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July, 2021

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ISBN:

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Further information on the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi.

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by the Registrar, MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi.

Laser Typeset by

Printed at:

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Dear Students,

Welcome to the course on British Romantic Literature.

This course is designed to introduce you to some of the renowned literary works of the stalwarts of the British Romantic era. These writers and works actively engaged with the social, cultural and political upheavals of the period thereby raising important questions for society. Personal observations of individuals received greater importance in the literary field, in this period. The reflections of social thinkers propagated widely through books and striking ideas spread like wildfire amongst the readers.

The romantic period was marked with a revolutionary spirit of the people ready to herald change. Many writers provided suggestions and solutions for the unspoken dilemma and grim situation of the subaltern classes through their works. This paper examines works of revered writers who charged the period with their innate creativity, excitement and mystery. It aims to provide a platform to its learners through which they can discover the panorama of romantic ideals and attitudes as envisioned by the influential thinkers of the British Romantic era.

After introducing the events leading to the rise of the romantic age in Unit 1, these readings will walk you through some celebrated texts and their summaries. In Unit II of Block 1, George Crabbe's new revolutionary style of poetry is discussed from Book 1 of 'The Village' published in 1783. In this work, he protested against Oliver Goldsmith's following of classical pastoral poetic form in his work 'The Deserted Village' printed in 1770. Crabbe realistically depicted the deplorable conditions of the rural poverty and desolate countryside thereby attracting the attention of many readers.

This literary period of romanticism in British literature surged primarily in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century. Many authors, poets, philosophers, politicians and other eminent personalities published their remarkable literary masterpieces during this time. They wrote to show their support and contradict prevalent issues, solutions and advancements through literature. Their ideas left indelible marks on the people and inspired them.

The literature of the period, the shift of socio-cultural scenario and happenings reverberated in each other. For the people, crucial intellectual forces of art, aesthetics, self-creation and reason breached a spark of liberation in them from their pasts. Illustrious works of William Blake like, 'The Tyger' and 'The Lamb' which presented two contrary views of god's creation both of which are reflected in the human soul. The tiger's fierceness in one work is contradicted with lamb's innocence in the other. Some critics believe that the image of a forceful tiger was used in the poem to convey the compelling forces of the industrial revolution on people and society.

'The Chimney Sweeper' is another acclaimed poem by Blake, written in two parts, in 1789 and 1794. In a simple style, it depicted the prevalent practice of child labour and the inhumane treatment of children, during this period. This poem is a form of a protest highlighting the social malpractice of exploiting innocent children as chimney sweepers and cruelly using their labour and coffins to build the riches of the church. This demo and appeal by Blake did not go unheard and resultantly, the Parliamentary Committee raised a report on the condition and utilization of kids as chimney sweepers in 1817.

William Wordsworth, S T Coleridge, Robert Southey were contemporaries who were the leading figures of their time and were known as the Lake poets. In 1807, William Wordsworth published his influential work 'Ode on Intimation of Immortality' in which he famously wrote about the immortality of the human soul and the limitations of life. 'Child is the father of man', 'Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might / Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height', and 'Our birth is but a dream and a forgetting', are some of the oft-quoted lines from this literary masterpiece.

Coleridge's ballad 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', published in 1798 was a part of the famous literary work the 'Lyrical Ballads' which he wrote in collaboration with Wordsworth. The poem has hypnotically captured readers over generations with its focused storytelling technique in form of a long ballad. It is a fictional narrative poem of the curse laid on the old sailor and his penance for his heinous act of killing a harmless albatross. Nature's retribution, human suffering at the hands of nature in form of shame, guilt and realization are important themes of this cautionary tale.

Charles Lamb's jovial and culinary treatment of his pigs in the essay 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' published in 1822 made it popular among the readers. Lamb is well known for his pioneering essay form and his bold literary persona Elia who unhesitatingly expressed his reflections on the prevalent vanities and snobbery of the elites. He conveyed his mundane observations and thoughts through historical fictional narratives. He thoughtfully used literary techniques like reverie, irony, hyperbole, and humour to deliciously blend the fiction with non-fiction to thereby cause a tickling sensation in the readers.

Another work in the course, 'Roll on thou Deep and Dark Blue Ocean' is an extract from the fourth canto of Byron's celebrated work 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' published between 1812 and 1818. It is a record of his travels, written in poetic form, through many places including the Ionian Islands and Spain. The young traveller compares the limitations of the man with the power and freedom of nature. Written from the perspective of a young man, fatigued from war, the poem contemplated nature's permanence and ways in which 'Man marks the earth with ruin'.

The root of the term 'Romanticism' exists in the old French word 'romanz' and it predominantly refers to the spirit of the era impregnated with the philosophical experiences of significant socio-political and intellectual revolutionary ideas. It was opposed to classicism and ideas of restraint and logic primarily deriving inspirations from ancient Greeks and Romans. The romantic writers held imagination, boundless human potential, and individual emotions in higher esteem than reason and common sense.

With a new flavour of Romanticism another British writer, Mary Shelly, ushered in the Science Fiction or sci-fi genre with gothic elements in 'Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus' in 1818. This horror story spotlighted the themes of social rejection and seclusion primarily based on the monster's disfigured appearance. It exposed the vice of indulgence, the destructive potential of science, problems with extremities of ambition and limitations of autonomous selfhood.

Our academic fraternity has made efforts to provide you with a glimpse of this generation so that the retrospective label of romanticism and its spirit of passion, liberty, and originality may awaken the freshness in your thoughts. Though some critics referred to this short span as a period of impractical and unrealistic

literature, it brought about many reforms and changes on the technological, social, philosophical and political fronts.

The storms of social and political change ended with the enforcement of the *Reform Act of 1832*, bringing about notable changes in the lives of common working-class people of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The Factory Act of 1833 also brought respite for the child labourers. With deep thought-provoking works, Britain progressed towards the Victorian era with Queen Victoria ascending to the throne in 1837.

Some of the units in this course have been adapted from the EEG-06 of BDP from SOH, as per the University Policy. We duly acknowledge the contributions of those course writers. The adaptation of the units have been approved by the experts in the experts committee meeting and by the School Board of SOH.



Block**1****BRITISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE I**

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Unit 2**George Crabbe: The Village: Book I** 35

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Sweeper'** 44

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block will introduce you to the important trends and movements in British Romantic Literature and give you detailed information regarding the signature writers of this era.

After the completion of this block, you will be able to:

- Explore and understand the general ideas of the British Romantic literature.
- Familiarise with the major influential literary works of this period.
- Independently comprehend their effects worldwide.
- Understand the lives and works of the torchbearers of this literary period.
- Trace their impact on the later generations.
- Read the poetry of George Crabbe and William Blake.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ROMANTIC AGE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Background to the Romantic Movement
- 1.3 Definition of Romanticism
- 1.4 Salient Features of Romanticism
- 1.5 Early Romantic Poets
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 - 1.5.2 Mark Akenside (1721-1770)
 - 1.5.3 Joseph Warton (1722-1800)
 - 1.5.4 William Collins (1721-1759)
 - 1.5.5 Thomas Gray (1716-71)
 - 1.5.6 William Cowper (1731-1800)
- 1.6 Robert Burns (1759-1796)
 - 1.6.1 The Use of Folk Song
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- 1.8 William Wordsworth (1770-1850)
 - 1.8.1 Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry
 - 1.8.2 Wordsworth's Practice of his Theory
 - 1.8.3 Wordsworth's Partnership with Coleridge
- 1.9 S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834)
- 1.10 The Second Generation of Romantic Poets
 - 1.10.1 Lord Byron (1788-1824)
 - 1.10.2 P.B. Shelley (1792-1822)
 - 1.10.3 John Keats (1795-1821)
- 1.11 Let us Sum Up
- 1.12 Questions for Further Study
- 1.13 Suggested Readings
- 1.14 Answers/Hints to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to:

- 1) provide a comprehensive view of the Romantic Movement, its beginnings, its sources of inspiration, its important features, its major figures and their contributions.

- 2) enable you to analyse, identify and appreciate Romantic literature, and
- 3) make you realise the importance of the Romantic Movement in English literature as a significant and fruitful literary epoch.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the Romantic Movement in England. It deals with the political, social, literary and other factors which brought about this movement. It considers various definitions of the term 'Romanticism' and it devotes a good part to the discussion of the salient features of Romanticism. The work of the early romantic poets is covered in section 1.5 of this Unit. It is followed by the description of some major romantic poets and their contribution to the movement are also discussed in detail. After providing an account of Robert Burns's use of the folk song and William Blake's use of mysticism and symbolism, the Unit moves onto the major figures of the Romantic Movement in England: William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. They are deemed to be the pioneers of Romantic poetry in English. After a brief survey of Wordsworth's work, his theory of poetry as stated in the Preface (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads* is examined critically. The literary partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge and their later differences are considered with reference to Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. The deviations from his stated principles in the actual writing of Wordsworth's poetry are briefly illustrated. A section is set apart for Coleridge's poetry and criticism. The last section of the unit introduces you to the second generation of Romantic poets: Byron, Shelley and Keats.

The lesson provides self-check exercises at the end of each important section so that you can assess your comprehension of the material presented. Questions covering the entire lesson are given at the end of the unit.

The major points discussed in the lesson are recapitulated briefly in "Summing up". The unit concludes with a suggested reading list which is a selected and annotated bibliography relevant to the subject matter of the unit.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Historians of English Literature have designated the period from 1798 to 1832 as the Romantic period. Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 and Sir Walter Scott died in 1832. Also, the Reform Bill which extended the right to vote to the middle class and labourers was passed by the Parliament in 1832. During this period, England moved from being a primarily agricultural to modern industrialized society.

Thus the balance of power passed on from the land-owning aristocracy to the owners of industrial units which employed large numbers of people. The mill-owners and their employees had developed different perspectives. In the political arena there were revolutions of far-reaching consequences to England. The American Revolution led to the Declaration of Independence (1776) by the thirteen colonies. The French Revolution was a shattering and sundering event which affected the whole of Western Europe in several ways.

The French Revolution received enthusiastic support in the beginning from the liberals and radicals in England. The Declaration of the Rights of Man by the French National Assembly was welcomed. Edmund Burke disapproved the events in France in his *Reflection on the Revolution in France* (1790). Tom Paine issued

a spirited rejoinder to Burke in his *Rights of Man* (1791-92). Tom Paine pleaded for a democratic republic for England by peaceful or violent means. Another book, *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) by William Godwin made a great impact on Wordsworth, Shelley and others. Godwin predicted that eventually all property would be distributed equally and all government would disappear. Later events in the French Revolution, notably the execution time beings of the royal family, the guillotine of innocent people during the Reign of Terror, and Napoleon's dictatorship disenchanted the early supporters.

The economic sphere also saw great convulsions. The manufacturing class became more powerful than the agricultural class. With the invention of James Watt's steam engine which replaced wind and water as sources of energy in 1765, there was a revolutionary change in the means and pace of production. The majority of population of England was becoming either owners and traders or wage earners without property. Thus, the people were effectively divided into the rich and the poor. With the introduction of more machinery into industry, cloned there was more unemployment. The soldiers demobilised after the French wars aggravated the labour market. There was an economic depression in 1815 caused by the fall in wartime demand for manufactured goods. These political, economic and social factors caused agitations and riots by the working class. The ruling class responded by more repressive measures. The unrest culminated in passing the Reform Bill which met the political aspirations of at least some sections of the population.

There were important developments in other spheres also. Capt. James Cook circumnavigated the globe (1768-71) and discovered Australia and the Sandwich Islands. Fascinating accounts of life in the South Seas led to a re-thinking on the nature of society and the political systems. Ocean travel became safer with Cook's accurate charting of the coastlines.

The exploitation of new markets in India and elsewhere gave an impetus to commerce. This in turn led to the development of industry and technology. The dissemination of ideas kept pace with the improvements in the communications network. The pamphlet became a powerful means for debating controversial issues. For instance, the debate on the French Revolution was conducted through pamphlets. Eventually the pamphlet was replaced by the periodical for debate on political reforms further. Parliamentary Reform was inspired by the achievement of the middle class in France. Public opinion in England favoured representation to big towns leading to the passage of the Reform Bill.

The Romantic writers lived through such momentous changes in the political, economic, social and literary spheres. The idea of revolution informed the Romantic Movement from the beginning. Many major writers of this period were aware that great changes were taking place around them and that these changes would inevitably find their way into literature also. The French Revolution seemed to be the great divide and the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind. William Hazlitt rightly observed in his book, *The Spirit of the Age*: "There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people.It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world – and of letters".

The French Revolution swept away time-honoured hierarchies in different spheres. The new slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity promised a free and egalitarian society. Monarchy was abolished and the feudal structure was demolished. The principle of the dissolution of hierarchies carried into literature meant that the genres of the epic and the tragedy which were at the top of the literary pyramid had to yield place to such forms as the lyric, the ode and the

ballad. In language, the cultivated speech of the elite was sought to be replaced by the speech of the common people. In the choice of themes, great events had to make way for more commonplace incidents. The characters depicted in poetry need not be kings or queens; humbler folks like a leech-gatherer, or a highland lass, or even an idiot boy was good enough for poetic composition. Thus the French Revolution caused a democratization of literature in genre, in language, in themes and in characters. The spirit of the age demanded these changes and the creative writer responded enthusiastically.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which years specify the Romantic period in English literature?
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- 2) What is the special significance of these years in English literary or political history?
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- 3) Name two important changes which occurred in the political and economic spheres in this period.
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- 4) What is Tom Pain’s theme in “Rights of Man”?
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- 5) What did Godwin predict in his book?
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- 6) Briefly explain the impact of the French Revolution on literature.
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1.3 DEFINITION OF ROMANTICISM

The term, 'Romanticism' is controversial. F.L. Lucas in his book "The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal" (1984) counted as many as 11,396 definitions. The term comes from the name 'Rome'. In the seventh and eighth centuries there were three main languages in Europe; (1) Lingua Latina which was the language of the scholars, (2) Lingua Barbara which was the language of Germanic tribes, and (3) Lingua Romanarustica which was a group of vulgar Latin dialects from which the Romance languages, namely, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Rumanian are derived. The term 'Romantic' is related to the Romance languages, the peripheral tradition, rather than to Latin, the main tradition.

The term, 'romantic' was first used in the late seventeenth century to describe paintings with certain bizarre qualities. When Le Tourneur referred to Shakespeare as a romantic writer, he meant that the English playwright was not a neo-classical writer. What is meant by a romantic writer is one who insists, implicitly or otherwise, on his own uniqueness. In the Age of Reason many writers said that they represented their age. This was not so with the Romantics. Words worth and Coleridge who worked together for sometime never applied the term "romantic" to themselves. Goethe defined "classic" as good health and "romantic" as sickness. This distinction is more psychological than aesthetic and it has received much currency. Around 1800, when Madame de Stael introduced German romantic literature into France, she stressed the medieval and Christian qualities in that literature. These qualities replaced rationalism and agnosticism of the Age of Reason. She felt that the aridity of the eighteenth century was over and that the new literature celebrated an open heart. Heine, the German poet, held an opposite view. Victor Hugo described romanticism as 'liberalism in literature'. The important point is that romanticism has political overtones.

The term implies a literary and philosophical theory which tends to see the individual at the very center of all life and all experience. The individual is placed at the center of art. Literature is, therefore an expression of his unique feelings and particular attitudes.

As Thrall and his associates say, romanticism "places a high premium upon the creative function of the imagination seeing art as a formulation of intuitive imaginative perceptions that tend to speak a nobler truth than that of fact, logic, or the here and now." Romanticism spread through most of Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It affected literature, art, music, philosophy, religion and politics.

It may be easier to understand the term 'romanticism' by examining its salient features in the next section.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain the origin of the term 'Romantic'.

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- 2) What was implied in Le Tourneur's description of Shakespeare as a romantic?

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3) How did Goethe differentiate the two terms 'Classic' and 'romantic'?

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4) What features of romanticism did Madame de Stael identify in German romantic literature?

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5) What is Victor Hugo's definition of romanticism?

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1.4 SALIENT FEATURES OF ROMANTICISM

Romanticism is opposed to the artificial conventions, the reigning literary tradition and the poetic establishment. The Neo-classical theory of poetry conceived it as imitation and as something acquired by training. The function of poetry, according to this view, is to instruct and to please. Art is a mirror in which we find a reflection of life. For the Romantics, the source of poetry is the poet himself. As Wordsworth puts it, poetry is a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". It is an inborn gift and not something that can be acquired. Poetry is the expression of emotion. The poet's imagination creates poetry. The traditional view that poetry is a painstaking endeavour is discarded by the Romantics. Blake thought that poetry comes from inspiration, vision, and prophecy. Keats said that poetry should come "as naturally as the leaves of a tree".

Romantic poets made daring innovations, in the themes, forms, language and style of poetry. Lowly and eccentric characters like 'an idiot boy' or 'a leech-gatherer' are material for poetic treatment by Wordsworth. Supernatural themes are used by Coleridge (The Ancient Mariner) and Keats (The Eve of St. Agnes). Romantic poetry often deals with "far away and long ago" exotic places and forgotten events. It draws inspiration from folk literature and the literature of the Middle Ages and of classical antiquity. Yet another innovation is the use of symbolist techniques, notably by Blake and Shelley. The latter poet's "West Wind" and "Skylark" are good examples.

The Romantic poets displaced humanity with external nature as the poetic subject-matter. Thus the description of landscape and its aspects becomes prominent. In fact, poets like Wordsworth saw in nature the power to chasten and subdue.

While neoclassic poetry is written on other people like Alexander Pope's "The Rape of Lock", romantic poetry is about the poet himself. The latter is highly subjective. The Romantic poets also had a fascination for solitary figures, social non-conformists, outcasts and rebels such as Prometheus, Cain, Don Juan and Satan.

Another significant innovation is the use of everyday speech of ordinary people instead of lofty poetic diction. We shall discuss this in detail later. The Romantic poets looked for new metres and stanzas to replace traditional forms. The heroic couplet gave place to the ballad, the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza and other experimental verse forms. Rural life is idealized in Romantic poetry. The wild, the irregular and the grotesque in nature and art fascinated the Romantic poets. Taboo themes like incest are used without any inhibition. Conformity to tradition and decorum as observed by the earlier generation are no longer respected.

Classicism and Romanticism are generally considered somewhat antithetical. Classicism is concerned with the social, the formal, the intellectual, and the static whereas Romanticism is concerned with the individual, the informal, the emotional and the dynamic. For instance, the common qualities, and not the differences of individuals is represented in classical literature. Joseph Addison's 'Sir Roger' is a basic human type. But the Romantics took their cue from Rousseau who said, "If I'm not better than other people, at least I'm different". The Neo-classical writers were interested in conformity, formality, acceptance of approved standards and patterns of behaviour. Careful workmanship is the hallmark of classicism. The unities are preserved by the classical writers whereas the Romantic writers do not observe them. Classicism focuses on the intellectual, romanticism on the emotional. The former is interested in describing static scenes in Greek sculpture whereas the latter attempts to catch the transient moments. Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" depicts the activities of people etched on a static urn.

Thus, the Romantic Movement was a revolutionary movement in many ways.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Explain the basic difference between the Neoclassical and Romantic theories of poetry.

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- 2) Name two important innovations in Romantic poetry.

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- 3) What type of themes and characters are chosen by the Romantic poets?

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4) What Poetic forms were favoured by the Romantics?

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4) Explain the antithetical relationship between Classicism and Romanticism.

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1.5 EARLY ROMANTIC POETS

Some of the features of Romanticism which we discussed above are seen much earlier than 1798 in a number of poets:

1.5.1 James Thomson (1700-1748) took a deep interest in nature. His poem, "The Seasons" (1730) evokes interest in the processes of nature. He is fascinated by the fearful aspects of nature such as floods and storms. He is described as "a poet of pictorial landscape". He speaks of the interactions between man and Nature in "The Seasons". The great variety and beauty of nature move him deeply. The following lines remind us of Wordsworth:

Now the soft Hour
Of walking comes for him who lonely loves
To seek the distant Hills, and there converse
With Nature, there to harmonize his Heart,
And in pathetic Song of breathe around
The harmony to Others.
(*The Seasons*, II, 1379-84)

1.5.2 Mark Akenside (1721-1770) was another fore-runner of Wordsworth. He attempted to revive the Greek forms of the lyric. His most important poem, "The Pleasure of Imagination" (1744) is at once didactic and descriptive. The poet sees that the beauty and harmony of nature is shown directly to the purified intellect:

Once more search, undismayed, the dark profound
Where nature works in secret; view the beds
Of min'ral treasure, and th'eternal vault
That bounds the hoary ocean; trace the forms
Of atoms moving with incessant change.
Their elemental round; behold the seeds
Of being, and the energy of life
Kindling the mass with ever-active flame:
Them to the secrets of the working mind
Attentive turn;
(*"The Pleasure of Imagination"*. Book I, 11 512-52)

1.5.3 Joseph Warton's (1722-1800) "The Enthusiast" (1744) presents Rousseau's primitivism and the Romantics' love of the antique. It speaks of the communion with nature, the superiority of the Noble Savage and the idyllic innocence of the New World:

Happy the first of Men, ere yet confin'd
To smoky cities; who in sheltering Groves,
Warm caves, and deep-sunk Valliesliv'd and lov'd
By Cares unwounded.
(The Enthusiast, 11.78-81)

1.5.4 William Collins (1721--1759) exercised pervasive influence on almost all the Romantic poets. He finds that landscape evokes ideas and emotions. He particularly loves Nature at twilight. His "Ode to Evening" is the forerunner of Keats's "To Autumn". Romantic tendencies such as a return to the past and anti-intellectualism may be noticed in his "Ode on Popular Superstitions". Coleridge is impressed with Collins's use of superstitions and classical legends. Collins's favourite theme of the twilight scene is illustrated in the following lines:

Now Air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd Bat,
With short shrill Shriek flits by on leathern Wing,
Or where the Beetle winds
His small but sullen Horn,
As of the rises 'midst the twilight Path,
Against the Pilgrim born in heedless Hum:
(Ode to Evening, 11.9-14)

1.5.5 Thomas Gray's (1716-71) well-known poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", pays attention to nature and a humble life which are dear to the Romantic poets:

Now folds the glimmering landscape on the sight,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;
(11.5-8)

Gray's later writings indicate the swing in the taste towards Medieval literature and Scandinavian folklore. His letters anticipate the Romantics' love of scenery and nature. He records the different moods of nature in charming detail. Such descriptions paved the way for Wordsworth's memorable descriptions of nature. Here is a short piece from Gray:

"In the evening I walked alone down to the lake by the side of Crow Park after sunset and saw the solemn colouring of night draw on, the last gleam of fading away on the hill-tops, the deep serene of the waters, and the long shadows of the mountains thrown across them, till they nearly touched the hithermost shore. At distance heard the murmur of many waterfalls not audible in the daytime".

(Journal in the Lakes)

1.5.6 William Cowper (1731-1800) is yet another precursor of romanticism. For him, love of Nature and religious worship are related activities. He believes that contemplation in the midst of Nature will bestow wisdom more easily than the reading of books. He prefers the beauty of the countryside and he portrays Nature in his poems. Cowper also attacks Alexander Pope for his "smoothness" and advocates the 'manly rough line'. This idea is later developed by Wordsworth. Cowper 'anticipated the romantic generation in his political liberalism, in his humanitarianism, and most of his sympathetic and faithful rendering of external nature". Contrasting the rural with the urban scene, he wrote:

God made the country, and man made the town,
What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught

That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least bethreatn'd in the fields and groves?
(The Task, Book 1.11.749-753).

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What particular features make Thomson akin to Romantic poets?

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- 2) What Romantic trait is noticeable in Akenside's poetry?

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- 3) Which principle of Rousseau do you observe in Warton?

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- 4) What Romantic tendencies in Collins won the appreciation of Coleridge?

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- 5) In what particulars can Gray's Elegy be called Romantic?

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- 6) What is the justification for calling Cowper a precursor of Romanticism?

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1.6 ROBERT BURNS (1759-1796)

Burns is the most beloved poet of the Scots. He is also a symbol of their national spirit. He was interested in a number of things which were later considered essentially romantic tendencies. He was steeped in Scottish folklore; he loved freedom and he respected the common man. He was attracted by nature; swimming

against the current in his time and he also believed that emotion was a better guide than reason.

1.6.1 The Use of Folk Song

Scottish patriotism in the eighteenth century longed for independence and unity. It seized upon any symbol of its uniqueness. Burns went in search of the Scottish ballad tradition both to oppose and reject the English culture. He is probably the best eighteenth century example of the influence of folk poetry on mainstream English poetry. There are two tendencies in Burns's life:

1. The cultivated tradition of polite poetry in the eighteenth century.
2. Peasant poetry about peasants among whom he lived.

Burns did not believe in any rules of composition. His poetry was strongly influenced by folk poetry. The folk elements in his poetry are:

1.6.2 Themes

The themes are generally death, birth, youth, old age, love and grief. Seasonal activities like harvesting and May dances and seasonal changes like snowfall are also used. Settings and dramatic situations are often stylized. Tableaus repeating certain fixed scenes also occur in folk poetry.

1.6.3 Form

The form of folk poetry is that of a debate, a series of riddles or tests. Birds and flowers are given human qualities. The number three is significant; three riddles, three actions, etc.

1.6.4 Vocabulary

The vocabulary is simple. Many stock phrases are used. Because of the oral origins of folk poetry, stock phrases and patterns aid the memory of the oral poet. Formal devices such as the refrain impose limits on language in folk poetry and indicate its origin in dance.

1.6.5 Rhyme

Folk poetry is not rigid in its use of rhyme as Neo-classical poetry. Assonance, alliteration and internal rhyme are common in this poetry. Observe these poetic devices in the following line of Burns:

There Wild Woods grow and rivers row.

There is variety in rhyme schemes. The metre in folk poetry is flexible.

Burns wrote many traditional and original songs, but he wrote three long poems. Only there was a movement favouring the short, pointed lyrics. Burns wrote a poem titled "To a Mouse" which is certainly a lowly subject. Writing on such subjects was against the grain of Neo-classicism. Another poem, "The Cotter's Saturday Night" shows his interest in the humble people. He had sympathy for the oppressed, sharing the ideals of the French Revolution. He had expressed dangerous sentiments such as the following just before the Revolution:

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.
(The Jolly Beggars, 11.292 ff)

Burns expressed strong patriotism for Scotland: he revolted against religious orthodoxy; he satirized Presbyterian and Calvinist faith in Scotland in his poems. "Holy Willie's Prayer" and "The Holy Fair". He is thus a precursor of the later Romantic poets like Shelley who re-examined religious belief in a more serious way.

1.6.6 Love Poems

Burns's greatest poems are his love poems. They are also influenced by folk Poetry. Repetition as a poetic device to produce an incantatory effect may be found in: "My Love is like a Red, Red Rose". Neo-classical poets like Pope avoided repetition for the sake of economy and for the progression of ideas. Another poem of Burns, "Ye Flowery Banks" is a lament which presents a native view of nature. In this girl's song, the traditional rose-thorn image is used to indicate loss of chastity. Happy nature is contrasted with the melancholy speaker and there is a return to the place of former happiness. Burns resorts to suggestion rather than direct statement in this as well as in the other poems. These are all intimations of Romanticism.

The range of Burns's love-songs is great. He could write of love from his personal experience and from a woman's point of view. He could write of love in old age with equal charm. Male protectiveness appears repetitively in many of his love songs including "A Red, Red Rose". Patriotism is another recurring theme in his songs. "Auld Lang Syne" is called "the world's greatest song of human fellowship and friendship".

Though Burns's poetry is based on local people and situations, he is not a 'regional' poet in any narrow sense. He stresses the elemental, the universal, and the permanent moods and thoughts in all humanity. He used the real language of man as he found it in the folk literature of his country and thus showed the path to Words worth. His use of lowly subjects and simple diction was a worthwhile example to Words worth and to other Romantic poets as well.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) What Romantic tendencies are present in Burns's poetry?

- 2) To which age did Burns belong chronologically?

- 3) Mention one symbol of Scottish patriotism which Burns sought passionately.

4) What are the contradictory but concurrent tendencies in Burns's poetry?

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5) What are the principal themes of folk poetry.

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6) Explain briefly the formal features of folk poetry.

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7) What is the purpose of using stock phrases in folk poetry?

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8) What poetic devices are frequently found in folk poetry?

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9) How can we say that Burns sympathised with the French Revolution?

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10) What intimations of Romanticism do you find in Burns's love poems?

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1.7 WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827)

We shall now discuss William Blake, but only briefly, because there is a separate unit on him in his block. He was hardly known in his lifetime, but now he has a

respectable place among English poets and artists. He was an engraver at a time when that art was losing its popularity.

Blake was a man of vision who saw ultimate truth at moments of great illumination. Vision is for him the great secret of life. His entire work - poetry or painting - is an attempt to develop this faculty of vision so that men may seem to understand and thereby forgive and act rightly.

His Songs of Innocence (1789) created through a new process called "illuminated printing" are examples of originality. He equated his extreme sense of freedom and happiness to the condition of childhood. In these poems he says that childhood is the original state of happiness, self-enjoyment and unity. In his "Songs of Experience" Written in 1794 he expresses his deep indignation at the hypocrisy and cruelty in the world. In "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" he affirms the re-integration of the human soul divided by Innocence (Heaven) and Experience (Hell) through Imagination.

Blake's poetry and painting are didactic. He wanted people to free themselves from convention and tradition and depend on their own intuition to realize their potential. The mystical tone, the symbols, the revolutionary ideas and the newness of his art made people think that he was a lunatic. He was more revolutionary in themes, diction and technique than Burns or Wordsworth but his genius was not recognised in his lifetime. He carved a place for himself in World literature because he swam against the current by defying reason in an Age of Reason and because he gave importance to intuition and imagination in an age of scientific skepticism.

Check Your Progress 6

- 1) What, in Blake’s view, is the importance of the faculty of vision?
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- 2) What is the relationship between innocence and experience as Blake sees it?
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- 3) How did Blake's views go against the prevailing ideas?
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1.8 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Wordsworth is a prominent leader of the Romantic Movement in England. He supported the French Revolution in its early phase but his liberalism gradually

dwindled. In 1795, he met S.T. Coleridge and this meeting was beneficial for both of them. They jointly authored *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) which is considered to be the beginning of the Romantic Movement in England. On the urging of Coleridge, Wordsworth explained the guiding principles of this new movement in his preface to the second edition of the book published in 1800. (We shall discuss the preface in detail in the next section). In addition to many lyrics, Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* (1850), a sort of spiritual autobiography like its subtitle "The Growth of a Poet's Mind," indicates. As the title suggests "the Prelude" is the first of a three-part poem "The Recluse". The second part titled "The Excursion" was published in 1814, but the third part was never written.

Wordsworth is better known for his short poems like "Tintern Abbey" and "Immortality Ode" than for his long and ambitious works. "Tintern Abbey" recounts three stages in the development of the poet's love of nature; (1) sensuous animal passion, (2) moral influence, and (3) mystical communion. "Michael" deals with the sturdiness of character and nature's healing power. The five "Lucy Poems" are also popular. In "Ode on Intimations of Immortality", Wordsworth attributes a child's wisdom and glory to the unconscious memory of a previous life. "Resolution and Independence" is yet another memorable poem. Wordsworth influenced modern thinking on the natural goodness of childhood, the moral value of simple living and the inspiring and healing powers of nature. Wordsworth seems to have attempted to translate into action, both in his life and in his work principle: "Simple living and high thinking" (A separate unit on Wordsworth discusses in detail his poetic achievement).

1.8.1 Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry

Wordsworth's observation prefixed to *Lyrical Ballads*, generally called "Preface" to the second edition of 1800 is his manifesto in which he discusses a number of issues related to the art of poetry. These issues include the nature of poetry, the creation of poetry, the impact of the poem on the reader and the difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry. The poet's views on these important topics are scattered throughout the preface and we have to piece together what he had said on each question.

First we will discuss the question of the subject matter. "Incidents and situations from common life" are deliberately chosen by Wordsworth. He thought that rustic and humble life is better suited for "the essential passions of the heart" and believed that the emotions of the rural people are simpler, purer and perhaps better than those of the city-dwellers. He also thought that people living in the midst of nature have a better moral attitude, and they become part of the sense of divinity present in nature.

The second innovation is the use of "a selection of language really used by men". Wordsworth attacked the so-called poetic diction of an earlier generation. Poetic diction is a painstaking invention and hence far removed from the living speech of ordinary people. The common speech or a selection of it, Wordsworth felt, is more appropriate to describe the incidents and situations from common life. Throughout the preface, Wordsworth repeatedly states that "simple and unelaborated expressions" as his choice: "My purpose was to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men; and such personifications [of abstract ideas] do not make any natural or regular part of that language."

Wordsworth finds a moral justification for poetry. The aim of the poet, in his view, is to correct men's feelings and to render these feelings more consonant with eternal nature. A poet provides us with spiritual exercises in order to give us new feelings and make our feelings more sane and pure.

The creative process is explained by Wordsworth in the following words:

"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity; the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on."

Implicit in this explanation of how poetry is created is a psychological approach. Wordsworth discussed the difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose. He says: "It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." This is a major point of disagreement between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Similarly, Wordsworth's views on metre are questioned by Coleridge. According to Wordsworth metre is a kind of restraining influence. By its regularity, metre holds passion in check. Also, metre seems to give poetry a kind of unreality:

"The end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure... Now the co-presence of something regular...cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion".

The Romantics give a high place to the poet; they endow him with the ability to speak to other men. Wordsworth asserts:

"He [the poet] is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind;" A poet is related to other men who have the same ingredients, but the poet has them in greater measure. Thus, the preface discusses a wide range of topics concerning poetry and the innovations which Lyrical Ballads introduced.

Check Your Progress 7

- 1) What are the three stages in the development of Wordsworth's attitude to nature in "Tintern Abbey?"

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- 2) Why did Wordsworth choose rustic life as his subject matter?

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- 3) Explain Wordsworth's views on the use of the language of common people.

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4) What, according to Wordsworth, is the aim of the poet?

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5) How did Wordsworth explain the creative process of poetry?

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6) What is the difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose in Wordsworth's view? Is it valid?

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7) What is the role of meter in poetry according to the "Preface"?

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8) What is the position of a poet in society? How does he compare with ordinary men?

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1.8.2 Wordsworth's Practice of his Theory

For all his commitment to "the language really used by men" Wordsworth could not help using archaisms, words of Latin origin, and inversion of normal word order in several of his well-known poems including "Immortality Ode" and 'The Prelude'. For instance in "Immortality Ode", he used "appareled" and "celestial". In The Prelude he used "recreant", "inscrutable", "discordant" which are polysyllabic words derived from Latin. Then there are archaisms like 'shod' (shoe) 'deigned (desired) 'springles' (traps). There are also inversions of word order in phrases like "by the vision splendid" for the sake of rhyme. In "Resolution and Independence", we have:

"Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,"
Or again, "Motionless as a cloud that old Man stood".

Wordsworth must have realized that the demands of his poetic art are more important than a rigid adherence to his theory as enunciated in the "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads.

1.8.3 Wordsworth's Partnership with Coleridge

Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge met in 1795. Coleridge spotted talent in Wordsworth and praised him as "the best poet of the age". The two friends met almost daily, discussed poetry, and composed large quantities of poetry. Their association was so close that the same phrases occur in the poems of both. They collaborated in some poems; they exchanged thoughts and lines of poetry. Coleridge helped Wordsworth in completing the latter's unfinished poems. Lyrical Ballads was the fruit of this extraordinary partnership. The famous "Preface" of 1800 was also a result of consultation between the two poets.

Of the two sorts of poetry based on the theme, Coleridge agreed to choose the supernatural and Wordsworth the ordinary. Accordingly, Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner" and Wordsworth wrote many of his poems for "the Lyrical Ballads." However, serious differences developed between the two on important questions. Coleridge did not agree with many parts of the "Preface". He objected to them as he considered them "erroneous". Some of Wordsworth's statements appeared to contradict "other parts of the same preface and the author's own practice in the greater number of the poems themselves". One such question was the difference between the language of poetry and that of prose. Wordsworth thought that there was no essential difference between the two. Coleridge thought they were different. He argued that metre is essential for poetry which implies passion.

1.9 S. T. COLERIDGE (1772-1834)

Since there is a separate unit on Coleridge, we shall briefly touch upon the major achievements of Coleridge here. He was a man of many parts; poet, philosopher, journalist, preacher, lecturer, playwright, literary critic and literary theorist. He pioneered a movement against the mechanistic psychology of the eighteenth century. More than the other Romantics, he recognised the supremacy of imagination as a creative power. *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is a seminal work dealing with his philosophy of poetry and a critical statement of Romantic ideas. It is in this book that he explains how he had dealt with the supernatural in his poetry. He attempted to give "a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith".

Coleridge tries to differentiate between the two key terms, 'fancy' and 'imagination' in the same book. He called imagination the "shaping and modifying" power and fancy, the "aggregative and associative" power. The former idea "struggles to idealize and to unify" while the latter is only "a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space". To illustrate his point, Coleridge said that Milton had a highly imaginative mind whereas Cowley had a fanciful one. Imagination itself is of two kinds, primary and secondary. Primary imagination, in Coleridge's view, is the organ of common perception through the senses and the secondary imagination is poetic vision. The latter one is the faculty that the poet ideally exercises. Fancy seems to correspond with the eighteenth century notion of wit in poetry. It is the faculty that enables the poet to put together metaphors and similes. Coleridge criticizes the mechanical sort of apparatus in poetry, exemplified by fancy which the imagination transcends. The use of the secondary imagination is a mystical operation. The secondary imagination mediates between man and nature and indicates the organic unity of the universe. Coleridge's discussion of Wordsworth's faults and merits is a balanced presentation. His criticism of

Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights is of great value. He attempted to find "the essences of Shakespeare's ideas to discover the laws that a great work of art creates within itself". He explained the nature of poetic expression and sought to answer the question "What is poetry"? His views on criticism are particularly significant as he was also an accomplished poet.

Coleridge is remembered for three poems, "The Ancient Mariner", "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel". All the three have the stamp of originality and all of them arise from the world of dreams, the subconscious. The Ancient Mariner is a ballad with memorable images and phrases. Kubla Khan is a vision poem seen in an opium dream. "Christabel" is a poetic fragment which evokes the medieval atmosphere through suggestion. As a literary theorist and as a poet, Coleridge made original contributions and his influence in these two areas is permanent.

Check Your Progress 8

1) What are Wordsworth's shortcomings in practising his theory?

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2) What are the positive aspects of Wordsworth's collaboration with Coleridge?

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3) What are the points of disagreement between Wordsworth and Coleridge?

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4) Explain Coleridge's ideas on "fancy" and "imagination".

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5) What is Coleridge's contribution to criticism?

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1.10 THE SECOND GENERATION OF ROMANTIC POETS

Three poets namely Byron, Shelley and Keats, belong to the second generation of Romantic poets. Although they do not belong to a school, they have many resemblances. All of them were “rebellious geniuses” who were not recognized or understood in their country and time. All of them died young before they could realize their full potential. They are thus “the inheritors of unfulfilled renown”.

1.10.1 Lord Byron (1788-1824)

Byron’s reputation as a poet and as a personality outside his own country was immense. He had influenced several French and German poets. His life itself was like a romantic poem and he is the hero of his poems. The phrase “Byronic hero” has become an independent and critical term to describe a youthful, daring, passionate, cynical, moody and rebellious figure. This type first appeared in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”, a long poem which describes in Spenserian stanza a tour in which the hero contemplates on the decaying monuments of European civilization and on human achievement. Byron describes the famous Coliseum in the following words:

Arches on arches! As it were that Rome,
Collecting the chief trophies of her line,
Would build up all her triumphs in one dome,
Her Coliseum stands.
(CXXVIII)

An example of Byron’s cynical view of history is given below:

There is the moral of all human tales;
‘Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First Freedom, and then Glory – when that fails,
Wealth, Vice, Corruption – barbarism at last.
(CVIII)

Byron was unlike other Romantic poets except, perhaps, Shelley. Also he did not have much respect for the others because of his aristocratic background. Augustan wit and elegance suited his elitist tastes better than rustic life and common speech. He had great admiration for Alexander Pope unlike several romantic poets. He felt that measured against the poetic practice of Pope, he and his contemporaries were “all in the wrong, one as much as another....we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself”.

Byron’s forte is his verse satire which is not surprising because of his admiration for Pope and other Augustan writers. English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809) written in the popular Augustan verse form of the heroic couplet is brilliant. Don Juan (1818-21) written in Ottava Rima is an unfinished satire. It is described as a picaresque novel in verse in which a variety of themes, styles and tones are used. Considered Byron’s best, “Don Juan” which is a criticism of life. Goethe called it “a work of a boundless genius”. Byron states his poetical preferences and prejudices thus:

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope,
Thou shall not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey,
Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy

With Crabbe it may be difficult to cope.
(CCIV)

The tone of the poem is characteristic of Byron's verse satires. In *Don Juan* "he sought to depict life in the comic spirit, to strip off the tinsel of sentiment and illusion".

His other verse satires are "Beppo" and "The Vision of Judgment". He also wrote two powerful dramas, *Manfred* and *Cain*. Russell Noyes says: "By the measure of his titanic energy and his impassioned self-assertion, Byron has given us a more potent expression of 'raw and naked humanity' than all the romantic poets put together.... He has given us masterly pictures of love, hate, patriotism, honour, disdain, revenge, remorse, despair, awe, mockery".

1.10.2 P.B.Shelley (1792-1822)

Shelley had very radical ideas; he was an idealist. He believed that mankind can be made perfect, tyranny can be abolished and freedom can flourish in all walks of life. He has hardly any equal competition as a lyric singer. The main theme of much of his work is that when tyranny and suffering are eliminated from this world and reason and love are given importance, then 'the Soul of the Universe' and 'the Spirit of Love' would be revealed. This is the theme of his most ambitious work, *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-19). Shelley, like Blake, was a poet of prophecy and of vision. "Ode to the West Wind" concludes with the prophecy: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Adonais (1821) is a pastoral elegy written in Spenserian stanzas on the death of Keats. Genius like that of Keats, unfortunately, is misunderstood. The critics hated Keats and that killed him. "Adonais" is regarded as one of the two or three great elegies in English. Like Wordsworth Shelley spent a good deal of time contemplating the natural phenomena. He believed that Nature was the outward manifestation of the inner and divine beauty. He called the inner reality 'Light and Beauty' of 'Sustaining Love' and he tried to identify himself with this. Shelley was fascinated with clouds, wind, waterfalls and such other natural phenomena. They became symbols of great significance to him. The cloud represents the cyclic mutation of water and it also symbolizes mutability and permanence inherent in the human spirit. Light and sound attracted him. He found music everywhere. In fact, he heard a 'vast universal symphony'. His own aspirations and his own poetic fervour are like the skylark which soars above, scanning the ground. And the music of the skylark's song would inspire:

Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The World should listen then.

Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" was written as a response to Thomas Love Peacock's. "The Four Ages of Poetry" and also supplements Wordsworth's "Preface" to "Lyrical Ballads". Shelley's platonic ideas find expression in the "Defence". He says that the poet reveals the phenomenal World to mankind. The word, 'poet' as used by Shelley, includes all artists and even philosophers. The artist is a superior being. Art improves imagination and so it is useful. Shelley asserts in the "Defence": "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World".

(There are two units on Shelley in the next block).

1.10.3 John Keats (1795-1821)

Among the Romantic poets, John Keats's dedication to poetry was total.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were both interested in philosophy which deflected their attention; Blake’s didactic intention coloured much of his work; Byron moved away from poetry to active participation in the liberation of Greece and Shelley’s poetry and political beliefs were closely linked. But Keats strove hard throughout his brief career to achieve the essence of poetry.

“On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” written in his twenty-first year may be called his poetic efflorescence. In “Sleep and Poetry” he spoke of his poetic aspirations and his dedication to poetry. “Endymion” was written to compete with Shelley in writing a long poem. “Hyperion” was an ambitious venture a la “Paradise Lost”. Keats wrote his most important poems in a period of nine months, January to September 1819. These are: The Eve of St. Agnes, La Belle Dame Sans Merci and all the six great odes and Lamia. Keats presents all experience as a mass of inseparable and irreconcilable opposites: Melancholy dwells with Beauty and the dividing line between love and death is thin. He believes that the great end of poetry is “that it should be a friend /To sooth the cares and lift the thoughts of man.”

Keats’s letters are an “indispensable accompaniment to [his] poetry”. They contain some of his germinal ideas such as “negative capability”. In a letter to his brothers, he says: “The excellence of every art in its intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth”. His letters also show his concern for suffering and evil in the World. He does not accept traditional philosophy or institutional religion as an adequate palliative for the “complexity and contradictions of experience.” Not many poets including Shakespeare and Milton could write such distinguished poetry at the age of twenty-four when Keats’s poetic career practically came to an end.

Keats published fifty-four poems in his life-time, another ninety-six works were published posthumously; his letters number around 300. This is an unmatched achievement within a short period of three years. Keats attempted a variety of poetic forms; romance in “Hyperion” and “The Eve of St. Agnes”, epic in Hyperion. He wrote different kinds of lyric: hymn in Hymn to Pan, the ballad in La Belle Dame Sans Merci, the sonnet in On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer and in the famous odes. Lamia was composed in heroic couplets in the manner of Dryden. The Pre-Raphaelite movement owes its origin to Keats’s La Belle Dame Sans Merci. Browning, Tennyson, Hopkins and Yeats have also acknowledged their debt to Keats. Because of his achievement as a poet and his wide-ranging and ever-growing influence Keats deserves to be called the “Poet’s Poet”, an appellation Charles Lamb gave Edmund Spenser in a different context.

Check Your Progress 9

- 1) How is Byron different from the other Romantic poets?

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- 2) What are Byron’s affinities with the Augustan Poets?

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3) What are some of the basic beliefs of Shelley?

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4) What does the cloud represent for Shelley?

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5) What is the usefulness of poetry as stated by Shelley in his “Defence”?

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6) What, according to Keats, is the aim of poetry?

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7) What is the usefulness of Keats’s letters?

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8) What is the justification for calling Keats the “Poet’s Poet”?

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1.11 LET US SUM UP

This unit makes an attempt to give you a comprehensive and concise view of the Romantic Movement in England. Keep the definition and features of Romanticism in mind while reading the poems of the Romantics. Also, try to examine Wordsworth’s principles and his actual practices. You may also notice that although the Romantic poets have something in common, each of them is unique in their own way. Each of them made his own distinctive contribution to Romantic poetry.

1.12 QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Discuss the political, social, economic and other factors responsible for the Romantic Movement.
2. Explain the salient features of Romanticism.
3. Show how Thomson, Akenside and Collins are precursors of Romanticism.
4. What early intimations of Romanticism do you find in Robert Burns?
5. Discuss Wordsworth's theory of poetry.
6. Write a note on Coleridge's contribution to poetry and criticism.
7. Comment on the uniqueness of Byron and Shelley.
8. Write a note on Keats's achievement.

1.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

The following books/articles will be useful for understanding the Romantic Movement:

Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 1953 (An original work of criticism, Discusses Romantic theory and critical tradition).

"The Romantic Period". *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, II 1962 (Useful introduction to the Romantic Movement).

Bloom, Harold. *The Visionary Company*, 1960. (Brief discussions of the important poems are given).

Cazamian, Louis. "The Romantic Period". *A History of English Literature*, Part II, Book V, 1947. (An insightful discussion of the features of romanticism and its practitioners).

Coleridge, S.T. *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, Chapters XIV and XVIII. Required reading for students of Romanticism. Coleridge dwells on his disagreements with Wordsworth.

Ford, Boris (ed.) *From Blake to Byron*. *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol. 5, 1957. (Extremely useful for the study of the Romantic period.)

Noyes, Russell. "Introductory Survey". *English Romantic Poetry and prose*. 1956. (Valuable and comprehensive introduction.)

Weinberg, Kurt. "Romanticism" in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Ed. Alex Preminger, Enlarged edn. 1974.

Wordsworth, William. "Preface" (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads*. (A seminal statement reprinted in many anthologies of criticism.)

1.14 ANSWER/HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress - 1

1. 1798 to 1832
2. See 1.2, first four lines.
3. Extending voting rights to the middle class and growing importance of the manufacturing class
4. Tom Paine advocated a democratic republic for England through peaceful or violent means.

5. See 1.2, second paragraph.

6. See 1.2 last paragraph.

Check Your Progress - 2

1. See 1.3, first paragraph

2. See 1.3, second paragraph

3. See 1.3, second paragraph

4. See 1.3, second paragraph

5. See 1.3, second paragraph

Check Your Progress - 3

1. See 1.4, first paragraph

2. Read 1.4, second paragraph

3. Read 1.4, second paragraph

4. Read 1.4, fourth paragraph

5. Read 1.4, fifth paragraph

Check Your Progress - 4

1 See 1.5.1

2 Read 1.5.2

3 Read 1.5.3

4 Read 1.5.4

5 Read 1.5.5, first paragraph

6 See 1.5.6

Check Your Progress - 5

1. See 1.6

2. The Augustan Age

3. The ballad

4. See 1.6.1

5. See 1.6.1.1

6. See 1.6.1.2

7. See 1.6.1.3

8. See 1.6.1.4 first paragraph

9. See 1.6.1.4 fourth paragraph

10. See 1.6.2, third paragraph

Check Your Progress - 6

1. See 1.7, second paragraph

2. See 1.7, third paragraph

3. See 1.7, fourth paragraph

Check Your Progress - 7

1. See 1.8, second paragraph

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2. See 1.8.1, second paragraph
 3. See 1.8.1, third paragraph
 4. See 1.8.1, fourth paragraph
 5. See 1.8.1, fifth paragraph
 6. See 1.8.1 seventh paragraph
 7. See 1.8.1, seventh paragraph
 8. See 1.8.1, concluding paragraphs.

Check Your Progress - 8

1. See 1.8.2, first paragraph
2. See 1.8.3, first paragraph
3. See 1.8.3, last paragraph
4. See 1.9, second paragraph
5. See 1.9, second paragraph

Check Your Progress - 9

1. See 1.10.1, second paragraph
2. See 1.10.1, third paragraph
3. See 1.10.2, first paragraph
4. See 1.10.2, fifth paragraph
5. See 1.10.2, last paragraph
6. See 1.10.3 fourth paragraph
7. See 1.10.3, fifth paragraph
8. See 1.10.3, last paragraph.

UNIT 2 GEORGE CRABBE'S THE VILLAGE

BOOK I

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction and Background
- 2.2 Explanation
- 2.3 Critical Responses
- 2.4 Suggested Readings
- 2.5 Check Your Progress : Possible Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you understand:

- The primary themes in Crabbe's The Village
- The eighteenth century tradition of topographical poetry
- Scholarly perspectives and responses on The Village

2.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

George Crabbe's (1754 – 1832) "The Village", published in 1783, is a narrative poem, following on the footsteps of eighteenth century Augustan topographical poetry. The eighteenth century was replete with poetry which celebrated the rural English countryside as the epitome of pristine beauty. They amalgamated elements of the pastoral and georgics to picture the rural landscape and living as humanity's ideal goal. Georgics chiefly described specifically named actual localities, but in the eighteenth century, along with describing the natural scenery they usually also gave information about specific rural subject matters giving genre sketches and brief histories of the resident people and their livelihood. The georgics get their name from Virgil's classical Latin composition "Georgics" which presented agricultural themes and celebrates peaceful rural nature. With John Dryden's translation of Virgil's Georgics in 1697, meant for a quintessentially urban literate readership, the rural themes garnered a renewed attention in poetry all throughout the eighteenth century. Some famous instances of Augustan poetry which thematically work around and adapt the georgics are Alexander Pope's "Windsor Forest" and Thomson's "The Seasons". The immediate trigger for Crabbe's poem was Oliver Goldsmith's widely acclaimed "The Deserted Village" published in 1770. It is suggested that Crabbe's "The Village" is a poetic response to Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village", based on the village of Auburn, narrating the remorseful decline of an agricultural economy brought on by the vices of mercantilism, corrupting influence of wealth, and consequent ecological disturbances. The poem, written in a sentimental vein, was very popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This anti-pastoral strain is developed further by Crabbe in his own poem and therefore, it is a far cry from the Augustan georgics which eulogised country life.

Unlike most eighteenth century topographical poetry, Crabbe does not name the village on which his poem is based. We would have accepted the location as Crabbe's fictitious construction, but for his son, who being a biographer, described his father's birthplace Aldborough, Suffolk, by quoting lines from the poem. The

geographical location is further substantiated with topographical details and we can vouch for the actual locality being indeed Aldborough. The genre sketches of the people, their professions and habits along with the prevalent “village vices” and poverty go on to give a realistic depiction and help to generate a concrete image of the place and its society. Crabbe was born in this impoverished seacoast village and detested his mean surroundings and dull occupations. He escaped to London and sought help from Edmund Burke, an established and reputed intellectual and statesman at the time. On reading Crabbe’s literary creations, Burke recommended him to James Dodley who eventually published Crabbe’s first set of poems called *The Library* (1781). Burke also helped him get accepted for ordination. In 1782, Crabbe became Chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle. In his Book I of *The Village*, Burke utilised his detailed observation to delineate the bleak surroundings of the village of his birth. The primary purpose of this poem is to communicate to urban readers the real hardships and harshness existing in rural living, admonishing the folly of the city bred who tend to believe that rural life is pristine and harmonious, devoid of corrupt influences of the city. Crabbe punctures the rural-urban binary which constructs the rural as sublime and in turn engages the reader in reverse optics, awakening them to the harsh realities of life in the village as he says: “I paint the Cot,/ As truth will paint it, and as Bards will not”. The Book II continues the theme of Book I over a hundred lines after which it deviates into a memorial eulogy of Lord Robert Manners, the brother of Crabbe’s patron, the Duke of Rutland. Crabbe was befriended by many poets over a period of time ranging from Samuel Johnson to Sir Walter Scott. Johnson is also said to have made minor changes in parts of this poem.

What is interesting in this poem is that there is an elaborate discussion and demonstration of how rural poverty is mystified and posited with picturesque quality in cultural productions of the time. Not only is this apparent in poetry and literature, but the phenomenon is widely rampant and amply visible in British landscape art and theatrical pastorals in the eighteenth century. As villages transited from being distinct bio-regions to being integrated within the frame of a national territory of Great Britain, there evolved a radical change in the depiction of country life in both art and poetry. The category of the ‘rural poor’ began to be of much interest in most cultural productions of the time. Famous painters of the times like Thomas Gainsborough, George Morland and John Constable represented the rural poor in a way so as to naturalise them and make them acceptable, sometimes as décor in the salons and drawing rooms of the rich. Village life was depicted in terms of repose and restfulness which erased the reality of physical hardship and the daily struggle for survival (More about this can be found in John Barrell’s famous work of social history, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*). In this sense, Crabbe’s *The Village* is rare and different, as it dismantles and exposes the concerted efforts to construct the myth of rural poise. Crabbe’s early life and upbringing grants authenticity to his criticism of the widespread dishonesty in the depiction of country life and makes it a credible voice of dissent.

At this point, let us pause and take stock of what we learnt.

Check Your Progress

1. We can say Crabbe’s ‘The Village’ is a
 - a. Pastoral Poem
 - b. Anti pastoral Poem
 - c. Idyllic Poem

- d. Socialist Poem
2. What are Georgics?
 - a. Poems with peaceful rural nature
 - b. Poems about cities
 - c. Maritime poems
 - d. Poems written in heroic couplets
3. Crabbe's The Village is a poetic response to
 - a. William Blake's Tyger
 - b. Virgil's Georgics
 - c. Alexander Pope's Windsor Forest
 - d. Oliver Goldsmith's The Deserted Village
4. Crabbe's The Village is based on his native village named
 - a. Aldborough
 - b. Villette
 - c. Auburn
 - d. Windsor

2.2 EXPLANATION

Crabbe gives a brief abstract to his Book I of The Village in his 'Argument' in which he introduces the main subjects:

The Subject proposed – remarks upon Pastoral Poetry – A tract of Country near the Coast described – An impoverished Borough – Smugglers and their Assistants – Rude Manners of the Inhabitants – Ruinous effects of the High Tide – The Village Life more generally considered: Evils of it – The Youthful Labourer – The Old Man: his Soliloquy – The Parish Workhouse: its Inhabitants – The Sick Poor: their Apothecary – the Dying Pauper – the Village Priest.

Likewise, we will divide the poem into three sections. The first section contains seven stanzas and deals with the futility and falsifications of romantic pastorals in the face of the harsh conditions of rustic life. The second section deals with the arid and harsh landscape. The third section deals with the rude and depraved people. This part deals with specific people giving accounts of loose moral scruples of the inmates.

Section I: Invectives on poetic imagination

Crabbe begins the Book I of his poem by clearly identifying his intentions and reasons of writing the poetry for which, surely the Muse of Yesteryears or the genteel fancy of conventional poetry is clearly not effective enough. He is all set to describe the life of the country poor, the hard labour and the worries of young peasants:

“The village life and every care that reigns
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;
What labour yields, and what, that labour past,
Age, in its hour of laguor, finds at last
What form the real Picture of the Poor,
Demand a song – the Muse can give no more.”

In his second stanza, he continues to disparage pastoral poetry and categorically states that the golden age of pastoral poetry, if it ever existed, is long past:

“Fled are those times, when in harmonious strains,
When rustic poets praised his native plains”

As already stated above, Crabbe’s account of rural life has been seen as a response to Oliver Goldsmith’s “Deserted Village” and therefore frames his broader attack on Virgilian pastorals. George Crabbe’s poetry can also be seen as an extended critique of the limitations of Romantic ideology. Crabbe claims to give a realistic description of the lives of the poor that Goldsmith did not. In contrast to Goldsmith, Crabbe describes the situation of the agricultural poor in painstaking detail. Early critics of Crabbe maintain that the two are opposites and that among the two writers, Crabbe is the more realistic whereas Goldsmith is the more poetic. Though written in a georgic mode, it adhered more to the realist poetic style of the eighteenth century emanating from Ambrose Philips’ *Eclogues* and John Scott of Amwell’s *Moral Eclogues*:

On Mincio’s banks, Caesar’s beauteous reign
If Tityrus found the Golden Age again,
Must sleepy bards the nattering dream prolong,
Mechanic echoes of the Mantuan song?
From truth and nature shall we widely stray,
Where Virgil, not where Fancy, leads the way?

The romantic poetic imaginary that constructs the countryside and its accompanying rural life as a safe haven full of simplicity, devoid of troubles only reveals the inexperience and ignorance of poets who probably were born and bred in the city and knew little about villages:

Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains,
Because the Muses never knew their pains

There were attempts to erase and silence discordant voices and vices existing in the rural neighbourhoods by sweeping them beneath the rosy carpet, “painted fair”, of scenic beatitude which politically symbolised the harmonious unity of the British nation in the eighteenth century. In that sense, Crabbe’s is a rational voice of resistance amidst a near homogeneous cultural construction of rural life as idyllic and ideal. Crabbe even suggests the relative lack of leisure and free time among the villagers who are compelled to plod and do hard labour under hostile conditions to make their living. Their daily fight for survival under miserable circumstances inflicted by a new economic dispensation is blamed for having robbed them off their earlier life of ease and idle rambling and replaced it with one full of compulsions of production. This has taken away from them not only their own local and indigenous poetry and songs, but also caused widespread illiteracy unleashing on them a life of penury and daily struggle:

They boast their peasant’s pipes; but peasants now
Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough;
And few amid the rural tribe, have time
To number syllables and play with rhyme
Save honest Duck, what son of verse could share
The poet’s rapture and the peasant’s care?
Or the great labours of the field degrade,
With the new peril of a poorer trade?

Such a rosy and harmonious picture is but banal and Crabbe denounces poetry which lacks the spine to portray reality with its accompanying dark sides. He chastises such poetry as being hypocritical and dishonest. The description of minutiae is Crabbe's denial to grant any aspect of the lives of the poor symbolic or metaphoric status. It traps the rural population in a world of concreteness, a "realistic" world. Therefore there is an absence of elevation. Although he describes serious social problems, he presents a world within which these can neither be addressed nor redressed.

I grant indeed that fleets and flocks have charms
For him that grazes or for him that farms;
 But when among such pleasing scenes I trace
 The poor laborious natives of the place,
 And see the midday sun, with fervid ray,
 On their bare heads and their dewy temples play;
 While some with feebler heads and fainter hearts,
 Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts
 Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
 In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?

Section II: Landscape and Topography

Crabbe evidently finds the mystification of rural poverty as highly objectionable and therefore wants to portray the truth as poets do not: "As truth will paint it, and Bards will not." The topography likewise is not represented as salubrious or in the picturesque method abundant with green pastures and rambling valleys, hugely popular in this century, but as a meager "frowning coast, which neither groves nor happy valleys boast". Here, instead of the usual pretty village scene, one can find the poor "O'ercome by labour, and bow'd down by time". This triggers his lament for the futility of poetry, its absolute failure to redress the evil in which the place and its people are trapped. The hollow salutations prove to be predatory, lacking in activism or revolutionary zeal and can also be seen as insulting and making a mockery of the villagers' misery. Poetry which falsely beautifies the surroundings and the general life of the rural poor can do nothing to improve and uplift the dreadful living conditions of the real people. These salutary verses remain empty and worthless giving little agency to the native inmates for a propitious prospect:

Nor ye, you Poor, of lettered scorn complain
To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;
O'ercome by labour, and bowed down by time,
Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?
Can poets soothe you, when you pine for bread,
By winding myrtles around your ruined shed?
Can their light tales your weighty griefs o'erpower,
Or glad with airy mirth the toilsome hour?

Much of the eighteenth century topographical art and poetry presents a landscape which is quintessentially tamed as pleasant and salubrious. The wilder aspects of landscapes are never addressed. Those winding vegetation which may seem picturesque in poetic terms may in fact be harmful and counterproductive for farming and crops. In fact, Crabbe unfolds a geography which is arid and difficult to tame and requires additional effort to make it productive:

Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
 Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye.
 There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
 And to the ragged infant threaten war;
 There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil,
 There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil;
 Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,
 The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf;
 O'er the young shoot, the charlock throws a shade,
 And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade.

This geography is symptomatic of the widespread depravation that persists in the village:

Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,
 With sullen woe displayed in every face;
 Who far from civil arts and social fly,
 And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.

Chaos, anarchy, corruption and drunkenness are characteristic of the rustic population residing in the village. Crabbe takes great objection to unruliness, random acts of crime and rampant disorder and the general state of misdirection that are as much visible as the “pathless waste” that makes for the crude landscape of the region. He also mourns the demise of popular village sports and matches in which the village youth actively participated in after they were done for the day, demonstrating physical valour and chivalry. Crabbe sees this erstwhile lifestyle gradually getting replaced by meaningless labour as the coastal village gets embroiled in a new vicious circulation concerning trade cargo and transport:

Beneath yon cliff they stand,
 To show the freighted pinnacle where to land;
 To load the ready steed with guilty haste,
 To fly in terror o'er the pathless waste ...

It becomes a self-defeating and relentless process of carrying and securing safe transit of cargo overseas and by land. There also ensue accompanied vices of smuggling, burglary, and piracy. Protecting oneself from some such vices become routine responses just as falling prey to these become inevitable.

In the next section, the poet puts himself in the midst of the village to contemplate about the vices that abound there. All of these are of course artificial and human-inflicted so much so that pure nature is completely and irretrievably altered. He gives a socio-economic analysis as he studies in-depth the occupational demographics of the place. He notes how fishing, which was steadily evolving as an industry replaced other occupations and provided employment to the villagers who were earlier engaged in activities which were more organic and natural. He obviously does not have a good impression about fishing which he clearly sees as mercenary and “savage”:

And a bold, artful, surly, savage race;
 Who, only skilled to take the finny tribe,
 The yearly dinner, or septennial bribe,
 Wait on the shore, and, as the waves run high,
 On the tost vessel bend their eager eye,
 Which to their coasts directs its vent'rous way,
 Their's or the ocean's miserable prey.

After giving reasons for the region's downward slide, he returns to his own predicament drawing an analogy with the swallows at the seacoast waiting for favourable wind to escape to more hospitable lands:

As on their neighbouring beach yon swallows stand
And wait for favouring winds to leave the land;
While still for flight the ready wing is spread

In the same way, he says, he was waiting for an opportune moment for an escape from the claustrophobic life, a life he looks back at with little fondness and an overwhelming agony. The poem acquires a tone of an autobiographical reflection as he recounts the moment:

Fled from these shores where guilt and famine reign
And cried, Ah! Hapless they who still remain;

There appears to be no compunction for his actions as Crabbe lays the entire blame on the nature of soil in the place which does not yield crops easily. Even hard labour is ineffectual, giving negligible returns from this sterile land, proving all hard work futile. Just as the mercantile economy takes over the land, the division between the rich and the poor widens and becomes markedly prominent. There are a few people who aggrandise and accumulate wealth while the others languish in poverty. Yet this gentrification is not without the participation of the labourers who are forced to become spectators to the visual excesses and ostentations of wealth that a few have amassed. The poor here are compared to slaves in a golden mine for though they do not own even a bit they are exposed to the sight of the wealth all the same. Crabbe goes on to paint a passionate but sordid picture of those poor workers who toil daily and shed their sweat so that only a certain few can enjoy a luxurious life:

See them beneath the Dog-star's raging heat,
When the knees tremble and the temples beat;
Behold them, leaning on their scythes, look o'er
The labour past, and toils to come explore;
See them alternate suns and showers engage,
And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;

In order to reveal the fanciful and unrealistic side to a romantic imagination of the village, Crabbe directly addresses all those who glorify the village, disclosing the sorry and meagre meals which most of the villagers survive on and would not even be touched, let alone eaten by those fanciful poets. Crabbe's wistful recounting of the hardships is only to bring to light "the fallacy of heightened imagination" which constructs the rural life in a manner rendering their penury invisible and giving a sense of happy satisfaction.

Section III: Village Inmates

From hereon, Crabbe actively delineates the miserable lives of individual villagers in order to refute the chief claims of idyllic construction of rural life by poets and painters. He mentions and recounts the life and journey of a once young and cheerful village lad who grows old in this village. He had once worked hard on the field as a young man but on turning old, sadly earns the epithet of the "lazy poor" from his masters who had exploited his labour all throughout. His masters have changed: someone he had seen as a child is at present his master "To me the children of my youth are lords/ Cool in their looks but hasty in their words". His daily strife for survival continues although decrepit old age and diseases have reduced his strength. He mourns the passing of his friends and can barely endure the exploitation and inhuman treatment, till he finally breathes his last due to

disease and decrepit old age. Here, the parish is the living emblem of discord and negligence, quite contrary to Christian beliefs in family and kinship. Children and parents are estranged from each other as familial bonds are supplicated under threats at the face of scarcity, want and debauchery:

There children dwell who know no parents' care;
 Parents who know no children's love, dwell there!
 Heart-broken matrons on their joyless bed,
 Forsaken wives, and others never wed;

Under these conditions, there is no scope for joy or happiness: nothing but desultoriness and misery abound, so does disease, old age and disability. The only possible relief from this cycle of bitter and listless life is in the form of death. The rude physicians, quacks and fraudsters dupe the sick, exploit their little means and eventually shove them down the dark alley of painful death. Crabbe here changes over to an elegiac mood, mourning the life and death of the nameless villager, who spent an entire life without recognition or appreciation and left silently without making a mark on anybody. However, death offers the ultimate release from serfdom since death is the greatest equaliser. After death, the stern words of the masters are pointless as they no more make the dead man rush hurriedly to work as before.

There lie the happy dead, from trouble free ...
 No more, oh Death! Thy victim starts to hear
 Churchwarden stern, or kingly overseer;
 No more the farmer claims his humble bow,
 Thou art his lord, the best of tyrants thou!

After his death, there looms an uneasy silence as it rings in the foreknowledge of mortality and flux. The villagers gather at the graveyard for the service and remember the elderly member of their community as they carefully embellish the corpse with the worldly objects and belongings he had earlier used. While the mourning crowd waits patiently for long hours to rest the dead, the church bell tolls poignantly with the reverberating wild screeching of an owl announcing the approach of dusk. Book I ends on a desultory note, with all the parishioners returning back to their village, forsaking the dead, as the parson felt he had more important tasks to deal with and refused to turn up for such a petty affair after all. The poor villager's misery does not end here as his mortal body has to wait for another suitable time which would depend on the convenience of the priest. In this way, lives remain trapped within a cycle of violent oppression in a place which is devoid of any semblance to social justice.

2.3 CRITICAL RESPONSES

McGann reads George Crabbe's poetry as an extended critique of the limitations of Romantic ideology. McGann claims that "Crabbe's verse is at once a critique and a revelation, for its novel subject matter represents the discovery that no subject lies outside the province of verse ('The Anachronism of George Crabbe'). Comparing him with Goldsmith, he says, Crabbe claims to give a realistic description of the lives of the poor that Goldsmith did not: "Yes, thus the muses sing of happy swains, / Because the Muses never knew their pains", or "By such examples taught, I paint the cot / As truth will paint it, and as Bards will not." In contrast to Goldsmith, Crabbe describes the situation of the agricultural poor in painstaking detail. Early critics of Crabbe maintain that the two are opposites and that among the two writers, Crabbe is more realistic whereas Goldsmith is

more poetic. Alfred Lutz says in his 'The Politics of Reception: The Case of Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*', that the description of minutiae is Crabbe's denial to grant any aspect of the lives of the poor symbolic or metaphoric status, traps the rural population in a world of concreteness, a "realistic" world. Therefore there is an absence of elevation. Although he describes serious social problems, he presents a world within which these can neither be addressed nor redressed.

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2.0 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Are Crabbe's invectives against eighteenth century romantic pastoral poetry justified?
2. List and discuss the reasons why we can call Crabbe's "The Village" an anti-pastoral.
3. How does Crabbe describe the lives and sufferings of the village inmates?
4. Point out the autobiographical references in Crabbe's *The Village*.

UNIT 3 WILLIAM BLAKE: ‘THE TYGER’, ‘THE LAMB’, ‘THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER’

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Songs of Innocence and Experience
- 3.3 The Lamb
- 3.4 The Tyger
- 3.5 The Chimney Sweeper
- 3.6 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you understand:

- William Blake as a Romantic poet
- William Blake’s idea of dualism in his Songs of Innocence and Experience
- Blake as a critic of social evils in the ‘Chimney Sweeper’ poems

3.1 INTRODUCTION

William Blake was one of the most mysterious Romantic Poets in the 18th-19th centuries, Britain. He was not only a poet but also an engraver, a painter, and a mystic. He amalgamated imagination with originality to create a most curious concoction. Mixing word with image, most of his poetry is accompanied by rich art work. Despite his inherent mysticism, his works displayed a heightened sensibility and sensitivity towards social issues. He can be called a “veritable polymath” since he was also a musician, giving tunes to his own poetry and singing them aloud as songs.

Blake was born on 28th November, 1757 in a middle class family which lived in Soho in London, the city where he spent all his life. In 1772, he joined as an apprentice with a renowned engraver called James Basire where he was gradually drawn towards medieval art and history. He produced many spectacular works which were unique blends of poetic and artistic genius memorable to generations after him. The most famous of these are: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Jerusalem and Songs of Innocence and Experience. All of his works emerge from a personal mythology which could be seen as radical. Because of his dense philosophy, he never achieved the acclaim which he should have received during his lifetime and in his later years, was relegated to being close to insane. He was married to Catherine Boucher, who assisted him throughout in his pursuits but died childless.

3.2 THE SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

The poems in this unit are from William Blake’s work titled ‘Songs of Innocence and Experience’. This was a collection of his poems first printed by Blake himself

in 1789, also illustrated with his own sketches. He republished the work five years later by including additional poems and called it *Songs of Innocence and Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of Human Soul*. Innocence and Experience are states of consciousness for Blake, neither of which is dispensable. Both, according to him, go on to make a composite whole. These two ideas suggest a mythical dualism which is a characteristic of the universe which incorporates binaries. The poems here are called 'songs' because as one of Blake's associates reported, Blake sang them aloud. Music was an important social skill with songs and singing being a vibrant and dominant culture among all sections of the society of the times. Operas and oratorio for the wealthy and street ballads for the poor were fairly common.

Though these poems seem to be relatively simple, even as they are written in childlike rhythms and rhyming patterns, they are deeply political, conveying complex emotions and commentary on existing social vices. Through images and imagery of everyday life, children, nature, animals and flowers, Blake portrays social injustices such as poverty, child labour, and abuse. As Julian Walker suggests, Blake's "*Songs of Innocence and Experience*", can be seen in relation with the development of children's literature as a genre. According to him:

The 18th century saw the development of children's literature as a genre: by the middle of the century it had become a profitable business. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* look superficially like traditional 18th century verse for children. But, in fact, the poems challenge and overturn many of the ideas and conventions contained in children's literature, exploring complex ideas about childhood, morality and religion.

Various types of children's literature proliferated at this time, depending on various ideas and constructions of childhood at the time. According to the Christian morality of 'original sin', children were perceived as inherently evil who had to be redeemed by training and punishment to become good Christians. On the other hand, in John Locke's work such as "*Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693)", the child's mind was perceived as an impressionable blank slate, to be carefully managed in order to create obedient, law abiding citizens. Jean Jacques Rousseau on the other hand thought of children as distinct entities, different from adults. The Romantics followed closely on his heels and constructed childhood as the ideal human state of pre-lapsarian innocence and adulthood as necessarily corrupt, characterised by a loss of innocence. Literature for children ranged from emblem books where animal anecdotes administered moral lessons, natural history books dealt with flora and fauna and school hornbooks that displayed both the alphabets and Biblical texts on a wooden paddle covered with transparent horn. These developed later into spelling and grammar textbooks and instructional books, most of which were illustrated, just like Blake's works. However, in very many ways, Blake went against these widely prevalent children's literature and subverted it. Fundamentally, Blake's view and voice are that of a child rather than of a preaching adult. Blake refuses to offer a clear moral resolution which is very uncharacteristic of children's literature such as the chapbook. Without making a moral judgment, Blake's poetry elicits a respect for the duality of natural world and of existence.

Michael Phillips speaks of the illustration on the title page of the *Songs of Innocence* which depict:

Two children standing at the knee of their nurse or mother reading from a book, out of doors, in a garden or the countryside. Symbolically a young vine

entwines itself for support around the trunk of a tree that in turn provides shade. Birds rise up through the lettering of the title. A piper in a broad brimmed hat leans against the capital letter of I of Innocence, while higher up, children can be seen playing higher up in O and G of Songs and an angel leans back against the letter N engaged in writing in a book.

Phillips, who compared this to other children's books of the times, finds Blake so much more progressive than the others. The picture spoken about above, in choosing an outdoor setting, makes the scene positively Romantic in its orientation. The children are placed in an idyllic surrounding, reading out to the adults. They are in control of their knowledge. This significant shift makes the adult acknowledge the children's way of experiencing the world.

3.3 THE LAMB

The Lamb is one of the simplest poems of Blake. It came out in his 'Songs of Innocence'. The symbolic meaning is almost obvious and overtly stated. There is a simple affirmation of faith. The companion piece for this poem is thought to be "The Tyger" in his Songs of Experience where he asks the rhetorical question, "Did he who made the lamb make thee?" The Lamb posits the process of creation as natural and spontaneous. In this poem, the speaker seems to be a child who compares the lamb with Jesus Christ and himself, a child. Addressing the lamb, the first of the two stanzas is full of questions:

Little Lamb who made thee
 Dost thou know who made thee?
 Gave thee life and bade thee feed.
 By the stream and o'er the mead;
 Gave thee clothing of delight,
 Softest clothing wooly bright;
 Gave thee such a tender voice,
 Making all the vales rejoice!
 Little Lamb who made thee
 Dost thou know who made thee?

On the other hand, the second stanza gives answers to the ones posed in the first part:

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
 Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
 He is called by thy name,
 For he calls himself a Lamb:
 He is meek and he is mild,
 He became a little child:
 I a child and thou a lamb,
 We are called by his name.
 Little Lamb God bless thee.
 Little Lamb God bless thee.

The Lamb's innocence and gentleness is associated with that of Christ, the archetypal shepherd: the shepherd who was in charge of his herd. This of course, is only symbolical of Christ as a guide of mankind. Just as a lamb leads a completely natural existence feeding on grass and drinking from streams and clothed in soft wool, similarly a child is also, as the Romantics believed, and in the words of Wordsworth, "the father of man" in its state of innocence and oneness with nature. This oneness is reminiscent in turn with man's euphoric pre-lapsarian

past in the Garden of Eden, man's original existence. By that logic, the father of man, Adam is also a child.

The gentle bleating of the lamb is similar to the merry chirping of the child which liven up the fields and valleys and the pastoral outdoors with their frolic and make it a repository of joy and happiness. They are both united in this as they share and inherit the gentleness of Christ, the Son of God. In Christian symbolism, Christ is memorialised, visualised, and worshipped as a little child in the arms of Virgin Mary. His vulnerability at the hands of worldly vices throws his innocence to even sharper contrast. The child then is pitted against the adult and the lamb is thereby contrasted with the tiger. The lamb and the tiger go to represent the dual facets of creation and the continuum of life. Good and vice are also the two aspects of the human soul. The stanza and therefore, the poem ends with uttering sincere prayers of long life to the lamb who is a representative of childlike innocence. As long as innocence is alive, the soul is alive and the world is balanced against the odds. The implicit meaning of this poem becomes even clearer when read in the light of its companion poem "The Tyger".

William Blake: 'The Tyger',
'The Lamb', 'The Chimney
Sweeper'

Check Your Progress -1

1. The Lamb symbolises:
 - a. Experience
 - b. Anger
 - c. Innocence
 - d. Sadness
2. The companion poem of The Lamb is:
 - a. The Chimney Sweeper
 - b. The Book of Urizen
 - c. The Tyger
 - d. The Lion
3. The Lamb is compared to:
 - a. Jesus Christ
 - b. The God of Old Testament
 - c. The God of New Testament
 - d. Nature

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3.4 THE TYGER

This poem appeared in The Songs of Experience. Along with The Lamb, The Tyger asks the same question about human beings' birth, origin, and creation. "The Lamb" in "The Songs of Innocence" affirms that God made the lamb. Whereas the lamb posits the process of creation as natural and harmonious, the tiger is a vehicle to reflect the sinister designs existent in the universe. Together, they make what Blake calls "the fearful symmetry". The reverberating question here is "Did he who made the lamb make thee?" The silent response of course is that the same hands dared to make both. The carnivorous tiger is a predator, whereas the herbivorous lamb is a meek and timid animal meant for prey. Though the lamb and the tiger are antithetical to each other, the same maker has shaped them. The ecological cycle places them within a continuum which balances evolution and nurturance.

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
 In the Forests of the night;
 What immortal hand or eye,
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The Tyger is full of strong aggressive words like “burning”, “night”, “fearful”, “deeps”, “dread”, “deadly”, “terrors”, which carry the sense of dark, awe-inspiring experience. This makes the reader aware of the terror that is essentially connected with creation. The tiger reveals to us the darker and fiercer side of creation.

In what distant deeps or skies.
 Burnt the fires of thine eyes?
 On what wings dare he aspire?
 What the hand, dare seize the fire?

In Blake’s personal mythology, the maker of tiger seems to bear a reference to Prometheus, who in Greek mythology, stole fire from the land of gods to gift human beings their civilisation. The fire that glows in the luminescent eyes of the tiger in the night seem to be the same, which was tamed and trapped by the bold hands of Prometheus and stolen from the land of gods. Prometheus was a Titan, a rebel and a cultural hero celebrated by many poets during this time, the most prominent being P.B. Shelley, whose *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) was an iconic work. In Blake’s own personal mythology, he revises the creation myth to take us before creation. Him who he calls Urizen is a self-absorbed creator of a novel universe and its rules and his son Orc is also a spirit of rebellion, resistance, and freedom. As the French Revolution triggered admiration and response in much of Romantic poetry and its imagery, this spirit of rebellion and freedom from authoritarian aristocracy is celebrated and written about with gusto. The tiger’s ferociousness also symbolises bold challenge to prescriptive rules and thus becomes a vehicle of challenge and freedom.

The poem is full of references to rebellion and therefore references to mythological characters emblematic of resistance and rebellion abound here. Along with Prometheus, there are overt and covert references to Satan who was struck by thunderbolt “As stars threw down their spears”, and to Icarus “Of what wings dare he aspire?” or Vulcan/Mulciber “In what furnace was thy brain?”. These have led most scholars to identify the tiger as a symbol of revolution. Peter Ackroyd is of the opinion that:

Even as Blake worked upon the poem, the revolutionaries in France were branded in the image of a ravaging beast – after the Paris massacres of 1792, an English statesman declared, “One might as well think of establishing a republic of tigers in some forest of Africa” and there were newspaper references to the “tribunal of tigers”. At a later date, Marat’s eyes were said to resemble “those of the tyger cat”.

In his *Prelude* (1850), Wordsworth talks of post-revolutionary Paris in the section ‘Residence in France’ as a “place of fear [...] Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam”. [Book X]

Many critics have also read the poem as a response to the progress of industrialisation so rampant at this time. Along with fire, which stands for human civilisation and industry, the next two stanzas speak of the creation of the tiger as a divine industry:

And what shoulder, and what art
 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
 And when thy heart began to beat,
 What dread hand? And what dread feet?

The tiger seems to be like a paranormal being. Every bit of the tiger's physical form exudes a preternatural aura. There is absolute awe, majesty, and mystery in the fashioning of the tiger's lethal muscular form, of its agile gait. The definitive suggestion of another worldly intervention is pitched to another level, to a level beyond human imagination: of a supernatural power nearly like those ingenious machines whose novelty had a whole generation spell bound for their miraculous abilities.

What the hammer? What the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp,
Dare it's deadly terrors clasp?

This stanza carries an implication of Vulcan, the God of fire and also of metalwork and smithery, referred to as Mulciber in Milton's *Paradise Lost* or as Haphaestus in Greek mythology. Vulcan was thrown over the crystal battlements by an angry Jove. As Mulciber in *Paradise Lost*, he was the designer and architect of Satan's palatial Pandemonium which housed his notorious 'Stygian Council'. The fire, the anvil, and the hammer are the signature instruments related to the dark god, Vulcan, who also becomes the representative of industrialisation and thereby an antagonist of the benevolent Christ of the poem *The Lamb*. This latent ambiguity is foregrounded in the next stanza:

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heavens with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who make the Lamb make thee?

The simple certainties and moral explanations of "The Lamb" disappear, giving way to a set of anxious ruminations and ambiguities. If the process of creation of the docile and submissive lamb is natural and organic, the creative force behind the making of the tiger is much more aggressive and passionate. However, as Blake expresses in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the creative process is inherently enigmatic encompassing dualities and a complex intermingling of energies. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of a moral and didactic knowledge to understand the synergic harmony of the universe inhabited by diverse creatures and also of schizophrenic tendencies of human impulse and spirit which is only a reflection of this divine duality. This brings us to the final lines of the poem, which seems to be almost identical to those in the end of the first stanza:

What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

There is a difference of only a word "dare" in the last stanza. This variation is pregnant with meaning being perceived as definitive and deliberate to the intention in the poem. This disparity has duly received a lot of critical attention. The lines shift from "could" in the first stanza to "dare" in the last signalling a sense of transgression and disobedience. The tone too shifts from the childish iambic pentameter which is the dominant rhythm in both 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger', to an inconsistent trochaic meter in the ending line. This makes creation an act of audacity, challenge and disobedience.

Check Your Progress - 2

1. The Tyger is a poem which talks of:
 - a. Human goals

- b. Divine virtue
 - c. Innocence
 - d. Divine creations
2. The hammer, the chain, the furnace refers to:
- a. Icarus
 - b. Vulcan
 - c. Satan
 - d. Jesus Christian
3. A dominant theme of The Tyger is:
- a. Innocence and docility
 - b. Magnanimity
 - c. Audacity and transgression
 - d. Beauty and virtue

3.5 THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER POEMS

Like The Lamb and The Tyger, The Chimney Sweeper appears in two different forms in both “the Songs of Innocence” and “the Songs of Experience” and like the earlier two poems, charts a progression from innocence. These poems deal with the prevalent cruel practice of those times when boys of the age as less as six were employed as chimney sweepers in London. Many poor families who were unable to feed their children decided to sell little boys for chimney cleaning work to masters who ran these services. Being small in size enabled little boys to climb up the chimneys to clean the channels. The job of cleaning these chimneys was not only difficult but also hazardous to health since long exposure to the dark and toxic soot ridden channels led to deadly diseases in many. The House Report on sweepers showed innumerable cases where respiratory diseases, stunted growth, fractures from falls, cancers and even death were suffered by children who were employed in these services. Blake placed his two poems in these two works to reflect dual and contrasting perspectives on the young chimney sweepers he saw on the streets of London.

The Chimney Sweeper in “the Songs of Innocence” narrates a tale of a life under bizarre circumstances that the sweep finds himself in. This is a painful tale of the boy narrator, who, at a tender age when he had barely got over liltling was sold off to a master as a slave after his mother died:

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “ ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”
So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep.

Yet, through all this cruelty, the boy manages to find optimism and he consoles his friend, another young chimney sweeper, when his head is shaved by the master. We find his innocence and sympathy alive in his words:

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I said,
“Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for when head’s bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

Tom's hair, which was like the woolly coat of a lamb, was symptomatic of the lamb-like innocence. The loss of hair therefore suggests the deliberate and forceful stripping of innocence in children put to labour in order to survive. The narrator comforts Tom by saying that this was a good riddance since now, his hair would not be dirty from the sooty deposits from chimney cleaning. On the other hand, the words seem to further suggest that the childlike innocence can never be polluted irrespective of the cruel circumstances.

The next stanza describes a dream which Tom sees at night further enhancing the comforting tenor of the narrator. The children's terror of going up the chimney and their apprehension that they would die there, indeed comes true in Tom's dream when he finds all his companions dead and lying in "coffins of black":

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

These coffins are metaphors of the dark and dreadful chimneys where they are condemned to die. Nevertheless, there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel as the messenger from the Saviour, an angel, unlocks their coffins to set them all free. And for the first time they experience freedom from the drudgery of urban life, in a sprawling green valley exuding idyllic charm. In the lap of nature, they are united with the creator and like the image in the cover page of the Songs of Innocence, ramble and play as children are meant to.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

They sport and frolic and are united back with nature where they originally belong. Their death gives these children an opportunity to regain their innocence as they return to the state of "naked and white" purity. This is also a blessed union with God which is blissful and eternal. The Angel reminds them that their good conduct would determine whether they could make this dream come true.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father and never want joy.

However, as one would expect, this was only a dream and waking up threw them back into the rude reality and to the drudgery of life, routine of work, and labour. The glow of the lit up outdoors had disappeared and in its place was the known damp darkness that Tom was familiar with. The dream had left behind the warmth of realisation which eventuated in reconciliation with their unfortunate circumstances. Also, the Angel's reminder about their conduct made them assume that their disciplined behaviour on earth would beget them fruits after their death.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

The poem seems to end with the children finding peace and solace in a false sense of security that is offered by religious faith. Within this narrative, there was an end to their misery even if their lives were put to an untimely end due to calamitous

circumstances. Within this framework of innocent and unstinted belief, their oppression and miserable lives was normalised and justified. It is as if they were put to test in their earthly lives for which they would be rewarded later in their afterlife. The sadness of their present life only became a necessary precondition to their enjoying everlasting joy in their afterlife. In “the Chimney Cleaner” poem of the Songs of Experience, Blake discloses the unjust system of organised religion which offers a charade of glory to oppression and impoverishment. This poem has a narrator who, unlike that of the one in “Songs of Innocence” is aware of this injustice and thereby can see through the narrative of faith which offers the logic on which their precarious lives are predicated upon.

A little black thing among the snow
 Crying “ ‘weep! ‘weep! In notes of woe!
 “Where are thy father and mother? Say?”
 They are both gone up to the church to pray.

The first line itself reveals the experience and misery of the child window sweeper “a little black thing” as a contrast against the backdrop of purity of the “white snow”. Like the child of Innocence, he too cries “weep! weep!” However, this child has been abandoned by his parents who have left him behind to go to the church to pray. Since he had not shown signs of resentment when he was left alone on the heath, nobody noticed his suffering and sadness.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
 And smil’d among the winter’s snow,
 They clothed me in the clothes of death,
 And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

The parents’ assumption that their child was content anywhere made them decide a life of woe for him, thinking he would not realise the brutality. His work as chimney sweeper may even lead to his death but that is of no concern to the insensitive parents who might have forced this hazardous occupation upon him to earn some money for their family’s daily survival. Moreover, his misery and suffering were normalised beneath an apparently harmonious vehemence “notes of woe” of Christian faith. This, to Blake is excruciatingly painful as it is cruel. His prior innocence was taken for granted by an unjust and lopsided system which saw no wrong in child labour and abuse.

And because I am happy and dance and sing,
 They think they have done me no injury
 And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,
 Who make up a heaven of our misery”.

This also marks the end of the child’s narration who displays a thorough understanding of his predicament and of his parents’ as well. This child of Experience directs his anger at the organised religion which keeps people blindfolded to the evils and sorrows which exist in the society. In the Innocence poem, there is suggestion that religion only normalises the feelings triggered by poverty and dispossession that is pain and sorrow within a narrative of life of hardship and an afterlife of bliss. There is a suggestion in the Experience poem that the Church and the institutions of religion even stand to gain by selling this myth. It only serves to maintain the status quo of social classes where the poor continue to be put to misery so that the rich can live a life of comfort by trampling on the rights of the dispossessed. Ultimately, the Christian doctrinal practices of the Church are exposed as shallow and unfair if they cannot rescue children like the chimney sweeper from their unfortunate predicament and give

them a better and improved life and opportunities to transcend the social status into which they are born.

William Blake: 'The Tyger',
'The Lamb', 'The Chimney
Sweeper'

Check Your Progress - 3

1. The Chimney Sweeper is a poem you will find in:
 - a. 'Songs of Innocence'
 - b. 'Songs of Experience'
 - c. Both the 'Songs of Innocence' and the 'Songs of Experience'
 - d. 'The Book of Urizen'
2. In The Chimney Sweeper, Blake addresses the issue of:
 - a. Poverty and hunger
 - b. Corruption
 - c. Child labour and abuse
 - d. None of the above

Questions for Further Study

1. Comment on Blake's portrayal of children and childhood in his Songs of Innocence and Experience.
2. Explain the concept of "fearful symmetry" in Blake's poetry.
3. How is the issue of organised religion treated in the two 'Chimney Sweeper' poems.

3.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

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