

**Institute of Distance and Open Learning
Gauhati University**

MA in English

Semester 3

Paper XIV

Poetry III- Victorian Poetry

Block 1

Major Statements



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Block Introduction:

The Victorian poets wrote their verse with the keen awareness that their words were not going to give them the kind of popularity and prominence that contemporary writers of fiction had gained. Even here, in India, scholars who are interested in studying the Victorian age, tend to turn to Victorian fiction rather than to any poet. However, if we compare the popularity of Victorian poets with the readability of the eighteenth-century poets who composed topical satire, the latter fall back a great distance behind. Although, with hindsight, Indians did not stand to gain any political mileage through the appreciation of Victorian verses. So, if we attempt to write the literary history of Victorian poetry through an Indian perspective, we can see that perhaps it deserves more attention than the Victorian readers were themselves want to give it.

Again, if we put Victorian poetry side by side with that of their immediate predecessors — the Romantic poets — then we can discern most clearly the cultural space that it occupied in the Victorian world of letters. That space was given to it perhaps grudgingly as we see in Arnold's "Dover Beach". We see that reluctant recognition again in that profound lament almost ritualistically maintained in Tennyson's tribute to the figure of Arthur Henry Hallam. From the standpoint of the twentyfirst century, it seems difficult to view the universe with the cries of Darwinism ringing in the ears as the Victorians had done. But if we can imaginatively reach out to their sense of doom — in the way that we are currently doing in the face of an ecological crisis — then the Victorian poet's agonising over a sustainable creed seems ethically valid. All the poets you will read about here, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Rossetti, Hopkins — are locked in the grip of conflict without the buoyancy of hope or reconciliation.

Victorian verse clearly steps out of the ideological enterprise of the Romantic poets who had seemed to hasten away from an avaricious society towards a communion with nature. The later nineteenth century, to which our poets belong, did not allow this turning back on the materialistic compulsions of a society left with almost no concept of cultural enrichment. If Arnold cries out against a world holding out only pain, so does Hopkins who nevertheless falls back on the core of compassion of the Christian faith. Browning's mask - against which his wife had complained - notwithstanding, the conflict

of individual and society is inserted within the frame of history and set against a reconstructed historical moment which refracts its meaning. Browning's manoeuvre of mixing history with aesthetic judgment makes yet another level of reading possible. Tennyson's protest against his times, we should remember, was as "anti-Victorian" rather than as spokesman of his age. All our poets wrote in repudiation of prevailing currents; the irony is that we remember them as the spokesmen of their age.

These preliminary remarks should direct your understanding of Victorian poetry more fruitfully, we hope. We have added and inserted as much information as you would find useful to accomplish your hopes of reading well. But again, space is severely limited so that what is left out is also sizeable! That means, you must note, that no study material can take the place of the good reference book by the able critic and scholar. Here, on this point, our lists of suggested reading will help you. We are sure that you will read more poetry henceforth.

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Unit 1

Victorian Background

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1.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the background of Victorian writing. Your knowledge of the chief trends and movements of the age will help you to contextualize the prose and poetry within the larger scenario. By the end of this unit, you will be able to-

- *sketch* the trends and main impulses that went into Victorian attitudes and culture
- *locate and identify* the various socio-historical forces that shaped the fiction and the poetry.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The literature produced during the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) presents features natural in an era of tremendous social change and intellectual advancement. Never before had there been such rapid and sweeping changes in the social fabric of England. The period witnessed rapid technological, political and socio-economic changes due to the effects of the Industrial Revolution mainly. It was an epoch in which science advanced and long-standing religious ideas and institutions were challenged and even attacked. Much of the writing of the period addressed the pressing issues of the day; never before had literature been so closely in league with, or so openly in war with the forces of social change.

Awareness of human limitation was at the forefront of the consciousness of Victorian writers as much as an almost opposing perception of the almost limitless boundaries of empire and technological development. Thus the Victorian era was a period of intense struggles and a frequent preoccupation with the mortality of the human race characterizes the period. These paradoxes led Charles Dickens to write in 1859 in the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, lines that resonated with contemporary readership: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” (*A Tale of Two Cities* 1). In spite of the vast changes—political, economic, scientific and religious—the poetic temper of the Victorian Age was not drastically different from that of the early nineteenth century. In its individualism, play of imagination, love of the picturesque and interest in nature and the past, Victorian poetry continued the Romantic tradition. But the sense of wonder and joy that illuminated Romantic poetry is missing in Victorian poetry. Much of Victorian poetry depends for its effect on impressiveness of manner and tone and expresses a generally wistful and elegiac tone.

The Victorian age had its own share of philosophers and thinkers, creating conflict in belief. Books like John Stuart Mill’s *Logic*, Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*, and F.H. Bradley’s *Ethical Studies and Appearance and Reality* articulated doubts regarding old beliefs and thus opened up hitherto uncharted intellectual territories for the writers of the age. The sweeping spiritual and scientific changes and the atmosphere of a different age gave the Victorian writer new dimensions which imparted to Victorian poetry a distinctive character of its own.

1.3 SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

One of the chief factors accounting for change was the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, which, by placing political power in the hands of the middle-class, paved the way for a new democracy. The development of practical arts, applied science and machine production led not only to increased comforts of living but also to a deep-seated materialism. Discoveries in science gave rise to revolutionary concepts, which unsettled many of the old bases of religious belief. Epoch-making discoveries in geological and biological studies disturbed profoundly traditional views of man’s creation and of the length of his history on this planet. The Wordsworthian meaning

of 'Nature' as something more than 'the material world', as indeed the very language of God — was increasingly both banished and relegated to the backwaters of the countryside. Wordsworth's model of memory and feeling—the growth of the human mind from childhood onwards in an ennobling interchange with the sacredly natural world—was displaced and damaged wholly if not lost.

One view of the Victorian age shows that besides other forms of social strife a growing current of feeling raised the dilemmas of religious faith in the face of secular beliefs. John Henry Newman described this feeling, of seeing "no reflexion of its Creator" (in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 1864) in the mirror of the busy, material world. Yet publication of religious books during the years between 1836 to 1863, was of a significant number. We should also remember that Hopkins's poetry, which was utterly steeped in a high religious faith, was not published. Whether God could be apprehended in the creation of the world became a question open to the intelligent mind to respond to. In the words of Matthew Arnold, the mid-century generation of John Stuart Mill found itself "Wandering between two worlds, one dead / The other powerless to be born" ('Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse'). Thus we can conclusively say that religious doubt is a hallmark of the age and that simply nothing could be taken to be in eternity.

It was not surprising, then, that the Church of England came under the shadow of expanding enfranchisement through the provisions of the Great Reform Bill of 1832. A movement recalling the sixteenth-century Reformation seemed to be playing itself out and thus between 1830 and 1850 we see "a second great, and perhaps final, crisis for the Western conscience." (P.Davis) Within the schisms in the Church of England, by the middle of the century, can be seen the Evangelical Movement. This movement had the support of more than a third of clergymen in England in 1851 and directed its energies at spreading the Evangel or the Gospel, to renew the 'vital simplicities' of the puritans of the Reformation, purify the faith of all adornments such as ceremonies and sacraments, drawn from Roman Catholicism. Its wide appeal lay partly in its assertion of individual 'adult conversion' in place of the formal rites of infant baptism.

The movement emphasized the corruption of human nature in terms of the theory of the Fall and attempted to establish direct faith in Christ and his grace. G. M Hopkins' poetry throws light upon this aspect of Evangelical

assumptions that thus hopes to establish unadulterated faith in art and religion. He idealized Nature as a Scripture and paid tribute to the glory of the Creator and His creation. In *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo*, for instance, he insists on the restoration of faith in Beauty and innocence and offers tribute to the omnipotent God,

“Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath,
And with sighs soaring sighs deliver
Them; beauty –in-the- ghost, deliver it, early now long
before death

Give Beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God , beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.”

SAQ:

These lines are from Hopkins’s “The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo” which is not included in your curriculum. As you read the quoted lines above, what are your first impressions of Hopkins the poet?

Choose the most appropriate descriptive phrases from the options given below in stating your impressions:

- i. mellifluous lyricism
- ii. picturesque quality
- iii. exquisite description of God’s beautiful gifts
- iv. rhythmic flow of alliterations
- v. lyrical praise of God
- vi. expert use of alliterations and assonances
- vii. vigorous beats of ‘sprung thym’
- viii. a diction built of words of few syllables strung together for a vigorous rhythm

The crisis in the Church of England did get more deeply advanced with the other important movement, the Oxford Movement or Tractarianism which was led from Oriel college, Oxford, by John Keble, Edward Bouverie Pusey and John Henry Newman. The *Tracts for the Times* issuing from this movement aimed at raising the awareness of the clergy to the critical state of the Church of England. Like the Evangelicals, Tractarianism stressed the fallenness of man and conducted the argument on the basis of theology. This was essentially its difference from the Broad Church Movement of Benjamin Jowett.

The Oxford Movement

The Oxford Movement or Tractarianism originated in July 1833 following upon Keble's famous Assize Sermon against a secularized parliament's interference in spiritual matters in the Church. The movement was led by the three intellectuals coming from Oriel College – John Keble, Edward Bouverie Pusey and Henry Newman, all three questioning the omnipresence of the Church who wanted to revive the sacramental value of the Church. They believed in the spiritual essence of things which can be realized only through experience of the divine and it is a doctrine hidden in language. Both Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement shared contempt for the primacy of human reason and established faith in the ethics of the Fall of man. A theological change took place during mid-Victorianism with the coming of Newman, Froude and Arnold.

The Romantic poets had found reality in a religion of Nature. In contrast, perhaps, scientific rationalism destroyed the beliefs of the Victorians. The Wordsworthian religion of Nature could not supply the same meanings for most of them. Tennyson saw in Nature what his acute senses and scientific knowledge imparted. To Browning, nature was an occasional backdrop for love, death and heroic striving. It was Arnold who came closest to the Wordsworthian attitude but even he could not find complete solace in Nature. The new skepticism destroyed for the Victorians the sense of wonder and awe that Nature inspired in the Romantics and they mostly observed and described nature with scientific accuracy. The development of the physical sciences, Darwin's evolutionary theory, German thinkers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche painted a new world-picture where God seemed unnecessary and man insignificant. As misconceptions in religion and life were slowly removed, it was natural for the sensitive poets to be beset with doubts. An age-long belief in a providential order changed into a meaningless universe of chaos. Poets like Edward Fitzgerald, Arthur Hugh Clough, and Matthew Arnold gave way to the despair they felt at the ebbing sea of faith. "Honest doubt" persuaded Tennyson in his poetic enterprise while Browning asserted: "We fail here to succeed hereafter".

Within a span of seventy years of the nineteenth century new social functions necessitated by new industrial conditions marked the age as much emphasis was given to 'self-help' that showed aversion to conventional government laws both political and social. Everyone felt the ugliness and distortion of

time and space and the world appeared to be too much with them. The changes on the economic front, Evangelicalism and subsequent ecclesiastical reforms resulted in social reform. The reformed parliament of 1833 took steps against the unequal distribution of clerical wealth and after that followed a great deal of religious activities.

Stop to Consider:

Here we can refer to Trollope's "Barchester Tower" where Trollope has depicted the ecclesiastical picture of the church of the 'fifties and 'sixties through comedy and satire. We can also refer to Lewis Carroll's "Looking-glass" world-view where he predicts the vision of a consumer world where things and words are all in random motion. His famous *Through the Looking Glass and what Alice found there* is a parody of Victorian Progress and Materialism.

The growing tide of intellectualism and liberalism popularized by representative university men and professionals such as John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, T.H.Huxley, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot contributed in the spread of democracy, bureaucracy, just as a wider belief in collectivism shaped the literature of the time. The Municipal Reform Act of 1835, the Local Government Act of 1888 propounded the scheme of self-government. A good many writers including John Henry Newman, F.D.Maurice, Charles Kingsley contributed to the intellectual upsurge of the era. The Evangelical movement marked a potent influence on the ecclesiastical orders of the age. It preached the religion of the heart as a reaction against the effects of the Age of Reason.

Stop to Consider:

Evangelicalism

The movement had its origin in the second half of the eighteenth century that showed its reaction against the religion of reason. It was a fundamentalist Protestant movement that looked back to the eighteenth-century John Wesley's Methodist revival. The Movement emphasized the corruption of the human at the ecclesiastical level and established direct faith in Christ's grace and omnipresence. Negating institutional knowledge and religion, the movement assigned faith in the word of Holy Scriptures and held man responsible for his

Fall who is born to suffer and hence damnation is inevitable. Further it laid stress upon faith in the inward experience of an individual who must seek salvation by God's grace.

Chartism

It was a working-class movement for reform which resulted from two major economic causes -- problem of high unemployment and high bread prices followed by trade depression and harvest failures. And the second factor was the loss of human labour due to the use of machinery. Chartism claimed a permanent political remedy and the charter demanded universal male suffrage, annual parliament, vote by ballot, payment of members of parliaments, the end of property qualification and equal electoral district. In fact Chartism gave confident expression to the radical working-class voice.

The Catholic emancipation of 1829, the parliamentary reform of 1832, the abolition of slavery act of 1833 (which was applicable to many parts of the British Empire with a few exceptions), and the Chartist movement can now seem to have indicated social progress and religious renaissance. As religious institutionalism collapsed, anarchy gripped the conscience of the people. In this respect the contributions made by the rising middle-class cannot be ignored. Carlyle observed that men were grown mechanical in head, heart as well as in hand and he termed the age as the 'Mechanical age'. The time is marked by growth of population and expansion of new colonial territory followed by spread of trade and commerce. From one English city - London - the number of cities grew to nine by 1851. "It was a whole new order or disorder, a vortex which pulled into the cities' factories and workshops the surrounding population for both labour and consumption." (P.Davis)

In his essay of 1839, *Chartism*, Carlyle observed that England was confronting the second stage of its role in world history; the first had been to conquer most parts of the planet for human use, "the grand Industrial task". In the first stage, was the physical and material revolution enabled by the inventions of Watt, Arkwright, and Brindley — the success of steam, the factory and the canal in the spinning of cotton, the steam-engine, the forging of iron, "railwaying, commercing and careering". With the change in the economy, developments of communication, the increasing number of immigrants became a matter of concern. The second stage of England's great task in world history now consisted of "the grand Constitutional task of sharing, in some pacific endurable manner, the fruit of said conquest, and

showing all people how it might be done” (in *Chartism*). In other words, society had to move to a new model of negotiation and consensus, from the older model of command and conquest. It is no surprise then that social consciousness at all levels of society flared up in intermittent waves.

For better job-opportunities people began to shift from countryside to town and city for its promise of livelihood. London, between 1820 and 1850, became the largest city in the world. This information itself is based on the Victorian penchant for facts, especially statistics that revealed quantities. The Statistical Society of London was also founded in 1834. Fact-seeking travel literature too flourished in this measure-loving age. The great displacement of the population from the rural countryside to the urban city is described by Alexis de Tocqueville (in his *Journey to England*): portraying the river Irwell through Manchester, he wrote:”From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilise the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization works its miracles, and civilized man is turned back almost into a savage.” And this experience of displacement finds its expression in the writings of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy.

Stop to Consider:

Pre- Raphaelitism

Pre- Raphaelitism was a complex moral phenomenon that attempted to break with the classical tradition of Reynolds. Envisaging a sort of escapism, Pre-Raphaelitism shared an affinity with the Oxford Movement which preached medievalist aesthetics. The spirit of the Pre-Raphaelites was essentially romantic which marked its release from the conventional didacticism and pessimism. Though originating in painting, pre- Raphaelitism left a positive impact on the literary scenario of the time in its attempt to restore simplicity and naturalness.

SAQ:

Which major movements of the Victorian age can be seen as articulating Tennysonian “honest doubt”? (80 words)

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1.4 WRITERS AND THEIR PRE-OCCUPATIONS

The Victorian age presents a multiplicity of events and activities and they find their expression in the literary writings of the period. Literary writing could not remain unaffected by contemporary discourses as can be seen in the writings of Tennyson and Browning, Dickens and Thackeray. We should note two features of those times which explain the nature of Victorian writing: the involvement of literary writing in contemporary issues; and the nature of the issues. Cardinal Newman in *The Idea of a University* saw the period's controversies in these terms: "It is one great advantage of an age in which unbelief speaks out, that Faith can speak out too; that, if falsehood assails truth, truth can assail falsehood." Belief, unbelief, and debate characterised the times. So did the involvement of writers in these debates. Carlyle saw the role of writers as akin to priests, with literary writing as a new kind of creed. Here we must refer to the advent of new ideas in the world of science, religion and politics. Darwin's evolutionary theory, the invention of the steam-engine, the construction of railways, the spread of education — all brought about radical changes in the social scenario. The all-encompassing tide of Darwinism led people to rethink, reconsider their ideas and values. Andrew Sanders sums up the tendencies of the time in the following words,

"A great deal of Victorian intellectual effort was spent in trying to hold together a universe which was exploding. It was an age of conflicting explanations and theories of scientific and economic confidence and of social and spiritual pessimism, of a sharpened awareness of the inevitability of progress and of deep disquiet as to the nature of the present."

SAQ:

How would you connect the political and the economic, with the religious and the philosophical changes in the period? Do you find any such connection between the varieties of disturbances in the Victorian era?
(60 + 80 words)

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The turmoil produced by scientific and intellectual achievements, industrialism, and technological achievements left a conspicuous impact on Victorian poetry. The poets of the age felt a sense of urgency to represent the sensibility/spirit of their time. Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Clough, Morris and many others are counted among the powerful and representative poets of the time who made an effort to establish poetic faith amidst Victorian unrest and skepticism. In terms of pattern and spirit, Victorian poetry shares in common with Romantic tendencies. However a shift can be noticed in terms of subject-matter: from Nature to Man. The romantic vigour, sensuousness and splendour is still there in Victorian poetry with the lyrical flow in the works of Tennyson, Swinburne, Rossetti and Arnold.

The self-consciousness of being “Victorian” can be traced back to the title given to E.C.Stedman’s volume of 1875, *Victorian Poets*. But what we see as “Victorian” today is the view of the post-Victorian period and not something that the representative figures of Victorianism thought of or labelled. Much of that “Victorianism”, to us, seems to be represented by names like Arnold, Dickens and Ruskin. But it is ironical that these were the very people who were critical of contemporary attitudes. As Davis sums up: “Many of the leading Victorian writers were of course, in some sense, anti-Victorian— or alternatively could be said to be *most* Victorian—in being deeply critical of the so-called Victorian attitudes of their own age:Matthew Arnold against complacent materialist philistinism, or Charles Dickens in exposure of religious hypocrisy, or Ruskin on the unfeelingness and uncreativity of his times. But the adverse reaction against the ‘Victorians’, which begins after Victoria’s death, goes on to include within the term figures such as Arnold, Dickens, and Ruskin themselves.” Many of these paradoxes and ironies can be traced in Tennyson’s (1809-1892) and Robert Browning’s (1812-1889) poetry. Their poetry is marked by the main movements of their time such as the Victorian dilemma and social unrest. Tennyson’s famous ‘*In Memoriam*’ represents the very Victorian controversy between faith and doubt and speculates over life and death. .

SAQ:

Attempt to define the word, 'Victorian' in terms of a unique world-view. (70 words)

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Among the minor poets of the age Elizabeth Barrett Browning occupies a special place who showed her concern over the problem of child labour in her poem "The Cry of the Children". The romance of her love life is well expressed in her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). Her *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is about a young social reformer and it emphasizes her moral and social ideals.

The artistic excellence of writers like D.G Rossetti (1828-1882), William Morris (1834- 96) and Swinburne (1837- 1909) with his haunting melody and metrical excellence provided a kind of romantic escape from the growing industrial and commercial world. In their artistic model, specially in the poetry of John Clare (1793- 1864) and Coventry Patmore (1823-96) we identify a philosophic speculation of romanticism. Along with that, other Victorian poets including James Thomson (1834- 1882), and Edward Fitzgerald (1803- 89), George Meredith (1828- 1909) aroused intellectual curiosity. Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" is an important specimen of Pre-Raphaelite art who was a major contributor to the Pre-Raphaelite periodical 'The Germ', and William Morris (1834-96) who showed intense medievalism and whose socialist faith is echoed in "The Pilgrim of Hope". Matthew Arnold (1822-88) moved to restore faith in poetic ideals and his poetry, as in "Dover Beach" considered by most to voice the sense of profound horror and anxiety of the Victorian age, attempted to bring back the 'high seriousness' he so strongly advocated:

“And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms
Of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

In the poem, the poet's melancholy synchronizes with the tranquil motion of the sea waves. The poet is optimistic about his age and is waiting for a divine spark which will cure them all of the 'strange disease of modern life' and he believes that amidst the Victorian crisis and unrest, poetry can work as a substitute through its 'criticism of life'.

Arnold's prose writings such as *Culture and Anarchy*, "The Study of Poetry", "Literature and Dogma" throw light upon the nature of poetry and its function in the restoration of culture. A classical endeavour marks his writings and he set high seriousness as a critical norm for judging poetry. His important writings include *Poems and Ballads* (1866), "Atlanta in Calydon" (1865) and "Songs before Sunrise".

Arnold was against dogmatism and rational prejudice. In *The Study of Poetry*, he envisages a high role for poetry:

"More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry."

SAQ:

What were Arnold's arguments for the exaltation of poetry? Do you think there was any religious influence in this argument? (70 + 60 words)

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A great deal of Victorian literature was concerned with the worldliness and skepticism and social unrest of the age. The fact of restless and destabilizing transitions shaped the very impulses of Victorian writing. Poets, novelists and essayists were influenced by the changing phase of the nineteenth century and showed their strong, positive as well as negative, reactions. Such reactions follow upon a refutation of inadequate notions of man and his society.

Social consciousness was affected by the industrial upheavals and changes were evident in the field of trade and commerce. The spread of economic changes, democracy, individualism and liberalism found expression in the writings of these poets and novelists. It was a time of revolution and reorganization. Charles Dickens, A. Trollope, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin showed their reaction against the spiritual vulgarity and degradation of moral values. The grotesque in Dickens' novels can be termed as a necessary reaction against and an outcome of the state of confusion and loss of the 'natural' as evident in *Oliver Twist* and *Pickwick Papers*. The incongruous playfulness and comedy draw attention to the underlying confusion and horror. Deirdre David considers Victorian novels to be ambitious, formless, generous, entertaining while the gothic and the sensational addressed the taboos associated with excess and the irrational. Along with social realism, in late Victorian writings, one can perceive a change of taste from social issues to experimentation with style and form.

Subsequently the late Victorian tendencies marked a shift from faithful representation of social process to a kind of self-conscious impressionism. In fact if one ideological function of the Victorian novel was to provide knowledge, another was to 'construct rules for the management of gender and sexuality'. (David, 12) Thus it was a time of revival that encouraged re-reading and retrieval, anticipating a change in the social system. This intellectual era was sustained by novelists like George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Dickens, Carlyle, Thackeray and Ruskin. As John Kucich argues, Victorian intellectual debates, both literary and non-literary, concerned science and religion as their objects of analysis and this debate was nourished by a growing humanitarianism and optimism about social reforms of the age, the evangelical movement and the spirit of cultural relativism. And we have the subversive fictions of William Thackeray and Anthony Trollope which sought consolation in picaresque and Romantic philosophy even while their reaction was mainly in the form of positivist naturalism.

W. M Thackeray, besides being a realist and a satirist, was an artist and a moralist and his novels preached the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice. His *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) is a social document where shams, deceptions and vanities are at play. The novel is subtitled 'a novel without a hero'. *Vanity Fair* shares the writer's notion of Victorian life with all its hypocrisy and snobbery. The novel is without a plot and the events develop through contrasts and confrontations.

Ruskin in his “*Unto This Last*” (1862) showed concern over the production of more unfeeling, and less human, beings in the industrial age. As Carlyle perceived, the problems of the age were mental, spiritual, political and even economic which distorted both space and time. The literature of the age shared a connection with the socio-historical events of the age and these writings claimed a humanitarian alternative and revival of religious order. Because of the interest of the middle-class in general enlightenment the question of education gained attention in the late Victorian period. Accordingly, an Education Committee of the Privy Council was set up with a system of inspection of the state-aided schools. It was only after the Reform Act of 1867 which enfranchised the working-class that the politicians gave importance to the spread of education. Dr. Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby, father of the Victorian cultural prophet, Matthew Arnold, was the great educational reformer of the ‘thirties who made contributions in popularizing public school life. In these schools much importance was given to the study of the classics setting high ideals of literary culture anticipating the advent of new journalism. It was a transitional phase of history – from aristocracy to democracy, from authority to mass-judgment. A tremendous influence was provided by John Stuart Mill’s “*On Liberty*” (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

Check Your Progress:

1. Consider the major preoccupations of Victorian writing in its involvement with contemporary crises.
2. Outline Victorian attitudes towards phenomena in the natural world in major works of Victorian literature.

1.5 POETIC CONCERNS

We may discern a connection between Tractarianism and Victorian poetry. Poems by Newman, Keble’s *Christian Year*, and some hymns by John Mason Neale, Isaac Williams, and F.W.Faber stand as their contribution to English poetry. However, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sister, Christina Rossetti, was certainly influenced by them. Tennyson’s conception of the religious life of the Middle Ages was, broadly speaking, derived from the ideas of

the Movement. So was the mood of the early poetry and the painting of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Victorian poetry marked, in many ways, a continuation of Romantic poetry in its spirit, splendour, and sensuousness. A characteristic melancholy marks their poetry which was an outcome of the literary decline, disintegration of moral values that characterized the age. The spirit of the age was essentially didactic / moralistic which insisted that poets avoid the directness of romantic poetry but a great deal of cultural activities were taking place in the age in the field of scientific, historical and philosophical innovations .

Stop to Consider:

We should observe that issues of common, public concern were debated through published treatises and other writings. One such issue of overwhelming importance, the theory of evolution, can be traced through its progress in the writings of Erasmus Darwin, and then others. His *Zoönomia* (1794-96) combined science and philosophy. His poem, *The Temple of Nature* was brought out posthumously. The work of Chevalier de Lamarck (from around 1802 to 1809) can be seen against Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830). Charles Darwin, in fact, studied this monumental work on his voyage on the *Beagle*. Darwin's own *The Origin of Species* followed only three decades later, in 1859. Interspersed in between we have the works of William Buckland and Philip Henry Gosse. *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* by Robert Chambers in 1844 was greeted by outcries from scientific circles. Herbert Spencer's thoughts were brought out as *The Development Hypothesis* in 1852 and *Progress: Its Law and Cause* in 1857. *The Origin of Species* "did not immediately excite opposition. That the first small edition was exhausted on the day of publication was probably due to the interest of theologians and scientists who were already aware of evolutionary speculation. Many older scientists were reluctant to accept Darwin's conclusions....But when Darwin published *The Descent of Man* (1871), though Pusey and Gladstone attacked it, there was no general excitement." We can note that T.H.Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* (1863) in which the theory was explicitly applied to "the human animal" (an expression which was now, significantly, becoming current), occasioned a new outcry."

A great deal of literary activity took place in the form of biography, autobiography, children's books or periodical journals.

Nonsense-writers like Lewis Carroll, and Edward Lear established faith in fantasy, absurdity, nothingness and comedy.

It is significant to mention here that by the end of the nineteenth century, a transition took place in terms of the reaction shown towards middle-class values. An anti-Victorian aestheticism grasped the general intelligentsia to make a gesture of independence from and resistance to the pressures and tensions of the time. Reference can be made to Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) where emphasis was given to 'experience', not the fruit of experience. Like the poets, the novelists of the period were also inspired to the task of tremendous literary strengthening and infusing it with a new vision to suit the activities of the time and they sought humanism to strengthen the feeling of human solidarity at the time of disintegration and moral crisis. The threat of unbelief is experienced by the people and it appeared that a literary faith was gradually replacing the dogmatic faith. Against the solidarity of the external world, the inner world appeared to be non-existent.

As it has been shown already the writers of the Age were inspired by the tendencies of the Victorian age and they felt a sense of urgency to reflect the spirit of the age through their writings. It was an age of Realism and the major writings of the age offered multiple responses to the warring and changing trends of the time. Perhaps the most prominent theme that finds its expression in those writings is the Victorian crisis of faith and Doubt. The material growth and the subsequent degradation of moral values is brought under scrutiny in these writings. Tennyson and Dickens offered the representative 'voices' and portrayed the Victorian world with all its crisis and imbalance. A melancholic strain runs through their narrative and this is followed by a wave of pessimism. Now, amidst Victorian dilemma of faith and doubt, a literary faith made attempts to replace traditional dogmatic faith. And this is reflected in the writings of Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy and G. M Hopkins -- a faith in love's immortality, a faith in the divine spark and a faith in verse.

It has been said earlier that Victorian poetry is, in many ways, a continuation of the nineteenth-century Romanticism and with the advent of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Evangelicals a wave of aestheticism marked its appearance. This finds its echo in the writings of Walter Pater, Swinburne and the Rossettis.

Stop to Consider:

Aestheticism

Several names and different speculative strands are associated with the Aesthetic Movement. Walter Horatio Pater (1839 - 1894) is considered to have led this movement: "At Oxford in the eighteen-sixties the Hegelian evaluation of the various kinds of human experience was expounded by Thomas Hill Green.... and was of primary importance for the determination of Walter Pater's point of view. At just this time Swinburne, following Gautier and Baudelaire, was controverting the Utilitarian criticism which demanded of art a moral emphasis and declaring that art should serve no religious, moral, or social end, nor any end save itself. Rossetti, while avoiding precept and controversy, was a strong and disturbing example of the artist wholly dedicated to his art. By seeking to make the social order comely, Ruskin, even while insisting upon moral values in art, prepared the way for Pater's doctrine of the comeliness of the individual life as a criterion of right conduct. Behind these and other expressions of dissatisfaction with the dominant Utilitarian creed was the pessimism of the mid-century which was a further stimulus towards hedonism."

Check Your Progress:

1. Assess the validity of the comment that the Victorian age was one "often searching for stable frameworks of understanding". Support your answer with references to any major Victorian work you have studied.
2. Justify the view that Victorian literature frequently stages "Victorianism's own struggle between old and new". Illustrate your points with textual examples.

1.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 2

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introducing the Poet
- 2.3 An Overview of his Works
- 2.4 Context of the Poem
 - 2.4.1 Autobiographical Elements in *In Memoriam*
- 2.5 Reading the Poem *In Memoriam* (Section 7, 35, 50, 96)
 - 2.5.1 Textual Themes and Motifs
- 2.6 Critical Reception
- 2.7 Summing up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit has been designed to facilitate a critical and insightful reading of the Victorian poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, with special emphasis on his poem *In Memoriam*. It is expected that this unit will provide you with answers to the variegated and multifarious issues raised within the ambit of the poem so that you are now in a better position to take a critical stance of your own. This unit will help you

- *connect* the life of the poet with the work
- *situate* *In Memoriam* within its socio-historical context
- *discover* the themes and motifs that the text presents
- *describe and explain* the meanings emerging from a proper reading of the poem

2.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Considered to be one of the most representative figures of the Victorian age, Tennyson, was born in 1809 to a vicar of the Church of England. While still an undergraduate at Cambridge, he published a group of little

verse studies in word-melody and word- picture in 1830. Two years later a second volume appeared, in which such poems as *The Lady of Shallot* and *The Lotos Eaters* showed his control over both the medieval and classical; *The Palace of Art* showed his desire to be no mere singer but a teacher. With *The Miller's Daughter* and *The May Queen* began a series of idylls of English life—short narratives, richly pictured and melodiously tuned, with touches of sentimentality and unreality, perhaps to win over an audience.

In 1836 Tennyson went to live in London where he came into contact with Carlyle and was stirred by his spirit of social protest. The latter's spiritual view of the universe, too, afforded him a support for his own religious faith, which was sorely tried by doubt. For ten years he brooded and worked away at his lodgings, publishing nothing. At the end of this period, in 1842, he emerged with two volumes, which were to take England by storm. In these he touched every province of poetry, from the lyrical simplicity of *Break, Break, Break* to the epic narrative *Morte d'Arthur*. In one of the poems, *Locksley Hall*, he uttered the protest of young men of his generation who felt keenly the pressure of their situation—of good, though not noble, birth—seething under the inequalities of rank and class distinctions; and the protest against an industrial civilization that made gold its supreme test of success. Five years later appeared *The Princess*, his contribution to a raging contemporary issue—the higher education of women. One sees here the conflict between his pure poetic interest in melody and picture and his desire to present a contemporary question in fanciful guise. However, the brilliance of such incidental poems as *Tears, Idle Tears* or the “Splendour Falls on Castle Walls” remains.

In 1850, Tennyson published *In Memoriam*, a hundred and thirty-one lyrics written over seventeen years in memory of Arthur Henry Hallam, a college-mate and beloved friend who died in 1833. The beginning touches upon the early phases of sorrow, moods of stunned and bewildered grief. Gradually the personal grief merges itself with an anxious speculation concerning the mystery of death and the hope of immortality. Through states of doubt, despair and anguished questioning, the poem slowly mounts to a region of firm though saddened faith, and ends in a full hymnal music breathing hope and fortitude of heart. To an age shaken with radical ideas relating to man's origin and place in the universe (though Darwin had not yet given his thesis

to the world) the poem helped tremendously to break down the opposition between science and religious faith.

In 1850 Wordsworth, who had been poet-laureate after Southey, died and Tennyson took the laurel. A government pension allowed him to marry and settle in the Isle of Wight from this time until his death 42 years later. He stood as spokesman of his people in times of sorrow or rejoicing. In such poems as *The Charge of the Light Brigade* or *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* he ministered to national pride, stoked the fires of imperialism and brought poetry closer to national life than it had ever been since Shakespeare. Later in *The Idylls of the King*, he uses the Arthurian legends to suggest modern moral and social problems and to emphasize on those evils, which he felt were the peculiar dangers of his own age.

Tennyson's later work consisted largely of the series of dramas, for the most part based on English history—*Queen Mary* (1875), *Harold* (1876), and *Becket* (1884). In "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" (1886) his earlier mood of protest gave way to an arraignment of society for its sordid materialism, its vice, cruelty and inefficiency. And then in a number of later poems he recreated the classic beauty of "Demeter", in the allegory of noble striving toward the light in *Merlin and the Gleam*, in the instinctive and spontaneous trust of *Crossing the Bar*. Though this last named is not his final poem, it could very well be taken as his final statement, his farewell word spoken with solemn gladness as he himself crosses the bar of death.

2.3 AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORKS

In any discussion of Victorian poetry, perhaps, the first name that comes to one's mind is that of Alfred Tennyson. Apart from *In Memoriam*, which is his magnum opus, Tennyson has a number of poems to his credit. In this section I shall discuss a few of these.

The Lotos Eaters: Published in 1832 and revised for the 1842 *Poems*. Its subject comes from Book IX of *The Odyssey*, where the sailors returning home after the fall of Troy land on a strange island inhabited by people who eat only the fruit of the lotos plant. Some of the sailors taste it and are filled with a langorous content that makes them reluctant to continue their journey.

While the subject in this poem is based on an episode in *The Odyssey* where Odysseus describes his weary mariners' brief stay with the Lotos Eaters, it is only in the opening stanzas and the sixth stanza of the choric song that the Homeric elements are contained. The five introductory Spenserian stanzas were written during the 1830 journey with Hallam through the Pyrenees and reflect that scenery and draw upon Spenser's description in *The Faerie Queene*.

Ulysses: *Ulysses* was written after Hallam's death and Tennyson maintains that there is more of him in this poem than in *In Memoriam*, for it was written under the sense of loss and all that had gone by, but also that life must still be fought out to the end. Published in 1842, the sources of "Ulysses" are Book IX of *The Odyssey* and Canto XXVI of Dante's *Inferno*. In the poem, Ulysses in his old age looks back on his past travels and sets forth for the last one, summoning the values of endurance, determination and hope to his aid.

Tithonus: Tennyson's *Tithonus* was published by Thackeray in 1860 in *Cornwall* magazine. Its original form was the poem 'Tithon', which Tennyson wrote in 1833 as a companion piece to *Ulysses* but did not publish then. As per the Greek myth, Tithonus was loved by Aurora (Eos), goddess of the dawn, who asked her father Zeus to grant him eternal life. Zeus agreed, but Aurora forgot to ask for eternal youth. Therefore, Tithonus grew older and older without dying. In pity for his plight, the gods turned him into a grasshopper.

The Princess: Published in 1847, *The Princess* consists of a Prologue, conclusion, and seven parts. The poem tells the story of a Prince, whose betrothed, Princess Ida, daughter of King Gama, prefers to live alone with her friends and to establish a centre of learning devoted to feminists. The poem manifests the growing Victorian concern for geology, astronomy, mathematics, evolutionary theory, feminism, domesticity and other aspects of the social hierarchy.

At the end of each section—interpolated in the third edition of 1850—are such enduring songs as 'Sweet and Low' and "The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls".

Maud: A Monodrama: *Maud* was composed at Farringford on the Isle of Wight in about a year (July 1855), however, the divisions in it were made

only at the eleventh edition in 1865. *Maud* was inspired from the earlier lyric “Oh! That `twere Possible”, which was written in 1833-4 after the death of Arthur Hallam. The original title was *Maud* or *The Madness*, but in 1875 Tennyson retitled it *Maud: A Monodrama*.

The narrator recounts the melancholy history of his life: his father’s death and the ruin of his family, his love for Maud and the duel in which he killed her brother, his separation from his home, his descent into insanity and his recovery through his patriotic commitment in the Crimean War. Some critics like Gladstone accused Tennyson of his seeming support of the Crimean War as panacea for disaffected youth. However, the poem is remarkable for the way in which Tennyson employs a variety of meters to convey the hero’s different moods.

Idylls of the King: This is one of Tennyson’s most ambitious works that was to receive wide acclamation followed by bitter criticism. Written over a period of forty years, one could see the obvious reasons behind the poem’s problems of coherence. In 1859, he published four ‘Idylls’: “Enid”, “Elaine”, “Vivien” and “Guinevere”. In 1869 he published “The Coming of Arthur”, “Pelleas and Ettare”, “The Holy Grail” and “The Passing of Arthur” which was based on the earlier “*Morte d’ Arthur*”. The central concern behind the whole work was to show the rise and fall of a society and to suggest symbolically and allegorically pertinence to the age in which he lived.

2.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

It could be said that *In Memoriam* is a public utterance, a conspicuous attempt to reconcile opposing tendencies which seemed to Tennyson and his contemporaries to be threatening the foundation of English society. Viewed from this perspective, it is fundamentally an effort to save religion from science by inducting a philosophy of religious and mystical experiences or by reconciling the nineteenth-century belief in the progress of species with the Christian concept of salvation.

In Memoriam is both a long and complex poem broadly arranged around three Christmas celebrations following Hallam’s death. Periods of intermittent composition extended over seventeen years, and the task of welding the disparate parts into a somewhat unified whole was effected in the later eighteen-forties. Instead of the elegiac plot of *Lycidas*, *Adonais*, or *Thyrsis*,

In Memoriam offers 133 stanzas apparently lacking in uniformity but intertwined by a number of images and motifs and resolutions, the most famous of which is to be found in section 95 of the poem. This stanza depicts Tennyson's climactic, ambiguous and mystical experience of his contact with Hallam's spirit. Tennyson leads the reader of *In Memoriam* from grief and despair through doubt to hope and faith. But as one reads the poem, one finds contrary emotions intruding into the individual stanzas with doubt enmeshed in faith and pain enmeshed in resolution. The poem is poignantly convincing as an expression of personal loss, the alternate subsidence and upwelling of grief, and the outcome in renewed happiness.

Stop to Consider:

Arthur Henry Hallam

When Tennyson went up to Cambridge, he made friends with 'several brilliant young men' — Arthur Henry Hallam, Edward FitzGerald, James Spedding, Richard Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton). The earlier influence of Byron now gave way to the 'two rising stars of English poetry, Shelley and Keats, posthumously renowned.' These were also happy years of a close relationship with Hallam. They went to Spain together 'with the quixotic intent to aid the insurgents; and Tennyson returned with memories of Pyrenean landscape which he worked into his poetry. Hallam, betrothed to the poet's sister, was a regular visitor at Somersby where Tennyson lived with his widowed mother, devoting himself to the cultivation of his art.....in the autumn came the crushing blow of Hallam's sudden death. This loss combined with symptoms of failing eyesight and the contemptuous reception accorded his poems by hostile critics to weigh him down. *The Two Voices* (originally entitled *Thoughts on Suicide*) discloses his state of mind in the dark days when *In Memoriam* was begun." (Samuel C. Chew & Richard D. Altick)

Arthur Henry Hallam's death in 1833 provided Tennyson with an immediate context against which to question is faith in nature, God and poetry. In some sections Tennyson sought to reconcile traditional faith with the new ideas of evolutionary science; but in others faith and reason are opposed. This tension between the dichotomous aspects of faith and doubt adds much to sustain the interest of the readers. *In Memoriam* was received with some approbation by leaders of the most diverse schools of thought.

The imagery drawn from recent discoveries in astronomy and geology attracted the attention of the scientists, which also marked the poem’s underlying evolutionary assumptions. The liberals welcomed its attempted compromise between science and religion. The orthodox recognized the effort to save faith from the grip of conquering materialism. Modern readers, brushing aside these old claims, are still held by its sustained beauty, its deep feeling and its wealth of imagery. The fused tremulousness of doubt and faith makes the poem the more moving.

SAQ:

Would you prefer to distinguish between Tennyson’s personal sense of loss and his ‘public’ doubt, or would you assert that they amount to one and the same? (60 words)

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2.4.1 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN *IN MEMORIAM*

The autobiographical elements in *In Memoriam* are resonant with multiple associations and one could almost immediately feel the tone of pathos and grief that runs through the verses. Arthur Henry Hallam, Tennyson’s intimate friend and his most immediate early critic, died suddenly and unexpectedly from a cerebral hemorrhage on September 15, 1833, while on a trip to Vienna with his father. Some five years earlier, shortly after his arrival at Trinity College in October 1823, Hallam had befriended Tennyson who was already a prominent figure in the College by that time. It could be surmised that Hallam’s passion for poetry immediately brought the two together. This feeling of grief over the loss of his friend is evoked very clearly in different parts of the poem starting from the Prologue. ‘Prologue’:

“Forgive my grief for one removed,
Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
I trust he lives in thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved” (Prologue; 33-36)

The Hallam family learnt of his death on September 28; Hallam's uncle posted Tennyson the news on October 1, although Tennyson probably did not receive it until several days later. Sections 9-20 of the poem could be considered to be something of a unit because of their common subjects like Hallam's death, the return of the body to England and the burial at Clevedon. The following lines from section 9 evoke the image of the ship returning from the shores of Italy with Hallam's body for burial:

“Fair ship, from that Italian shore
Sailest the placid ocean-plains
With my lost Arthur's loved remains,
.....
Sleep, gentle heavens, before the prow;
Sleep, gentle winds, as he sleeps now,
My friend, the brother of my love.” (Section 9; 1-16)

Stop to Consider:

Some amount of attention has also been paid to speculations about a homosexual dimension to their friendship. It should always be recalled that, throughout the nineteenth century, friendship between young men would be viewed by twentieth-century standards as exceptionally close. A rigorously imposed etiquette, particularly in regard to prolonged separation of the sexes, was the most important cause for this. High points in their relationship included the trip to the Pyrenees in 1830 and a tour of the Rhineland in 1832.

At Cambridge, Hallam was considered by all who knew him to be the most promising figure of his generation, a statement substantiated by numerous reminiscences. As titular leader of the Apostles, the Cambridge undergraduate literary group, he introduced Tennyson to that society and its stimulating atmosphere. Hallam's influence was profound. It was Hallam who helped Tennyson through the difficult period following publication of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* in 1830 and helped him working over the new volume for 1832. Hostile reviewers—the two most vicious were Wilson and Croker (who had earlier savaged Keats)—stung hard and deep. Hallam's role in meliorating their otherwise negative effects simply cannot be overrated, both at the time and for the future's sake. He was friend,

critic, and philosopher to a sometimes confused and lonely poet who desperately needed the guidance, warmth, and compassion that Hallam freely offered. Moreover, Hallam was engaged to Emily, Tennyson's sister. As he was shortly to become a member of the family, his loss was shattering. The extent to which relations developed between the Tennysons and Hallam could be glimpsed from the following lines:

“Dear as the mother to the son
More than my brothers are to me” (Section 9; 19-20)

Following Hallam's traumatic death, Tennyson retreated into a period of mourning in which he seems to have indulged in writing as a mode of purgation which was both personal as well as professional. Many short lyrics which were composed during this period were later shaped into the elegiac stanzas which make up the early sections of *In Memoriam*.

Hallam's death had exacerbated Tennyson's already brooding and hypersensitive temperament to a state of depression which no mere passage of time can remedy. Domestic and personal troubles before 1833 had prepared the way: the death of his father in 1831, the mental breakdown of his younger brother, Edward, and the opium addiction of Charles in 1832 and Croker's harsh treatment of his 1832 poems in the *Quarterly Review*. These personal and family problems are very implicitly evoked in the poem in a wistful longing to share his afflictions with Hallam:

“If along with these should come
The man I held as half-divine
.....
And ask a thousand things of home;
And I should tell him all my pain,
And how my life had droop'd of late
And he should sorrow o'er my state.” (Section 14; 9-15)

After 1833, the burden of family business fell on his shoulders when Frederick left on a pleasure trip to Italy. He was concerned for his mother, for his sister Emily and for Septimus, who was also for a time, threatened with nervous breakdown. The unfriendly reception of his poems continued to worry him, and kept him from venturing to publish another volume. Upon the death of his grandfather in 1835, the Tennysons were slighted. Amidst these depressing circumstances, the death of Hallam came like a jolt.

Preoccupied already with the bearing of science on religion, he could not fail to find in this personal loss a demonstration of the finality of death and the remoteness of God.

Check Your Progress:

1. Starting as an elegy for his friend, *In Memoriam* proceeds to incorporate a long philosophical discussion on the universal issues of life, death and the hereafter. Summarize Tennyson's views as expressed in the sections prescribed for your study.

2. To what extent, do you think, *In Memoriam* enacts a "struggle" between the conflicting aspects of science and religion, faith and doubt, hope and a sense of annihilation? Highlight those passages in the poem which 'enact' such a struggle.

2.5 READING THE POEM IN MEMORIAM (SECTIONS 7, 35, 50, 96)

Here I have incorporated a discussion of the different sections of *In Memoriam* prescribed for your course:

Section 7 immediately strikes a note of personal loss that is acutely felt and is irrevocable. It starts with a reference to Hallam's house ("Dark house") at 67 Wimpole Street, London which again recurs in section 199 of the poem. The poet's bereavement is amply expressed in his longing to clasp a hand that "can be clasped no more". Another noticeable factor is the manner in which the poet talks about 'rains' in this section. While rain is usually symbolic of life and regeneration, here we find Tennyson talking about the ghastly course of a life through the drizzling rain on a bleak morning. This perhaps is an indicator to show that nature could no longer be simply thought of as an entity that is keen to shower its benevolence upon human kind. While the rain in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* regenerates life, here in Tennyson, it is used as a stark reminder of transience and death. The note of hopelessness is amply expressed by the use of alliteration in "the bald street breaks the blank day".

This feeling of grief is exacerbated by the physical absence of Hallam that overwhelmingly overpowers him, "he is not here". From the tone of personal crisis in Section 7, the poem goes on to encompass in **Section 35**, the crisis

and hopelessness afflicting society in general, induced by the knowledge of mutability of life and species. This sense of pathos is embedded in the poet's realization that "Man dies, nor is there hope in dust". In this section, an opposition could be found between impermanence of individual life and species and the permanence of Love:

“...O Love, I strive
To keep so sweet a thing alive.” (Section 35; 6-7)

Here the idea is for 'Love' to exist in more than a physical sense. This is one of those sections in the poem wherein one could find influences of Tennyson's reading of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* which had a shaping influence on Tennyson.

SAQ:

Explain with reference to the context: "Yet if some voice that man could trust / Should murmur from the narrow house, / 'The cheeks drop in; the body bows; / Man dies: nor is there hope in dust:' // (90 words)

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Section 50, depicts a conflict-torn psyche invoking a greater power (the power could be the spirit of Hallam or it could refer to his vocation, namely the art of poetry) that could sustain itself in crisis:

"Be near me when my light is low... / Be near me when my faith is dry... / Be near me when I fade away..." (Section 50: 1, 9, 13). Here 'Time' is personified as a 'maniac' and used as a metaphor to show the ravages it could wreak on human life by 'scattering dust'. The turmoil of the thinking mind, however, finds some kind of temporary alleviation in section 96 wherein the poet suggests a way out of this burning crisis.

Section 96 starts with a direct address to a lady with "light-blue eyes", most probably his beloved and wife Emily Sellwood whose religious scruples about Tennyson had been a factor in their delayed marriage. An attempt

has been made in this section to bring about a resolution to the dilemma erected in Section 50 with the assertion that "...there lives more faith in honest doubt". This is perhaps also a reply to the scrupulous faith of his wife ("...doubt is Devil-born") in particular and the people nurturing blind faith in religion in general. He presents Hallam as the epitome of thinking and sensitive Victorian mind that reconciled faith and doubt:

"He fought his doubts and gather'd strength

.....

And laid them; thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith..."

(Section 96; 13-16)

SAQ:

Tennyson is remembered for his poetic virtuosity. Explain the metaphor in section 50 in terms of Tennyson's larger dilemmas (90 words)

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2.5.1 TEXTUAL THEMES AND MOTIFS

The following are the various themes and motifs found in the various sections of the poem *In Memoriam* by Tennyson.

In some places in *In Memoriam* there is a vague optimism about the progress of nature: but its general tenor shows that **Nature** cannot probably lead men to God: even when natural appearances are sometimes in conformity with faith (and more often they are not) they cannot form the basis on which faith rests: belief must be based on what men feel:

"I found him not in world or sun

.....

I heard a voice 'believe no more'

And heard an ever breaking shore

That tumbled in the Godless deep;" (Section 124, 5- 12)

The passage in the 'Epilogue' about consciousness moving through 'life of lower phase' resulting in man, who himself leads on to 'the crowning race' refers, on the one hand, to the mutability of species while on the other hand, it has references to successive creations. Tennyson maintains in the poem that man is but the "herald of a higher race" that he but "subserves another's gain"; that instead of being the end and purpose of creation, he is only a member of the series and is destined to be extinguished like the rest.

Tennyson, in *In Memoriam*, was by no means content to accept man's present existence as a mere preparation for the life of more perfect beings. It was this belief that the individual is only an instrument in the perfection of a total scheme, far more than the belief in the mutability of species, that made Tennyson doubt the benevolence of the order of the universe.

Throughout the Darwinian controversy Tennyson showed no unwillingness to accept Darwinian 'Theory' in the sense that the physical nature of man was derived from lower animals. In a conversation with Tyndall he actually appears to welcome the view of the life of nature as a lower stage in the manifestation of a principle which is fully manifested in the spiritual life of man. What troubled him was that the spiritual life of man might only be a lower stage in the evolution of something else. Sometimes as in the Epilogue, he contrives some measure of optimism about it; sometimes he tries above all to attain some assurance that in spite of appearances, there is no created being which 'but subserves another's gain'.

Stop to Consider:

The name of John Tyndall comes with an interesting facet of Victorian intellectual life. Philip Davis calls him a "popularizing physicist" who, among other things, "summarized the findings of the scientist J.P. Joule, in his work on heat-loss and heat-gain". Davis records: "Together with "Darwin's bulldog" Thomas Huxley, the mathematician W.K.Clifford, and the astronomer Richard Proctor, Tyndall was one of the great Victorian populizers of those scientific ambitions [of Helmholtz, Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, William Thomson(later Lord Kelvin)]. In an attempt to return specialized studies to the general culture, these writers sought a language within the popular literary and political journals of the time by which to bring science to a public without a formal scientific education."

Other reflections which upset his belief in the benevolent ordering of the universe were the amount of pain in the world and the blind profusion of nature: “An omnipotent Creator who could make such a painful world is to me sometimes as hard to believe as a blind matter behind everything. The lavish profusion too in the natural world appalls me, from the growth of the tropical forests to the capacity of men to multiply, the torrent of babies”. There is nothing unusual in being troubled by the amount of pain in the world; to Tennyson it remained real, and his scientific reading did nothing to mitigate the impression. Why the profusion of the natural world should have appalled him is less clear. To many it has seemed to be a striking evidence of the power and benevolence of the Creator. The answer to this could perhaps be found in section 55 of *In Memoriam*:

“Are God and Nature then at strife?
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems
So careless of the single life” (section 55; 5-8)

The profusion of nature is only an effort to keep the type in being, and implies an attitude of carelessness about the individual. On all this, the influence of Lyell was profound who in his *Principles of Geology* asserted that man has made little difference to the physical world of nature. He argues that the effects of man on his environment are perhaps greater than but similar to the other species of animals. Though the appearance of man in the universe was extraordinary, it was not really very significant to the universal scheme of things. It is this, far more than any other consideration of man’s origin that made cosmic optimism difficult for Tennyson:

“It is difficult to hope
That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed
Or cast as rubbish to the void” (section 54; 5-7)

But nature gives little support for the belief: “so careful of the type she seems, so careless of the single life”. On a closer examination one could find that Nature is not even careful of the type: “She cries, “a thousand types are gone:/I care for nothing, all shall go....” The testimony of the rocks shows that multitudes of whole species have gone, have been created apparently only to disappear.

But there is another aspect of nature that has been considered in *In Memoriam*. For instance let us have a look at the following extract from the poem wherein man is hailed as the herald of a higher race:

...at the last arose the man

.....

So if he type this work of time
Like glories move his course and show
That life is not as idle ore
(section 118; 12-20)

Side by side where God and Nature are seen operating in opposite poles, we find passages where the process of nature is given an optimistic interpretation.

SAQ:

Would you view Tennyson's conception of the human as being based on biblical faith or on the scientific discourses? (80 words)

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So far as the poem is concerned, Tennyson's idea of progress suggests something that has to do with the reconciliation of God and Nature; it is to him that "one far off divine event,/ to which the whole creation moves". Tennyson seems to be suggesting 'man' as a step in the process of development of the crowning race which will be different from what 'man' is today. But this interpretation too is fraught with obscurity. Neither is it clear what the one far-off divine event could be, nor is it plain how Tennyson in his mood of evolutionary optimism supposed that it would come about. Those who seek in the doctrines of science a support for a religious faith are apt to find it, but at the cost of considerable confusion of thought.

Check your progress:

1. Can it be said that Tennyson's poetry is in some ways a clash between Genesis and Geology? Give a well considered response.
2. Evaluate Tennyson's meditations on 'life' and 'death' with special reference to the sections prescribed for you.

In section fifty-two of *In Memoriam* the poet says that he feels intuitively that all suffering must have its just reward: "good will be the final goal of ill." He tries to believe this, yet his intellect will not let him hold such a notion with certainty. "We know not anything" he says. Man on earth knows nothing of the afterlife, nothing of God, nothing of some greater scheme. He does not even know if any of these things exist. In this poem Tennyson tries to reconcile his faith with his doubt, his religious belief with the material world. If he can prove that life has purpose and that pain and suffering have some meaning in the afterworld, then he can prove that his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, did not live and die in vain. Again, Tennyson's thinking here seems profoundly influenced by the burgeoning evolutionary theories of his time. The scientific evidence gathered in the nineteenth century— particularly Charles Lyell's discovery that some of the Earth's rocks were formed hundreds and millions of years ago trivialized man's existence. This new knowledge proclaimed that most people, worms, moths and everything else live futile lives. A single man, or even the whole race of man, cannot hold much importance over enormous tracts of time.

In this particular poem, however, Tennyson does not reach a definite conclusion. He defers the problem. That life contains meaning is but a "dream," as he says, and "dream" here has two meanings: first, hope; and second, a subconscious thought. His intuition tells him that life possesses purpose, but still he requires more concrete knowledge. The image of the infant crying evokes utter helplessness and inexperience. Since the poet cannot communicate with the dead or God, he has "no language but a cry," or just an unheard plea for answers. This poem concludes with a religious image, of an infant reaching for light, which we take as the poet grasping, not only for knowledge, but for salvation as well. These images of the last stanza stand in marked contrast to those of the earlier lines, which drew from just earthly material — moths burning and worms split in half. The line

“That nothing walks with aimless feet,” for example, elicits the drawing of man walking through evolution, from ape to *Homo sapiens*. The combination of these images foreshadows Tennyson’s eventual solution: that man evolves spiritually as well as physically and so will one day be united with God.

SAQ:

Does the Victorian poet posit a redeemable future? Or does a ‘golden past’ condemn the present, for such a poet ? (60 +60)

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2.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Twentieth-century criticism of *In Memoriam* begins with A.C. Bradley’s *A Commentary on Tennyson’s “In Memoriam”*, published in 1901. Bradley offered informative annotations of the entire poem along with concise biographical, bibliographical and literary background and questions on the poem’s unity. Admitting its greatness, Bradley still found *In Memoriam* defective as an ‘organism’. Bradley did touch on the question of unity when in the *Commentary* he examined the bearing of the sections on one another. It is a forced synthesis which appeared in 1850 with its three arbitrary divisions of Despair, Regret and Hope.

In an attempt to rehabilitate Tennyson in a new century, Sir Harold Nicholson in his *Tennyson: Aspects of his Life, Character and Poetry* (1923), postulated a dichotomy between the melancholy romantic lyricist, who was worth preserving and the moralistic spokesman for Victorianism, who was not. According to him, the Tennyson of *In Memoriam* belonged to the first of these categories; but Romantic melancholy scarcely provided the best ground for defending an unfashionable poem the year after *Ulysses* and “The Waste Land” were published, especially when the modernist verdict that Tennyson was a poet of dissociated sensibility was already pronounced by T.S. Eliot in 1921. Eliot’s 1936 essay “*In Memoriam*” (*Poems, Ancient and Modern*), declared the poem as the most unapproachable of all

Tennyson's poems—a long poem made by putting together short lyrics, which has only the unity and continuity of a diary.

In 1944, W.H. Auden in the introduction to his book *A Selection of the Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, called Tennyson “the stupidest English Poet” but acknowledged the poem *In Memoriam* to be his masterpiece. It was however left to Paull F. Baum to assault the poem directly. In *Tennyson: Sixty Years After* (1948), the first book-length study after Nicholson's, Baum saw the poem as hastily and arbitrarily assembled from materials that are incompatible in genre (the personal elegy and the philosophical poem) and style. “Parts of the poem will live” Baum commented, but, “as a single poem it has had its day and ceased to be.”

By the late 1950s the reception of *In Memoriam* in literary spheres had undergone a reversal as scholars began to detect continuity rather than conflict between the Victorians and the Moderns. There appeared a new inclination to accept the work as poetry, coupled with a dramatic increase in the number of scholars who were working on it. The founding in 1957 of the interdisciplinary journal *Victorian Studies* and of *Victorian Poetry* in 1963, ensured the Victorian scholars regular outlets for publication. In an essay appearing in the second volume of *Victorian Studies: In Memoriam: A Way of the Poet* (1958, 139-148), E.D.H. Johnson, again takes up the ‘structure’ of the poem for his study and comes up with the analysis that parallel to the stages defined by three Christmases, there is a subsidiary structure in the poet-speaker's developing sense of his own art. In *The Romantic Assertion* (1958) R.A. Foakes proposed a method of considering precisely the kind of poetry that eluded the New Critics. He examines the symbolic importance of certain traditional imagery within the poem directed towards the affirmation of basic values.

The turning point in the reorientation of twentieth-century Tennyson criticism could be marked in 1960 with the publication of Jerome H. Buckley's *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet*, which according to Joseph Sendry was the first major study of the century to appraise the entire Tennyson corpus without belabouring him for his Victorianism. The chapter on *In Memoriam* defines the unity of the poem as ‘stylistic’ based on the recurrence of key images. Besides imagery, Buckley took up such matters as the speaker's recovery of assent—which he finds analogous to that in *The*

Prelude—and the relation of *In Memoriam* to literary tradition, especially to that of the pastoral.

On the central issue, that is, the relationship of the part to the whole, no clear consensus has emerged as literary studies tend to be drawn towards either of the two poles: *In Memoriam* as a record of experiences or as a literary artifice. Different and varied labels have been used to describe this dichotomy: such as ‘process’ versus ‘product’ by Dwight Culler in *The Poetry of Tennyson* (1977), or developmental versus architectural by James R. Kincaid (*Tennyson’s Major Poems: The Comic and Ironic Patterns*, 1975). Alan Sinfield, who has applied this dichotomy most systematically and fruitfully in *The Language of Tennyson’s In Memoriam* (1971), entitled one of his chapters “Linnet and the Artifact”: the linnet representing romantic impulses, individual and expressive and the artifact refers to classical qualities such as objectivity, impersonality and generality. This reading shows that the two realms need not be mutually contradictory or exclusive.

Going back to the categories of ‘process’ and ‘product’ (as discussed by Culler), the former refers to the evolution of the speaker’s consciousness, the successive stages of which are represented by various sections. Statements on behalf of the ‘process’ position highlight the autobiographical element that the poem so strongly conveys. J.C.C. Mays in his “*In Memoriam: An Aspect of Form*” is of the opinion that the most important means to unity in *In Memoriam* is the feeling that “all the time Tennyson is there beside us, talking”. Critics like Ward Hellstrom in *On the Poems of Tennyson* (1972), Francis P. Davlin in “Dramatic Irony in the early sections of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*” and Michael Mason in “*In Memoriam: The Dramatization of Sorrow*”, point out the unity of the poem in terms of the speakers’ developing consciousness. Their distinctive note is a dramatization of the speaker. Hellstrom pointedly refers to this figure as the ‘persona’ in a work of art rather than conventional autobiography. In Mason, this persona gets an identity independent of his author because by the end of the poem the reader is aware of recurrent distortions in the way this persona represents the world.

Critics of the ‘product’ group like Joanne P. Zuckermann (in “Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* as Love Poetry”) argue that the poem is a carefully shaped whole. Sinfield has located the appeal of the poem to the stylization of its

language rather than the arrangement of its parts within a whole. The critic who addressed this question in most explicit terms is probably Valerie Pitt in *Tennyson Laureate* (1962) who argued that from revisions and rearrangements during composition and departures from autobiographical fact, Tennyson was assembling his elegy according to an artistic plan. The same issue has been taken up by F.E.L. Priestley in his book *Language and Structure in Tennyson's Poetry* (1973).

SAQ:

Compare Tennyson's concept of 'time' in the poem with the similar concept in the Shakespearean sonnet no.107. Can there be an appropriately 'historical' difference? (80 + 60 words)

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.....
.....

A fairly large number of critics have chosen to differentiate among parts of the elegy by identifying climaxes or turning points. An important section of the poem which most critics have pointed out and referred to is section XCV, where the poet experiences, through a trance, a much longed-for union with his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, which is simultaneously accompanied by a profound intuition of meanings in things. Some scholars like Robert Langbaum hold the opinion that this mystical encounter produces a fundamental reorientation of the poet's outlook, and of the direction of the poem; for in that trance the poet has the epiphany that transforms and transcends all the problems of the poem. In the interest of maintaining an open-ended stance, Henry Kozicki (in "Meaning in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*") rejects all readings that give XCV climactic importance, and without naming specific turning points, claims that the development of the persona (taken as a 'collective mind') proceeds in convulsive stages through the will's activity in the world. Kerry McSweeney in "Pattern of the Natural Consolation in *In Memoriam*" takes XCV as the equivalent of the peripeteia of the traditional elegy (the sudden turn from "he is dead" to "he is not dead") and interprets the reversal as the speaker's reconciliation with the external world and through memory with his own past. Carlisle's interpretation is antithetical to that of McSweeney's who analyses that the characteristic

pattern of feeling is from “wild questioning grief to acceptance” though he sees the clarity of this pattern opposed by the waywardness of an extended period of time, not found in conventional elegy.

While the basic question regarding the structure of *In Memoriam* remains unresolved, similar debates have also arisen with regard to the attempts of locating the work within a particular ‘genre’. F.E.L. Priestley in *Language and Structure in Tennyson’s Poetry* analyses that the very notion of genre that Tennyson received from the Romantics was no longer a stable model to be imitated but a repertory of effects to be combined in changing ways. Thus *In Memoriam* as he declares, is entirely ‘sui generis’. Elaborating on Priestley’s thesis, W. David Shaw urges that the chief generic innovation of *In Memoriam* is a fusion of disparate features. Unable to offer a genre that could adequately contain the poem, scholars define its peculiar character by the way in which it modifies and reverses its generic expectations in as much as by the ways in which it fulfills them. This tension between participation in and opposition to a given ‘genre’ is well illustrated in studies concerning the literary type with which it is most frequently aligned—the pastoral elegy. The next most important genre—or perhaps better, generic field—into which *In Memoriam* has been placed by recent critics is the literature of confession or conversion. Eliot’s characterization of the poem in 1936 as “the diary of a man confessing himself” had become well established in the next decade that Graham Hough could observe that the virtues of the poem are entirely those of personal confession.

Check Your Progress:

1. Expatiate on the idea that Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* is less about the loss of hope and more about reconciliation. Give textual references.
2. Which symbols convey Tennyson’s idea of mutability and decay? How does Tennyson confer a typically ‘Victorian’ question on the idea of eternity given that Darwin’s theory had put all into doubt?
3. How does interweave the different sections of *In Memoriam*? Would you call it a thematic signifier poem? Give your views with support from the text.
4. How does history recur as a theme in the poem in the light of Tennyson’s preoccupation with his personal loss?

2.7 SUMMING UP

In the preceding sections attempt has been made to give you an overall idea of Tennyson's aesthetics with *In Memoriam* as the point of reference. In the introductory sections you have been presented with an overview of his works, the controversies of the age that shaped his poetry and the critical acclaim that his works have been accorded with over the years. *In Memoriam* is important both as an expression of personal grief as well as a public statement since both the spheres merge together in the poem to make it what it is. Hence the subsequent sections of this unit contain a reading of the specific sections of the poem prescribed for your course and a detailed analysis of the various aspects including the different themes and motifs. The Victorian age was fed by the controversies that surfaced due to the conflicts between traditional religious beliefs and the radical ideas proposed by developments in various departments of science. By containing these debates and giving us a picture of the paradoxical tendencies of its times, *In Memoriam* earns for itself the status of a representative work of the age to which it belonged.

2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 3

Robert Browning

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introducing the Poet
- 3.3 An Overview of His Works
- 3.4 Browning's 'Dramatic Monologue'
- 3.5 Reading the Poems
 - 3.5.1 Reading *Fra Lippo Lippi*
 - 3.5.2 Reading *A Grammarian's Funeral*
- 3.6 Critical Reception
- 3.7 Summing up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to yet another preeminent figure of Victorian poetry, Robert Browning, who was also Tennyson's contemporary and the artist of the 'dramatic monologue'. Attempts have been made to familiarize you with the poet's background, some of his personal details, the period he lived in and the several literary concerns that shaped his life and career. Thus this unit has been structured to help you to

- *place* the poet in his proper historical context
- *identify* the nature of his literary preoccupations
- *understand* the significance of the 'dramatic monologue'
- *explore* the nuances of the poems, and
- *articulate* your own critical response

3.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Browning's fame as a poet is closely involved with his reputation as a philosopher of optimism. His genius is robust and vigorous. He has such hopefulness and belief in human nature that it shrinks from no man, however

clothed and cloaked in evil and however miry with failings. His investigations of evil are profoundly consistent with an indomitable optimism. One can say “All’s right with the world,” when one looks at the smiling face of things.

Browning was an erudite scholar and one of the most prolific writers of the Victorian era, but with little formal education. After the age of fourteen, Browning had no regular education, but in the library at home, he read widely and acquired the taste for out-of-the-way books which was to furnish him with his vast but undisciplined erudition. “Ossian” and Byron were his first masters, but in 1826 he came across the poems of Shelley and became an avowed disciple of the “Sun-treader”. Attendance at the theatres roused his ambition to be a “maker of plays”; but first he conceived the idea of writing a poem, an opera, and a novel, each to appear under a different pseudonym. Nothing could be said of the opera and the novel, but the poem was “Pauline” which came out anonymously in 1833.

Stop to Consider:

Love for books was nurtured in Browning by his well-to-do parents. The Brownings resided near Dulwich and the gallery there was one of the favourite haunts of the young Robert Browning. His father shared with him a passion for old tales of intrigue and violence, and the two followed together the latest crime-stories in the newspapers. In the light of Browning’s subsequent predilection for criminal types and morally wrapped characters, this early shaping influence upon his imagination requires emphasis. For the austere atmosphere of worship in the religion of Evangelical dissent in which his mother instructed him he retained a reverence which long afterwards he expressed in his poetry.

Between 1841 and 1846 Browning published eight little pamphlets entitled *Bells and Pomegranates*. The first of these was “Pippa Passes” which was later on to become one of Browning’s most popular poems. *Bells* also contained dramas; *A Blot on the ‘Scutcheon’* was the cause of a bitter quarrel with Macready. After writing *A Soul’s Tragedy* Browning abandoned his long effort to write for the stage. He had found in the dramatic monologue the medium ideally suited to his genius. Of poems in this form, *Dramatic Lyrics* contained among other things, “My Last Duchess” and “Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister”. *Dramatic Romances* and *Lyrics* included, with much

else on a somewhat lower level, the lastingly popular “How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix”, “The Flight of the Duchess”, the first nine sections of “Saul”, and that masterpiece of historical and psychological insight, “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church”.

In 1844, Elizabeth Barrett published her *Poems* in one of which Browning read a commendation of himself whereupon he addressed her a letter of admiration which led at once to friendship and soon to love. On September 12, 1846, the lovers eloped and settled in Italy which was their home from 1847 till Mrs. Browning’s death in 1861. To Mrs. Browning, Italy meant mainly contemporary politics; to him, painting, music, history, landscape and the complex temperament of a fascinating people. He observed disapprovingly the elaborate ritual of Catholic worship, contrasted it with the simple piety of English dissent, and from his reading of Strauss’s *Leben Jesu* drew out the further contrast between faith and rationalism. The Brownings visited London in 1855 and *Men and Women*, a collection of poems got published. The enthusiasm of Rossetti and his circle increased the immediate sale of this new work. But this soon dropped off and though reviews were generally favorable few readers seem to have discerned the surpassing excellence of many of these poems. Carlyle had long been Browning’s admirer; Landor ranked him with Chaucer and Ruskin praised him in his *Modern Painters*.

Stop to Consider:

In 1860, Browning discovered on a Florentine bookstall an “Old Yellow Book” containing a collection of records of a murder trial at Rome and the execution of the murderer in 1698. Only gradually did the poet realize that this was the material precisely suited to his interest in psychology, in the criminal mind, and in Italian social history, and to the technique of the dramatic monologue. Meanwhile, his wife’s health was declining; she was overwrought when Italian hopes languished after the Peace of Villafranca; and she died in 1861. Life in Florence was henceforth impossible for Browning and he left the city never to return; and with his son made London his home with occasional sojourns in France. *Dramatis Personae* (1864) shows a shift of interest from Italian to English themes and an alert attention to such vital issues of the day as the Darwinian hypothesis.

Browning's masterpiece *The Ring and the Book*, was published in four installments (1868-1869) and received with almost universal acclaim. In popular estimation Browning was henceforth second only to Tennyson among living poets and by many he was accorded the first place.

Balaustion's Adventure (1871) is his first extended incursion into the field of classical mythology which he was now for some years to cultivate diligently. To 1872 belongs *Fifine at the Fair* which involved fascinating study in erotic psychology. The fascination which crime and the mentality of criminals had for Browning, led him to write *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873). It concerns an actual contemporary French trial involving a contested will and a suspected suicide. Another psychological study of villainy is *The Inn Album* (1875) founded upon the case of a card-sharper in *The Greville Memoirs*.

Browning's enthusiasm for life, his vitality, his insistence on strenuous endeavor did much to stem the tide of moral pessimism which infected so much of the European literature of the century. Browning's was a philosophy of imperfection. As he wrote in "Abt Vogler":

"the evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound...

on the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven the perfect round."

It was the striving toward perfection rather than the attainment that mattered most to him; the onward going rather than the goal itself. Browning's determined optimism found expression in poem after poem. In "Abt Vogler", Browning reiterates that "all we have willed or hoped or dreamt of good shall exist". Browning did not share with Tennyson the contemporary doubts and crisis. While Tennyson wrote "The woods decay, the woods decay and fall" (Tithonus), Browning chose to write on the incorrigible Pied Piper of Hamilton. His robust "Prospice" contrasts sharply with Tennyson's quiet acceptance of death in "Crossing the Bar".

Stop to Consider:

There were many misconceptions about Browning's robust and hearty confidence. Some opinions which has put into the mouths of his characters for dramatic purposes have often been misconstrued as his own. Even eminent scholars like Welleck and Warren have pronounced: "The oracular sayings of Victorian poets such as Browning which have struck many readers as revelatory

often turn out to be mere portable versions of primeval truths.” Statements like:

God’s in his heaven,
All’s right with the world!

may appear very inadequate today. Browning did not merely glorify men, women, love and adventurous energy but he also explored the psyche of many twisted and damaged soul that dwelt beyond the usual Victorian horizon but the essence of the charge against him remains.

Browning’s vivid hope and trust in man is bound up with a strong and strenuous faith in God. As Arthur Symons says, “Browning’s Christianity is wider than our creeds, and it is all the more vitally Christian in that it never sinks into pietism.” Browning is never didactic, but his faith is the root of his art, and transforms and transfigures it. As a dramatic poet he is so impartial and can express all creeds with such ease that it is possible to prove him (as Shakespeare has been proved) a believer in everything and a disbeliever in anything.

In 1889, Browning chanced to come across the pages of Edward FitzGerald’s newly published *Letters* wherein he wrote in a passage: “Mrs. Browning’s death is rather a relief to me, I must say: no more *Aurora Leighs*, thank God!” This was supposedly addressed to a private correspondent and should not have been published; but agitated and enraged, Browning wrote the scathing verses *To Edward FitzGerald who Thanked God My Wife was Dead*. The painful episode is of biographical importance because it shows the passionate tenderness with which he cherished the memories of his dead wife and also because this bitter episode hastened his end. Browning wrote prolifically but all his works are not of the same standard. His last collection of poems *Asolando: Fancies and Facts* was published just before his death in 1889 and was a collection of love lyrics, versified anecdotes and philosophical pronouncements. To a twenty-first century mind, many of his pronouncements of love, religion, and faith have become obsolete. However, his exuberant vitality can still be very attractive.

3.3 AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORKS

In this section, I shall briefly give you an idea some of the works from Browning’s literary oeuvre.

Pippa Passes: *Pippa Passes* was published in 1841 as the first of a series of eight pamphlets under the general title *Bells and Pomegranates*. The

poet's father bore the printing cost for the entire series. *Pippa Passes* is a product of Browning's first visit to Italy in 1838. The poem is set in Asolo, near Venice, where the poet was collecting materials for *Sordello* (1840). Pippa is a silk-winder who spends her holiday wandering through the small Italian town of Alonzo, singing songs and thinking of the local people whom she considers the most blessed. But in reality, the lives of these people are totally different from the innocent imaginings of Pippa.

The other pamphlets in the series of eight include *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1843), *Colombe's Birthday* (1844) *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy* (1846)

Sordello: Written in 1840, *Sordello* was received with severe criticism on account of the charges of obscurity of style and allusion. The poem provides a comprehensive view of the poet's mind and art in his early phase. The historical setting of *Sordello* is the strife between two rival factions, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, in northern Italy in the thirteenth century. The protagonist is Sordello, a troubadour, praised by Dante but otherwise obscure. Arthur Symonds' characterization of the poem as a 'psychological epic' is apt, for the focus is the developing conflict within the hero between egoism and sympathy, art and society, contemplation and action – that finally proves fatal to him.

Men and Women: This collection of poems was published in 1855. Browning himself felt that the contents showed him writing "lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get the people ear and see" and the volume was the first of his works to achieve some measure of popular success. Apart from "Love Among the Ruins", the enigmatic "Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Came" and "A Toccata of Galuppi's", it included several mature examples of the dramatic monologue: *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, *Andrea Del Sarto*, "Saul" and "Cleon".

Andrea Del Sarto contrasts markedly with the exuberance of *Fra Lippo Lippi* (prescribed for the course) in that it is a classic study of moral and aesthetic failure. In this poem, Browning links up Andrea's artistic failures to flaws in character.

Dramatis Personae: This is a collection of poems by Browning, published in 1864 and the first collection to appear after the death of Elizabeth Barrett

Browning in 1861. Some of the most celebrated poems included in this volume are *Abt Vogler*, “Prospice”, “Rabbi Ben Ezra” and longer poems like “A Death in the Desert”, “Mr. Sludge”, “The Medium” “Caliban upon Setebos” etc.

“Caliban Upon Setebos” has been the most widely admired poem of *Dramatis Personae* (1864). Though occasioned by the intellectual convulsion resulting from the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, Browning’s Caliban has little to do Darwinian Theory. Rather, Browning’s subject is man’s inveterate tendency to create God in his own image. Several commentators have argued that Browning’s satiric target in this poem is orthodox Calvinism, which regarded man as corrupt and God as supreme whose will and justice are inscrutable.

In “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, the conflict between soul and flesh is condemned. This poem is an imaginative exercise, an attempt to express an ideal by a dramatic representation of a man, who has reached extreme old age without finding it necessary to despair. It is, as Stopford Brooke says, “a poem which only Browning could have written. . . .” When the Rabbi in the quest of old age considers what his life has been and how God has wrought it for eternity, Browning repeatedly affirms the nobility and superiority of man:

“Rejoice, we are allied
To that which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive”

The poem is not didactic but there is a sustained glow in which ethical passion and its splendour blend superbly.

The Ring and the Book: *The Ring and the Book*, an epic-length poem in twelve books and Browning’s acknowledged masterpiece was published in four instalments, 1868-69. Despite its enormous length (22,000 lines), this work was a notable success. It is based on an infamous triple murder that took place in Rome in 1698—a case that roused much excitement in its times, but, a century and a half later, was merely relegated to a chapter in the history of Roman judiciary. It was, as Carlyle is said to have told Browning, “an old Bailey story that might have been told in ten lines, and only wants forgetting”. Browning daringly chose to tell his “Roman murder story” ten times over from as many distinct points of view. The risk of boredom through repetition was minimized by having each character

emphasize, suppress, and distort various elements of the case according to his own interests and motives.

Among the Victorian poets, Browning was one who wrote prolifically. It is difficult to discuss all of his poems within this limited space. Therefore, in this section I have given a very brief account of his works which could further arouse your interest in reading his other poems.

3.4 BROWNING'S 'DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE'

Before explaining what a dramatic monologue is, let us have a look at the following lines:

“That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf’s hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will’t please you sit and look at her?”

Some of you must be familiar with these lines from Browning’s *My Last Duchess*. These lines immediately tell us that a particular character is speaking out his feelings in front of an audience. A dramatic monologue is a type of lyric poem, in which a character in fiction or in history delivers a speech explaining his or her feelings, actions, or motives. The monologue is usually directed toward an audience who is present and listening but whose voice we do not hear, with the speaker’s words influenced by a critical situation. In the above lines, it is the Duke of Ferrara, speaking to an emissary about his dead Duchess whose painting is now hung on the wall.

SAQ:

Critics have noted that any lyric poem is always “overheard”. Does the ‘listener’ (or the reader) in the dramatic monologue “overhear” or “hear” the poem? (70 words)

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Influences on the dramatic monologue are both general and specific. In a general way, the dramatic tradition as a whole may have influenced the style of the monologue. Indeed, the style of the dramatic monologue, which attempts to evoke an entire story through representing part of it, may be called an endeavour to turn into poetry some features of drama.

Victorian poetry saw the high flowering of dramatic monologues with names like those of Tennyson's, Arnold's and Browning's associated with the genre. Of the trio, it is Browning who is usually credited with perfecting the form. When discussing the poetic form of the dramatic monologue, it is rare for it not to be associated with Robert Browning. Browning has been regarded as the master of the dramatic monologue. Some critics are skeptical of his invention of the form, for dramatic monologue is evidenced in poetry preceding Browning; it is believed that his extensive and varied use of the dramatic monologue has significantly contributed to the form and has had an enormous impact on modern poetry. As Preminger and Brogan argue, "The dramatic monologues of Robert Browning represent the most significant use of the form in post-Romantic poetry".

Browning always wanted to be a successful dramatist. He found in the dramatic monologue, a poem in which a single speaker speaks to an imaginary listener, his true medium. Browning is like Shakespeare in the absolute centering of his interest in humanity and in his understanding of the fallibility of mankind. In the regular dramas, the inquiry into motive is sacrificed to interest in the plot. What men aspire to be and are not is a proper subject for discussion; but the plot demands action. Consequently he found his medium in the dramatic monologue, where a subject's case could be presented from the inside. The characters of his dramatic monologues are often men and women caught at moments of anxiety and obsession. They are troubled with psychological and moral problems and hence their lasting appeal. Browning was more fascinated with negative characters (for instance, the brutal and egocentric Duke in *My Last Duchess*) because he felt that good characters gave few problems. Apart from *My Last Duchess*, other poems which can be cited as benchmarks in 'dramatic monologue' are *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Caliban upon Setebos*, *Porphyria's Lover* as well as the other poems in *Men and Women*.

Stop to Consider:

The Persona/Speaker and the Listener in Browning's 'Dramatic Monologues'

The personae/speakers in Browning's poems are mainly known historical figures. Significantly, most of them are connoisseurs, artists, musicians, thinkers, or even manipulators. But even when the soliloquizers are not known historical figures, he establishes a physical context through carefully selected details, references, or objects. Each of the speaking voices is given an individual articulation, a turn of phrase, an emphasis, a pause, a reiteration, or an idiolect which serves to give them a particular trait. The distinguishing characteristic of Browning's dramatic monologues is that they make new demands on the reader. The dramatic monologues of Browning are characterized by certain identifiable traits which, according to Landow, are that, "The reader takes the part of the silent listener; the speaker uses a case-making argumentative tone; the reader completes the dramatic scene from within, by means of inference and imagination". Critics have interpreted the third requirement, the reader's interpretation and conclusion, as a suspension of the reader/listener between sympathy and judgment. The reader has a choice regarding the intent of the speaker, but he/she must remain removed until the speaker is done making his argument. Glenn Everett believes the role of the listener is one of discovery which engages the imagination, but the listener must remain detached and abstain from passing judgment until the work is known as a whole. Wagner and Lawlor urge that the role of the listener is passive; he/she "cannot help but hear". The position of the listener is exactly "a passive receptor of a verbal *tour de force* that leaves him no opportunity for response". On the other hand the typical Browning speaker is an "eloquent rhetorician" whose "dramatic situation itself is obviously only created by the presence of the other" (Wagner-Lawlor), the other is identified as the silent listener. The speaker characteristically uses strongly rhetorical language which distinguishes the dramatic monologue from the soliloquy. Both *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *A Grammarian's Funeral* are dramatic monologues. The agenda of each speaker is quite different, as is the tone. Application of the three principles that characterize Browning's dramatic monologues, as pointed out by Landow, could help the modern reader understand the unique intent of each poem more fully.

Check Your Progress:

1. Comment on Browning's use of poetic persona in "Fra Lippo Lippi". How effectively does Browning make use of historical detail to construct the persona? Use passages from the text to support your answer.
2. Discuss Browning's use of the dramatic monologue in the poems prescribed for you. In what way does Browning posit a Victorian concern for 'realism' in his dramatic monologues?

3.5 READING THE POEMS

This section presents a reading of the two prescribed poems by Browning, *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *A Grammarian's Funeral*.

3.5.1 READING *FRA LIPPO LIPPI*

Browning in *Fra Lippo Lippi* immediately introduces his readers to the speaker, the painter-monk, whose monologue constitutes the poem. In keeping with the situation, the unsaintly friar is introduced, caught by the civic guard in the dead of night in his neighbourhood, quite able and ready to pour forth his ideas and adventures:

“You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame? You think you see a monk!
What, 't is past mid-night, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?” (lines 1-5)

In *Fra Lippo Lippi*, Browning has given a lively portrait of a man to whom life in its fullness is the only source of joy. In the course of the poem, he emerges to be an embodiment of the true Renaissance spirit, metamorphosed by ironic fate into a monk. In the present poem, which constitutes his monologue, Lippi luminously indicates the true end and aim of art and the false asceticism of so-called “religious” art, in the characteristic comments and confessions of an innovator in the traditions of religious painting. The following lines from the poem will serve to substantiate how Lippi is keen to follow his own style of art:

“I'm my own master, paint now as I please
You keep your mistr...manners, and I'll stick to mine!”

Lippi in the course of his monologue, also mouths the castigations of the Prior who belittles his art for ‘painting body’ and not ‘soul’:

“ ‘.....It's art's decline, my son!
You are not of the true painters, great and old;
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!’ ” (lines 233-237).

In response to the above criticism, this is how Lippi defends himself:

“I’m not the third, then: bless us, they must know!” (line 240).

SAQ:

How far is Browning being faithful to his ‘historical’ construction of the character? Is Browning justified in using history for an imaginative construction? (50 + 60 words)

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In the entire course of the monologue Lippi is found attempting to justify his theory of art as well as his philosophy of life, both of which are diametrically opposed to the stance of the order within which he is supposed to operate. The structure of the poem is built around the manner in which he conducts his vindication. He begins his main line of defense by revealing the straitened circumstances that had led to his becoming a convert as a boy:

“I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street
I starved there, God knows how a year or two
.....
The wind doubled me up and down I went
.....
By the straight cut to the convent” (lines 81-89).

He also justifies his conduct indirectly by covertly attacking the hypocrisy of the monastic way of life. Let us consider the depiction of his introduction into the monastic way of life:

“So, boy, you’re minded—quoth the good fat father,
Wiping his own mouth—‘twas refection of time—
To quit this very miserable world?...” (lines 93-95)

Therefore, Lippi defends himself passionately; for after all:

“You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear never to kiss the girls” (lines 224-225).

Fra Lippo Lippi is infused with biting wit and stinging irony; for, it is first and foremost the monologue of a bohemian who could not be contained by the ascetic order. A large measure of irony is brought into play in the poem to reveal the hollowness and hypocrisy of the monastic way of life. To reinforce this irony implicated in the gap between appearance and reality, Browning makes use of a key structural element in the poem, that is, the recurrent references to the Prior’s niece.

<p>SAQ:</p> <p>Does Browning endorse aestheticism as against religious dogmatism? (70 words)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

The first reference to the niece occurs when the monks exclaim over the life-like quality of Lippi’s work. One of them says, “That woman’s like the Prior’s niece who comes/ To care about his asthma: it’s the life!” (lines 170-171). However, their praise is checked when Lippi’s work is depreciated by the so-called learned. The Prior sums up the objections: the business of the artist is not to depict reality; rather he is to “give us no more body than shows soul” (line 188) and orders Lippi to erase his work and begin all over again. Just as the Prior completes his theologically grounded denunciation of Lippi’s art: “Rub all out, try at it a second time” (line 194), his attention is caught by the life-like portrait of the niece. The diction and punctuation of the passage that describes his reaction to this part of the painting calls attention to several significant changes of tone, which, we may assume, are appropriately dramatized by Lippi. The decisive assurance of “Rub all out...” is interrupted by a startled tone of wonder, brought on by Lippi’s skill, which then changes into an attitude of reflectiveness as the Prior thinks of what the niece represents in his life: “Oh that white smallish

female with the breasts,/ she is just my niece... Herodias, I would say..." (lines 195-196). The 'dash' here is of crucial significance and heightens the irony of the situation and signals an emotional turn. The Prior abruptly awakens from the private reverie induced by Lippi's artistic genius; and realizing the extent to which he has forgotten himself, exclaims with white-hot anger: "Who went and dance and got men's heads cut off!/ Have it all out" (lines 197-198).

The significance of reference to the Prior's niece is not fully revealed until the final mention of the niece is made as Lippi describes his picture:

"... I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick
Like the Prior's niece—Saint Lucy I would say" (lines 383-387).

The irony here is double-fold. On one hand, since Saint Lucy is the patron saint of those who are afflicted in the eye, while Lippi's point is that where beauty in art is concerned, the Prior is blind. On the other hand, the reference to the niece has a hint of an illicit relationship, this time in Lippi's description of the atmosphere as he hurries away with the "little lily thing". The Prior's niece stands for both sensual and earthly beauty combined with illicit love. While she is a symbol of blindness on the part of the Prior (and of his whole order) to appreciate the place of beauty in art, she is also symbolic of the hypocrisy and pretensions of the monastic order of life.

Fra Lippo Lippi is one of Browning's most successful dramatic monologues, and the central character is perhaps the most Chaucerian of his creations. William B. Toole in his essay "Wit and Symbol: The Prior's Niece and the Structure of *Fra Lippo Lippi*" urges that Lippi's immense vitality, his enormous delight in and appreciation of himself and the sensual life reminds one of the Wife of Bath. This sensual exuberance is responsible for the predicament in which the painter-monk finds himself when the poem starts. But the facet of his character that to a great extent is crucially implicated in the shaping of his monologue is the suppleness of his wit and crafty intellect reflective of his hard-won understanding of human nature, which also enables him to disentangle himself from an embarrassing situation without slighting in any way his philosophy of life:

“If you get simple beauty and nought else
You get about the best thing God invents
...and you’ll find the soul you have missed
Within yourself, when you return him thanks” (lines 216-220).

His monologue becomes an apologia as well as a song for himself.

3.5.2 READING A GRAMMARIAN’S FUNERAL

Like *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the introductory lines of *A Grammarian’s Funeral* immediately present the reader with the dramatic situation in the poem. This concerns the burial march of the dead grammarian undertaken by his students from a plain in the darkness to the place of entombment upon a mountain peak, partly covered with the thickness of clouds and at times catching a glimpse of the first rays of the rising sun. The physical setting, the intended object of the march, and the relation between the speaker and the dead person is swiftly presented in lines 1-28:

“Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether “ (lines 1-4)

The tone of the speaker/persona here is less argumentative than in *Fra Lippo Lippi* because it is at one level a panegyric laid out by the grammarian’s student. The listener is invited into the poem at the very beginning: “Let us begin and carry up this corpse,/Singing together” (1-2). From here the speaker has the attention of the listener and will continue to speak of his teacher.

SAQ:
How much of a role does the regular meter of the poem play in determining our response to the narrative? (90 words)

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The middle part of the poem (lines 29—132) contains the encomium sung for the grammarian, unified by a narrative of the dead man's life, described as a physical deterioration but a spiritual ascent. Thus the framing narrative of the burial march parallels the narrative about the grammarian's life, in that both are ascents:

“He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo!

.....
Left play for work, and grappled with the world

.....
Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.” (lines 33-52)

Beneath the apparent eulogy (which here assumes the character of a monologue) of the grammarian by his disciple, lies a subtle element of irony that leads one to think whether the grammarian wasted his whole life in dry scholarship or that his pursuit of knowledge and perfection made his life really admirable:

“Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.” (lines 51—52)

The readers' judgment of the grammarian depends to a large extent upon their understanding of the role played by the disciple whose monologue constitutes the poem. His words are at times fraught with ambivalence of tone and assessment, as in the following:

“Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he has learned it
When he had gathered all books had to give!
Sooner he spurned it” (lines 65—68)

Although Browning shows sympathy for the dead grammarian, the poet at the same time severely censures a wasted life. G. Robert Stange admits that Browning is praising a Renaissance humanist for devoting his whole to the fulfillment of a noble purpose, namely the absolute mastery of ancient literature as a key to wise living and for the faith that what cannot be achieved here will be achieved hereafter. But Richard D. Altick, in a spirited and insightful article argues the case for another possibility: “denied the poet's approbation, if not his compassion, the scholar is a dead gerund-grinder”, or at best, “a rabbi ben ezra” of the verb-endings.

The dramatic situation is again the main focus of the closing portion of the poem; lines 133 and following describe the arrival at the place of burial. The students judge the mountain peak to be the proper burial place for the grammarian; its elevation, rarefied atmosphere, and morning brightness symbolize for them the moral distinction of the grammarian's life:

“Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightenings are loosened

.....

Lofty designs must close in like effects
Loftily lying” (lines 141—146)

It is at the same time, interesting to observe that that the setting with which they associate their master could be easily understood to symbolize his failure to appreciate life in its totality (for the peak of the mountain is a place for 'sepulture' and subject to clouds and storms). In the following line, which is an apparent eulogy for the grammarian by his students, the reader could see an ironic statement:

“This man decided not to Live but Know—” (line 139)

The above line acts as a pointer to the idea that the grammarian, in choosing a scholarly life, failed to 'Live' life.

SAQ:

Which kind of living or existence is being upheld in the poem ? Or is Browning ambivalent regarding the question? (60 + 60 words)

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It is important to understand that the poem is a dramatic monologue and not a mock encomium, although it contains one. Therefore, another point of interest for the reader seems to be the dramatic subject, that is, the students who speak about him. Our judgment of the dead scholar is significant only insofar as it verifies or invalidates theirs. The teacher's death has aroused in them a spirit of inquiry into the meaning of their profession and destiny.

The poem has an ironical point to present, which has to do with the discrepancy between the students' extravagant pretensions to nobility and their self-revealed vulgarity—aesthetic, intellectual and moral. They seem to arrogate the poetic gifts they attribute to the grammarian. At a closer look, however, it could be seen that the students are deficient in intellectual virtues and incapable of objective judgment. This failing takes many forms, several of which may be illustrated from the following lines:

“Well, here’s the platform, here’s the proper place;
Hail to your purlieus
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and feathered race.” (lines 133-136).

The banality of “here’s the platform” is juxtaposed in the following line with the exalted apostrophe, “Hail to your purlieus”, which depicts their penchant for hollow verbosity. Moreover, “highfliers of the feathered race” could symbolically refer to the coterie of intellectuals, distinguished from the rest of the community, which also depicts their priggishness. Their attitude to life is apparent from the very beginning of the poem. The common life or the life of the common people is according to them, “the level’s and the night’s”; it is culturally and spiritually low (line 23). They leave the “unlettered plain, its herd and crop” (line 13). The mountain stands in contrast; it is “cited to the top,/ Crowded with Culture!”(lines 15-16).

In an attempt to exalt themselves through their encomium of the dead grammarian, the students repeatedly betray the ignoble truth about him and themselves by a bathetic image. For all their aspirations of a morally “superior” life, the students reveal that they believe that the life of the scholar is devoted to achieve a greater reward from that of the worldly man. In their comments upon the grammarian’s life and works, the disciples have actually revealed their garbled and shrunken attitude to life and reality.

Check Your Progress:

1. Browning’s dramatic monologues are considered to reflect both ironic contemplation and intensity of feeling. Highlight the poetic strategies by which Browning creates this effect.
2. Comment on the view that the ‘personae’ of Browning dramatize historical perspectives on a given situation. Illustrate your answer with textual references.

3. To what extent are Browning's dramatic monologues to be taken as studies in the field of Victorian psychology, then newly emerging? Comment on the dramatic realism of Browning's characters.

3.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

During his lifetime, Browning experienced to a greater extent than any of his contemporaries, the vicissitudes of a poet's lot. A long period of depreciation, in which his poetry was a byword for difficulty and obscurity, was followed by a sudden access of fame. From the time of the publication of *The Ring and the Book* in 1868-69 until his death in 1889, his position beside Tennyson as one of the two master poets of the Victorian era was secure. Criticism was succeeded by panegyric reaching its height in the adulation of the Browning Society and its offshoots in England and America.

In particular, Browning has suffered along with Tennyson, from the general reaction inimical to Victorianism and its entire works which characterized the opening decades of the twentieth century. The charge that Browning was closer to being a prose-writer than a poet was related to the charge of laziness. To many of his readers it seemed that he had not taken the pains, as Tennyson had, to acquire that noble beauty, and elevation of spirit which seemed necessary for the finest poetry. George Eliot, for instance, thought that Browning had 'a footing between the level of prose and the topmost heights of poetry'.

Although Browning wrote numerous dramatic monologues, his contemporaries have often criticized his work as being too emotional. Browning's limitations are many. In spite of all his intellectual efforts and imaginative prowess, Browning did not produce one memorable character which lives on outside his pages like those of Chaucer, Shakespeare or Dickens. F.L. Lucas says that most of Browning's characters are very much himself. He could not take an objective view of any character. Such was the intensity of his personal interest that it pervades not only the *dramatis personae* but the world in which they live. John Foster's comment however refutes this argument of Lucas, "... we never think of Mr. Browning while we read his poems; we are not identified with him, but to the persons into whom he has flung his genius... we are upon the scene ourselves—we hear, feel, and see—we are face to face with the actors—we are a party to the tears that are shed, to the feelings and passions that are undergone".

The tag of being a difficult poet, with which Browning has been branded springs from the obscurity of his language. Browning’s syntax and idiom suits his purpose but often creates problems for his readers. He composed at a hectic pace and was indifferent about revising his works. He sometimes omitted necessary parts of speech, left clauses and sentences unfinished. There was in him a curious strain of the Renaissance learning and medieval pedantry and his utterances were at times deliberately crabbed. In an attempt to defend Browning against the charges of obscurity Algernon Charles Swinburne insists that to accuse Browning of obscurity is “as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire”. He is something too much the ‘reverse’ of obscure: he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with incessant rapidity. According to Swinburne, it is hopeless to enjoy the charm or to apprehend the gist of his writings except when a mind is thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the contact of the writer’s. But his enduring appeal lies in his lyric intensity, his grasp of characters and his power of transmuting soul-states into vivid energetic poetry.

SAQ:

Examine the reasons for Browning’s alleged ‘obscurity’. Would you regard this as a ‘Victorian’ or an ‘anti-Victorian’ (or ‘modern’) quality? How does this affect our responses to Browning’s poetry? (60 + 30 + 60 words)

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In a letter to R.W. Dixon, dated October 12, 1881, Hopkins labels Browning as a poet with many frigidities. As he says, “Browning is not really a poet. . . he has all the gifts but the one needful and the pearls without the string. . . I suppose him to resemble Ben Jonson, only that Ben Jonson has more real poetry”. Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, places Browning next to Shakespeare in terms of a creator of characters. His caliber, as per Wilde’s contention, is at par with Shakespeare: “He is the most Shakespearian since Shakespeare. . . [and] will be remembered not as a poet, but, as the most supreme writer of fiction that we ever had.” While Santayana in his “Poetry of Barbarism” refers to Browning’s poetry as that which rests upon primitive feelings, primal happiness and beyond the reach of philosophy, G.K. Chesterton’s analysis goes so far as to suggest that Browning’s optimism is that of an ultimate and unshakable order, that which is founded upon the absolute sight, and sound, and smell, and handling of things. He is something far more convincing, far more comforting, far more religiously significant than an optimist: he is a happy man. It is out of the concern for everyday experience, the pressing need for detail so disliked by Santayana that the essential insights of Browning’s poems emerge.

3.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have been given, by and large, an idea of the poet that Browning is; an account of his works; the techniques that were incorporated in his poems and the concerns that shaped them. There is a blending of thought and feeling that goes into the making of his poems. There is no doubt that, like the novelist Dickens, who wrote prolifically, Browning is also one of the most prolific writers of the Victorian age. Browning is today, perhaps, honoured more as a pioneer in the difficult art — the art of psychological portraiture in verse. His main achievement as a poet is the unprecedented range of his work. In the midst of the storms of doubt and disbelief, of mockery and denial in religion, he stood unshaken by the controversies. The impression that we get from the works of Browning is that of a poet with a robust personality. The poet in him is made up of many men. He is a dramatist, humorist, lyricist, painter, musician, philosopher and scholar, each in full measure, and he includes and dominates them all.

3.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 4 Matthew Arnold

Contents:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introducing the Poet
- 4.3 Critical Reception
- 4.4 Context of the Poems
- 4.5 Reading the Poems
 - 4.5.1 Reading *Dover Beach*
 - 4.5.2 Reading *Yea, In The Sea of Life Enisled*
- 4.6 Summing up
- 4.7 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to one of the major critical writers of the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold. Attempt has been made to introduce you to the central characteristics of his poetry. The unit will help you to have an insightful reading of his poems and it is expected that after going through the issues raised, you will be in a position to

- *connect* the poet with his work
- *locate* the poems prescribed for you in their socio-historical context
- *analyse* the themes and motifs that the texts present.

4.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

If we take into account the period of transition in the nineteenth century, the contribution of Matthew Arnold comes to the forefront. The dilemma of the modern artist is quite evident in the poetry of Arnold. The crisis of faith and sense of alienation that are frequently discussed by Tennyson and Browning are also echoed through the poetry of Arnold. He concerned himself with social and cultural values, a critic who put literary taste to scrutiny. He believed in the regenerating power of poetry and its capacity to replace religion. Propagating humanist ideals through his poetry Arnold examined

civilization and culture. A vein of melancholy runs through his poetry echoing fragmentation and a sense of divided self during the age of Victorian skepticism.

The Victorian age is typically known for its great social upheavals, political strife, democracy and cultural transitions. The English Victorian age is considered to be important in modern Western history. In literary terms, the conflict was internalized largely in terms of the neoclassic and Romantic ideals. Science and rapid industrialization propagated extreme materialism and loss of traditional values which resulted in cultural anarchy. Age-old dogmatic values received a major jolt following the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). The theory of evolution and subsequent changes in belief systems yielded newer experimentations and avenues of enquiry. It questioned the very foundations of Christianity when the biblical version of Creation was challenged. Besides the tide of the Oxford Movement (that began with Keble's Assize sermon before the Queen's accession), Pre-Raphaelitism conducted its subversion of the literary tastes of the time. The progress and increase in public wealth also gave a boost to gross materialism and philistinism.

Among those who raised their voices against the corrupt tendencies of the time was Matthew Arnold, the poet and visionary who put the Victorian critical temperament to scrutiny. Being a prophet of humanism and art, Arnold reacted against the provincialism and philistinism of his age. Arnold, in his *Culture and Anarchy*, and "The Study of Poetry" talked about moral and social passions for doing good and preferred a 'culture which believes in making reason and the will of god prevail, believe in perfection.' For him poetry is 'the criticism of life' that aimed at interpreting human life and action.

Stop to Consider:

The time was historically significant for the growth of democracy after the 1832 Reform Bill. The intellectual climate since 1860s at the Oxford and Cambridge also influenced the social life of the time. The development of science and the spread of liberal education among all classes influenced the literary temperament of his age .

The crisis of religion finds explicit expression in "Dover Beach" and poems like "The Forsaken Merman" and "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse". *Arnold's* is

a critical appraisal of the world which offers 'neither certitude , nor peace , nor help for pain'. His meditative poetry is characterized by a subdued melancholy and the sense of a lofty quest. Nature and landscape stand in his poetry for guidance and inspiration. Landscape offers him the analogical mirror to reflect his inner conflicts. For instance in the poems such as "Dover Beach", "The Forsaken Merman", "Quiet Work", and the "Marguerite" love-poems , nature is used as the topography of the mind.

Born in 1822, 24 December, at Laleham, on the Thames, Arnold was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold and Mary P. Arnold. Dr. Arnold was the Headmaster at Rugby School who made great contribution to the public education in England. Arnold was admitted to Winchester School in 1836 where his closest associate was Arthur Hugh Clough. In 1840 he was honoured with the Rugby Poetry Prize for Alaric *at Home*. He was elected for an open classical scholarship at Balliol College, Oxford. He was also honoured with a fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford. In 1847, he was appointed Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne, who was the president of the Lord Russell's Cabinet. In 1848-49 during his journey to Switzerland, he met Marguerite, to whom he dedicates some of his love-lyrics. In 1851, he was appointed one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. He married Frances Lucy Wightman in the same year. His first volume of poetry, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, was published in 1849 anonymously. In 1852, his *Enpedocles on Etna and Other Poems* appeared anonymously. In 1853, his volume of poems was published and his 'Prefaces' contributed to subsequent literary theory and criticism. In 1857 Arnold was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford and he gave his inaugural lecture on the modern element in literature. His classical drama, *Merope*, was published in 1858. In 1861, appeared his *The Popular Education In France and On Translating Homer*. It was the same year when his associate Arthur Clough died. Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and *New poems* appeared in the year 1862. In 1870 he got the degree of Doctor of Civil law (D.C. L) at Oxford University. In the same year his *St Paul and Protestantism* appeared. *Literature and Dogma* appeared in the year 1873 and in 1875 appeared *God and the Bible* that contributed to the prose literature. His *Essays In Criticism* appeared posthumously. In 1888, Arnold died of *angina pectoris*.

4.3 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The greatest of the Victorian critics, Arnold bags mixed responses from his critics. His poetry demands reflection on the larger issues concerning life and the self and the world in crisis and conflict. Thus his poetical endeavour inculcates a sort of philosophy. As John P. Farrell observes, a fundamental tension between symbolic poignancy and ironic pointlessness governs his poems. The importance of Arnold rests mainly upon the variety of his intentions and the single-mindedness of his treatment of literary, social and religious issues. His poetry and poetic theories share propagandist intention and that is acknowledged by critics like T.S Eliot. Regarding his love poems, H.C. Duffins says that Arnold's love poetry is informed by "an astringent emotion that touches the heart more poignantly than the sultrier passions that are found in the greater love-poems". He identifies a brooding meditateness in Arnold's poetry.

A sense of confusion surrounds round his images and Lionel Trilling is of the opinion that his poems (specially the "Marguerite" poems) involve a tangle of contradictions. We don't know, for instance, who is Marguerite. Does she exist or is it just a poetical figment? Who is rejected by whom? Yet this sense of confusion and contradiction, according to Trilling, contributes to the actuality of the affair. His poetics and notions definitely have contributed to the critical temperaments of his time. His theory of the 'touchstone' and classicist endeavour have checked the norms of high poetry. The disinterested endeavour of the poet-critic will invite the people to inculcate fresh and true ideas which will make creation possible. As R A Scott-James says, in Arnold the apostle of moral perfection becomes the prophet of moral perfection. Thus it can be stated that Arnold's poetry establishes the relationship between a literary critic (the poet also) and his society in which he lives. As Wimsatt and Brooks write, Arnold had expounded in somewhat more detail the kind of new message – 'the sweetness and light', the blend of 'Hebraic Spirituality' and 'obedience with Hellenistic critical spirit' which Arnold considered culture should aim at.

SAQ:

Write a note in support of Trilling’s view of the ‘Marguerite’ poems.
(80 words)

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4.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEMS

“Dover Beach” is included in Arnold’s *New Poems* published in 1867 after his marriage with Frances Lucy Wightman. They both made a visit to the English Channel at Dover and experienced its ‘melancholy, long, withdrawing roar’. A profound melancholy runs through the poem as it addresses the question of faith and doubt. Against the tranquil atmosphere of the English Channel, Arnold pours his melancholic strain of thoughts representing the sense of loss and growing agnosticism. The Moon-blanching landscape of Dover leads the poet to reflect on the main movements and dilemma of the time. The poet draws the attention of his wife to the harsh sounds of waves and the pebbles.

To Marguerite (1857) is considered to be one of the finest and loveliest lyrics of Arnold, inspired by love for his beloved. The poem offers a philosophical reflection on the futility of love. The poet shares a sense of deep isolation and speculates on man and his universe. The personal experience attains the dimension of the universal and thereby brings forth existential questions. Both “Isolation: To Marguerite” and “To Marguerite – Continued” (“Yea, in the sea of life enisled”) are elegies.

4.5 READING THE POEMS

4.5.1 READING *DOVER BEACH*

The previous sections help you to read the poem “Dover Beach”. The poem is an expression of the emotional, the religious, the philosophical and the skeptical. All these aspects surround a love addressed to his beloved. To the casual reader the ostensible focus of the poem is the famous English landmark of the beach at Dover. But Arnold is moved to a reconsideration

of its associativeness with English society. The poem thus projects the crisis of the very society that had provided the poet's inspiration and ideals. A profound melancholic note undergirds the simple landscape poem. The opening lines of the poem set its tone.

The first fourteen lines lament the loss of faith and harmony. The tranquil and serene seascape conveys a sense of fear and anxiety. The poet hears 'the grating roar/ Of pebbles' and the 'tremulous cadence' fills his mind with sadness. The moonlit sight is symbolically developed in contrast to the inner confusion and darkness of his heart.

The use of the sea-imagery is symbolic in 'Dover Beach' as well as in the 'Marguerite' poems. It draws into itself a whole range of values connected with history and corporeal time. The "melancholy, long withdrawing roar" of the sea of faith haunts his soul. The word, "melancholy" becomes suggestive of the spiritual sterility of the age. The waves bring in "The eternal note of sadness" suggesting both the unceasing, continued movement of sea waves and the unbroken history of human grief. Almost naturally, the poet is reminded of classical Greek tragedy and the name of Sophocles, one of its greatest exponents.

SAQ:

Which tragedies by Sophocles have become defining statements of ancient Greek principles? (30 words)

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From the reference to Sophocles, Arnold sweeps his mind to Dover, by "this distant northern sea", that is to say, so remote from the time and place of Sophocles' own "Aegean" shores on the Mediterranean. Yet the connection is not unlikely: England (as Carlyle stated) was at the zenith of its powers in a way comparable to ancient Greece. Arnold cannot avoid the comparison in view of his own role in urging his own countrymen, especially thinkers and intellectuals, to look to the common European Graeco-Roman heritage for inspiration. Two lines of thought emerge from

the figure of Sophocles — the unremitting history of human tragedies and miseries, and the role of faith in society. Both provided the foundations of Sophoclean tragedy. Neither *Oedipus Rex*, as not even Aeschylus’ or Euripides’ great dramas, are conceivable without the community’s sense of faith in the common ideals. When, at the end, Arnold refers to the warring mobs, disorganized and with no clear goals, he highlights the absence of divinity in just this diminished “Sea of Faith”.

The sea, in ‘Dover Beach’, is not merely the imagined body of collective beliefs. It draws into itself topography, spiritual power, and the continuum of historical time.

Arnold’s expression of his dismay over contemporary disorder in England’s cultural conditions is posited in the final lines of “Dover Beach”,

“And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

Both the absence of an inspiring vision capable of leading contemporary society and the jarring clamour of religious factionalism expose the “naked shingles of the world”, the rocky debris at the bottom. The argument, almost by logic, leads to the individual as the agent of hope: “let us be true / To one another!” In a world bereft of certitude or help, hope, or peace, the single individual, or the personal relationship is the only centre of possible change. We could refer to the diverse social movements that rift apart Victorian society and whose potentially divisive activity betokened the challenge of cultural reconstruction against which Arnold erects the personal association of love.

SAQ:

The opening lines of ‘Dover Beach’ are regarded as most evocative. Enumerate the several ideas evoked in these lines. (50 words)

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John Racine identifies a meditative structure in 'Dover Beach' where the poet captures a 'movement from the purely sensory to the rational', the meditation that ended on a 'note of exalted fervour invoking the hope of salvation and a vision of the coming Apocalypse'. The concluding lines of the poem throw light on the poet's utter confusion amidst the sea of confusion and anarchy,

Change is inevitable and that is admitted through the following expressions, "The Sea of faith / Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore / Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled. / But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar, / Retreating, to the breath / Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear / And naked shingles of the world."

The decaying faith, sense of loss and ennui are explicit in these lines. Then the recognition of destiny leads to a sense of rationality -- a kind of self-knowledge and he asks his beloved to be faithful to him, to be true to him. Love is projected as a possible remedy for the spiritual crisis for the world seems to be providing 'neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain'. A similar sense of loss and ennui is conveyed through the poem "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse",

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn."

A sense of alienation that is typically modern is evident in the poem. Its landscape shows an inner vision of life itself, allowing us to speculate and demand self-introspection. The rhythm of the poem also represents the melancholic significance of the poem. The transition from the sensuous to the rational can be perceived in the very division of the stanzas. The transition itself establishes the poet's faith in love. Nature, for Arnold, is a source of comfort and inspiration. Nature teaches us the lesson of self-dependence and unity. In another poem 'Quiet Work' he addresses Nature asking her to instruct him in setting the right ideal,

"One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,
One lesson which in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties kept at one
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity."

Arnold's classicism showed a reaction against Romantic subjectivity. His love of Hellenic culture, art and literature finds reflections in his poetry and critical writings. His emphasis on the 'touchstone' and the 'grand style' marks his classical endeavour. His classicism is also evident in his emphasis on suitable 'action' as the central theme of action that is 'serious' and 'weighty'. That action must appeal to those elementary feelings that are independent of time. He paid his tribute to the classical ideals of Homer, Sophocles, Epictetus, in his poetry whose 'balanced soul' saw life steadily and 'saw it whole' and set them as models for writing the best poetry.

Whether in 'Dover Beach', in 'To A Friend', 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse':

"Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery;" ('Dover Beach')

A similar note is echoed in the poem "To a Friend",

"My special thanks, whose even-balanced soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild."

Arnold was indebted to the classical masters for their moral integrity and perfection in intellectual activities.

Stop to Consider:

Arnold's poetry is a quest for perfection and permanence by focusing on cultivation of poetry that emphasizes action, not on romantic fancifulness. As a classicist Arnold believed that the mode of representation should be particular, precise and ordered. His 'Preface' to 1853 is, in fact, a manifesto of classicism. He projected poetry as a medium for cultural transactions -- poetry that can bring enlightenment to the people through its ubiquitous significance. Poetry can restore the eternal significance of time amidst doubt and confusion. In the very beginning of the essay "The Study of Poetry", Arnold expresses his faith and strong confidence in the future of poetry. He says that for poetry, the idea is everything and that 'the strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry'. The best poetry, according to Arnold, exhibits a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us that leaves no scope for "charlatanism". As he

himself says in his essay, the excellence of poetry lies both in its matter and manner. In order to mark excellence both personal and historic estimates must be avoided. Instead he must employ a 'real' estimate to make poetry yield its full benefit – the benefit of clearly feeling and deeply enjoying the excellent and classic in poetry. In his poetic and reformist endeavour he referred to the method of the 'Touchstone' and demanded "high seriousness" and the "grand style" as necessary requisites for great poetry. He believed that "poetry is the criticism of life". By 'criticism of life', Arnold drew attention to the inevitable interpretation of life. By reviving the classical ideals he tried to modify the sensibility of his time. Sharing ideas about great poetry, Arnold writes,

"There are two offices of poetry -- one to add to one's store of thoughts and feelings -- another to compose and elevate the mind by a sustained tone, numerous allusions and a grand style."

Check Your Progress:

1. Attempt to justify the view that 'Dover Beach' is a critique of contemporary society conducted through the lens of classicism. Support your answer with textual references.
2. To what extent would it be right to read 'Dover Beach' as a poem arguing from an unspoken assumption of faith to a spoken declaration of the need for faith? Give justifications for your answer.

4.5.2 READING "TO MARGUERITE" - YEA, IN THE SEA OF LIFE ENISLED

Torn between reason and romanticism, hope and dogmatism, Arnold expressed his concern over the spirit of time. His verses express this deep sense of anxiety. The crisis of poetic sensibility that was adversely affected by the sweeping tide of 'Science' and materialism creates the despair that tends to see no salvation gives to his poetry a tension between this negative apprehension and the restraint of formal classicism.. Poems like *The Strayed Reveller and other poems* reflect introspectiveness and profound melancholy. Life's misery, sufferings, trials and tribulations find expression in the poem. Being obsessed with the mundane world the poet weeps,

"Is there no life, but these alone?

Madman or slave, must man be one?"

His *Empedocles on Etna* evokes the fragmentation of values and doomed humanity. The sense of loss and hopelessness is followed by a realization of man's destiny that is perhaps pre-determined. Man is destined to suffer. He believes that

“A God, a God their severance ruled!”
 (“To Marguerite – Continued”)

The belief in the eternal design of Destiny has allowed him to accept his lot and withdraw his self,

“Farewell! - and thou, thou lonely heart,
Which never yet without remorse
Even for a moment didst depart
From thy remote and sphered course
To haunt the place where passions reign-
Back to thy solitude again.”

(“Isolation: To Marguerite”)

The conflict between a sense of communion and estrangement is explicit in his poetry. The instability on his part is the result of this very tension. Just like Prufrock (in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S.Eliot) he shares a nervous sensibility. He had the vision of an organized society which he valorized. Behind the feeling of nostalgia and hopelessness, a desperate longing for spiritual clarity and certitude pervades his poetry. The spiritual hunger is felt by the poet who exhorts his contemporaries to ‘see life steadily and see it whole’. He was not a pessimist like Hardy, but he is ‘still nursing the unconquerable hope, still clutching the inviolable shade with a free, onward impulse.’

Stop to Consider:

Arnold's realization that materialism led to cultural degradation is more fully to be seen in his essays. He inveighed against “philistinism” seeing in it the malaise of a society unable to check its virulent tendencies because there was no cultural consensus. He did make clear the connection between the proper study of poetry and critical thought. He wrote to Arthur Clough that ‘these are damned times’ fed by ‘the sickening consciousness of our difficulties’. Arnold was against dogmatism and prejudice. Through an almost reformist missionary zeal, he tried to project poetry as an intellectual panacea:

“More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”

His “Marguerite” poems and poems like “Sohrab and Rustam” also carry an appeal to classical rituals of loss and regeneration. The loss of inner harmony is a theme in his writings. The motif of self-withdrawal, the sense of estrangement in the “Marguerite” poems suggests hopelessness of life followed by an awareness of futile love and reunion. The poems highlight the breakdown of human sensibility and relationships. The “Marguerite” poems speculate on the dearth of human love and sympathy. Man becomes a lonely island in the sea of life,

SAQ:

In what way, do you think, does Arnold exhibit a quest for the certainty of a redeeming goal? Would you call the ‘Marguerite’ poem one such instance of his desire? (60 + 60 words)

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Arnold has written two small volumes of lyrics- *Switzerland* and *The Faded Leaves* which were inspired by his love for ‘Marguerite’ and his wife, Lucy Wightman. The ‘Marguerite’ poems are not merely personal love-lyrics, but speculate on man’s place in the universe and his destiny. The vein of melancholy and sense of alienation and nostalgia also pervade the poems. The sense of loss and the self’s withdrawal mark these poems. In a morally fallen-apart universe even love is futile.

The ‘Marguerite’ poems share this bitter love-experience of the poet. The poems finally draw the universal conclusion that love is an illusion. The poem is a philosophical reflection on the illusion of love and the poet’s

world-view is conveyed through landscape-imagery. The ocean becomes a microcosm of the whole world and its islands represent man. The opening lines of the poem epigrammatically convey man's isolated place in the universe,

“Yes! In the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.”

Human beings are devoid of company, joy and peace and are living forlorn lives like the separate islands in the sea surrounded by the vast unbridgeable gulfs of water of the ocean. The sea represents time and life which are unfathomable and unbridgeable.

SAQ:

The lines above are followed by two more lines in the stanza. Does the sense of these last two lines militate against the meaning of the four opening lines, or does it deepen it? If it does, in what way does Arnold give a fresh turn to the word “alone”? (50 + 60 words)

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The sense of nostalgia followed by a deep longing for reunion haunts him whenever he watches the illuminated moonlit world, the starlit skies or hears the nightingale pouring its melancholy note. ‘A longing like despair’ overpowers him but it also intimates a moment of ecstasy,

“Oh! then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent!
Now round us spreads the watery plain--
Oh might our marges meet again!”

The poet knows that it is a mystery and man is destined to suffer isolation. He held God responsible for the extinction of the fire of love. The sad realization of the first stanza is followed by the conception of a spiritual beauty of the second and third stanzas. ‘The unplumb’d, salt’ represents the innumerable, unfathomable mystery of the sea that throws in distance between the islands. Arnold perceives the inevitable human destiny that is responsible for man’s tragedy. The philosophic reflection on time and eternity executes a deeply pessimistic feeling. The past is irretrievable and disallowing one to look back to it. The past can be an inspiration to the present.

SAQ:

“A God, a God their severance ruled!” To what extent can this be the ‘inference’ of the poet’s syllogism in the poem? Or, would you prefer to call it his article of faith? (60 + 50 words)

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4.6 SUMMING UP

Arnold’s critical theory influenced the major literary and critical trends of his time. Projecting poetry as a great civilizing and regenerating force Arnold preached his philosophy of culture. In *Culture and Anarchy*, he says that culture is the indispensable aid for projecting best thoughts and values. Thus powered by the spirit of nationalism and Humanism, Arnold endeavoured in his poetry to bring forth ‘sweetness and light’ in culture. His poetic theory was grounded on evaluation and interpretation. Arnold preferred a sense of disinterested endeavour on the part of the critic that can curb his sense of prejudice. As he says, the absence of prejudice and dogmatism will help him in setting the right standard for art and culture. The Critic, according to Arnold must learn to see things clearly so that he can make the best ideas prevail in the world. Arnold’s importance on critical over the creative was a necessary reaction to the cultural anarchy that engulfed the Victorian era. His critical tools and poetics were attempts to promote culture – an attempt to draw the attention to “the best that is known and thought in the world”.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do the elements of desire and fulfillment enhance descriptions of the landscape in the two poems set for your study? Highlight relevant passages in your answer.
2. Arnold insisted on the grandeur of matter and manner in poetry. Show how 'classicism' is an important element in his poems with the help of textual examples.
3. Show, with the help of textual illustrations, the social associations of Arnold's imagery in the two poems set for your study.
4. Comment on the use of natural imagery in Arnold's poems in the light of his references to issues of social concern.

4.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 5

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Contents:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introducing the Poet
 - 5.2.1 Poetry in the Victorian Age
- 5.3 Works of the Poet
- 5.4 Critical Reception
- 5.5 Context of the Poem
- 5.6 Reading the Poem *The Blessed Damozel*
- 5.7 Summing Up
- 5.8 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's most famous poem, *The Blessed Damozel*. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- *place* the poet in his historical age and context,
- *discuss* the range of possible meanings that enrich the poem,
- *assess* the ways in which the poem has been received,
- *explain* poem in its totality.

5.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Though considered to be one of the minor poets of the Victorian age, the poetry and paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, christened Gabriel Charles Dante, nevertheless were of considerable importance, especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. A poet, painter and translator, Rossetti (1828-82) was born in London of Italian background and parentage. He was educated in 1836-43 at King's College School, London, where he acquired mastery over Latin and French. In 1843-46, he attended Cary's Art Academy in Bloomsbury Street where his interest in poetry and painting became apparent. He then spent a brief, unfruitful period at the Antique

School of the Royal Academy where he worked under Ford Maddox Brown. But the association was short-lived as Brown asked Rossetti to paint mainly still-lives. In the meantime, Rossetti's friendships with Holman Hunt and John Everett Millias led to the formation of the 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' (PRB), in the autumn of 1848. Other members of the PRB included Thomas Woolmer, Frederick George Stephens, William Michael Rossetti and James Collinson. The 'PRB' sought to bring about a revolution in English painting and poetry against the prevailing aesthetic conventionality.

Joan Rees brings to the fore the demands made upon the reader: "To read him, the reader needs to concentrate his inward eye in prolonged gaze of introspection, recognizing forms, events, sensations deep within the inner mind." Just as Arnold was called the 'Apostle of Culture', Rossetti may be called the 'Apostle of Beauty', an embodiment of the nineteenth-century 'Spirit of Art'. He very well justified Milton's assertion that poetry should be simple, sensuous and passionate. He was a true aesthete, assenting to the norm of *l'art pour l'art*, i.e., art for art's sake. Rossetti's poetry and painting were of considerable importance in the last half of the 19th century. His works are characterized by a distinctly Romantic spirit, with wafting resonances of Arthurian legends, medieval romances, Dantesque mysticism and hot-house criticism.

Rossetti married Elizabeth Siddal, one of the many 'stunners', (to use the PRB term), whom the poets and painters made their subject: beautiful women with red- gold hair, attenuated fingers, faintly sulky mouths and swan-like necks. But her early death left him in a state of extreme morbidity which in turn affected his work. Moreover, he was also condemned by Robert Buchanan in a vicious pamphlet, *The Fleshly School of Poetry*, but Rossetti managed a rebuttal with *The Stealthy School of Criticism*. But by now, he became paranoid and suicidal, which finally took its toll on him, and in 1882, he died, a near- recluse, shortly before his fifty- fourth birthday.

Stop to Consider:

The Conditions of Literary Production in the Victorian Age

If we seek to answer the question as to why the "PRB" endeavoured to bring about a radical change in prevailing aesthetic standards, we have to know the state of art and literary writing in the period.

A notable fact is the expansion of the market for reading matter. In 1836 John Stuart Mill remarked that the time was “a reading age”. The publication and circulation of newspapers, periodicals, and books (novels, especially) were greatly increased. We have to remember the emergence of the “great Victorian triple-decker novel” towards the latter part of the century. In this light, Dickens’s success (as also Bulwer-Lytton’s and Wilkie Collins’s) is remarkable. Works of fiction serialized in periodicals like the *Cornhill Magazine* pushed up the sales of monthly and weekly periodicals. In 1847, George Henry Lewes claimed in his article on “The Condition of Authors” that “literature has become a profession” and “It is a means of subsistence, almost as certain as the bar or the church”. As Philip Davis further tells us, “The periodicals brought together literature, philosophy, history, sociology, and politics — without fixed lines of demarcation. Serialized fiction existed alongside the world of social policy, current affairs, and science.” There was indeed a widening of the range of views: there was a “development of a vigorous, non-specialized, polymathic freedom of thinking in Victorian England, working within a definition of ‘literature’ or ‘letters’ wide enough to allow speculative linguistic movement across and between several disciplines.”

In 1870, Anthony Trollope observed, in “On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement” that the English had “become a novel-reading people”. Earlier, Hazlitt had compared prose and poetry and found the former to be a lower, demotic medium (in “On Poetry in General”, 1818) than the writing of poetry. G.W.F. Hegel, the great Romantic philosopher in his lectures on aesthetics which he delivered in the 1820s, pointed to the novel as the result of a prose world order which subjected the poetry in the inner being to the material, prosaic reality of the external world. The situation was such as Davis tells us: the high individual passion of the elite Romantic lyric had now given way to “the novel’s common ground of social language and shared dialogue”.

Among the new voices in this burgeoning new world of rapid literary production, we need not forget that the woman’s voice was gaining intellectual literary ground.

5.2.1 POETRY IN THE VICTORIAN AGE

The Victorian age was one of rationalism and religious revival. It saw the emergence of the Oxford Movement, also known as the High Church Movement and the Tractarian Movement. The ‘High Church’ sought to revive ancient rites, with all their pomp and symbolism. It appealed to the sensibility and imagination, which during the eighteenth century had been

crushed by the supremacy of the intellect. One of Wordsworth's disciples, John Keble, professor of poetry at Oxford, later started the 'Oxford Movement'. His ideas had appeared as early as 1827 in his *Christian Year*, a series of pious effusions appropriate to the religious festivities of the year, a sort of commentary on the Anglican liturgy full of gentle emotion and beautified by a feeling for nature. The movement to restore High Church Principles spread and Anglo-Catholicism was born. Apart from Keble, it was inspired by E. B. Pusey, Regius Professor of Hebrew, who originated 'Puseyism', the form of Anglicanism which was nearest to Rome, without being merged into Romanism.

You should keep in mind that the Victorian age is, more specifically, one in which novel-writing gained pre-eminence, notably those by Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray. Poetry, at the beginning of this period, had been refreshed as well as muddied by two generations of Romantic innovation. Two names dominate it in the middle of the century, those of Tennyson and Browning. Victorian poetry is at its best when it evades, in some way or the other, life and reality. The vein of rich pictorial poetry that was implicit in the Keats-Tennyson tradition was developed by Rossetti and the PRB, but in conjunction with other techniques and attitudes, which make the whole situation complex and in some respects self-contradictory. It is believed that of his two disciplines, Rossetti learned the language of poetry second. Like his paintings, his poetry also involves juxtaposition of narrative and decorative material, as well as shifts between physical description and symbolic details. Many poems, including the one in this unit, *The Blessed Damozel*, were composed to accompany canvasses by him and other artists.

Some features of Victorian poetry

Philip Davis : "It was no more than a phrase in a letter to Arthur Hugh Clough in February 1849, but in declaring his age to be fundamentally 'unpoetical' — 'not profound, not ungrand, not unmoving: —but *unpoetical*' — Matthew Arnold was to clinch the terms of much contemporary and future estimate. Victorian poetry was a poetry made self-consciously weak in an age that, because of vast social and economic changes, seemed ever increasingly in literary terms the age of the novel. . .

.. It was its own consciousness of its social and historical situation that helped internally to weaken Victorian poetry. Swamped by the thought of its questionable relevance within a new mass industrial and democratic society, poetry became self-consciously peripheral.”

Rapid industrialization, leading to the rise of Benthamite Utilitarianism, exerted tremendous pressure on literary culture especially around 1810-1840 as described by John Stuart Mill in his *Autobiography* (1873). In this scenario of Benthamite attacks upon Romantic individualism, and on the imagination, attention veered towards a language which would be more scientifically analytical. Thus, as Davis tells us: “An elegiac pining *against* pining is a characteristic of much Victorian lyric verse.’the nobleness of grief is gone,’ cries Arnold, ‘Ah, leave us not the fret alone!’ (‘Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse’). It was that plaintive note of loss which provoked charges of melancholy and morbidity, passivity and other-worldly yearning — charges tendentiously summed up in the word often used to dismiss such poetry in a world of hard masculine realities: ‘feminine’. It is characteristic of the period, in all its extension and blurring of meanings, that certain categories, such as male-female, initially established as definitive should begin to float free of their immediate referents, in search of the bounds of significance.”

Indeed, the very tone of such poetry also seems related to the Victorian cult: the ritualization of loss, as witnessed in deathbed scenes, elaborate funerals, mourning dress, and piously inscribed gravestones, in reaction against the secular fear of extinction. As in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850) itself, this feeling of death-in-life extended beyond the terms of personal mourning: it brought together in a strange but powerful amalgam both a religious sense of loss and a sense of the loss of religion....”

“Without a social mission, the problem for poetry became a religious problem, within a material world. Yet poetry was increasingly explained in psychological terms, as the product of emotional associations in persons possessed of a sensitivity greater in degree than that of ordinary people, though not different in kind.....”

“The domain appropriate to poetry seemed to be shrinking. ‘In the old times’, Arthur Hallam had written in a review of the *Poems: Chiefly Lyrical* of his friend Tennyson, ‘the poetic impulse went along with the general impulse of the nation’, but not so in these days: hence the melancholy which so evidently characterizes the spirit of modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncracies rather than community of interest.’ (‘On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry’, *The Englishman’s Magazine*)”

As Matthew Arnold was to note, poets indulged in ‘the dialogue of the mind with itself’, as they no longer had confidence in sharing in a common belief or of readers.

Davis further notes: “To Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a critique self-banished to the realm of private notes and letters, too much Victorian poetry was what he called Parnassian. On Mount Parnassus, sacred to Apollo and the Muses, Poetry bore a capital ‘P’: by the middle of the nineteenth century, however, it had degenerated into becoming a ready-made lyric language, of lofty diction and heavy lamenting tones, which made the production of a poem possible without its first having to earn its individual right to existence.”

SAQ:

How far, do you think, Rossetti’s aestheticism endeared him to the Victorian public? Can we assert that aestheticism was revolutionary in the Victorian context? (80 + 50 words)

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5.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Let us now have a look at some of the major works of Rossetti. Since it is not possible to include all his works, the references to certain lesser works have been left out. Dante Gabriel Rossetti brought out his first pictures and first poems in 1849. As mentioned earlier, he was a painter first and a poet, second. Rossetti was instrumental in translating Dante’s *Vita Nuova* and fragments of old Italian poets. He was one of the prominent figures of the PRB and brought out numerous works during the late 1840s and throughout the 1850s both as poet and painter. Truth to nature, distinctness of details, profuse pictorial imagery, warm, sensuous colouring—all these symbolize Pre-Raphaelite poetry, which is also true of Rossetti. Some of his well-known paintings include ‘The Girlhood of Mary Virgin’, ‘How They Met Themselves’ and ‘Ecce Ancilla Domini’. These works bespoke of times redolent with the fragrance of the Middle Ages. His paintings are highly symbolic, being spiritually charged with various Dantesque subjects, religious

drawings from the Old and New Testaments, and also Arthurian canvasses. But Rossetti also brilliantly juxtaposed the past and the present as can be seen from his unfinished painting 'Found', which symbolically and realistically deals with the evils of modern city life. *Jenny*, a ballad published in 1870 is about a prostitute, and Rossetti's only poem with a contemporary subject. It had a close connection with the contemporaneous 'Found'.

The pictorial suggestiveness of Keats' poetry proved to be a source of inspiration for Rossetti. Beyond *The Blessed Damozel* in exquisite verse, the subject constitutes one of his most characteristic canvasses.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was originally a painters' movement, founded in 1848 by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, F. G. Stephens, James Collinson, Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Thomas Woolmer. These young artists aimed at a return to older principles in painting, but as Rossetti, and many of his followers were gifted writers, their work gave rise to a literary movement which advocated a close study of nature and a revival of the spirit and methods of the early Italian masters, before Raphael.

The Pre-Raphaelites worshipped beauty above everything else and they were above all, artists: art was their religion. Keats was an inspiration to them and they found their favourite models in his poems *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Isabella*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. They aimed at expressing genuine ideas, to study nature minutely, to produce, by their standards, good pictures and sculptures, to revolt against the eighteenth century academicism, and to revolutionize colour in painting. Their ideals appeared in *The Germ*, their short-lived mouthpiece. Simplicity and accuracy of detail, symbolism and a medieval outlook informed much of the work of the PRB. John Ruskin, the scornor of the Renaissance, hailed the beginnings of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Although the Brotherhood lasted only for a few years, before its founders went their different ways, it had a distinctly marked influence upon later nineteenth century artists and writers, including William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Arthur Hughes and Coventry Patmore.

We may choose to overlook just how much of an intervention Rossetti and his brotherhood made in terms of artistic techniques of the time. But we cannot overlook the fact that even in the zeal of their radical opinions, the PRB changed the techniques of painting and brought in the concern with detail that disturbed Victorian attitudes towards art. Their aim was to retain the brilliance of colours

through the revival of techniques of Quattrocento art and it was indeed John Ruskin the critic who hailed their realism. Millais' painting, "Christ in the House of His Parents" was considered blasphemous for its portrayal of Christ in His humble origins. Rossetti's own close association with William Morris should also be kept in mind for the rise of the artisans' movement.

As has been mentioned earlier, Rossetti may be called the 'Apostle of Beauty', the embodiment of the nineteenth-century 'Spirit of Art'. The poetry of meditation and worry, although it often drew on Wordsworthian cadence and Tennysonian languor, could not be expected to develop the vein of rich pictorial poetry that was implicit in the Keats-Tennyson tradition. This vein was developed by Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites. Since the PRB believed in simplicity and accuracy of detail, their work gave rise to a literary movement which advocated a close study of nature and a revival of the spirit and methods of the early Italian masters. It is indeed paradoxical that the Pre-Raphaelites began both as realists and medievalists.

SAQ:

Which aspect of Romantic poetry would you consider to have influenced Rossetti in his poetic compositions? (80 words)

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Rossetti's love of the supernatural can be fathomed in poems like *Sister Helen*, essentially in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition of the ballad revival. The sombre atmosphere is maintained by the use of irony, a subtly employed refrain, pointedly economical language and a pervading sense of doom for its striking effects. His love of the Middle Ages is represented in *The Staff and Script*, a tale of medieval chivalry. In such poems as *The King's Tragedy* and *The White Ship*, Rossetti touches up the popular ballad, with all its rough simplicity and naivete. And in "The Bridge's Prelude" and "Rose May", he recreates the splendour and sensuousness of Keats' *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia*. Rossetti's work consisted mostly of sonnets and ballads,

and his poetry, like his painting, was detailed, often cast in ballad form, and sometimes archaic in language.

Rossetti turned to poetry from painting, his mind nourished and enriched by Dante and the early Italian poetry, his Italian heredity and background was strongly felt in his poetry. He had great artistic gifts, but his poetic world lies beyond the limits of our ordinary experience- a shadowy world ruled by mystery, wonder, beauty, love and lit by another light than that of common day. He, like Keats, worshipped beauty above everything else, focusing chiefly upon the beauty of the female form. It was because of this sensuality in his works that drew trenchant criticism from Robert Buchanan, who condemned ‘the fleshly school of poetry’.

SAQ:

Attempt to give an adequate definition of the “pictorial” quality of Rossetti’s writing. Would you distinguish between the two qualities of the “pictorial” and the Keatsian “sensuousness” in his poems ? (50 + 60 words)

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His poems were conspicuous for their simple strength and dramatic movement, making continual use of the refrain and obtaining striking effects. However, he was not very successful in concealing the artificiality of such imitations of a rude and simple poetry.

While Tennyson, Arnold and Clough represent the spiritual distress of their times, Rossetti’s poetry shows no contact with the political or social conditions of his age. He completely withdraws himself from his age and rarely deals with a contemporary theme. He was influenced by the chivalry and romance of the Middle Ages. But no one poet has assimilated all these diverse elements in the way that Rossetti has done.

Rossetti influenced many later poets like Swinburne, whose use of verbal devices was a characteristic of his genius. The dream poetry of the *fin- de- siecle* poets — Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, and the

other companions of the young Yeats in the Rhymers' Club — were in the Keats- Tennyson- Swinburne line. William Butler Yeats also began under the influence of Spenser, Shelley, Rossetti and the aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century.

If we ask ourselves- “Why do we read Rossetti today?”, the answer would simply be that it is because his work is extremely individual and original. Rossetti remains an impressive, though somewhat puzzling poet, possessing an energy, even a savagery, which is far removed from what we find in the Pre- Raphaelite painters or in the other poets who contributed to *The Germ*. He had certain other sources of strength, which he however, could not always assimilate to the other aspects of his art. Admirable as his art is, it is indeed more than a little suggestive of that decadence, which is perhaps inevitable in poetry which is not fed by the healthy currents of normal life.

Stop to Consider:

Rossetti, Tennyson, Browning

“In order to fully understand the historical significance of Rossetti and the PRB, we can refer to how Grierson and Smith describe the late nineteenth-century situation: “To a younger reader becoming fully aware of his taste for poetry in the eighties of last century there were two major luminaries still in the heavens, . . . Browning died in 1889, Tennyson in 1892. Among such younger readers Browning stood at the moment rather higher in favour than his more widely acknowledged rival, if such a word is admissible. But there were other poets whose appeals were more insistent, indicated more clearly the direction in which they wished to move, the so-called pre-Raphaelite group with their doctrine of Art for Art's sake; a group whose influence was to be felt by poets so divergent as Kipling and Wilde and Yeats.”

In the 1850s, Rossetti made some drawings for *Poems* by Alfred Tennyson (1857), with contributions from John Everett Millias and Holman Hunt too. His *The Early Italian Poets* (1861) later revised as *Dante and His Circle* (1874) are translations from some sixty writers which demonstrate yet another aspect of his talents. Succinct passages from Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Fazio degli Uberti and many others appear with ancillary critical notes and editorial apparatus. Rossetti diverted his gifts to designing stained glass, furniture

and tiles too- but strain on his eyes compelled him to turn increasingly to poetry. *Poems* (1870) was followed by Buchanan's attack on him. Even at his most morbid and paranoid state, he brought out *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881) which included the sonnet sequence *The House of Life* and *The King's Tragedy*. *The House of Life* is a landmark in Victorian aestheticism. These sonnets are a perplexing potpourri of love, mysticism, Dantesque love, exaltation, despair, obscurity and autobiography. There is a sort of mystic symbolism in place of medieval allegory and is a richly embroidered embodiment of universal passion.

Rossetti's work is inherently individual and original. He had that quality of strangeness which Pater regards as an essential feature of Romantic art. His works remain distinguished in English literature for their rich Italian colouring and warm, sensuous quality.

Stop to Consider:

Rossetti's sister, Christina Rossetti, was a delicate and religious woman, passionately devoted to High Anglicanism, which later moulded some of her finest verse. Her religious convictions even led to the collapse of her engagement with James Collinson. She represented most perfectly the ideal of simplicity of the PRB. She possessed a lyrical gift and her verse is remarkable for its love of verbal invention and metrical experiment. Her fanciful imagination is revealed in the poem meant for children 'Goblin Market.' Her religious and secular poetry are characterized by frank meditations on death, Heaven with a keen interest in natural, pictorial imagery.

Check Your Progress:

1. Show in detail how the pictorial quality of Rossetti's poem, "The Blessed Damozel" supports its central theme.
2. Highlight those features of Rossetti's poem, "The Blessed Damozel" which show its 'Victorian' context. Keep your answer close to the text.

5.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

You will find it difficult to gather much commentary on Rossetti's work. A possible reason for his work not having received wide and serious

consideration - a situation now well redeemed - may have been due to his having been such a controversial figure in the Victorian period. We are providing you here (from the Internet) below a passage from such damning comments. Twentieth-century readings of the Victorian period have more widely acknowledged that the 'PRB', and D. G Rossetti in particular, were artists and poets of greater account than the Victorians themselves were prepared to affirm. Against the unfortunate background of a slow critical accommodation, standard histories of English poetry, such as *A Critical History of English Poetry* (1944, 1962) by Sir Herbert Grierson and J.C.Smith, firmly place DGR and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, in the line of significant Victorian poetry.

Grierson, and fellow-scholar, Smith, observed that Rossetti's worship of "Love and Beauty" was "individual and earthly", neither religious (like his sister's) nor commonplace. They connect Rossetti's highly individual beliefs to his personal tragedies and his personal status in English society: "Rossetti's poetry is an exotic in our English garden. He was three parts Italian by blood and half Italian by culture. In boyhood he absorbed Coleridge and Keats; at nineteen he discovered Browning . . .; but he underwent a stricter discipline in his minute study of the early Italian poets. He was at home in Italy, not contemporary Italy, the Italy of Mazzini and Garibaldi and Cavour, but the Italy of the Middle Ages, a land of poets and painters in whose company he could forget the drab ugliness of industrial England."

In their final summing up of Rossetti's contribution, these critics are of the opinion that "he left an indelible mark on English poetic diction, both by the simplicity of his earlier style and the sumptuousness of his later; and he expressed the passion of wedded love, in rapture and in desolation, with an urgency of thought and feeling unsurpassed in English poetry."

Stop to Consider:

Below is an extract from the vitriolic criticism that denounced Rossetti as belonging to the "fleshly" school of poetry. It gives us a measure of the radical departure that Rossetti had made from the conventions of Victorian writing.

"In petticoats or pantaloons, in modern times or in the middle ages, he is just Mr. Rossetti, a fleshly person, with nothing particular to tell us or teach us, with extreme self-control, a strong sense of colour, and a careful choice of

diction. Amid all his “affluence of jewel-coloured words,” he has not given us one rounded and noteworthy piece of art, though his verses are all art; not one poem which is memorable for its own sake, and page: 340 quite separable from the displeasing identity of the composer. The nearest approach to a perfect whole is the *Blessed Damoze**l*, a peculiar poem, placed first in the book, perhaps by accident, perhaps because it is a key to the poems which follow. This poem appeared in a rough shape many years ago in the *Germ*, an unwholesome periodical started by the Pre-Raphaelites, and suffered, after gasping through a few feeble numbers, to die the death of all such publications. In spite of its affected title, and of numberless affectations throughout the text, the *Blessed Damoze**l* has great merits of its own, and a few lines of real genius. We have heard it described as the record of actual grief and love, or, in simple words, the apotheosis of one actually lost by the writer; but, without having any private knowledge of the circumstance of its composition, we feel that such an account of the poem is inadmissible. It does not contain one single note of sorrow. It is a “composition,” and a clever one. Read the opening stanzas: — [lines 1 - 12] This is a careful sketch for a picture, which, worked into actual colour by a master, might have been worth seeing. The steadiness of hand lessens as the poem proceeds, and although there are several passages of considerable power,—such as that where, far down the void, “this earth / Spins like a fretful midge,” [lines 35-36] or that other, describing how “the curled moon / Was like a little feather / Fluttering far down the gulf,”— [lines 55-57] the general effect is that of a queer old painting in a missal, very affected and very odd. What moved the British critic to ecstasy in this poem seems to us very sad nonsense indeed, or, if not sad nonsense, very meretricious affectation. “

The Contemporary Review, Vol.18; published 1871 August - November

Walter Pater and John Ruskin

Walter Pater: “English critic, essayist, and humanist whose advocacy of “art for art’s sake” became a cardinal doctrine of the movement known as Aestheticism.”

John Ruskin: “English writer, critic, and artist who championed the Gothic Revival movement in architecture and had a large” influence upon public taste in art in Victorian England. . . . In the course of that year [1851] Ruskin was induced to champion the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of young English artists founded in reaction against contemporary academic painting, less because he admired them than because he thought the critics unfair to them. He befriended the painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who disliked him; established a lasting and happy friendship with the artist Edward Burne-Jones; and cultivated the company of John Everett Millais ...”

(From Encyclopedia Britannica)

Walter Pater, the Victorian aesthete, with his precept of the supreme value of beauty, has this to say about Rossetti's indebtedness to Dante: "One of the peculiarities of *The Blessed Damozel* was a definiteness of sensible imagery, which seemed almost grotesque to some, and was strange, above all, in a theme so profoundly visionary. The gold bar of Heaven from which she leaned, her hair yellow like ripe corn, are but examples of a general treatment, as naively detailed as the pictures of those early painters contemporary with Dante, who has shown similar care for minute and definite imagery in his verse; there, too, in the very midst of profoundly mystic vision. Such definition of outline is indeed one among many points in which Rossetti resembles the great Italian poet, of whom, led to him at first by family circumstances, he was ever a lover".

Stop to Consider:

Richard L. Stein notes an instance of paradox in Rossetti's painting. In his words, "The version of *The Blessed Damozel* painted for Frederick Leyland makes a point of its double life in particularly dramatic fashion. Rossetti divides the canvas into two parts, creating an unequal vertical diptych, in which the worlds of the divided lovers are represented separately.....The painted and printed versions of *The Blessed Damozel* dramatize the pervasiveness of Rossetti's tendency to juxtapose alternate, even opposing visions of a single subject while leaving vague or unexpressed the thought that initially brought them together and gave them meaning as parts of an integral work of art".

SAQ:

Would you consider "The Blessed Damozel" as a ballad, a Victorian sequence-poem, or a romantic lyric? Give reasons for your answer with examples from the text. (90 words)

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5.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

"The Blessed Damozel" appeared for the first time in *The Germ*, the literary magazine of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which however, lasted for

only four issues, published between January and April, 1850. Besides poetry by Rossetti himself, it also contained poetry by his sister, Christina Rossetti and the poet and critic, Coventry Patmore. Rossetti's short story, 'Hand and Soul', and reviews of contemporary verse by his brother and the editor of the magazine, William Michael Rossetti, also appeared in it.

The poem was revised for publication in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in 1856, and again before its appearance in *Poems, 1870*. This highly symbolic poem epitomizes Pre-Raphaelite verse, being also complemented with a painting with the same name by Rossetti.

Rossetti told Hall Caine thirty years after the appearance of the poem that he had written "The Blessed Damozel" as a sequel to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* (published in 1845). In his own words- "I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearnings of the loved one in heaven". Rossetti's early readings of Dante have influenced the general conception as well as many other details of the poem.

5.6 READING THE POEM

The 'Damozel' leans out "from the gold bar of Heaven", yearning for her earthly lover, whose reflections are expressed parenthetically throughout.

The previous sections enable us to read *The Blessed Damozel*. As mentioned earlier, this poem is Rossetti's best-known work, a mystic conception, embodying the suggestive characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite verse. The poem is the exquisite yearning of a woman leaning out "from the gold bar of Heaven", yearning for her earth-rooted lover. What makes the poem "Dantesque" in its general conception is its intricately ritualised Christian setting of religious symbolism:

"The blessed damozel leaned out / From the gold bar of Heaven; / Her eyes were deeper than the depth / Of waters stilled at even; / She had three lilies in her hand, / And the stars in her hair were seven. //

"Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem, / No wrought flowers did adorn, / But a white rose of Mary's gift, / For service meetly worn; / Her hair that lay along her back / Was yellow like ripe corn. //

“Herseemed she scarce had been a day / One of God’s choristers; / The wonder was not yet quite gone / From that still look of hers; / Albeit, to them she left, her day / Had counted as ten years.”

SAQ:

Pick out the words, phrases and symbols in the poem which sustain the religious associations of the poem. (70 words)

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The first three stanzas describe the Damozel, her visage and habit, as she leans out for her earthly lover, whose reflections are expressed parenthetically throughout:

“(To one, it is ten years of years.
..... Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she lean’d o’er me....her hair
Fell all about my face.....
Nothing: the autumn- fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)”

You should note that there is a paradox in the description of the Damozel - she is ‘earthly’, yet resembles the divine figure of the Madonna in that words like “deep”, “stilled” waters and “deeper” suggest depth and spirituality. The title of the poem has already set in place the perspective through which we are to regard her. The mention of “Mary”, the symbol of the white rose, the white lilies and the seven stars in her hair, ring out the tones of divine worship and sacred ritual. These details are both clear and richly suggestive. What appears to break this line of association comes in the comparison of the damozel’s hair to sheaves of ripe corn, since such a ‘raw’ detail also looks to the contradiction of the holy and the sacred. Obviously, Rossetti is deliberately disruptive of aligning any reading with such associations; one can almost understand why the Victorian sensibility was outraged.

Stop to Consider:

As we live in the twenty-first century where the Internet is ubiquitous, and distance learners take full advantage of cyberspace, here are two URLs which you can locate for material on Rossetti and the PRB. It will show you just how much research and investigation has gone into D.G.Rossetti and his work. Unless this kind of information is available, further research is not possible and our readings of 'The Blessed Damozel' will remain superficial. Look up these web-pages and see for yourself what is worth knowing about the topic.

<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1847.s244.raw.html>

<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/bibliography.rac.html>

Reading Rossetti's poetry is similar to looking at his paintings, because his poems, like his paintings, are so carefully wrought. It was Rossetti's early readings of Dante that instilled in him the symbolizing and sacramentalizing aspects of the medieval temper. His own disposition also stimulated a tendency to identify the concretely physical with the permanently spiritual. The "three lilies in her hand" and the seven "stars in her hair" of the Blessed Damozel might be mere literary properties, but when Rossetti says,

"And still she bow'd herself and stoop'd
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she lean'd on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm."

we find that this symbolizes a kind of bringing together of the spiritual and physical aspects. It needs to be mentioned here that Philip James Bailey's poem, *Festus* seems to have definitely influenced the development of *The Blessed Damozel*. It had a marked impact on the formulation of the central idea of Rossetti's poem and the imagery by which he developed it. There is, however, a decorative use of religious imagery in Rossetti which is not found in Bailey, along with a studied curiosity and simplicity.

SAQ:

Do you think that Rossetti’s chief interest lies in mingling the spiritual and the physical? In the lines given above, bring out the specifically “spiritual”. (80 + 60 words)

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Rossetti employs paradoxes in his poem, as can be seen in the departed maiden in heaven longing for human love; her spiritual “body” warming the “gold bar” at the edge of paradise.

“The sun was gone now; the curl’d moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.
(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird’s song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearken’d? When those bells
Possess’d the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing?)”

The parenthetical first- person reflections are a constant reminder of the presence of the narrator all along.

About the next five stanzas (lines 14 onwards) seem to emphasize the ‘mystical’ distance between the damozel’s position in heaven and the ‘earthly’ *terra firma* below. The poet-narrator makes it clear that if a mystical imagination is at work here then such visualising must refer to both time and space. We could even assert here that Rossetti’s mind is not at peace with mystifying ‘spirituality’ which ignores the dimensions of space and time. In other words, the details of time (lines 18 - 24) and space (lines 27 - 37)show a refusal of vague, illusory concepts. Rather than merely attribute this to the artist’s penchant for the visual lines of a given concept, we could

also refer to Rossetti’s opposition to the mystification of religious dogma. (We could recall to the heated debates stirred up by the famous early painting “Christ in the house of his parents” by Millais). You should recall here that among the stated aims of the PRB, was also the call to return to nature. You can also refer to John Ruskin’s early championing of the PRB as the rise of a new realism.

SAQ:

Attempt to elaborate the meanings generated by the title of the poem - ‘the blessed damozel’ - in keeping with the narration itself. (80 words)

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The madonna’s thoughts are decidedly ‘earthly’: she has (lines 37 - 44) bowed herself out of the “circling charm” of the soulful, chaste, new arrivals in heaven. If the madonna is ‘pure’ by the convention of the very conception — only the pure go to heaven — Rossetti seems to undercut the very notion of purity, religious purity in particular, by implicating it with the bodily and the ‘earthly’. The senses are at work: the visual, the auditory, the tactile, at least three kinds of sense-experience are given their place in the case of the ‘dead’ madonna. Time is to be seen as a force, one of the grand elements through which the madonna has to cut a visual possibility in order to ‘see’ her earthly lover. Even the idea of light is to be examined through the prism of metaphysical abstraction (lines 49 -58).

However, far from assuming Rossetti to be holding up mysticism for its untenable assumptions, the rest of the poem is a paeon to the pure love of mind and body (lines 67 - 132). The religious ideal of the spiritual heaven is set in contrast to the ‘purity’ of the love that the desiring madonna holds for her absent lover. There is pathos to be seen in the desires of the forlorn damozel whose love for her beloved is presumed to be capable of fastness and constancy in the face of the vast spatial and temporal distance between the two lovers (line 35).

The last stanza brings in the heightened strangeness of pure love that must remain unfulfilled in order to be valued as spiritual. At one level, heaven is seen as the place that leaves the pure in love with no fulfillment. Perhaps we can see Rossetti's radical questioning of the traditional notion of a heaven that answers our needs. A contradiction is seen to be almost necessary between spiritual yearning and a higher order of earthly love. (last stanza)

The Blessed Damozel is as much about its title character as it is about her lover on earth. The pictorial detail of the heavenly landscape is an indicator of the speaker's imagination, and the source of this power, is his grief for the Beloved. Freshness and simplicity in the handling of detail, and a relatively plain style validate the speaker's emotion and makes its strength more convincing. In the concluding lines of the poem,

“The light thrill'd towards her, fill'd
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes pray'd, and she smil'd.
(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres:
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)”

we find a juxtaposition between two experiences, one real and the other imagined. However, the poem, instead of choosing between them, stresses their interdependence.

SAQ:

Do you find any antitheses between the experiences and the thoughts of the damozel and her lover on the earth? If you do, what meaning is implied here? (30 + 50 words)

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Rossetti's attempt to combine concrete particularization and tremulous symbolic meaning is characteristic of his poetry. He tried to work in a medieval mode in the Victorian world, because of which, it can be said, he achieved limited success in the context of his operations. However, there is no doubt that *The Blessed Damozel* is an undeniably original poem and the line from Keats through Tennyson to Rossetti is a real one so far as the handling of pictorial imagery is concerned. To that extent, he remains the embodiment of Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism.

The Blessed Damozel is a poem with the simple diction reminiscent of the symbolists (who would follow later with the *fin-de-siecle* poets) which greatly contributes to its effectiveness. The mode is neither really Keatsian nor Swinburnian — nor truly Dantesque, for that matter, as the disposition of the emotion is altogether too self-conscious. Rossetti catered to the Pre-Raphaelite norm of art for art's sake by using a strong conception of scene and situation, and its precise delineation, lavish imagery and wealth of detail. But though he employs considerable pictorial detail, it is the element of thought and even abstraction, the attempt to reduce everything to an idea or an essence, which is more characteristic of his poetry. His poetry is sometimes even criticized for its reductiveness.

Stop to Consider:

Below is some related material from the web-page cited. You can check out the validity of the material with other resources in case you are asked to. However, considering that this web-site seems to be focused on DGR and the PRB, we feel that you should be made aware of such resources in the public domain.

<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.g415.raw.html>

However that may be, no one disputes the fact that it was DGR who initiated the idea of *The Germ*. The venture was sustained by his energy and programmatic goals "towards Art" and literature. The contents of each number reflect his ideas and influence. It is not surprising to learn, from surviving early documents, that he was the chief agent working to secure material for publication.

The key persons involved in founding the periodical were DGR, his brother WMR, and William Holman Hunt, although the whole of the PRB circle discussed the journal and how it should be constituted. This initial circle also included James Collinson (1825?-1881), Millais, Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907), and Thomas Woolner (1825-1892). Others more or less closely associated with

the PRB circle contributed to the periodical but were not involved with its production. At first the idea was to call it *The P. R. B. Journal*, a title that emphasized the desire to preserve a certain integrity of thought. This plan was abandoned, however, and the decision was explicitly made to enlarge the scope of the contributions to include material that could not be called Pre-Raphaelite in any strict sense.

Nonetheless, for all its heterogeneity *The Germ* does sustain certain consistent attachments. Most apparent is its anti-secular attitude. Pervading the journal is a loosely defined but unmistakable set of religious goals, as well as a closely related conviction that art and literature are the vehicles that can be most relied upon to secure those goals. The journal recurs to subjects like early Italian painting, medieval topoi of various kinds, and discussions of the relation between early and contemporary art and literature. The latter are particularly revealing. DGR and his friends were much interested in how works of imagination once served both devotional and social functions, and how at certain times—the medieval period was paradigmatic here—religious and secular work seemed undivorced, as if formed in a tense double-helix. How such a state of affairs might be recovered in the mid- and late 19th-century was a question to be explored as well as a goal to be gained.

The Germ was an instrument toward those ends. It consisted of both verse and prose (the latter both fictional and expository). Only four numbers were published (January, February, March, and May, 1850). Discontinued when it proved a financial failure, it was critically noticed, it had a significant influence, and eventually its importance came to be widely recognized.

Rossetti's attempt to combine concrete particularization and tremulous symbolic meaning is characteristic of his poetry. He tried to work in a medieval mode in the Victorian world, because of which, it can be said that he achieved limited success in the context of his operations. However, there is no doubt that *The Blessed Damozel* is an invincibly original poem and the line from Keats through Tennyson to Rossetti is a real one so far as the handling of pictorial imagery is concerned. In many ways, he remains the embodiment of Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism.

Check Your Progress:

1. Substantiate Grierson's opinion that Rossetti made a significant contribution to the diction of English poetry of the time.

2. Comment on the paradox that the Pre- Raphaelites began both as realists and medievalists. How do these qualities affect the description of the “blessed damozel”?

3. “We two will lie in the shadow of /that living mystic tree”. Who are the “we two” here? Comment on the thoughts that are attributed to the damozel.

4. Comment on the cosmic imagery in the poem in the context of the PRB’s ‘return to the truth of nature’.

5.7 SUMMING UP

In the previous sections of this unit, attempts have been made to give a holistic idea of Rossetti. In the introductory section, we have tried to estimate the greatness of Rossetti by referring to his literary pursuits and achievements; how he catered to the norm of “art for art’s sake”. We saw how Rossetti can be called the “Apostle of Beauty”. In his works, we saw how he was influenced by Dante and Keatsian languor. We have paid attention to his significant works, so that we can understand Rossetti’s oeuvre in its proper context. His works are characterized by medievalism, a pictorial exactness, sensuousness as well as a love of the supernatural. This is followed by a brief discussion on how the poet has been received by readers and critics alike. In the section ‘Reading the poem’, we see how the poem generates a range of meanings through the devices used by Rossetti.

5.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Vol 4. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2001.

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Unit 6

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Contents:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introducing the Poet
- 6.3 Critical Reception
- 6.4 Context of the Poems
- 6.5 Reading the Poems
 - 6.5.1 Reading *The Windhover*
 - 6.5.2 Reading *Pied Beauty*
 - 6.5.3 Reading *God's Grandeur*
- 6.6 Summing up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 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

6.2 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)

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6.3 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.” He further writes that Hopkins is likely to prove significant for future poetry and he has been the only influential poet of the Victorian age.

6.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Hopkins’ supreme faith in his poetic energy had its roots in the social and religious movements of his time. Hopkins was welcomed by Newman himself into Catholicism in 1866 and he gave up poetry after becoming a Jesuit in 1868. He accepted the world anew and experimented on language that marked its significance as speech. Hopkins felt the contradictory, opposing forces of his era and established faith in the worth of the individual.

Stop to Consider:

The sacramental view of nature and realization are developed in the poems of 1877-78 such as *‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’*. The poet’s religious experience of beauty is crucial to these poems as he celebrates the Maker and His creations with all its wonders. In *‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’* the poet starts with an invocation where he offers his gratitude towards God who is the ‘lord of living and dead’. He prays God to shower bliss upon the spiritually sterile world,

“Make mercy in all of us, out of us all
Mastery, but be adored, but be adored king.”

God is omnipresent who offers the grace, beauty and comfort that save us. The poet greets his presence,

“His mystery must be instressed, stressed;”

He believes that this divine stress and stroke ‘that stars and storms deliver’ can flush the sinning flesh.

The sense of ‘this-ness’ is rooted in his faith in individual experience and he tried to establish poetry as religion. Apart from the influence of Newman, Liddell and Pusey, Hopkins was inspired by the idealist philosopher, T. H. Green, and aesthetic priest and artist, Walter Pater, who taught him the lesson of art, and culture, the essence of the perception of beauty and creativity. This led the priest-poet to explore the ‘inscape’ of ‘landscape’ (Nature) to conquer darkness and defeat. His poetry dealt with the immediate and the particular.

'God's Grandeur' (Feb., 1877) was occasioned by the repugnance of the dullness of the industrial age, the ugliness and the unrest of Victorian England. Written in 'sprung rhythm', 'The Windhover' (1877) rests upon his faith on divine beauty and grace. The bird mirrors Christ and nature appears to be scripture. God's grandeur is again valorized in 'Pied Beauty', celebrated with all its dappled things. A sense of mystery and wonder pervades the poem and offers a wonderful symphony of praise dedicated to the Creator. The influence of Duns Scotus is clearly evident here it celebrates intense particularity and distinctiveness of natural things.

Stop to Consider:

Duns Scotus

"(1266 - 1308), influential Franciscan realist philosopher and scholastic theologian who pioneered the classical defense of the doctrine that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was conceived without original sin (the Immaculate Conception).".....

"it is clear that in 1300 Duns Scotus was already at work on his monumental Oxford commentary on the *Sentences*, known as the *Ordinatio* or *Opus Oxoniense*."

"Despite their imperfect form, Duns Scotus' works were widely circulated. His claim that universal concepts are based on a "common nature" in individuals was one of the central issues in the 14th-century controversy between Realists and Nominalists concerning the question of whether general types are figments of the mind or are real. Later this same Scotist principle deeply influenced Charles Sanders Peirce, a U.S. philosopher, who considered Duns Scotus the greatest speculative mind of the Middle Ages as well as one of the "profoundest metaphysicians that ever lived.".....

"His strong defense of the papacy against the divine right of kings made him unpopular with the English Reformers of the 16th century for whom "dunce" (a Dunsman) became a word of obloquy, yet his theory of intuitive cognition suggested to John Calvin, the Genevan Reformer, how God may be "experienced."

.....

"During the 16th to 18th century among Catholic theologians Duns Scotus' following rivalled that of Thomas Aquinas and in the 17th century outnumbered that of all the other schools combined." - *Encyclopedia Britannica*

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the analogical significance of Hopkins' imagery with special reference to the prescribed poems.
2. How far would you agree with the Leavisite view that the sense of difficulty, tension and resistance are essential to Hopkins' poetic effect? Give reasons for your argument.

6.5 READING THE POEMS

In his poetry Hopkins puts emphasis on the essence of experience, or the need to experience the sights and sounds of nature. The Romantic and the orthodox are present in his poetry. As Bell Gale Chevigny writes, Hopkins' poetry "sustains Romantic tradition and belongs to the Victorian resurgence of orthodoxy". (pp.142) All things are held by 'instress' (the power or potential to actualize sensual experience), the divine essence and cohesive bond /force that has sustained the Great Chain of Being.

Along with that the agony and frustration of the splitting self is evident in the poems. Thus the 'inscape' in Hopkins elevates landscape as battlefield where the poet has endeavoured to present conflicts of the mind. For instance, in the poem 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' he depicts the conflict of the mind, the very crisis of faith and doubt. The poet is in search of a self-definition. The imagery of nature is vividly used to represent the struggling self. As he has mentioned in his journals and letters, he showed sensibility towards solitude, sense of loss of time and beauty and the horror of extinction. Here it can be said that Hopkins' mind was in opposition to the ravages of industrialisation and growing materialism. The rapid progress of industrialism heralded the most cataclysmic changes to be seen in the loss of faith and the transformation of the rural landscape. His poetry marks a revolt against the inherent cruelty of such human activity and its consequent violence done on nature.

Stop to Consider:

Hopkins was writing at a time when post-Darwinian regression questioned the conventional institutions and ideology. The theory of natural selection and social Darwinism threatened to overtake conventional ideas of the origins of

the universe and human history. The tension between liberal and the conservative as well as the spirit of compromise are evident in his poetry. The crisis of faith and subsequent Victorian unrest led to newer experimentations. It was also the same time when the Reform Bill was passed in 1867 that opened ways for future democracy that was essentially bourgeois. As Andrew Sanders writes, it also appealed to an anti-theoretical streak in English culture. But even amidst religious crisis, Hopkins preserves his religious faith in his verses, a religious spirit that had a divine mission of its own.

Showing concern over the moral ugliness of the nineteenth century after the industrial revolution, Hopkins wrote to his friend Alexander Baillie,

“What I dislike in towns and in London in particular is the misery of the poor; the dirt, squalor, and the ill-shapen degraded physical (putting aside moral) type of so many of the people with the deeply dejecting, unbearable thought that by degrees almost all our population will become a town population and a puny, unhealthy and cowardly one.”

Hopkins’ sonnets show how man has failed to attain perfection because of their sins. The loss of faith is regretted in these sonnets. Amidst crisis and uncertainty, the priest-poet has restored faith in the divine, the absolute, by elevating the concrete world.

The sonnets included in *Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves* are written in 1884-85 which are considered as the most introspective of his sonnets ‘issued from his soul in a catharsis of his burdened spirit’. They are reflective of his spiritual desolation and agony that was born of trial and suffering. The poet despairs,

“Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.”

(“God’s Grandeur”)

Man has sinned and the poet believes that redemption is possible only through the preservation of beauty and innocence. As such the priest-poet seeks shelter in Christ and like a pantheist he presents a vision, of being the eternal union of Christ and Man projecting Self into nature. His poetry

remains a witness to his conviction in the divine presence of things. His vision is unique to himself. The concepts of ‘inscape’ and ‘instress’ further strengthen his poetic endeavour. “The Windhover”, “God’s Grandeur”, “Felix Randal” are some of the remarkable nature poems where nature is held as a mirror to depict the internal conflict of the poet. The spiritual crisis, sense of alienation from God are dominant themes of these poems. The self is constantly struggling in quest of comfort and salvation.

SAQ:

Which lines in the poems under study suggest a strong sense of the individual self? Would you say that this is partly because Hopkins does not simply narrate, but tends to dramatize the lyric ‘persona’? (70 + 60 words)

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6.6.1 READING *THE WINDHOVER*

The poem demands multiple interpretations because of its rich imagery. Written in sprung rhythm, the poet’s personal experience attains a universal dimension in *The Windhover*. Hopkins’ theological framework is best expressed in the poem. Through an analogical representation, the poet has addressed Christ by appropriating the valour and mastery of the bird.

He has caught sight of a ‘morning’s minion’, the windhover. Here the poet’s use of the royal imagery is significant. The falcon is addressed as a prince of the kingdom of daylight. The majestic presence of the bird pervades the poem. The use of the compound words such as ‘dapple-dawn-drawn’ falcon is interesting. Here the word ‘dapple’ refers to the variegated colour of the sky. The movement and action of the falcon is keenly observed by the priest-poet and he is addressed as a ‘dauphin’ or prince who wrestles with the wind for glory. The surging and gliding movement of the bird are sights of ecstasy and enjoyment. The expert flight of the bird is compared to the swift gliding movement of a skater on a snow-covered mountain.

With the sestet the poet addresses the divine falcon directly and craves for its mastery. He exclaims in ecstasy,

“...here /

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

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!”

The kestrel is said to hover over with wings beating as it looks for prey, before it plummets to earth — its “stoop”. We can note just how the predominant effects of the lines relate to the unique beauty of the bird’s flight, the moment in nature dressed in splendour, and the beholder’s (the poet’s) sense of religious wonder and surrender. The word “Buckle!” gains emphasis from being placed after the first line of the sestet. The idea that Hopkins gives us refers to how, by being hurled by the wind, the kestrel comes out stronger. So, “my heart in hiding” that “Stirred for a bird” will come out stronger just as by ‘buckling’ or giving in, or tightening up, a stronger fire can break out. The “sillion” was the land farmed by a monastery (in the medieval period) and which would turn up minerals on being ploughed. Bleak embers flash into sparks with a new flame when they fall as the bird’s fall is also the gathering of greater strength:

“the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion /

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!”

We see thus a movement from the description of the bird and its symbolic importance to the symbolism that this carries for the poet’s own spirit.

SAQ:

There are about eight alliterations in the poem - identify them. (50 words)

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Here the image of ‘fire’* echoes the expression in God’s grandeur,

“The world is charged with the grandeur of god.”

Stop to Consider:

The poet restores a faith in beauty and grandeur of god . The holy blood of Christ is symbolized by palm juice that can refresh the sinning heart. He believes that things will be alright after God's arrival and subsequent spiritual revival. The glorification of the material world has allowed the poet to overcome difficulties and sufferings. The poet appears to be a stoic figure and admits the 'mystery of suffering' and 'beauty of sacrifice'. He accepts them as part of god's design. The perception of earthly Beauty and its experience as a religious endeavour further elevate the poems to an experience of a Higher Reality. The spirit is essentially pagan and significantly the pagan and the modern are simultaneously developed to establish a poetic truth. A work of art is a living thing for Hopkins and the vision of Hopkins is essentially artistic.

The word 'buckle' refers to fusion of all things that are brute and natural. This is a moment of ecstasy enjoyed by the poet. Fire refers to god's glory and grandeur that flame out like 'shining from shook foil'. The poet considers the divine falcon as the incarnation of Christ, the Saviour. The word 'chevalour' refers to sovereignty, heroism, beauty, valour and glory. As Hopkins himself announces in the title, he celebrates God's creation and pays tribute to the all-pervading force that restores innocence and beauty. The poet anticipates a change and in this respects the reference to the transformation of 'blue-bleak embers' is symbolical. The reference to two royal colours, gold and vermilion suggests redemption and renewal. It is quite evident that the poem best reflects Hopkins' poetic principles of 'inscape' and 'instress'.

6.6.2 READING *PIED BEAUTY*

Hopkins' reverence for nature is once again manifested in this poem. Here, again, nature is celebrated with all its beauty and variety as an embodiment of original and divine energy. The poem opens with a tribute to the creator of the universe who has decorated the world with 'dappled things'. The poet takes pleasure in the pied beauty of nature and perceives a sacramental design within it. The poem is rich in inscape imagery. The religious and the secular are celebrated together. The "couple-coloured" skies, the "fresh-fire coal chestnut-falls", the multi-coloured wings of the finches, the plotted

landscape — all are characteristically unique. The poem begins like a hymn in ecstatic praise of God,

“Glory be to god for dappled things”

The poet admires the presence of different variety of things in nature (the sweet, sour, swift, slow, bright and the lusterless). The eleven lines that go to make up the poem list out or catalogue the diversity contained in the short description, “pied beauty”. All originate from the same divine force thus bringing out the co- existence of contrasting things in nature. The poet praises all contrariness (“All things counter, original, spare, strange”) and the fickleness (of monochromatic hues) or intermingling of colours in freckled appearances. Contraries are to be praised

“With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;”

because all constitute the immense variety of life and the world. No part of this world can be rejected for showing the intermingling of differences and opposites. The poet is pointing to the harmony in admixture as an essential part of God’s creation.

SAQ:

Would you say that Hopkins holds out to the reader an ethical point of view in his regard for nature? (80 words)

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Note the use of compact phrases , the repetition of consonant sounds in the poem.(‘Fresh-firecoal chestnut falls’, ‘fold, fallow and plough’). The influence of Duns Scotus is quite prominent in this poem.

The fact of creation is a mystery for us all. It is beyond human knowledge – why these things are freckled and dappled. The poem makes an attempt to concretize the material world with a democratic pattern that is essentially divine and it is an artistic realization of the balance of opposites. The perception of this holy pattern allows him to experience a more exalted

concept of beauty. The catalogue of dappled things, the compact and loaded word-images give a vivid picture of the world of creation.

6.6.3 READING *GOD'S GRANDEUR*

The poem starts with a tribute to Christ, who is omnipotent and omnipresent,

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

God's grandeur is celebrated and valorized with all its manifestations in “God's Grandeur”. The opening images refer to the sparkle of God's grandeur. The light that shimmers when foil is shaken down recreates the sparkling splendour of divine brightness in unexpected actions. We are reminded of God's divine presence in unexpected moments as in the image of the oozing of oil from crushed olives which compresses the mixed ideas of both grinding toil and the rewarding fruit of such toil as well as the association of power and kingship in the image of olive oil. The divine brightness falling in a spray promises more: “It will flame out”. There is a hint of the incendiary flaming out of a fire with the foil. The poet presses us to the inference that if God's divine presence can break forth any moment, then rhetorically speaking, “Why do men then now not reckon his rod?”

‘Rod’ is a symbol of ‘wrath’ and ‘power’; God's stern authority stands against injustice and exploitation but men choose to ignore it. The poet grieves that men have to tread the weary path of struggle and labour

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

SAQ:

Hopkins tends to embrace nature in the human world by adopting a sweeping comprehensive vision. Bring out this effect in his poems (80 words)

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The slow, heavy repetitive metre of generations having “trod”, evokes the sense of great burden of sorrow and labour. Not surprisingly, trade (or commerce) “sears” as would excruciating pain or injury. Rather than repeat the term, the poet uses assonance — “bleared”, “smeared” — to insert other meanings of dullness brought on by pain and deformity, perhaps, just as ‘toil’ or hard struggle soils or makes filthy what is clean and pure. Hopkins uses his poetic device of repeating through associated sounds to great effect: ‘seared’, ‘bleared’, ‘smeared’, accumulate all these senses to build up an image of a human world replete with excruciating labour and pain, tied to service without just returns or reward and pulling man further into the darkness of sorrow. This is in contrast to what we saw in the opening lines holding up the images of brightness and splendour.

“All” is smeared with human activity, dredged with human sweat and pain, laid barren by the human race. The soil has lost its fertility but the perpetrator of this barrenness is beyond feeling because material covers the feet. The foot is “shod” with leather or its equivalent and is thus deprived of its ability to feel the soil which has been laid bare that the foot might find its covering.

Here the phrase “seared with trade” refers to the progress and materialism of the age of industrialism. This also refers to the increasing commercial activities and growing spiritual degradation. The loss of innocence, beauty and serenity is regretted by the poet. Men remain indifferent to the cruelty exerted on nature. The sense of loss or innocence in the octave is followed by a conviction in nature’s omnipotence and benevolence. The faith in the regenerative power of nature invigorates his heart. But it is also true that the human can never fully deplete the bounty of nature which has regenerative power:

“Nature is never spent”

Nature always restores its essence and freshness despite the injustice and violence done to it. In extreme faith he says,

“And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, Morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs”

The sunset affirms the dawn and thus the poet expects change and renewal.

Stop to Consider:

One prominent theme in his poetry is the glory of God reflected in nature. In poems like 'Pied Beauty', 'God's Grandeur' and 'The Windhover', 'Thou art indeed just' Hopkins appears as a devotee of Christ who establishes a faith in the 'Heraclitean Fire'. Man's sufferings, frustrations are brought out through nature imagery. Like Wordsworth, Hopkins has used nature as a comforting sight establishing a faith in the regenerative power of Nature. He believes that man's redemption is possible only after his surrender to Christ. The preservation of beauty is also possible through a preservation of such faith. The tension between the physical and the spiritual is essentially creative in Hopkins. In *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo* he insists on the restoration of faith in beauty and innocence,

"Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath,
And with sighs soaring sighs deliver
Them; beauty –in-the- ghost, deliver it, early now long before death
Gibe Beauty back, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self
And beauty's giver."

Pay attention to the use of imagery, and onomatopoeic words such as "seared, bleared, smeared". Though Hopkins is often charged with ambiguity, his ambiguity is essentially creative. F. R. Leavis opines that the difficulty, tension and resistance in Hopkins are essential part of the poetic effect. He further observes that Hopkins shares an association with Shakespeare, Donne, Eliot and Yeats so far as his use of spoken language is concerned. Hopkins' strength mainly lies in his use of living speech. Expressions like 'generations have trod, have trod, have trod' that involve repetitions show a wrong sense of dissatisfaction and frustration.

The essence of nature's purity and innocence lies in its spiritual embodiment where the spirit stands for creative energy. The reference to 'Holy Ghost' suggests Hopkins' belief that the divine presence of the 'bright wings' will continue to restore the beauty and worth of the world.

Check Your Progress:

1. Elaborate on the poetic strategies by which the several associations of the 'windhover' with the poet's spirit, nature and Christ are achieved by Hopkins in his poem.

2. Highlight the ways by which Hopkins poses religious compassion as an antidote to the logic of worldly values in his poems.
3. Comment on the approach to nature as the repository of both aesthetic beauty and ethical values in Hopkins' poetry.
4. Discuss the view that the tension in Hopkins' poetry is centered less on the conflict between the poetic and the artistic sensibilities as between a utilitarian logic and an acceptance of God's mysterious presence.

6.7 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.

6.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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