BRITISH ROMANTIC REVIVAL

BA (English)

First Semester

Paper I

Directorate of Distance Education

TRIPURA UNIVERSITY

Reviewer

Dr Amita

Lecturer, IBRI College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman

Authors:

Dr Madhu Rani, Assistant Professor, Sunderdeep Group of Institutions, Ghaziabad
(Units: 1.2, 2.2, 3.2.2-3.2.4, 4.2-4.5) © Dr Madhu Rani, 2015

Dr Shuchi Agrawal, Assistant Professor, Amity University, Noida
(Units: 2.3, 2.4) © Dr Shuchi Agrawal, 2015

Books are developed, printed and published on behalf of Directorate of Distance Education, Tripura University by Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

VIKAS® PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT. LTD.
E-28, Sector-8, Noida - 201301 (UP)
Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999
Regd. Office: 576, Masjid Road, Jangpura, New Delhi 110 014
• Website: www.vikaspublishing.com • Email: helpline@vikaspublishing.com

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

British Romantic Revival

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
Unit I **William Blake:** Lamb **William Wordsworth:** To the Skylark, Tintern Abbey	**Unit 1:** Blake and Wordsworth **(Pages 3-23)**
Unit II **ST Coleridge:** Dejection-An Ode **John Keats:** Ode to a Nightingale **PB Shelley:** Ode to the West Wind	**Unit 2:** Coleridge, Keats and Shelley **(Pages 25-54)**
Unit III **Charles Lamb:** In Praise of Chimney Sweepers, Dream Children, A Reverie	**Unit 3:** Charles Lamb **(Pages 55-70)**
Unit IV **Jane Austen:** Pride and Prejudice	**Unit 4:** Jane Austen **(Pages 71-91)**

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

In 1798, Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads* jointly. A preface to it was added in 1800 by Wordsworth. This is what historically initiated the poetry and other works of Romantic Revival. The word 'revival' means to recreate with a difference. In England, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Byron typified Romanticism.

Some of the features of Romanticism are: 1) Stress on imagination as against intellect. Wordsworth in his preface defined poetry as 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. Coleridge classified imagination as primary and secondary in *Biographia Literaria*. 2) This was poetry of subjectivity as opposed to the Neo-Classical objectivity. 3) The slogan was 'return to nature'. There was no elitist urbanity in their poetry.

In the book, *British Romantic Revival*, we have particularly dealt with specific works of Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, Lamb and Jane Austen to provide a diverse range of prose, poetry and novel to the students.

Many of the works of Charles Lamb are reflective of the literary Romanticism of his age. He was more interested in content over form; the expression of thought and feeling was paramount in his writing. Like other Romantics, Lamb was fascinated with the past, with antiquity, and with fantasy. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Coleridge have in a way different views about romanticism; their own unique peculiarities of being a romanticist.

This book has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Unit Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Terms further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

UNIT 1 BLAKE AND WORDSWORTH

NOTES

Structure

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reading William Blake and William Wordsworth back-to-back brings to mind the similarities and differences between them. As they are contemporaries, both are considered key figures in the Romantic Movement in poetry.

Both Blake and Wordsworth particularly emphasise childhood in their poetry. For example, Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* appear to treat childhood as a symbol of the human condition as seen from Blake's perspective. Wordsworth writes in quite a different way about his physical surroundings and childhood, but nevertheless, still describes nature and youth as representing something more than simple trees, rivers or scarcity of years.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience
- Analyse Blake as a visionary poet
- Discuss Wordsworth as a poet of nature
- Describe the development of thought in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*

1.2 WILLIAM BLAKE

NOTES

William Blake was born in London on 28 November 1757. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke of having visions—at four he saw God 'put his head to the window'; around age nine, while walking through the countryside, he saw a tree filled with angels. Initially his parents tried to discourage him from lying but later they did observe that he was different from his peers and did not force him to attend conventional school. In 1782, he married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship. She gradually helped him print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today; the couple had no children. Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III's treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence* in 1789 and followed it in 1794, with *Songs of Experience*. Some readers interpret *Songs of Innocence* in a straightforward fashion, considering it primarily a children's book, but others have found hints at parody or critique in its seemingly naive and simple lyrics.

1.2.1 Songs of Innocence: Overview

The spontaneity of these songs is the spontaneity of art, not of nature, of imagination and not of experience. Nothing but the purest imagination could give so stainless an image. The pure expression of spontaneity has never been made before or since. If we compare the 'Songs of Innocence' with Stevenson's 'Child Garden of Verses,' we are not once conscious of an immense difference. Stevenson writes of his own childhood, making the reminiscent efforts and fanciful condescension of a grown man. Blake recaptures the child's mind. He does not merely write about childish happiness; he becomes the happy child. He does not speak of, or for, the child; he lets the child speak its own delight and, what is most marvellous, there are no false tones in his voice. Stevenson is particular writes memories of his own childhood: he expresses what he remembers of his own wonder or fancy, his childish hopes and fears. Blake is universal – he expresses the natural delight in the life of every happy child in the world. The cry of his '*Little Boy Lost*' is the cry of every child at the first discovery of loneliness.

All this has been recognized. But what is not so widely recognized is the fact that these songs are all symbolic. *The Lamb* is a symbol of 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' *The Echoing Green* is not only the record of a happy day; it is a symbolic presentation of the Day of Innocence from sunrise to sunset. *Infant Joy*, *The Little Black Boy*, and *Laughing Song* symbolize the three ages of Innocence: infancy, childhood, and youth. *A Cradle Song*, *Nurse's Song*, and *Holy Thursday* are symbolic of the same ages of man, this time in relation to society; and the remaining poems, which images the human soul in its quest of self-realization, are all of even deeper symbolic import. Reading them, Blake once decided they should be placed in order because we pass through consecutive stages of

growth from infancy to self-consciousness. It is a mistake to say that the symbolism of these poems is so unobtrusive that it can well be neglected. Without that symbolism, these poems could not have been written, and to ignore this fact is not the best way to appreciate them.

NOTES

Blake's theme was the soul of man. His aim was to revel the same nature of the soul. This is ultimately the concern of every true poet. Blake differs from others in that it was his whole concern. His aim being clear to him, how was he to attain it? Symbols as Freud has shown, are the only language of the soul. When Blake realized exactly what he wanted to write about he could employ no other means but the symbols. How else could the immaterial adventures of the soul find sensible means of expression?

There are many technical faults like palpable irregularities, metrical license, lapse of grammar; but often the sweetest melody and the daring eloquence of rhythm saves it all.

There is in these poems the same divine afflatus as in Blake's *Poetical Sketches*; a maturity of expression, despite the persisting negligences and a maturity of thought and motive. These poems also have a unity and a mutual relationship, the influence of which is much weakened if the poems be read otherwise than as a whole.

Who but Blake, with his pure heart, his simple exalted character, could have transfigured a common-place meeting of charity children at St. Paul's, as he has done in the Holy Thursday. It is a picture of tender and grand at the same time. The bold images, by a wise instinct resorted to at the close of the first and second stanzas and the opening of the third, are in the highest degree imaginative; they are true as only poetry can be.

The poem *Spring* is very vocal despite imperfect rhymes. From addressing the child, the poet, by a transition infrequent with him, passes out of himself into the child's person, showing a wide-range of sympathy with childlike feelings. We are made to see the little three-year-old prattler stroking the white lamb, her feelings made articulate for her. Even more remarkable is the sentiment appropriate to that perennial image of meekness. To this poem, the fierce eloquence of *The Tiger* in the 'Songs of Experience' is an anti-type. In *The Lamb* the poet again changes person to that of a child. Of lyrical beauty, *The Laughing Song* is a good specimen, with its happy ring of merry innocent voices. This and the *Nurse's Song* are more in the style of his early poems but of far mature execution. The little pastoral poem *The Shepherd* has a delicate simplicity. Noteworthy also is *The Echoing Green* with its picture sequences in a warmer hue, its delightful domesticity, and its expressive melody. The touching *Cradle Song* is irradiated by a lovely sympathy and piety. More enchanting still is the air of fancy and sympathy which animates *The Dream*; that

Did weave a shade o'er my angel-guarded bed;
of an emmet that had lost her way,
Where on grass me thought I lay.

NOTES

The readers appreciate the symbolic grandeur of *The Little Boy Lost* and *The Little Boy Found*, or the enigmatic tenderness of *The Blossom* and *The Divine Image*. The verses, *On Another's Sorrow*, express some of Blake's favourite religious ideas, his abiding notions on the subject of the Godhead, which surely suggest the kernel of Christian feeling. A similar tinge of the divine colours the lines called *Night* with its revelation of angelic guardians, believed in with unquestioning piety by Blake. The poet here makes us conscious, as we read, of the noiseless steps of the angels. For a nobler depth of religious beauty, with a grandeur of sentiment and language to suit, there is no parallel or hint elsewhere of such a poem as *The Little Black Boy*:

My mother bore me in the southern wild.

We may read these poems again and again, and they continue fresh as at first. There is something in them which does not become stale, a perfume as of a growing violet, which renews itself as fast as it is inhaled.

The Chimney Sweeper and *Holy Thursday* are remarkable due to the anticipation of the daring choice of homely subject, of the yet more daringly familiar manner, nay, of the very metre and trick of style adopted by Wordsworth in such poems as *The Reverie of Poor Susan, The Star-Gazers*, and *The Power of Music*. The little chimney-sweeper's dream has the spiritual touch peculiar to Blake's hand.

The tender loveliness of these poems will hardly re-appear in Blake's subsequent writing. Darker phases of feeling, more sombre colours, profounder meanings, ruder eloquence, characterize the *Songs of Experience* five years later.

The design, which in the most literal sense illuminates the 'Songs of Innocence', consist of poetized domestic scenes. The drawing and draperies are as grand in style as graceful, though covering few inches' space: the colour pure, delicate, yet in effect rich and full. The mere tinting of the text and of the free ornamental border often makes a refined picture. The costumes of the period are idealized, the landscape given in pastoral are symbolic hints. Sometimes these drawings almost suffer from being looked at as a book and held close, instead of at due distance as pictures, where they become more effective. In composition, colour, pervading feeling, they are lyrical to the eye, as the Songs are to the ear. On the whole, the design of the 'Songs of Innocence' are finer as well as more pertinent to the poems; more closely interwoven with them, than those which accompany the 'Songs of Experience'.

The renascence of wonder: Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' carried his own peculiar blend of the earthly and the unearthly. The first stanza of the first poem has an imaginative naiveté that belong to no one else:

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me.....

Blake's lyrics most completely fulfil the definition of romanticism as 'the renascence of wonder'. The world of nature and man is the world of love and beauty and innocence enjoyed by a happy child, or rather by a poet who miraculously

retains an unspoiled and inspired vision. But in the 'Songs of Experience' the serpent has corrupted Eden, and themes that before had the radiance of spontaneous purity and joy are darkened by a knowledge of age and evil and suffering and oppressive authority. The most striking if not the most typical contrast is that between *The Lamb* and *The Tiger,* between a primitive painting of the innocent child, lamb and Christ, and a fiery incantation, a symbolic hymn of wonder and terror and power. In *The Tiger,* Blake celebrates the untamed forces in man and nature that must shatter unnatural ethical restraints and mechanistic philosophies.

This is how Alexander Gilchrist, who wrote an exhaustive biography of Blake, commented on the 'Songs of Innocence':

'As we read, fugitive glimpses open, clear as brief, of our buried childhood, of an unseen world present, past, to come; we are endowed with new spiritual sight, with unwonted intuitions, bright visitants from finer realms of thought, which ever elude us, ever hover near. We encounter familiar objects, in unfamiliar transfigured aspects, simple expression and deep meanings, type and anti-type. True, there are palpable irregularities, metrical licence, lapse of grammar, and even of orthography; but often the sweetest melody, most daring eloquence of rhythm, and what is more, appropriate rhythm. They are unfinished poems: yet would finish have bettered their bold and careless freedom? Would it not have brushed away the delicate bloom, that visible spontaneity, so rare and great a charm, the eloquent attribute of our old English ballads, and of the early songs of all nations. The form is, in these songs, a transparent medium of the spiritual thought.'

1.2.2 The Poem: The Lamb

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee.
Little Lamb God bless thee.

NOTES

1.2.3 Some Important Explanations

1. Little lamb……..made thee.

   The first stanza contains a number of natural pictures to build up lamb's habitat. But the emphasis is on the 'lamb-hood'–that is, the character and qualities of this innocent creature of God. The speaker asks: 'Little Lamb, who made thee?' The speaker is, of course, a child who puts child-like questions.

2. Little lamb……bless thee.

   The maker of the lamb is himself called a 'lamb'. The reference is to Christ who, because of his qualities of gentleness and meekness, and mildness is so called.

   For he calls Himself a Lamb – Christ is known as a Lamb.

   Christ also possessed the qualities of a child and praised the innocence of children. (That is why, in the Introduction, the child on the cloud may be regarded as symbolizing Christ).

   We are called by His name: Both the child and the lamb have the same qualities as Christ. They all share the qualities of meekness, mildness and innocence.

   The lamb, the child, and Christ are identified in this poem. Christ had the qualities of meekness and mildness which both a lamb and a child possess. Christ was an incarnation of love and tenderness.

   'The structure of each stanza consists of a theme (2 lines), its exposition (6 lines), and a coda (2 lines). Technically it is a triumph of form, but that one hardly notices, such is the childish beauty of the symbol, and the deep religious feeling which pulses through it.'

1.2.4 Critical Appreciation of the Poem

The Lamb is one of the simplest poems of Blake, both as regards the subject and the style. It has a significant position in the '*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*'.

In the first stanza, the child who is supposed to be speaking to the lamb gives a brief description of the little animal as he sees it. The lamb has been blessed with life and with the capacity to feed by the stream and over the meadow; it has been endowed with bright and soft wool which serves as its clothing; it has a tender voice which fills the valley with joy. We have here a true portrait of a lamb.

In the second stanza, there is an identification of the lamb, Christ, and the child. Christ has another name, that is, Lamb, because Christ is meek and mild like a lamb. Christ was also a child when he first appeared on this earth as the Son of God. Hence the appropriateness of the following lines:

He becomes a little child,
I a child and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.

The child in this poem speaks to the lamb, as if the lamb were another child and could respond to what is being said. The child shows his deep joy in the company of the lamb who is just like him, meek and mild. The poem conveys the very spirit of childhood – the purity, the innocence, the tenderness of childhood and the affection that a child feels for little creatures. A religious note is introduced in the poem because of the image of Christ as a child.

The Lamb is a pastoral poem and it thus perfectly harmonizes with the pastoral note of the Introduction to the 'Songs of Innocence'. The pastoral note in Blake is another symbol of innocence of joy.

The particular significance of this poem lies in the fact that it is a counterpart to *The Tiger* of the 'Songs of Experience'. In other words, *The Lamb* and *The Tiger* represent the two contrary states of the human soul. The opposition between these two poems is most pointed and striking. The lamb represents the violent and terrifying forces within man. Taken together, the lamb and the tiger represent the duality of human nature.

1.2.5 Blake's Vision of Childhood as Depicted in the 'Songs of Innocence'

The world of the 'Songs of Innocence' is largely a child's world. It is a world of simplicity, purity, happiness, and security, though touches of the adult world of misery and guilt do occasionally intrude here. The central situation in this world is that of a child or young animal delighting in life. Fear is not necessarily totally absent from this world, but when danger threatens, a parent-figure (father, mother, God, or angel) is at hand to console and to comfort.

The keynote of the world of the 'Songs of Innocence' is struck in the very opening poem called *Introduction* which is a little pastoral but which is also an appropriate preface to the poems that follow. Blake here thinks of himself as a shepherd with a pipe, playing, songs of joy in the open country, when he sees a 'child' or a lamb; and under its inspiration he writes 'happy songs' which 'every child may joy to hear'. The child in this poem seems to carry suggestions of (1) the Christ child speaking from Heaven ('a cloud'); (2) an angel symbolizing innocence; and (3) the spirit of pastoral poetry. It is possible therefore, to treat the poem as an allegory, its subject being divine inspiration. The poem brings divinity effortlessly to earth. The fact that the poem deals with divine inspiration in such simple and natural terms makes it a highly appropriate introduction to the Songs of Innocence. The poet shows himself setting out happily to record the joys of childhood which are pure and secure.

The Echoing Green is the record of a happy day. It is a scene of a village green on a warm afternoon in late spring, but it is also a symbolic presentation of the days of innocence from sunrise to sunset. Children, young folk, and the old people all participate in an 'unfallen' enjoyment of life in a beautiful natural environment. The poem reminds us of the Biblical picture of Adam and Eve before they sinned and were expelled from Paradise. Even the reminiscences of the old people seem not to contain any regret. The end of the day brings rest and refreshment, not fear of darkness.

NOTES

The Lamb suggests the Lamb of God that 'taketh away the sin of the world'. What is vital in this poem is the nature of the innocent creature of God. Innocence has a divine source. The innocent lamb symbolizes Christ, the incarnation of love and tenderness. The child who speaks in the poem is also identified with Christ because Christ became a child and particularly praised the innocence of children. The child-like qualities of this poem lie particularly in the little speaker's unselfconscious and serious address to the lamb as to another little child, and in his delight in repetition.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. When was William Blake's first printed work published?
2. Who wrote an exhaustive biography on William Blake?
3. State one poem each from the 'Songs of Innocence and 'Songs of Experience'.

1.3 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) changed the course of English poetry. While he was not the first nature poet, his treatment of the theme of nature made his contribution to English literature unique. Unlike his predecessors such as John Dyer (1700-1758), James Thomson (1700-1748) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) who described nature in a conventional manner, Wordsworth had as his theme the internal world of man, strivings of the mind and the sublime experience of the soul.

Wordsworth began his literary career with *Descriptive Sketches* which was published in 1793. He was deeply influenced by the French Revolution and much of his poetical fervour is infused with the ideals that formed the French Revolution. His poetic inspiration found its ideal expression in the *Lyrical Ballads.* It would not be an exaggeration to state that Wordsworth, along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, initiated the English Romantic Movement. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 started the Romantic Movement, with its primary emphasis on the theme of nature. While poets were writing about ancient heroes, Wordsworth advocated that poets should write about nature, children, the poor and the common people. He advocated the use of simple words to express personal feelings. He defined poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings arising from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. As he writes in the *Lyrical Ballads*, 'Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science' (from *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd ed., 1800).

Wordsworth's aim, as Coleridge states in *Biographia Literaria*, was 'to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention… and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us.' The *Lyrical Ballads,* to quote the critic Albert,

'is epoch-making, for it is prelude to the Romantic Movement proper'. A few poems such as *Simon Lee,* and *Expostulation and Reply* are remarkable, while *Tintern Abbey* is without any doubt the masterpiece of the *Lyrical Ballads*, or as Albert puts it, 'one of the triumphs of his genius'.

It is in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* that Wordsworth elaborated upon his theory of poetry. He regards poetry as the finest of all aesthetic expressions; for him, poetry is the 'breath and finer spirit of all knowledge' whereas, the poet for Wordsworth is a man 'possessed of more than organic sensibility'. Wordsworth has also discussed at length what he perceives as an appropriate subject and style of poetry. To quote Wordsworth, the ideal themes were drawn from 'incidents and situations from common life', that is 'humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passion of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain maturity'. Over such themes, it was Wordsworth's intention to throw 'a certain colouring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect'.

Commenting on the element of style, Wordsworth denounces the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers' and instead prefers to write poetry in a 'selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'. For him, there is no real distinction between the 'language of prose and metrical composition'.

1.3.1 The Poem and Important Explanations: Tintern Abbey

FIVE years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. — Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view

In these lines, the speaker begins by relating to the reader that a lot of time has passed since he had last visited the banks of the River Wye. In the next few lines, the poet starts reminiscing about his last visit and how the visit had left upon him a lasting impression. The speaker then begins to describe the 'steep and lofty cliffs' and says that they are just like he remembered them. Wordsworth reiterates that he has come 'again' and how the mountain cliffs impress upon him thoughts of solitude and seclusion. The poet expresses his sense of peace as once again he finds himself witnessing the merging of the vast landscape with the endless sky.

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see

NOTES

These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

In these lines, the poet muses over the tranquil landscape with the cottages, the orchards laden with their unripe bounty of fruit. The green hue is soothing to the poet as he once again recalls having seen the hedge rows, pastoral farms and wreathes of smoke rising to the sky from the dwellings of vagrants in the 'houseless woods'.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: — feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: — that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, —
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

NOTES

The poet in these lines contemplates how in the last five years, when he had not seen this landscape, its memories had remained with him as fresh as ever. He says that often in the din and rush of the city life, he had derived in a wearied state a soothing sensation from recalling those peaceful moments he had spent there; and those memories restore tranquillity within him. The speaker says that such beauteous forms also elicited within him thoughts of some 'unremembered pleasure' of countless little 'unremembered acts of kindness and of love', which for a moment may appear trifle but endow endless riches to human lives. It is these moments which lend a sublime feeling, a blessed mood to our lives and lessens the burden of leading our lives in a harsh, unintelligible world. He says that such a serene feeling blesses us in a manner that our corporeal frame is suspended and we almost become a 'living soul' which is in a state of harmony with the universe.

In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart —
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!
And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity, The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. — I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love, That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest

NOTES

Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

The speaker says that often perturbed by the fretful stir of this world, he has turned to the river Wye for succour, and that when he stands here again, he is rejuvenated by the belief that he can find solace to sustain him through the coming years in future. He then goes on to say that he is no more the same individual who had come to visit river Wye five years ago when he was like a roe full of optimism and energy. He says that he cannot relate what the sounding cataract meant to him or what feelings the tall rock induced within his being. The speaker says that today with more experience, he can no longer indulge in boyish pleasures that he derived from experiencing the outward beauties of nature; rather he has started deriving pleasure from the solace that nature lends to the troubled soul. He says that he has learnt to see in nature the power to 'chasten and subdue' disturbing elements.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, — both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being.
Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more

Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance —
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence — wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love — oh! with far deeper zeal

NOTES

NOTES

Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

The poet feels the presence of something divine in every aspect of nature that fills his entire being with a sense of joy and peace. The speaker says he continues to be a lover of nature and finds repose in its bounties. The poet then turns to his sister who has accompanied him to this visit and in whom he finds his dearest companion. The poet says that he sees in his sister an image of his former self. Addressing his sister, the poet says that he is making a prayer to nature to lead him from joy to joy eternally and all the while induce in their beings lofty and sublime thoughts such that the 'dreary intercourse' of every day mundane life does not make them insensitive to the beauties of nature. He says that 'memory' serves 'as a dwelling-place 'For all sweet sounds and harmonies' and it is these memories that will heal her soul if 'solitude', fear or pain assail her in this life. The poet ends the poem by saying that the memory that they both stood together as worshippers of nature will help them overcome years of absence from these beautiful 'steep woods and lofty cliffs' and refresh in their mind's eye what the green pastoral landscape meant to them.

1.3.2 Critical Appreciation

Tintern Abbey was composed in the year 1798 and it is considered to be one of the most significant of all the works of Wordsworth. One of his most celebrated and critically acclaimed poems, it is seen by critics as a record of the different stages in the growth of Wordsworth's poetic genius and imagination. Critics often regard it as a miniature epic that thematically anticipates his epical endeavour, *The Prelude*. *Tintern Abbey* brings out much of Wordsworth's poetic and philosophical beliefs. Written in blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter, the poem comprises the elements of an ode, conversation poem as well as dramatic monologue. In the opening lines, the poet is seen meditating upon his earlier visit to the River Wye. The memories of his earlier visit fill him with a deep sense of 'tranquil restoration'. The narrator recalls that five years earlier when he had visited River Wye, he had almost a sublime, transcendental experience; what perplexes and saddens Wordsworth is the fact that he is no longer able to experience that same feeling. In the first twenty-five lines, Wordsworth solely deals with the sensory perception and appreciation of nature's beauty. It is in these lines that Wordsworth's thematic principle comes to the fore, that being, the interconnectedness of man and nature. The opening line connotes the passage of time by apprehending it through the change of seasons and the sweet soft murmur of the Wye. In these lines, Wordsworth draws a relationship between man, nature and time.

In the next few lines, Wordsworth proceeds to develop the link between the mind and nature. He says that the lofty cliffs amidst the virgin seclusion impress upon him the feeling that the earth is merging with the sky in a divine unison.

In the lines 26 – 50, he proceeds to address the effect that Wye and its soothing transcendental beauty has upon him. In the Lines 59 -110, Wordsworth explores in depth how he apprehends enlightenment through nature, while the rest of the poem is an exploration of his relationship with his beloved sister Dorothy and thoughts about the future.

As Kaiser Jr., an American evangelical scholar and writer writes, 'In Wordsworth's *Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, the narrator melts into nature, and they form one infinite, contiguous existence. Awed at the prospect of infinitely contiguous reality, he is roused to the sublime state'. The poet seems to find joy and solace in completely absorbing himself into nature. The poet succeeds in creating an illusion of an infinite connectedness between the landscape of the sky and the poet's soul. The narrator gradually weaves the magic upon the reader too and engages him by describing the visual aspects of the secluded scene.

The sanctity of the tranquil surroundings enables the poet to have a sublime, transcendental experience. Again and again, Wordsworth emphasizes on the solitude, the silence which induces a sense of well-being and contentment. The poet becomes so enchanted with the beauty of the landscape that he becomes embroiled in even the minutest aspects such as 'wreathes of smoke sent up, in silence'. As Kaiser writes, so powerfully intense and passionate is Wordsworth's representation that he almost invokes the landscape in the mind's eye of the reader; to quote Kaiser, 'Wordsworth paints a picture, not unlike a Turner watercolour, blending the landscape with complementary hues, and lending a still greater sense of harmony to the scene. One can imagine the narrator reposing under his sycamore, scanning the pastoral landscape, his eye focusing on the hedge rows, copses and country cottages, then panning backward to notice the mysterious wreathes of smoke above the trees. He is effectively absorbed into the landscape, as has already happened to the other mysterious inhabitants of the valley. Like the hedgerows indicate sheep herding, so too do the wreathes of smoke indicate the presence of these unseen folk'.

Wordsworth also explains his vision of mutual intercourse, or communion, between nature and the mind. Retreating into the solitude of his memories, Wordsworth tries to efface the din of cities. He recalls how in the most troubled times, amidst the 'hours of weariness', these memories of nature's calmness gave him strength and gave him 'sensations sweet'. In the following lines, he once again lays emphasis on the connectedness between nature, time and man.

Wordsworth says that so strong is the power of nature to soothe frayed souls that even while he was far away from the lap of nature, he could perceive the beauty of nature with his mind's eye, and that through this communion with nature, he felt a sense of peace and connectedness. Through his connection with nature, he is able to draw on the boundless potential of the earth.

In the lines 36-50, Wordsworth expounds the crux of the poem as he describes endowment of his prophetic vision. Wordsworth says that nature invokes within him a natural sense of tranquillity which enables him to draw on nature's potential through self-surrender to both nature and his own mind. Wordsworth suggests pantheism here, as he says the tranquil mood envelops him completely, leading him into a state

NOTES

akin to a trance. As Kaiser writes, 'This trance lends Wordsworth the wisdom and insight to "see into the life of things". This "blessed mood" invokes not only a mental and emotional change, but a physical change as well. Wordsworth's body seems to almost enter a stasis, not unlike what appears to occur in transcendental meditation. The body slows down to a point where it does not distract us, and indeed all corporeal things disappear'.

Another critic, William Christie, writes that as Wordsworth would 'have us believe,… *Tintern Abbey* is a poem of emancipation and enlightenment, discovering and celebrating the harmony - indeed, unity - of man and Nature, as had Coleridge's *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* and *Frost at Midnight*. Far from being an "exploration", *Tintern Abbey* represents on at least one level an escape from the "dark passages" of life; an escape, literally and metaphorically, from "lonely rooms: mid the din of towns and cities" , for it is thus incarcerated that the poet feels "the burthen of the mystery" and "the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world" most acutely. The escape itself is, by turns, upwards (transcendence), outwards (geographical relocation), and, ultimately, both'.

Of all the works of Wordsworth, critics assert that *Tintern Abbey* is the most paradoxical. It is seen by a critic as 'at once highly derivative and highly innovative: derivative, in that it is rooted in the eighteenth-century recollective, topographical tradition of Thomson, Warton, Akenside, Cowper, Bowles, Rogers, Southey, and even Goldsmith; innovative, in that it initiates a descriptive and psychological depth and fusion – a poetic language expressive of the imaginative co-operation of mind and nature - as well as achieving the unapologetic audacity or reach that we identify as "the Romantic sublime"'.

Wordsworth on his second visit to the River Wye is consistently drawing a comparison between his memories of his earlier visit or 'mental revisiting' and the experience he has in context of those memories in his 'physical revisiting'. He is representing a 'mental landscape' by trying to superimpose it upon the present landscape. This develops in the poet a deep sense of unease and perplexity as he is unable to apprehend the Wye with as innocent and calm mental state as he had done five years earlier. In these five years, the poet's disillusionment with the hollowness of the revolutionary fervour of the French Revolution has incapacitated the poet's ability to indulge in the sublime beauty of nature as before.

Tintern Abbey has been seen as a holistic statement of Wordsworth's philosophy of nature. The poet recalls how as a boy, when he still retained the innocence of childhood, he '*like a roe / I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep river, and the lonely streams'* (lines 67-69), had absorbed the 'sensations sweet'. It is these 'sensations' which his adult mind recalls to draw sustenance amidst the din of the city and fill his being with a sense of 'tranquil restoration'. Not only that, he says that these memories

Have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love" (lines 29-35).

Wordsworth asserts that nature's peaceful environment rejuvenates a person's soul so that even amid the stress of city life, one can find solace and that is the reason why he still is,

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; . . . . .
. . . . . well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (102-111)

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. Name some of the predecessors of Wordsworth who wrote about nature in a conventional manner.
5. After how many years is the speaker in Tintern Abbey revisiting the River Wye?
6. Lyrical Ballads is a compilation of two important Romantic poets. Name the poets.

1.4 THE POEM: TO THE SKYLARK

Ethereal minstrel! Pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

1.4.1 Critical Appreciation

This poem of Wordsworth is an ode in praise of a bird famous for many unique qualities. The skylark spends most of its time flying high in the sky. The poet wonders

NOTES

whether it does so because it likes to stay away from the earth in which there is so much of unhappiness. However, it does drop in silently as and when it pleases into its nest on the ground.

The skylark flies high to great heights in the open sky and sings lovingly to its mate which also inhabits the same open sky. Their song is heard in the plain down below. It proudly asserts the fact that the beauty of its songs does not depend on the pleasant season of spring. It stays on without it.

Wordsworth addresses the skylark as a wandering singer who seems supernatural and a 'pilgrim of the sky' who wishes to have nothing to do with the cares of this world. But he concludes the poem by praising it for singing its melodious songs in broad daylight unlike the nightingale in the 'shady wod' high in the open sky which are heard by people down below on the earth. The skylark in doing so is like the wise man who soars to great heights without losing sight of his bearings on the earth below.

This little poem is also full of oxymorons. Let us take an example: 'A privacy of glorious light': How can there be 'privacy' in the open sky in 'glorious' sunlight? It's possible because the skylark is the only bird which can fly to such great heights.

1.4.2 Beneficial Influence of Nature

Throughout Wordsworth's work, nature provides the ultimate good influence on the human mind. All manifestations of the natural world for example, the highest mountain or the simplest flower—elicit noble, elevated thoughts and passionate emotions in the people who observe these manifestations. Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of nature to an individual's intellectual and spiritual development. A good relationship with nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds. As Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude,* a love of nature can lead to a love of humankind. In such poems as *The World Is Too Much with Us* (1807) and *London, 1802* (1807) people become selfish and immoral when they start living in the cities and distance themselves from nature. Humanity's innate empathy and nobility of spirit becomes corrupted by artificial social conventions as well as by the squalor of city life. In contrast, people who spend a lot of time in nature, such as labourers and farmers, retain the purity and nobility of their souls.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. Why according to the poet does the skylark spend most of its time flying high in the sky?
8. Why is skylark called the 'pilgrim of the sky'?

1.5 SUMMARY

NOTES

- Reading William Blake and William Wordsworth back-to-back brings to mind the similarities and differences between them. As they are contemporaries, both are considered key figures in the Romantic movement in poetry.
- William Blake was born in London on 28 November 1757. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke of having visions.
- In 1782, he married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship.
- Although clearly intended as a celebration of children and of their unadulterated enjoyment of the world around them, Songs of Innocence is also a warning to adult readers.
- Innocence has been lost not simply through aging, but because the forces of culture have allowed a hope-crushing society to flourish, sometimes at the direct expense of children's souls.
- Songs of Experience allows Blake to be more direct in his criticism of society. He attacks church leaders, wealthy socialites, and cruel parents with equal vehemence.
- Blake's lyrics most completely fulfil the definition of romanticism as 'the renascence of wonder'.
- The world of nature and man is the world of love and beauty and innocence enjoyed by a happy child, or rather by a poet who miraculously retains an unspoiled and inspired vision.
- *The Lamb* is one of the simplest poems of Blake, both as regards the subject and the style. It has a significant position in the 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience'.
- The child in this poem speaks to the lamb, as if the lamb were another child and could respond to what is being said. The child shows his deep joy in the company of the lamb who is just like him, meek and mild.
- *The Lamb* is a pastoral poem and it thus perfectly harmonises with the pastoral note of the Introduction to the 'Songs of Innocence'. The pastoral note in Blake in another symbol of innocence of joy.
- William Wordsworth (1770-1850) changed the course of English poetry. While he was not the first nature poet, his treatment of the theme of nature made his contribution to English literature unique.
- Wordsworth began his literary career with *Descriptive Sketches* which was published in 1793. He was deeply influenced by the French Revolution and much of his poetical fervour is infused with the ideals that formed the French Revolution.
- Commenting on the element of style, Wordsworth denounces the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers' and instead prefers to write poetry in a 'selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'.

NOTES

- *Tintern Abbey* was composed in the year 1798 and it is considered to be one of the most significant of all the works of Wordsworth.
- One of his most celebrated and critically acclaimed poems, it is seen by critics as a record of the different stages in the growth of Wordsworth's poetic genius and imagination.
- The poet in *Tintern Abbey* contemplates how in the last five years, when he had not seen this landscape, its memories had remained with him as fresh as ever.
- He says that often in the din and rush of the city life, he had derived in a wearied state a soothing sensation from recalling those peaceful moments he had spent there; and those memories restore tranquillity within him.
- The speaker says that often perturbed by the fretful stir of this world, he has turned to the river Wye for succour, and that when he stands here again, he is rejuvenated by the belief that he can find solace to sustain him through the coming years in future.
- *To the Skylark* by Wordsworth is an ode in praise of a bird famous for many unique qualities. The skylark spends most of its time flying high in the sky.
- Wordsworth addresses the skylark as a wandering singer who seems supernatural and a 'pilgrim of the sky' who wishes to have nothing to do with the cares of this world.

1.6 KEY TERMS

- **Pantheism**: Pantheism is the belief that the Universe (or nature as the totality of everything) is identical with divinity, or that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent God.
- **Oxymoron:** It is a figure of speech that juxtaposes elements that appear to be contradictory.

1.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* was published in 1783.
2. Alexander Gilchrist wrote an exhaustive biography on William Blake.
3. *The Lamb* by Blake is a poem from the 'Songs of Innocence' and *The Tyger* is from the 'Songs of Experience'.
4. John Dyer (1700-1758), James Thomson (1700-1748) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) are some of the predecessors of Wordsworth who described nature in a conventional manner.
5. The speaker in *Tintern Abbey* is revisiting River Wye after a gap of five years.

6. *Lyrical Ballads* was jointly written by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
7. According to the poet the Skylark spends most of its time flying high in the sky may be because it likes to stay away from the earth in which so much of unhappiness abounds.
8. Wordsworth addresses the skylark as a wandering singer who seems supernatural and a 'pilgrim of the sky' who wishes to have nothing to do with the cares of this world.

1.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Blake's Songs of Innocence.
2. What suggestion does Wordsworth give to his sister, Dorothy in *Tintern Abbey*?
3. Write a short note on Wordswoth's attitude to nature and its benevolence.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss Blake's vision of childhood as depicted in the Songs of Innocence.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, *Tintern Abbey* in detail.
3. Analyse the poem, *To the Skylark* and comment on its message.

1.9 FURTHER READING

V. Erdman David. 1982. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. London: University of California Press.

Sarkar, Sunil. 2003. *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Manning, J Peter. 1990. *Reading Romantics: Texts and Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leonard, Barnett George. 1973. *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*. USA: Haskell House.

UNIT 2 COLERIDGE, KEATS AND SHELLEY

NOTES

Structure

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In their own way, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley contributed something unique to the Romantic movement. Coleridge was able to explore the emotional and supernatural side of the creative experience.

For Keats and Shelley, the Romantic Movement became an exploration of the poet's desire to achieve immortality through their work. It also became a movement where a philosophical analysis of what people know and how they will be perceived as time passes became critical points of discussion. In this unit, some of the important works of Coleridge, Keats and Shelley have been discussed in detail.

NOTES

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the sensuousness of Keats' poetry
- Analyse the revolutionary spirit of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*
- Describe Coleridge's attitude of nature in *Dejection: An Ode*
- Discuss the treatment of nature by the poets of the Romantic era

2.2 S.T. COLERIDGE

Dejection: An Ode was originally a verse letter, and was first written on 4 April 1802. It is said that in its original form it was made up of 340 lines. It was then thoroughly revised, and six months later published in the Morning Post of 4 October 1802. It was again revised and finished in its present form of 139 lines. Now it consists of eight stanzas of uneven lengths. It is supposed to have been addressed to Sara Hutchinson. She was sister-in-law to Wordsworth and Coleridge had fallen in love with her after his marriage to Sarah Fricker. In its revised form, the poet bewails his gloomy, barren dejection in which he has lost 'the shaping spirit of imagination.'

According to the poet's biographers, the dejection engulfed his mind because of his unhappy marriage, bitter family-quarries, spasms in the stomach, hopeless passion for Sara Hutchinson, opium-pills, and wine. The more he tried to come out of it, the deeper he sank into it. The main cause of the poet's sorrow is that this state of dejection virtually destroyed his creative poetic power.

2.2.1 The Poem: Dejection: An Ode

Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,
With the old Moon in her arms;
And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!
We shall have a deadly storm.
(Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence)

I

Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Æolian lute,
Which better far were mute.
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light,

(With swimming phantom light o'erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
And sent my soul abroad,
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

III

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

IV

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:

NOTES

NOTES

Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

V

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

VI

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.

For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

VII

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality's dark dream!
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream
Of agony by torture lengthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,
Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
Thou mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold!
What tell'st thou now about?
Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds—
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!
And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shudderings—all is over—
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less affright,
And tempered with delight,
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay,—
Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Nor far from home, but she hath lost her way:
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.

NOTES

NOTES

VIII

Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,
Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
With light heart may she rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.

2.2.2 Summary of the Poem

I. In the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence the poet (Thomas Percy) tells his master that at a late hour last night, he saw the old stands in the arms of the new one. So a terrible storm is about to appear soon.

   Coleridge begins his ode with reference to the weather forecast in the quoted lines. He says that if the post of the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence can make such a weather forecast, he can also do so as he notices the old moon in the arms of the new one in the sky. So a terrible rainy storm shall disturb the night soon. He wishes that the noisy storm would come just then, scared his dejection out of his being, and fill him with poetic inspiration as it used to do in the past.

II. Addressing his beloved Lady, he says that he has been gazing at the western sky throughout the peaceful evening. Beautiful objects of nature are there before him. Yet he is unable to feel their charm.

III. He has lost his genial spirits. A heavy burden of grief fills his heart, but the beautiful objects of nature try to heal him. So he believes that the real sources of passion and life are within the human heart. When they are dried up, one cannot expect the external objects to revive them.

IV. Addressing his Lady, he says that nature does not possess any life independent of ours. We cast our joy or sorrow over her, and are happy or sad accordingly. The objects of nature are lifeless and uninteresting. Whatsoever light or glory we see in them, it is a projection of the glory of our own soul.

V. The source of this light, this glory, this beautiful and beauty-making power is the joy in the heart and soul. In effect, this joy is at once life, pleasant thoughts and feelings. This joy is the power-giving principle, and unites us with nature, through imagination. This joy is granted only to the pure-hearted. All the

external melodies and pleasant sights of nature are simply the echoes and the reflections of the joy.

VI. There was once a time when the poet's heart was filled with this joy. So he was able to even derive pleasure from the hopes of others. But now he has been crushed by earthly sorrows and cares. What pains him most is that every fit of his dejection impairs the inborn gift of his creative power of imagination. His metaphysical studies, too, have damaged his poetic powers, and tend his thoughts to barren metaphysics.

VII. Thoughts of metaphysics are poisonous to the poet's mind. So he wants to divert his attention to the beauty of nature. But the wind does not give him any joy. It is producing a sound of groaning wounded soldier trembling with cold. And now it is producing the sound of a moaning little girl who has lost her way home.

VIII. It is already midnight but there is no sleep in the poet's eyes. The poet then concludes his ode with a prayer for Sara Hutchinson. May she sleep gently. May she get up with a cheerful heart the next morning. May she live in happiness for ever and ever.

2.2.3 Critical Appreciation and Explanation of Important Passages

'Dejection Ode has all the vividness of the earlier conversation poems, and in the self-analysis that Coleridge gives of his failure, a post-mortem by a merely medically alive Coleridge on the poet that had died inside him – thought and feeling are integrated more surely and is more powerful than in any other of his poems. On a miniature scale, the poem resembles a tragedy. From a calm but menacing beginning, it works to a tragic climax and subsides into something not unlike 'calm of mind, all passion spent.' A true tragic climax cannot, however, exist at the level of hysteria, and 'Dejection', superbly successful, as it is in creating both despair of loss and (paradoxically) the wonder of what it lost, breaks down at the very point where it ought to reach its greatest strength. Its pathos is more convincing than its tragic power for at the moment when Coleridge becomes conscious of his restored power to feel, the poetry turns self-conscious and bardic in its declaration, not embodiment, of tragic emotion.

Thou mighty poet, even to frenzy hold!
What tell'st thou now about?

The tone is forced, not surprisingly, since the motion it expresses is not a natural, but an agonised release.'

– Raymond Wilson, in A Coleridge Selection, 1963

Explanation of Important Passages

1. And oh……..and live.

   This passage has been extracted from the poem *Dejection: An Ode* composed by S.T. Coleridge. In the foregoing lines he forecasts a rainy storm, noticing

NOTES

the old moon in the lap of the new one. Here he feels that the present gusty wind might develop into a loud and rainy storm right away. For, in the past the sounds of such a night-storm and those of the obliquely falling night-showers had often elevated his dejected soul. Their noise certainly filled him with awe. Yet it also stirred his poetic imagination and sent his poetic soul into the objective world of nature. So he wishes for the blowing of such a storm just now. For he hopes that, perhaps, it might still give him the same poetic impulse as it used to do in the past. He also hopes that the noisy storm might scare his dulling dejection out of his heart and soul. And probably it might also awaken his soul to its poetic genius, and make it poetically alive and active again. The poet implies that rain and a storm usually gave him poetic impulses in the past, but at present his dejection has almost deadened his poetic faculty. He therefore wishes for a rainy storm, hoping that it might rouse his soul from the painful slumber of dejection. He is not sure of the gift from the painful slumber of dejection. He is not sure of the gift from the storm. So he writes that the rain and the storm might 'perhaps their wonted impulse give.'

2. A grief…….no relief.

   Here the poet, is in a state of great dejection and describes its nature to his friend, Lady Sara Hutchinson. He says that his dejection is a grief without any painful emotion. In other words, it is empty of any painful feeling. Yet it is gloomy and has caused low spirits in him. It has been smothered by an inner agent and is also sleep-inducing. It is a cold sorrow without any passion at all. It has no tendency to express itself in a natural way, such as a word, a sigh and tear. It tends to seek no such relief as may break its monotony. The poet implies that his dejection is peculiar and even strange. It is a 'neuro state.'

3. My genial……..are within.

   Here the poet says that his dejection has deprived his soul of its inner cheerfulness, making it dead to the beauty of nature in the external world. He says that his soul has sunk down to the level of extremely low spirits. There is a heavy weight of grief. In order to lift the weight off his soul, he has been gazing on the western sky, the floating clouds, the stars and the crescent moon for a long time. He notices those beautiful objects of nature there but he does not feel the effect of their beauty upon his heart and soul. His attempt to seek a sensation of joy from pretty nature objects is futile. Even if he were to gaze on the green light lingering in the sunset sky for ever, the external beauty of nature could not make him gay and cheerful. The poet is of the belief that the real sources of intense joy and gay life lie in the cheerfulness of the soul. Now that his soul's cheerfulness is gone, he cannot accept the beautiful objects of nature to excite in him the thrills of joy. The poet implies that his low spirits have impaired his faculty of feeling pleasure or pain. Consequently he has looked at the beautiful western sky vacantly. Hence he proceeds to comment that the sources of man's pleasure pain, and liveliness can be traced back to the cheerfulness of the human soul.

4. O lady……..her shroud.

Here the dejected poet expresses his belief that nature has no life independent of the human on-looker's. The ode is addressed to Sara Hutchinson, whom Coleridge had fallen in love with. Addressing her as 'Lady', he says that the joys or the sorrows that man receives from nature are the reflections of his own mood. In herself, nature is something dead and insensate. She lives in the life of man. So, if a person is cheerful enough to look upon her as a bride, nature appears to him as the most beautiful bride dressed in the most charming wedding garments. Likewise, if a man is sad, nature seems to him to be a corpse covered in a shroud. The poet implies that objects of nature are just like reflectors. They reflect the nature of the onlooker's mood, his gaiety, sorrow and other moods. In themselves they are what they are, characterized by their peculiar qualities, colour and properties.

The poet's attitude to nature as reflected in this poem is quite different from the attitude he held earlier, and expressed in the poems entitled *The Eolian Harp, This Lime Tree Bower, My Prison* and *Frost at Midnight.* These poems reflect his view that pretty scenes of Nature arouse in each heart a sense of beauty, love, and joy. He also believed:

'That nature never deserts the wise and pure.'

But in the present passage his view of nature is radically different.

2.2.4 Coleridge's Attitude to Nature in The Dejection Ode

Dejection: An Ode may be called a poem of sorrow. The poet's heart is filled with a grief of strange nature. It is:

'A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stiffed, drowsy unimpassioned grief
Which finds no natural outlet, not relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear.'

According to a critic, Coleridge is dejected to the level of neuroses and in this neurotic state he first wishes for a night-storm of thunder and rain. For in the past such a storm had moved his soul, made it alive to joy, and sent his 'soul abroad.'

He then begins to gaze on the western sky decked with stars and the new moon. He finds the scene beautiful but he does not feel their beauty. To use his words:

'I see them all so exceedingly fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!'

It follows that he has lost his power to feel the beauty of nature. He has also lost the capacity to feel joy. In the poem, he further says that his 'afflictions' have given rise to the present state of dejection in him. This dejection, which he describes as 'a grief without a pang, void,' has caused a total failure of his genial spirits: To quote him:

'My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast.'

NOTES

In the self-analysis of the failure of his poetic sensibility from the beginning of the poem to its end, the poet's complaint is that he has lost the power of feeling beauty, or rather, the power of feeling delicate emotional impression of joy made by 'fair' objects of nature.

Coleridge later propounds a peculiar thesis. It is the cheerfulness of a person's soul that is the basis of his creative sensibility. In the third stanza he calls this cheerfulness of the soul 'genial spirits.' Addressing Sara Hutchinson as 'Joy Lady,' in the fifth stanza, he writes:

'Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower,
A new Earth and a new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud.'

Lest his point should be missed, he hammers it home as follows:

"We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.'

In these lines he says that a poet with a cheerful soul possesses 'the shaping spirit of imagination.'

Coleridge gradually comes to the most remarkable part of his thesis. He writes:

'O Lady ! We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garments, ours her shroud.'

As discussed earlier, Coleridge here says that our joy or sorrow is the reflection of our own mood. If we are in genial spirits, and look upon nature as a bride, she seems to us to be a bride dressed in most beautiful wedding garments. If we have been bereaved of a dear one, and look upon nature, she seems to us to be a corpse covered in a shroud. Now, upto this point, there is little objection to the poet's thesis. For example, when he himself listens to the wind in the present poem, it seems to him to be groaning. Further, its groans resemble those of wounded, shivering, trampled, soldiers of a retreating army. But the objectionable part of his thesis is that nature has no life independent of the on-looker's. It is a view based on the German metaphysics studied by Coleridge.

This view is radically different from that he held in his earlier poems, namely '*The Eolian Harp* (1976), *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* (1979), *Frost At Midnight* (1798), and some others. In them, he reflects his pantheistic view of nature. For example, in *The Eolian Harp*, he looks upon objects of Nature as a

series of harps which the divine breeze plays on. To him the divine breeze is the soul of God. In *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison*, he expresses the view that scenes of nature arouse in each heart a sense of beauty, and joy. He also expresses the view:

That Nature ne'er desert the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
A wake to love and Beauty

NOTES

In *Frost at Midnight*, Coleridge expresses the view that God is present in everything. He also believes that he will himself educate his son, Hartley Coleridge, through the agency of nature:

So shall thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, Who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in Himself,
Great universal teacher ! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

2.2.5 Critical Appreciation of Dejection: An Ode

Evidently Coleridge's attitude to nature as embedded in *Dejection: An Ode* is basically different from his view of nature expressed in his earlier poems. He was a great poet, and probably one of the greatest English critics, yet his views expressed in the poem invite some criticism. He argues that his 'affections' have caused the failure of his 'genial spirits.'

John Keats was rejected by Fanny Browne. He suffered from consumption, and he knew he was going to die in his youth. But these two things made him a great poet. Coleridge says our joys or sorrow casts its colouring over a nature object. It may be true of a poet who does not believe in an independent and pantheistic power of nature. Coleridge says his studies in metaphysics have damaged his shaping spirit of the imagination. To Donne, a metaphysical thought was a great sensation, and it stirred his creative imagination. Further, Coleridge says that nature is dead as a source of poetic stimulus, or as an independent impression-maker. Science can refute this view to the core.

Yet, it cannot be denied that Coleridge's poetic sensibility and his creative imagination suffered a great loss. The cause of the loss may probably be treated back to great doses of opium, too much wine drinking and some mental diseases caused by them. As for his view of nature expressed in this poem, it is not taken seriously in modern criticism. It is taken to be the view of a sick mind writing in a neurotic state, not the view of a same philosopher Coleridge sometime was.

2.2.6 The Poetic Thought

The poetic thoughts of the poem can support Wilson's view to some extent. It can be summed up as follows:

NOTES

One evening the poet is in a state of great dejection. To divert his attention from his grief, he looks at the new moon and finds the old moon in her lap. Like Thomas Percy, the poet of the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence, he makes a weather-forecast that a storm will come soon. Then he wishes the wind could develop into a rainy storm right away, scare away his dejection, move his being, and send his poetic soul aboard, as it had usually done in the past. For he suffers from an overpowering grief, it is without a painful emotion. It is, however, dark, dismal, stifled, sleep inducing, and without any passion. It has caused a total failure of his genial spirits. He gazes on the beautiful western sky for an impulse of joy from nature. But the beauty of nature does not move his heart and excite pleasant thrills in it. It instils him to conclude that nature is lifeless and insensate. So whatever beauty or sweetness we perceive in her, it is the reflection of our own mood – an emanation from our own soul. To quote his words:-

"O Lady ! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud."

Coleridge then defines the nature of his thesis. He says that the cheerfulness of the soul "is the spirit and the power."

"Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven."
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies she echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light."

There was, in the past, a time when he was a happy poet with a powerful poetic imagination and talent, but his dejection has suspended his poetic talent and his creative imagination. He turned to study metaphysics to tide over his dejection, but metaphysical tendencies overpowered his imagination and became the habit of his soul.

Yet now he has spurned metaphysics and has turned to 'listen to the world.' He is, however, shocked to see that the sound of the wind resembles a long scream of agony. Then the wind seems to be making 'Devil's Yule.' Soon its noise comes to resemble the groans of some wounded but tramped and shivering soldiers of a retreating army. Finally, the wind-noise seems like the weeping and sobbing of the little girl who, in Thomas Otway's verse tale, loses her way home:

The poet then becomes conscious of the time. It is midnight, but there is no sleep in his eyes. Then he wishes his lady love might never experience such sleeplessness.

NOTES

To conclude, Coleridge's poem *Dejection: An Ode* is one of the greatest of his poems. It is possessed by a poetic sweep which carries the reader into its poetic world right away and wins all sympathy for Coleridge. Since the poet is incapable of experiencing the beautiful sights of nature, we are only given a distant view of the moon standing in the blue lake of the sky, as a lotus. We are also made to hear the fearful noises of the wind 'that rav'st without.' According to a critic, Coleridge has not lost all his poetic powers in his neurosis of dejection. His romantic imagination and emotion move along the marshes of dejection, slowly and steadily, but surely. It evidences the fact how great a poet Coleridge is. Written in irregular metres, the poem is a great romantic ode. Here the poet laments over the grave of the shaping spirit of his poetic imagination.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. When was Dejection: An Ode first written?
2. What does the poet wish for in the beginning of the poem?
3. In which poem does Coleridge present the view that God is present in everything?

2.3 JOHN KEATS

Unlike Byron and Shelley, John Keats was more committed to the idealism of art than to the idealism of politics or philosophy. Keats devoted himself to the worship of 'art for art's sake' and acquired an excellence in the art of poetry. Although famous for his odes, such as *Ode to Psyche, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Ode to Autumn*, Keats also wrote longer poems, such as *Endymion, Lamia, Isabella and Hyperion,* which were all masterpieces. His writing initiated a new kind of poetic movement whose chief slogan was 'art for art's sake'. This section, critically analyses the writing style of the poet and his treatment of nature in poetry.

John Keats (1795-1821) was not only the last but also the most perfect of the Romanticists. His mother and brother died of tuberculosis and Keats himself suffered from the same disease. He was acutely aware of the pain and suffering which caused his premature death. Due to this, his poetry is marked by the awareness of pain, suffering and death. Keats died at an early age of twenty-six. However, he is regarded as a major poet and a great genius. He displayed his concept of beauty and thoughts vividly in his odes. Unlike Byron and Shelley, Keats was more committed to the idealism of art than to the idealism of politics or philosophy. His odes represent his love of sensuous beauty, a touch of pessimism and a strong individualism.

Keats' treatment of nature in poetry is entirely different from that of Wordsworth and Shelley. He is not influenced by the pantheism of Wordsworth. He does not see any divine spirit in nature, but rather loves nature for its external beauty

NOTES

and charm. Keats is a poet of nature. He loves nature for its sensory appeals to his five senses, which are touch, taste, hear, sight and smell. Moreover, Keats has a sixth sense with which he observes nature so keenly. He loves nature for its own sake and his picturization of nature is detailed and elaborate.

In *Ode to Autumn*, he describes the beautiful pictures of fruits and flowers. The ripe apples, the swollen gourd, the sweet kernel in the hazels and the honey in bee-hives have a rich sensuous appeal. The songs of autumn are the mournful sounds of gnats, the bleating of lambs, the singing of crickets, the whistling of the redbreast and the twittering of the swallows. The whole poem illustrates Keats's extraordinary powers of observation of the world of nature. In *Ode to a Nightingale*, he also presents various delightful pictures:

And happy the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by her starry fays;

In the *Ode on Melancholy*, Keats paints a beautiful picture of rain falling from a cloud on the drooping flowers for his readers:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud.

Keats follows Greek poetry in personifying the objects and forces of nature. They called the moon Cynthia, and the sun, Apollo. They saw Dryads in the wood and Naiads in water. In his *Hyperion* and *Endymion*, he follows Greek poetry to a great extent.

Keats's important poems are related to, or grow directly out of inner conflicts.

For example, pain and pleasure are intertwined in *Ode to a Nightingale*:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk. (1-4)

Love is intertwined with pain, and pleasure is entwined with death in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*:

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild (13-16)

2.3.1 The Poem: Ode to a Nightingale

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, 5

But being too happy in thine happiness,
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South!
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet

NOTES

NOTES

Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that ofttimes hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

2.3.2 Critical Appreciation of Ode to a Nightingale

NOTES

Ode to a Nightingale is the most well-known ode by Keats. The poem also contains strong subjective elements, dealing directly with Keats' personal life. The poet reflects on the conditions of human existence. He contrasts the misery of life with the bliss of art. The poet compares his own drowsiness to the joy of the nightingale. The bird soars freely and sings a song of external happiness, unaware of the miseries of human life which is full of weariness, pain and death. The poet expresses a keen desire to leave this world of sufferings, fever and fret. He wants to merge with the ecstatic world of the nightingale.

At first, he thinks of entering this magical world through red wine, but later prefers to use the 'Viewless wings of poesy'. He wishes to leave this world and reach the blissful world of the nightingale. It is through his poetic imagination that the poet lands in the world of the nightingale. He wishes to die peacefully while the nightingale sings her sweet song. However, all of a sudden, his imagination fails and the poet returns to the world of reality. The song of the nightingale came to an end and disappeared in the next valley. The poet wondered if he had seen a vision or a waking dream. He enquires of himself whether he is awake or asleep. *Ode to a Nightingale* is one of the best poems written by John Keats. In the beginning of the poem, we can decipher that it is evening. The poet is sitting in a garden. He hears a nightingale singing a song. The blissful song of the bird causes pain in his heart. He feels as if he was numb and powerless, without any feeling or action. His senses become intoxicated as though he had drunk hemlock or a cup full of opium a minute ago. He sinks into the river of forgetfulness.

The poet says that his condition is not a result of envy regarding the happy life of the nightingale. He is quite happy with the bird's happiness. He calls the nightingale a nymph of the trees. He imagines that the nightingale is singing her song in a spirit of joyousness in some sweet plot, sitting in a grove of green beech trees. The poet wishes to venture into the happy world of the nightingale. Initially, he would like to go there with the help of red wine. Such a wine should have been cooled deep into the earth. He wants to sing and dance with happiness like the people of the provincial area of France. Then, he wishes to drink a beaker full of the warm South, filled to the brim with bubbles rising from it. He wants to drink the particular wine in order to leave this world unseen and establish himself in the blissful world of the happy nightingale. The poet wishes to flee from this world, which is full of weariness, fever and fret. People suffer from a number of maladies and they sit and hear each other crying with pain.

In the human world, nothing is safe. The old people suffer from palsy and their hair turns grey. The young people are not liberated from fever and fret as well. Here, thinking fills people up with despair and in this world, beauty and love are short-lived. Then, the poet changes his idea of taking a cup of wine. He says that he will go the world of the nightingale with the help of his poetic imagination. In his imagination, he reaches the place where the nightingale is singing in full-throated ease. He finds that the night is beautiful. The moon is shining in the sky and is surrounded by the stars. However, the place where the poet is sitting is dark. Only

NOTES

dim moonlight reaches there when the breeze blows and the branches move. In the world of the nightingale, the poet says that due to the darkness, he cannot see the flowers that are blooming on the ground. Nor could he see the flowers hanging on the branches of the trees. But in the sweet-smelling darkness, he can guess which sweet flowers must be blooming in the summer season. There should be the flowers of white haw thorn, eglantine and violets in the leaves. He can smell a musk rose around him. It is visited by murmuring flies in summer evenings.

The poet is in a dark place, but he is listening to the sweet song of the nightingale. He says that he has often wished to die an easy death. He has called death by delicate names in many of his poems. He has often requested death to come to him and take away his breath quietly. He wishes to leave this world peacefully and without any pain. The nightingale is pouring forth her soul with extreme pleasure. Even if he dies now, the nightingale would continue to sing, but his ears would not be able to hear her song. It would be the song of mourning for the poet. The poet, in his ecstasy, calls the nightingale an immortal bird. She is not born to die like human beings. As an individual bird, she will die sooner or later, but her song will remain alive in the world for eternity. The same song was heard in the past by kings as well as common people. It was perhaps the same song which was heard by Ruth when she was standing in some alien cornfield. It brought comfort to the sad heart of Ruth, making her feel homesick. It was the same song that opens the magic windows of fairy castles on perilous seas in some lonely island. When the poet thinks of forlorn lands, it acts like a ringing bell. It brings the poet back from his imaginary world to the world of hard realities. The poet bids farewell to his imagination. He says that one cannot go on living in the world of imagination forever. He has to return to the world of hard realities sooner or later. The poet's imagination ends and he comes back to the world of harsh realities, finding himself alone. The music of the nightingale gradually fades away and he wonders whether he was asleep or awake.

2.3.3 Keats' Sensuousness

Keats was considered the greatest romanticist who had always been a lover of beauty. He said in *Endymion*, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' As a sonneteer, he did not live to write many sonnets, but the few sonnets he wrote, are some of the best in English literature. For example, *When I have Fears that I may Cease to be, Human Seasons, On Looking into Chapman's Homer and Bright Star*.

John Keats is predominantly known for sensuousness in his poetry. This is the unparalleled quality of his poetic genius. Human beings are said to have five senses—touch, taste, hear, smell and sight but Keats is believed to have six senses because of his great power of intuition. He is especially known for his power of acknowledging the grief and pain of society but at the same time, his poetry is full of aesthetic qualities. His love of beauty in any form is supreme. He though was scared of death because of his tuberculosis, his approach to society was very positive. No doubt, many of his poems are full of melancholy, gloom and grief but still he is the one who even in dire circumstances of his life sees beauty all around.

NOTES

Ode to a Nightingale is one of the finest examples of Keats's rich sensuousness. In the very beginning of the poem, the poet desires for red wine from the fountain of the Muses which appeal to our senses of smell and taste.

Keats's conception of love and beauty was unsurpassed. His sensuousness depends on the minuteness of details. In the present poem, he also creates an atmosphere of numbness and drowsiness under the effect of intoxication. He is more a poet of sensuousness than of contemplation. Every line of the poem is full of sensuous beauty.

There is a great difference between sensuality and sensuousness. Keats is not a poet of sensuality, a poet of depicting carnal pleasure or lusty, rather his poems are strikingly sensuous. His pictorial senses are not vague. No one can deny that Keats had a very good eye and a remarkable feeling for the music of words; as a sensuous poet, he falls into the line with Marlowe and Tennyson. Keats is a sensuous mystic.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk

2.3.4 Keats' Negative Capability

Keats belonged to a literary movement called romanticism. The poet, in the real world, escapes or attempts to escape into the ideal. Disappointed in his mental flight, he returns to the real world. Usually he returns because he has not found what he was seeking. However, the experience changes his understanding of his situation, of the world. Keats considered poetry to be the embodiment of the ripest and the fullest experience mankind is capable of. The doctrine of 'Negative Capability' is aimed at not the egoistic self-assertion, but the negation of self. It is a capacity for objectively in the midst of terrible personal suffering and a capacity to come to terms with this misery not through fact and reason but through an understanding of its true nature. It involves the ability to identify oneself with the subject of one's poetry or art.

Beauty for Keats is not an inert thing or a thing whose value lies in having no relevance to ordinary life. He sees the terrible truths of life so intensely that they become the elements of beauty. In *Ode to a Nightingale*, the poet writes:

"The weariness, the fever and the fret
Here where men sit and hear each other's groan.
Where palsy shakes a few sad last gray hairs."

Keats is often associated with love and pain both in his life and in his poetry. He wants to accept all things in all moods. He wishes to reveal the beauty of life in life, to realize in his own work the principle that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'. Negative Capability is closely related to the ability to 'perceive beauty'.

NOTES

In *Ode to a Nightingale*, Keats presents a very bleak and pessimistic picture of mortal life where

"Youth grow pale and spectre thin and dies,
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow."

Keats can face the tragic predicament with honesty and courage. However, he also longs to enter the joyful world of nightingale on the 'viewless wings of poesy'. Therefore, Keats accepts life as a whole with all its shades and shines, as he is capable of objectifying the subjective experiences. To him, everything merges into art and beauty.

2.3.5 Treatment of Nature in the Romantic Era

The Romantic Era is commonly seen as a whole, as the concept of interest in nature, primitive ages and human emotions are to be found in all major works of the period. Nature is one of the key interests of the Romantic Period. It is celebrated in all three phases of English Romanticism. It is necessary to indicate some aspects of nature poetry during the century preceding Romanticism. The importance of nature in this period has been shown by various scholars. The Romantics felt themselves to be in revolt against the principles of the preceding age of Neoclassicism. Fundamentally, this was a revolt against form rather than the subject-matter.

The Age of Pope set up certain principles of composition which were to produce a classical harmony in poetry. Nature was systematically 'methodized' by means of poetic diction and emotional restraint. Pope's view of nature is perhaps typical of the early eighteenth century. In his *Essay on Criticism*, he sees nature as the uniform and unchanging norm:

First follow nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart.
At once the source, and end, and test of art.

There were several other Romantic poets and writers, who contributed exceedingly to the Romantic era.

S.T. Coleridge

If Wordsworth's poetry illustrated the leading romantic ideas of man as a spiritual and growing being of nature, Coleridge's poetry depicted the irrational and supernatural element in man and life. If Wordsworth laid stress on the everyday experiences of his simple characters, Coleridge concentrated on the highly unusual experiences of his simple characters. Coleridge used supernatural elements in his unfinished lyric *Kubla Khan*:

'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.'

NOTES

Robert Southey

Southey holds his place in romantic poetry due to his association with the lake poets, than of his literary talents. His most ambitious poems include *Thalaba the Destroyer, The Curse of Kehama, Madoc* and *Roderick*. Southey wrote far better prose than poetry and his *Life of Nelson* is a well- known work of prose.

Sir Walter Scott

With Walter Scott, romantic poetry became more popular. His *Marmion* and *Lady of the Lake* aroused the whole nation to enthusiasm. Scott is predominantly known for his novels. At the outset, we must honestly confess that Scott's poetry is not artistic. It lacks the deep imaginative and suggestive qualities that make a poem the noblest and most enduring work of humanity.

James Thomson

It was primarily the publication of *The Seasons* which established James Thomson's name as a poet. The poem consists of four parts and a concluding 'hymn'. In the order of the first collected edition in 1730, these parts are namely Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Each poem deals with a season of the year and discusses natural phenomena and human activities characteristic of these seasons. The central theme of the poem is nature in all its visible aspects. The narrative action serves only as an episodic ornament.

Thomson is a master in the description of wild nature. Even the smallest details of nature and the life of animals are taken into consideration. Thomson gives a very charming description of the life of birds, their courtship, the building of the nests, the hatching and feeding of the young ones, and the first flying lessons. One of the typical scenes in autumn is the gathering of migrant birds. Even in winter, one finds an exquisite sketch of a redbreast at the window.

All these examples indicate how important sensory perception is for Thomson. At times, there is a superabundance of epithets and exuberance of diction which renders understanding rather difficult. It is quite obvious that much of Thomson's description of nature is the result of his personal experience. He has an eye for detail as well as panoramic view. This makes the poem concrete and timeless. The emotional element is much stronger in the description of forces of nature as they leave a stronger impression. He also admits that nature is the source of his poetic inspiration. The healing influence of nature is stressed repeatedly.

To nature's voice attends, from month to month

And day to day, through the revolving year

Thus, nature consists of innumerable aspects for Thomson. It includes everything that can be grasped with the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Nature is not only the entire cosmos with its wonders and revelations, it is also found in smallest details like the redbreasts, the flowers of summer and the fruits of autumn. Man is nature's subject and master. Nature is as eternal as it is transitory and changeable. It is a symbol of continuous death and rebirth of life. Nature is no longer the unchanging norm, but the ever-changing ideal. Another new

element is the introduction of poetic emotion into poetry. Thomson firmly believes that all emotions incited by nature are purifying and good. Thus, Thomson anticipates the romantic ideas in a very influential manner.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. Name some of the famous odes by Keats.
5. What does Keats' 'negative capability' mean?
6. Which poet is a master in the description of wild nature?

2.4 PB SHELLEY

Like Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was a great revolutionary, who championed the cause of liberty. He revolted against tyranny of the State, against corruption in morals and manners. His *Queen Mab* was an angry protest of an idealistic youth against a corrupt and coarse society. His *The Spirit of Solitude, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, Ode to Liberty, Mont Blank* were poems of revolutionary ideals which made passionate plea for the total freedom of human will and ideal social order. Romantic poetry is predominantly known for nature, beauty, love, imagination, etc. Poets have hardly spoken about death and desperation. In such themes, Shelley stands out as a romantic poet. His strong disapproving voice, radicalism, revolting temperament made him one of the leading poets of his age. His close friends were John Keats and Lord Byron. It is also said that when he died, a pocket book of Keats's poetry was found in his pocket.

2.4.1 Introduction to Shelley's Poetry

P.B. Shelley was born in Sussex in 1792. His parents belonged to the class of nobility. As a child he was highly fanciful like William Blake. He was a sensitive boy who held self-respect above anything else. Shelley joined Eton College in 1804, where he was ridiculed and called 'Mad Shelley' by other boys. He was ill-treated as he revolted against the tyrannical system prevalent in the school. While at Oxford, he published his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* because of which he was expelled from the university. First Shelley married Harriet, a school girl whose parents never agreed to this marriage. Even Shelley's own parents disinherited him for this. Later he eloped with Mary, who later wrote *Frankenstein*. Sadly, this elopement led to Harriet's well-known suicide.

Nature was obviously a primary source of inspiration for Shelley's poetry. In 1818, he left for Italy and never returned. The picturesque scenery of Rome and Pisa influenced *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas*. His most famous short poems, *Ode to the West Wind* and *To a Skylark*, are based on actual experiences in Italy. Shelley's nature poetry is concerned with the more immediate descriptions and feelings produced by the poet's experiences with nature. Of major

NOTES

importance in this connection are *Alastor, Mont Blanc, The Sensitive Plant, Ode to the West Wind, To a Skylark* and several short poems. The concept of ideal beauty not only strongly influenced the form of Shelley's poetry, but also helped to constitute the theme of his work. The treatment may be narrative or reflective, but it always relies heavily on description.

Shelley's view of the landscape finds its two extremes in the ideals of the cave and the isle. The Platonic concept of the cave as the abode of thought and dream was one of Shelley's favourites. Thus, the mountain scenery is closely connected with his philosophic ideas. Descriptions like the following occur repeatedly in various poems, but with similar expressions:

'. . . wintry mountains, inaccessibly
Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray.
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay,'

(The Witch of Atlas)

Apart from the description of a stationary scene, the wild, mountainous landscape may engage in dramatic effects. The poems *Alastor* and the *Spirit of Solitude* are an allegorical voyage of the mind. The varying description of the scenery is symbolic of the tragic changes wrought in the poet's soul. The poet is a master in the rendition of sound impressions. He contrasts the roar of the waterfall with the harmonious sound of the wind in the trees. He describes a small brook in three different aspects, two of which involve sound effects: '…..the rivulet

Wanton and wild, through many a green ravine
Beneath the forest flowed- Sometimes it fell
Among the moss with hollow harmony
Dark and profound Now on the polished stones*
It danced; like childhood laughing as it went:
Then through the plain in tranquil wanderings crept,
Reflecting every herb and drooping bud
That overhung its quietness…'

(Alastor)

Shelley's love for the sea is connected with his love for waterfalls and brooks. He usually prefers to see it stormy, powerful and majestic. Shelley's dream maidens are garmented in light. His fondness for water, which combines the effects of sound, motion and light, may also be the result of his view of a unified nature. In the poem *To a Skylark*, the water imagery is the underlying effect:

'From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody,'

(To a Skylark)

Shelley compares the mind of the poet to a mighty river, which has its origin in the pure and spiritual heights of an eternal power. Mont Blanc expresses this idea

NOTES

symbolically in the river Arve, which originates in the remote and serene mountains of Mont Blanc. The introduction of the poem hints at its symbolical meaning:

'The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves.
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters,…'

(Mont Blanc)

In the purest form of spiritual mysticism, the poet identifies himself with the spiritual powers of nature and loses himself in them. Shelley is probably the greatest lyricist.

Comparing Shelley with Wordsworth, critics say, 'Wordsworth found and Shelley lost himself in nature.' E. Blunden says of Shelley, 'Shelley did not take up every subject for verse in the solemn, neutral way which we scholiasts are liable to ascribe to him.'

2.4.2 The Poem: Ode to the West Wind

O wild West W*ind, thou breath of Autumn's being,*
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill 10
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

II

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aëry surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head 20
Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,

The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay, 30
Lulled by the coil of his crystàlline streams,
Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know 40
Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be
The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed 50
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

NOTES

NOTES

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone, 60
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

2.4.3 Critical Appreciation of Ode to the West Wind

The West Wind is highly personified in this poem. The West Wind is presented as a destroyer as well as a preserver. The poem is both a personal and political document. It is an objectification of the poet's own revolutionary zeal. He derives strength from it and hopes that his own verses will be as powerful as the wind. The poet has a message of hope for all mankind. The west wind is free and can move anywhere it likes. It is symbolic of the poet's great love for freedom and revolution. The West Wind is very powerful and sweeps away everything that comes in its way. The poet prays for the same power he had while he was young. He wants to be tameless, proud and swift, even though the years are weighing on him. He has fallen on the thorny ground and requests the west wind to lift him like a wave, a leaf or a cloud. The message of the poem is very clear when the poet muses that if winter had arrived spring would inevitably follow soon in a matter of time. This shows the poet's unflinching faith in human progress, perfectibility and predictable optimism.

In the beginning of the poem, the poet says that the west wind carries some seeds away with it and scatters them everywhere. These seeds remain under the earth like dead bodies in the grave. They lie there during the whole of winter. Then, spring comes and rouses them by blowing its bugle. In other words, the seeds start sprouting and blooming in the spring season. The dreaming earth comes to life, and plants and flowers of different colours and sweet smell scatter over the fields and the hills.

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

The new sweet buds look like the flocks of sheep. The poet calls the wind a wild spirit. He says that it moves all over the place, destroying the old vegetation in order to create a new one.

Thou dirge……..
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,

NOTES

In *Ode to the West Wind*, the poet highlights the effect of the west wind on the sky. The West Wind has scattered the clouds all over the sky. The West Wind is like a dirge, which is a funeral song, of the dying year. The passing night is like a dome of the big tomb, and in this dome, all dark clouds are gathered by the west wind. These dark clouds will bring forth rain, lightening and hails. In other words, rain, lightening and hail will burst from these dark clouds gathered under the dome. The poet wishes the same power for himself and requests the west wind to bestow it on him. The west wind lifts a wave, a leaf or a cloud and in the process provides energy and strength to them. He says that he has fallen on the thorns of life and is bleeding. He is passing through a very difficult time. There was a time when in his youth he was like the west wind, tameless and proud, but the burden of age and time have chained him and made him humble, bowed and helpless. Therefore, the poet makes a fervent appeal to the west wind to give its power to him.

Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

The poet invokes the West Wind to give him some of its power in the above lines. He requests it to drive his dead thoughts over the universe as it does to the withered leaves. These withered leaves are helpful in bringing new life. Similarly, his dead thoughts will be helpful towards giving birth to new ideas. The power of the West Wind will hasten the birth of a new revolution and new world order.

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

In the end, the poet expresses great hope for mankind. The cycle of nature is such that if winter comes, spring will soon follow. With the arrival of spring, sorrows and sufferings will be replaced by joyous and happy days. Joyful times are bound to arrive soon and the poet is highly optimistic about the spring of bliss and happiness.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. Name some poems of Shelley that belong to the genre of revolutionary ideals.
8. What does Shelley mean by the lines: 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind'?

2.5 SUMMARY

- *Dejection: An Ode* was originally a verse letter, and was first written on 4 April 1802. It is said that in its original form it was made up of 340 lines. It was then thoroughly revised, and six months later published in the Morning Post of 4 October 1802.

NOTES

- According to the poet's biographers, the dejection engulfed his mind because of his unhappy marriage, bitter family-quarries, spasms in the stomach, hopeless passion for Sara Hutchinson, opium-pills, and wine.
- On a miniature scale, the poem Dejection: An Ode resembles a tragedy. From a calm but menacing beginning, it works to a tragic climax and subsides into something not unlike 'calm of mind, all passion spent.'
- *Dejection: An Ode* may be called a poem of sorrow. The poet's heart is filled with a grief of strange nature.
- In the self-analysis of the failure of his poetic sensibility from the beginning of the poem to its end, the poet coleridge's complaint is that he has lost the power of feeling beauty, or rather, the power of feeling delicate emotional impression of joy made by 'fair' objects of nature.
- Evidently Coleridge's attitude to nature as embedded in *Dejection: An Ode* is basically different from his view of nature expressed in his earlier poems.
- Unlike Byron and Shelley, John Keats was more committed to the idealism of art than to the idealism of politics or philosophy. Keats devoted himself to the worship of 'art for art's sake' and acquired an excellence in the art of poetry.
- Keats' treatment of nature in poetry is entirely different from that of Wordsworth and Shelley.
- Keats is not influenced by the pantheism of Wordsworth. He does not see any divine spirit in nature, but rather loves nature for its external beauty and charm.
- *Ode to a Nightingale* is the most well-known ode by Keats. The poem also contains strong subjective elements, dealing directly with Keats' personal life. The poet reflects on the conditions of human existence.
- Keats was considered the greatest romanticist who had always been a lover of beauty. He said in *Endymion*, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.'
- Beauty for Keats is not an inert thing or a thing whose value lies in having no relevance to ordinary life. He sees the terrible truths of life so intensely that they become the elements of beauty.
- Keats is often associated with love and pain both in his life and in his poetry. He wants to accept all things in all moods. He wishes to reveal the beauty of life in life, to realize in his own work the principle that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'.
- Like Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a great revolutionary, who championed the cause of liberty. He revolted against tyranny of the State, against corruption in morals and manners.
- P.B. Shelley was born in Sussex in 1792. His parents belonged to the class of nobility. As a child he was highly fanciful like William Blake.
- *The West Wind* is highly personified in this poem. The West Wind is presented as a destroyer as well as a preserver. The poem is both a personal and

political document. It is an objectification of the poet's own revolutionary zeal.

- The cycle of nature is such that if winter comes, spring will soon follow. With the arrival of spring, sorrows and sufferings will be replaced by joyous and happy days.

NOTES

2.6 KEY TERMS

- **Negative capability**: The term has been used by poets and philosophers to describe the ability of the individual to perceive, think, and operate beyond any presupposition of a predetermined capacity of the human being.
- **Ode:** Ode comes from the Greek *aeidein,* meaning to sing or chant, and belongs to the long and varied tradition of lyric poetry.

2.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. *Dejection: An Ode* was first written on 4 April 1802.
2. The poet wishes for a night-storm of thunder and rain as the poem starts.
3. In *Frost at Midnight,* Coleridge expresses the view that God is present in everything.
4. Some of the famous odes of Keats are *Ode to Psyche, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn and Ode to Autumn.*
5. It is a capacity for objectively in the midst of terrible personal suffering and a capacity to come to terms with this misery not through fact and reason but through an understanding of its true nature. It involves the ability to identify oneself with the subject of one's poetry or art.
6. James Thomson is a master in the description of wild nature.
7. *The Spirit of Solitude, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, Ode to Liberty, Mont Blank* are some poems of revolutionary ideals by Shelley.
8. In these lines, Shelley states that the cycle of nature is such that if winter comes, spring will soon follow. With the arrival of spring, sorrows and sufferings will be replaced by joyous and happy days. Joyful times are bound to arrive soon and the poet is highly optimistic about the spring of bliss and happiness.

2.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Who was Sara Hutchinson? What role does she play in the poem *Dejection: An Ode?*
2. State Coleridge's attitude of nature in *Dejection: An ode.*
3. Write a short note on Keats' sensuousness.

NOTES

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write the critical appreciation of Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*.
2. Write a detailed note on the treatment of nature in the Romantic era.
3. Discuss the revolutionary spirit of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind.*

2.9 FURTHER READING

V. Erdman David. 1982. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake.* London: University of California Press.

Sarkar, Sunil. 2003. *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Manning, J Peter. 1990. *Reading Romantics: Texts and Context.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Leonard, Barnett George. 1973. *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*. USA: Haskell House.

UNIT 3 CHARLES LAMB

NOTES

Structure

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Charles Lamb (10 February 1775 – 27 December 1834) was an English writer and essayist, best known for his *Essays of Elia* and for the children's book *Tales from Shakespeare*, which he produced with his sister, Mary Lamb (1764–1847). Among the individual essays, *Dream-Children* and *Old China* are perhaps the most highly and generally admired.

In this unit, two of his famous essays *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* and *Dream Children: A Reverie* have been discussed in detail.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe Charles Lamb as an essayist
- Summarize the episodes of the essay, *Dream Children: A Reverie*
- Discuss the element of humour and pathos in *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*
- Analyse the depiction of child labour in the nineteenth century literature

3.2 CHARLES LAMB AS AN ESSAYIST

Charles Lamb, a well-known literary figure in the nineteenth century, is chiefly remembered for his *Essays of Elia*. This collection is famous for his wit and ironic

NOTES

treatment of everyday subjects. Due to the element of nostalgia and humorous idiosyncrasies in his essays, his works were celebrated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

The personal and conversational tone of the essays has charmed many readers; the essays established Lamb as the most delightful of English essayists. Lamb himself is the Elia of the collection, and his sister Mary is 'Cousin Bridget.' Lamb used the pseudonym Elia for an essay on the South Sea House, where he had worked decades earlier; Elia was the last name of an Italian man who worked there at the same time as Charles. This was why this name was used by Lamb.

His essays brought in a new kind of warmth to English prose. A critic had pointed out, 'His sentences can be intense, they can sneer, they can scream, but they always have a kind of rounded glow, like a welcoming, slightly melancholy fireplace.'

'Lamb's humour, humanity, and the sense of pathos are all his own; and it is mainly these qualities which differentiate his essays from those of his contemporaries. His essays are rich alike in wit, humour, and fun.'

Editors, Hallward and Hill observe in the Introduction to their edition of the *Essays of Elia*:

'The terms wit, humour and fun are often confused but they are really different in meaning. The first is based on intellect, the second on insight and sympathy, the third on vigor and freshness of mind and body. Lamb's writings show all the three qualities, but what most distinguishes him is humour, for his sympathy is ever strong and active.'

3.2.1 The Essay: Dream Children: A Reverie

CHILDREN love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterward came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old

NOTES

ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, "that would be foolish indeed." And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighborhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psaltery by heart, aye, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said "those innocents would do her no harm"; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening, too, along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavors of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved by Alice, he had mediated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then, in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L——, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the

NOTES

old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries —and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain;—and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterward it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarreling with him (for we quarreled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty, dead mother. Then I told them how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name"—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor armchair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side—but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever

3.2.2 Outline of the Essay

One evening Alice and John (Lamb's dream children – in reality Lamb had no children) came to him to hear from him an account of their elders. Lamb told them about their great-grandmother Field, Uncle John Lamb and their mother Alice Winterton.

Lamb told the children that their great-grandmother lived in a big house in Norfolk. She lived in such a way that she always seemed to be the owner of the great house while she was only its keeper. But she maintained the dignity of the house. It was an old house with a wooden chimney. On the chimney was carved the full story of the ballad, *The Children in the Wood*. But a foolish rich man, who

purchased that house, replaced the wooden chimney with a marble one with no ballad on it. Their great-grandmother was a very religious and pious woman. She knew all the psalms by heart. She was a woman of a good nature and sweet temperament that she was loved and respected by all. When she died, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory. She was a patient of cancer, her disease bowed down her body, but it could never bow down her spirit. She was very courageous. Despite the fact that the house was haunted by the ghost of two children, she would sleep all alone in the house with no fear. She loved all her grandchildren very much; she would invite all of them to the great house to enjoy their holidays; Lamb, the author, used to pass his holidays there. He often wandered about the house for hours all alone. He used to go on staring at them until they appeared to be living persons or he himself a marble statue. He enjoyed wandering, in the gardens too.

Charles Lamb then told his children about their uncle John Lamb, John was so brave, handsome, kind and considerate that he was loved by all. Great-grandmother Field, who, though, had equal love for all the children, had special affection for him. He was a good horse-rider. Charles Lamb remembers how, when once he was 'a lame-footed boy', John carried him (Charles) on his back for miles. Charles remembers with regret that, quite to the contrary, when John himself was lame-footed, he could not do anything for him. After his premature death Charles often missed his kindness and always wished him to be alive again.

Hearing the sad tale of John's life the dream children became so sad that they requested their father (Charles Lamb – the dream father) not to go any further about their uncle. They requested him to tell them something about their dead mother. Then he told them 'how for seven long years, he courted the fair Alice W—n. Alice, his daughter, resembled her mother very much'. As Lamb stared at her face, the children gradually grew fainter to his view. They spoke nothing, but seemed to be saying that they were not his children; they were nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. This reality shattered the dream of the author, and brought him back into his bachelor arm-chair. His sister Bridget was sitting by his side.

3.2.3 Some Important Explanations

1. *Children love …….. never saw.*

   Reference to the Context- These are the opening lines of the essay, '*Dream Children*' by Charles Lamb, a famous essayist of the Age of Romanticism. He is known as the 'Prince among Essayists.'

   Charles Lamb, in this essay, tells us about the children's liking for listening about their elders. He presents before his brother John Lamb; and his beloved, Alice Winterton (Ann Simmons).

   Explanation– In these lines the author gives us some idea of his understanding of child-psychology. Children always like to listen to facts from the lives of their elders, when they (the elders) were children. In other words, it is the hobby of the children to know about the activities and circumstances of their

NOTES

elders of the period when they themselves were young children. With the help of their imagination they try to form an idea of their great uncle or grandmother about whom they are habituated to hear, but whom they never saw.

Note:—The whole essay, and particularly, these lines exhibit that Lamb, in spite of the fact that he could never become father, had a good and remarkable understanding of child-psychology.

2. *Then I told …… with them.*

Explanation– In these lines Lamb speaks of the goodness of his grandmother. While telling his dream children – Alice and John – about their great grandmother, he said that she was very affectionate and kind to all her grandchildren. She used to invite all of them to her great house in Norfolk during their holidays. Besides all the other attractive objects, the house had the busts of twelve Caesars, the Roman Emperors. Lamb would go on gazing upon them so fixedly that the lifeless busts seemed to him as living persons or felt that he himself had become lifeless like the statues there.

Note:—This speaks of Lamb's love and interest in observing the beauty of architectural pieces.

3. *We are not……. name.*

Explanation– Having told his children about their great-grandmother Field, Uncle John Lamb, and mother Alice Winterton, Charles Lamb stares at the face of Alice. The dream children grew fainter to his view. Though they spoke nothing yet they appeared to be saying that they were not of Alice, nor of the author. They went to the extent of saying that they were not children at all. They then presented the harsh reality of Lamb's life before him that it was not he, but it was Bartrum, whom the children of Alice would call father. (Although Charles has wooed Alice for seven long years yet he could not succeed in marrying her. She was married to Bartrum, a pawnbroker in London). The children further said that they were nothing, and less than nothing. They, in their own eyes, were only dreams. They said that they were only that which might have been, i.e. if Charles Lamb had succeeded in marrying Alice, they would have been his real children. Also they acquainted Lamb with the reality that he had to wait for ages on the tiresome banks of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. Only after that they would be able to get resistance and name. In other words, they had to pass through the whole process of human birth and existence.

Note:—In Greek mythology 'Lethe' is one of the rivers of hell causing forgetfulness of the past to all who drank of it. This word in Greek stands for oblivion. 'The idea of the soul, waiting for incarnation, sitting on the banks of Lethe, is platonic.'

3.2.4 Autobiographical Element in 'Dream Children'

In '*Dream Children'* Charles Lamb presents the facts about his own life, about his grandmother Field, and his brother John lamb. In this essay he talks to his dream children. He tells them about their great grandmother Field. She was, according to

NOTES

him, upright and graceful, gentle and generous, and religious and courageous. She, in her youth, was the best dancer in the area in which she lived. She was a housekeeper in Norfolk but she lived in such a way as if she herself were the owner of the great house. She was loved and respected by all. She loved all her grandchildren very much. But she had special affection for John Lamb, the elder brother of Charles Lamb. She invited all her grandchildren to her house during their holidays.

This essay also tells us about his brother, John Lamb, who was dead. It also tells us of the great love that he had for his brother and how he missed him, and felt lonely without him. Charles Lamb depicts him as very kind and sympathetic to him and the family. It is due to his love of mystification that Lamb depicts him so. In reality he (John) was selfish and unsympathetic. He did nothing even for his parents and insane sister.

Through this essay we also come to know of his unsuccessful love-affair with Alice Winterton. He courted her for seven long years, but all in vain. She married Bartrum, not the author, and the latter remained bachelor throughout his life. He, consequently, had no children. In the face of Alice, one of the dream children, he sees the image of his wife (Alice Winterton, whose real name is Ann Simmons, whom he loved and courted for seven years).

This essay, besides being a vivid description of the persons and events closely associated with Charles Lamb's life, is the best example of the fact that 'Charles Lamb laughs with tears in his eyes.' He experienced in his life various despairs and frustrations, sorrows and sufferings, and troubles and tensions. His mother was a little insane and so was his sister. She in a fit of insanity stabbed her mother. Charles Lamb looked after her (sister) throughout her life. He got no cooperation from his brother John Lamb. Even his love-affair with Alice Winterton (Ann Simmons) gave him only frustration and dejection. This shows that his life was a tale of sorrow. He laughs to check his tears.

This essay is full of pathos and humour. The dominant note of the essay is pathos, but touches of humour are also present. The tale of his Grandmother Field's life is full of pathos. The description of John's becoming lame is also pathetic. The tale of John's life becomes all the more pathetic the moment Charles Lamb says to his children: 'I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarreled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was an uneasy without him, as he, their poor uncle, must have been when the doctor took off his limb.'

Children's expressions and activities sometimes provide the essay with a tinge of humour. While listening about her great grandmother's talent of dancing – 'Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement'. She stops it the moment she notices her father looking grave. When Lamb tells his children about his dislike for the fruits in the garden of his grandmother John puts back the bunch of grapes into the plate. These childlike activities give some humour to the otherwise serious essay. According to the author, Compton-Rickett, 'Humour with Lamb is never far from tragedy, through his tears you may see the rainbow in the sky, for him humour and pathos are really inseparable from one another, they are different facets of the same gem.'

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Under what pseudonym did Charles Lamb publish his essays?
2. Who was Elia?
3. Name the ballad whose story was carved on the wooden chimney in the essay, Dream Children.
4. With whom does Lamb have an unsuccessful love affair in his prime days?

3.3 THE ESSAY: THE PRAISE OF CHIMNEY SWEEPERS

I like to meet a sweeper — understand me — not a grown sweeper — old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive — but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek — such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the peep peep of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aerial ascents not seldom anticipating the sun-rise? I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks — poor blots — innocent blacknesses —

I reverence these young Africans of our own growth — these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind.

When a child, what a mysterious pleasure it was to witness their operation! to see a chit no bigger than one'sself enter, one knew not by what process, into what seemed the fauces Averni— to pursue him in imagination, as he went sounding on through so many dark stifling caverns, horrid shades! — to shudder with the idea that "now, surely, he must be lost for ever!"— to revive at hearing his feeble shout of discovered day-light — and then (O fulness of delight) running out of doors, to come just in time to see the sable phenomenon emerge in safety, the brandished weapon of his art victorious like some flag waved over a conquered citadel! I seem to remember having been told, that a bad sweep was once left in a stack with his brush, to indicate which way the wind blew. It was an awful spectacle certainly; not much unlike the old stage direction in Macbeth, where the "Apparition of a child crowned with a tree in his hand rises."

Reader, if thou meetest one of these small gentry in thy early rambles, it is good to give him a penny. It is better to give him two-pence. If it be starving weather, and to the proper troubles of his hard occupation, a pair of kibed heels (no unusual accompaniment) be superadded, the demand on thy humanity will surely rise to a tester.

NOTES

There is a composition, the ground-work of which I have understood to be the sweet wood 'yclept sassafras. This wood boiled down to a kind of tea, and tempered with an infusion of milk and sugar, hath to some tastes a delicacy beyond the China luxury. I know not how thy palate may relish it; for myself, with every deference to the judicious Mr. Read, who hath time out of mind kept open a shop (the only one he avers in London) for the vending of this "wholesome and pleasant beverage, on the south side of Fleet-street, as thou approachest Bridge-street —the only Salopian house,"— I have never yet adventured to dip my own particular lip in a basin of his commended ingredients — a cautious premonition to the olfactories constantly whispering to me, that my stomach must infallibly, with all due courtesy, decline it. Yet I have seen palates, otherwise not uninstructed in dietetical elegances, sup it up with avidity.

I know not by what particular conformation of the organ it happens, but I have always found that this composition is surprisingly gratifying to the palate of a young chimney-sweeper — whether the oily particles (sassafras is slightly oleaginous) do attenuate and soften the fuliginous concretions, which are sometimes found (in dissections) to adhere to the roof of the mouth in these unfledged practitioners; or whether Nature, sensible that she had mingled too much of bitter wood in the lot of these raw victims, caused to grow out of the earth her sassafras for a sweet lenitive — but so it is, that no possible taste or odour to the senses of a young chimney-sweeper can convey a delicate excitement comparable to this mixture. Being penniless, they will yet hang their black heads over the ascending steam, to gratify one sense if possible, seemingly no less pleased than those domestic animals — cats — when they purr over a new-found sprig of valerian. There is something more in these sympathies than philosophy can inculcate.

Now albeit Mr. Read boasteth, not without reason, that his is the only Salopian house; yet be it known to thee, reader — if thou art one who keepest what are called good hours, thou art haply ignorant of the fact — he hath a race of industrious imitators, who from stalls, and under open sky, dispense the same savoury mess to humbler customers, at that dead time of the dawn, when (as extremes meet) the rake, reeling home from his midnight cups, and the hard-handed artisan leaving his bed to resume the premature labours of the day, jostle, not unfrequently to the manifest disconcerting of the former, for the honours of the pavement. It is the time when, in summer, between the expired and the not yet relumined kitchen-fires, the kennels of our fair metropolis give forth their least satisfactory odours. The rake, who wisheth to dissipate his o'er-night vapours in more grateful coffee, curses the ungenial fume, as he passeth; but the artisan stops to taste, and blesses the fragrant breakfast.

This is Saloop— the precocious herb-woman's darling — the delight of the early gardener, who transports his smoking cabbages by break of day from Hammersmith to Covent-garden's famed piazzas — the delight, and, oh I fear, too often the envy, of the unpennied sweep. Him shouldest thou haply encounter, with his dim visage pendent over the grateful steam, regale him with a sumptuous basin (it will cost thee but three half-pennies) and a slice of delicate bread and butter (an added halfpenny)— so may thy culinary fires, eased of the o'er-charged secretions from thy worse-placed hospitalities, curl up a lighter volume to the welkin — so may

NOTES

the descending soot never taint thy costly well-ingredienced soups — nor the odious cry, quick reaching from street to street, of the fired chimney, invite the rattling engines from ten adjacent parishes, to disturb for a casual scintillation thy peace and pocket!

I am by nature extremely susceptible of street affronts; the jeers and taunts of the populace; the low-bred triumph they display over the casual trip, or splashed stocking, of a gentleman. Yet can I endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness. — In the last winter but one, pacing along Cheapside with my accustomed precipitation when I walk westward, a treacherous slide brought me upon my back in an instant. I scrambled up with pain and shame enough — yet outwardly trying to face it down, as if nothing had happened — when the roguish grin of one of these young wits encountered me. There he stood, pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob, and to a poor woman (I suppose his mother) in particular, till the tears for the exquisiteness of the fun (so he thought it) worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes, red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed, yet twinkling through all with such a joy, snatched out of desolation, that Hogarth — but Hogarth has got him already (how could he miss him?) in the March to Finchley, grinning at the pye-man — there he stood, as he stands in the picture, irremovable, as if the jest was to last for ever — with such a maximum of glee, and minimum of mischief, in his mirth — for the grin of a genuine sweep hath absolutely no malice in it — that I could have been content, if the honour of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and his mockery till midnight.

I am by theory obdurate to the seductiveness of what are called a fine set of teeth. Every pair of rosy lips (the ladies must pardon me) is a casket, presumably holding such jewels; but, methinks, they should take leave to "air" them as frugally as possible. The fine lady, or fine gentleman, who show me their teeth, show me bones. Yet must I confess, that from the mouth of a true sweep a display (even to ostentation) of those white and shining ossifications, strikes me as an agreeable anomaly in manners, and an allowable piece of foppery. It is, as when

A sable cloud

Turns forth her silver lining on the night.

It is like some remnant of gentry not quite extinct; a badge of better days; a hint of nobility:— and, doubtless, under the obscuring darkness and double night of their forlorn disguisement, oftentimes lurketh good blood, and gentle conditions, derived from lost ancestry, and a lapsed pedigree. The premature apprenticements of these tender victims give but too much encouragement, I fear, to clandestine, and almost infantile abductions; the seeds of civility and true courtesy, so often discernible in these young grafts (not otherwise to be accounted for) plainly hint at some forced adoptions; many noble Rachels mourning for their children, even in our days, countenance the fact; the tales of fairy-spiriting may shadow a lamentable verity, and the recovery of the young Montagu be but a solitary instance of, good fortune, out of many irreparable and hopeless defiliations.

In one of the state-beds at Arundel Castle, a few years since — under a ducal canopy —(that seat of the Howards is an object of curiosity to visitors, chiefly

NOTES

for its beds, in which the late duke was especially a connoisseur)— encircled with curtains of delicatest crimson, with starry coronets inwoven — folded between a pair of sheets whiter and softer than the lap where Venus lulled Ascanius — was discovered by chance, after all methods of search had failed, at noon-day, fast asleep, a lost chimney-sweeper. The little creature, having somehow confounded his passage among the intricacies of those lordly chimneys, by some unknown aperture had alighted upon this magnificent chamber; and, tired with his tedious explorations, was unable to resist the delicious invitement to repose, which he there saw exhibited; so, creeping between the sheets very quietly, laid his black head upon the pillow, and slept like a young Howard.

Such is the account given to the visitors at the Castle. — But I cannot help seeming to perceive a confirmation of what I have just hinted at in this story. A high instinct was at work in the case, or I am mistaken. Is it probable that a poor child of that description, with whatever weariness he might be visited, would have ventured, under such a penalty, as he would be taught to expect, to uncover the sheets of a Duke's bed, and deliberately to lay himself down between them, when the rug, or the carpet, presented an obvious couch, still far above his pretensions — is this probable, I would ask, if the great power of nature, which I contend for, had not been manifested within him, prompting to the adventure? Doubtless this young nobleman (for such my mind misgives me that he must be) was allured by some memory, not amounting to full consciousness, of his condition in infancy, when he was used to be lapt by his mother, or his nurse, in just such sheets as he there found, into which he was now but creeping back as into his proper incunabula, and resting-place. — By no other theory, than by this sentiment of a preexistent state (as I may call it), can I explain a deed so venturous, and, indeed, upon any other system, so indecorous, in this tender, but unseasonable, sleeper.

My pleasant friend JEM WHITE was so impressed with a belief of metamorphoses like this frequently taking place, that in some sort to reverse the wrongs of fortune in these poor changelings, he instituted an annual feast of chimney-sweepers, at which it was his pleasure to officiate as host and waiter. It was a solemn supper held in Smithfield, upon the yearly return of the fair of St. Bartholomew. Cards were issued a week before to the master-sweeps in and about the metropolis, confining the invitation to their younger fry. Now and then an elderly stripling would get in among us, and be good-naturedly winked at; but our main body were infantry. One unfortunate wight, indeed, who, relying upon his dusky suit, had intruded himself into our party, but by tokens was providentially discovered in time to be no chimney-sweeper (all is not soot which looks so), was quoited out of the presence with universal indignation, as not having on the wedding garment; but in general the greatest harmony prevailed. The place chosen was a convenient spot among the pens, at the north side of the fair, not so far distant as to be impervious to the agreeable hubbub of that vanity; but remote enough not to be obvious to the interruption of every gaping spectator in it. The guests assembled about seven. In those little temporary parlours three tables were spread with napery, not so fine as substantial, and at every board a comely hostess presided with her pan of hissing sausages. The nostrils of the young rogues dilated at the savour. JAMES WHITE, as head waiter,

NOTES

had charge of the first table; and myself, with our trusty companion BIGOD, ordinarily ministered to the other two. There was clambering and jostling, you may be sure, who should get at the first table — for Rochester in his maddest days could not have done the humours of the scene with more spirit than my friend. After some general expression of thanks for the honour the company had done him, his inaugural ceremony was to clasp the greasy waist of old dame Ursula (the fattest of the three), that stood frying and fretting, half-blessing, half-cursing "the gentleman," and imprint upon her chaste lips a tender salute, whereas the universal host would set up a shout that tore the concave, while hundreds of grinning teeth startled the night with their brightness. O it was a pleasure to see the sable younkers lick in the unctuous meat, with his more unctuous sayings — how he would fit the tit bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links for the seniors — how he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it "must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman's eating"— how he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing-crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony — how genteelly he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if it were not good, he should lose their custom; with a special recommendation to wipe the lip before drinking. Then we had our toasts — "The King,"— the "Cloth,"— which, whether they understood or not, was equally diverting and flattering; — and for a crowning sentiment, which never failed, "May the Brush supersede the Laurel!" All these, and fifty other fancies, which were rather felt than comprehended by his guests, would he utter, standing upon tables, and prefacing every sentiment with a "Gentlemen, give me leave to propose so and so," which was a prodigious comfort to those young orphans; every now and then stuffing into his mouth (for it did not do to be squeamish on these occasions) indiscriminate pieces of those reeking sausages, which pleased them mightily, and was the savouriest part, you may believe, of the entertainment.

Golden lads and lasses must.

As chimney-sweepers, come to dust —

JAMES WHITE is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died — of my world at least. His old clients look for him among the pens; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed for ever.

3.3.1 Outline of the Essay

Charles Lamb's essay, *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* first appeared in the London Magazine in 1822. It was earlier subtitled, *A May Day Effusion*. May Day was called the day of the chimney sweepers; the day of their annual street festival**.**

Lamb makes a very important point in the essay that it is the child chimney sweeper that he particularly likes to meet: 'one of those tender novices, blooming through their first negritude……'.

William Blake had rendered the cry of the chimney sweeper as, 'weep' and Lamb has changed it to 'peep' of the sparrow in this essay. Chimneys were swept

at dawn because that was the only time of the day when they were not in use and cool enough to enter.

The child chimney sweeper preaches a lesson of patience to mankind. In his description of chimney sweepers, he gathers the oral tales and literary motifs connected with the child chimney sweeper. Lamb's essays are not in the protest tradition as the poems of William Blake, but Lamb in some of the paragraphs slips into describing the miserable life of the chimney sweepers – 'starving weather', kibes heels', 'raw victims', 'premature apprenticements', etc.

NOTES

Throughout the essay, there follow a number of encounters between the speaker and the sweeper. It is only in the last section of the essay that Lamb is able to join the chimney sweepers in festivity due to his old school friend James White. For a single day, during the time of festivity, these children were treated as if they were citizens of the country.

But in the last paragraph, James White is dead and the suppers for the chimney sweepers have ceased.

3.3.2 Child Labour in Nineteenth Century Literature

The concept of child labour changed drastically in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the type of labour children performed. Increasingly employed in factories and mines, children were thrust into dangerous and unhealthy situations within the adult working world. Romantic and Victorian writers offered sympathetic representations of working children in their poetry and fiction.

In the early part of the nineteenth century thousands of children in England were employed in mines, textile factories, workshops, usually working for long hours at very low wages. Although the Factory Act of 1833 set the minimum age for children working in factories at nine, it was rarely enforced. Other industries, like the manufacture of glass, lace, pottery, paper, and tobacco, were subject to no regulations at all.

Let us discuss some of the literary figures who had taken initiatives to curb child labour. Robert Southey visited textile factories in the early part of the nineteenth century to take heed of the situation; Samuel Taylor Coleridge authored several pamphlets and letters on child labour; and William Cobbett, addressed the House of Commons, although he appeared to believe the claims of factory owners that British prosperity was dependent on the labor of youngsters. Cobbett reported to the ministers that 'a most surprising discovery has been made, namely, that all our greatness and prosperity, that our superiority over other nations, is owing to 300,000 little girls in Lancashire.'

The plight of the climbing-boys and chimney sweepers captured the imagination and sympathy of authors and reformers. William Blake's famous poem '*The Chimney Sweeper'* appeared in 1789, and was followed in 1822 by Charles Lamb's essay '*The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers,*' wherein Lamb changed their cry from Blake's ''weep, 'weep, 'weep,' to the 'peep peep of a young sparrow,' and referred to the soot-blackened climbers as 'young Africans of our own growth.' Charles Dickens dealt with the horrors of the chimney-sweeping trade in *Oliver Twist* (1838).

NOTES

Dickens had a unique perspective on the subject of child labour, reflecting upon his own experience working at Warren's Blacking Factory at the age of twelve when his father was held in debtor's prison. Completely on his own, working long hours in rat-infested quarters, young Dickens felt abandoned by his family, and his bitterness over this period of his childhood continued to influence his life and writings.

Dickens and several other writers of the period dealt with the black humour and pathos of young factory workers and labourers.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. When was Lamb's essay *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* first published?
6. What happens in the last part of the essay?
7. What was the minimum age of child labour set by the Factories Act, 1833?

3.4 SUMMARY

- Charles Lamb a well-known literary figure in the nineteenth century is chiefly remembered for his *Essays of Elia*. This collection is famous for his wit and ironic treatment of everyday subjects.
- The personal and conversational tone of the essays has charmed many readers and established Lamb as the most delightful of English essayists. Lamb himself is the Elia of the collection, and his sister Mary is 'Cousin Bridget.'
- In '*Dream Children*' Charles Lamb presents the facts about his own life, about his grandmother Field, and his brother John lamb. In this essay he talks to his dream children.
- Dream children also tells us about his brother, John Lamb, who was just dead. It also tells us of the great love that he had for his brother and how he missed him, and felt lonely without him.
- Through the essay Dream children, we also come to know of his unsuccessful love-affair with Alice Winterton. He courted her for seven long years, but all in vain. She married Bartrum, not the author, and the latter remained bachelor throughout his life.
- Charles Lamb's essay, *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* first appeared in the London Magazine in 1822.
- The praise of chimney sweepers was earlier subtitled, *A May Day Effusion*. May Day was called the day of the chimney sweepers; the day of their annual street festival.
- The child chimney sweeper preaches a lesson of patience to mankind. In his description of chimney sweepers, he gathers the oral tales and literary motifs connected with the child chimney sweeper.

- The concept of child labour changed drastically in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
- The plight of the climbing-boys and chimney sweepers captured the imagination and sympathy of authors and reformers.

NOTES

3.5 KEY TERMS

- **Reverie:** A state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts; a daydream.
- **May Day:** May Day on May 1 is an ancient Northern Hemisphere spring festival and usually a public holiday. May Day was called the day of the chimney sweepers; the day of their annual street festival.

3.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Charles Lamb published his essays under the pseudonym 'Elia'.
2. Lamb used the pseudonym Elia for an essay on the South Sea House, where he had worked decades earlier; Elia was the last name of an Italian man who worked there at the same time as Charles. This was why this name was used by Lamb.
3. The ballad, The Children in the Wood was carved on the wooden chimney in the essay, *Dream Children.*
4. Charles Lamb had an unsuccessful love-affair with Alice Winterton.
5. Charles Lamb's essay, *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* first appeared in the London Magazine in 1822.
6. In the last paragraph, James White is dead and the suppers for the chimney sweepers have ceased.
7. The Factory Act of 1833 set the minimum age for children working in factories at nine.

3.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Charles Lamb as an essayist.
2. Who are Alice and Lamb? What was their reaction towards Lamb by the end of *Dream Children*?
3. Name some of the oral tales and literary motifs used by Lamb in his essay *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*.

NOTES

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of the essay, *Dream Children: A Reverie* by Charles Lamb.
2. Discuss the autobiographical element in Lamb's essay *Dream Children: A Reverie.*
3. Analyse the element of humour and pathos in Lamb's essay *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers.*

3.8 FURTHER READING

V. Erdman David. 1982. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake.* London: University of California Press.

Sarkar, Sunil. 2003. *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Manning, J Peter. 1990. *Reading Romantics: Texts and Context.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Leonard, Barnett George. 1973. *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*. USA: Haskell House.

UNIT 4 JANE AUSTEN

NOTES

Structure

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen was one of the greatest woman novelists of the nineteenth century. She was the daughter of a humble clergyman living at Stevenson, a little village among the Chalk hills of South England. Her full length novels are *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Northanger Abbey, Emma and Persuasion.* This unit deals with Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in particular.

Pride and Prejudice is a novel of manners by Jane Austen, first published in 1813. The story follows the main character, Elizabeth Bennet, as she deals with issues of manners, upbringing, morality, education, and marriage in the society of the landed gentry of the British Regency. Elizabeth is the second of five daughters of a country gentleman living near the fictional town of Meryton in Hertfordshire, near London.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse Jane Austen as a novelist
- Discuss her art of characterization
- Analyse the features of domestic novels
- Describe the major themes and events of *Pride and Prejudice*

4.2 JANE AUSTEN AS A NOVELIST

NOTES

Jane Austen was one of the supreme artists in fiction. She was a highly sophisticated artist. In the opinion of the critic, W.L. Cross, 'She is one of the sincerest examples of our literature of art for art's sake.' Her experience was meager and insignificant, but from it sprang an art finished in every detail, filled with life, and meaning. She possessed the magic touch and a talent for miniature painting. No doubt her range was limited, but her touch was firm and true. She use a 'little bit two inches wide of ivory' and she worked on it 'with no fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour.'

Jane Austen was a very careful artist. She wrote her novels with care, constantly revising them. There was nothing in her novels that did not have a clearly defined reason, and did not contribute to the plot, the drama of feelings of the moral structure. She knew precisely what she wanted to do, and she did it in the way that suited best.

Her Limited Range

The range of Jane Austen's novels was limited. She drew all her material from her own experience. She never went outside her experience, with the result that all her scenes belonged to South England where she had spent a considerable period of her life. Austen exploited with unrivalled expertness the potentialities of a seemingly narrow mode of existence. From the outset she limited her view of the world that she knew and the influences that she saw at work.

Jane Austen defined her own boundaries and never stepped beyond them. These limitations were self-imposed and she always remained within the range of her imaginative inspiration and personal experience. The characters of the novel are neither of very high nor of very low estate, and they have no great adventures. A picnic, a dance, amateur theatricals, or at the most an elopement are some outstanding events. The stories and events are told from a woman's point of view and deals only with such persons and events that naturally come within the range of her novels. Lord David Cecil, a British biographer and historian remarks, 'Jane Austen obeys the rule of all imagination composition; that she stays within the range of her imaginative inspiration. A work of art is born of the union of the artist's experience and imagination. It is his first obligation, therefore, to choose themes within the range of this experience. Now Jane Austen's imaginative range was in some respect a very limited one. It was, in the first place, condoned to human begins in their personal relations. Man in relation to god, to politics, to abstract ideas, passed her by. It was only when she saw him with his family and his neighbours that her creative impulse began to stir to activity.'

Jane Austen was finely alive to her limitations 'and out of these unpromising materials, Jane Austen composed novels that came near to artistic perfection. No other writer of fiction has ever achieved such great results by such insignificant means; none other has, upon material so severely limited, expanded such beauty, imaginity and precision of workmanship.'

Lack of Passion

Jane Austen's novels do not represent stormy passions and high tragedy of emotional life. She was primarily concerned with the comedy of domestic life. But with her very mental makeup she was incapable of writing a tragedy or romance. Jane Austen was absolutely incapable of writing adventurous tales dealing with romantic reveries and death scenes.

NOTES

Austen chose a limited background for her novels. Her novels are recognized as 'domestic' or 'the tea-table' novels and the reader seeking anything like high romance in her works would be disappointed. There is hardly any feeling for external nature in her stories and there is little passion in her pictures of life. Whatever language of emotion is used, is forced and conventional. The kind of life that she has depicted is the one which she had put in the mouth of Mr. Bennet in '*Pride and Prejudice'*. 'For what do we live but to make sport for our neighbours and to laugh at them in our turn?'

Her Realism

Jane Austen was a supreme realist. Her stories are all drawn from the life that she knew. Emma tells us of a delightful girl who is as she was in the years when Napoleon was emperor. The ordinary commonplace incidents and the day-to-day experience formed the warp and woof of her novels. Sir Walter Scott wrote in his diary that the talent of Jane Austen as a realist was the 'most wonderful' he had ever met with. 'That young lady had a talent for describing involvements, feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I have ever met with.'

Jane Austen described the English country scene with skill and fidelity. She gives a vivid and glowing picture of the social manners and customs of the eighteenth century. She created numerous realistic characters. Jane Austen is nearer to life than any of the earlier novelists. Speaking of Jane Austen's age, the critic G.E. Milton wrote: 'Jane Austen was the first to draw exactly what she saw around her in a humdrum country life, and to discard all incidents, all adventures, all grotesque types, for perfect simplicity.'

Plot Construction

Austen's great skill lies in plot-construction. Her skillfully constructed plots are really the highest objects of artistic perfection. Her novels have an exactness of structure and symmetry of form. All the incidents that are introduced have their particular meanings.

Jane Austen's plots are not simple but compound. They do not compromise barely the story of the hero and the heroine. In *Pride and Prejudice* for instance, there are several pairs of lovers and their stories form the component parts of the plot. In the novels of Jane Austen the parts are so skillfully fused together as to form one compact whole.

In the plots of Jane Austen action is more or less eliminated. Action in her novels consists in little visits, morning calls, weddings, shopping expeditions, or the quizzing of new arrivals. These small actions and incidents go to make up the plots

of Jane Austen's novels. Her novels are not novels of action, but of conversation. The place of action is taken up by conversation and scene after scene is built up by the power of conversations. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, dialogues form the bulk of the novel.

NOTES

Referring to the great skill of Jane Austen's plot-construction, W.L. Cross remarks in *The Development of the English Novel*: 'No novelist since Fielding has been master of structure. Fielding constructed the novel after the analogy of the ancient drama. *Pride and Prejudice* has not only the humour of Shakespearean comedy, but also its technique.'

Characterization

Jane Austen is a great creator of characters. She has created a picture-gallery filled with so many delightful characters. Her characters are not types but individuals. She portrays human characters with great precision and exactness. Her male characters are almost perfect. She creates living characters both male and female, and draws them in their private aspects.

Jane Austen has an unerring eye for the surface of personality and records accurately the manners, charms and tricks of speech of her characters. Nothing escapes her notice. In this respect she can be compared with her great successor Dickens, who is unique in drawing surface peculiarities. Dickens does not go below the surface while Jane Austen does. She penetrates to the psychological organism underlying speech and manner, and presents the external relation to the internal. In *Pride and Prejudice* the scene wherein Darcy proposes to Elizabeth at Hunsford Personage is a fine psychological study. Darcy if outwardly composed and taciturn, is driven within by a conflict between his love for Elizabeth and hatred for her stupid relations which prevent him from marrying her.

Sir Walter Raleigh wrote of Jane Austin, 'She has a great sympathy for all her characters and their follies and foibles do not annoy her. Jane Austen is never angry with her characters. In *Pride and Prejudice* Mr. Collins and Lady de Bourgh are figures of fun, monstrous puppets of silliness and snobbery, to be elaborated and laughed at.'

As a Satirist and Moralist

Jane Austen is a satirist as well as moralist. Satire is an element in which Jane Austen lives but there is no trace of the savage indignation in her writings. Her attitude as a satirist is best expressed in the words of Elizabeth when she says: 'I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can.' It is evident that her satire was sympathetic. Walter Allen, literary critic and novelist rightly points out, 'Jane Austen was a moralist – an eighteenth-century moralist. In some respects, she was the last and finest flower of that century at its quintessential.'

Dramatic Nature of Her Art

Jane Austen developed the dramatic method both in the presentation of her plots and characters. Instead of describing and analyzing the characters, she makes them

reveal themselves in their action and dialogues. The plot is also carried forward through a succession of short scenes in dialogues. Though keeping the right to comment, she relies more on dialogue and that is her main forte. The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is dramatic. Baker points out that both the theme and the plot-structure of *Pride and Prejudice* are remarkably dramatic. He divides the novel into five acts of high comedy.

Her Humour

Jane Austen's attitude towards life, presented in her novels, is that of a humorist, 'I dearly love a laugh', says Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, and this statement equally applies to the novelist. She laughs at follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies. Folly is the chief source of laughter in the novels of Jane Austen and she creates comic characters who provoke nothing but laughter. Her comic characters are Mrs. Bennet, Sir Walter Eliot, Mrs. Norris, Mr. Collins and Mr. Woodhouse. She laughs at each one of them because of their foolishness and foolish actions. Irony is a conspicuous aspect of Jane Austen's humour. There is enough of verbal irony in her novels.

Style

Jane Austen rendered a great service to the English novel by developing a flexible, smooth-flowing prose style. She is sometimes a shade artificial. But at her best her prose moves nimbly and easily and enables her narrative to proceed onward without any obstruction. 'It does not rise to very great heights, being almost monotonous in its pedestrian sameness except when relieved by an occasional epigram or well-turned aphorism. It achieves its greatest triumphs in dialogue. It is not a prose of enthusiasm or exaltation. But it is wonderfully suited to dry satiric unfolding of the hopes and disappointments of the human heart.'

W.L. Cross aptly remarks, 'The style of Jane Austen cannot be separated from herself or her method. It is the natural easy flowing garment of her mind, delighting inconsistencies and infinite detail. It is so peculiarly her own that one cannot trace in it with any degree of certainty of the course of her reading.'

Jane Austen is undoubtedly the greatest woman novelist as Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist. Faithful observation, personal detachment, and fine sense of ironic comedy are among Jane Austen's chief characteristics as a writer. Austen's novels mark a big step forward in the development of English novel. Her range is limited but her touch is firm and true. Her stories may not be exciting and thrilling, but the picture of life that she presents has all the charm of vivid narration. Dialogues form a prominent feature of the narrative of Jane Austen. Her stories are dramatic in nature. Her characters are taken mostly from the aristocracy and upper middle class of the English village and its vicinity. She created numerous realistic characters. She presents remarkable psychological studies of men and women, avoiding passion and prejudice. Her novels have a distinct moral purpose. She is the greatest English novelist because of her craftsmanship, purity and simplicity of her style and themes.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What kind of action is seen in Jane Austen's novels?
2. Which scene in Pride and Prejudice is a fine psychological study?

4.3 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: AN OVERVIEW

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, and their Five Daughters

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet live in the village of Longbourn which is situated in the County of Hertfordshire. They have five daughters – Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine (or Kitty), and Lydia. The youngest is fifteen years old. Mrs. Bennet's chief desire in life is to see all her daughters suitably married and happily settled. In fact, the marriages of her daughters have become an obsession with her.

Mrs. Bennet's Expectation

A rich young man by the name of Mr. Charles Bingley takes a palatial house called Netherfield Park on rent. This country house is situated at a distance of about three miles from the village of Longbourn. Mr. Bingley begins to live in this house with his sister, Caroline Bingley, as his housekeeper. He has a friend by the name of Mr. Darcy who joins him at Netherfield Park for a short stay, but continues to stay there for a couple of months. Mrs. Hurst, a married sister of Mr. Bingley, also comes with her husband to stay at Netherfield Park. Mrs. Bennet feels very glad to know that the new occupant of Netherfield Park is a rich bachelor. She tells her husband that there is every possibility that Mr. Bingley would choose one of their daughters as his would-be wife. Mr. Bennet does not share his wife's enthusiasm though he too would like Mr. Bingley to choose one of his daughters as his future wife. As Mrs. Bennet is a woman of a mean intelligence, and as her talk is very often foolish, Mr. Bennet had got into the habit of making sarcastic remarks to her and about her. In other words, he often pokes fun at her.

Mr. Darcy, a Very Proud Man; Elizabeth's Prejudice against Him

An assembly is held periodically in the town of Meryton which is situated at a distance of about one mile from Longbourn. This assembly is a kind of social gathering which is attended by all the respectable families of the town and the neighbouring villages. At the first assembly, which is attended by Mr. Bingley and the other inmates of Netherfield Park, Mr. Bingley feels greatly attracted to Jane Bennet who is the prettiest of the Bennet sisters. He asks Jane for a dance, and she gladly accepts his request. In fact, he dances with her a second time also. Mr. Bingley suggests to his friend Mr. Darcy that the latter should not stand idle but should dance. He suggests that Mr. Darcy should dance with Elizabeth Bennet who is sitting nearby. Mr. Darcy, however, replies that this girl is not attractive enough to tempt him to dance with her. Elizabeth overhears this remark and conceives a dislike for the man who has made

such a disparaging remark about her in her hearing. In fact, from this time onwards, she becomes prejudiced against him. Darcy, on his part, is a very proud man. Like Mr. Bingley, Darcy is also a very rich and a handsome bachelor. Any girl in this neighbourhood would be glad to marry him, but this pride is a most disagreeable trait of his character. Mrs. Bennet describes him to her husband as a haughty and horrid man. In fact, everybody at the assembly finds him to be too proud.

Mr. Bingley, Expected to Propose Marriage to Jane

Mr. Bingley's preference for Jane Bennet is noticed by everybody at the assembly. In fact, both Mr. Bingley and Jane have felt mutually attracted to each other. Mr. Bingley's two sisters, Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, also develop a liking for Jane. In fact Miss Bingley invites Jane to dinner at Netherfield Park; and the Bennet family considers this invitation to be a great honour and also a golden opportunity for Jane. Jane goes to Netherfield Park but catches cold on the way because it has been raining. The consequence of her indisposition is that she has to stay on at Netherfield Park for about a week during which Elizabeth also joins her in order to attend upon her. The intimacy between Jane and Mr. Bingley's sisters now increases; and both Jane and Elizabeth begin to think that Mr. Bingley would surely propose marriage to Jane soon. However, Miss Bingley does not feel any liking for Elizabeth. In fact, Miss Bingley begins to feel jealous of Elizabeth.

A Change in Mr. Darcy's Attitude to Elizabeth

In the meantime, Mr. Darcy's attitude towards Elizabeth changes. On a closer acquaintance with her, he finds that there is, after all, a good deal of charm about this girl. She has a very intelligent face; and she has dark eyes which add the charm of her countenance. She also has a pleasing figure and a lively temperament. Mr. Darcy begins actually to like this girl of whom he had originally disapproved even for the purpose of dancing. Miss Bingley begins to dislike Elizabeth all the more because she finds Mr. Darcy feeling inclined towards her (Elizabeth). Miss Bingley wants Mr. Darcy for herself. In other words, she hopes that Mr. Darcy might marry her; and therefore Miss Bingley would not like any other girl to catch Mr. Darcy's fancy and thus to come in her way. It is during Elizabeth's enforced stay with her sister Jane at Netherfield Park that Mr. Darcy gets the opportunity to interact with Elizabeth with Mr. Bingley and Miss Bingley participating in those conversations.

Miss Charlotte Lucas, the Daughter of Sir William Lucas

Within a walking distance of Longburn, there lives a family which is on visiting terms with the Bonnet family, The head of that family is Sir William Lucas, and he lives in a house, which he has named 'Lucas Lodge' with his wife and several children, the eldest of whom is Charlotte Lucas, aged twenty-seven years. Charlotte is a great friend of Elizabeth; and they always like to talk to each other frankly.

Charlotte expresses to Elizabeth her view that Mr. Bingley has felt greatly attracted by Jane and might marry her if Jane encourages him and reciprocates his interest in her. Elizabeth agrees with this view.

NOTES

Elizabeth's Continuing Prejudice and Darcy's Continuing Pride

Elizabeth finds herself no closer to Mr. Darcy. If anything, the rift between them has become wider. Mr. Darcy would certainly like to marry Elizabeth but he finds that she belongs to much lower status than he does, and he, therefore, finds it most improper on his part to marry a girl of that status. Elizabeth continuing to harbour her original prejudice against Mr. Darcy does not show any special attention to him. In fact, in the course of a conversation, Elizabeth says to him that he has a strong tendency to hate everybody, while he says in reply that she has a strong tendency deliberately to misunderstand everybody.

Mr. Collin's Proposal of Marriage, Rejected by Elizabeth

Mr. Collins now appears on the scene at Longburn. He is a cousin of Mr. Bennet; and he is the man to whom Mr. Bennet's whole property is entailed. On Mr. Bennet's death, Mr. Collins would inherit Mr. Bennet's property because Mr. Bennet has no male issue. On Mr. Bennet's death, therefore, Mrs. Bennet and her daughters would find themselves impoverished. Mr. Collins comes on a visit to the Bennet family, his intention being to choose one of the Bennet sisters and propose marriage to her. As Jane is expected by everybody to marry Mr. Bingley, Mr. Collins makes a proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. Elizabeth, however, has found Mr. Collins to be an oddity, that is, a queer kind of man. Mr. Collins speaks a good deal about his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh who has been kind enough to him to confer living upon him and appoint him the rector at Hunsford. The manner in which he talks about Lady Catherine shows him to be an accomplished flatterer. At the same time, he has too high an opinion of himself. Elizabeth, therefore, rejects Mr. Collins.

Elizabeth's Prejudice Deepened by Mr. Wickham's Account

Another character now enters the story. He is Mr. George Wickham, an officer in the militia regiment which is stationed near the town of Merytown. Mr. Wickham and Mr. Darcy had known each other since their boyhood because Mr. Wickham's father was the steward to Mr. Darcy's father. Mr. Wickham has certain grievances against Mr. Darcy, though these grievances are baseless and show only Mr. Wickham's ill-will towards Mr. Darcy. In the course of a social gathering, Mr. Wickham gets acquainted with Elizabeth and tells her his grievances against Mr. Darcy, emphasizing the fact that Mr. Darcy is a very handsome man and whose talk is very interesting. In fact, she fancies herself as being in love with Mr. Wickham. If Mr. Wickham were to propose marriage to her, she would probably have accepted the proposal. In any case, she now feels further prejudiced against Mr. Darcy because of Mr. Wickham's tale of injustices and wrongs which, according to his account, he has suffered at Mr. Darcy's hands. At the ball which Mr. Bingley has arranged at Netherfield Park, Elizabeth is told both by Mr. Bingley and Miss Bingley that Mr. Wickham is an undesirable man, and that he seems to have told many lies to her about Mr. Darcy; but Elizabeth is not convinced by what she is told by them. She cannot believe that Mr. Wickham could have told any lies. In this, of course, she is badly deceived because later she discovers the reality of this man.

Mr. Collins, Married to Miss Charlotte Lucas

Mr. Collins visits Longburn again. Having come into contact with Miss Charlotte Lucas, he decides to propose marriage to her. He is very anxious to get married because Lady Catherine has been pressing him to get married, and because he thinks that a clergyman should set an example of his marriage to his parishioners. So he proposes marriage to Miss Charlotte Lucas who is only too pleased by this proposal because, having already attained the age of twenty-seven, she is very keen to get married at the earliest opportunity. And thus, Mr. Collins and Miss Charlotte Lucas get married. Mr. Collins takes his newly wedded wife to the personage at Hunsford where Lady Catherine is quite pleased to meet the reactor's wife.

A Setback to Jane's Hope of Marrying Mr. Bingley

Instead of receiving a proposal of marriage from Mr. Bingley, Jane now receives a letter from Miss Bingley informing her that all the inmates of Netherfield Park are leaving for London. This piece of information comes as a great blow to Jane's hopes. Then Miss Bingley writes another letter to Jane, this time from London. Miss Bingley, through this letter, informs Jane that Bingley and the others might not return to Netherfield Park. Mr. Bingley is thinking of marrying Mr. Darcy's sister, Georgian, who is a very beautiful and highly accomplished girl. Thus Jane finds that her hopes of marrying Mr. Bingley have been dashed to letter, feels as disappointed and distressed as Jane herself. Elizabeth is deeply attached to Jane; and therefore, she fully shares all anxieties and Joys of Jane.

Elizabeth's Visit to Hunsford

Elizabeth now pays a visit to Charlotte at Hunsford. She goes there in the company of Charlotte's father. Sir William Lucas, and Charlotte's younger sister, Maria. Charlotte introduces her friend and her relatives to Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Lady Catherine is a very proud woman and takes every opportunity to impress upon others the fact that she is socially superior to them. Lady Catherine invites them all to a dinner at her house ('Rosings Park') which is a splendid mansion and splendidly furnished. Sir William and Maria are deeply impressed and awed by the splendor around them; but Elizabeth remains calm and composed.

Elizabeth's Rejection of Mr. Darcy's Proposal of Marriage

A new development now takes place. Mr. Darcy, accompanied by a cousin, Colonel Fitswilliam, comes on a brief visit to Lady Catherine who is Mr. Darcy's and Colonel Fitswilliam's aunt. And now the stage is set for another meeting between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth. At a party which is held by Lady Catherine at her house, Elizabeth plays piano and also has much conversation with Colonel Fitswilliam who impresses her as a very kind man. Mr. Darcy and Colonel Fitswilliam now begin to call at the personage daily to meet the inmates. However, Mr. Darcy's chief interest in paying these visit is to meet Elizabeth. Actually, Mr. Darcy is now more in love with Elizabeth than he had been before. And so one day he makes a personal of marriage to her. However, in the course of making this proposal, he emphasizes on her social inferiority to him, and he makes her conscious of the fact that he is doing her a favour by

NOTES

proposing marriage to her. As a self-respecting girl, Elizabeth does not like the condescending and patronizing tone in which Mr. Darcy proposes marriage to her. She, therefore, declines his proposal. She gives two other reasons for her refusal. One is that Mr. Darcy had been unjust and cruel to Mr. Wickham; and the other is that Mr. Darcy had advised Mr. Bingley not to marry Jane. The information about Mr. Darcy's having obstructed Mr. Bingley's proposal of marriage to Jane was given to Elizabeth by Colonel Fitswilliam who, however, is not himself aware of the exact particulars regarding Mr. Darcy's intervention in Mr. Bingley's plans of marriage. Elizabeth has been able to infer the correct situation from Colonel Fitzwilliam's talk.

Mr. Darcy's Defense against Elizabeth's Charges

On the following day Mr. Darcy hands over a letter to Elizabeth. On going through the letter, Elizabeth is filled with astonishment. This letter contains Mr. Darcy's defense of himself against the charges which Elizabeth had levelled against him on the previous day. In this letter Mr. Darcy states the true facts about Mr. Wickham, exposing that man as a most unreliable fellow and a rogue. In this letter he also admits that he had prevented Mr. Bingley from proposing marriage to Jane but he defends himself by saying that he had done so under a genuine belief that Jane was not really in love with Mr. Bingley. This letter produces a deep effect on Elizabeth. In fact, her reading through this letter marks a turning-point in her attitude towards Mr. Darcy. She begins to think that she had been totally wrong in her judgment of Mr. Darcy's character and also that she had grossly mistaken in having relied upon Mr. Wickham's account of his relations with Mr. Darcy. At the same time, Elizabeth finds that Mr. Darcy's letter, though containing a defense of himself, is written in a tone, which is insolent and haughty. Thus, Mr. Darcy's pride still remains intact, though Elizabeth's prejudice has begun to crumble.

No Development in the Jane-Bingley Affair

Mr. Darcy leaves Rosings Park for London before Elizabeth can take any action on the letter which he had handed over to her. On her way home, she stops in London for a day with her uncle and aunt Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner with whom Jane has already been staying for the past three months. Although Jane had been staying in London for such a long period, she had not been able to meet Mr. Bingley who also lives there. Jane had during this period called on Miss Bingley but even she had shown some indifference to Jane. This creates an impression in Jane's mind that perhaps she is now permanently alienated from Mr. Bingley whom, at one time, she had hoped to marry. Both sisters now return home. Elizabeth informs Jane of what had passed between Mr. Darcy and herself. She also tells Jane of Mr. Wickham's real character as revealed in Mr. Darcy's letter to her. Jane feels shocked to know that such a handsome and smart man as Mr. Wickham possesses a wicked heart.

Lydia, Invited by Mrs. Forster to Brighton

The militia regiment stationed near the town of Meryton has now shifed near the city of Brighton. Lydia feels very depressed because she would no longer be able to lead a gay life. However, Mrs. Forster, the wife of the colonel of that regiment

invites Lydia to accompany her to Brighton. Lydia feels delighted by Mrs. Forster's invitation because, by going to Brighton, she can continue her contacts with the officers. Elizabeth privately urges her father not to give so much freedom to Lydia. Her father, however, does not wish to stop Lydia from going there.

NOTES

An Unexpected Meeting between Elizabeth and Mr. Darey

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner come to Longbourn on their way to Derbyshire where they intend to go on a pleasure trip. They would leave their two children with the Bennet family, and themselves proceed to Derbyshire. They had previously arranged with Elizabeth that she would also accompany them on their trip. Originally, they had wanted to go to the Lake district, but subsequently they had changed their minds. In any case, Elizabeth now goes with them. On the way they pay a visit to Pemberley House which is tourist attraction. Pemberley House is a splendid mansion and belongs to Mr. Darcy. When going round this great country house, they happen to meet Mr. Darcy himself. Mr. Darcy was not expected at the house till the following day when he was to arrive here from London; but he has come a day earlier because of a change in his schedule. Mr. Darcy greets Elizabeth most cordially and shows a lot of courtesy to her uncle and aunt. There is not the least touch of arrogance in Mr. Darcy's attitude at this time. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner's get the feeling that Mr. Darcy is in love with Elizabeth. On the next day, Mr. Darcy calls on Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner and Elizabeth at the inn where they are staying in the nearby town of Lambton. He brings his sister Georgiana with him. This visit further strengthens Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner's belief that Mr. Darcy is in love with Elizabeth. Elizabeth too gets the same impression.

The News of Lydia's Elopement with Mr. Wickham

Now Elizabeth has also begun to feel attracted towards Mr. Darcy. This attraction had begun at Hunsford after Elizabeth had gone through Mr. Darcy's letter. It is now likely that Mr. Darcy would renew his proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. But an unexpected event occurs to disturb the peace of the Bennet family. Colonel Forster informs Mr. Bennet by an express letter that Lydia, who was staying with Mrs. Forster in Bridgton, had eloped with Mr. Wickham whom she had been meeting frequently. When Elizabeth learns this sad news from a letter written to her by Jane, she tells her uncle and aunt that she must get back home to provide whatever comfort she can to her parents in this crisis. She also tells Mr. Darcy of what has happened.

Elizabeth, Back at Longbourn

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner now cut short their holiday and return with Elizabeth to Longbourn. Mrs. Bennet is almost crazy with grief at Lydia's misconduct and at the disgrace which Lydia has brought to the family. Mr. Gardiner now also proceeds to London in order to help Mr. Bennet in his efforts to trace Lydia. After a few days Mr. Bennet returns to Longbourn, having failed in his efforts to trace Lydia or Mr. Wickham. Mrs. Gardiner now leaves Longbourn with her children, and joins her husband in London where they have their home. Mr. Bennet feels most repentant of having always indulged Lydia's desires and whims.

NOTES

After a few days, Mr. Bennet receives a letter from Mr. Gardiner. According to the information contained in this letter, Mr. Wickham and Lydia have been traced and are staying in London without having got married. Mr. Wickham has said that he would marry Lydia only on certain conditions. These conditions include the payment of a certain amount of money to him. At the same time, Mr. Gardiner has informed Mr. Bennet that everything is being settled with Mr. Wickham and that Mr. Bennet should not worry about the welfare of Lydia. A marriage duly takes place after Mr. Wickham's demand for money has been met. The Bennet family gets the impression that the money has been paid by Mr. Gardiner. But Elizabeth soon learns from her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, that the whole settlement had been arrived at by the intervention of Mr. Darcy, and that the entire money had been paid by Mr. Darcy himself. This information produces a profound effect upon Elizabeth regarding the character of Mr. Darcy who has done a great service and a great favour to the Bennet family by saving the good name of the family. But for Mr. Darcy's intervention, Mr. Wickham would never have married Lydia but would have forsaken her. Lydia would in that case have been a deserted girl with a shameful past.

Mr. Bingley's Proposal of Marriage to Jane

A change now takes place in Mr. Bingley. This change is as sudden as the change which had been responsible for his having given up his intention to marry Jane. Accompanied by Mr. Darcy, he now goes to Netherfield Park and gets in touch with the Bennet family. He makes a proposal of marriage to Jane which she most gladly accepts.

Elizabeth's Acceptance of Darcy's New Proposal of Marriage

Lady Catherine de Bough now pays a visit to Longbourn and has a private interview with Elizabeth. She warns Elizabeth not to agree to marry Mr. Darcy in case he makes a proposal of marriage to her. Lady Catherine says that Mr. Darcy has to marry her own daughter, Miss Ann de Bourgh, and that Elizabeth should, therefore, not come in the way. Elizabeth, however, refuses to give Lady Catherine any promise in this connection. After a few days, Mr. Darcy comes to Longbourn and proposes marriage to Elizabeth. By this time Elizabeth's attitude towards Mr. Darcy has undergone a complete change. All her prejudices against him have disappeared. She now feels that he would be the right kind of husband for her. She, therefore, accepts his proposal without the least demur or hesitation. Thus, Mr. Darcy whose pride has by now completely melted away, and Elizabeth whose prejudices have completely disappeared, are united in wedlock. In fact, the marriage of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth takes place on the same day as the marriage of Mr. Bingley and Jane.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

3. Who is George Wickham in Pride and Prejudice?
4. Which character takes a palatial house called Netherfield Park on rent?
5. Name the five daughters of Mr and Mrs Bennet.

4.4 IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

NOTES

Character sketch of some of the important characters of pride and prejudice has been discussed in this section.

1. Elizabeth Bennet

Her physical charm: Of all her heroines, Jane Austen likes Elizabeth Bennet most. During the last one century and a half, countless readers and critics have fallen in love with her. Elizabeth is certainly not as beautiful as Jane, still she is graceful and charming. There is something indefinable about her charm which cannot be easily analysed. Her beauty does not strike at first sight but takes time to make impression. Darcy does not find her beautiful when he first meets her. She is tolerable. Darcy does not find her beautiful enough to tempt him. But later Darcy says that she is 'one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance.' Elizabeth is a complex character.

Understanding of human nature: Elizabeth has a good understanding of people. She claims that she fully understands Bingley and she is right. She looks through the mask of friendship of the Bingley sisters and discovers their conceit. She had known Mr. Collins to be an affected fool from the first letter he writes to them. She alerts her father to the impending dangers of Lydia's flirtations. She is aware of the vulgarity of her mother, the simplicity of Jane, the pedantry of Mary and the frivolity of Kitty and Lydia. It does not take her long to feel the cynical irresponsibility of her father. Elizabeth, however, fails to understand some intricate people like Charlotte Lucas, George Wickham and Darcy. Charlotte is an intimate friend. Her feeling of affection blinds Elizabeth to her demerits. In case of Darcy, his slighting remark, in the beginning of the novel, about her being just 'tolerable' hurts her pride. This makes her prejudiced against him. As a result of this prejudice, she misunderstands every word and every action of his. Wickham appears, she misunderstands every word and every action of his. Wickham appears graceful and charming. Being singled out by such a charming officer gratifies her and she succumbs to his charms.

Willingness to learn: Elizabeth is willing to learn. The process of her self-awakening begins after she reads Darcy's letter. She begins to read it with a strong prejudice against him. But gradually she realizes the truth of his statements. She now feels mortified at her spiritual blindness. She grows absolutely ashamed of herself. She realizes that she had been blind and prejudiced. This dramatic moment of self-revelation gradually brings about a total awareness of reality. She comes to know that Wickham is a charming unprincipled flirt. She begins to understand that Darcy is exactly the man who, in nature and talent, would most suit her. Her prejudice was wrong, but there was an element of honesty about it. And we love her for her honesty of mind.

Her moral courage: Elizabeth has great moral courage. She declines two marriage proposals: both undesirable but both attractive in their own way. Her father's estate is entailed on Mr. Collins. Her connections are very low and vulgar. Her mother warns her that she will not be able to maintain her after her father's death. Mr. Collin's proposal at least promises the comforts and security of a home, if no love. Mr. Darcy's proposal is still more attractive, because she realizes that it would be a

NOTES

great honour to be the mistress of Pemberley. In these circumstances, it needed great moral and spiritual courage to reject these proposals. But Elizabeth did not want to marry where there was no love. She is indeed gifted with rare strength of character.

Elizabeth shows her strength of character in other matters also. Whenever she faces an act of absurdity, she asserts her independence of mind. She faces Lady Catherine with calm composure and unruffled dignity. When this lady tries to pressurize her to promise that she will not marry Darcy, Elizabeth refuses to be browbeaten by her. She never loses an argument. She is really a spirited and independent girl. She asserts her individually whenever required.

Her sense or wit and humour: Elizabeth is gifted with an irrepressible sense of wit and humour. Mr. Bennet is also very witty but he is often cynical. Elizabeth's wit pleases but it never hurts. In her brilliance of wit she reminds us of Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. There runs a strain of innocent raillery in all her conversation. Incorrigibly humorous, she does not spare anyone. She is capable of laughing as much at herself as at others. She loves Jane dearly but does not spare her from her raillery. She cannot help laughing even in most serious situations in life. When Elizabeth gives Jane the news of her engagement to Darcy, Jane asks, 'But are you certain – forgive the questions – are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?' Elizabeth, with cool and delightful irony, replies, 'There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already that we are to be the happiest couple in the world.' But she never oversteps the limits of propriety. There is no doubt that Elizabeth's wit, besides being refined and subtle, never outruns discretion.

Her warm-heartedness: Another quality of Elizabeth is her selflessness and warm-heartedness. The concern she shows for Jane during her stay at Netherfield, the way she walks all the way to Netherfield speaks well for her. She feels concerned at Bingley's removal from the neighbourhood and is genuinely happy when Jane is engaged to him.

Elizabeth is indeed a lovable heroine. Of all Jane Austen's heroines, she impresses and delights us most. We can conclude with Shakespeare's words: 'Time cannot wither her nor custom stale her charm.'

2. Mr. Darcy

Darcy is the hero of *Pride and Prejudice*. He is the owner of the Pemberley estate worth ten thousand pounds a year. He is twenty seven, tall, handsome and of majestic appearance. He is one of the complex characters in the novel. While comparing Bingley and Darcy, Jane Austen tell us that in judgement and understanding, Darcy is definitely the better of the two.

His pride: The first characteristics that we note about Darcy is his pride. It is evident right from the moment he makes his appearance. He refuses to be introduced to any other lady except the two in his own party. He is declared to be 'the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world.' Several instances of his pride can be cited. He refuses to dance with Elizabeth: 'She is tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me.' In Chapter 11, he tells her, 'I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so

soon as I ought, nor their offences against myself….. My temper would perhaps be called resentful.' When he makes his first proposal to Elizabeth, his tone is very proud and haughty.

However, there are attempts to justify his pride. Charlotte Lucas does not feel offended by it: 'One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family fortune, everything in his favour should think highly or himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud.' Wickham tells Elizabeth that 'almost all his actions may be traced to pride, and pride has often been his best friend.' Some characters in the novel think that his pride is the result of his shyness. But after Darcy has been engaged to Elizabeth, he himself confesses his having been proud:

NOTES

'I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately, an only son (for many years, an only child), I was spoiled by my parents, who, though good themselves, allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing – to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own.'

He is shy, but his pride is not just his shyness. And he is not just proud, he is even prejudiced against other people. Hence when he first insults Elizabeth, he is motivated by his prejudice against the rural people who are much beneath him in social status.

Humbled by love: Darcy falls in love with Elizabeth quite early in the novel. Darcy feels that she is rendered intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. He is also attracted by her pleasing figure and the easy playfulness of her manners. He gets an opportunity to observe her more closely at Netherfield where she has gone to nurse the ailing Jane. He notices her exuberance of spirits, and her warm-heartedness. He is impressed by her intellectual sharpness and her sparkling wit. Darcy next meets her when she is on a visit to Hunsford. He repeatedly calls at the parsonage. He is again struck by her refinement and his sense of appreciation is shown in his compliment. 'You could not have always been at Longbourn.'

It is Elizabeth's angry refusal of his proposal that marks the beginning of the great change in him. Elizabeth charges him with having broken Jane's heart and having ruined Wickham's life. She also accuses him of not behaving in a 'gentleman-like manner'. This accusation humbles him. The next time, they come together at Pemberley, he takes pains to behave like a gentleman. He wishes to be introduced to the Gardiners. He requests Elizabeth to allow him to introduce her to his sister Georgiana. After Lydia's elopement with Wickham, he saves the family from disgrace. He makes provisions for the man he hates, pays off his debts, purchases him a new commission in the army and persuades him to marry Lydia. All this, he does out of his love for Elizabeth. He himself admits the miracles Elizabeth's love has brought about in him:

'What do I not owe you? You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you I was properly humbled.'

His integrity of character: Darcy appears to be a man of principle. There lies beneath all his actions a conformity with high standards of conduct. There is absolutely

NOTES

no duplicity about him. In his proposal of Elizabeth, he does not hide the struggle he has undergone before he finally professes his love. When he is rejected by Elizabeth, he is not ashamed of his feelings. He makes it clear: 'But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence.'

His love and kindness: Darcy's relationship with Bingley, Georgiana and his tenants gives other side of his character. It is his pride and haughty manners that are shown aside when he is in Elizabeth's company. But it is quite another Darcy that others speak of and admire. To Bingley he is an esteemed friend. He has the highest regard for his opinion and judgement. To Georgiana, Darcy is a very loving brother, very eager to fulfill every desire of hers. To his tenants 'he is the best landlord and the best master that ever lived; not like the wild youngmen now-a-days, who think of nothing but themselves.'

Some critics feel that Darcy's transformation in the second half of the novel is incredible. They regard him as one of Jane Austen's serious failures. They attribute this failure to either her immaturity or to her general weakness in portraying male characters. The fact is that the action is unfolded from Elizabeth's point of view. We see Darcy through Elizabeth's eyes, and her eyes are prejudiced. We have to put together all the qualities of his character to get a correct picture of his personality. The writer has emphasized his negative qualities in the first half of the novel, but his inherent goodness cannot be hidden for long. His pride is slowly humbled through the love of Elizabeth. Darcy's portrayal in no way can be seen unconvincing.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

6. Which of Shakespeare's heroine does Elizabeth resemble?
7. What changes are found in Elizabeth when she reads Darcy's letter?

4.5 FIRST IMPRESSIONS TO PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Pride and Prejudice was originally entitled *First Impressions*. When Jane Austen revised the novel, she gave it the present title. The present title is perfectly appropriate and suitable. It does not need any justification. We can only discuss its significance. Jane Austen is not a psychological novelist. She is a painter of social manners. In the present novel, however, she analyses the interaction of the human emotions like pride and prejudice.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy symbolizes pride. On his very first appearance in the novel, he is declared to be 'the proudest and most disagreeable man in the world.' Wickham tells Elizabeth that almost all of Darcy's action may be traced to pride, but he calls it 'filial pride, his pride in his father now dead', and 'brotherly pride, his pride in his sister Georgiana'. Darcy's pride hurts Elizabeth when he declines Bingley's suggestion to dance with Elizabeth. He remarks, 'She is tolerable but not

handsome enough to tempt me.' Elizabeth at once gets prejudiced against him and she resolves to hate him. Darcy's assertion that he cannot forget the vices and follies of others intensifies her prejudice. She begins to misinterpret all his utterances and actions. If Darcy's pride affects his judgement, Elizabeth's prejudice affects hers. Darcy fails to detect the impropriety of Wickham's derogatory statements about Darcy. She allows herself to be imposed upon. So complete is her trust in Wickham that she readily declares Darcy to be hateful.

Their process of self-discovery starts at Rosings. Embarrassed by the vulgarity of his aunt Lady Catherine, Darcy gets a new vision of life. He realizes that the refinement of manners is not the monopoly of a particular class. His rejection at the hands of Elizabeth proves to him the futility of those things in which he took pride. There must be something wrong with his values as he could not please a woman he loved. His rejection completely humbles him. Elizabeth's moment of self-awakening comes when she receives Darcy's letter. She realises the validity of his objections to the Jane-Bingley marriage. She is now ashamed to think that she has been 'blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd'. She was proud of her discernment and understanding, but she has all along been blind. She is now ready to change her notion. Darcy's role in bringing about Lydia's marriage with Wickham overwhelms her. Elizabeth realizes that Darcy is exactly the man who is nature and talent will most suit her. Both of them give up their pride and prejudice and are united in marriage.

4.5.1 'Pride and Prejudice' as a Domestic Novel

Jane Austen has rightly been described as a writer of domestic novel. She is notorious for never going out of the parlour. She makes a very candid confession that for her two or three families in a 'country village' are enough to work with.

Pride and Prejudice deals with the domestic life and aspirations of the Bennets, the Lucases, the Bingleys and the Darcys with scattered references to a few other families. These are all middle class people. The Bennets and the Lucases belong to the lower middle class, while the Bingleys and Darcys are comparatively affluent. Since they are all land-owners, they have nothing to do to earn their living. The usual tensions of working life are absent from their life. *Pride and Prejudice* consists of a ball at Meryton, another at Netherfield, Jane's visit to Netherfield and Elizabeth's visits to the Hunsford Parsonage and the Rosings. Apparently, nothing sensational happens during these visits, except that Jane catches a cold on her way to Netherfield, Elizabeth unexpectedly runs into Darcy during her visit to Pemberley, or Lydia and Wickham elope towards the end of the novel. But even this elopement does not lead to any untoward results. Darcy, who was expected to withdraw after this slur on the Bennets, does nothing of the kind and in fact plays a key role in setting the matters right.

Pride and Prejudice is concerned with husband-hunting. The chief aim for Mrs. Bennet, mother of five marriageable daughters, is to strike suitable matches for them. The Lucas family is confronted with the same problem. Miss Bingley is eager to secure Darcy's hand for herself. Lady Catherine is equally interested in her daughter's marriage with Darcy.

NOTES

Jane Austen is also interested in discussing the importance of marriage taking place due to intellectual understanding and emotional compatibility, and not just for beauty or for the allurement of money. Mr. Bennet married for beauty and for good looks and soon got disillusioned. His wife had a weak understanding and an illiberal mind. Mr. Bennet sought comfort in his library or in his walks. Charlotte Lucas knows that Mr. Collins is a pompous ass. But she agrees to marry him because he is in a position to offer her financial security. She too never finds real happiness in her life. Lydia is captivated by Wickham's handsomeness. That he is utterly unprincipled is obvious to everybody, for he shifts from Elizabeth to Miss King to Lydia with great felicity. But Lydia prefers to ignore this fact. And she too ruins her life.

The novel also shows the adverse effect of ill-matched marriages on the emotional development of the children. Thus if Mary, Kitty and Lydia are unequal to the demands of life, the responsibility lies primarily with their parents, one of whom is indifferent and irresponsible, the other indulgent and concerned but stupid, Jane too lacks emotional maturity. Even Elizabeth, the best of the lot, barely escapes the ill-effects.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

8. What is the chief aim of Mrs Bennet in Pride and Prejudice?
9. What was the original title of Pride and Prejudice?
10. When is Darcy awakened by the new vision of life?

4.6 SUMMARY

- Jane Austen was one of the supreme artists in fiction. She was a highly sophisticated artist. In the opinion of the critic, W.L. Cross, 'She is one of the sincerest examples of our literature of art for art's sake.'
- Jane Austen wrote her novels with care, constantly revising them. There was nothing in her novels that did not have a clearly defined reason, and did not contribute to the plot, the drama of feelings of the moral structure.
- The range of Jane Austen's novels was limited. She drew all her material from her own experience.
- Jane Austen defined her own boundaries and never stepped beyond them. These limitations were self-imposed and she always remained within the range of her imaginative inspiration and personal experience.
- Jane Austen's novels do not represent stormy passions and high tragedy of emotional life. She was primarily concerned with the comedy of domestic life.

NOTES

- Jane Austen described the English country scene with skill and fidelity. She gives a vivid and glowing picture of the social manners and customs of the eighteenth century.
- Jane Austen is a great creator of characters. She has created a picture-gallery filled with so many delightful characters. Her characters are not types but individuals.
- Jane Austen is a satirist as well as moralist. Satire is an element in which Jane Austen lives but there is no trace of the savage indignation in her writings.
- Of all her heroines, Jane Austen likes Elizabeth Bennet most. During the last one century and a half, countless readers and critics have fallen in love with her.
- Elizabeth has a good understanding of people. She claims that she fully understands Bingley and she is right. She looks through the mask of friendship of the Bingley sisters and discovers their conceit.
- Elizabeth is willing to learn. The process of her self-awakening begins after she reads Darcy's letter. She begins to read it with a strong prejudice against him.
- Elizabeth is gifted with an irrepressible sense of wit and humour. Mr. Bennet is also very witty but he is often cynical. Elizabeth's wit pleases but it never hurts.
- Darcy is the hero of Pride and Prejudice. He is the owner of the Pemberley estate worth ten thousand pounds a year. He is twenty seven, tall, handsome and of majestic appearance.
- Darcy falls in love with Elizabeth quite early in the novel. Darcy feels that she is rendered intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. He is also attracted by her pleasing figure and the easy playfulness of her manners.
- Some critics feel that Darcy's transformation in the second half of the novel is incredible. They regard him as one of Jane Austen's serious failures.
- Pride and Prejudice was originally entitled First Impressions. When Jane Austen revised the novel, she gave it the present title. The present title is perfectly appropriate and suitable. It does not need any justification.
- In *Pride and Prejudice,* Darcy symbolizes pride. On his very first appearance in the novel, he is declared to be 'the proudest and most disagreeable man in the world.'
- Jane Austen has rightly been described as a writer of domestic novel. She is notorious for never going out of the parlour. She makes a very candid confession that for her two or three families in a 'country village' are enough to work with.
- *Pride and Prejudice* deals with the domestic life and aspirations of the Bennets, the Lucases, the Bingleys and the Darcys with scattered references to a few other families. These are all middle class people.

NOTES

- Jane Austen is also interested in discussing the importance of marriage taking place due to intellectual understanding and emotional compatibility, and not just for beauty or for the allurement of money.
- The novel also shows the adverse effect of ill-matched marriages on the emotional development of the children.

4.7 KEY TERMS

- **Domestic novel**: Sometimes referred to as 'sentimental fiction' or 'woman's fiction,' 'domestic fiction' refers to a type of novel popular with women readers during the middle of the nineteenth century.
- **Moralist**: A moralist is someone who has very strong opinions about what is right and what is wrong.

4.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Action in Austen's novels consists in little visits, morning calls, weddings, shopping expeditions, or the quizzing of new arrivals. These small actions and incidents go to make up the plots of her novels.
2. In *Pride and Prejudice* the scene wherein Darcy proposes to Elizabeth at Hunsford Personage is a fine psychological study. Darcy if outwardly composed and taciturn, is driven within by a conflict between his love for Elizabeth and hatred for her stupid relations which prevent him from marrying her.
3. George Wickham is an officer in the militia regiment which is stationed near the town of Merytown.
4. A rich young man by the name of Charles Bingley takes a palatial house called Netherfield Park on rent.
5. Mr and Mrs Bennet have five daughters – Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine (or Kitty), and Lydia.
6. In her brilliance of wit Elizabeth reminds of Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It.*
7. The process of her self-awakening begins after Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter. She begins to read it with a strong prejudice against him. But gradually she realizes the truth of his statements. She now feels mortified at her spiritual blindness. She grows absolutely ashamed of herself. She realizes that she had been blind and prejudiced.
8. The chief aim for Mrs Bennet, mother of five marriageable daughters, is to strike suitable matches for them.
9. *Pride and Prejudice* was originally entitled First Impressions.

10. Embarrassed by the vulgarity of his aunt Lady Catherine, Darcy gets a new vision of life. He realizes that the refinement of manners is not the monopoly of a particular class. His rejection at the hands of Elizabeth proves to him the futility of those things in which he took pride.

NOTES

4.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the dramatic nature of Austen's art.
2. Who is Mr Bingley? What relation does he share with Jane?
3. At what point in the novel does Darcy experience change of attitude towards Elazabeth?
4. Why does Lydia feel delighted by Mrs Forster's invitation to accompany her to Brighton?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the achievements of Jane Austen as a novelist.
2. Analyse Austen's art of characterization with special reference to Elizabeth and Darcy.
3. How can Jane Austen be called a domestic novelist? Support your answer with examples.
4. Discuss the appropriateness of the title *Pride and Prejudice*.

4.10 FURTHER READING

V. Erdman David. 1982. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. London: University of California Press.

Sarkar, Sunil. 2003. *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Manning, J Peter. 1990. *Reading Romantics: Texts and Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leonard, Barnett George. 1973. *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*. USA: Haskell House.

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES