

Block**2****BRITISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE II**

Unit 1

**William Wordsworth: 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality from
Recollection of Early Childhood', 'Lines Composed A Few
Miles Above Tintern Abbey'** **57**

Unit 2

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner':
Ballad Tradition & Summary** **68**

Unit 3

**'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner': Analysis, & Literary
Elements Sweeper'** **85**

Unit 4

**'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner': Analysis, & Literary
Elements Sweeper'** **101**

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block will introduce you to the most important British Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

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

- Get introduced to the trend setters of British Romantic poetry.
- Be familiarised with the major influential factors on William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- Independently comprehend their effects worldwide.
- Understand the lives and works of the torchbearers of this literary period.
- Trace their impacts on the later generations.

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UNIT 1 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: ‘ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD’, ‘LINES COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY’

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Romantic Poetry
- 1.2 William Wordsworth
- 1.3 Tintern Abbey
 - 1.3.1 Introduction to Tintern Abbey
 - 1.3.2 Outline of the Poem
 - 1.3.3 Interpretation
- 1.4 The Daffodils
 - 1.4.1 Outline of the Poem
 - 1.4.2 Interpretation
- 1.5 Poetic Devices in Tintern Abbey and Daffodils
- 1.6 Questions for Further Study
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to Wordsworth, one of the pioneers of the nineteenth century English Romantic Movement. The two poems included in your study are Tintern Abbey and Daffodils. The study of this unit is intended to

- help you understand the features of English Romantic Poetry in relation to Wordsworth.
- offer you a detailed analysis of Wordsworth’s poems prescribed in your course.
- enable you to understand the poetic devices employed by Wordsworth.
- gain insight into Wordsworth’s attitude towards nature.

1.1 ROMANTIC POETRY

In the last unit of the previous Block (Block 1, Unit 6), you studied The Elegy written by Thomas Gray towards the second half of the 18th century. You may recall that Gray has been classified as a pre-Romantic poet whose Elegy anticipates the Romantic Movement in English poetry. The Romantic movement of the early 19th century is a continuation of the pre-Romantic trend seen in Gray. Gray’s poems mark the nascent appreciation of the power of imagination. His successors are the Romantics – Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron. With them, the emphasis shifts altogether to the sphere of feeling and imagination.

These poets look at the world with the eye of imagination, which is honed and trained to penetrate beyond its surface reality and to perceive the essential reality beneath it – what Wordsworth defines as “the Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe. To Wordsworth “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. Shelley defines poetry as “the expression of the imagination”, while Keats says “I describe what I imagine”. The Romantic poets thus seek to portray the Infinite within the finite world, the ideal within the actual. The 19th C in Romantic poets move away from the rational way of looking at the world towards intuitive and individual insights. Thus, the single characteristic which distinguishes Romantic poetry is the importance it attaches to the power of imagination.

1.2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) has written some of the finest poems on Nature in English language. He was one of the pioneers of the early English Romantic Movement in English poetry. He was deeply involved in the early enthusiasm of the French Revolution. With Coleridge, he published “The Lyrical Ballads” in 1798, which marks the beginning of a new trend in English poetry. Wordsworth wrote a Preface to the second edition of “The Lyrical Ballads” in 1800 which is regarded as the literary manifesto of the movement. Wordsworth’s great poems include Tintern Abbey, Michael, Ode on Intimations of Immortality, The Prelude, and Ode to Duty besides a large number of short lyrics – notable among them being The Lucy poems, The Solitary Reaper, Daffodils and The Leech Gatherer.

1.3 TINTERN ABBEY

1.3.1 Introduction to Tintern Abbey

Tintern Abbey is the abridged title of the poem Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey On Revisiting The Banks of The Wye During A Tour. This poem was composed and published in 1798 and stands as a testimony to the two basic creeds that Wordsworth enunciated in his ‘Preface’ to The Lyrical Ballads in 1800. Wordsworth stated that poetry has its origin in “emotion recollected in tranquility” and that poetry is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. In the light of these two poetic creeds, let us analyze the significance of the full title of this poem. Can you identify the key word in this long title that lends support to Wordsworth’s theories on poetic composition?

Wordsworth’s emphasis is on the word “revisiting”. This poem was composed on his revisiting the Tintern Abbey that stands on the banks of the river Wye after a lapse of five years. Hence, the poem is a recapitulation of the emotions that Wordsworth had experienced on his earlier visit to the place. These recollected emotions give rise to fresh feelings of joy that spontaneously flow out through this poem. The poem in short, is an expression of Wordsworth’s thoughts and feelings in the presence of a remembered scene.

Tintern Abbey is a spiritual autobiography. Wordsworth’s recollection of pleasures enjoyed during an earlier visit interlaced with harmony experienced in his present visit holds out to him the prospect of a similar joyous experience in the future and thus knits the poem into an autobiographical framework. The poet traces his spiritual growth and development in the poem and therefore it is referred to as a spiritual autobiography. Wordsworth wrote three other poems of autobiographical kind – Ode on Intimations of Immortality, Ode to Duty and The Prelude. Tintern Abbey is the first among these four poems.

The poem also falls in the category of meditative poetry which is philosophical in intent and circular in structure. Tintern Abbey begins and ends with an invocation to Nature. The last stanza with a reference to woods, cliffs and the green pastoral farms is an echo of the opening stanza and thus the poem gains a circular frame.

1.3.2 Outline of the Poem

The poem can be summarized along its five movements (each movement corresponds to a stanza).

In the first movement, the poet describes nature with a special emphasis on its essential quality of harmony and order.

In the second movement, he speaks of the gifts of nature with respect to himself. Harmony in nature brings about harmony in the poet – in his senses, heart, mind and soul. As a result, the poet enters into a state of mystical trance when all his external sensations are laid asleep and only his soul is awake, which with the help of his power of imagination sees “into the life of things”- i.e., perceives the essence of existence. Nature’s greatest gift is to transport him to a sublime state where he can get a glimpse of the Infinite.

In the third movement he wakes up from his state of trance only to be tormented by doubts as to the validity of these gifts of nature (harmony and insight.) But the doubts are at once silenced as he recalls how he had always received comfort and consolation from a recollection of these images of nature whenever he had experienced the stress and strain of life amidst the din and noise of cities and towns.

In the fourth movement, the poet surveys the scene before him – the sense that had given him so much pleasure and reassurance in the past. He asserts that nature will continue to provide similar sustenance in the future. What makes Wordsworth so positive in his affirmation of nature’s perennial gifts? He traces the three stages of his approach to nature – in his boyhood, youth and manhood and how through a fusion of these varied experiences, he has always felt complete harmony and identification with nature. It is then that he recognizes the correspondence between the spirit in him and the spirit in nature as they both are moved by “the Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe”. Nature has thus been a harmonising and protecting influence on the poet.

In the fifth and final movement (not included in your course of study) Wordsworth addresses nature with gratitude and a renewed prayer. He seeks nature’s blessings on his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, who is in the second and youthful stage of her approach to nature. He prays that she, like him, shall be led from joy to joy and shall also experience the intimations of immortality in the presence of nature.

1.3.4 Interpretation

Stanza 1 (II 1-22)

Wordsworth is celebrated as a poet of nature-not only for his accuracy of description (as exemplified in this stanza), but also for expressing the spirit of the landscape. Wordsworth personifies nature in all his poems and he perceives a one-to-one correspondence between man and nature. In this connection, it is worthwhile to recall the comment of Matthew Arnold— a 19th century poet and critic who said that it looks as though nature has taken the pen out of Wordsworth’s hands and written the poem for him. A detailed study of Wordsworth’s poems reveals that despite the focus on nature, Man is the protagonist in all his poems. It is Man who is at the centre in his works and Wordsworth’s thesis involves

the interplay between the Mind (of Man) and nature. Man is the subject of his poems, God (the Infinite) is the object and nature provides the link between the subject and the object.

In these lines 1-22, nature is described not only in terms of its composition, but the details relate to its innate qualities of harmony, seclusion, and quietude.

II 1-2: Note the threefold repetition of “five”. What is the significance of this repetition? :

- (i) It offers a statement of the length of what has lapsed since the poet’s earlier visit to Tintern Abbey.
- (ii) The threefold repetition taken in conjunction with the words “long” and two visits. For the poet, this long absence has only made his heart grow fonder of the place with memories of the images of nature which are forever green and fresh in his mind.

From line 2 onwards, notice the repetition of the word “again” in lines 2,4, 9 and 14. Can you discern a connection between the two words “five” and “again”? “Five” refers to the past—his visit to the place five years ago. “Again” refers to the present—his present visit to the same spot. The return to the valley after an interval of five long years gives him an excitement similar to the earlier one, but made richer by the blend of the past and the present. This holds hops for a more intense form of experience in the future.

II 2-22 Note the keywords that stress on the essential qualities of nature such as harmony, solitude and quietness. Wordsworth describes nature in terms of “the soft inland murmur” (4), “steep and lofty cliffs” (5), “secluded scene” (6), “quiet of the sky” (8), “repose” (9), “green hue” (13), “silence” (18), “hermit” (21-2) & “alone” (22).

I 3 “mountain springs”: suggest freshness. Because they flow with a soft inland murmur, there is the added suggestion of harmony and gentleness.

II 5-7 The steep and lofty cliffs that connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky suggest the link between the peaceful landscape below and the profound quietness of the heavens above. The harmony he notices in nature infuses harmony in the mind of the poet. These lines establish the perfect communion between Wordsworth and nature.

II 10-17 Nature is harmonious in all her aspects. Here you notice nature’s harmony in colour. The orchard tufts with their unripe fruits look green. They seem to be lost in the surrounding groves and copses which are also green. The colour green is associated with springtime freshness described in II 3-4.

In the first stanza, we notice Wordsworth’s talent for expressing the spirit of the landscape. He has fused the world of man (of cottages and pastoral farms, of orchards and hedgerows, of vagrant dwellers and hermit) with the world of nature (of the lofty cliffs and mountain springs) and both are connected with the quiet of the sky (the Symbol of the Divine Spirit). The landscape of Tintern Abbey reveals to Wordsworth the unity of the universe.

Stanza II (23-48)

Wordsworth describes the gifts of nature bestowed on him. The most unique gift is harmony and the most exalting gift is the perception of the infinite within the finite world of beauty.

I 23- "beauteous forms": "beauteous" is used in the sense of harmony. The forms of nature are not only harmonious in themselves, but capable of inducing harmony in others. They are not only beautiful but they inspire a sense of beauty in others too.

II 23-7 These beauteous forms have smoothed him in his hours of loneliness and weariness, in lonely rooms in the midst of the noise of towns and cities.

II 27-30 "sensations sweet": Harmony on the plane of the senses.

"felt in the blood and felt along the heart": harmony on the plane of the emotions.

"passing.....restoration": harmony on the plane of thoughts.

Nature has given him sensual, emotional and mental harmony. Thus being at peace within, he is able to perform spontaneous acts of kindness and love. Hence Wordsworth feels a lot of gratitude towards nature.

II 37-48 describe the state of mystical trance that the poet attains as a result of complete inner harmony infused in him by nature.

In this state, the world ceases to be a burden and he is able to perceive the order and coherence within it. With his power of imagination, he penetrates into the core of existence to discover the Infinite pattern within. This is what he means when he says that he "sees into the life of things"

Stanza 3

II 49-57 The third movement expresses a doubt in the poet's mind regarding nature's gifts to him. But the doubt is cleared as he recalls with gratitude how the memories of the Wye had given him comfort and consolation during the periods of stress and strain.

54 "have... heart": suggests the palpitations of excitement as he remembers the pictures of the sylvan wye.

Stanza 4 (58-111)

The fourth movement traces the spiritual growth of Wordsworth.

II 66-72 : boyhood approach to nature

72-85 : youthful approach

93-102 : manhood approach

II 58-65 : Wordsworth has a faint and dim recognition of the scene before him, which he had seen five years ago.

60 : "sad perplexity": Wordsworth is puzzled as to whether he can count upon his present experience of joy and harmony to sustain him in the future. This leads him to trace his different experiences he had during his three-stage approach to nature.

66-74 the boyish days are characterised by "glad animal movements". Like a new-born lamb, he had sprinted across the mountains and meadows, by the side of rivers and streams in a state of sheer physical excitement.

74-77 That time is past. The boyish days are over and in the next stage "Nature was to him all in all". These lines express Wordsworth's romantic love for nature. The essence of romantic love is the total

identity between the lover and his beloved. No other feelings, no other thought, no other individual exists for the lovers... the senses which had given him the visual images of nature have kindled in him a romantic yearning for nature.

78-83 Wordsworth is known as the mighty poet of the eye and the ear. These are the two senses that provide him with visual images of nature. Hence he speaks of "the sounding cataracts" (auditory perception) and the tall rocks, mountains and woods (visual perception). He says that these objects of nature were not only an appetite (a physical craving for sensual satisfaction), but objects of passion to him. There is a fusion of the senses and the heart in this second stage resulting in a total communion between the poet and nature. No extraneous thought or interest intrudes into this state of total identity.

II 85-95 Wordsworth no longer experiences "the aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" as he enters the third stage of his approach to nature. But he has no regrets for these losses because "abundant recompense" has followed. No longer does he approach nature in the hour of thoughtless youth, but he has matured, been chastened and subdued of his romantic exuberance. How has this transformation come about?

Wordsworth gives the answer in II 93-4, "...but hearing often times; The still sad music of humanity". Why does humanity make a chorus of sad music? What does the poet mean by describing the "sad music" as "still"? How does he get to listening to this still, sad music of humanity?

Wordsworth's youthful approach to nature was one of passion, of "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures". But this romantic love does not last forever. It is in his recognition of the transitoriness of something as powerful as romantic passion that he understands the yawning gap between human aspiration for something eternal and the denial or non-fulfilment of the same. The phrase "sad music of humanity" crystallises the unfulfilled aspiration of mankind for the Infinite. This sad music is still because it is heard by the soul and does not appeal to the sensual ear of man. Hence humanity makes a chorus of still sad music.

By listening to the still, sad music of humanity, the poet says that he is chastened and subdued. The earlier romantic stage had no thought or concern for anything other than their mutual existence (Nature and Wordsworth). But in this mature stage of his approach to nature, both mind and humanity have been included. Wordsworth makes an integrated approach to nature with a fusion of his senses, heart, mind and soul. It is then he discerns that the spirit in him is identical with the spirit in nature and both are interpenetrated by the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe".

II 95-102 In this adulthood approach, he feels the presence of the sublime Spirit that breathes and moves through all beings-that includes both the world of nature and the mind of Man. He finds the manifestation of that propelling force in all subjects and all objects. The Primary Spirit is the force that lies beyond all thinking things and all objects of all thought.

Is this a mystical experience and is it unique only of Wordsworth? No, because if it is a mystical experience, it can take place only in a state of trance (as described in the second stanza). But here Wordsworth communicates his experience with an emphasis upon the things seen and remembered and not unrelated to a visible

world. The presence of outer nature sets into motion varied kinds of experiences until he discovers that the spirit in nature and the spirit in him are not distinct, but interfused by something that moves and breathes through them. Therefore, he is a worshipper of nature which has given him the sublime experience of "the one thing that rolls through all things". Given below is a diagrammatic illustration of the interplay between Man and nature as Wordsworth perceives it:

The outer rims of the two concentric circles represent the external aspects of Man and nature. The senses (the eye and the ear) perceive the external objects of nature and give Man a sensual delight. The inner circle representing the heart – the seat of emotions – finds a corresponding layer in nature as it apprehends the essence of nature – its beauty and harmony. The result is an experience of passionate love for nature. (refer 1.80) Deeper within is the mind - the seat of thought which experiences "tranquil restoration". The innermost aspect of Man is his soul which relates itself to the spirit in nature and recognizes the identity between the two. Hence, Wordsworth's thesis is that the spirit in Man is the same as the spirit in nature and both are moved by the Primary Spirit of the universe.

II 105-106 "both what they half create/And what perceive."

The objects of nature are apprehended by the eye and the ear. But why does Wordsworth say "what they half create?" While Man is totally absorbed in nature, what is outward (external) comes to him through a selective perception made by the eye and the ear. The shaping spirit of his imagination acts on this selective perception and helps him recognize in nature the presence of the universal spirit. Without the presence of nature and his love for it, he could not have gained this sublime experience.

II 106-111 This mature love for nature enables him to love other men.

He has been liberated to have a total acceptance of the world. This is the guidance he receives from nature. The world of nature and the perception of the senses together influence the moral and spiritual aspects in him so that the fourth movement ends on a reverential note of gratitude to nature. He offers his thanks to nature whom he addresses as his spiritual educator and moral guide.

The meditation comes to an end in the final stanza (not included in your course) when the object of this meditation—nature—is approached with great reverence and prayer. Wordsworth prays to nature like a devotee who approaches his deity in a mood of certitude.

Tintern Abbey blends past and present, the youth (his early years) and his new self (mature years). These experiences are not disparate ones but they comprise of one totality. Wordsworth's visit to the Wye after a lapse of five years confirms his belief in the unity of the past and the present as well as his belief in unity of Man and nature. This poem is a spontaneous outflow of his powerful emotions and feelings as a result of his recollection of his previous emotions that he had experienced during his earlier visit to the place.

1.4 THE DAFFODILS

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
 And twinkle on the milky way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:
 Ten saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their in Sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced: but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 A poet could not but be gay,
 In such a jocund company:
 I gazed-and-gazed-but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils.

1.4.1 Outline of the Poem

This poem records an anecdote of Wordsworth's life history when he came upon a bunch of daffodils while walking in Lake District. Daffodils are yellow flowers that are found in plenty in Lake District, a picturesque mountainous region in England. Wordsworth says that Daffodils is not just a poem of simple human sentiments of pleasure and delight on seeing a bunch of daffodils, but this tender and delicate poem has much to offer to the reader in terms of "knowledge". By "knowledge", Wordsworth means knowledge of the process of poetic creation. The poem is remarkable for its accuracy of description and it also offers an account of the way poetry is created. It illustrates the working of Wordsworth's imagination as it acts on the picture of daffodils given by the senses and turns it into a rich, perennial source of joy and inspiration. He can recall these images at times of stress and strain or during periods of loneliness and experience joy and tranquillity. Daffodils is yet another instance of the overflow of emotion recollected in tranquillity.

1.4.2 Interpretation

1.1 "could" suggests a mood of desolation, of uncertainty, and loneliness. The movement of the cloud with no discernible pattern or direction suggests that the poet is wandering aimlessly.

Contrast this mood of depression with the later mood of "bliss of solitude" described in 1.22. The metamorphosis takes place as a result of the poet finding himself in "jocund company"(1.16) of the daffodils. The poem thus records the progress of the poet from an initial state of loneliness to a state of fellowship with nature which leads him to a state of creative joy in the process of poetic composition.

II 3-4 The poet's mood of indifference is "all at once" broke as his eyes rest upon a "host of golden daffodils". These lines hint at the beginnings of poetic process in Wordsworth. The flowers which to begin with

are described as "a crowd" are referred to in the following line as "a host". The term "crowd" is associated with a number of persons or things pressing together without any order. Wordsworth initially sees the flowers as bunched together with no order about them.

But the creative process within him is set in motion as he suddenly discovers a pattern in their midst. They no longer appear as a crowd, but take the form of "a host" – a term often associated with "a host of angels." The daffodils are no longer simple yellow flowers in wild growth, but they are of a rich golden hue. The poet's creative imagination is already at work as the crowd of yellow flowers is transferred into a host of golden daffodils.

II 5-6 Wordsworth is remarkable because of his accuracy in his presentation of details. The daffodils need adequate water and shade for their growth. Hence the poet says that the daffodils are seen in abundance beside the lake and beneath the trees.

116 The poet sees the fluttering and dancing movement of the flowers as they are swayed by the breeze that blows across the lake. Again in lines 13-14, he says that the waves danced like the flowers but not with "glee". The word "glee" is a significant word in Wordsworth's poems when he uses it to describe the joy of creative activity. The dance of the daffodils is akin to creative ecstasy.

What sets the flowers and the waves in motion? It is the breeze—yet another significant word in his poems. "Breeze" in Wordsworth's usage often represents creative inspiration. The breeze that sets in motion the daffodils in gay abandon is equivalent to the poetic breeze that sets in motion the poet's imagination towards creative activity.

11 17-24 The daffodils are linked with the stars that shine and twinkle on "the milky way". By instituting this comparison with the stars, Wordsworth has made the daffodils a part of the universal order. The multitudinous flowers tossing their heads in sprightly dance resemble the bright stars in the Galaxy. Shining, twinkling and dancing, the flowers exude joy and life that lift the lonely heart of Wordsworth into a state of bliss. In such a company, the poet cannot but be gay. Where he was lonely at the beginning, he is now in "the jocund company" of the daffodils.

11 17-24 gazed: looked intently. In 'the case of Wordsworth, it is an act of mind. It is both perception and creation. Compare "what they half create and what perceive" (11 106-7) (Tintern Abbey). The poet is not only experiencing immediate pleasure but is storing the experience for the future. But he is not conscious of what he is doing as he gazes at the daffodils.

Later when he is in a pensive and vacant mood, in loneliness and disquietude, he is able to recall these delightful pictures of the daffodils. They flash upon his inward eye—the eye of imagination—and give him peace and consolation. As he recollects the past emotions in tranquillity, he is creatively inspired to render these emotions flow through his poetic composition.

Daffodils concretises Wordsworth's romantic belief in poetry as "a spontaneous overflow of emotions recollected in tranquillity".

1.5 POETIC DEVICES IN TINTERN ABBEY AND THE DAFFODILS

1) In his preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth presented a set of propositions about the nature and criteria of poetry. We have dealt with Wordsworth's basic definitions of poetry as "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and as "emotion recollected in tranquillity". Besides these, he had also commented on poetic diction and figurative speech. Wordsworth believed that poetry is the instinctive utterance of feeling and passion and so the language of poetry is the language of passion and emotion and therefore, it is natural. In other words, he said that there is no need in poetry to deviate from ordinary language—(i.e.) the language spoken by men under the stress of genuine feeling. He describes natural language as "the simple and unelaborated expressions of essential passions by men living close to nature". As for the figures of speech employed in poetry, Wordsworth rejected the concept of figures as the ornaments of language. He said that the figures of speech instead of being "supposed ornaments" should be naturally suggested by passion. Both diction and imagery in these two poems "Tintern Abbey" and "Daffodils" are consistent with Wordsworth's pronouncements. For example the imagery in Tintern Abbey expresses its quietness and harmony. Wordsworth speaks of harmony in sights and sounds. The progression to the quiet phase of nature is seen in the progression in the imagery from the "din of cities" to "the soft inland murmur" to "the still, sad music of humanity". Note the harmony in colour in the opening lines of the poem. Similarly in Daffodils, we notice the poet's creative imagination that turns "a crowd" of yellow flowers into "a host" of "golden" daffodils.

- 2) Wordsworth's use of similes in Daffodils is illustrative of his use of figures as suggested by his emotion and feelings. He begins the poem by instituting a comparison between himself and the cloud—suggestive of his drifting aimlessly in a mood of desolation and despondency. Try to explain the other comparison in the poem between the daffodils and the stars on the milky way.
- 3) Identify the use of alliterations in the two poems.
(Hints: "Sensations Sweet", "Secluded scene", "Sent up in silence" (Tintern Abbey), "Stars that Shine", "Beside the lake, beneath the trees" (Daffodils) "Ten thousand....Tossing".
- 4) Wordsworth's insistence upon language as primitive utterance of passions is seen in the archaisms in the poems. For example we have the expression "beauteous forms" (Tintern Abbey), the "jocund company" (Daffodils) that suggest the impassioned utterances of the poet.

1.6 QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- 1) What do you understand by the term "spiritual autobiography"?
- 2) Do the poems Tintern Abbey and Daffodils subscribe to Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity"?
- 3) What are the three stages of Wordsworth's approach to nature? How is his mature approach to nature distinct from his boyhood and youthful approaches?
- 4) Explain Daffodils as a poem about the process of poetic creation.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

- Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions" and as "emotion recollected in tranquillity:"
- Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey is a spiritual autobiography dealing with the spiritual growth and development of Wordsworth.
- Wordsworth's poems illustrate his romantic theory about nature and criteria for poetry.
- Language of poetry, according to Wordsworth is the natural language spoken by men.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: 'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER': BALLAD TRADITION & SUMMARY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction to the S.T. Coleridge
- 2.2 Introduction to the Poem *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*
- 2.3 The Ballad
- 2.4 Outline of the Poem
- 2.5 Text of the Poem *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* (Parts I,II& IV)
- 2.6 Interpretation
- 2.7 Poetic Devices
- 2.8 Check Your Progress : Possible Questions
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall introduce you to another Romantic poet called Samuel Taylor Coleridge who along with Wordsworth published 'The Lyrical Ballads' in the early quarter of the 19th century. The extract prescribed for your course is from Coleridge's ballad *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*. In the course of your study of this unit, we will explain:

- the characteristics of a ballad
- an outline of the poem (of all the seven parts)
- a detailed analysis of the poem (Parts I,II&IV) that includes annotation and critical analysis
- the poetic devices employed in the ballad.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO S.T.COLERIDGE

Coleridge (1772-1834) was both a poet and a critic. He was a close associate of Wordsworth, who with him holds an important place in the English Romantic Movement. Some of his best poetical works include *France: an Ode*, *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel*, *Dejection Ode* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge presented his philosophy of poetry and his critique on Romantic ideals in his (literary autobiography), 'Biographia Literaria'. As a philosopher, Coleridge tried to reconcile science, religion and politics, while as a literary critic he anticipated modern psychological criticism.

Coleridge said that in his poetry he dealt with the supernatural and that he "sought to give a semblance of truth" to make "these shadows of imagination" appear natural. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel* are poems that arise out of the subconscious and evoke a magical and mysterious mood.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner has a close parallel to the Biblical story of Abel and Cain, the two sons of Adam and Eve. Adam minded the sheep while Cain was a tiller of the ground. In course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruits of the ground while Abel offered Him the fat portions of his sheep. The Lord accepted Abel's gifts but not that of Cain.

In a fit of jealousy and anger, Cain killed Abel and thus became the first murderer on earth. The Lord cursed Cain and said, "You should be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" He put a mark on Cain to warn other men to stay away from him.

The Rime of The Ancient Mariner is a similar story about an old sailor who thoughtlessly kills an albatross (a large sea bird) during a sea voyage. He is punished for his cruel, wanton act and experiences extreme physical hardship and alienation from God and Man and is tormented by feelings of guilt. As part of his penance and expiation, he is cursed to wander from country to country and narrate his story and thereby relive those horrible moments.

Do you recognise the similarities between these two stories?

- i) They both involve an unpremeditated crime done on an impulse.
- ii) Both lead to alienation from man and God.
- iii) Both Cain and the Mariner suffer a curse which includes wandering from place to place.
- iv) Both stories have a strong moral that if man violates the laws of nature he must suffer.
- v) In both stories the guilty man atones for his crime through re-living his experience.

Thus, the two stories deal with crime, punishment, penance and some kind of redemption (forgiveness). It is interesting to learn from contemporary evidence that Coleridge was keenly interested in the subject of guilt, suffering and expiation. He began writing a poem called "The Wandering of Cain" and although he did not complete it, he modelled his Mariner on the figure of Cain and explored the theme of psychology of guilt in this poem.

Coleridge's poem tells the story of the Mariner in a dramatic and imaginative way. The narrative content lends itself to the form of a ballad. The poem also incorporates certain basic ideas about poetry which Coleridge and Wordsworth formulated in the Preface To the Lyrical Ballads. Accordingly, Wordsworth was to write poems dealing with familiar objects and scenes and make them interesting and new while Coleridge was to deal with persons and experiences that are strange and unfamiliar and make them appear natural. He was to describe these mysterious events and people in such a way that while reading them the reader will temporarily forget their strangeness and believe them to be true. In short, Coleridge was to make the reader suspend his disbelief and thereby not question the credibility of the narrative. How was Coleridge to achieve this?

- i) by describing the natural settings in the poem accurately to create the impression of reality

- ii) by making the emotions and reactions of the characters seem authentic and psychologically convincing such as the reader might himself experience in a similar situation.
- iii) by linking the supernatural world of spirits and non-natural happenings with the real world to show that these two levels of existence are interrelated and affect each other.

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge demonstrate in their different ways the basic romantic belief that there is a spirit or life in Nature and that man must live in harmony with nature. This belief is termed pantheism. Other features that make this poem a romantic ballad are:

- i) Coleridge's use of the power of imagination to conjure up a spiritual world that lies beyond reality.
- ii) his sensitivity to the objects and phenomena of nature.
- iii) his interest in and use of the stories, atmosphere, language and poetic form of the Middle Ages (12th to 15th centuries). His interest in the medieval period is known as medievalism (an important element in the poetry of John Keats whom you will study in the next unit).
- iv) his keen interest in the working of the human mind in this poem—a study of the psychology of crime and guilt.

2.3 THE BALLAD

The setting for the poem *The Ancient Mariner* is the Middle Ages. Coleridge uses archaic words and creates the atmosphere of that era. A popular form in medieval times is the ballad and this is the form Coleridge employs for his poem. The original ballads (like the oral popular folk songs in India) were anonymous. We do not know who wrote them except that they were stories sung before an audience. *The Ancient Mariner*, however, is a "literary ballad"—i.e. a poem consciously modelled on the original form and written to be read and not necessarily sung.

In a ballad

- i) The story is told in a simple and direct manner
- ii) There is a quick succession of new scenes and incidents
- iii) The language is simple and terse
- iv) In a literary ballad, archaic words and spellings common in medieval poetry are used to create an authentic atmosphere.
- v) Repetition of phrases occurs frequently
- vi) There is frequent use of alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds)
- vii) Normally a 4-line stanza is used with the first and third line consisting of 4-feet and the second and the fourth of 3-feet. Usually the rhyme scheme is abcb.

2.4 OUTLINE OF THE POEM

Part I: An old sailor' (the Ancient Mariner) detains a guest at a wedding to tell him the story of his strange voyage. The guest is eager to join the festivities, protests but the Mariner with the force of his personality compels him to sit and listen. The voyage begins normally and the ship sails southwards till it reaches

the Equator. It is then driven by a storm to the regions of perpetual ice. There is no sign of life there till a large sea bird, the albatross appears. This coincides with the coming of a favourable wind and the ship returns northwards. The bird is welcomed by the ship's crew who feed it and enjoy its company. It follows the ship for nine days when all of a sudden without any apparent cause, the Mariner shoots the bird.

Part II: The ship moves northwards but the foggy conditions of the Polar Regions persist. The Mariner's shipmates blame him for killing the bird of good omen that made the breeze to blow. When, however, they approach the equatorial regions and the fog clears and the sun shines brightly, they applaud the Mariner's deed of killing the bird as though it was responsible for bringing the fog along. They thus become accomplices in the Mariner's crime. At the equator, the ship is stranded without a breeze and the crew suffer terribly from heat and thirst. This marks the beginning of the punishment for the killing of the albatross. The shipmates now blame the Mariner for their suffering and they hang the dead bird around the Mariner's neck as a sign of his guilt.

Part III: The ship remains stationary and the torture of the crew continues. They are visited by a horrifying skeleton ship manned by two fearsome figures. One is identified as Death and the other as Life-in-Death. They gamble for the lives of the crew: Death wins all of them except the Mariner whom Life-in-Death takes possession of. Part III ends with the death of all the crew members while the Mariner remains alive to be left alone with his torment.

Part IV-VII: The Mariner suffers total isolation and he is plagued by a sense of guilt. The only living things visible are the sea-creatures which look ugly to him as they crawl about. He is surrounded by the bodies of his shipmates whose eyes seem to curse him even in their death. This agony continues for 7 days when under the light of the moon the Mariner observes a Hermit and asks him to listen to his confessional story. As he begins to narrate his experiences, he is wrenched by a terrible agony which leaves him only when his story is finished. This compulsion to roam from land to land and narrate his story (and relive his experience) is the penance that he must do all through his life.

Sounds from the wedding celebration are heard and as the wedding guest gets ready to leave, the Mariner tells him that his greatest joy in life is to be a part of the human community once again. The Mariner teaches by his own example that as part of God's creation we must love and revere all things that God has made. The poem ends with the departure of the Mariner and the wedding guest finds himself 'a sadder and a wiser man' after this strange encounter with the Mariner.

2.5 TEXT OF THE POEM "RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER" (PARTS I, II, & IV)

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1798) (Parts I, II, & IV)

PART I

An ancient Mariner meeteth three gallants bidden to a wedding feast, and detaineth one.

IT is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.'

He holds him with his skinny hand,
'There was a ship,' quoth he.
'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!'
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

The Wedding-Guest is spell-bound by the eye of the old seafaring man, and constrained to hear his tale.

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

'The ship was cheer'd, the harbour clear'd,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

The Mariner tells how the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather, till it reached the Line.

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon——'
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The Wedding-Guest heareth the bridal music; but the Mariner continueth his tale.

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

The ship drawn by a storm toward the South Pole.

'And now the Storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roar'd the blast,
The southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

The land of ice, and of fearful sounds, where no living thing was to be seen.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd,
Like noises in a swound!

Till a great sea-bird, called the Albatross, came through the snow-fog, and was received with great joy and hospitality.

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steer'd us through!

And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen, and followeth the ship as it returned northward through fog and floating ice.

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perch'd for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmer'd the white moonshine.'

The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen.

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—'With my crossbow
I shot the Albatross.

'The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!

His shipmates cry out against the ancient Mariner for killing the bird of good luck.

And I had done an hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averr'd, I had kill'd the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

But when the fog cleared off, they justify the same, and thus make themselves accomplices in the crime.

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averr'd, I had kill'd the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze continues; the ship enters the Pacific Ocean, and sails northward, even till it reaches the Line.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow follow'd free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

The ship hath been suddenly becalmed.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

And the Albatross begins to be avenged.

Water, water, everywhere,

And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue, and white.

A Spirit had followed them; one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet, neither departed souls nor angels; concerning whom the learned Jew, Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus, may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more. The shipmates in their sore distress, would fain throw the whole guilt on the ancient Mariner: in sign whereof they hang the dead sea-bird round his neck.

And some in dreams assuréd were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was wither'd at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

PART IV

The Wedding-Guest feareth that a spirit is talking to him;

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribb'd sea-sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand so brown.'—
'Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropt not down.

But the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceedeth to relate his horrible penance.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

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He despiseth the creatures of the calm.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

And envieth that they should live, and so many lie dead.

I look'd upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I look'd upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I look'd to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

But the curse liveth for him in the eye of the dead men.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they look'd on me
Had never pass'd away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected, and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival. By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide;
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemoock'd the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt always
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watch'd the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,

And when they rear'd, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watch'd their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coil'd and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

Their beauty and their happiness.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,

He blesseth them in his heart.

And I bless'd them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I bless'd them unaware.

The spell begins to break.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

2.6 INTERPRETATION

Lines

1-16 The poem begins abruptly with the opening line, "It is an ancient Mariner" (line 1). This is a characteristic feature of a ballad where no words are wasted by way of circuitous introduction to the story. The reader is straightaway geared into the movement of the story.

"ancient" suggest that (i) the mariner is old and (ii) he belongs to a distant past—a hoary antiquarian.

Thus the term "ancient" infuses a sense of awe and fear—both of someone dreaded and yet strangely fascinating. The young wedding guest is arrested by the presence of this ancient-looking mariner though he desires to be away from him.

Coleridge builds on the term "ancient" with an unusual description of the mariner that makes the word "ancient" collate with mariner. His skinny hand, long, grey-beard and glittering eye give him a ghostly appearance. He looks as though he has come from a far-off world and his sudden arrival into the natural world of men who are gathered at a wedding feast bring the two worlds together within the range of credibility. His mesmeric hold on the wedding guest suggests that if in some strange way the latter is compelled to stay back and listen to the mariner's story, the reader can also suspend his disbelief and accept the narrative without raising questions regarding the mariner's narration.

5-8 We also note the contrast between the festive and joyous mood of the wedding feast and the eerie atmosphere evoked by the mariner's appearance and his story. A gradual change comes over the young guest as he is held back from the wedding feast by the mariner. His

querulous tone of anger in the opening quatrain followed by his effort to extricate himself from the clutches of the mariner gradually yield to a meek submission to the Mariner's will and he listens to him like a "three years' child".

9 "unhand": a dramatic representation of action. The Mariner with his skinny hand holds the young man but he drops it all of a sudden. By this time the old man has cast his spell on him so that the young wedding guest is rooted to the stone on which he sits held by the mariner's "glittering eyes" (13).

21-24 The mariner's story which began with "There was a ship" suddenly moves with incredible speed to describe the start of the voyage and conjures up a picture of a fast sailing ship. The movement here is the movement from the world of reality to the world of the narrative. By giving us pictures of the harbour and the kirk, the hill and the lighthouse, Coleridge glides us through from the world of the wedding to that of strange and eerie happenings. Do you notice Coleridge's close attention to details in these lines? The sequence kirk-hill-lighthouse shows the order in which these landmarks on shore disappear as the ship sails farther into the sea.

25.30 These illustrate the poet's faithfulness to geographical details. The fact that the sun rises on the right indicates that the ship is steering towards the South. (compare line 83, part II). As the ship moves towards the Equator, the sun becomes nearly overhead.

32-40 The story which had been proceeding on an even tone becomes dramatic from now onwards and holds the listener's interest by its own power. The young man will no more interrupt the narration except by way of exclamations of fear and horror. The wedding revelry will have no effect on him as he is spellbound by the story and it's moral.

41-50 Description of the storm that drives the ship off-course towards the South Polar Region. Can you recognise the sequence of powerful imagery in these lines? The poet institutes four comparisons in succession. The storm is personified and is described in terms of a cruel and tyrannous being. The imagery shifts soon after and it is compared to a powerful bird with strong wings pushing the ship forward.

The ship moving with incredible speed by the force of the stormy wind is also compared to a man fleeing the clutches of a vengeful enemy who pursues him with shouts and blows. The ship driven over the waves resembles the man bending forward to save himself from blows. Coleridge attempts to evoke a picture of strange and fearsome happening manipulated by an invisible demonic force.

47 The enemy is close behind him, so near that his shadow touches him.

51-70 The events that now occur are narrated in a precise and matter of fact way which gives the impression that they are taken from the log-book (or diary) of a ship. This helps to convince the reader that these events had actually happened and are therefore 'real'. The narration has moved into the supernatural world and yet all that happens there has a semblance of reality.

This is a vivid description of the south Polar Regions. The intense

cold of this scene will be contrasted with the fiery heat of the next scene (in part 2) just as the terrible sounds of the clashing ice will be contrasted with the fearful silence to follow in the next part. A special feature of Coleridge's description of natural objects is his ability to make them appear both 'real' and 'mysterious' at the same time. For example, the icebergs are beautiful but sinister: their brightness is somehow gloomy and frightening. The ice is 'green as emerald' and it sends a 'dismal sheen'. Identify the figure of speech in this phrase. It is an oxymoron in which there is an apparent contradiction in the words. The ship is surrounded and dwarfed by the huge icebergs. As they hit against each other they make a tearful sound like that of an unfriendly and hostile animal that snarls and growls. Notice the use of onomatopoeia (the use of words which create the sound which is being described) in "cracked", "growled", "roared" "howled". All these words convey the loud unpleasant sound of icebergs cracking and banging together. These lines also illustrate the use of repetition (a characteristic feature of the ballad) to emphasise their being completely surrounded by ice. (L. 59-60).

65-66 From the beginning the Albatross is described as though it was a human being. In fact at certain points in the action it is even associated with Christ who was killed by sinful men for no real reason and was hung upon a cross (the albatross is killed with a 'cross-bow' and its dead body is hung 'like a cross' around the Mariner's neck). By making this association (it is called a 'Christian soul') Coleridge is perhaps suggesting that the killing of the bird is not a trivial act but as serious as breaking of the normal law as the killing of a man would be.

71 The ship now begins to move northwards.

77-78 (Refer to 1154-56). Here again the description of the moonlight shining through the white fog highlights its eerie aspect: natural objects seem to act abnormally.

79-82 The expression of horror on the face of the Mariner deepens as he approaches the part of narration relating to his criminal action. This is noticed by the wedding-guest and his dramatic interruption draws attention to the agony suffered by the mariner every time he speaks of his guilt. The question of the wedding guest is followed by a pause before the Mariner gives the answer. This indicates his reluctance to mention the ghastly deed. The abrupt conclusion of Part I also serves to focus attention on the dastardliness of his action. It is interesting to note how each part in the poem ends with an allusion to the albatross and the crime.

Part II

83-86 The ship continues its northward journey. ,

87-90 Compare II, 71-74 for the use of repetition with slight but significant variations.

91-96 Although the ship moves on steadily, the fog persists. The sailors who miss the bird's presence condemn the mariner for his evil deed and blame him for having killed the bird of good luck that had made the favourable south-wind blow.

Note that this stanza is of 6 lines. Coleridge occasionally varies the

- length of his stanza (ref. Lines 45-50 & 97-102) to suit the needs of his narrative. Here the lengthening of the stanza serves to emphasize the importance of the incidents described—the inconsistent and contradictory behaviour of the crew is thus highlighted.
- 97-102 When the fog finally ends and the sun rises bright and clear the sailors justify the mariner's action affirming that it was right to have killed the bird that caused the foggy weather.
- The inconsistent attitude of the shipmates is noteworthy. They judge the action of the Mariner not by any sound or consistent standard of right or wrong but simply by its effects on them. As the commentary states they become accomplices in the crime.
- 97-98 draw attention to the magnificence of sunrise at sea by likening the rising sun to the head of God himself.
- 103-106 A stanza famous for its alliteration. The repetition of the 'f' sound conveys the swift, unhampered forward progress of the ship.
- The entry into the silent sea (here the Pacific Ocean) is dramatically sudden,
- 107-110 Contrast the rhythm of this stanza with that of the preceding one. There is a distinct slowing down to convey a feeling of stagnation and helplessness.
- 111-114 The sun which had earlier been welcome (contrast with II, 97-98) now becomes an object of oppression. The sun is not "glorious" but "bloody". It is not like "God's Own head"—mild, benevolent and a source of energy, but appears severe, harsh, and an all-consuming fire. The heat is dull, intense, and unrelieved.
- The sun directly above the mast indicates that the ship is once again at the Equator. Through the haze the sun appears small like the moon and the scene is eerie, strange, and ghostly.
- 115 The repetition conveys the effect of endless monotony.
- 117-118 A very famous simile from English poetry. The comparison creates a self-contained picture.
- 118-120 Here the commentary is important. The suffering of the mariners is linked directly to the crime. Though the Ancient Mariner is guilty of the actual killing, the others by applauding the action have proved their complicity in the crime and are therefore condemned to be punished. Initially, their torment takes the form of heat, thirst and complete inaction.
- 123 An exclamation to express the intensity of the horror.
- 125-126 The description of the sea creatures is deliberately ugly to emphasise the Mariner's revulsion for these lowly creatures. The repetition of the word 'slimy' along with a grotesque description of crawling with slimy legs creates a sense of the hideousness of the sight.
- 127-130 The scene at night, though bright and colourful is ugly and ominous. Mysterious lights whirl about as in a dance and the stagnant water glistens like oil.
- 131-134 The Spirit of the South Pole (and therefore guardian of that region)

has come to avenge the death of the albatross. It hovers near the ship and appears in the sailors' dreams. They are told in their dreams that their suffering is a punishment for the crime.

- 139-142 The sailors are unable to speak because of their parched tongues. The shipmates reproach the mariner with accusing looks. They hold the Mariner guilty and responsible for their misery and express their anger by hanging the dead bird around his neck as a visible sign of his guilt.

Part IV

- 145-150 Part IV opens with an interruption by the wedding guest. He fears that the Mariner who seems to have appeared from the dead is perhaps a ghost rather than a living man. He is, however, reassured by the Mariner that he had not died and that his penance has been prolonged.

Notice how the three physical characteristics of the Mariner mentioned at the beginning of the poem are repeated here.

- 153-155 express the terror of the wedding guest. The full horror of the ghastly appearance of the Mariner is brought out by the repetition.

- 156-182 traces the torture suffered by the mariner. His mental state is one of reproach: he envies the living things around him and seems to envy even the lot of the dead crew. There is, as of yet, no indication of repentance and his reaction towards the sea-creatures is one of revulsion. (The words 'slimy' and 'rotting' are echoes of the earlier lines 123 & 125 to remind us that there has been no change in his attitude. In fact, he not only hates the sea-creatures but there is even a note of despair in line 160 where he speaks of his own life as an intolerable burden.)

Mariner finds neither rest nor peace and everything that he sees around him merely intensifies his sense of isolation from all living things. He is even alienated from God: as part of his punishment, he has lost the capacity to pray and can therefore find no comfort from heavenly grace.

Coleridge has effectively conveyed the restlessness of the Mariner who craves for relief but finds none. Can you suggest the effect of the many repetitions in these lines? These have the effect of conveying the unending and prolonged monotony of his situation with no possibility of relief. (Look, for example at line 171 which illustrates this well.) Also note how effectively Coleridge has suggested that the suffering of the mariner is both physical and psychological; the thirst, the heat and the throbbing head and eyes are accompanied by a lack of mental peace. He is acutely aware of his loneliness, his guilt, the reproach of his dead mates and above all, his alienation from God, man and all living things.

- 176-182 shows how deeply oppressed he is by the cursing and accusing looks in the dead man's eyes. He wishes only for death but even this is denied to him. (Can you suggest why this is so? He has been won not by Death, but by Life in Death. Besides, his punishment is to be a prolonged one. Unlike his shipmates, he alone has been singled out for possible redemption.)

Passages describing the Mariner's agony are interspersed with beautiful pictures of nature. This is a particularly elaborate passage. Why do you think this is so?

It is a prelude to a crucial event in the story and helps to prepare us for it. You may have observed that in the story, the Mariner is quite passive: he undergoes many experiences but he performs only two important actions. One is the irrational act of killing the bird. The other which is described here is that of admiring the beauty of all living things, feeling a spontaneous love for them and experiencing a sense of harmony with all creation. From this moment onwards the Mariner's penitence and redemption (forgiveness) begin. He no longer feels isolated, he is once again able to pray and feel positive emotions and nature too ceases to be hostile. Instead of the relentless heat and dull monotony, he now feels the soothing influence of the cool moonlight and sees the varied colours of the objects and creatures around him.

186-192 In his total isolation, he watches the moving moon accompanied by a few stars and the appearance of the moonlight on the water. There is a sharp contrast between the cold white light of the moon and the angry redness of the warm sea.

193-205 These lines are meant to convey the lesson of the healing power of Nature.

He observes the water snakes and is fascinated by their beauty especially by the unusual and almost magical transformation that they undergo in the moonlight. He now no longer finds them repulsive.

This is a passage of great beauty emphasising the rich colours of the water creatures. This is also closely related to the theme of the poem. This appreciation of the beauty of the sea creatures marks the beginning of the Mariner's repentance. (Incidentally, the passage is based on the actual appearance of water-snakes observed in the islands of the Pacific Ocean.)

Coleridge stresses upon both the beauty and the joy of nature's creatures.

205-209 Again the image of positive emotions as a reviving spring of fresh water (ref. 205). With the help of these gentle and loving thoughts the curse begins to pass off and he is once again able to pray. This is an indication of grace and forgiveness.

210-212 This section (like the previous one) ends dramatically. The albatross is mentioned briefly and focuses attention upon the centre of dramatic interest and the incident to which the whole section has been leading up. The last two lines are in fact the dramatic centre of the whole poem. It is from these that the 'moral' of the poem emerges in II, 614-616 in part VII:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The Mariner's spontaneous love for nature's creatures brings an end to the first

phase of his punishment. The fact that the external sign of his crime and guilt, the dead albatross, now falls off his neck and sinks into the sea is an indication of this. Coleridge here indicates the link between the Mariner's positive reaction and the beginning of redemption.

2.7 POETIC DEVICES

The form of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is that of a ballad. (During the second half of the 18th century the ballad form had been revived and it enjoyed considerable popularity among the Romantic poets.) The old medieval ballad served as a model for Coleridge and he incorporated its most distinctive features. Some of these are:

- i) Simplicity of language and the use of brief direct statements. Examples of such usage are:

The sun came up upon the left,

Out of the sea came he!

And he shone bright, and on the right

Went down into the sea. (25-28)

We could not speak, no more than if

We had been choked with soot. (137-38)

- ii) The sudden introduction of new elements and rapid transition to new incidents. For example, without any previous suggestion, there appear in quick succession the ship, the silent sea, the Spectre woman and her mate, Death.
- iii) Use of archaic words and spellings to capture the authentic atmosphere of the medieval ballad. Some examples are: eftsoons (12), swound (62), uprist (98) clomb (209).
- iv) Repetition of phrases and lines. This is a feature of all oral poetry (such as the epic) and it is used by Coleridge for emphasis and to heighten the dramatic effect. Refer to the following lines:

The ice was all between,

The ice was here, the ice was there;

The ice is all around: (58-60)

For all averred, I had killed the bird

That made the-breeze to blow.

Ah! wretch! said they, the bird to slay,

That made the breeze to blow! (93-96)

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

Alone on a wide wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony. (232-235)

- v) Extensive use of alliteration as in:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free:

We were the first burst

Into that silent sea. (103-106)

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,

We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I suck, on the blood, (157-60)

- (vi) The harmony between wound and sense, i.e. onomatopoeia is illustrated in:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled. (L. 61)
Yet, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea. (125-126)
Attempt to locate more examples of these poetic devices.

2.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- 1) Give a description of the Ancient Mariner. What effect does he have on the wedding guest?
- 2) From the sections of the poem which you have studied, choose the incident which you have found most interesting and describe it in detail. Also try to show the significance of the incident you have described. (E.g. the shooting of the albatross, the calming of the ship, the Mariner's spontaneous affection for the sea creatures).
- 3) Give an account of the punishment suffered by the Mariner. Attempt to show the various stages and the different kinds of suffering he undergoes.
- 4) With examples from the poem, illustrate the variety of natural scenes described.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have:

- Learnt about the features of ballad poetry;
- Have studied Coleridge's use of these devices
- And analysed in detail and understood an extract from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

2.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

<https://resources.saylor.org/archived>

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. The Annotated Ancient Mariner. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Ed Martin Garduer. New York : C N Potter, 1965. Print.

“Samuel Taylor Coleridge”. : The Poetry Foundation web., September 2013.

UNIT 3 ‘THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER’: ANALYSIS, & LITERARY ELEMENTS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction to the S.T. Coleridge
 - 3.1.1 Introducing the ballad ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’
 - 3.1.2 Structure of the ballad
 - 3.1.3 The Title
- 3.2 Part-wise analysis
 - 3.2.1 Argument
 - 3.2.2 Analysis of the Argument
- 3.3 The Ballad: Part 1 – Part IV
 - 3.3.1 Part 1- Analysis with comments
 - 3.3.2 Part II- Analysis with comments
 - 3.3.3 Part III- Analysis with comments
 - 3.3.4 Part IV- Analysis with comments
- 3.4 Check your Progress
- 3.5 The Ballad: Part V – Part VII
 - 3.5.1 Part V- Analysis with comments
 - 3.5.2 Part VI- Analysis with comments
 - 3.5.3 Part VII- Analysis with comments
- 3.6 Use of Literary Elements: A Critical Review
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- The purpose of this unit is to help you understand the ballad thoroughly.
- In order to not to be repetitive, the text of the poem is not reproduced here.
- In the part-wise analysis, care is taken to explain each stanza with critical commentary.
- To sum up the analysis a critical note is provided at the end.

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO S.T.COLERIDGE

In the preceding unit you read about the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the tradition of ballad writing. You have also read about the background of Coleridge’s celebrated ballad “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and acquainted yourself with the story through the summary of the ballad.

In this unit you have to analyze the text part wise and understand in detail, its stanza-wise meaning with critical comments and learn about the allusions, references, and other literary elements employed in the poem.

3.1.1 Introducing the ballad *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

This long ballad is the longest poem written by Coleridge and is included in ‘The Lyrical Ballads’ published in 1798 in which Coleridge had contributed only four poems including the present one and the rest were contributed by Wordsworth.

3.1.2 Structure of the ballad

There are in all seven parts of varying lengths in this ballad. Most of the stanzas are quartets with the exception of some of them being sestets, quintets, tercets or couplets. The second part is the shortest which contains fourteen stanzas whereas the last three parts are as long as each containing twenty five stanzas or more. The poem is written majorly in quatrains in the traditional rhyme scheme abcb and the ballad meter with the first and the third lines in iambic tetrameter and the second and the fourth lines in iambic trimeter.

3.1.3 The Title

Let us look at the title of the poem – ‘The Rime of the **Ancient Mariner**’. ‘Rime’ here means the poem or an insistent strain which the mariner is adamant upon narrating to someone. ‘Rime’ also means hoarfrost which is kind of a freeze or ice and in the poem the mariner’s horrifying encounters with freezing temperatures, sheets of ice and frost form the most recurring images. The epithet ‘ancient’ with the ‘mariner’ conveys that the man is not simply an old man but is so aged that he appears to be belonging to a different age or appears as an antique relic from the remote past. Use of archaic spellings for the words ‘ancient’ and ‘marinere’ highlights the agedness and strangeness of the person. The poet uses archaic spellings of many words which show that the tale belongs to the bygone days and is about a past experience.

3.2 PART-WISE ANALYSIS

You may refer to the text of the poem given in the previous unit and for detailed understanding of the poem read the part wise analysis given below:

3.2.1 Argument

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancient Mariner came back to his own Country.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Argument

The text of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* begins with an ‘Argument’ in which the poet states very briefly the outline and the subject matter of the story of the poem. At the very outset the poet presents the ‘argument’ of the poem in one sentence containing the scheme and the gist of the poem. The “Line” stands for the Antarctic Circle and the star-crossed journey back home is through the Great Pacific Ocean. It is a rhyme i.e. a lyrical account of a journey through the ‘rime’ which went awry. The adventure turned into a disaster after the ship was blown towards the South Pole.

3.3 THE BALLAD: PART I – PART IV

3.3.1 PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,

And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

...

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS.

Analysis

The poem begins with the three guests who are hurrying towards the church to be part of a marriage ceremony. The mariner bids one of them to stop. The guest feels helpless before the agedness of the mariner and the powerful looks of his keen eyes but is unwilling to stop and pleads before the mariner to let him go. The guest feels cornered. The bridegroom who was about to arrive is his close relative. The guest gets restive to hear the joyous commotion which signals that the feast is ready. But the old mariner catches hold of the guest's hand and abruptly begins telling him the story of his journey. The guest becomes so irritated that he snubs the mariner and calling him an old fool, asks him to take his hand away from him. The mariner instantly releases his hand.

Despite being free, the wedding guest finds himself powerless to move away. The mariner with the intense look in his eyes holds him back and he finally submits himself to the mariner's will like a little child. He sits down on a stone and the mariner begins telling his tale. Use of "spake" indicates that the ancient mariner spoke in an ancient manner. The mariner tells that their ship had started on its voyage from their native harbour under favourable wind conditions cheered by their well-wishers. Soon the ship sailed past familiar points like the kirk (a church), the hill, and the lighthouse. Initially the days went by peacefully in a normal manner. The sunrise on their left and the sunset on their right indicated that the ship was sailing southwards. The fact that with each passing day the sun shone higher right overhead conveys that from the northern hemisphere the ship was moving towards the Equator.

The wedding guest hears the sound of the bassoon and becomes impatient because it meant that the bride had stepped into the marriage hall. He draws a mental picture of the bride's entry into the hall and imagines her to be fresh and lovely like a red rose. The guest gets restless again and wanted to join the party yet he felt powerless in front of the bewitching hold of the mariner's bright eyes on him. The mariner continues with his story that soon the ship was caught in the eye of a storm which was so fiendish and powerful that it almost lifted the ship and pushed it beyond the Antarctic Circle. The 'storm-blast' is here personified as a brutish male; an enemy who attacked with vengeance and continued to chase the defeated adversary who had already lost the ground. The picture of the ship with its sloping masts and dipping prow is comparable to a subdued weakling with a bent head. The ship had drifted a long distance away but the storm roared after it like an abusive bully.

The ship was now in the frigid waters. Huge icebergs, high like mountains floated towards the ship. The ice was clear and shining and there existed nothing else except the ice. The place was devoid of not only humans but of all creatures.

Everywhere it was ice and ice. The ice cracked and produced fearful sounds of growling, roaring and howling. The fear and the freezing cold had left those aboard the ship half fainted.

After a long while they saw an albatross coming through the misty fog and they welcomed it. The men offered it food which it ate and hovered around the ship. The ice split and the ship could now negotiate its way through the sea. Wind from the south direction started blowing, helping the ship to move northwards. The albatross followed the ship. It became friendly: the sailors gave it food and it perched on the mast or the pall. It was there at the prayer hour in the evening and stayed through the full moon night.

At this point in his tale the mariner suddenly became silent and appeared as if he was possessed by a devil. The wedding guest consoled him and asked him why he looked so scared. The mariner told him that he killed the albatross with his cross bow. The mariner doesn't seem to have shot the albatross for any justifiable reason, whatsoever. It was completely a thoughtless and unnecessary act which the mariner realized soon after having committed it but now he could not undo it. This doomed him to a life of eternal wandering warning people not to commit such blunders as he did.

3.3.2 PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:

Out of the sea came he,

Still hid in mist, and on the left

Went down into the sea.

...

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks

Had I from old and young!

Instead of the cross, the Albatross

About my neck was hung.

Analysis:

The ship was now sailing back northwards so the East was on the right side of the ship and the West was on the left. Though a good south wind was propelling the sails, it was still foggy and the sun looked hidden behind the mist all day long which dampened the spirits of the sailors. Moreover the absence of the sweet albatross was also acutely felt by them.

All opined that it was a sinful act on part of the mariner to kill the bird which was a good omen and whose appearance coincided with the cracking of the ice and the blowing of the favourable wind. Then the fog and the mist vanished and the noon-time Sun began shining with all its brightness. The superstitious sailors immediately changed their opinion and blaming the albatross for the fog and the mist praised the mariner for killing it. They justified the senseless slaying and thus became partners in the mariner's sin.

Aided by the good breeze, they furrowed through the sea easily for some distance before they entered the silent latitudes and to their dismay realized that this part of the Pacific Ocean was windless. This part of the ocean was so silent their talking among themselves was the only audible sound. The Sun which a short while

ago looked ‘glorious’ to them now appeared ‘bloody’. In the absence of any air movement the ship stood still upon the ocean and appeared like a picture painted on the canvas. There was no cloud or rain or mist or snow which could serve as a source of fresh water and their throats became parched. They were surrounded by the immense expanse of water of the endless ocean but there wasn’t even a single drop of water which they could drink.

The slimy creatures crawling on the surface of the sea appeared hideous to the crew. They could have no respite from heat and thirst either during day-time or at night. The slimy water looked like hot oil when it changed colors in the light of the Sun. The crew members began guessing why they were being so harried and concluded that it was due to the mariner’s killing of the albatross because right after that their ship got guided towards these troubled waters perhaps by some unseen power. There was perhaps a spirit under the water which pushed their ship to this place of motionless silence. In the scorching heat and utter drought their tongues were so dried that they stiffened and could not move to speak even a word. Dryness, like smoke and soot, choked their gullet. They all threw accusing looks at the mariner holding him singly responsible for the disaster. They put the carcass of the dead albatross round his neck. And, in place of the cross which is a symbol of redemption he now carried the dead bird as a symbol of damnation.

3.3.3 PART III

There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.

A weary time! a weary time!

How glazed each weary eye,

...

The souls did from their bodies fly,—

They fled to bliss or woe!

And every soul, it passed me by,

Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

Analysis

The crew was passing through the worst of times. Not only were their throats parched but their eyes were too dried up as well. The gaze in their open eyes got fixed as they could not even bat an eyelid. The mariner saw something far away in the western horizon which initially was no bigger than a dot. As it neared, it looked like mist and gradually started assuming a certain shape but it continued to appear and disappear and shift places on the water as though trying to dodge an invisible spirit. The mariner and the sailors watched in amazement but their throats and lips were so parched that they could not utter even a word and could neither express joy nor lament. In order to be able to speak, the mariner bit his arm and wet his tongue with his own blood. Shedding the blood is a symbol of purification and atonement for sins.

The mariner was able to speak to tell his companions that it was a ship which was visible on the water. The men heard the voice of the mariner but could only gape and grin in response as they could not move their parched lips or tongue. By now the ship neared and they could themselves see it. They took a deep breath indicating hope and some relief.

The mariner pointed out that the ship was now no longer changing its direction and was heading straight towards them to perhaps rescue them from the impending doom. The mariner however noted with wonder the strange phenomenon of the ship moving steadily without the presence of winds or waves to propel it. It was evening time. The reflection of the crimson sun had reddened the sea water in the west. The sun, ready to plunge into the sea, was positioned right on the water surface when the ship eclipsed the sun from the view of the crew.

It was a skeleton ship with bars and it appeared as if the sun was put behind the bars of a prison house. The mariner prayed for the release of the sun. Now he was really frightened to note that despite the flimsy and see-through gossamer sails unable to hold air, the ship was moving speedily towards them. The mariner then noticed a woman and wondered whether she was the lone crew member in that ship. Then he noticed another figure which looked like the very embodiment of Death and the mariner guessed that Death was the companion of the demonic woman with red lips, golden yellow hair, white skin and wayward looks. She was so scary and nightmarish that a look at her would freeze one's blood. She was Life-in-Death.

The skeleton ship then came close to the mariner's ship and the mariner saw the two of them engaged in a game of casting the dice. Life-in-Death then announced that their game was over and that the final throw was won by her. In jubilation she whistled thrice. By now the sun plunged fully into the sea and instantly, the stars appeared in the sky. As night came the phantom hulk sped away and was soon at such distance over the sea that only a light whisper could be heard. The crew was greatly scared by these eerie happenings. The mariner felt that fear was sucking his life-blood. The stars lost their sheen and the night deepened. In the light of the lamp the face of the helmsman appeared white and drained of all colour.

The crescent moon with one bright star rose up in the eastern horizon and was still at a low level in the sky when the sailors started turning into dead lump one after the other. There were two hundred crew members beside the mariner and they died silently without any groan or sigh except that each one turned his dying gaze towards the mariner as if accusing him of their plight leading to their death. Although the mariner survived, he was still smitten by an irretrievable curse. His life was no better than death. The mariner could sense the flight of the souls of the sailors. But he wasn't certain about how to view this flight – whether the release of the soul was a blissful state for it or a greater woe. As each soul left its body, it whizzed past the mariner and reminded him of the “swoosh” of his crossbow. It burdened him with a heightened sense of guilt.

3.3.4 PART IV

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!

I fear thy skinny hand!

And thou art long, and lank, and brown,

As is the ribbed sea-sand.

...

The self-same moment I could pray;

And from my neck so free

The Albatross fell off, and sank

Like lead into the sea.

Analysis

Hearing about the wearied souls and ghastly deaths of the sailors, the wedding guest thought that the narrator could himself be a ghost of one of the dead sailors. The frightened guest expressed his fear when he said that he was scared of the skinny hand, the gaunt, skeletal, long and thin frame and the keen eyes of the speaker, the old mariner. The speaker assured him that he was very much alive and the guest was not in the company of a ghost as the mariner had not dropped down dead.

Further he explained that his sad, lonely and cursed life and his ghastly circumstances had reduced him to his present state. He had stayed in an agonized state all alone on the vast sea surrounded by dead bodies of his companions who all were once so beautiful. The sea was replete with thousands of slimy, slithery creatures and like these living things he too was alive. The sea creatures appeared hideous to him and the sea smelled rancid. He took his eyes off the sea. But on the deck of the ship the sight was even more depressing and frightening where the two hundred men were lying dead. He had no choice but to keep his eyes closed. He looked upwards to the sky in an attempt to send up a prayer to the heavens above for mercy but he failed to utter the prayer and only a whisper escaped from his lips. The mariner felt that not only his mouth but his heart too had gone dry. He felt a choking sensation.

The scene around the mariner was predominantly of death. He became sick and tired of the spectacle. Whether he looked upwards at the sky or below at his feet or at the sea around himself, he could see nothing except death so he had no other choice but to keep his eyes closed. He kept his wearied eyes closed for so long that his eyeballs started pulsating. Surprisingly, the two hundred corpses of the sea-men strewn around his feet did not fester. The accusing look in their eyes horrified the mariner. He feared that like the curse of an orphan, the look in the dead men’s eyes would spell doom for him. The mariner withstood this horrifying situation and survived through it for seven days and seven nights against all the odds.

The serenity of the moon is contrasted with the deathly silence around the mariner. Moreover, unlike the mariner, the moon is not lonely but is accompanied in its majestic upward journey by a star or two. There is a notable contrast between the moon and the mariner in terms of clarity of their surroundings too. The moon shone bright whereas the mariner was amidst a sultry and hoary frost. The bright moon light caused the shadow of the ship to fall on the sea water. The ship was under a curse of lifelessness and so the expanse of sea where the shadow of the ship fell remained still and fiery red as though burning in fires of hell. The mariner saw hordes of creepy water creatures turn and move beyond the shadow of the ship. Their bodies glistened and reflected the moon light. The mariner noticed how beautiful and variously rich in hues these crawly beings appeared as they turned and coiled throwing golden flashes around them.

While watching the richly coloured water snakes the mariner feels a sudden surge of love and compassion towards these creatures which he views as symbols of life and happiness in the sea of Death. The mariner addresses them as ‘happy living things’ and thinks that in this distant sea, far removed from the mainland, the beauty of these creatures has remained unnoticed and unsung. He blesses the snakes inadvertently and experiences a certain softening in his hitherto stiffened and frozen heart. He is also able to say his prayers and just as he finds that the Christian virtues of love and compassion have resurfaced making him capable

of blessing and praying, the dead albatross is freed from his neck and falls and sinks into the sea like heavy lead.

3.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Both the old mariner and the wedding guest go through an experience of getting trapped. Comment on the similarities and differences between the two experiences.
2. Why does the wedding guest get impatient in the company of the old sailor?
3. Describe the significance of the appearance of the albatross. What does the bird stand for?
4. What was the cardinal mistake of the ancient mariner? Could he ever put that mistake behind him?
5. Explain the significance of the albatross being hung around the neck of the mariner.
6. What makes the poet use the image “a painted ship on a painted sea”?
7. Under what conditions did the sailors get stuck near the South Pole?
8. Describe the horrendous situation of the mariners in the Pacific Ocean.
9. What was the ray of hope that appeared to the sailors stuck in the Pacific Ocean? How did this hope turn into a nightmare?
10. How did the old mariner get rid of the dead albatross hung around his neck?

3.5 THE BALLAD: PART V – PART VII

3.5.1 PART V

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
 Beloved from pole to pole!
 To Mary Queen the praise be given!
 She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
 That slid into my soul.

...

The other was a softer voice,
 As soft as honey-dew:
 Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,
 And penance more will do.'

Analysis

From the moment the mariner blessed the sea snakes he experienced some welcome relief in the form of gentle sleep which had so far eluded him. He is thankful to the benign mother who took pity on him by blessing him with sleep, a heavenly attribute of the humans. In his sleep, he dreamt that the empty buckets on the deck were filled with dewy water and when he woke up he found it to be a reality as it actually rained. His dried up throat and parched lips were wet. It was verily a benediction descending on him. The rain water gave him such relief that he felt light like a soul without a body. The hiatus of stillness was broken

and things now moved. The wind started roaring and blowing and the sails got filled with air. Signs of life replaced the silence of death. The sea came lively with many other ships and boats with their flags and sails moving on the surface of water. The sky also got animated with the twinkling of the stars.

The sky kept pouring down its mercy in the form of rain. The clouds split apart with a thunderous sound and a column of lightening like a river of light descended from the sky and brightened up everything. The ship now sailed forward and the dead bodies of the sailors groaned and showed up signs of movement. The dead sailors stirred and rose up in a synchronized motion. They neither spoke nor batted their eyelids but conducted themselves in an uncanny manner. They took positions at their respective places and started steering the ship even though there was no breeze to fill its sails. The mariner could make out that these were not humans but spirits who worked in a mechanical way like robots. Among the dead was also the son of the mariner's brother who, as a spirit, was tugging at the rope together with the mariner but without any interaction or eye contact whatsoever.

The wedding guest got frightened at the description of the ghostly scene but the mariner consoled him by telling him that these were not the troubled souls of the dead sailors but blessed spirits which came to the rescue of the mariner and of the ship. These spirits steered the ship throughout the night and as it dawned, they left the dead bodies softly through their mouths with a light sound. The mariner looked lovingly at the spirits as they darted towards the morning sun. The mariner now heard more sounds around him and realized that it was the dawn chorus of birds. There were numerous birds including the skylarks and other little birds which filled the sea and the sky. Their sweet singing resembled the combined music of a flute and various other musical instruments. The heavenly music gradually stopped as the day advanced but the ship continued to smoothly sail on without any breeze. It appeared that the ship was being pushed by some invisible force from underneath. The mariner was sure that some spirit had sneaked beneath the ship.

At noon time, the ship's movement stopped and it stood still on the ocean for almost a minute before it started moving again but with jerky back and forth movements. Suddenly, like the pawing of a horse, blood was flung at the mariner and he fell down unconscious. He had no idea regarding how long he remained unconscious but when consciousness returned to him partially he heard two voices – one stern while the other soft. The first voice, perhaps pointing towards the mariner asked the second voice whether he was the man who with his cruel bow had killed the innocent albatross. The crime of the mariner was viewed as serious because he had himself lured the bird to the ship which helped him break free from the land of mist and snow. The bird was a symbol of love. It was as dear to God as man himself. It was God's creature. Now the softer voice, as if praying to the first voice for sparing the man's life, argued that the man had already done penance and for him to atone for his crime it may be decreed that he would continue to do more penance.

3.5.2 PART VI

First Voice

'But tell me, tell me! speak again,

Thy soft response renewing—

What makes that ship drive on so fast?

What is the ocean doing?'

It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

Analysis

The two voices continue their conversation. The first voice now questions the second about the secret behind the fast movement of the ship and makes a guess that it appears to be the handiwork of the ocean. The second voice softly replies that the ocean does not have the capacity to raise a storm. The ocean is only an obedient slave who stands still in front of his master. He patiently looks up to the Moon and does not move at his own volition. He turns rough or remains calm in accordance with the instructions he receives from the Moon.

Then the second voice draws the attention of the first towards the Moon who was looking at the Ocean lovingly like a benign woman. The moon and the sea are personified as woman and man here and we also come to know that the two voices are male voices as each calls the other as 'brother'. The first voice remains dissatisfied with the reply given by the second and asks again the reason for the fast speed of the ship in the absence of wind or wave. The second voice replies that as the ship moves fast it cuts the air at the front which closes from behind the ship and pushes it. The second voice expresses happiness at the speed of the ship as they have to travel to somewhere before it gets late. The second voice also reveals that the ship would move fast only as long as the mariner is under the spell; its speed would slacken when the mariner's trance is abated and he gains consciousness.

When the mariner woke up from his swoon he found that the ship was sailing, the moon was shining, the weather was gentle and the dead men who should have gone to their charnel dungeons were standing on the deck with their stony gaze fixed on the mariner while their stony eyes glittered in the moonlight. The mariner could discern the same pain and curse in the eyes of the dead sailors which he had observed when they had fallen dead one by one. The mariner could neither look upwards to pray nor turn his eyes away from the dead standing on the deck. The mariner sensed that the ghastly spell was now over as he observed that the ocean was now a clear green. However he was still in a terrified state. He dared not look around for fear of the unknown. His situation was like that of a lonely man who on hearing the sound of footsteps turns around once but then dares not turn his head again although he fears that some sinister being is following close behind.

The mariner felt that there blew a gust of wind at him though there was not even a ripple in the sea to suggest the presence of even a gentle wind. The gust of air ruffled the mariner's hair and fanned his cheek. However, the air which was blowing only on the mariner was taken as a welcome thing by him. The sails lifted softly and the breeze blew sweetly and to the happy surprise of the mariner, he noticed the kirk, the hill and the lighthouse atop his own country. The mariner's ship drifted towards the harbour and there he felt such surge of emotions on being near his country that he started sobbing and praying to God with thankfulness. The feeling was too deep for words or for wishes. He prayed to God to let him be

either completely awake or let him slip into an eternal sleep. The water of the bay where the harbour stood was as clear and transparent as glass. The reflection of the moon fell into the water and the smooth moonlight was strewn all around. In the moonlight, the rock along the sea shore was shining bright. The kirk chapel which stood on top of the rock was bathed in the moonlight and so was the weather cock which was steady and motionless. Calmness and white light marked the scene. From this serene calmness emerged crimson shadows which fell a little distance from the prow in front of the ship. The mariner got surprised to witness the phenomenon of the unusual colour of these numerous shadows. He instantly turned his eyes backwards to look at the deck and was stunned to see that on each corpse lying flat and lifeless there stood a fluorescent seraph comprising of a transparent white light. These angels (seraphs) were waiving their hands which presented a lovely and heavenly sight. They made no sound at all and the silence like some celestial music soothed the mariner’s heart.

Soon thereafter the mariner heard the sound of oars falling on the sea water and the pilot of a boat along with his assistant calling out and rowing the boat fast towards him. The mariner was pleased to hear the dash of oars and human voices and thanked the merciful God. He knew that the dead men could not cause that welcome sound and that it was a God sent help to him. Soon he saw a third man in the boat. This was a hermit singing hymns in praise of God. The hermit lived in the jungle stretching beyond the sea as one mounted up the slopes away from the sea shore. The hermit must have composed the hymns while he lived in the jungle.

3.5.3 PART VII

This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
He loves to talk with marineres
That come from a far countree.

...

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.

The hermit had a sweet voice and he used to talk to the mariners who had been away on the sea for a long time. A moss covered cushioned old oak stump served as his seat of worship where he offered prayers three times a day. As the small skiff carrying the hermit, the boy and the pilot neared the ship, the mariner could hear what they were talking amongst themselves. From their conversations it was clear that the boat did not come there on its own. Rather, it had responded to the light signal which it had received from the ship. They were surprised to see that when they came close to the ship those numerous bright lights were no longer there on the ship. The hermit also found it strange that the ship which had sent the distress signal did not make any response to the cheer call from the boat.

The ship looked shrunken and the hermit pointed out that its planks were twisted and the sails were withered and worn out. The ship resembled a mass of dry twigs and leaves of ivy creepers which could break under the weight of snow and float

over water in a brook in summer. The ship presented an unusual and ominous spectacle which reminded the hermit of an unnatural incident that he had once witnessed in which an owl let out a shriek and attacked a wolf that was eating its own young ones while the mother wolf was away. The pilot also got terrified at the fiendish look of the ship and perhaps wanted to sail away from it when the hermit encouraged him to go forward towards the ship. The boat reached near the ship but the mariner did neither speak nor move. When the boat touched the ship at its bottom it appeared as if the water in the bay split into two and with a loud bang the ship started sinking into the sea like heavy lead.

The loud sound pierced through the sky and the ocean. The mariner lost his consciousness and had only a dreamy memory of his body floating on sea and then the memory of his being on the skiff boat. The mariner compares his floating on the water to that of a dead body of a drowned man which after being under water for almost a week bloats and rises up to the surface above. When the ship sank, large amounts of water rushed in and caused a whirl upon which the boat spun round and round. After the ship was gone under water, all was silent on the sea except for the sound of the bang which echoed from the hills. The mariner, who perhaps wanted to say something, moved his lips. It frightened the pilot so much that he screamed and fell unconscious on the floor of the boat. But the hermit remained calm. He raised his eyes and prayed to God to save the pilot and everybody else on the boat which now did not have a pilot to steer it.

Whether it was the effect of the prayer or it was out of a sense of thankfulness, the mariner picked up the oars and started rowing the boat. The pilot's boy went crazy with surprise and happiness and exclaimed loudly how wonderful it was that the devilish creature whom they had rescued knew how to row. After the devastating experience on the sea, the mariner's countenance, demeanour and the shrivelled body looked so much phantom-like that the boy on the boat called him a Devil. The mariner steered the boat towards the shore and they alighted from it. The mariner thus stood finally on the land of his own country. The hermit felt shaky because he was not sure whether the creature who had rowed them to the shore was a man or some other being. The mariner implored the hermit to shrive him. He wanted to be relieved of his guilt by confessing before the holy man his sin of killing the innocent albatross. The holy hermit allowed him to make his confession and bid him to be quick in telling about himself and his story.

The mariner felt a heart wrenching agony when he recalled the horrifying events and narrated to the hermit the story of his fateful sea voyage. At the end of his tale he felt that a great burden was lifted off his heart and he felt a bit at ease. For the first time, it was before the hermit that the mariner had told the tale of his sin. However, intermittently at uncertain intervals the heart burning and gnawing agony of his sin returned and each time when it happened he must relate the story of his sin before someone with a view to convey the moral or the lesson which his life had taught him. This seems to have become the purpose of his life and he goes from one place to the other like night and never stops at one place. He has developed a mysterious power which makes him identify the right person who would surely listen to his speech. He also seems to have gained mastery over the art of storytelling. The mariner's tale completes almost at the same time when the ceremonies related to marriage are completed and they hear a loud uproar of laughter from the marriage hall. The bride and the bridesmaids have moved outside to the garden bower and are singing and merrymaking to mark the wedding. By now it is already evening and the church bell signals that it is prayer time.

The mariner now recalls how lonely he was on the vast sea where even God who is said to be omnipresent did not seem to be there. This sense of loneliness and the acute need to feel the merciful and benign presence of God has made the mariner realize the importance of being in the company of good human beings with loving souls. He says that he would prefer to be part of a gathering comprising of old men, babies, young men, same age friends and young women in a church where all pray together and bend before God, the great Father than to be attending a marriage feast. The mariner now bids goodbye to the wedding guest and before departing tells him the philosophy of his life. He says that love is the noblest feeling which descends upon the human beings from the almighty God who has created all creatures and loves them all. So the foremost principle of our lives should be to love all the great and small things which God has created giving it more priority than simply praying to God.

The old mariner with the peculiar grey beard and bewitching eyes then departs. The wedding guest has become much sombre by now and empathizes with the mariner. He can feel the mariner’s sense of loneliness imagining how isolated and forsaken he must have felt on the endlessly vast sea. He is benumbed and stunned by the extraordinarily strange rime of the ancient mariner. He is no longer in a mood to attend the wedding festivities. He turns away from the bridegroom’s door. This episode has transformed him completely. The next day he gets up a more sober and wiser man.

3.6 USE OF LITERARY ELEMENTS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the premier poet-critic of modern English tradition, distinguished for the scope and influence of his philosophy about literature as much as for his innovative verse. The poem is set in the conversational mode and everyday simple language is used. It is a continuous straightforward narrative presented in the order the events took place. It is divided in seven parts. The stanza form is mainly quartet and the rhyme scheme is abcb but there are five line and six line stanzas too. The poem is a lyrical ballad which was first published in 1798 in the volume ‘The Lyrical Ballads’, a joint venture by Coleridge and Wordsworth. It contains the salient characteristics which define Romantic poetry.

The mariner and the albatross are at the centre of this ballad. The mariner is no ordinary a man and the albatross is no ordinary a bird. These are metaphorical motifs. The mariner’s face is wrinkled and his hands are skinny, shrivelled and skeletal. His mannerism too is not in consonance with the times. There is something otherworldly and ghostly about his appearance. It appeared to be a compulsive necessity for him to relate his tale to someone as if telling his story was a pre-condition to dispel some curse or magical spell and liberate his tormented soul from the infernal fires. There is urgency in his tone which can brook no delay and the intensity in his looks exercises a binding pull on the will of the listener who finds himself helpless to move even one step further.

The albatross is a symbol of beauty, innocence, blessings, good luck and friendship. It restores the connectivity of the ship and its crew with the world which was lost to them by drifting away. But the reckless act of the mariner transforms a friend into a foe, a blessing into a curse and a sport into pangs of remorse. The ship is caught in a silent, windless, and rainless zone. The tired, thirsty and listless sailors in the ship present a picture of a painted ship on a painted ocean. However, virtues of pity and truthful repentance re-establish the mariner’s

relationship with the benign God who saves him from the predicament of total loss and wrenches from the grip of Death the life of the mariner though the lives of the two hundred hired seamen and companions of the mariner are claimed by Death. The mariner, although alive, has a deathly existence surrounded by Death and slimy messengers of death. The mariner passes through a trance and a spiritual visitation by the merciful God which releases him from the state of being transfixed in misery. The mariner emerges literally a sombre and wizened man.

The use of personification is very striking in this poem. The sun is personified –
 “The sun came up upon the left, Out of the sea came he!”

The storm-blast is personified --

“And now the Storm-Blast came, and he

Was tyrannous and strong:

He struck with his o’ertaking wings,

And chased us south along.”

Death and Life-in-Death are personified and are shown playing a game of dice on the deck of their hulk which approached the Mariner’s ill-fated ship. They throw the dice and Death wins each time claiming the lives of the seamen one by one. It is only on one occasion that Life-in-Death which appears as a woman with red lips, yellow hair and white skin wins in a deal and Life-in-Death comes to the share of the mariner, the speaker who is thus the lone survivor of a snow storm followed by parching heat aboard a sea liner.

The poem contains mystical themes, supernatural imagery, bizarre experience, rhetorical questions, and a message of love and compassion. The themes include sin, curse, mercy, God, Christ, angel, fear, agony, atonement for sin, life, death and survival. The albatross becomes a metaphor for a mental burden, a shame and a curse. The sea snakes are looked down upon with disgust and this contemptuous outlook intensifies the deathly curse. However, when the mariner regards the same snakes with love and appreciation, they become the metaphor of redemption. It breaks the spell of the curse because the spring of love which gushed from his heart was a genuine and truthful feeling of merciful love. The albatross and the snakes, thus become metaphors of spiritual revelation. The mariner recognizes his connection with God and the concept of universal brotherhood. Sailing southwards suggests a journey towards trouble while sailing back northwards suggests a gradual recovery from complete annihilation. The agony is physical, psychological, and spiritual and is a symbol of universal agony. The mariner goes through extreme cold and heat and experiences hunger, thirst, fear, horror, fits of unconsciousness, guilt, remorse, tiredness, loneliness and absence of sleep.

Simile is used in descriptions like –

“The Wedding-Guest stood still,

And listens like a three years’ child”,

“The ice ... roared and howled,

Like noises in a swound”,

“Nor dim nor red, Like God’s own head,

The glorious Sun uprist” ,

“And every soul, it passed me by,

Like the whizz of my crossbow!”

and many more.

Use of alliteration, end rhyme, internal rhyme, refrain and metered verse add to the musicality of the ballad. Internal rhyme, the rhyme within a single line in the verse, is frequently used by Coleridge in this ballad, for example --

“The guests are met, the feast is set”,

“Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken”,

“With throats unslaked, with black lips baked”.

The poem is full of dramatic elements. It has, in fact, been adapted into a silent film drama (1925) and a photo animated action film (1975). The first person narration, a gripping story, catchy dialogues, the background setting, the listener’s verbal and non-verbal responses, a dramatic end make it fit material for stage presentation.

The poem is one of the leading ones which make abundant use of the supernatural. The storm-blast which blew the ship towards the south pole as if a spirit had pushed it adrift, the ice crackling with the appearance of the albatross, blowing of the fair winds, the senseless killing of the albatross by the mariner with his crossbow, the ship getting caught in the silent zone, the hanging of the dead albatross round the mariner’s neck, complete absence of air movement, the mariner’s slaking his throat with his own blood, easy movement of the ghostly ship even without the wind, the physical description of the eerie figures playing the game of dice on the deck of the skeleton ship, the fall of the sailors one by one synchronized with the winning throw of the dice by Death, the whizz sound of the souls as the soul of each of the dead sailors rushed past the mariner, the accusing look transfixed in the eyes of the dead sailors, the connection between the end of the curse and the fall of the dead albatross, the dead bodies of the sailors rising up to row the ship out of the silent zone, the angelic lights which caught the attention of the skiff boat, all these and many other events create the supernatural atmosphere of horror and mystery in the ballad.

The mariner is a much mellowed down and wiser man at the end of his journey and he feels a compelling necessity to tell his story and impart it to someone to spread further the message of love and universal oneness among all God’s creatures. It appears to be a necessary step towards atonement of his sin. After listening to the mariner’s tale, the wedding guest returns home, a wiser, calmer and a more humane person. The poem leaves a mesmerizing and enabling effect on the reader too.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. What kind of psychological impact does the old mariner’s narration leave on the listener?
2. Why must the mariner keep retelling his story to new persons?
3. Under what circumstances do the two hundred sailors die? How do their dead bodies get redeemed?
4. How does the ancient mariner initially look at the slimy sea creatures? What happens when his attitude towards them changes?
5. What is the real and symbolic significance of the rain that falls on the old man when he is stuck on the sea?

6. Romantic poetry is replete with mystery, aura and quaintness of phenomena. How is “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” a masterpiece of romantic poetry in this sense?
7. “Human impetuosity leads to nature’s retribution”. Depict The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as an illustration of this belief.
8. Comment on the role played by the hermit in the poem.
9. Explain The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as a moral commentary on the Christian concepts of sin, guilt, suffering and expiation.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Christie, William. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: a Literary Life. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

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UNIT 4 ROBERT SOUTHEY: ‘AFTER BLENHEIM’: ANALYSIS AND LITERARY ELEMENTS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Robert Southey: A Brief Biographical Sketch
- 4.3 The Background to the poem "After Blenheim"
- 4.4 Text
- 4.5 Glossary
- 4.6 Summary and Analysis and Critical Appreciation
- 4.7 Poetic Devices
- 4.8 Prosody and rhyming scheme
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Suggested Reading
- 4.11 Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

You are going to be introduced to the novel world of Robert Southey in this unit.

- Robert Southey’s poem “After Blenheim”;and its Historical Background
- It’s Summary, Glossary Critical and Appreciation.
- Robert Southey’s use of poetic Devices.
- Prosody and rhyming scheme contributing to the overall structure of the poem.
- Summing up of our progress, Suggested Reading and Finally

4.1 INTRODUCTION

“After Blenheim,” (1796) also known as “The Battle of Blenheim,” is a poem by Robert Southey who has been conferred the poet laureate for England for his contribution to poetry. The war of Spanish Succession of 1701 -1714) forms the subject matter of the poem as Charles II did not have a successor after his death in 1700. Phillip V, King Louis XIV’s grandson ascended the throne controversially resulting a war between Austria and France; according to the former, the latter has grabbed power with unfair means. The whole of Europe has been dragged into war and the Austrian side led by England defeated the France-led side at the Bavarian town of Blenheim in Germany bringing about a turning point in the war. . England’s Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene of Savoy are the two greatest heroes in the battle whom Southey has referred to in the poem.

4.2 ROBERT SOUTHEY: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robert Southey is a rebel from the very beginning as he has been expelled from

Westminster School for his opposition to flogging. He has advocated a radical ideology and along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge he was pondering over to move to America in favour of a utopian vision. He gave up that idea and considered writing plays and ballads like "Inchcape Rock" and "After Blenheim". Soon he became a famous writer of verse and an accomplished biographer (The Life of Nelson) too. Although Southey as a poet was not a match to his illustrious peers like Wordsworth, his skillful prose writing is beyond doubt as none other than Lord Byron calls it 'perfect'. His early radical stand was influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine and French Revolution. In 1794, he wrote a 'dramatic poem' in three acts about the peasants' revolution of 1381 entitled "Wat Tyler". The poem deals with the opposition of peasants against the new tax imposition for meeting expenses of the Crown's war against France. However, Southey sacrificed his radical stance for name and fame as he became poet laureate of England in 1813.

4.3 THE BACKGROUND TO THE POEM "AFTER BLENHEIM"

Two children seek information about skull from their grandfather in the poem confirming to the ballad form. What follows is the grandfather's description about the war which brought with it large scale destruction of homes, civilian casualties were rampant, and rotting corpses found all around pointing to the extent of inhumanity war can come down to. Southey's main thrust is the common folk who suffer like anything else in a war who disapprove of the cruel and brutal reality that go with it, let alone glorifying it as a heroic act. The grandfather's repeated recourse to war as "a famous victory" and "a great victory" has no base because he fails to describe as to what exactly is the cause of the war. Breaking out of war has got no meaning for the common people as they do not have even an iota of knowledge about the war or its devastating consequences; they are only concerned with either the victory or the loss.

4.4 TEXT

After Blenheim

IT was a summer evening,

Old Kaspar's work was done,

And he before his cottage door

Was sitting in the sun;

And by him sported on the green

5

His little grandchild Wilhelmine.

She saw her brother Peterkin

Roll something large and round,

Which he beside the rivulet

In playing there had found:

10

He came to ask what he had found

That was so large and smooth and round.

Old Kaspar took it from the boy,

Who stood expectant by;

Lay rotting in the sun;
 But things like that, you know, must be
 After a famous victory.
 "Great praise the Duke of Marlbro' won,
 And our good Prince Eugene"—
 "Why 'twas a very wicked thing!"
 Said little Welhelmine;
 "Nay—nay, my little girl," quoth he,
 "It was a famous victory. 55
 "And everybody praised the Duke
 Who this great fight did win"—
 "But what good came of it at last?"
 Quoth little Peterkin.
 "Why that I cannot tell," said he, 60
 "But 'twas a famous victory." 65

4.5 GLOSSARY

1. Sported: Played
2. Green: Grass field
3. Rivulet: Small Stream
4. Rout: Defeated, made to flee
5. Plough share: the main cutting plate of the plough behind the coulter
6. Slain: Killed
7. Wonder struck: awestruck, surprised, expectant
8. Quoth: said
9. Yon: (archaic) there, nearby
- 10: Dwelling: house
11. To fly: fled
12. Rest his head: to take shelter
13. childing mother: Pregnant woman
14. Something large and round: Human skull

4.6 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

After Blenheim Stanza-wise Summary

Stanza 1- The first stanza begins with a picturesque description of a summer evening. The poet introduces the main character of the poem; old Kasper had just finished his work for the day and was sitting in the sun before his cottage door, watching his granddaughter Wilhelmine play on the field.

Stanza 2- While playing, Wilhelmine saw her brother Peterkin rolling something “large, smooth and round” which he had found beside the stream. He was curious to know what that thing was and thus turned to his grandfather for information.

Stanza 3- Old Kasper took the “large, and smooth, and round” thing from his grandson’s hands and shook his head with a sigh as he figured that it was some “poor fellow’s skull” who had died in the war. It is ironic that he refers to the battle of Blenheim as a “great victory” at the cost of loss of human lives.

Stanza 4- Kasper goes on to mention that he had found many such skulls while ploughing the land as thousands of soldiers were killed in the victorious war. The dead bodies of these soldiers lie in the fields unnoticed. However, Kasper’s use of the term “great victory” expresses his pride at the sacrifice of the soldiers who played a vital role in the war.

Stanza 5- The children were excited to know more about the war. They were curious to know about the purpose of the war. They had associated a sense of thrill, adventure, and excitement with the idea of war and sacrifice. Little Wilhelmine looked up to her grandfather in anticipation with “wonder-waiting eyes”. In this stanza, the poet attempts to distinguish the kind of curiosity and enthusiasm associated with a child.

Stanza 6- The battle of Blenheim was one of the major battles of the war of Spanish succession in which the English successfully defeated the Franco-Bavarian army. Kasper takes pride in the “great victory” but he is unable to tell his grandchildren the reason behind the war. He did not even try to find the purpose behind it. He just chose to know what others told him regarding the war – that it was a “famous victory”.

Stanza 7- In this stanza, we observe Kasper recollecting the memories of his past. He tells the children that his father used to live at Blenheim. The French soldiers burnt the homes of several innocent people among which was his father’s. This destruction forced the people to leave the village and search for a safer place. Kasper’s father, thus, fled with his wife and young Kasper in search for shelter but he was unable to find a home because of the dreadful war. This rendered their family homeless.

Stanza 8- Stanza eight highlights the horrific aspect of wars. The symbol of “fire” and “sword” embodies the evil spirit of human cruelty and destruction. The image of the death of pregnant mothers and new-born babies heightens the idea of the ruination of human beings caused by none other than men themselves. The idea is to express how thousands of innocent lives are taken in due course of a futile and meaningless war that is sure to bring only damage and destruction. The irony in the poem is made evident by Kasper as he says that these things are meant to happen at every battle where there is a “great victory”.

Stanza 9- The poet, through Kasper, goes on to describe the agony of war. He mentions the “shocking sight” of the battlefield that was full of dead bodies of the soldiers rotting in the sun. Through this image, the poet attempts to bring into consideration the indignity in the way the soldiers lay. They are reduced to a mere status of an inanimate object. There is no dignity, no glory in war; only misery. Even after such a terrifying aspect of the war, Kasper regards it as a “famous victory” which emphasizes the ignorance of the old man about the purpose and consequence of war.

Stanza 10- Duke of Marlbro was an English General. He was the commander of the British forces in the battle of Blenheim. Prince Eugene and Duke of Marlbro

represented Britain in the battle and defeated the French at Blenheim. Kasper sang praises for the men who brought the “famous victory” to the nation. But Wilhelmine, confused at the meaningless praises, exclaims that the war was a “wicked thing”. For the first time in the poem, we see a disapproval of the false glory of war. But, not answering to his granddaughter he does take recourse to repeating same thing again. The war is not a wicked thing for him as it comes with grand success of a “famous victory”.

Stanza 11 In stanza eleven which concludes the poem, Kesper is in full praise for the Duke who has won the war for England, their motherland. With the innate nature of a child, young Peterkin asks his grandfather what worth the war has for the successive generations? Unable to satisfy the young mind’s query, all that he says is that it is a famous victory. It points to the poignant irony in the poem as against the grain of loss and devastation; the only thing the old man reiterates is that the war has brought national pride to them.

Analysis

It is an anti-war poem by poet laureate Robert Southey written in the ballad form in 1796. “After Bleheim” better known as “The Battle of Blenheim” where Blenheim is the English equivalent of the German village Blindheim found on the left bank of river Danube in the state of Bavaria in southern Germany.

Southey offers different perspectives on war by actually recounting the aftermath of one of the famous battles of 18th century, the war of Spanish Succession where the coalition of forces led by English Army defeated the French and Bavarian forces at the battle of Blenheim.

Southey maintains a safe distance from taking direct recourse to war, but begins with in the conversational ballad tone where a farmer is talking to his grand children. Gradually the attention of the reader is drawn towards the battle field. Peterkin has found ‘something Targe and round’ knows with the help of his grandfather that it’s a human skull, reminding the tender boy and the reader about the devastating aftermath of war.

Old Kasparov describes the horrible story of the battle and the resultant loss of life. But ironically he never tries to explain what the root cause of the war is or why such a war has broken out? The old man’s vivid description of war where corpses ‘rotting in the sun’ and little Wilhelmine’s firm assertion that war is a ‘wicked thing’, Southey’s spokesperson, the old man Kasparov repeatedly says that the battle is a ‘famous victory’. The reader is repeatedly reminded of the assertion of validating the importance of a war. Of course, later in his career, Southey seems to repudiate the passive acceptance of war as the inevitable happening.

The poem speaks against the inhuman killing as a result of indulging in war. Soldiers are the immediate casualties; innocent civilians are not spared either. The result, out of this gruesome battle, is a misnomer. Many people even do not know what a war actually means. They believe only in a tailor made story to justify the stubborn behaviour of their leaders. The poem attempts to point out the reality involving a war, however, famous like the present one at Blenheim, is only about mindless killing of innocent people resulting in loss of life and property.

It begins with old Kaspor finishing a normal day’s chore, takes rest out in the sun in front of his cottage, watching his grand children at play. Peterkin, his grandson is playing with a hard round object he found near the stream. He takes it to the old man who explains 'Tis some poor fellow's skull," which he often finds in fields while ploughing . the children insist on their grandfather telling the story behind

the skull, particularly, the girl wilhelmine waiting eagerly, "with wonder-waiting eyes,/ Now tell us all about the war/ And what they fought each other for"

Kaspar explains the devastating story of the battle where Duke of Malbrough routed the French, although he himself has no answer to the reason for fighting a war. He goes on to explain that his father had a cottage near the rivulet "My father lived at Blenheim then", the place his grandson Peterkin traced the skull. The soldiers were on the rioting spree, burning the houses and killing the innocent civilians at will. His parents had to flee to save their lives along with their child. The horrible account of the war records minutely how thousands of innocent people, including pregnant women and children were killed in the war. But Kaspar never repents for the loss of life and property regarding the end result as a great victory for England.

Thousands of rotting corpses are found around but Kaspar justifies these deaths in the name of national pride which seems a rhetoric of war where countries do not hesitate to spend lion's share of their wealth for defense purposes ignoring poverty of the masses. When his grand daughter Wilhelmine points out that war is a wicked thing, he contradicts her saying that it is great victory. Whereas being a child, Peterkin asks a pertinent question what is the use of a war? He did not offer a satisfactory answer, he only believes in others saying that it is a great victory.

It is through a conversation between Kaspar and his grandchildren that the poem starts. One of the children informs his grandfather that he has found something 'large and round' on the field, to which his grandfather remarks that it is a skull and there are many more to be found. There are instances that run throughout the poem to support the main ideas of tragic end of war and the vulnerability of human life. The poem "After Blenheim" makes us ponder over the purpose and result of a war and questions its validity.

War always comes paired with catastrophe and destruction. Kaspar's gruesome descriptions of the war, which is followed by his casual utterances, form an effect of irony. It is ironic that it was a great war but no one knows why. In the meaningless outbursts of the war heroes, the unawareness of the futility of war and the inability to comprehend the scathing horror of the outcome is detected in the minds of the common people.

The characters are introduced in the poem in the very beginning. We come across an elderly farmer named Kaspar who is sitting in front of his cottage watching his grandchildren Wilhelmine and Peterkin play on the lush green field on a summer evening. When the children enquires about the cause of the war, Kaspar replies that the significance of the war was in the victory that the English routed the French that the later generations would call a great and famous victory. Kaspar also informs them boastfully that there are a number of skulls to be found on the field that belongs to the poor fellows who died while fighting in the war.

The 'great victory' refers to the victory in the battle, which also happens to be an example of patriotism as well as ignorance. However, Kaspar is at a loss to explain the cause of the battle. Kaspar knew that the fields were filled with dead bodies of the soldiers, he knew about the destruction of life and property, the death of the newborn babies. However, according to him such things are all a part of the war and they do not negate the glory of the victory which is why when Wilhelmine says that the battle must be a "wicked thing," Kaspar tells her she is wrong. It was a famous victory, he says.

In the following stanzas, we see the poet depicting the terror of war. After the battle was over, thousands of dead bodies of soldiers lay rotting in the field in indignity. There are sound effects in this stanza and they are generally helped by the assonance of 'shocking' and 'rotting' and the sense of alliteration in the first line. These together give a greater resonance to the horrific image of death. The scene of 'rotting' reduces dead men to carrion.

“They say it was a shocking sight

After the field was won;

For many thousand bodies here

Lay rotting in the sun;”

The poet has employed a number of poetic devices in the poem like alliteration, repetition and irony. Throughout the poem Kaspar regards the war as a glorious victory.

The readers come across Kaspar praising the Duke and the Prince for defeating the French army and for bringing glory and pride to the nation, thus, creating more confusion and dilemma in the children's mind. The children are unable to grasp the essence of the so-called glory in a war that their grandfather is singing praises about. It is through the innocence of the children that the disapproval and pointlessness of war is presented.

Kaspar seems to hide all the destruction and agony caused by the war by repeating that it was a great victory. He seems to be afraid of breaking the romantic notions of war that are influenced by the people around him who idealize war without realizing the damage that comes with it. And these romantic ideals of war are what he also wants to put in the minds of the grandchildren. War to him was of a greater good, even though came at the cost of death and destruction.

We again come across the line “But 'twas a famous victory”. The war was fought over a trivial dispute but it did cost the lives of thousands of soldiers. It was fought near the village of Blenheim, in Bavaria, on the left bank of the river Danube, on August 13, 1704. The English and Austrians, under the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene, defeated the French and Bavarians, under Marshall Tallard and Marsin.

The only thing that is undeniable in a war is that destruction of life and property is sure to take place. Victory cannot bring back all the lives which were lost during the war. That is why the poet questions the effectiveness and the need of war. Thus, the poem ‘After Blenheim’ successfully depicts the poet's message that war is something which must be avoided, as all it brings is more destruction and dissatisfaction in this cruel world.

Critical Appreciation

“After Blenheim” is a brilliant poem in the traditional ballad form by Robert Southey where an old man, sitting in front of his cottage intently watches his grand children playing on the field. The cottage, having an important historical connection of its own, is situated on the bank of a stream where an important historical battle between the English army and the French army has been fought long back. While playing the boy found a skull partially buried under ground and carried it to his grandfather for being curious about revealing its identity at the instant. The old man, in his reply, revealed that it is supposed to be a human skull, a terrible reminder from the battle of Blenheim, fought many years ago. The boy asked his grandfather about the battle in detail; the grandfather said that it was a

famous war recording 'a Great Victory' for English army which reverberates at the end of almost each stanza.

The poem recounts the terrible aftermath of war fought between two European super powers some ninety four years ago. What is even more interesting is that the choice of the locale of the poem which happens to be small cottage near a stream where actually the battle was fought between two rival parties long back. The story of the poem involving an old man and his grandchildren, (not his son, perhaps killed in the very battle itself), are left to lick the wounds of a great war. The old man sitting outside his cottage, not inside it, has some symbolic connotations that war has reduced many civilians homeless who cannot straighten their back bone after being terribly affected by the war. Interestingly a human skull links the remote past with the present. What past has sown in the form of a war, the immediate present reaps the result of that devastating consciousness. The poem follows a symmetrical structure where bloodshed and horrible accounts of war has been consciously described almost in each stanza. The old man is not in a mood to give in that war is has catastrophic consequences hailing it as a great victory. Even when his grandchildren remind him that war is a wicked thing he is in no mood to rethink about the reality, justifying the war as being the national pride comes with a cost of its own. It might also throw light on another facet of Southey's personality that the young revolutionary poet is in favour of a war which has been changed later to accept things as they are being represented symbolically by grand children.

While old Kaspar approaches war, rescinding all its catastrophic consequences, casually. However, irony is at work when the poet uses the deliberate ploy of gruesome details of war followed by a casual approach hailing it as great victory. It also points, time and again, that war comes with a great cost, whatever reasons one must assign for its justification. It has also contemporary relevance of how the questioning of our national pride is invoked while allocating meaty share of the budget to defense establishments, not withstanding plight of poverty the common people are subjected to, of the respective countries. The imagery of ploughing is used to show that skulls are multiplying; the old Kaspar found more skulls in the plough field which points to symbolic reproduction of the skulls and it certainly is disturbing sight for young children representing the future generation.

Again the introduction of the skull is not a smooth one. At the outset, the poet introduces us to something 'large and smooth and round' which certainly refers to playing object like a toy or ball. When it is revealed that the child has found a skull exposed before the children, unsettling all our hopes and pleasantries in a great way. No more is it about a pleasant English summer evening. The incident of a boy playing with a skull without knowing what is, is shocking. A similar effect is achieved in stanza eight when it is revealed that "A new born baby died' indicating that the death of innocent new born baby is really shocking without assigning a valid reason.

Shocking imagery also found in the soldiers death for unknowingly carrying out orders of their masters, for the survival of kingdoms or for continuation of dominance of one country over the other. Human life has been reduced to meeting deaths routinely without realizing the true worth of their life. The poet is aware of the notoriety of a war; he is repeatedly asserting that the war is a great victory for English side, but for the losing side, the cost with which it is fought is irreparable.

The theme of 'Man's inhumanity to man' is being interwoven into the corpus of the poem effected by a war. Skulls found in plenty in the plough field and the

one that Peterkin finds, bear testimony to this cowardly act. The perpetrators of war must also know for sure that while fulfilling their wild ambitions, they also put the entire humanity in a spot of fix for centuries together. Ironically, what the adult world is ignorant about war, children seem to undertake the responsibility of judging the war for its wicked connections.

Children are intent on knowing the repercussions of war: immediately after finding a skull Peterkin asks his grandfather what it is; Wilhelmine is also prompt about knowing the things associated with war. Kaspar explains the devastating happenings at Blemheim but does not know the causes of war. Nor is he interested to know its causes. He reiterates one thing that it is a great victory for Austria and England. Later old Kaspar knows pretty well that women and innocent children also died in the battle of Blemhiem as the cost for the glorious victory. Unlike the modern day politicians who justify war in the name of “collateral damages”, Kaspar seems to be complacent.

The symbolic overtone, a human skull carries is significant because being the most important functionary of human body it has got no significance before a war which consumes everything like a wild fire. Similarly, the repetitive effect of war as a great victory suggests that the opposite true because the death and devastation that a war brings with it overshadows the tag of victory for a selected few. For an immediate gain one has to pay prices for centuries together. Southey argues in contrasting terms that war is not at all welcome in the context of development of human civilization.

4.7 POETIC DEVICES

Alliteration: A poetic device which refers to consonant sounds at the beginning of the words is called Alliteration. Southey uses this poetic device to achieve special effect in the poem. Consider this example:

“Now tell us what ‘twas all about,

Young Peterkin, he cries;

And little Wilhelmine looks up

With wonder-waiting eyes;

“now tell us all about war;

And what they each other for.”

Irony: It is a poetic device in which the literal meaning is exactly opposite of the intended meaning. Basing on situations, irony does play significant role within the poem to attract the reader’s attention as to what poet actually intends to convey. In the poem, the ole man Kaspar’s glorification of war as a great victory comes only at the great cost of loss of life and individual dignity. Victory at war comes at the costly expense of poverty, mass killing and loss of continents and blurring of boundaries. Notions of “famous victory” and “great Victory” have been blatantly overshadowed by phrases like “I couldn’t make out” and “why that I cannot tell”. The truth is that war brings with it a fleeting and false pride which is a nonstarter in comparison to the causalities and destruction it leads to. Irony gives the poet an advantage to deal with such poignantly contrasting situations which no other poetic device can ably represent.

Archaism: It refers to the words which are no longer in use. Its odd and off beat appeal helps the poet to make out for the loss of lighter vein in the poem. High seriousness sacrificed sometimes to balance between the serious and lighter moods

within the framework of the poem. Lines like "Nay nay, my little girl, quoth he" uses archaic words like Nay and quoth to achieve the desired effect. The only thing is that the reader needs to know the meaning of such words.

Metonymy: it's a figure of speech in which a concept or thing is explored by something closely associated with it. In the line "And by him sported on the green" refers to the ground covered with grassland on which the children play. Here the play ground is associated with greenery which is green in colour.

Repetition: the poet also uses repetition to good effect as to point out the ignorance of the old man kaspar about war and its aftermath. The repetition of phrases like "things like that", "you know", and "must be" point to the increasing degree of uncertainty and ignorance of the after effects of a great war. Similarly, reference to war as a "famous victory" or "great victory" also points to the limitation of the old man in comprehending the negative sides of war. In both the cases, the old man is the victim who is supposed to have much more foresight than the children who do not have enough experience to know about the deeper values of life.

4.8 PROSODY AND RHYMING SCHEME

Meter: It refers to the technical aspect of

Each stanza contains six lines. The meter of the stanzas confirms of the following pattern

1. Iambic tetrameter (four iambs for a total of eight syllables).
2. Iambic trimeter (three iambs for a total of six syllables).
3. Iambic tetrameter (four iambs for a total of eight syllables).
4. Iambic trimeter (three iambs for a total of six syllables).
5. Iambic tetrameter (four iambs for a total of eight syllables).
6. Iambic tetrameter (four iambs for a total of eight syllables).

The first stanza demonstrates the metric pattern.

....1.....2.....3.....4

It was..|.a sum..|.mer ev..|.en ing,

....1.....2.....3

Old Kas..|.par's work..|.was done,

....1.....2.....3.....4

And he..|.be fore..|.his cot..|.tage door

....1.....2.....3

Was sit..|.ting in the sun,

....1.....2.....3.....4

And by..|.him sport..|.ed on the green

....1.....2.....3.....4

His lit..|.tle grand..|.child Wil..|.helmine

Rhyme

The end rhyme in each stanza except the second is abcdd. The third stanza demonstrates this pattern:

- a....Old Kaspar took it from the boy,
 b.... Who stood expectant by;
 c....And then the old man shook his head,
 b.... And, with a natural sigh,
 d...."Tis some poor fellow's skull," said he,
 d.... "Who fell in the great victory.

In the second stanza, the end rhyme is abcd⁴.

Alliteration

In several stanzas, Southey uses alliteration to promote rhythm and euphony. Stanza five is an example.

"Now tell us what 'twas all about,"

Young Peterkin, he cries;

And little Wilhelmine looks up

With wonder-waiting eyes;

"Now tell us all about the war,

And what they fought each other for."

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this poem we have explored the theme of war to its utmost limit.

- War brings with it devastation and cruelty.
- Human beings are pitied against Mankind; what is more significant in the context of the poem is experienced men of society committing the mistakes repeatedly, where as children do see the ugliness of war and the lurking danger behind it.
- Use of poetic devices by the poet contributing to the theme of the poem in the larger context.
- Meter and prosody as technical device contributing to the structure of the poem.

4.10 SUGGESTED READING

Palgrave, Francis T. ed. *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Literature*, selected and arranged with notes by Francis Turner Palgrave. London: Macmillan, 1875.

Speck, W.A. *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006.

4.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How does the poet reconcile all contrasting moods in the poem? Answer in the light of the poem you have studied.
2. Why are wars important for us today? What message does Southey's poem convey to us as students of literature?
3. What special effects do poetic devices play in a poem? Analyse the poetic devices with reference to the text you studied.

4. Do you agree that “After Blenheim is a anti-war poem? What answer do you give in your defense?
5. Is the poem about “a wicked thing” or a “great victory”? Give your opinion with reference to the poem.
6. State briefly the moral of the poem in your own words.
7. How does history help to understand the poem “After Blenheim”? Explain.



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