



GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

Institute of Distance and Open Learning

Semester- II

MA in English

Paper - IV (ENG-2046)
20th Century Poetry

ENG-02-II-2046

GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
Institute of Distance and Open Learning

M.A. Second Semester
(under CBCS)

ENGLISH
Paper: ENG-2046
20th CENTURY POETRY



Contents:

Block: I

- Unit 1: Introduction to 20th Century Poetry
- Unit 2: G.M. Hopkins “Carrion Comfort”, “God’s Grandeur
- Unit 3: G.M. Hopkins “Carrion Comfort”, “God’s Grandeur (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 4: T.S. Eliot : *The Waste Land*
- Unit 5: T.S. Eliot : *The Waste Land* (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 6: W.B. Yeats-‘The Second Coming’, ‘Byzantium’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’
- Unit 7: W.B. Yeats-‘The Second Coming’, ‘Byzantium’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ (Supplementary Unit)

Block: II

- Unit 1: Marianne Moore: ‘Critics and Conniseurs’
- Unit 2: Marianne Moore: ‘Critics and Conniseurs’ (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 3: W. H. Auden: ‘Danse Macabre’, Septeber 1, 1939’
- Unit 4: W. H. Auden: ‘Danse Macabre’, Septeber 1, 1939’ (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 5: Dylan Thomas : Poem in October
- Unit 6: Dylan Thomas : Poem in October (Supplementary Unit)

Block: III

- Unit 1: A. K. Ramanujan: ‘Small Scale Reflections on a Great House’
- Unit 2: A. K. Ramanujan: ‘Small Scale Reflections on a Great House’ (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 3: Ted Hughes-‘The Thought Fox’, ‘Theology’, ‘Pike’
- Unit 4: Ted Hughes-‘The Thought Fox’, ‘Theology’, ‘Pike’ (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 5: Derek Walcott: ‘A Far Cry from Africa’
- Unit 6: Derek Walcott: ‘A Far Cry from Africa’ (Supplementary Reading)
- Unit 7: Seamus Heaney-‘The Tollund Man’
- Unit 8: Seamus Heaney-‘The Tollund Man’ (Supplementary Unit)
- Unit 9: Carol Ann Duffy: ‘Warming her Pearls’
- Unit 10: Carol Ann Duffy: ‘Warming her Pearls’(Supplementary Unit)

Contributors:

Dr. Tapati Barua Kashyap Dr. Dolikajyoti Sharma	Block I Unit 6, Block 3 Unit 7 Block I Unit 1
Asst. Prof., G.U. Dr. Binita Sharma Lecturer, B.R.M. Govt. Law College, Guwahati	Block I Unit 2
Himaxee Bordoloi Asst. Professor, Darrang College	Block I (Unit 2, 3)
Dr. Uttara Devi Former Asst. Prof., GUIDOL	Block I Unit 4, Block II Unit 3
Ananya Bhattacharjee Asst. Prof., Guwahati College	Block I Unit 5
Dr. Ronchai Basumatary Asst. Prof., Sapatgram College	Block I (Units 6,7)
Richa Barua Research Scholar, Cotton University	Block II (Units 1,2)
Dr. Santulan Mahanta Asst. Prof., HPB Girls' College	Block II (Units 3,4) Block III (Units 3,4)
Dr. Rajesh Tiwari Associate Prof., Abhayapuri College	Block III (Units 1,2)
Manas Neog Asst. Prof., Madhya Kamrup College	Block III (Units 5,6)
Priyanka Kakoty Asst. Prof., DCB Girls' College, Jorhat	Block III (Units 7,8)
Anshuman Bora Asst. Prof., Debraj Roy College, Golaghat	Block III (Units 9, 10)

Course Coordination:

Director Dr. Manashi Bora Dalim Ch. Das	GUIDOL, Gauhati University Dept. of English, Gauhati University Asst. Prof., GUIDOL
--	---

Content Editor:

Dr. Lalan Kishore Singh	Dept. of English, Gauhati University
--------------------------------	--------------------------------------

Format Editor:

Dalim Ch. Das	Asst. Prof., GUIDOL
----------------------	---------------------

Type Setting & Cover Designing:

Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami Nishanta Das	IDOL, Gauhati University GUIDOL, Gauhati University
---------------------------------------	--

May, 2022

© Copyright by IDOL, Gauhati University. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise. Published on behalf of Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University by the Director, and printed at Gauhati University Press, Guwahati-781014.

BLOCK 1

Unit1

Introduction to the Twentieth Century Poetry

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Socio-Historical Context
- 1.4 Important Poets
 - 1.4.1 William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)
 - 1.4.2 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)
 - 1.4.3 William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)
 - 1.4.4 Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)
 - 1.4.5 Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973)
 - 1.4.6 Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)
 - 1.4.7 Philip Larkin (1922-1985)
 - 1.4.8 Ted Hughes (1930-1998)
 - 1.4.9 Seamus Heaney (1939-)
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The present unit aims to familiarize you with the context of modern poetry in general, and *give* a brief introduction to the poets included in your syllabus and their particular themes. However, by the time you finish reading this unit you will have–

- *made* a comprehensive survey of modernism in modern poetry
- *read* about the representative modernist poets
- *grasped* the main ideas behind the kind of poetry they are involved with
- *understood* the significance of the various socio-historical elements which became instrumental in their inception

1.2 INTRODUCTION

J.M.Cohen, in *Poetry of This Age*(1960), quotes from T.S.Eliot's 'East Coker' to describe the situation of the modern poet:

“So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling.”

Cohen points out that “Eliot’s verdict on his achievement is an excessively severe one. Every poet since Baudelaire has been conscious that the equipment he has inherited from the great poets of the past is shabby, if not worn out. But, . . .new measures have been invented and new resources of vocabulary explored by the poets of the last hundred years. It is not so much that the equipment has deteriorated, but that the demands upon it are very much greater than those made by Wordsworth and Keats, Hugo, Tennyson and Heine. For the poetry of the divided man needs to be psychologically far subtler than that of the outward-looking poets of the past. . . .The last fifty years of European poetry have seen several ‘raids on the inarticulate’ , attempts like that of the surrealists to tap inspiration at a deeper source than the waking consciousness can comprehend. But on the whole modern poets have probably kept up with the increasing demand on their powers of expression.”

Cohen makes the point that “One of the principal themes of the modern poet has therefore been the break up of a society from which he felt increasingly alien.

John Holloway marks out the importance of Thomas Hardy's poetry in the modern period: "Hardy, it must be remembered, was writing verse steadily from the 1860s; and, with its plain vernacular language, and its strong . . . awareness of everyday life, his large body of verse forcibly invites us to see nineteenth-century poetry itself in other than 'dream-world' terms.

Hardy's long period of activity as a poet – from the 1860s to the 1920s – significantly bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and does so not only in the matter of dates, but of outlook, technique and diction as well. In many of Hardy's best poems the dominance of folksong as a model, or of the street-ballad, is clear; this is another respect in which he parted company with the traditions of 'polite letters'. These qualities of language and of technique are not surface qualities. These facts make Hardy a key figure in the whole development of later poetry; and one may note that the poetry of the middle and later twentieth century has probably followed him, consciously or unconsciously, more than anyone else."

Holloway makes the further observation that the poetry of Hardy (discussed above) and other poets like him at the turn of the century—Edward Thomas, and D. H. Lawrence, for instance—was based on experience that was "traditional and rural". In contrast, the "centre of life had moved away from what was rural. Thence, as we learn, the "new poetry which came into being from about 1910 did not modify the English tradition which has just been discussed, but departed sharply from it. Pound called for poetry at "such a degree of development . . . that it will vitally concern people who are accustomed, in prose, to Henry James, . . . and in music to Debussy" . . . This new poetry looked not to the countryside, but to the great city." This new poetry, affiliated to the great city, felt the impress of the Continental poets like Laforgue, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Eliot remarked: "[Baudelaire] gave new possibilities to poetry in a new stock of images from contemporary life." London was a visible preoccupation of the poets of this new poetry. In Pound and Eliot, as Holloway continues, "the range of intellectual, cosmopolitan and culturally polyglot interests is far wider than in earlier

poets like Henley, Dowson and the rest. Pound's interest in Far Eastern literatures, and Eliot's Sanskrit studies bear witness to that".

The new verse had strong links with Post-Impressionism and even Expressionism, a fact that becomes clear by virtue of "Pound's insistence, in the 1913 Imagist Manifesto, on the integrated image, stark and clear, and on a maximum economy of words in the poem".

The new poetry, Holloway makes clear, also repudiated the prosperous urban middle-class and its values. It adopted a decidedly cultural-elite stance. In its avoidance of bourgeois values, the new verse drew on its links with the poetry of the later nineteenth century. The same prosperous middle-class had, we should remember, disgusted Yeats when it had failed to respond to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (Ireland). So, as Holloway notes, "That modern poetry started with this repudiation of the broad city middle class affords a link between the new poets of the 1910s and those of the Aesthetic Movement of the 1890s, and helps one to see how it was natural enough that Pound's earliest verse should have *fin-de siècle* qualities, or that like the nineties poets Pound should have had a special interest in Old French or Provençal."

We can see how the line of modern poetry drew upon a cosmopolitan culture that helped it to eschew bourgeois values and uphold aestheticism. These strains are clear in Yeats' essay of 1901, *What is Popular Poetry?* or even in his *The Symbolism of Poetry* (1900) which was written under the influence of Arthur Symons's book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which introduced English readers to the French Symbolists. Yeats sought to bring together (in the words of Holloway), "poet and peasant . . .but grocer and politician were in another world." The break with the old tendencies consisted thus in a "firm repudiation of what was seen by Yeats as the whole Tennysonian stance, the poet as public figure writing for the broad middle class and diluting his poetry until that class could take it in."

These new social affiliations of the new verse were to be seen reflected in its techniques – "in the demand that social respectability

should not be allowed to impose restrictions of subject-matter upon the poet, nor literary convention impose restrictions of diction or emotion.” Moreover, “this change in social orientation led to an insistence on the supreme virtue of economy and concentration: poetry was not to be made easy for the relaxed general reader.”

In his early essays Yeats lay down these very reasons for refusing to conform to “a sequacious logic, a self-explaining easy-to-follow train of thought.” This rejection of neatly logical exposition in poetry thus created in modern poetry one of its most striking characteristics—“a constant laconic *juxtaposition* of ideas” (Holloway) rather than “a banally lucid exposition”.

1.3 THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many of the revolutionary developments in nineteenth-century England actually had a far-reaching impact well into the twentieth century. First of all was the Industrial Revolution that reached its peak in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rapid industrialisation in England thereafter saw the end of the pre-industrial economy of Britain finally surrender to a newer way of life (urbanised and more modern) by the end of the century. The sense of community began to lose its ground rapidly, leaving behind a more fragmented society in which one could no longer hold on confidently to any fixed and stable sense of identity. Apart from this there was the impact of Darwin’s evolutionary theory that questioned the existence of God; furthermore, there was Marx in the later part of the century whose socio-economic theories sought to interpret the class system emerging under industrialism and capitalism. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, there emerged yet another theorist who was to have a powerful impact (both positively and negatively) on the entire scenario of Modernism: Freud. With Freud came his theory of the unconscious as determining human actions and thoughts through its deep and irrational force; with such a concept, it was no longer possible to hold on to the idea of a stable human subject,

since it would always already be divided within itself. All these developments became more evident in the very forms and language adopted by the Modernist poets like T. S. Eliot, for example. Then again, the anthropological work of James Frazer was to have a profound impact on Modernist literature as a whole.

By the end of the nineteenth century the earlier stability of the British Empire in danger of disintegration chiefly from nationalist movements and rebellions against it in the various colonies. The first significant event in this was the Boer War (1899-1902) in South America which turned out to be a hollow victory for Britain. But the greatest event at this point was the First World War (1914-1918).

Modernism as a trend in twentieth-century English literature was already in evidence before the outbreak of World War. The avant-garde had already established its dominance over earlier developments in art and literature. It was accelerated by the fact that newer education laws and increased literacy brought about a tremendous change in the reading public. Although this resulted in a parallel rise of the press and 'popular' literature, it nevertheless also extended a hand towards the growth of newer media: the radio, the television, cinema and popular music. A section of the intelligentsia saw this as the onslaught of the masses which would vulgarise the taste and appreciation of 'high' literature, and felt themselves alienated in this modern world. As a result the avant-garde, as mentioned earlier, rose with a small target audience of people having a superior education and taste who could identify with this sense of isolation. One has to only go through the poems of Yeats and Eliot and the novels and essays of E. M. Forster, for instance, to gauge this point of view.

With the First World War, however, all these preoccupations underwent a deep change as England, among other European nations, tried to grapple with its magnitude and destructiveness. This was manifested most strongly in the poetry produced during the time. The War gave rise to a group of young poets like Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried Sassoon (many of whom died in action in the battlefield) who are collectively known as the War poets.

Then there were Yeats, Pound and Eliot who were already writing during this time. All these poets echoed the starkness of death and the mood of anxiety and uncertainty that they encountered first-hand. England (as the rest of Europe) was seen in terms of a barren, dehumanised dystopia, not only literally (the battlefield images of the War poets), but metaphorically as well. The years after the end of the War saw the full development of Modernist poetry with one of the major texts, *The Waste Land*, being published in 1922.

The poets of the 1930s however, were more deeply affected by the Second World War (1939-45), the more so because many of these poets were at the formative stage of their careers. This war was more destructive than the earlier one and more importantly, had actually entered Britain through the Blitz in London. The most crucial event in this, however, was America's act of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan; this signalled the end of an era to most writers of the time with the advent of a new atomic age. Eliot's *Four Quartets* was a resonant articulation of this sense of ending and nostalgia, coupled with a stark emptiness. Dylan Thomas, on the other hand, tried to evolve, through the language of poetry, a counter to the deadening effect of war. While most of these poets wrote from a distance about the War and acted thereby as commentators and critics there were a few poets like Alun Lewis, Keith Douglas and Sidney Keyes who had actually fought and were killed in action in the war (Henry Reed was another poet who survived the war). The poems of these, like the earlier War Poets, echoed the extreme nearness of death, though with pessimism. Unlike many of their predecessors (especially during the first two years of the First World War), who were patriotic and enthusiastic in their wartime experiences and descriptions, these poets talked more of the desolation and regret accompanying this war.

Another political event that touched the poetry of the Thirties specifically was the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) between the forces belonging to the Spanish dictator Franco and the Republican army which sought to bring democracy to the nation. Many poets, like Auden, for example, extended their support to the Republican army.

Finally, the Irish struggle for independence in the early twentieth century and the troubles in Northern Ireland during the second half of the century also forms the chief context for the poetry of Yeats and Heaney. Yeats was writing during the time of the Irish literary renaissance and actually was a part of it, though he was against the violence of the Irish revolutionaries. After Ireland secured its independence in 1923, however Northern Ireland still remained under the rule of Britain. For a number of decades during the mid-twentieth century, sectarian violence (between supporters of the British Government and supporters of Irish autonomy) defined this region, and this becomes the major concern of Heaney.

This is a very brief account of certain key contexts of modern poetry which I have also discussed to some extent in the previous section with reference to individual poets.

1.4 POETS OF THE MODERN WORLD

1.4.1 WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939)

Yeats was not only a poet but a dramatist as well, and played an important part in the Irish Literary Revival. His volumes of poems include *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914), *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1920), *The Cat and the Moon* (1924), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair* (1929), and *Last Poems* (1939). Some of his best-known plays are *The Countess Kathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *On Baile's Strand* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907), *The Player Queen* (1922), and *The Herne's Egg* (1938).

While talking of himself and his generation as the last of the Romantics, Yeats was, however, keenly aware of the cultural and political contexts of his own time, especially the Irish struggle for independence that manifested itself in a series of rebellions and uprisings in the early 20th century. Thus, in his poetic career, Yeats

registers different phases, taking on, initially, the mantle of the Romantic poets with a visionary idea of poetry and the poet's vocation. His later poetry from the transitional *Responsibilities* onwards, takes on a bare style, self-consciously dispensing with romantic trimmings, using a half-colloquial diction, and often, a casual tone. Chris Baldick identifies some of the general and important themes and concerns of Yeats in his poetry as those of "permanence and impermanence ("Sailing to Byzantium", "Among Schoolchildren", "Byzantium"); of the cyclical patterns of world history ("The Second Coming", "Leda and the Swan", "Two Songs for a Play"); of contemplation and action ("An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", "Long-legged Fly"); of body and soul ("Michael Robartes and the Dancer", "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop"); of art and the artist ("Ego Dominus Tuus", "The Circus Animals' Desertion"), the hostility of the philistine modern world to the Artist ("September 1913", "The Fisherman", "Under Ben Bulbin"), the gracious patronage bestowed by the landed gentry and aristocracy ("At Galway Races", "Coole Park, 1929", "The Municipal Gallery Revisited"); and the violence, betrayals, and guilt of living Irish history ("Easter, 1916", "Meditations in the Time of Civil War", "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "Parnell's Funeral")" (Baldick 2004: 84-85). Finally Yeats is closely associated with the symbolist technique in modern English poetry, a tradition that goes back to the nineteenth-century French movement of the same name.

1.4.2 THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT (1888-1965)

A representative modern poet, T. S. Eliot also experimented with drama, reviving the English tradition of verse drama. He was also an important critic who was responsible for a renewed interest in many poets and writers of earlier ages, significantly, the Metaphysical poets. His major poetical works include *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), *The Waste Land* (1922), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), and *Four Quartets* (1943) which was a collection of four earlier works:

Burnt Norton (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942). His dramas include *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932), *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959).

The poems in Eliot's first collection of poetry marked a radical change in English poetry from most models prevailing till the very early part of the twentieth century. In the title poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot adapted the model of the dramatic monologue in order to explore the intricate relationship of the modern subject with her/his self and the outside world. This resulted in a kind of poetry that "disintegrat[ed] character into mood", and combined "comedy and pathos" in the figure of Prufrock – the speaker of the monologue – who is "a painfully hesitant young man, emotionally paralysed by self-consciousness, his sense of self crumbling into disconnected and overpowering images" (Baldick 2004: 97). Eliot also etches out the ennui and tedium of modern urban life in much of his poetry. His major poem, *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, registers the impact of one of the major events of the period: the First World War and the resultant crisis of empire, particularly, the British Empire. As a result, the waste land in the poem is not just a patch of uncultivated land laid waste by war (an image that figures so prominently in the poetry of that group of poets collectively referred to as the War Poets). Instead, it is a symbolic re-creation of a country swept by the annihilating effect and consequences of a pan-European war and a parallel economic dislocation as well as the image of a country having to come to terms with the potential disintegration of its imperial holdings, with rising opposition to imperial rule and colonisation both at home and abroad. The poem is a complex interweaving of a variety of poetic styles and forms from diverse periods as well as numerous motifs from classical and English literature. It is also an extremely polyphonic text with a number of voices from both past and present – from myth, folklore, and the real milieu of the real urban world – adding to the layers of meaning in the text. It is an evocative account of the cultural, emotional and

spiritual desolation looming over Britain, and, by extension, over the European world after the First World War.

Eliot is noted for his extensive use of *vers libre* or free verse in his poetry. However, it is always accompanied by a strong sense of rhythm and metre. Moreover, he also carries on with the tradition of English poetry, particularly in his use of the dramatic monologue, thereby making an attempt to modify and re-create tradition in order to make the past relevant in the present. This is discussed by Eliot in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”.

1.4.3 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883-1963)

A versatile author, Williams was at once a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist and dramatist. His works include: *Paterson* (1946-58, and a complete edition in 1963), *Collected Earlier Poems* (1951), *Collected Later Poems* (1950), *Journey to Love* (1955) and *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1963) [poetry]; *White Mule* (1937), *In the Morning* (1940) and *The Build-Up* (1952) [novels]; *The Knife of the Times and Other Stories* (1932), *Life Along the Passaic River* (1938), *Make Light of It* (1950), and *The Farers' Daughters* (1951) [short stories and documentaries]; *Many Loves and Other Plays* (1961) [drama]; and *Autobiography* (1951) [life writing].

Williams, along with other members of his group, such as Alfred Kreymborg, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Louise Bogan, attempted to create a poetry that would evoke a specifically American context rather than the Anglo-American modernism of Pound and Eliot, though the latter were undoubtedly influential presences in the formative years of American modernism. Their (Pound and Eliot's) impact was chiefly noticeable in their rejection of bourgeois society and its secular, material and egalitarian ideology. However, as Williams saw it, these poets, particularly Eliot, had ultimately to be rejected because the revolutionary and experimental techniques Eliot used in his poetry were explored ultimately as a means to facilitate the renewal of traditional and chiefly, English and European or Continental values. On the other hand,

Williams tried consistently to locate himself and his work in America, primarily by employing the language as it was spoken by the Americans, capturing the flavour of American experience mediated through the consciousness of *being* an American. In this, Williams' career as a physician was of utmost importance to him since through it he gained access to the private and intimate domestic lives of people. As a result, his poetry permeates with a "matter-of-fact tenderness toward external nature that permeates his work" (Feder in Ford 1995: 320). It is, moreover, an experience that facilitated an exploration of the self through "an apprehension of the physical reality of people in their intrinsic locality" (Feder in Ford 1995: 320).

Some of the other influences on Williams' poetry were Imagism and, later, Dadaism. Under such influences, Williams conceptualised the theory of the poem as an object that, like a Cubist work of art, expresses its meaning through the medium of its form. The poet's role, thereby, is to create a new reality through language that has a consonance with its present and modern cultural and linguistic context (Feder 1995: 320).

In his emphasis on the significance of the local as a representative of the universal (evident in his willingness to incorporate even mundane, ordinary and so-called trivial and everyday episodes or images in poetry shorn of all the embellishments of 'art') Williams also seems to present a return to that egalitarianism and secularism that Pound and, more vehemently, Eliot had rejected.

1.4.4 WALLACE STEVENS (1879-1955)

Wallace Stevens, another major American Modernist poet, also took a position in partial opposition to T. S. Eliot and the modernism he represented, though many of his early poems bore the influence of Eliot. His collections of poems include *Harmonium* (1923), *Ideas of Order* (1935), *Owl's Clover* (1936), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction* (1942), *Parts of a World* (1942),

Transport to a Summer (1947), *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) and *The Rock* (1955).

Like Williams, who was incidentally a friend of his, Stevens is also concerned with the constant dialogue and at times conflict between the real and the unreal that make the notion of reality itself precarious. However, the difference between the two poets lies in that “[f]or Williams, reality, affirmed by the imagination, is an end product, a ‘new object’; for Stevens, it is process, subject, and method” (Feder in Ford 1995: 323). Stevens is more concerned about how one’s imagination mediates between the external reality and the inner world of the mind and, by doing so, revises and re-creates one’s perception of the real world. Poetry, for Stevens, becomes, again, a medium through which this process can be explored.

For Stevens, such an exploration, moreover, is possible only on the level of the individual, and not by affiliating oneself with any particular group. This leads him to avoid becoming a member of any particular Modernist movement and sharing a common ideology. This is accompanied by a comic sense in Stevens’ poetry that counterbalanced the ironic tone of most Modernist poetry. Again, for Stevens, poetry and its forms and language serve to transform reality – whether of the external world or of the self itself – and explore the ways and factors that determine such transformation, so that a newly created poem is also a discovery of some new facet of this ‘reality’. It is the mind which, through its conscious and unconscious processes makes the apprehension and re-creation of reality possible. At the same time, however, it itself is always vulnerable to “necessity, change and death”; it constantly invents and re-fashions myths in order to bring upon the “devious ways of self-creation” the “ultimate reality of extinction” that traditional myths themselves seek to evade (Feder in Ford 1995: 324, 325). There is, therefore, in Stevens a deliberately non-conventional attitude to myth that is reinvented in his poetry.

1.4.5 WYSTAN HUGH AUDEN (1907-1973)

Auden and his colleagues (in particular, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice) became prominent as poets in the 1930s and registered a self-conscious divergence from the high modernist poets like Eliot and Pound. They did this by refusing to resort to exoticism and remoteness of their precursors and by bringing back established poetic forms both popular and literary like the ballad, the sonnet and the villanelle. At the same time, they retained the sense and experience of modernity in the subject matter, tone and diction of their poetry. They also favoured a simplicity of technique and diction in contrast to the earlier modernist thrust on experimentation with language and technique, “although their range of reference [was] more modernistic both in embracing the sights and sounds of contemporary urban and industrial life and in maintaining an intellectual detachment that owe[d] something to Eliot” (Baldick 2004: 103).

The Auden group initially published their poems in the anthologies *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933) and subsequently in the journal *New Verse* (1933-9). As Baldick points out, the ‘new’ was pertinent being born in the twentieth century, they were more at ease with a “post-Victorian culture of monopolized transport, aviation, and mass entertainment than any of their predecessors” and, therefore, unlike Yeats, Eliot and Pound, “were not inclined to bemoan the arrival of their century as a catastrophic Fall from the aristocratic glories of old into vulgar suburbanism” (Baldick 2004: 104). Their poetry possessed a social awareness especially of England and an acknowledgement of the inevitable presence of modern technology and science in contemporary urban life. Marx and Freud were the two great intellectual influences on the Auden group. For Auden, the crisis of modern existence manifested itself particularly in terms of illness and neurosis and “‘psychosomatic’ illness”, a concept he borrowed from psychologists Homer Lane and Georg Groddeck (Baldick 2004: 105-6). His poetry, unlike Eliot’s which explored one’s private and inner world of experience, tended to concentrate more on a public situation and experience. He waded of the view that the private could no longer remain

insulated from the social and the political contexts. Therefore, instead of being obscure and difficult, Auden's poetry strives to become more accessible and popular since this entails a social perspective. However, the affinity of Auden with the preceding modernists lies in the fact that he shares "the same poetic quest for a meaning to life amidst images of a contemporary world which fail to form a coherent whole" (Carter and McRae 2001: 146). Some of the notable collections of Auden's poetry are *Poems* (1930), *The Orators* (1932), *Look, Stranger* (1936), *Nones* (1951), and *The Shield of Achilles* (1955). Auden also co-authored a few plays with Christopher Isherwood, of which the best-known is *The Ascent of F6* (1937).

Several comments have to be considered in relation to the kind of poetry that Auden wrote in the 1930s. A critic (Reed Way Dasenbrock) highlights the closeness of poetry to politics in the modern period. The case of W.B. Yeats comes to mind. He says, "Yeats is the central example of a twentieth-century poet whose life and work were caught up in political events from the very beginning." Further, "The Irish Revolution and the cultural revival which preceded it constituted the first important moment in the twentieth century in which poetry and politics are in significant relation and in which the work of a great poet responds to and actively shapes important political events. The political struggle of 1916 to 1923 which won Ireland independence was unthinkable without the cultural revival which came before." We are also reminded that "the Irish literature which created the Irish Renaissance was written in English and Irish was not ... restored as the functional national language."

The same commentator goes on: ". . . Anglo-American modernism is the second key moment in the literary history of the twentieth century when poetry and politics intersect fatefully. . . . Modernist writers became distinctly more interested in politics after the First World War, as should occasion little surprise, since it seemed only a matter of self-interest to analyse the causes of the war and see what could prevent its reoccurrence. . . most modernists who survived the war were left convinced that substantial changes in the structure of European society were desirable, probably essential. In *Kangaroo* Lawrence wrote

of the war-atmosphere in England, ‘no man who really consciously lived through this can believe again absolutely in democracy.’ ”

Thus, as we are told, “Inspired by the Irish example which showed that poets could have an effect on society, modernist writers sought to align themselves with forces of social change which left an important place for art and the artist”. It could be stated that “If Yeats is unquestionably the greatest and most influential Irish poet of the twentieth century and Pound is arguably the greatest and unquestionably the most influential American poet of the twentieth century, then one can certainly draw the conclusion that some of the century’s most important poetry stands in close relation to to the politics of its time.” England must be mentioned because “in the work of the first generation of poets after modernism, the ‘Auden generation’, who constitute the third and in an important sense the last moment in which a central movement in the literary history of the twentieth century intersects with a central movement in political history.” Also, the important fact is that, “It is the orientation towards Marxism, however, which most sharply differentiates the Auden generation from their modernist predecessors.”

Check Your Progress:

1. Highlight the literary responses to the great Wars in poetic terms in the early twentieth century.
2. To what extent can ‘modernism’ be seen as a response to the larger social concerns in the twentieth century? Discuss with reference to the work of Eliot, Yeats and Auden.
3. Relate the work of the modernist poets to the question of perspective and identity. Make a particular reference to the work of Dylan Thomas and Eliot.
4. Attempt an analysis of Auden’s *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* in the light of his views on the role of poetry in society and the life-world.
5. Highlight the main concerns of Anglo-American modernism with the reference to the work of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams paying particular attention to their responses to the difficulties of derived traditions.

1.4.6 DYLAN THOMAS (1914-1953)

Born at Swansea, Wales, Dylan Thomas brought into the poetry of the thirties till the early fifties a dissident voice that militated against the constraints of the socially and politically committed poetry of the Auden group. His poems were first published in collected form in *Eighteen Poems* (1934), which was subsequently followed by *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1939), *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1952). Besides poetry, Thomas also wrote short stories, published in two collections, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) and *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1955), as well as the radio play *Under Milk Wood*.

Along with Yeats (as in “Easter, 1916”), Wilfred Owen (“Strange Meeting”), Louis MacNeice (“Bagpipe Music”) and Auden (“Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love”), Thomas (in poems such as “And Death Shall Have No Dominion”) was part of a revival of half-rhyme (partial consonance of end words in verse line without an accompanying assonance: *love/have*) and pararhyme (full consonance without assonance: *love/leave*) instead of full rhyme. Meanwhile, with Robert Bridges, who, in 1913, broke away from the traditional English metres based on accent or stressed syllables in favour of the French technique of counting only the number of syllables in each line, English poetry began the modern tradition of the English syllabic metre, one which was continued in the 1930s by poets such as Auden, Thomas and Thom Gunn. In fact, the first three collections of Thomas’s poetry exhibited all techniques in all but one of the fifty-nine poems comprising these volumes.

In addition to an innovative technique, Thomas brought into his poetry an intensity and a vigour born out of an attempt to strain the limits of language in order to express very powerful feelings. This frequently made his poems (especially the early ones) dense in meaning while his images frequently earned the label ‘surreal’. The “Romantic vigour and flamboyance” of Thomas was a strong divergence from “the anxious, uncertain tones of T. S. Eliot, the more cautious Romanticism

of W. B. Yeats, and the social preoccupations of W. H. Auden” (Carter and McRae 2001: 146).

Thomas’s poetry was also different in its deliberate avoidance of any notion of social or intellectual or rational life and experience in favour of a celebration of the organic processes governing the natural world (including human beings) and bodily functions. This is re-enacted for Thomas in language as well, whose workings and effects are autonomous and regenerative and as immune from rational rules as the entire creative process.

Childhood is one of the key motifs in Thomas’s poetry. Poems like “Poem in October” and “Fern Hill” celebrate the spontaneity of the child who is more organically involved with nature. These poems, therefore, are an adult poet’s retrospective re-creation of and an accompanying awareness of the loss of what Walford Davies calls “the child’s intimate sense of wonder” (Davies 2003: 51).

The Second World War also profoundly influenced Dylan Thomas, filling him with a deep shock and outrage. However Thomas’s response was the affirmation of the cyclic processes of nature and ultimately, therefore, the telescoping of life and death, regeneration and decay into one another, that could hopefully provide a counter to such unnecessary and ‘unnatural’ destruction brought on by the war. This can be seen in his wartime poems like “Deaths and Entrances”, “Ceremony after a Fire Raid”, and “A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London”.

SAQ:

What constitutes the “modernist” elements of Thomas’ poetry ? Do you think there is any conflict between the “modern” and the “Romantic”? Does Thomas effect a reconciliation between these seemingly opposed tendencies? (50 + 50 + 60 words)

.....
.....

1.4.7 PHILIP LARKIN (1922-1985)

Philip Larkin's name is usually associated with the Movement, a short-lived group formed during the 1950s that took a strong anti-Modernist stand. The term "Movement" was coined by J. D. Scott, literary editor of *The Spectator*, in 1954 to describe the work of writers such as Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings and Robert Conquest. Most of its members came from a lower middle-class background and consciously incorporated this factor in their works that include both prose and poetry. Movement poetry was primarily published in two anthologies: D. J. Enright's *Poets of the 1950's* (1955) and Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956). It was characterised by the presence of an anti-romantic, witty, rational and sardonic observer and speaker. The Movement poets adopted an honest, unsentimental and unemotional approach; reality was by far mundane and ordinary for them, yet it concealed within itself a certain dignity. There was also an emphasis on the clarity of ideas and images, intellectual detachment and formal perfection. While these aspects retained their presence in the work of these writers, the group itself, however, had disintegrated by 1957.

Larkin's poetry is indicative of these attitudes though it nevertheless continues with the tradition of Romantic poets like Wordsworth and the late nineteenth-century poets like Arnold and Hardy in its exploration of the themes of death, change and private disillusionment. In addition, working with "established rhythms and syntax", and "conservative poetic forms", Larkin, like Hardy, "writes about what appears to be normal and everyday, while exploring the paradox that the mundane is both familiar and limited" (Carter and McRae 2001: 439). The influence of Hardy is noticeable in Larkin's later volumes like *The Less Deceived* (1955), *Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974), while his initial poetry (*The North Ship*, 1945, and *XX Poems*, 1951) shows the influence of Yeats.

Larkin's poetry has also been seen as a response to a perceived national and cultural decline. 'Englishness', thereby, like Thomas's 'Welshness', is a notion that becomes so pertinent in Larkin. In

“Englands of the Mind” (published in *Preoccupations*, 1980), Seamus Heaney contrasts the post-War English sensibility in the poetry of Larkin and Ted Hughes in terms of the “Englands of the Mind” each imaginatively re-creates out of England’s history (the third poet Heaney considers in this respect is Geoffrey Hill) and sees in both certain continuities of English ways of life and experience from its past history which, however, are disappearing fast in a modern, post-War England. However, while Hughes goes back to a pre-modern England in which Christian elements cohabit with pagan beliefs, Larkin goes back to Anglo-Norman England with its sophistications of manners and language. This is reflected in their specific poetic techniques: the alliterative mode of Old English poetry resonating in Hughes and the Norman cadence in Larkin. While Hughes invokes myth and the elemental presence of nature in order to root his English sensibility, for Larkin, the modern English way of life incorporates a retrospective, “nostalgic pessimism” brought on by several historical factors like Britain’s decline as an imperial power and its decreasing political and economic influence (Heaney, quoted in Regan 1997: 15). This leads to a renewed importance of the “native English experience”, but at the same time, it is, in Larkin, detached and often disinterested:

“He sees England from train windows, fleeting past and away. He is the urban modern man, the insular Englishman, responding to the tones of his own clan, ill at ease when out of his environment. He is a poet, indeed, of a composed and tempered English nationalism, his voice is the not untrue, not unkind voice of post-War England....”

(Heaney, quoted in Regan 1997: 15)

Colin Falck points to the anti-romantic element of Larkin’s poetry: “by identifying himself with the drab, fantasy-haunted world of the waste land Larkin has not only downgraded the whole of real existence against an impossible absolute standard, but has also cut the ground from under the poet’s feet. The fantasy, which he has elected to share has little to do with romanticism, because it destroys the very bridge which romanticism would construct between the ideal and the world which actually exists: the poet can no longer do anything to bring our dreams into relation with reality. The ideal, for Larkin, has become

inaccessible, and being inaccessible it can only throw the real world into shadow instead of lighting it up from within. In the typical landscape of Larkin's poems the whole chiaroscuro of meaning, all polarities of life and death, good and evil, are levelled away. Farms, canals, building-plots and dismantled cars jostle one another indiscriminately – the view from the train window, with its complete randomness and detachment, is at the heart of Larkin's vision –and all of them are bathed in the same general wistfulness. There are no epiphanies.”

From here it becomes easy to see why Larkin is seen sometimes as a ‘realist’. John Holloway includes Larkin's poetry in the literature of “minimal affirmation”. Larkin's verse strategy in poem after seems to be to *insure* against anything that might come into his work on too easy terms, anything that could possibly be seen as a lapse into soft-centredness or sentimentality.”

Thus it comes as no surprise that pessimism is another characteristic frequently attributed to Larkin's poetry. This is partly because of the apparent passivity of the poetic voice, an unwillingness to interfere with the course of things as they are (in contrast to the Romantic tradition of active involvement). But Larkin frequently invokes ritual and native tradition as a counter to the progressive decline of modern England. This can be seen in his use of certain symbols (like the ritual of going to church and buildings like the hospital and the church) that seem to preserve, in a world where religion has lost its potency, a certain source of faith that despite being secular is still powerful amidst the general disintegration of post-War English culture.

1.4.8 TED HUGHES (1930-1998)

Ted Hughes was much influenced by D. H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas and, like them, focussed largely on nature and its forces. Some of his best-known volumes of poetry are *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967), *Crow* (1970), *Cave Birds* (1975), *Gaudete* (1977), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *Moortown* (1979), *Rivers* (1983), *Flowers and Insects* (1987), *Wolfwatching* (1989), *Tales from*

Ovid (1997) and *Birthday Letters* (1998). In addition, Hughes also wrote stories and poems for children. Hughes was famously married to the American poet and novelist Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1961.

One of the key concerns of Hughes is the energy and violence existing in nature which he associates with the creative principle. The vigour and force of nature is most noticeable in the animal world for Hughes, as a result of which, many of his poems deal with animals like the hawk, the pike and the jaguar. He also focuses on the single-mindedness of these animals as they ensure their survival through the exercise of their sheer strength and power. Viewed without sentiment, the natural world becomes for Hughes not a symbol of human values or notions but a network that transcends the human – the human, in fact, becomes a mere part of it and is denied of any superior agency. It is in consequence of such a decentred gaze that even a little songbird, the thrush, is seen as a powerful, efficient, and powerful predator, creating panic among the creatures it hunts. In his later works, Hughes shows a greater preoccupation with myth and legend as the artistic media between human existence and the powerful and uncontrollable forces of nature.

Hughes has also been seen by Terry Gifford as belonging to both the “anti-pastoral” and the “post-pastoral” traditions in English literature – two developments that form a critique of the traditional pastoral and its idealisations even as they emerge necessarily from the tradition itself.

As an anti-pastoral poet, Hughes shows the awareness that the natural world can no longer be considered as an Arcadia immune from the real world as it is, but is, instead, “a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose” (Gifford 1999: 120). This tradition of writing does not totally ignore the pastoral convention but is a more serious engagement with it and its tropes, as can be seen poets like Crabbe and Goldsmith in the eighteenth century, Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Arnold in the nineteenth, and Lawrence, John Clare, Patrick Kavanaugh, Hughes and Seamus Heaney in the twentieth. Hughes attempts, like Blake, to cut through the “self-protective tendency” of the pastoral that selects

elements that are comforting to one's perception of the world and therefore is self-deceiving (Gifford 1999: 135).

As a post-pastoral poet, Hughes work is aligned with authors like Blake, Wordsworth, John Muir, Thoreau, Lawrence, Ursula Le Guin, Gillian Clarke and Adrienne Rich (Gifford 1999: 169). This tradition takes into account the changing cultural context of the modern world and a corresponding change in one's attitudes towards nature that goes beyond the pastoral distinction between the urban and the rural. This, of course, is also a characteristic of the anti-pastoral position. However, along with this, the post-pastoral not only rereads the idealised assumptions of the pastoral but devises a language to sidestep such dangers and envisage a world in which human beings are not alienated from nature but become organically linked to it and to every other creature within it. It is, in other words, a more ecocentric approach that can "both celebrate *and* take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness" (Gifford 1999: 148).

Some of the characteristics accompanying this tradition are a respect for the natural world and its processes; an acknowledgement of the world as cyclic in its processes of birth and death, growth and decay, so that nature is seen employing a creative violence and destruction; the realisation that since human beings are also part of this world, one's inner nature and workings of the mind and body are necessarily reflections of outer or external nature; seeing culture as inevitably determined by nature and, conversely, attitudes to nature as culturally constructed (so that the nature/culture, inner/outer, private/public binaries are considerably diminished); and the belief that one's consciousness can be transformed into conscience that takes responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions towards other species (as in Hughes's "The Otter" where there is an acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of the human consciousness as it creates a picture of humans hunting down the otter, who has now become a king in exile). In most of his poems, Hughes echoes these concerns that make him one of the most individual poets in twentieth-century English literature.

1.4.9 SEAMUS HEANEY (1939-)

Seamus Heaney voices, like Yeats and Thomas, preoccupations that are unique to the cultural background they come from, since all three are not ‘English’ but rather Irish and Welsh. This is reflected in Heaney who engages constantly with the violence and horror accompanying Northern Ireland’s attempts to free itself from British rule. The 1960s Troubles, that forms the background to such poems as “Triptych”, parallel the Troubles in the early decades of the twentieth century marking Ireland’s struggle for independence from Britain. Consequently, Heaney’s vision is not merely limited to Northern Ireland but stretches across the whole island, as can be seen, for example, in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991) and *The Spirit Level* (1996). Apart from poetry, Heaney has earned much critical acclaim for his translation of *Beowulf* (1999).

Heaney uses memory, legend, myth, and elements from Irish history in order to evoke the picture of as it is lived and experienced not only in the context of contemporary violence but also in the context of poetry and the vocation of a poet. Digging and the peatbog are thus two key tropes in his poetry. Digging is significant because the poet “digs into his own memory, into the lives of his family, into the past of Irish history and into the deeper levels of legend and myth which shape the character of the people of his country” (Carter and McRae 2001: 446). On the other hand, the wild, undomesticated and deep nature of the bog that preserves traces of past life through countless periods of history is a potent site in which the ancient, primordial, pagan and even early-Christian elements come in contact with the present and the contemporary so that what is past (for example, ritualistic sacrifice as alluded to in “The Tollund Man” or the act of revenge) surface even in the present (as can be seen in “Triptych” in which the poet brings in ancient Christian customs centring round the idea of a ‘Station’ in order

to emphasise its weak but still restorative pastoral power even in the midst of ceaseless violence).

In Heaney, as in Thomas, Larkin and Hughes, there is an engagement with place and identity, and consequently, on the use of language to evoke the sense of location and setting. While Thomas evokes a specific notion of Wales in his poetry, Hughes and Larkin both project different versions of England. In like manner, Heaney uses local (Irish) in conjunction with international (from places like Denmark, America, Africa, and ancient Greece) elements (in terms of archaeological discoveries, myths, religious customs or rituals and so on) in his poetry. He, moreover, shows a keen awareness of the English poetic tradition and language in order, however, to assert the Irishness of his poetry. This is accompanied by the precarious figure of the poet himself, “growing up a Catholic in a divided province, then becoming an emblematic exile in England and America” (Carter and McRae 2001: 447).

Heaney’s *Preoccupations* (1980), his first volume of essays, is ‘preoccupied’ with the individual freedom of the poet on one hand and the demands made on one by tradition, history, place, religion, one’s community or society, on the other, the tussle between which effectively denies the possibility of adhering to any fixed identity as either poet or Irishman, since these two aspects are frequently contradictory. Many of his poems (such as “Digging”) express, therefore, this ambivalence in which the poet shows a “devotion to inheritance, asserting continuity with the past, family, community; the desire for attachment and experience; a sense of guilt for departing from tradition” (Andrews 1998: 41). Heaney’s use of nature, and the form of the pastoral explored in a post-pastoral fashion can also, therefore, be read from this perspective.

1.5 Summing Up

The period of modern poetry stretches from around the end of the nineteenth century to contemporary times, as the inclusion of later poets

like Hughes and Heaney implies. This means that you have to read many of these poets in a frame of reference that goes beyond the tradition of modernist poetry and that brings in postmodern and postcolonial references as well. In this section, I will give a brief overview of this unit. The next section will give you a short introduction of some major modern poets and their particular styles and preoccupations. Section 1.4 will attempt to present some of the major events of the period that had a significant impact on literature, including poetry, produced during this time. The following section again goes over some of the key themes and concerns common to all the poets discussed in Section 1.3, while the final section will comprise a list of works cited in the unit as well as a few books for further reading.

1.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Andrews, Elmer (Ed.). *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Baldick, Chris. *The Modern Movement* Volume 10: 1910-1940. Oxford: OUP, 2004

Barlow, Adrian. *The Great War in British Literature* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Bradbury, Malcolm, and McFarlane, James, (Eds.). *Modernism 1890-1930*; London: Penguin, 1991 [1976].

Carter, Ronald, and McRae, John; *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland* [2nd Edn. 2001] London: Routledge, 2005. (Ind. Rpt.)

Davies, Walford. *Dylan Thomas*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2003. (Ind. Rpt.)

Feder, Lillian. "The Literary Scene" in Boris Ford (ed.) *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Volume 9: American Literature. 307-353.

Ford, Boris (Ed.). *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Volume 7: From James to Eliot. London: Penguin, 1996 [1983].

—————. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*
Volume 8: From Orwell to Naipaul. London: Penguin, 1998 [1983].

—————. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*
Volume 9: American Literature. London: Penguin, 1995 [1967].

Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York and
London: OUP, 1975.

Goodby, John. “‘Very profound and very box-office’: the Later Poems
and Under Milk Wood” in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (eds.)
New Casebooks: Dylan Thomas. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 192-220.

Unit 2

G. M. Hopkins: “Carrion Comfort”, “God’s Grandeur”

Unit Structure :

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introducing the poet

2.3 Critical Reception

2.4 Context of the Poems

2.5 Reading the Poems

2.6 Summing Up

2.7 References and Suggested Reading

2.1 OBJECTIVES

Hopkins’ poetry sounds unconventional, experimental and unique. He was a technically complex poet, an ordained priest whose Catholic theological principles combined a debt to Duns Scotus’ philosophy in his poetic achievements. This unit brings to you the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins who is remembered for the beautifully expressive poetry of religious wonder and faith in a world filled with the manifestation of divine energy. By the end of the unit you should be able to

- *explain* the poetry of Hopkins
- *identify* his technical innovations
- *relate* Hopkins’ poetry to the reputation he was accorded in the twentieth century

2.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Born at Stratford, Essex in 1844, Gerald Manley Hopkins belonged to a middle-class high Anglican family who marked a transition in English poetic taste. Though he is remembered as a late Victorian, his poetry marks a transition from 'Victorian' to 'Modern'. He hailed from an artistic family and his father himself published poetry. His diaries and letters show that he had a passion for natural landscape. In many ways a most extraordinary Victorian, virtually unknown in his life time, an aesthete who had a keen appetite for detail, he took interest in music when he was in Highgate School in 1854. He coloured his note-books with different sketches. He had a pantheist's eye for the concrete and the sensuous and his poetry was characterized by startling musicality. He studied theology in Welsh college and his poetry reflects his theological endeavour. Being an ascetic, he followed the Jesuit order in 1868, at the age of twenty-four and that brought a transformation in his life. Poems like "Easter Communion" (1865) and "Easter" (1866) reflect his ascetic strain of thought. He remained a preacher at the Jesuit Farm Street Church in London and after that he went to Mount St. Marys' College, Chesterfield to become its sub-minister. For a year he preached in Oxford at St. Aloysius.

When he was at school he published *A Vision of the Mermaids* and that is considered to be the most characteristic of his early poetry. The influence of John Keats and Spenser can easily be perceived in his poetry in his depiction of the sensuous quality. His sensuous apprehension of the world finds its expression in the loaded, packed words and embedded sentences. They carry Hopkins' aesthetic and ascetic temperament. He met Robert Bridges at Oxford and that was an important event in Hopkins' life and their friendship left a lasting influence upon his poetry. It is significant to mention here that Hopkins' poetry was not published in his lifetime and it was Robert Bridges who published his poems after his death, in 1918, twenty-nine years after his death. He left for Oxford in 1863.

Now it is pertinent to mention here the major change that came in the 'sixties. The tension between the spirit of Romanticism and the renaissance of Tractarianism swept Oxford. Besides, the essence of the aesthetic movement and the Pre-Raphaelites influenced the artistic and

literary taste of the time. Ruskin, Swinburne, Walter Pater showed great aesthetic endeavour through their writings. His poetry marks a difference from the Pre-Raphaelites insofar as its religious endeavour is concerned. Art and religion are blended together in Hopkins. While Matthew Arnold showed his reaction against religion and dogma in his poetry, Hopkins tried his poetry with a religious ardour. Again, the Tractarian movement in 1833 coloured his later poetry. Hopkins was influenced by the terms and the tide of the age and that is well reflected in his poetry.

The concepts ‘instress’ and ‘inscape’ are crucial to Hopkins’ poetic aesthetics and spiritual growth. And the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus and his theory of knowledge coloured the spirit of Hopkins’ poetry. As Scotus’ theory reveals, knowledge has its roots or source in the senses. Hopkins perceives a unity in variety wherein lie ‘dappled’, contradictory and opposing forces together.

Stop to Consider:

“Star of Balliol”

“Hopkins won the poetry prize at the Highgate grammar school and in 1863 was awarded a grant to study at Balliol College, Oxford, where he continued writing poetry while studying classics. In 1866, in the prevailing atmosphere of the Oxford Movement, which renewed interest in the relationships between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church by John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman. The following year, he left Oxford with such a distinguished academic record that Benjamin Jowett, then a Balliol lecturer and later master of the college, called him “the star of Balliol.” Hopkins decided to become a priest. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1868 and burned his youthful verses, determining “to write no more, as not belonging to my profession.”

Though he lived in late Victorian times, Hopkins is considered to be a modern poet in the sense that he marked a break from the Victorian tradition insofar as his technical approaches are concerned. He renovated the Anglo-Saxon metrical pattern and rediscovered “sprung rhythm” in his poetry. The use of this rhythm is to be seen in his *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875) which stood as a prelude to his whole work.

A.S. Collins writes that Hopkins’ poetry had a special appeal for the post-war world that revealed a sense of spiritual tension and frustration. It can also be said that Hopkins, through his poetry, tried to establish a

poetic truth that would unite the concrete and the abstract world together. His poetry is a search for truth exploring newer possibilities. Discussing Hopkins' poetry, Herbert Mcluhan observes that Hopkins was neither a nature mystic, nor a religious mystic, but an analogist. In his words, "His is a sacramental view of the world since what of God is there he does not perceive nor experience but takes in faith." (Mcluhan, 82). Herbert calls it a 'mirror mechanism' applied by Hopkins to show the analogical significance.

Sprung Rhythm

In terms of technical innovations, Hopkins revived a meter named "Sprung Rhythm" which he first experimented with in his poem 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' written in 1875. It appropriated the rhythm of prose and is very much akin to the natural speech in contrast to traditional prosody. It does not consist of a fixed number of syllables. He maintained flexibility in meter and insisted on the rhythmical pattern of poetry. It consists of strong stressed syllables followed by an irregular number of unstressed syllables. The stressed syllables contain strong thoughts and emotions.

In 1879, Hopkins wrote to Robert Bridges that the poetical language of an age should be the current language heightened to any degree.

Walter J. Ong, the critic of oral traditions, rightly says that Hopkins succeeded in reaching to the very 'inscape' of his medium of verse. In his analysis, Hopkins was a true successor of Spenser, Donne and Shakespeare that further influenced modern poets like Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas.

Inscap and Instress

The term 'inscape' is coined by Hopkins to designate the principle of beauty in things. He applied the term to refer to the distinctiveness in a natural thing. It is originally a Scotist concept of Haecceitas or 'this-ness' that asserts its uniqueness. In one of his letters to Robert Bridges, he referred to inscape as the very soul of Art. He wrote to Bridges,

"No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness... But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what above all I aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design or pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice cannot have escaped."

Instress is the very force of perceiving inscape that is attached to the intensity of feelings. It is the very unifying force (visionary) that involves a network of associations. It is the very essence of artistic creations.

SAQ:

The words, “sacramental”, “analogical” and “mirror mechanism” all show one aspect of Hopkins’ religious faith which is to be found in his poetry. Would it be correct to say that this means that his use of images aims to show the symbols of God’s presence? Give textual extracts. (50 + 50 words)

.....
.....

2.3 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Hopkins has become a test case for modern poetry. Hopkins’ poems were first published in 1918 and it is probably inevitable that the modern poets should have considered him as one of their contemporaries. John Wain even makes an important observation that Hopkins’ poetry satisfies the two chief modern poetic principles – irreducibility and simultaneity. Discussing Hopkins’ poetry Herbert McLuhan observes that Hopkins is neither a nature mystic, nor a religious mystic, but an analogist whose poetic faith allows him to analyze through meditation.

Hopkins’ experimental vocabulary, language and rhythm have drawn the attention of modern critics like I. A Richards, William Empson, F. R Leavis and J. Hillis Miller. They regard Hopkins as a classic example of modern poets. On the other hand, critics like William Butler Yeats is of the opinion that Hopkins had been a decadent poet whose style heralded a transition in nineteenth century poetry. F. O. Matthiessen terms Hopkins’ experimental language as a Romantic revolt against ‘poetic diction’. Readers often seem to encounter difficulties while going through Hopkins’ poetry which is largely due to its complex diction and vocabulary. Hence his poems tend to be obscure. However, critics like F. R. Leavis identify a positive use for this ambiguity and consider that the sense of difficulty, tension, resistance is an essential part of the poetic effect. Hopkins’ strength mainly lies in the fact that he brought poetic language closer to living speech. F. R Leavis pointed to the contemporary significance of Hopkins’ poetry saying that “a technique so much concerned with inner division, friction and psychological complexities in general has a special bearing on the problems of contemporary poetry.”

2.4 Context of the poems

The ‘terrible sonnets’ of Gerard Manley Hopkins are a group of poems written in the year 1885. “Carrion Comfort” is one of the ‘Terrible Sonnets’ which expresses Hopkins’ grief and sense of isolation. The swift changes in the pace of life brought about by the modern forces had a deep impact on the Jesuit priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Furthermore, being an Englishman who had removed himself from the protestant faith and dedicated his life to one of the most influential Catholic sects, Hopkins, couldn’t afford himself a pleasant welcome in Dublin. In the very first place, Hopkins was alienated from his family due to his conversion to Catholicism. His move to Ireland in 1884 only added to his sense of estrangement. The uncongenial atmosphere of Ireland eventually deteriorated his health, and this aspect finds expression in his letters to his closest friend Robert Bridges. Joseph Feeney speculates from Hopkins’ letters and journals how his life in Ireland was accompanied by tiredness, lack of energy, and inability to complete his daily tasks.

STOP TO CONSIDER:

Amrinta Wallace

“Hopkins was so vulnerable when he was in Dublin – so lonely, so isolated – that for some reason we kept coming back to this image of a child trapped in an adult’s body in this very large house.”...

“We found one of his letters from this time, to his friend Bridges in England,” says MacMahon. “He’s just writing a letter, and in the middle of it he goes – in capital letters – AND WHAT DOES ANYTHING AT ALL MATTER. That really stuck in my head, that line. There was a constant battle between his role as a priest and his role as a poet. He talks about some of the poems being “forced” upon him; at times, you feel he almost wishes that he wasn’t writing anything.”

--- The Irish

Times. <https://www.irishtimes.com/profile/arminta-wallace-7.1593800>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/profile/arminta-wallace-7.1593800>

Hopkins uses the sonnet form as a framework to reflect on despair and ‘tortured expression’ of faith and doubt. “Carrion Comfort” is possibly the most widely recognized Terrible Sonnets which evokes

his sense of alienation. Hopkins expresses his acute sense of misery in one of his letters to Bridges, "my fits of sadness, though they do not affect my judgment, resemble madness" (17 May 1885; Letters, p.216). He further states, "The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant, and crippling" (Further Letters, p, 256. "Carrion Comfort" is one such 'therapeutic' means to express his struggle with depression. Hopkins vents out his emotions through the poem to know the reason behind his sufferings. By questioning God, Hopkins addresses his inner conflicts; yet paradoxically his faith in God makes him stronger and triumphant enough to overcome any sense of despair.

Being a Jesuit Priest himself, Hopkins' poetry is undoubtedly marked by an intense sense of religiosity. Critics argue that he becomes the great meeting point of humanity with God. In "God's Grandeur", Hopkins dwells on the paradox of God's persistent concern for humanity, despite humanity's obliviousness to spiritual values. The poem is considered to have been written against the backdrop of the second Industrial Revolution in 1877 when humanity seemed to have lost sight of the close connections between God and nature. The poem is an attempt on Hopkins' part to retrieve the lost connection between humanity and God by emphasizing the 'grandeur' of God's creation. The massive changes swept in during the second Industrial Revolution with the advancement of technology had a deep impact on the natural world created by God. The destruction of the natural landscape, mining processes, pollutions generated by the changing waves of modernity is being lamented by Hopkins in the poem. The poem exposes Victorian society's disruption of the natural world through anthropogenic activities. In this regard, Hopkins connects the loss of 'nature' to the loss of spirituality, thereby calling attention to a narrative of renewal of both the natural world as well as the spiritual crisis.

STOP TO CONSIDER:

Hopkins was deeply pained by the mutual impoverishment of man and nature. His consciousness for nature aligns him with the sentiments of his predecessors such as Wordsworth whose "The world is too much with us" echoes similar concern as Hopkins' opening move "The world is charged, as grandeur flows from God". At a time when Hopkins wrote this poem, "farmland and meadow are disappearing under encroaching slag heaps and the blighting smudge of foundry smoke" (*A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* 65)

Outside the beauty of the valley in which the poem was written, "Wales itself had numerous areas blighted by mines and smelters" (65).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

1. Hopkins' poetry is often characterized by a sense of personal grief and melancholy. Do you agree? Elucidate your answer with examples from the prescribed poems.
2. Explore the theme of 'nature' in Hopkins' poetry with special reference to the poems prescribed.

2.5

2.5.1 Reading the poem "Carrion Comfort"

The context of the poem "Carrion Comfort" explains how the personal grief and spiritual anguish of the poet form an integral part of this sonnet. A detailed study of the sonnet "Carrion Comfort" further highlights show the poet's struggle with depression and his dwindling faith in God is accentuated with the deployment of stylistic devices, particular to Hopkins. As in most of his 'Terrible Sonnets', the key element of Hopkins's "Carrion Comfort" is one of struggle: the struggle between 'despair' and 'faith' on the grace of God. Following the typical Petrarchan sonnet format "Carrion Comfort" begins with an eight-line stanza- octave, followed by the six-line sestet, with the rhyming scheme abbaabbacdcdd. The Petrarchan sonnet structure is employed by Hopkins to set the dialogic framework in the poem, wherein the poetic persona poses the question on 'despair' in the octave which is subsequently answered in the sestet. The poem begins with the poetic person's denial to feast on despair which is beautifully evoked through the statement 'not feast on thee'. The internal rhyme used in each line increases the cumulative phonetic effect of the poem. The speaker's intent to resist any sense of despair is voiced through a host of repetitive statements:

Not, I'll carrion comfort, despair,

not feast on thee;

not untwist- slack they may be- these

last strands of man

In me or, most weary, cry I can no

More. I can;

can something, hope, wish day come,
not choose not to be. (Hopkins)

A closer examination of the sonnet reveals that the Octave presents 'a self' who not only refuses to give hope up but also asserts an act of 'will' as evident through the repeated use of the word 'I can'. Paradoxically, the series of negatives presented in the poem such as 'not' 'not feast' 'no more' suggests that the mood is not conducive enough for the 'will' to function. Here, it can be seen how Hopkins brilliantly blends diction with the thematic aspect to add overall effect to his poem.

The poetic persona's inability to operate his 'will' eventually leads to the speaker's series of questions as to why he has been consigned a life of sorrow:

But ah, but O thou terrible, why
wouldst thou rude on me?
Thy wring-world right foot rock?
lay a lion limb against me? Scan
with darksome devouring eyes
my bruised bones? And fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped

There; me frantic to avoid thee and flee? (Hopkins, line 5 -8).

The alliterations used in phrases such as 'wring-world right-foot rock', 'lay a lion limb', 'darksome devouring' and 'bruised bones' highlight the harshness of Hopkins's solitary test of faith. The predatory images of 'lion' 'devouring' showcase the intensity of undercurrent on the poet's life. The aforementioned passage is also rife with Christian Imagery. The image of the 'rock' has been interpreted as the stone that gave forth water for Moses in Wilderness, or it might also refer to St. Peter, the 'rock' upon which the church was built.

SAQ:

In "Carrion Comfort" Hopkins begins with a sense of denial of a self.

Comment on this aspect of the poem. (80 words).

STOP TO CONSIDER

The compound words used by Hopkins such as 'wring world', 'lionlimb', 'darksome devouring' are a reflection of the binary epithet commonly used in ancient Greek poetry, which Hopkins taught at the university college at Dublin.

In his article "The Culture of the Ancient Epithet: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Translation of Imagination" Jack Mitchell states, "Hopkins' epithets are comparable to Timotheus' for their innovativeness; unlike Timotheus, however, Hopkins was innovating in a tradition of atraditionality, in which vividness and specificity are meant to provoke reactions on the part of the reader" (150, Mitchell).

The 'motif of turning' starts at the beginning of line 1 in the sestet; "Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear (Hopkins 1554). The assonance of the 'I' sound which repeats six times in this first line is resonant of Hopkins' reaffirmation of then dwindling faith (as seen in the Octave) and defiance of his inner weakness. The 'chaff' here may refer to the speaker's disturbing thoughts, which when blown away will leave him 'sheer and clear'. The use of 'toil' and 'coil' in the lines, "Nay in all that toil, that coil/ since (seems) I kissed the rod" gives the impression of unproductive labor. Yet, Hopkins suddenly realizes his acclamation into the presence and grace of God and anticipates that all his sufferings would end with the spiritual grace of God, and his 'heart lo!' will directly and joyfully experience the 'cheer' around him despite the isolation embedded in his 'self'. The poem, thus, ends with the central affirmation that at least one of the numerous selves of the poet did receive God's grace, and the over-powering 'heaven-handling' has 'flung' and 'foot-trod' Hopkins' spirit.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

- What are the poetic devices used by Hopkins in the poem?
- Comment on the religious allusions deployed in the poem.
- Why do you think "Carrion Comfort" is a 'terrible' sonnet or a sonnet of 'desolation'?

2.5.2 Reading the poem “God’s Grandeur”

Hopkins’ “God’s Grandeur” is also written in the Petrarchan sonnet format with a conventional abba abbacdedcd rhyme scheme. The sonnet essentially consists of iambic pentameter, except for the third line where Hopkins slightly diverts from the traditional Petrarchan sonnet sequence by adding an extra foot. The unusual and elated diction of Hopkins’ poetry ostensibly marks its difference from the poetics of other nineteenth-century writers. The specificity of Hopkins’ poetry lies in his powerful execution of metaphors, and this is beautifully deployed in “God’s Grandeur”. For instance, the initial metaphor used in the sonnet is surprisingly, that of God’s Grandeur as an electric force. Hopkins is a master of the juxtaposition of form and content to create effective meanings, and his unique syntactical structure makes his poetry all the more appealing. This distinctive feature of his poetry is evident in “God’s Grandeur”, “Generations have trod, and trod,”. This first line of the second quatrain of the Octave shows how Hopkins uses the syntactical technique of repetition to emphasize how men are continuously involved in activities that eventually distance them from the grace and grandeur of nature. According to Paul Mariani, the very first line of the poem, “the world is charged with the/grandeur of God” sets the moral imperative of the poem. This ‘single unified declarative statement’ expresses the main theme of the poem. By drawing a comparison between ‘the grandeur of God’ to an electric force that ‘charges’ the world, Hopkins presents the idea of God as an essence in nature who has regenerative powers.

STOP TO CONSIDER

The Sonnet "God's Grandeur" can also be seen as a narrative of the evils of modern life within the Biblical context of the Fall 12, set forth by the 'Profession of Faith' in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, where, in the octave, following his fall, man is shown as 'radically and irrevocably (rejecting) God and his reign, whilst in the sestet, Man was shown not to be abandoned by God, but, on the contrary, "God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Profession of Faith*, chapter 1 para 392).

The powerful words 'charged' and 'flame out' in the beginning lines point to the energy which draws an essential connection between God in Nature and the industrial world of the nineteenth century. Hopkins'

unique mastery in poetic diction demands extra attention from the readers to comprehend his levels of interpretations. For instance, in the second line, "It will flame out, like shining from shook foil", the phrase 'a piece of foil' is not easily intelligible. But as evident from Hopkins' letter to Robert Bridges, the 'foil' refers to gold foil, and the simile 'like shook foil' is suggestive of God's grandeur with a lightning-like quality. The following lines, "it gathers to a grandeur, like the ooze of oil,/ crushed..." refers to grandeur as surging in power and gathering momentum. The richness and energy of this power are expressed through the simile "like the ooze of oil". Thus, if a drop of oil is 'crushed' (Hopkins is referring to the gathering of oil from the crushing of olives as indicated from his *Letters*) the force is transmitted to its entire surface. Likewise, God's diffusive power is also manifested in nature and the entire world.

SAQ:

Elaborate on the poetic strategies used by Hopkins in the sonnet.

Now, the question which troubles the speaker is the fact that if God's presence is manifested in the world of Nature, why do men fail to pay attention ('reck') to his authority?

Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

The immediate answer is given by the speaker in the next couple of lines, where he considers the repetitive activities of men, his preoccupation with industry and commerce as the reasons behind the emerging gulf between humanity and God/Nature. The conscious use of words such as 'reckless' and 'mind-less' showcase humanity's inability to recognize the presence of God. Furthermore, the word 'care-less' indicates the uncaring aspect of human beings towards God and Nature as evident through the persistent anthropogenic activities of the Victorian world. Such destructive attitude of Man often resulting from commercial greediness further expands the physical proximity between Nature/God and man.

... nor can foot feel,

being shod”

The Sestet begins with a shift in its tone, “And for all this, nature is never spent”. Here, the phrase, 'and for all' gives the sense of 'despite' wherein Hopkins states that despite all the sufferings at the hand of humanity, Nature can never be 'exhausted', and it still invigorates 'freshness'. In the concluding part of the Sonnet, Hopkins, by juxtaposing the images of 'night' and 'day' shows how there is still a possibility for a renewed hope in a seemingly lifeless world.

And after the last lights off the black West sky has gone

springs the morning. ...

The poem thus ends with a note of optimism where 'hope' still pervades if one recognizes the grandeur of God in the things around him. The religious allusions indicating the 'rebirth' of Christ, essentially posits a world where the 'sins' of the industrial world would be washed away for a new 'rising'.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

- Read the poem against the backdrop of nineteenth-century Industrial world.
- Examine the influence of Hopkins' Jesuit ecclesiastical life in the prescribed Sonnet.

2.6 SUMMING UP

You would have seen from the discussion above that Hopkins' poetry is a reaction to the spiritual crisis and unrest of his time. He regrets human failure to establish faith in self and knowledge. The self in Hopkins is constantly struggling with resistance and power. The internal conflict is mirrored through the miniature of a landscape. Through poetic endeavour he is restoring faith in the new order. The awareness of the holy pattern (the one Spirit that governs the world) consoles his frustrated heart and allows him to gratify the Creator and His creation. His poetry is not only significant for its technical experiments, but also for the philosophical conflict that they represent. His faith in creative power and its 'dappled' manifestations is a necessary reaction to his

crisis ridden period. Nature and the landscape appear to him a vast scripture and within it he mirrors the physical, moral and the divine. Sparing little room for traditional language and prosody Hopkins makes use of alliteration, assonance, internal rhymes, and repetitions in a flexible way to give language its distinctive touch. It is natural that Hopkins must be charged for his ambiguous and obscure use of language. F. R. Leavis discusses that Hopkins makes positive uses of ambiguity and expects from the reader repeated intellectual effort. Leavis is of the opinion that Hopkins is the only influential poet of the Victorian age. A. S. Collins writes that Hopkins' poetry (through a combination of powerful intellect and sensuousness) made special appeal to the post-World War I world. Hopkins' poetry is a plea against the changing pattern of an industrialised world and the crisis of Christian faith. As J. Hillis Miller writes, Hopkins treats poetry as the exploration and exploitation of the possibilities of sound-patterns. Within a democratic set up Hopkins perceives the world in its totality and like a craftsman he interweaves the internal with the external. His original handling of language and the compressed imagery makes the verse original and complex.

2.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Alan M, Rose. "Hopkins' 'Carrion Comfort': The Artful Disorder of Prayer". *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 15, No 3, 1997 (Autumn). Pp. 207-217. www.jstor.org/stable/40002114

Mackenzie, Norman H. *A Readers Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins*, St Joseph's University Press, 2008.

Mariani, Paul. "God's Grandeur: A Close Reading" <https://scholar.google.com>, http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/lectures_2016/gods_grandeur.html

Mitchell, Jack. "The Culture of the Ancient Epithet: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Translation of Imagination". *Translation and Literature*, Volume 22 Issue 2, pp 149-166.

Pearson, Hilary E. "The Terrible Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spirituality of Depression". Way-London- Society of Jesus Publications, 46. 1, 2007. www.theway.org.uk

Roger, L. Slakey. "The Grandeur in Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur'". *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 7, No 2, 1969 (Summer). pp 159-163. www.jstor.org/stable/4000496

Sheldon-Dean, Hannah. "God's Grandeur". Lit Charts. Lit Charts LLC, 19 Dec 2018. Web. 8 August 2021.

Tomlinson, Terri Elise. "Diatribes with Despair: Gerard Manley Hopkins' Proto-Modernist Conflict with God Expressed Through His Mastery of Language". <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/998/2018/03/Terri-Tomlinson-Diatribes-With-Despair.pdf>. Web. 6 August 2021.

Unit 3

G.M. Hopkins

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Understanding Hopkins as a ‘remarkable innovator’.
- 3.3 Religious Influence in Hopkins’ Poetry.
- 3.4 Hopkins’ other poems related to “Carrion Comfort” and “God’s Grandeur”
- 3.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers.
- 3.6 Important works on Hopkins.
- 3.7 References and Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Appreciate G.M. Hopkins’s contribution to modern poetry
- Learn about some of the poems by Hopkins
- Explore various dimensions of Hopkins’s poetry
- Answer important questions relating to his poems

3.2 Understanding Hopkins as a ‘remarkable innovator’.

One of the commonest approaches to studying poetry is elucidating the physical and/or technical aspects of a poem in an objective way. In other words, the central question which occurs while examining any poetry is: how is the ‘meaning’ of a poem conveyed to the readers? ‘Meaning’ in a ‘modern’ sense, however, does not essentially confine to the thematic essence of a poem, but it also contains the various technical devices such as imageries, symbolism, and other syntactical structures

employed by a poet to communicate with his/her readers. So far as G. M Hopkins is concerned, his innovative experiment in poetic technique accords him a place among modern poets. F. R Leavis considers Hopkins as 'one of the most remarkable technical inventors who, ever wrote' poetry. At times he is accused of obscurity but he is a remarkable innovator and his experiments with language won him the sobriquet of being modern. To understand Hopkins's poetry, therefore, readers have to familiarize themselves with the technical nuances of his poetry. Hopkins' poetry needs to be approached with regard to his use of language, symbols and imageries, complexities of structures, and his marked differentiation from other poets of his era.

One of the innovations of Hopkins lies in his attempt to recreate literary ways of expression through the deployment of what he terms as 'Inscape', 'Instress' 'Sprung Rhythm' and his use of remarkable stylistic devices. Inscape refers to the unique design or pattern of every individual thing in the world. "All the world is full of inscape," wrote G M Hopkins in his journal. The theological belief behind this was that God never repeats himself. Hopkins tries to perceive the unique patterns, order of things in the world of nature and to express the experience through his language. The intricate relationship between human experience and human language is key to understanding Hopkins' poetry. The Ascetic years of Jesuit training in Hopkins' life allowed him to enjoy rural peace which sharpened his senses to acquire or revealing the world in terms of its minute detailing like colour, shape, design, odour, and energy. He wrote to Dixon, "unless you refresh the mind from time to time, you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape of a thing is". Hopkins used to experience and observe nature very closely with a child's eye. It is, therefore, very interesting to notice how Hopkins perceives the minute details and the uniqueness of patterns in nature and expresses them with a feeling of novelty. Hopkins is interested in, to put in the words of W. A M Peters 'the relation between the parts of the thing to each other, and again of the parts to the whole. As he writes in one of his Journals "I thought how sadly the beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if only they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again" (quoted in Gardener 12). 'There lives the dearest freshness deep down things', Hopkins writes in "God's Grandeur". The 'freshness' is the distinctiveness of things (inscape) which is often invisible to the common eye. The inscape of beauty finds true reflection in Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" where every object found in nature from the 'brinded-cow' to 'spotted landscape' is rendered a particular, unique and distinct quality. The force which determines an inscape or rather holds it, is termed as 'Instress' by Hopkins. It is the unifying force in the object

which actualizes the inscape in the mind of the perceiver. According to Gardener, “Instress is the sensation of inscape - a quasi-mystical illumination, a sudden perception of that deeper pattern, order, and unity which gives meaning to external forms”(12). Hopkins equates the ‘Instress’ with God’s sustaining love and power which holds the individuality (inscape) of every object of nature. Hopkins' aim of poetry is, however, not only to produce 'physical inscapes in external nature but also to produce inscape of speech-sound. Poetry for Hopkins lies between prose and music; prose says things by making logical statements, whereas, music says things by making pure patter of sound. It is this musical end which Hopkins aspires constantly, “speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over, and above, the interest of music” .

STOP TO CONSIDER:

Hopkins' concepts of 'Inscape', 'Instress', 'selving' are uniquely applicable to impart a completely distinctive moment in time via poetry. Everything in the universe was characterized by what he called 'Inscape': the distinctive design that constitutes individual identity. This identity is not static but dynamic. Each being in the universe 'selves, that is, enacts its identity... the human being... recognizes the inscape of other beings in an act that Hopkins calls 'Instress'.

Logical verbal meaning for Hopkins is secondary to the 'shape' The 'shape' in a poem is the total sound pattern imposed onto it by the poet which is being received by the listener's ear and perceived by their mind. However, Hopkins did not exclude logical verbal meaning entirely. He said, "some matter or meaning is essential to it, but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape, which is contemplated for its own sake" (quoted in Wimsatt). This remark by Hopkins can be taken as the key to understanding his poetry. To attain this 'Inscape' of language in 'shapes' he uses devices of rhythm and sound and alludes to Old English alliterative verse, Norse and Icelandic poetry, and classical meters of Pindar's odes and the chorus rhythm. Hopkins’ sonnet “God’s Grandeur” is a production of the time when Hopkins was mastering this Welsh technique.

SAQ:

Hopkins’ Poetry needs to be approached with regard to his stylistic variations. Do you agree? Explain with examples. (100 words)

Hopkins is also praised by modern critics for his onomatopoeic skills. His use of vowels for the onomatopoeic effect finds beautiful expression in “God’s Grandeur”:

“Seared with trade;
bleared smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and
Shares man’s smell”... (“God’s Grandeur”).

Hopkins' use of alliterative patterns comes from Old English verse possessing three alliterations per line. Sprung Rhythm is another innovation in meter by Hopkins which allows him freedom from the normally fixed quantity of syllables. In Sprung rhythm, the poet has no limit on the total number of syllables; giving flexibility to speech. The idea of sprung rhythm was already visible in the nursery rhymes and lullabies for children but it was Hopkins' poetry where this form was heightened from its 'natural cadence'. When it comes to Hopkins' use of syntax; it is also unique, not usually accepted and understood by grammarians. His organization of words to create the meaningful structure of language is a distinctive quality of his works. It is very important to analyze his structures and patterns to understand his poetry properly. He uses poetry as a medium to express what he senses or feels. A reader needs to delve deep beyond the surface level to decipher Hopkins' poetry.

3.3 Religious Influence in Hopkins’ Poetry

Born to devout Anglican parents, Hopkins was committed to religion quite from an early age. Pertaining to the major religious controversies fermenting within the Anglican Church during the Victorian era, Hopkins deserted his ancestral religion and converted to Catholicism. Naturally, the subject matter of most of Hopkins’ poetry is religious. The power of God's creation becomes the central crux of his poems. In "God's Grandeur", the landscape in its natural state itself, reflects the all-pervading grace of God. The use of Biblical allusions in “Carrion Comfort” showcases how Hopkins wins ‘hope’ against ‘despair’ and seeks comfort in the almighty by leaving his rotten (carrion) despair behind:

...Thy wing-world right
foot rock? lay a
lion limb against me? Scan
with darksome devouring
eyes my bruised bones?

Critics opine that there are many strains of Hopkins' religious poetry. As Joseph J Feenay argues, "Hopkins is a religious poet of great religious variety: of piety, sin, and guilt, of escape from and love of the world, of Christ and the Trinity, of the Eucharist, scripture, and the sacraments, of morality and the spiritual life" ("Hopkins: A Religious and a Secular Poet" 4). While poems such as "Carrion Comfort", "Thou art Indeed Lord", and "I wake and feel" attempt to provide solace to God-seeking Hopkins, other poems such as "God's Grandeur", "Pied Beauty", "The Windhover" expresses religious piety and glory of the Lord.

Typically described as a religious poet Hopkins' works give off "a white heat of spirituality" and his "sensuous appreciation of the outer life" mingles with "a vein of ethical and divine interpretation" (Feenay 4). Hopkins' poetry, therefore, can be addressed by considering his 'Christian', 'Anglican', 'evangelical', 'Jesuit', 'Catholic', or 'sacramental' stance in view. Such a nuanced understanding would help in deciphering the various Biblical allusions employed by Hopkins in his poetry. Having said that, it has to be mentioned that, despite being a religious poet Hopkins is, and should be read, enjoyed, and studied in countless ways. As discussed earlier, Hopkins' innovation in rhythms, sounds, and forms earned him the status of a 'secular' modern poet. His poetry also to put in the words of Feenay, "deserves a suspension of 'belief' and prejudice to be read with sympathy and understanding. Hopkins' works also, therefore, need to be assessed through diverse approaches be it biographical, linguistic, and/or 'modern'. A balanced approach to his works would undoubtedly render a fruitful reading.

STOP TO CONSIDER

"Hopkins's poetry has always been recognized as unorthodox to some degree. All readers, from the first to the latest, whether they have responded positively to the poems or negatively, have recognized that they are unusual....

The English Jesuit journal *The Month* had been prepared to accept the 'Deutschland' provided that 'it rhymed and scanned and construed and did not make nonsense or bad morality, and their eventual refusal to publish it can be taken as acknowledgment of its unorthodoxy...

Robert Bridges's Preface to the 1918 edition of the Poems described Oddity and Obscurity as detriments, while the eminent critic I.A. Richards in the late 1920s called the same oddities deliberate virtues” (White 140).

3.4 Hopkins’ other poems related to “Carrion Comfort” and “God’s Grandeur”

Hopkins’ “Spring”, “In the valley of Elwy”, “The Sea and the Skylark” and “The Windhover” is written around the same time he wrote “God's Grandeur” in 1877. The aforementioned poems share similar traits with “God's Grandeur” with regard to both theme and style. Through these Sonnets, Hopkins valorizes Nature as a manifestation of God and shows his concern for the gradual destruction of Nature by Man. Written in the Petrarchan Sonnet sequence as “God's Grandeur”, Hopkins in his “Spring” gives a joyful description of the spring season by drawing on various images from the natural world in the octave. In the sestet, Hopkins puts forward his questions to Christ and asks him to save the children from the sin of the world. Much like “God’s Grandeur” the “Spring” is also set against Hopkins’ religious backdrop wherein he uses Biblical allusions to address his queries to God. The use of phrases like ‘little hands’ and ‘thrust eggs’ clearly alludes to Christ.

Hopkins’ unique style and thematic concerns of “God’s Grandeur” are also evident in “The Windhover”. Considered as one of the best poems of Hopkins, “The Windhover” also addresses Christ as suggested by the sub-title ‘To Christ our Lord’. This Sonnet follows the same pattern of thought as “God's Grandeur” and “Spring” where the speaker describes the flawless creation of God in the octave and draws on spiritual equivalents in the Sestet to illuminate the existence of God. While employing the poetic technique of ‘Inscape’ to express the distinctiveness of each object of Nature, Hopkins considers God as the unifying force who holds such an ‘inscape’; a world charged with God's grandeur in “God's Grandeur” and the ‘billion times told lovelier God in “The Windhover”. Similarly, in “The Sea and the Skylark” Hopkins gives a vivid description of joyful singing of the Skylark in Nature in the octave followed by a grim picture of the destruction of Nature by human beings in the sestet.

It has already been stated how Hopkins experienced alienation and depression during his Dublin years. Many critics consider his vocation as Jesuit Priest as the sole reason for his estrangement. The poems he wrote after his conversion to Catholicism differ considerably from his earlier creations. His ‘sufferings’ were reflected in the “Terrible Sonnets” which comprised seven sonnets. The group of Sonnet includes

"To Seem the Stranger", "I Wake and Feel", "No Worst", "Carrion Comfort", "Patience", "Hard Thing", and "My Own Heart". The sense of alienation that forms the crux of "Carrion Comfort" also finds reflection in "To Seem the Stranger":

"To Seem the stranger lies my lot, my life
Among strangers".

Similarly, in "No Worst" Hopkins uses striking Image to convey the terror of the depressive self, falling over the edge into insanity:

"O the mind, mind has mountains;
Cliffs of fall"
Frightful, sheer, no man-fathomed.
Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there..."

Hopkins' dark mood is reflected in his use of phrases like 'what word/wisest my heart breeds' and 'dark heavens baffling ban' in the Sonnet "To Seem a Stranger" much like "Carrion Comfort".

STOP TO CONSIDER

"On December 8, 1875, Hopkins read the newspaper's account of a shipwreck off the coast of Kent. The Deutschland, a steamer carrying emigrants from Bremen to New York, had run aground in a storm, and more than fifty of its passengers and crew were drowned. Hopkins, who was in Wales studying theology as part of his nine-year training to become a Jesuit priest, was especially struck by the detail that five of the dead were Franciscan nuns—exiles from imperial Germany, where Bismarck was prosecuting his Kulturkampf against the Catholic Church."

"The shrieks and sobbing of women and children are described by the survivors as agonizing." Hopkins "was affected by the account," he told a friend years later, "and happening to say so to my rector he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint, I set to work and, though my hand was out at first, produced one."

Source: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/11/back-to-basics-2>

3.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

Q1: Reflect on Hopkins' attitude towards the scientific and technological advancements of the Victorian era as represented in the poem "God's Grandeur".

Ans: Victorian era is significantly marked by the Industrial Revolution, which brought about a great change in the lifestyles, thought processes, and morality of the people. The rapid advancement in scientific, technological, and medical fields undoubtedly brought about changes and improvements in economy, trade, and communications all over England, often blurring the lines of class divisions and resulting in social mobility. But Hopkins was critical of the technological progressions in the society, as he was much concerned about the negative impacts of such advancements on the natural world and humanity. Hopkins' position as a Jesuit Priest made him consider the natural world as an integral part of God himself. Therefore, he was deeply pained to see the mutual impoverishment of 'man' and 'nature'. The 'reckless' destruction of Nature through anthropogenic activities shattered Hopkins, who possesses a keen eye and love for the world of nature. For Hopkins, God manifests himself through every creation of the living Nature.

Hopkins' "God's Grandeur" can be understood against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution and its sabotage of the Natural world.

"...Generations have trode,
have trode"

The first line of the second quatrain of the octave shows Hopkins' concern over Men's mindless activities. His repeated use of the word 'trode' highlights how such incessant activities by Man is eventually distancing them from the power and grandeur of God and Nature. In the pursuit of materialistic gain, Humanity is unmindful of their activities which is slowly deteriorating their relationship with God and the natural world.

"...the soil is bare now,
nor can feet feel, being shod"

The 'bare' soil in the above line indicates the intensity of destruction caused by human beings. The shoes of the humans (being shod) which are indicative of the Industrial world symbolically act as a barrier between humanity and the natural world. The 'foot' possesses the power to connect with the earth, but after being shod with materiality it has lost its sensitivity to stay connected to Nature and God.

However, towards the end of the poem, Hopkins affirms that the grandeur of Nature can never be exhausted, "...nature is never spent".

After the darkness of each night, a new day begins with freshness. Similarly, God acts as a rejuvenating force in Nature who holds the power to renew the world afresh.

Q2: Analyse “Carrion Comfort” as a representation of Hopkins’ inner conflict and personal anguish.

Ans: The discussion on Hopkins’ life and poetry makes it evident that his conversion to Catholicism impacted his life and creativity to a greater extent. Hopkins’ decision to become a Jesuit Priest entails a life of commanding asceticism. Consequently, his preoccupation with the extreme form of Catholicism separated him from his family and country and brought about a sense of dislocation to him. The years of Hopkins’ stay in Dublin are characterized by a sense of 'despair' and desolation as demonstrated through his various letters to his friends. In one of his letters to his friend Robert Bridges, Hopkins seems to be talking about his growing traits of depression, weakness, lack of energy to do anything. He wrote to Bridges, "I think my fits of sadness, although they do not affect my judgment; resemble madness". (*A Readers Guide*). Some critics commented on Hopkins' vocation as Jesuit Priest as the reason behind his mental problems. His sufferings and personal anguish find particular expression in his "Terrible Sonnets". "Carrion Comfort" is one such sonnet that presents his inner turmoil and his refusal to give up to 'despair':

“Not , I’ll not, carrion comfort,
Despair, not feast on thee”.

The above lines evoke Hopkins’ firm refusal to succumb to the darkness of depression. Hopkins’ desolate self was in much need of some consolation and validation from God. Involving himself in a series of questions, Hopkins asks God the reason behind God’s decision to bequeath a life of suffering to him. Although Hopkins doesn’t come to a resolution as to why or what God is doing to him, but he discovers his 'self' or one of his stronger 'selves' which can which could sustain any form of 'despair' by having strong faith in God. The sonnet, therefore, showcases Hopkins' dwindling state between 'despair' and 'faith' in God.

... “Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,

Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh,
cheer”.

Despite the ‘toil’ and ‘coil’ brought about by the tempests of his life, Hopkins, nevertheless, finds resurgence in God’s optimism and his ‘heart lo!’ directly and joyfully experiences the ‘cheer’ around him. The dwindling faith of Hopkins, then, recuperates towards the end of the sonnet, giving solace to his otherwise anguished mind.

Q3: Write a note on the use of Biblical allusions in the prescribed poems.

Ans:

Biblical allusion makes brief and direct references to Biblical events, characters, places within a literary work. Hopkins' poetry has abundant Biblical allusions owing to his religious background. His active involvement with Christianity paved the way for him to creatively employ such allusions in his works. The title of the Sonnet "God's Grandeur" itself is a reference to the magnificence of God (The Christ). Furthermore, the word 'charged' in the first line of the poem refers to the 'Creation story' where the world was created with a spark of life, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1.3). While the 'light' pervades the universe, the speaker is saddened by the deteriorating condition of the Industrialized world. However, despite the pervading darkness, Hopkins is hopeful of the arrival of Christ to redeem humanity from the 'black sky'.

“...And after the last lights off the black west sky has gone
springs the morning, at the brown brink eastward,”

The above lines figuratively refer to the arrival of Christ to the rescue of humanity and the renewal of the degenerative Victorian world. The advent of the Holy Ghost can be analyzed to the Biblical event of the Resurrection of Christ. "Carrion Comfort" is also representative of Hopkins' take on Christian religiosity. Hopkins always maintains his connection with Christ and it beautifully gets manifested in his writings. In the process of showing his discontent with life and his struggle with despair, Hopkins uses various Biblical allusions to vividly portray his inner anguish.

“...But ah, but O thou terrible,
Why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wing-world right foot rock?
lay a lion limb against me...”

The above lines give the idea of the speaker being threatened by a predatory animal- suggestively a lion. Also in the sestet, the poet 'twens' into an animal, 'lapping strength'. The 'lion' according to Biblical allusion, is often identified with Jesus; it is the lion who would purify- the apocalyptic as the lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5). The phrase 'O thou terrible' is then, a reference to Christ, who like the lion is majestic and all-powerful. Hopkins also suggests Biblical allusions in the sestet:

“Why? That my chaff might fly,

my grain lie, sheer and clear”

Here, the 'grain' symbolizes 'the bread of life in Christian doctrine. His disturbing thoughts are as momentary as the 'chaff' which would fly off, but his faith in God is resolute and firm as the 'grain' of Christ.

The Biblical allusions in Hopkins's poetry, therefore, not only uphold his beliefs and morals but also blends aesthetic intentions with deep symbolism.

Q4: Examine Hopkins as a modernist poet with reference to the prescribed poems.

Ans:

Hopkins with his unconventional, experimental, complex technical styles of writing, marks a transition in English poetic culture from 'Victorian' to 'Modern'. He lived in late Victorian times, but so far, his writings are concerned, Hopkins marks a clear departure from the typical Victorian style of 'sentimentality'. He was very much attracted by the Anglo-Saxon sentence structure, words, and metrical forms which he later on renovated and rediscovered in his poetic techniques. Hopkins' search for 'newer possibilities' in his poetry paved way for modern poetry. Most of the anthologies of Modern Poetry, therefore begin with Hopkins, although chronologically he doesn't fit in the modern context. What makes Hopkins essentially modern, is his novelty of style and techniques in poetry. Critics observe that the poetry of Hopkins is characterized by a sense of 'tension', and 'complexity'. F.R Leavis, a critic of the modern age finds contemporary relevance in Hopkin's poetry. To put in the words of Leavis, "a technique so much concerned with inner division, friction, and psychological complexities in general has a special bearing on the problems of contemporary poetry". Aligning with the characteristics of modern poetry, Hopkins' poetry also characterizes inner conflicts, anguish and addresses the complexities of human existence.

In the sonnet "God's Grandeur", Hopkins expresses his concern for the deteriorating relationship between humans and God; how human beings are drifting away from the divine power and flowing into the world of exploitation and destruction for materialistic gains. Such ethos runs parallel to the modern spiritual crisis of degenerative values, where the loss of connection between Humanity and God leads to chaos and anarchy. However, Hopkins ends his poetry with an optimistic note, for he finds hope in the existence of God despite the 'darkness' permeating the world.

The swift changes of life in the modern era 'cripple' the modern Man with a sense of isolation. Most of Modern poetry reflects this sense of

alienation and isolation. Hopkins' poetry is also marked by a sense of questioning the existence of 'being'. "Carrion Comfort" is one such poem in which Hopkins questions the purpose of his 'existence' amidst the sorrow pervading his life. The question of the 'self' which is central to modern Man, finds reflection in "Carrion Comfort" when he contemplates the reason behind his suffering. Is it God who is causing him trouble with the sorrows or is it his own 'self' who increases his suffering through his thought process? Such queries posit psychological complexities which have relevance to modern poetry. Through a series of dialogues, Hopkins asserts his sense of isolation which is again reflective of the modernist concept of the struggle for individual identity and purpose in life. Hopkins's religious undertones can undoubtedly be found in his poems owing to his Jesuit convictions. However, as seen from the above discussions on his innovations in poetic forms, Hopkins' poetry lines up with modern facets of poetry concerning both the technical and thematic aspects.

Q5: Write a note on Hopkins' Innovative poetic techniques of 'Inscape' and 'Instress'.

Ans:

The theological belief, 'God never repeats himself' denotes that every creation of this world, be it landscape, person, or any other natural element possesses its peculiar characteristics which enables them to differentiate from one another. In short, every creation has its individuality. This pattern and design of individual things are termed as 'Inscape' by Hopkins. 'Instress' is a related term to 'Inscape' which refers to the actual experiences a beholder has of 'Inscape': how is it received into the sight, memory, and imagination of the perceiver. In providing readers with 'Instress', the task of the poets is to find perfect images which will help in capturing the 'Inscape' of things for the readers and will give them the scope for getting along with the poet's point of view.

The 'Inscape' or uniqueness is understood or perceived by a person through his observation. This idea was already found in the writings of the medieval theologian, Duns Scotus, and in the poetry of the Romantic poets. However, Hopkins reworked the idea and later coined the terms 'Inscape' and 'Instress'. By acquainting oneself with such techniques a reader can understand Hopkins' nature of poetic creations based on his experiences. While Hopkins had not given any precise critical theory of 'Inscape' and 'Instress', the understanding of the term can be gathered from Hopkins' use of it in various Journals and Letters. As Graham Storey notes, "the word 'Inscape' is first used in the journal of Swiss trees, on a Continental walking -tour of July 1868; 'Instress' of the beauty of Giotto; inspired by a visit to the Natural Gallery shortly before". Hopkins felt it was the artists' job to perceive

and express the 'Inscapè' (the uniqueness) either in art or in words. Inscapè is a soul of art; to Hopkins, it doesn't simply consist in the surface-level observation or a visible scene. He believes that 'Inscapè' reveals their creator just as the inner 'self' of the bluebell manifests the divine. And 'Instress' for him is the energy that holds the 'inscapè' together. It refers to the impression of individual objects or men. Hopkins notes how the philosophy of Scotus influenced him to see the distinctiveness of things., "when I look in any 'Inscapè' of the sky or the sea I thought of Scotus". Hopkins' idea of 'Inscapè' and 'Instress' therefore harmonizes with Scotus' theory of 'Individuating Principal'. In the words of Alison G Sulloway, the commonality between Hopkins and Scotus is, "God created each living thing with its specific peculiarities that would never be recapitulated in another thing". In Hopkins' poetry, however, he not only produces 'Inscapè of things' but also consciously produces or creates 'Inscapè' of speech sounds. He defines poetry in his Journal as 'speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above the interest of meaning".

3.6 Important works on Hopkins

- ❖ *The Enclosure of an Open Mystery: Sacrament and Incarnation in the Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, David Jones and Less Murray by Stephen McInerney.
- ❖ *Selected Poetry* by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Oxford World's Classics.
- ❖ *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Survey and Commentary* by Elsie Elizabeth Phare.
- ❖ *The Contemplative Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, by Maria R Lichtmann.
- ❖ *A Readers Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* by Norman H Mackenzie.
- ❖ "Hopkin's God's Grandeur" by Todd K. Bender, *The Explicator*. Vol 21. No 7.
- ❖ "The Grandeur in Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur'" by Roger L Slakey, *Victorian Poetry*. Vol 7. No. 2.
- ❖ "Hopkins' 'Carrion Comfort': The Artful Disorder of Prayer" by Alan M. Rose. *Victorian Poetry*. Vol 15. No 3.
- ❖ "Gerard Manley Hopkins and the poetry of Inscapè" by W.H Gardner. *Theoria*. No 33.

3.7 References and Suggested Reading

- Alan M, Rose. "Hopkins' 'Carrion Comfort': The Artful Disorder of Prayer". *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 15, No 3, 1997 (Autumn). Pp. 207-217. www.jstor.org/stable/40002114
- Feeney, Joseph J. "Hopkins: A Religious and a Secular Poet". *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 84, No 334, 1995, pp 120-129. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30091991>
- Gardner, W.H. "Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Poetry of Inscap". *Theoria*. No 33. pp. 1-16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41801840>
- Mackenzie, Norman H. *A Readers Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins*, St Joseph's University Press, 2008.
- Mariani, Paul. "God's Grandeur: A Close Reading" <https://scholar.google.com>, http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/lectures_2016/gods_grandeur.html
- Mitchell, Jack. "The Culture of the Ancient Epithet: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Translation of Imagination". *Translation and Literature*, Volume 22 Issue 2, pp 149-166.
- Pearson, Hilary E. "The Terrible Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spirituality of Depression". Way-London- Society of Jesus Publications, 46. 1, 2007. www.theway.org.uk
- Roger, L. Slakey. "The Grandeur in Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur'". *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 7, No 2, 1969 (Summer). pp 159-163. www.jstor.org/stable/4000496
- Sheldon-Dean, Hannah. "God's Grandeur". Lit Charts. Lit Charts LLC, 19 Dec 2018. Web. 8 August 2021.
- Tomlinson, Terri Elise. "Diatribes with Despair: Gerard Manley Hopkins' Proto-Modernist Conflict with God Expressed Through His Mastery of Language". <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/998/2018/03/Terri-Tomlinson-Diatribes-With-Despair.pdf> . Web. 6 August 2021.
- Urban, David V. "Ignatian Inscap and Instress in Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Pied Beauty," "God's Grandeur," "The Starlight Night," and "The Windhover"". *Religions*, Vol. 9. No 49, 2018. pp. 2-13. doi:10.3390/rel9020049
- White, Norman. "Poet and Priest: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Myth, and Reality". *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 79. No 314, 1990, pp 40-49 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30091944>

Unit 4

T.S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*

Unit Structure :

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introducing the Poet
- 4.3 Works of the Poet
- 4.4 Critical Reception
- 4.5 Context of the Poem
- 4.6 Reading the Poem *The Waste Land*
 - 4.6.1 The title of the poem
 - 4.6.2 The epigraph
 - 4.6.3 The Burial of the Dead
 - 4.6.4 A Game of Chess
 - 4.6.5 The Fire Sermon
 - 4.6.6 Death by Water
 - 4.6.7 What the Thunder Said
- 3.7 Summing up
- 3.8 References & Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

We bring to you here the unit on *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot. You can see that it is massive! But that is necessary because we have to keep abreast of Eliot's famous, allusive style. To use the notes properly, you should do some further explorations of the texts that are alluded since we only bring the bare introductions to you here. However, by the end of the unit you should be able to—

- *write* about Eliot's style of poetry and poetic method

- *explain* the references in *The Waste Land*
- *elaborate* in detail the significance of the range of references in the poem
- *discuss* the meanings embedded in Eliot's poem

4.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

The name of T.S. Eliot is so thoroughly inscribed into the history of modern English poetry that you would probably not need an extensive introduction to him or his poetry.

He is considered to have exercised an influence on contemporary poets (including the younger generation) for about twenty-five years – something that had not happened to any writer before him for about a century. *The Waste Land* stood as a radical, brilliant example of Modernist poetry for about twenty years after it first came out. In the 1940s and 1950s his literary judgments carried profound weight. Poets who succeeded Eliot had to cope with his dominating presence in the struggle to establish their own identity.

Stephen Spender recalled that “Eliot was the poet of poets” to his generation. Archibald MacLeish remarked, in the mid -'twenties, that “after Eliot” nothing more could be written except “more Eliot”. William Carlos Williams thought that, following the publication of *The Waste Land*, “the bottom had dropped out of everything” that he had valued in poetry. These are just a few remarks that help you to an understanding of the extent of Eliot's literary standing. Poets writing in the twenties and the thirties had to perforce contend with the standards set by Eliot in the writing of verse.

Some critics in the 1950s and 1960s also held the opinion that Eliot's work came as a kind of disruption in the natural development of English and American poetry. In some senses Eliot helped to effect a transformation in literary taste. We have to agree with Charles Altieri's

remark that at one level Eliot was “the American poet who brought Anglo-American poetry into the modern age by forcing it to encounter urban life, by refusing sentimental idealizations in pursuit of the mind’s intricate evasions and slippages, and by intensely engaging the various modes of victimage fundamental to contemporary culture.” As Altieri understands, Eliot showed newer poets new techniques –“Eliot simply provided new ways of assuming voices, registering details, adapting speech rhythms and putting elements together within poems.”

Stop to Consider:

The Biographical Context

This is just a brief account of the biographical facts of Eliot’s life which should be filled up in detail with further reading. Born in America, on 26 September 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, Eliot had his childhood summers spent on the Northeast coast of the United States. He was educated in St. Louis, at Milton Academy, then at Harvard, one year in Paris with return to Harvard, then in Oxford on further study. He married Vivien Haigh-Wood in London; worked as a school-master, as Extension Lecturer, and then in Lloyd’s Bank, in its foreign department. Following the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* Eliot became the centre of London literary circles. The coming out of *The Waste Land* in 1922 was a sort of climax, as was the founding of *The Criterion*. He moved into publishing in 1925 in the house of Faber and Gwyer where he remained for the rest of his life and in due course becoming “the preeminent man of letters of his time”. He formally converted to Christianity and took up British citizenship in 1927. He delivered the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1932-33 and formally separated from his wife. *The Criterion* came to an end in 1939, and he gradually turned to drama thereon from poetry. Vivien Eliot died in 1947, while Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948. He remarried in 1957, Valerie Fletcher. Eliot died in 1965. As James Olney observes, “Throughout this public career of some fifty-five years there were frequent, regular publications; lectures and criticism, individual poems and collections, drama—the visible production of a professional man of letters. These biographical details are all there now, immensely fleshed out in the biographies by Peter Ackroyd and Lyndall Gordon, as a kind of given: they are public property, public knowledge.”

4.3 WORKS OF THE POET

To help us understand the impact that Eliot's poetry had on his contemporaries, Altieri suggests that "we must place ourselves within the world of late Victorian and Georgian poetry, as if for the first time confronting the opening of "Prufrock" : "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table; / Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, / The muttering retreats / Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels . . ." "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is the poem we often remember Eliot by because it has such a startlingly new pattern of imagery and emotional progression. It is the predominant lyric of the early volume of 1917, *Prufrock and Other Observations*. The same volume contained poems like "La Figlia Che Piange", "Portrait of a Lady", "Preludes", "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", and "Morning at the Window".

In 1920 the volume with other now-familiar poems like "Gerontion", "Sweeney Erect", "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", "Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service", "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar", "Whispers of Immortality", "The Hippopotamus", to name some, came out. The four parts of his *Four Quartets* actually came out singly prior to their being joined as a single, long poem: *Burnt Norton* in 1936 in the volume *Collected Poems 1909-1935*; *East Coker* in the *The New English Weekly* of 1940('Easter Number'); *The Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942) in *The New English Weekly* and then as separate poems in pamphlets. The encompassing title, *Four Quartets*, was given in 1943.

Eliot is also to be remembered for his work in the theatre—from *Sweeney Agonistes* (1926-27) to *The Elder Statesman* (1958). In a sense, Eliot's poetry shows the signs of drama in the making: "It might even be better to consider the printed verse as itself a series of gestures, speeches, quasi-theatrical occasions" (Robin Grove). Among his plays are *The Rock* 1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958).

Eliot, as some have pointed out, belonged to a line of poet-critics –John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, and Matthew Arnold. As a critic, Eliot wrote his essay, “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry” for the *Egoist* which brought it out in 1917, while “Tradition and the Individual Talent” was brought out in 1919. His first major volume of criticism came out as *The Sacred Wood* in 1920; the famous article on “Hamlet and His Problems” in the *Athenaeum* in 1919, and the essay “The Perfect Critic” in 1920 (as the opening essay of *The Sacred Wood*). The essay on “The Metaphysical Poets” first came out in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1921. In “Hamlet and His Problems”, Eliot introduces his famous idea of the “objective correlative” while ‘tradition’, which is so central to his critical program, came up in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. “Criterion” was also another concept crucial to Eliot’s ideas of art and it was in relation to this concept that Eliot helped to found the journal, *The Criterion*, in 1922. The aims of this journal are stated in “The Function of Criticism” printed in the October 1923 issue. This essay introduced a debate on the contesting claims of Classicism and Romanticism which was to continue over many years. Eliot gave many lectures in America after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, in 1933, published as *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*. Towards the later part of his career, Eliot subscribed increasingly to the idea that great literary art needed more than just a rich literary tradition, needed larger standards of judgment outside the strictly literary tradition.

Stop to Consider:

It is surely going to be useful for you to know from David Perkins, how Eliot’s significance can be estimated in the larger picture of modern English poetry. Perkins writes:

“We may ask, ...why it was Eliot, so much more than these other poets [Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens], who loomed in the path of his immediate successors. During the first period of Pound’s strong influence on modern poetry, roughly from 1912 to 1925, Pound and Eliot were a front, and Eliot’s impact was augmented by this alliance. Their critical statements spread the demand that poetry should “modernize” its style, and their own poetry exemplified what was

meant. Yeats, Hardy, and Frost did not seem comparably “modern” in the period when this adjective acquired a special cachet. Recognition of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams was delayed by Eliot’s ascendancy, and Pound’s influence waned after 1921, when Pound left London. Living in Paris and, after 1924, in Italy, Pound could no longer be a personal force. Meanwhile in London Eliot founded and edited *Criterion* magazine and became an editor at the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. Most younger poets in England and the United States were published by Eliot or hoped to be.”

You may gauge from the above commentary how ‘modernity’ in verse came to be defined and how the names of the poets came to be categorized on the basis of this kind of artistic demand. Eliot’s reputation was closely linked to that of Ezra Pound’s and the existence of the magazine, *Criterion*.

With reference to Eliot’s artistic dominance, Perkins reminds us that “With poets younger than Eliot it was at its height from 1922, when *The Waste Land* was published, into the 1930s.”

4.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

In 1919 we find the first mention of *The Waste Land* as a poem that Eliot had had in mind. But it was almost a decade in the making as Eliot wrote fragments that later went into making up the complete poem. Eliot seems to have worked consistently on the poem around 1921, under difficult personal circumstances, at first calling it, ‘He do the Police in different voices’. It finally came out in full form in the *Criterion* in October 1922, having been through the hands of Ezra Pound. The American edition came out in December 1922; in September 1923, the Woolfs brought it out under the imprint of the Hogarth Press. Regarding Eliot’s notes to the poem, Manju Jain tells us, “The published editions of the poem differed from the magazine versions by the addition of Eliot’s notes. Eliot had at first intended only to put down all the references for his quotations to avoid the charges of plagiarism which had been levelled at his earlier poems. But the poem was still not long enough for publication as a book, so he expanded the notes, to which he later mockingly referred as his ‘remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship’.

. . Pound’s editing streamlined the poem, and gave it greater unity and coherence. He cut away material that he thought extraneous, and located the underlying rhythm and music of the poem. Pound did not add anything to the poem. His main contribution, as Moody suggest, was to discriminate between what was veritable and genuine, and the false or factitious writing, and so to elicit what Eliot had actually achieved.”

If we choose to read the poem in autobiographical terms, we still come up with Eliot’s deep concern with the crises surrounding him. Jain informs us, that “Eliot was deeply affected by the political and economic crisis in Europe during and after the First World War. During the War, he wrote to his father (23 December 1917), ‘everyone’s individual lives are so swallowed up in the one great tragedy that one almost ceases to have personal experiences or emotions, and such as one has seem so unimportant . . . I have a lot of things to write about if the time ever comes when people will attend to them’ ”. Jain also remarks that “Recent criticism has emphasized the confessional, autobiographical aspects of *The Waste Land*. The poem’s critique of the contemporary post-War scene has been interpreted as a strategy Eliot used for presenting indirectly his spiritual autobiography in an age that was not conducive to the genre.” However, the personal autobiography cannot be set apart from how he felt profoundly disturbed by the larger circumstances of his time.

4.5 READING THE POEM

4.5.1 THE TITLE OF THE POEM

Eliot said in his notes that he took the idea from *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) by Jessie Weston. Together with *The Golden Bough* (1890) by Sir James Frazer, these two works of anthropology gave to Eliot the main ideas behind the poem. Frazer’s work was a study of myth and ritual in primitive society and exerted an enormous influence on Eliot’s generation, especially in literary circles. Without going into too much detail, we have to note Frazer’s findings that the myth of the dying and the resurrected god was important in primitive rituals of fertility. The god, who is central to this cult, is the god of the vegetative

world and his death and resurrection enacts the yearly cycle of seasons. Primitive religions saw life and fertility as being indivisible thus linking variations in the processes of growth and decay, as also in reproduction and degeneration, to the death, rebirth and marriage of the gods. By performing certain rites believed to hold magical powers, such societies hoped to help the god, who was the principle of life. These rituals were enactments of the death, or the burial, or the drowning, or the resurrection of the god.

Jessie Weston's study of the Grail legend in *From Ritual to Romance* contained her discussion of the striking resemblances between some features of the legend and the primitive cults of the dying and the resurrected god of the vegetative world. Weston observed that no Christian legend surrounding Joseph of Arimathea (a disciple of Christ) and the Grail existed. According to her, in some versions of the legend the ruler of the Waste Land also appeared as the Fisher King. As per Christian interpretations, the name of the Fisher King harked back to the fish symbol of early Christianity, as seen in such epithets as 'Fishers of Men' by which the Apostles were to be known. The fish, as Weston confirms, was an ancient symbol of 'Life' and thus the title of the Fisher has been associated with the deities who were connected with the generation and preservation of life. The Grail legend, seen against this background, appears to be a surviving version of the ancient rite that promised the secret of the physical and spiritual sources of life. Through various transformations, the god of the 'Life Principle' and the accompanying symbolism came to be taken over by the legend of the Christian faith.

Stop to Consider:

The Grail Legend

"The Grail was the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. According to the legend, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Christ, caught the blood from the wound made in Christ's side at the crucifixion in this cup and brought it to Glastonbury in the West of England. The scriptures, however, only mention that Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Christ, wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid it in a tomb hewn out of a rock. The Grail was subsequently lost, and the search for it became an archetypal symbol of the quest for spiritual truth, especially

in medieval romances about King Arthur and his knights. . . The search for the Grail is undertaken by a knight whose quest takes him to a land which has been laid waste. The ruler of the land suffers from impotency, either by illness or by maiming. His infirmity brings about a suspension of the reproductive processes of nature, and there is a prolonged drought. The knight meets with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious chapel – the Chapel Perilous – where he is expected to put certain questions about the Grail and another holy relic, the Lance which pierced Christ’s side. The effect of the hero’s questions is to restore the rivers to their channels – the ‘Freeing of the Waters’ – and render the land once more fertile. In some versions of the legend the king is also restored to health and vigour. Jessie Weston concludes that the task of the Grail hero in this respect is no mere literary invention, but a heritage from prehistoric times, going back to the Rig Veda.” (Manju Jain: *T.S. Eliot: Selected Poems and A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*)

There are other possible associations that link the title of the poem to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine where it is written: “I wandered, O my God, too much astray from Thee my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to myself a waste land.” There are also references in the Bible to images of the vineyard that will become a waste land through the wrath of God: “And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it” [Isaiah v, 6]. But as Manju Jain suggests, the title also resonates with ideas of the wasting of contemporary of Europe, or the waste regions of the human psyche and consciousness, the idea of sterility which is both physical and emotional, and even spiritual.

For Ezra Pound *il miglior fabbro* : Ezra Pound was one of the founding figures of the modernist movement, an American poet and critic. “*il miglior fabbro*” is taken from Dante’s *Purgatorio* (xxvi, 117) in the tribute to Arnaut Daniel, the twelfth-century Provençal poet. Eliot’s explanation for this phrase was that “I wished ...to honour the technical mastery and critical ability manifest in his own work, which had also done so much to turn *The Waste Land* from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem”.

4.5.2 THE EPIGRAPH

It is taken from a satire, the *Satyricon*, of the 1st century AD, written by the Roman writer Petronius. These words are spoken by Trimalchio who is drunkenly boasting. His words, as translated, are: “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.”

The Sibyls, in Greek mythology, were women with prophetic powers. The Sibyl who lived at Cumae (the ancient city close to Naples) was granted long life by the god, Apollo, as she had been granted the boon by him. While she had asked for as many years of life as the number of grains of sand that her hand held, she had not cared to ask for eternal youth. Through these words, Eliot is able to bring in the idea of death-in-life.

In the poem, the Sibyl evokes associations with both Tiresias and Madame Sosostris. While these figures all share the idea of prophecy and clairvoyance, you can see that they also carry ideas of aging and decline.

SAQ:

What kind of mythical associations does Eliot seek to bring to mind with the words, ‘the waste land’? (90 words)

.....
.....

4.5.3 THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

The title of this first section of the poem echoes the title of the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer – ‘The Order for the Burial of the Dead’ –in the Church of England.

“April is the cruellest month, breeding . . .

A little life with dried tubers.” We normally think of April, the month of the season of spring, as a time of joy and celebration after the harsh coldness of winter. But here this is reversed as if to say that the return to life and growth is painful because in many ways, to many people, oblivion and ignorance of reality is preferable to being painfully aware. Eliot is being perhaps ironical by echoing a common feeling – that consciousness is difficult and therefore to be like the dead even while living, is better. Setting this in the context of what the title gives us, the growth of lilacs in a land already known to be dead, the stirring to life of roots dulled in aridity with the falling of spring rain, the removal of the blanket of forgetfulness brought by the snow, all these images pronounce the pain of life and growth amidst death-dealing waste. Moreover, April is the month of Easter when Christ was crucified and then resurrected. So Eliot begins with the theme of death-in-life and the pain of the renewal of life.

To see snow as keeping us “warm” is only apparently contradictory because under the layer of snow, life is maintained. The mixing of memory with desire may allude to a novel by Charles-Louis Philippe, as well as ‘Weddah and Om-el-Bonain’ by James Thomson (1834-82), a narrative poem centred on death and burial. A poem by James Thomson, ‘To Our Ladies of Death’ contains the lines: “Our Mother feedeth thus our little life,/ That we in turn may feed her with our death” which then proceed with speculation on the way in which the dead body will later mingle with the soil, “One part of me shall feed a little worm . . . One thrill sweet grass, one pulse in bitter weed.” In a deadened, apathetic life consciousness acts unwillingly, in small parts.

SAQ:

Who is the “us” in these lines ? Is it the same “us” that appears in the later line, “we stopped in the colonnade” ? Would you call it the same as the one that speaks in German in line 12 ? (30 words)

.....
.....

Hofgarten: in Munich, a public park

“Bin gar keine Russin, stamm’ aus Lituaen, . . .

I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.” Jain suggests Eliot had met the Countess Marie Larisch, writer of *My Past* (1913), and the description of the sledding probably came from this meeting. However, as we read these lines we are also led by the poet to imagine the contemporary European scene with its decadence.

“Bin gar keine. . .”: this is a quotation from the Countess Marie’s conversation and refers to the question of racial purity that had become an issue of great moment among Germans. It says, “I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am a real German”. In the background of such a statement lies the subjection of Lithuania to Russia, which Germany claimed and occupied briefly in 1917. So the Countess here is claiming a German identity; such identity would not have been of much consequence then but it does go to show the simmering political tensions lying below the surface in Europe in the period of the world wars.

What are the roots that clutch, . . . stony rubbish ? The image here, of roots clinging to an arid life is an allusion to the Book of Job viii, 11-13, 16-17: “Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water . . . His roots are wrapped about the heap, and seeth the place of stones.”

Son of man: Eliot refers us here, in his notes, to Ezekiel ii, 1, where God addresses the prophet, Ezekiel, “Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.” Ezekiel had to spread the word of God among the unbelieving, rebellious people of Israel.

broken images: a biblical allusion to Ezekiel vi, 6, to God’s pronouncement on the Israelites who worshipped idols –“ and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down”.

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief: Eliot refers us to Ecclesiastes xii, 5 where the preacher preaches of the vanity of life and that the faithful must remember God even in their youth.

There is shadow under this red rock . . . Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you: In an early poem ('The Death of Saint Narcissus'), Eliot had written –

“Come under the shadow of this grey rock
Come in under the shadow of this grey rock
And I will show you a shadow different from either
Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak . . .”

There are also biblical resonances: Isaiah ii, 10, “Enter into the rock, and hide there in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty”. In Isaiah xxxii, 2, “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land”. In Corinthians x, 3-5, Christ is described as the ‘spiritual Rock’. But in *The Waste Land* the shadow of the rock only reminds us of our mortality, it does not give shelter or comfort. There is an insistence on “shadow”; on the one hand, the allusion to Job viii, 9, “we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow”, and also we have the vision of mortality in the shadow of the rock, that negates the Romantic notion of the individual self.

I will show you fear in a handful of dust: dust symbolizes physical mortality as the body turns into dust after death. In Ecclesiastes xii, 5,7, the preacher emphasises that the physical being will return to dust. John Donne, in Meditation IV of *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), “what’s become of man’s great extent and proportion, when himself shrinks himself, and consumes himself to a handful of dust . . .”. Marlow, in Conrad’s story, ‘Youth’, is nostalgic about youth’s illusions: “the heat of life in a handful of dust”. But Eliot changes this to fear being revealed in a handful of dust. We must also remember the Sibyl’s request for immortality based on the grains of sand she held in her hand.

Frisch weht der Wind

Der Heimat zu

Mein Irisch Kind

Wo weilest du? Eliot’s shows this allusion to refer to Richard Wagner’s opera, *Tristan und Isolde* (*Tristan and Isolde*), I, 5-8. A sailor’s song which begins the opera, “The wind blows fresh to the homeland. My

Irish girl, where are you lingering?” does not refer to Isolde, she supposes that it does and is enraged. We can detect a subtle hint of foreboding in these lines. In the story, Isolde is brought by Tristan from Ireland to Cornwall to marry his old uncle, the king of Cornwall. On the voyage, Tristan falls in love with Isolde having accidentally drunk of a magical potion. Eliot’s quotation is aimed in evoking the entire romance and act a prelude to the lines that follow describing the events in the hyacinth garden. Hyacinths symbolize the resurrected god of the fertility rites. The Greek mythological figure, Hyacinth, was killed in an accident and a flower grew from his blood. In the play, *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) by August Strindberg, a final scene takes place in a room full of hyacinths. Hyacinths also evoke emotional feelings of desire and poignancy.

—**Yet when we came back, late, . . .** seems to refer to the recollections of a passionate romantic moment. But that moment was full of contradictions –both rapture and the suspension of feeling.

Oed’ und leer das Meer. : “Desolate and empty the sea”. This is taken from the last act of Wagner’s opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, where Tristan is lying wounded and waiting for Isolde. The shepherd who is keeping a watch looking out to sea for signs of her arrival, can see no sail approaching. The speaker in the poem is desolate, in a fashion similar to the speaker in the opera, as desolation marks both the situations of the two speakers. What is highlighted is the sense of desolation but unlike the story of Tristan and Isolde where love is exalted through death, the situation of the speaker in the poem does not hold out the possibility of such transcendence.

Madame Sosostris contains a reference to *Crome Yellow* (1921) by Aldous Huxley in which a male character dresses up as a gypsy woman calling himself, ‘Sesostris’, who tells fortunes. Eliot may have aimed at ridiculing Madame Blavatsky, the Russian spiritualist, and the practice of fortune-telling. The Anglican burial service pleaded for foresight (“Lord, let me know mine end.”) and Eliot seemed to have considered fortunetelling as a parody of this plea. So Madame Sosostris does not have spiritual powers and cannot find the ‘Hanged Man’. Eliot, in his notes, identified the Hanged Man with the hooded figure of Christ.

wicked pack of cards: the Tarot pack of cards, made up of 22 picture cards, of which 21 are numbered, allegorically representing material forces, virtues, vices, and natural elements. The last card is the fool (precursor of the joker). Later, 56 numeral cards were combined, thus bringing up the total to 78. These cards were the first playing cards in Europe but were probably first used in telling fortunes. In divination, meaning was assigned to the cards, while the meaning got modified in combination with other cards and with how the client appeared to the seer. Weston, in her study, surmised that the original use of the Tarot was to foretell the rise and fall in the waters which brought fertility to the soil.

Phoenician Sailor symbolising the fertility god. The image of this god used to be thrown into the sea at the end of summer symbolizing its death. The image would later be reclaimed to symbolize his resurrection, the renewal of life with spring. In section IV this figure reappears as Phlebas. Phoenicia, in ancient times, was the region that now is Lebanon adjoining modern Syria and Israel.

(Those are pearls that were his eyes . . .) In Shakespeare's *Tempest* these lines are from Ariel's song in Act I, sc.i. They refer to the fears of Ferdinand that Alonso, his father, has drowned and Ariel then consoles him with these words.

Belladonna: in Italian, 'beautiful lady'; also the name of a poisonous plant an extract from which is used by women to enlarge the pupil of the eye. Belladonna was also one of the three Fates of classical legend. Combined with these various associations, the **Lady of the Rocks** brings in an allusion to Walter Pater's discussion of da Vinci's famous portrait 'Mona Lisa' (or La Gioconda). The discussion shows the lady to be mysterious, darkly secretive, like a vampire. In Eliot's poetry "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks" is the image of a dangerous and seductive woman, a threat to the speaker or persona.

Man with three staves; Wheel; one-eyed merchant; Hanged Man : figures in the Tarot pack. Where the speaker (Madame Sosostris) says that the card is blank, it could be that she is just speculating because there is actually no blank card in the Tarot pack and if she is being forbidden to see what is the 'something' that the merchant is carrying on his back, it shows her limitations as well as surrounding her with a

mysterious world of the occult. As for the hanged figure, Eliot says in his notes that he is referring to the Hanged God mentioned by Frazer. Eliot, tries to conflate this figure with that of the hooded figure in lines 362 – 363 in part V of the poem, the figure of Christ who was crucified on a cross. The Tarot-card figure of the hanged man shows a youth hanging by one foot from a T-shaped cross.

Mrs Equitone: Eliot interposes a name which is satirical; one of Madame Sosostris’s clients.

Unreal City : Eliot’s note quotes from Charles Baudelaire’s poem in French ‘Les Septs Viellards’ (or, The Seven Old Men) the opening lines – “swarming city, city full of dreams, / Where in broad daylight the spectre stops the passer-by”. Eliot acknowledged his debt to Baudelaire for having been shown “the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic.”

I had not thought death had undone so many : Eliot refers us to Dante’s *Inferno* iii, 55-7, “so long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone so many”. In Dante’s poem, this is the scene when the poet sees on the outskirts of hell all those souls who had displeased God, having lived without praise or infamy, having chosen neither the good or the evil and thus welcome neither in heaven or in hell. They “never were alive”, nor had they “hope of death”. But in Eliot’s poem, this is the description of the workers on their way to work in the City district of London, the commercial heart of London.

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled : Eliot recalls Dante’s *Inferno*, iv, 25-7 –“Here there was no plaint, that could be heard, except of sighs, which caused the eternal air to tremble”. These sighs emanate from the souls in Limbo; souls unbaptized though virtuous, not redeemed by worship of God, condemned not to be saved but to live without hope.

Jain tells us that Eliot explained his use of Dante’s lines with these words: “Readers of my *Waste Land* will perhaps remember that the vision of my city clerks trooping over London Bridge from the railway

station to their offices evoked the reflection ‘I had not thought death had undone so many’; and that in another place I deliberately modified a line of Dante by altering it—‘sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled’. And I gave the references in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it.” Eliot also said that he borrowed lines from Dante ‘in the attempt to reproduce, or rather to arouse in the reader’s mind the memory, of some Dantesque scene, and establish, a relationship between the medieval inferno and modern life.’”

King William Street; Saint Mary Woolnoth: London landmarks

‘Stetson!’ : American hat manufacturing company thus the name of the broad-rimmed, high-crowned hat worn especially by cowboys of the American mid-West; Stetson was also the name of the hat worn by the Australian and New Zealand forces; Ezra Pound is also known to have favoured a sombrero-stetson. One reading of this is that Stetson is the persona’s ‘alter ego’, suggesting a split self.

Mylae : in 260 BC, Mylae (ancient city in north Sicily) was the site of a battle between Rome and Carthage.

That corpse you planted last year . . .the sudden frost disturbed its bed? : there is an association here with Frazer’s account of the priests who buried effigies, made of corn and earth, of Osiris at the festival of sowing. Later, when the effigies were brought up, the corn would have sprouted from the body of Osiris, thus the sprouted grain were hailed as the cause of the crop. But the metaphor of the corpse also points to the buried self, the hidden parts of the self, the life within unseen by others.

Oh keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men : the ordinary idea of the dog being friends with men is also combined with the idea present in the Old Testament that the dog is a threat. In the Bible, Psalms xxii, 16-20, the Lord’s help is sought –“For dogs have compassed me: The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: They pierced my hands and my feet . . .Deliver my soul from the sword; My darling from the power of the dog”. Eliot’s note refers us to John Webster’s *The White Devil*, Act V, iv, to the dirge sung by Cornelia for her son – “But keep the wolf

far thence, that's foe to men, / For with his nails he'll dig them up again".

You! hypocrite lecteur! –mon semblable, —mon frère! :Eliot mentions in his notes Baudelaire's poems *Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil), and quotes the final line of the prefatory poem –'Au Lecteur' (To the Reader) 'O hypocrite reader, my fellow-man, my brother!' Baudelaire's attempt is to make the reader confront within himself the spiritual emptiness, the vice of ennui, which is common to both reader and poet.

SAQ:

How important is it for the reader to know of the Old Testament, the Bible, the story of Tristan and Isolde, Dante's great poem, and other literary sources, in order to adequately respond to Eliot's characteristic mode of poetic construction ? Give your opinion. (80 words)

.....
.....

Stop to Consider:

Allusions in Eliot's Poetry

"Allusions was one of the badges of Eliot's professionalism." James Longenbach's statement here is part of his explanation as to why Eliot made use of allusions in his poetry. Longenbach infers that "Eliot self-consciously made his poetry difficult, the property of a specialist, in order to increase the status of poets". Further, Longenbach leads us to understand that "In more ways than one, . . Eliot's allusions were part of a self-consciously political program. . . Despite the ways in which Eliot manipulated allusions in his poems, the practice of allusion came naturally to him, and he often expressed his deepest feelings through allusions."

Longenbach goes on to comment: "Throughout *The Waste Land* Eliot's allusions generally do not seem simply ironic (contrasting past and present) because they are presented in dramatic contexts: the allusions are spoken by dramatic voices in particular scenarios, and the aural quality of the poem often makes the echoes seem less learned than ghostly – as if other voices were speaking from the past."

Longenbach's explanation may be helpful in understanding how the allusions work – "In the Unreal City" passage which concludes the first part of *The Waste Land* (lines 60-76), for instance, Eliot begins by alluding to Baudelaire's "Les sept Vieillards,"

moves on to the *Inferno* (“I had not thought death had undone so many”), then to the hour of Christ’s crucifixion (“a dead sound on the final stroke of nine”), to the Punic Wars (“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!”), to Webster’s *White Devil* (“Oh keep the Dog far hence that’s friend to men”), and finally back to Baudelaire’s preface to the *Fleurs du Mal* (“You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, - mon frère!”). All these references are folded into what begins as a naturalistic description of the City of London . . . but then becomes an increasingly horrific city of dreams. The allusions, by relating modern London to medieval Florence, ancient Greece, and nineteenth-century Paris, suggest that this condition is neither unique nor insurmountable. In *The Waste Land* . . . the wide field of references are folded into the present to remind us of historical continuity and show us the way out of our predicament – they are “fragments . . . shored against my ruins”.(line 430)

4.5.4 A GAME OF CHESS

One of the main themes in this section is, as Jain suggests, the negation of romantic love. Three sources are suggested for the title of the section: the play *A Game at Chess* by Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) as well as another by him, *Women Beware Women*; ‘In the Cage’, a short story by Henry James. In line with the theme of the section, —the “predicament of the trapped characters” – we refer also to the passage from Petronius which depicted the Sibyl hanging from a cage and then also to Virginia Woolf’s story, ‘An Unwritten Novel’. Eliot refers to *Women Beware Women*, in which the game of chess is played in the foreground by the duke’s accomplice, Livia, with Bianca’s mother-in-law to distract her while Bianca is forcibly seduced by the duke in the background. Every move in the game has its counterpart in the manoeuvres of the duke. The original title of the section was suggested by the passage from Petronius, while in James’ story the heroine is a young woman who works in a telegraph office making her feel as though she is a guinea-pig trapped in a cage.

From the line **The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne** till the line **In which sad light a carved dolphin swam**, we are given (as Jain reads) “the literary tradition of fatal romantic passion. The artificial, stilted, cloying style and diction satirize the sensibility and mode of expression of this tradition”.

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne Eliot's note refers us to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, II,ii –“The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne”. But Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra's grand barge and the meeting with Antony is not ironical as in the passage here but you should be familiar here with the story of the famous love affair of Antony and Cleopatra and how it brought a tragic end to its protagonists.

From satin cases ... the image of the woman at the dressing-table also is reminiscent of a similar description of Belinda in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. Pope's poem is a satire so the depiction of Belinda was satirical.

laquaeria: Eliot alludes to Virgil's *Aeneid*, i, 726, which reads “flaming torches hang from the golden-panelled ceiling, and the night is pierced by the flaring lights” –lines relating to the banquet given by Dido, Queen of Carthage, in honour of Aeneas. Aeneas finally deserts Dido who then destroyed herself on a funeral pyre.

The lines of this section thus evoke associations of stories of love and passion which end in death and destruction. We have to read the lines against what follows, beginning with the rape of Philomela, preceded by Eliot's reference (in the words **sylvan** scene) to the lines in *Paradise Lost*, Canto IV, when Satan arrives at the garden of Eden.

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king : Eliot refers us to the Roman poet, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which recounts the Greek myth wherein the tongue of Philomela was torn off by King Tereus of Thrace, to prevent her from telling others of his raping her. When she revealed the violation to her sister Procne by weaving words into a garment, Tereus pursued her with an axe, whereupon the gods changed her into a nightingale.

And still she cried, and still the world pursues note the abrupt change from past tense to present continuous highlighting the continuity between past and present. Eliot is suggesting here that the plight of Philomela continues into the present.

'Jug Jug' to dirty ears: Jain's reading of this line will help you —“A conventional way of representing bird-song in Elizabethan poetry; it was also a crude joking reference to sexual intercourse. The contrast here is between the pure song of the nightingale which cannot be violated or profaned, as was Philomela, and the vulgar interpretations of the song.

Paradoxically, however, the song is violated by the crude interpretations given to it.”

SAQ:

The reference to Philomela highlights an important aspect of Eliot’s thoughts regarding society and culture – how would you frame this ?
(70 words)

.....
.....

‘What is that noise?’ /The wind under the door . . . Is there nothing in your head?’

Several associations come in here : *The White Devil* by John Webster contains the lines –

“Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle questions, — /I am i’t’h’ way to study a long silence,/ To prate were idle, —I remember nothing. / There’s nothing of so infinite vexation / A man’s own thoughts.” Also, in *King Lear*, I, i, Lear warns Cordelia: “Nothing will come of nothing.” In *Hamlet*, III, ii, Ophelia tells Hamlet, “I think nothing, my lord”.

The wind under the door: Eliot refers us to a line from John Webster’s *The Devil’s Law Case*, III, ii : “Is the wind in that door still?” (spoken by one surgeon to another when he hears the groan of a man assumed dead.).

I remember/ Those are pearls that were his eyes: Eliot’s note to the line **Are you alive . . . ‘in your head?’** refers us back to the hyacinth garden. We can even presume that the speaker here is the same as the woman in the hyacinth garden in the first section.

Jain’s reading of these lines is:

“There is an implied allusion to Paolo and Francesca, who are in the second circle of Dante’s *Inferno*, which contains the souls of those who had subjected reason to lust. Francesca tells Dante: ‘There is no greater pain than to recall a happy time in wretchedness’ (*Inferno* v, 121-3). The earlier drafts make the allusion more explicit. In response to the woman’s distraught question, ‘What is that noise now? What is the wind

doing?’ (l.119), the persona silently comments, ‘Carrying / Away the little light dead people.’ This alludes to Dante’s desire to speak to Paolo and Francesca: ‘Willingly would I speak with those two that go together, and seem so light upon the wind’ (*Inferno*, v, 73-5) The souls of the lustful are carried along by an infernal hurricane which never rests. Dido and Cleopatra, alluded to in the opening passage of ‘A Game of Chess’, also inhabit this circle of hell. Francesca and Paolo are condemned to be eternally bound to each other, as are the couple in ‘A Game of Chess’.”

O O O O that Shakesperian Rag—/It’s so elegant/ So intelligent: ‘Rag’ is the name given to one form of jazz music for dancing, very popular about the time of the First World War. There was an American ragtime hit of 1912 which Eliot draws upon (“That Shakesperian Rag/ Most intelligent, very elegant,/ That old classical drag,/ Has the proper stuff . . .”) ‘O O O O’ echoes both Hamlet’s last utterance (in the Folio version) and Othello. This line is a retort to the earlier taunt of the woman –‘Is there nothing in your head?’ – but it also brings out the inner torment of the persona.

I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/ With my hair down, so.: in the line earlier (92) where there was an allusion to the banquet scene in the *Aeneid*, in honour of Aeneas, a correspondence was already set up between the woman of this section and Dido, Queen of Carthage. The correspondence is ironic and here Dido’s frenzy on Aeneas deserting her is recalled through this line. Dido is in her palace in Carthage.

demobbed: slang, abbreviation of “demobilized”, meaning, released from military service

HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME: call of the bartender at closing time in British pubs (a pub is a kind of restaurant which serves liquor and snacks). But here we can also hear echoes of Andrew Marvell’s poem, ‘To His Coy Mistress’ which contains the lines “But at my back I always hear / Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near”

gammon ham or bacon.

Good night, ladies, . . . good night: echoing Ophelia’s last words in *Hamlet* (IV, v) when she drowns herself. There is less of an ironic contrast here between the suffering of Ophelia and the woman of the

passage – both are victims. The other women in this section were also victims. Lil’s story may sound coarse but it is one of pain and suffering. The whole passage relating to Lil does not really reflect natural speech rhythms but is better viewed as stylized utterances in the manner of music-hall comedy. We have seen here in this section two contrasting couples, one neurotic and locked in a sterile relationship, the other locked in physical fecundity. The title is applicable to both the couples – neither relationship is fulfilling to the couple. However, Lil and Albert have more companionship. As Jain reads, “Eliot is concerned with the problem of sexual morality, and with relationships without love, irrespective of class.”

Stop to Consider:

European civilization and Eliot

Eliot’s deep concern with the state of society in Europe is apparent in *The Waste Land*. We learn from Manju Jain that some interpreted the poem as “an imperial epic” or “an image of imperial catastrophe”. But in a 1919 review, “Eliot distanced himself from imperialism and drew a connection between Romanticism and imperialism. . . . Eliot went on [with reference to George Wyndham’s *Essays in Romantic Literature*] to suggest tentatively the political ramifications of the relationship between Romanticism and imperialism: ‘It would be of interest to divagate from literature to politics and inquire to what extent Romanticism is incorporate in Imperialism; to what extent Romanticism has possessed the imagination of Imperialists, and to what extent it was made use of by Disraeli’. Given Eliot’s distrust of Romanticism for its self-evasion, individualism and lack of restraint, it would be easy to infer that he extends his criticism to imperialism as well. The naive Romanticism of attitudes such as those of Wyndham, Eliot suggests, were exploited by imperialist politicians such as Disraeli.

In a later essay Eliot asserted a continuity between the Roman empire and the contemporary civilization of Europe: ‘We are all, so far as we inherit the civilization of Europe, still citizens of the Roman Empire.’ However, Eliot went on to emphasize the disparity between the ideal of the Roman empire which Virgil imagined, and the political reality—‘the Roman Empire of the legionaries, the pro-consuls and governors, the business men and speculators, the demagogues and generals.’ Virgil’s concept, according to Eliot, ‘remains an ideal’, the highest for ‘any merely temporal empire’. It was left to Christianity to develop and to cherish this ideal, for the Roman empire ‘was transformed into the Holy roman Empire’.”

You can see for yourself the characteristics of Eliot's sweeping gaze over history and over civilizations. With regard to his critical view of the past, Peter Dale Scott notes: "Eliot's remapping of the past helped authorize his famous question, still unanswered, in response to England's capitulation at Munich in 1938: "Was our society . . . assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies, and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends?" One need not be an Anglo-Catholic to share this cultural anxiety, which as Eliot noted was not a simple criticism of a government, but a doubt about the validity of a civilization".

Another critic writes, "Eliot's awareness of tribal cultures, their religious sensibilities and their potential for art was also intense but critical, engaging him both at the intellectual and the emotional levels, but almost always with an awareness of countervailing points of view. Eliot's reading in anthropology provided him not simply with material for cross-cultural comparison but with the concrete details of cultic observances from which he constructed virtual worlds of belief and sensibility. . . .By undertaking a serious "suspension of belief" in the presuppositions of his own culture, and by regarding these other points of view as genuinely *possible*, Eliot was able to explore with authenticity and conviction worlds of otherness closed to many of his predecessors and contemporaries."(Cleo McNelly Kearns)

Check Your Progress:

1. Explore with close textual analysis the basis of the view that "in general, the allusions in *The Waste Land* disperse clear meanings into other contexts, undermine the notion of authentic speaking, and blur boundaries between texts."
2. Elaborate the ways in which the persona in the *The Waste Land* becomes a device to foreground historical continuities as well as historical dislocations. What is the role assigned to the figure of Tiresias and the voice of the thunder in this connection?
3. Write explanatory notes on (i) 'Desolate and empty the sea', (ii) 'Da'; (iii) I had not thought death had undone so many; (iv) 'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, — mon frère!'

4.5.5 THE FIRE SERMON

The Fire Sermon was preached by the Buddha (c.563 BC – c. 483 BC) "against the fires of passion, hatred and infatuation".

The river's tent is broken : at one level this is a naturalistic description of the leafy cover over the river now broken because summer is over. The leaves are now fallen; we find a suggestion of something of value having been lost, perhaps something precious enough to be sacred. But the word 'tent' in the Old Testament also referred to the 'tabernacle' (Jain: "a wooden framework covered with curtains, carried through the wilderness in the Exodus by the wandering tribes of Israel as a place of sacrifice and worship"). Jain reads into these lines a "contrast between the violation of the river's tent which the speaker mourns, and the permanence and sanctity promised in Isaiah xxxiii, 20-1: 'Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.' "

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song. . . Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed." Eliot refers us, in his notes, to Edmund Spenser's 'Prothalamion' which was written to celebrate the joys and ideals of marriage, in honour of the double wedding of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester in 1596. The scene is set on the Thames strewn with flowers from the nymphs of the river ('All lovely Daughters of the Flood') on the bridal day. Eliot underlines the contrast between the sordid filthy present and the pastoral vision of Spenser but this contrast is not absolute. Jain points to an ambivalence in it—"It preserves an elegiac feeling for what is lost and also undercuts Spenser's idyllic world. We are reminded, too, of the drowned Ophelia, who was to have been Hamlet's bride. The nymphs – those of Spenser's poem, and the girls in the modern city deserted by the heirs of city directors—are departed because summer is over and because Spenser's world no longer exists. The equation of Spenser's nymphs with those of the modern city suggests that Spenser's pastoral world existed only as a literary artifact, and was an idealized poetic fancy. Spenser, too, postulated a future golden world, and realized that it was imperilled."

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept. . . Psalms cxxxvii, 1-4, where the psalmist laments recalling the Israelites longing for their homeland as they wandered in exile in Babylonia—"By the rivers of

Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”. As Lemman can also stand for one who is the object of illicit passion, ‘the waters of Lemman’ brings in associations with the fires of lust. But here it is joined to the Thames both of Spenser’s imagination as well as of contemporary London. A feeling of alienation of the persona from the contemporary scene enters through the biblical reference, and a longing for a different world. From November 1921, while recovering from a nervous breakdown in Lausanne, the town close to Lake Geneva (Lake Lemman in French) in Switzerland, Eliot continued with the writing of *The Waste Land*.

But at my back in a cold blast I hear. . . spread from ear to ear.: ironic parody of the line in Marvell’s poem, ‘To His Coy Mistress’, “But at my back I always hear . . . hurrying near” . This reverses the lyrical imagery of the preceding lines, drawing on Spenserian resonances.

While I was fishing in the dull canal: the speaker makes an ironic identification with the Fisher King

Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck/ And on the king my father’s death before him. Eliot refers to *The Tempest* I,ii, where Ferdinand mourns his father’s death. As Jain points out, the Fisher King begins to be identified now with the brother instead of with the persona, shifting again to his father, while the persona becomes identified with Ferdinand.

White bodies naked on the low damp ground. . . year to year: the speaker continues with the idea of death but in contrast to the images in Ariel’s song or the vision of death in the fertility rites as the prelude to new life

SAQ:

What is the poetic strategy by which Eliot sustains, without losing sight of it, the recurrent strain of the associations with the fertility rite, the cycle of birth and death, the renewal of life, and the god of life and death? (90 words)

.....
.....

But at my back from time to time I hear: again the reference to Marvell's lines

The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring/Sweeney to Mrs Porter in the spring: Eliot's reference is to *The Parliament of Bees* by John Day (1574-1640?) wherein occur the lines:

'When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,
A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
Where all shall see her naked skin.'

In the Greek legend, Actaeon was the huntsman who came Diana (the goddess of chastity) bathing with her nymphs. He was thus turned into a stag as punishment, then was torn to pieces by his own hounds. We also have to refer to Eliot's response to Stravinsky's music which, he thought, transformed the "barbaric cries of modern life" into music. Here Sweeney will come upon Mrs Porter; Sweeney figures in other poems by Eliot as the "natural, sensual man".

O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter /And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water: Eliot writes in his note that these lines are from an Australian ballad in Sydney, sung by Australian troops in the First World War – "O the moon shines bright on Mrs Porter / And on the daughter of Mrs Porter. / And they both wash their feet in soda water / And so they oughter / To keep them clean". In some versions of the ballad, it is pointed out by Jain, Mrs Porter was a legendary brothel-keeper in Cairo.

Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!: Eliot points to Paul Verlaine's (1844-96) sonnet, 'Parsifal' –"And, O those children's voices singing in the dome." Manju Jain explains in detail: "Parsifal, having conquered the temptation of lust and cured the king of his wound, adores the Grail and hears the voices of children singing in the dome. Verlaine is referring to Wagner's *Parsifal* and its music, where the voices in the dome and the knights join in a song of praise and gratitude to Christ the Saviour. Before he heals Amfortas, the king, Parsifal's feet are bathed with water from the holy spring by the now repentant temptress Kundry. The ceremonial washing of feet is parodied in the preceding lines on Mrs Porter. The quotation evokes the indescribable yearning expressed in Verlaine's poem. There is also an ironic awareness that such

aspiration perhaps exists only in poetry, and that it may be merely a rhetorical device.”

Stop to Consider:

Meaning by Allusion

Harriet Davidson, a critic, observes that “The function of allusion in *The Waste Land* has been much debated; allusion can be considered a metaphoric device, which depends on similarities between the text alluded to and the present text. But allusion is also a dispersive figure, multiplying contexts for both the present work and the text alluded to and suggesting a cultural, historical dimension of difference. For instance, the jolting allusion to *Tristan und Isolde* . . . has a certain propriety for the poem because of its theme of tragic love and its images of fresh wind and water complementing the stirrings of April. But the reader is first struck by the different, perhaps unfamiliar, language and scene, which needs translation, interpretation, and contextualizing. While it is surely a relief to turn away from the chilling symbolism of the “handful of dust” . . . the reader ends up in a land of confusing particularity and unfulfilled desires.”

So rudely forc’d: referring to the rape of Philomela

Tereu: the Latin vocative form of Tereus, the violator of Philomela. John Lyly (1554-1606?) gives this interpretation in *Alexander and Campaspe* of the nightingale’s song – ‘Oh, ’tis the ravished nightingale. / *Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu!* she cries’.

Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant: one of the early seats of Christianity, it is modern Izmir in Turkey, a great trading port of Asia Minor once upon a time; one of the seven churches in Asia named in the New Testament. As Eliot composed his poem, Smyrna was of great interest being taken over by Greek forces in May 1919 but recaptured by the Turks in 1922. Through parody Mr Eugenides is associated with the Fool in the Tarot pack of cards, and also with the Syrian merchants who spread knowledge of the Attis and Mithra cults across the Roman empire.

Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants. . . weekend at the Metropole: Eliot claimed that this was based on an actual experience.

C.i.f.: “Cost, insurance and freight”

documents at sight: relating to the business transaction in the course of which “the documents of ownership and transport would be handed to the purchaser in exchange for a bank draft payable on sight.”

demotic French: French as popularly spoken. Mr Eugenides’s name means ‘the well-born’; he speaks demotic French, sells currants in London, comes from Smyrna – he is cosmopolitan.

Metropole: fashionable hotel in the south of England, on the coast, in Brighton. A “weekend in Brighton” implied an invitation to casual sex.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back. . . Her stove, and lays out food in tins.:

in the background we have Dante’s *Purgatorio*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the seventh century BC poetess, Sappho’s fragment, ‘Hesperus’, as well as resonances from ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ by Thomas Gray (1716-71), ‘Requiem’ by R.L.Stevenson (1850-94). Tiresias is a central figure here, from the ancient myths and legends whose sight was the sight of the prophet who can see into time. Tiresias is the blind prophet. We find Tiresias even in Tennyson’s poem. Manju Jain’s notes here are comprehensive –

the evening scene as Dante’s *Purgatorio*, canto viii, opens is described thus, “ ’Twas now the hour that turns back the desire of those who sail the seas and melts their heart, that day when they have said to their dear friends adieu, and that pierces the new pilgrim with love, if from afar he hears the chimes which seem to mourn for the dying day’. Jain reads – “Echoes from this scene heighten the tone of melancholy and pathos in this passage. . . In Eliot’s poem this is the hour when ‘the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk.’ In Dante it is the hour when the supplicant soul in Purgatory joined and raised both its palms and devoutly sang the ‘*Te lucis ante*’, the hymn for the last service of the day: ‘Before the close of light, we pray thee, O creator, that through thy clemency, thou be our watch and guard.’

In his note Eliot emphasizes Tiresias’s bisexuality, quoting specifically from the Latin text of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid’s version of the legend, Tiresias was transformed into a woman for hitting with his staff

two snakes copulating in a forest. Seven years later, when he came across the same pair of snakes, Tiresias hit them again and, as he had hoped, was turned back into a man. . . In the myth, Tiresias was successively male and female. In *The Waste Land* he is specifically hermaphroditic.

In his representation of Tiresias Eliot is also aware of other legends associated with him. One legend attributes Tiresias's blindness and prophetic powers to Athena, whom he saw bathing. . . Tennyson uses this variation of the legend and assimilates Tiresias to Actaeon in his poem, 'Tiresias': 'Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much, / And speak the truth that no man may believe.' Eliot's earlier oblique allusion to Actaeon . . . indicates that he had this legend and Tennyson's poem in mind. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus is sent to Hades to consult Tiresias as to the manner of his returning home to Ithaca . . . In *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* by Sophocles (495-406 BC) Tiresias is the blind, withered prophet who knows that Thebes has been cursed because of Oedipus's patricide and subsequent incestuous marriage to his mother, despite the fact of his ignorance of the identity of both his parents. . . Dante placed Tiresias in Hell with the augurs and diviners who, because they wished to peer into the secrets of the future, have their faces turned so that they can only go backwards, because looking forward was denied to them (*Inferno XX*). Eliot took the phrase 'Tiresias' from Swinburne's 'Tiresias', a poem in which Dante figures.

In *The Waste Land* Tiresias is associated with the Sibyl of the epigraph through his longevity and gift of prophecy. In some versions of the myth Tiresias has a speical staff to guide him in his blindness. This staff, and that with which he struck the serpents, connect him with 'the man with three staves' of the Tarot pack . . . , and with the Fisher King. Tiresias's sterility, too ('Old man with wrinkled female breasts') links him symbolically with the Fisher King. His bisexuality highlights the theme of the mobility and indeterminacy of sexual identity.

Tiresias, however, is not the unifying consciousness of the poem, as Eliot's note would have it. His point of view, too, is subject to scrutiny . . . In fact, the voyeuristic Tiresias with his desiccated sensibility is symptomatic of the moribund civilization of which he is a spectator. He

represents a state of mind prefigures in ‘Gerontion’ which Eliot had considered using as a prelude to *The Waste Land*. Like Dante’s augurs and diviners, Tiresias can only look back and is denied a vision of the future. Eliot’s representation also stresses the simultaneity of time. the episode of the typist and the clerk is set within the temporal perspective offered by Tiresias’s encompassing consciousness, so that the mythical past is reduced to the level of this episode.”

We should keep in mind Eliot’s own note on Tiresias – “Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a ‘character’, is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem.”

SAQ:

How does Eliot connect the idea of the seer (Tiresias) with the perspective upon the ‘waste land’? What is encompassed by Tiresias’ vision ? (60 + 60 words)

.....
.....

the young man carbuncular: a carbuncle is a pimple or red spot on the face, often due to drinking; according to Jain, “Eliot said that he intended the phrasing of ‘the young man carbuncular’ to echo ‘that old man eloquent’ in Milton’s sonnet ‘To the Lady Margaret Ley’. Recognition of the echo reinforces the effect of burlesque.”

Bradford millionaire : Bradford, an industrial town in the north of England, produced many millionaires. Eliot is mocking the millionaire as much as the clerk.

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all . . walked among the lowest of the dead): the bisexual Tiresias of *Odyssey* and *Oedipus*.

When lovely woman stoops to folly: Eliot refers to *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74) in which Olivia sings the song

beginning with this line. There does not seem to be any ironic contrast between Olivia and the typist. Jain remarks, that Eliot here “continues his critique of the sentimental style of the eighteenth century.” This episode, as the one in the pub, is stylized, and not naturalistic or realistic.

‘This music crept by me upon the waters’: Eliot refers us to *The Tempest* I, ii. Ferdinand utters these words as he remembered the allaying of his grief at his father’s supposed death. There are two references here – the typist’s gramophone record and Ariel’s song in *The Tempest*. It also looks forward to the mandoline’s whining in l.261, and the song of the Thames daughters.

Strand, Queen Victoria Street, Lower Thames Street: streets in London

fishmen: Jain points out that these are not fishermen but workers from the fish market at Billingsgate

where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold : Eliot’s note says –“The interior of St.Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among Wren’s interiors.” This is the church near London Bridge and the fish market, which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723). Eliot decried the possible loss of such churches. Together with the Doric and the Corinthian, the Ionian was one the three ancient architectural styles.

This passage re-creates a sense of sadness and alienation in the persona who remains detached from the noise and bustle.

The river sweats / . . . To Carthage then I came: Eliot explains in his notes, that ‘the song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 they speak in turn.’

The river sweats / Oil and tar / . . .Wallala leialala: compare this with the description of the Thames at the opening of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and note the similarities. In Conrad’s novel, the Thames leads into the heart of great darkness.

Greenwich reach : the Thames at Greenwich

Isle of Dogs: the banks of the Thames opposite Greenwich

Weialala leia / Wallala leialala : the Rhine maidens’ lament

Elizabeth and Leicester: Eliot refers, in his notes, to the *History of England*, Vol.I, ch.iv, by J.A.Froude, quoting the letter of De Quadra to King Philip of Spain in which he describes Queen Elizabeth flirting with Lord Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, while watching games on the river Thames.

Beating oars / . . .Rippled both shores: comparable to Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra's barge in line 77 ('A Game of Chess').

White towers : perhaps the stone towers of the Tower of London

Highbury, Richmond, Kew: districts of London

Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me.: Eliot refers to Dante's *Purgatorio* v, 133 –"Remember me, who am La Pia: Siena made me, Maremma unmade me." As Jain explains, La Pia was the Lady of Siena, an Italian town, who was reported to have been murdered on her husband's orders by being pushed out of the castle window at Maremma. In Dante's poem, she narrates her story to the poet and appeals to him to convey news of her to her friends on earth. She is one of those souls in Purgatory who met with a violent end but made their peace with God through repentance.

Moorgate, Margate Sands: the first is a poorer locality of London with which Eliot was familiar while he worked at Lloyds Bank. The second is a seaside resort on the Thames estuary, in Kent. Eliot recuperated from illness and wrote one draft of *The Waste Land*.

To Carthage then I came: we are referred by Eliot to the *Confessions* of St.Augustine –"to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." Augustine's lines tell of the temptations (sensual) in his youth. From (modern) Algeria, where he was born, Augustine went to Carthage at the age of sixteen.

Burning burning burning burning: Elito's notes says in his notes—"The complete text of the Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in the late Henry clarke Warren's *Buddhism in Translation*. . Mr.Warren was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident." Jain gives us the text of the Sermon –

“All things, O priests are on fire . . . The eye, O priests, is on fire; forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire, impressions received by the eye are on fire . . . With the fire passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair are they on fire.”

O Lord Thous pluckest me out: Eliot, referring us to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, notes – ‘The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.’ We learn from Jain the significance of Augustine’s words (“I entangle my steps with these outward beauties, but Thou pluckest me out, O Lord, thou pluckest me out!”) that they are “illuminated by God’s vindication of Joshua the high priest in Zechariah iii,2. Joshua is accused by Satan but vindicated by God: . . . Joshua’s filthy garments are removed and he is reclothed. This is symbolic of the removal of the iniquities of Joshua and his people and the restoration of Jerusalem to peace, harmony and prosperity. Eliot also seems to have had in mind the words of the prophet Amos, castigating Israel’s failure to believe in God: ‘I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord’ (Amos iv, 11) Jain further tells us – that both the Buddha and St. Augustine look upon sensual temptation as a burning fire. “The Buddha advocates the cultivation of an aversion for the pleasures of the senses, which will lead to freedom from passion, and thence from rebirth. St. Augustine trusts to the grace of God for salvation.”

SAQ:

How effectively does Eliot use the symbolism behind the “fires” in this section, ‘The Fire Sermon’? Which associations are brought in to amplify the deficiencies of past figures? (70 + 80 words)

.....
.....

4.5.6 DEATH BY WATER

Phlebas the Phoenician: associated with the “drowned Phoenician Sailor”, the “one-eyed merchant” and with Mr Eugenides, the merchant of Smyrna. Jain feels that Eliot may have also sought to relate, through the use of the name, with Plato’s dialogue, *Philebus*, the discussion of the relations of pleasure and wisdom to the good. Philebus supports enjoyment, delight and pleasure while Socrates points out that wisdom and intelligence, added to right opinion and honest reasoning, are better than pleasure. ‘Death by Water’ is perhaps a criticism of the position held by Philebus.

A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell: echoing the words of Alonso in *The Tempest* –“O thou mine heir /Of Naples and of Milan, what strange fish Hath made his meal on thee?” Alonso believes Ferdinand, his son, to be drowned. What is brought out here is the image of physical dissolution.

Gentile or Jew: as in the Bible a Gentile is one of a non-Jewish nation or belongs to a non-Jewish faith, the phrase includes all of mankind. A possible reference to St.Paul’s condemnation of sinners is here, sinners of all hues, Gentile or Jew. (Romans II, 9-11)

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward: “The wheel of fortune, which was one of the cards in the Tarot pack . . . In Greek mythology Ixion, in the underworld as a punishment for his crimes, was bound on a wheel that turned for ever. Possibly the wheel is also the incessant cycle of death and rebirth. Perhaps the line mocks the illusion that human beings can control their fortunes. The image of the whirlpool and the wheel is illuminated later in *Ash-Wednesday* . . . [and] *Murder in the Cathedral*...” (Jain)

Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you: “In *Philebus* Socrates comments on self-deception: ‘people who think themselves taller and more handsome and physically finer . . . than they really are.’” (Jain)

Stop to Consider:

Sounds as place in *The Waste Land*

You should have noticed by now that Eliot's poem has many references to place, or location. As much as the many 'voices' and sounds that make up the poem's minute details, the landscapes that the poem situates these voices in, give to the poem its peculiarly striking quality—the sea, rivers, deserts, snow on the ground, city-dwellings, hyacinth garden, cities, mountains ('Himavant') –all contribute to the total effect of the poem. In this connection it has been remarked, by Alan Marshall, that “the city that Eliot *sees* is a much less animated affair than the one that he listens to. . . In Eliot's waste land most of the individual details about people and place are supplied by the ear, a phenomenon which coincides with the stress he later put on what he called the “auditory imagination” . . . London exists most frequently as a place that Eliot hears”

Consider the lines—

“ ‘This music crept by me upon the waters,’
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon:” (lines 257-63)

4.5.7 WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

According to Manju Jain, Eliot thought of this section as “not only the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all”. Eliot's note for this section “states that in the first section of part V, three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous, and the present decay of eastern Europe. The story of the journey to Emmaus is told in Luke XXIV, 13-31. Two disciples were travelling on the road to Emmaus (a village near Jerusalem) on the day of Christ's resurrection and discussing the events that had happened. The risen Christ joins them and explains to them all the things in the scriptures concerning himself in order to convince them that his death and resurrection were in full accord with the divine plan. However, the

disciples do not recognize him until he blesses their evening meal, and he then vanishes out of their sight. The approach to the Chapel Perilous, described by Jessie Weston, is the final stage of the Grail quest. The quester meets with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious chapel before going on to the Grail Castle itself. Sometimes there is a ‘Dead Body’ laid on an altar; sometimes a ‘Black Hand’ extinguishes the tapers; and there are strange and threatening voices. This is apparently an adventure which is fraught with extreme danger to life, and in which supernatural and evil forces are engaged. The decay of eastern Europe is a reference to the Russian Revolution.

None of the three themes achieves dramatic resolution. The third figure remains unrecognized; the quester is left in the chapel—the Castle does not appear, nor does the Grail; and the refugees do not find a haven. The three journeys merge and remain inconclusive.” (Jain)

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces . . . He who was living is now dead: reference to the events from the betrayal and arrest of Christ following the night of prayer and agony in the garden of Gethsemane, till the moment of crucifixion. Christ’s arrest in Gethsemane is recalled here.

After the frosty silence. . . agony in stony places: the scene of Christ’s prayer and agony before the arrest (Matthew, XXVI, 36-46); also recalling Golgotha, ‘the place of a skull’, the site of Christ’s crucifixion.

Prison and palace and reverberation / Of thunder of spring over distant mountains: after his arrest, Christ was taken to the Palace of the High Priest of the Jews for a public interrogation; then he was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor of Jerusalem, in the Hall of Judgement; Christ’s death was followed by a cataclysmic earthquake

He who was living is now dead/ We who were living are now dying: Luke XXIV, 2-5 –“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen”; Christ’s followers saw two men in shining robes who said these words.

With a little patience: the word has special meaning here signifying suffering, endurance, both of which qualities also are to be found in

passion; there is a connection here with the state of Christ who endured suffering between the last supper and the crucifixion, including the agony he endured in Gethsemane.

Here is no water but only rock . . . Who is the third who walks always beside you?: Jain tells us: “Eliot thought that these twenty-nine lines of ‘the water-dripping song’ were the only ‘good lines in *The Waste Land*’, and that the rest was ephemeral . . . Eliot believed that ‘the less “realistic” literature is, the more visual it must be . . . Dreams, to be real, must be seen. In this passage clear visual images and precise representations of sound are evoked by hypnotizing, incantatory rhythms to create a visionary effect.”

cicada: the insect which produces a high-pitched prolonged drilling sound

Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees: based on Eliot’s actual experience in Quebec, Canada. A literary reference may be here, according to Jain, to Whitman’s poem, ‘When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d’ –“Solitary the thrush, / The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements, / Sings by himself a song.”

When I count, . . . But who is that on the other side of you ?: Eliot here evokes the journey of the disciples to Emmaus even while his notes say that he was influenced by the account of an expedition to Antarctica. The members of the expedition were haunted by the delusion that one member more had joined them than they could count. Jain’s comments say: “The allusion to the Arctic expedition helps to explain the hallucinatory effect of the passage and the indeterminate identity and gender of the hooded figure. However, Eliot is perhaps also deliberately mystifying the reader by veiling the reference to the risen Christ.

Grover Smith points out that the strange event recounted here forms an interesting parallel to a Buddhist legend in Warren’s *Buddhism in Translations*, which may have influenced the passage.”

Stop to Consider:

Voices, identity and perspectives in *The Waste Land*

Eliot felt that “You cannot create a very large poem without introducing a more impersonal point of view, or splitting it up into various personalities” as he wrote the poem. By splitting the interior monologue (as he had used it in ‘Prufrock’) into many fragmentary monologues, Eliot revealed his preoccupation with ideas of shifting, discontinuous identities. Manju Jain points to this aspect of the poem –“The different voices and points of view shift, merge, dissolve, collide, so that the boundaries between them cannot easily be demarcated. The pronouns, too, are indeterminate displacing the reader and making it difficult to assign a fixed identity to the speaker or to the addressee. . . the plurality of voices in ‘The Burial of the Dead’ cannot be unravelled with any degree of certainty. In ‘What the Thunder Said’, the identity of the ‘you’ is ambiguous—is the same ‘you’ being addressed in lines 359—65 (‘Who is the third who walks always beside you?’) and in lines 420-2 (‘your heart would have responded / Gaily, when invited, beating obedient/ To controlling hand’)? Whose heart would have responded ? And whose are the controlling hands? Any interpretation of the passage will depend upon the identity given to them which, however, remains ambiguous.

The ‘I’ of the poem, too, does not have an autonomous, determinate identity. It is fractured into a number of personae. . . The poetic persona also encompasses multiple voices from the past in the form of quotations and allusions. It does not, however, consist only of a tissue of quotations; it also speaks with the immediacy of personal experience which is not derived from texts . . The self is thus not a unified entity but is fluid and shifting, and consists of a plurality of voices. Besides the poetic persona, the pronoun ‘I’ is used also to designate Marie, Tiresias, and the woman in the pub. Although they are relatively more distinctive as ‘characters’, they remain fragments of consciousness and can also be interpreted as roles assumed by the persona. . .

.....To read *The Waste Land*. . as a poem in which the several voices and points of view merge into a single identity would be to discount its complexity of tone and feeling. The text is a site where a plurality of voices and meanings cross and recross without necessarily being resolved into a unity in which differences are submerged.”

Murmur of maternal lamentation: recalling the “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children’, the words of Christ to the bewailing women who lamented his taking away (Luke XXIII, 27-8)

What is that sound high in the air . . .Ringed by the flat horizon only: Eliot’s notes refers us to *Blick ins Chaos* (A Glimpse into Chaos), by Herman Hesse (1872-1962), translated: “Already half of Europe, already at least half of Eastern Europe, on the way to Chaos, drives

drunkenly in spiritual frenzy along the edge of the abyss, sings drunkenly, as though singing hymns, as Dmitri Karamazov [in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1821-81] sang. The offended bourgeois laughs at the songs; the saint and the seer hear them with tears.”

Jain informs us: “During world War I Hesse lived in neutral Switzerland and wrote denunciations of militarism and nationalism. Hesse’s work is a meditation on how Dostoevsky’s insights in *The Brothers Karamazov* prefigure the collapse of Europe. Hesse views the maintenance of civilization as a conflict between man’s higher faculties and his repressed, primeval instincts which he now sees emerging as a result of the decay and exhaustion of European culture. For these visionaries, however, the decay is the prelude to a new birth. It is a period of anarchic spiritual experiment which Hesse associates with a longing for the east, for Russia, and for a new type of man – the ideal of the Karamazov, primeval, Asiatic and occult. This new type would be imaginative, powerful, spiritual, defying bourgeois values. Eliot shares Hesse’s vision of the decay and collapse of Europe but not his answers. He visited Hesse at Montagnola, near Lugano, on 28 May 1922. In a letter of 13 March 1922 to Hesse Eliot expressed his admiration of *Blick ins Chaos*, finding in it a seriousness the like of which had not yet occurred in England.

The word ‘horde’ came into the European languages from the steppes of central Asia. It signified a mass of creatures on the move, a blind menace, less human than animal. The derogatory connotations of the word here are qualified by the adjective ‘hooded’, which associates the refugees with the hooded figure of Christ. The Biblical echo of the ‘murmur of maternal lamentation’ also arouses feelings of pity and compassion. Eliot was deeply distressed by the destitution in central Europe after the First World War.”

What is the city over the mountains . . . Unreal: As Jain comments — ‘The present decay of eastern Europe’ is seen within the perspective of the rise and fall of civilizations throughout history. No temporal city endures or offers a lasting home. Eliot’s vision of the ‘unreal’ cities of temporal civilizations may have been intended as a contrast to the ideal

city imagined by Plato, which inspired St Augustine's vision of the City of God. In Plato's *Republic* Glaucon tells Socrates: "you mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is in the ideal; for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth."

And bats with baby faces . . . voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells: the 'surrealistic' imagery came, according to Eliot from a painting by Hieronymous Bosch, the 15th-century Dutch painter. Bosch's paintings were visual allegories of hell, invented with strange forms combining parts of real beings, and related to the real through allusive elements.

reminiscent bells : bells of churches in London,; 'falling towers' of other imperial cities; there is also reference to Browning's poem, 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' which Eliot had praised in his Clark Lectures of 1926 for creating the sense of a "double world". Browning's poem has a dream-like narrative which parallels the "hallucinatory terrain" of 'What the Thunder Said'. Jain further adds: "It has been suggested that there is an allusion to Jessie Weston here—a bell was rung at the Chapel Perilous to signal that the Knight had survived his ordeal."

empty cisterns and exhausted wells: in the Old Testament these signified loss of faith and worship of false gods.

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home: Chapel Perilous of the Grail legends

although it could be any chapel "in the visionary landscape of the poem".

Only a cock stood on the roof tree: in biblical terms, the cock is associated with betrayal as, upon Christ's being arrested, Peter thrice denied knowing Christ, and the cock crowed immediately after the denial. Peter thereupon remembered Christ's words: Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matthew xxvi, 69-75) But the cock also has positive connotations as it heralds morning. Jain marks that

“Eliot’s onomatopoeia reproduces the sound of the crowing of the cock. This is the French rendering of the English ‘Cock-a-doodle-do’.

Himavant: “The Sanskrit name for high, snow-covered mountains in the Himalayan ranges”.

Check Your Progress:

1. The use of myth in *The Waste Land* has a structural as well as a critical function. Expatriate upon this statement.
2. Examine Eliot’s critique of contemporary society as being based on a sense of ‘cultural alienation’. Does it add to or detract from his modernist cosmopolitanism?
3. Eliot’s concern with religion and its myths in *The Waste Land* was allied to his view of cultures as alternate perspectives which were under threat in contemporary modern civilization. Examine the validity of the statement in relation to the different sections of the poem.
4. Analyse the role of the quest motif in *The Waste Land* in connection with the Grail legend, the figure of the Fisher King, and the god of renewal of life.

Then spoke the thunder / DA: Jain’s comments will be useful for you—

“Eliot refers the reader to the Fable of the Thunder in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* V, 2. The threefold offspring of the creator Prajapati, gods, men and demons, approach Prajapati for instruction after completing their formal education. To each group he utters the syllable ‘da’. Each group interprets this reply differently. The gods interpret it as ‘*damyata*’ (‘control yourselves’). The men interpret it as ‘*datta*’ (‘give’). The demons interpret it as ‘*dayadhvam*’ (‘be compassionate’). When the groups, in turn, give their interpretations, Prajapati responds with ‘*Om*’ signifying that they have fully understood. The parable concludes: ‘This very thing the heavenly voice of thunder repeats, *da, da, da*, that is, control yourselves, give, be compassionate. One should practise this same triad, self-control, giving and compassion.

Eliot's attention was first drawn to this passage in May 1912 by Charles Lanman, his Sanskrit teacher at Harvard, who gave him a copy of Vasudev Laxman Shastri Phansikar's Sanskrit edition of *The Twenty-Eight Upanishads*.

In the original text, 'da' is interpreted differently by three orders of existence—gods, men and demons. This sequence provides an orderly descent through the scale of existence and gives an indication of the shortcomings of each of the three orders. The fable concludes, however, by exhorting men to practise all the three injunctions for it is suggested that there are no gods or demons other than men. Eliot, too, sees them as pertaining to the human condition. He altered the original sequence possibly because he believed that the two imperatives of 'give' and 'sympathize' are necessary prerequisites for the attainment of self-control. In the original passage, the triple injunction is itself an interpretation of the thunder's utterance, even though it is validated by Prajapati's response. Eliot, in turn, adapts that interpretation and gives to it his own meaning."

Datta: what have we given? . . . an age of prudence can never retract: a recurrent theme in Eliot's poetry, as Jain points out; connect this with the earlier section on the hyacinth garden. Eliot interprets the thunder as an injunction to self-surrender.

memories draped by the beneficent spider: Eliot refers us again to Webster's *The White Devil*, to Flamineo's speech warning against unfaithfulness.; Jain reads—"Although the allusion introduces a darker, disturbing note, the emotionally charged passage is a negation of Flamineo's cynicism."

Dayadhvam: Eliot reads this as 'sympathize' although some versions look on it as meaning 'be compassionate'. Eliot's note refers us to Dante's *Inferno*, xxxiii, 46—"and below I heard the outlet of the horrible tower locked up" spoken by Ugolino della Gherardesca, an Italian noble of the thirteenth-century who recalls his imprisonment with his two sons and grandsons in a tower. Ugolino heard the key 'turn once only' once they were locked up. The keys to the prison were thrown into the river and the prisoners left to starve. As Jain remarks, "The allusion communicates a sense of finality and suggests the terrifying

consequences of imprisoning oneself within one's own ego or consciousness.”

Eliot also quotes from *Appearance and Reality* (1893) by the philosopher F.H. Bradley (1864-1924) on whom he had written his Harvard doctoral dissertation . . . In the quoted passage Bradley writes of the impossibility of communicating with others, since each self is enclosed within its own privately apprehended experience . . . The injunction of the thunder to sympathize affirms both the possibility and the necessity of communicating with others, . . . The injunction of the thunder is seen as a desired necessity, as opposed to an actual state of being. The ability to sympathize and so to escape from the prison of the self is held out only as a tenuous, momentary possibility.”

Coriolanus: the hero of Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus*, a Roman general who would have been consul but was later banished from Rome due to his contempt for the Roman mob. He took his revenge by leading the Volscians, (whom he had earlier defeated on behalf of the Romans) against Rome. However, a Volscian general, Aufidius, finally conspired against Coriolanus and slew him with the accusation that Coriolanus had betrayed the Volscians. Jain remarks that Eliot's allusion to Coriolanus is unclear –“Perhaps Eliot's lines suggest the very tenuous possibility of reviving for a moment a Coriolanus who has learnt to sympathize, rather than a recovery of the earlier, unbroken, self-sufficient man. Possibly, the memory of a broken Coriolanus serves as a reminder to those who are self-sufficient and lacking in sympathy.”

Damyata: Eliot's translation of the word is “control”; some translations give it as ‘restrain/control’.

I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me: Eliot refers us to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the figure of the Fisher King.

Shall I at least set my lands in order?: In Isaiah xxxviii, 1, the prophet Isaiah says to King Hezekiah, whose kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians –“Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live”. Jain reads: “Eliot's line suggests the need for setting the waste regions of the self in order.” She also suggests another allusion

to the prayer of the Italian poet, Jacopone da Todi (1230- 1306), which Dante “prefixed to the *Purgatorio*: ‘Set my love in order, O thou who lovest me’.

London Bridge is falling down: refrain of the familiar nursery rhyme – ‘London Bridge is falling down, falling down,/ London Bridge is falling down, / My fair lady.’ Connecting this with the earlier, “Falling towers/ Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London”, we can turn to the suggestion by Moody that “there could be a mocking glance through the nursery rhyme at the builders of bridges, entered in Frazer’s records, who buried a living person in the foundations to appease the river god and keep the bridge from falling.” Jain thinks that “the line evokes the collapse of civilization’ it also suggests the disintegration of the self.”

Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina /—Eliot’s note refers to Dante’s *Purgatorio* xxvi, 145-8 – ‘ “And so I pray you, by that Virtue which leads you to the topmost of the stair—be mindful in due time of my pain”. Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.’ Dante meets the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, who is suffering punishment for lustfulness, in Purgatory, to be purged of his sins, who pleads for Dante’s prayers.

Quando fiam uti chelidon —**O swallow swallow:** line from an anonymous Latin poem (perhaps of the second century) ‘Pervigilium Veneris’ (The Vigil of Venus). The poem is an invocation, Jain tells us, to “love and springtime, . . . The quoted phrase comes at the end: “Now the raucous swan song sounds on the lake: the girl of Tereus pours forth her music from the poplar shade, as if moved to tell of love, not to lament her sister and the barbarous husband . . . Hers is the song, and we are silent: when will my spring come? When shall I become as the swallow that I may cease to be silent?” Procne, Tereus’s wife, was transformed into a swallow, and Philomela into nightingale, when they were pursued by Tereus, who had raped Philomela. . . .

‘O Swallow, Swallow, opens the Prince’s song in section iv of Tennyson’s *The Princess*. The Latin phrase from ‘Pervigilium Veneris’ is amalgamated with an echo from Tennyson’s poem, written nearly two thousand years later . . . to evoke an unbearable yearning for release and

transformation, together with an anguished recognition of its impossibility.”

Stop to Consider:

Dante’s *Purgatorio* – *Purgatorio* (Italian for “Purgatory”) is the second part of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. It is an allegory telling of the climb of Dante up the Mount of Purgatory, guided by the Roman poet Virgil. In the poem, Purgatory is depicted as a mountain in the Southern Hemisphere, consisting of a bottom section (Ante-Purgatory), 7 levels of suffering and spiritual growth, and finally the Earthly Paradise at the top. It was written in the early 14th century.

Gerard Nerval - Gérard de Nerval (1808 – 1855) was the *nom-de-plume* of the French poet, essayist and translator **Gérard Labrunie**, one of the most essentially Romantic French poets.

Richard Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*

Tristan und Isolde (*Tristan and Isolde*, or *Tristan and Isolda*) is an opera, or music drama, in three acts by Richard Wagner to a German libretto by the composer, based largely on the romance by Gottfried von Straßburg. It was composed between 1856 and 1859 and premiered in Munich on 10 June 1865 with Hans von Bülow conducting.

These explanatory notes are from the ‘Wikipedia’ on the Internet. You should find them useful even they are very brief.

Le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie: a line from ‘El Desdichado’, a sonnet by Gerard de Nerval (1808-55). Jain’s explanation –“Aquitaine was the region in southern France where the troubadour poets, writing in the Provençal language, flourished from the late eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. The medieval concept of courtly love, which deeply influenced later European lyrical poetry, first appeared in troubadour poetry. Physical passion is idealized and sublimated in the cult of courtly love. The culture of which the troubadours were a part was destroyed by the Albigensian Crusade against heresy in southern France (1208-13). By that destruction de Nerval’s persona, the Prince of Aquitaine, felt himself disinherited of the tradition of the troubadours. Eliot appropriates Nerval’s voice and persona to lament the decay of his culture. The ‘ruined tower’ fuses the earlier images of falling towers, signifying the disintegration of civilization and of the self.”

Why then Ile fit you: Eliot refers to *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd (1557?-95), the subtitle of which “Hieronymo is Mad Againe”. Jain points to a closer connection with the words of Hieronymo (the hero of the play): “Hieronymo, frantic with grief because of the murder of his son. plans the destruction of the murderers. He is asked to write a court entertainment and replies, ‘Why then Ile fit you!’ His answer is double-edged, meaning that he will write something suitable for the occasion, and that he will punish the murderers fittingly. he arranges that the murderers, who act in his play, are themselves killed during the performance. Hieronymo’s play was composed of fragments of poetry in unknown languages: ‘Each one of us / Must act his part in unknown languages,/ That it may breed the more variety.’ The allusion to Hieronymo’s play, therefore, evokes the cultural fragmentation which is enacted in the preceding lines. It also hints at a major strategy of *The Waste Land*—the playing of roles in different languages whereby the author’s intentions are masked. In the guise of Hieronymo the poet here seems disconcertingly to threaten the reader . . . or himself. The quotation of the subtitle of Kyd’s play . . . suggests the precarious nature of the poet/persona’s mental equilibrium.”

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata: Jain thinks that the triple injunction of the thunder appears as a possible way of countering madness.

Shantih shantih shantih: Eliot finds the equivalent of this in ‘the Peace which passeth understanding’, and refers to the words of Paul with which he addressed the early Christians – ‘And the Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus’ (Philippians iv, 7). We can agree that Eliot’s attempt was to find a word or phrase which conveyed the profundity and thus he went outside European tradition to find one. The spelling here was perhaps to approximate as closely as possible to the Sanskrit word. Jain adds: “The ending of Eliot’s poem is hedged with uncertainty. Moody suggests that the invocation may have meant for Eliot himself, as he completed the poem, ‘a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation, which is in itself indescribable.’ Or as Rajan points out, the final benediction may be read as ‘reflecting the peace of enlightenment, or as indicating no more than

exhausted subsidence into a consolatory formula, a termination rather than an ending.’ The invocation seems to articulate a desire rather than affirm than achieved state.”

4.6 SUMMING UP

You should be overwhelmed by now – by the mass of detailed explanations of the references needed to properly read *The Waste Land*. However, you should also have realized by this time that Eliot’s work is hugely comprehensive and sweeping in its canvas. In fact, you should be interested by all that is hidden in a line of words. In a sense, you need to be a scholar—Eliot would have been most happy with that—to read all that lies below the surface of a line of Eliot’s poetry. He does not merely confine himself to the adroit quibbling of words that often stands in for verse. Yet it is also true that none outside the scholarly circuit can get to the heart of Eliot’s poetry. The ideology tugs both ways. *The Waste Land* makes it clear to all of us that there is no simple vision that will answer the grave doubts regarding Western civilization. You should find it interesting –even excited – to know that Eliot dared to go outside his own culture to draw in widely different perspectives on the cataclysm that the Western world faced in the third decade of the twentieth century. The references therefore should make this absolutely clear to you. If as a student, you are worried by the mass of notes, just give the poem one thorough reading, to be followed up by a more informed survey later on. The explanations above mean that you at least have an idea of the main features of the texts Eliot refers to – for instance, what is Dante’s *Purgatorio* all about? That will be of immense help in your final understanding. By the end of your having worked through the unit, you should be able to write at least a thousand-word essay on the subject!

4.7 REFERENCES & SUGGESTED READINGS

David Perkins – *A History of Modern Poetry - Modernism and After* ;
The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and
London, England, 1987

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

Jain, Manju, *T.S.Eliot: Selected Poems* (With A critical Reading and
Comprehensive Notes), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, by
arrangement with Faber & Faber, 1992

Leavis, F.R. *New Bearings in English Poetry* University of Michigan
Press, 1932, 1936

Cox, C.B., and Arnold P.Hinchliffe, '*The Waste Land*': *A Casebook* ,
Macmillan, London, 1968

* * *

Unit 5

T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

5.1 Objectives

5.2 “The Waste Land”: Approaching the Poet/ Reading his poems

5.3 Eliot’s preoccupations in “The Waste Land”

5.4 Eliot’s distinctive style in “The Waste Land”

5.5 Critical Reception

5.5 References and Suggested Readings

5.6 Answers to Check your Progress

5.1 Objectives

This unit is an attempt to provide a supplementary reading of T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”. This unit will help the learners-

- To understand the ways of approaching T.S. Eliot as a poet and read “The Waste Land” and other poems.
- Situate the poem in the context of modernism.
- To analyze Eliot’s style and the issues pertinent in his various poems.
- Find answers to the important questions related to Eliot’s poems.

5.2 The Waste Land: Approaching the Poet/ Reading his poems

T.S. Eliot is considered to be one of the forerunners of modern poetry. His poems are infused with the complexities of the lives of people in the modern world. The 20th century witnessed a number of significant changes in the socio-political scenario as well as technological advancements. These rapid changes impacted the lives of the people in numerous ways. One such impact was felt strongly in the spiritual and emotional degeneration that found expression in the works of many writers of the modern age including Eliot. Therefore, it is important to situate Eliot's poetry in this context and approach him as a modern poet. The 20th century poetry was marked by some revolution in poetic taste and practice. Writing at such a juncture in history, Eliot understood that poetry should reflect the complexities of life that came along with such changes and also represent the culture decadence of the early 20th century. Modernism advocated freedom of speech and breaking away from the conventions through experimentation and Eliot's poetry was embedded with modern orientations in terms of style and language.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" we encounter the problems of Prufrock who is the representative of modern man. The poem gives us a glimpse into his troubled life with physical and intellectual weaknesses. The fragmentary nature of his existence is highlighted through his mental state which determines the way he views the world. The frequent images of disintegration reflect the sub conscious mind of the person. If we consider the setting of the poem, the physical space can be considered as an extension of the person's mental state. The modernist approach of examining the inner psyche of a person is represented in Eliot's poems. The idea of alienation features in most of the modern texts and Eliot's poems also represent this idea delving deep into the psychology of modern man.

Stop to Consider

Most of Eliot's poems deal with the psychological aspect of man in the context of the twentieth century. The world that he observed and represented in his works is mostly disoriented, alienated and degenerated. It was essential that modern writers like him give a true representation of the present scenario breaking away with the Victorian ideals and sentiments. The horrors of World War I had

changed the perception of the writers who captured the transformed world and the troubled consciousness of the people in their works. Prufrock is one such person whose dilemma to face the world, inability to make a decision and the problem to communicate with others can be regarded as an example of the paralysis of human psyche.

The poem “The Hollow Men” presents a strange world which is alienated and surrounded by people who have no hopes in life. The condition of life that is portrayed is an impact of the First World War that brought utter despair and frustration among people. People are termed as ‘dead’ and the horrors of the war have left a state of nothingness in the European culture. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker states that he belongs to a group of ‘hollow men’ and the space that they inhabit is also ‘hollow’. Eventually the readers realise that the speaker’s emptiness or hollowness is not physical, it is an extension of the degeneration of the European culture. There are many instances in the poem where these ‘hollow men’ are described as inhuman lacking some essential human values. They are emotionless and voiceless and it seems that their life is completely meaningless devoid of any hope and faith. If we look at the thematic aspect of “The Waste Land”, moral decadence is suggested and not directly stated and the poem gives us a horrific vision of the barbarity of human existence. The sense of chaos and confusion brought by the war is one of the predominant themes in many of the poems of the modern era.

5.3 Eliot’s preoccupations in “The Waste Land”

The opening of the poem introduces April as the ‘cruellest month’ challenging the conventional notion of the month as being associated with life and rebirth. Various poems have attributed April month with sweet showers but Eliot in “The Waste Land” calls April’s showers as cruel. The metaphorical use of seasons and allusions to nature suggest the way in which Eliot visions the modern waste land that is devoid of the capacity to produce new life. Not only is the physical world barren but the poet’s sensibility is also not nourished due to the life conditions. The impact of the great war and the technologized world that lacked traditional values and beliefs could not ensure a place conducive to new life and growth. The poet lacked inspiration to work and all he could imagine was ‘a heap of broken images.’ However, a certain recovery of

the European society is suggested and improvisation of the modern poetic tradition is also seen in the writings of Eliot and others. Eliot gives a number of death images and calls 'London' as an unreal city. The first part of the poem called 'Burial of the Dead' is a representation of the consequence of the First World War. 'Burial of the Dead' presents a number of images of life and death. Although life is breathing and germinating new forms, the speaker in the poem regards rebirth as cruel because any kind of new life reminds him of death. For example, the soil in which plants grow during spring consists of the dead leaves of earlier plants. The title 'Burial of the Dead' can be related to the Anglican burial service. The first section is again divided into different parts which gives us the perspective of different speakers.

The first part deals with the childhood memories of a woman who claims that she is German and not Russian. The woman gives example of some aspects of the season in relation to the barren state of her present existence. In the second section there is an apocalyptic vision of a journey into a desert. The speaker questions if any root or branch would grow out of the stony barren soil. All the symbols of modern life are broken and it is a wasteland where the sun is presented as harsh, the trees are dead and they offer no shade and the song of the birds could not be heard any longer and there is dearth of water. The speaker talks about the presence of something other than one's own shadow that is cast behind or in front of the person. The speaker is talking about the shadow of death and this arouses a feeling of fear among the readers. The speaker gives a glimpse into the romantic past but now his feelings are neither alive or dead. There is an Emptiness that he feels which has rendered him speechless and he could hear nothing but silence, this feeling is manifested in the desolate and empty sea that he visions.

In the next section, Eliot introduces Madam Sosostriis who is famously known as the lady fortune teller with tarot cards. She reads the cards and gives a gloomy picture, envisioning a place where people are walking aimlessly in circles. In the last section of 'Burial of the Dead', Eliot presents London city with a crowd of people feeling isolated and alienated and walking with their eyes cast down at their feet. The speaker in the section seems to encounter a man with whom he fought together at the battle of Mylae. The speaker asks Stetson about the dead body that was planted in the garden and questions how far it has grown. The entire first part of the poem is a commentary on the philosophical underpinnings of life and death.

In the second section called 'A Game of Chess', Eliot presents a number of voices. At the very beginning, the readers are given a glimpse of the setting of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with a

richly furnished room. Ovid's story of the rape of Philomela and her transformation into a Nightingale is also represented. The conversation between a neurotic woman and a man is presented where the woman desperately wants the man to speak to her. It is suggested that men have lost their voices and are almost dead inhabiting in rat's alleys. The last part of the section is based on Ophelia's final scene before her suicide in Hamlet. Eliot makes use of the medley of voice and these voices are not always distinguishable from one another.

In the third section titled 'The Fire Sermon', the natural atmosphere is described in detail and suggested how it is a manifestation of the human condition. The speaker says that the trees by the side of the river appear to be motionless, their last few leaves clinging onto the branches are about to sink. The place is without any human trace and the land seems to be barren, the soft wind is blowing without any human to hear it. The speaker when he says that all the nymphs are gone suggests that the romantic aspect to life has disappeared. It is also mentioned that the sweet Thames River will stop flowing eventually when he will finish his poem and every human trace like empty bottles, sandwich papers, handkerchiefs, cigarette butts and other kind of trashes that flow along the river are not visible now. The speaker also mentions that he could hear the laugh of death and is also worried because there are only few things for him to say after which sweet Thames will stop flowing. The fourth section of the poem called 'Death by Water' depicts the death a man Phlebas the Phoenician. This is the shortest section of the poem which deals with the significance of death. It is mentioned that the creatures of the sea have eaten up his body and nothing remains of him in this earth. All the worldly cares and worries have gone along with his death and this reminds the entire humanity about the mortality of one's existence.

Stop to Consider

"The Waste Land" can be regarded as a poem that deals with the alienation and the broken state of modern life. The poem is a reflection on World War I and the trauma caused by the war to the entire generation not only on the battlefield but also on a personal level. Through the poem, Eliot wants to make the readers realise that World War I has rendered modern society as lacking both the spiritual guidance as well as the cultural richness of the past. The people have lost their ability to connect or communicate with others which is a distinctive feature of human life. There are many instances in the poem which shows that the modern world has taken away the

essential human qualities and values and the people walking on the streets of London city are represented like Zombies, a condition which clearly indicates the disillusioned state of the survivors of World War I and also the impact that the war had on the common people

The last section of “The Waste Land” called ‘What the Thunder Said’ is quite dramatic in terms of the use of imagery as well as the depiction of events. An apocalyptic climax is built where people are seen as suffering and crying in the prison as well as in palaces because there is no sign of life with only rocks seen everywhere. The gardens are cold and lifeless and every man who was alive is now dead, the people are slowly moving towards their end. The cities of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna and London are referred to as unreal cities which have seen destruction time and again. A dilapidated Chapel is mentioned which can be assumed to be the chapel in the legend of the Holy Grail. A transition is seen when a cock crows at the top of the chapel and it begins to rain. This has brought respite in the lives of the people by relieving the drought and bringing back life and regeneration to the land. This setting then shifts to the Ganges which is far away from Europe. Eliot draws on The Hindu fables especially the Upanishad by meditating on life and interpreting ‘what the thunder says’. It is believed that the thunder expresses through its speech and Eliot ends the poem with the traditional ending of an Upanishad, that is, the final chant of ‘Shantih Shantih Shantih’ seeking peace through spiritual tradition.

Self-Assessment Questions

- The Waste Land is a commentary on modern civilization. Reflect on this idea.
- Consider the role of history in The Waste Land and think about Eliot’s conception of time.
- The water imagery of The Waste Land is significant starting from the summer rain in the beginning to the redeeming spell of rain at the end. Analyse the imagery and its importance in the poem.
- Comment on The Waste Land as a poem of hopefulness or pessimism.
- Analyze the philosophical element of life and death in the poem.

5.4 Eliot's distinctive style in "The Waste Land"

Eliot has experimented in terms of language as well as style in "The Waste Land". The poem can be regarded as an important statement of 20th century poetry not only for the extensive symbolism that was used but also for the skill with which Eliot used formal techniques that the early modern writers had just begin to experiment with. Eliot has successfully represented the post-war sense of desolation, isolation, uselessness and the disillusionment of an entire generation. One of the striking features that we find in "The Waste Land" is that there is no chronology or timeline as far as the plot of the poem is concerned. In fact, "The Waste Land" does not have a plot that has a definite beginning and an end. The poem can be conceived as a text that has five sections and this is the only obvious structure of the poem that has to be read in continuum to have a comprehensive understanding of the overall poem. The readers will encounter different kinds of characters who are not related to one another but all of them seem to share some kind of experiences that are common. If we look at the literary style of the poem, we see that there are some monologue and stream of consciousness technique used in the poem to represent the inner lives of the characters and their mental states.

One of the first characters that we encounter in the poem is Marie in 'The Burial of the Dead,' who is an aristocrat. She is remembering her life in Munich and she says:

And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,

My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,

And I was frightened.

We come across two women in the section called 'A Game of Chess,' and it is a bar setting where the bartender is announcing closing time. One of the characters says,

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said--

I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.

The multiple voices in the two sections are different but the dialogues of the characters are presented in such a manner that it is difficult to distinguish who is saying what and to whom the speech is directed. When the bartender says, 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME' the readers do not have any clue regarding who the speaker of the line is because it is not written within quotation marks and herein lies the complexity of

the language of the poem. All the voices in the poem seem to dissolve with each other leaving the readers confused about the identity of the person.

In “The Waste Land” Eliot has used allusions, symbols, different kinds of verse forms and he has amalgamated poetic fragments to represent the language of a generation in crisis and this was considered to be the classic example of the language of a modern poem. The juncture at which Eliot was writing this poem was a significant time in his life when he was thirty-three, an age when Dante had imagined the Heaven and Hell and written it down in his Divine Comedy. The age of thirty-three is also significant because it was at the same age that Christ was crucified and we have references to the death of Christ and how he became the Saviour of mankind in “The Waste Land.” Eliot had a deep sense of literary tradition where he also experimented with free verse in order to represent private as well as public experiences and his writings also tend to combine lyrical modes and tones into a poem of epic scope.

Check your Progress

1. When was “The Waste Land” published?
2. Who is the narrator of “The Waste Land”?
3. Who was Phlebas?
4. From where is the title of “The Waste Land” taken?
5. Who was Madame Sosostris?
6. Why does Eliot use the phrase “The Waste Land”?
7. Why is April the cruellest of all month?
8. What are lilacs symbolic of?
9. Who was Philomela?
10. Who was Stetson?

Like many modern writers, Eliot was always conscious about his equation with literary tradition. In his famous essay “Tradition and Individual Talent”, Eliot explained how modern poets should always be conversant with tradition while maintaining their originality. Eliot also believed that understanding poetry of the same tradition with a new perspective is important in order to achieve greatness of poetry. Eliot has experimented incorporating fragments of tradition in his poem “The Waste Land” by using a number of allusions. For example, many scholars have identified a number of allusions in the poem where Eliot

has drawn upon instances from the Book of Common Prayer, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Donne, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Sappho and others. The very beginning of the poem has allusion to the Father of English Poetry, Geoffrey Chaucer. Eliot, by alluding to Geoffrey Chaucer, has placed “The Waste Land” in a particular English literary tradition. However, there is a departure in Eliot where he represents the April season differently from that of Chaucer. According to Chaucer, the showers of April bestow life and regeneration in this earth,

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote

But Eliot presents April as the cruellest of all months that breeds “Lilacs out of the dead land” and therefore the traditional association of April with that of rejuvenation is challenged in “The Waste Land.” Eliot has used these allusions to serve various purposes of his poetic needs. The allusions had helped him to give some symbolic weightage to the contemporary aspect of the poem and make the readers to create some kind of associations in their minds.

Eliot, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, writes about the mind of the poet as a catalyst and he said, “*When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless, the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, 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.*” This aspect of impersonality can be associated with Eliot’s idea that poetry is more about form and balance and not entirely about the expression of emotions. For example, in “The Waste Land”, Eliot has created a number of characters with various voices but he has not identified himself with any one character but tried several personas and therefore he has been able to achieve the kind of impersonality that he claims poetry should achieve.

“The Waste Land” has challenged many conventions of the poetic tradition particularly the poetry of the nineteenth century by rejecting traditional meter, rhyme and the stanza pattern. The poem is written mostly in free verse although Eliot believed that every poem made certain use of some kind of meter that made the poem unique. Eliot was also of the opinion that some of the most interesting verses

have used simple form like the iambic pentameter and withdrawn from it constantly and some verses have not used any form at all. The life of the verse lies in this fixity and fluidity that drives away the monotony of composition. Eliot wanted to capture the actual mood and rhythm of speech and therefore he constantly experimented with different techniques. The radical use of language, experimental rhythms and syntax made it difficult for the readers to comprehend the meaning of his poems easily.

5.5 Summing Up

From what Perkins has to tell us, Eliot's artistic fame was not comprehensible to poets and critics older than him. These included names like H.L. Mencken, Harriet Monroe, Van Wyck Brooks, Louis Untermeyer, Harold Monro, Amy Lowell, John Crowe Ransom, and W.B. Yeats. Among academicians, F.O. Matthiessen was the first to publish significant commentary on Eliot in a book brought out in 1935.

Eliot's own critical contributions went a good way towards augmenting his fame in the literary world.

We may note, with the helpful review written by Prof. Jewel Spears Brooker, that the "history of Eliot criticism from the 1920s until the present can be charted dialectically. Major critics in the first generation (say, from the late twenties to the fifties) accepted Eliot into the canon and anointed him as the greatest poet of his age; many critics in the next generation (say, from the sixties to the eighties) rejected him and heaped contempt on his art, his literary theories, his religion, and his politics; a number of present critics, younger and trained in philosophy as well as literature, have returned to him with fresh appreciation and understanding. The negative criticism was part of a larger reaction against modernism and the New Critics, but the attacks on Eliot went far beyond the attempt to historicize him and to judge him by standards other than his own. Attacks on Eliot and modernism abated in the 1980s; he is returning as a positive reference point in modern letters and his position as one of the century's finest poets is secure."

It helps us to know that *The Waste Land* has aroused puzzlement among its readers from its very publication. As Harriet Davidson comments, "the poem's lack of thematic clarity and its careful refusal of connections between images, scenes and voices, makes *The Waste Land* particularly open to different interpretations. In fact, it is a measure of

the poem's indigestibility that many of the controversies surrounding the poem when it was published in 1922 persist today. Readers in the twenties argued over whether the poem was too radical and meaningless or too conservative and tied to traditional values. New readers are still likely to come away from the poem bewildered by the many voices, allusions, and shifting tones of the poem. And professional critics still argue over the most basic of issues: what voice, if any, dominates the poem, what themes control the poem, and what values are upheld by the poem?"

Davidson continues to say –“Given these unresolved questions, it seems surprising that the poem has come to seem such a monolithic representative of the long dominant New Critical values.

5.6 References and Suggested Readings

Bergenzi, Bernard. *T. S. Eliot*, Collier Books, New York, 1972

Cuddy, Lois A., and David H. Hirsch, eds. *Critical Essays on T. S. Eliot*, G. K. Hall & Co., 1991.

Howarth, Peter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernist Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Kenner, Hugh, ed. *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice Hall Inc., 1962

Krasner, David. *A History of Modern Drama*. 1st ed., vol. 1, John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2011.

Longman, Pearson. “LDOCE.” *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, fifth ed., Pearson Education Limited, 2009.

Mahdi, Ali Abduljalil. “Tradition in T.S Eliot’s The Hollow Men”. University of Kufa. Miola, 2017

Martin, Graham. ed. *Eliot in perspective*. Humanities Press, 1970.

Marin, Castaneda. “English Modernist Poetry: T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land”. University of Newcastle, 2017

Mihsin, Haider Jebur. “Allusion in T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Hollow Men’.” *Babl University Journal, Human Science*, vol. 22, no. 6, 2014

Pericles Lewis's *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 129- 151

Ricks, Christopher. *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*. University of California Press, 1988.

Robert S. “Seven Types of Intertextuality.” *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality*, by Michele Marrapodi, 1st ed., Manchester University Press, 2014, pp. 13–25.

Unger, Leonard. *T. S. Eliot*. University of Minnesota Press, 1970.

Unit 6

W. B Yeats : ‘The Second Coming’, ‘Byzantium’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’

Unit Structure :

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introducing the Poet
- 6.3 Works of the Poet
- 6.4 Critical Reception
- 6.5 “The Second Coming”
 - 6.5.1 Context of the Poem
 - 6.5.2 Reading the Poem
- 6.6 “Byzantium”
 - 6.6.1 Context of the Poem
 - 6.6.2 Reading the Poem
- 6.7 “Sailing to Byzantium”
 - 6.7.1 Context of the Poem
 - 6.7.2 Reading the Poem
- 6.8 Summing Up
- 6.9 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the unit is to introduce W.B. Yeats, one of the major and Nobel Prize winner modern poets. Yeats used Irish folklore as background material for his early poems. The emergence of Yeats as a poet and thinker can be understood in relation to his Irish background and he can be termed as the pioneer of Celtic revival in Ireland. And as modern poet, his modernity has also been very much connected with his nationality.

By the end of this unit, you will be able to —

- *place* Yeats in the English poetic tradition
- *identify* Yeats as pioneer of Celtic revival
- *have* more insights on Irish history and culture and Evaluate Yeats contribution to English poetry

6.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

W.B. Yeats was born on June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, a seaside suburb of Dublin. The family of Yeats's father was mercantile settlers. He spent his childhood alternately in London and Sligo. Yeats's father John Yeats was born in 1774 and was sent to the Dublin University, where after winning Bishop Berkley's gold medal for Greek, he took orders in the Church of Ireland. In 1803, he married Jane Taylor, the daughter of a Dublin Castle official, and two years later was appointed in county Sligo, where he remained until his death in 1846. As Joseph Hone says: "It was in this way that the long association of W.B Yeats's family with Sligo began." John Butler Yeats, artist, author and philosopher was born at Tullylish in 1863. Joseph Hone so says—"The married couple settled in a house at the head of Sandymount Avenue, Dublin and their house was called 'Georgeville'. At Georgeville late at night on June 13th, 1865, the poet, W.B Yeats was born. He was given the name of William Butler and baptized a month later at Donnybrook Church."

The first three years of infancy were passed in his birthplace Dublin. But in 1868, the family moved to London so that his father could study to become a professional painter. The family then settled at 23 Fitzroy Road, Regent's Park and lived there until 1874.

Sligo, not London was the original home for all the children of John Butler Yeats. For W.B Yeats, the human being who first occupied a special place in his mind was not his father or mother but grandfather William Pollexfen of Sligo, the silent and fierce old man, as Yeats describes in his poem—"In memory of Alfred Pollexfen".

In 1874, when Yeats was nine years old, the family moved from 3 Fitzroy Road, Regent's park, London to 14 Edith villas, West Kensington. In 1875, Yeats began to attend the Godolphin School in Hammersmith. But throughout his school days, Yeats felt a yearning for

the West of Ireland. The visits to Sligo had become very few, yet Yeats's great love for Sligo remained with him for the rest of his life.

In 1880, when Yeats was fifteen, the family left London for Ireland. Their return to Ireland was mainly for financial reasons. During that period, Yeats's family employed a servant, a fisherman's wife, who was a mine of local lore and whose accounts of supernatural adventures provided Yeats with material for a whole chapter called 'Village Ghosts' in *Celtic Twilight*—his first published work which appeared in 1893.

Yeats died of heart failure on 28th January and was buried in accordance with the wishes expressed by him in "Under Ben Bulbin" with the inscription: "Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman, pass by."

Stop to Consider:

Celtic Revival in Ireland

The term Celtic Revival applies to a group of writers who had been calling attention to a wealth of unused literary material in Ireland, as Kipling had done for India. The school probably originated in a lecture by Stopford Brooke, a famous historian, on "the need of getting Irish literature into the English language." Its changing centers have been the Irish literary Society, the National Literary Society of Dublin, the Irish Literary Theatre and later Abbey Theatre (1904) The original purpose of the revival was to awaken interest in what was called ancient bardic literature. The bardic tales were first recorded in Latin by missionary monks, who collected enough to fill over a thousand volumes, few of which have been printed.

Yeats is honoured as leader of the Celtic Revival, more so in other countries than in his own. To a certain extent, the literary pursuit of Ireland is reflected in Yeats's own career. The Gaelic period, before the Norman conquest, with all its strange beauty of legend and imagination the Anglo-Irish writings in English with the International outlook of eighteenth and nineteenth century culture; then the Revival blending the two strains, beginning with writings primarily concerned with matters of Irish interest and then becoming of more universal interest; all these have their parallels in Yeats's life. Yeats began to attempt the fusion of Gaelic nationalist and Anglo-Irish elements in Ireland.

6.3 WORKS OF THE POET

At the age of seventeen, Yeats first began to write verses. Although Yeats wanted to be an artist, but he continued to write poetry mostly on romantic subjects in the manner of Shelley. In 1885, Yeats verse appeared for the first time in ‘Dublin University Review’. Many of his early ballads reappeared in *The Wanderings of Oisín and other poems*. In 1887, his verse was published in England for the first time, when his ‘The Madness of King Groll’, appeared in the magazine *The Leisure Hour*. In the same year, he edited an anthology of poetry, which was published in Dublin under title *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*.

In 1888, he compiled a volume entitled *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, which was published in London. Thus gradually Yeats’ popularity began to grow wider. And he was beginning to be accepted by the public as an authority on Irish folklore and a poet of importance.

In George Pollexfen’s house, in 1888, Yeats completed a long poem on a theme from Irish legend: *The Wandering of Oisín and Other Poems*. The lyrics and Ballads contained in this Yeats’s first published book of verse—were in due course reprinted under the title *Crossways*.

Yeats in his *Memoirs* wrote: “I was twenty- three years old when the troubling of my life began. I had heard from time to time in letters from Miss O’Leary, John O’Leary’s old sister, of a beautiful girl who had left the society of the Vice regal Court for Dublin Nationalism. In after years I persuaded myself that I felt premonitory excitement at the first reading of her name. Presently she drove up to our house in Bedford Park with an introduction from John O’Leary to my father. I had never thought to see in a living woman of such a beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past.”

Of course, Maud Gonne became his chief interest. From the moment of their meeting all life for Yeats was changed, changed utterly. But, Maud Gonne did not respond to his passion. She accepted him with

delight as a friend and she was obsessed by a burning desire to free Ireland from its seven hundred year's dominion by England.

In 1891, the Rhymer's club was formed and in that year also, Yeats founded, in London, the Irish Literary Society. During that year he returned to Ireland on a visit, in the course of which he asked Maud Gonne to marry him. She refused but begged him for his friendship. Obsessed by her thought he wrote in that year a play—*The Countess Cathleen*, whose heroine was no one but Maud Gonne. The theme of the play was that Cathleen is a beautiful noble woman who, having sold her soul to the Devil so that her people may be saved from starvation, eventually goes to Heaven.

In 1894, Yeats wrote a play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. In 1899, Yeats's third volume of verse, *The Wind among the Reeds* appeared. For a long time, it was widely believed that all the love poems in this book, and in the books which followed it, was addressed to Maud Gonne. Yet there are some poems, which point to another woman, perhaps to more than one. There was a beautiful dark woman to whom Yeats refers in his unpublished autobiography, by the name 'Diana Vernon'.

In 1908 Yeats's *Collected Works* in verse and prose was published in 8 volumes. Then in 1910, Yeats another new volume *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* was published. The most striking fact to be mentioned here is that now Yeats had changed his style of writing his verse. John Unterecker in his book *A Reader's Guide to W.B. Yeats* said—"The romantic wistfulness, the dreamy, decorative quality of much of his earlier verse now gave way to a manner at once more terse, astringent and masculine, which becomes apparent in this volume." This trend is evident in his next volume *Responsibilities* (1914). In 1919, Yeats's new collection *The Wild Swans at Coole* was published.

From the time of the Easter Rising of 1916 up to the civil War of 1922, Yeats was more affected by public events. His violent romance was replaced then by the bitter realities and that can be ascertained from his *Michael Robertes and the Dancers* (1921), which reflected the clashes of those events. On Easter Monday 1916 the Irish rose in rebellion against the English, and between 1916 and 1921 they fought

the English in a guerrilla war. Even after 1921, rival Irish factions fought a civil war about whether to accept the peace Treaty which gave independence to the Irish Free state but separated it from the six counties known as Northern Island.

In 1918, Yeats published a volume of essays on mystical subjects, *Per Amica Silentia Luna*, which showed his interest in hidden world and mystical things. In 1922, Yeats became Senator of Irish Free State and during that period he delivered several important lectures in Senate. But, before publishing Yeats's most powerful verse collection *The Tower*, Yeats wrote another verse collection *A Women Young and Old*, and all these poems were written during in 1926 or 1927. In 1923, the King of Sweden awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, which was presented to him and two years later he published his appreciation in a short work-The Bounty of Sweden. In 1925, Yeats published his *A Vision*. It is an elaborate book on prose and it records Yeats's astrological, mystical and historical theories. In 1926, Yeats made a translation of Sophocles' Oedipus the King. Yeats presented it at Abbey Theatre. In the same year he wrote a book or a long essay on the death of Synge entitled *The Death of Synge* and other passages from an old Diary.

In 1927, Yeats *The Winding Stair* appeared and in 1928, he completed his other prose work, *A Packet for Ezra Pound*. In 1930, Yeats wrote a play entitled *The Words upon the Window Pan* and in 1933, his new collection of poems *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* and a new edition of his *Collected Poems* were published and in 1934 his *Collected Plays* appeared. In 1938, Yeats wrote *Purgatory*, a One Act play and on 28th January, 1939 Yeats died of heart failure.

6.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Yeats's poetry falls roughly into three divisions—the romantic, the realistic and the mystical. In the poetry of the first period, he dwells on love, beauty, nature and Irish mythology and tales of the supernatural, which he weaves into lovely dreams. In the second period,

his attention was on the grim reality of the Irish struggle for freedom. In the final period, both the dreams of early youth and realities of the Irish situation are replaced by a mystic contemplation of life, developed from various sources like native, eastern and western. Yeats's poems belonging to his early period dealt with Irish fairies, peasants and materials taken from Irish folklore. His *The Rose* (1893) reflects his use of Irish folk materials. And some of the poems in this collection deal with the legend of ancient pre-Christian Ireland: Cuchulain, the heroic fighter and lover; Furgus, the king who abandoned his kingdom to become a poet. According to John Unterecker—"Yeats made ultimately Cuchulain's battle with sea a structure designed to express man's anguish maddened by the complexities of warring emotions."

Stop to Consider

Yeats's Concept of Mask:

Yeats discovered a technique by which the personal utterances could be given the impersonal appearance. In this connection Yeats used masks of Beggar man, Crazy Jane, Tom the Lunatic, the wild old wicked man and the lovers of the Last poems and so on. Yeats's early poems reflect his use of Irish materials and Gaelic legends, but his style changed in poems of the middle period. In *Responsibilities*, his Irishness became connected with real people.

Although Yeats was a lyricist and symbolist, in his *The Wind Among the Reeds* he tried to help his readers understand the difficult Celtic and Occult material he was working with. Most of the poems of this collection, were written for Mrs Shakespeare or Maud Gonne to such characters as Hanrahan or Michael Roberts, Yeats could sort out his several selves. Using his feeling of multiple personality, he created poems. Most of the poems here, Yeats assigned to Aed, a character he explained in magical terms as "fire burning by itself". He described Michael Robertes as "fire reflected in water", Hanrahan was "fire blown by the wind." Yeats returned to his earlier method of using Irish materials. His two later volumes *The wild Swan At Coole* and *Michael Robert and His Dancers* show "the reblossoming of his poetry after the

cold winter rages of *Responsibilities*,” as A. Norman Jeffares says-
“The use of Irish materials helps originality and makes one’s verses sincere and gives one less numerous competitors. Besides, one should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one’s life.”

The Nobel award and the Senatorship crowned Yeats’s progress as man and poet. This flourishing life is reflected fully in the ‘Tower’ poetry.

6.5

6.5.1 Context of the poem: The Second Coming

The poem was written in 1919 after the First World War that created a sense of valuelessness of human lives and chaotic and disorderly situation all around the world. It was coincided with the beginning of the Irish War of Independence in January 1919, that followed the Easter Rising in April 1916. It was the time before the British Government decided to send in the Black and Tans to Ireland. Yeats used the phrase "the second birth" instead of "the Second Coming" in his first drafts.

The poem was written in the time when the flu pandemic of 1918-1919 created a sense of uncertainty when his pregnant wife Georgie Hyde-Lees caught the virus and was very close to death. The pandemic claimed 70 percent death rates among the pregnant women. While his wife was convalescing, Yeats was composing “The Second Coming”. The poem was first printed in *The Dial* in November 1920, and finally included in his collection of verses *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* published in 1921. The poem has Biblical reference of the Apocalypse and prophecy of Second Coming and describe the atmosphere of post-war situation.

6.5.2 Reading the Poem: The Second Coming

The first stanza of the poem creates an image of disorder and uncontrolled situation. The gyre keeps on widening by losing control

from the centre and there is discord between falcon and the falconer. The “falcon cannot hear the falconer”, perhaps because of the uncontrollable “widening gyre”. The falcons were used to hunt animals in medieval period, the bird was supposed to come back to its owner. But perhaps because of the disturbances created by “widening gyre” the bird could not hear its master’s call. The disconnection between the owner and the bird suggests disorderly chaotic situation. The line “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold” suggests reflection of World War when most of the European countries crumbled due to lack of control from Central Government. The centre has no control and the things were falling apart. Because of the disorder and discord, the anarchy and chaotic situations were emerging fast in the world. The “blood dimmed tide” suggests a reference to the bloodshed of the World War that polluted the rivers and oceans making them red. In the blood dimmed tide the responsible stakeholders and innocent people were submerged. The responsible stakeholders were baffled and confused by the situation while irresponsible peoples were excited for the destruction with full intensity. It was because of irresponsible handling of situations that went out of control:

“The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all convictions, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity” (Lines 6-8).

In the second stanza, the poet assure that it was the sign of “Second Coming”. The speaker senses a danger where he visualised a destructive image. The destruction is inevitable and eminent because of the sins, and lack of human values and lives. The first coming was pleasant and blissful but the second coming is for punishment and destruction. The “Spiritus Mundi”, which is the soul of the Universe was rattling with the arrival of apocalypse and sent the horrible image of rough beast:

“When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi

Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert” (Lines 12-13)

He was troubled by the sight of horrible image that was emerging from the desert. The shape of the beast was abnormal that had a lion’s body and head of a man. Its gaze was dangerously threatening and “pitiless as

the sun”. The shadows of the indignant desert birds that reel about the mysterious creature make the appearance more horrible.

Stop to Consider

The concept of “second coming” has religious origin. Both in Christianity and Muslim belief systems the return of Jesus Christ after his ascension to heaven is found. The mention regarding Christ is found in Messianic prophecies and in Christian eschatologies. In the New Testament the word *epiphaneia* is used to refer to the arrival of Christ. In the Greek New Testament the term *parousia* is used seventeen times to refer to the arrival of Jesus Christ which also appear in Mathew 24:37. In Islam, the term *Raj'a* is used to refer to return or the “second coming”. In Christian eschatological views the second arrival of Christ is mentioned who will come back to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. In Catholicism, it is believed that the Christ will come back to bring fullness of reign of God and he will punish the sinners and glorify the good souls which will be the final and eternal judgement but his return will depend on transforming power of holy spirits in the liturgy, living with the teachings of Christ and prayer for the Lord to come. According to Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the second coming of Jesus will be radically different than his first coming, which "was to save the lost world". Modern Scriptures of 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' teach that Christ's "Second Coming" will be the beginning of millennium which will be fearful for wicked and peaceful for good souls. They belief that there will be increasingly natural disasters, severe wars, and man-made disasters before the Second Coming.

In the last stanza of the poem, the poet reveals that the beast has not arrived yet, but its arrival is inevitable. His vision was eminent signal of the destruction of the world. The ‘stony sleep’ in the line “That twenty centuries of stony sleep” suggests insincerity of the people of the world towards the call of God. The cycle of “twenty centuries” is over and it is the right time to start another cycle by destroying the present generation. The nightmare created by the rocking cradle by the beast was an warning of the arrival of the destructive beast. The preparation for the arrival is almost ready as the last two lines of the poem suggest,

And what rough beast, its hour come
round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born
(Lines 21-22)

According to Christianity, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem to save the human beings from sins. But the rough beast that was moving towards Bethlehem to be born was for punishment of guilty people and destruction.

6.6

6.6.1 Context of the poem: Byzantium

The poem is set in Byzantium, depicts a night in the city. Byzantium is known as Istanbul today, it was an ancient Greek city in classical antiquity and became known as Constantinople in late antiquity. Its Greek name was 'Byzantion' and was Latinised as 'Byzantium' which was an important city during Byzantine Empire. The city was colonised by Greeks from Megara in 657 BC and later it was conquered by Ottoman Empire in 1453 AD, the city was also the capital of Roman Empire. The great Cathedral mentioned in the poem refers to the church of St. Sophia, built in the central part of Byzantium. Byzantium is presented as the city of perfection of art, creativity and human values.

6.6.2 Reading the Poem Byzantium

"Byzantium" was written four years later in 1930 after "Sailing to Byzantium", it can be read as sequel of the latter. The poem was published in the collection *Words For Music Perhaps and Other Poems* in 1932. In "Sailing to Byzantium", Yeats expressed about his desire to go to Byzantium and the poem is a depiction about his experience of stay in Byzantium. During the break of these two poems Yeats was suffering from Malta fever that impacted his physical and mental health.

The poem talks in first-person view point about the city of Byzantium, what happens at night. In the first stanza of the poem the poet starts with the depiction of the night in the city of Byzantium, “The unpurged images of day recede;/The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed”. When the night starts, the day’s human activities recede. Yeats expresses a sense of disappointment with “drunken soldiers” and “night-walkers (prostitutes)” which are the weaknesses of human nature and frailty. The cathedral gong signals the arrival of night and the soldiers of the emperor remains fast asleep, the songs of night-walkers fade out slowly. The ‘starlit” or “moonlit” dome show the insignificance and complexities of human lives, caused by the “fury and the mire of human veins”. The phrases such as “unpurged images”, “drunken soldiers”, “night-walkers”, “human veins” suggest poet’s disappointment with degrading human values of the time.

In the second stanza the speaker sees a floating image, addresses it as “Superhuman” that reminds him of “death-in-life and life-in-death” as the ultimate truth, “Before me floats an image, man or shade,/Shade more than man, more image than a shade;”. He was confused whether it was man or shade, that looks like an image more than a shade. The usage of the verb “float” hints more to be image. It has “no moisture and no breath”, appears dry-mouthed. The use of “mummy-cloth” suggests human body that has to wrap the soul and unwound after death while entering afterlife. Moreover, it also suggests the complexities of human experiences the soul has to carry before death.

In the third stanza, the poet sees something like miracle, “bird or golden handiwork”, more “miracle than bird or handiwork”. The miracle or the golden bird was planted on “the starlit golden bough” that looked like “cocks of Hade’s crow”. The description about golden bird that looked like miracle is a reference to the perfection of art in Byzantium which has become immortal or timeless. The bird which is created from “changeless metal” scorns the bird of flesh and blood that are momentary:

“In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood” (Lines 22-24).

In the fourth stanza at midnight “on the Emperor's pavement flit”, the poet saw a fire which was neither created by fuel sticks nor by striking a piece of iron against a flintstone. The fire looked like self-generated one, which was not even quenchable by the storm. In that flame, the speaker saw blood begotten spirits came and dance:

“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”.

The “blood-begotten” spirits that came and danced in the fire, and whose sleeves were not even burnt down alludes to the Christian belief of ‘fire of judgement’ where impure souls of sinners are punished and purified. In the fifth stanza, the poet depicts the final process of the spirits. More and more spirits came to join the process of purification by crossing the sea on the back of dolphins. The imagery of spirits riding on the back of dolphins gives a reference to Roman beliefs that the souls of dead people are carried to the Isles of Blessed. The “golden smithies” or the golden goldsmiths of the Emperor were given the responsibility to look after the process of purification. The process was continued even though the marbles of the dancing floor broke, and the sea was torn by the dolphins until the silence of the night was disturbed by the gong sound of the cathedral.

6.7

6.7.1 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Yeats’s poetry had blossomed in *The Wild Swans at Coole* and *Michael Robertes and the Dancer*, but the real flowering came with *The Tower*.

The Tower represented Yeats in all his moods and vacillations; it was the perfect and unique background for all aspects of his character and interests.

To a certain degree, he became a member of a community, and, paradoxically enough, attempted to graft the old virtues of his own race onto the new experiment of the Free State. The poem ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ symbolizes the old virtues of his own race on to the new

experiment of the Free State. A. Norman Jeffares in his *W. B. Yeats : Man and Poet* so said- “His experience at the Abbey had given him a tautness of expression that added to the dramatic elements of his own character; his study of the eighteenth century Anglo-Irish gave him rhetoric and clarity. The poetry of *The Tower* period is rich because of the fullness of Yeats’s life, because his style was reaching maturity at the same time as his life.”

The story of *The Tower* is part of Yeats’s life and reveals the essentially fresh qualities of his mind and outlook.

The best comment on the poem, however he gave for a broadcast of his poems: (BBC, Belfast, 8 Sept, 1931)—“Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called ‘Sailing to Byzantium’. Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city.

6.7.2 READING THE POEM “SAILING TO BYZANTIUM”

This poem was written in the autumn of 1926. Yeats’s knowledge of the city was largely derived from his reading of *W.G. Holmes, The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905). The symbolic meaning of Byzantium can be discovered in Yeats’s prose (*Sailing to Byzantium* and *Byzantium* are both complementary poems in many respects). Byzantium is a holy city, as the capital of eastern Christianity and as the place where God exists because of the life after death Yeats imagines existing there. His description of Byzantium shows that he valued the position of the artist in the city. The ancient city of Byzantium was remarkable for the beauty of its buildings and the art of its craftsman. Yeats’s city is both historical and ideal. It is a symbol of holiness, of perfection of art, of the world of intellect and spirit as distinct from the world of senses. The poem celebrated the permanence of art against the transitoriness of Nature.

Yeats's poem is a picture of a voyage from the material world to the holy city of eternity. In his persona of aging poet, he is one of purgative withdrawal, from that "Country" where "Fish", flesh or fowl commend all summer long/ whatever is begotten, born and dies. In that sensual music of pragmatic illusion and of re-establishment in "the holy city of Byzantium", Yeats achieved unified sensibility and unity of being.

In September 1926, he began "Sailing to Byzantium" in an intensified mood of envy of the young who are not old for love. Love came constantly into his thoughts in 1926, one of his great creative periods.

Byzantium and Constantinople were two adjacent towns that merged into one city. In 395 the Roman Empire was divided into two, and Byzantium became the capital of the Eastern Empire. It remained the capital of an Empire until the Turks captured it in 1453.

The historic Byzantium was remarkable for the skill of its craftsmen and the beauty of its buildings. But Yeats is writing about an ideal city; Byzantium has become for him a Utopia, a symbol of holiness, of perfect craftsmanship, and of Ireland's future achievement in the arts. It is the world of intellect and spirit as distinct from the world of the senses. Now Yeats's age leads him to a more openly expressed envy of their youth and activity and yet he is not shocked by the events taking place as before. He equates himself with the tower and the lamp and the search for wisdom of antiquity and finds compensation in them.

Stanza I

*That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations— at their songs,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, and fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.*

Ireland, the poet feels is a land for young, imaginative artists and not for old men. The young are drawn into the creative cycle while the old continue their songs of youthful reminiscences. One of the central themes of the poem is the opposition between youth and old age. Yeats was preoccupied with the decay and loss due to old age. He resented the loss of youth and physical beauty. Every one who is allured by the natural cycle of birth and death gets trapped within it and life's preoccupations make intellectual life seem relatively worthless in spite of the greater permanence of products of spirit and of art. The poet contrasts the merely sensual with the truly spiritual. Byzantium becomes a symbol of spiritual achievement while the poem becomes a journey towards true spiritual life.

That is the country he is leaving with regrets—the Ireland of his youth, the country of young love and physical vitality. He has grown too old to fit into its life.

The imagery “the salmon falls” refers to Yeats’ reminiscence of Sligo. The river drops down through the town in a series of falls up which the salmon leap in the spring when returning to spawn. Salmon are symbols of strength and beauty.

The young man is caught up in the sensual music as surely as fish are caught up in a net.

Though his body is deteriorating with old age, he is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul.

Stop to Consider:

Symbol and Myth in Yeats’s Poems

A myth is defined as one story in a mythology - a system of hereditary stories, which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group. In his *Essays*, Yeats describes symbols as “the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist. Moreover symbols themselves emerge from the divine. For the mind of the man is one with the Great Mind of the Universe and the memory of man, one with the same Great Memory. Although he used symbols in the manner of

earlier romantics to convey supersensual, visionary truths, Yeats differed significantly from most of the predecessors in deriving his symbols from external traditions. The occult provided a major source of symbols and Irish myth or legend provided another. Symbolism, suggestion and allusion abound in his poetry. Martin Gilkes says—“The only excuse for symbol is that something vital about human life can be better or more fully said in that way than in any other. The danger of it is that it affords of the earliest means of escape into the land of unreality.” Yeats uses both the symbolism of sounds and ideas. So, Yeats’s poetry is a communication with spirits, with an unseen order of things

Yeats’s view of Byzantium is given in his work *A Vision*. “I think that if I could be given a month of antiquity or leave to spend it when I choose, and I would spend it in Byzantium.” This poem is representation of the combination and unification of the subjective and objective man, which is in reality impossible to achieve. Symbol and images became more subjective in Byzantium. His aim here is to achieve a unity in being—where subjectivity and objectivity become one.

Stanza 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*

Yeats is grieved at the innumerable problems of old age which affect man’s capacity to live life pleurably and fruitfully. Old age is insignificant like ‘A tattered coat upon a stick’. It is as hollow as a scarecrow, with the physical appearance of a human being but lacking the human essence.

Though his body is deteriorating with old age, he is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul. His soul must clap its hands for joy as it realizes it is approaching nearer to perfection. The soul must also sing—an idea which combines the ideas of singing for joy and of writing poetry. To teach his soul to sing he must,

metaphorically, sail to Byzantium. The only way in which the soul can learn to sing is by studying monuments of its own magnificence such as Byzantium art.

One needs to look at old age as the liberation of the soul which actively experiences the beauty beyond one's immediate range. Yeats, so seeks fresh stimulus in sailing to Byzantium.

Stanza 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 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.*

Yeats refers to the sages in the frieze at St. Appolinaire at Ravenna and invokes them to spiral down the cone to him. A Perne is the spool or bobbin on which the thread is spun. The Perne carried the thread of human life which is unwound within the gyre in the opposite direction to the movement of the gyre. Perne also means a kind of hawk and the image of a bird is like the descent by the sages. It is convincingly linked with the golden bird of the last stanza. By the image 'perne in a gyre' Yeats refers to successive ages as a system of gyres.

In the world of art an image is as holy as a sage. God, the supreme artist and is the artificer of eternity and the holy fire, like the poet with his imagination which makes all artifices.

The image 'God's Holy Fire' refers to Blake's drawing. Blake drew for Dante's poems that show Dante entering the refining Holy Fire.

Stanza 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 enameling
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 seems to refer indirectly to Hans Anderson's tale "The Emperor's Nightingale" in which reference has been made to the Emperor's palace at Byzantium where there was a tree made of gold and silver and artificial birds that sang. It is also possible that Yeats may have had in mind "Ode to a Nightingale" written by Keats, where the latter had referred to "the self same song heard in ancient days by Emperor and Clown." The poet, in case he is born again, wants to take his form from the artist's imagination so that he would be able to defy the transitory quality of all natural things and their impending decay. As an artifice he would become immortal and sing of what is past or passing or to come rather than follow the course taken by fish, flesh and fowl of birth and death.

Thus, by imprisoning his thought in a system, he gained a strong belief that he knew and understood—"What is past, or passing, or to come."

Stop to Consider:

The Concept of Unity of Being

Yeats's theory of history, *A Vision* revealed his concept of the Unity of Being. His Irishness lies in his quest for this Unity of Being. In the book Yeats's biography: *Life as a Symbolic Pattern*, Joseph Ronsley says: "Yeats was candidly eager to blend his life and his art into a single image. He came to feel that he could write with authority only if he were able to bring many interests into conjunction. He himself said that the necessity for hammering his thoughts into Unity began in 1888 or 1889. The phrase 'Unity of Being' he heard first from his father, though he attributes his conception to Dante." Thomas Parkinson in *W.B. Yeats: The later Poetry* speaks of him as overt dramatist. In his role he is a maker of *dramatis personae*, the sphere of personification of passions whether in plays or in nominal lyrics." Through his

poetry Yeats wanted to achieve 'Unity of Being' and that is the integration of religious and temporal concerns. By his love for Maud Gonne and unable to win her, Yeats sought compensation in perceiving her as an earthly expression of the eternal beauty that can never be fully attained in time.

SAQ:

1. Why does the poet wish to sail to Byzantium? (50 words)

.....
.....

2 Consider how sailing to Byzantium moves between contraries such as youth and age, life and death, change and changelessness, nature and art. (80 words)

.....
.....

6.8 SUMMING UP

After publishing this collection *The Tower* (1928), Yeats's most significant focus is upon passion - the fact and the idea. Yeats's most significant variations on the theme of passion: passion as Defence, passion as joy, passion s sublimation or Innocence, passion as transcendence or Apocalypse. Passion as fact and idea, practice and concept, is everywhere in Yeats's, as poet and man. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley two years before his death, Yeats says "...my poetry all comes from rage or lust." *The Tower* is a return to the pole of negation. Here, the bitterness is brilliantly evoked and masterfully controlled.

The poem "Sailing to Byzantium", published in 1928, expresses Yeats's desire for eternity. Byzantium civilization is 'elaborately rich', but represent the perfection of the spirit as opposed to nature. He longs to escape from his own time—a period of confusion and disintegration.

6.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Jefferes, A.N. *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B Yeats*, 1974.

Ronsley, Joseph. *Yeats's Autobiography: Life as a Symbolic Pattern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1968.

Stallworthy, Jon (ed). *Yeats: Last Poems* (A Selection of Critical Essays), Macmillan, 1975.

Unterecker, John. *A Reader's Guide to W.B.Yeats*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1977.

Jefferes, Norman.A. *W.B Yeats: Man and Poet*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul ltd, 1962.

Unit 7

W. B Yeats : ‘The Second Coming’, ‘Byzantium’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

7.1 Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 How to Approach W.B. Yeats

7.3.1 On “The Second Coming”

7.3.2 On “Byzantium”

7.3.3 On “Sailing to Byzantium”

7.4 Summing Up

7.5 References and Suggested Reading

7.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Appreciate the poetry of W. B. Yeats
- Develop a perspective on the poems under discussion

7.2 Introduction

William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet, dramatist and prose writer who was born in June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, County Dublin, Ireland and was educated in Ireland and in London in a highly artistic

family. His brother Jack was an esteemed painter and his sisters Elizabeth and Susan Mary involved in the Arts and Crafts movement. He was responsible in bringing Renaissance in Irish Literature along with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and others. He was Protestant and belonged to Anglo-Irish community. Yeats helped to found Abbey Theatre. In his later years he served two terms as Senator for Irish Free State. He was awarded Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923. He was deeply influenced by P.B Shelley, Edmund Spencer and poets of pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and started writing when he was seventeen. Although his earlier writings were not successful latter he turned his focus on Irish mythology and folklores and on the creativity of William Blake. He was also influenced by Oscar Wilde in his later years, where such evidences are found in his theory of aesthetics, stage plays that ran like motifs in many of his works. In 1890 Yeats joined Hermetic Order of Sthe Golden Dawn and along with Ernest Rhys co-founded the Rhymers' Club, an association of London-based poets who met regularly in a Fleet Street tavern to recite their verse. Yeats showed great interest in mysticism, occultism, spiritualism and astrology. He also became a member of the paranormal research organisation The Ghost Club in 1911 where he was influenced by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. He was also fascinated towards Hindu philosophy under the influence of Theosophist Mohini Chatterjee.

7.3 How to Approach W.B. Yeats

W.B Yeats was well acclaimed by the readers and the critics for his in-dept depiction of many issues as his creativity dealt with variety of themes. Although he was influenced by many of his contemporary writers he borrowed ideas from Irish mythology and Folklore. John Kelly maintained that Europe did not originate any of Yeats ideas, rather it helped to refine and sophisticate that were needed for his aesthetic and artistic progress. Yeats had interest in some European writers who

appeared like-minded to enhance his own thinking and gave him confidence to pursue his aesthetic mode. A. Norman Jeffares had the opinion that Yeats' knowledge of Foreign language was poor and he absorbed foreign literature eclectically, through the medium of English and in the opinion of Helen Vendler this served as cacophony in his poetry. Michael Faherty observed that Yeats had indifferent attitude towards modern industrial world who tried to ignore it as much as possible. F.R. Leavis found more Irish elements, who brought renaissance in Irish literature than pure product of Victorian romanticism in W.B. Yeats. C.K. Stead found Yeats' belief in 'impersonality' like T.S. Eliot according to whom "great poetry defines states of mind more permanent and universal than those conscious thoughts and feelings which are the expression of a single 'personality' in its passage amongst the accidental and the transient."

W.B. Yeats started writing when he was only seventeen and continued until his death. He wrote about 90 pieces including poem, prose, essays, drama, novel, autobiography and criticism. His early works include *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889), *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and *Deirdre* (1907). The source of "The Wanderings of Oisín" can be traced to the lyrics of the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology where influence of both Sir Samuel Ferguson and the Pre-Raphaelite poets are discernable. In 1880s Yeats met writers such as Oscar Wilde, P.B. Shelley, G.B. Shaw and Lionel Johnson who influenced Yeats creativity in a greater extend. He also met Maud Gonne, an Irish nationalist revolutionary whom he proposed for marriage, but was rejected who became his muse and he dedicated his *The Countess Cathleen* to her in 1892. Yeats developed interest in occult and met theosophist, Madame Blavatsky to learn more about occultisms in 1886. His first significant poem "The Island of Statues", a fantasy work was inspired by the poetic models of Edmund Spenser and Shelley. In 1886 he published his first individual pamphlet *Mosada: A Dramatic Poem*, that comprised a print run of 100 copies paid for by his father. His other early poems, *Poems* (1895), *The Secret Rose* (1897), and *The*

Wind Among the Reeds (1899) are based on meditations and include the themes of love or mystical and esoteric subjects. Yeats worked with Shri Purohit Swami in translating Upanishads from Sanskrit that resulted in the publication of *The Ten Principal Upanishads* in 1938. Yeats had great visionary and idealist interest like that of Blake and Shelley that found expression in the collection *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899) where he employed occult symbolism in several poems included in the collection. Yeats initiated the innovative Irish drama with the help of Lady Gregory and her neighbour Edward Martyn and started staging in 1899 in Dublin that included his *Countess Kathleen*. Their effort of promoting Irish drama resulted in the founding of the Irish National Theatre Society where Yeats became president. In the 1st decade of the 20th century Yeats busied himself with Abbey Theatre, wrote around 10 plays in simple and direct style of dialogue that was required for the stage and this shift of style can be traced in the collections the 20th century: *In the Seven Woods* (1903), *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), and *Responsibilities* (1914). “Easter, 1916” was an expression of Yeats reaction to Easter rising where his beloved Maud Gonne’s former husband was executed.

7.3.1 On “The Second Coming”

Yeats’ “The Second Coming” consists of both traditional and modern elements. He has combined both the traditional and modern styles. However, there are scopes to read the poem from modernist perspective. Modernism is “widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, but especially after World War I (1914-18)” (Abrams 175). Yeats has used biblical references such as spiritus mundi, second coming of Christ, rough beasts, and at the same time he draws references from post-war situation of lawlessness. The combination of traditional and modern elements in

the poem gives reader the scope to approach from religious, secular and symbolic context. The theme of destruction and rebirth dealt by Yeats in the poem itself is a theme of modernism in literature. The modernist thinkers questioned the traditional modes of social organisation, human self, religion, values, and morality. The traditional techniques, styles, themes and mode of thinking seemed outdated to represent post-war situations or human values. Yeats alludes to the destruction of traditional civilisation as he writes:

That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.

The cycle of “twenty centuries” suggests traditional society that was going to be destroyed by the rough beast, ‘modernity’ which was underway to take the definite shape. Yeats gives scope for religious, secular and symbolic perspectives that give a warning to future generation regarding decaying trend. During 1860s, the decade when Yeats was born was also the decade when Ireland was recovering from the crisis of Great Famine happened in 1845-49 that led society to question the traditional Irish values. The conservative power of the past was on the way to transformation for the new vision for future. Modernity is projected as the enemy and the inevitable path for reconstruction for future including constitutional and societal reform. The traditional society led the world into Great War that led to question traditional values and the best and innocent people lost conviction. From the religious perspectives the transition was created from traditional orthodoxy to the combination of secularism and religiosity. In the poem Yeats has employed both catholic and secular themes or symbolism that make his poem modern poem. The Great War led many people to lose faith and moved away from religious traditions and values.

7.3.2 On “Byzantium”

In Byzantium, the poet talks about present day situation of the city. The “urpurged image”, “drunken soldiers”, “night-walkers” create an image of immorality and irresponsibility of the people that show degrading human society. The poem can be read from modernist perspectives, and at the same time it has the elements of romanticism. The poem is also expressive of Yeats’ sense of Aestheticism. His interest in the aesthetics of Byzantine art get expression in his comment on Byzantine mosaics:

I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St Sophia [AD 537] and closed the Academy of Plato [AD 529]. I think I could find in some little wine shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the supernatural descending nearer to him than to Plotinus even, for the pride of his delicate skill would make what was an instrument of power to Princes and Clerics a murderous madness in the mob, show us a lovely flexible presence like that of a perfect human body (quod. in Schultz 1).

His depiction of Byzantium in both the poems “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Byzantium” expresses his aesthetic concerns by questioning the dichotomy of human decay and unchangeable artefacts. Yeats’ aesthetic concerns provide the definition, value and purpose of art. For Yeats, as Mathew Schultz observed “the art object seems to provide a cultural study, and its value is determined not by mere verisimilitude, but by the whole of its being: Surface (form) is as much a cultural marker as substance (content) (Schultz 232). Art is “not only critique or representation, but also (as) an object/event in historical reality” (Schultz 232). Richard Finneran observed that the basic subject of “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Byzantium” is ‘Nature vs Art.’ While depicting

immortality of art over mortality of Nature Yeats also offered a metacriticism of art's purpose. He posed questions related to art object i.e., how to approach art and what is the purpose of art. Yeats seems to suggest that "the aesthetic experience would not be complete if the sensual experience did not develop into a cognitive reaction" (Schultz 237). Yeats poems insist on going deeper than sensual experiences. He also expresses the purpose of art as the provider of aesthetic pleasure as he desired to become mechanical artifice (the gilded, singing bird) whose only purpose acknowledged here is 'to keep a drowsy Emperor awake' and 'to sing to lords and ladies.' But art is not only for entertainment but also for cultural representation based on historical reality. Art is socially influenced product or vice-versa and cultural markers and combination of both experience and perception. Yeats' Byzantium also give scope for New Historical approach. The reader has the scope for parallel approach both to history and text.

7.3.3 On "Sailing to Byzantium"

Yeats carried forward responsibilities of both Irish and English Literature. He was symbolist as well as imagist. He creates allusive imagery and symbolic structure in his poems. He had great interest in mystic beauty of culture and art. The poet was not satisfied with the existing younger generation who didn't have seriousness about life and about future. The poem can be read from modernist perspectives. In the first stanza of the poem the poet expressed his sense of rejection of the existing generation. The poet reflects lack of seriousness about future of modern generation who are busy in enjoying momentary pleasure. The lines "...The Young in one another's arm, birds in the trees/-those dying generation" suggests lawlessness and decreasing human values of Post World War I situation. There is multiple possible approach of the poem, one of them being the symbolic approach. One of the symbolic approaches focus on 'sailing' and 'Byzantium'. The poet structurally

moves (process of creation) to create a poem i.e., Bible. His physical travel (sailing) to Byzantium (New Jerusalem) symbolically represents his participation in the process of Creation. Yeats presents his concept of mythical lunar system in “A Vision” where he sees a place for spirits after death and where he is a visitor coincide with his quest for eternity in artifice who is now “old aged, is seeking to realise his aim: the quest, the poetic highest aim - eternal and immortal art” in “Sailing to Byzantium”. Yeats usage of the symbols i.e., air, water, fire, earth, golden bird out of fire gets Biblical intertextuality. Much of the themes of the poem has commonality with Biblical Revelation and Genesis. Yeats’ inclination towards romanticism also makes the poem possible for romantic approach. The poem has full of adventurous and imaginative elements. Yeats also hinted at his intension towards spiritualism as he said:

I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts about that subject I have put into a poem called 'Sailing to Byzantium'. When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells, and making the jeweled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city (Jeffares 217).

Yeats’ search for spiritual life by rejecting materialism opens up avenues for spiritual reading of the poem. His use of Byzantium (that exist in history) as spiritual perfection also gives scope for New Historical approach. The poem also has elements of modern poems that gives scope for modernist approach. Although the poem was written in 1923, the postmodern reading by critical theories such as New Criticism and Reader-response Criticism will make meaningful reading.

Stop to Consider

Did W.B. Yeats remain as an ideal in the modern poetry after 1940s?

Since the Second World War the prevailing style of poetry in Great Britain has been unlike that in the United States, yet it may equally be called Postmodern. For the term Modernism, like all such terms, covers many moments and tendencies, and, on the whole, the contemporary poetries of England and America have been formed in relation to different moments in the Modernist period. In England the new poetry of the 1950s was created in antagonism to the revived Romanticism of Dylan Thomas and of much poetry written during the Second World War, and it was equally created by a decisive rejection of the high Modernism of Eliot and Pound. (Yeats was repudiated more as a belated Romantic than as a Modernist, and Stevens and Williams were hardly known.) The values that inspired the new poetry from Larkin to Geoffrey Hill included rational thought and communication and introspective honesty, with the complexity of perception and attitude that inevitably attends the honesty of the intelligent. These values were associated with the “academic” New Criticism in the United States, but in England they were regarded as elements of native tradition to which English poetry should return.”

7.4 Summing Up

The ‘Metaphysical revival’ was in full swing. One researcher has counted the number of critical and scholarly writings on the Metaphysical poets published each year; they rose from fourteen in 1900 to forty-one in 1923 to seventy-three at the peak in 1934, after which there was a gradual decline to fifteen in 1950. Meanwhile the young poets were reading this formerly neglected ‘race,’ and, since Metaphysical qualities and characteristics – whatever they might be – were being praised by so many

authorities, the young poets tried to emulate them. By 1952 more than seventy living poets had been denominated Metaphysical by one critic or another. If some of these names – Yeats, Cummings, Frost, Rexroth—now surprise, they indicate to what extent ‘Metaphysical’ had become a synonym for ‘modern.’ No less surprising are the older poets in whom Metaphysical affinities were found; this list includes Lucretius, Goethe, Blake, Wordsworth, and Emerson. Clearly there was no agreement on just what the ‘Metaphysical’ qualities were.” – *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After* – David Perkins

The ‘Metaphysical revival’ was in full swing. One researcher has counted the number of critical and scholarly writings on the Metaphysical poets published each year; they rose from fourteen in 1900 to forty-one in 1923 to seventy-three at the peak in 1934, after which there was a gradual decline to fifteen in 1950. Meanwhile the young poets were reading this formerly neglected ‘race,’ and, since Metaphysical qualities and characteristics – whatever they might be – were being praised by so many authorities, the young poets tried to emulate them. By 1952 more than seventy living poets had been denominated Metaphysical by one critic or another. If some of these names – Yeats, Cummings, Frost, Rexroth—now surprise, they indicate to what extent ‘Metaphysical’ had become a synonym for ‘modern.’

7.5 References and Suggested reading

Jefferes, A.N. *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B Yeats*, 1974.

Ronsley, Joseph. *Yeats's Autobiography: Life as a Symbolic Pattern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1968.

Stallworthy, Jon (ed). *Yeats: Last Poems* (A Selection of Critical Essays), Macmillan, 1975.

Unterecker, John. *A Reader's Guide to W.B. Yeats*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1977.

Jefferes, Norman.A. *W.B Yeats: Man and Poet*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul ltd, 1962.

BLOCK 2

Unit 1

Marianne Moore:” Critics and Connoisseurs”

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Biographical Sketch of the Poet
- 1.4 Her Works
- 1.5 Context of the poem
- 1.6 Reading the poem
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 References and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives

The main objective of this unit shall be to familiarise readers with Modern American Poetry with special reference to Marianne Moore through her poem “Critics and Connoisseurs”. Acknowledged as one of the leading modernist of American poetry, Marianne Moore had been an innovative, unique and progressive voice among her contemporaries whose contribution to poetry has been critically recognised. In fact, her literary contributions had been well received and appreciated from her initial years by eminent writers from her period like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot who placed her among the leading literary figures of American poetry. Keeping these ideas in consideration, this unit shall attempt to

provide an introductory overview of the poet while also providing a detailed analysis of her biographical, social and literary aspects.

In addition to this, the unit shall also provide a critical analysis of the prescribed poem “Critics and Connoisseurs”, a masterpiece packed in four strict stanzas by Marianne Moore. The poem is a complex work that primarily attempted to discuss her literary opinions on poetry. In it, the poet also challenged the dominating male expressions in literatures that consequently had shadowed the presence and contributions of female writers. Keeping to the seriousness of the theme of the poem, Moore employed her unique poetic style that had subtle elements of Imagism. Despite the tendencies towards Imagism, Moore maintained herself as a distinct literary personality who challenged, questioned and deconstructed the literary, critical and academic conventions which placed her as a prominent figure in American poetry.

While this unit focuses on Moore as a multifaceted personality with high literary and creative calibre, the second unit shall focus on the critical responses regarding Moore by her contemporaries as well as by the current generation of readers who have partially forgotten her poetic legacy. Keeping this in consideration, the motive of reading the poem “Critics and Connoisseurs” by Marianne Moore shall not be limited only to appreciating her literary contribution to the American modernist poetry but also revive her as one of the landmarks of modernist poetry.

1.2 Introduction

Acknowledged as one of the most accomplished and innovative modernist poet. Marianne Moore has often been considered as perfect poet of the philosopher whose continual revision of her poems due to her strong tendencies for precision made her poems clear, sharp, tight, lucid and exquisite in her expression, language and imageries. Although she was closely associated to members of Imagism and modernism, yet she

maintained a unique poetic style of her own which in a sense attempted to deconstruct the conventional tradition of American aesthetic and poetic vision as practiced by her contemporaries. In fact, her poetic style was highly idiosyncratic with strong moral and intellectual insights which she framed through her close and accurate observation to details. Such a craftsmanship of Moore was highly admired by her contemporaries which helped in establishing a secure position for the poetess within the male-dominated literary world. In this sense, she didn't belong to any fixed categorization of poetic style. This creative freedom along with her streak for formal experimentation enabled her to contribute with fascinating inventions through her writings in the field of modern poetry in America. While, her period was abundant with narratives of alienation, despair, war, uncertainty and materialism, Moore was able to maintain a glimpse for the intelligence, positivity, playfulness and spiritual consciousness for her readers. To this end, her poems have been acknowledged both nationally as well as internationally; with several of her works been translated in several languages. This has helped in locating Marianne Moore as a popular culture text in our contemporary literary and theoretical period.

In fact, Moore's continual attempt to revise her poems resulted from her deep passion for precision which also helped trace the poetess personal and creative journey to maturity and evolution. This trend allowed her readers to get actively involved in reading the poems (and its changes) to understand the psychology of the poet and the social as well as the literary temperament of her period. Such a technique used by Moore in her poetic writings made her appear as an "avant-garde in her own day" for her works were largely placed outside the literary grain of her times. This was done with the intention to "pleas[e] / no one but [her]self," (Gregory and Hubbard 1-2). To this end, she enjoyed creative freedom that allowed her to explore significant and universal themes.

To achieve success of her poetic writings, Moore used a literary technique that was precise, elliptical, allusive, discursive and meditative. In fact, her poems ranged from complex issues such as poetry writing, nature, paintings, animals, sports, feminism, marriage and ethics; all of which she interpreted through her direct experiences from her daily life. In this regard, we not only get an account of her personal encounters but also of her psychological, literary and creative engagements. Through these efforts Moore, like most of her contemporaries attempted to raise potent questions regarding poetry that might be suitable for the new democratic American culture. This was an outcome of her patience to frame her poems over years and not as a resultant of “fits and bursts”. To this end, Robert Pinsky considered Moore’s writings as a work of “a collector, an antiquarian, rooting among the archives for choice additions: as a sub-sub-librarian, extracting and compiling, as a consumptive usher dusting off texts... [as well as] an enthusiast of sorts”. In this regard, she presented intellectual curiosity with acquisition while emphasizing “procedures over questions of form and technique”.

In addition, the peculiarities of Moore to provide extensive quotations, criticism and morality have been adequately added to enhance a sense of seriousness in her writings. This trend in Moore’s writings for David Herd emerged from her experiences as an essayist and editor to *The Dial* which consequently positioned her as a “poetic hoarder” (122). Through her poems, we see that Moore also framed her own conception of poetry which thereafter became her medium to spread to her readers. For this purpose, her poems were well-structured, clear and effective as it following regularised diction and presentation that situated her works with great exactness, fineness and enthusiasm. This literary perfection and maturity of Moore’s writings came from her being not only a well-accomplished poet but also a renowned editor, essayist, critic and translator who valued and emphasised each word of her writings. In this sense, her works never emphasised on anything in particular; in fact, it

attempted to integrate and assemble everything so as to enhance the reader's pleasure and interaction with her poems. Such an impulse grew from her admiration and gratitude towards her readers for whom "she took every opportunity to document her fastidiousness, remarking frequently on the labour and perseverance necessary for her to produce a poem" (Herd 133). These attributes were acquired by Moore throughout her literary journey which she consciously incorporated in her poems through continual editing and revision; which collectively reflected her personal and literary growth, evolution, accomplishments, contributions and legacy in Modern poetry.

1.3 Biographical sketch of the poet

Marianne Craig Moore, the famous American modernist poet was born in November 15, 1887 in Kirkwood, Missouri, U.S.; to John Milton Moore, a mechanical engineer as well as an inventor and Mary Warner Moore who took care of her children throughout her life. While, the couple lived in conjugal harmony, several psychotic episodes suffered by John Moore forced the couple to separate from each other. The separation took place even before Marianne Moore was born; subsequent to which the family lived with Marianne Moore's grandparents and relatives in St. Louis and Pittsburgh, until she became sixteen. Following this, they moved to Pennsylvania in the year 1896, where her mother found employment as an English teacher in a private girls' school. Being reared by their mother, both Marianne Moore and her brother John Warner Moore became devoted Presbyterians which made the family approach the Christian faith as a lesson in strength vindicated through trials and temptations. Here, she attended the Byrn Mawr College where she studied Major in biology which she completed in the 1909. It was during this period of her life that Moore started writing short stories and poems for *Tipyn O'Bob*, the campus literary magazine of the Byrn Mawr

College. Through this experience, we witness her steady decision and growth in becoming one of the leading writers of American modernism. After her graduation, she briefly worked at Melvil Dewey's Lake Placid Club. Following this, she enrolled herself at the Carlisle Commercial College, where she studied commercial subjects. This experience helped her attain the job of a school teacher at the Carlisle Indian School from 1911 to 1915.

In the year 1918, Moore moved to New York with her mother where she became an assistant in the New York Public Library. During this period, she met many influential writers like William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens; who shaped her literary instincts and craft. In fact, her contribution to the prestigious literary magazine *The Dial* increased her popularity in the literary circles of America. To this end, she was later appointed as the acting editor of *The Dial* from 1925 to 1929 which exposed her to members of the Imagist movement such as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Hilda Doolittle. Under their influence, she devoted herself to writing poetry and criticism. In fact, she was often grouped with them; in addition to T. S. Eliot and later, Elizabeth Bishop, to whom she was a friend and mentor. With her increased involvement in literature, many of Moore's poems first published in *The Egoist* was collected and published in her first book, *Poems* by Hilda Doolittle, done without Moore's consent. This indifferent attitude in commercially publishing her poems was because Moore considered "her body of work was too slight for a book". Such an excuse for Leavell, on citing Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams, seemed "partly disingenuous- [for] she had more than enough poems each time- and partly strategic". While the unapproved edition of her poems enraged Moore with Doolittle; she also took up the matter seriously with the publication house, for she considered it "not to her 'literary advantage' to publish a book just then". In fact, her predications regarding the critics' responses for her work seemed correct as it was

received with “outright hostil[ity]” (7). However, this critical opinion changed with the release of her second book, *Observations* which won the Dial Award in 1924. Following this, *The Dial* stopped its publication in the year 1929 which led to Moore’s decision of moving to Brooklyn where she compassionately cared for her ailing mother until her death in 1947. During this period, she extensively wrote poetry which led to the publication of *Collected Poems* that won the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Bollingen Prize. In addition to this, she was awarded the Helen Haire Levinson Prize by the *Poetry* magazine in the year 1933. Following this period of seclusion, Moore emerged as a literary celebrity who also became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1955 and was elected as the Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1962 for the immemorial services and contributions done by the artist to literature and arts. Despite her fame, she continued to publish poems in various magazines like *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Partisan Review* and *The New Yorker* while also actively reviewing books and publishing her criticisms.

Despite her vibrant writing career, she lived her personal life in utmost privacy and seclusion after her mother’s death. The decision to live the life of solitude also emerged from her decision to remain unmarried throughout her life. In addition to her literary pursuits, Moore also held strong opinions on politics. In this regard, she openly opposed Benito Mussolini and Fascism along with Pound's ideas on anti-semitism. She was predominately a Republican who fervently supported Herbert Hoover. In fact, Moore was involved with the American suffrage movement during her university period. Through this, she fought for women’s right to vote, progressivism and women’s education. To this end, she not only wrote articles for magazines but also framed her writings that echoed the politics of her times. While her literary and political engagement grew to greater heights, Moore suffered from several medical complications as an outcome of a series of strokes in the

last few years of her life which led to a drastic decline in her health conditions. She died in the year 1972 with full honour in the Evergreen Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Following her death, Moore was inducted into the St. Louis Walk of Fame in 1996 and in the year 2012 was inducted into the New York State Writers Hall of Fame.

1.4 Her works

As a young student in Byrn Mawr College, Moore displayed a great deal of creative instinct for poetry which received mixed critical responses. Despite it, she penned an enormous volume of works ranging across literary genres. However, she concentrated mostly in poetic writings wherein she flourished as a prominent literary figure. In fact, her initial poems were published in magazines like the *Egoist*, *The Dial* and *Poetry*; while her first volume *Poems* (1921) was selected and arranged by Hilda Doolittle and published by Winifred Ellerman in England through The Egoist Press without Moore's consent. While this volume received mixed criticism, Moore too was disappointed with the collection. Keeping to this, she curated her second collection *Observations* (1924) which included poems that were chosen by the poet; representing her full range of forms, themes, emotions and philosophies. The volume was published by The Dial Press and contained several classical poems of Moore such as "Marriage", "The Fish", "Poetry", "The Labors of Hercules" and "An Octopus". In fact, this book got Moore awarded with the second Dial Award for significant contribution and achievement in poetry after the first having been awarded to T. S. Eliot in 1922. Following this, she published *Selected Poems* (1935), *The Pangolin and Other Verse* (1936), *What Are Years* (1941), *Nevertheless* (1944) and *Collected Poems* (1951) which won both the Pulitzer Prize in poetry, the National Book Award and the Bollingen Prize in 1953.

In addition to her poetic works, she was also engaged in translation of *The Fables of La Fontaine* (1954); *Like a Bulwark* (1956); *O, to Be a Dragon* (1959); *Tell Me, Tell Me: Granite, Steel, and Other Topics* (1966); and *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (1967). She also wrote reviews, criticism and essays that ranged on subjects like painting, sculpture, literature, music, nature, animals, fashion, herbal medicine, and sports. In fact, her confidence in writing criticism and reviewing books emerged at the same time that she started publishing her poetry which she explicitly expressed in her personal letters to her brother. For her, both of these impulses were complementary and conjoined. To the list of her prose writings, Moore is credited with works like *A Marianne Moore Reader* (1961), *Predilections* (1955), *Idiosyncrasy and Technique: Two Lectures* (1958) and *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore* (1987). In addition, Moore also ventured into fictional writings in the latter period of her life. To this end, Moore had a novel and an unfinished and unpublished memoir. In fact, her creative efforts from this period resulted in her being awarded with the Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing (1945), the Poetry Society of America's Gold Medal for Distinguished Development, the Bollingen Prize (1953), the National Medal for Literature (1968), and an honorary doctorate from Harvard University and five other universities.

1.5 Context of the poem

The poem, "Critics and Connoisseurs" was first published in July 1916 is often considered to be one of Moore's most frequently anthologised works that primarily dealt with the art of poetry. In this sense, the poem is a fine example of *ars poetica*, a literary technique used and popularised by the famous classicist Horace as he attempted to provide a guiding roadmap for aspiring poets on the art of writing poetry.

The term *ars poetica* is a phrase taken from Latin, meaning “The Art of Poetry”. Through this work, Horace celebrated the importance of precision, decorum and observations which Moore consciously instilled in her writing style. While Moore frequently used this poetic technique in many of her famous works like “Poetry” and “Baseball and Writing”, the poem “Critics and Connoisseurs” has often been regarded as her best work in this category. Through them, Moore penned her critical opinions on poetry. While her thoughts provided a glimpse to her craft, philosophies and psychology, it also attempted to provide answers to the serious question as to “what is poetry?”

In addition to this aspect, the poem also delved into the idea of the marginalised women in the literary modern circle that was largely dominated by Man. While, Moore’s writings contained strands of feminism, yet she firstly identified herself as an individual poet writing from female experiences. This approach by Moore was appreciated and respected by her contemporaries who saw her literary strengths for precision, observation, frequent quotations and citations as her original style of writing. In fact, these elements allowed Moore to highlight her superior skill of addressing sensitive issues concerning gender in literatures as advocated in her poem “Critics and Connoisseurs”. This was done with the intention to create a gender-conscious space that could open dialogue across genders to create a gender neutral space that shall celebrate equality and androgyny. For this purpose, she strategically refuted from identifying her speaker in the poem with a personalised “I” or a highly dramatic persona. Instead we find the presence of an abstract speaker who adopted and expressed their ideologies without any explicit conformation of any recognised beliefs. To this end, her poems have successfully continued to remain unique; especially among the women poets of her generation, for she continued to be didactic yet secular, precise yet complex, personal yet social and traditional yet a modernist. Keeping to these literary aspects in the poem “Critics and Connoisseurs”,

Moore also highlighted her power to detailed observations and description in describing the critic and the connoisseur as “members of the professionalized intelligentsia... [who]represents cultural power” (Levy 48). In fact, through the poem, Moore questioned and challenged the male-dominated poets and critics that are more interested in dominating the literary world while overshadowing the presence, contributions and achievements of female writers. This feminist approach in Moore poems had been an immediate outcome of her personal experiences and struggles in the initial phase of her career. Despite this, the speaker employed in the poem, “Critics and Connoisseurs” is not a female but a fictionalised voice that is educated, witty and gender neutral. In this regard, Robert Pinsky has labelled “Critics and Connoisseurs” as an “aggressive mock-satire [that provided a] parody version of social discourses”. In fact, it also advocated Moore concept of aesthetics through critics and connoisseurs that have been represented through animal symbolism. This was done in an attempt to highlight the problems attached to “ambition without understanding” (110). Keeping to the distinct style of Moore, the poem, “Critics and Connoisseurs” too employed free verse and quotations that she often experimented as a modernist. Since her poems employed perspective beyond her opinions, it also aided in providing knowledge of the real world in all of its intricacy and complexities. In this sense, Moore’s poems work as a guiding roadmap for her readers to understand and interact with her contemporary society that was divided between uncertainties, power struggle, exploitation and marginalization. In fact, Moore as a socially engaged poet emphasized on multicultural tolerance, biodiversity, heroic open-mindedness, democracy and individual liberty in her poems as it dealt with modernist seriousness about reality through the praxis of new realism.

1.6 Reading the poem

Like most of her poems, “Critics and Connoisseurs” too dealt with the art of poetry writing which for Moore, as addressed in the poem was often emerged from the “unconscious fastidiousness”. To illustrate this idea further, Moore used a first-person speaker that was neither ironically distanced nor lyrically expressive. In fact, the poem contained a strong undertone of high prosaic quality for which she used conversational language. As mentioned in the opening sentence of the poem, the idea of “unconscious fastidiousness” repeated in three variations included children (as indicated in stanza one), a swan at Oxford (as indicated in stanza two) whose disbelief and disinclination to move made the connoisseur conscious, and the fastidious ant (as indicated in stanza three) that stood as the rhetoric for a critic that was ambitious in their aspiration but without knowledge and understanding. In this regard, the poem could be read as a poem about writing poetry as explained through the concepts of critics and connoisseurs by employing different ideas, themes, words and imageries. The poem also highlighted her deep love and reverence for nature and animals as evident through the central images of an ant and a swan, whom she symbolised as the critics and the connoisseurs. This element added a bent for naturalist tendencies in her poems.

To this end, we also observe that the swan attempts to dominate the stream of education under partakes self-defense and identification of its inherited privileges. While this assumption resonated the woman/man binary in literature; it also reflected the politics of power through sexism wherein Men have often wielded language, history, knowledge and expressions to suit their privileged category. In this sense, the swan could be seen as the powerful and privileged Men in the male-dominated literary world. To illustrate these symbolic references, Moore used

several humorous examples with an ironic intent; taken from everyday life which made her poem appear relatable to her readers.

While the poem contains several significant rhetoric, the central one is that of the ant being an emblem for “unconscious fastidiousness” and the swan being its alter-ego as being placed as the “conscious fastidiousness”. Developing the relation between the swan and the ant, Moore used several Latinised words like reconnoitered, ingredients, disinclination and proclivity; along with compound words like flamingo-colored, maple-leaflike and battleship. In addition to this, Moore used different diction to reveal the swan as a stubborn, greedy, artificial and somewhat unpleasant creature to please; while the ant (also the connoisseur) was described in complete opposition to the swan; as a simple, meticulous, humble, diligent, disciplined, careful, hardworking and a skilful creature. In addition, the ant had been described as a creature with no elegance but no falsity and hypocrisy. It simply carried its job until it proved useless and then abandoning it for “a particle of whitewash”. Keeping to this rhetoric, Moore considered the connoisseur to be the “unconscious fastidiousness”, while the critic had been regarded as the “conscious fastidiousness” who exhibited ambition without understanding. Adding to this, the poem also addressed the rigidity of a critic which for Moore hampered their contribution to the critical. This was because rigidity often blinds us to reality and makes us take an ‘artificial’ standpoint that deadens our intellectuality and sophistication.

Despite, the fact that the idea of fastidious dominated the first part of the poem, “Critics and Connoisseur”, the second part following the fourth stanza in the poem finds almost no mention of the concept. This break indicated the steady decline of the idea to its complete disappearance by the end of the poem, yet retaining this organic structure in form, content and themes. The literary technique used in this poem is impressive as there is minimal rhyming in the poem which therefore produces an effect of intermittent music. In fact, the visual shape of the

poem is unconventional as each stanza ranges from very short line immediately followed by longest lines. The rich imagery of stanzas is a mix of positivity and dullness. This was done to distinctly emphasize on the contrasting representation of critics and connoisseurs. The continual contrast between the critics and connoisseurs found throughout the poem had added a subtle sense of hostility towards the lowly critics who have ambition but without proper understanding. To achieve this end, Moore consciously used daily experiences through memories and cognitive retention which added touches of personalized accounts to her works. To make it interesting, Moore played with words and sounds through the literary techniques of alliteration, assonance and rhymes that were unevenly structured to disrupt the normal reading strategies for the readers. This unusual style of Moore also introduced a level of humor, witticism and playful irony in the poem that helped her poem connect directly with the readers; that had been abound with intellectual curiosity and literary knowledge that elaborated her critical opinions on poetic consciousness.

1.7 Summing Up

Despite Moore's enormous literary contribution to American poetry, her legacy is rarely celebrated in the contemporary period. This is because her readers faced great trouble in understanding her complex poetic style that was constantly revised and edited. Such a tendency resulted in Moore's subsequent compromise and relegation from the mainstream literary voice of her period. In fact, this tendency of Moore's style was critically challenged and thereafter ignored it as an unpopular approach for constant revisions would include the presence and intention of the writers which (post)modernist theories out rightly rebuked. In this sense, we should read Moore's poems not only as simple creative writings but also as her critical opinions. Such a framework was also

evident in the “Critics and Connoisseurs” wherein she identified and opposed both the ant and swan that symbolised the critics and the connoisseurs. In fact, the complex anecdotes of the ant and swan were shaped by Moore’s response and approach to fastidiousness. Through them, Moore also questioned the diminished role, identity and presence of women writers in the male-dominated literary world.

In conclusion, we can consider Moore as a powerful voice in American Modern poetry whose innovation, distinct style and originality marked her as a significant contributor to literature and criticism. This is despite the personal and professional hardships that she encountered. To this end, Moore stands as a proto-feminist who inspired several writers; while the most notable being Elizabeth Bishop. Despite her influence in American poetry, there has been a substantial decline in her popularity which seems to be an outcome of increased complexity, quotations, seriousness, revisions and intellectual participation of her readers. This had made her appear as an eccentric writer whose exact place on the map of modernist poetry remains undetermined. However, it would be completely misleading to not recognise that it was only Moore that was respected by eminent male writers and critics of the early twentieth-century American avant-garde who admired her eye for details, observations, artful style, word play and realism. To this end, Moore could be seen as a ‘hostess’ rather than a conqueror who desired dominion over new territories. These traits could be seen in her poetry that is linked with self-effacement and romantic egoism; which consequently made her poems hospitable as well as well-informed and therefore an enriching experience for her readers.

1.8References and Suggested Readings

Herd, David. *Enthusiast! Essays on Modern American Literature*. Manchester University Press, 2007.

Leavell, Linda (ed.) “Introduction.” *Observations*. Macmillan, 2016.

- Levy, Ellen. *Criminal Ingenuity Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Gregory, Elizabeth and Stacy Carson Hubbard. "Introduction." *Twenty-First Century Marianne Moore: Essays from a Critical Renaissance*, edited by Elizabeth Gregory and Stacy Carson Hubbard. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 1-11.
- Abbott, Craig S. *Marianne Moore: A Reference Guide*. G.K. Hall, 1978.
- Bloom, Harold (ed.) *Modern Critical Views: Marianne Moore*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.
- Costello, Bonnie. *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions*. Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Davis, Alex and Lee M. Jenkins (eds.) *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Holley, Margaret. *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Lakritz, Andrew M. *Modernism and the Other in Stevens, Frost and Moore*. University of Florida Press, 1996.
- Miller, Cristanne. *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority*. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Nitchie, George W. *Marianne Moore: An Introduction to the Poetry*. Columbia University Press, 1969.
- Parisi, Joseph(ed.)*Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*. The University of Michigan Research Press, 1990.
- Paul, Catherine E. *Poetry in the Museums of Modernism*. The University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Schulman, Grace. *Marianne Moore: The Poetry of Engagement*. University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Schulze, Robin. *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907–1924*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002.

Unit 2

Marianne Moore:” Critics and Connoisseurs”

Supplementary Unit

2.1 Objectives

While the previous unit focused on Marianne Moore’s biographical and literary dimensions, this unit shall aim to locate the prominent American Modernist poet among her contemporaries as well as in the critical responses of the present day. To this end, the unit shall attempt to

- provide additional information on Moore’s poems,
- help readers recognise and understand the writing style and technique of the poet
- provide a general overview of the critical essays, articles and books written on the poet
- initiate critical thoughts among students regarding Marianne Moore and her illustrious poetry

2.2 How to approach Marianne Moore

As Marianne Moore attained a more secure position within the male-dominated literary world through her important influence on the development of modern poetry, she maintained a unique style of writing that was highly idiosyncratic with undertones of Imagism. From them, she acquired the quality of clarity and precision of language as well as expression. In fact, to achieve this quality in her writings, Moore revised her poems throughout her life with significant editing and omissions that

were not accidental but well-intended by her creative maturity. While, this aspect of Moore's writings generated heavy criticism, yet it didn't deter her from experimenting. In addition to this, she often used visual imagery and secondary quotations with an aim to provide multiple perspectives and values to her audience. Such a hybrid and innovative method of composition was practised by the poetess with the intention of playing with words by removing the original quotes from its source and reapplying it in her poems to enhance the deepened beauty and meaning of the original, or better it, in her composition with added perspectives. However, it should be noted that the quotations used by Moore were not for decoration or praise from the erudite; but to enhance her thought, content, form and structure of her poems. In fact, her poetry collections were often accompanied with citations that highlighted the poet's mind to her readers which consequently opened the possibility for an ongoing dialogue with her readers. To achieve this deep engaging interaction between the readers and her poems, Moore consciously made an effort to make her poems appear informal, impersonal and critical. In fact, the continual editing of her own poems allowed Moore's readers to witness the gradual personal and literary evolution of the poetess. This for Costello, Feldman and Barsanti, as cited by Cecire indicated that "precision [was] [Moore's] passion" which made her works appear "clear, flawless," and "absolutely hard" (Leavell 10 and Cecire 83). Such a trend made her language, expression and contents of her poems extraordinarily condensed and precise; with a single image suggesting a variety of ideas and associations. In addition, the unique literary aspect of Moore led to multiple texts of a single poem by her. While, this "challenge[d] the idea of the poem as stable artifact and of the poet as static subject", it also generated an unnecessary confusion among her readers and critics (Gregory and Hubbard 2).

As a literary individual, Moore indulged in issues concerning nature, art, ethics, life, animals, sports and the philosophy of aesthetics

through her poems which were largely structured as free verse poems with a “regular pattern of end rhyme”. This original contribution by Moore to the literary world resulted in “Eliot call[ing] her ‘the greatest living master’ of ‘light rhyme’ and ‘the first, so far as I know, who has investigated its possibilities’” (Leavell13). In fact, her poetic style was distinctly different from her contemporaries as they were generally post-Romantic, sentimental and gendered. While these elements made her works appear as anti-poetic mode of expression, it also established her as a feminist whose works not only provided a female representation but also deconstructed the centrality of patriarchy by mapping a new gender-conscious narrativity. To achieve this end, she placed herself as an ‘individual’ and not as a ‘woman poet’ within the male-dominated literary world. Keeping this in consideration, she also rejected the impersonal and conditioned structure of language framed by patriarchy for poetry that was generally gender-biased.

In addition to this, Moore was also a great admirer of sports, nature and animals; all of which were found in her poetic pursuits. In fact, the presence of animals as central images were included by Moore in her poems to emphasise on the themes of independence, honesty, ethics, freedom, life and the organic integration of art and nature. This was because Moore had been an earnest admirer of art, beauty, creativity and nature throughout her life. While these ideas were advocated by Moore in her poems, she mainly used the literary tradition of free verse, post-script notes, allusions, conversational language and quotations. In addition to these attributes, most of her poems were distinctly structured with the title immediately running into the first line of the poem which therefore made her titles a significant and organic component of her aestheticism. This unique style seemed to be an original contribution of Moore to literature along with her complex allusion and precision of words and images. In fact, her constant revisions rather than creating a sense of confusion and idiosyncrasy among her readers, revealed Moore

as a conscientious poet who was determined to not keep her poems and aestheticism static. To this end, her works have always been subjected to continual growth and maturity. While this tendency allowed her to defamiliarize her poems; it also compelled her readers to actively participate in the meaning-making process and the shifting aesthetics of her works. This literary engagement had often been considered as Moore's attempt to celebrate the modernist spirit of 'making it new in every reading', a rhetoric that was widely manifested and practiced by her contemporaries.

The constant revision of her works allowed us to also locate her shift from didactic poetry that she wrote in her initial years to her later poetry that mainly dealt with her conception of defamiliarization and aesthetics pursuits. This drastic shift in Moore's writing style was made possible by the advancements of technology and publication methods which made her revisions and editing appear as necessary opportunities to engage different concerns with her readers. Despite this, her poems continued to maintain a sense of unity and stability. In fact, the complex combinations of negations and modifications in Moore's poetic style made her writings genuine, fluid and original; while also providing the necessary unsettledness to her works and her readers. To this end, her poems became a mode of communication and dissemination of knowledge that appealed the mass audience. In this sense, her works is no longer limited to a personalised narration but had become a social and literary guide for her readers as well as the upcoming generations of writers who continued the streak of modernity in literature.

2.3 Critical comments on Moore's poems

As indicated in the previous unit, Marianne Moore has penned an extensive collection of poems that she didn't seek to commercially publish as she felt that they were not ready for public readership.

Recognizing this, Moore constantly revised and edited her works which is why there are several versions to her same writing. While this may cause a certain degree of confusion among her readers, it also marked her steady growth in her personal and literary ventures. Keeping this in consideration, this section shall aim to provide general commentaries and critically analysis of few of Moore's famous poems so as to provide a better understanding of the poet and her literary productions.

To this end, we shall aim to explore her wide collection of poems; of which her most frequently cited poem; the "Poetry" comprehensively established her conception of poetry and aesthetics. For this purpose, she employed the literary technique of *ars poetica*, or a poem about 'writing a poem', a form used by the famous classicist Horace whose main intention was to provide his critical advises to poets on the art of writing poetry and drama. Understanding the benefits of this literary technique, Moore used it as the main form in the poem. In fact, she did so with the intention to provide her critical opinion on poetry writing as an imaginative and creative act. To this end, the poem was also structured as an anti-poetic stance with provocative rhetoric and lines like, "I, too, dislike it"; a stance that allowed her to investigate the art of poetry. Understanding the magnum scope of her efforts, Moore framed her poems with a serious and ironic tone using a prosaic style. In fact, in her poems imagination, expression and language had mostly been considered as the raw materials of poetry while also positioning poetry as an effort of the genuine artist. Taking her concerns forward and also in an attempt to develop her philosophies of literature, Moore in her poem, "Picking and Choosing" considered literature as "a phase of life" which could be worthwhile and constructive, if it dealt with the real world. As she celebrated realism, Moore mentioned several prominent writers like Shaw, James and Hardy in the poem; as individuals who interpreted "life through the medium of emotions"; while critics like Gordon Craig, Burke and Xenophon opinions had been used by Moore

to develop her own philosophies on life, ethics and truths. In a similar tone, Moore in her poem “You Say You Said” emphasised on the importance and value of “few words [as] best” and “admired”. While such a standpoint may result to “discretion” and “disgust”, it avoids “opportunity to [not] be a hypocrite”. This concern had also been reflected in her poem, “Baseball and Writing” wherein she attempted to explore the varied dimensions of poetry. In this regard, she compared the act of playing baseball and writing as two similar engagements that happen to generate a sense of excitement and uncertainty. This correlational between the two activities stemmed from her deep love and respect for both writing and the sport as both of them taught her “humility”. While she “loved baseball” because it was a “defensive game”, it also allowed her to explore the roles and possibility of “defense or self-defense for survival” through her works. Like most of her poems where she addressed the idea of defense, her poem “Baseball and Writing” extensively dealt on this concern as it mainly penned as a suggestion for the “post-game broadcasts”. In fact, the poem comprises of over ten quotations which made it appear critical and prosaic (Knutson 164-165).

In a different framework, Moore also explored the theme of imagination in her poetry. To this end, she wrote the poem, “The Mind is an Enchanting Thing” where she interrogated the politics and complexity of memory along with all its multifaceted roles. In fact, this poem by Moore has often been considered to be one of her greatest poems that established her as a significant voice of modernism. The poem appeared significant as it also made an indirect evocation to Emily Dickenson. This was because there were startling similarities between the two poets, especially in their engagement and references to the animal world. In this regard, Moore explicitly expressed her deep love for the natural and nonhuman world in her famous poems “Fish”, “An Octopus” and “Spenser’s Island”. In fact, the poem “An Octopus” is a

long meditative poem structured as a free verse with 193 lines that originally comprised of 230 lines in its first publication to the literary magazine *The Dial* in 1924. The poem is a reiteration of her personal experiences of her visit to the Mt. Rainier National Park. Through the natural setting, Moore attempted to develop the idea of natural sublime as “she present[ed] an environment that actively resist[ed] human expression” (12). Since the description of the poem was typically framed as a romantic sublime, it was also overloaded with sensory references that represented nature with a deep sense of awe, reverence and elevation. Keeping to this theme, the poem “The Fish” by Moore also attempted explores the spiritual link between nature and life. To achieve this idea, Moore using the symbol of the fish, also attempted to understand the elements of beauty and distress that is abound in the oceanic and human life wherein every component is linked to life and death. In this sense, the poem moves beyond the simple description of fishes and the ocean as Moore delved into a deep mediation on human civilization, inhumanity and barbarianism in the poem. To enhance these ideas, Moore highlighted a constant battle between the ocean, shore, cliff and the marine creatures who are helpless victims of environmental and anthropogenic occurrences. This idea was also addressed by Moore in her poem “A Graveyard” that focused on misfortunes, death and the sea, a recurring theme in many of her poems. To achieve this end, Moore explicitly addressed the ocean as a “well excavated grave”; an expression through which he attempted to explore varied but constant struggles in human life which are eventually bounded with their inevitable death.

In addition to “Fish” and “An Octopus”, her poem “Spenser’s Island” also glorified nature. However, in this poem, Moore took a regional stance as she celebrated the rich culture and nature of Ireland. Developing on this idea, Moore also highlighted the subsequent defiance of the Irishmen to accept and accommodate the imperial American

culture into their indigenous social fabric. To this end, there had been a strong impulse of ambivalence and a deep desire for resistance to change/reform that Moore addressed through her poem. Unlike the cultural tension, every aspect of the environment, despite their underlying differences; has been shown to be naturally interconnected and adaptive to each other. Such approaches made “Spenser’s Island” appear more hopeful despite the several negative connotations found in the poem. In addition to this, the poem also captured the sophisticated, responsible and proper Irish culture through sensual lyrics, assonances, alliteration and symbolic rhetoric. In fact, the description of nature in the poem has been endowed with the element of divinity thereby making it a point of cultural, environmental and spiritual regeneration.

While the above discussed poems attempted to provide a critical and literary opinions held by Moore, poems like “Silence”, “The Paper Nautilus” and “Marriage” gave us an insight to her personal relationships and experiences. In this regard, the poem “Silence” dealt with the struggle between the speaker and her actual father who was a talkative person. Adding to this, Moore in the poem conceptualized her idea of “superior people” as individuals, who mainly enjoyed their own company in solitude while also being “self-reliant like the cat”. This was because they preferred privacy, solitude and minimal conversation. To this end, they also avoided “long visits” for they realized that the “deepest feeling[s]” are often best expressed “in silence;/ not in silence, but restraint”. Through this poem, Moore also tried to draw the benefits of silence as a key component for a fuller understanding of different peoples, situations and the world. For this purpose, Moore advised her readers to not only be an opinionate individual but also be a good listener. In a similar tone, Moore in “The Paper Nautilus”, an extremely complex and eerily poem; which is often grouped with her nature/sea poems, dealt with ideas like nature, life, love, poetry and motherhood. The poem is believed to have been written for Moore’s young friend,

Elizabeth Bishop that was penned after the death of Moore's mother. While the poem comprised of a lingering negative energy, the end of the poem seemed to be hopeful as it expressed the unconditional love of a mother towards her children. However, it should be noted that despite her attempt to glorify motherhood, Moore was never blinded the dangers and complexities embodied in a 'mother' who is often seen as a rhetoric of love, sacrifice and security. While delving on the struggles of women, Moore not only discussed women's position in literature but also in motherhood and marriage which she extensively discussed in her famous poem, "Marriage". Through the poem, Moore voiced her personal opinions regarding the social institution. In fact, for Moore marriage was an unavoidable social institution which often reduced women to marginality, silence and objectification as it has been a subtle contestation of power among the genders. Such a power politics made 'good marriage' a rarity. Despite her strong opinions, she didn't directly take any side between the sexes. In this sense, she appears to be a proto-feminist that stood for gender equality. Developing her critical opinion on marriage, life, ethics and poetry in the "Marriage" used several complex allusion as well as Shakespearean and biblical references. One of the central references used in the poem was the mythical couple Adam and Eve, through whom Moore attempted to criticize both the sexes for their failure to see beyond their own vanity and selfishness. This was done with the intention to explore the fundamental meaning, structure and obligations of marriage. In fact, she satirized the social institute structured by the lopsided patriarchal culture while she explored the relationship between poetry, gender and power.

2.4 Critical opinions on Moore's poetry by contemporary scholars

While the above section, dealt with the critical overview of Moore's famous poems, this section shall aim to provide general

opinions on the poetess by critical scholars whose well-intended research explorations have added new dimension to Moore's personality, experiences and writings. To these efforts, she is often seen as a feminist, ecologist, sports lover and an advocate for animal studies. In addition to these accolades, she herself was also considered as a critic by her contemporaries as her writings were aimed to develop her poetic and aesthetic ideas. Such an effort by Moore has been studied by several critics like Charles Tomlinson, Celeste Goodridge, Darlene W. Erickson, Donald Hall, Pamela Hadas, Patricia C. Willis, Ellen Levy, Elizabeth Gregory and Stacy C. Hubbard, Jeanne Heuving, Linda Leavell, Guy L. Rotella, John M. Slatin, Sabine Sielke and Kristin H. Zona; as they attempted to theorise the significant literary contributions of Marianne Moore in American poetry.

In addition, Harold Bloom in his comprehensive and critical work *Marianne Moore* (2004) engaged in an extensive research on few of Moore's famous poems like "The Steeple-Jack", "The Fish", "Poetry" and "Marriage". In fact, Bloom through his scholastic insights provided analytical perspectives on few of Moore's central themes and her unique style of writings as he dealt with concerns like continual revision, feminism, aestheticism, modernism, imagination, allusion, identity and power politics through social conditioning/ideologies. The illustrative study of Moore by Bloom also contained her biographical, social, literary and critical components; all of which help us understanding the powerful legacy of Moore in American poetry. In a similar attempt, Cristanne Miller in *Cultures of Modernism* (2005) traced the literary and gendered communities of Moore's contemporaries. For this purpose, Miller closely studied Marianne, Mina Loy and Else Lasker-Schuler. This was done with the intention to provide a comparative study of the writers. In fact, the contributions of Moore had been acknowledged by her contemporaries; an area that Darlene E. Erickson extensively explored in *Illusion is More Precise Than Precision* (1992). In it, Eliot's

praises seem to be the centre of investigation which resulted in demonstrating the poet's unique ability to combine observation, optimism and originality. The book showcased Moore as a 'magician' of words who could conjure truth beyond words. Alongside, the work also argued Moore to be one of the strongest female voices in the twentieth century American literature. Taking these ideas forward, Jeanne Heuving in *Omissions are Not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore* (1992) applied feminist literary criticism to discuss Moore's wide array of literary production. In it, Heuving expressed the refusal of Moore to make gender a central subject of her writing; while also agreeing that gender acted as a crucial determinant in Moore's poetic production. Such a defiant stance by Moore made her poetry not only ambivalent and multivalent, but also subversion to the existing meanings constructed by patriarchy.

In addition to these areas of research, John M. Slatin in *The Savage Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (1986) attempted to draw a comprehensive evolution of her long poetic career. Concentrating of the personal, critical and literary developments, Slatin documented Moore's eccentric aesthetic beliefs which were unrelated to her contemporaries. In addition, the ideas of self and identity were also explored which like Moore's poetry was marked with a deep sense of isolation that the poetess sought to desperately overcome. Tracing her innate desire and dream for literary success in the work, Moore has generally been projected as an ambitious person who was often categorized with eminent writers like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. Such a categorization was also explored by Elizabeth Gregory in her work, *Quotation and Modern American Poetry*. In fact, in this work Gregory also examined ways in which modern American writers struggled with questions of literary authority and cultural identity as endorsed by the conventional European models. To this end, the use of quotation has been traced from classical period to the

modern times. Keeping to this illustrious study quotation, special emphasis had been made in the analysis of the use of quotation in modern and postmodern literature with special reference on the texts of Eliot, Williams and Moore; who for Gregory, were the central figures of American modernism.

While the above mentioned anthologized collection focused on Moore's poetic style, they mainly concentrated on a singular attribute of the poetess. Unlike them, Charles Tomlinson's *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1969) and the recent *Twenty-First Century Marianne Moore: Essays from a Critical Renaissance* (2017) by Elizabeth Gregory and Stacy Carson Hubbard provide critical insights on Moore. In fact, both the collections have played a significant role in reviving the rich legacy of Moore for the contemporary readers. For this purpose, Tomlinson in his collection extensively explored several concerns of Moore's poetry like the 'art of poetry', motives and motifs in her poems, modernism, her eye for observation, politics, mediation and enactment. In a similar tone, Gregory and Hubbard attempted to locate Moore in the contemporary and literary scene. Such an effort generated a new range of critical awareness of Moore in the twenty-first century. In fact, for them, such an event could be considered as the Renaissance of Marianne Moore. To substantiate their arguments, the collection included several interesting perspectives on Moore as a modernist whose literary evolution had inspired many of her successors; while also making her a cultural icon.

Probable questions

1. Discuss Moore as a modernist poet.
2. Elaborate on the unique poetic style of Marianne Moore.
3. Critically analyse how Moore's poem "Critics and Connoisseurs" disseminated the poetess' critical, poetic and aesthetic opinions.
4. Write a note on Moore's method of 'revision' practiced in her poems

5. Discuss the image of the swan and the ant used in the poem “Critics and Connoisseurs”.
6. What are the central themes discussed by Moore in her poems?
7. Analyse “Critics and Connoisseurs” as a fine example of *ars poetica*.
8. Moore in her poem, “Critics and Connoisseurs” elaborated on the marginalised position of women in the literary world of her contemporary period. Elaborate.

2.5 Summing up

Despite her strong legacy, we have witnessed a steady decline of Moore’s secured position in Modern poetry. While, in the recent years, there have been extensive efforts to recognise her literary contributions and revive her poetical endeavours; there continues to be a certain degree of defiance to celebrate her works as readers find her unique style of obscure quotations, notes, untraditional subject matter, and sheer complexity; highly frustrating and disoriented. Although, Moore wanted such an engagement between her works and her readers whom she sought to liberate through her poems; yet she faced heavy criticism from her readers and critics who were unwilling to pursue her complex and different style of writing. This attitude by her audience became one of the key factors that compromised Moore’s contributions to modernism as critics are minimally interested in the author’s practice of continual revisions in recovering the authorial meaning. Realizing this concern, contemporary critics are re-examining Moore’s status in literary studies with an intention to provide a comprehensive study of women writers in American Modern poetry. To this end, Marianne Moore became an interesting site of critical study for her works dealt with ideas such as feminism, animals, nature, sports, poetry and aestheticism. In fact, her

unique engagement of these concerns with her original poetic style made her appear as a fine modernist, both in her vision and art.

2.7 References and Suggested Reading

Cecire, Natalia. "Marianne Moore's Precision." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, Vol. 67, No. 4, University of Arizona, 2011, pp. 83-110.

Diehl, Joanne Feit (et al.) *Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore: The Psychodynamics of Creativity*. Princeton University Press, 1993.

Erickson, Darlene W. *Illusion Is More Precise Than Precision: The Poetry of Marianne Moore*. The University of Alabama Press, 1992.

Goodridge, Celeste. *Hints and Disguises: Marianne Moore and Her Contemporaries*. University of Iowa Press, 1989.

Gregory, Elizabeth. *Quotation and Modern American Poetry: Imaginary Gardens with Read Toads*. Rice University Press, 1996.

Gregory, Elizabeth and Stacy Carson Hubbard. "Introduction." *Twenty-First Century Marianne Moore: Essays from a Critical Renaissance*, edited by Elizabeth Gregory and Stacy Carson Hubbard. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 1-11.

Hadas, Pamela W. *Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection*. Syracuse University Press, 1977.

Hall, Donald. *Marianne Moore: The Cage and The Animal*. Pegasus, 1970.

Heuving, Jeanne. *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore*. Wayne State University Press, 1992.

Leavell, Linda (ed.) "Introduction." *Observations*. Macmillan, 2016.

Levy, Ellen. *Criminal Ingenuity Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Martin, Taffy. *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist*. University of Texas Press, 1986.

Merrin, Jeredith. *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and the Uses of Tradition*. Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Molesworth, Charles. *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life*. Atheneum, 1990.

Rotella, Guy L. *Reading and Writing Nature: The Poetry of Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop*. Northeastern University Press, 1991.

Sielke, Sabine. *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore and Rich*. University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Slatin, John M. *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986.

Stapleton, Laurence. *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance*. Princeton University Press, 1978. Tomlinson, Charles(ed.)*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice Hall, 1969.

Weatherhead, A. Kingsley. *The Edge of the Image: Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams and Some Other Poets*. University of Washington Press, 1967.

Willis, Patricia C.(ed.)*Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*. The National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1990.

Zona, Kirstin H. *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint*. The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Unit 3

W H Auden : ‘Danse Macabre’, September 1, 1939’

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introducing the Poet
- 3.3 Works of the Poet
- 3.4 Critical Reception
- 3.5 Context of the Poem
- 3.6 Reading the Poem
- 3.7 Summing up
- 3.8 References & Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

We bring to you in this unit an approach to W.H. Auden’s poems ‘Danse Macabre’, and ‘September 1, 1939’. Proverbially, two poems cannot tell us the range of a poet’s work, especially with respect to a poet like Auden’s who ranged over many forms of writing in poetry. Also, these two poems indicate many of the issues that can be traced through Auden’s whole corpus. We have tried here to help you to an appreciation to these subtleties by including related writing or commentary. We believe thus that by the end of the unit, you will have –

- *gained* a sufficiently nuanced reading of the poems
- *learnt* just how the poems are a sensitive response to Auden’s times
- *discovered* some ideas regarding the poems’ artistic merits, and
- *found* the best way to explain the complexities of the poems

3.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

If you consider the dates of Auden’s life – February 21st, 1907, to September 28th, 1973, you should be able to easily visualise the fact that he was a contemporary of some famous twentieth-century names and lived through some infamous dates and events. Auden is often named together with his two famous contemporaries, T.S.Eliot and W.B.Yeats. In the history of English poetry, poetry of the Anglo-American world that is, these three names are normally linked to each other in a line despite the fact that the three poets developed and worked in their own highly individual ways.

The experience of reading the three poets is always marked by palpable differences. To state it very briefly, Eliot's poetry is evocative of the modernist world of 'the wasteland' vision, while Yeats's vision is built around the Irish world of political struggle and hope as well as Georgian and Imagist moments. On the other hand, Auden's work confronts almost analytically the world of wartime destruction and the prospects for twentieth-century society. In a broad sweeping view of Auden's career what is most noticeable is that he moved from an 'English' beginning to a more 'American' phase which then becomes more of an 'international' phase. The Auden of the 'English' phase is conventionally held to be a 'political' poet, different from the later 'religious' believer. This view however appears to be limited to a superficial consideration of the poet since Auden himself resisted this neat division and perhaps it does not help us with the complex subtleties that the poetry often contains.

One critic (Richard Davenport-Hines) says of Auden: "He was an encyclopaedist who liked to collect, classify and interpret large amounts of information, and strove to integrate natural phenomena, spiritual experiences, human history and intimate emotions into a system in which both body, spirit, feelings and intellect cohered. His poems drew ideas from the work of other poets as well as novelists, historians, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, political scientists and anthropologists. He was the first great English poet to be born in the twentieth century, and the first whose work was profoundly influenced by psychoanalytical and Marxist theories."

Stop to Consider

Biographical

Wystan Hugh Auden's early education was in St. Edmund's School at Hindhead, Surrey, and then at Gresham's School at Holt in Norfolk. As a schoolboy, Auden displayed a sensibility that made his parents think that he would specialise in the science subjects. In 1925 Auden went up to Christ Church College, Oxford. By this time Auden was already writing poetry and held his own opinions about poetry and poets. Humphrey Carpenter's biography of the poet describes his homosexual encounters during his college-days. This was the time when Auden met many others who would later become the generation named through him: Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, for example. Christopher Isherwood, with whom Auden would later collaborate, had already known him from their time at St. Edmund's.

Auden's father was a doctor of varied interests from whom he inherited an interest in the new subject, psychology, and in mythological legends and tales as well as in the Icelandic sagas. Auden's mother played an influential role in his life especially in bequeathing to him a love for music.

Early in his life Auden showed a social awareness beyond his years. As an undergraduate he worked on the side of the workers in the General Strike of 1926 although, as Allan Rodway points out, this was not any radicalism at work. It was the 1930s, with the Great Slump or Depression which heightened his social awareness. Already, in 1928 he had chosen to go to Berlin for a year. He discovered the work of Brecht

while there just as he also came across John Layard, an anthropologist and psychologist who had been a pupil of Homer Lane, an American psychiatrist.

Returning home after Berlin, Auden tutored in London and taught in private schools till 1935. During these years he wrote his most explicitly political poems, plays with Christopher Isherwood, as well as his most famous poem of the time, 'Spain 1937', the result of his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Auden traveled considerably in this period: to Iceland from July to September 1936 and then to China between January and July in 1938, besides the earlier brief trip to Spain. On his journey to Iceland with Louis MacNeice, Auden wrote his long "Letter to Lord Byron", an accomplishment in light verse. The China sojourn with Christopher Isherwood produced *Journey to a War* which includes the sonnet sequence, 'In Time of War' together with a verse commentary. His volume *Look Stranger!* had already been published while he travelled. Unhappy with the name given to it by the publishing house of Faber, Auden renamed the volume, *On This Island*, in its American version. *Another Time* was another volume of 1940 which contained some of his most interesting verse.

Auden wrote plays, some in collaboration with Isherwood, which were taken up for performance by the avant-garde experimental Group Theatre. *The Ascent of F6* was enacted in 1936 and *The Dance of Death* in 1935. A critic (Christopher Innes) records: "Auden's connections with Eliot were particularly close on the theatrical level. Eliot published Auden's earliest play, 'Paid on Both Sides' . . . Both were centrally involved with the Group Theatre, which produced *Sweeney Agonistes* and Auden's *Dance of Death* . . . in 1935."

SAQ:

1. After which poet/poets does Auden's name appear in standard histories of English Literature? (20 words)

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

2. Which important events occurred between 1907 and 1973 which affected Auden? (30 words)

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

Relating the poetry to the concerns that the poet thought important for his times gives us a special insight into Auden's poetic qualities. If we try to highlight Auden's purely aesthetic experimentation or innovations we might begin to underestimate the impact he had on his contemporaries. It was probably the particular flavour of the 1930s, and the '40s that compelled intellectuals in the Western world to be involved with the catastrophic times that society then was passing through. As a poet, however, Auden's contribution was to search out the poetic forms which could shape literary responses to the world economic crises of 1929, the inter-war developments from the beginning of the 1930s to the outbreak of the

second world war in 1939, the years of actual conflict till 1945, and the aftermath in the late 1940s and the 1950s.

The poem that you are about to read here, dedicated to W.B. Yeats, is a fine example of the manner in which Auden foregrounds this range of ideas or issues that make his poetry so highly evocative and so deeply engaging.

Stop to Consider:

The Auden Generation

This was the descriptive term coined by the critic, Samuel Hynes, to mark the extent of Auden's influence during his early career in England. Besides his friends and contemporaries who came under his spell at Oxford, Auden's stature as a model poet was widely acknowledged. In 1980, John Ashbery, the poet, told an interviewer, "Forty years ago when I first began to read modern poetry . . . he was *the* modern poet." This is augmented by Ian Sansom who traces Auden's defining influence over several generations of English and American poets, and who thus finds it more appropriate to pluralize Hynes' phrase and write of the "Auden Generations".

It is equally important to understand that this influence was not just poetical but that it was also ideological and Marxist. Auden's Marxism has come in for much debate and criticism, but his poetry of the 'thirties was decidedly the poetry of the 'Court Poet of the Left' (E. Mendelson). Even though his brand of Marxism was idiosyncratic, Auden was sensitive to the sweeping political troubles of the time including the rise to power of Hitler, the acute effects of the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the moral debasement of public life which induced him to oppose established bourgeois values. This sense of political radicalism lies behind many poems of the 1930s like 'A Communist to Others' (1932), and 'Spain 1937'.

New Signatures, New Writing

In 1937, Geoffrey Grigson named the double number of his periodical *New Verse*, the 'Auden Double Number' which contained tributes by a host of contemporary names including Dylan Thomas, George Barker, Herbert Read, Edwin Muir, Sir Hugh Walpole, and even Ezra Pound.

3.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Auden's range of writing extended over categories of both poetic and prose productions. At the height of his fame he belonged to the 1930s in England when he invited critical attention with the publication of *The Orators* in 1932. You have already read above about some of his major achievements. His work is most memorable both for its range of experimented forms and for the manner in which he formulated the hopes and desires of his times. In the 'English' phase, Auden voiced all those concerns which troubled the whole of the "Auden Generation". Some of the poems stand out with their social themes while others, like the satirical *Letter to Lord Byron*, reach out even to the casual reader. In the anthology *The Poet's Tongue* of 1935, Auden declared that those "who try to put poetry on a pedestal

only succeed in putting it on the shelf. Poetry is no better and no worse than human nature; it is profound and shallow, sophisticated and naïve, dull and witty, bawdy and chaste in turn”.

Many of Auden’s long poems were written after his move to America (excluding ‘Letter to Lord Byron’, *The Orators* and the plays for the Group Theatre). These included *New Year Letter* (1940; containing around 1,300 lines in simple English), ‘For the Time Being’, and ‘The Sea and the Mirror’.

Peter Porter comments that Auden wanted to make modern poetry accessible to the modern reader rather than obscure and difficult. This led him to revive many of the older inherited English poetic forms: ballads, Pindaric odes, alliterative verse, threnodies, aphorisms, sapphics, villanelles, sonnets, sestinas, cabaret songs, catalogues, terza rima and ottava rima, rhyme royal, and American syllabics.

The Enchafèd Flood (1951), *The Dyer’s Hand* (1963), *Secondary Worlds* (1968) and *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973) contain most of Auden’s collected prose work. We might note with interest what Tony Sharpe conjectures: that Auden might be “surprised to observe how much prose he had ended up producing: for he valued his output in this medium much less than his poetry . . . If, as he asserted, art creates its ‘secondary’ world out of elements found in the ‘primary’ phenomenal one . . . then writings about writing might be deemed to offer no more than a tertiary world.”

The Later Auden:

From the summer of 1948 Auden began to visit Italy regularly. The volume *Nones* (1951) is of this period. It was followed by *The Shield of Achilles* in 1955. The poems of these volumes showed Auden’s continued experimentation with style and metrics. You will find ‘The Shield of Achilles’ frequently anthologized. In this connection, you may find it interesting to note what Edward Mendelson has to say: “ ‘The Shield of Achilles’, the opening poem of the middle section of the book of the same name, has become an anthology piece thanks to its apparently straightforward sentiments against war, cruelty, impersonality and regimentation, but the poem is more subtle than its overt sentiments. Its hidden subject is the way in which impersonal speech makes possible inhuman actions. The stanzas in which Thetis watches Hephaestos create Achilles’ shield report on actions for which neither is personally responsible: until the final stanza (where Hephaestos hobbles away from his creation and Thetis cries out in dismay at it), ‘she’ looks at what ‘his hands’ do, but neither is an ‘I’ or ‘you’ and neither chooses anything. The shield made by ‘his hands’ portrays equally impersonal scenes of a barren landscape with an army of ‘A million eyes, a million boots’, but no individual persons except for the ‘ragged urchin, aimless and alone’, who lives in a solitude where individuality is meaningless because it can imagine no relations to other individuals. The poem became popular partly because it could be read as flattering its readers

with the assurance that they are not unjust like faceless authorities and violent youths; but, as always in later Auden, the poem is a deeply unflattering portrait of the reader as the passive, observing Thetis, and of the poet as the indifferent craftsman Hephaestos, each allowing the worst to happen by their failure to protest against it in first-person speech.

The overt themes of *The Shield of Achilles* are large matters of war and injustice, but the covert themes are Auden's arguments with himself about his art and his relation to it."

The volume *Homage to Clio* belonged to 1960 and contains a moving work in prose, 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' (the title of Goethe's autobiography, meaning "poetry and truth"), which is subtitled, 'An Unwritten Poem'. About the year 1957, Auden settled down in the village of Kirchstetten in Austria. In America Auden had been lecturing for nearly two decades and in 1956 he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford a professorship which ran its term till 1961. *About the House* was the volume which appeared in 1965 while *City Without Walls* came out in 1969. This last volume showed Auden at his most autobiographical though also at one of his most inventive phases, while also returning to political themes in such poems as 'August, 1968' much as he had done in 'September 1, 1939'. Auden also wrote in the Japanese poetic form, the haiku, as in 'Et in Arcadia Ego' (in *About the House*). *Epistle to a Godson* was out in 1972 while *Thank You, Fog* was brought out posthumously in 1974. He died in his sleep in Vienna in September in 1973.

Stop to Consider:

From 'The Shield of Achilles'

“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 liked 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." (1952)

3.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, Richard Hoggart, Randall Jarrell, Joseph Warren Beach, Monroe K. Spears, Edward Mendelson, Edward Callan, Samuel Hynes, and Stan Smith are some critics and scholars whose critical comments and scholarship have determined the shape of Auden's critical heritage. Auden received much critical disdain from the Leavisite critics while he was often assailed for what was conservatively thought to be superficial poetic brilliance. However, as Stan Smith records, "From his first public collection, *Poems* (1930), Auden was everywhere in the 1930s, both text and talisman. Naomi Mitchison in *The Weekend Review*, 25 October 1930, welcomed the volume as the harbinger of 'the New Generation', proof that 'the country is not going to the dogs after all'. . . In 1932 John Hayward, the keeper of T.S.Eliot's critical conscience, wrote of *The Orators* as 'the most valuable contribution to English poetry since *The Wasteland*'. Smith further stresses that the 'Auden effect' lay in that ability to catch the changing moods of the time in luminous images, magical phrases and breath-taking aperçus, expressing sentiments that people were unaware they shared until they read him."

3.5

3.5.1 Context of the Poem "Danse Macabre"

Danse Macabre literally means 'Dance of Death' in French. It is a Mediaeval allegorical concept on the universality of death. No matter whatever is one's position in life, danse macabre unites them all by the all conquering and equalising power of death as expressed in the drama, poetry, music, and visual arts of the mediaeval Western Europe. A typical pictorial or literary representation of danse macabre consists of a procession or dance of both living and dead figures where the representations from all walks of life, typically arranged in order of their rank, from pope and emperor to child, clerk, hermit, and labourer all led by dead dancing along to grave. The generic theme started as a warning to the sinners, but the Black Death in the 14th and 15th Century which swept away almost half of the population in Western Europe rendered a fatalistic response through this phrase. Death has

been a major theme in art and literature, and it still is a dreaded mystery despite changes in human civilisations and progress of mankind. Therefore through the Renaissance till the present age, it has been an inspiration for artists and writers. Thus in the 18th and 19th centuries, danse macabre remained a source of artistic inspiration, though the spiritual guidance part was mostly lost.

3.5.2 Reading the Poem “Danse Macabre”

‘Danse Macabre’ is one of Auden's shorter poems dealing with the theme of the fragility and transience of personal love. This along with ‘September 1, 1939’ and some other poems (like ‘Dover’ and ‘In memory of W. B. Yeats’) were included in his collection, *Another Time* (1940). This poem is highly representative of a troublesome period and its general moods of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. ‘Danse Macabre’ was written in 1937, and the historical context to it is the Spanish Civil War. The poem is in fifteen stanzas in quadruplets. However, the movement of the poem divides it into three main parts and the last stanza returns to the movement of the first.

The first two stanzas serve the purpose of setting a scene of an impending horror. And this horror is a certainty, with a sense of imposition which the very opening line suggests. In both these stanzas, first three lines are set against a contrasting fourth line. Civility, reason, high diplomacy all which characterise an ideal social state is replaced by warfare and hostility. And when the war affects people’s lives, the rhythm of daily existence is lost – piano, fairytales of a reasonable giant, and all the things of daily usages become irrelevant and find place in the store-rooms. In short it is a farewell to all the principles and values we cherish along with the sense of security that Europe had nurtured.

The sudden state of anarchy resulting from the Spanish Civil War is being compared here as the unchained state of the Devil – as if it has arisen from the dungeon where it was put earlier. With the Devil let loose, there is chaos everywhere. Though Auden puts humorous colloquial language here, as evident in phrases like “broken parole” and “...the well where his Papa throws...”, yet the message is clear that things have turned into a chaotic state from an otherwise orderly desirable existence.

Think about it

Is the Devil a new hero in this poem? Read the poem and find out if the poet’s actions reflect the Devil as an ideal.

Where do we find the Devil then? He is now everywhere, he walks freely, he may be found by the bridge, by the streams, and he casts a shadow over everything. The devil has invaded into the private lives as well, traces can be found in some very private parts in the

household like the cupboard or under the bed. No place is safe; conspiracy has crept into every corner in life. Here we find the juxtaposition of modern industrial life and pagan eyes of superstitious fear (influenza, goose, and gull).

If this Devil is to triumph over everything we had been holding dear to us, it will be a matter of shame for the humanity. The “heart” here is a representation of not a mere blood pumping vital human organ, it is everything beautiful that the humanity stands for, and everything the Devil despises. Therefore, “were he to triumph”, he would “drag [humanity] low”. Devil would then steal the heart, and defile it. The very cause of love will be lost then.

With the outbreak of the chaos, millions of people have already been harmed, just like the doves succumbing to the charms of the poisonous snake. Here we may draw a Biblical reference of the Original Sin where the snake tempted the first human beings into committing the Sin. Here the poem takes a dark ironic turn, for, the poet now resolves to save mankind from the Devil and yet he has every intention to destroy mankind in the process of doing so. He intends to become the axe to cut down hundreds of unsound trees which stand for the beliefs of mankind so far.

Next the poem takes a slightly autobiographical turn when the poet proclaims himself to be the “spoilt Third Son”. This, however, should not be considered as the ultimate meaning of the line. The reference here is again from the Book of Genesis. Adam and Eve had first two sons Cain and Abel. After the murder of Abel by Cain, the latter was condemned to a life of wandering for that sin. After the death of Abel, Adam and Eve’s third son Seth was born, in whose line of descendance we have Noah who saved the mankind in the Great Deluge. Some sects within Christianity include Seth in the genealogy of Jesus. The reference to the Third Son, therefore, becomes significant here when the poet sees himself as someone of the similar magnitude. He therefore takes up the responsibility of chasing away the Devil and to get rid of the human race in the process.

The poet furthers the argument in favour of riding the earth of the human race by stating that the human behaviour has turned into a world of horror, like the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were infamous particularly for the sin of desire. As God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire, the poet too intends to take charge of that liquid fire and destroy the places where all modern time crookedness is found. The adjectives “sedentary” and “slick” used for Sodom and Gomorrah here renders a reference to the apathetic and yet efficient modern industrial life.

If the action plan of the poetic persona so far is found highly aplomb, an intellectual shudder soon punctures the prophetic claims with a huge comic irony. The humourous irony is found in what the poetic persona plans next to getting rid of the Devil. A ridiculous individual will is expressed throughout the tenth stanza, the recurrent use of the first person pronoun “I” accompanied by the strong modal verb “shall” denotes a mindless self-display. The same sentiment runs through the eleventh stanza as well.

This momentary peak of self-glorification soon gets exhausted and the poem returns to the theme of horror. Strains of adolescent and infantile tittering g (“So Little John, Long

John, Peter and Paul, / And poor little Horace with only one ball”) are introduced to set the mood for a cyclical nature of history. The last two lines of the twelfth stanza reminds us that we are entrapped in a blood-letting catastrophe of a war (“You shall leave your breakfast, your desk and your play / On a fine summer morning the Devil to slay.”).

Violence has become an engine for the modern world. Ironically “order and trumpet and anger and drum / And power and glory” all which are markers of violence are the markers of establishing peace and order as well. All these are supposed to get the earth rid of the mortal sins – a violent expiation.

Towards the end the poem, the poet displays an acute understanding of the evil and the suffering of the world. The Biblical reference is drawn here to pose as a striking contrast against the clutter of consumer life. The modern world subsists, and therefore although mankind is alive yet it must die.

In the last stanza of the poem, we find an echo of the opening line of the poem. The stanza as a whole portrays the spectacle of destruction once again. These lines beautifully return to where the poet had started, bidding farewell to all those things we find comfortable with and security in. The last stanza also renders a sense of lyrical nature by acting like a refrain.

Check Your Progress:

- *Find the colloquial and humourous tone in the poem. Think about the purpose they serve here.]*
- *Do you find Auden as one of the ‘Angry Poets of the Thirties’ in this poem?]*

3. 6

3.6.1 Context of the poem ‘September 1, 1939’

‘September 1, 1939’ was first published in the American magazine the New Republic on 18th October 1939 issue. There are many things which make this poem interesting in its literary standing and at the same time keep its everlasting relevance to human society. The title of the poem gives the readers a fair idea of the historical backdrop of its composition. It was the first poem of the World War II. However, it would be a mistake to assume it as a running commentary on the contemporary political turmoil caused mainly by Hitler’s attack on Poland on the given date. Rather, the date in the title of the poem is just a referential point to a dive into the history of anarchy and a shuddering reminder that history is a vicious cycle. The poet W. H. Auden is one such poet who would re-edit, rewrite, and even alter the texts of his writings to a great extent after writing a poem – and this poem was not an exception. With

this and a few other poems, Auden went to the extent of disowning when all other types of alterations did not satisfy him. Thus, even though he allowed a version of the poem to be reprinted in a Penguin anthology *Poetry of the Thirties* (1964), he left a note about this and four other poems “which he is ashamed to have written”. He was alienating himself from the poem so much that in his 1966 edition of *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* this was omitted and would continue to be omitted in any other collections thereafter. However, in the aftermath of 9/11 the poem received a renewed interest from the American public, in its original unedited form. Now this poem has become one of the most famous examples of a writer attempting a revision and the readers refusing to allow that.

3.6.2 Reading the Poem ‘September 1, 1939’

If we examine the themes of some of the great poems in the literary history, we find many addressing to the question of love; some others addressing to the problems of war; some have been observed to speak directly to our contemporary conditions, to various crises, fears and threats of annihilation; and lastly there are some that console, inspire and delight. Very few like ‘September 1, 1939’, however, address all of the above.

‘September 1, 1939’ consists of 99 lines, written in trimeters. It is divided into nine 11-line stanzas with a shifting rhyme scheme. Each stanza being composed of just one sentence so that – as Auden’s fellow poet Joseph Brodsky pointed out – the thought unit corresponds exactly to the stanzaic unit, which corresponds also to the grammatical unit.

The narrative of the poem begins with the narrator sitting in a dive bar in New York City. That was on the same day when Hitler’s actions have brought the hitherto pretending forces into the War – thus ending the “low dishonest decade” of political deceptions in the Western Europe. Economic crisis, ring unemployment, and people losing jobs had already had a toll, the “low dishonest decade” was the decade of the Great Depression. Here the narrator sitting in the ambiance of a dive bar becomes an allusive reference to the gloomy situation the world had just entered into. It was the end of the “low dishonest decade” bringing along “the unmentionable odour of death” by Hitler’s actions. From the onset, the speaker moves on to psychoanalysis of Hitler’s actions employing the Jungian concept of “huge imago” – the idealised self. He hereafter feels that the imago is a part of the collective consciousness in the German culture which perhaps started Martin Luther’s Protestant shakeup of Christianity. By mentioning Luther, Auden refers to the huge Protestant Movement whose religious practices re directly related to Luther’s theories. The “offence” of Luther which had “driven a culture mad” is the anti-Semitism Luther stood for. He believed that Jewish faith could be wiped out if all the Jews were converted into Christianity – a dangerous proposition for the future. Hundreds of years later his views were adapted by the Nazi party. Linz here is also an important reference. This is the place in Austria where Hitler was born and this is the same place to where Hitler travelled to make the formal announcement of his plans to annex Austria into a larger German empire.

The next reference is drawn from the book by exiled Greek general Thucydides – dictators abusing an apathetic population edging out knowledge and reason. A society under dictatorship become used to sufferings; poor governance and sorrow leave their marks on it. Even democracies like Germany or the United States may experience such horrors. From the contemporary Greek society of Thucydides till the rule of Hitler more than 2000 years later, all those societal ills are recurring. This recurring pattern in history is perhaps deliberately put through the stanzaic pattern of 11 lines throughout the composition, even though they do not rhyme just in order to remind the reader of the variations in the history, yet they tend to repeat the vowel and consonant sounds at the ends of the lines.

Given the backdrop of the World War II, America was initially not involved in that War – thus it had been a “neutral air”. Moreover, the urbanization in America that time is characterized by the skyscrapers – a symbol of human achievements and technological prowess. However, the skyscrapers get mentioned here not simply as an achievement, but as a façade of failure of the human race. Skyscrapers rise while obliterating smaller buildings, and rising number of those can be seen as powerful countries exerting control over smaller ones. It can be seen as a conspicuous advance of capitalism similar to the German military aggression.

The poetic persona then returns to the ambiance of the bar and the people sitting in there. All those people appear to have been trying desperately to cling on to their normal life, trying to be undisturbed by the world-changing events in Europe that day. The bar itself becomes a symbol of a fort for those who want the conventions of the daily life to remain unhampered – the lights must stay on, the music must keep on playing – all the comforts of an untroubled life must be there to make oneself feel at home. This reveals the nature of very human existence, a vulnerable one; all is afraid of the evil and yet neither is as happy nor as innocent as everyone pretends to be.

The propaganda of the windiest militants and the cunning talks of the important politicians can be compared to the deepest desires of the common people. What is similar in all of these is not any universal love for others; rather it is a selfish desire of oneself to be loved by everyone other. Here Auden refers to the Russian ballet dancer Nijinsky who wrote in his diary “Some politicians are hypocrites like Diaghilev, who does not want universal love, but to be loved alone.” Auden also went on to say that such habits which are so deeply rooted in human beings will always reflect in human behaviour.

Common working class has been referred to as a dense population of daily commuters travelling to the city everyday for work. This travel is a desperate attempt for achieving “ethical life” but they are in fact bound in the traditional understanding of social order. People above these commuters, the politicians of different ranks, are as well “helpless” as their actions are some sorts of “compulsory game” instead of exerting their own will, from which they cannot get released. Both the citizens and politicians are referred to as deaf and dumb.

Next the poet thinks about a necessary binary contradiction in social order. The contradiction is between the concept of “state” and lone existence. The balance between these two the citizens and the rulers try to strike is a lie. He, however, does not blame the either side. Those who run for political power are also concerned about their own survival – for basic human concerns are the same for all, which brings us to the last line of the eighth stanza where the poet stresses on the necessity of love for each other for life. The eighth stanza, however, is the most troubling one for Auden. He very soon felt that the very last line of that stanza, “We must love one another or die”, to be a lie as human beings are anyway mortal. He, therefore, first changed the line to “We must love one another and die” and in the 1945 volume of *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* he subsequently omitted that stanza.

The last stanza resets the mood to that of fear and helplessness. Yet, here the tone turns into that of hope. The “points of light” or the rays of hope shine on some people who try their best to stay positive and with a will to connect to similar minds. Here the poet wishes to make his own connection to them, though he acknowledges that he is just made “Of Eros and of dust”. Eros is the Greek god of love and sexuality which are core ingredients of humanity, and dust as a contrast is the reference to mortal existence in a physical world.

Stop To Consider:

- Think about the stanzaic pattern in the poem. Also try to recognize the rhyming pattern and their occurrences, if any, after you finish reading the poem. Does the pattern serve any specific purpose to the thoughts in the poem?
- Luther has been celebrated as a pioneer in liberalizing Christianity from the grasp of the Roman Catholic Church. However, Auden sees him as the beginning point of an anti-Semiotic movement whose influence will strengthen the activities of those like Hitler’s. Do you agree?
- Look at Auden’s reference to the architectural technological advancements which are quite signature elements in his poetry. He is also called a ‘Pylon poet’ for employing imageries from such fields. Does that make him a poet celebrating the technological marvels or his pylon imageries serve beyond that?

4.7 Summing Up

This unit should have incited your interest in the poetry of W.H. Auden. We have provided you with an explanation of the poem prescribed for your study so that you can at least state its salient features. How much historical material went into the writing of the poem

has also been brought to you. While Auden would have approved an innovative reading of the poem since he considered poetry to be an epistemological source which gives us knowledge of the world, it is also important that we should know for certain some of the complex history that gave life to the elegy to Yeats so that the contextual meaning of each word in the poem is recovered. That way our own readings here will be found to be nuanced and sensitive.

4.8 References and Suggested Reading

Auden, W.H. *Selected Poems* (New Edition); edited by Edward Mendelson, New York: Vintage International, December 1989.

Rodway, Allan *A Preface to Auden* ; Longman, New York, 1984.

Smith, Stan *The Cambridge Companion to W.H.Auden*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K.2004.

Unit 4

W H Auden : ‘Danse Macabre’, September 1, 1939’

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

4.1 Objectives

4.2 How to Approach the Poet

4.3 Important Poems by the Poet that You Should Read

4.4 A Note on “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”

4.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

4.6 References and Suggested Reading

4.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- Appreciate Auden’s poems mentioned
- Learn about other important poems by the poet
- Answer questions about Auden’s poems

4.2 How to approach the poet

Wystan Hugh Auden was an Anglo-American poet who exerted major influence on the poetry of the twentieth century. He is noted for his stylistic and technical achievements. His works deal with diverse array of topics like religion, politics, love, and morality; often culminating more than one topic in his poems. He is known for his extraordinary intellect and wit. At the beginning of his literary career he came into the notice of another stalwart T. S. Eliot who helped him in

publishing his first book *Poems* in 1930. Therefore, we get a clue that he established himself as a significantly promising poet right at that time.

If we look at the decade of 1930s itself, it is an eventful and a fateful decade. It is often referred to as the darkest and bloodiest hour of humanity. It is the most disturbing decade of mass poverty, violent extremism, and the consequent World War. In politics and literature the decade of 1930s is more than a mere chronological frame, it rather acts as a warning from the history. As has been the tendency, the decade found place in literary media due to its multi-faceted agony. Naturally the representative poets of the era are referred to as the angry poets of the thirties. In contrast, the preceding decade, often referred to as the Roaring Twenties, was the decade of economic prosperity. Not only the economic growth, the decade of the twenties saw social, artistic, and cultural dynamism. It was the decade when radical political movement gained significant momentum – the October Revolution and the Russian Civil War led to the spread of Communism as a reaction to which Fascism rose in parts of Europe. The boom of the twenties was silenced by the devastating Wall Street Crash in October 1929. So as a stark contrast to the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression arrived unwarned and unwarranted. Starting the career at such a transitional period, Auden in his early days was leaned towards Communist ideologies. It, however, would be a mistake for considering him to be a Communist poet all through his life. Marxist and Freudian beliefs in Auden soon gave way to religious and spiritual ideas.

Born and raised in heavily industrial northern England to a physician father who had extensive knowledge of mythology and folklore, and a strictly Anglican mother, we find in Auden the influence of these all. Moreover he had the exposure to psychoanalytical readings in his father's studies. An industrial surrounding supplied Auden with various industrial imageries such as the references to trains, factories, roads, skyscrapers etc. He was not the only poet to employ these imageries though, all the Pylon Poets made extensive use of such industrial imageries. Auden's attraction for science never waned. As would be a difficult task for a new poet to deal with such a host of themes and topics at the beginning of the career, Auden's early poems too are fragmentary and quite abrupt in nature mostly relying on the concrete images and a colloquial language. But in contrast, the matured Auden is considered to be one of the most skilled poets to have employed the traditional rhyme and meter in modern times.

Stop to consider

The Pylon Poets or the Auden Group of Poets were poets of similar minds in the 1920s and 1930s. Can you identify the other poets who are included in this group?

By the second half of the 1930s, we find evidences of political turmoil in his poems resulting in from many travels in that period. “In Time of War” is a sonnet sequence by him which is a commentary in verse form. Monroe K. Spears commented about Auden’s long poem ‘The Age of Anxiety’ as a “sympathetic satire on the attempts of human beings to escape, through their own efforts, the anxiety of our age” in his book *Poetry of W.H. Auden*.

Auden moved in to United States of America in 1939. His first book published in America was *Another Time* which contained some of his best known poems like the ‘September 1, 1939’ along with elegies on A. E. Housman, Matthew Arnold, and William Butler Yeats. All these poets had great influence on Auden. In this volume we find a different Auden, a more ethically concerned poet, probably due to his re-embrace of the Christianity. However, John G. Blair in his *The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden* warns the readers against finding the person of Auden in his poetry -- “In none of his poems can one feel sure that the speaker is Auden himself. In the course of his career he has demonstrated impressive facility in speaking through any sort of dramatic persona; accordingly, the choice of an intimate, personal tone does not imply the direct self-expression of the poet.”

As a poet of the 1930s, Auden deals with the political events naturally, most of which were related to wars of different kinds in different part of Europe. The poems of that period vividly portray the course of wars and subsequent human sufferings. This dealing with the theme of war led many to consider Auden as a *war poet* which he was not. Although the theme was mainly war, the intent, however was not. His war poems do not glorify the act of war to justify calling him a war poet. They rather explore the dimensions of the process of war just to find a solution if that could have been prevented, and present the undesirable effects of war just to condemn that. Those poems called for a greater human love instead of justifications for a war of any kind.

Auden had been quite experimental with his poetic language. In fact, his linguistic innovations gave birth to a new adjective ‘Audenesque’ which is described by Karl Shapiro as “the modernization of diction, the enlarging of dictional language to permit a more contemporary-sounding speech”. Auden never stopped with his dictional innovations. His technical experimentations too were a lifelong process and had widened the scope in English verse.

It is often contended whether Auden was best in his early career during the tumultuous era or it is his later writings which are more mature. But for every step in his career he has left some remarkable works which offer graceful intellectual perspectives to respective periods.

4.3 Important Poems by the Poet that You Should Read

The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue (1947) for which he won Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1948. It was a modern version of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse. Auden started working on this new long poem in 1944. It is hailed by T. S. Eliot as the best of Auden’s poems. However, just as Eliot faced criticism for his ‘Waste Land’, Auden as well was criticized for this poem. Though the subject of this poem is the World War and its devastating impact, yet it the first glimpse of the setting is found in his *September 1, 1939* itself.

‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats’ (1939) was written following the departure of Yeats in January that year. Apart from an elegy to Yeats, this poem is also a meditation on relevance of poetry in a modern world. This poem is divided into three parts. First part discusses the time of the poet’s death. Then it is solaced that though the mortal soul has departed yet the works will live on in the readers’ mind. In the second part Auden though addresses Yeats, yet here he turns away towards poetry in general. Here we find the oft quoted deliberate remark “poetry makes nothing happen”. In the third part Auden turns towards Yeats once again seeking inspirations.

‘Night Mail’ is a remarkable representation of Auden as a Pylon Poet. England that time was heavily dependent on the postal services and mails, as far as they had the travelling post offices in mail trains for

a fast delivery of mails. In the dead of the night what happens inside a train carrying letters is beautifully captured in this poem which was actually written for a documentary film. The train travels overnight from London to Glasgow and on the run it picks up bags of letters and sorts them out while on the move. The train delivers to both rich and poor, moves through landscapes both high and low, pastoral and industrial. The rhythm of the poem is such that it matches the movement of a train hauled by heavily puffing steam engine. Steam, coal, pistons and all the sounds they make is translated into the rhythm of the poem. This reflects how the modern technology has eased the doing of business.

The Shield of Achilles (1952) is another longer poem which is amazingly composed in two different stanza forms. The stanzas with shorter lines refer to the Homeric story of the shield while the stanzas with the longer lines deal with the barrenness in the impersonal modern life. The presence of imagination in the Homeric world appears in contrast to the violent modern world of dismay.

Auden's 'Epitaph of a Tyrant' (1939) is a remarkable poem of just six lines which stands relevant even today. In just six lines he talks about the nature of tyranny. Obsession with "Perfection, of a kind" is the nature of a tyrant. "The poetry he invented was easy to be understood" – poetry is something creatively composed, not invented like a scientific machine for a specific purpose. But this is what a tyrant does, he either takes credit for something he has nothing to do about or just deliberately reconstructs an existing idea to be understood and utilised for his purposes. Like many other Auden's poems, this too was inspired by the appalling decade of 1930s and yet with an all time relevance.

4.4 A Note on "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

On 26 January 1939 Auden arrived in New York, U.S.A., together with his friend, the writer Christopher Isherwood, as the result of a decision he had previously taken, of moving to America. Auden's biographer tells us, "the snow was falling heavily in New York City. It was the coldest day so far that winter, blocks of ice were seen floating in the Hudson River. About the middle of the day news came that, in Spain,

Barcelona had fallen to Franco, and the Spanish Republicans had in effect lost the war.” Both features of such an arrival in New York city are carried forward in the poem you are about to read - intense cold, and news of defeat. But why, Yeats? Arriving in New York, Auden sent some poems to be published and among these were many that were concerned with the failures or successes, and the character, of other writers. For instance, one poem was on Matthew Arnold, another on Voltaire. As a young poet, Auden had looked up to Yeats and had been influenced by him. Yeats had edited, in 1936, Auden’s *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. In the same year as the poem, in 1939, Auden also wrote a piece entitled, “The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats” in the form of a trial conducted in a court of law. Among the many hostile charges brought by the “prosecution” against the “accused”, the poet is found to be guilty of not understanding his age, of being indulgent towards myths and fairies. The ‘defence’ is not specially strong in making out a case against these charges. Auden makes some points regarding the role and function of poetry in society which reveal some reservations in his praise for Yeats. Auden writes here, of Yeats’s poems: “From first to last they express a sustained protest against the social atomisation caused by industrialism, and both in their ideas and their language a constant struggle to overcome it. The fairies and heroes of the early work were an attempt to find through folk tradition a binding force for society . . . For art is a product of history, not a cause.” The middle section of the poem was added only in the second edition printed in April in the *London Mercury*.

4.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

Q. What are the major themes in Auden’s poetry?

Hint: Auden is a culmination of both tradition and modernity. While he writes about the contemporary life, images are drawn upon from vast

areas ranging from mythology to the industrial life. Some of the consistent major themes in his poetry are the fleeting love, representation of the contemporary political affairs, disturbing horrors of modern times, death and suffering, cyclic nature of history, power, and fear. But hope nevertheless is another theme which makes his poetry inspiring rather than terrifying.

Q. Comment on the allusive style of Auden with sufficient reference to his poetry.

Hint: Auden has a significant number of works which are allusive – indirectly referring to some previous events. Allusive style is adopted because the poet does not want to explain the context of the work of art, but the understanding of the work by audience needs sufficient background knowledge of events. For instance the poems like ‘September 1, 1939’, ‘Epitaph of a Tyrant’, ‘If I Could Tell You’, and several others including those in *Shield of Achilles* which could be understood against the backdrop of the events related to the World War II. Auden’s contemporary readers might find it comparatively easier to get through the allusions than a modern reader who is naturally oblivious of the references. His works therefore requires great deal of background study on part of the readers.

Q. Examine the modern world expressed in Auden’s poetry.

Hint: Auden grew up in an environment which offered him the perspectives of both mythological and modern worlds. He, therefore, could see and feel the restlessness of the contemporary life which is reflected in his poetry. This anxiety is caused by diverse agents – moral degradation, war, depression, hopelessness of existence, failed love to name a few. Altogether these agents inspire the poet to express the modern world as it is. Auden’s poetic technique serves its best to represent his thoughts on the matter aptly.

Q. Assess Auden as a poet of the 1930s.

Hint: 1930s was the decade which followed the Roaring Twenties but with horror and depression. Political events left such an impact upon Europe that not a single human being could avoid political involvement. The poet, more than any other human being, reacted to the time in that early stage of his poetic career. The compositions in that period are often mistaken for war poems, which were in fact anti-war poems. Auden captured the mood of the 1930s in his poems and while doing so he

explored the political dimensions as analysis of the period. He had quite an analytical and intellectual perspective on that period. These are evident in his poems like ‘September 1, 1939’, ‘Epitaph on a Tyrant’, and even in the elegies he wrote in his early poetic career.

Q. Explore the theme of humanity in Auden’s poems.

Hint: (Read the chapter once again and try to find your answer from the reading. Support your answer with readings of some more poems than those have been discussed here).

4.6 References and Suggested Reading

Hecht, Anthony, “Poetry Makes Nothing Happen: Another Time,” in *The Hidden Law*. Harvard University Press. 1993.

Hynes, Samuel. *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*. Viking Press. New York. 1977.

Hynes, Samuel. ‘The Voice of Exile: Auden in 1940’ in *Sewanee Review*, Vol 90, No. 1, Winter 1982, pp. 31-52.

Guernsey, Bruce. Review of *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, in *Library Journal*, Vol. 103, No. 10, May 15, 1978

Jenkins, Nicholas. “Either Or or And: An Enigmatic Moment in the History of ‘September 1, 1939,’” in *Yale Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3, July 2002, pp. 22-39.

Jenkins, Nicholas. "Goodbye, 1939," in *New Yorker*, April 1, 1996.

Kermode, Frank. “Faithing and Blithing” in *W. H. Auden: The Critical Heritage*, edited by John Haffenden, Routledge. 1997.

Miller, James. “Auden's ‘September 1, 1939,’” in *Explicator*, Vol. 62, No. 2, Winter 2004, pp. 115-19.

Unit 5

Dylan Thomas "Poem in October"

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introducing the Poet
- 5.3 Works of the Poet
- 5.4 Critical Reception
- 5.5 Context of the Poem
- 5.6 Reading "Poem in October"
- 5.7 Summing up
- 5.8 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

Dylan Thomas is one of the leading post war poets of England. By the end of this unit you will be able to-

- *locate* him as a 'neo-romantic' poet
- *read* his poems in between high modernist poetry and the Movement poetry
- *relate* his poems to various ecclesiastical ideas which affected him as a poet
- *grasp* the significance of his apparent verbal obscurity in his poems

5.2 Introducing the Poet

The very name 'Dylan Thomas' conjures up the image of a poet who has written some of the most passionate, immortal lines in English language: "I sang in my chains like the sea", "I advance for as long as forever is". Yet, his work has received extreme reactions like that of Donald Davie who accused him of foregoing articulation in favour of crafting a hotchpotch that resists any attempt at identification of the individual objects. Sisson contends, "Thomas is historically important as the prototype of much of the literary pretension of the 1940s." [C. B. Cox, "Welsh Bards in Hard Times: Dylan Thomas and R. S. Thomas"] There are, and thankfully so, critics of another order; John Wain opines that the resistance to Thomas on the part of the English critics results from his all so apparent Welshness, "...the open emotionalism, the large verbal jesters which seem to them mere rant, the rapt pleasure in elaborate craftsmanship, and above all the bardic tone."

Thomas, who grew up in Wales, spent his childhood in Swansea, interspersed, at regular intervals, with visits to his maternal aunt Carmarthenshire dairy farm. These rural sojourns provided an impetus to much of his later literary energies.

From the outset Dylan Thomas rejected the poetic model whereby rhyme and metre, image and metaphor are employed primarily as means of shaping and 'dressing' — as one might dress a hedge or a person — observations and reflections derived from ordinary experience. Thomas earned his poetic creed out of words rather than working towards words; to bring to light a submerged, 'unsentimental' reality through his 'craft or art' rather than using poetic devices to shape and dress essentially mundane or prosaic thoughts. He was fascinated with words, with their sensory qualities, meaning and connotations. *Finnegans Wake*, he later said, is the greatest work of our time, and though there is no evidence that he had read much of the book, he imitated the hypnotic incantation and density of Joyce's language.

Hopkins' poems were "obscure" to him, but Thomas loved them for the lavish, patterned use of sound he caught from them. Hopkins' sprung rhythm extended his own rhythmic resources. The vivid imagery of nature in both Hopkins and Lawrence, whose collected poems Thomas read from cover to cover, impressed him greatly; both poets presented a nature charged with sacred being, and Lawrence especially provided Thomas with his vocabulary of archetypal images. He read Eliot and Auden, and though he rebelled against them, they also influenced his style, and he was led by Eliot's critical essays to read in Herbert Grierson's anthology of English poetry of the seventeenth century. He admired the complex metaphors and puns, and was moved also by Donne's pervasive sense of morality.

Thereafter there was a considerable lull in his career. For he had no regular job and what he obtained through short stories, reviewing, film scripts, poetry readings, and sponging slipped through his fingers. He had spectacular quarrels with his wife. His talent was deserting him; at least, he found it increasingly difficult to compose, and months would pass with nothing to show for them. He died in New York of over drinking at the age of thirty-nine.

Placing him in the English literary tradition is an enterprise that will count when you proceed with your reading of the poem. In placing him within the canon, it has to be mentioned that the readers rejoiced in Thomas' style because he challenged the dominant tendencies of the 1930s. Not that Eliot, Auden, Empson, and Ransom were passé but while the intellectual discourse and sparkling wit of these poets were revered there was this wistful longing for strong, direct emotion. No poet in the 1930s and 1940s, not even Spender, released emotion — moreover, affirmative emotion—in greater force and volume than Thomas. Technically the means to this included_ sweeping, unqualified assertion, traditionally rhetorical syntax with much repetition and apposition, lavish alliteration and assonance for emphasis, immensely energetic diction and rhythm, semantic vagueness, and a bardic or vatic pose.

"And death shall have dominion"; "That force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age."; "Light breaks where no sun shines." Such assertions may not completely satisfy the intellect as it sifts the texts to discover their exact meaning. But they are glorious.

SAQ:

Attempt to name the typical features of Thomas's poetry. (60 words)

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

5.3 Works of the Poet

Thomas wrote half of his poems and many short stories whilst living at his home, *And death shall have no dominion* is one of his best known works written at this address. His highly acclaimed first poetry volume, *18 Poems*, was published on 18 December 1934, the same year he moved to London. The publication of *18 Poems* won him many new admirers from the world of poetry. Again, the publication of *Deaths and Entrances* in 1946 was a major turning point in his career. Thomas was well known for being a versatile and dynamic speaker, best known for his poetry readings. His powerful voice would captivate American audiences during his speaking tours of the early 1950s. He made over 200 broadcasts for the BBC. Often considered his

greatest single work *Under Milk Wood*, is a radio play featuring the characters of Llareggub, a fictional Welsh fishing village (humorously named; note that 'Llareggub' is 'Bugger All' backwards, implying that there is absolutely nothing to do there).

Thomas progressed through a period of "occasional" verse in which he focused his general notions on particular incidents and situations to give a grave and formal ceremonial poetry ("A Refusal to Mourn", "Do not go gentle into that goodnight", "On the Marriage of a Virgin," etc.) to a period of more limpid, open-worked poetry in which, instead of endeavoring to leap outside time into a pantheistic cosmos beyond the dimensions, he accepts time and change and uses memory as an elegiac device ("Poem in October," "Fern Hill," "Over Sir John's Hill," "Poem on His Birthday"). But these divisions are not strictly chronological, nor do they take account of all the kinds of verse he was writing. There is, for example, "A Winter's Tale," a "middle" poem, which handles a universal folk theme with a quiet beauty that results from perfect control of the imagery.

There are several critics who consider Thomas' war poems to be his major achievement; and without necessarily endorsing this, it is clear that the poems in question perform the extraordinary feat of holding the self as performance and physical destruction within — a telling war-time coinage -- the theatre of war.

Thomas first appeared, to readers thereby trained to regard Eliot's dry gentlemanliness as the approved poetic stance, to be a prophet of wild new romanticism, challenging the cerebral orderliness of the fashionable poetry of the time. His breathless and daring imagery, with its skulls, maggots, hangmen, wombs, ghosts and thighs, his mingling of biblical and Freudian imagery, of the elemental world of nature in the raw with the feverish internal world of human desires, human secrets, human longings and regrets, his compound adjectives ("sea-sucked," "man-melted," "tide-tongued," "man-iron," "altarwise") — all this suggested a great liberating verbal energy.

Stop to Consider

Neo-romanticism:

"Neo-Romantic" style developed in England during the 1930s and was briefly ascendant during the 1940s. Dylan Thomas was its major poet. "Romantic" was the time, and implied that the Neo-Romantics were challenging the high Modernism of the 1920s and the discursive, intellectual style of the 1930s. Thomas was typical in this respect. He had the mystical intuitions, emotional intensity, personal utterance, and natural imagery of a poet in the Romantic tradition. But in the same poems he was also a poet of Metaphysical wit and Symbolist technique. Other poets of the Romantic revival similarly absorbed Modernist influences while also rebelling against them. Vernon Watkins was a disciple of Yeats. If we accepted Roland Barthes' description of Modernist poetry as an "explosion" of autonomous words, the paradigmatic English Modernist would be David Gascoyne in his youthful Surrealist phase. In short, the interrelations between Neo-Romantic style and other tendencies of the age defy brief or simple description. No minor part of the problem is that Neo-Romantic style varied from poet to poet as much as Modernist styles did.

In fact, however, though some of Thomas's poetry of the 1930's had over-excited imagery, a closer look at his poems revealed not only that they were constructed with enormous care and the images were most carefully related to each and to the unfolding meaning, but also that these images were put at the service of a number of clearly conceived themes — the relation between man and his natural environment, the problem of identity in view of

the perpetual changes wrought by time, the relation of the living to the dead and of both to seasonal change in nature.

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the root of trees

Is my destroyer

The natural processes that linked past with present and man with nature gave him comfort. As Thomas developed, and his imagery became more disciplined, the theme of the unity of all life and of life and death as part of a continuing process in which the whole world of nature was involved became steadily more discernible. So did the ritual and sacramental element in his poetry. "After the Funeral" (1938), an elegy on an aunt in which he sees the sad shabbiness of her life and environment transfigured by love, is a triumph of compact emotional suggestion, every image having its place in building up the transition from mourning to comfort. Many of his poems of the 1940s are more open worked than his earlier productions, and sometimes possess a rhythmic fluidity that sweeps on the meaning with fine effect. "Poem in October," for example, begins:

It was my thirtieth year to heaven

Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron Priested shore

The morning beckon

With water praying and call of seagull and rook
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall
Myself to set foot

That second

In the still sleeping town and set forth.

Here the compound adjectives ("Mussel pooled," "heron priested") and the sacramental suggestions ("priested," "praying,") are carefully placed in the run of the stanza and the uneven line-lengths give a reckoning motion that helps to involve the reader emotionally in the poem. *Deaths and*

Entrances (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1953) show clearly that Thomas was capable of finely disciplined effects in both language and movement, and that, in spite of a tendency to overdrive favourite images and to confuse poetic gesturing with the poetic achievement, he was not a shouting madman but, at his best, a highly craftsman like poet. His popular adulation followed by his early death evoked a reaction, and the charge of empty verbal posturing was brought against him by some of the younger poets of the mid-1950s who were seeking a new chastity of diction and economy of effect (The Movement is a typically low-key, yet ironically aggrandizing label applied to themselves by a group of poets who emerged in the early 1950s, among them Philip Larkin, D.J. Enright, Donald Davie, Anthony Thwaite and Kinsley Amis himself. Their reaction against their 1940s predecessors was manifested in a plain style, a disdain for rhetoric or ostentation and a commitment to discursive realism — all clearly at odds with what Thomas seemed to stand for.) But though Thomas's reputation is not as high now as it was in the few years immediately before his death, his place is secure — not as the neo-romantic overdose he was once thought to be, but as a thoughtful, indeed a cerebral, poet who sought to put new drive and passion into the language of English poetry and who in his brief life left a handful of poems that will be read and remembered outside the classroom and the critic's study.

An appreciation of his poetic style would be incomplete without recording the attendant critical pressures ladled on it by the critics. Andrew Sanders notes that the association of the work of the Anglo-Welsh poet with a lush kind of surrealism has more often been assumed than proved. As his ambitious and uneven first volume, *18 Poems* (1934), suggests, Dylan Thomas (1914-53) had begun to mould an extravagant and pulsatingly rhetorical style before he became aware of the imported innovations of international surrealist writing. He was, however, decidedly a poet who thought in images.

On Donne

If there is a kinship evident in Thomas's verse it is with the 'difficulty', the emotionalism, the lyric intensity, and the metaphysical speculation of the school of Donne. It is Donne's 'Death's Duel' which is cited in the title of Thomas' volume *Deaths and Entrances* of 1946 ('our very birth and entrance into this life, is exit us a morte, an issue from death') and it is Donne's ghost that broods over the poem written in memory of Thomas's aunt Ann Jones. "In memory of Ann Jones", published in *The Map of Love* in 1939, is, however, specifically Welsh in terms of its local reference and in the claims that Thomas makes for himself as 'Ann's bard on a raised hearth'. In considering the confined corpse laid out in the farmhouse parlor it evokes a memory of a gush of love in the past (Ann's 'fountain heart once fell in puddles / Round the parched worlds of Wales and drowned each sun') and it yearns for a future universal release from death.

5.4 Critical Reception

Thomas' work was in the first place (around the 1930s) received as 'formless' writing - critics like H.G. Porteus reviewing his work, had spoken of an "unconducted tour of Bedlam". The opinion, however, shifted in the period following his death. It was more widely acknowledged to be tightly controlled and shaped. Crucial to this process was the publication of Thomas' letters to his fellow Swansea poet Veron Watkins in 1957. This showed Thomas to be a painstakingly conscientious craftsman striving deliberately even agonizingly for his effects. These letters were complemented by a sympathetic and illuminating study by Ralph Maud, one of the doyens of Thomas' criticism, *Entrances to the Poetry of Dylan Thomas* in 1963 and by his publication of Thomas' early note-books in 1968 (*Poet in the Making*). The notebooks are an extraordinary record of poems written between the ages of 16 — 20, revealing the strikingly precocious, yet consistent,

evolution of the unique stylist — poet. A *Select Letters*, edited by Constantine Gibbon in 1967, and a *Collected Letters*, edited by Paul Ferris in 1985 added further weight to the argument that Thomas was thoroughly aware of what he was doing, even in his most seemingly obscure pieces.

Many earlier commentators focused on the importance of Thomas' Welshness: indeed, this together with speculation concerning the 'true' origin of Llareggub, the town in *Under Milk Wood*— has now become one of the dominant and more depressing features of the cottage industry that is Dylan Thomas today. This is of course which — like the focus on the character of the poet it resembles in some ways — is dangerously susceptible to simplification and stereotyping. A reductive policy of race and place a dot to dot psychoanalysis in which pre-determined drives 'explain' everything, overriding more complicated understandings of the self as produced by, and interacting with complex societies historically mutating through time. Both societies and selves are structures which are defined by their capacity for change and claims for their fixed character must be treated with suspicion. And it is precisely the notion of unitary subjectivity which is so problematized in Thomas' writing, particularly in the early poetry and short fictions. And when new theory made its foray into the scene around the 1960s, it was precisely this concept of the unitary self, the **I** as coherent and issuing from an organically whole identity. At precisely the time when Thomas' work could have been read as anticipating such ideas, in the early 1970s, it was being isolated and side-lined in a debate about belonging and identity that were inappropriate to its strategies. However, the entire rhetoric changed with the coming of texts like Said's *Orientalism*(1978). The new critical light shed on the conceptions of national identity and cultural otherness shifted the larger framework within which Thomas was viewed. He was no longer just the bardic other of the thin-lipped London literati nor the deviant Welshman. With the onset of Said's work and following him that of Homi Bhabha, among others, more nuanced ways of reading marginalized or non, metropolitan writings occurred.

Check Your Progress:

Analyze the significance of Welshness' in the poetry of **Dylan** Thomas.

.....
.....

Thomas' work was in the first place (around the 1930s) received as 'formless' writing - critics like H.G. Porteus reviewing his work, had spoken of an "unconducted tour of Bedlam". The opinion, however, shifted in the period following his death. It was more widely acknowledged to be tightly controlled and shaped. Crucial to this process was the publication of Thomas' letters to his fellow Swansea poet Veron Watkins in 1957. This showed Thomas to be a painstakingly conscientious craftsman striving deliberately even agonizingly for his effects. These letters were complemented by a sympathetic and illuminating study by Ralph Maud; one of the doyens of Thomas' criticism, *Entrances to the Poetry of Dylan Thomas* in 1963 and by his publication of Thomas' early note-books in 1968(*Poet in the Making*). The notebooks are an extraordinary record of poems written between the ages of 16 — 20, revealing the strikingly precocious, yet consistent, evolution of the unique stylist — poet. A *Select Letters*, edited by Constantine Gibbon in 1967, and a *Collected Letters*, edited by Paul Ferris in 1985 added further weight to the argument that Thomas was thoroughly aware of what he was doing, even in his most seemingly obscure pieces.

Many earlier commentators focused on the importance of Thomas' Welshness: indeed, this — together with speculation concerning the 'true' origin of Llareggub, the town in *Under Milk Wood* - has now become one of the dominant and more depressing features of the cottage industry that is Dylan Thomas today. This is of course which — like the focus on the character of the poet it resembles in some ways — is dangerously susceptible to simplification and stereotyping. A reductive policy of race and place a dot to

dot psychoanalysis in which pre-determined drives 'explain' everything, overriding more complicated understandings of the self as produced by, and interacting with complex societies historically mutating through time. Both societies and selves are structures which are defined by their capacity for change and claims for their fixed character must be treated with suspicion. And it is precisely the notion of unitary subjectivity which is so problematized in Thomas' writing, particularly in the early poetry and short fictions. And when new theory made its foray into the scene around the 1960s, it was precisely this concept of the unitary self, the 'I' as coherent and issuing from an organically whole identity. At precisely the time when Thomas' work could have been read as anticipating such ideas, in the early 1970s, it was being isolated and side-lined in a debate about belonging and identity that were inappropriate to its strategies. However, the entire rhetoric changed with the coming of texts like Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The new critical light shed on the conceptions of national identity and cultural otherness shifted the larger framework within which Thomas was viewed. He was no longer just the bardic other of the thin-lipped London literati nor the deviant Welshman. With the onset of Said's work and following him that of Homi Bhabha, among others, more nuanced ways of reading marginalized or non-metropolitan writings occurred.

Stop to Consider

Post Colonial Thought

Said had written of the ways in which the West had established, over the course of centuries, a specific discourse dealing with the East by marginalizing it as an Other, perceived often in self evidently contradictory terms as exotic, barbaric, cowardly, obscurantist and so on. For Bhabha, however, the central term in analyzing post colonial literatures is 'hybridity'. Writings which are 'hybrid' cannot be described in terms of a 'discourse' and the 'counter-discourse' it invites; as Bhabha points out, to simply oppose the prominent

discourse is to risk remaining tract within its binary structure, opposing the identity imposed with another constructed. Inverting the binary terms of an unequal relationship between cultures and nations, however unequal that relationship may be, is to remain within the limits said by those terms. Abandoning the dichotomies of Said, Bhabha argues that post colonial writing derives from a refusal to belong to any essential identity and not from a compromise between cultures; a recognition that such a concept of identity is an imperial construct in the first place.

5.5 Context of the Poem

Celebrating the convivial ruptures and innocent joys of childhood, Dylan Thomas's 'Poem in October' can easily be contextualized in the tradition of Traherne and Vaughan. Reminiscent of the poems/plays/novels exploring the theme of renewed existence on one's birthday, this poem is best contextualized in the context of childhood memories. Here, Thomas celebrates his thirtieth birthday and the very first line of the poem "It was my thirtieth year to heaven" refers to temporality and the positing of the year thirty invokes a feeling of being straddled in-between two time-zones. This poem is an example of the occasional poems meant to celebrate different occasions and exemplifies the poet's use of surrealistic imagery. Although not expressed overtly, here Thomas' religiosity lies in his acceptance of the cycle of birth and decay, i.e. "a mysticism of the senses that transcends the sensuality with which he began" (J.M. Cohen).

5.6 Reading "Poem in October"

This is a poem that explores in luminous imagery, the many joys of childhood, communicating a special sense of the holy in the wonder of the child. The occasion of the thirtieth birthday is seen as an affirmation and celebration of the sensual joys of living, an occasion which connects the immediate experience to the intimate absorption of a "child's /Forgotten mornings". However, the thoughts of death are intermittently sensed as morphing the dynamics of a mere rejoicing in life's sensory pleasures. Thomas's poetry returns to the same large themes over and over. He asserts a Blakean Wordsworthian-Whitmanian intuition of the unity and holiness of all existence. He wants to celebrate the life-process totally. But individuation, time, and death are involved in the process, and force him into ambivalence and paradox.

On Death

If death is a return to the whole, it is a positive. If it is extinction, it is dreadful. Hence,

Do not go gentle into that good night

Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage
against the dying of the light.

If "good night" is the phrase said at parting for sleep, the metaphor deprives death of terror. But "that good night" is final; hence the urgent imperative, "Do not go..." But "that good night" asserts that night is desirable, presumably as a return to the all. Thomas delighted to dwell on childhood because children have, he believed, no consciousness of being separate from the world. Or reaching further back before the tragic fall into individuation and separateness, he tried to reenter, in imagination the being of an embryo, or even of

the first germinal life before the embryo is formed. Taking death as an aspect of the ongoing process of life, he denied its ultimate reality. We return he said, with the daisies.

In fact, the poem stands as testimony to Thomas' acknowledgement of his in-between status. The very first line of the poem "It was my thirtieth year to heaven" refers to temporality and the positing of the year thirty invokes a feeling of being straddled in-between two time-zones. The line, moreover, is in the confessional strain — a mark of the poem being written in the emerging realms of maturity. It has to be noted that in Larkin's era when the average mortality rate was not more than seventy, thirty was accepted as the onset of middle age.

The first stanza of the poem evokes the pristine morning of the poetic speaker's birthday: an experience that is marked by the prevalence of sensory delights. The auditory and visual images reign supreme: the poet actually wakes up to his "hearing from harbour...". The first strains of a being waking up to the most pristine of all mornings - the morning of his nativity is aptly construed in images that concur with the actual process of our registering sounds before opening the peepers to the material world. The use of words like "knock of sailing boats" and "water praying" conveys this very sense of auditory impressions. Sanctification of an ordinary sea-scape is evoked through the use of the words that bear the imprint of biblical influences – "heron / Priested shore" and "water praying". The entire stanza sounds like an incantation with the call of the birds present in the earliest of biblical documents (thus evoking a sense of the primeval) and the knock of the boats on the "net webbed wall". The juxtaposition of the words "net-webbed" is interesting, because there is this play with the word "webbed"- a trait that Thomas was so fond of—which conjures pictures of the watery universe and again, it refers to the fishing boats with their nets that are perhaps tied to the walls of the harbor.

Stop to Consider

Sacramental Imagery

The import of these words is simply that these are sacramental images intended to give a sacramental meaning to the statement. It is a kind of imagery of which Thomas is very fond (one can find numerous other examples, among them such a phrase as "the parables of sun light" in "Poem in October". Examples abound from his other works: the water bead **and the ear of** corn are symbolic primal elements, to which all return at the end. But the reason behind the use of "Zion of the water bead" and "synagogue of the ear of corn" is not lost on us if we consider the poetic intention. The word sacrament refers to the ritual of receiving grace in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. By partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, the faithfuls remind themselves of Christ's grace and the sacrifice he made for the human kind. The word sacramental is used here to signify Thomas' tendency to deify and unravel Christian notes in every act of creation. Can you look for more of such instances from the prescribed poem and that of "Fern Hill"?

The appraisal of the other stanzas is left undone primarily for reasons of shortage of space and the concurrent utilization of the same in the discussion of larger frameworks. The surrealistic tenor in this poem is a point that has been reiterated by critics time and again. Thomas, however, argued that his poems were not automatic writing and therefore not surrealist. This kind of response to protest that it was painstaking craftsmanship — is understandable.

Surrealism and Dylan Thomas:

It cannot be missed that Thomas was, after all, an avid reader of the avant-garde periodical *Transition*. Surrealism, whose project, according to Walter Benjamin, was 'to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution', was in fact a complex set of artistic practices which went far beyond voluntarism or associationism, as a glance at the variety of surrealist visual art— say, Salvador Dali's hallucinatory realism and the collage of Max Ernst's *La Sentaine de Bonte* — reveals. More importantly, to the extent that surrealism had affinities with the Metaphysicals' "violent yoking together of heterogeneous images" there was a link between surrealist practice and the climate created earlier by Eliot and Herbert Grierson.

Thomas, an avid reader of Donne, exploited such similarities to forge a semi surrealised Metaphysical diode, a form of Gothic, from a marginalized and belated

Welsh modernism. In this — as with Freudianism — he was pragmatic and ambivalent rather than systematic.

In the lines : "...birds of the winged trees flying my name/ Above the farms and the white horses" "With its horns through mist and the castle/ Brown as owls", his poetry at times can be read as furnishing a visual confirmation of Surrealist-type images. Thomas almost mimics the attributes of the metropolitan style where it can be made to coincide with his poetic tactics. And in both embracing and rejecting surrealism he created a provincial simulacrum of surrealism, or what has been called *surregionalism*.

In an appraisal of Thomas, the impact of the biblical theme can hardly be over-looked. Despite its appearance, as a miscellaneous collection of lyrics, Dylan Thomas' poetry is a closely unified body of work. Poetic unity

customarily reveals itself in cohesive imagery (what Kenneth Burke calls "symbolic equations"), and in the repetition and development of related themes. In his world of creation, for example, Thomas describes not an Edenic universe, but - as Blake does - a world which falls in the very moment of creation. As the poetry moves along, from *Incarnate Devil* to *Fern Hill*, furthermore, he comes to align his concept of creation more with the Biblical story - he supplies an "Eden" to precede the "Fall." And it is, finally, in the poem written to introduce *Collected Poems* that he comes - with hesitation, self-consciousness, and some self-depreciation - to assume the Noah persona, a persona which epitomizes his regenerative vision. Regardless of Thomas' intentions and regardless of chronological imprecision, his poetry is unified by a "Biblical rhythm." The details of that rhythm can be clearly established by a consideration of the images and themes of (1) creation, (2) fall, and (3) redemption or regeneration.

Thomas, however, did not conceive of the universe as entirely anthropomorphic. While his view was generally identical with Blake's view that "God only Acts and Is, in existing beings and men," his poetry never completely discarded the transcendent and autonomous God of the Welsh chapel.

It is not necessary to postulate a specific relationship of Thomas to any doctrinal or theological position regarding the Fall, or the Garden of Eden. As far as his poems go, he could just as well have used classical allusions to the Golden Age, or accounts of the fabled Hesperides, or Freud's first unweaned state, in order to emphasize the imperfection of his world. But the fact of the symbolism remains that it was primarily derived from an imaginative re-creation of the Bible. The idea of Eden which is important to the symbolism is related to the "Edenic" states known to living man-childhood and rare moments of tranquillity in nature, and even rarer moments of sexual bliss. Referring to childhood, before the "rumour of manseed / Within the hallowed gland," Thomas can say, "Green was the singing house". This is also the

condition in the later Edenic descriptions of "Fern Hill" where the memory of childhood "was all / Shining, it was Adam and maiden". This joyful memory of Eden's green persists in spite of the fact that the poet now realizes he was "green and dying," now realizes the inevitability of the Fall, of suffering and death. Thomas' best picture of the unfallen state is another description of childhood in "Poem in October".

"And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's/Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother/ Through the parables of sun light/ And the legends of the green chapels."

The last stanza of the poem stages an attempt to play out the various contraries present all throughout the body. The idea of transience that seeks to reside through regular repetitions emerges from the line "O may my heart's truth / Still be sung / On this high hill in a year's turning." Poetic exercise is the only way left to absolve oneself in a world plagued by the vagaries of impermanence.

SAQ:

What special attributes are recalled in "a child's forgotten morning"?

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

What special attributes are recalled in "a child's forgotten mornings" (70 words)

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

It is worth stressing this at the outset, because there are still some people who talk of Thomas as though he were a writer of an inspired mad rhetoric, of glorious, tumbling, swirling language, which fell from his pen in magnificent disorder. He has been held up by some as the antithesis of Eliot and his school, renouncing the cerebral orderliness of the 1920s and the 1930s in favor of a new romanticism, an engaging irresponsibility. And on the other hand there are those who discuss his poems as though they are merely texts for exposition, ignoring the rhyme scheme and the complicated verbal and visual patterning to concentrate solely on the intellectual implications of the images. The truth is that Thomas is neither a whirling romantic nor a metaphysical imagist, but a poet who uses pattern and metaphor in a complex craftsmanship in order to create a ritual of celebration. He sees life as a continuous process, sees the workings of biology as a magical transformation producing unity out of identity, identity out of unity, the generations linked with one another and man linked with nature. Again and again in most of his poems he seeks to find a poetic ritual for the celebration of this identity: Man is locked in around of identities; the beginning of growth is also the first movement towards death, the beginning of love is the first move towards procreation which in turn moves towards new growth, and the only way out of time's menagerie is to embrace the unity of man with nature, of the generations with each other, of the divine with the human, of life with death, to see the glory and the wonder of it.

I am herein going to attempt a cursory stylistic appreciation of the poem, a feature introduced to encourage you to do many more of the same. The nature of Thomas's poetry demanded severe prosodic regulation. A typical Thomas poem does not move careful along grammatical articulation but is carried headlong by highly formal rhythmic patterns. Rhythm in a Thomas poem is sounding rhythm — rarely the hard to hear-to-hear music inspired syntax. We are hardly aware that the opening stanza of "Poem in October" proceeds along a series of shifted constructions; the images are separated by

a very acute sense of metrical timing. Typography, syllable count, and a texture of interior rhymes and alliteration allay the feeling of incompleteness occasioned by the lack of exact grammatical relationships.

SAQ:

How does the style of the poem "Poem in October" augment the main ideas embedded within it? (60words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

His best work lies in those spacious stanzas where the long-breathed rhythms can rise and fall, move up to a climax, and dwindle to silence. The stanza of "Poem in October" is a beautiful prosodic mechanism. In it he crowds his stresses together "And the twice told fields of infancy". Although Thomas truculently denied any knowledge of Welsh and its highly formal metrical systems, his lines chime with internal consonantal correspondence, or *cynghanedd*, a prescribed feature of Welsh versification:

Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbor wood... (*Italics mine*)

Stop to Consider

The correspondence in this line forms *cynghanedd croes*: a pattern of alliterated syllables in symmetrical arrangement (w...h:h...w). "Fern Hill" abounds in such permutations: And the lilting house and the grass was green... And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman... Look for more of such lines with alliterated syllables in the parallel poem mentioned. Would you let this Welsh trace suggest Thomas' idea of nationality? Another feature of Welsh versification in the aforesaid is the rich use of internal rhyme and assonance. Thomas often rhymes from middle of the line to the middle of the next, or from middle to end. Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green, The night above the dingle starry... Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party Inferences can be drawn from a play like *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter. My intention behind introducing the play goes deeper than noting the apparent echo that the title has to the cause that occasioned the present poem. According to Pinter's official biographer, Michael Billington, in *Harold Pinter*, echoing Pinter's own retrospective view of it, *The Birthday Party* is "a deeply political play about the individual's imperative need for resistance," yet, according to Billington, though he "doubts whether this was conscious on Pinter's part," it is also "a private, obsessive work about time past; about some vanished world, either real or idealized, into which all but one of the characters readily escapes. ... From the very outset, the defining quality of a Pinter play is not so much fear and menace — though they are undoubtedly present — as a yearning for some lost Eden as a refuge from the uncertain, miasmatic present". Pinter's play opens the door to another world, cogent and familiar, the part we hide from ourselves. And in the projection of the arbitrary treatment meted out by the authority figures — there emerges a striking similarity, if we consider the ravages of time that

the poet reiterates time and again. This work, which apparently belongs to another genre altogether, is introduced here to show an alternative treatment of the same thing of desire for a pre-lapsarian past which continually evades us but for moments of a return.

5.7 Summing Up

In the sections, an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the literary opus that is Thomas. In the introductory sections, I have tried to estimate the greatness of Thomas by referring to the various influences that molded his artistic sensibilities. In surveying his literary career, special attention has been given to the themes which prompted the unique style manifested not only in the content but also the style of his poetry. In a reading of Thomas the issue of his poetic style can never be ignored. This is followed by a brief overview of how the poet has been received down the ages right to the recent times. While in the section entitled "Reading the Poem" the prescribed poem is seen through the prism of readings that illumine separate aspects of the poem whilst garnering connections with other pieces of literature.

5.8 References and Suggested

Goodby, John. *New Casebooks : Dylan Thomas*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Perkins, David. *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999.

The Poetry of Dylan Thomas Author(s): David Daiches. Source: *College English*, Vol. 16, No, 1 (Oct, 1954), pp. 1-8 Published by National Council of Teachers of English. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/371613> Accessed: 28/02/2009

Dylan Thomas and the "Biblical Rhythm" Author(s): William T. Moynihan Source: *PMLA*, Vol. 79, No. 5 (Dec., 1964), pp. 631-647 Published by: Modern Language Association Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/461150> Accessed: 28/02/2009.

Unit 6

Dylan Thomas: *Poem In October*

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introducing the poet
 - 6.2.1 A strategic approach to Dylan Thomas
 - 6.2.2 Important poems with useful commentaries
- 6.3 Close reading of the prescribed text
 - 6.3.1 Background of the poem
 - 6.3.2 Notes and References
 - 6.3.3 A Critique of the poem
- 6.4 Understanding the poet
- 6.5 Summing up
- 6.6 References and Suggested Reading

6.1 Objectives

The objectives of the prescribed unit is to acquaint the learners with the writings of Dylan Thomas, English poet of Welsh origin, his themes and concerns, uniqueness as a poet, language, style, style features, his inclination towards rustic environment has mastery of symbolism, poetic diction and a lot more dimensions about Thomas. At the close of this unit, you will be able to grasp the dynamics of Dylan Thomas poetic universe and his path breaking (Neo) Romantic cult. You will also be foregrounded by his calculating use of vocabulary and

equally befitting style. Further, you will be aware of the approaches needed for understanding a poet of Dylan's stature.

6.2 Introducing the Poet

Dylan Thomas, born in Swansea, Wales, began to write poetry while still at school and worked in Swansea as a journalist before moving to London. His first volume of Verse, Eighteen Poems (1934) won accolades of the intellectual circuits. He then embarked on a career of journalism, broadcasting and script-writing.

Dylan Thomas felt no attachment towards TS Eliot and WH Auden's (two other frontier poets in twentieth century English Poetry) thematic concern with social and intellectual issues, and his writing with its intense lyricism and highly charged emotions, has more in common with the Romantic convention. The publication of Death and Entrances in 1946, which contains some of his best known poems like "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill", established him with a wide public. Collected Poems (1952) consolidated Thomas position and reputation as a poet.

Dylan was a relentless experimenter with verse-forms and stanza patterns, and always tried to use a stanza pattern, like John Donne, in harmony with his thought and emotions. Though Thomas never entirely abandoned the orthodox metrical form of English verse, based on the position of stressed and unstressed syllables, he gradually used it less often in his later works, except for satire and occasional poems. He also experimented for a time with free verse, that is verse liberated from fixed rules of versification.

The earliest poems – that is, the poems of Thomas boyhood are in traditional patterns of metre and stanza-structure. Thomas tried his hand at many strict forms of verse structure. Influenced by several

contemporary or near contemporary poets, and affected by prevailing fashion, Thomas returned from conventional verse patterns and experimented with the so-called 'Free verse'. However, Thomas soon grew tired of Free verse as it offered no help to a poet and turned away from free verse and adopted a system based on syllabic count. John, Donne, the father of Metaphysical school of Poetry, was perhaps Thomas guide in the use of verse patterns. Similarly, Donne and the Metaphysical poets influenced him in the structure of stanzas.

6.2.1 A strategic approach to Dylan Thomas

Any casual approach to a poet of Dylan Thomas structure will be baffled by the poet's technical dexterity, his iconoclastic approach to writing poetry and extremely intricate style. Coupled with it is his extensive use of symbols to convey complex psychological states to his readers. The poet's objective was to bring to light the inner darkness, the hidden psychological complexes, sense of guilt and its consequences, into the light of day, and this he could only do through an extensive use of symbols. The ordinary resources of the language did not suffice for his apprehension of inner reality. Since there is close similarity of interest between Dylan and Freud, the poet's symbols have often been interpreted in terms of Freud. But more often than not Dylan's symbols have different values from those of the Freudian symbols. Whereas for Freud, 'fruits' symbolizes the female breast and definitely doesn't symbolize offspring, it is generally a child symbol for Dylan. Whereas for Freud, 'caves' 'churches' and 'chapels' refer to the female genitalia. Thomas uses 'caves' to signify the innermost recesses of the self, and 'churches' and 'chapels' – particularly sunken ones – to signify lost pristine faiths. Thomas associates 'ladders' and 'climbing' not with sexual intercourse, but with man's spiritual ascent 'riding' and 'flying'

symbolize a desire to grow up, and singing symbolizes a defiant joyfulness.

Apart from symbols, Dylan's lyrics are saturated with imagery drawn from the natural world, the Bible and cosmology. Imagery of light, sea, fruit, the seasons etc. is constantly used symbolically to assert the kinship of man and nature. In this way, he communicates cosmic processes by the use of concrete imagery drawn from the world of nature with which he was intimately familiar as a village boy, both of the sea and the woods.

You will, therefore, have to familiarize yourselves with the poetics of Dylan Thomas themes, techniques, verse-patterns, diction, symbols, figures of speech, images etc. prior to your engagement in his works. It will also be extremely useful if you read Freudianism and the history of symbolism before you become preoccupied with his poetic universe. Furthermore some light is also to be thrown on the poet's boyhood days at Swansea and his closeness with his aunt Ann Jones who reverberates throughout his verse.

6.2.2 Important poems with useful commentaries

It should be extremely useful if this segment of the Unit on Dylan Thomas 'Poem in October' features analysis of some other poems. You will be able to form a better notion of the poetic universe of Thomas. The above section (3.2.1) provides you with some hints to have an access to the writings of Dylan Thomas. In this section you will be acquainted with some other really provocative poems by the same author. Discussion follows :

(i) 'Fern Hill'

‘Fern Hill’ included in Thomas collection *Deaths and Entrances* (1946), represents the passage of a man’s life from boyhood to adulthood and the realization of his morality. The poem begins as a direct evocation of the speaker’s visit as a child to his aunt Ann Jones’ farm of the same name Fern Hill in Llangain Wales. The Middle section of the poem depicts a dream like, pastoral world which alludes to scenes from the garden of Eden. Time emerges as an authority figure that has strict control of the speakers’ life. ‘Time let me play and be Golden in the mercy of his means’ (Lines 13-14). Towards the end, the speakers’ older voice takes over mourning the loss of youth. The theme is based on Blake’s division of the world of experience and it is reinforced through the use of Wordsworthian double consciousness.

‘Fern Hill’ clearly falls into two sections – section one is concerned with the speakers’ experiences as a youngboy when he used to spend his summer holidays in his aunt’s idyllic farmhouse in Wales, while section two concerns itself with the awakening in the child which signifies the loss of innocence. At the crux of this loss are the myths of fall of ‘Adam and maiden’. The world of innocence is one in which the child is in complete union with nature. This pristine world offers him an Edenic bliss. Thomas describes this blissful world in a way that it appears timeless without a sense of decay or loss. The repetition of ‘golden’ affirms it. Time and golden enjoy a good ally. The color ‘Green’ is also repeated throughout the text. ‘Green’ seems to reflect the child’s environment as he frolics in his youth one feels the slow passage of green and golden days that seem a part of Eternity. For the speaker, each morning was like the morning of creation. He would return to waking consciousness and discover the farm, gone during the night come back like a wanderer white with dew.

In the next stanza, Thomas gradually moves towards the transition between the worlds of innocence and experience the speaker’s sleeping

is a symbolic one which ends a flashing in the dark, hinting at an awakening. This awakening is initiating the child into the world of maturity and this initiation into mature world of also entails the loss of Edenic bliss, innocence and freedom. The poem, thus, reflects its basic theme that euphoric paradise cannot last forever.

In the final stanza, the speaker once again contemplates the memories of his boyhood but now the awareness becomes dominant. The concluding line refers to his chained situation in the world of experience. He realizes the ultimate truth that though he seemed to be a favoured child of Time. Time held him captive and dying, in spite of his freshness, joy and innocence that seemed free and flowing.

(ii) ‘A refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire of a Child in London’

Included in Dylan Thomas collection *Death and Entrances* (1946) it is an elegy on a child burnt to during an air raid. It is a song of grief, no doubt, but quite an unusual one. The poet mourns, but says emphatically, that he will never mourn the great and glorious death of the child, till the very end of creation, till the time when he himself dies and becomes one with grain, sand and water i.e. with the objects and forces of nature. He will never mourn, for mourning will only diminish the glory and majesty of its death. The poet says that he will he will never mourn, but he is still mourning. He is in effect saying that its death was for too glorious and heroic for a common place. He is thus, extolling the majesty and heroism of the child’s death, by this negative approach to it. It was a noble death, and the poet’s grief is too deep for tears.

The process of birth and death is a cosmic one, and after death the human becomes one with the non-human, the microcosm merges with the macrocosm, life returns to its very source and becomes one with it. In a sweeping and comprehensive view of man’s life on earth since creation, the poet shows the eternity both of life and death. Adam and Eve died – they were the first to taste death. Then Christ suffered and

was crucified. The child is, thus in the company of Adam, Eve and Christ.

All created things – whether man or bird, beast and flower – are fathered or made by God, and hence all are equally sacred and holy. Life both of man and nature, comes out of darkness and natured to that very ‘primeval darkness’, after death. The human becomes one with sand, seed and water. The child who died so heroically has become a part of the macrocosm, is now in the majestic company of grain, sand and water. It has, thus, achieved immortality. Death is not the end, but the beginning. It is the renewal of life, when one dies, one is born to a new life. After the first death, there is no after, for then one becomes eternal, a part of the holy and glorious process of nature.

The poem ends on an interestingly ambiguity, is the first death ‘birth or death?’ It can be defined either way, and it doesn’t really matter. What Thomas is saying, of course, is what he says so often, that ‘Death shall have no dominion. And as usual, he is saying it in terms of a scientific humanism rather than in Old Testament or New Testament terms. The three functionality positive images of stanzas 2 and 3 ‘lion of the water bead’, ‘synagogue of the ear of corn’ and ‘mankind of her going’ – really anticipate the affirmation of final stanza.

Clark Emerey’s comments sound quite pertinent here. He says : ‘This is a poem with a big sound. It starts with an emphatic ‘never’, impressively piles up an hyphenated epithets to regain the attitude briefly lost by until and gaining momentum, across the whole world’s history, from chaos to Judgement day, with darkness, silence, light and sea – brought into play. ‘However, CEM Joad has criticized the poem as being obscure and says that none derives any pleasure from a roading of it. But this is not the case, for the elegy becomes explicable and a source of deep joy to the painstaking reader.

Dylan Thomas elegy is a great work of art. It has a rich texture with layers withing layers of meaning. Its structure is rigid and well built. It is an organic whole, and the wholeness is achieved by the repetition of words, phrases, images, similes and metaphors. As usual, this elegy is also marked by repetitions of which is a distinctive and distinguishing feature of Dylan Thomas poetry.

Apart from these poems and the one to be analysed in this unit, some other poems ‘Lament’, ‘In my craft or Sullen Art’, ‘After the Funeral’, ‘Light Breaks where no Sun Shines’, ‘Especially when the October wind’ deserve close analysis for a thorough appreciation of the poetics of Dylan Thomas. These poems are scattered in the collections mentioned in 3.2. You will be at ease with Dylan’s verse after reading the commentaries of the two poems in 3.2.2.

6.3 Close reading of the prescribed text ‘Poem in October’

In this segment you will be provided with a threadbare analysis of the poem ‘Poem in October’, the crowning glory of Dylan Thomas poetic career and his most anthologized poem. The analysis comprises a number of sections. It is as follows :

6.3.1 Background of the Poem

‘Poem in October’ is a birthday poem written in October 1944, this poem was published in the collection of poems entitled Death and Entrances in 1946. The poem was written in 1944 in the seclusion of his Wales retreat in Langherre. Dylan had already exhausted the material of

his four Swansea notebook material but an entirely fresh composition representing the flowering of Dylan genes at the close of the word.

This birthday lyric at once set the seat of critical approval on his reputation Dylan's short as a writer of scripts for the film industry and for the BBC taught him the value of clarity and precision. Hence the lyric has none of the obscurity and abundant imagery of the poem in the earlier volumes, *Collected poems (1934)*, *Twenty five poems (1936)* and so on. Death is a recurrent theme in twentieth century literature which we notice in Dylan's verse. Dylan is a great experimenter with language. His experimentations with language evokes the romantic sensitivity. His poetry is remarkable for his innovative language and style.

6.3.2 Notes and References

This section aims at making your access to the text by providing you with ample notes and references in the text. Read the text and the notes and references in reverse order to have an in depth understanding of the poem and in turn aesthetic enjoyment.

Stanza – I

Line 1 : 'It was my thirtieth year to heaven' – For Dylan Thomas a birthday was not an occasion joy, but of grief, for he felt that every birthday was one more forward step in his march towards heaven, i.e death.

Line 2 : 'To my hearing Wood' – he heard the various sounds coming from the forest and the seashore. The setting is provided by Laugherre which is a sea town. A schizoid individual with a divided self often points a world of imagination and identifies himself with it, he cannot do so with the real world. In this world of imagination he feels

that everything belongs to him, that everything is being done for his sake. Hence the stress on my throughout the lyric. The world around seems to be made for the celebration of his birthday.

Line 3 : And the mussel pooled – pools full of mussels, a kind of small fish

Line 3-4 : And the heron priested shore – The poet finds all nature holy. The herons sitting on the shore seem to him to be priest praying for him.

Line 6 : ‘With water praying’ waves of the ocean rise high, praying for the poet.

Line 6 : And call of seagull and rock – the call of the seagull comes from the shore and that of the rocks from the wood. This is my hearing to which he wakes. Dylan is the poet both of the woods and the sea.

Line 7 : And the net webbed wall – the walls of the harbour overhung with fishermen’s net which looks like cobwebs from a distance.

Line 9 : And set forth – the poet responded to the call of the morning and stepped out for the walk.

Stanza II :

Line 2 : Winged trees – trees having leaves, which seen to the poet to be their wings.

Line 2 : Flying my name – It is his world, it his line, and so the birds fly high his name celebrating his birthday. So the line may simply be the fantasy of the schizoid individual, or it may refer to the present poem in which Dylan celebrates his 30th birthday, or it may be merely the high tides which to the poet’s imagination seem be flying so high on the wings of the birds.

Line 3 : Above the farms and the white horses – There is a lovely confusion of the farm and the shore. The schizoid has no clear

perception of time and space, and distinctions are blurred and confused. Hence the seashore outside and the farms with their white horses inside the town become one, and the poet's name is flown over both, at one and the same time.

Line 7 : High tide and heron dived – the poet's fantasy is broken, the dream world into which he had escaped from harsh reality is broken and the herons and the high tides which had seemed to him to be celebrating his birthday and praying for lives, are no longer there. They dive into the ocean, so to say, and disappear.

Line 8 : Over the border – crossed the boarder separating the town and the forest, the sea and the outside world.

Line 9-10 : And the gates of the town closed – Dylan came out quite early, and by the time people were waking he was far away. The gates of the town were closed to his view.

Stanza III

Line 1 : A springful of larks in a rolling – The poet now climbs the hills towards which he had been walking. He looks up and finds that the clouds are full of larks as in the spring season.

Line 3 : Summery – hot as in the summer season

Line 3 : Hills shoulder – he node up the hill, over which the poet is now climbing towards the top

Line 6 : Here were found....suddenly – on the hill there is a lovely confusion of the season and climate. It is both springlike and summery. This confusion of seasons indicates the achizoid's inability to distinguish between one thing and another. He lives and moves in a world of fantasy where time past or present, places near and distant, climates and seasons, all mingle in a lovely confusion. However, such fantasies cannot be kept up for any length of time and reality soon breaks in with a painful

disturbance of the tranquil dreamworld. Sweet singers have come there along with the poet, they may be symbolic of the poet himself whose lyrics have gained in clarity and sweetness. He himself has become a springful of larks a sweet warbler of immortal lyrics.

Stanza IV

Line 1 : 'Dwindling' – becoming smaller in size, as the poet reaches the top of the hill.

Line 2 : 'The size of a snail' – looking as small as a snail.

Line 2 : 'With its horns' – the tower of the Church and the castle are being likened to the Church and the castle are being likened to the horns of a snail.

Line 2 : 'Brown as oel' – the castle is brown, like the color of an owl, the symbol of death and desolation.

Line 5 : 'Tall tales' – the legends of his youth, in his imagination the poet Dylan saw the boy Dylan as a hero, the centre of many heroic adventures.

Line 4 : 'The gardens of spring and summer' – they symbolize the beautiful glorious world as re-created by the imagination of the poet. It is present in his memory, much glorified and romanticized by the shaping power of imagination.

Line 5 : 'beyond the border' – the border or boundary here is the border of time. Beyond the limits of the present lies the past his boyhood glowing with beauty under the stress of imagination. The 'border' is first the boundary which separates one weather from another, and secondly, that which separates time present from the time past.

Line 7 : 'marvel' – his birthday is because there are two weathers and two times present at one and the same time.

Line 8 : ‘But the weather turned around’ – his escape into the fantasy world of his boyhood was short lived. Soon his fantasy was broken and soon he had to return to harsh reality. There is turning away from the past to the present, and from spring and summer to cold and winter.

Stanza V :

Line 2 : ‘blue altered sky’ – it was still a blue sky, may be of or Fern Hill but it was a different sky from the larkful one of the present. The memories and visions of the past are more glorious.

Line 3 : ‘Streamed again’ – fell on his memory like a shower of ram or a current of water.

Line 3-4 : ‘a wonder of summer currents – the poet remembers the happy days which he spent in Fern Hill where was situated the farm of his aunt. It was a country noted for its apples, pears and currents, and the boy Dylan walked like a Lord there.

Line 7 : ‘when he walked with his mother’ – the grown up remembers his happy boyhood at Swansea.

Line 8-9 : ‘parables of sunlight’ – sunlight as glorious and beautiful as described in legends and stories. Fiction and wonder of childhood symbolize the glorious vision of his childhood.

Line 10 : ‘the green chapels’ – the woods, he has visions of his happy boyhood when the woods seemed to him not only beautiful but also holy. Sunlight and green trees are the glory of Fern Hill.

Stanza VI :

Line 1 : ‘twice told fields of fancy’ – the glorious visions and wonders of childhood first lived through and now remembered, hence twice told.

Line 2 : ‘his tears burned my cheeks’ – the grief and sorrows of childhood made him suffer one again as he recollected them. This makes the boy and the poet, past and present Langherne and Swansea, one.

Line 2 : ‘his heart moved in mine’ – the grown up poet experiences once again the joy and griefs of the boy.

Line 4 : ‘summer time of the dead’ – the past of the poet when he was a boy.

Line 5 : ‘whispered the truth of his joy’ – from the dead past, the ghost of the boy whispered, so to say, to the objects of nature around him, the joy he had experienced at that time. He once again experienced the similar joy.

Line 7 : ‘and the mystery long alive’ – he again felt the same sense of wonder as he had experienced as a boy.

Stanza VII :

Line 1 : ‘And there could I marvel’ – wonder at the truths that were revealed to him, the feeling of oneness with the objects of nature and with the ‘boy long dead’ which he had experienced.

Line 2 : ‘Away but the weather turned around’ – his nostalgia for a vanished past soon ended and he returned to the present, thus he could regain some measure of self control and face the reality of the moment, the reality that he was no longer a boy but a man of thirty.

Line 3-4 : ‘joy of the long.....in the sun’ – was intensely experienced once again in the real present, not in the dead past through vision and memory. The joy is ‘true’ because it is really experienced in the present through the poet’s achievement of identity with the outside world.

Line 6 : ‘It was my thirtieth year to heaven’ – the poet’s nostalgia is overcome and he realizes the truth of the present moment.

Line 7 : ‘leaved with October blood’ – covered with fallen leaves red in colour. Hence it is October blood or October is bloody.

Line 8 : ‘heart’s truth’ – truths – tree joys and sorrows which he has experienced.

Line 10 : ‘In a year’s time’ –After a year, on his next birthday ‘Turning’ the great war of transformation and time, is as it should be, last. Time’s magic has evoked the timelessness of art.

6.3.3 A critique of the poem

Dylan Thomas ‘Poem in October’ is a multiple poem bearing the features of modern poetry. The theme of the poem is the recollection of memories of childhood in the present, i.e. on his thirtieth birthday. He recalls his boyhood joyfully. No note of melancholy appears in his recollection of childhood. Dylan Thomas writes in an extremely rhetorical style. The rhetoricity of mostly in the first stanza where he uses the words like ‘heron priested shore’, ‘mussel pooled’ in so useful a way. He breaks the rules of grammar, punctuation and changes the syntax to convey different themes vividly to the reader. It may be that he intended to express the unconscious state of mind of a man in the easy hours in the morning of using the words mentioned above the point becomes obscure not purposively what to portray such a different moment as makes the poem obscure. Present and past are remembered simultaneously in the poem when he says –

My birthday began with the water

.....

And walked abroad in a shower of all my says (line 11-16)

It is mentioned in the opening paragraph of this critique that ‘Poem in October’ is a modern poem containing features of modern poetry. Its woods, rhythms, phrases, theme etc. speak of its modernist character Of rhythmic flow, one of the characteristics of modern poetry, appears here and there in the poem.

The lines –

The morning beckons with water praying

In the still sleeping town and set forth (line 5-10)

Language in the poem is not easy to follow on our first reading. It is obscure the imageries in the poem are also not simple, for example ‘heron-priested shore’. Dylan Thomas here uses the image of birds to convey the idea of serenity of the place. Another example of the use of obscure image springs out in the line ‘My birthday began with the water’. Water here is used most probably to mean the baptizing process of a child in its birth. It is not that the poet uses only complex images, simple images, too, occur here there in the poem :

Though the town below lay leaved with October blood (line 67-68)

The phrase ‘October blood’ is used here to give the image of fallen leaves reflecting red colour in the month of October.

Ambiguity also shines out in the poem. A note of ambiguity is struck in the following lines – ‘My birthday began with the water’ (line 11). Here the poet may mean his baptism when he was born. In Christianity a child is baptized by sprinkling holy water on it just after birth. Another meaning develops that the sound of water is produced while water knocks at the shore in the early morning of his birthday. Again it may mean his birthday was a rainy one. Such words with multiple meaning form a part of poetry. The poem is an outcome of the

poet's experiences of childhood. The meaning develops in a characteristic manner.

Pantheism i.e. identification of oneself with nature also features in the poem. Dylan Thomas identifies himself with Nature as he says – 'These were the woods, the river and sea/ where a boy/in the listing/sometimes of the dead whispered the truth of his joy/To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide/And the mystery/Sang alive/Still in the water and singing birds' (line 53-60). Metaphorical employment is to be seen in the poem – 'with its horns through mist and the castle/ Brown as owls' (line 33-34). Again in the lines ' A springful of larks in a rolling/Cloud and the roadside bushes bringing with whistling/Blackbirds and the sum of October/Summery' (line 21-24), the 'roadside bushes brimming with whistling blackbirds is a metaphor to suggest the passing of time – 'And walked abroad in a shower of all my days (line 16)

There is a conventional rhyming. Rhyme is almost half : 'Heaven' and 'heron', 'wood' and 'road', rock and awake; 'nothing' and 'whistling', 'October' and 'shoulder' are examples of slant or half rhyme in the poem.

Strict formal control is one characteristic of the poem. On our first reading it may appear to you that the words are not under control. But on analysis this idea becomes falsified. Sounds and rhythm are subtly used. Images are repeated. The image of 'heron' is repeated in two lines (i) 'heron priested shore' (line 4) and (ii) 'High tide and heron dived' (line 16). The image of lark is also repeated. Frequent use of parallel construction of words is also seen, phrases like 'heron priested shore', 'net-webbed wall', 'sea-wet church', 'larkful cloud' and 'long dead child' are examples of parallelism.

To sum up 'poem in October' is the outcome of mingling of different literary elements. It is intensely lyrical and carries the personal

experience of the poet. The inter weaving of music and metaphor and the complex verbal patterns with the extraordinary rhythmic force and resounding Celtic super abundance inevitably recall both Hopkins and James Joyce.

6.4 Understanding the poet

The utilization of Dylan Thomas in connection with his prescribed ‘Poem in October’, I do humbly hope, will give you adequate input about such a magical and mystical poet. Reading Dylan Thomas is a rigorous mental exercise and the resultant aesthetic joy makes you forget the rigours undergone while reading him. As suggested in 3.2.1, you are to altogether adopt a different approach for a thorough understanding of Dylan Thomas dynamics of verse writing. You will be aware at the end of the unit that to some degree the 1940s were Thomas decade. In the 1930s there had been felt, for one thing, the dwarfing presence of the century’s two greatest poet, Yeats and Eliot, certainly as the forties wore on, Thomas came more and more into his own.

6.5 Summing up

A brief summary of the unit is added at this point to sustain your interest in and continuity with the mind and art of Dylan Thomas. Although Dylan Thomas wrote poetry before and after World War II, his poetry bears very little about the ills of the man-man disaster. Like John Keats, who was least worried about the French Revolution and its socio-political implications, Dylan Thomas was self-possessed and cared little about the war and its far-reaching impact on humanity. His obsession

had been with nature and complex human relationships and psychological states of the modern man. Dylan Thomas remains a minor poet compared to Eliot and Yeats but his technical dexterity is inimitable and enchanting.

6.6 References and Suggested Reading:

Goodby, John. *New Casebooks : Dylan Thomas*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Perkins, David. *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999.

The Poetry of Dylan Thomas Author(s): David Daiches. Source: *College English*, Vol. 16, No, 1 (Oct, 1954), pp. 1-8 Published by National Council of Teachers of English. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/371613> Accessed: 28/02/2009

Dylan Thomas and the "Biblical Rhythm" Author(s): William T. Moynihan Source: PMLA, Vol. 79, No. 5 (Dec., 1964), pp. 631-647 Published by: Modern Language Association Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/461150> Accessed: 28/02/2009.

BLOCK 3

Unit 1

A. K. Ramanujan : “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House”

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introducing the poet
- 1.3 His Works
- 1.4 Critical Reception
- 1.5 Context of the Poem
- 1.6 Reading the Poem
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 Glossary
- 1.9 References and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives:

The chief objective of introducing a versatile genius like Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan at this level is to inform the reader's mind regarding the varied ways life draws people. While going between the lines of the poem the reader would be able to know how with the help of the poem “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House” the poet has laid before us a multi-layered meaning of house and life. Ramanujan’s belief of home, love for the nation he belongs to and above all his faith in the almighty God is presented in a subtle manner. The surface value of the poem may not appeal to the readers but as the poem progresses, the hidden or rather the symbolic meaning of life appears. Most of us do not value the importance of one’s home but later in life we hanker after the same home where we belong to. A sense of belongingness is created by

the poet not only in the living things but also in non-living objects too. The unit aims to familiarise the readers regarding the conception of life. Ramanujan stayed abroad and spent his days in a different country in different contexts but the thought process regarding the meaning of life remained the same.

1.2 Introducing the Poet:

A. K Ramanujan was born on March 16, 1929 Ramanujan in Mysore City. His father had a great love for the English language besides his interest in Kannada and Sanskrit languages though he was an astronomer and a Professor of Mathematics at the famous Mysore University. Ramanujan's mother used to manage the household affairs and took ample care of both the sons. It needs mention here that Ramanujan also had a brother, whose name was A.K. Srinivasan. Srinivasan was also a writer and a great mathematician. As mentioned above A.K. Ramanujan was a versatile genius. He was a poet who could write in five languages. He was a scholar, professor, philologist, folklorist, translator, a playwright all welded into one. Ramanujan received his early education in a high school called Marimallappa's High School at Mysore. Ramanujan joined college as a science student but as per the wish of his father he switched from Science stream to Arts and excelled in his education. He was a Fulbright scholar in 1959-62 at Indiana University. Later, from the Indiana University Ramanujan was awarded a PhD degree in Linguistics. Ramanujan may be termed as one of the pioneers who advocated for non-standard and local dialects to be given their dues. Ramanujan belonged to a period when the first wave of change in mode of education began. Those who were a little privileged gave preference for studying outside the country. Those who returned to the country after study could not play a constructive part in the field of education despite the country's cherished values, were not able to work it out for themselves, hence created a complete mess of the existing conditions. In the case of

Ramanujan, it was the opposite. Though he was rendering his services in a foreign land, his heart and mind was equally with the native land. It is only because of this aspect, we find in his poems a kind of startling originality, a kind of sophistication and above all his love for the country is clearly exhibited. When we look at the career of Ramanujan it gives us a clear picture of his conception of humanity, and his love for the nation he belongs to. This can be analysed as he worked as a teacher both in India and abroad. The education process and policy of India at that time and the education policies of other nations provided ample scope in improving and contemplating his works of art. As a result he was able to condition his works which had a universal appeal. Ramanujan worked as a lecturer of English at Quilon and Belgaum. He later taught at The Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda for about eight years. In 1962, he joined the University of Chicago as an assistant professor. He was affiliated with the university throughout his career, teaching in several departments. He taught at other US universities as well, including Harvard University, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, and Carleton College. At the University of Chicago, Ramanujan was instrumental in shaping the South Asian Studies program. He worked in the departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Linguistics, and with the Committee on Social Thought.

In 1976, the Government of India awarded him with the Padma Shri, and in 1983, he was given the MacArthur Prize Fellowship. In 1983, he received a MacArthur Fellowship. As an Indo-American writer, Ramanujan had the experience of the native as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems such as the "Conventions of Despair" reflected his views on the cultures and conventions of the east and west.

A. K. Ramanujan died in Chicago on 13 July 1993 as result of an adverse reaction to anaesthesia during preparation for surgery as reported.

1.3 His Works:

A.K. Ramanujan was a voluminous writer. He had a number of translation works from Old Tamil to Old Kannada. Though it would not be possible to discuss all his works, attempts would be made to cover the noted works of Ramanujan. Therefore, some of his early works, some from the middle period and some from the later stages would be discussed keeping in mind the poem prescribed for your study. In *The Interior Landscape* which is a collection of love poems from a classical anthology describes unforgettable sequences of love poems. The story in the anthology unveils a series of dramatic sequences among the lovers involved and other characters. The story is a series of dramatic exchanges between a shifting array of characters demonstrating lovers go through five phases of love, from first meeting, anxiety, infidelity and separation to final union, each associated with a lush interior landscape of their own. Speaking of Shiva, A.K. Ramanujan, says, “They all speak of Siva and speak to Siva: hence the title.” It is a book of *vacanas*, religious lyrics written in Kannada free verse by medieval *Virasaivas*.

A.K. Ramanujan’s *The Striders* is one of the well-known symbolical poems. In this poem the poet with the help of the *Striders* gives the idea about deconstructive analysis of Indian sensibilities. This poem explains about the ultimate strength of human beings in every aspect. *Strider* is a small water insect which may be small but the poet explains it from a different angle. In the first stanza of the poem he gives the idea about its physical appearance and makes it a source of ideas. Later he describes a water bug as a bubbled eye which is dynamic and not static. Human ideas are also like bubbles that are very short and do not stay for a long time. The poet explains about Indian tradition and links it to the ancient to modern times and he describes the energy of the insect which gained through yoga so that it could walk on the water without sinking. Identity crises manifesting his ‘*striders*’ like floating existence as a displaced individual. The tool that the poet employs as resistance to that dominant

sense of loss and dejection is the poetics of return incorporating excessive use of memories and nostalgia for original home and cultural heritage.

Augmented by A. K. Ramanujan's definitive introduction and notes, *Folktales from India* is an enchanting collection of one hundred and ten tales translated from twenty-two different languages is an indispensable guide to India's ageless folklore tradition. It offers a rich variety of Indian folk traditions. It is harrowing and comic, sardonic and allegorical, mysterious and romantic. In some of the tales we find Gods disguised as beggars and in some as beasts. Animals are characterised as hatching Machiavellian intrigues, sagacious jesters and magical storytellers, wise counsellors and foolish kings—all of these exhibit a different world, yet one firmly grounded in everyday life. Folktales from India are an excellent collection in which the tales are arranged in such a manner that each section is varied and easy to understand. Another notable work of Ramanujan is the *Second Sight: Indianness of A.K Ramanujan*. The terms 'Indian' and 'Indianness' are clearly understood after examining the poem— *Second Sight*. Ramanujan does not leave us in the lurch with regard to a plausible connotation of these terms, and he subtly suggests in the title-piece that a Hindu, which is equivalent to an 'Indian', is supposed to have 'second sight', to have a moral, spiritual and mystical vision of life. "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" is yet another poem which after critical interpretations can be called a very Indian poem and be discussed in later sections. Ramanujan in his cultural essays titled "There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (1990) contributes his theoretical and aesthetic contributions which span several disciplinary areas. Ramanujan explains his view of cultural ideologies and behavioural outcomes in terms of Indian psychology. Ramanujan in his work in folklore studies highlights the mixture of the Indian oral and written literary tradition. His essay "Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections" (1989), and his commentaries in *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967) and *Folktales from India, Oral*

Tales from Twenty Indian Languages (1991) are good examples of his work in Indian folklore studies.

1.4 Critical Reception:

A. K. Ramanujan's works are highly acclaimed and he is regarded as one of the leading Indo-Anglian poets. It is because Ramanujan's concept of nation, home, familial bonds and language is largely because he is the poet of memories. Staying away from home in a foreign country, Ramanujan preserves the very spirit of Indianness in him and it is one of the reasons that he is appreciated not only for his works but also for his personality. Despite the twists and turns his poetry emerges as poetry that is totally committed to an idea of India. Harriet Zinnes, in her review of *The Striders*, says: "Mr. Ramanujan writes frequently about his childhood Indian experiences, and thus flavours the poems with images of fig trees, mynahs, snakes, Madurai, diction and attitude toward the object." Ramanujan worked at the Indiana University in the United States and there he was awarded the Ph. D degree in Linguistics. Ramanujan was considered one of the great scholars of the South Indian Languages. Ramanujan attained distinction as a scholar when he depicted in depth the alienation a part of human existentialism philosophy, emerging as the most dominant theme of poetry. With his personal experiences he also manifests meaninglessness of hollow customs and rituals in religious and cultural milieu of the society. It is highlighted through his poems.

1.5 Context of the Poem:

"Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House " is one of Ramanujan's layered poems as it unfolds various interpretations about the word "House". Ramanujan through this poem expresses his experiences of homesickness as he was staying abroad. Analysing the unity and diverse

culture of the country, he illustrates the value of the house to which one belongs. The poem also generates a feeling of patriotism by citing the word house, which in fact stands for the country. The use of the word “small scale” actually conveys the opposite meaning as the title is the ironic indication that one does not understand the value of the house and its worth. It is not a small scale reflection but indeed a very big impression of the house one belongs to. Another layer of the poem may be that the poet wanted people to understand the present value of life. Nothing exists after one leaves the earth and everything remains on the earth itself which is the eternal home for living beings. The poet in this context speaks elaborately of the “Great House” which may be our loving native land, or the country in the broader context be also regarded as our home. It is here one grows up, cherishes the memory of all the loving beings and above all the return that the house (country) has given to us. A love for the land may be discussed in the broader context of the poem.

1.6 Reading the Poem:

A. K. Ramanujan’s *Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House* " was included in the anthology titled *Relations* published in 1971. It is a long narrative poem of ninety one lines. Ramanujan divided the poem into sets of three and four lines. As the poem is composed in free verse hence there is no rhyme scheme as such. As Ramanujan wishes to convey a kind of image in the poem, any kind of rhyming scheme might have hindered the purpose. At the very beginning it has been stated that it is a multi-layered poem. Now you all might be confused and applying one’s own ideas about the layers of the poem. So let us discuss the poem unveiling all its layers and try to come to the conclusion of the poet’s perception about the poem. The poem begins with a description of a house and its characteristics. The poet tells us that the house is such that everything gets attracted towards the house and once it enters the house it never leaves it—be it living or non- living things. So the first layer is

unfolded in a symbolic manner. No one wants to leave one's house, whatever may be its size, location. The warmth of one's own home cannot be replaced with anything. The poet says that even stray animals come to that home and stay there forever only because of the treatment they receive. The poet even says that non-living things which enter the house get mingled with those already gained an identity in that house. Another symbolic description is of the female cows being impregnated and the girls within the house would look through the holes of the windows. The speaker here describes the traditional values practised in the country by telling that such actions were not approved of for the girls at that time.

In the next stanza the speaker mentions about the books which are lying in the house for a long time and the books are matured because they are over read and now they have become the safe habitat of silverfish. That is, the books could have been disposed considering the conditions but they are also the part of the house.

The next stanza speaks of the predominance of the Hindu religion throughout India. The act of worship in the country and preparation of food for God which is later distributed in the neighbourhood in the form of Prasad. It also gives a feeling of Spirituality that the dishes are left behind in the house to stay there permanently. The poet further speaks about the servants who once inducted in the house stay there forever. This speaks of the warmth of the people and the house. Even photographs and the old-fashioned record players is an asset for the house. These items throw light on the family history and the like and dislikes of the persons of the family of that house. He goes on, describing sons-in-law who forget their mothers and stay in the house for other reasons.

The next stanza mentions about the young ladies who enter the house and how they get accustomed over certain rituals. Another important aspect that can be found in association with the young women and the

household are banana trees. In the next stanza for the first time, the poet discusses something which is leaving the house but the attraction of the house is such, the poet remarks, it “will come back“. He speaks about the bales of cotton being sent to “invisible Manchester”. And when it comes back, it is “milled and folded”. The poet gives reference to the way the cotton is processed within a factory. The poet in the next stanza speaks of the letters. It is observed as the poet says that letters which were sent from the house ultimately are redirected and reach the house with markings on them that the letter could not be delivered and are sent back to the house. Through the metaphor of the letter, the poet says that the elders of the house might have left the house in order to earn but as time passed they felt the urge for the home and return to their native home with marks of experience over their faces of staying away from the home.

It is said by the poet that even the rumours once uttered by some distant relatives come back to house as if it was not a rumour and the inhabitants start believing in them. In one of the stanzas the poet has drawn a pen picture of the family structure of the times in which the girls of the family after marriage visit their parental home and later followed by the son- in- law who also prefers to stay there. In another stanza the speaker describes how a beggar once visited the house and sang a “prostitute song”. The tune of the song was not that sweet though the same tune was sung by the cook of the house in the backyard repetitively.

“A beggar once came with a violin
to croak out a prostitute song
that our voiceless cook snag
all the time in our backyard”.

Another layer of the poem is that it hints at the feeling of patriotism. No one can leave one’s country until compelled but despite that the poet mentions that he or she always has a yearning towards the country and

as soon as they get opportunity, they return to their motherland which in broader perspective is the “home” for them. The poem explicitly expresses Ramanujan’s personal desire to be attached with his country which is his real “home”. The third layer with which the poem may be interpreted is as if the poet is suggesting the role of Almighty in creating this earth as home for everyone. Everything stays on the earth though people might have a lot of misconceptions regarding life after death. If the earth is regarded by all as one’s own sweet home and whatever good could be done for the betterment of the place one lives in, the place would become a home like Heaven. As it is said that Heaven and Hell do not exist anywhere, it is the mind that makes Heaven upon earth. Now the term Heaven may be interpreted as home as the poet speaks in the poem.

The concluding lines of the poem aptly describe the gravitational power that the ‘home’ has. How dead soldiers are brought back to the same house from where once they went to defend the borders and how destiny plays its role and they return lifeless undergoing tumultuous journeys to reach the same loving house before the arrival of the news sent via telegram. Hence the poem after analysing in a phased manner makes us feel the importance of one’s home.

SAQ

What is your opinion about A. K. Ramanujan as a poet? Would you consider him as one of the greatest writers who had universal impact because of his writings?(100 words)

.....
.....

How far A. K. Ramanujan has been able to communicate his idea of house in the poem “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House”? (100 words)

.....
.....

How does "the house" become such an important element in the poem?

(70 words)

.....
.....

CheckYourProgress

1. Read the description of the things which came from outside and stayed in the house permanently?

(Hint: Greasy sweet plates, women, son-in-law etc.)

2. Comment on books in the library.

(Hint: "Silverfish" breeding in the books.)

3. How are the letters come back to the house? Trace its allegorical meaning

(Hint: letters are compared with elders going out of the house and returning with experience of life.)

4. Comment on the title of the poem with special emphasis on the word "House"? (Hint: House being a metaphor is discussed in the poem with symbolic significance.)

1.7 Summing up:

So as per the discussions made in the previous section an attempt has been made for a threadbare discussion about the poem. As it has been said about the poet A. K. Ramanujan by the critics that though he stayed in the US and taught Linguistics there but his heart yearns for that "Great House" which may be his native place, may be the country to which he belonged. The poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" is one of his representative poems demonstrating his idea of a

“Great House”. Ramanujan in this poem has used a very common and obvious technique of alliteration. It is just to keep the readers aware of the topic with which the poet is dealing. Ramanujan at times wants to express a number of ideas and as a result sometimes he switches over to another line without completing the previous one. This technique of enjambment is effectively used in the poem.

1.8 Glossary:

Philologist: One who studies the history of languages, especially by looking closely at literature.

Indo-Anglican: Indo-Anglican literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. This term is specifically used in context of writing and should not be confused with the term Anglo-Indian.

Alliteration: It is a figure of speech. This consists of frequent repetition of the same letter or syllable at the beginning of two or more words.

Enjambment: It is a literary device in which a line of poetry carries its idea or thought over to the next line without a grammatical pause.

1.9 References & Suggested Reading:

Ramanujan, AK, Ed. Folktales From India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-Two Tales, Grendel Books, 1991.

King, Bruce. Three Indian Poets, Oxford India Paperbacks, 1991.

Parthsarthy, R. Ed. Ten Twentieth-century Indian Poets, Oxford University Press, 1990

Ghosh, Mandira. Indian Poetry through the passage of time.
Authorspress, 2016.

Supplementary Unit for poetry

How to approach the poet/ how to read his/her poems:

As we know that A. K. Ramanujan belonged to the southern part of India so knowing a little bit about the culture and place to which Ramanujan belonged would definitely help the readers. Moreover, it is important to have a biographical sketch of the writer because that would lead us the kind of person he is and in that light his works may be read and discussed. Sometimes we find that the writer is not only a poet but also a dramatist or an essayist as the case may be. So in that case it becomes necessary to analyse his works and formulate a kind of opinion of the writer as to how and why the writer is conditioned in that manner.

Important poems --apart from the prescribed ones-- that a learner should read to get a sense of the poet's distinctive style/preoccupations:

Yes it is essential to know about the writers major works. It is true that we cannot ascertain a writer of excellence based on one or two of his works. In order to analyse a person's insight his other important works throw a deep insight of the writer's psychology. In case of A. K. Ramanujan some of his great works like his collection of Folktales offers a vivid picture of the country which at times we discover only after going through it. The Striders and Second Sight reveal beforeus another picture of Ramanujan.

Probable questions and suggested answers: The probable questions on the poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House " may be as follows:

Name the things that live in the forever in the poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House". (Suggestions for writing the answer: the poet has categorically mentioned about things staying forever in the

house. Even if something/somebody leaves the house ultimately comes back to the house)

Discuss about the structure of the poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House " (suggestions: write about the total number of lines in the poem. The type of stanzas—three line or four line stanza. The Literary Devices and Poetic Techniques used by the poet in structuring the poem and use of alliterative language and effective use of enjambment technique etc

What are the metaphorical implications of the "Great House" as mentioned by the poet in the poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House ". (Suggestions: the " great house" acts as a metaphor representing the nation India, where nothing goes out, once it enters the house i.e the country)

Write a note on the symbolism used in the poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House " (suggestions: the poem the loaded with symbolic images. The very title is symbolic. Though the title suggests small scale reflections but the poet draws it in a grand scale. The use of the word house too has a symbolic as well as allegorical meaning in it. 4. Important essays/books/materials on the poet that a learner should go through to grasp the subject better. Any other study suggestions that may help learner in understanding the poet are mentioned below:

A. K. Ramanujan. "Returning," *Uncollected Poems and Prose*. New Delhi: OUP, 2001.

A. K. Ramanujan. *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan* ed. Vinay Dharwadker, New Delhi: OUP, 1999.

Jahan Ramzani. "Metaphor and Post coloniality: The Poetry of A. K. Ramanujan," *Contemporary Literature*, 1998.

Keith Harrison. "For Raman (In Memoriam, A. K. Ramanujan 1929-1993)," *The Oxford India Ramanujan*, ed. Molly Daniels Ramanujan New Delhi: OUP, 2004.

Krittika Ramanujan. *The Collected Poems of A.K. Ramanujan*, ed.

Krittika Ramanujan. New Delhi: OUP, 1995.

Surjit S. Dulai. "First and the Only Sight: The Centres and Circles of A. K. Ramanujan's Poetry," *Journal of South Asian Literature* (Summer 1989).

Unit 3

Ted Hughes "The Thought Fox", "Theology", "Pike"

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Introducing the Poet

3.3 Works of the Poet

3.4 Language and Style in Ted Hughes' poetry

3.5 Critical Reception

3.6 Context of the Poems

3.7 Reading the Poems

3.7.1 Reading "The Thought Fox"

3.7.2 Reading "Theology"

3.7.3 Reading "Pike"

3.8 Summing up

3.9 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the unit is to introduce the poet Ted Hughes to you and make a detailed study of the poems prescribed in your syllabus.

By the end of your reading the unit you should be able to—*place* Ted Hughes in the English poetic tradition

- *explore* Hughes' singular treatment of the innocent savagery of the world of Nature

- *analyse* critically and enjoy reading Hughes' poems
- *evaluate* Hughes' contribution to English poetry.

3.2 Introducing the Poet

One of the liveliest poets writing in Britain since 1945, Ted Hughes came into the 'poetry scene' when British poetry was largely dominated by the Movement Poets. Ted Hughes (Edward James) was born on 17th August, 1930 in Mytholmroyd, a small town in west Yorkshire and raised among the local farms in that area. His childhood was dominantly rural. According to Hughes his first nine years shaped everything. His father, William Hughes, was a carpenter who fought in the First World War and he happened to be only one of seventeen survivors of an entire regiment who perished at Gallipoli. When Hughes was seven, the family moved to Mexborough, a coal-mining town in South Yorkshire and the harsh landscape of the moors of that area is predominant in his poems. His parents opened a newsagent's and tobacconist's shop out there. He did his early education in Mexborough Grammar School. As a boy he spent much time on shooting and fishing expeditions with his brother, and his consequent obsession with animals and his sense of the beauty and violence of the natural world serve as a theme in his poetry again and again.

In 1948 he joined Pembroke College, Cambridge on a scholarship. The English, archeology and anthropology he studied here enabled him to write in systematic details about the brutal life force that he so glorified. He also specialized in mythology. Here he met the American poet, Sylvia Plath, but before joining the University he did National Service by joining the RAF for two years. After graduating from the university, he worked as a rose-gardener, a night-watchman, a script-reader, a zoo attendant and a teacher. In 1957 he moved to the USA after marrying Sylvia Plath the previous year. The couple returned to England in December 1959. In 1962, Hughes left Plath for Assia Gutmann Wevill. Less than a year later, Plath committed suicide. Like Plath, Wevill too committed suicide, after killing their four year old daughter, Shura. In 1970, Hughes married Carol Orchard, with whom he remained married until his death. Hughes's writings have been often overshadowed by

his-tortuous marriage with Plath. While at US he taught English and creative writing at Amherst College, his wife taught literature at Smith College.

In 1957 he published his first volume of poems, *The Hawk in the Rain* and its terse celebration of raw natural energies and its stress on the physical, animal and subconscious in a vigorous vernacular which was in total contrast to the urbane, restrained, rational, disillusioned, ironic setting and tones of the Movement poets won him immediate recognition. This recognition led him on to write profusely for readers who were awaking to a renewed vogue for topographical poetry that arose in the environment-conscious second half of the 20th century.

He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1984 after John Betjeman's death and he remained in this capacity till his death. He received the Order of Merit from Queen Elizabeth II just before he died in 1998.

SAQ:

What kind of associations are brought in by Hughes' writings on animals?—energy, bestiality, brutal honesty and ferocity? (80 words)

3.3 Works of the poet

Hughes' started writing poetry when he was about fifteen and his first volume of poems *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) won him immediate accolades and marked the beginning of a prolific writing career. It was followed by *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967) and several books of children's verse. *Crow* (1970) is a sequence of poems in which he introduces the central symbol of the crow. This symbol of the dark subconscious side of human nature is repeated frequently in subsequent volumes. In this volume Hughes retells the legends of creation and birth through the dark vision of the predatory, mocking indestructible crow, 'screaming for blood' amidst 'the horror of

creation'. Later volumes include *Cave Birds* (1975), *Season Songs* (1976), and *Moortown* (1979). He also published plays for children, a version of Seneca's *Oedipus* (1968) and edited various anthologies, *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *River* (1983) being two of the more popular ones. Some of his more recent volumes are *Wolf watching* (1989), *Rain Charmfot the Duchy and Other Laureate Poems* (1992) and *New Selected Poems* (1995). *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992) and *Winter Pollen* (1995) contain some of his prose works:

Tales from Ovid contain a selection of free verse translations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In *Birthday Letters* he has published poems describing his relationship with Plath.

3.3.1 Hughes and the English Poetic Tradition:

In the works of Ted Hughes which he wrote as a reaction against the postwar poetry of the Movement poets, we find traces of the influence of several older and earlier native British poetic traditions. If in a few poems like "The Horses" we find closeness with the serene Wordsworthian Nature in most of his other poems he reveals the violence and irrationality that belongs to the Tennysonian world of Nature. His attachment to anthropology made him look at the world of myth in a new, modern way. Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* had a strong influence on him during his early poetic career. His training in anthropology attracted him to ancient European, oriental and American myths. At each stage in his development, Hughes has of course tried to transcend these influences and emerge as a poet with a distinctive singular style. In his early works we can clearly see the influence of Hopkins, Lawrence, Yeats and Dylan Thomas. We can also trace in his work the lasting influence of Greek tragedy, medieval alliterative poetry, Shakespeare, Donne and the English Romantic Poets more specifically Blake, Wordsworth and Keats. Conceptually Hughes' poetry owes much to Freud and Darwin. In his verse we find that violence and human repression are inextricably part of the same mechanism, Civilization engendering a more insidious violence born of repression itself.

Stop to Consider

Ted Hughes on Poetic Influence:

in the way of influences ... everything goes into the stew ... Donne I once learned as many of his poems as I could and I greatly admired his satires and epistles. More than his lyrics even. As for Thomas, *Deaths and Entrances* was a holy book with me for quite a time when it first came out. Lawrence I read entire in my teens ... except for all but a few of his poems. His writings coloured a whole period of my life. Blake I connect inwardly to. Yeats spellbound me for about six years. I got to him not so much through his verse as through his other interests, folklore and magic in particular. Then that strange atmosphere laid hold of me. I fancy if there is a jury of critics sitting over what I write, and I imagine every writer has something of the sort, then Yeats is the judge. There are all sorts of things I could well do but because of him and principles I absorbed from him I cannot. They are principles that I have found confirmed in other sources ... but he stamped them into me. ... There are others. One poet I have read more than any of these is Chaucer. And the poet I read more than all other literature put together is Shakespeare. ...

I read Lawrence and Thomas at an impressionable age. I also read Hopkins very closely. But there are superficial influences that show and deep influences maybe are not so visible. It's a mystery how a writer's imagination is influenced and altered. Up to the age of twenty-five I read no contemporary poetry whatever except Eliot, Thomas and some Auden. Then I read a Penguin of American poets that came out in about 1955 and started me writing ... Crowe Ransom was the one who gave me a model I felt I could use. He helped me get my words into focus. ... But this whole business of influences is mysterious. Sometimes it's just a few words that open up a whole prospect. They may occur anywhere. Then again the influences that really count are most likely not literary at all. Maybe it would really be best of all to have no influences. Impossible of course. But what good are they as a rule? You spend a lifetime learning

how to write verse when it's been clear from your earliest days that the greatest poetry in English is in the prose of the Bible. ... Influences just seem to make it more and more unlikely that a poet will write what he alone could write.

(Source: Ekbert Faas's interview with Hughes in 1970, reproduced in Appendix 2 of Faas's *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, California, 1980), p 202.)

Hughes on Poetry and the Role of the Poet: Hughes had some very definite ideas about poetry and its functions and about his role as a poet. He has written and spoken a great deal about these ideas and, as might be expected, he deplored the sentimental, artificial approach to poetry. He reacted against the genteel statements of the rational and common-sense experience of the Movement writers and formulated a poetics of irrationality and violence adopting modernist techniques to write confessional poems scornfully abandoning Georgian moderation in favour of more primal passions.

Hughes believes that poetry is a magical and powerful way of reaching our feelings and emotions - our subconscious, natural energies. He believes that these energies have been repressed by an emphasis on the scientific approach to life and teaching. We are taught, he says, that emotions are dangerous and that they can distort our judgment and should not be relied upon when we have decisions to make, and that they have nothing to do with truth.

Creativity is necessary for survival and it requires both imagination and logic. Hughes sees it as the job of any kind of artist to help release our suppressed creative energies and he believes that poetry is particularly effective for this purpose. He nursed a shaman like conception of his poetic mission and often he sees himself as a shaman, a kind of tribal medicine man who makes symbolic journeys to the underworld of the subconscious to bring back lost souls and to cure sick people. The words, the symbols, the images and the musical rhythms of the poetry, are, for him, like the shaman's magic drum which helps him on his journey. It is these which stir our imagination, and the effect is a magical release of emotional energies.

In *Poetry in the Making* (1970) Hughes states that there is no ideal form of poetry or writing. His poetry ranged from free verse to highly structured forms and rhyme schemes. He gradually abandoned traditional forms and

stated that the "very sound of metre calls up the ghosts of the past and it is difficult to sing one's own tune against the choir." In his poetry we find that he matches form, diction and style to the subject matter. Hughes considers the aural quality of a poem important than the visual impact it makes through the images and metaphors. In an interview he expressed his preference thus, "I prefer poems to make an effect on being heard, and I don't think that's really a case of them being simple because for instance Eliot's poems make a tremendous effect when you hear them, and when I first heard them they did, and when I was too young to understand very much about them they had an enormous effect on me It's just some sort of charm and series of operations that it works on you..."

SAQ:

Define in clear terms Hughes' approach to the world of Nature. Would you call it one of neutrality, of scientific objectivity, of empathy, of superciliousness, or of antipathy? (80 words)

3.3.2 Violence in Ted Hughes's Poetry:

The consistent strain of violence in the poetry of Ted Hughes has often prompted critics to pounce on his works and convert them into evidence in a sociological study of the perpetual tortures, terrors and mass massacres prevalent in society in the post-World Wars era thus often overlooking the poetic merits of his works. Hughes agrees that post-war poets were indeed greatly influenced by the meaningless violence and wrote frequently using violence as a theme but he also states that violence as a theme was nothing new in literature and can be traced down to the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Dante Shakespeare, Blake and can also be found in the *Bible*, the various epics and *Beowulf*. In an interview, talking about violence in poetry, Hughes says,

"When is violence 'violence' and when is it great poetry? Can the critic distinguish? I would say that most critics cannot distinguish. The critic whose outlook is based on a rational skepticism ... simply cannot distinguish between fears for his own mental security and the actions of the Universe ,redressing a disturbed balance. Or trying to. In other words he is incapable of judging poetry ... because poetry is nothing if not that, the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error. ... Violence that begins in an unhappy home can go one way to produce a meaningless little nightmare of murder etc. for TV or it can go the other way and produce those moments in Beethoven. ..." (Source: EkbertFaas's interview with Hughes in 1970, reproduced in Appendix 2 of Faas's *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, California, 1980), pp 198-99)

Admittedly, Hughes's poetry is replete with violence, brutal violence at that. He writes about violence in love and in hatred, in the battlefield, in the animal kingdom and in human society. But from Hughes's perspective his poems are 'not about violence but vitality'. Violence though painful and very often fatal, is also a guarantee of energy and of life. He says,

Stop to Consider

'Violence' in Ted Hughes

"... Any form of violence — any form of violent activity — invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe. Once the contact has been made it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond ordinary human activity enters. When the wise men know how to create rituals and dogma, the energy can be contained. When the old rituals and dogma have lost credit and disintegrated, and no new ones have been formed, the energy cannot be contained, and so its effect is destructive — and that is the position with us. And that is why force of any kind frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook. In the old world God and divine power were invoked at any cost — life seemed worthless without them. In the present world we dare not invoke them — we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them from destroying us. We

have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination — anything bigger introduces problems the demons get hold of it. That is the psychological stupidity, the ineptitude of the rigidly rationalist outlook — it's a form of hubris, and we're paying the traditional price. If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? You accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control — rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one. ...

SAQ:

Show the allusions to violence in the poems, 'Thrushes' and 'Pike'. (70 + 70 words)

.....
.....

3.3.3 Animals and Nature in Hughes's Poetry:

Hughes' earlier poetic work is rooted in nature in general and, in the innocent savagery of animals in particular. Tennyson's phrase "nature, red in tooth and claw" could be aptly applied to him. Hughes is acutely aware of the mixture of beauty and violence in the natural world, and writes of it with fascination, fear and awe which arises from a colonial defensive love of his territory. He finds in animals a metaphor for his view on life. In his poems he expresses a rapt fascination with animal energy which he developed from his exposure to the world of nature and animals in his early childhood days.

Observing the world & Nature from close quarter he became aware of the affinities that exist between animal and human life. In the world as he saw it, animals live out a struggle for the survival, of the fittest in the same way that human strive for ascendancy and success. Yet he presented the animal world as alien and opposed to the civilized human consciousness and for that reason peculiarly close to sub-rational instinct in the self.

Reorienting the beast tablet() emphasize the possibilities of the conflict that exist between civilization and beastly elements Hushes has written poems like *Pike, An Otter, The Bull Moses, View of a Pig, The Jaguar, Hawk Roosting, The Hawk in the Rain*. He fills these poems with the animals" physical presence and, endows their natural strength with mythic power. The characteristic theme of violence is evident in them. In many of his animal poems he sets the savagery of nature against the pretensions of civilization. However, in "The Horses" he writes about the passivity and gentleness of a group of ten horses at a particular moment in their existence.

Stop to Consider

Hughes and the Tradition of Nature Poetry

Continuing the tradition of Nature poetry which started with the pastorals and continued through the times of Shakespeare, Blake, Wordsworth and Tennyson till his times Ted Hughes, in his works, explored the relationship that exists between Nature and Man. Shakespeare in his works showed that as long as there is harmony between the human world and the world of Nature, everything is right with the world.

Wordsworth, the greatest Nature poet, had a rather limited view regarding Nature. He believed that 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her' and to prove his point he often chose a favoured corner in his 'own countryside to 'write about. To quote Wordsworth's own words, in his poetry he 'refers to the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to invest the, material universe, and the moral relations under which 'I have wished, to exhibit its most ordinary appearances.'

After Wordsworth came Tennyson who was aware of the existence of a terrible force in Nature that was 'red in tooth and claw' and who was not a moral teacher, nurse and guardian. This view was similar to that of Schopenhauer's Which saw Nature as a nightmarish force. Much earlier Hume had spoken of blind Nature Look around this Universe. What an immense profusion of Beings,, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the Only beings worth regarding. How hostile **and** destructive to each other! How insufficient all Of them are for their own Happiness! How contemptible or odious to the Spectator! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind Nat* impregnated. a great vivifying Principle, and pouring forth from her Lap

without Discernment or Parental Care, her maim'd and abortive Children. But Ted Hughes considers Nature an ambivalent force and looks at her with various different attitudes. In some of his works he writes about the violent side of nature — 'Pike', 'Crow', 'Hawk' 'Roosting' - and at other times in poems like 'The Horses', 'The Wind' and 'October Dawn' his description of the natural landscape is as vivid and pictorial as Wordsworth's.

SAQ:

Comment on the exclusive focus on animals in Hughes's poetry. (60 words)

.....
.....

3.3.4 Hughes's War Poetry:

Being still a child when the Second World War ended Hughes did not experience first-hand life in the trenches. However, his father had fought in World War I and happened to be one of the seventeen lucky men of his regiment to have survived death in the Gallipoli battle and it was from him that he heard several tales of mental and physical horrors experienced by the soldiers. He felt a revolt against the man-made calamity, the dropping of the atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the large scale massacre of the Jews by the Nazis. These narrations left a permanent impression on the mind of the young, sensitive poet and he recalls them in *Out, Six Young Men*, *Bayonet Charge*, *Crow's Account of the Battle* and *Grief for Dead Soldiers*. In these poems Hughes shows a rare boldness in expressing the horror that war had created. Unlike the Movement Poets who benumbed by the war avoided talking about it and wrote poetry depicting urban reality, he felt that one could not avoid the problem by shutting one's eyes to it. Therefore, without being sentimental and in a matter-of-fact manner Hughes depicts faithful

pictures of the nightmare that the World Wars had created and the vision of a nightmarish world it had left behind.

3.4 Language and Style in Ted Hughes's Poetry:

The maturity and originality of his style has contributed largely to Hughes' greatness as a poet. Hughes has experimented with several different styles of writing, ranging from the Wordsworthian and the metaphysical to the modern East European poets but each time he has adapted these styles and made them his own. What is more remarkable is that each time he has adjusted his style to suit the subject matter. Commenting on his style Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts have said, "Hughes is a great poet, in whose hands our language is both familiar and different from anything we had thought possible. He reminds us that we still speak the language of Shakespeare, that locked within the words we use is an instrument capable of registering the reality of things and of inner states".. Hughes is a renovator of language and his style can be best described in words which he had used to describe the style of a fellow poet, Keith Douglas. Hughes writes, "It is not that he uses words in jolting combinations, or with titanic extravagance, or curious precision. His triumph is in the way he renews the simplicity of ordinary talk. It is a language for the whole mind, at its most wakeful, and in all situations. A utility general purpose style ... that combines a colloquial prose readiness with poetic breadth, a ritual intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with clear direct feeling, and yet in the end nothing but casual speech". An analysis of Hughes' poetic style will reveal a dexterous use of words and rhythm and a bold use of metaphor. His imagery and factual descriptions which are vivid original, arresting and intense are characteristically rich and sensuous. His use of onomatopoeia, condensation, colloquial words and phrases, the capacity to express elusive or shadowy thoughts and a frequent use of conceits and hyperbole, a narrative element, dramatic effects and ironical humour can seldom be surpassed.

Check Your Progress:

How would you place Ted Hughes in the context of modern English poetry? How unique or special would you call his preoccupation with animals in this context?

.....
.....

3.5 Critical Reception

Winner of many literary awards, critics have routinely ranked Hughes, as one of the best poets of his generation ever since the publication of his first collection of poems *The Hawk in the Rain*. This volume won him immediate acclaim and as he continued spinning out volume after volume of poetry. He began to be regarded as a poet who wrote about the raw, wild and savage energies of the natural world rather than society in a vigorous vernacular. This view about Hughes poetry is not entirely correct because in many of his poems we find that underneath the wild and savage forces that he celebrates disguised metaphors echo and reverberate on issues related to a series of historical struggles like the Reformation, Industrial Revolution, and the First World War

Ted Hughes is frequently described as a difficult poet. His poetry is not easily understood like that of his popular predecessor, John Betjeman. Also, he is still frequently described as a poet of blood and violence, which is not quite the expected style of the official poet laureate. Hughes is far from the conventional public figure.

One of the common allegations against Hughes' poetry is that they do not develop. He appears to be endlessly re-drafting the same poem. In spite of his earnestness his visionary spontaneity is repetitive. His poems may (in spite of their fascination with elemental energies) also be read as protests against the post-war consensus which was challenged by the election of a radical

conservative government in 1979. Underlying is a desire of human beings to occupy a primal natural world before industrial servitude.

3.6 Contexts of the Poems

3.6.1 ‘The Thought-Fox’

It is a product of the poet’s experience of inspiration in a suffocating life. While studying English at Cambridge, he felt that the “terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus” of literary tradition has made him to write no new poems. This realisation made him to switch his subject of study from English to Archaeology and Anthropology. So, one thing is clear that he did not like the burden of tradition in poetry which T. S. Eliot had stressed upon. Unlike Eliot, Hughes seeks freedom to create his own work. But that does not mean that he was all the way disrespectful of earlier poets. In fact he is pretty much influenced by nature poets like G. M. Hopkins and Edward Thomas. The unsentimental treatment of nature found in Thomas impressed Hughes and that was further conditioned by D. H. Lawrence who puts instinct over rationality. And if we look at the animal poetry of Hughes, it is a wonderful Darwinian theatre of cruelty and brutality which are two honed skills celebrated and appreciated – the fittest survives because of these two skills. Thus, we have the roosting hawk anticipating its moves even in its sleep; the flower flourishes even before the arrival of a pleasant spring. Another aspect to notice is that these survivors are not collective survivors, rather these are instances of individual survivals, individual characteristics. ‘The Thought-Fox’ is not a survival poem as one reads through for the first time, but it is too the survival of the individual poet through the process which he does instinctively.

3.6.2 ‘Theology’

‘Theology’ along with ‘Reveille’ in the collection *Wodwo* became the first Eden poems for a chronological reader of Ted Hughes. Both of these poems mention of the Serpent – the unordinary creature. Hughes, however, does not subscribe to the Christian belief of the Serpent in the Eden and tries to reject that wholesale belief. Thus, in ‘Theology’ we find Hughes deconstructing the existing construct and then reconstructing the story. The poem, therefore, first takes up the

constructed belief which a reader is familiar with, then right in the first line itself the process of deconstruction of the existing belief takes place with an assertive and “No” as the first phrase, and then the following two stanzas reconstruct a new belief. In ‘Reveille’ we find the serpent biting Adam and Eve in their sleep and they eventually waking up to their pain – a contrast to the biblical myth of seduction of mankind which was like showing a pleasant dream. In ‘Theology’, however, we find a counterpart of ‘Reveille’, though the process of myth-busting still takes place. We must remember that *Wodwo* poems are distinguished by a journalistic style of assertiveness which enabled Hughes to rise to his creatively potent period of his poetic life.

3.6.3 ‘Pike’

Both ‘Thrushes’ and ‘Pike’ have been taken from Hughes second volume of poems *Lupercal* published in 1960 after his US sojourn with wife Sylvia Plath. The title *Lupercal* is derived from the Roman festival of *Lupercalia* celebrated on the 15th Of February. Lupercal was a temple in Rome and it suggests the elemental forces worshipped by the Romans in the form of the wolf. It also shows Hughes’s use of archetypal symbols borrowed from classical mythology and his tendency to vest it with new meaning. Many of the poems in this volume are technically and stylistically better crafted than those in the earlier volume, *The Hawk in the Rain*. The poems in this collection deal with man’s confrontation with Nature and the animal world. An interesting and important feature of most of these characteristically good early poems is the role of protagonist as perceiver. These protagonists register some startling or frightening quality or energy in the world, but make no claim to embody their own personality.

3.7 Reading the poems

3.7.1 Reading ‘Thought Fox’

Before entering into the poem, let me ask you a question. How many of you have ever come across a fox? In our childhood in rural villages, some of us might have heard the call of the fox at night, but

seldom do we see the animal. And there are talks of the cunningness of the fox. We know that the fox is out there somewhere, but we do not see it easily. This is the essential noticeable character of a fox – it usually avoids being noticed when it moves. And if you are waiting for seeing one, at the best you might have a quick glimpse of it with not much detail. With such a character, a fox intrigues our mind with imaginations – we draw mental pictures of it, we just wish we could see it properly. Does the fox play hide-and-seek with us? Our fox, therefore, is kind of a mystery. Think about the fox in a real-life environment, and we proceed with the poem.

The poem ‘Thought Fox’ is written in free verse. However, Hughes retains a regular form of quatrains, each stanza of four lines. Apparently the poem is unrhymed, and yet we find eye-rhyme, half rhyme, and repetitions replacing the rhyme scheme beautifully.

Stop to Consider

The opening line somewhat echoes the opening line of G. M. Hopkins’s poem ‘The Windhover’. Read the poem and try to find any reason that Hughes decided to echo that line.

As a student of literature you might have come across the term ‘juxtaposition’ by now. It is the placement of two separate ideas which the reader can compare and contrast. Our poem in consideration, ‘The Thought Fox’, can be seen as a juxtaposition of the nature of a fox and the process of writing poetry. At least the title of the poem suggests such juxtaposition. However, the poem itself appears more like an extended metaphor where the movements of a fox is being compared to the contemplative process of composing poetry. Hughes, like many of his animal poems, presents the fox as a contemplative animal moving with measured and quick steps. If you were ever indulged in writing poetry, you would know that it is a process of contemplation as well as quick capture of thoughts – thoughts which may appear for flash of a moment like the glimpse of a fox we get. Having said that, let us look at the poem.

It is widely perceived that poetry happens best in silent solitariness. Doesn’t that remind us of Wordsworth’s thoughts recollected in tranquility? As our poetic persona in this poem opens his lines, it too is the midnight – a time when the world in most parts goes into deep slumber. All the busy humdrums otherwise existed during the day are now absent – it is the best time to contemplate one’s thoughts.

Only things beside the awake poet are the ticking clock and the white paper which is ready to bear the thoughts of the poet. The mention of the clock and the paper deepens the idea of the midnight's silence. The ticking of the clock and the sound of movement of our fingers on a sheet of paper are the sounds we can hear only in silence. These are the sounds you might never have heard in the busy classroom bustles, but you definitely have while sitting in the silence of an examination hall. Therefore we get a pretty much good idea of the poet's awareness about the surroundings right at that moment. This awareness of the poet brings us to the very second line of the poem, "Something else is alive". However, from the point of view of the poetic device, the ticking clock is also a transferred epithet which refers to the loneliness of the poet. The poet is conscious about the passing of the moments and yet nothing happening.

The second line of the first stanza further manifests in the second stanza of the poem. This stanza, however, is yet far from presenting anything which is alive in the previous stanza. Any other physical noticeable objects are not around within the vision of the eyes, just like the absence of the stars when seeing through the windows. This absence of the stars furthers the idea of total darkness in the outside world on the surface level. But our poet is pretty much aware of something entering into that depth of darkness. This darkness is not to be confused with the set-up of a horror story – it is rather the impenetrable denseness of the psyche which is undisturbed and unpolluted by any other external disturbance. When you sit at the table to write about something, this precisely is the state of mind – undisturbed and in absolute alienation from the outside world. But till now the approaching entity is neither clearly visible, nor perceived properly. It is some thought rustling in the dense psyche. It is not yet a concrete idea, rather a blurry vision about the poem the poet is about to compose – just like the fox in the darkness outside. One just perceives it rising, but not quite clear right at the beginning what it is.

Then in the third stanza we find the fox's nose touching the twig leaf. The very concept of touching refers to the sensory perception of something. It is in fact the poet grasping an idea – the nose of the fox as he puts it. It is just the nose which is not the whole fox but the nose itself is the unique feature of a creature, The poet grasps to some idea which he is about to write, but it is still not the complete poem. Along with the nose come the eyes. Eyes serve as a huge metaphor here. In every culture eyes serve as the optical imagery, the thing which provides perspectives. Eyes provide vision. Just as the eyes of the fox, or any living creature for that matter, offers perspectives and options for movement, an idea also is followed by different perspectives. One just has to consider which of the different perspectives one would follow. It

is once again the poet's mind which has already grasped an idea and now contemplating on in which direction he should proceed with that idea. The final line of this stanza uses an epistrophe in the form of repetition of the word 'now'. This epistrophe, when read out loud with proper rhythm, reminds us of the ticking of a clock. Each ticking moment of the clock is a ticking of eagerness inside the poet's mind to express the ideas which he has just conceived.

Until now, the blank paper which the poet was holding was white as the snow outside. But just as the white layer of snow between the trees now bears the footprints of the fox as it moves, the movement of thoughts in the poet is also being printed on the blank paper. The fox leaves its trail in the snow and the thoughts inside a poet's mind leave the trail on the paper. As the fox moves nearer, in a shadowy form, our poet also gets hold of the idea he is dealing with. The idea may be shadowy as to describe, but it is a bold one. One may not be able to provide many details, but one may provide something about the shape – that is what the poet's state of mind at this moment.

However, in the fifth stanza, the fox now appears across the clearings, it is visible now and is about to get busy with its own business. Our poet too is now clear about his ideas and is concentrating on writing. There is no more playfulness or hesitation. The fox is about to move towards its target and so is our poet. With determination the process of composing proceeds just like the approaching fox.

In the last stanza the fox abandons its formlessness to all the essence of its existence. The fox enters into "the dark hole of the head" of the poet. The "sudden sharp hot stink of fox" is the complete existence of the fox and for the poet it is the completion of his poem with all the essences imbibed with his thought. This is when the thought takes the final shape, with a sense of fulfillment. With the fulfillment the poem and the fox become a single entity. Thus the title thought-fox gets justified in the end.

Stop to consider

Hughes uses a few peculiar phrasing such as 'coming about its own business' instead of the common idiom 'going about one's own business', 'hole of the head' instead of 'whole of the head'. What kind of effect do these alterations create?

3.7.2 Reading ‘Theology’

You must have been familiar with the biblical creation story from the Book of Genesis about the fall of man from the idyllic Garden of Eden as a result of the seduction by the serpent. The two early humans ate the forbidden fruit of knowledge and were eventually exiled from Eden for committing that act of sin. The rest of the humankind as a result became born sinners for the sin committed by the earliest ancestor, and sin from which only God the omnipotent can set free at certain point of time after death. This is the dogma of the institution of church. The whole didactic equation here is that the serpent which is equated by church with Satan seduces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, Eve in turn seduces Adam to the same and Adam finally commits the sin of eating the fruit sharing it with Eve. But in our poem Ted Hughes offers a counter didactic equation. He presents a subversive retelling. He wryly states that the story told to us is a “Corruption of facts”. He offers an equally plausible replacement for that dialectic equation.

Stop to consider

Why Fall of mankind from the Garden of Eden has been such an important matter? Does mankind stand opposite to an omnipotent force which instead of forgiving Man for the sin found more pleasure in hurling out of the Garden of Eden?

‘Theology’ is a poem of just fortyeight words consisting of twelve lines which are divided into three stanzas. An analysis of the poem also commands the analysis of diction right in the beginning. As I told earlier that the poem begins with an assertive “No”, it clearly intends to refute with the belief the readers already have had. This “No” puts a conversational tone and at the onset throws the readers into a contest of beliefs which they may or may not have. In the Book of Genesis the fall of mankind from the Garden of Eden actually enhances the glory of the Creator – the dogma of whom should Adam and Eve listened to, the serpent or the Creator? As the Fall is attributed to the act of not listening to the Creator, the lesson has been that mankind thus must suffer and must repent – thereby reinforces the power and glory of the Omnipotent.

But Hughes strips the story of Creation off any glory. His version is that there is no glory in Adam and Eve's fall.

In the second stanza Hughes offers his version of Fall. It was the choice of Adam to eat the apple without being subjected through a chain of seduction as the Genesis would tell us. Eve in turn eats Adam – which may be explained as the passing deeds of humans. And the serpent, with its natural impulse eats Eve. Here Adam and Eve are not two mere early humans, because the very act of deconstructing the Biblical myth makes us to reconsider them as the early humans. Adam is the agent of first disruption to a perfectly balanced natural state. He did something which he was not supposed to do. Eve eating Adam is again an act of continuation, which is metaphorically represented by the act of eating. Eve here is the agent of continuation of an idea once initiated by someone. If Adam did something wrong, then Eve the female figure representing the force of procreation denotes the further propagation of the act of Adam. The act of doing something wrong thus spreads further, causing further imbalance in the state of nature. As the serpent eats Eve, it is the act of consequence of all these. Thus the ancestors of the human race are not cast away from the Garden of Eden as the religious didacticism would tell us; rather they entered the dark intestine of the serpent. And as being the ancestors of the human race, they took along with them the entire society into that dark intestine where the society continues to live today. The description of the serpent we find in another poem 'Reveille' becomes relevant here – whose "coils| Had crushed all Eden's orchards". The serpent is therefore though not evil, yet an object which stands for in stark contrasts with everything in the Garden of Eden.

As if the reconstructing the Fall was not enough, Hughes then shatters the role of the omnipotent God in the third stanza. Here we find the serpent comfortably putting his meal inside his intestine, a natural process for it, however horrible for the creatures which were eaten by it. While doing so, it smiles to querulous calling of God. God here is no more the omnipotent power which guides or rescues the humankind. God is reduced to a helpless and powerless entity which is oblivious of these events or has lost power to affect the future. So far the language of the poem had been unpretentious. But the very word "querulous" in the last line deconstructs the image of God to something whose acts has no effect on the world surrounding him.

Stop to Consider

Is the serpent in this poem as essentially evil as the Satan in Milton's 'Paradise Lost'? Does Hughes here try to protect the reputation of the serpent by any means?

3.7.3 Reading 'Pike'

"The Pike"

Pikes are a kind of fresh water fish. They can grow to a maximum recorded length of 6 feet, reaching a maximum recorded weight of 35 kilograms. They have been reported to live for 30 years. They have the elongated, torpedo-like form of predatory fishes, with sharply-pointed heads and sharp teeth. Their coloration is typically grey-green with a mottled or spotted appearance. The pike's marking is like a finger print, each with different patterns.

The pike feeds on a wide range of food sources. Their primary prey is other fish, including their own kind. They devour fish up to one-third of their own size. Pike are cannibalistic; some 20% of their diet consists of pikes smaller than themselves. Pike have little respect for relative size and they can be potential pests when introduced into alien ecosystems.

"Pike" is one of Hughes's best poems where he describes the pike from recollection of the fish from childhood fishing expeditions in his native Yorkshire. In the poem besides describing the predatory nature of the fish he narrates two marvelously economical anecdotes and impressions from his past to substantiate the perfection this fish has attained as a predator and weaves them into a single theme. Here, Ted Hughes challenges the reader to view nature in a totally new perspective by exploring the power and violence in it. We find Hughes totally obsessed with the devouring ferocity lurking in

every depth and crevice of life. In spite of its cannibalistic traits the narrator's empathy with the pikes is so thorough and so concretely specific that the effect is of magical incantation. The pike even though it can be killed by man, is given supernatural attributions by the language that Hughes sometimes employs in describing them, and by his awestruck feeling of the mystery of their existential reality, so different from our own though constantly suggestive of the human. While describing the animal's physical presence he has also endowed its natural strength with mythic power in Lawrentian passages which are yet pure Hughes.

When, at the end, the narrator fishes in terror at night he is no longer fishing for pike, but for the nameless horror which night's darkness frees to rise up from the legendary depth of his dream, his unconscious.

Check Your Progress:

1. From your reading of 'Pike' and 'Thrushes' write a critical note on Ted Hughes perspective on animals.
2. Would you subscribe to the view that Ted Hughes is a poet of violence? Discuss the theme of violence in Ted Hughes's poetry with reference to 'Pike' and 'Thrushes'.
3. Do you agree with the view that in his poems Hughes unites admiration and horror to give a characteristic tension to his animal and nature poems? Discuss with reference to the poems prescribed in your syllabus.
4. Discuss with suitable illustrations from the prescribed poems Hughes's treatment of Nature. How is his treatment of Nature different from that of Wordsworth's?
5. Write a note on Hughes' use of nature and animal' imagery with reference to any one of the prescribed poems.
6. Write a critical essay on Hughes' language and style with reference to the poems prescribed in your syllabus.

3.8 Summing Up

Ted Hughes is best described in Stan Smith's words, "the noble poetic savage, warbling his native woodnotes wild to an appreciative audience". From all that we have discussed so far we can surmise that in his poetry Ted Hughes is not concerned with the reality of a superficial urbanity but with the material reality that governs larger questions of life and death, Nature, the animal world and the inner world of man. In his poetry he tried to go to the bottom of the metaphysical and spiritual questions about life. Like Blake we find in his work a progress from knowledge of the superficial seen from a singular, one-sided perspective to the core of the matter.

Beginning as an observer of animals in his childhood, we find him at first fascinated by their energy. In later poetry he finds a kinship between this animal energy and the vast reservoirs of inner energy that mankind has suppressed. Though his love for Nature began more or less on Wordsworthian lines, we observe that Hughes concept of Nature matured sufficiently during his later years. His view is a comprehensive one which simultaneously accounts for the Wordsworthian, Schopenhauerian and Darwinian aspects of Nature. He traces a close kinship between the ambivalent but powerful forces within man and the inscrutable and terrible working of the world of Nature. Equally remarkable is the fact that Hughes has dealt with many modern concerns, like war and violence, with an awareness which is lacking in many of his contemporary poets. No wonder then that Hughes was appointed the Poet Laureate.

3.9 References and Suggested Reading

- *Sylvia Plath: Journals 1950-62*, foreword by Ted Hughes (1982)
The Silent Woman by Janet Malcolm (1994)
- *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet* by Elaine Feinstein (2001)
- *Three Contemporary Poets* Thomas Gunn, Ted Hughes & R.S. Thomas, A Casebook edited by A.E. Dyson, Macmillan (1990)

- *Eight Contemporary Poets* by C. Bedient (1974)
- *The Art of Ted Hughes* by K. Sagar (1978)
- *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* by E. Faas (1980)

Unit 4

Ted Hughes "The Thought Fox", "Theology", "Pike"

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

4.1 Objectives

4.2 How to Read Ted Hughes

4.3 Important Poems of Ted Hughes that You Should Read

4.4 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

4.5 References and Suggested Reading

4.1 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Critically appreciate Ted Hughes' poetry
- Learn about few important poems by Ted Hughes
- Answer important questions relating to the poems being discussed

4.2 How to Read Ted Hughes

Edward James Hughes who is known to us as Ted Hughes was of Irish descent. As a child he got the opportunity to spend time outside which nurtured the ability of keenly observing the things in Nature,

which would later manifest in his poetry. As he turned seven, his family moved to Mexborough where he found an increased interest in animals. And at the Mexborough Grammar School his natural writing ability was encouraged by his teacher. It was there he got introduced to the works of T. S. Eliot and George Hopkins.

After serving in the Royal Air Force, Hughes attended Cambridge to study archeology and anthropology, which would harbour his interests on myths and legends. The year 1956 was pivotal in his life. That was the year he married famous American poet Sylvia Plath. With her encouragement he sent his manuscript to a first book contest run by The Poetry Centre. And he was judged the first by none other than Marianne Moore, W. H. Auden, and Stephen Spender. That manuscript got published as his most famous collection of poetry *The Hawk in the Rain* in the following year, which immediately secured him an international reputation. The book was published by Harper in September 1957 won the Somerset Maugham Award.

On a surface level Hughes is remembered for his animal poems. ‘Crow’s Theology’, ‘Crow’s Fall’, ‘Jaguar’, ‘The Thought Fox’, ‘Hawk Roosting’, ‘Pike’ all such poems with the tell tale titles, and then we have different animal imageries such as hawk, thrush, crow, cow, cat, dog, mouse, bull, pig etc. appearing in many other poems to affirm that belief. Yes indeed, his poems used more extensive use of animal imageries than any other poet did. However, they are not just some poems dealing with animals and subject to ecocritical critiques. They also represent his ideas on free will, reason, violence, schizophrenia, ritual, shamanism and other subjects from time to time. Here is what Douglas Dunn Speaks about Hughes:

I think Ted Hughes is probably a traditional English nature poet in his heart, but because of contemporary humbug, as well as the humiliations and upheavals of the twentieth century, and the distortions upon the imagination which they've produced - the

affront of recent history - he's been deflected away from an attention to nature and creatures, which I think is his love, in order to orchestrate feelings within a kind of Lawrencian ideology: it shouldn't really be necessary.

(Haffenden 1981 p. 33)

After a brief period of teaching and writing in the United States, Hughes returned to England in 1959. Soon in the next year his *Lupercal* was published which included some of his most popular evocations of animals. This volume of poetry established Hughes as a major poet. Unfortunately, if it was the time of his career success, it was also the time around when his marriage with Plath started to fall apart. Plath committed suicide in February 1963. Further trauma for Hughes was that his other lady love Assia Wevill also committed suicide in 1969. These deaths, particularly that of Plath kept on haunting, and Hughes started to live away from the public eye. The following few years after Plath were mostly spent on working his fourth book *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow* which eventually got published in 1970. This volume brought to the British public the dark fabulist tradition of Eastern Europe. Crow here is a metaphor for dissected troubled human selves. It speaks about the futility of life, all waiting for the execution by death which can be delayed but not for long. Here Hughes perhaps deliberately uses the harsh Yorkshire dialect in which he grew up. Meanwhile the void in poetic publication was filled with two other volumes *Wodwo* (1966) and *Recklings* (1967). Poems composed during his days of teaching in America made up most parts of these two volumes. Up till then the subject matter of his poetry heavily focused on animals. His interests as a result developed more towards Shamanism and Buddhism. Shamanism renders healing substance, unites the sublime and the beautiful, and illuminates the natural world as a path to spiritual experience in Hughes' poetry. In *Wodwo* on the other hand, we find the elements of Zen Buddhism which looks at life

In the year 1970, Hughes once again got married, to Carol Orchard who would remain with him till his death in 1998. He started collaborating with Seamus Heaney on two best-selling children's anthologies – *The Rattle Bag* and *The Schoolbag*. Then after we find him as a passionate children's writer whose portfolio would include *The Iron Man*, *The Iron Woman*, *Tales from Ovid*, *Season Songs*, *Under the North Star*, *Meet My Folks*, *What is Truth*, *Moon Whales*, *Collected Poems for Children*, *The Mermaid's Purse*, *Tales of the Early World* etc. to name a few.

Hughes was appointed Poet Laureate in 1980 and just before his death he was appointed a member of the Order of Merit by Queen Elizabeth II. Seamus Heaney spoke in his funeral,

“No death outside my immediate family has left me feeling more bereft. No death in my lifetime has hurt poets more. He was a tower of tenderness and strength, a great arch under which the least of poetry's children could enter and feel secure. His creative powers were, as Shakespeare said, still crescent. By his death, the veil of poetry is rent and the walls of learning broken.”

(Boyanowsky, p 195)

4.3 Important Poems of Ted Hughes that You Should Read

Superficial reading of Hughes would startle a reader on account of its apparent presentation of gloom and horror. The essential strength of the poet's voice, however, should disturb the reader less. Hughes' poetry, which has been marked for violence, embraces three distinct negotiations. First one is the 'energy' of an ancient hero as found in the 'Hawk Roosting', second is the 'suffering' like Prometheus which brings one almost near to that energy, and lastly the 'violence' or 'cruelty' like that of St. George who mismanages the energy.

Crow (1970) is one of Hughes' most important achievements. This volume has a central character Crow which borrows both from the

worlds of trickster and Christian mythologies. The core group of poems in this volume is considered to be an attack on the Christianity. After the death of Plath this book was the product of the barren period in Hughes' life which revitalised his imaginative freedom and creative energy. The Crow in this volume is an eternal wanderer searching for the female Creator. While carrying a hag across a river, Crow tries to answer some questions pertaining to love. In his public reading sessions, Hughes used to offer a narrative context to his Crow poems. It is apparent from his expressed desire to complete the work as he originally perceived that he valued these poems quite high and at the same time was unsatisfied with what he was able to compose as. According to critic Keith Sagar,

The Life and Songs of the Crow would undoubtedly have been one of Hughes' greatest works had that vast project not been aborted in 1969 following the second paralysing 'explosion of pain' in Hughes' life. Crow itself is a gathering of what could be salvaged from the debris. These fragments from the first two-thirds of the story have been widely misinterpreted because readers lacked the necessary context of Crow's quest, the 'epic folk-tale' in which Crow was to have been transformed. Hughes came to regret not having provided this essential framework in some form, and always gave chunks of it whenever he read Crow poems. But he declined to publish this material until he gave me permission to do so in this book.

(Sagar, xii)

Claude Rawson even suggests the ecological devastations of Crow are "objects of aesthetic delight for [their] own sake, as much as any plum in Stevens". (Rawson 1976 p. 325)

'Pike' is another famous poem by Hughes, taking the reader back to his boyhood when he was fishing in the pond of an ancient monastery. Fishing itself becomes for the poet a perfect metaphor for the poetic act. If we are to consider the pond which was as deep as the entire England, the immense 40lb weighing pike is an ancient consciousness exploring

the depth of the dark fantasies in the depth of the pond. The antennae of the pike projected from the known self of the fish itself into the darkness of the unknown hold the prospects of hauling consciousness to face whatever the horror and marvel that may exist down in the bottom.

‘The Jaguar’ is often read as a representation of a visionary. If we consider the readings of this poem by the poet, his commentary, then we find him celebrating the Jaguar as a nature-spirit replete with liberating spirit. At the same time there is the concern for the disturbing aspects of the baser nature of the human beings. In his essay ‘Poetry and Violence’ the readers are urged to look at it as the symbol of political trauma in the collective unconscious. Many critics, however, still consider this poem as a commentary upon fascism.

The Hawk in the Rain poems reveal us a man who is imprisoned in his single-visioned mind. Man distances himself comfortably from the surrounding energies and wandering elementals, and yet looks at them through windows. He makes no effort to come in terms with these things, rather cowardly runs for his life. The only defense he has is poetry where he hides inside and can defend his own ego with word patterns. This volume projects the eternal battle of the vitality and death. Three of the four basic elements which are considered to be provider of vitality are here found to be in alliance with the death – earth is not the life giving ploughland, rather a mass grave; water is drowning and full of down-dragging mud instead of quenching thirst; and air is not something one breathes in to live, rather it manifests itself into a powerful wind with the capacity to kill everything. Where is the hope for the vitality then? It is the hawk which perfectly masters the ability to effortlessly remain in the exact centre. This hawk survived the mud and blood of the trenches and bomb craters in the World War I which his father and uncles took part in. The effect of the poem is, however, far from depressing.

4.4 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

1. Read the Crow poems and try to find out the underlying themes in them.

Hint: Nature constitutes a major theme of his Crow poems. The nature symbols, however, do not act as preaching metaphors for people. People find their reflections on the natural animals only when they wish to. Another major theme in Hughes' Crow poems is the projection of contrasting elements. Different kinds of opposite energies of the universe manifest in the conflicting natures. Some people point out to misogynistic theme in Hughes' poetry as well. Hughes, however, doesn't speak ill or well about women. But his women are not respected to be sure. Find out these themes in the said collection of poetry.

2. Discuss the pastoral and anti-pastoral concepts of nature in 'Hawk Roosting'.

Hint: Anti-pastoral elements can be found in unidealised depiction of the nature which gives us a sphere of tension, disorder, and inequality which befit the Darwinian theory of survival of the fittest. Hughes' hawk is indeed a Darwinian survivor and predator. Nature does not serve as an idyllic place of pastoral writing anymore. The creation becomes a bunch of prey and predators.

3. Write a note on symbolism in Ted Hughes.

Hint: Almost all of Hughes' poems have symbolism. His animals are not mere living beings in the natural world, but they can be seen as revealing human emotions such as anger, sorrow, grief, betrayal etc. Hughes often uses animal imagery to ridicule humans. His close observation of animals eventually leads him to understand their psyche. His animal symbolism also represents two opposing forces – vitality and destructibility.

4.5 References and Suggested Reading

Boyanowsky, Ehor. *Savage Gods, Silver Ghosts In the Wild With Ted Hughes*. Douglas & McIntyre Limited. 2010.

Faas, Egbert, "Ted Hughes and Crow." *London Magazine*. X, 10) (January 1971)

Haffenden, John. *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffendedn*. Faber, London. 1981.

Lomas, Herbert. "The Poetry of Ted Hughes." *The Hudson Review*, XL, 3 (Autumn 1987)

Sagar, Keith. *The Laughter of Foxes*. Liverpool University Press. 2000.

Unit 5

Derek Walcott: A Far Cry from Africa

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introducing the Poet
- 5.3 Context of the Poem
- 5.4 Reading the Poem, “A Far Cry from Africa”
- 5.5 “A Far Cry from Africa”: A Discussion
- 5.6 Summing Up
- 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives:

This unit introduces St. Lucian poet, Derek Walcott and provides a discussion of his popular poem “A Far Cry from Africa”. Walcott inherits two cultures. His both grandmothers belonged to the group of African natives and both grandfathers were white settlers in Africa. This hybrid origin alienates him from associating with either culture completely. The confusion born out of this split identity has a serious impact on Walcott and is reflected in his writings.

By the end of this unit, the readers will be able to-

- *understand* the impact of a hybrid identity upon Derek Walcott
- *realize* the utmost tension occurred in Kenya during the Mau Mau uprising
- *acknowledge* Walcott’s critique of atrocity on humans for political gains.

5.2 Introducing the Poet:

Nobel laureate Derek Walcott (1930–2017) is an eminent literary figure in the Caribbean literature and also receives a place of pride among the contemporary English-language writers. Popular as a poet and playwright, he explores basically the themes of cultural chauvinism, ethnicity and political inequality in his writings. Although his writings are primarily concerned about Caribbean culture and its colonization by the Western settlers, yet, they appear to have a universal appeal.

Walcott was born in St. Lucia, a former West Indian colony of the British. Walcott was initially trained in painting, but he developed interest in poetry and his first poem was published in a local newspaper when he was only 14 years old. At the age of 18, he published his first collection of poems, *25 Poems*. From the very beginning, Walcott was successful in using European poetic form to testify to the Caribbean experience. This commitment enlist him in a prestigious position in the 20th century Caribbean literary figures such as Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Aimé Césaire and Maryse Condé on the French--speaking side; and Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and C. L. R. James from the English-speaking islands, as well as the Trinidad-born V. S. Naipaul.

Walcott's anthology of poems, *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960*, published in 1962 drew the attention of the reading public towards him. "A Far Cry from Africa" is included in this anthology. These poems celebrate the Caribbean history and culture, and also expose the flaws of colonialism. He has a number of anthologies of poems to his credit. They are - *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), *The Prodigal* (2004), *Selected Poems* (2007), *White Egrets* (2010), and *Morning, Paramin* (2016).

A major aspect in Walcott's writing is the addressing of his African and English ancestry. Besides, Walcott had a deep passion for travelling. He split his living between New York, Boston, and St. Lucia since 1950s. Walcott's writings bear testimony to this passion of his. Furthermore, his writings address Western and African culture at the same time. Arthur Vogelsang in this regard comments, "These continuing polarities shoot an electricity to each other which is questioning and beautiful and which helps form a vision altogether Caribbean and international, personal (him to you, you to him), independent, and essential for readers of contemporary literature on all the continents."

Among Walcott's contribution, *Omeros* is generally considered as a major achievement. This epic poem is a re-imagination of Trojan War in the context of the Caribbean. British poet, playwright and critic Sean O'Brien has a very high opinion on the work. According to him, Derek Walcott is "one of the handful of poets currently at work in English who are capable of making a convincing attempt to write an epic ... His work is conceived on an oceanic scale and one of its fundamental concerns is to give an account of the simultaneous unity and division created by the ocean and by human dealings with it." He further says, *Omeros* is "an effort to touch every aspect of Caribbean experience". Reviewing Walcott's *Selected Poems* (2007), renowned poet Glyn Maxwell commends Derek Walcott as a poet not so much to his themes as to his ear: "The verse is constantly trembling with a sense of the body in time, the self sung across metre, whether metre is steps, or nights, or breath, whether lines are days, or years, or tides".

Stop to Consider

Omeros is an epic poem by Derek Walcott. It was first published in 1990. This seventy-four chapter work is divided into seven "books". Critics often view this work as the major achievement of Walcott. This epic is loosely modeled on Homeric epics. Some of the work's major characters include Achille and Hector, two island fishermen; Major Plunkett, a retired English officer, and his wife Maud; Helen, a housemaid; Seven Seas, a blind man who represents Homer symbolically and the poet himself. Although the central narrative of the poem takes place in the island of Saint Lucia, there were scenes from the places such as Brookline, Massachusetts, Lisbon, London, Dublin, Rome and Toronto.

Unlike a conventional epic poem, *Omeros* has no main protagonist or "hero" per se. The narrative is divided between his characters and his own voice following no clear, linear path. These irregularities and its metafictional elements ensure the poem as a postmodern text. So far as the plot of *Omeros* is concerned, it can be divided into three main narrative threads. The first one deals with the rivalry between Achille and Hector over their love for Helen. The second thread is the story of Major Plunkett and his wife Maud living on the island of St. Lucia. The final thread is Walcott's autobiographical

narrative of himself. Walcott, here, advocates a return to traditions to challenge the modernity born out of colonialism.

Derek Walcott is also a renowned playwright. He is the winner of an Obie Award for his play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967). He is a co-founder of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in the year 1950. In 1981, as a faculty member of Boston University, he founded the Boston Playwrights' Theatre. Some of his most popular plays include- *Henri Christophe: A Chronicle in Seven Scenes* (1950), *Harry Dernier: A Play for Radio Production* (1952), *The Last Carnival* (1986), *Beef, No Chicken* (1986). In his prolonged teaching career, Walcott taught also at Columbia University, Yale University, Rutgers University, and Essex University in England. Moreover, apart from the Nobel Prize in 1992, Walcott's honours included a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award, a Royal Society of Literature Award, and, in 1988, the Queen's Medal for Poetry. He was an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Stop to Consider

Dream on a Monkey Mountain is a notable play by Derek Walcott that begged him an Obie award. It deals with a West Indian's quest for his indigenous identity and heritage. The protagonist, Makak, despises himself for being black. He is sent to jail for destroying things in a local market. In jail, he has an apparition of a white goddess who forces him to return to Africa. In his dream, Makak becomes a great warrior in Africa and is able to convince others to join him. He, finally, beheads the white goddess and wakes up to realize that his obsession with whiteness is no more. He accepts his black identity and calls himself by his real name, Felix Hobain, and resolves to return home.

5.3 Context of the Poem:

"A Far Cry from Africa" is set in the backdrop of Mau Mau uprising in Kenya during 1950s. Written in 1962, this poem enumerates the horrific experience of this period, during which a brutal massacre of human lives took place. Derek Walcott, while writing the poem, was living in his

birthplace, the island of St. Lucia, which was still a colony of Great Britain. Walcott, therefore, seems to keep a soft corner for the Mau Mau revolutionaries with whom he shares blood relation. Also, he inherits white blood as his both grandfathers were European settlers in Africa. The poem is a critique of the outcome of the revolution: the genocide committed on both sides- the colonized Kikuyus and the British colonizers. The poet also expresses his identity crisis and cultural alienation occurred due to his mixed racial ancestry towards the end of the poem.

Stop to Consider:

Mau Mau uprising is now regarded as one of the significant steps towards Kenya's liberty from British colonization. The Kenya African Union (KAU) under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta had been pressing the British government for land reforms and political rights in vain. The increasing marginalization of the natives in every aspect of living had forced the radical activists in KAU to organize a militant sort of nationalism against the white settlers. The largest number of the revolutionaries belonged to the tribe of Kikuyu, which is the largest and most educated tribe in Kenya. Also, there were some participants from the tribes of Embu and Meru. By the year 1952, the fighters started attacking the farms of white settlers and destroyed livestock. They also targeted their political opponents. On the part of British Government, a state of emergency was declared in October, 1952, and an aggressive counter-insurgency fight was given rise to. This bloodshed lasted till 1960. According to Kenya Human Rights Commission, 90000 Kenyans were tortured, maimed and executed, and 160000 were detained in the most appalling conditions. However, the Mau Mau revolution was overthrown by the year 1960, the reforms has started and Kenya became independent on December 12, 1963.

5.4 Reading the Poem “A Far Cry from Africa”:

The poem, “A Far Cry from Africa” contains three stanzas. The first stanza has ten lines and it presents an introduction to the Africa of 1950s witnessing the Mau Mau rebellion. The second stanza consisting of

eleven lines can be considered as a continuation of the first stanza. On the other hand, the third stanza with twelve lines mainly portrays the indeterminacy in Walcott, which is a result of his hybrid identity.

Stanza-I

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
Corpses are littered through a paradise.
But still the worm, colonel of carrion, cries
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead."
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy;
What is that to the white child hacked in bed,
To savages expendable as Jews?

The beginning lines of the poem portray the setting, which is African plain, referred to as 'the veldt'. The word 'tawny' literally means an orange-brown or yellowish-brown colour and 'pelt' refers to the furry skin of animal. The narrator, by these expressions, most seemingly calls attention to the drastic changes taking place in Africa after the British Imperialism was introduced, especially the Mau Mau revolution, which has peeled off, 'ruffled', the serenity in the atmosphere entirely. On the one hand, the Kikuyu revolutionaries are thriving at the expense of bloodshed; and the colonial settlers, 'the worm', are also intent on showing no compassion to the native Africans on the other hand. This brutality has littered the African landscape, the 'paradise', with human corpses. The statistics of the killings is what matters the most to the colonialists and all the wrongs are quilted under the pretext of colonial policy. However, the atrocities on the part of both sides can never be justified in any way. The cut throat competition for power results in the massacre of innocent human lives. There is no explanation to an incident like 'the white child hacked in bed' or the plight of the native Africans, who are subordinated only because of their skin-colour and tortured in the similar way the holocaust of Jews by the Nazis.

Stanza-II

Threshed out by beaters the dry rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries

Have wheeled since civilisation's dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain;
The violence of beast on beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity with inflicting pain.
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread
Of the long peace contracted by the dead.

This stanza begins with a pictorial description of a typical hunting expedition of the White settlers. During such a hunt, a group of helpers is employed to drive out the animals to open spaces by beating on drums. This reference to hunting may also allude to the traditional custom of group-hunting prevalent in Africa. The way an animal is killed ruthlessly during hunting, the white settlers and the Mau Mau revolutionaries are thirsty for each other's blood. The narrator disapproves of the policy of colonialism. He is not unaware of the sickening onslaughts of Colonization in Africa. His mentioning about the iconic bird of ibis, which has been found in Africa on a large scale, is most seemingly an allusion to the natives. The narrator realizes that the plight of native Africans have been wheeling since the 'dawn' of civilization.

The narrator, then, comments on the brutish ways both the Mau Mau revolutionaries and colonial settlers approach each other. It is considered a natural law that animals are violent towards others and most of them survive on the flesh of others. Similarly, human beings who proclaim to attain a divine status by reaching on the zenith of civilization, ironically, expose this sort of animalistic behaviour by inflicting pain on their fellows. In other words, human beings have been killing each other and ironically proclaiming themselves as civilized.

Stanza-III

Again savage necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again
A waste of our compassion as with Spain,
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
I, who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How shall I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

In this stanza, the narrator most seemingly talks about the distant observers of the ongoing tension, who accept this savagery as necessity and also well versed about the terseness of the happenings, yet, remains away from any involvement. The poet apparently compares this distancing attitude to that of nations such as France and Great Britain towards the Spanish Civil War. In order not to intervene in the rise of insurgency in Spain, a pact was signed by twenty seven nations. However, the Nationalists or Insurgents were aided by Italy and Germany and victory came their way in March, 1939. The poet, then, uses the animal image of gorilla to refer to the Mau Mau insurgents and calls the White imperialists, superman, in a derogatory sense. The Africans, here, represent primitive natural strength whereas the British is presented as an artificially enhanced power.

The final section of this stanza depicts the poet's anxiety as a person from a mixed origin. He shares blood relation with both the parties engaged with the upheaval. His both grandmothers are Africans and both grandfathers are whites. In his view, the struggle led by the Mau Mau revolutionaries have done such atrocities to human beings that their cause itself has become dirty. Till the end of the poem, the poet remains perplexed because he inherits element from both the groups. The poet is torn between his blood relation with the Africans as well as the Europeans. This hybrid identity divides him and isolates him from either culture. His hybrid heritage prevents him from identifying completely with any of the cultures.

5.5 “A Far Cry from Africa”: A Discussion:

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" belongs to the category of postcolonial poetry. The poem portrays a vehement criticism of the British colonization in Africa and its aftermath. The poem is set in the backdrop of Mau Mau uprising in Kenya during the period of 1950s.

Walcott is seriously disturbed by the brutish massacre occurred as a result of the battle between Mau Mau revolutionaries and Western settlers. The poet's both grandmothers were Africans and both grandfathers were white. Hence, this mixed ancestry gives rise to confusion in him about which group he should support. However, the poet is taking neither side and remained perplexed till the end of the poem.

Among the Mau Mau revolutionaries, the largest number is of the Kikuyus, the largest and most educated tribe in Kenya. The organization of Kenya Africa Union (KAU) started demanding for political rights for the natives and land reforms in vain since 1945. This gave rise to a more militant sort of nationalism. By 1952, radical members of KAU, mostly the Kikuyus, organized as a secret group, Mau Mau, began attacking the farms of white settlers and also targeted their political opponents. The British government in Kenya declared a state of emergency and countered the Mau Mau uprising with iron fist leading to a massacre of the natives as well as the whites till the end of emergency in 1960.

Stop to Consider

The expression 'A far cry' in the title of the Poem can be interpreted as a long distance or something totally different. Walcott's use of this phrase in the title of the poem seems to suggest that this poem on African setting of 1950s is written from a great distance since the poet was in his birthplace, the island of St. Lucia, while composing the poem. This long distance may also refer metaphorically to his half-African and half-European identity. As mentioned in the poem, the poet inherits blood from the groups, the colonized and the colonizer, as his grandmothers were native African and grandfathers were white settlers in Africa. Hence, the poet is far away from associating himself completely with either culture. Furthermore, the title may have another meaning as well. During the Mau Mau uprising, atrocities on human beings on the basis of colour transformed Africa into a land of violence. Africa is generally visualized as a land of natural bounty with rich cultural heritage. Seemingly, by this title, Walcott is suggesting that African 'paradise' has been lost and is a far cry so far as the present scenario is concerned.

“A Far Cry from Africa” begins with a metaphorical representation of the painful experiences during the Mau Mau uprising. The brutality exercised by the colonizers as well as the revolutionaries against each other has interrupted the tranquil setting of the country. The phrase ‘tawny pelt’ most seemingly refers to the natural, peaceful atmosphere in Africa. The bloody battle between these two groups has peeled off the serenity of the country. Walcott uses the sickening image of flies feeding on blood to describe the growth of Kikuyu revolutionaries and their brutish attacks.

The poem, then, draws attention to the backwashes of the rebellion. Atrocities on humans committed on a large scale by both the parties has turned the country, ‘paradise’ as described in the poem, into a land of death and destruction. This decaying ‘paradise’ is an indication to the turbulence in the history of Kenya. Walcott’s uses the disgusting image of ‘worm’ that thrives on carcasses as an emblem of ultimate decay, which he compares with the slaughtering of the natives by the western settlers. The savior image of the colonizers is contradicted with the disgusting image of ‘the worm’. In the expression, “colonel of carrion”, the word, ‘colonel’ can be interpreted as a pun on ‘colonial’. He sarcastically indicates that killing of human beings are reduced to mere statistical representation showing no compassion for each other.

Self Assessment Question:

Q. How is violence and cruelty in Kenya of 1950s revealed in the poem?

Scholars, at times, attempt to justify the presence of British colonizers in Africa to ‘civilize’ the natives. However, slaughtering of human beings under the pretext of colonial policies can never be justified. The image of the ‘white child’ stabbed in bed portrays the suffering of innocent humans having no affinity to this blood thirsty competition for power. Walcott also condemns the spare-no-white approach of the revolutionaries by this image. During the rebellion, even the livestock kept by the white settlers were destroyed. On the other hand, the massacre of the natives on the part of the British army has been compared to the extermination of Jews by the Nazis. This sort of

savagery of killing people of a particular ethnicity gets repeated in the world from time to time. The poet, then, provides a pictorial presentation of a hunting scene. Most seemingly, it is a reference to the British army searching for the insurgents. Reference to the ibis bird may be an allusion to the native Africans. The narrator realizes that the plight of native Africans have been wheeling since the ‘dawn’ of civilization.

Self Assessment Question:

Q. What do you think is the central theme of the poem “A Far Cry from Africa.”

As realized by Walcott, it is ironical that ‘civilized’ human beings thrive on exerting violence on others. Such a situation would have been natural among the beasts. This process of conquering others is the law of the forest. However, the ‘upright man’, who is on the verge of reaching ‘divinity’, is not justified to behave in the ways beasts do. It seems that humans end up with ‘inflicting pain’ in others and thereby taking recourse to the law of the jungle. Moreover, the poet argues that although the rebels justify their brutish ways as ‘necessity’ or need of the hour and consider it as a national cause, the cause itself has been littered by the bloodshed they are accounted for. The animal image of gorilla refers to the Mau Mau revolutionaries portraying animalistic temperament and the word ‘superman’ is a sarcastic reference to the European settlers and their Eurocentric notions.

Self Assessment Question:

Q. Comment on the use of animal imagery in the poem “A Far Cry from Africa”.

The final lines of the poem are indicative of the indecisiveness encountered by the poet as his ancestry is a mixture of both cultures. This hybrid heritage perplexes him to decide on which side he should associate himself with. His split identity and anxiety caused by it gives rise to the ambivalent feelings towards the Mau Mau revolutionaries and the white colonial government. The poet can take favor of none of them since both bloods circulate along his veins. He has been offered an

English tongue and cherishes a deep love for it and on the other hand, he cannot tolerate the slaughter of the natives whom he shares blood relation with. However, he is highly critical of both the parties throughout the poem for the inhumane happenings in the African soil. He writes, “I who am poisoned with the blood of both, where shall I turn, divided to the vein?” The poet is torn between his blood relation with the Africans as well as the Europeans. This hybrid identity divides him and isolates him from either culture. His hybrid prevents heritage him from identifying completely with any of the cultures. He remains in the state of indecisiveness, troubled and hopes for peace and harmony in the region.

Check Your Progress:

- i. Do you consider the title “A Far Cry from Africa” justified? Give reasons.
- ii. Critically discuss the central idea of the poem, “A Far Cry from Africa”.

5.6 Summing Up:

Derek Walcott’s poem “A Far Cry from Africa” deals with the theme of split identity and indeterminacy born out of it. Walcott experienced a hybrid cultural upbringing. He is half-African and half-European, which leads to a conflict of identity in him. This ‘divided’ self keeps him at length from associating truly with the Africans as well as the Europeans. As discussed above, this poem provides a critique of the genocide committed by the revolutionaries and the British army during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in 1950s. As he condemns colonialism, Walcott must have moral support for the Kikuyu revolutionaries at the beginning. However, the true picture of the rebellion has made him comment that the Kenyan ‘cause’ has been dirtied with blood. The poet, however, remains unresolved about his identity and is torn between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized.

5.7 References and Suggested Readings:

Balakian, Peter, "The Poetry of Derek Walcott", *Poetry*, Vol. 148, No. 3 (June, 1986), pp. 169-177, Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20600767>

King, C. G. O., "The Poems of Derek Walcott", *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sept.,1964), pp. 3- 30, Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40615401>

Trueblood, Valerie, "On Derek Walcott", *The American Poetry Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May/June 1978), pp.7-10, Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27775879>

Walcott, Derek, *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, Faber & Faber, USA, 1986

Unit 6

Derek Walcott: A Far Cry from Africa

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 An Introduction to Select Poems of Derek Walcott
- 6.4 Major Themes in Walcott's Poetry
- 6.5 Critical Reception of Derek Walcott's Poetry
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives:

It is expected that by reading through this material, the learners would be able to-

- *learn* Walcott's other poems that resemble "A far Cry from Africa" as far as the central idea is concerned.
- *appreciate* the critique of Colonialism in Walcott's poetry.
- *get* an introduction to critical reception of Walcott's poetry.

6.2: Introduction:

In this supplementary unit, the readers are introduced to select poems of Derek Walcott, which can be enlisted with "A Far Cry from Africa" so far as their central idea is concerned. In this context, two poems- "Ruins of a Great House", "Names"- have been discussed briefly. These works reveal the same postcolonial complexity and

provide a critique of colonialism. The next section deals with the major themes in Walcott's poetry with primary emphasis on the poems taken up for discussion in this self learning material. An attempt has been made to bring select essays on Walcott's poetry to the notice of the learners.

6.3: An Introduction to Select Poems of Derek Walcott:

Derek Walcott's poem "A Far Cry from Africa", as discussed already deals with a critique of colonialism. Set in the backdrop of Mau Mau uprising in Kenya of 1950s, it portrays Walcott's condemning of cruelty and violence on the part of the British colonialists as well as the rebelling Kikuyus. Walcott also expresses his intense inner tension born out of his hybrid cultural heritage. Due to his mixed ancestry, he feels like an outsider to either group involved in the brutish happenings in Africa and is far from associating himself completely with any of them. This dilemma in Walcott is expressed at the closure of the poem:

I, who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How shall I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live? (26-33)

The poet describes himself with expressions such as 'poisoned with the blood of both' and 'divided to the vein'. He is perplexed within this in-betweenness, not able to choose between African culture and his love for English language. Peter Balakian observes, Walcott "Wrestle(s) with the complex identity... his irreconcilable and pluralistic cultural situation as a transplanted African in a colonial English society" (170-71).

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" was included in his 1962 collection of poems, *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960*. Some other poems such as "Ruins of a Great House", "Two Poems on the Passing of an Empire", "Names", "Return to D'Ennery; Rain" can be

enlisted within the same category of “A Far Cry from Africa” so far as their central idea is concerned. A discussion of Walcott’s poems- “Ruins of a Great House” and “Names” is attempted below.

6.3.1: Ruins of a Great House: A Discussion

Text of the Poem:

Ruins of a Great House

*though our longest sun sets at right
declensions and makes but winter
arches, it cannot be long before we
lie down in darkness, and have our
light in ashes...*

BROWNE: Urn Burial

Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House,
Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candle dust,
Remain to file the lizard’s dragonish claws;

The months of those gate cherubs streaked with stain.
Axle and coach wheel silted under the muck
Of cattle droppings.
Three crows flap for the trees,
And settles, creaking the eucalyptus boughs.
A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose
The leprosy of Empire.
‘Farewell, green fields’
‘Farewell, ye happy groves!’

Marbles as Greece, like Faulkner’s south in stone,
Deciduous beauty prospered and is gone;
But where the lawn breaks in a rash of trees
A spade below dead leaves will ring the bone
Of some dead animal or human thing
Fallen from evil days, from evil times.
It seems that the original crops were limes

Grown in the silt that clogs the river's skirt;
The imperious rakes are gone, their bright girls gone,
The river flows, obliterating hurt.
I climbed a wall with the grill ironwork
Of exiled craftsmen, protecting that great house
From guilt, perhaps, but not from the worm's rent,
Nor from the padded cavalry of the mouse.
And when a wind shook in the times I heard
What Kipling heard; the death of a great empire, the abuse
Of ignorance by Bible and by sword.
A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,

Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.
The world's green age then was a rotting lime
Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.
The rot remains with us, the men are gone.
But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind,
That fans the blackening ember of the mind,
My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.
Ablaze with rage, I thought
Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,
And still the coal of my compassion fought:
That Albion too, was once
A colony like ours, 'Part of the continent, piece of the main'
Nook-shotten, rook o'er blown, deranged
By foaming channels, and the vain expense
Of bitter faction.
All in compassion ends
So differently from what the heart arranged:
'as well as if a manor of thy friend's...'

"Ruins of a Great House" deals with Walcott's critique of colonization. He expresses his rage at white settlers for their subordination of the Caribbean natives during the Colonial period. In this poem, as Patricia Ismond observes, "Walcott takes his first naked look at the violations and injustices of the slave past and is provoked to strong outrage, and to condemnation of its surviving ills" (40). The Great House can also be

interpreted as a representative of plantation economy thriving on slavery. According to Jamaican scholar and poet, Edward Baugh, “The ‘great house’ or ‘big house’, residence of the slave master, which had dominated plantation landscape and society, is an emotionally charged image in the West Indian imagination. In the poem, the persona’s walk round the ruins of a great house is the occasion for a probing into the midden of history, an action which rekindles a flame of rage at the history of slavery and ‘the leprosy of Empire’ (43)”.

The epigraph of the poem is taken from Sir Thomas Browne’s work *Urn-Burial* (1658), which details the ancient Roman burials and coals from funeral pyres in his native land. Walcott seems to suggest that the way British were colonized by the Romans, the Caribbean was under the domination of British. The poem also deals with a decaying great house, which alludes to the end of the mighty British Empire. The ‘great house’ can also be a symbol of dispossession and loss of dignity. Walcott condemns the injustice done to the slaves during those ‘evil days’ and ‘evil times’, which is finely expressed as “...the abuse/Of ignorance by Bible and by sword”. Bible and sword refer to the two ways (religion and military power) of exerting colonial dominance.

However, the poet’s resentment turned into compassion towards the end of the poem. He is, undoubtedly, outrageous about the white settlers’ treatment of the natives; but, a sense of solidarity with the whites can also be seen here. The British suffered the same kind of subordination in the past, when their land, the Albion as it was called then, was colonized by the Romans:

*That Albion too was once
A colony like ours,...*(CP 20)

Moreover, the poet has a deep passion for English language and the British literary tradition. The poet is repulsive towards the colonialist policies of the British settlers, but, there is a strong liking in him for European literary tradition. In response to this ambivalence, Patricia Ismond comments, The real sting comes from an anomaly to which Walcott is especially sensitive: that the literature and crimes of the empire were produced from one and the same source...” (41).

Throughout the poem, the poet quotes and draws upon selected verses from popular English writers. In this regard Baugh observes, “Another factor which motivates the resolution is the effect of the English poetic

tradition, on which Walcott draws, in an Eliot-like weave of quotations and allusions –Browne, Donne, Milton, Blake, Shakespeare. The poem is at once an appropriation and celebration of that tradition (43). Towards the end of the poem expresses a harmonizing tone of sympathy and fellow-feeling. As a poet Walcott aspires to inherit the great European poetic tradition. In the words of Narendra Rajan Malas, “The conflicting emotions and cultural in-betweenness are not assessed negatively, rather this very complex and ambivalent situation is used for creative purpose. So Walcott successfully assimilates the past literary masters of the English language with the various aspects of Caribbean poetry. *Ruins of a Great House* highlights this endeavour to adopt European literary tradition in the West Indian context”.

6.3.2: “Names”- An Introduction

Text of the Poem

Names

[for Edward Brathwaite]

I

My race began as the sea began,
with no nouns, and with no horizon,
with pebbles under my tongue,
with a different fix on the stars.

But now my race is here,
in the sad oil of Levantine eyes,
in the flags of Indian fields.

I began with no memory,
I began with no future,
but I looked for that moment
when the mind was halved by a horizon.

I have never found that moment
when the mind was halved by a horizon--
for the goldsmith from Benares,
the stone-cutter from Canton,

as a fishline sinks, the horizon
sinks in the memory.

Have we melted into a mirror,
leaving our souls behind?
The goldsmith from Benares,
the stone-cutter from Canton,
the bronzesmith from Benin.

A sea-eagle screams from the rock,
and my race began like the osprey
with that cry,
that terrible vowel,
that I!

Behind us all the sky folded
as history folds over a fishline,
and the foam foreclosed
with nothing in our hands

but this stick
to trace our names on the sand
which the sea erased again, to our indifference.

II

And when they named these bays
bays,
was it nostalgia or irony?

In the uncombed forest,
in uncultivated grass
where was there elegance
except in their mockery?

Where were the courts of Castille?
Versailles' colonnades
supplanted by cabbage palms
with Corinthian crests,
belittling diminutives,
then, little Bersailles

meant plans for a pigsty,
names for the sour apples
and green grapes
of their exile.

Their memory turned acid
but the names held;
Valencia glows
with the lanterns of oranges,
Mayaro's
charred candelabra of coca.
Being men, they could not live
except they first presumed
the right of every thing to be a noun.
The African acquiesced,
repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children say:
moubain: the hogplum,
cerise: the wild cherry,
baie-la: the bay,
with the fresh green voices
they were once themselves
in the way the wind bends
our natural inflections.

These palms are greater than Versailles,
for no man made them,
their fallen columns greater than Castille,
no man unmade them
except the worm, who has no helmet,
but was always the emporer,

and children, look at these stars
over Valencia's forest!

Not Orion,
not Betelgeuse,
tell me, what do they look like?
Answer, you damned little Arabs!

Sir, fire flies caught in molasses.

The poem is dedicated to Edward Brathwaite, one of the major voices in the Caribbean literary canon. His writings focus on the issues of black identity, cultural history of the Caribbean population and also the aftermath of slavery. Brathwaite engages himself with the use of language and typographic innovations. His postcolonial standpoint and his innovations with national language gave inspiration to the Caribbean writers in 1970s.

The poet visualizes the plight of the African slaves, who were uprooted from their native soil and transported by ships to work in the Caribbean during the colonial period. At the very beginning, the poet seems to suggest that the racial identity was forced upon the natives once they started their journey to the unknown world “with no horizon”. The burden of learning a new language for their survival is described as “... pebbles under my tongue”. These African natives were reduced to mere slaves, bereft of any other identity at all. Their past culture has been undermined by colonialist policies and forced them to a position with unknown future: “I began with no memory,/ I began with no future...”. “The mind was halved by a horizon” refers to the ambivalence in the colonized beings. They are influenced by the colonizing whites and there are remains of their pre-colonial culture also in their memory. Such a crisis of identity leads to psychological disturbance which is expressed as: “... that terrible vowel,/ that I!”. Walcott employs a simile of a fishline getting merged into the water body to describe how history of the colonized is sabotaged by the colonialists. The image of tracing the names on the sea beach with a stick, which is erased out by the sea again and again, may be studied as the natives’ searching in vain for their long lost identity. The poet also brings to focus how the colonized people from different lands are surviving under the same circumstances by referring to “goldsmith from Benares”, “the stone-cutter from Canton”, “the bronzesmith from Benin”.

The second part of the poem turns the readers’ interest from the colonized to the colonizer. He calls that it is an act of mockery on the part of British settlers to rename common places and objects in the colonies after significant places in their homeland. The colonizers were desperate to create a homely environment for themselves. They also left their home, luxury, family members in the mission of civilizing the

world, as they considered their colonial policies initially. However, they attained the position of master and their cruel treatment of the natives, their racial discrimination can never be undermined. Renaming the places and object in British fashion could never achieve the desired outcome. The Africans accepted and repeated the names, but their own cultural influence was always there:

“The African acquiesced,
repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children say:
moubain: the hogplum,
cerise: the wild cherry,
baie-la: the bay”

However, in the final part, the expression of “... you damned little Arabs!” is a derogatory addressing of the natives. It brings to light the Colonizers’ treatment of the natives. And, the African children’s response in the final line, in which they observe stars in the sky as “fire flies caught in molasses” represents their plight. It may be a symbolic representation of the Africans falling into the trap of colonial policies.

6.4 Major Themes in Derek Walcott's Poetry:

Derek Walcott holds a significant position in the Caribbean literary canon and also popular as a contemporary English-language writer. The poetry of Derek Walcott primarily deals with his critique of colonialism and crisis of identity in a postcolonial setting. Although his writings are primarily concerned about Caribbean culture and its colonization by the Western settlers, yet, they appear to have a universal appeal. Catherine Douillet writes, “...Walcott’s poetry and plays is a dive in the depths of the Caribbean past, present, and futures.... Walcott explores in his writing the processes of identity making in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean The intricate relationships between the colonized and the colonizer and the ways in which the Caribbean self embraces and is split between different places and loyalties are central themes in Walcott’s writing.”

Derek Walcott's poems, such as "A Far Cry from Africa", "Ruins of a Great House", "Names" bring into fore the colonizer-colonized relationship in the Caribbean. They express the poet's resentment at the colonialists for their inhumane treatment of colonized beings. In "A Far

Cry from Africa", the setting is the Mau Mau uprising of 1950s. Walcott vehemently criticizes the colonialists for the massacre of the natives and holds them responsible for this great turbulence occurred in Kenya. However, the poet is also not undermining the violence and cruelty on the part of the Kikuyu revolutionaries. He believes that killing of human beings have dirtied the very cause of the rebellion. In a similar way, "Ruins of a Great House" hints at the inhumane treatment of Africans by the white settlers. The great house is a symbol of those 'evil days' and 'evil times' of oppression. In "Names", the poet visualizes the plight of the African slaves, who were uprooted from their native soil and transported by ships to work in the Caribbean during the colonial period. African natives were reduced to mere slaves, bereft of any other identity at all. Their past culture has been undermined by colonialist policies and forced them to a position with unknown future.

Another important aspect of Walcott's poetry is the portrayal of the problematic of identity in postcolonial beings. The introduction to a totally alien culture results in psychological complexity in the colonized. Their identity is split between the remains of their past culture and the present cultural aspects. In the poem, "Names", search for their past identity is communicated through the image of tracing the names on the sea beach with a stick, which is erased out by the sea again and again. The Africans are influenced by the colonizing whites and there are remains of their pre-colonial culture also in their memory. Such a crisis of identity leads to psychological disturbance which is expressed as: "... that terrible vowel,/ that I!". This issue of split identity finds expression in "A Far Cry from Africa" as well. The poem expresses the poet's anxiety as a person from a mixed origin. He shares blood relation with both the parties engaged with the upheaval. His both grandmothers are Africans and both grandfathers are whites. Till the end of the poem, the poet remains perplexed because he inherits element from both the groups. The poet is torn between his blood relation with the Africans as well as the Europeans: "I, who am poisoned with the blood of both,/Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" This hybrid identity divides him and isolates him from either culture. His hybrid heritage prevents him from identifying completely with any of the cultures.

6.5 Critical Essays of Derek Walcott's Poetry

A large body of critical works has been done on Derek Walcott and is easily accessible from online repositories. However, in order to have a general understanding of the poetry of Derek Walcott, Peter Balakian's essay "The poetry of Derek Walcott" and C. G. O. King's essay, "The Poems of Derek Walcott" can serve the purpose. It is observed in King's essay that Derek Walcott's work clearly reveals that "a poet's merit lies, not in creating a medium denoted by a cliquish label, but in his power to grasp the elements of his own experience, and to show, by placing them within a universal tradition, that they are a meaningful part of the world's experience. In Walcott's poetry as well as his plays, West Indian reality painfully conflicts with that of the outside world, emphasizing each man's moral obligation to life itself".

Peter Balakian's essay, "The Poetry of Derek Walcott" brings to light significant aspects of Walcott's poetry. He praises Walcott's early poem "As John to Patmos" as an "ars poetica and a written vow" for its expression of "sacred sense of vocation and his moral and aesthetic commitment to his native realm- his island, St. Lucia and the entire Caribbean archipelago". Balakian observes that although the early poems of Walcott are simple in their intention and less complex so far as the metaphorical richness is concerned. However, they express "a remarkable maturity and confidence in them".

Balakian commends Walcott for his "Adamic ability to embody rhythmically and metaphorically the natural history of his world and transform it into culture making language". In this context, he refers to the poem such as "Origins", "The Sea is History", "Schooner Flight", "The Star Apple Kingdom", "Sainte Lucie" and his book length epic poem, "Another Life". He also observes Walcott's ability to build upon the "...traditional forms of English poetry without ever compromising his passionate energy or his language's inner music", which is finely expressed in his sonnet sequence, "Tales of the Islands". In the poems, such as "A Far Cry from Africa", "Two Poems on the Passing of an Empire", Walcott begins to "wrestle with the complex identity...his irreconcilable and pluralistic cultural situation as a transplanted African in a colonial English society". Moreover, Balakian has a very high opinion on Walcott's epic, *Another Life*. He writes: "The poem is at

once a paen to the culture of his island and the history of the Carribean and a dramatization of the morphology of the poet's mind. In his double culture and his divided self, he sees the music of language, the basis of metaphor, and the moral meaning of poetry...He has managed to do what a modern epic must do: encompass history, myth, culture and the personal life with the realm of aesthetic vision”.

Walcott also deals with “the tensions between the passionate life of love and poetry and his responsibilities to his domestic life and his solitary self”. Poems such as “Love After Love”, “Sea Grapes”, “Fist” and “Winding Up” bear testimony to it. At the final paragraph of the essay, Balakian comments, “It is difficult to think of a poet in our century who- without ever betraying his native sources- has so organically assimilated the evolution of English literature from the Renaissance to the present, who has absorbed the Classical and Judeo-Christian past, and who has mined the history of Western painting as Walcott has. Throughout his entire body of work he has managed to hold in balance his passionate moral concerns with the ideal of art.”

Moreover, in relation to the poems such as, “A Far Cry from Africa”, “Ruins of a Great House” and “Names” Catherine Douillet's essay, “The Quest for Carribean Identities: Postcolonial Conflicts and Cross-Cultural Fertilization in Derek Walcott's Poetry” may be helpful for students to understand the postcolonial themes reflected in Walcott's poetry. Douillet, in this essay, comments, “Delving into Nobel Prize laureate Derek Walcott's poetry and plays is a dive in the depths of the Caribbean past, present, and futures.... Walcott explores in his writing the processes of identity making in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean and the complex connections between Caribbean identities and the Caribbean sea and landscape.... The intricate relationships between the colonized and the colonizer and the ways in which the Caribbean self embraces and is split between different places and loyalties are central themes in Walcott's writing.” (1)

6.6 Summing Up:

Derek Walcott's poems celebrate the Caribbean history and culture, and also expose the flaws of colonialism. He explores basically

the themes of cultural chauvinism, ethnicity and political inequality in his writings. The issues of identity in a postcolonial setting is one of his prime concerns. Poems, such as “A far Cry from Africa”, “Ruins of a Great House” and “Names” bear testimony to it. Although his writings are primarily concerned about Caribbean culture and its colonization by the Western settlers, yet, they appear to have a universal appeal.

6.7 References and Suggested Reading :

Balakian, Peter, “The Poetry of Derek Walcott”, *Poetry*, Vol. 148, No. 3 (June, 1986), pp. 169-177, Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20600767>

Douillet, Catherine M, “The Quest for Caribbean Identities: Postcolonial Conflicts and Cross Cultural Fertilization in Derek Walcott’s Poetry”, *AmeriQuests*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2010) , Accessed from <https://doi.org/10.15695/amqst.v7i1.169>

King, C. G. O., “The Poems of Derek Walcott”, *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sept.,1964), pp. 3- 30, Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40615401>

Malas, Narendra Ranjan, “Bridging the gaps: A Reading of Derek Walcott’s A Far Cry from Africa and Ruins of a Great House”, *The Contour*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp. 41-47

Trueblood, Valerie, “On Derek Walcott”, *The American Poetry Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May/June 1978), pp.7-10, Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27775879>

Walcott, Derek, *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, Faber & Faber, USA, 1986

Unit 7

Seamus Heaney: “The Tollund Man”

Unit Structure :

7.1 Objectives

7.2 Introducing the poet

7.3 Works of the Poet

7.4 Critical Reception

7.5 Context of the Poem

7.6 Reading the Poem

7.7 Summing Up

7.8 References and Suggested Reading

7.1 Objectives

This unit has been designed to help the students acquaint themselves with Seamus Heaney’s first poem on a bog body titled “The Tollund Man.” Attempts have been made to highlight Heaney’s touch with his land and the love that he harboured for his countrymen. Seamus Heaney’s poetic techniques have been discussed in relation to the poem which would help students to connect to his other poems too. The unit will help the students to:

- place the poem in its proper context.
- understand the literary occupations that the poet has used in the representative poem.
- appreciate the poem in its totality.
- appreciate the connect between the poet and his work.

7.2 Introducing the poet

Seamus Justin Heaney is one of the living, major and well-known Nobel Prize winner modern poets. It was in 1995 that Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for his works composed during what he called, in his Nobel Lecture, 'a quarter century of life waste and spirit waste'. ("Crediting Poetry", the Nobel Lecture 24). Seamus Heaney is also a representative of Irish tradition and culture. His poetry reflects his love for Irish culture. His first volume of poetry is about 'digging' in the sense that the act of writing is for him an unearthing of his past and the historical roots of his nation. By taking his own materials and myths from his Irish background, he has also been able to achieve universality as a modern interpreter of ancient myth as significant for modern age.

Heaney belonged to a place called Northern Ireland where till recently violence was the order of the day. So, it is quite natural for Heaney to refer to that turmoil through his writing. Heaney's Irishness was made strong by the sense of his own place. Heaney, in his essay "The Sense of Place" says—"Irrespective of our creed or politics, irrespective of what culture or subculture may have coloured our individual sensibilities, our imaginations assent to the stimulus of the names, our sense of the place is enhanced, our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind is cemented."

Heaney was born on 13th April 1939, at Mossbawn, near Castledawson, county Derry in Northern Ireland. His father, Patrick Heaney, a Roman Catholic was a cattle-dealer and his mother was Margaret Kathleen McCann. Heaney was the eldest of nine children. Margaret Heaney, along with her sister-in-law, Mary, who lived with the family, formed a special bond with the eldest child. The family as well as his birth-place, Mossbawn, helped form young Heaney's personality.

Heaney's father, Patrick Heaney, was a cattle-dealer who owned a forty-acre farm. Patrick Heaney served as a member of the rural council. The two poems in Heaney's first volume of poetry— 'Digging' and 'Follower' refer to the poet's father. 'Digging' is about discovering the poet's connection

between his vocation and his inherited traditions. Although he has come away from his father's ways of living, yet he does dig on with his pen. In his memoir, *Preoccupations*, Heaney laments—"When I was learning to read, towards the end of 1945, the most important books in the house were the ration books—the pink clothes coupons and the green points for sweets and groceries." Thus from his early childhood, he made it a promise to stick to the pen and to dig with it

"Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests. I will dig with it." (Digging', *The Death of a Naturalist*.)

His first volume explores the transformation of the boy into man, farmer into poet and the whole volume is 'digging' in the sense that the act of writing is an attempt to explore the poet's past and the historical roots of his society.

The other poem "Follower" is an apology to his father that he is not, nor can ever be, truly like him. In the Irish psyche, ancestry is a potent force, steadying the individual and shaping his or her sense of identity. It is perhaps even more important in the north of Ireland. Michael Parker in his book, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet* says—"It is perhaps even more important in the north of Ireland where the Catholics are a minority 'in a province that insists that it is British', and where the notion was pronounced that British and Protestant cultures was superior. Though breaking with family tradition by working the field of literature, Heaney maintains his links with 'the energies of generation' in celebrating his forbears."(p 6).Michael Parker says—"Ancestry, like history and myth enabled Heaney to connect the current of past and present." Heaney is always true to his own place and he had a special bond with his place and ground. So in his poem 'Kinship', Heaney asserts— "I step through origins like a dog turning its memories of wilderness on the kitchen mat. ("Kinship", *North*).

The frequent tributes in poetry and prose to neighbours from his home-ground reveal the debt he feels he owes to them, and his desire to fuse his achievements with theirs. In "A Poet's Childhood" (1971), we meet Joe Ward, a carpenter and 'a kind of poet too', since 'making a rhyme is like making a joint' and an unnamed young girl to who came to darn old socks,

whose needle-work also provides a metaphor for the 'stitching and unstitching' of the poet's task.

In his earliest poem we meet Dan Taggart, Big Jim Evans and Henry McWilliams, the 'Achilles', 'Ajax' and 'Nestor' of the local 'epic' world. In the community in which Heaney grew up, Protestants and Catholics "lived in proximity and harmony with one another" and generally showed tolerance and courtesy to each other, such as that displayed in "The Other Side" in *Wintering Out* and 'Trial Runs' in *Stations*. In the latter, a protestant neighbour returns from Italy with a particularly imposing set of rosary beads for his father. Heaney won scholarships at St. Columb's college, before being appointed lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast. He worked as an English teacher at St. Thomas Secondary school, Belfast and at St. Joseph's College, before being appointed lecturer at Queen's University. He was guest lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1970-71 and in 1976 settled in Dublin to work as part-time lecturer at Carysfort, a college of education. He began teaching at Harvard University in 1982, becoming Boylston professor of Rhetoric, Harvard, in 1984. From 1989 to 1994, he was professor of poetry at Oxford University. Heaney, who now lives in Dublin, drew on his farm childhood and wrote about nature in his early poetry. In the 1970s he began writing about the political turmoil of Northern Ireland in such works as *North* and *Field Work* and *The Sunday Times* of London described Heaney as 'the finest poet writing in English'. Heaney has been writing extensively and it is Heaney whose poems carry a universal appeal to the problems of Northern Ireland. In 1995, Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

For Heaney, poetry has some legislative power. 'In his essay, "The Government of the Tongue" Heaney says, "What I had in mind was this aspect of poetry as its own vindicating force. In this dispensation, the tongue. (representing both a poet's personal gift of utterance and the common resources of language itself) has been granted the right to govern. The poetic art is credited with an authority of its own." In an interview in *Irish Times* in 1972, Heaney said—"I have been writing poems lately that grow out of words and ways of talking. " Heaney's 'etymological' poems are rituals that recreate the bond between word and root, place-name and sacred earth. Etymologist, in fact, means a

"studier of roots". Latin Stoics such as Varro during the first century A.D claimed that by discovering the original forms of words, called *etyma* or roots, the precise correspondence between reality and language could be ascertained.

7.3 Works of the poet

Seamus Heaney drew his poetic inspiration from different ends. It is clear that his ancestors as well as his neighbours helped him from his poetic sensibilities. Several names of his neighbourhood so appear in his poems, like Dan Taggart, Big Jim Evans and Henry Mc Williams, the 'Achilles', 'Ajax' and 'Nestor' of the local world. Heaney grew up in a community in which Protestants and Catholics lived in harmony with one another. This can be ascertained from the poems like "The other Side" in *Wintering Out* and "Trial Runs" in *Stations*.

Mossbawn pump, Heaney's birthplace, appears as a source for Heaney's creativity. The pump appears in "Rite of Spring" and "Mother" in *Door into the Dark*, in "Sinking the Shaft" in *Stations*, in "A Drink of Water" and "The Thome Road" in *Field Work* and in "Changes" in *Station Island* and in several poems of his other books.

Heaney published his first collection of poems *The Death of a Naturalist* in 1966. This collection shows the influence of Kavanagh's faith on Heaney, that the local could articulate the Universal. Heaney's own place, Mossbawn, provided Heaney with a source for creative energy in this path of poetry. Heaney, from the early collections, tried to combine in his work personal memories with images of Irish heritage and the landscape of Northern Ireland. There are also references to English-Irish and Catholic-Protestant conflict. His second collection, *Door into the Dark*, was published in 1969 and his early Collections were praised as nature poetry of the kind written by Ted Hughes. *Wintering Out* in 1972, *North* in 1975 established him as a more substantial writer, engaging with serious cultural and political issues of Irish identity in a territory torn by dispute. With *North* he began to explore themes of violent Irish history ("Mother ground/ sour with the blood/of her faithful") that he confronted with a more urgent and autobiographical emphasis in *Field Work*, which contains public and

political poems of great achievement. Heaney's other published works are *Poems 1965-1975* in 1980, *Sweeney Astray* in 1983, *Station Island* in 1984, *The Haw Lantern* in 1987, *The Cure of Troy* in 1990, *Seeing Things* (Collection of Poems, in 1991), *Beowulf* (Translation of *Beowulf* from Old English to modern English by Seamus Heaney, 1999) *The Spirit Level* in 1996, *Electric Light* in 2001. The increasing violence from 1969 onwards and the sufferings of his community, however, made it necessary for Heaney to probe more deeply and critically into his catholic origins from *Wintering Out* onwards.

And, his prose works are *Preoccupations* (Selected Prose, 1968-78), *Government of The Tongue* (Essays, 1988), *The Place of Writing* (Richard Ellmann Lectures, 1989), *The Redress of Poetry* (Oxford Lectures, 1995), *Finders Keepers* (Selected prose, 1971-2001) in 2001. Heaney's *Preoccupations* traces how "his roots were crossed with his reading".

7.4 Critical Reception

Seamus Heaney is generally considered as the next great poet of Ireland after W B Yeats. Like Yeats, Heaney has touched several aspects of Irish culture, history, folklore, song, myth and religion and has written a kind of poetry that embodies the experiences and emotions of the Irish people. But critics like Terry Eagleton say—"There are two particular reasons, among thousands others, why the comparison of Heaney with Yeats is inept. Yeats's conception of poetry was a fairly commonplace Romantic inspirationalism, entailing an irrationalism not unconnected with his politics. Heaney, by contrast, conceives of art as labour, craft and production, precariously analogous to manual labour, traffic with Nature mediated by verbal rather than material instruments." On the contrary, critics like Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson accuses Heaney of distorting history with myth. Henry Hart in his book says- "Mythopoetic poets are usually autobiographers in disguise, yet Heaney is not simply promoting Catholic and nationalist ideologies by linking his Irish roots with a prelapsarian Eden. He dwells on those place-names and archaeological names with English, Scottish and Irish origins, records a pastoral Gaelic past that perhaps never existed and laments social and personal falls that certainly did. While British planter plays antithesis to Irish native,

Heaney always aims for a dialectical synthesis. His allegorical symbols and etymological myths are meant to highlight the present troubles against a more fertile, unified background." Heaney has been compared with the great Irish Poet, William Butler Yeats, and in fact several critics have called Heaney "the greatest Irish Poet since Yeats."

7.5 Context of the poem

Seamus Heaney's poem "The Tollund Man" was inspired by a bog body that was discovered in peat in Denmark. In the Jutland peninsula of Denmark, in 1950s two brothers were cutting peat in their farmland. They stumbled upon a dead body and thought that it was a murder victim. When this was reported to the administration and investigations were carried out, it was revealed that the body belonged to the Iron Age, approximately dating it back to 400 B.C, 2400 years old. It looked recent because it was so well preserved by the bog. This body was named the Tollund Man since it was discovered in a place called Tollund in the Jutland peninsula of Denmark. Archaeologists, forensic scientists, radiologists, paleobotanists and even dentists conducted various studies on his body. Silkeborg Museum carried out these researches and the body after discovery was initially kept at the Silkeborg Manor for public display. Aarhus is the place where the naturally mummified body of the Tollund Man was kept to be displayed in the museum. Aarhus is the main city on the Jutland peninsula of Denmark. Of various bog bodies that were discovered in different parts, the Tollund Man become most popular. He was admired for the gentle expression he had on his face. Thousands of people flocked the museum to look at the body of the Tollund Man. Silkeborg Museum, in their website mentions that seeing the Tollund Man is "a meeting with the past- face to face."

P.V Glob, an archaeologist concluded that most of the bog bodies discovered were victims of religious rites, believing that the Tollund Man was sacrificed to Nerthus-Mother Earth to ensure good crop.

Did you know**Wijnand van der Sanden**

Wijnand van der Sanden put up an exhibition in 1996 at Silkborg Museum , Denmark where he brought together almost all the bog bodies discovered in northwestern Europe. He is a Government archaeologist and foremost authorities on bog bodies working in Netherlands. His book *Through Nature to Eternity: The Bog People of Northwest Europe* is a significant work on bog bodies.

Meet Me at the Museum

Published in 2018, *Meet Me at the Museum* is an epistolary novel by Anne Youngson. This novel consists of an exchange of correspondences between a farm wife living in England and a Danish museum curator. In her letters, the lady from the farm writes to inquire about the Tollund Man.

The Irish Rebellion of 1798 is another context of the poem “The Tollund Man”. Seamus Heaney refers to the atrocities committed on his countrymen during the Irish Rebellion in the second part of the poem. The Irish Rebellion was a major uprising against the British rule in Ireland. Among many reasons of the Rebellion, one was religious discrimination. As a result of the Rebellion, in 1800, the Parliament of Ireland was merged with the Parliament of Britain. The Society of United Irishmen who led the Rebellion were inspired by the French and the American Revolutions.

7.6 Reading the Poem

Heaney’s poem “The Tollund Man” has been divided into here parts. The first part has five stanzas of four lines each and the second and third parts have three stanzas of four lines each. Thematically, the division of the poem in three parts is significant. The first part deals with the discovery of the Tollund Man and his physical description. The second

part draws a comparison between the Tollund Man and the Irish people of Heaney's times. In the third part there is a parallel drawn between the past and the present journeys. There is also a sense of fruition as the pilgrimage intended in the first stanza of the first part finds a fruition in the concluding part.

The poem opens with the speaker expressing his desire to visit Aarhus so that he can see the Tollund Man that has been recently discovered.

“Some day I will go to Aarhus”

Aarhus is a place near Denmark and it is supposed from the desire of the speaker that most probably there is a museum in Aarhus where the body of the Tollund Man has been kept. Aarhus, for the speaker has more connotations than just being a site where archaeological discoveries are displayed and researched. For the speaker Aarhus is a place of pilgrimage. Hence, visiting Aarhus is as significant as going on a pilgrimage. Heaney introduces the subject of his poem with seriousness by equating it with a pilgrimage.

The Tollund Man brings to the mind of the speaker a sense of devotion and going to visit Aarhus would be the speaker's way of paying tribute to the sacrifices of a man who laid down his life for his community thousands of years ago. He intends to go there for the larger connotations that the sacrifice of the Tollund Man implied rather than the uproar that the discovery of the body created in the scientific arena. For Heaney it would not be an ordinary journey like the ones he had earlier taken with his wife, it would have the manifestations of a pilgrimage.

STOP TO THINK

Q. What does Seamus Heaney mean by a pilgrimage? (Hint- Does he use the word pilgrimage to refer to a religious journey prioritising spirituality or is the word pilgrimage used to mean a “collective historical experience.”)

Next, Heaney concentrates on the physical description of the Tollund Man. He has a peat brown head and his eyelids are distinct. Heaney says that his eyelids are like mild pods which signify that the Tollund Man was prepared for his death. His death was not a sudden occurrence and perhaps that is the reason why one cannot spot any restlessness on his visage. Perhaps he sacrificed his life and found contentment in it. He still wears his pointed skin cap.

“To see his peat brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.”

After the discovery of the body of the Tollund Man, he has been exposed to scientific investigations and experimentation. He has become a subject of study. Although he had died thousands of years ago, the discovery of his body seems to be a sort of resurrection- resurrection of the past. Heaney says that a grain of the last meal of the Tollund Man is still intact in his stomach.

“His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,”

This last gruel refers to the gruel which he was made to eat as a ritual before the sacrifice. Studies have revealed that the grain is similar to one of the grains that people in Denmark still consumed. The reference to the last meal of the Tollund Man is an attempt by Heaney to humanise the man. Interestingly, in the first stanza, Heaney in speaking of Aarhus as a pilgrimage site sought to distance the Tollund man- looking at him with reverence and endowing him with divine ramifications keeping aside the mortal details. In this stanza by focussing at the food of the Tollund Man, Heaney tries to bridge the distance. He humanises the Tollund Man and points out that he was just an ordinary human being (with all mortal weaknesses) as any human being of the 20th Century. His last meal was very basic. Heaney locates the Tollund Man in both time and place. The Tollund Man no longer belongs to the past, he is very much of the contemporary times. The landscape where he is discovered is described as a flat, relatively a

bogland in the countryside. The discovery of his last meal also speaks about the resources that he had access to in his lifetime.

In the third stanza of the first part, Heaney moves on to give more details about his physicality. The Tollund Man wore nothing except a sheepskin cap. He was dug out naked except for a girdle and a noose around his neck.

“Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,”

The reference to the noose around his neck indicated that he died either by hanging or by strangulation. Heaney waits a long time gazing at the mummified body of the Tollund Man- studying him and waiting for more revelations to unfold. Heaney says that he would wait there not only to gaze at the past and try to understand it but also to contextualise the past in the present. He would foreground the Tollund Man in the present and seek answers to problems of his contemporary times.

An ambiguity is introduced in the fourth line of the third stanza:

“I will stand a long time
Bridegroom to the goddess.”

The ambiguity arises from the fact that the reader is not sure whether this line refers to the relation between Heaney and the Tollund Man or whether it points out to a relationship between the Tollund Man and someone else.

The fourth stanza clarifies the doubt aroused in the last line of the previous stanza. “Bridegroom to the goddess” is the relationship between the Tollund Man and the earth that he was buried. The Goddess had control over him the moment he was laid down.

“She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint’s kept body,”

The use of the word torc which refers to an ornament worn around the neck also symbolises control. The earth, that is, the marshy land opened up to receive his body. The marsh absorbed him within. The “dark juices” are the peat coloured juices of the marshland which

preserved his body. Just like a Saint's body which is preserved, the body of an ordinary man is preserved by nature. The metaphorical goddess had endowed him with immortality by preserving his body all these years and then presenting him to the world in the 20th Century as a significant discovery and object of study. His body if decomposed would have made the land fertile but here it has been the other way round.

Stop to consider

The theme of fertility that Seamus Heaney uses in the poem is very poignant. It echoes the relation between man and land or man and nature that Heaney in his poems try to highlight. Look at the images related to fertility in the poem.

In the last stanza of the first part of the poem, Heaney draws attention to the land where the body of the Tollund Man was discovered.

“Trove of the turfcutters’
Honeycombed workings.
Now his stained face
Reposes at Aarhus.”

He describes the land as “Trove of turfcutters”, that is, host to many such bodies upon which much research has been carried on. The bogland is referred to as “trove”- a treasure store of valuable bodies. The land is a rich repository of valuable and delightful things here, the reference to bog bodies. The Tollund Man's body which has inspired the poet to write this poem is just one of the bodies. Numerous works and many experiments have been conducted on the body of the Tollund Man who now rests in Aarhus.

The second part of the poem starts with Heaney starkly commenting that he would commit a blasphemy.

“I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog”

In the first stanza of the second part, Heaney again brings in the metaphor of holiness. Heaney risks blasphemy because being a Catholic he reveres a Pagan bog body. The excavation site is a holy site for him.

He says that he would pray to the Tollund Man to germinate the land- to make the land fertile. He refers to different bog bodies discovered in the marshlands; all preserved by the natural peat. These discoveries are significant in the historical context of Ireland.

The discovery of these bodies bring to Heaney's mind the troubles in Ireland which persisted for a major part of his adult life. These bodies bring to his mind images of violence and torture on common Irish people.

“The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards,”

There were gruesome reports of people being hanged- of “stockinged corpses”- victims hooded with stockings to prevent sight. The sight of the bog bodies bring to his mind a particular incident when four brothers were dragged for miles out of their houses and tortured. Hence, the reference to their tell tale skin and teeth. “Flecking the sleepers” refers to the blood stained sleepers or wooden beams on railway tracks. The four young man were dragged for miles along the railway tracks and hence these tracks were blood stained.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Tom Barry in his book *Guerilla days in Ireland* writes- “It was of a farmer's family who had been shot in reprisals by the Blacks and Tans, left lying on their backs beside their open door.” (pg 135)

USE OF STOCKINGS TO HOOD

The victims were strangled to death by the use of stockings or the victims were hooded with stockings so that they could not see.

Importance of the metaphor of digging in Heaney's poems

Land and digging are important metaphors that can be found in Heaney's poems. In the poem "Digging", through a simple act of digging potatoes which is a farm practice of Heaney's family, the poet tries to establish a relationship between generations of his family. He speaks of a family lineage of skilled potato growers and how skilled his father and grandfather were with the spade. Heaney laments that he could not carry on this family tradition. However, he wishes to "dig" with his pen. This means that he would write about his culture, traditions and try to keep them alive-in this way he would be connected with the past. A similar metaphor of "digging" with an attempt to connect with the past is also found in "The Tollund Man."

In the third part of the poem, Heaney draws a connection between the sacrifices of the Tollund Man and the sacrifices of his countrymen. As he drives across Denmark, Heaney imagines the journey of the Tollund Man towards death- towards freedom shrouded in sadness. He imagines the man on his last ride through the countryside and the emotions that might have surged in him as he travelled to meet his end.

"Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbrel
Should come to me, driving,"

There are two journeys that Heaney talks of in the last part of the poem- one is the journey of the Tollund Man and the other is the journey undertaken by Heaney across Denmark. He likens his journey to the journey of the Tollund Man. He imagines that the love that he harboured for his countrymen must have been the same love that the Tollund Man had for his community people and it is this love which propelled him to make the sacrificial move. A similar love inspires Heaney to do something for the people of his country.

As he rides through Denmark he names places- Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard- locations where bog bodies were discovered. He feels that these bodies which have died long back are trying to tell him

something. They are pointing at the Irish people, perhaps making a statement. But Heaney says that he does not know their tongue, he cannot comprehend their language. Another interpretation of the last stanza of the poem can also be that while Heaney is undertaking a journey to Jutland, he does not know the way. He stops and asks passers by the direction to Jutland, they point out their fingers and tell him the way but Heaney cannot understand since he does not know their language and therefore he feels lost. He says that he would be lost at Jutland.

Check your Progress

Q1. Seamus Heaney uses the discovery of the Tollund Man to speak of larger issues like violence. Comment on this statement. (Hint: The torc, noose, rituals of human sacrifice, relation to the Irish Rebellion)

Q2. Why does Heaney look at the Tollund Man with reverence? (Hint: respect for the sacrifices, idea of pilgrimage, blasphemy)

Q3. What is imagery? Discuss Heaney's use of imagery in "The Tollund Man." (Hint: imagery, use of symbolism, Heaney as a modern poet, images of the body, bridegroom)

Q4. Discuss how Seamus Heaney establishes a relationship between the past and the present in the poem "The Tollund Man". (Hint: context of the poem, bog body, sacrifices of the revolutionaries, relevance of the bog body in contemporary times)

Q5. The poem ends with a sense of paradox. Explain the paradox in the last line of the poem. (Hint: refer to the oxymoron used in the last stanza, relation of home and unhappiness, not able to understand the language in his own homeland, alienation)

7.7 Summing up

Thus, in the above sections attempts have been made to analyse the poem "The Tollund Man." The technicalities employed by the poet have

been highlighted and the poem has been connected to a historical context. Seamus Heaney was one of the finest English writers from Ireland. His poems are significant for the symbolism and imagery that he engages in and also for the historical context that they are situated in. Even in the simplest of his approaches, we can read into Heaney's love for Ireland and the connection he tries to establish with his roots. "The Tollund Man" starts with a discovery of a naturally mummified corpse about 2400 years old and very appropriately goes to connect to the issues in Ireland during Heaney's time. For Seamus Heaney, it has been the process of "digging" with varied manifestations and a desire to resurrect.

7.8 Glossary

Aarhus- Danish town on the east coast of the Jutland peninsula close to which bog bodies were discovered by PV Glob

Saint's kept body- the miracle of his preservation in peat makes the Tollund Man a religious relic

Honeycombed workings- patterns made by peat diggers spades resembling a honey bee's store

Tumbril- open cart

Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard- sites (villages) associated with the discovery of bog bodies

7.9 References and Suggested Reading

Bloom Harold. *Seamus Heaney*, Chelsea House Publishers: Philadelphia, 2003.

Cavanagh Michael. *Seamus Heaney's Poetics*, The Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C, 2009.

Donoghue Bernard O'. *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, Cambridge University Press: UK, 2009.

Unit 8

Seamus Heaney: “The Tollund Man”

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Approaches to Seamus Heaney
- 8.3 Themes in Seamus Heaney’s poetry
- 8.4 Important Poems that You Should Read
- 8.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers
- 8.6 Summing up
- 8.7 References and Suggested Reading

8.1 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Develop a perspective on Seamus heaney’s poetry
- Find clues to how to read his poems
- Learn about important poems by Heaney
- Answer important questions about the poet

8.2 Approaches to Seamus Heaney

This section would look into ways by which the reader can approach Seamus Heaney. Heaney was born in 1939 and there are many emblems of modernism that can be found in his poetry when we look at his use of images and symbols in his poems. A poet of the twentieth Century, Heaney’s poetry reflected built up rich patterns of meaning. He was not a poet who just dwelt upon self indulged personal emotion, but also dealt with complex, allusive contrast in his poems. The process of

meaning making was rendered complex by his use of images, metaphors, symbolism, oxymorons and also paradox. Seamus Heaney believed that with true art, we can draw a line between bigotry and sham. He resorted to the use of symbolism in his poetry- symbols adequate to the predicament of the people in the society. In poems like “The Bogland”, “The Tollund Man”, the archaeology of bodies became a symbol which would lead him. In “The Tollund Man”, Heaney attempts a binocular view of the past and the present.

Seamus Heaney said in a radio interview:

“My evolutions, my feelings, whatever those instinctive energies are that have to be engaged for a poem, those energies quickened more when contemplating a victim, strangely from 2,000 years ago than they did from contemplating a man at the end of our road being swept into a plastic bag- I mean the barman at the end of our road tried to carry out a bomb and blew it up. Now there is of course something terrible about that, but somehow language, words didn’t live in the way I think they have to live in a poem when they are hovering over that kind of horror and pity.”

Although a modern poet, a reading of Heaney’s poems reveal much of Irish Romanticism. A reading of the poet would be incomplete if we do not take into account the influences upon him. One of the major influences on Heaney during the early part of his life were the Irish Literary Revivalists. The Irish Literary Revival was a flowering of Irish cultural endeavour from 1880s to 1920s. This Revival drew upon a romanticised version of an Irish mythical past. This endeavour of the Revivalists extended to the early decades of the twentieth century. In general terms Seamus Heaney valued the work of the Revivalists and contributed to unearthing of the Irish past. Beginning in the 1960s, Seamus Heaney began developing a regionally based poetry. He began conceiving of Northern Ireland as a viable region in which to ground his poetry and anchor his attempts to unify the Province’s divided inhabitants. Seamus Heaney was influenced by regionalism of other writers and poets, chiefly R.S Thomas’s Welshness and Norman MacCaig and Hugh MacDiarmid’s Scottishness. Regarding R.S Thomas’s *The Bread of Truth*, Heaney commented in the *Trench* (June, 1964):

“Welsh religion. Welsh landscape, Welsh characters throngs tightening his imagination and intelligence.... the physical features of the Welsh hill country and its inhabitants are presented in pungent detail, so that a self contained world gradually evolves in the imagination...the sensibility

that informs this work is instinctive, fermented in the dank valleys of a country imagination...” (pg 42)

The earliest influence upon Seamus Heaney was Patrick Kavanagh. Kavanagh was also a son of farmer and had spent the early part of his life as a farmer. Kavanagh’s “sense of place” differed from that of the Revivalists. Rather than myth, he drew his experience from rooted and lived experience. It was Kavanagh’s poetry that inspired Heaney to use natural speech in his works.

Heaney also acknowledges the influence of the American poet Robert Frost in his works. He called Frost “a farmer poet”. Richard Kearney in “Seamus Heaney: From Revivalism to Postmodernism” mentions that Heaney’s primary inspiration (as we are told) is one of place, his quintessentially Irish vocation, the sacramental naming of a homeland. Hence, the preoccupation with images of mythology, archaeology and genealogy and of returning to forgotten origins. Though Kearney seeks to challenge this notion, much of it is true from a reading of his poems.

Landscape functions as a repository of cultural and religious signifiers that must be read closely to determine how regionalism has powerful and potentially liberating effects on cultural consciousness. Landscape reminds Heaney of his childhood. Bog is not just the landscape, it is memory. Whatever was put in the Dublin museum, was a sign of exploration in the boggy area. The things found in the bog awakened the public and the private memory of the poet. Heaney’s ruralism is grounded in his religious understanding of his native countryside, which forms an essential component of his rural regionalism. The blend of the Pagan and Christian rootedness confounds binary attempts to categorise Heaney’s regionalism. Bog, for Seamus Heaney symbolised a “placeless place”. The bog had a physical entity, but it was not something which could be limited within boundaries. The more one dug into the bog, the more he could be confounded with astonishing discoveries. With endless layers and layers of soil, it was like an archive of lost/forgotten cultures. At times, the bog would also be a replication of the self rather than that of history. Hence, Heaney’s bogland is “bottomless”, it is an “unfenced country”, the bog “keeps crusting”:

“Every layer they strip

Seems camped on before

The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.

The wet centre is bottomless.” (Bogland, lines 25-28)

Heaney envisions entire Ireland as a bogland and there was so much to unfold from it's history. The deeper one went into it's past, the more one could unfurl and marvel at the rich repository it held in it's layers. The land is very much alive in his poetry- it watches as eyes do and it has so much to tell.

Seamus Heaney had an anchor in the physical realities of the Irish countryside as well as in the sophisticated work of the Irish nationalists too. This is another reason why Seamus Heaney is also considered to be a political poet. Readers can notice the tension in Heaney's works between an impulse towards personal poetry and political poetry. The political aspect in Heaney's poetry is evident from a vantage point anchored in Northern Ireland- a territory characterised by clashes between Unionist Protestants loyal to the British and Republican Catholics (Michael Bernard-Donals). Heaney negotiates very successfully between the two domains- the personal and the public. According to Seamus Heaney, this is the tension that every poet has to face- the creation of the aesthetic work in the face of brutal reality. It is between these two poles that the poet has to move dialectically. In 1974, Heaney wrote of his desire to be faithful in poetry both to historical reality and to the perspectives of a humane reason.

As far as the bog body poems are concerned, we notice that they are more politically charged compared to poems like “Digging.” Poems like “The Tollund Man”, “Bog Queen”, “The Grauballe Man” portrays violence perpetrated hundreds of years ago and a parallel revulsion of violence in 1969 and 1979. The bog poems are a social/political document of the later twentieth Century Ireland as well as Ireland in the Iron Age. Donals mentions:

“the reality of the situation is only approachable by way of rhetoric: regardless of the situation, one obviously must make an assessment of it and then react to it and those assessments necessarily how to do with ‘where you stand in the context of the moment. It could not be otherwise: You can't choose to be or not to be political, say more than you can choose to be or not to be human.” (pg 86-87)

Heaney's poetry seems to be most local ,hence the inevitability of being political. In his volumes of poetry like *The Death of a Naturalist* and *North*, Seamus Heaney attempts to represent and understand tribal revenge in Northern Ireland and at the same time liberate himself from it. In the words of Jonathan Hufstader, “In early poems about shovals as guns and frogs as predators, Heaney confronts

the task of self definition within the framework of a rural and catholic tribal identity. He then goes on to search for poetic rituals of self liberation, rituals which he typically hopes will free him from atavistic compulsions and be a healing balm for the troubled people about whom he writes.” (pg 23) We notice symbolisms of violence even in his early poems like “Digging.” In this poem, the shovel is symbolically replaced by the pen but one can read that there are references to violence inspite of the fact that it looks like a simple farm poem. The very act of the speaker looking at the physical body of his father and the energy that his father exudes while using the shovel can be read as physical attributes of violence. The shovel commits violence on the earth. The soil here symbolises Ireland and the act of digging can also be read as an act of violence on the Irish land. At the same time, the poet refers to his grandfather too-the reference to his father and his grandfather who are emblems of ancestry are symbolic of men through ages who have been engaged in various internecine violence. The young speaker is attracted to the work of the ancients- to the inherited tribal activity, but then, he chooses not to follow them. Perhaps that is the reason why the image of the shovel which can be equated with the image of the gun in the first few lines of the poem is replaced with the image of the shovel now being equated with the image of the pen. The poet makes an individual choice- he chooses the pen over the gun. He distances himself from tribal work and chooses to write- in a way, he distances himself from tribal violence, from shooting. The poet realises that he is not a hardman like his ancestors who can use the gun but he is a man who can exercise his physicality only with the finger and the thumb, hence the use of the pen. This interpretation of a seemingly simple farm poem like “Digging” portrays Heaney as a political poet. According to Jonathan Hufstader, “Gunmen profess violence, whereas liberal writer abjures it, but in Northern Ireland the writer, like the gunman, explores new depths of the violent experience.” (pg 26)

Seamus Heaney can also be approached as a postmodern poet. For instance, in the bog body poems other than reviving/resurrecting history, the poet also sounds to be self reflexive. Just like the layers of bog, there are layers of truth and it becomes very difficult to come to terms with the real. Heaney’s version of the “real” is presented in a very complex manner. With the bog bodies becoming signifiers of the ancient world, only assumptions can be made, the reality/signified keeps on deferring. The identity of these bog bodies are not a complete whole, fragments of these bodies are studied, researched upon to form assumptions of these Iron Age people and their way of life. It is an attempt at looking at history through these fractures and figments. The very mention of a museum realm presents a hyperreal world to the

readers. The bog bodies after being excavated from the bog and placed in the museum for public display become objects of art. For instance, in the poem “The Grauballe Man”, Seamus Heaney speaks of the body of the Grauballe Man as a piece of art created out of suffering just as the statue of the Dying Gaul in the Roman museum.

Irish Literary Revival

The Irish Literary Revival was also known as the “Irish Literary Renaissance” or the “Celtic Twilight”. It was a part of more general national movement known as the “Gaelic Revival.” It was a literary movement which spanned from 1880s to the first part of the twentieth Century. As a literary movement, it was engaged in Irish language, culture and Irish nationalism of the 19th Century. It engaged with romantic and patriotic interest both in the Irish past and present. Almost forgotten heroes of legends were exalted. Superstitions, customs of rural Ireland also found expression in the works of the Revivalists. W.B Yeats was the most significant figure of the Irish Literary Revival. He founded the Irish Literary Society, the National Literary Society and the Irish National Theatre. Other figures were G.B Shaw, JM Synge, Lady Gregory, James Joyce, George Moore, Douglas Hyde to name some. In the writings of these Revivalists, Irish songs, tales, heroic cycles of Irish myth and legends were revived. By the 1920s the Irish Revival put Ireland on the literary map of Europe.

8.3 Themes in Seamus Heaney’s Poetry

Seamus Heaney deepens the realm of death in his poems. Death is an eternal subject matter of his poetry. He speaks of death with two connotations- death in his homeland and death in the language of poetry. With reference to “The Tollund Man”, Heaney mentions in *Death of a Naturalist*:

“When I wrote this poem, I experienced a new feeling, the feeling of death.” (pg 124)

There are instances in “The Tollund man” where the poet gazing at the Tollund Man and unconsciously identifies himself with the ancient victim of ritual violence. The man who stands naked awaiting his burial in the fen of the Earth goddess seems to be the poet himself. Perhaps, that is the reason when the poet is riding to Jutland, he can imagine the

ride of the Tollund Man to his death. The poet too starts feeling that he is journeying towards his death just like the Tollund Man. This is a “sad freedom” which the victim/poet enjoys! When Seamus Heaney saw the picture of the Tollund Man for the first time in PV Glob’s book, it brought to his mind an uncle from his childhood whom he revered a lot. That might also be one of the reasons his acquaintance with the Tollund Man starts with a sense of identification.

Edna Longley, speaks of the Tollund Man as a scapegoat, “a privileged victim and hence Christ surrogate.” This idea of the calling the Tollund Man Christ surrogate brings in the idea of atonement and sacrifice- atoning for the sins of many; of sacrificing one’s life for the larger good of humanity (here, the tribe to which the Tollund Man belonged). Hence, the theme of sacrifice being closely associated with the theme of death. The Tollund Man was aware of the sacrificial ritual of which he was the victim and perhaps he had gone for it willingly believing that it would bring prosperity (in terms of fertility) for his community. So there is no stress on his dead face, he dies a contented death for the reason that he was content with the sacrifice that he was making. The Tollund Man was given to the goddess of fen as a yearly fertility ritual. Hence, the idea of sin or atonement of sins cannot be associated appropriately with it, however, we can read into the willingness to be sacrificed for the fertility ritual which meant that it would contribute to the prosperity of his community does make the comparison appropriate to some extent. At the same time, it should also be kept in mind that the primitive human sacrifices took different forms in different cultures.

Stop to consider

Jung in *Symbols of Transformation* departs from Freud’s Oedipus theory when he speaks about the relationship between the mythic hero and the mother. For Jung, the mother of desire represents the bottomless centre of the unconscious. The mythic hero must travel to the bottom to experience the unconscious in a dangerous way and thereby risk death. The victim saves no one but himself by symbolically dying. The bog in “The Tollund Man” can be read as that bottomless unconscious and the Tollund Man as the mythic hero who symbolically meets his death. It is the pagan bog and his submission to it is both sacred and violent. This is one interpretation of sacrifice that can be read in “The Tollund Man.”

(*Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones*, pg39)

The sense of the past is another significant theme in Heaney's poems. According to Seamus Heaney in "Place, Pastness, Poems: A Triptych" the sense of the past constitutes what William Wordsworth might have called a "primary law of our nature", a fundamental human gift, as potentially civilizing as our gift for love. He is of the opinion that the ancient/old is not an idea, it is more a quality of feeling. The old/ancient had the capacity to come closer to oneself, to understand oneself better and at the same time to alienate. This is the ambiguity of the ancient that Heaney contemplates upon in his poems. Then, there are other dimensions of the past that Heaney speaks about in the essay, a past which is imposed and an unconscious past which we choose. It is this past which gives us our cultural markings, contributes to our status as creatures conditioned by language and history. In his poems where he deals with the past, Heaney enters into the realm of the museum where the past is conjured. For Heaney, when a person looks at any ancient object displayed in the museum, he is transported to a different time. For a moment, the gazer is transported to a redemptive mood of openness and readiness. Heaney in his essay "Place, Pastness, Poems: A Triptych" says:

"When we gaze at an ancient cooking pot or the shoe of a Viking child or a gaming board from the rubble of a Norman keep, we are exercising a primary part of our nature."

In the bog body poems, Heaney highlights an interesting relationship between the bog and the bodies that are buried in it. The bog is exemplary of the place that swallows and at the same time preserves these bodies, in turn to be swallowed and preserved by them- the "seeps of nature" that "digest" the Bog Queen also become "illiterate roots" that die and are absorbed in her "stomach"! For Heaney, the bog was also an emblem of adversity.

Belief is one of the impelling forces in Heaney's poetry. According to John Wilson Foster, "Crediting Marvels: Heaney after 50", Seamus Heaney trusts so much in the marvellous that for the reader he is capable of transforming even the "sluggish".

8.4 Important Poems that You Should Read

To refer to a statement in Dillon Johnston's "Irish Influence and Confluence in Heaney's Poetry"-

“Poems arrive in the context of other poems read or written by the poet”
(pg 156)

Hence, in order to understand “The Tollund Man” better, we have to refer to some other poems of Seamus Heaney which can be categorised as bog body poems. In Heaney’s collection of poems titled *North*, four poems have been inspired by bog bodies. They are- “Bog Queen”, “The Grauballe Man”, “Punishment” and “Strange Fruit”. A cursory reading of some poems have been provided in the following segments which will help the readers comprehend “The Tollund Man” better.

Bogland: Political background

Heaney’s bog poetry was inspired by P.V Glob’s *The Bog People*

In 1972, when Heaney published *Wintering Out*, Northern Irish violence had already escalated; in 1969 British troops had been sent to Belfast and Derry; in 1971 internment without Jury trial had begun in Ulster, with over 1500 people interned in the first year. On 30 January, 1972, “Bloody Sunday” British paratroopers fired upon Derry Civil Rights marchers, killing 13 and sectarian violence reached new heights. No one living in Northern Ireland went unscathed by them; eventually everyone on both the sides knew a friend or family whose life had been changed or ended by them. In August 1972, Heaney and his family left Belfast and moved to the Republic of Ireland, where they lived for four years in Glanmore, County Wicklow, in a gate keepers cottage attached to the Synge estate and rented to them by its owner. Heaney resigned his lectureship at Queen’s University and committed himself fully to the writing of poetry.

8.4.1 Bog Queen

In “Bog Queen”, Heaney portrays a bog body that speaks for herself. Interestingly, this is one of its kind where a corpse speaks for itself, what it would say about its posthumous state. This body was discovered in 1781 by a turfcutter on the Moira Estate, south of Belfast and sold to Lady Moira. In this poem, the corpse speaks with objectivity about her own disintegration. The poem opens with the bog queen stating “I lay waiting”, thereby signifying a process of delay; as if the

body was aware of it's own disintegration and therefore was waiting to be discovered by humans so that she would then be preserved by them or at least humans would be able to identify her. There is no violence that she speaks about thereby indicating that unlike the Tollund Man, her death was natural. The bog queen describes her natural process of decay due to the change of seasons and the effect of winter on her degenerating body:

“through my fabrics and skins

the seeps of winter

digested me,

the illiterate roots”

These lines tell us that unlike the Tollund Man who was naked, the bog queen had clothes on her body when she died but these clothes degenerated with the passage of time. For ten stanzas, she lies undisturbed by human intervention. She does not object to being exhumed. She waits patiently for the day when she would be discovered. Heaney uses anatomical terms- stomach, socket, brain, pelvis, diadem to make an impression of the objectivity with which the bog queen speaks about her posthumous state.

This poem is another example from Seamus Heaney's oeuvre of poetry which conjures the past. The poem asserts that in spite of everything, something of the past is always preserved and waiting to be (re)discovered. In spite of the “turf face and demesne wall”, “heathery levels”, “glass-toothed stone”, “the seeps of winter”, the bog queen lay waiting because she believed that she would be discovered. The bog queen here symbolises a past waiting to unfurl. A sense of hope accompanies the process of decay; perhaps this is where the ambiguity of the poem lies.

8.4.2 The Grauballe Man

The Grauballe man was another bog body. It was discovered by peat cutters in April 1952 near Grauballe in Denmark. Unlike the Tollund Man whose face revealed a sense of contentment, the Grauballe Man's visage showed signs of violence. The body revealed an expression of inner sadness:

“weep the black river of himself.”

It had a slashed throat of human sacrifice and the skin seemed tanned. Heaney makes use of a number of similes to describe the Grauballe Man- bog oak, basalt egg, swan's foot, swamp root, ridge and mussel. Heaney says that he looks like a child new born but one that has had a difficult birth:

“bruised like a forceps baby.”

The confrontation with primitive violence which Heaney starts in “The Tollund Man” continues in “The Grauballe Man.” He remembers seeing the first picture of the Grauballe man in P.V Glob's book. The look of the Grauballe Man was etched in his memory forever because of the violence that was evident on his face. This violence on the face of the Grauballe Man is emblematic of the violence in Ireland. It reminds Heaney of the turbulent times on the Irish soil. The Grauballe Man represents all those bodies who have been victims of violence:

“with actual weight

of each hooded victim,

slashed and dumped.”

The last lines of the poem give an impression of the Grauballe Man being taken out from the ancient times and slashed and dumped into the contemporary to represent violence since ages on the Irish soil. Through the shocking closing lines of the poem, Heaney overturns the objectivity of history by the insult of the actual. Just like the poem “The Tollund Man” where we can read into the confrontation of the past and the present, in “The Grauballe Man” too such a temporal confrontation takes place but with slightly different ramifications. While the Tollund Man's sacrifice brought to mind the sacrifices of the Irish countrymen, the violence on the body of the Grauballe Man brought to mind the internecine violence in Ireland. The head of the Grauballe Man is not in proper shape and this is what troubles the poet. This improper head shape brings to his mind recurrent scenes of violence and that is what disturbs him. Like the statue of Dying Gaul- an art made out of suffering, Heaney too creates art out of suffering in “The Grauballe Man”.

8.4.3 Punishment

Heaney's poem “Punishment” is based on the preserved mummified body of the Windeby Girl discovered in the year 1952. He begins the poem with third person narration and describes atrocities committed on

the fourteen year old Windeby Girl. She was stripped, punished and her body mutilated. It was deciphered that she was punished for committing adultery. He calls her the “little adultress”. He observes the fragile body of the girl as she is moved to the bog area. Before being taken to the bog area, she is stripped and her body inflicted with violence for transgressing the tribal code. He imagines all that she must have endured and how she must have felt while being dragged to the bog area. Heaney compares her to a “barked sapling” because she is young. He empathises with the girl from the beginning of the poem:

“I can feel the tug
of the halter a the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.”

The poem moves from subjectivity to objectivity. In the opening lines, he can feel the atrocities on the body of the Windeby Girl. Then, he compares her in a most controversial manner to the plight of the young Irish Girls and the punishment that they had to endure if they were found to have a relationship with British soldiers. Heaney says that she is “sister” to the Catholic women whose heads were shaved and who themselves were tarred for fraternizing in the 70s with British soldiers:

“her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring
to store
the memories of love.”

She becomes one of these Catholic women who endure punishment for the sake of love.

In the last part of the poem, Heaney starts distancing from the Windeby Girl. He is no longer a person who can feel the halter at the nape of the young girl but he is now the “artful voyeur”, a silent onlooker who

“...have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,

cauled in tar,

wept by the railings,”

With “Punishment”, Heaney’s archaeology of persons becomes an anthropology of the present. It is as if he is trying to coincide the past and the present with a message which seems to tell us- dig however deep, the person who rises to the surface (from a distant past), is the one you recognise from your own life (in the present).

8.4.4 Strange Fruit

“Strange Fruit” is one of the last of Seamus Heaney’s bog poems. The eagerness and spirit with which he perceives The Tollund Man seems to change by the time Heaney writes his last poem on bog bodies. This poem is based on the discovery of a girl in the bog in 1942 near Denmark. When the body of this girl was discovered, she showed signs of violence on her body- her nose was broken and her eyeholes were blank. Heaney describes her as “perishable treasure.” He makes use of a number of images of fruits and vegetables which are rotten and have become inedible. Her head is an “exhumed gourd”, the skin on her face is as dried plum, her head is distorted by the violence that was inflicted on her. The skull shows evidences of personal violence.

Then Heaney refers to writings of Greek historians of the First Century BC- Diadorus and Siculus. He feels distanced by the present that he witnesses. He had read these historians but found it difficult to understand their work. It was with “gradual ease” that he understood them. This nameless girl was murdered. Heaney is disturbed by the violence that can be inflicted upon an individual. This poem can also be read as a sequel to “Punishment”. The reasons of the girl’s death have not been mentioned, her life has been rendered insignificant and hence she has been forgotten. There are no historical annals which speak of her. Yet, there is a defiance, a retaliation that the girl exhibits:

“Beheaded girl, outstaring axe

And beatification, outstaring”

It is this retaliation that the poet admires and this arouses in him reverence for the girl- an artistic reverence. The reverence that the poet speaks of in “Strange Fruit” is very much different from the reverence that he had for the “Tollund Man”. This reverence has artistic

connotations rather than religious undertones. He does not talk of praying to the girl, but it is artistic voyeurism that she inspires in him:

“What had begun to feel like reverence.”

8.4.5 Digging

The poem “Digging” does not fall in the category of the bog body poems. A reading of this poem is significant to understand Seamus Heaney’s sense of tradition and the metaphor of digging which is a common metaphor running through his bog body poems.

Though the title of the poem “Digging” seems to be dull, Seamus Heaney presents the process of digging as a complex one, one that involves a lot of artistry. The poet can hear his father digging with the shovel in the flowerbeds. This image of his father reminds him of his grandfather who was a turfcutter. He remembers taking milk to his grandfather as a child when his grandfather was digging- the grandfather drank the milk and straightaway resumed work- embodying determination and hard work even for a dull and repetitive act of digging. This is family lineage inspires the poet. He marvels at the way his father can use the shovel, the energy that he exudes while doing so. Unfortunately, the poet cannot continue his family lineage. The disturbing thing in the poem “Digging” is that the child is offered only two options of instrument- one is the spade and the other is the gun. Choosing the spade would mean to choose the traditional occupation of farming and choosing the gun would mean to take up arms and go for Republican militarism. Initially, it is the gun that lures him:

“Between the finger

And my thumb

The squat pen rests, snug

as a gun.”

By the time we reach the end of the poem, the child has decided to go for the pen- use the pen as an instrument to dig his culture and traditions and write about them. He decides to use the pen as spade because he is not adept at farming. Though he is not an expert in the art of digging the soil, he can still honour his culture through values he has learnt from his family. He resolves to value his tradition. The poem starts with the

physical act of digging and proceeds to give metaphorical dimensions to this act of digging.

In the “Poet’s Chair”, Heaney envisions his poem as a ploughshare as he watches his father ploughing. Just as a ploughman who finishes a furrow to move on to a next one, the poet too moves from one verse to the next.

8.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

Q1. “Heaney found in the victims of ancient sacrifice parallels with the many lives lost during the Irish Troubles.” Explain with reference to the bog poems.

(Hint- Tollund Man as a ritualistic sacrifice- primitive times- significance of sacrifice in primitive times- contemporary problems- Irish troubles- victims of Irish troubles)

Q2. Explain how Seamus Heaney uses the link between the past and the present in his poems.

(Hint- Past- Heaney’s approach to history- childhood memories- primitive times- killings- Irish troubles- similarities between the ancient times and Heaney’s time-attitude to the Troubles)

Q3. Discuss Seamus Heaney’s regionalism with reference to his poetry.

(Hint- Irish landscape- memory- significance of Irish landscape for Heaney- influences of other regionalisms on Heaney-bogland- significance of bogland)

Q4. Discuss how Seamus Heaney uses the bogland as symbol of death and life.

(Hint- Bogland- significance of the bogland- bogland as imagery- resurrection- revival of history- significance of history in contemporary times- dead bodies- significance of bog bodies- their relevance- life)

Q5. “There is an element of hope in the resurrection of the bog bodies.” Comment.

(Hint- Revival of history- Tollund Man- his sacrifice- positivity- objectivity of the Bog Queen- attitude of the girl in Strange Fruit against atrocities- element of hope amidst the violence)

Q6. “Seamus Heaney’s bog poems ostensibly represent his human protest against violence, embedded in the cruel images of ritual killing.” Explain.

(Hint- description of bog bodies inflicted with violence- images used to portray violence- reference to individual bog body poems- voice of protest- blasphemy- Strange Fruit- defiant attitude of the young girl- protest in the form of objectivity maintained in the description of the deteriorating body by the Bog queen- Digging-taking up the pen against tradition- individual choice)

Q7. “Seamus Heaney universalises his personal experience through use of imagery and evocative language in his poems.” Express your opinion on his statement by referring to his bog poems.

(Hint- Heaney’s regionalism- rootedness-personal experience- memory-childhood- political poet- imagery- universal symbols- bogland as symbolic- reference to individual bog poems- how language and imagery make the personal experience universal)

Q8. Discuss how Seamus Heaney transforms the familiar and the mundane into a significant subject of poetry through use of powerful language.

(Hint- Familiar act of turfcutters, potato diggers- familiar bogland, farmland landscape- familiarity with the Troubles for the Irish People-museum as a place of preserving historical and cultural artefacts- use of imagery to familiarise and at the same time defamiliarise with the mundane- powerful language- use of metaphors to defamiliarize the mundane)

Q9. Situate your understanding/analysis of “The Tollund Man” against other bog body poems written by Seamus Heaney.

(Hint- themes of bog body poems- analysis of “The Tollund Man”- reference to other bog body poems- similarities, differences found in themes, metaphors, symbolism)

Q10. Discuss Seamus Heaney as a post modern poet.

(Hint- Irish Romanticism in Seamus Heaney’s poetry- characteristics of post modernism- locating the post modern features in Heaney’s poetry)

8.6 Summing Up

In this unit you have learnt about the features of Seamus Heaney’s Poetry and how to approach him. Further, you have gained some knowledge about some of his important poems. Further, you have

also found clues to answer some of the important questions about Heaney's poetry and the specific poem under discussion. The list of resources on the poet, given below, will help you navigate your study and broaden your understanding of the poet.

8.7 Suggested Reading

Bloom Harold. *Seamus Heaney*, Chelsea House Publishers: Philadelphia, 2003.

Cavanagh Michael. *Seamus Heaney's Poetics*, The Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C, 2009.

Donals Michael Bernard. "Governing the Tongue: Seamus Heaney's (A)Political Aesthetic", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol 20, No 2 (Dec 1994), pp 75-88.

Donoghue Bernard O'. *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, Cambridge University Press: UK, 2009.

Heaney Seamus. "Place, Pastness, Poems: A Triptych". *Salmagundi*. No 68/69, *The Literary Imagination and the Sense of the Past*, (Fall 1985-Winter 1986) pp 30-47.

Hufstader Jonathan. *Tongue of Water Teeth of Stones*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1999.

Russell Richard Rankin. "Seamus Heaney's Regionalism", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol 54, No 1 (Spring 2008) pp 47-74.

Kearney Richard. "Heaney and Homecoming", *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester 1988), pp 113-122.

Vendler Helen. *Seamus Heaney*, Harper Collins: London, 1998.

Unit 9

Carol Ann Duffy: "Warming Her Pearls"

Unit Structure:

- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Introducing the Poet
- 9.3 Her Works
- 9.4 Critical Reception
- 9.5 Context of the Poem
- 9.6 Reading the Poem
- 9.7 Summing Up
- 9.8 References & Suggested Readings

9.1 Objectives:

This unit will familiarise you with Carol Ann Duffy's poem "Warming her Pearls" (1987) as a representative text of late-twentieth-century British poetry and also as the marker of a significant shift in the history of women's poetry in English. The unit addresses the distinctive thematic facets of the poem to place it in the wider social, political, and cultural circumstances of the period in which it was written. The unit is prepared in such a way that it will demonstrate the poet's place in British literary history and trace the circumstances of the poem's reading and reception ever since.

After reading this unit, you will be able to--

Situate the poet in the history of late 20th Century British Poetry.

Understand the nuances of women's voices through her works.

Analyse the selected poem as a representative Duffyesque text.

9.2 Introducing the Poet

Carol Ann Duffy is a major voice in contemporary British poetry. She was born in 1955 in Glasgow, Scotland to parents of Irish-Scottish origin. Duffy's family subsequently moved to Stafford, England where she completed her schooling. In 1977, she received a bachelor's degree with honours in Philosophy from the University of Liverpool. Duffy started her professional career as a lecturer of poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University where she later became a professor and also the Creative Director of the Writing School housed in the university. As a token of recognition of her contributions, she was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1995, then the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2002, and was named a Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) in 2015.

English Poetry or British Poetry?

The term English poetry (or literature for that matter) has come to be applied to the body of works written in the English language across geographical spaces. With the advent of Postcolonial literatures in English, today it is not difficult to talk about let us say, the English poetry of Papua New Guinea or that of North East India. Be that as it may, English poetry used to refer to the canonical literary productions of the British Isles in the recent past and entailed Eurocentric cultural figurations that had attained almost a mythical stature as part of the British Imperial expansionist policy. Postcolonial English poetry with its diversified and heterogeneous cultural contexts, resistant themes, and translational aesthetics challenged the homogeneity of the canonical and, to use Dipesh Chakraborty's sense of the term, 'provincialised' the English canonical poetry as British poetry. Getting reduced thus, the contemporary British poets needed to explore possibilities. The poetry of Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, and Philip Larkin are often considered important milestones in this respect. Carol Ann Duffy's poetry too with a strong Scottish local colour and flavour ordains British poetry with a distinctive positionality.

Duffy's creative prowess was visible early in her life as she started writing poetry when she was at Stafford Girls High School and was supported by two of her teachers to publish her poems. As she was starting to get recognition as a poet, she came into contact with several societies and collectives of poets. At the age of 16, she started being in a relationship with Adrian Henri, one of the *Liverpool poets* and the same continued for more than a decade until they got separated in the year 1982. Subsequently, Duffy developed a same-sex relationship with poet

Jackie Kay which lasted for 15 years, and during this relationship, Duffy openly proclaimed herself to be a lesbian.

In 2009, Duffy became the first woman Poet Laureate of the UK and remained in that capacity for ten years. During her tenure, she was known to have written poems on issues of British national interest, the contemporary political and environmental concerns, and also most sensitively on the marginalised sections of the society like those of the LGBTIQ+ communities. From these descriptions, it may not be difficult for you to understand that Duffy's personal life, including but not limited to her sexual orientation or for that matter her gender identity, is intricately related to her poetic outputs.

Stop to Consider

Sexuality has been an oft-debated issue within feminist circles. As against universalist assumptions of feminist writing as well as political activism arguably led by white middle-class women of the West, sexual minorities such as the LGBTIQ+ communities have raised questions about the stability of the heterosexual masculine/feminine binary for the sustenance of gender identity. After Judith Butler (see *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, published in 1990), gender has been looked down upon as a performative act and not a biologically given category. Butler's formulations have paved the way for the discipline and practice of Queer Studies which came to existence at the intersection of feminist studies, gender studies, and gay and lesbian studies. Like Gender Studies, Queer Studies highlights the constructed nature of sexualities and critiques the deterministic assumptions of identity, based on one's sexual orientation or preferences.

Historically, Duffy is often placed among the New Generation of poets to emerge in the 1980s following a brief but radical movement of the Martian School by a loosely formed group of poets of the seventies such as Craig Raine, Christopher Reid, and James Fenton. Martianism, as a term, derived its currency from *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home* (1979) by Raine. The movement, as suggested by John Redmond, is marked by the unhomely marriage of exotic descriptions nearing the semblance of science fiction with down-to-earth, domestic environments (246). Duffy follows the Martians, contemporaneously with fellow poet Simon Armitage whose immediate influence happens to be a rapturous, radicalising aesthetics of the Martian School.

Registering distinctive utterances to announce the fin de siècle moment of twentieth-century British women's poetry, Duffy's texts imbricate tendencies to refrain herself from coming into any direct and immediate

emotional involvement with experience sun like her predecessors, especially her male counterparts. Rather, sheen acts her circumstances by creating multiple dramatic characters within her artistic premise. She is particularly interested in portraying marginalised beings, historicising their resistance, thereby implicating their subsistence and agency which they might otherwise be denied or deprived of.

Although the range of her poetic techniques and themes resists easy summation, she is known, inter alia, to have revived the tradition of the dramatic monologue in British poetry. Employed by Robert Browning, one of the doyens of the Victorian age, to wide popularity, dramatic monologue, in Duffy's hands is of course transformed into a fitting tool to bring forth a colloquialism that would kindle the polyphony of women's poetic articulation demonstrating a vigorous 'social turn' in twentieth-century poetry. Duffy's poetic temperament, in that way, comes very close to what Mikhail Bakhtin identified to be 'the dialogic' so far as the playful multivalence of voices within the ambit of the literary language is taken into account.

SAQ

What makes Carol Ann Duffy a contemporary British poet? (50 Words)

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

Is Carol Ann Duffy's sexual identity intricately related to her poetry? (50 Words)

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

Let us now take a brief survey of the major works of the poet.

9.3 Her Works

Duffy is a prolific poet whose career has spanned over more than four decades now. Her first notable collection of poetry appeared in 1985

under the title *Standing Female Nude*. The eponymous poem from the collection is based on a painting by French Cubist painter Georges Braque where a female prostitute is seen standing in a difficult posture for her portrayal. The poem dramatises the voice of this woman and thereby asserts her marginalised subjectivity with an agency like many of Duffy's works. However, when it comes to her artistic representation, the irony of being subjected to the hands of a renowned male high-class artist is also clear:

"I shall be represented analytically and hung
In great museums. The bourgeoisie with coo
At such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art.

("Standing Female

Nude", Lines 5-7)

This was followed by her collections *Selling Manhattan* (1987) and *The Other Country* (1990). While she received the Somerset Maugham Award for the former, both the collections garnered wide critical acclaim and popularity. Commenting on *Selling Manhattan*, poet Vernon Scannell of *The Tiger and the Rose* fame associates the poems compiled in the volume with a world shrouded by poverty, violence, fear, and frustration; however, Duffy's deft verbal resourcefulness could treat these realities "in ways that are not depressing" (qtd. in Dowson 2016, 9).

In 1993, Duffy's collection *Mean Time* was published and the poems of this volume attracted both critical and popular attention. Duffy was original enough to treat the themes of love and loss in several poems compiled in this volume and they were remarkable given the fading glory of emotionalism in the hands of her contemporaries. The collection received the Whitbread Poetry Award.

Her next work *The World's Wife* (1999) marks a decisive shift in Duffy's poetic sensibility with its vehement thrust on feminist essentialism. Although there have been recurrent concerns for women's voices in Duffy's poetry, this volume makes the same concern an exclusive one and potentially the cornerstone of her thematic pluriverse. Asserting expression on marginalised female selves who were either real or even fictional counterparts of renowned and often celebrated male figures, Duffy fashions the poems of this collection as a counter-cultural force to fortify the discourse of female individuality and autonomy.

Duffy's first remarkable work in the new century—*Feminine Gospels* (2002) can be considered a useful extension to what she offered in *The World's Wife*. Symbolic density and a strong socio-political consciousness are Duffy's hallmarks in this volume although a temporary decline of her popularity could be seen along this time as the

work failed to gain due attention from the reading public in a significant way.

It was, however, with the publication of her next major collection titled *Rupture* (2005) she saw a resurrection of her career. Duffy won the prestigious T.S. Eliot Award for this volume of poetry. As many as fifty-two lyrics are compiled in the volume which, although diverse in their outlook, celebrates 'intimacy and interconnectedness [as] female preoccupations' (Dowson 2016, 13). However, she does not fail to assign and assert a universal character to the very preoccupations in the poems. Similar observations can be made in the case of the works produced during Duffy's Laureateship, viz *The Bees* (2011) and *Ritual Lightning: The Laureate Poems* (2014). Duffy's poems continue to be anthologised in important edited collections at the turn of the second decade of the present century.

SAQ

How does Duffy come to terms with the idea of marginality in her poems? (100 Words)

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

Briefly comment on the stylistic innovations of Duffy's poetry. (100 Words)

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

9.4 Critical Reception

Duffy's plenteous poetic outputs have always invited zealous critical reading. One of her fervid critics Peter Forbes coined the term 'Duffyesque' to suggest her "unique crafting of emotional truth into literary forms that are woven from colloquial speech patterns, disruptive syntax, de-familiarizing symbols, and captivating sound effects" (qtd. in Dowson 26). However, the poet herself declares the Duffyesque to be 'the music of being human' (qtd. in Dowson 26).

Owing to recurrent and strong female concerns, a great many of her poems, and especially those included in her collections *Standing Female Nude*, *The World's Wife*, and *Feminine Gospels* widely attracted feminist and gender perspectives for their critical reception. As a popular poet who has been writing for over four decades bridging two centuries, Duffy has often been termed the able successor to Auden and Larkin. With her blunt take on the issues pertinent to her times through a colloquialism signifying accessibility of style, she secures for herself a unique and authentic space among her contemporaries.

9.5 Context of the Poem

"Warming Her Pearls" was first published as part of Duffy's collection *Selling Manhattan* in 1987. Later it was compiled in several other collections as well. Set in Victorian England, the poem is a monologue in free verse recounted by a maid who dotes on her mistress and romantically longs for her by wearing the mistress' pearl necklace to keep it warm in her absence. Duffy dedicates this poem to Judith Radstone (1925-2001), a bibliophile and political activist with whom she is known to have had a conversation about the Victorian practice of maids wearing pearls of their ladies under their clothes to warm them by their skin and also to increase their lustre (O'Day 2001). The very conversation inspired Duffy to compose the poem.

The poem, however, came to be widely considered as one of the prominent instances of lesbian love poetry. A fervently critical response to female sexual repression and the resultant displacement of desire predominantly ascribed to the Victorian social milieu is also at the heart of the poem.

9.6 Reading the Poem

As has been mentioned in the previous section, "Warming Her Pearls" is a dramatic monologue in free verse. The poem contains six stanzas with four lines in each of them. Upholding the perspectives of a Victorian maid serving her mistress, the poem gives expression to the maid's voice which is otherwise hardly paid any attention by the society to which she belongs.

The poem begins with the speaker's proclamation, in first-person narratorial mode, that she feels the touch of a pearl necklace on her skin under her clothes. She was directed by her mistress to wear it in order to

keep it warm till the evening when the speaker is supposed to comb her mistress' hair and then put the necklace around her fair neck. The speaker's mind is full of thoughts about her mistress throughout the day—how would her mistress contemplate on the choice of a dress for her evening party or how she would cool herself with a fan while the speaker would work for her with enthusiasm. All this while, the speaker would keep wearing her mistress' necklace and feel the heat of her body entering and warming the pearls in it.

The speaker overtly appreciates the mistress' beauty and declares that she dreams about her while being alone in her bed in the servants' attic. In her dream, she would visualise her mistress dancing with tall men during a ball session, getting puzzled by the speaker's fragrance persistently emanating from the necklace which even the mistress' expensive French perfumes could not hide or diminish.

As an everyday practice, the speaker applies powder on her mistress' shoulders with a rabbit's foot. And watches her mistress' soft skin taking up a pink tinge which seemed to the speaker like slowly letting out a sigh. As the speaker glances at her mistress' mirror during this, her lips open but she could hardly speak anything.

In the night speaker envisions her mistress' homecoming in her carriage. She visualises on her mind how the mistress takes off all her clothes as well as jewels and retires herself into the sheets which according to the speaker is her usual way of going to bed. Around the same time, the speaker is awake, alone on her attic bed, with full knowledge that the pearl necklace is away from her body and is cooling. The speaker is tormented by the absence of her mistress' pearls and she burns in desire as well as despair.

In her review, Kate Clarke expresses that as per a survey done in 1891, one in every three women between 15 to 25 years of age in Victorian England were in domestic service. Severely underpaid and uncared for, these women were sometimes referred to as 'slaveys' ("Women and domestic service in Victorian society"). Duffy's poem responds to this grave and disturbing picture of socio-economic inequality of the Victorian period, whereby the inexpressible desire of a maid in the margins of society is skilfully articulated. However, the rupturing social class difference distancing the speaker from her mistress perpetuates repression, relegation, and subjection.

"Warming her Pearls" is one of the earliest of Duffy's poems to openly explicate as well as problematise female homosexual desire. Victorian society was known for its notoriously prescriptive and punitive measures against human sexual liberty and its open expression or artistic representation. As against this, however, Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976) claims that sexuality in the eighteenth century through the Victorian period had alternative yet important means of

manifestation e.g., through pathological, legal, educational, and religious discourses, etc and in them, sexuality was explicitly accounted for even under circumstances otherwise. Foucault thereby refutes the so-called 'repressive hypothesis' of the Victorian period (32-33).

Stop to Consider

Victorian Age (1837- 1901) was known for its prudery which was officialised through legislations aimed at curbing the instances of violation of 'appropriate' sexual behavioural norms. As per the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 women could be divorced for a single act of adultery whereas for men it was to be proved that they had committed other offenses in addition to adultery. Equally notorious was the Contagious Diseases Act of 1860 according to which medical examinations were forcefully conducted on prostitutes in towns where troops would station (Furneaux 2014). Similar was the attitude against the instances of violation of heteronormativity. There were a number of works in the twentieth century that addressed sexual repression in the Victorian age given the context of prescriptive sexual behaviour, acts, as well as their representation. Steven Marcus's work *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (1966) elaborately looked into the Victorian attitude on morality and identified deep-rooted hypocrisy in sexual matters. The work was influential on Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976) the first volume of which discussed the very idea of sexual repression in the Victorian age as merely hypothetical and explored the role of alternative regimes of representation. Foucault's works were followed by Queer theorists as well as activists who worked at the intersections of gender and Cultural Studies and analysed the socio-political implications and the nuances of alternative sexualities.

Gynaecologist Dr William Anton's treatise *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857) can be cited in support of Foucault's claim. However, Dr Anton's extreme take on women's sexuality in the period was contentious:

"The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled by sexual feelings of any kind." (qtd. in Furneaux 2014)

Such abject denial of sexual desire in females in the Victorian period fuelled theoretical responses from critics in the late twentieth century. Critics such as Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Susan Bordo, etc have been found deliberating around gender and sexuality especially in terms of representations around the female body or identity. One common contention for all of them is to demystify sexuality as a discursive construct subject to contestable engagements.

Duffy's projection of female 'queer' sexuality in the poem can be considered a creative supplement to the critical formulations of these theorists.

In "Warming her Pearls", the speaker passionately fantasises her mistress as her object of desire throughout the poem. However, the speaker can neither have a fulfilling sexual union with the mistress nor can she pronounce her desire in direct terms due to the fear instilled by her low social standing and also because same-sex relations were treated as a perversion and hence were banned. Even the speaker finds it difficult to express her feelings in a structured way but presents her thoughts through irregular, disjunct lines as she tries to suppress the expression of her true feelings. It is the pearl necklace that under the circumstances becomes the medium or the bridge between the two through which the speaker channelises her repressed desire. However, as the speaker states that the necklace is slack on her neck like a rope put by her mistress (line 8) which suggests the ambiguity of her feeling towards the necklace as it acts both as a source of happiness when possessed, although such possession is temporary, and as an instrument by which her mistress extends domination and control over her. The necklace serves as the symbol of the shifting dynamics of power in the poem.

A noteworthy aspect of the poem is that it concentrates on the gaze of the speaker fixed at the mistress. Her fantasies about her mistress are presumably not unrealistic but the consequences of her voyeuristic onlooking at her even during her private moments. It is interesting to note that while Victorian high society put the working-class people constantly under its gaze, Duffy's poem talks back to such equations of power and returns the gaze in the most peculiar and secretive manner. In the speaker's secret fantasies about her mistress, she asserts her own sense of being, justifies her perspective, and thus transpires individuality. This empowerment made possible by the literary discursivity reflects Duffy's standing on queer sexuality as a counterpoint to heteronormativity or what Adrienne Rich critiques as 'compulsory heterosexuality.'

Stop to Consider

Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) in her influential essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" (1983) argues that a heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman, far from being natural, needs to be treated as a social institution wherein patriarchal forms of power exert domination over women. For Rich, heterosexuality is 'compulsory' because it is deemed as the only legitimate means of sexuality suppressing the alternatives as deviation or perversion. Heterosexuality, according to Rich, facilitates the men to have access to women for sexual gratification largely disregarding the question of women's consent or choice. As against this, lesbian

experience refutes the male-centric equations in heterosexuality and celebrates a pluralistic female-to-female intimate bonding (both sexual and non-sexual). The lesbian intervention into feminist studies thereby challenges the widely circulated notion of 'sisterhood feminism' according to which all women are supposed to be sisters in their unified stand and solidarity against patriarchy.

The poem aptly represents a dialogic poetics to which Duffy is often attributed due to her ventriloquism. The dramatisation of the speaker's circumstances corresponds to stupendous negotiation of how women are represented across contemporary discourses. The speaker is confined to her 'attic' yet by dint her fantasies she is indulging effusively. Her range of vision is way wider-- from the Yellow Room through the ball dance session to the nocturnal outings in carriages. Even in her imagination, these are instances of reciprocities between herself and her mistress facilitated by rhetoric. The poetic canvas thus posited typifies a multivocality that reinforces the social turn of contemporary poetry as has been stated earlier.

Check Your Progress

1. What constitutes the Duffyesque?

(Hint: Stylistic experiments with colloquialism and the monologue, feminist themes, recovery of the voice of the marginalised, etc)

2. How does the dramatic monologue help Duffy write poems that are socially informed?

(Hint: Dramatic Monologue gives the poet ample scope to distance herself from her poetic portrayals and allows her to set the tone of a conversation that is artistically disinterested but socially committed).

3. Is "Warming Her Pearls" a merely queer love lyric?

(Hint: The poem brings into the fore an important context of marginalisation. Although queer desire is the core concern of the poem, it does not fail to touch upon the general circumstances of human subjection based on civilisational inequity vis-a-vis class and gender.)

SAQ

How does "Warming Her Pearls" subvert the Victorian insistence on

heteronormativity? (100 words)

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

Does the speaker's gaze over her mistress alter the power relations being acted out in the poem? (100 words)

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

9.7 Summing Up

The previous sections of this unit were aimed at providing you with an estimate of Carol Ann Duffy's poetry through her most representative works and an analysis of one of her best-known poems—"Warming Her Pearls".

The initial sections introduced the poet as well as her principal works. Her works uphold, inter alia, an effort to give voice to the underprivileged sections of the society including sexual minorities who are otherwise silent in mainstream texts. Duffy is also known for her dramatic monologues where quirky characters are brought to life through an accessibly conversational mode of expression. Many of her works can be termed as exercises of a dialogic enterprise entailing a pluriverse, replete with women's utterances in all their diversity.

The latter sections analysed Duffy's poem "Warming Her Pearls" which can aptly be treated as a representative Duffyesque monologue depicting the queer love of a maid towards her mistress in a Victorian setting. Asserting individual subjectivity to the maid in terms of her monologue, the poem professes pluralistic assumptions of female utterances as a subversive feminist force to counteract patriarchal propaganda.

9.8 References & Suggested Readings

Dowson, Jane. *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

Dowson, Jane, and Alice Entwistle. *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry*, Cambridge UP, 2006.

Duffy, Carol Ann. *Standing Female Nude*, Pan MacMillan, 2016.

Duffy, Carol Ann. "Warming Her Pearls". *Norton Anthology of Poetry* (5th Edition) ed. Margaret Ferguson et al., WW Norton & Company, 2005. p. 2007.

Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality, Vol I: The Will to Knowledge* (1976), Penguin Books, 1998.

Furneaux, Holly. "Victorian Sexualities." *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*, British Library, 15 May 2014.
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/victorian-sexualities#footnote1>. Accessed 20 August 2021.

O'Day, Deirdre. "Judith Radstone: Radical bibliophile devoted to the worlds of poetry and protest." *The Guardian*, 13th February 2001.
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/feb/13/guardianobituaries.books>. Accessed 20 August 2021.

Unit 10

Carol Ann Duffy: "Warming Her Pearls"

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 Approaching the Poet and Her Poetry
 - 10.2.1 Colloquialism
 - 10.2.2 Multivocality and Dialogism
 - 10.2.3 The Politics of Alternative Sexualities and Feminist Conviction
 - 10.2.4 *'The Music of Being Human'*
- 10.3 Analyses of Some Quintessential Poems
- 10.4 References and Suggested Readings

10.1 Objectives

In this unit, you will be provided with insights into the critical perspectives to place Carol Ann Duffy's poetry in a larger cultural context. The unit is prepared in view of relating Duffy and her poetry to the conditions that are giving shape to contemporary British literary as well as cultural paradigm.

10.2 Approaching the Poet and Her Poetry

Poet Carol Ann Duffy is someone who bridges the poetic landscapes of two centuries. While she holds on to an immensely popular image as a poet through her conventional collections and anthologies published in

the last two decades of the twentieth century, she is equally able to cope with the transitional and transformative field of the literary in the twenty first century. Interestingly, as part of the contemporary literary marketplace, Duffy is very recently seen contributing voice-overs for audiobook versions of her collections or reciting her popular poems in sessions before large fan-gatherings which are recorded and made available as open-access resources on virtual platforms.

This is unquestioningly the mark of Duffy's versatility as well as adaptability which is also suggestive of the imperviousness of her poetic outputs to easy framing and categorisation. Having said that, the following perspectives can be deduced to read and discuss her poetic oeuvre.

10.2.1 Colloquialism

Duffy's poetic expressions are conversational and she exploits colloquialism extensively in her poetry. It allows her to subsume the everyday speech of diverse sections of people and merge them with her own in an artistic confluence. For Duffy, this is a democratic act of liberating poetry from the strictures of formal, literary language (Dowson and Entwistle 2005; 214). Colloquialism in Duffy's poetry also marks a democratic politics of linguistic free play by which the authorial and emotive excesses are contested.

The monologue is Duffy's favourite form with which to encapsulate her poetry. After Robert Browning, it is in the lyrics of Duffy that the dramatic monologue finds its most vigorous and resurgent presence. However, Duffy ensures its revision in tandem with the changing values and altered political-cultural commitments with time. Without compromising on the artistic or aesthetic standards, Duffy recreates the dramatic monologue as a tool of the socially engaged poet for the contemporary times. Colloquialism becomes the necessary stylistic criteria under the circumstances. The 'dramatisation' of the everyday articulations within the increasingly heterogeneous British social order in the twenty first century suits Duffy's aesthetic goals too.

Colloquialism is also the means by which Duffy asserts the autonomy of the female voice against the monolithic male voice immanent in the discourse of British poetry. She explores and projects the pluralistic assumptions borne by colloquialism in poetry as the celebration of the resistant feminist voice. Dowson and Entwistle (2005) consider it to be an answer to the monopolised language of power exerted by patriarchy in

literary productions through 'dramatised persons and social interactions' (212).

SAQ

What is the role of colloquiality in Duffy's poems? (100 Words)

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

1.2.2 Multivocality and Dialogism

1.2.3 The Politics of Alternative Sexualities and Feminist Conviction

1.2.4 'The Music of Being Human'

1.3 Analyses of Some Quintessential Poems

1.4 References and Suggested Readings

Corcoran, Neil. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*, Cambridge UP, 2007.

Dosa, Attila. *Beyond Identity: New Horizons in Modern Scottish Poetry*, Rodopi, 2009.

Dowson, Jane. *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

Dowson, Jane, and Alice Entwistle. *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry*, Cambridge UP, 2006.

Wenthe, Wiliiam. "The Craft of Thought: The Sentence in Contemporary Poetry", *The Kenyon Review*, 30(2). pp 149-171. URL: www.jstor.org/stable/27653813. Accessed 10 September, 2021.