BEGE-143
Understanding Poetry

Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Humanities

EXPERT COMMITTEE

Dr. Anand Prakash (Retired)
Formerly at Hansraj College
University of Delhi

Dr. Hema Raghavan (Retd.)
Formerly at Gargi College
University of Delhi

Dr. Vijay Sharma
Principal (Retd.)
RLA College
Delhi University

Prof. Malati Mathur
Director, School of Humanities

IGNOU Faculty

Prof. Neera Singh
Prof. Malati Mathur
Prof. Nandini Sahu
Prof. Parmod Kumar
Dr. Pema Eden Samdup
Ms. Mridula Rashmi Kindo
Dr. Malathy A

COURSE PREPARATION

BLOCK 1 : BRITISH POETRY

Dr. Anand Prakash (Retd.) (Unit 1 to 4), Formerly at Hansraj College, University of Delhi

BLOCK 2 : AMERICAN POETRY

Dr. Nupur Chawla: Unit 1 to 4, Assistant Professor, Maitreyi College, Delhi University, Delhi

BLOCK 3 : INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

Dr. Richa Bajaj: Unit 1 to 4, Hindu College, University of Delhi, Delhi

BLOCK 4 : POETRY FROM THE MARGINS

Dr. Payal Nagpal: Unit 1 to 4, Janki Devi College, University of Delhi, Delhi

COURSE COORDINATION, CONENT & LANGUAGE EDITING

Ms. Mridula Rashmi Kindo, IGNOU (Course Coordination and Content & Language Editing of Block 1-4)
Dr. Anand Prakash (Retd.), Formerly at Hansraj College, University of Delhi (Content & Lanuage Editing of Block 2 to 4)

COVER PAGE ARTIST & COVER DESIGN

Ritu Bhutani, an independent artist, conducts regular art workshops at Pathways School, Gurgaon and The Social Canvas, a weekly art program.

Cover Design by A.D.A. Graphics, New Delhi

SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Munni Naudiyal
Assistant Executive (Data Processing)

PRINT PRODUCTION

Mr. Y. N. Sharma
Assistant Registrar
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

Mr. Sudhir Kumar
Assistant Registrar
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

May, 2021

©Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2021
ISBN:-
All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Further information about the School of Social Sciences and the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068, India or the Official Website of IGNOU: www.ignou.ac.in
Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, by Registrar, MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi
Lasertypeset by Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-25
Printed at:

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Dear student, welcome to the course titled "Understanding Poetry." It aims to acquaint you with the meaning and importance of poetry in our life. As you would know, poetry is as old as humanity itself. All societies have a tradition of poetry, oral or written. Also, at the centre of poetry lie emotions and feelings that are innate in us. Apart from enjoying poetry in our life, we reflect on the words and expressions in it for earning a deeper understanding of the truth enshrined literary writing in general and poetry in particular. In the modern period, we study and analyze poems and share our thoughts about them with others.

In this course, we shall engage with poetry written in England, America and India. Here, we have a selection of poems written in each of these countries. In addition to the three important segments mentioned, we have a category called the margins that takes us into the perspective of people away from the mainstream in our country. See that this fourth segment has an importance of its own and should therefore be considered for viewing in depth. Also note that two blocks in this course are focused exclusively on India. With that in view, the first two blocks of this course serve as a backdrop to the culture in our country.

The four blocks in this course are as follows:

Block 1: British Poetry.

Block 2: American Poetry.

Block 3: Indian English Poetry.

Block 4: Poetry from the Margins.

The first block "British Poetry" is wider in range. It begins with a unit on a general note, introducing you to the value and relevance of poetry as well as the nature of this particular form. The ideas in this unit would apply to the units of all other blocks in this course. This unit is given the name "Poetry: An Introduction." The other three units provide for our reading poems from England composed in the long span of time from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth. Indeed, the distinction is not as much between the centuries but the trends to which the selected poets belong. Through them you will learn about poets such as John Donne, Andrew Marvell, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson. The first two of these belonged to the Metaphysical stream, Wordsworth and Coleridge to Romanticism, and Browning as well as Tennyson represented the Victorian trend. You will also get to know here that Metaphysical poetry stretched the limits of meaning in language and employed hyperbole to focus on apparently simple truths. One of the truths in this category of writing was love. Romanticism was always linked with the mood of the time, not so much to the specific aspects of life, and Victorian standpoint projected an earthy lyricism through the poetic mode. The variety of poems in this block will surely enrich your understanding by letting you enter into the domain of wit, imagination and social appeal.

The second block named "American Poetry" has poems by four poets. They are Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and Langston Hughes. They cover the whole range of the twentieth century. It is also assumed that American poetry in the previous centuries was not as creative and rich in connotation as it became in the twentieth century. In the discussions in this block, we note that American poetry had a great amount of diversity with respect to

themes and regional colouring. As we read the poems here, we realize that America was not an integrated society the way England was. Among themes, stress was discernible in terms of individuality in the American poetic tradition. Williams, Stevens and Hughes spoke from the standpoint of their specific experience. This was reflected in their use of idiom. These poets were socially conscious and voiced their concerns with gusto. So far as Robert Frost is concerned, one finds him laid back and steady in conviction. The dramatic element is particularly pronounced in his poetry. One has to struggle hard for spotting a viewpoint in him. Frost asserts the obvious but the same carries in it far-reaching associations. In his case, common sense would soon take the form of a deeply felt truth. One can safely see that American poetry in the twentieth century has carried the weight of freedom and humanist values earned by people from political clashes in the previous centuries.

In the third block titled "Indian English Poetry," you will be face to face with poetry written in English by an erstwhile colonial subject. English came as a secondary tool of communication to the Indian mind. It was sourced in study and hard-earned conviction and emanated from adherence to European values. The Indian English poet was a divided sensibility. S/he looked at the phenomena around her or him from two angles simultaneously, one's own as an individual and that seeking approval for expression from a distant onlooker. The poetry also made sense from the class angle. Poets invariably came from the educated middle class with an urban background. That limited their scope and range. At the same time, their poetic venture freed them from tradition. All poets in this block belong to the post-Independence period. Their outlook is experiential. They seek guidance from what they see happening in front. They are also more creative than their counterparts in other languages. Initially, they carried the burden of modernism. Later, however, they shed anxiety and took a bold position on the issues of the day. In this block, you will come in contact with voices that courageously express their intent. From Nissim Ezekiel and Eunice D'Souza to Dilip Chitre and Keki N. Daruwalla, not to mention A.K. Ramanujan, Jayant Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar and Agha Shahid Ali, there is a long sequence of responses and assertions.

You will find the fourth block interesting for an altogether different reason. Its title is "Poetry from the Margins." It presents the poetry of the people who live away from our society. Think of the tribals in India as well as those others, victims of prejudice and economic deprivation, whom we see only for a short while during the day. We do not interact either with the former or the latter, the socially oppressed. Of late though, they have become visible to us because of the democratic structure we adopted after Independence. This block is devoted to the poetry written by members of these two sections. To the tribal life belong poets Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih from the Khasi tribe and Nirmala Putul from the Santhal tribe. Nongkynrih's poems are "The Colours of Truth" and "The Ancient Rocks of Cherra." Nirmala Putul's poems are "Mountain Woman" and "Mountain Child." The other two poets Jyoti Lanjewar and Sukirtharani come from the sections of the socially oppressed in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu respectively. Lanjewar's poems are "Caves" and "Leadership." Sukirtharani's poems are "Pariah God" and "Untitled Poem II". This block will also tell you about specific debates on the tribals and Dalits. With the help of these debates, we shall understand the nature and temperament of these two sections. The poems discussed in this block will acquaint you with the richness, simplicity as well as the problematic existence of these sections.

Overall, the course has a special value and significance; it will bring you face to face with poetry, life and culture in different parts of the world as well as the variety and diversity present in our own country.

Block

1

BRITISH POETRY

ignou THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 1: British Poetry

Dear student, you would be curious to know about the content in this block. Its title is "British Poetry." Prepared to meet your requirements with respect to poetry in a general sense, it will begin with a discussion on the nature of poetry. Questions such as what is poetry, how it is different from other forms of literature, and what it does to appeal to your sensibility will be taken up in its first unit. That will help you become clear about the larger role poetry might play in the field of culture. Please keep in mind that these and other related questions enable you to understand the importance of poetry in common life. In this part, you will confront these issues. But these issues are not as simple as they appear. On closer scrutiny, you may see that general points about poetry such as these will lead you to the meaning of human imagination, creativity and the way feelings and emotions are expressed in life. With assistance coming from them, you will earn capability to grasp as well as enjoy the great masterpieces written in English and other languages. You will also get to know the relationship between poetry and the historical period in which it is produced. The interaction between the two becomes a framework providing an authentic nature and specificity to poetry. The title of the first unit in this block is "Poetry: An Introduction."

The title of the second unit is "Metaphysical Poets." This will take you straight into the middle of English poetry. The poets who preceded the Metaphysical poets were Geoffrey Chaucer who wrote in the fourteenth century and Philip Sydney as well as Spenser who wrote in the sixteenth century. The Metaphysical poets came in the seventeenth century. You may be wondering why we begin in this unit with a poetic trend that existed in the seventeenth century. The answer is that we have chosen to begin with the two poets, John Donne and Andrew Marvell since they are closer to us in time than the earlier ones. The language of these two poets sounds more familiar than that of the sixteenth century and before. From the point of view of emotions and feelings, too, Donne and Marvell belong to our era of secular ideology and humanism. In this unit, we have one example of poetry each from the two poets. We read here Donne's poem "Canonization" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." You will enjoy Donne's poem for its wit. The poem is rich in connotation. It might say two opposite things in the same breath. That is certain to excite your imagination. A similar thing will happen when we read Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." It is a poem of love and the closely related subject of time. Mark the range in which vast areas of human emotion and death, or time, are captured.

The third unit engages with the trend of Romanticism that dominated the English cultural scene from the last quarter of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. In this unit, two poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge are discussed with reference to one poem each by the two. Here, we have a view of Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." I use the word "imagination" in the context of poetry as a literary form. You will find that this word enjoys an intimate association with Wordsworth and Coleridge. Apparently, the two poets say little of importance about their country or society and are concerned primarily with the world of mind. That qualifies them to be called Romantic. However, they bring their time and society in focus, not respecting details but the mental state presented therein. "The Ruined Cottage"

tells us about the strength and courage of a woman in the hills and "Kubla Khan" takes us on a journey to a land of wonder. At the same time though, we remain ever submerged in the atmosphere of deprivation and dullness in English life. "The Ruined Cottage" keeps us stuck to the fact of poverty and want in society and "Kubla Khan" has us in the grip of fear, turmoil and ghostliness. As a result of this, we are hard put to explain why the two major writers of the time avoid the contemporary context in their imagination. The Romantic trend gave us the poetry of the supposedly unreal and illusory.

The last unit of this block is given the name "Victorian Poets." This is the only title that refers to a monarch, Queen Victoria. Yet, more than to the monarch, the title refers to the long period of time in which Queen Victoria ruled England, from 1837 to 1901.For that reason, the period signified the socio-literary trend "Victorianism." This unit sticks to Victorianism influencing the poetry of the period. It covers two representative poetic voices, Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson. The poems that are analyzed and commented upon here are "The Last Ride Together" and "Crossing the Bar." The first poem takes up for discussion the issue of pessimism in circumstances of doubt and uncertainty. Browning twists the point of Victorianism to say that fulfilment and harmony are possible if the individual involved in the existing life-struggles stressed the value of the moment. For Browning, the important thing was the intellectual acumen enabling him to adopt a defiant posture. On the other hand, the unit considers Tennyson as a poet of calm and balance. In it is explored the region of feeling rooted in a disciplined life. "Crossing the Bar" by Tennyson is lyrical in rendering the feeling of stability and self-assurance. Here, Victorianism is reflected in accepting the situation as a phenomenon of lasting tranquility. The unit shows that poetry can be a means of accepting and compromising with the inevitable. The poem recognizes that a particular social climate can hinder the process of exploration and replace it with accepting that which is on offer. The process of exploration was the hallmark of Romanticism. Victorianism reversed that process effectively.

UNIT 1 POETRY: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall grapple with the literary form known as poetry. First, we shall raise the question—What is poetry and how should one interpret it in general terms? After talking about it briefly, we shall proceed to consider a few opinions of established poets and critics to learn of the nature of poetry as well as its role and function. I am sure that this popular subject will be of some interest to you as scholars and students of literature. It will help you distinguish poetry from prose and take you into the domain of feelings and emotions as well as those ideas and attitudes that relate to higher goals of life, and the ideals to be pursued for making us self-aware and sensitive. Let us consider the precise sense in which the word poetry is used.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Under this head, the distinctive aspect of poetry may be considered. In this regard, let us take help from Philip Sydney who said of poetry that it was "almost the highest estimation of learning" (Enright 4). That means human learning realizes itself at a truly supreme level through the poetic act. It is assumed that wisdom is crystallized in poetry and enlighten those areas of life that generally remained shrouded in darkness. Sydney has left some scope for other forms of literature to come equal to poetry, to contend with them, through use of the word "almost." For him, then, debate is needed to affirm the place that poetry enjoys with respect to rational and thoughtful prose. The latter belongs to philosophy where mind is active to understand the phenomena of the world surrounding us. Also mark that philosophy defines and explains even as poetry shares and communicates. The target for poetry is learning where for philosophy it is distinct and precise finding. In that sense, learning is simpler since based on observation and awareness. The terms of poetry and prose are laid out through deployment of specific vocabulary. Sydney knows the value of distinction and sticks to the set of words that would assist him in the enunciation of the point. His aim is to explore the region of truth as he has said that poetry "in the noblest nations and languages that are known,

hath been the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little, enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges." Clearly, in human social existence, poetry is the first measure of light, and source of nurturing, as it sets the tone for approaching complex processes of knowing that will then be mastered gradually. Here, we see that there is no binary between light and nurturing on one side and increased knowing on the other. Seeing and observing are one with continuance of effort to grasp deeper aspects of nature and society. So far as Sydney is concerned, beginnings of learning in its pure and spontaneous way are to be recognized in poetry across nations and communities.

Sydney wrote *An Apology for Poetry, or The Defence of Poetry* (from which the lines quoted above have been taken) in 1580, way before Shakespeare appeared on the English literary scene. That means poetry had come under attack at the time and "an apology" or a "defence" was needed to underpin the veracity of this art form. Let us not forget that for a long period of time literature and poetry had been synonymous. Thus, poetry or the whole of literature had come to lose their sheen as they were seen to be engaged with "unreality," not with areas of contention in politics, religion or nature that were accepted as tangible and real. The same may be true for the times to come, as in our own time, too, we connect with poetry partly defensively, but chiefly to assert its place in the real imaginative act. One says this because knowledge soon went in the direction of science and learning as a seminal enterprise had to fend for itself through evoking support in feelings and fantasy. But the effort to assert has continued uninterrupted. Reference can be made to Dryden's *Dramatic Poesy*, Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's and Matthew Arnold's discussions on poetry, and T.S. Eliot's "Individual Talent," among others. All these take up the cause of poetic expression unmistakably.

1.2 POETRY IN ITS LINKAGE WITH SOCIETY

Let us look at poetry from a slightly different perspective, that of social significance enshrined in the verse form. It is not merely to do with various branches of knowledge or with imagining scenes of peace and harmony in life as the Romantics in England did in the early nineteenth century. For this purpose, we pick the poet and critic Jose Marti (1853-1895) tell us about the poetic use to which the great American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892) put in the same century when the Romantics lived and wrote. Talking of Whitman, Marti says about poetry the following:

It is a matter of expressing in words the hubbub of throngs of people settling down, of cities at work, and of oceans and rivers harnessed and put to man's use. Will Walt Whitman pair consonants and combine in tame couplets these mountains of merchandise, these forest of mast, these cities of ships, these battles where millions are felled to preserve man's rights, and let the sun, whose limpid fire spreads over the vast landscape, rule over all? (Marti 182)

We note here words that denote larger than life developments such as merchandise, ships, man's rights, and vast landscape. Obviously, the change occurring in America is the issue. Firstly, should literature take cognizance of this change, and if yes, can the mentioned aspect be contained in simple description? For Marti, the change in conditions of life should be reflected in literary writing so that it may prepare itself for holding the range and intensity of contemporary

happenings. Literature in general and poetry in particular take cognizance of the happenings around them. Also, the happenings would relate to occupations and workings of people that keep them in good shape. Motivations of living are a good source of inspiration as well as actual experimentation for improving upon existing methods of techniques to produce. For this reason, poetry depicts people in their states of happiness and sadness. It appears quite simple to write a happy or sad song or a tragic account of failures in life. But come to think of it, these states carry within their fabric a whole area of human survival and struggle. As such, the emotional states are records of people's working in their circumstances. On another plane, they set standards of quality that humans created by dint of hard work and discipline. Good poetry makes the reader aware about the said circumstances and the struggles waged by people working in a spirit of mutuality and unity. So, we have individuals and groups living in a social ethos. In the process of living, individuals and groups construct ideas to suit their requirements. The general nature of the activity mentioned in our discussion is the raw material that poetry uses to project its meaning, ideals, lessons drawn from life and specific morals to pursue. Above, we have cited a response to Whitman's poetry. Taking help from the reference to Whitman, Marti has responded to the issue of representing life in the following manner:

Walt Whitman speaks in verses that seem bereft of music until, after listening to them for a while, one hears something like the earth echoing to glorious, unshod, conquering armies riding across it. At times his language strikes one as the window of a butcher shop hung with sides of beef; at others like the song of patriarchs singing in chorus with that gentle world-weariness, at the hour when smoke vanishes in the clouds. (Marti 183)

In this quote, we are struck by the earth echoing to the march of armies. It signifies the power of poetry that can hold a conversation with the working of the earth. Which are the armies crossing the vast grounds of various countries on a mission of victory? In an obvious sense, the armies comprise energetic young men going in a particular direction bound to an aim. See that the armies do not have to concern with personal desires but to achieve a commonly held ideal. The mention of patriarchs and clouds lifts the level of the account to an altogether different level. The comment says about the times of high passion, glory and big triumphs. Soon we become conscious about the nineteenth century America caught in turbulence and vigour. Also note how poetry in an essential sense covers all aspects of nature and society, of human and other forms of life and spreads its net. That is where poetry is elemental, touching only broader parts of reality. That Is where we might start from for making of poetry.

1.3 POETRY IN THE PROCESS OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

From here on, we go into the specific areas of society and history from where poetry draws its inspiration and gets moulded by the existing environment. In this part of discussion, we shall talk about poetic trends and also seek assistance from poets and critics if necessary. What comes straight to mind in this regard are the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the post-Elizabethan decades in the seventeenth century, poetry as a literary medium was in use quite consistently. First the Metaphysical poetry that experimented with a new kind of emphasis. It went by wit essentially. The emotion was sought to be held in check most of the

time. The language of poetry was distinct and self-conscious. It defied convention and offered a challenge to the reader's imagination. The mode was of a game that poets played. Since drama had been in the air for a long while, the poets enjoyed the deployment of dialogue. Tension prevailed at the centre of the poem more in the manner of a device than a naturally occurring flow. Also, the poets dealt with such philosophical concerns as death, love, time and ideas playing a crucial role in life. We might as well say that a sort of culmination of all these happened in the way Milton composed his poetic works, mainly *Paradise Lost*. Clash of views was the hallmark of Milton's expression. Let us remember that Milton had initially planned to write *Paradise Lost* as a drama. His intention was to bring issues such as the fall, the role of Satan, God and Son as well as other important figures in the ambit of interaction. Significantly, both Adam and Eve were to move through the perspective of sin in terms that would bring them closer to the reader and make him see the concerned tussles as if his own. So far as poetry was concerned, Milton interpreted it as "the precious life-blood of a master spirit." This is high praise. Think of the words in this statement that raise the level of poetry to the uppermost level of human creativity. Of this kind of poetic expression, Milton is the last example, giving his all to it and showing the said expression is akin to man's cherished emotions and goals.

1.3.1 Poetry in the Augustan Age

However, poetry could not sustain any longer the vigour that Chaucer, Marlowe, Shakespeare and Donne had expressed through it. One may ask about the reason behind the decline of it towards the end of the seventeenth century. It moved out of the territory of drama and threat to it came also from pressures asking for prose. In that context, the eighteenth century was in the middle of preparing ground for realistic appraisal of things, the mundane and immediate. No more those flights either in intellect or passion that had made poetry their companion. In general, issues cropping up in the wake of mercantilism gave a different turn to poetry by confining it to the life in the city. The eighteenth century was termed the Augustan age and its ideals had undergone vital changes. It aligned itself with stability, social manners, moral conduct, considerations of harmony and a new definition of art at the centre of which stood the heroic couplet. In that scheme, reason and intellect occupied superior position satire as a form was thought to be corrector of deviations from the norms. The strengths of the eighteenth-century poetry lay in exposing hypocrisy, sham and falsehood that was on display in day-to-day dealings of people in the urban centres. The times had to do much with the powerful section of trade and commerce that had wealth but no dignity. With them, depth of emotions and feelings was never the issue and success alone mattered. Folly and humbug reigned supreme. Those were the new realities. Let us remind ourselves, however, that literature cannot impose its own traditional norms, the ones rooted in the earlier circumstance, on the act of representation. Instead, writing has to keep pace with novelty on which it has limited control, if at all. We note in the eighteenth century an empowerment of the ordinary folk in the country. The merchants who came to rule the roost were an offspring of the ordinary masses busy with production in small towns and villages from where they were heading towards the cities. Their produce was becoming merchandise since it was meant to be made available to a wider section of consumers away from the place where producers lived. Increased amount of wealth in the hands of this section was the result. At the same time, this section required manners and morals going parallel to their social influence. At the core

of their activity and aspiration was planning, appropriate articulation to communicate with fellow tradesman, handling the class of artisans and labour skillfully, to name a few. On its side, skillfulness would bring in clever ways to bring round difference and disagreement. In sum, mind and reason were the requisites. Even if prosaic, these traits suited the new ethos better than imaginative exploring of the surroundings. Put them next to the literary representation of the day, the sharply satirical verse, and see that the two were identical in nature. This is what eighteenth century poetry, such as that of Alexander Pope, was. Many of Pope's titles contained the word "essay"—*An Essay on Man*, and *An Essay on Criticism*, for instance. The word had a somewhat connotation then, nevertheless it was indicative of the changed scenario. Those became examples of the Augustan poetry that contributed towards lending support and authenticity to the society unfolding at the time. Two things, then—closeness to prose and drawing attention to reason than emotion came up concretely. The following poetic manner comes to mind:

> In Poets as true genius is but rare,
>
> True Taste as seldom is the Critic's share;
>
> Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,
>
> These born to judge, as well as those to write.
>
> (Enright, *An Essay on Criticism* 111)

In these lines, Pope is remarkably near the spoken idiom. For the sake of clarity, let us paraphrase Pope's lines—"In poets, we do not see genuine talent these days. In the same manner, critics also do not exhibit any sense of judgment. Both poets and critics draw their wisdom from the heavenly powers, the former have their role in judging what is wrong or right and the job of the latter is to write." The point made by Pope is to differentiate the two from the angle of that which they are supposed to do in society. The only word of contention here is "heavenly powers" that denotes less the figure of God or gods than the inclination inherent in the minds of the two. Further, judging and writing are placed in the context of work and its merit. Reduce work and merit to labour and value and the poetic line begins to resemble a statement made by a shopkeeper in terms of the trade. At the same time though, Pope is no less a poet than his counterparts in the seventeenth or nineteenth centuries since he raises fundamentally the question of what is beneficial for society and how the act of writing can tell us about the evaluation of effort in the domain of human creativity. Indeed, he complains about the falling standards of writing in poetry and criticism. The irony lies in the fact that literary writing is under attack, in these lines, from those who do not take their job seriously and let idleness and mediocrity enter creativity. Also, mediocrity would work through the mundane and average, not inspired engagement with truth and intellectual substance. Pope's poetry is rooted in the reality of his time and reflects the rot spreading in contemporary sensibility.

1.3.2 The Romantic Trend

It is interesting to note that in the eighteenth century, foundations had been laid for a new kind of writing that swore by imagination, something that was not figuring in Augustan poetry. In the period, mundane ruled and the lofty occupied back seat. Reason and intellect were at work, not the aspect of life that drew strength as well as appeal from feelings and emotions. I have the Romantic

movement in mind that recognized the place of high ideals in life and evoked the hidden areas of human interest. The Romantic movement also had a close alliance with nature, the simplicity of rural life and the wonder residing in dreaming about social change and human fulfilment. These last poems were absent in the urban setting of mercantilism, money, profit-making and success. A third thing stayed in the background. Next to England, just on the other side of the border in France, a chain of momentous happenings had started that would take in its grip the thinking of the whole of Europe. That was the French Revolution. At a higher level, the French upheaval had much in common with the American War of Independence a couple of decades before, in the seventies. The American War was characterized by the spirit of anti-colonialism and the French Revolution, starting in 1789, had the struggle against monarchy at its centre. These two movements would not make political sense to bourgeois consolidation in England. I am deliberately using this reference to show that poetry might tap emotional resources of a whole nation, if not of a multiplicity of nations, and shake up deeply entrenched structures all over the place. Romanticism was such an example of a poetic trend. Thus, I return to the nature of poetry and project a changed point of view of literature in the context. Let me draw your attention to what William Wordsworth would say about poetry towards the close of the eighteenth century. At the threshold of a new era of literary writing, Wordsworth's object was to

> choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. (Enright 164)

The argument put forward by Wordsworth has two important expressions, "language really used by men" and "a certain colouring of imagination." The men denote in the context common people in the village who share their intent with the neighbour directly and through simple language. The scope of the intent is widened with use of imagination. The emphasis is clearly on simplicity and genuineness. This was missing in the poetry of the eighteenth century where wit, insight and criticism as well redefining of norms were central. Wordsworth's departure from the convention indeed clarifies for us the crucial trait of Romanticism. In one major step, Wordsworth crosses the boundary of culture and reaches the rural setting. For Romanticism, the village is the well-considered preference. See that the note struck by Wordsworth is an act of conscious assertion.

And the assertion is not of the royalty or the moneyed and privileged, but of the simple folk who speak "a plainer and more emphatic language." In the last part of the passage, we note the mention of the "elementary feelings" twice. What could be the reason for this? The elementary signifies both fundamental and vital, something without which humans will cease to be human. Poetry for the Romantic viewpoint is partial to the trait of innocence. At a deeper level, this becomes a sharp critique of ostentation and prosperity, laying bare their hollowness. As you remember, Romanticism has a connect with the dominant passion that the French Revolution generated. Looked at in this manner, the Romantic definition of poetry relates with the feelings yet to be recognized in their true potential. The future of poetry is to rest with those who dream of an alternative paradigm of creativity.

To take the cause of poetry further, Wordsworth touched upon the idea of the poetic process, the act in which the poet is aware of the job he performs. That is the beginning of a new aspect with which any future poet deals with. In this regard, the famous lines of Wordsworth are the following:

> I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. (Enright 180)

This quote is a good guide to anyone aiming to be a poet. For Wordsworth, the aim is to capture a feeling the poet had in the raw. That, however, was not the time to write but to wait for a tranquil moment when he revisited the feeling to affirm its true nature. The feeling having meanwhile attained a concrete form became fit for capturing. It takes the poet back to the moment when he had the feeling initially. Thus, tranquillity has a functional role, and "the tranquility gradually disappears." We have seen that Wordsworth as a Romantic poet is careful about his poetic act and is driven by the cause of awakening the self and asserting it.

1.3.3 Modernism and Poetry

For the literary trend that started in the latter half of the nineteenth century and reigned supreme in the twentieth century, I use the blanket term Modernism. Firstly, the word itself is problematic. Immediately as modernism is used, the nineteenth century, howsoever appealing a literature it may have produced, is pushed into the background as unmodern. Secondly, modernism does not indicate a direct link with the established viewpoint of modernity. Interestingly, humanism or rationality, too, have been kept outside the fold of modernism. The word sticks to the present time, namely the late nineteenth century when social systems in Europe had become shaky. The truth of that moment became the watchword of literature. Let us have a look at the reason behind this interpretation of modernism.

The regimes of the period could not move towards increased production any longer. The glut of goods in the market caused crash in the prices and profits fell. Alternatively, if production was restricted, factories faced closure and workers lost jobs which in turn affected demand for goods in the market. It appeared that laissez faire or the free market principle had lost relevance in the new situation.

In the realm of writing, this meant human initiative had become weak and control on it from invisible forces in the economic environment had grown stronger. Think of its connection with a writer who felt stifled by the society he lived in. What kind of human figures would he visualize for depiction in his writing? For him, success or failure became meaningless since writing suffered loss of faith. Literary expression was removed from its central position in society and the writer was without a point from where to view life. This aspect of a dead end was projected as modernism. Meanwhile, clouds of a world war hovered over Europe. It was no longer possible to be a pessimist like Matthew Arnold or an optimist like Browning. Both situations had a common basis in a goal meant to be pursued.

An important departure from literary trends we talk of was that modernism of the twentieth century had no historical placing. It was an independent and autonomous entity; it seems to have descended suddenly on the literary scene. One could call it an ideology of loneliness, alienation and being. The modern individual carried it on his shoulders. Indeed, the individuality of a person was the very thing according to it. There being no link with or support from society, neighbourhood, and relationships as well as institutions such as the family or the work place, the individuality floated around helplessly. T.S. Eliot's "Love Song" comes to mind. The figure of Prufrock searches for a point of reference in vain. We see in the poem his psychological domain. He doubts and self-doubts. The sense of emptiness haunts him all the time. Prufrock is a product of pre-War years when nothing seemed to make sense. The goals and concerns of nationalism, human good, social equality, and justice attracted people no more, or Eliot exhibits this view in his poems quite definitively. The accepted idea of modernism since the Renaissance period had taken in its fold principles of rationality, humanism and questioning of ills and evils without break. The new modernism turned a blind eye to that. In order to justify such a position, Eliot sought to separate art from life's processes and underlined a cleavage between art and social issues. He did it while discussing the nature and relevance of art. Let us consider the following:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. (Enright 294)

Mark that Eliot mentions historical criticism only in passing and deals with the question of art only in aesthetic terms. For him art is not a social product, it does not require a social base. Also, the cohering and conforming of the poet are at the individual level—he shall conform, he shall cohere. In addition, the work of art is also a single and autonomous entity. The work of art is on one side and "all the works of art which preceded it" are on the other as if standing at distance from each. I wonder if that is a lapse, but Eliot has in mind solely the living poet whereas all those who belong to an earlier period fall in the category of "the dead." The main contention, however, is about a neat division between the alive, the practicing, and the dead. That may be unacceptable to a whole section of the deprived and oppressed authors and the larger audience in the western capitalist world and the colonized communities. Is Eliot aware of such a division, such a

distance? The interesting part is that the colonized communities might have a different and more meaningful centre of existence than available to the inhabitants of the waste land.

1.3.4 Poetry in Our Time

What the modernist Eliot failed to see was noted in concrete terms by a different set of poets in the thirties and forties. These latter were called pink poets. They were mindful of fissures in western and other societies caught in the web of mixed cultures and ideologies. In that sense, the challenge for poetry in the twentieth century was the shrinking scope of art that came to terms with the tangle material developments. In fact, the aesthetic had to be in vital connect with the human-social dynamic. There could be spotted an urge in the contemporary world to look at the surroundings critically. Outside the gloom in the market-dominated world existed hope for change in the anti-imperialist struggles at the time. Emergence of Soviet Russia was one sharp pointer. The modernist mind saw in it a certain doom of tradition. As indicated, for poetry beyond Eliot and his contemporaries were expressions of protest discernible in poets such as W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender. It was an unmistakable turn to revolutionary strategies in art in corners of Europe, Africa and Asia. Bertolt Brecht in Germany, Pablo Neruda in Chile appeared on scene with paradigms of freedom and justice in an idiom that stretched from the literary heights already touched by Walt Whitman in the previous century.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have gained familiarity with a few basic aspects of poetry such as its link with society and history. Even as based in feelings and emotions, poetry seeks its inspiration from its surroundings. It follows the rhythms of life around it, whether of the people sitting at the top of the ladder or those placed at the bottom of it. All the same, the writers of poetry project the dimension of the past the way it was shaped initially and the way it changed into the form it assumed later. We realized how poetry evolved a specific character under pressures from outside as well as from the writer's consciousness. It kept pace with changes in its environment and contributed in its own way to the process of cultural and social development. From its beginnings in the period of Renaissance to its weakening in the modern period as also its flowering in far away cultures of the colonies, poetry exhibited its inner dynamic. These should help us connect meaningfully with the next three units in this block.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1) There is a specific way in which poetry carried the influence of life in the eighteenth century. Elaborate.

2) What was the distinctive feature of Romantic poetry? Explain.

3) What did modernism come to mean in the twentieth century? Explain with reference to T.S. Eliot.

1.6 REFERENCES

Enright, D.J. and Ernst De. Eds., *English Critical Texts*. New Delhi: OUP,2010

Marti, Jose. *On Art and Literature: Critical Writing*. Fp. 1982. Delhi: Aakar, 2011.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Abrams, M.H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford, 1953.

Barrell, John., *Poetry, Language and Politics*. Manchester, 1988.

Enright, D.J. and Ernst De. Eds., *English Critical Texts*. New Delhi: OUP,2010

Marti, Jose. *On Art and Literature: Critical Writing*. Fp. 1982. Delhi: Aakar, 2011.

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 2 METAPHYSICAL POETS: JOHN DONNE AND ANDREW MARVELL

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- gain knowledge about the Metaphysical poets John Donne and Andrew Marvell;
- critically analyse on significant poem of each of Donne and Marvell.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, I shall briefly comment upon the metaphysical trend in English poetry of the seventeenth century. This will be with reference to the changed climate of culture; it reflected wit in its diverse ways of representation and became a point of departure from conventions established in Elizabethan England. Help will be sought in this regard from biographical details of the poets and specific factors, cultural or social, active in the period. Thereafter, a poem each of John Donne and Andrew Marvell will be discussed at length—the former's "The Canonization" and the latter's "To His Coy Mistress." While doing so, we shall go into the issues the two poems raise and identify the authorial intent and purpose working through each of them. Those will then be explained so that we can relate to them and see their relevance to our context.

2.2 A VIEW OF THE METAPHYSICAL TREND

What we associate with Metaphysical poetry emerged in English cultural life in the early seventeenth century is uncertainty. That was the period of political and ideological clashes, one finding it difficult to tie oneself with a strong belief. Monarchy existed at the time as the crucial governing factor. The Tudor kings had given the country a firm footing in political order thriving on a stable centre. The court headed by the king ruled to the advantage of all, the upper classes and the people at the lower rung. At the same time though, the arrangement was not as stable as it had been in mid-sixteenth century. Social tensions could be seen increasing by the day under pressure from one or other development. Towards the end of her tenure, Queen Elizabeth herself did not command as much respect as she did in the fifteen eighties as cliques raised head and conspired to disturb harmony for petty gains. England had become weaker than before and the common masses faced unease of living. With the Queen's death in 1603, the change from the Tudor dynasty to the Stuarts had traumatized a large section of the populace in terms of loyalty and faith. The people did not look for guidance, the changed leadership at the top of the court or the Church of England that had established itself in place of Roman Catholicism in the preceding years inspired no confidence. In the context, King James was the new reference—he came from a Roman Catholic background and received support from those who had been secretly critical of the previous regime. It appeared that ground was slipping from under the feet of the English people who had veered around England as a nation. Thus, in matters of social living and religious faith the Englishman moved on a shaky ground. The common feeling was neither physical nor spiritual predominantly. It could only be described as "metaphysical," beyond the physical and spiritual, something weird and deeply disturbing.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the dramatic mode dominated the literary space. That mode presented the affairs of the world on the stage with actors enacting social roles. Plays dealt with issues of political or social interest. They generated interest in the audience for the broader ways of living. The aspects of governance, morality, loyalty, and human relationships held sway. Drama had meant success or failure at the social level. The life at the court, military ventures, dissidence in the section of the nobility, heroism pitched against fraud and trickery were matters of enquiry. The metaphysical poetry broke that and drove sensitive minds towards self-examination. Internal feelings and processes of thought became new areas of interest. It led away from the dramatic mode and looked for the private and personal domain of individuals. It has been rightly observed by Ronald Carter and John McRae that,

While theatre was the most public literary form of the period, poetry tended to be more personal, more private. Indeed, it was often published for only a limited circle of readers. This was true of Shakespeare's sonnets … and even more so for the Metaphysical poets, whose words were published mostly after their deaths. (Ronald Carter, Ronald and John McRae. *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. New York: Routledge, 2001, 94)

The distance created between drama and poetry was crucial. It neatly separated the public domain from the world of individual thought. Also, the thought in the case covered exploration and the urge to experiment, it encouraged the writer to unsettle accepted notions of conduct. For a long time, the word "metaphysical"

carried negative implications. It denoted something unnatural and weird, having no link with serious writing. It was seen as laboured and stretched. Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century gave this word to the poets such as Donne, Herbert and Marvell in the previous century. In fact, till the early twentieth century, metaphysical poets did not attract serious critical attention. Herbert J.C. Grierson and T.S. Eliot later retrieved these poets to establish them as worthy of critical attention and thought.

2.3 ABOUT THE POET: JOHN DONNE

(Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

John Donne (1572-1631) was a poet, priest and a soldier in sixteenth-seventeenth century England. He was born into a Catholic family at a time when Catholicism was an illegal faith. Church of England was at the religious centre and the King was deemed supreme authority there. Donne's family were 'recusant Catholics', a term used to define those who continued allegience to Pope and Roman Catholicism, refusing to follow the Church of England. He had to drop out of both Hertford College, Oxford and University of Cambridge because of his Catholicism. A degree would be conferred upon the individual only if s/he took the Oath of Supremacy which was an act of swearing allegiance to the King as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. He was elected as the Member of Parliament in 1602, a year after which Queen Elizabeth I died, succeeded by King James I of England. A time of patronage, Donne too wrote under his patron Robert Drury. In a turn of events, Donne wrote two anti-Catholic polemics, *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610) and *Ignatius His Conclave*(1611). King James, impressed with Donne's work asked him to take holy orders and he became a priest in the Church of England in 1519, though grudgingly. Thereafter he serves as the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London from 1621-1631. His early poetry were satires on Elizabethan society and he also wrote erotic poems, the elegies, where he deployed unconventional metaphors. His later poems developed a more pious and sombre strain, and many assume financial strain and numerous illnesses as reasons for it.

2.4 "THE CANONIZATION": THE TEXT

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace,
Or the King's real, or his stamped face
Contemplate, what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who say my tears have overflow'd his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one man to the plaguy bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love,
Call her one, me another fly,
We are tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the Eagle and the Dove.
The Phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it.
So to one neutral thing both sexes fit,
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms,
As well a well-wrought urn becomes

The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us *canoniz'd* for Love.

And thus invoke us: 'You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)
Countries, towns, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love!

2.5 "THE CANONIZATION": AN OVERVIEW

The above poem has the title "canonization." The word means raising of level of a person after death. It is generally related to the region of spirituality. As the raised level is recognized and finally accepted by society, the person concerned earns additional esteem and is looked up to by the people. Under Christianity, the person is of the level of a saint. But can it not go into other areas of life? Donne thinks it can. Hence the poem with its emphatic assertion of the idea.

For us, the process of recognition and acceptance of great virtues is important. As suggested, it can be in culture, morality, and specifically literature. As we read this poem, we might see the poem bestowing greatness on the emotion of love. One of the greatest poets of love in English literature, John Donne uses wit, argument, and flashes of creativity to exhibit his preference for love and lovers. Mark that the poet has drawn love out of the realm of spirit or transcendence and put it on the pedestal of the body, human senses and indeed in antagonism to the affairs of politics, economy and military ventures. Keep also in mind the fact that Donne mentions these fields of life since they are the vital centres of Elizabethan and Stuart periods. At the time, court took to politics and merchants employed the influence of money to get things done. The military ventures were still more deeply structured in a country vying for honours in the European frame.

"The Canonization" has 45 lines. It has five stanzas of nine lines each. In its own manner, it has a rhyme scheme even as Donne takes some liberty in his use of it—he plays with words, their sounds as well as meanings. The angle of meanings makes the poem witty. I give examples from the last stanza and see that in it, "love" is rhymed with "drove" and "above." Further, "hermitage" goes well with "rage" in the next two lines, whereas "eyes," "spies" and "epitomize" occur consecutively in the following three lines. Keeping the rhyming words in mind, shall we charge Donne with lightheartedness or levity? Think and reach your conclusions. At the same time though, consider that the poem has survived almost four hundred years in England's cultural history and it is thought to be a great poetic feat as well as a profound statement. The poem challenges convention

and might unnerve the reader with its straightforwardness. There is no chance of alleviation of the soul and spirituality that may be inherent in the attitude to religion the poet maintained. Donne had a profound belief in matters of spirit and grace, dimensions that he constantly explores in his religious poetry. Here, Donne gives his all to love and its power to transcend interests of privilege, comfort and wealth. He does not care much for the latter and fiercely argues in support for celebratory intimacy with the woman lover.

2.6 "THE CANONIZATION": STANZA-WISE ANALYSIS

In light of the above, let us take a look at the first stanza.

Stanza 1

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place, 5
Observe his honour, or his grace,
Or the King's real, or his stamped face
Contemplate, what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

It is the beginning of a dialogue between the lover and the beloved, the former being "I" and the latter "you." Also, the stanza of nine lines is one sentence. The first line is in the form of an assertion, "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love." It begs the question whether reference to God in the line is provocative and might shock the believers. But the sentence has not ended. The second line moves unstoppably from thereon to the ninth. In this length, the point is made that the beloved may concentrate on things such as the fear of contracting paralysis, joint pain, suffering loss of fortune, a plan to rise in status, improve mental skills, join a progressive path, gain high office, aspire for worldly honour or divine grace, attain nearness to the King or from distance meditate on King's face embossed on coins. So far as the lover is concerned, the beloved has any or all these options to adopt. However, the poet-lover impatiently demands of her to know, "So you will let me love." We can call it a total commitment to love.

Stanza 2

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love? 10
What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who say my tears have overflow'd his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one man to the plaguy bill? 15
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still

Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

In the second stanza, the idea is expanded further to cover areas of life that will ensure stability in trade and commerce. The poet has decided to steer clear of the field mentioned, nor would he disturb any who joined in it of his own will. Also, he would not disturb the course of nature, nor be a cause of spreading a disease, that being not his wish or plan. Another might be of choosing a career in army. The poet-lover is clear about either—he would not be part of a military campaign and leave alone. The list of rejections includes, too, the debates and dissentions lawyers indulge in. At the end of all these mentions, he makes a declaration of his sole intent that "she and I do love." Indeed, all worldly options available to the poet-lover lacked appeal. The only one no person would ever think of considering is what the poet is hankering after—of loving.

Stanza 3

Call us what you will, we are made such by love,
Call her one, me another fly,
We are tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the Eagle and the Dove.
The Phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it.
So to one neutral thing both sexes fit,
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

The third stanza takes us to the mystical aspect of life where love gets defined in a new manner and the metaphysical is raised to another level. For Donne, love is paradoxical, it has mutuality of the two lovers as well as their separateness. The two reinforce each other. The idea of the moth or fly proves it beyond doubt. So does the myth of phoenix. The flies move around the candle flame and are burnt as they approach the flame. This implies that the two die in the act of approaching the taper. From there, Donne is led on to the Eagle and Dove. The two have strength and docility. They represent action and fight on one side and peace on the other.

Stanza 4

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms,
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canoniz'd for Love.

