetry. Two of Wordsworth's observations can bring us close to his meaning. The first is that the reader has been accustomed to connect with a particular movement of metre a particular feeling. The second point is to be found in Wordsworth's account of the effect of the metre used by him in the poem, "The Thorn." As for the first point, the poet who deals with a cheerful passion and whose language is inadequate to convey that passion may use a metre which has cheerful associations; the same consideration applies to the poet dealing with a melancholy passion. Regarding the second point, Wordsworth adds in a note that in his poem 'The Thorn', in order to

ensure dramatic propriety he has used language incommensurate with the passion and inadequate to raise the reader to a height of desirable excitement.” However, in order to “impart passion to the words”, the poet has used a “lyrical and rapid metre”, so that an apparently quick movement will be imparted to a poem which in fact moves slowly. Wordsworth no doubt means that the rapidity of the metre will give to the words of the poem associations of excited and urgent utterance, though the words actually “move slowly”, that is, are longwinded and repetitious, in keeping with the principle of dramatic propriety. Wordsworth’s second major argument in defence of metre is a natural offshoot of his earlier argument regarding the regulatory role of metre. Because of the “regularity” metre and because of its association with “a less excited state,” metre ensures that even the most painful descriptions of passion, as in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, do not distress us to the extent of robbing us of the aesthetic pleasure conveyed by such passages. On the other hand, Samuel Richardson’s novel, *Clarissa Harlowe*, wrings out the last drop of pathos from painful situations, and because it is in prose, we are reluctant to re-read or enjoy aesthetically the relevant passages. The same effect is created by an extremely popular domestic drama written in prose by Edward Moore and published in 1753. It is hardly possible, however, to attribute the cause of the difference in aesthetic effect to the presence of metre in Shakespeare and its absence in Richardson and Moore, for the artistic abilities involved are radically different; but Wordsworth’s basic point, namely, that metre regulates and makes bearable, even enjoyable, extremely painful descriptions of strong passion, is not controversial at all.

Wordsworth himself admits that his theory of metre is incomplete. He does not, for example, have anything to say about the art of poets like Spenser and Milton who employ unusual rhythms in the metrical context of their poetry in order to emphasise the meaning of words. He says nothing of the art of poets like Shakespeare and Donne who skillfully use actual rhythms of speech as an effective contrast to the formal constraints of metre. Nevertheless, it has been rightly said that Wordsworth explores, more profoundly than any earlier poet or theorist, the aesthetic and psychological factors which lie behind the appeal of metre.

Unit 10 (d)

10 (d): Wordsworth’s Definition of Poetry

Perhaps the most famous passages of the *Preface* are those in which Wordsworth describes the

nature of poetry, first calling it a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and then describing it as “emotion recollected in tranquility.” Often regarded as Wordsworth’s definitions of poetry, these two statements have been quoted and requoted in textbook after textbook on the nature of poetry. Sometimes each of these is quoted in isolation as Wordsworth’s considered opinion regarding poetry. But we are going to see, while examining in detail the full implications of each observation, that they must be taken together in order to arrive at a comprehensive idea about Wordsworth’s views on the nature of poetry.

“Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings”

The first of Wordsworth’s observations on the nature of poetry occurs early in the *Preface* and must be quoted in full to counter the tendency to isolate the phrase quoted above and take it as Wordsworth’s complete definition of poetry. While speaking of “the triviality and meanness” which are often introduced into their poetry by some contemporary poets and which are justly criticised by some reviewers, Wordsworth says that though the subject matter of his own poetry is taken from humble and rustic life, it cannot be called mean or trivial, since each of his poems has “a worthy purpose”. We shall soon see what Wordsworth means by “worthy purpose,” but the point at issue here is the full comment on the nature of poetry : “For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings : and though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subject but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply.” Already Wordsworth is qualifying his opening statement that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings by adding that these feelings must be accompanied by deep thought. Nevertheless, the phrase about “spontaneous overflow” has appealed to the imagination of many as the quintessential Romantic notion of poetry. The reasons for this perception are because the phrase appears to define lyric poetry and it is the lyric which can be taken as the most characteristic poetic form of the Romantics; in fact, for most theorists of Wordsworth’s generation, the lyric was the essentially poetic form, and usually the type of poetry whose attributes are ascribed to poetry in general. As M.H. Abrams has shown, the concept of poetry as

the expression or overflow of feeling is to be found in almost all the important critics of the Romantic period, “in conjunction with philosophical theories as disparate as Wordsworth’s sensationalism and Shelley’s Platonism, the organic idealism of Coleridge and the positivism of John Stuart Mill”. The ideas of spontaneity, along with sincerity, and of the integral unity of thought and feeling, are the essential criteria of poetry for the Romantics, as opposed to the neoclassic criteria of judgement, truth, perfect matching of content with preexisting poetic form. The doctrine of spontaneity or sincerity is also implied in Keats’s comment that if poetry does not come as naturally as leaves to a tree, it need not come at all. But the doctrine as expressed by Wordsworth has been criticised on several grounds. After pointing out that Wordsworth modifies his initial description of poetry as spontaneous overflow by saying that it takes its origin in emotion recollected in tranquillity, Rene Wellek observes that Wordsworth often relies on the initial inspiration, the “inward impulse”, in composing his poetry. Wordsworth says that often the numbers came to him spontaneously, that they “came in such a torrent that he was unable to remember it”, that he “poured out a poem truly from the heart.” Nevertheless, if sincerity were the only criterion of good poetry, the passionate outpourings of love in the poems written by adolescents would have to be regarded as good poetry. Another critic, Graham Hough, observes that if good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, we have to leave Milton’s *Lycidas* and Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* out of the category of good poetry. However, as Wellek also observes, Wordsworth is not an advocate of emotionalism in the raw. He often acknowledged the share of consciousness in poetic creation. He was also in the habit of constantly and meticulously revising his verse. He declared that “my first expressions I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are best.” However, in thinking of poetry as a spontaneous overflow and as taking its origin in emotion, Wordsworth advances an expressive theory of poetry, the theory that poetry is “expression”, that it is in some way an outpouring of the poet’s own emotions. This theory is difficult to reconcile with the poet’s own other theory that the poet finds his subject matter in the lives of humble and rustic people, that he even adopts as far as possible the language of this class of people. According to this other theory, the poet, who belongs to a different class, imitates the lives and manners and language of the rustics. This is the theory of poetry as imitation, a theory as old as Plato and Aristotle, and one of the main tenets of eighteenth-century critical theory.

Emotion Recollected in Tranquility

This other famous phrase used in the *Preface* reinforces the view that for Wordsworth poetry is not just a verbal response to the stimulus of passion or emotion. While justifying his use of metre and commenting on the pleasure it produces, Wordsworth offers this account of the nature of poetry : “I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings : it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility : the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment”. The point of quoting such a long passage will, I hope, be gradually obvious. But first I want you to notice that Wordsworth himself links the two definitions of poetry to suggest that they should be taken together. Various stages in the composition of poetry are clearly indicated in this passage. First, there is what we may call a primary emotion aroused by some object, experience, scene, etc. Secondly, there is the stage of recollection of this emotion in tranquility; in other words, the poet remembers that on a particular occasion, he felt a particular emotion. The third stage is one in which the state of tranquil recollection is transformed into one of actual emotion. The transformed emotion may be called a secondary emotion, which is kindred or similar to the primary emotion. The fourth stage is that of actual composition. Finally the emotion arising from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, which Wordsworth does not specifically identify.

The stages described above, especially the first three stages, can be felt to be part of common experience. When we recollect a personal loss, the original sorrow is experienced again; when we remember a personal humiliation, the original emotion of anger is aroused again. The fourth stage is experienced by the poet exclusively. Wordsworth’s description of the final stage has invited much critical comment, especially with regard to the “various pleasures” and “the state of enjoyment”. It may be argued that the pleasures are aroused by the metrical forms of

poetry, as Wordsworth has previously shown. But such pleasures arise in the reader's mind, while in this context Wordsworth is obviously thinking of the poet's experience during composition. An explanation of the pleasures felt by the poet may be found in Wordsworth's sonnet beginning "There is a pleasure in poetic pains." That sonnet expresses the poet's satisfaction in "the sense of difficulty overcome". The difficulty is caused by the problem of finding the right expression for what the poet wants to convey:

"How oft the malice of one luckless word
Pursues the enthusiast to the social board,
Haunts him belated on the silent plains ?
Yet he repines not, if his thought stand clear,
At last, of hindrance and obscurity."

The poet experiences pleasure after embodying his thought successfully in appropriate language. This pleasure is unique to the poet, and not shared by the reader, who does not experience the poet's sense of achievement.

In the light of the lines on poetry taking its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility, the process of Wordsworth's own poetic composition may now be briefly examined. The poet's emotion is aroused on some particular occasion by some experience. This experience is in some way connected with an important subject. If the subject is not important, the poet's feelings would not be powerful enough to be an incentive to the composition of a poem. At a later stage, the original emotion is recollected in tranquility. During the interval, the emotion has been evaluated as "important", "connected with important subjects". The mood of tranquility gives way to a rekindling of the primary emotion, and this signals the moment of composition. The process of composition is accompanied by a pleasure which arises out of poetic pains. Wordsworth never specifically mentions the length of time between the primary emotion and its rekindling; but it is not necessarily a long one. Wordsworth wrote many poems almost as soon as he was drawn by the subject, for example, "The Thorn", "Tintern Abbey." But it is significant that both poems involve recollection : the former is prompted by the recollection of a ballad, while the latter is inspired by an earlier visit to the landscape. Some other poems of his, such as *The Waggoner*, emerge "From hiding-places ten years deep."

Validity of the Definition

As for the validity of the theory of poetic composition, indicated in the two famous definitions of poetry, critical opinions differ. There are many poems to which the theory is applicable. Keats's Ode "To Autumn" seems to have been written almost as soon as the poet experienced the autumnal scene. On the other hand, Shelley's elegy *Adonais*, though prompted by Keats's death, has at its heart Shelley's remembered anger at the critical maltreatment of his own poetry. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is based on the remembered stimulus of the song of the bird, while the poem also draws upon other painful memories. As we have seen, some of Wordsworth's own poems derive from emotion long recollected in tranquillity, while some other poems of his seem to have been composed on the spur of the moment. Therefore, Wordsworth's theory of poetry, though applicable to many great poems of his and other poets', is not generally valid. But T. S. Eliot's dismissal of Wordsworth's theory of poetry as emotion recollected in tranquillity is patently unfair, because Eliot's own view of the poet's mind as a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings and images is not very different from that of Wordsworth. Indeed, W.J.B. Owen has shown that many later theories of poetry are essentially similar to that of Wordsworth. To give two examples, T.S. Eliot says in his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that "certain images" which the poet has used in his own verse "recur, charged with emotion, rather than others"; another major twentieth-century poet, Stephen Spender, says in *The Making of a Poem* that "our ability to imagine is our ability to remember what we have already once experienced and to apply it to some different situation".

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*.
2. Blades, John. *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads*.
3. Brown, Marshall. Ed. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol V.
4. Mason, Michael. Ed. *Lyrical Ballads*.
5. Owen, W.J.B. *Wordsworth as Critic*
6. Owen ed. *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*.
7. Tillotson, Geoffrey. *Augustan Poetic Diction*.
8. Wellek, Rene. *A History of Modern Criticism*, Vol. III.

9. Murray, Patrick. *Literary Criticism*.

10. Watson, John. *English Poetry of the Romantic Period*.

The author of the module gratefully acknowledges his profound debt to the books mentioned above.

Assignments

Short Answer Type

- (a) Briefly indicate the historical importance of the *Preface*.
- (b) How far did Wordsworth and Coleridge collaborate in the writing of the *Preface* ?
- (c) Bring out the main characteristics of poetic diction.
- (d) What was the original form of Wordsworth's statement of his poetic aims? How many times was the *Preface* revised?

Essay Type

- (a) In what sense is Wordsworth's *Preface* a Romantic manifesto ?
- (b) Why does Wordsworth reject poetic diction? What kind of language does he propose in its place?
- (c) Why does Wordsworth adopt a selection of the real language of men in his poetry?
- (d) "There neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition". Elucidate.

- (e) How does Wordsworth defend the use of metre in his own poetry? Why is the defence necessary?
- (f) How does Wordsworth describe a poet ?
- (g) Summarise Wordsworth's observations on the relationship between poetry and general truth.
- (h) Wordsworth defines poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and as taking its origin in "emotion recollected in tranquility". Do you find any contradiction between the two definitions? Give a reasoned answers.

BLOCK III

UNIT 11

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*

11 (a): Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was born in the small rural town of Ottery St. Mary in the country of Devonshire. A temperamental, dreamy child, he was sent after his father's death to Christ's Hospital school, London. He was a rather precocious young student with remarkable powers of 'inspired' talk. He entered Jesus College, Cambridge but his brilliant career in classics there was diverted by French revolutionary politics, heavy drinking and an unhappy love-affair. Ultimately he did not take any university degree.

In the summer of 1794 Coleridge met Robert Southey and together they invented Pantisocracy, a scheme to set up a commune in New England. It was to be an ideal democratic community in which all men and women would live with equal rights. But the scheme never materialised. In June 1794 Coleridge came to Racedown, Dorset where he met Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy. The close friendship between the two resulted in the joint publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Published anonymously, the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* contains twenty three poems, four including "The Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge and the rest by Wordsworth. The second edition of the volume came out in 1800 and the famous "Preface" was added to it replacing the "Advertisement". A few months later Coleridge went to Germany where he attended lectures at the university and read the philosophical writings of Kant and the others. This experience had a strong influence on Coleridge and helped him in forming the ideas he voiced so powerfully in *Biographia Literaria*.

The volume was originally conceived in 1814 as a short explanatory preface to the *Sibylline Leaves*. But it rapidly expanded into a two-volume apologia for his literary life and opinions.

Part I is broadly autobiographical. It describes Coleridge's friendship with Southey and with the Wordsworths and goes on to trace his struggle with the dynamic philosophy of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and the Schlegels. Part II is almost entirely critical, attacking Wordsworth's "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*. But paradoxically, it defends the poetry itself. Coleridge concentrates on the psychology of the creative process. He propounds new theories of the origins of poetic language, metre and form as the interpenetration of passion and will. In his own words, he endeavoured "to establish the principles of writing rather than to furnish rules how to pass judgement on what has been written by others."

The Origin and Nature of *Biographia Literaria*

Coleridge was impelled to write *Biographia Literaria* partly because of his disagreement with Wordsworth on the nature and function of poetry. When Wordsworth wrote a 'Preface' to the 1800 edition of his *Lyrical Ballads*, he put forward certain apparently dogmatic and unacceptable views on the subject. In 1815 one more edition of the poems was brought out with a new 'preface'. This increased Coleridge's discomfort on the issue. Moreover, Coleridge was justly hurt that Wordsworth had not been generous to acknowledge his indebtedness to Coleridge on certain points. He wanted to write a corresponding preface to his own poems. This, he felt, would record the development of his own independent critical position. Coleridge was thus keen on dissociating himself from Wordsworth as he did not see eye to eye with Wordsworth on some of the major issues. The preface that he intended to write for his own poems finally swelled into *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge began working on it between June and September 1815, and the book was published in July 1817. In the first volume of his literary autobiography Coleridge declares his aim of investigating 'the seminal principle' of poetic composition. He intends expose, by transcendental deduction, the nature of the imaginative faculty which the poet characteristically employs. After deducing what the faculty of imagination is he will show what defines poetry as its recognisable product. Thus the initial plan was quite straight-forward; the first volume of *Biographia Literaria* will provide a philosophical theory of imagination while the second will explain how the imagination expresses itself. And the philosophy of the first volume and the literary criticism of the second would complement each other. But unfortunately the project ultimately did not turn out to be as systematic as it was originally conceived to be. In fact,

for some reason or other, all Coleridge's critical works suffer from a woeful lack of system. *Biographia Literaria* is no exception. The work in its final form appears ill-planned and incomplete, fragmentary and digressive. Very often the most pregnant remarks are scattered in marginalia or footnotes where Coleridge says the vital things in a less rigorously systematized way.

11 (b): Coleridge's Disagreement with the Views of Wordsworth

Coleridge was in sharp disagreement with Wordsworth almost immediately after the publication of Wordsworth's famous 'Preface'. He expressed his sentiment in a letter to Robert Southey : "Although Wordsworth's "Preface" is half a child of my own brain ... yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth". Though there might have been a large area of commonly held views when the 'Preface' was conceived, Coleridge soon took exception not merely to adventitious matters but to some fundamental concepts. Coleridge's major disagreements, however, centre on Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction. Wordsworth had emphasised that he had gone against the practice of many of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, of using 'gaudiners' of expression and "inane phraseology". Wordsworth expressed his preference for a 'selection of language really used by men'. By 'men' Wordsworth actually meant lower class or rustic people living in close contact with the soil. Explaining why only rustic life was chosen for this purpose Wordsworth says that in that condition, free from all outside influences, men speak from their personal experience. Quite naturally the low and rustic people "convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions." Such a language, therefore, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted by for it poets". Poets in their desire to confer honour upon themselves and their art, separate themselves from the sympathies of men and indulge in arbitrary habits of expression. The language of the common man, on the other hand, is born out of the manners of rural life and from the elementary feelings. Such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived. Finally, as a natural corollary to his concept of poetry, Wordsworth argues that the language of poetry cannot differ materially from that of prose.

Against these contentions, Coleridge cogently argues and in detail, even though he agrees with Wordsworth in condemning the 'artifice' of their fellow poets. Coleridge praises

Wordsworth for having identified as important “the natural language of impassioned feeling”. But he disagrees with Wordsworth’s idea that “the proper diction of poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken, with due exceptions, from the mouth of men in real life, a language which actually constitutes the natural conservation of man under the influence of natural feelings.” Coleridge disputes Wordsworth’s claim to have chosen “low and rustic life” as the material for his poetry. Coleridge cites such poems from Wordsworth as “The Brothers”, “Michael”, “Ruth” and “The Mad Mother” to establish that the characters who feature in these poems are clearly not taken from low and rustic life. Coleridge further points out that the sentiments expressed in such poems are not entirely attributable to “their occupations and abode”. The thoughts and feelings, language and manners of such characters have nothing to do with their living in the countryside. Rather, Coleridge feels that without ‘education’ and ‘original sensibility’, rural life will make man selfish, sensual, gross and hard-hearted.

On the question of the language of poetry, Coleridge refutes Wordsworth’s claim that “the very language of men” constitutes the language of poetry. “Everyman’s language”, says Coleridge, “varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings”. Every man’s language, therefore has, first, its individualities; secondly the common qualities of the class to which he belongs and thirdly words and phrases of universal use. No two men of the same or different classes speak alike, although both use words and phrases common to all. This applies as much to the language of the country as that of the town. Which of these forms of speech, asks Coleridge, is “the real language of men”? Each, he replies, has to be purged of its uncommon or accidental features before it can become the ordinary language of men. Once the peculiarities are omitted from each, the result will be common to all. And the omissions and changes to be made into the language of rustics before it could be used in a poem are as numerous and weighty as would be necessary in adapting to the same purpose the ordinary language of tradesmen. Such a language alone has universal appeal and is therefore the language of poetry. And it differs from the language of prose even as “prose itself ... differs and ought to differ from the language of conversation.

11 (c): Coleridge's Ideas Regarding the Origin and Role of Metre

Wordsworth in the 'Preface' asserted that "there neither is, nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." Coleridge finds fault with Wordsworth's assertion on a number of grounds. He goes on to show very clearly why and wherein the language of metrical composition essentially differs from that of prose. Coleridge points out that although the words used by prose and poetry are the same, their arrangement in each is different. It is true "that there are sentences which would be equally in their place both in verse and prose," but the point to consider is whether "there are not passages which would suit the one and not the other." Coleridge is of the opinion that the norm of language appropriate to ordinary prose discourse is completely different from that appropriate to poetry. As a form of written composition poetry has its own objectives and its own methods to attain those objectives. The primary objective of poetry, according to Coleridge, is the evocation of pleasure. Metrical form, with or without rhyme, has a pleasure of its own. Even though the nature of the pleasure may not be very noble, no one can deny that a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds. But metre for Coleridge does not simply mean a superadded charm. This is where he fundamentally differs from Wordsworth. For Coleridge, metre must suit the language and content of poetry so as to become an organic part of the composition. Coleridge goes on to establish this by referring to the 'origin of metre'. Coleridge says that while the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of "increased excitement", these elements are formed into mere artificiality by a voluntary act of the will. He also describes the manner in which poetry works, by "distinction without disjunction". This suggests the harmony or fine balance of two opposite forces, 'metre' and 'rhythm'. Metre here apparently means metrical pattern, and 'rhythm' is the rhythm of ordinary speech. He observes the same double effect in the metrical time sequence. The pleasure of poetry is in part derived from the and previous expectation of the reader: there are attractions in the journey itself. He opines that metre is not only an adornment, but it also must be organic. All other parts of the composition must be made consonant with it.

11 (d): Coleridge on Fancy and Imagination

As poetry, according to Coleridge, is an act of imagination, it is necessary to understand

what he meant by the term. During the seventeenth century the terms Imagination and Fancy had often been used in a vaguely synonymous way. This was in keeping with mediaeval and Renaissance tradition where 'imagination' had been fairly close with 'phantasia'. 'Phantasia' meant the lighter and less responsible kind of imagination. A certain depth of good feeling grew around the term 'imagination' in the writings of Addison. It stayed close to the heart of eighteenth century poetry. An early and somewhat haphazard attempt was made in the note to "The Thorn" to discriminate between Imagination and Fancy. But it was Coleridge who first made a systematic attempt to desynonymize Fancy and Imagination. In chapter IV of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge declared, "Milton had a highly imaginative, Cowley a very fanciful mind."

Coleridge owed his interest in the question of imagination to Wordsworth's poetical practice. It was the experience of listening to Wordsworth's recitation of a manuscript poem that led Coleridge to think about the issue. Coleridge noticed in Wordsworth's poems "the union of deep feeling with profound thought, the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed,..." "Repeated meditation led me first to suspect", writes Coleridge, "that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power." Before Wordsworth poets only gave 'what oft was thought' and hardly ever what was equally *felt*. It was he who bridged the gulf between the two. These words of Coleridge reflect in part the conclusions of the Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart who in his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792) described fancy as a lower faculty providing the materials of sensation. Coleridge, however, distinguishes between Fancy and Imagination not in terms of superiority or inferiority but in terms of systemic differences.

In Chapter XIII of his *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge describes Fancy as a mere "aggregating" power. He says that Fancy acts only "by a sort of juxtaposition", it is a sort of mirror repeating simply or by transposition. To quote Coleridge : "Fancy ... has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials readymade from the law of association." In other words, Fancy can only bring together things that lie remote and form them

into a unity. But in the process Fancy cannot fuse the things to produce anything new. Fancy involves acts of choice of arrangement and in so far as it does this, it is a more active faculty than mere perception and mere memory. But Fancy is certainly different from the Imagination in that it cannot create vitally new things. Imagination is described by Coleridge as an ‘esemplastic’ power, a power that can assimilate, blend and fuse materials to create an entirely new thing. The difference between Fancy and Imagination may be likened to the difference between a mechanical mixture, as in the productions of fancy, the ingredients are held together but they retain their original properties. In a compound, as in the productions of imagination, they are “dissolved, diffused, dissipated” into a new substance altogether. Imagination is the distinguishing quality of the poetry of Shakespeare and Milton, while fancy marks the poetry from Donne to Cowley.

UNIT 12

12 (a): Coleridge’s Views on Primary and Secondary Imagination

From a study of the effect of imagination Coleridge is led to examine its very nature and genesis. He finds two forms of imagination which he calls primary and secondary. To quote Coleridge: “The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and different only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.”

From the definition it follows that Primary Imagination is simply the power of perceiving the objects of sense — persons, places, things — both in their parts and as wholes. It enables the mind to form a clear picture of the objects perceived by the senses. It is a universal faculty and is possessed by every individual. It is also an involuntary act of the mind. When confronted with a mingled mass of matter, it involuntarily changes them to shape and size, making perception

possible. The Secondary Imagination, on the other hand, is a special faculty of the mind possessed only by poets and creative artists. It is also a conscious process as this faculty is used by the artists in a conscious way. It is, therefore, a more active agent than the Primary Imagination. What is perceived by the Primary Imagination is dissolved, diffused and dissipated by the Secondary Imagination in order to re-create. It is a synthesizing and modifying power. From its 'plastic stress' objects emerge fashioned in its own likeness. They are not to it as they what they are in the external world of nature, but as the mind conceived them to be. The Secondary Imagination is, above all, a unifying or esemplastic power which, besides unifying the faculties of the soul, identifies the mind with nature and nature with mind. For the truth that the poet discovers lies neither in him nor in the things he sees, but in 'the identity of both'. This synthetic or marginal power, Coleridge believes, reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities. However, Coleridge finds no difference of *kind* between Primary and Secondary Imagination because both work on the objects of sense. The difference between them, according to Coleridge, is only one of *degree* because while the Primary Imagination works on the objects of sense in a feeble way, the Secondary Imagination works in a very strong and emphatic fashion. This position of Coleridge, however, is open to debate.

12 (b): Coleridge's View on Poetry and Poets

Coleridge's theory of the Imagination modifies the traditional view of art in general and poetry in particular. As a product of Imagination poetry tends to become more a form of self-revelation than an act of imitation. Poetry is not just an imitation of reality in its outward manifestation. It rather reveals what lies deep within it, "*the natura naturans* which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man." It is the reconciliation of and difference. The difference is as essential to it as the likeness, for without difference it would be a copy of facsimile art. But the poetic art in particular is "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities of sameness with difference, of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with the old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement." Imagination as an active agent reveals itself in the reconciliation of these pairs of

opposites in poetry.

Poetry as an activity of the Imagination thus idealises the real and realises the ideal in the process of this reconciliation. A poem naturally partakes of this general object of poetry but it has a form, which distinguishes it from other kinds of composition. The final definition of a poem, as given by Coleridge, runs thus :

“A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminate by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.”

A poem uses the same medium as a prose composition, namely, words. The difference between the two lies in the different use of words in consequence of their different objects. The immediate object of a work of science is truth. The immediate object of a poem is pleasure. A work of science may nevertheless produce pleasure and a poem may also communicate truth. That is why, the immediate object is to be differentiated from the ultimate object. Pleasure and not truth is the immediate object of poetry and as metre under certain conditions conduces to it, poetry prefers metre to the language of prose. These conditions are that it should suit the language and content of the poem. Metre should thus evolve from within the content of the poem. It should not be a mere superaddition for the sake of embellishment. That is why a novel or prose romance which also has pleasure for its immediate object, if put into metrical form, cannot be called poetry. The metrical form would not be appropriate to its content. Poetry is also different because in poetry each component part affords as much pleasure as the whole. The whole is not just a summation of the parts.

Every part of the poem must be consonant with the other parts as well as with the whole. This forms the crux of Coleridge's theory of organic unity of poetry. In a long poem some parts are loosely bound to the main poem and therefore the effect produced on reading is hardly gratifying or not gratifying at all.

After explaining the nature of poems and poetry Coleridge goes on to define a poet. Like other Romantics, Coleridge also feels that poetry of the highest order may be found even outside metrical composition. As examples of poetry outside metrical pattern, Coleridge refers to the

works of such writers as Plato, Isaiah, Bishop Taylor and Burnet. The meaning of the word 'poet', Coleridge opines, is related to the meaning of the word 'poetry'. "The poet", Coleridge writes, "described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity ...

He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination."

12 (c): Coleridge's Contribution as a Critic

The reputation of Coleridge as a philosopher and critic stands very high. Saintsbury places Coleridge on equal position with Aristotle and Longinus. Arther Symons called *Biographia Literaria* "the greatest book of criticism in English." Exponents of Romantic criticism in our time such as Sir Herbert Read, Humphry House and M. H. Abrams have shown how Coleridge achieved a happy synthesis of what is best in the Neo-classicism and what is undeniably valid in Romanticism. In their view, Coleridge patented what is called "the expressive criticism." Modern Romantics regard as central to Coleridge's system the transcendental premises — his faith in a reality existing 'out' there and the truth of a living relationship between the human mind and the phenomenal world. Next to the Romantics, I. A. Richards hails Coleridge as a forerunner of the modern science of semantics. Richards dispenses with the metaphysical matrix of Coleridge's thinking but draws our attention to Coleridge's deep interest in language and in words, especially their etymology and contextual connotations. It is this interest in language that has impelled some of the New Critics like Cleanth Brooks to turn to Coleridge for inspiration. In more recent times there has been a tendency to find affiliation between Coleridge's thinking and deconstructive criticism. Kathleen Wheeler regards Coleridge criticism as capable of admitting a post-structuralist interpretation. That Coleridge can be subjected to such varied interpretations only proves that Coleridge is very much relevant even in our times.

Suggested Reading

J. Shawcross. in two volumes. *Biographia Literaria*. (ed.) OUP., 1969

2. M. H. Abrams. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. OUP., 1971.
3. Richard Fogle. *The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism*, University of California Press, 1922.
4. Humphry House. *Coleridge*, Clark Lectures, London, 1953.
5. Basil Willey. *Nineteenth Century Studies* Penguin Books, 1973.
6. I. A. Richards. *Coleridge on Imagination* Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955.
7. Kathleen Wheeler. *Sources, Processes and Methods in Colridge's Biographia Literaria*. Cambridge University Press, 1980.
8. W. J. Bate. *Colridge*, Macmillan, 1968.
9. Rene Welleck. *A History of Modern Criticism* Vol. 2. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981.

Assignments

1. Comment on the distinction that Colridge makes between Fancy and Imagination.
2. How does Colridge distinguish between Primary and Secondary Imagination?
3. Discuss Coleridge's views on the origin and function of metre in poetry.
4. How does Coleridge define a poem ?
5. Critically examine Coleridge's views on poetry and poets.

6. Write a note on the controversy between Wordsworth and Coleridge about the language proper to poetry.
7. Examine Colridge's contribution as an exponent of organicist poetics.
8. Assess contribution of Coleridge as a critic.

BLOCK IV

UNIT 13

Henry James: 'Art of Fiction'

13 (a): Objectives

This module aims at elucidating Henry James's essay "The Art of Fiction," published in Longman's Magazine 4 (1884) and reprinted in *Partial Portraits* (1888). The module also discusses James's assumptions for which he criticizes Mr. Walter Besant's "The Art of Fiction" (1884). Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" is a reply to Mr. Walter Besant's "The Art of Fiction".

Besant's ethical views of writing fiction inspired many of his contemporary fiction-writers, critics, and reviewers. Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" is one of the parts of that debate. It presents realism as a great tool to express what James called "impression of life." There are two parts in this module. The first part presents Henry James as critic of Novelistic Art and the second part elucidates his "The Art of Fiction." Walter Besant and Henry James: *On the Art of Fiction*.

Unit 13 (b): Henry James as Critic of Novelistic Art

Henry James (1843–1916) was a British-American novelist and critic. He remained an artistic-realist till the end. His famous novels were published between 1901-1914 (the death of Victoria and the beginning of World War I). Since King Edward VII reigned from 1901 to 1910, the period is also called the Edwardian Period in English Literature. Besides writing novels based on observed lives of the Americans and the English, Henry James wrote many critical notes on writers and propagandists. Martha Nussbaum has rightly remarked that James's *The Ambassadors* challenged the conception of rule-dominated moral reasoning. (Noël Carroll "Art and the Moral Realm").

In this module Henry James's works are critically assessed to justify him as a critic. His works of criticism carry various titles: *French Poets and Novelists* (1878), *Hawthorne* (1879), *Partial Portraits* (1888), *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (1893), and *Notes on Novelists* (1914).

His *Views and Reviews* (1908) contains his early reviews, introductions, and pronouncements in letters. Some other critical notes, reviews and epistles were published posthumously titled *Notes and Reviews* (1921), *The Future of the Novel* (1956), *American Essays* (1956), and *Literary Reviews and Essays* (1957).

As a critic, besides writing prefaces to his novels, Henry James meditated critically on contemporary novelists and predecessors. As a young reviewer, he referred repeatedly to Nathaniel Hawthorne's work. He was fond of reading the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). He often used Hawthorne's work as touchstone to assess awareness of other novelists to hidden realities of societies. His first lengthy discussion of Hawthorne appeared in *The Nation* in March, 1872. He also wrote about Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Balzac, Goethe, Gautier, Matthew Arnold, Flaubert, Maupassant, and Alphonse Daudet. He criticized Beuve for his negative responses to Honoré de Balzac .. He criticized Hippolyte Taine (1828-93) for not giving enough attention attention to "the intellectual climate of our literature." However, he admires Taine's essay on Balzac. He admires Balzac and Gautier for their art of representing life and moral responsibility. He liked Matthew Arnold's idea of high seriousness and moral value and followed the theory of criticism of life as an ingredient of the novel. It seems that he formulates his theory of criticism on the observation of Arnold as moral critic. He appreciated Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, Alphonse Daudet, George Eliot, Miss Harriet Prescott, Wells, Bennett, and Turgenev for their artistic capacities to represent life. He ridiculed A.C. Swinburne, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde for their futile artistic attempts. He praised the concept of "The New Novel" for its actual connection with realities and signs of life.

The critics regard James as a realist because he believes that an artist must have the power of selecting the most suitable sign, mark, incident, or the fragment of an event to exemplify existing society as a whole. In Hawthorne he remarks that an artist is not historian but a knower of the original event. He does not open the documents of the events but gives hints. In *Notes on Novelists with Some Other Notes* (1914) he asserts, "Art cannot imitate life, if it does, it becomes a reflection of confusion" ("Gabriele D'Annunzio" 275). He differentiates life from art: "Life being all inclusion and confusion, and art being all discrimination and selection"(AF) He believes that art is a "chemical process, the crucible or retort from which things emerge for a new function" (LC: 1984. 930) and that the artist is an alchemist who "renews something like the old dream of the secret of life". In other words, we can say that he includes intentions of both the

writer and the reader and their crafts of understanding the world. He does not allow his author to write anything irrelevant to the understanding of the reader. It is with this vision of art that he often maintains distinction between the novel and romance. If romance adheres to adventure, dare, and acts of struggling characters, he accepts it and affirms that it adheres to unnatural things or subject matters. In *The Future of the Novel: Essays on the Art of Fiction*, James

declares: “Literature, is an objective, projected result; it is life that is the unconscious, the agitated, the struggling, floundering cause” (“Honoré de Balzac” 1984, 119).

Henry James thinks that an artist is an alchemist because he knows how to uniform varieties of form, unity, tone and he knows how to create illusion — the illusion of a world which is akin to our living reality. This reality doubles the charm of art and entertains the reader. This art of the novelist validates his greatness because it produces enjoyment and cheerfulness in the reader. The Artist’s art of creating illusion depends on the power of his art to mirror the signs of realities. Henry James contends: “The artist should have at least tried his best to be cheerful” (“Ivan Turgenev” LC: 997). Art of an artist “must lift up the reader's heart” (“Alexandre Dumas” 279). This contention inspires his belief that “Life is dispiriting; art is inspiring” (“Alexandre Dumas” LC: 279). In *Essays in London and Elsewhere* he condemns Turgenev for his gloomy writing; condemns Flaubert for his social and political partiality and for his hatred of the bourgeoisie.

Henry James is one of the greatest masters of modern literature who developed the novelistic art as genre-theory. R. P. Blackmur edited James’s “Prefaces” into one volume titled *The Art of the Novel* (1934) which exemplify how the novel reflects the tints of life. He says in his “Prefaces” to his novels that an art of enjoyment remains after exorcising the sophisticated artistry, imaginative, or factual imitation.

UNIT 14

14 (a): Critics’ Remarks on Henry James as Critic

T. S. Eliot does not consider Henry James a successful literary critic. He says, “His criticism of books and writers is feeble ... Henry was not a literary critic” (“On Henry James” 1918; 1945). Eliot acknowledges James as a novelist and remarks in this context that “he had a mind so fine

that no idea could violate it" (1918; 1945). In his essay "Arnold and Pater," Eliot's concluding remarks justify James as a follower of Art for Art's Sake and not a realist novelist (*Selected Essays* 405). However, René Wellek in his essay "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism" (1958) neglects Eliot's bitter criticism and appreciates Henry James's art of criticism. He elucidates how his works constitute a bridge between the early nineteenth century criticism and modern criticism.

Henry James to my mind is by far the best American critic of the nineteenth century who ... is brimful of ideas and critical concepts and has a well-defined theory and a point of view which allow him to characterize sensitively and evaluate persuasively a wide range of writers: largely, of course, the French, English, and American novelists of his own time...All his life he was acutely conscious of the low status and condition of English and American criticism, and the need of a revival of criticism, especially of the novel. (Wellek 293-321)

Percy Lubbock (1879-1965) in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) calls James "the only real scholar in the art" and considers him "the novelist who carried his research into the theory of the art further than any other" (186-187).

Morris Roberts's *Henry James's Criticism* declares that "no critic has ever gone more deeply into the philosophy of art" (1929 120) R. P. Blackmur appreciates James's "Prefaces" to the New York edition of his novels as "the most sustained and the most eloquent and original piece of literary criticism in existence" (1934 7). Garry L. Hagberg (b. 1956), a professor, philosopher, and jazz musician, studied Henry James in the purview of Wittgensteinian theory of meaning and justified him as a philosophic literary critic in his book *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory* (1994). Henry James's critical essays canonized the theory of narrative technique, artistry, psychological realism and are still cited in the discourses of M.M. Bakhtin, Gerard Genet, and Frederic Jameson. Frederic Jameson has admired Henry James's concept of "Point of View" as a historic act in relation to his interpretation of "reification" and "commodification." Jameson has disseminated James's views of fiction with reference to the fictional potent of reflecting the masses (See "The Vanishing Mediator" in *Ideologies of Theories* (2008); "Romance and Reification" in *The Political Unconscious* (1981; 2002).

In "The Art of Fiction," Henry James has used the phrase "the era of discussion" with reference to the then ongoing debate on the art of fiction. In the debate there were chiefly four writers of his time: William Dean Howells, Besant, James, and Stevenson. The root of the "era of discussion" (AF 52) is Howells's essay "Henry James Jr." written in response to Henry James's art of characterization and published in *The Century Magazine* November 1882. The essay set off the controversy for the author's racial observation of Henry James's work. In this essay, Howells introduces James's works in relation with his family background and his personal associations. Howells observes James's art of characterization and calls him the "artistic-analyst" novelist. He says, "Evidently it is the character, not the fate, of his people which occupies him" (Howells). He also called him an American representative of the Zola school i.e. the school of realism. He Henry James: "annalist" and "analyst" and admires him as a greater novelist than any other of his time. For Howells James does not tell the stories through intricate plots but presents an analysis of characters taken from society. "In one manner or other the stories were all told long ago; and now we want merely to know what the novelist thinks about persons and situations. Mr. James gratifies this philosophic desire" Howells contends.

Howells introduced the phrase "The Art of Fiction" in a statement regarding the English novel . He says: "The art of fiction has, in fact, become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray." Two years later, Mr. Walter Besant, a novelist, a critic and a historian, delivered a lecture on "The Art of Fiction" at the Royal Institution in London on 25 April 1884. This lecture inspired many contemporary critics and review writers to speak for and against the art of fiction. On April 26, 1884, an evening newspaper the *Pal Mal Gazette* published a short review of the lecture in the column "Occasional Notes." On April 30, the *Pal Mal Gazette* published "The Art of Fiction." In May, Chatto and Windus published the lecture with the author's notes and comments. R.H. Hutton published a review of "Mr. Besant's Lecture on Art of Fiction." In 1891 *the New Review* revived the debate through two symposia, "The Science of Fiction," featuring Besant, Paul Barget, and Thomas Hardy, and "The Science of Criticism," featuring James, Lang, and Edmund Gosse. In 1895 Henry James's former friend and the young novelist Vernon Lee, added some relevant ideas in his "On Literary Construction" published in the *Contemporary Review*. Rob Davidson noted the popularity of the topic in *The Master and the*

Dean:

Besant's essay, subsequently published in pamphlet form, was briefly reviewed by the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Spectator* in London, while in the United States the *Nation*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Tribune* fleetingly noted Besant's ideas. Besant's lecture provoked more ripples than waves, but James clearly saw an opportunity; his own "Art of Fiction" appeared in *Longman's Magazine* in September 1884. (Davidson 51)

Henry James responded to this current debate with the same title "The Art of Fiction." He joined this debate in the *Longman's Magazine*. He called the very affair "the era of discussion" to which R.L. Stevenson gave a rejoinder in *Longman's Magazine* in winter and wrote an essay, "A Humble Remonstrance." James called Stevenson's essay a "genuine rejoinder" in his letter written to Stevenson on December 5, 1884. "The Art of Fiction" was reprinted in *Partial Portraits* (1888). Stevenson's "rejoinder" was included in *Memories and Portraits*. James's "The Art of Fiction" is a response to Mr. Besant's views on "The Arts of Fiction." James contradicts Besant's ideas of art of fiction that conform to *Belle Letters* and the training of the artist. Besant is of the view that fiction is one of the Fine Arts. He advances three propositions for it. He says that:

1. Fiction is an Art in every way worthy to be called the sister and the equal of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Music, and Poetry ; that is to say, her field is as boundless, her possibilities as vast, her excellences as worthy of admiration, as may be claimed for any of her sister Arts.
2. It is an Art which is governed and directed by general laws; and that these laws may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion.
3. Like the other Fine Arts, Fiction is so far removed from the mere mechanical arts, that no laws or rules whatever can teach it to those who have not already been endowed with the natural and necessary gifts. (AF 3-5)

James's response to Besant's "Art of Fiction" establishes a theory of fiction as a literary genre. In the beginning of "The Art of Fiction," James states that the novel had never been identified as a literary genre. He said that there was no idea printed or documented that could circulate the knowledge of the creation of fiction, could declare rules and methods of reading, understanding and writing fiction. He states that fiction "had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it – of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice

and comparison.” Moreover, he appreciated Mr. Walter Besant’s setting up a meaningful debate on the theory of novel as an art. However, his opinion is different than that of Besant’s. Unlike Besant, James was fond of reading art as personal impressions of life. Here ‘personal’ corresponds to what he termed the “author’s art of execution” based on “exercise of freedom.” As confessed in his letter to Stevenson, he says “My pages, in *Longman*, were simply a plea for liberty.” After reading James’s “The Art of Fiction”, one may conclude that Henry James wanted to see the novelistic art free from classical strains. In 1817, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, despised the reading of fiction calling it a “kill-time” rather than a “pass-time.” He imagined it as a “species of amusement” which is nothing but “spitting over a bridge” (1817, 1 34). Henry James appreciates the artistry of the novelist who represents artistic illusion as real as it was before its conversion in the hands of an artist. This becomes possible only if an artist feels that he has the liberty to write what he feels or whatever he experiences as “personal impressions of life.” In this manner, Fiction competes with life. The artist lives beyond petty rules made by Besant in his “The Art of Fiction.” Henry James’s arguments in response to Besant’s art of fiction maybe stated thus:

1. He believes that art lives upon developing arguments, experiment, curiosity, “upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints... Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilizing when they are frank and sincere.”
2. Literature should be either instructive or amusing. The most important objective of the author is how to make his writing interesting and catchy.
3. Author as artist must realize his power of freedom to feel and execute his feeling after its filtrations. The art of fiction cannot be disowned or cannot be trained or taught.
4. He justifies the categories of the good and bad novels: “the bad is swept, with all the daubed canvases and spoiled marble, into some unvisited limbo or infinite rubbish-yard, beneath the back-windows of the world, and the good subsists and emits its light and stimulates our desire for perfection.”

Thinking and its execution belongs to the author. Neither thinking nor its execution can be taught. Art of thinking cannot be imitated nor can it be represented in its actual condition, because the art of thinking lies in innovativeness of an individual. Henry James affirms that “the old Evangelical hostility” and theories developed under its impression (Platonic Idealism of Art)

since the Renaissance have damaged the value of Fiction. He contradicts Besant's idea of art saying that art includes liberty of the artist. He differentiates a novelist from a painter. The painter knows the scientific materials he uses in the painting whereas a novelist knows his articles or subjects but he has to choose, select, or opt for the subjects of characterization and events that constitute plot—a living plot which tells of an analysis of life; a contrast of the past and the present. The selection of incidents which takes place in day-to-day life also dwells in the space of a writer's "freedom to feel and say":

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. (AF 61)

The author chooses the form after choosing the facts or subjects, and then he chooses tone and finally executes it for the readers' pleasure. These qualities of an author make him a novelist. They are the result of his personal effort: "The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that," Henry James contends. He thinks that the artistry of an author is measured through measuring his art of execution—the result of immeasurable attempts. The art of a novelist is the result of a personal effort" and that is why, art without author is meaningless. Art is not sufficient; artistry of an author produces effect in the art. Artistry is not the subject of divine inspiration as Besant declares in his last proposition but a result of the artist's personal effort. James emphasizes that the art of fiction lives upon the author's art of experimental execution: "there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant — no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes."(AF 61)

Creativity cannot be taught, nor can it be injected by any other than the writer himself. Art is boundless and the artist has limitless power of execution. Henry James objects to Besant's idea of the possibility of teaching how to write fiction or how to become an artist. James's idea of "liberty" contradicts Besant's idea. In fact, he contradicts all that Mr. Besant attributes to the rules to be followed by the novelist and the subjects he chooses for his novel. He objects to the "precision and exactness" of "the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion" and "conscious moral purpose;" and "It is almost impossible to estimate too highly the value of careful workmanship—that is, of style;" however "the most important point of all is the story;" and "the story is everything." (AF 62-63)

He agrees with critics who believe that fiction ought to reflect Realism. However, his contention

about the sense of reality in the novel is a bit different from that of other Realists. For him, documentation of exactness of reality in an artistic manner is not a possible act because of immensity and uncertainty of realities: “humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms” (64). Social reality cannot be represented as it is found in the society. The filtration of realities is a process of novelist’s art of execution. He also agrees with critics who believe that the novel is an expression of the novelist’s personal experience. However, he thinks, “experience is limitless.” How can an exact experience be expressed? He clarifies that an experience is like a “spider-web”: “Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue” (64).

An Experience cannot be expressed as it is apprehended. Thus both reality and experience are inexpressible phenomena. On this ground, he discards Besant and affirms that expression of reality and experience lacks ‘preciseness and exactness’ and that the novel is not the writer’s experience or the result of the seen world but “impressions” or “tints” of lived experience. For him, impression is the unseen experience filtered from the seen one; it is an implication of an incident (Besant call it “experience”), a pattern, “air of reality” etc.” The power of the artist lies in the power of writing such traces, “impressions,” “air of reality” etc. As he says:

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. (AF 65)

The soul of a novel is not the story but incidents. For James, experience is an incident; and this incident embellishes the novelistic art. This thinking demolishes the classic difference between the novel of character and the novel of incident. James thinks that the soul of novel is not the story but incidents illustrated by its author. Howells has also traced this feature in the novels of Henry James. Howells thinks, implicitly, that Henry James is an analyst of persons and situations. So, James believes in exposition of incidents (i.e. impressions of life or air of reality) not in the story-telling. Because “when one says picture, one says of character; when one says novel, one says of incident ... What is character but the determination of incident? What is

incident but the illustration of character? What is a picture or a novel that is not of character?" (AF 69). Besides making a distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident, he also makes a distinction between interesting and uninteresting novels. The interesting novels untie the unseen realities contained in the experience. A typical selection, an inclusive selection, of incidents exposes the impression of life. In that sense, the novel competes with life. The interesting novels are products of a mind that is far from sophisticated artistry, and near to "conscious increase of freedom", to a skill to know the taste of contemporary readers that may expose the world (75).

James compares the narrative arts of Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) with Ivan Turgénieff for exemplifying what he called interesting and uninteresting narration. He compares so as to emphasize on the tangibility of contents "hidden in the bosom of common things".

The air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel —the merit in which all its other merits (including that conscious moral purpose of which Mr. Besant speaks) helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as nothing, and if these be there they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist. They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here, in very truth, that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother, the painter, in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the color, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. (AF 66)

Henry James objects to Besant's idea of story as the soul of novel. He differentiates the story from the novel as one differentiates "the idea and the form; the needle and thread." Story is not the novel. It is the idea to the form called novel that is "the most magnificent form of art" (AF 79). He also objects to the concept of "fiction without adventure." He interprets romance to its literal meaning i.e. adventure, mystery, wonder, strangeness, and sensuousness, relating it to the novels of R.L. Stevenson, M. Edmond de Goncourt, and George Eliot (AF 81). For Besant the novel of romance damages 'moral purpose' of the novel, but James understands the term in relation to what he has already called 'the interesting novel.' The word 'interesting' is the key to his concept of novelistic art. It serves as the purpose of the novel with the help of which Henry James contradicts Besant's 'moral purpose' of the novel.

Henry James emphasizes that the perfection of the novel depends on the liberty of an author and his art of execution. The perfection of art is itself the most interesting purpose. Regarding the English novel, he says that the moral purpose, in connection with societal corruption (Plato has talked of it) and art, is a 'diffidence' or shyness of the author (82). This shyness or diffidence leads to the imperfect art, because, it does not have resultants of individual artistic effort; it does not reflect the openness, vastness, liberty of an individual novelist. A bound author, a shy author, or a diffidence author is an author who is confused of optimism and pessimism, good and evil. He cannot explore the wisdom of the world. The author's purpose is not to preach or teach but to open choices of how to live humanly. In order to do it, he must be enjoyable, must be interesting. Thus, James justifies that the only aim of the novelist is to write 'interesting.' This intended purpose will itself teach him how to touch the heart and mind of the readers. It is a bit difficult task. It seems easy but it is a difficult one. 'To make the art 'interesting' is the deepest quality of the artist. Henry James seems Longinian when he points out that "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer" (AF 83).

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that mind is rich and noble, will the novel, the picture, the statue, partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. (AF 83)

With his freedom, an author can produce that truth which is common to everyone's perception. Recognition of this perception increases the charm of a work of art. That is why, the only moral purpose of an author is to express true account of "impressions of life". In his words: "the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel is, as I have already said, that it be *interesting*. This freedom is a splendid privilege, and the first lesson of the young novelist is to learn to be worthy of it" (AF 84). Thus, Henry James's "Art of Fiction" maybe enumerated as below:

1. Art of painting and art of fiction are two different genres of art because the former is more scientific and destined than the later one(56).
2. Art is not sufficient in itself. Artistry is neither a divine gift nor an inspired one. It is the result of innumerable attempts with liberty by the author. The author's "exercise of freedom" helps him write the "interesting" novel (59-61).

3. An author cannot express all his experiences because experiences are like spider-webs. Artistry of an author lies in identifying the “impressions of life” and incidents in the experienced or seen subjects.(64)

4. Besant talks about “selection” as an art of the writer concerning the expression of the story whereas James thinks about the “selection” which must be meshed up with freedom of the author to select whatever he wants to make the novel “interesting”; to select a typical “sense of reality” which enriches the subject of fiction(74-75). However, he clarifies that there is no reality that reflects society as it is. He relates the “art of selection” to the selection of “air of reality” from immensity of reality; to pictorial description of the unseen in the seen (i.e. experience); the “personal impression of life”; and not all the experiences.

5. “Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive” (75). This characteristic of an author carries him away from what Mr. Besant termed “laws of fiction”—harmony, perspective, and proportion (62-69).

6. He dissolves the classical distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident; and adores what he terms “interesting” novel. He clarifies that these distinctions are made for the reader’s convenience but do not work where there is a talk of art of fiction as a theory. He relates this idea to the term ‘romance’ interpreting it as an interesting element in the novels, and thus he appreciates Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (70-75).

7. “Story” is an idea that needs a form called the novel. Thus, “story” is not the soul of the novel, but the presentation of the story is the soul of the artistry of a novelist. Henry James defines plot in connection with character, “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?” (76-80).

8. There is no “conscious moral purpose” of an author to moralize, or to preach the readers. He denies all Evangelical views against art and says that the only purpose of an author is to make his story ‘interesting’, exposing truth embedded in the so-called truths.

9. It can only be possible when the author uses his liberty freely without any restriction of negative thinking. He clarifies that the art of fiction is related to execution of fiction, “questions of art are the questions of execution,” it does not concern with issues related to moral or immoral (80-81). “For many people art means rose-colored windows and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs. Grundy. They will tell you glibly that artistic considerations have nothing to do with the disagreeable, with the ugly; they will rattle off shallow commonplaces about the

province of art and the limits of art, till you are moved to some wonder in return as to the province and the limits of ignorance” (75).

An artist lives beyond territories of common thinking of the masses which tend to differentiate one from the other in the name of morality/immorality; pessimism/optimism; good/evil and vice versa. The only thing that is under him, is his art of execution based on exercise of freedom. This freedom is a splendid privilege, and the first lesson of the young novelist is to learn to be worthy of it. His famous pronouncement for artist concludes “The Art of Fiction”:

All life belongs to you, and don't listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life altogether, breathing a superfine air and turning away her head from the truth of things. There is no impression of life in it (84).

Assignments

1. What are the major concerns of the essay “The art of Fiction” by Henry James?
2. Assess the contribution of Henry James as the Critic of modernist fiction.

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Walter Besant and Henry James: *On the Art of Fiction* (AF)

--- *Hawthorne* (1879)

BLOCK IV

UNIT 15

T.S. Eliot: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'

15 (a): Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) was American by birth, though he spent almost all his literary career in England. Along with another American expatriate, Ezra Pound, Eliot became part of the circle associated with the emergence of Modernism. He had been earlier a student of Harvard University where he worked on a thesis and finished writing it, but did not complete the University's requirements for the degree. This doctoral dissertation was published in 1964 as *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* and immediately impressed several twentieth-century philosophers as the work of an original and well-equipped philosophic mind. As poet, playwright and critic, he soon emerged as one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century. By 1919 he had become an important contributor of critical articles to the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Athenaeum*. *The Sacred Wood*, published in 1920, collected the best of these critical essays and contains, among other significant critical documents, the two that we are going to discuss. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" contains two of Eliot's very influential critical doctrines — the idea of tradition and the view that "the progress of an artist is ... a continual extinction of personality". "Hamlet and His problems" was originally a review article, but its chief importance lies in the apparently original phrase "objective correlative", which reinforces his impersonal theory of art.

15 (a): Eliot as Critic

Eliot liked to see himself as belonging to the long-established English critical tradition of

great poet-critics, such as John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Colridge, and Matthew Arnold, before him. In fact, he described his own literary criticism as “a by-product of my private poetry workshop” and as “a prolongation of the thinking that went into my own verse”. These two remarks, as we are going to see soon, throw an important light on a large part of his literary criticism. Eliot was not simply a literary critic, however, but an important commentator on society, religion and culture, as one can see from the very titles of some of his books — *After Strange Gods, The Idea of a Christian Society, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. The works of literary criticism which gained him pre-eminence among twentieth-century critics are, apart from *The Sacred Word, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism Essays Ancient and Modern*, and *On Poetry and Poets*.

We may now briefly consider the leading ideas Eliot’s literary criticism and the reasons why he continues to appeal to us as a critic. Eliot has, more than any other critic, effected a major revaluation of the major writers and important periods of English poetry. In the process he attacked many established reputations, such as Milton and those of the Romantic poets and exalted Dante, the Metaphysicals, Dryden, the Jacobean dramatists, and the French Symbolists like Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarme. Although in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” he stresses the importance of an inclusive European tradition of poetry, too often for him it was these poets and a few others who constituted the poetic tradition. Eliot also has an important and coherent theory of poetry which emphasises the impersonality of poetry, its adherence to tradition rather than novelty, its expression of a “unified sensibility”, its skilful use of common speech, and its search for a suitable “objective correlative” which would embody a particular emotion. Eliot also makes a famous — or notorious — critical diagnosis according to which a “dissociation of sensibility” became apparent in English literature after the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets, a dissociation from which English literature was yet to recover. In his essays on Dante he explores the role of ideas or beliefs in poetry and asserts that a proper appreciation of poetry does not require the assent of the reader to the ideas or beliefs which are the raw material of poetry. Although Eliot did not claim for himself the status of a conscious and coherent theorist, subsequent critical theories have emphasized the consistency and force of several of his theories as well as their continuing relevance.

Eliot exerted considerable influence on New Criticism, especially on the New Critics’ focus on the text to the exclusion of everything else; but his own criticism is largely cultural and has a

tendency to make general observations instead of offering a close reading of the text. Again, Eliot is sometimes seen as eccentric in his critical pronouncements, even as an iconoclast, like some other Modernists. One may cite in this connection his remark in "Hamlet and his problems" that "So far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece *Hamlet* is most certainly an artistic failure". But behind all his critical comments, however shocking they might appear at first, lies a consistent philosophical theory. Eliot's critique of *Hamlet*, for instance, is consistent with a larger aesthetic theory. The recognition of Eliot as a critic with a well developed philosophical theory has been largely brought about by the publication of his doctoral dissertation on F. H. Bradley. That dissertation has been recognized by eminent twentieth-century philosophers like Bertrand Russell, Harold Joachim and Josiah Royce as the work of a trained philosopher. Another factor has contributed to the recognition of Eliot as a critic with a coherent aesthetic theory : various postmodern theories start from the same metaphysical concepts that Eliot holds. A recent critic has made a brilliant adaption of one of Eliot's own sentences in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" : Eliot's work can be read more clearly now, almost fifty years after his death, because we know more than he did, and *he* is what we know. In his doctoral dissertation Eliot expresses his conviction that neither subjectivity nor any kind of objective principle can be an adequate basis for thought. His distrust of subjectivity, usually and rightly attributed to his anti-Romantic stance, is also a natural outcome of his philosophical position that concepts of subject and object as distinct entities are only simplifications. In this connection philosophers have referred to the anti-metaphysics of Eliot's critical theories, a critical position which is revealed in one of the most difficult sentences in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" : "The point of view I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul : for my meaning is that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways." Like poststructural criticism, Eliot's critical theories seek to undermine the abstractions of metaphysical thought, such as the Self, the Object, Reality, God, Idea. A further and related point of affinity to challenge dualisms as expressed in distinctions between inner and outer, word and thing, romantic and classic. "Eliot's work is marked by a tendency towards complexity and an embrace of contradictions similar to the both/and structure characteristic of postmodern thought."

Eliot's advocacy of "impersonality" in the same essay is an outcome of this philosophical

position. In his early poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” the speaker expresses his anguish over the fact that he has such a thing as personality. Eliot does not believe in an autonomous self. There are some poets and critics who claim to follow an “inner voice”, but in his essay, “The Function of Criticism” Eliot says that he himself is an “inner deaf mute”. Eliot’s idea of tradition can be linked to the notion of the hermeneutic philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer that tradition is a completely new way of taking our thinking beyond the subject/object binary. These are just a few examples of Eliot’s continuing relevance to our postmodern ways of thinking. Speaking more generally, we can say that we continue to read Eliot’s criticism for three chief reasons: the first reason is applicable to all other great critics—we read such critics for the way in which their comments illuminate literature. Secondly we want to see what kind of a guide Eliot is to literature—in what ways we can criticize the critic, for criticism is as inevitable as breathing. The third reason for our reading Eliot’s criticism is that it throws a great deal of light on his own creative writings. To take only one example, the much discussed obscurity of Eliot’s poetry finds a theoretical justification in his comments that “poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult” and that “The poet must become more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary—language into meaning.”

Synopsis of ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’

Eliot begins by saying that the word “traditional” is often used in contemporary criticism in a pejorative sense, and seldom appears in a context of praise. While praising a poet the tendency is to single out those aspects of his work which appear to be unique or original. But if we approach the work without strenuously seeking to find its individuality, we may discover that some of the most admirable, even some of the most original, features of his poetry are those in which he shows his awareness of tradition. It is natural for poets during their adolescence to come under the influence of one or more of their ancestors; but even mature artists cannot deny the role of tradition in their works. To follow tradition, however, does not mean blindly imitating the artistic achievements of the immediately preceding generation of poets; in fact, many such derivative literary movements have sunk into oblivion. Besides novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a far more important matter. It is not something inherited but something which has to be obtained

by great labour.

Eliot, however, does not define tradition simply by negatives; he now goes on to identify the positive aspects of his concept of tradition. First of all, tradition becomes a historical sense. Eliot then says what he means by a 'historical sense'. "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." The historical sense makes a writer aware not only of his generation, but of the whole of the literature of Europe and of the literature of his own country. The historical sense makes a writer aware of the simultaneous existence and the simultaneous order of European literature and the literature of his own country. "This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional". At the same time the historical sense makes the writer all the more conscious of the present. Secondly no artist can be seen in isolation. He must be always seen in relation to his predecessors and needs to be judged accordingly. The judgement involves an aesthetic not a historical principle. When a new work of art appears, something is added to the existing order of works of art. The existing works of art have already formed an order : they are like monuments which shift, as it were, and make necessary adjustments in order to accommodate the new work of art. As a result of the appearance of the new work, the values and proportions of each work of art in relation to the whole order undergo a process of readjustment. The new work is best understood in relation to past works of art which not only throw light on it but are in their turn illuminated by the new work. This is what Eliot means by conformity between the old and the new; this is why he says that the past is altered by the present just as the present is directed by the past. The author of the new work of art should be conscious of the fact that he is going to be judged by the standards of the past : it is a process of judgement in which two things are measured by each other. The new work must not simply conform with the past : if it does, it will not be new. However, its conformity with the standards of the past, along with its newness as a work of art, is a proof of its value.

In his attempt to elucidate further the vitally important relationship between the past and the present, Eliot uses some other metaphors. The past must not be thought of simply as a lump of inert matter, but as something living and continuing in the present. Nor should the past be selectively confined to a few predecessors whom the new author admires. The poet must be aware of the "main current", a metaphor which conveys the idea of the past flowing into the

present. This main current can never mean one or two writers, but contains within it “the mind of Europe”. The mind of Europe comprises not just the greatest writers but everything else in the development of art. In other words, it is an inclusive, not an exclusive, entity. However, the present differs from the past in a very significant way : it is aware of the past in a manner in which the past could never have been aware of itself. If we say we know better than our predecessors did, we are merely saying that these predecessors are what we know. Eliot is careful to point out that to acquire a historical sense one need not be a great scholar. For writing his great plays on Roman history and historical figures, Shakespeare relied mainly on Plutarch, the Greek biographer and historian (c. AD46-c.120), who wrote twenty-three *Parallel Lives* of famous Greek and Roman figures of history, and four single lives. Yet “Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum”. What is required, therefore, is the capacity to absorb knowledge, not prodigious erudition. “What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.”

Since, therefore, tradition is a much bigger thing than individual talent, the latter should always be subordinated to the former. The artist must always surrender his own self to the infinitely more valuable entity — tradition. In this sense, the progress of an artist becomes “a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.” Eliot characterises this process as “depersonalization” and says that it is here that art approaches the precision of science. As if to prove this equation, Eliot uses a scientific analogy to express his view of the process of poetic composition. The analogy is that of a catalyst, a filament of platinum, which is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide. When these two gases are mixed in the presence of the platinum, they form a new chemical compound— sulphuric acid. This combination occurs only when the platinum is present, but nothing happens to the platinum : it remains unaffected, inert and neutral. Moreover, the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum. The platinum is therefore the catalyst and suggests to Eliot a perfect analogy with the poet’s mind in relation to the raw material of his poetry. What Eliot calls the impersonal theory of poetry has two aspects: the poet’s individual self in relation to tradition, and the author in relation to his poem. Both these aspects are characterised by the subjugation of the artist’s private self. The poet’s mind, which is like the catalyst, might make use of personal experience, but in the finished poem the personal nature of the experience is nowhere apparent. Indeed, “the

more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.” Continuing the catalyst analogy, Eliot says that the emotions and feelings which constitute the raw material for a poem are like the two gases, oxygen and sulphur dioxide. These emotions and feelings may combine in the poet’s mind in varied and unpredictable ways. A poem may be formed by one emotion or may contain many; it may consist of either emotions or feelings only. The greatness of a poem, however, is determined not by the greatness or sublimity of the emotions or feelings, but by the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure under which the fusion of the raw materials takes place. These raw materials may have originated in some personal experience, but “the difference between art and the event is always absolute”. Again, the fusion of the raw materials that go to the making of a poem may have little or nothing to do with the ostensible subject of the poem. For example, Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” contains a number of feelings which do not have much to do with the bird, but are prompted by other occasions, and which are brought together by the experience of listening to the bird’s song and by the bird’s attractive name. Emotions never experienced by the poet may serve as the raw material of a poem, in the same way that his personal emotions may provide the basis of his poem. That is why Eliot finds fault with Wordsworth’s definition of poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquillity”. “For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity.” However, Eliot himself compares the poet’s mind to a receptacle where numerous feelings, phrases and images are stored up and “remain until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.” In all this the role of the poet is only that of a catalyst: his mind mediates poetry into art in an almost passive manner.

15 (b): Eliot’s Concept of Tradition: Its Roots in Modernism

The literary which is called Modernism now and in which Eliot was a leading figure has sometimes prompted conflicting perceptions. It has been seen as a complete break with tradition, and also as a movement firmly rooted in tradition. If the latter view of modernism predominates in current discussions of the movement, it is in no small measure due to Eliot’s forceful advocacy of tradition, not only in this early essay, but also in many of his subsequent critical and creative writings. Eliot’s idea of the order, the creative unity of literature, is now regarded as

an important aspect of Modernism. We find this idea in other Modernists, for example, Ezra Pound and James Joyce. All three figures belong to the peak period of Modernism, 1910-1925. One may refer in this connection to M. H. Abrams's definitive analysis of Modernism. As Abrams points out, most critics agree that Modernism involves "a deliberate and radical break with the traditional bases of both Western culture and Western art," and that the precursors of this break are thinkers who questioned the certainties that had hitherto provided a support to social organization, religion, morality and the conception of the human self — thinkers such as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud and James Frazer, whose *The Golden Bough* stressed the correspondence between central Christian tenets and pre-Christian myths and rituals. Abrams then suggests that the main activity of literary Modernism took place after the First World War had shaken people's faith in the foundations and continuity of Western civilization and culture. The roots of Modernism lie undoubtedly in attempts by writers to come to terms with a new view of human beings emerging through the ideas of Darwin and the thinkers mentioned above. One way of understanding Modernism is to see it as an attempt made by writers, consciously and unconsciously, in technique as well as theme, to find alternative possibilities which would make sense of human history, civilization, art and science in the light of the new ideas. The First World War convinced many that something was grievously wrong with the Western civilization, that writers and artists had shown an incapacity to cope with this crisis, and that the existing modes of thought and art were inadequate. The central feature of Modernism, therefore, became a re-evaluation of tradition. It also led to a rejection of immediate forms of art as models. Modernism at first appeared to be startling and revolutionary, but eventually its roots in tradition were recognized. The Modernists the past, but also sought to preserve it on a new basis. Eliot's repeated insistence on the interaction between past and present affirms this aspect of modernism. The same emphasis is found in the writings of the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, especially in his essay, "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style", first published in Russian in 1919. The relevant passage is as follows : "The work of art arises from a background of other works and through associations with them. The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it. "

... Not only parody but also any kind of work of art is created parallel to and opposed to some kind of form. The purpose of the new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality". It is striking that this essay of Shklovsky and

Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" were published in the same year, 1919. There is no question, however, of Eliot borrowing his idea from the Russian Formalist, because Shklovsky's views were unknown to the English Modernists. The striking similarity between the two writers' views only suggests that both were giving expression to the spirit of the time.

15 (c): Sources of Eliot's Concept of Tradition

Both the essays in your course were first published in *The Sacred Word* (1920), and the introduction to that volume clearly indicates that Eliot saw himself as Matthew Arnold's successor to the guardianship of the golden bough in the sacred wood of tradition. (The "Golden bough," first mentioned by Virgil in his epic, the *Aeneid*, was associated with the cult of the goddess Diana at Aricia, "where there was a sacred tree from which a branch had first to be broken off by the runaway slave who wished to kill the priest and take his place. This legend of ritual killing can be paralleled in other societies, and from this starting-point Sir James Frazer developed his great work on the evolution of religious beliefs and institutions, *The Golden Bough*." *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*.) Arnold also believed in the critic's duty to preserve tradition and emphasised that the creative ability of writers is enhanced by an awareness of the best that has been known and thought. Thus Eliot's concept of tradition is not altogether new, though more than any other critic, Eliot has applied the concept to literature. In his book, *T. S. Eliot*, Bernard Bergonzi has pointed out that a possible source for Eliot's idea of the simultaneous order of the past and the present can be found in Dante. Dante represents for Eliot "the mind of Europe." In a very concrete way, the *Divine Comedy* offers an illustration of simultaneous order among poets, shown first in the companionship of Dante and Virgil, and then in their encounter with the great poets of antiquity. Other possible sources of Eliot's concept have been mentioned by Sean Lucy in *T.S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition*. As Lucy says, first place to look for such ideas on the necessity of a knowledge of tradition is the critical work of Matthew Arnold. In his essay, "The Function of Criticism at the present time," Arnold speaks of the necessity for the creative writer of the best ideas on every matter which literature touches. It is also necessary to recall in this connection Arnold's insistence on the use of the classics of Greece and Rome as a model for great poetry. Again, one of Eliot's contemporaries, T. E. Hulme, exerted some influence on Eliot's attempts to connect classicism with discipline and

tradition. Unlike Hulme, however, Eliot developed these ideas into a complete literary.

UNIT 16

16 (a): Tradition and the Individual Talent: The Historical Sense

Tradition, says Eliot, “involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year...” Eliot’s insistence on the indispensability of the historical sense is Modernist in spirit. Modernist writers were almost obsessively concerned with history in a double sense : their concern was not only with what was happening in their world, but with the nature of historical understanding as such. In this connection the mythopoeic basis of history is usually regarded as very significant. Myth can embody a vast range of historical consciousness, gives a valuable perspective on one’s own age and culture, revealing the limitations and partiality of the issues with which one’s own contemporaries are concerned. In myth the Modernist writer found a timelessness which can be illustrated by James Joyce’s treatment of the Homeric myth in his novel *Ulysses* as well as Eliot’s own allusive technique which spans different ages and cultures, including his own, in *The Waste Land*. This is one way of understanding Eliot’s insistence on the historical sense. Another way, suggested by John Xiros Cooper, is to put Eliot’s emphasis on historical sense in the overall context of the Modernist notion that history is progressive, “that time inevitably sees the improvement of life, culture, and morals” Eliot, however, also makes the point that present developments in art are not always an improvement upon the past. “The contemporary artist is not at the head of the class simply because he comes chronologically after the artists of the past.”

The historical sense is for Eliot both a sense of the timeless and the temporal, and of the timeless and the temporal taken together. It makes us aware simultaneously of the past as well as contemporaneity. In order to acquire this historical sense one does not need prodigious erudition, one needs only the kind of sensibility which enabled Shakespeare to absorb an essential knowledge of Roman history from Plutarch. Though Eliot here seems to play down the role of scholarship in acquiring a historical sense, his own ideal was always that of the scholar-critic. His own scholarship was formidable : he was well versed in philosophy, was intimately acquainted with French literature and ancient classical literature, and knew several languages,

including Sanskrit. His own sense of and attitude to history have however been variously interpreted. Rene Wellek maintains that Eliot not only means 'timelessness' by tradition but has a double concept of time. On the other hand he holds a Hegelian view of history. Each age is completely integrated and the poet is a mouthpiece of his age. Writing about Dante, he says that "the great poet, in writing himself writes his own time". On the other hand, he affirms an eternal standard, universal quality, of art. The coexistence of these two apparently contradictory views of history is found in his idea of the historical sense as a sense of the temporal as well as of the timeless. This double conception of history has given rise to conflicting judgments on Eliot's own sense of history, and whether or not his critical method can be called "historical". For Edmund Wilson, Eliot is the typically unhistorical critic, because he treats all literature as if it existed simultaneously and because he applies absolute judgements to literature and tends to see it in a temporal vacuum. John Crowe Ransom on the other hand regards Eliot as one of the finest examples of the historical critic, who uses his historical studies for the sake of literary understanding.

16 (b): The Philosophical Basis of Eliot's Concept of Tradition

The philosophical basis of Eliot's concept of tradition has been most fully discussed by the philosopher, Richard Shusterman. Shusterman examines Eliot's ideas in the light of two philosophical traditions : hermeneutics and pragmatism. Shusterman shows how Eliot's view of tradition finds support in the ideas of the hermenutic philosopher Gadamer. Like Eliot before him, Gadamer uses the notion of tradition for a new way of thinking about the past, present and future. According to Gadamer, we are all shaped by the traditions and prejudices of the society to which we belong. Sharing these traditions and prejudices is an essential part of being human. But these traditions and prejudices are not fixed; they are constantly changing, in the process reshaping past, present and future. Eliot's many pronouncements on tradition can be shown to be consistent and coherent by examining them from either a hermeneutic or a pragmatic point of view. Eliot's focus on language and the accepted norms of meaning shows his affinity with the pragmatism of some of his former teachers at Harvard University where William James was developing his work. According to Gadamer, learning to speak means coming to terms with the medium through which we exist and perceive a world that has already

been interpreted by a language and a tradition that establish a “horizon” of language. Gadamer also believes that prejudice is not something that can be dispelled by the progress of science. Prejudice, or a pre-given orientation towards the world, is the source of the questions that clarify our understanding of that world. “Given that prejudice cannot be eradicated, because human existence is always/already historically situated, it follows that there can be no prior truth ... that establishes the certainty of knowledge; there is only the constant work of interpretation” (Macey, David, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*). Eliot recognizes this constant work at interpretation in his theory of tradition : tradition, says Eliot, “cannot mean standing still”. The other philosophical tradition in terms of which Shusterman interprets Eliot’s idea of tradition is pragmatism, which takes the continuity of experience and nature as the starting point for reflection. As a pragmatist, William James believes that human life is characterised by a vast array of personal, cultural and religious approaches that cannot and should not be reduced to one.

Tradition, for Eliot, involves criticism and change. As he writes, “if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged.” This critical outlook should be directed not only at the immediate past but at all past achievements. The artist cannot take the past as a “lump” or “as an indiscriminate bolus”. A critical understanding of the past will enable the writer to recognize the “main current” and not to get bogged down in one preferred period or in some fossilized reputations. We have already seen that for Eliot tradition is not only a transcendental, timeless standard, but also involves change. Had it not been so, the “main current would be a stagnant pool rather than a current”. Eliot maintains that tradition moves through “the mind of Europe” and that this is a mind which changes. There is a tension here between recognizing change as inevitable and essential for continuing tradition and at the same time seeing change as a threat to the stability of standard which is sought from tradition. If he ignores the need for change, Eliot has to treat as irrelevant his own innovations in poetry; if he advocates only change and nothing else, even Shakespeare would become obsolete and irrelevant. Eliot’s image of tradition as “the main current” wonderfully conveys the essential balance between change and identity : “Fluid movement in an essentially fixed course”, in the words of Shusterman. In order to express the same idea of tradition as a combination of fixity and flux Eliot uses another metaphor, that of an ideal order of monuments. Eliot considers it essential

that tradition should maintain a firm standard and at the same time accommodate changes in art. So far as the new work of art is concerned, it may not conform to tradition's firm standard and thus fail to be a work of art; but if it simply conforms to tradition's firm standard, it may not be significantly new. As Eliot says, "To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art." This need to accommodate the apparently conflicting demands of tradition and innovation, stability and change, has been characterised as an *aporia* in Eliot's theory. *Aporia* is a term from the Greek, meaning "without an opening." In Classical and Renaissance handbooks of rhetoric *aporia* is a figure of speech naming a state of doubt or a speaker's uncertainty about how to proceed with an argument. A celebrated example is Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech. The term has been revived in poststructuralist thought to similarly name a paradox or moment of self-contradiction that cannot be resolved easily and where meaning therefore becomes undecidable. Source : Brooker, Peter, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*. For Eliot, the relationship between tradition and a new work of art is a process of mutual conformity and readjustment. It follows from this that the new work also can significantly modify the form of tradition. Since this idea of the possibility of modifying tradition suggests a doubt about the firmness of tradition's standard, Eliot uses the metaphor of monuments to convey an idea of stability. But this metaphor conflicts with the earlier image of flexibility and movement. Eliot says, "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted, and this is the conformity between the old and the new. In visual terms this is a ludicrous image because it suggests that the great and firm monuments of tradition begin to shift and shuffle themselves in order to make room for a new work of art, and that this shifting and shuffling will continue in order to accommodate every significant new work in the future.

These philosophical bases of Eliot's theory of tradition have been pointed out in the main by Richard Shusterman. To these may be added some observations made by other commentators. Thus it has been shown that Eliot's concepts of tradition, poetic impersonality and the objective correlative may be traced to the philosophical theories of F. H. Bradley and Bertrand Russell. Bradley's scientific realism and positivistic objectivism were inspired by his revolt against the

Hegelian idealist tradition. Eliot himself acknowledged the influence of Bradley in his own prose style, and several critics have argued that the philosophy of Eliot's criticism is thoroughly Bradleyan in character. Perhaps the most important aspect of Bradley's philosophy which influenced Eliot is his concept of an organicism where the meaning of anything is not autonomously given but is always a function of its place and interrelations with other things in a larger whole. This is congenial to Eliot's theory of tradition where the meaning of a poet or a work of art depends on its relation with all the other elements in the tradition. As Eliot says, "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone". Of course, this observation of Eliot is corroborated by the later theory of intertextuality. ["Intertextuality" is a term which implies that individual texts are inescapably related to other texts and that their meanings are correspondingly provisional and plural. The term is associated with the insights of Derrida's Deconstruction. A further brief theorization occurs in an early essay by Julia Kristeva who saw in Mikhail Bakhtin's theories the logic that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." Source : Brooker, Peter, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*.] The theory of tradition is also supported by the pragmatic idealism of Eliot's Bradleyan thesis which argues that the existence of our common world relies on our sharing a consensus about what we mean and think, a stability which tradition provides. However, Bradley as a philosopher also denied the existence of the plurality of facts and rejected the method of analysis. Eliot's early criticism, on the other hand, strongly advocates the importance of facts and analysis. Throughout *The Sacred Wood* Eliot asserts that "the critical attitude is to attempt to analyse" and the critic needs "a sense of fact". Eliot's early criticism also emphasises objectivity, shared public truth and outside authority. These aspects of Eliot's critical theory are usually said to derive from the philosophy of Bertrand Russell who upheld the value of a logical, analytic approach to facts. This emphasis on facts and on the logical method influenced Eliot in his formulation of the impersonal theory of poetry, of which his theory of tradition is an important component. Eliot himself says that "the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" and his views regarding "the relation of the poem to its author" are the two aspects of his "Impersonal theory of poetry". There are two means of ensuring objectivity — accurate correspondence to an external object and consensus of judgement among a community of artists. Finally, as we briefly articulated earlier, Eliot's idea of tradition finds corroboration in the theories of Gadamer, who, like Eliot, insists on the futility of to recover

original authorial intention. The main reason we understand past classics differently from the way their authors and contemporaries understood them is that we necessarily see them as *past* classics and try to understand them in terms of the role played by them in a past history leading up to our present situation. As Eliot says, “But the difference between the past and the present is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show.” However, in view of the changes and developments encountered by us in a changing world, we cannot rigidly cling to our past interpretations and beliefs. Eliot insists therefore that tradition itself must be constantly reinterpreted and revised, that “tradition cannot mean standing still.”

16 (c): A Critique of Eliot’s Concept of Tradition

In his essay Eliot emphasises the idea of wholeness, catholicity in his theory of tradition. He explicitly says that tradition should not be exclusivist, that tradition must not be reduced to a few writers or a preferred period. In his critical writings, however, Eliot shows a preference for some “private admirations,” chiefly Dante, the Jacobean dramatists and the Metaphysical poets. He also tends to concentrate on one or two preferred periods, for example, the seventeenth century. It seems from his critical practice that Eliot sought to redefine tradition in order to suit his own and other Modernists’ poetic agenda. Eric Svarny has shown that like Ezra Pound, Eliot was using the term “tradition” with a polemic intent. They shared the aim of promoting certain writers, such as Henry James, Wyndham Lewis, James Joyce and others, denigrating others such as the Georgian poets, and protesting against what they considered the insularity of the contemporary literary scene in England. That an American-born poet should formulate a theory of tradition was, according to Svarny, an extremely effective stroke of literary politics. Eliot himself, in a later essay “To Criticize the Critic”, explicitly declares his polemical bias : “in my earlier criticism, both in my general affirmations about poetry and in writing about authors that had influenced me, I was implicitly defending the kind of poetry that I and my friends wrote.” Two main aspects of Eliot’s polemic intent are mentioned by Svarny. First, there was the belief, shared by Pound and Eliot, that a wider definition of literary tradition than the one provided by English Post-Romanticism was needed for the appreciation of their own work. Contemporary

literary criticism tended to reserve consideration for the major English literary figures, accepted without question the achievement of nineteenth-century English poets, showed only a moderate awareness of Classical poets and little awareness of French poetic traditions. Pound specifically, and Eliot in more general terms, recommended a non-provincial and non-native definition of literary tradition. Secondly, by emphasising the contemporaneity of tradition, Pound and Eliot were implicitly defending their own innovative literary practice. They wanted to show that the innovators were not a group of eccentrics but belonged to a living tradition and that their detractors were merely ignorant.

Moreover, Eliot uses the term “tradition” in the singular while in reality literature deals with a plurality of traditions. In fact, the views of tradition held by Eliot and Pound were in several ways different. They shared only three things : an enthusiasm for nineteenth-century French poetry, an admiration for Dante, and a rejection of Milton. Eliot widens the definition of the term ‘tradition’ beyond the native English traditions to include the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer, thus attaining a breadth of reference in order to accommodate his own poetry. But it was a singular definition of poetry, as opposed to plurality, and Eliot also takes “tradition” to connote order and authority. Raymond Williams has used the phrase “predisposed continuity” in his *Marxism and Literature* to characterise this idea of tradition. Eliot’s redefinition of tradition is evident in the way he, in his essay “The Metaphysical Poets”, shows that Donne and his followers are more in the “direct current of English poetry” than critics like Dr. Johnson had thought. But Eliot’s attempt to privilege the Metaphysicals over the Victorians, to raise the status of the Jacobean playwrights and to praise Dante at the expense of Blake raises an uncomfortable question : why is it that for Eliot poets of an age tend to be superior to those of another ?

Eliot’s concept of tradition has also been criticised by the feminist critics, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their book *The War of the Words*. The title is appropriate because they use war as a controlling image, maintaining that Modernism is a product of sexual battle, Modernist techniques are weapons against women, and tradition involves an attempt to define and protect the territory of male combatants. Gilbert and Gubar take the complementary Eliotic terms “tradition” and “individual talent”, and by modifying the second term, present them as opposites : “Tradition and the Female Talent : Modernism and Masculinism”. By displacing “individual” with “female”, they seek to convey a sense of community, the opposite of “individual”. Eliot’s famous statement about the existing order of monuments forming an ideal order until it is

modified by the new work of art is substantially modified by Gilbert and Gubar : “Eliot’s theory that new works of art alter not only our sense of the past but also our sense of what art might *be* actually seems to reflect the sexual crisis that underlies Modernism. For inevitably, the ‘ideal order’ of patriarchal literary history was radically modified by the introduction of the new (really new) work of art — and, as Woolf remarked, that really new work was women’s writing”. Eliot, in their view, constructed a tradition and a literary history in which they had no part.” They maintain that what Eliot really wants is the erasure of the 17th and 18th century histories, the obliteration of the history associated with the entrance of women into the literary marketplace”. Jacqueline Rose, however, makes a more valid point in her essay, “Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare : *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*”. “As with language, so with sexuality, an insistence on order always speaks the other and more troubled scenario which it is designed to exclude.” Rose characterises Eliot’s reading of tradition as oedipal. In order to control his disordered subjectivity, the artist must give himself up to something outside himself and surrender to tradition. “Thus, just as in the psychoanalytic account the son pays his debt to the dead father, the symbol of the law, in order to fully assume his own history, so for Eliot, the artist pays his debt to the dead poets and can only become a poet by that fact.”

It has also been pointed out by Richard Shusterman that Eliot himself considered the theory of tradition inadequate; otherwise he would not have buttressed it in the same essay with the theory of the impersonal nature of art. There were three reasons why Eliot considered the idea of tradition inadequate. First, there was the fear that too much dependence on tradition could degenerate into dogmatic conservatism. In fact, several critics have pointed out that Eliot’s idea of tradition eventually hardened into dogma : he declared that he was classicist in literature, Anglo-Catholic in religion and conservative in politics. For Eliot, according to such critics, “order” became “orthodoxy”, just as “disorder” became “heterodoxy” or “heresy”. Secondly, if tradition inheres in a consensus, it becomes devoid of an ontological base [“ontological” means “dealing with the nature of existence ”]. Something universally agreed to may nevertheless prove wrong. Thirdly, in Eliot’s eyes tradition was no longer vigorously living, but was rather fragmented, fractured, debilitated, and misguided. It was therefore not enough to say that a living tradition would take care of itself, being reinforced by the practice of a community of artists. When tradition was in crisis and consensuality to its forms unstable, was it possible for consensual tradition to support itself? Eliot therefore turned to the scientific realist model of

objectivity in his search for something powerful and attractive outside the sphere of a weakened tradition. This was his theory of the impersonality of poetry.

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Assignments

Short Answer Type

1. Mention and briefly explain the two critical theories propounded by Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”.
2. Who are the predecessors of Eliot in the English critical tradition? Do you find any significance in the fact that all of them, like Eliot himself, are poet-critics?
3. Which aspects of Eliot’s criticism influenced New Criticism?
4. Who are the philosophers who influenced Eliot’s thinking? Briefly mention their theories.
5. What are the possible sources of Eliot’s concept of tradition?

Essay Type

1. In what respect do you consider Eliot’s concept of tradition as a Modernist thought?
2. What does Eliot mean by “the historical sense”? Why is the historical sense essential for an artist?
3. What are the philosophical bases of Eliot’s concept of tradition?
4. Attempt a critique of Eliot’s concept of tradition.

5. Which aspects of Eliot's concept of tradition are reinforced by later critical theories?

6. Assess Eliot as a critic based on a critical reading of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

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