The next stanza is more concrete since it brings the idea back from its heights of mystery and encloses it in literary expression. Even as the question is of death, the poet tackles the theme of immortality through mortality. The usual trick played upon death is of building tombs that remain pointers of how humans lived and loved. Donne has a different take on the issue. His answer to building tombs is giving a protective cover of words to the love he cherishes for his beloved. For him, the sonnet erects better walls and "pretty rooms" for love than a structure of bricks. In a more precise sense, the ashes of the lovers could be preserved in a literary composition that he calls "a well-wrought urn." This phrase was made famous by critics in the twentieth century. Thus, as Donne emphatically announces, true canonization would be that the feeling of love was immortalized in a love poem.

Stanza 5

And thus invoke us: 'You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove 40
Into the glasses of your eyes
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)
Countries, towns, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love! 45

In the final stanza, love is made at once a hermitage, a place protected from viewing by the world, and sensuous undertaking of soul's contraction. The idea is erotic in the sense that the two lovers live in isolation and are undisturbed. Its religiosity consists in the sanctity one attaches to the relationship. The question is whether the two can co-exist and even merge with each other. Donne himself was a man of religion, a preacher and a great scholar. For this reason, he was called Dr Donne. In poetry, he accords a very high place to intimacy between the lovers. This is reinforced by wit and a deep faith in the Divine. At the same time, death, life, beauty and passion are blended with one another in it. "Glasses of your eyes" in it is celebratory and suggestive of mirth, with the whole world asking for such a pleasure, "begging" for it "from above" so that that they earned "A pattern of your love."

2.7 MARVELL AND DONNE AS METAPHYSICAL POETS: BACKGROUND AND THEMES

As we finish discussing Donne and move towards Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) who was born in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, much later than his predecessor, let us begin considering metaphysical poetry as an expression of thoughtfulness and intellectual viewing. The themes Metaphysical Poetry dealt with were of the urban male equipped with an evolved sensibility—he was educated, circumspect, courageous and open-minded. He also responded genuinely, free from bias or preconceived notions. It is significant that this urban male had no pressures from his readers and peers to adopt a particular standpoint.

He did not publish, but only circulated his poems among friends and cultured acquaintances. The outlook informing this trend of writing was rational; it went into the reasons behind the phenomenon he confronted. He was curious to make sense of the scene unfolding before him. In fact, the word "scene" is important in the context; it was constantly changing, sometimes for the better, mostly for the worse.

We might refer to the struggles between the monarchs of the day and the Parliament that generated debate as well as misgivings and misapprehensions. The masses and the gentry were not sure about the rightness and wrongness of the issues in front. The questions were political and ideological. The former touched upon policies pursued by the monarch and the latter were concerning faith and belief. Andrew Marvell was face to face with an atmosphere of divided loyalties, doubt and self-doubt. The existing thought, too, ceased to be philosophical, it grappled instead with actual reactions of the people to the developments around them. Keep in mind the building up of the civil war in mid-seventeenth century. It did not happen overnight but was the result of a whole century of social conflicts. Initially, the spectacle was of disturbed minds, later it became affected by real fears of existence. The process of nationalist integration helped England no end. That made it move from strength to strength. Initially, the monarch received support from forces that strengthened the country, tied the people in a social bond that had culture and religion to sustain them. At the same time though, the unity of social sections threatened to sow seeds of secular ideals in the minds of the emerging urban populace. The clergy too was changing, subjecting faith-related matters to criticism at the individual level. Put all these together and see that metaphysical poetry was gaining ground and spreading its influence beyond the cities and towns to the hinterland. We view this process in clear light as we interpret the poems of Andrew Marvell.

Marvell was a combination of Puritanism and individual liberty. The former gave him discipline and intellectual rigour and the latter allowed him indulgence of the senses. Where did the poet stand between the two? Would he keep reminding himself that he was to be a straightforward defender of self-discipline from where the point of inspiration of piety would guide him? On the other hand, would he reject entirely the logic of life that resided somewhere in his mind telling him to see it and recognize its concreate existence? Whereas in Donne the question would have been answered with reference to the mystery of divinity working in an individual's life, in Marvell the question would stand firm in the middle of dilemmas the poet faced. There was no scope in Marvell for the said mystery or mysticism that was associated with his predecessor. Let us also keep in mind that much time had elapsed between the two poets under discussion. English society was not the same in Marvell's time that existed in the first half of the seventeenth century. Individual liberty had struck roots meanwhile and poets as well as thinkers had to take cognizance of a mind capable of resolving conflicts of the spirit with the world surrounding it. Also, the struggle of the individual with his inner self had acquired dimensions that went beyond philosophy. In the new social order, those dimensions were to assume a yet more sustained shape comprising intellect and scientific learning. The air of the second half of the century was qualitatively different from that of the sixteen tens and twenties. In that sense, Donne and Marvell complement each other and give us a fullness of understanding of the Metaphysical thought.

2.8 ABOUT THE POET: ANDREW MARVELL

(Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

Andrew Marvell (1621-1628) was a British satirist, politician who was also a part of the House of Commons between 1659 and 1678. A friend of John Milton, Marvell was born in Yorkshire. He was a son of a clergyman of Church of England. From 1642-1645, he travelled in Europe. He was in favor of Charles I and criticised his execution. Only later did he become sympathetic to the republican cause of Oliver Cromwell, who was against monarchy. This being the robust political background, let us now look at the poet's literary persona.

Let us see how T.S. Eliot describes the poet Andrew Marvell. For Eliot, Marvell's grave needs neither rose nor rue nor laurel; there is no imaginary justice to be done; we may think about him, if there be need for thinking, for our own benefit, not his. To bring the poet back to life—the great, the perennial, task of criticism—is in this case to squeeze the drops of the essence of two or three poems; even confining ourselves to these, we may find some precious liquor unknown to the present age. Not to determine rank, but to isolate this quality, is the critical labour. The fact that of all Marvell's verse, which is itself not a great quantity, the really valuable part consists of a very few poems indicates that the unknown quality of which we speak is probably literary rather than a personal quality; or, more truly, that it is a quality of a civilization, of a traditional habit of life.

Eliot has rightly asserted that Marvell's poems send out to us the message of concrete living and they contain what may be called "the essence" and the "quality." These are counter posed to the "quantity" of Marvell's writing. He did not write many poems, but the quality of what he wrote was path-breaking. Also, as we read the poems today, we find that their quality is "literary," not "personal." It does not draw attention to Marvell but to the value of the meaning he captured through them. At the same time, the meaning was not of the poet but of the time when the writing happened. What Eliot emphasizes is "a quality of civilization, of a traditional habit of life." Let us have a view of these words. Civilization is a raised level of understanding. It accords respect to the emotion Marvell expressed. "Traditional habit of life" indicates those forms of behaviour that relate to stability and enrichment stance a poet adopts. Eliot always appreciated the staying power of literature that kept it grounded in the dynamic reality of how people felt and

reacted to challenges. We have to see whether this idea is actually central to the poem we study in this unit. We shall focus upon the literariness of the poem "To His Coy Mistress."

First, let us acquaint ourselves with the poem. It is in the voice of the poet persona who presents a specific stance. Is the stance intellectual, something that brings out the question of assertion? Is the poet persona expressing annoyance or deep questioning, or yet more, an eagerness to work out of the business of living? We might see in the query a gradual movement from a state of mind (annoyance), to exhibit impatience (forced questioning) to the final concern for the life he is caught in (the nature of the business of living). We shall pursue this path for realizing the literary aim.

2.9 "TO HIS COY MISTRESS": THE TEXT

Had we but world enough and Time,
This coyness Lady were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges side
Should'st Rubies find: I by the Tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood:
And you should if you please refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable Love should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.
Two hundred to adore each Breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An Age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your Heart.
For Lady you deserve this State;
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I alwies hear
Time's winged Chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lye
Desarts of vast Eternity.
Thy Beauty shall no more be found,
Nor in thy marble Vault,

My echoing Song: then Worms shall try
That long preserv'd Virginity:
And your quaint Honour turn to dust;
And into ashes all my Lust.
The Grave's a fine and private place,

But none I think do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hew
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing Soul transpires
At every pore with instant Fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our Time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapt pow'r.
Let us roll all our Strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball:
And tear our Pleasures with rough strife,
Thorough the Iron gates of Life.
Thus, though we cannot make our Sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

2.10 "TO HIS COY MISTRESS": SECTION-WISE ANALYSIS

Lines 1-10

Had we but world enough and Time,
This coyness Lady were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges side
Should'st Rubies find: I by the Tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood:
And you should if you please refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews. *10*

In the first ten lines of the poem, we find the use of hyperbole, words carrying exaggeration. The poet would go to any length, it is said, for carrying out the wishes of the beloved. The tone is of playfulness as if he were humoring her. The

references to Time take the poet persona through historical happenings such as the Flood and the conversion of the Jews in the ancient past. Apart from history, there is mention of geography. The Indian Ganges and the river Humber stand out. The time spent by the lover is equally pleasure-giving with the lover searching for rubies before he would meet his woman from a closer angle. Also, the lover indirectly says that so much of time is not available to them. The suggestion is that humans have very little time in which to love and derive pleasure. The nature of love, too, is indicated. It is of physicality, of the senses.

Lines 11-20

My vegetable Love should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.
Two hundred to adore each Breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An Age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your Heart.
For Lady you deserve this State;
Nor would I love at lower rate. 20

We move to the next ten lines, and what do we come across? It is sensuality of the extreme kind. Meanwhile, the tone of levity has given place to the loving as a serious pursuit. The body parts of the woman are stated from eyes to the forehead and then on to "each breast." The rest of the body is emphasized in terms of each part. Years of life are counted as "hundred years," "two hundred," and finally, "thirty thousand." These will be spent "adoring" the woman's body. We do not fail to note that in the first half of the poem there is a remarkable mix of wit, over-emphasis and roguishness. For grasping the sense of the poem, wit might be used as a serious indicator. The poet persona passionately argues in support of an idea that cannot be put into action—love is not available to humans as they long for it. The opposite is true. The moment of love comes and soon disappears. That is the tragic part. Marvell has made this point subtly to suggest that the essence of life is loss, scarcity and defeat even as the desire is uncontainable in the short span of time one gets.

Lines 20-30

But at my back I alwies hear
Time's winged Chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lye
Desarts of vast Eternity.
Thy Beauty shall no more be found,
Nor in thy marble Vault,
My echoing Song: then Worms shall try
That long preserv'd Virginity:

And your quaint Honour turn to dust;
And into ashes all my Lust. 30

These lines present a dreary picture. Every moment of human life is marked by the dread of death moving near the individual human being. Suddenly, the aforementioned Time turns into Death riding a chariot to catch the man as fast as possible. How does Marvell spell the nature of human existence and the scene around? The answer to this question is summed up in the expression desserts of "vast eternity." This is completely antithetical to the sensual picture of love visualized in the beginning. We are made to imagine the beautiful human body turning into a corpse and resting in the grave where "Worms shall try/ That long preserv'd Virginity." Clearly, the spectacle has changed from an event of celebration to a horror. For the mistress, her beautiful body served the cause of chastity and honour even as the lover's passion bore the markings of lust. The envisioned ending of both in the grave is deeply saddening, if not subject of bitter realization.

Lines 31-46

The Grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hew
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing Soul transpires
At every pore with instant Fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our Time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapt pow'r. 40
Let us roll all our Strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball:
And tear our Pleasures with rough strife,
Thorough the Iron gates of Life.
Thus, though we cannot make our Sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

In these last fifteen lines, the drama of love as a paradox receives a new colouring. Marvell uses wit to work out an effective answer to defeat Death as Time. The paucity of time becomes for him a challenge. For Marvell, the resolution lies in putting the opportunity of loving to appropriate use. It offers a fine example of metaphysical conceit, a neatly presented argument that turns tables on the adversary. Under the discipline of the conceit, the vocabulary of coarseness is transformed into that of bright hopefulness, and words occur of the manner of "embrace," "youthful hue," "morning dew,"and "willing soul"—these being characteristics of youthful humans. In that phase, their bodily pores earn the heat of "instant fires" that make them behave like "like amorous birds of prey." Thus, the fight in the new situation is between Time on one side and lovers enjoying intimacy on the other. In that moment, strength and sweetness of the lovers is

"rolled up into one ball" and pleasures are snatched from the struggle they have with each other in the act of togetherness.

2.11 "TO HIS COY MISTRESS: A THEMATIC OVERVIEW

The poem is about a vision that would guide the humans in their pursuit of living. It is to do with acceptance of the real permeating their surroundings. For the humans who are projected as lovers, it is essential they do not lose way in the middle of uncertainties. The hurdles get created because of doubt and self-doubt. Wrong knowledge is the basis of the doubt in the woman lover—she has lost initiative for the reason that traditional norms and principles have created a web to imprison her. The male lover is not just a man but the visionary in whom the poet and lover stand united. We call him the poet persona in our discussion. He, too, has to work hard for convincing the woman lover about the truth of what he calls Time. Couched in the vocabulary of sensuality, the poem makes the philosophical point that things keep on moving from one phase of life to another irrespective of what is being pursued by ordinary mortals. However, the answer is hidden in the human intellect, call it wit if you like, that alone can work out the method to free oneself from the tentacles of fate, inevitability and worldly possessions. This idea sets Marvell apart from all other Metaphysical poets including John Donne who wavers between divinity and love. Is it because Marvell is historically better placed to see the conundrum meaningful living presents? Let us not overlook the clouds of a decisive civil war in mid-seventeenth century venturing to unravel the hidden dynamism of realist thought. For a short while in that period, the poets were face to face with processes of change and courageous intervention. As quoted above, Eliot called it "a quality of a civilization, of a traditional habit of life." We can give further thought to it and give it an appropriate articulation in view of what unfolded in the latter part of the twentieth century.

2.12 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we came to grips with the Metaphysical trend as a concept. We were able to see why the problematic word aroused curiosity in criticism for such a long time even as the basic view was one with the prevailing ethos seventeen forties and fifties. We noted it shaping up as time progressed. Help in that regard came from John Donne's poem "The Canonization." There was a touch of intense curiosity and deliberation as Donne went on evolving his perspective. One could not miss in Donne's engagement with love the sense of the religious and rational angles simultaneously. With the discussion of Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress," we got on to firmer ground and saw the nature and efficacy of the intellectual conceit at the back of Metaphorical poetry. In that effort, T.S. Eliot's argument to appreciate Andrew Marvell assisted us greatly. We also noted the changing ideological scenario in England in the middle years of the seventeenth century to play a significant role; it found a voice in Marvell's poetic endeavour.

2.13 QUESTIONS

1) What was the atmosphere in England when Metaphysical poetry was written?

2) Interpret the term 'metaphysical' in the context of the early seventeen century England.

3) Donne represents love in both worldly and mystical terms. Comment with reference to the poem "The Canonization".

4) What according to Donne is a preferred way to immortalise love?

5) Explain the phrase "well wrought urn" as used by Donne in the above poem.

6) Comment on the poet's treatment of the concept of time in the poem "To His Coy Mistress".

7) Compare and contrast ideas of love in Donne's "The Canonization" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress".

8) Do you think the male lover in the two poems is overbearing? Give a reasoned answer with references from "The Canonization" and "To His Coy Mistress".

2.14 REFERENCES

Alden, Raymond MacDonald. "The Lyrical Conceits of the Metaphysical Poets". *Studies in Philology*, Vol.17, No.2, 1920.

Carrol, John. J. "The Sun and the Lovers in "To His Coy Mistress". *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.74, No.1, 1959.

Claire, John. A. "Donne's The Canonization". *PMLA*, Vol.80, No.3, 1965.

Eliot, T.S. "The Metaphysical Poets". *Times Literary Supplement*, 1921.

<https://www.usask.ca/english/prufrock/meta.htm>

Perkins, David. "Johnson on Wit and Metaphysical Poetry". *ELH*, Vol.20, No.3, The John Hopkins University Press, 1953.

2.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

Austen, Frances. *The Language of the Metaphysical Poets*. Basingstoke, 1992.

Brooks, Cleanth., *Historical Evidence and the Reading of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. Columbia, 1991.

UNIT 3 ROMANTIC POETS: WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- understand the Romantic era and the Romantic poets;
- be able to comment on two important poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall take a poem each by the two Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge for discussion. Our aim would be to grasp the meaning of the word "Romantic" that sets it apart from other forms of English poetry as distinct with its own features. The poem by Wordsworth would be "The Ruined Cottage" and by Coleridge *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; these would provide examples of the Romantic expression in a specific sense, exhibiting features of a different kind of poetry written in the early nineteenth century. Needless to say, Romantic poetry marked a clear departure from that written in the preceding period. With the two poets as subjects of this unit, Wordsworth stood primarily for simplicity and spontaneity and Coleridge for fantasy, there being a recognizable gap between them. In the thematic content, too, the two poets showed variation in concern and interest. Yet, the two shared the broader perspective of **humanism** and imaginative representation. Also, they worked in close proximity as poets.

3.2 WHAT DOES "ROMANTIC" STAND FOR?

This is a correct point of entry for us. In an apparent sense, whatever appears to be unreal and dream-like is considered romantic, the opposite of this word being real or realistic. But Romantic with a capital R is a historical construct. It was associated with a happening, a trend that reworked the nature of social understanding in the closing years of the eighteenth century. The happening referred to was French Revolution of 1789.The decisive episode was the third in Europe in a span of 150 years—the first two being the English Civil War in mid-seventeenth century and the American War of Independence in 1775. Since we are directly concerned with French Revolution, let us stress its passion and fervour against the French monarchy. The fight was between the French ruling class headed by the monarch and those men and women who came from the lower rungs of society under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was attended by great violence and bloodshed. At the end, the common people were the victors. How do we define the passion and fervour the episode generated, and which rooted out the entrenched aristocracy for good? Who were the heroes of this struggle against the mighty state? The answer is, the common masses who lived in cities, towns, and more significantly the villages. Look at the list of sub-heads under the category "The Popular Revolution" in a chapter in Georges Lefebvre's book *The French Revolution*. The sub-heads are: "The Economic Crisis; The 'Good News' and the Great Hope; The Aristocratic Conspiracy and the Revolutionary Mentality; The Parisian Revolution; The Municipal Revolution; The Peasant Revolution and the Great Fear; The Night of August 4; and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen; The October Days." (vi)1. See the range of activities the writer refers to in this case. It covers the whole spectrum of the phenomenon. In its sweep, the whole of France has shown itself.

Let us talk briefly about the aristocratic conspiracy. All the privileged in the country got together and thought of ways to disrupt the unity among the masses. The dividing line between the two was clear. The significant part is that the section with resources felt threatened by those who had nothing to fall back on. Also, there was no locus standi of the privileged except tradition sanctifying their high position. This brought out the worse in them—violence, high-handed behaviour, tricks and falsehoods. Instead, strength of the people without resource came from their common cause of freedom from shackles. The latter were in the form of the state observing rules of hierarchy. Inequality was the essence of their thought. If masses saw the aristocracy as their adversary, they had to draw inspiration from the thought of standing up to the hierarchy. If we translate the view of resistance in imaginative terms, we would take recourse to fancy, dream-like envisioning of harmony. Those indeed form the crux of the romantic principle. It had deep roots in a different kind of traditional virtue that reached humans from nature, village, mutuality of faith in community living and innocence of perception. Romanticism stood for these things. As suggested, this is what the people involved in the struggle thought of. They wished to bring in the aforementioned range of social life to counter the force of monarchy, the old system of control and governance blocking social growth and natural direction.

What we have seen in the foregoing is the crux of Romanticism. It is a view we imagine. The view goes against the spirit of dogma and rigid tradition. The process of understanding of this phenomenon is complex. That has the stability of the state of affairs. Who would not like to see continuing the old ways, the tested and

tried? There are dangers in the opposite scenario. Nothing is certain and assured. Humankind is wary of change. It despises change for the simple reason that change would bring the element of uncertainty. On the other hand, change is attractive and inspiring. It dares man to take a step in the direction of the unknown where dangers lurk. At the same time though, the dangers invite to move in that direction— the region of fantasy and the unexplored. Indeed, the more the danger, the more is the urge to know and experiment. It is so fascinating! See that we have indicated in clear terms the terrain of the unexplored. That was the time in the closing years of the eighteenth century when new avenues had been opened to visualize a new world of possibilities hitherto unimagined.

Getting back, we come to understand that the Romantic mind bade good bye to the established, the accepted and internalized. The Romantic mind was not in love with the clear and the mundane that lacked inspiration and did not offer any challenge. The clear was a construction of common sense. It sought continuity with traditional wisdom so that ordinary principles appeared eternal. Further, the village, the open fields and dense forests had given way to the ways of the city, the urban living led by money and worldly success. Romanticism rejected them as superficial. Keeping it in view, let us consider briefly the concerns of Wordsworth's poem "The Ruined Cottage." But this might precede with a general view of the poet Wordsworth.

3.3 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AS A ROMANTIC POET

(Image source: Wikipedia)

Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth, Cumbria, England on 7 April, 1770. The place was a market town situated at the confluence of the River Cocker and River Derwent. The town, a part of Cumbria, was close to the Lake District that appears as a constant reference in Wordsworth's poetry. His poetic career began with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, co-written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. The book had two editions, one in 1798 and the second in 1800. It contained poems such as "Tintern Abbey," "The Tables Turned" and "Michael." The "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" was published in 1804. Wordsworth completed his epic-length poem *The Prelude* in 1805 and kept working on it

further till his death in 1850. Finally, the poem had two versions, the 1805 version and the 1850 version. Both versions of *The Prelude* were published posthumously. During the long period between 1805 and 1850. Wordsworth wrote a large number of poems, close to 400 and kept up with changes that occurred in England over time.

His initial interests were in consonance with social change and revolution and he was a champion of people's causes. In this context, one should keep in mind Wordsworth's visit to France during the years of the French Revolution where he was politically active as a supporter of the common masses. As things unfolded though in the years following this period, he changed priorities and became more and more philosophical. The shift occurred clearly in the first decade of the nineteenth century that saw his loss of concern for the common masses. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth had changed over to the nationalist conservative paradigm and was rewarded for it with the title of Poet Laureate eventually. Still, whatever the political choices, Wordsworth was linked imaginatively with the humanist concerns and seldom lost touch with emotional aspects of social life, not once in sympathy with the pomp and show of the market that cast a shadow on ideology and general outlook of the people. Even today, Wordsworth is remembered for his attachment preference for simplicity and spontaneity. His choice always remained "the still sad music of humanity," a phrase that occurred in "Tintern Abbey." Here, also to be noted are the lines "To me the meanest flower that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" that form part of his "Immortality Ode."

Wordsworth's mind was always haunted by nature, and by the ways of life away from the city. Village, the mountainous region, the wanderer in the forest, and the like are recurrent images in his poetry. At the same time, he would consider nature as a source of strength and self-awareness. He saw it working inside himself, guiding and teaching him, letting him learn as a person. If he felt changes in his outlook, he would ascribe them to the care nature gave him. He kept the notion of nature's educative company sustaining him. It worked like a mantra. Significantly, in each phase of life nature made him conscious about the value of being with the common humanity in its journey towards goals that would never be reached, but trying for which was essential. As a consequence of the many failings simple humanity met, there would be moments of breaking apart. But humans had it in them to live by hope that would take them forward.2 This was left to interpret by the poet. In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth reached such a conclusion. The question was taken up at length in *The Prelude*. In both poems, the note of autobiography was predominant. That was the quest Romanticism attempted and finally defined.

3.4 WORDSWORTH'S POEM "THE RUINED COTTAGE"

Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" is in your course; it presents the specific sense of want and deprivation away from the city. The poem presents a cottage in a state of disarray and decline. The poet's tone is elegiac, leaving us thinking about a shrinking world. Perhaps, the world of the village has no future to look forward to. This theme was explored at length by Wordsworth in another poem "Michael" where the writer identified with a peasant happy in his surroundings but has a son who wishes to go to the city for some time. Before leaving for the

city, the son made a promise that he would return soon. But he never came back even as the peasant's misery kept piling up. The same subject is pursued in "The Ruined Cottage." Let us see how the poem begins:

'Twas summer and the sun was mounted high.
Along the south the uplands feebly glared
Through a pale steam, and all the northern downs
In clearer air ascending showed far off
Their surfaces with shadows dappled o'er
Of deep embattled clouds: far as the sight
Could reach those many shadows lay in spots
Determined and unmoved, with steady beams
Of clear and pleasant sunshine interposed;
Pleasant to him who on the soft cool moss
Extends his careless limbs beside the root
Of some huge oak whose aged branches make
A twilight of their own, a dewy shade
Where the wren warbles while the dreaming man,
Half-conscious of that soothing melody,
With side-long eye looks out upon the scene,
By those impending branches made more soft,
More soft and distant.

The scene captured in these lines is typically Wordsworthian, with a stress on the richness of the details of nature; these expand the scope of the poem. The interplay between shadows and "steady beams of clear and pleasant sunshine" catches attention. It is away from the humdrum of the city and tells of happy prospects to follow. But that is not the intention of the poet. For him, this description is to work as a positive background to the series of happenings coming later if he cared to appreciate it. The following scene is restrictive and dreary, the sense of pain and loss will be more intensely felt. Note in these lines the "soft cool moss," "some huge oak whose aged branches make a twilight of their own" and "those impending branches made more soft" promise tranquillity.

But at the same time, the title of the poem lurks behind these to warn of difficult days to visit the scene. The mood changes to a picture of dilapidation. That sets the tone of melancholy and tragedy. The change is introduced with "other lot was mine." The poet shows his deep concern for the decay he observes in a corner of those hills. In the introduction of change is hidden an actual person, a pedlar, a wanderer in the hills and selling his ware, who becomes a bridge between the reader and the poet. We are going to be witness to the account the pedlar would present. Since the cottage and the family living in the cottage are the subject of the poem, we may take note of the state of affairs surrounding them. From outside as the poet approaches the place, he sees the four bare walls of the cottage with no inhabitant in sight when an old man lying motionless on a bench nearby is spotted. The description of the pedlar is evocative, offering more than a picture of the human figure. An aged man,

He lay, his pack of rustic merchandize

Pillowing his head—I guess he had no thought

Of his way-wandering life. His eyes were shut;

The shadows of the breezy elms above

Dappled his face. With thirsty heat oppress'd

At length I hailed him, glad to see his hat

Bedewed with water-drops, as if the brim

Had newly scoop'd a running stream.

First, we become aware of the poet's choice of such an ordinary person for portrayal so we knew of what he did, whom he visited and the things he felt in the process of pursuing his trade. From here on, we would be in touch with two narrators, the poet and the pedlar. The former is a means of articulating the details about the ruined cottage and the latter a witness of the happenings over time.

3.5 A VIEW OF "THE RUINED COTTAGE"

The poem is a story of life of a family living in the hills. Its chief characters are the woman Margaret, her husband Robert and their two children who together constituted a happy family unit. The pedlar would come over to their home and exchange greetings. He would stay and chat with the woman and watch the husband busy on his loom during the day and labouring happily in the field and the big courtyard in the evenings and mornings. The couple was loving and jovial and the hospitality of Margaret was unforgettable. The atmosphere is beautifully, though briefly, romanticised in the poem. It resembles a small paradise on earth where the earth and human beings live in utmost harmony. One says "briefly" since the cottage inhabitants were soon overtaken by two years of successive crop failures. We are told of this with great sensitivity in the voice of the pedlar, where the pain is intense and the earlier tranquillity is severely disturbed. There is also a reference to Robert falling seriously ill at one point and is left weak by the disease. The crop failure led to further misery and what appeared to be a never-ending sequence of happy incidents soon became matter of great misery and want. All this is told in the poem with sadness. In it, the poet's voice and the pedlar's feelings merge to make a feeling of suffering and deep sympathy. To quote:

[E]re the second autumn

A fever seized her husband. In disease

He lingered long, and when his strength returned

He found the little he had stored to meet

The hour of accident or crippling age

Was all consumed. As I have said, 'twas now

A time of trouble; shoals of artisans

Were from their daily labour turned away

To hang for bread on parish charity,

They and their wives and children—happier far

Could they have lived as do the little birds

That peck along the hedges or the kite

That makes her dwelling in the mountain rocks.

Here, a total merging of the troubled family and the little birds and mountain rocks is perceived. Still more telling is the talk of "shoals of artisans/ To hang for bread on parish charity."That stretches the dimension to cover a wider area of social life in the secluded mountainous surroundings. We take note of the community of labouring people, "their wives and children" going through starvation that would gradually take them to slow death. The situation is sad. The family faces disarray since there is nothing the family can do to get back the stability they had in life earlier.

3.6 "THE RUINED COTTAGE": AN EXAMPLE OF POETIC NARRATIVE

The poetic narrative, the story so to say, hangs on three characters in the main—the poet-listener, the pedlar giving the first-hand account, and Margaret. As the narrative proceeds, the listener and the teller get fused into one figure that empathizes with Margaret. From then on, the focus is on the woman whose life's phases and increasing sadness are captured. Within the spaces of this arrangement fall the description of Margaret's husband, and the two children they had initially. At one stage, the husband Robert decides to leave the place to join the army. His decision is explained as a step to get some money to be used later by Margaret for sustenance. Robert never told Margaret his plan of leaving. He simply disappeared. In a couple of days of his going, the woman saw "a purse of gold" left by someone in her home. This suggested to her, the husband's idea behind his plan. Margaret has grit and spends time looking after her two children. She is fated to see the elder son dying first. After a few years, the younger one also dies, leaving her entirely alone in the cottage. Those are incidents hiding their own truth about what Margaret went through and the impact it left on the pedlar. The poem ends with Margaret, too, meeting death.

In the title of the poem, "ruin" is of many levels. Even nature is a part of it that takes human life away from the cottage and the scene is interpreted so very clinically, in minutest detail, by the pedlar. By itself, the wild plants and shrubs take over to combine with the walls, doors, windows, even books on the shelf that turn into a wasteful growth. The question arises whether the spirit of Margaret was shattered by the working of forces in and around her home. The answer is a firm no, says the narrator. To quote:

My Friend, enough to sorrow have you given,

The purposes of wisdom ask no more;

Be wise and chearful, and no longer read

The forms of things with an unworthy eye.

She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.

I well remember that those very plumes,

Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,

By mist and silent rain-drops silver'd o'er,

As once I passed did to my heart convey
So still an image of tranquillity,
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. I turned away
And walked along my road in happiness."

Here, the positive words are wisdom, peace, calm earth, tranquillity and beautiful. The other set of words that get rejection are sorrow and despair as well as idle dream. One should leave them behind. The pedlar ends the description with "I . . . walked along my road in happiness." Such a message in the poem expects the reader to go over the suffering of the helpless as a part of life that meant wisdom, not despair. Therein lies the dignity of living, suggests Wordsworth through the poem.

Finally, we observe that the poem has brought to light the misery of a country woman in surroundings of nature. There is a link between the sufferings of the woman and the circumstances in which she is placed. Even as she faces "ruin," she accepts her fate with fortitude. The poet has shown the decline in her fortune dramatically. He uses a viewer in the form of the pedlar. The two views of the episode intensify the effect.

3.7 SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: VOICE OF ROMANTICISM

(Image source: Wikipedia)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in 1772 in Ottery Saint Mary in Devon, Great Britain. One of the leaders of the English Romantic Movement, Coleridge was a

close associate and friend of William Wordsworth. Poems for which he became famous in Romantic poetry include *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*, "Kubla Khan", and *Christabel*. In his book *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explained his views on the poetic process with ingenuity and insightfulness. In it, his thoughts and opinions are of great merit, containing seeds of what would emerge later as leading theories of writing. Apart from containing elaboration of important philosophical concepts, the book traces Coleridge's personal journey as a poet. Coleridge was a great table talker. He excited the contemporary with comments and observations; these took his listeners into the realm of speculation. He was an admirer of Shakespeare and analysed some of the Bard's characters, such as Hamlet, with great depth. He is considered a pioneer in the field of psychological criticism. Coleridge died in 1834.

Coleridge's closeness with Wordsworth did not mean that they agreed on all aspects of literary writing. In many a case, they differed with each other in approach and outlook. With respect to poetry, we see in Coleridge an emphasis on metaphysics and magic. Whereas Wordsworth engaged mainly with the life of simplicity and innocence, Coleridge chose the spiritual and the psychological aspects for poetic depiction. Comparing the two, Ronald Carter has observed:

> Wordsworth's poetry is concerned with the ordinary, everyday world and with the impact of memory on the present; Coleridge's poetry frequently communicates a sense of the mysterious, supernatural and extraordinary world. Wordsworth stated that he wanted to explore everyday subjects and give them a Romantic or supernatural colouring; by contrast, Coleridge wanted to give the supernatural a feeling of everyday reality. (Carter 208)3

It is suggested that Coleridge received inspiration from those elements in human nature that were laid in the layers of the mind. He let imagination follow its own creative ways and explore unknown fields of experience. Coleridge's stress on the supernatural sets him apart as a poet of mystery and vision, a realm that fills the reader with wonder. One sees in his poetry a search for the sources of creativity, fears and apprehensions submerged in the human mind and a longing for knowing the forces active in dark shadows, fierce storms, and angry seas. This was not perceived or appreciated by Wordsworth who stood for natural surroundings, the theme of childhood, the life in a lonely hut, and the pleasure of memory that gave him sustenance.

One can raise the question whether the two contrasting ways of approaching life (as happened in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge) could be considered parts of a single movement called Romanticism. In answer to it, one might argue that Coleridge and Wordsworth engaged themselves with a variety of responses of the human mind, that being the centre of interest in a vital sense. Society with its clashing structures, economic interests, urban living, divisive penchant of choices was seldom their concern. That was crude materialism catering to worldly issues mired in superficial pleasures. On the other hand, in Romanticism both villages and high seas were the opposite of what one saw in political clashes or social tensions witnessed in the ways of living in a city. What joined Wordsworth and Coleridge was the keener aspect of vision in which humanity and nature stood integrated. Particularly in Coleridge, the unknown held great fascination. Needless to say, with the unknown came subjects of human spirit, sin and virtue as well as threats and dangers. Innocence and spontaneity saved Wordsworth from falling prey to doubts or apprehensions. In Coleridge, however, dark and

disturbing images of the supernatural, something not available to reason, howsoever sublime, became the issue. From this viewpoint, let us have a look at Coleridge's famous poem, "Kubla Khan".

3.8 "KUBLA KHAN": THE TEXT

Let us read the poem:

Kubla Khan

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

3.9 "KUBLA KHAN" AS A POEM OF MAGIC AND WONDER

This poem by Coleridge has the basic features of illusion. It depicts the unreal and the imaginary. Nothing in it resembles that which we ever saw in life. As we see the poem's subtitle, we note that by the poets' own admission, it is "a vision in a dream. A Fragment."

Lines 1-11

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground

With walls and towers were girdled round;

And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,

Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

The beginning takes us away to a world where a mysterious king by the name Kubla Khan ordered a pleasure-dome be built. The name of the place is equally mysterious, Xanandu. The beginning has eleven lines that contain two long sentences. In them, we are made to think of the nature of the sacred river, the sunless sea, and a forest of incense-bearing trees. Sacredness and incense are directly linked. However, the sunless sea is associated with darkness. The poet has talked of an enclosed place. It is girdled. The place has forests and also spots of greenery in it. We might visualize it as a painting. When we put these details together, we think that pleasure, natural scenery, holiness and the protecting walls build through these lines a spectacle of beauty and wonder. The mention of "ancient" in the lines also points towards the unknown and unimaginable. Is the writer taking us on a journey to the distant past that is fixed in its own character and will never be available to us? Since I call this scene a painting, I am imagining the place as fixed and unmoving. The river and the streams in it run on their course but they denote calm and rhythm.

Lines 12-36

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted

Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!

A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted

By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,

As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,

A mighty fountain momently was forced:

Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst

Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,

Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:

And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever

It flung up momently the sacred river.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion

Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,

Then reached the caverns measureless to man,

And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far

Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the dome of pleasure

Floated midway on the waves;

Where was heard the mingled measure

From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,

A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

The atmosphere changes in the above lines. It is a long passage of 25 lines. First, we are told of a "deep romantic chasm," a gap in the earth wide, deep and threatening. The word "romantic" implies the opposite of the real. Yet, we may look at it and soon turn eyes away so it would not send messages of destruction to us. In one stroke, calm and rhythmic pattern take a beating. The poet says, "it is a savage place," something alien to human and civilized living. We are told that in those surroundings, a woman is weeping as she waits for her "demon lover." Further, the place is enchanted, driven by a magical force. The time is of the night even as the moon in the sky is not shedding enough light, it being "a waning moon." Still more disturbing is the mighty fountain keeping company with the panting earth, volcanic bursts and dancing rocks. We are made to think of an earthquake shaking and toppling everything in the scene. The previously existing sunless sea has turned here into a lifeless ocean.

We are informed that all this tumult constitutes actually voices of the ancestors who warn there would be seen a war. Under impact of the shaking earth, the pleasure-dome, too, is seen as swaying. Its shadow on the waves of the river shows this. The last two lines of this section indicate a shift. They turn attention away from the violent scene and prepare ground for a rhythmic working out of the deathly riddle inherent in the passage. The word "miracle" at the end of the passage is metaphorical more than it is literal. Such things do not happen, are not seen in the phenomena of life. They are the working of chance, an unknown unrecognized agency. In that sense, the poem itself is a miracle, to the reader and the poet. But miracle lights up the dark moments of life, makes them look up, struggle with self to get sense out of the scene in front.

Lines 37- 47

A damsel with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw:

It was an Abyssinian maid

And on her dulcimer she played,

Singing of Mount Abora.

Could I revive within me

Her symphony and song,

To such a deep delight 'twould win me,

That with music loud and long,

I would build that dome in air,

That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

The third section has ten lines. It reads faster and the lines are short. They follow a different beat. It is celebratory and is close to a dance sequence. We can raise the question whether this is a logical way ahead from the previous cluster of lines. An answer would be that in a dream sought to be portrayed in a poem, no particular logic is adhered to. The two passages can link with each other as two pictures placed together. It is called "a vision once I saw," that would mean it is something different not just in theme but also in terms of time. "Once" takes the reader into a different time-frame. The vision contains a maid who is playing on the musical instrument dulcimer and singing along with it a song. We note that the song affords a "deep delight" accompanied by "loud music." That brings back the memory of the pleasure-dome King Kubla Khan ordered to be built. The poet is firm in his belief that he "build that dome in air." Thus, by a circuitous route, we return to the mission of erecting the pleasure-dome. Once announced, the mission sends the poet into a frenzy. The next and last part of the poem is the capturing of that frenzy.

Lines 48-54

And all who heard should see them there,

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

The last part of the poem has eight lines. These show us the poet using the quaint ritual of the onlookers weaving three times a circle around him. Why? Because he is fed on honey-dew and has "drunk the milk of Paradise." In these lines, again there is a mention of holiness ("holy dread). It follows from the tone and tenor of the poem that it crosses boundaries of reason and logic to present a vision. In the sub-title, the expression "a fragment" was given. We may ask ourselves whether the poem ended abruptly justifying it was a fragment. We have no evidence of it being a fragment since for us the poem is certainly a whole—implying it has logic its own. It began with the idea of the pleasure-dome that finally got realized on the strength of music and dance.

In the nineteenth century context, Romanticism also meant a working of imagination at its peak. It drew help from dreams, fancies, imaginings, magic, and make-believe. Romanticism indicated the parallel existence of man's inner life, his mind and creativity, an area that had not yet been explored. It was beyond the reasoning prevalent at the time. Coleridge's poems such as "Kubla Khan," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and "Christabel" are examples of that creativity in which magic and miracle are supreme. Are those for real? The questions have been raised by Coleridge in definitive terms.

3.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed one poem each by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. "The Ruined Cottage" is by the former and "Kubla Khan" is

by the latter. The two poems exemplify English Romantic poetry manifesting two distinct responses to the aspects of the nineteenth century England. Both relate to nature, the second in a peculiar sense though. In the first poem, the loneliness and poverty as also the grit of the woman of the mountain are highlighted. In the second poem, we confront the magical nature of the scene that cannot be easily imagined by human beings. It does not end at a specific point of the depiction, but pauses with a jerk as if a thread that was continuing from one point suddenly broke. It is ghostly and contains the hints of death and destruction. Consider placing these poems together. We may then realize that Wordsworth's answers in "The Ruined Cottage" are secular and humanist, dwelling on the perseverance of the poor. On the other hand, Coleridge evokes mystery and fear on purpose, visualizing that much in the human imagination is unknowable. You may have visualized in these poems the working of the human mind as opposed to the incidents that take place in the social environment. The two poems complement each other under the larger trend of Romanticism.

3.11 GLOSSARY

Humanism : a viewpoint that is based on the conduct of human beings in society. It emphasises the values of objective thought as against the notions of divinity and traditional morality.

Phenomenon : the scene in society that encompasses life, ideas, norms and values.

Hierarchy : the structure with parts that standing in order of importance. The structure has people at the top, the second position, the third position, and so on.

Monarchy : a system of governance where the King is supreme authority in a society. It is based on the ruler in the position of a king as his birth right

3.12 QUESTIONS

1) What do you understand by Romantic poetry? Explain.
2) Discuss Wordsworth as poet of nature.
3) Write a critical note on Wordsworth's poem "The Ruined Cottage."
4) Discuss Coleridge as a poet of Romanticism.
5) What do 'magic' and 'mystery' signify in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"? Explain with examples.
6) Is "Kubla Khan*"* entirely unreal, having no link with the nineteenth century England? Support your answer with examples from the poem.

3.13 REFERENCES

1) Carter, Ronald. *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. Oxon: Routledge, 2011. Indian Reprint.
2) Lefebvre, Georges. *The French Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1962.

3) Raymond Williams has observed: "The historically liberating insight, of a new kind of possible order, new kinds of human unity, in the transforming experience of the city, appeared, significantly, in the same shock of recognition of a new dimension which had produced the more familiar subjective recoil. The objectively uniting and liberating forces were seen in the same activity as the forces of threat, confusion and loss of identity." Kanav Gupta. Ed. *Romantic Poets.* Delhi: Worldview, 2016, p. 31.

3.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

Carter, Ronald. *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. Oxon: Routledge, 2011. Indian Reprint. Kermode, Frank., *Romantic Image*. London: Routledge, 1957.

Lefebvre, Georges. *The French Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1962.

Reed, Arden,, ed, *Romanticism and Language*. London, Methuen, 1984.

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 4 VICTORIAN POETS: ROBERT BROWNING AND ALFRED TENNYSON

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- know about the Victorian Age;
- understand the term Dramatic Monologue;
- discuss the content of the poems of Browning and Tennyson.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall have a view of the Victorian poets with help from one poem each by Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson. The presentation shall take us to the age in which the two poets lived. They were inspired by the developments of the age. At the same time, they charted a territory of poetic expression unique to their times. The Victorian Age followed the Romantic tradition that believed in dreaming big and recognizing the trends of the time as challenges. The time span between the eighteen forties till the end of the nineteenth century characterized stability. Yet, the age produced poets that left an impact on the cultural landscape. This will be highlighted in some detail in this unit. The unit will also provide to you the analysis of Browning's "The Last Ride Together" and Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar".

4.2 THE VICTORIAN AGE

Let us take a general view of the socio-cultural developments in the nineteenth century England. The period between 1837 and 1901 is considered to be the Victorian age, literally because Queen Victoria reigned during this period. However, the term refers to the larger phenomenon that changed England crucially. It also impacted Europe that reshaped and redefined itself in the nineteenth century. Clearly, different countries of Europe were interlinked economically and socially.

The Nineteenth century was a century of self-doubt and philosophical questioning. It saw the rise of important thinkers such as Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill, and Sigmund Freud making significant contributions to the thought of the day. The ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century had already made inroads into the thinking across countries in the continent. Rousseau gave a call for return to nature because the course of the existing society, according to him, had snatched away everything spontaneous from the common people. The masses were in the grip of the regulated life of the city with rules and principles that curbed processes of thought. For that reason, Rousseau would make sense in the previous century. In the nineteenth century, thinkers and writers engaged in intense debates on questions of science, technology, morality and religion. Karl Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*(1848), focused upon the plight of the workers and the underprivileged. Marx's analysis hinged on the clash of interests between the proletariat and the capitalist class in a historical frame. Charles Darwin challenged the theory of creation with his evolutionary model in the book *On the Origin of Species* (1859). A deep questioning of God led to the Victorian crisis of faith as a result. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the later years of the 19th century proclaimed that God was dead and the human being had to rely on his own resources for resolving questions of existence. The works of Sigmund Freud further sharpened the critique of society and God, as Freud connected the cause of anxiety and fear in life with the oppressive social institutions affecting the human mind. Rational observation and scientific analysis were the two methods to understand society, nature and human behaviour. Of these three, society loomed large in the Victorian period since it alone could give strength and stability to the common people needing resources to sustain them. That was the crux. Yet, matters could not be resolved on the social plane unless the governing social relations were upturned. The physical dimension of the existing dilemmas had made people sit up and wonder. Interestingly, these issues had become the staple of the nineteenth century fiction. Novels, philosophical treatises, political comments and analyses as well as scientific tracts were the order of the day. It appeared that poetry was losing ground to these new forms of expression. The Victorian dilemma was as much of society as it was of the literary expression.

The aims and objects of people in the nineteenth century were to look for intellectual support. Previously, the support came from belief systems and norms of tradition. Most of them were linked with philosophical thought that permeated entrenched principles of life.

4.3 TRANSITION FROM ROMANTICISM TO VICTORIAN THINKING

The nineteenth century was unique in the sense that it graduated from ideas of the past to the ones that were to be forged anew. This was seen specifically in the Romantic age that questioned social institutions and searched for resolution in nontraditional areas of life. Blake, Wordsworth and Keats as well as Shelley stand testimony to this. Romanticism became a precursor for changes that might visit the society later in the century. The concerned changes were in the process of coming up but were not yet visible to the eye. This question found clear mention in the poetry of the period. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" (1867) comes to mind. It talks of absences of support, psychological and moral. In it, the poetic voice visualizes the sea at Dover appearing unconcerned about the society on the hard plain. The poem uses the metaphor of the sea reflecting the mechanical rising and falling of life irrespective of a goal. Did it indicate a crisis? For Arnold, the "Sea of faith" bound human life with its protective grip in the past. The turning of the poem into a melancholic song is unnerving. The poet bemoans the dwindling of faith in the present era when no "certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" exists. We may remember in the context that Arnold talked of the lofty place that poetry occupied in human affairs. For him, poetry was capable of "a high order of excellence." He observed that "The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can." (Enright, 261-2)

The Victorian crisis of faith is a commonly used phrase. It denotes the dilemma of the nineteenth century individual caught between personal belief and larger historical forces. The new scientific theories raised issues of morality, fellow feeling, and ease of living. At the other end of the spectrum stood upheavals, too daunting for comfort. Social revolution knocked at the door and if allowed in and to work for, they would spell untold violence. The background for such a circumstance was the rising gap between the rich and poor. The privileged stuck to dogma, thinking that would ensure stability. Yet, the number of those who wished to work and were without work threatened to shake up the apparent balance in life. Contrast it with the impatience of the Romantic poet in the preceding decades to only feel defeated since the new was not all that reassuring. Science questioned as faith wavered.

Where would poetic expression stand in those times of malaise in the thirties and the forties? The poets of the period had a great tradition of poetry behind them. In the shadow of Romanticism, the Victorian poet would find it difficult to get a subject of immediate relevance, something that would inspire him to engage with. The difference was that the challenges were haunting the powers that be, the state, the politics, as well as the thinkers. The crisis was predominantly economic. Increase in poverty and lawlessness were the issues keeping the administration on its toes. The writer was an abject spectator of the social scene unfolding in front.

Romantic expression derived strength from nature and an innocent past evoked by life in the village. The Victorian period, however, had not the same passion for creating a new perspective and waiting for a new dawn. The vision covering vistas of possibility, experiment and creativity had gone. The answers lay in complexities of the past driving society to a stalemate. The village structures

based on a sedate agriculture were being dismantled by the resource-hungry capitalism. The industrial revolution introduced factory-based production and it attracted large masses of people to the cities. Management of colonies far from England was another burden the metropolitan England had to bear. The colonies ensured regular supply of raw materials but that added to the schedule of production on a yet larger scale. That provides us with the background against which the two poems in your course can be interpreted. The poems are Browning's "The Last Ride Together" and Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar." "The Last Ride Together." We begin with a short account of Robert Browning.

4.4 BROWNING: THE MAN AND THE POET

(Image source: Wikipedia)

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was born in Camberwell, England. His writing career spanned the entire nineteenth century. Although he received limited formal education, he was well versed in both Greek and Latin. He began writing poems early in life and his first book of poems was published anonymously under the title *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* in 1833.He was twenty-one years old. One could discern in the poem his passion for the contemporary concerns. Later, he adopted an objective stance. That earned him appreciation in the literary circles. Soon, he was in touch with Elizabeth Barret, a woman senior to him by six years. She wrote poems and had won acclaim before he came to know her. Finally, against the wishes of her family, she married Robert Browning secretly. This helped Browning decisively in many ways. Being fond of her, he wished to preserve her as a friend and beloved at any cost. She was seriously ill and needed a climate different than that prevailing in England for recovery. In 1846, the couple shifted to Florence, Italy and lived there for fifteen years. The life in that city influenced his poetry. The previous subjectivity in writing was gone and Browning wrote with a sense of detachment.

As we read Browning's poems, we note that even as he shares with the reader his sentiments and feelings, he sees to it that they are combined with an intellectual attitude. He consciously chooses to maintain distance from what he states. Such a distance equips him with dramatic skills to portray life's situations. In his poems, he seldom gives his own voice to the characters he chooses to present. He lets

them have their own. Browning also has the penchant for dwelling on psychological tendencies. He would elaborate them and give them a distinct shape. Gradually, such an attitude became the defining nature of Browning's poetry.

4.5 BROWNING AS THE POET OF DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

It was the use of the dramatic monologue in poetry that won Browning fame and renown. That also provided interiority to the form. His poetry contained portrayals with a specific thought content. Through the monologue form, he created characters gifted with capability to look inward. Later in his career he wrote verse drama as well. This was concretized in *Stafford* that he composed in 1837. His other plays in verse form include *Pippa Passes* (1841), *A Blot in the Scutcheon* (1843) and *Luria* (1846).

Another aspect of Browning's poetry is optimism. It reflects an attitude of acceptance and assertion. Interestingly, Browning stood apart from his times. He was not exactly critical of them (the times) but brought in awareness while dealing with them in poetry. This gave a special quality to his utterances. The best part of his poetic expression was its relative detachment from the context where it was placed. He stood on his own, defining shades and adding to his characteristic twists. Other poets of his period carried remnants of Romanticism, extending melancholy to a context that rested on soft language and easy sentimentality. That made the Victorian poetic expression weak and insipid. Browning's strong individualism stood him in good stead. He knew what he was saying since he went with confidence into the implications of the idiom current at the time. We do not see any sense of doubt or uncertainty in Browning. Nor is he particularly given to anxiety or helplessness that characterized the Victorian ethos. However, this is confined, as suggested, to his individual stance where he thinks and intellectualizes. The poet assumes the role of an interpreter. He represents a fascinating unity between a person who feels and the one who makes sense unto himself of the given circumstance. This lends subtlety to the poem. The dilemmas coming up in this process are the stuff of Browning's poetry. If that is what we witness, how could he be called a Victorian poet?

4.6 ANALYSIS OF "THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER"

The poem in your course is "The Last Ride Together." Its title hints at a few things. Why the last? And does it portray togetherness of two people ending in tragedy? An important feature of the poem is that it is a portrayal as well as a performance. If read by the poet to an audience, it will resemble a dramatic piece. The poem is in the voice of the lover drawing the reader into his inner world. We might also see that as the speaker "I" addresses the reader directly. Let us give the poem a read:

The Last Ride Together

I said—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,

Since now at length my fate I know,

Since nothing all my love avails,

Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be—-
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
—Only a memory of the same,
—And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me

II.

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me, a breathing-while or two,
With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
Who knows but the world may end tonight?

III.

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once—-
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—-
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll

Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,—All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI.

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach,
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

ignou THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

VII.

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—-
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII.

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,
"Put in music we know how fashions end!"
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX.

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—-
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X.

And yet—she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,—-
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

4.7 A GENERAL COMMENT ON THE POEM

This poem has ten stanzas each of which contains eleven lines. In the title of the poem, the word "Last" has many meanings. It may be referring to the many rides in the past all of which were enjoyable. The obvious meaning of the word is that the lovers are meeting on this occasion for the last time. Connect that with the ending of the poem, "Ride, ride together, for ever ride." Think of the word "ride" in the case. It could denote a relationship, a joining together at the physical level. Indeed, physicality is the crux. Not for a single moment are the lovers away or separate from each other. The lover is talking continuously either to her or his own self. The union between the two defines the central parameters of the poem.

In spite of the many stages the poem passes through, the emotion of love is at its core, giving it great vigour. The poem is not sentimental or emotional. It is primarily of the intellectual kind. We see in it how different points are made about life, passion, time, various art forms and the human aspect of living. There are differences, contrasts, similarities, and strong or weak stresses on the arguments forwarded. The poet proves to his own satisfaction that arts such as music, sculpture, or poetry lack in the pleasure of the moment that can be prolonged to eternity. His own preference would be for poetry but there, too, love between man and woman scores over the act of composing a poem. The poem is in the classical mode where emotions work under the discipline of logic. We see this reflected in the speech. The command of the poem is in the hands of the speaker who argues, counter-argues, reaches conclusions, uses rhetoric, raises questions and proves the point of love as a supreme experience.

4.8 STANZA-WISE ANALYSIS

I

I said—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,

Since this was written and needs must be—-

My whole heart rises up to bless

Your name in pride and thankfulness!

Take back the hope you gave,—I claim

—Only a memory of the same,

—And this beside, if you will not blame,

Your leave for one more last ride with me.

In this stanza, "since" is used five times. It serves the specific purpose of connecting with the lover's long history of relationship with the woman. This affords him reasons to ask her for a favour—"Your leave for one more last ride with me." In the past, he has had a good number of rides with her, the present one might be one more to add to them. What do you say about the reasons he has given? I believe he is both humorous and earnest. The jocular tone suggests that his bonding with her has lasted a long time. But where is the harm? He could enjoy her company one more time. He failed in his mission of being her companion all his life. Why? By the lover's own admission, the woman decided to end the relationship. Can we call it the beginning of a narrative? After the episode of friendship, a new one of parting with her has begun. Will the woman oblige him and give him consent for one more ride with him? This creates curiosity and suspense for the reader. The question may be answered in the following stanza:

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;

Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs

When pity would be softening through,

Fixed me, a breathing-while or two,

With life or death in the balance: right!

The blood replenished me again;

My last thought was at least not vain:

I and my mistress, side by side

Shall be together, breathe and ride,

So, one day more am I deified.

Who knows but the world may end tonight?

The first five lines of this stanza are charged with uncertainty. Will the woman agree? After a struggle, she says, "Right!" The consent is hard earned for the lover, it became a question of life and death. Read the first five lines and guess what went on in the woman's mind at the time. First, the lover saw pride in her "deep dark eyes." The expression "pride demurs" conveys her rejection that was temporarily withdrawn. "Replenished me again" brings the half-dead lover back to life. He is excited that if the world ended as he rode with her, the ride would assume permanence. See the words used for the moment of togetherness, they make us aware of the predominance of the body in the poem. The love between the man and the woman bears the intensity of physicality. The association of the bodies being active in intimacy raises the two in level—the lover is "deified," he

becomes a god. Because of the power generated in these lines, it takes us to the following lines:

III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud

All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed

By many benedictions—sun's

And moon's and evening-star's at once—-

And so, you, looking and loving best,

Conscious grew, your passion drew

Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,

Down on you, near and yet more near,

Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—-

Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!

Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

Mark "billowy-bosomed." The comparison of the woman's body with the cloud is to create a sense of beauty at many levels. The lover thinks of nothing else except nearness with the beloved in that moment. That means all to him. He enjoys it immensely, his imagination being at work in the moment. Its vocabulary is of the manner of day-to-day living, and at its back stands the poetic power. The beauty of the woman is compared with natural elements such as the cloud and the star. The comparison is not of one body part with the cloud or star, but in terms of human passion. The visualization is dreamy with the soft feel and lightness of the cloud having similarity with the woman's bosom. Soon, this is achieved poetically, intimacy hinted at between the lover and beloved.

IV

Then we began to ride. *My soul*

Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll

Freshening and fluttering in the wind.

Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry?

Had I said that, had I done this,

So might I gain, so might I miss.

Might she have loved me? just as well

She might have hated, who can tell!

Where had I been now if the worst befell?

And here we are riding, she and I.

Here, the passion of the lover is intense—"Thus we began to ride." The said ride is not of moving along a path, but is result of the active engagement of the lovers with each other. In riding, they attain closeness. The soul smoothening itself out refers to the previous and present states. Previously, the minds of the lovers were

tied to conventions, now they shed old inhibitions and are awakened. Living in the moment is different experience. The former does not go forward but generates passion from within. The writer mentions ifs and buts of social existence that stifle fulfilment. Categories of hate and love become irrelevant. Shall we call it the celebration of human senses in a circumstance the lovers created on strength of their conscious choice? Browning means precisely that at the end of this stanza.

V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds?

We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,

Saw other regions, cities new,

As the world rushed by on either side.

I thought,—All labour, yet no less

Bear up beneath their unsuccess.

Look at the end of work, contrast

The petty done, the undone vast,

This present of theirs with the hopeful past!

I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

In these lines, the poet-lover raises the question of failure in life. This gives a sense of loss to human beings, whereas the important thing is the effort. Take, says the poet, the point of love that engages the lover and beloved into the unknown regions where attaining bliss is the sole aim. Making plans would not yield pleasure, only being active will result in satisfaction. Conversely, what one does is petty, whereas that which remains to do is vast. Also, success does not matter in such a context. Enlarged argument about success or failure is of no consequence against close companionship of the lovers. See how the poet establishes the value of love.

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?

What heart alike conceived and dared?

What act proved all its thought had been?

What will but felt the fleshly screen?

We ride and I see her bosom heave.

There's many a crown for who can reach,

Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!

The flag stuck on a heap of bones,

A soldier's doing! what atones?

They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.

My riding is better, by their leave.

Here, the poet juxtaposes love with other professions in society. What do statesmen and soldiers get at the end of their missions? In the poet-lover's opinion, they spend a whole life to get a mention in history books or a stone laid in their memory. That, however, will not amount to much when put next to the pleasure the lovers earn while riding together. Clearly, the poet-lover says in glee—"My riding is better." For the many associations of the "ride," refer to the previous stanzas where riding was elaborated as the enjoyment the lovers had in moments of intimacy.

VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—-
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

In this stanza, a ticklish question is asked. It is linked with the work of a poet. That makes the observation ironical. The writer gets here a chance to judge his own endeavour in light of that which he said in the appreciation of loving. He asks, who is better: the poet, or the lover? Browning gives the pride of voice to the lover, not to himself as a poet. We see a split here between Browning the poet and Browning the lover. That is the moment of judging oneself in the pursuit of doing and saying. Is there a gap between the two? If yes, who is the weightier of the two? There is no doubt in Browning's mind though. The poet is busy saying, assessing, rhyming and putting together emotions. It is the poet's life-long mission. However, it does not touch the ecstasies of love. For Browning, lovers do not compose poems. Instead, they do the very thing called love. The poet admits defeat in front of the lover.

VIII

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,

"Put in music we know how fashions end!"

I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

This stanza brings into the reference the sculptor and the musician. Both of them are men of the arts dealing in aesthetic affairs. The lover addresses each one of them and asks about their standing in broader life. His tone is that of a victor as if he stood on a higher pedestal, and rightly so. The arts are fine as they go, but the hard work and time spent on them by the artistes take their toll. Pleasure is the last thing that the artistes would think of. Their eye or ear would remain stuck to their work. The Venus in stone would not have the kind of admiration a young woman walking towards him might receive. And so far as the musician is concerned, he takes long to hone his skills to win appreciation from an audience. In both the cases, the years spent on the pursuit raise the issue of true joy. To a similar pursuit, of love, the lover gives "my youth; but we ride, in fine." Obviously, there is no comparison.

IX

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate

Proposed bliss here should sublimate

My being—had I signed the bond—-

Still one must lead some life beyond,

Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.

This foot once planted on the goal,

This glory-garland round my soul,

Could I descry such? Try and test!

I sink back shuddering from the quest.

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?

Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

This stanza raises the level of the "The Last Ride Together" still higher. In it, the terms are philosophical. The concepts of the earth and heaven have been brought in. It is significant that Browning talks in this poem about the heights love can attain on the earth. Yet, we may consider that the reference to the divine adds worth to human passions. Interestingly, the reverse is suggested to be equally true. The implication is that the awakening about heaven is made possible through the route of humanity occupying the earth. The meaning of "a bliss to die with, dim-descried" is that humanity of the earth can give glimpses of heavenly bliss that are not easily seen.

X

And yet—she has not spoke so long!

What if heaven be that, fair and strong

At life's best, with our eyes upturned

Whither life's flower is first discerned,

We, fixed so, ever should so abide?

What if we still ride on, we two

With life for ever old yet new,

Changed not in kind but in degree,

The instant made eternity,—-

And heaven just prove that I and she

Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

This stanza has hidden in it a vague suggestion about eternity achievable in life. The two lovers have remained close to each other for some time and one of the lovers has not spoken for a while. What could be the reason for the two in tight embrace and the moment came to stand still? Vocal and impetuous as ever, the male lover dreams that they might have reached heaven, the final destination. This may be called the flight of imagination in which the wish-fulfilment occurred. Even if that were a make-believe, it was worth gloating over. See how the state of eternal bliss is visualized in words such as "with our eyes upturned" and "life for ever old yet new." That is the image of eternity. The idea is reinforced with "Changed not in kind but in degree" and "instant made eternity." That is as near bliss as the two lovers could reach. Has it happened or is the lover only believes to be the case? In the answer to this question can be found the resolution of the issue dealt with in the poem.

In the poem as a whole, the overall emphasis is on the pursuit of love in human life. The nature of the poem being the dramatic monologue, it conveys a mental state and an ideal that human beings wish to realize. Within the parameters of the monologue, a form of representation addressing one's self and an imagined audience, the complexity of social surroundings and an escape route from them are being projected.

The surroundings are hinted at by the many areas engaging human attention. Those are of a statesman, a soldier, poet, sculptor, and musician. The final preoccupation is of religiosity. These are only examples. However, they point towards conscious choices one makes. Do these lead an individual anywhere? No, says the lover. They only catch a person in a web of activities. The escape route is that of emotions letting an individual receive inspiration from them. The central word is "ride." It is repeated again and again in the poem. The word has rich associations. It stands for relationship and interaction. It also keeps life pure from day-to-day happenings, unaffected by the prevailing norms of living. Love is at the core of existence and gives full liberty to the individuals involved in it. See the way the lover in the poem begins with a no from his beloved and gains nearness with following rejection. He leaves it to her to go away from the scene or temporarily be with him for a short while. The point made is that temporary togetherness can be made intense and enriching. The message coming out of this is of quality living. The intensity of closeness conceals in it what the poet has called eternity. There is a whole argument behind the dialogue, a monologue in fact, that works on the dialectic of living and existing, of gaining selfhood and mechanically observing external norms. It is an intellectual poem in the best sense of the word.

4.9 TENNYSON: THE POET

(Image Source: Wikipedia)

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) was poet laureate in the court of Queen Victoria. He was born in a middle-class family and his father was a clergyman. Tennyson completed his education from Trinity college, Cambridge and published his first collection of poems along with his brother while still in college in 1827 titled *Poems by Two Brothers*. Later in life, he became a leading poetic voice and wrote about the beauties hidden in nature as well as about important figure in culture and history. To the latter, he gave an independent voice. In his case, it was an amalgamation of the subjective and objective. He would write lyrics on one side that revealed his inner feelings and long verses that commented objectively upon the issues of his time. The works he is known for include "Ulysses", *In Memoriam*, *The Lady of Shallot*, and *Idylls of the King*.

Even as Tennyson followed the Romantic poets who linked their role as voicing grievances of the common people, Tennyson listened to the middle-class preferences of sedateness and tolerance. He belonged to the period of relative stability, The repeal of the Corn Laws and a time of peace in the country sent waves of conservatism to its writers, enabling them to breathe easy and write about human feelings than radical aspirations. That took Tennyson away from politics and social dissent. He came to adopt a nationalist stance. It resulted in melancholy taking cognizance of loss of faith and the rise of scientific materialist thought. The former was to be promoted and the latter presented as an unsettling thought. Change in society was not the strong point of Tennyson. It disturbed him and left him restless. He was a Victorian poet in the true sense. Yet, he had his own areas of inspiration and emphasis.

Perhaps, a kind of poetic detachment from the poet's own opinion was in the air. Browning had laid the foundation of the dramatic monologue. In it, the poet spoke in the manner of another person, a figure picked up from the past. It was the dominant mode in Browning. Tennyson attempted the same. However, he would write equally emphatically about his own individual feelings and emotions. In this regard, Grierson's view about Tennyson is worth noting:

Tennyson was the heir of the Romantic Revival; he had outgrown Byron, he found Shelley thin, but he had learned something from Coleridge and Keats, and

tried to learn something from Wordsworth; and he had a solid backing of classical scholarship than any of them. The Arthurian poems in particular suggest Keats by their pictorial quality. But Tennyson was not so richly endowed as Keats in the less

4.10 ANALYSIS OF "CROSSING THE BAR"

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

The central theme of the poem is death and specifically the poet's visualization of his death. It is a take on what he leaves behind and how his death might be received by those he knows. He wishes that "may there be no moaning of the bar, when I put out to sea". The sea is the metaphor for death or an afterlife. At the same time though, Tennyson hides behind the narrator to achieve objective distance between the image and him. Thus, we are face to face with an onlooker who has a viewpoint of his own. The narrator, thus, constantly refers to the time of living that kept him steady and comfortable. The lines in the poem seem untouched by pain or anxiety felt by an individual or a section of society. The tone of the poem is philosophical that looks at the surroundings with vague curiosity. It soon turns into an idea one is to engage with.

For us, the lines in the poem present a state of mind that is impersonal and detached. The voice in the poem seldom looks inwards. It wishes to define a posture the poet may have evolved over time. In view of this, it matters little that one is leaving a place and going elsewhere or may stay back and see things the way they exist. In the title, "crossing" is reflective about the act of proceeding in a direction but avoids spending time upon what one might confront on reaching

the destination. Calmness and tranquility seem to be the stance the narrator has lived with all one's life. The question arises whether at the back of the poem stands a period of steady fulfilment that marked the temperament of the nineteenth century as the poet was witness to. Since tensions and doubts are not the issues one grapples with, it is an apt projection of what has been termed the steady character of Victorianism.

4.11 STANZA-WISE ANALYSIS

I

Sunset and evening star,

And one clear call for me!

And may there be no moaning of the bar,

When I put out to sea,

In this stanza consisting of four lines, we find that the third and fourth lines do not form a whole sentence—the fourth line has a comma at its end. Interestingly though, we do not feel the need to rush to the fifth line for knowing what we are being led to. The reason is that this poem assigns no importance to a statement. Instead, it presents to us a couple of pointers. First, we begin thinking about the link between the first and the second line. The gap between the two is significant. If it is time of sunset, why should the poet make mention of a call? The third line expresses a wish that no bar should give out a cry of pain. The fourth line is half sentence. Soon, we move out of the stanza and guess the poetic intention. In the context, the poet talks to himself, saying the day has ended and it is time to rest. Also, he has perhaps been waiting for a message and a call. The bar in the next line is the curved surface of sand. That tells us the poet looks on a seashore. The picture is finally complete, with the poet completing his life's innings. As a result, he has to prepare for the journey beyond life. Do we not think that the poet has a quiet message to convey? He accepts death as a fact of life.

II

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,

Too full for sound and foam,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep

Turns again home.

Here, we are made to observe the sea as the end of the earth. Does that mean the earth stands for life and the region beyond the sea is where the poet's journey would end? To make it clear, the poet reminds us of the call in the first stanza. We are told that the tide is "too full for sound and foam." It is quieter and deeper. It speaks about the temperament of the sea ready to envelop the poet in its folds. The poet praises the sea as turning "again home." Thus, the earth as home changes into a place that becomes "again home." There is a problem, yet. One says it since the initial impression was that the home was the region beyond the sea. Which is home then, the sea or the place beyond the sea? Or is it that the sea and the place beyond it are the same for the poet? Possibly, we shall get the answer in the next stanza.

III

Twilight and evening bell,

And after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell,

When I embark;

The words in this stanza are soft and lyrical. Consider the rhyming of "bell" with "farewell" and "dark" with "embark." Also, dark is associated with sadness, but the poet denies it, saying it is "no sadness" in the present case. The prospect of starting the journey, embarking on it has no trace of the sense of missing the place the poet inhabited all his life. Getting back to the first line, the evening bell might give us an idea of the church. Mark that bell is spoken of as if in passing. On the other hand, the last line has the word embark, literally using a boat for the journey. It is simple yet so subtle! The stanza as such captures a moment of utmost tranquility. Death in the case evokes fulfilment, not loss.

IV

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crost the bar.

"Bourne" means the final goal or destination in life. As such, "our bourne of Time and Place" has a transcendental dimension. Still, the poet does not explicitly suggest heaven, nor does "my Pilot" suggest God. It is worth appreciating that the direct and less than formal address in the use of "Pilot" denotes close relationship, as in between friends. It has respect and self-respect inbuilt in the phrase. Again, "face to face" is sensuous, hinting at a long wait preceding the final union. Both Time and Place with capital letters in the beginning are philosophical. They widen the scope of the message. Likewise, "flood" is not merely a rise in the tide but the mythical event in the dawn of human history. That makes the poet use "crost." The lines in the stanza are tantalizing. They do not commit but provide pointers. It is an enriching description. It uplifts the sense and covers the details in glory. We are impressed by the control exercised by the poet. Let us bear in mind that the poem was the last Tennyson composed. The lytic has an unparalleled grace. It is a whole statement about living in the human and social world and bidding goodbye to it when the life in it has remained fulfilled. Tennyson lived a life of poetic and social success.

Tennyson was seldom taken by the current concerns of the age in which he lived—it was an age of doubt, turmoil and search. Tennyson remains stuck to the accepted and established, never bothering about to the visions of change and dynamic conduct. He should not be accused of avoiding the uncomfortable but of attesting to that which he normally confronted. His supposed conservatism had a dignity about it. He chose for inspiration the myths and legends of the medieval period. This was at the expense of newness and experimentation. Be that as it may, Tennyson will keep appealing to us on strength of maturity and sedateness he chose to adopt and put to use in his writing.

4.12 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we discussed a poem each by Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson. In them, we saw the questions that disturbed the Victorian mind. In "The Last Ride Together," the lover sought answers to the problem of fulfilment absent in the existing period. For this reason, the poet explored the area of human preoccupation with self of the individual. In the same manner, Tennyson pondered over the life's journey signified by the voice of the narrator—the journey in question met with peace and equanimity at the end. The happy ending of the two poems said with full clarity the message of values that sustained life in a major part of the nineteenth century. For grasping the nature of the dilemma in that period, a view of Romanticism helped, too. This was mentioned with emphasis in the unit.

4.13 GLOSSARY

Regulated life of the city : Artificial life; the mechanical pattern followed by the people in a city.

The evolutionary model : Associated with Charles Darwin that rejected the idea of creation of the world by a divine being.

The sea of faith : A term used by Matthew Arnold for describing the confusing state of organized religion.

The pleasure of the moment

that can be prolonged to eternity **:** Moment as eternity is a paradox, the two seem opposite to each other but mean a specific thing in the context. In poetry, the moment is generally emphasized. The more intense its, the stronger becomes its appeal, everlasting and engaging.

4.14 QUESTIONS

1) What do you understand by the Victorian crisis of faith? Has it to do the emergence of emergence of science in the nineteenth century? Discuss.
2) Explain the main concerns of Victorian poetry as distinct from those of the Romantic poetry.
3) Discuss Browning's "The Last Ride Together" as a dramatic monologue.
4) Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" contains a vision of peace and tranquility. Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

4.15 REFERENCES

Nietzsche, Friedrich *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None.* 1885.

Enright, D.J. and Ernst De Chickera. Fp. 1962. *English Critical Texts*. New Delhi: OUP, 2010.

A period of steady fulfilment: It has negative connotations. Steady fulfilment lacks dynamism and is indeed static

4.16 SUGGESTED READINGS

Armstrong, Isobel., *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, poetics and politics*. London: Routledge, 1957.

Black, Eugene C., *Victorian Culture and Society*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

Enright, D.J. and Ernst De Chickera. Fp. 1962. *English Critical Texts*. New Delhi: OUP, 2010.

Nietzsche, Friedrich *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None.* 1885.

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY