# ELECTIVE ENGLISH

**BA [English]**

**Fifth Semester**

**Paper G-5**


**Directorate of Distance Education**

**TRIPURA UNIVERSITY**

# Reviewer

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**Units:** (1.0-1.2, 1.6-1.10, 2.0-2.2, 2.6-2.10, 3.0-3.1, 3.7-3.11, 4.0-4.1, 4.4-4.8) © Reserved, 2017

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E-28, Sector-8, Noida - 201301 (UP)
Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999
Regd. Office: 7361, Ravindra Mansion, Ram Nagar, New Delhi 110 055
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# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## Elective English

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|---|---|---|
| **Unit I:** | **British Drama**<br>Shakespeare-*As You Like It* | **Unit 1:** British Drama<br>**(Pages 3-26)** |
| **Unit II:** | **British Poetry**<br>Shakespeare-*Let me not...*<br>Milton-*On His Blindness,*<br>John Donne-*The Good Morrow,*<br>Andrew Marvell-*To His Coy Mistress*. | **Unit 2:** British Poetry–I<br>**(Pages 27-64)** |
| **Unit III:** | **British Poetry**<br>Matthew Arnold-*Dover Beach*,<br>Robert Browning-*Porphyria's Lover*,<br>Wilfred Owen-*Strange Meeting*,<br>T.S. Eliot-*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. | **Unit 3:** British Poetry–II<br>**(Pages 65-127)** |
| **Unit IV:** | **Substance and Critical Appreciation**<br>Unseen verse Piece | **Unit 4:** Substance and Critical Appreciation<br>**(Pages 129-141)** |

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# INTRODUCTION

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Literature symbolizes people, culture and tradition. It guides us towards a world full of experience and helps us evolve ourselves through its literary journey. It speaks to us in its various forms such as short story, poetry, drama, prose, fiction, non-fiction and so forth.

William Shakespeare, the greatest playwright that England has ever produced, is thought to be a poet and dramatist of all ages. Ben Jonson is of the view that Shakespeare 'was not of an age, but for all time'. For twenty years Shakespeare dedicated himself industriously to his art, writing thirty-seven plays, one hundred and fifty-four sonnets and two longer narrative poems. This book, *Elective English* deals with Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* and covers all the important aspects of the play. The book also deals with many aspects of the English literature with reference to British poetry and drama. It deals with British poetry, particularly focusing on the works of John Milton, John Donne, Andrew Marvel, Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, Wilfred Owen and Robert Browning.

This book, *Elective English*, is written in a self-instructional format and is divided into four units. Each unit begins with an 'Introduction' to the topic followed by an outline of the 'Unit Objectives'. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with 'Check Your Progress' questions to test the reader's understanding of the topic. A list of 'Questions and Exercises' is also provided at the end of each unit, and includes short-answer as well as long-answer questions. The 'Summary' and 'Key Terms' section are useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

# UNIT 1 BRITISH DRAMA

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**Structure**



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, the greatest playwright that England has ever produced, is thought to be a poet and dramatist of all ages. Ben Jonson is of the view that Shakespeare 'was not of an age, but for all time'. Born on 23 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, William Shakespeare appeared in the dramatic and literary world of London in 1592 and became an important member of the company of players known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men (called the King's Men after the accession of James I in 1603). For twenty years Shakespeare dedicated himself industriously to his art, writing thirty-seven plays, one hundred and fifty-four sonnets and two longer narrative poems.

*As You Like It* is one of his middle comedies, where the plot of the play is borrowed and adapted from Thomas Lodge's prose romance *Rosalynde*, written in 1590. To say that it is not an original story, but borrowed from a prose-romance, would be doing injustice to the dramatist, as today the prose-romance is not remembered and read anymore; but the play *As You Like It* is still read and prescribed all over the world in different courses of literature. It only goes on to show the poetic, aesthetic, cultural and historical significance of the play which still makes us ponder over it. In this unit, we will introduce you to the play in short by going through its diverse themes, the comic elements of the play and the issues like cross-dressing as well as pastoralism.

## 1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss *As You Like It* as a romantic comedy
- Explain the meaning of a pastoral comedy
- Describe cross-dressing as a device used to re-establish patriarchy *As You Like It*
- Evaluate the themes in *As You Like It*

## 1.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE

With the establishment of theatres like The Globe, Black Friars and White Friars in the Elizabethan Age, drama became the most popular literary genre, providing livelihood to countless playwrights, actors and others associated with the production of plays. The University Wits realized the latent potentialities of drama and in their plays, the exuberance and vitality which typify Elizabethan drama made themselves felt. Drama, which had gradually blossomed into a secular and mature genre in the hands of the University Wits, especially Marlowe, bloomed fully in the hands of Shakespeare. Regarding the merit of Shakespearean drama, we cannot help agreeing with Edward Albert 'that it is the crown and flower of the Elizabethan literary achievement, and embodies almost the entire spirit both of drama and poetry.'

Shakespeare was the essence of the spirit of the Renaissance. One of the greatest dramatic poets of all times, Shakespeare has immortalized in blank verse all his knowledge and experience of human life in a variety of plays falling into the diverse group of comedies, tragedies, tragi-comedies, histories and dramatic romances. They reflect not only his preoccupations as a dramatist but also the temperament of the Elizabethan audience. His characters and their faults and foibles are idiosyncratic of the Elizabethan Age but at the same time have a universal appeal.

There is no unanimity among literary historians regarding the dates and the order of Shakespeare's plays. In fact, it was not until 1623, seven years after his death, that the First Folio edition was printed. It contained thirty-six plays (*Pericles* was omitted) and these are now universally accepted as Shakespeare's. The following table represents an approximate estimate of the dates of the plays:

**1591-92**

*Henry VI* Part II

*Henry VI* Part III

*Henry VI* Part I

**1593**

*Richard III*

*The Comedy of Errors*

**1594**

*Titus Andronicus*

*The Taming of the Shrew*

*Love's Labour Lost*

*Romeo and Juliet*

**1595**

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

*King John*

**1596**

*Richard II*

*The Merchant of Venice*

**1597**

*Henry IV* Part I

**1598**

*Henry IV* Part II

*Much Ado About Nothing*

**1599**

*Henry V*

*Julius Caesar*

**1600**

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*

*As You Like It*

**1601**

*Hamlet*

*Twelfth Night*

**1602**

*Troilus and Cressida*

*All's Well that Ends Well*

**1603**

*Theatres were Closed*

**1604**

*Measure for Measure*

*Othello*

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**1605**

*Macbeth*

*King Lear*

**1606**

*Antony and Cleopatra*

*Coriolanus*

**1607**

*Timon of Athens* (unfinished)

**1608**

*Pericles* (in parts)

**1609**

*Cymbeline*

**1610**

*The Winter's Tale*

**1611**

*The Tempest*

**1613**

*Henry VIII* (in parts)

### 1.2.1 Classification of the Plays

There are different categories of plays which can be summed up as follows:

- **The Early Comedies:** *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* belong to this group. These early plays are rather immature where the plots are less original, the characterization is sketchy and the wit falls flat. Over all, the style is not that of a mature Shakespeare.
- **The English Histories:** These plays display the rapidly maturing art of Shakespeare and his concern with the contemporary desire for stable government. The history plays like *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (2) and *Henry* V are remarkable for memorable characters like Falstaff and the mingling of low life with chronicle history.
- **The Mature Comedies:** To this group belong *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. The plays are full of vitality, contain many comic situations and the most popular of Shakespeare's comic characters like Beatrice and Benedick, Sir Toby Belch and Touchstone who are full of warmth and humanity.
- **The Sombre Plays:** Also called 'Problem Plays' or 'Bitter Comedies', these plays show the falsity of romance and the sordidness of reality. They are comedies because they do not end with the death of the chief characters,

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but reflect a cynical and disillusioned attitude towards life. *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* fall in this category.

- **The Great Tragedies:** *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are the great tragedies of Shakespeare and mark the climax of his dramatic art. They are supreme in the realms of literature because of their intensity of emotion, psychological insight and powerful style.
- **The Roman Plays:** Though written at fairly wide intervals, they follow the lines of the tragedies and are based on North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* belong to this group.
- **The Last Plays:** *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are the last plays, marking a befitting end to the career of the greatest dramatist in the English literary canon with their predominant note of reconciliation and forgiveness.

## 1.2.2 Features of the Plays

The features of Shakespeare's plays are as follows:

- **Originality:** Though the plots of his plays were largely borrowed (in keeping with the tradition of the age) with his Midas touch, he turned them into gold impinging on them the mark of his originality by interweaving plot within plot as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by making history glow with the spirit of his imagination in *Macbeth* and by giving each of his plays a uniqueness which has made them immortal in literature.
- **Characters:** Shakespeare's forte lay in characterization and in terms of output and variety, he is unrivalled in literature. His characters, irrespective of their historical or romantic background, have a sure touch of humanity that makes them plausible, keeping them within the range of the audience's sympathy. Regarding Shakespeare's rich gallery of portraits, Edward Albert says: '…the villain Iago is a man of resolution, intelligence and fortitude; the murderer Claudius (in *Hamlet*) shows affection, wisdom and fortitude; the peerless Cleopatra is narrow, spiteful, and avaricious; and the beast Caliban has his moments of ecstatic vision.' Looking at his versatility, one cannot help but exclaim like Hamlet 'What a piece of work is man!'

  Another significant feature of Shakespeare's characterization is his objectivity and though many have tried, none has achieved his ability to remain neutral to heroes (Hamlet, Othello and Lear) and villains (Claudius, Iago, Goneril and Regan) alike. Each of the characters, from the king to the clown, has a philosophy of his own. As Hamlet says:

  *There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,*
  *Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*
  *And Macbeth confesses in a soliloquy:*
  *Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*
  *That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*

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*And then is heard no more: it is a tale*
*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury*
*signifying nothing.*
*For the melancholic philosopher Jacques in As You Like It:*
*All the world's a stage*
*And all the men and women merely players.*

And finally as Prospero points out: *We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep.*

- **Metre:** The blank verse polished by Marlowe attains a brightness and shine in the hands of Shakespeare. He shows more range and variety than any other artist who dabbled in the use of the blank verse. The soliloquies of the great tragedies are a testimony to this fact, whether it is Macbeth:

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,*
*Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,*
*To the last syllable of recorded time;*
*And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*
*The way to dusty death.*

Or, Hamlet: *To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them?*

- **Stylre:** Besides his dramatic gift, Shakespeare was essentially a poet. The beautiful songs interspersed in his plays show his poetic genius. His style reveals a consummate craftsmanship and is a combination of versification and rarity of images with accompanying music. Such a style moves easily into the highest flights of poetry as in *Twelfth Night:*

*That strain again! It had a dying fall:*
*O! it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound*
*That breathes upon a bank of violets,*
*Stealing and giving odour.*
*Iago's remark on seeing Othello already destroyed by jealousy*
*Not poppy, nor mandragora,*
*Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world*
*Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep*
*Which thou ow'dest yesterday.*
*shows the beauty of the rhythm that brands Iago as an infernal villain.*

Shakespeare is, undoubtedly, a universal poet and dramatist. In Ben Jonson's words, he 'was not of an age, but for all time.' His genius has stood the test of time and his plays trace the drama of human life with its share of joys and sorrows. As Legoius points out:

> Free of every theory, accepting all of life, rejecting nothing, uniting the real and the poetic, appealing to the most various men, to a rude workman as to a wit,

Shakespeare's drama is a great river of life and beauty. All who thirst for art or truth, the comic or the tender, ecstasy or satire, light or shade, can stop to drink from its waters, and at almost every instant of their changing moods find the one drop to shake their thirst.

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### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How is the Renaissance spirit manifested in Shakespearean drama?
2. What did Edward Albert say about Shakespeare regarding the merit of Shakespearean drama?
3. In which year was Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* written?
4. Name some of Shakespeare's plays which belong to 'The Early Comedies' category.
5. What are 'The Sombre Plays'?

## 1.3 SHAKESPEARE: *AS YOU LIKE IT*

A comedy is a work in which the characters and their follies, foibles and discomfitures are presented in such a fashion so as to mock them which would not only entertain the audience or the readers, but at the same time would make them learn through the mistakes of the characters that they should never repeat such mistakes or fall into traps because of such follies. In other words, a comedy's main function is two-fold—to entertain as well as to educate. But this very classical notion of comedy is being challenged by William Shakespeare when he wrote his romantic comedies where the primary emphasis is on entertaining the audience through the romance between the hero and the heroine. Moreover, in Shakespearean Comedies we see that the heroines take the centre stage and they are the ones who often move the plot of the play forward.

**The Elizabethan Era**

The Elizabethan Era is the period associated with Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558–1603) and is often considered to be the golden age in the history of English Literature. It was the zenith of the English Renaissance. The Renaissance began in the fourteenth century Italy and from there it spread throughout Europe. Renaissance meant rebirth, in European context; Renaissance was the rebirth of the classical learning. Therefore, the age of Renaissance saw the birth of new interest in ancient Greek and Roman classics which created a fresh vigour and vitality in the mindset of the people. The significant change that occurred during the Renaissance is that Man started questioning the given things and tried to figure out for themselves the reason behind it. The temper of scientific enquiry dominated the age. The Elizabethan Era is the greatest age of English literature as plays and poems reached a new height in this age like never before. The prominent writers of the age are William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh,

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among others. They not only wrote plays, poems, essays but experimented with different genres and often tried intermingling genres. Shakespeare in *As You Like It* is mingling the genres of pastoral, romance and comedy to create a new genre. It was a time of the flourishing of theatre, as theatre severed its link from the churches and established itself as a secular institution. Moreover, the Elizabethan era is also seen as an age of exploration and expansion. In England, the Protestant Reformation was going on which helped in creating a national mindset. This period witnessed a rapid growth in English commerce and naval power.

Before getting into the discussion of *As You Like It* as a comedy, let us delve further into the notion of comedy as the Greek practitioners of the art followed. In a comedy, it is generally a rule that no great misfortune happens to any of the characters and the play ends on a happy note, as the main characters achieve what they aspire to. The play is written and performed in such a manner that the audience or readers pleasurably engage themselves while watching or reading it. Though comedy's chief aim is to amuse the readers, but there is another function that is usually associated with a comedy—to correct the vices and follies of people, by mocking and criticizing those very vices and follies. Comedy is supposed to work as a medicine on the audience as they get to know their follies and vices and can correct them before any misfortune mars their life. Thus, the two-fold purpose of a comedy enhances its appeal, as it works as a medicine on us without making us realize that we are getting purged by it. Classical dramatists like Titus Maccius Plautus and Publius Terence (Roman) and Aristophanes (Greek) wrote comedies which became a standard framework for writing comedies. Their comedies include certain features which can be enumerated as:

- Comedy is realistic, it is usually based on people who are low in rank in the society. Aristotle, the Greek Classical scholar in his book *Poetics* says that tragedy is inclined to imitate people above the level of our world and comedy below it.
- The primary objective of a comedy is to satirize and to correct people's vices and follies through satire. The vices are ridiculed and exposed so that the audience can laugh and learn while watching the play.
- Usually the tragic and the comic elements are not intermingled in classical comedies, as that would mar the comic effect of the play. Before any misfortune is about to fall on any character or characters, the disaster is averted as a comedy should end happily with wish-fulfillment.
- Classical comedies strictly observed the unities of time, place and action. The time frame of the play should not be more than twenty four hours. The setting of the play should be one throughout the play and there should be one plot presented in the play.

William Shakespeare and his contemporaries went beyond the prescribed classical norms of comedy to reinvent a new genre which is usually termed as romantic comedy, where the romantic and the comic elements intermingle to delight

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the audience. The main motive is not to educate or point out the vice and corruptions in society, but to entertain the theatre-going mass. Romantic comedy developed, as mentioned earlier, by the Elizabethan dramatists based on prose romances such as Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*—the source of Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* Romantic comedies usually have a love affair where the beautiful and wise heroine, often disguised as a man (cross-dressed), overcomes all difficulties to get her lover and the play ends on a happy note (usually in marriage). Thus, in a romantic comedy the main theme is love, where love ends in fruition overcoming all difficulties.

*As You Like It* is a typical romantic comedy as the main theme of the play is love and its different manifestations, though there are other elements included within the objective of the play. With its multiple themes, its complex plot and use of divergent literary devices, *As You Like It* creates a unique space for itself and evolves as a new kind of play. The main features of *As You Like It* as a romantic comedy are:

- Romantic love is portrayed in the play through the pairs of Orlando-Rosalind, Oliver-Celia and Phebe-Silvius. Orlando-Rosalind and Celia-Oliver fall in love with each other in their very first meeting. Whereas Silvius has fallen in love with Phebe, though Phebe does not care much for Silvius' love. All these three pairs are stylized in the fashion of romantic love. Moreover, the character of Orlando is fashioned in terms of Petrarchan love tradition, where the lover is a person from the lower strata of society than his beloved and hence never ventures to proclaim his love to the beloved, instead he writes poems where he celebrates his love and the beauty of the beloved.
- But Shakespeare, through different means mocks Romantic and Petrarchan love. Touchstone-Audrey love affair is presented to mock romantic love and Jacques makes a satiric attack on the romantic love and at the end of the play when all the characters are pairing together in wedlock, Jacques remains melancholic.
- The character of Jacques is thought to be the original creation of Shakespeare, as the character does not exist in Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*. Shakespeare deliberately introduced the character in the play to make a critique of romantic love, the main theme of the play. The contemplative and melancholic nature of Jacques cannot be called tragic, but the character is of importance; Jacques and his temperamental wit questions the comic spirit of the play. Jacques also questions the nature of the pastoral as he calls Duke Senior and his lords 'usurpers' as they have usurped the natural dwelling place of the animals. *As You Like It,* through its pastoral setting, not only creates an atmosphere of calmness and simplicity where all problems are resolved, but also questions the literary tradition of the pastoral. Shakespeare shows the pastoral as the ideal space as it is usually referred to in the Elizabethan poetry, but at the same time through the character of Jacques unmasking the pastoral.
- The character of Rosalind is of much importance in this play as she is the main turner of events. In Act I, she is a subdued character in the Court of

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Duke Frederick; but from Act II onwards, when she reaches the Forest of Arden along with Celia and Touchstone, she takes charge of the situation and at the end in a magical way solves all the tribulations. In Shakespearean comedies, the heroine is always the main protagonist, whereas tragedies centre around male characters. Though, one needs to see the gender equations in much deeper light as Rosalind needs to cross-dress as a male (her disguise as Ganymede) to take control of the situation. Moreover, Shakespeare, by giving the 'Epilogue' of the play to Rosalind deviates from the tradition as the 'Epilogue' is usually spoken by a male character, points out the importance of the character of Rosalind.

- The characters of fools and clowns are as important to Shakespearean comedies as any other aspect. Whereas, Touchstone is the official fool, Jacques is a Melancholy man seeking the motley wear of the fools and Corin is a rustic fool who is termed a 'natural philosopher'. All these characters with their wit or the lack of it and with their temperamental nature provide a comic element to the play. The role of fools in Elizabethan Court is not only to provide jest and laughter in the otherwise tense atmosphere of the court, but their presence itself serves as a critique of the court. As they are the official fools, therefore, they acquire the right to laugh at the courtly proceedings and courtiers, and in the process make a subversive statement against the court in a joking manner. Thus, the fools provide laughter to the audience/readers in the play. The difference between fools and clowns is that we laugh with the fools, but we laugh at the clowns.

But, *As You Like It* cannot be called a classical comedy because of the following reasons:

- It does not have a corrective purpose and a satiric tone as classical comedies have. The purpose of Shakespeare behind writing *As You Like It* is to produce innocent laughter and not to laugh at follies and foibles. Though there are certain satiric elements in the play, as the notion of romantic love and the use of the pastoral by the courtiers is being critiqued and satirized. But the critique of these twin themes is not the dominant element in the play.
- The play is not merely about the ordinary people as classical norms prescribe. The characters are from different shades of life—some from court and some from the country side. The intermingling of characters from all ranks of life makes the play much more realistic. Moreover, the interaction of people from the lower and higher ranks makes the play deal with an aspect where the difference between the courtly and country atmosphere, culture and rituals are being brought to the forefront.
- The play does not follow the unities of time, place and action—the play is not set in a span of twenty four hours. The setting of the play changes from Oliver's house to Frederick's Court to different parts of Forest of Arden, and the play does not deal with a single theme or action, as multiple

stories and themes are intermingled to produce a complex plot. Though in doing so, the play does not lose its essence, Shakespeare with his craftsmanship provides an organic unity to the play even when all the three unities are flouted.

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It is true that *As You Like It* is not a comedy in the classical sense of the term; but it is a kind of a romantic comedy which questions the classical parameters to pave the path for a new kind of comedy known as romantic comedy.

### 1.3.1 *As You Like It* as a Pastoral Comedy

> The Forest of Arden like the wood outside Athens is a region defined by an attitude of liberty from ordinary limitations, a festive place where the folly of romance can have its day. — *C. L. Barber*

In William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, an adaptation of Lodge's *Rosalynde*, the Forest of Arden acts as a foil to the Elizabethan courtly life. The deviants from the court find a space of exile in the 'pastoral' Arden where they set up a parallel court under the hegemony of Duke Senior. Though a certain kind of festivity and revelry captures the mood of the Forest of Arden, *As You Like It* 'brings home the awareness that pastoralism is the ideology of the court'. Thus in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare makes a radical departure from the mainstream Renaissance use of the pastoral.

The pastoral made its origins in Greece, where Theocritus used rural settings and bucolic shepherds to explore the sorrows of love and the tough injustice of daily life. The Roman poet Virgil expanded this tradition and Shakespeare's contemporaries, Spenser (*The Shepheardes Calendar*, 1597), Philip Sidney (*Arcadia*, 1590) and others used the pastoral to talk about the artificiality and scheming nature of the court as against the unravished natural, joyous and innocent countryside. But Shakespeare could see much ahead of his contemporaries and found out that the Forest of Arden, pastoral in some ways, poses similar power relations as that of the court. For the deviant characters of the court, Duke Senior, Orlando and others, pastoral is a temporary refuge. The aristocrats of the court consciously fashion themselves as shepherds to enjoy the rustic rural setting so that they can present their dissatisfaction with the court. It is not only Rosalind who cross-dresses as Ganymede, but all the outsiders of the Forest of Arden disguise themselves as Shepherds as they are misfits to this other (pastoral) world. The politically impotent can only take refuge in shallow pastoralism and pretend to be shepherds to cover up their own limitations. Thus, in *As You Like It*, one of the main agendas of Shakespeare is to unmask the pastoral (and to present to his audience/readers the reality behind the pretense of the pastoral).

For reasons of acceptability, Shakespeare deliberately presents the unmasking of the pastoral in a sugar-coated bitter pill of comedy. The character of Jacques is an addition by Shakespeare to Lodge's *Rosalynde,* as it is through Jacques that Shakespeare presents the subversion of the sanctified notion of the pastoral as represented by the characters from the court who are taking refuge in the Forest of Arden. Jacques, by linking the court and the country in their sacred heritage of cruelty and tyranny undercuts the idyll of the greenwood. In Act II Scene (ii), at the

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sight of a deer hurt by a hunter's arrow, Jacques decries the injustice of Duke Senior's party as he says:

> …we
> Are mere usurpers, tyrants…
> To fright the animals and to kill them up
> In their assigned and natural dwelling place (II, ii, 61-63)

Thus, the bonhomie of Duke Senior and the 'rustic revelry' of the 'marriage wedlock' are destabilized by Jacques' satirical perceptions as it 'mocks the sentimental pastoralism of the courtiers who moralize their discomforts of exile into blessings'. Jacques is like the melancholic figure Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* who presents the catharsis of the play, though the 'happy ending' (as it is the norm in comedy) in matrimonial vows and convenient reconciliation of the power game between Duke Senior and Duke Frederick, Orlando and Oliver channelizes the audience to 'comic laughter' without realizing the tragic interrogation of the pastoral.

William Shakespeare employs the tradition of the pastoral genre to mock the audience's notion of laughing at the idyll that comedy constructs. When Duke Senior accuses Jacques of being a libertine, Jacques confesses to Rosalind that his melancholy is 'a melancholy of my own, compounded by many objects' (IV, i, 16) but at the same time, Shakespeare also presents how the Forest of Arden or the pastoral has the power to soothe the ailing people of the court. He may unmask the pastoral and show the politics as it is carried out by Duke senior in the Forest of Arden but at the same time he also celebrates the simplicity of the countryside as Corin is represented as a natural philosopher as he says:

> The property of rain is to wet and fire to burn; that good pasture fats sheep;
> and that a great cause of the night is lack of the sun.

The simplicity of Corin is posed against the scheming nature of the court. Therefore, it cannot be said that *As You Like It* is merely an unravelling of the pastoral sentimentalism, since it is also a comparative study of the court and the country, of simplicity and complexity, of politics and love. Helen Gardner rightly says, 'Arden is not a place where the laws of nature are abrogated and roses are without their thorns … if man does not slay and kill man, he kills the poor beasts. Life preys on life.' So whether it is the Court or Arden, life is all about preying on others for one's pleasures, as Amien's lovely melancholic song proclaims:

> Blow, blow thou winter wind,
> Thou art not so unkind
> As man's ingratitude. (IV, I, 174 – 176)

Thus, 'all the world's a stage' to perform as fools, mostly we fool ourselves by fashioning us in erroneous dressing while the proclaimed fools present themselves as fools as they know:

> When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools …
> (*King Lear*, IV, iv, 183 -184)

In the Forest of Arden, the joyous picture of human achievements culminates into futility as 'most friendship is feigning and most loving mere folly'. The trial and

error method through which we come to the knowledge of ourselves is symbolized by the disguises in the Forest of Arden. This discovery of the truth by feigning is the centre of *As You Like It*, as the play is all about meetings and encounters; and about conversations and sets of it: Orlando vs Jacques, Rosalind vs Phoebe, and above all, Rosalind vs Orlando. Thus, in *Shakespeare Survey,* Prof. Harold Jenkins rightly points out 'how the points of view put forward by one character find contradiction or correction by another, so that the whole play is a balance of sweet and sour, of cynical against the idealistic, and life is shown as a mingling of hard fortune and good lap.' We can say that *As You Like It* is also about the contradiction between the court and the pastoral, though the contradiction itself is questionable and needs to be pragmatically examined to understand the nature and importance of the pastoral in the Elizabethan Age.

### Check Your Progress

6. When did Shakespeare appear in the dramatic and literary world of London?
7. Name the source of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.
8. What is a comedy?
9. Why did Shakespeare deliberately introduce the character of Jacques in *As You Like It*.

## 1.4 CROSS-DRESSING IN *AS YOU LIKE IT*

> I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat. (II, iv, 4-7)

Rosalind's speech in *As You Like It* rigidly demarcates the social role that dresses play in the society. Dress is symbolic of the 'fashioning of the self' as it presumes certain codified behaviour from the person wearing that particular dress. Consequently, cross-dressing destabilizes the cultural polarities that the patriarchal society creates for its own benefit. It is not true that cross-dressing or female transvestism is only confined to the Renaissance. It originates from Ovid's story of Iphis and Ianthe in *Metamorphoses*, Book IX. In five of Shakespeare's comedies we find the heroines—Rosalind, Viola, Portia, Julia and Imogen—cross-dressing 'to escape the constraints and the vulnerability of the feminine' (Catherine Belsey, 'Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies').

Cross-dressing not only questions the codified behaviour that is related to the dress but also questions the violence that is perpetrated on women which makes them cross-dress. Rosalind makes this very evident when Celia talks about going to the Forest of Arden:

> Alas, what danger will it be to us,
> Maids as we are, to travel forth so far?
> Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold (I, ii, 112-115)

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Women should stay within the four walls of the house—this was the notion that was a consequence of the patriarchal society. This is represented by the Puritan pamphleteers, like Stephen Gosson, an English satirist, who argues:

> Thought is free; you can forbid no man that vieweth you (Women) ... for entering to places of suspicion.

The Puritans believed that when a lady ventures out of the household, it is not only a threat to her bodily purity, but much more than that—her reputation. She might be the object of 'promiscuous gazing', but more than that she will be transcending the image of the 'goddess of the household' to a 'whore in the marketplace'. Thus, cross-dressing for Rosalind becomes essential not only to save herself from promiscuous gazing and rape but also to keep her image intact as a chaste lady according to the patriarchal norms. In that sense, if cross-dressing is a disruption of the patriarchal codification of dress; it at the same time, reinscribes patriarchy. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* speaks of resistance not as an outside power but inscribed within it as its irreducible opposite. Therefore, Stephen Greenblatt in *Shakespearean Negotiations* writes:

> Though Shakespeare characteristically represents his women characters—Rosalind, Portia, Viola—as realizing their identities through cross-dressing, this whole conception of individuation seems to be bound up with Renaissance conceptions of the emergence of the male identity.

Identity depends on binary oppositions, therefore, the fixing of meaning is the fixing of difference as opposition. In these oppositions, one term is always privileged, and one is always the 'other', always what is not the thing itself. Catherine Belsey, a British literary critic, rightly said, 'Women, then as now, were defined in relation to men and in terms of their relations with men.' As gender identity is fixed by the way one dresses up, therefore, a certain power relation also becomes evident. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* had to cross-dress to enter the court. Similarly, when Rosalind enters the Forest of Arden as Ganymede and meets Orlando, Orlando is comfortable enough with Ganymede to talk about his love for Rosalind as male bonding in the patriarchal society is stronger than that of male-female bonding. On the one hand, Orlando was in love with Rosalind in a bookish way and followed the Petrarchan tradition by not articulating his love to Rosalind, on the other hand he could talk about it very easily with Ganymede. When Rosalind is dressed as Ganymede, her discourse makes much sense to others as it is coming from a man who has a particular social role to perform. Thus, through cross-dressing, fixed and stable gender identity and gender behaviour is put under contestation. Elaine Hobby says, 'through Rosalind, we are presented with two interwoven challenges to the stability of gender.' This is achieved through a juxtaposition of Rosalind's characteristics as a young woman with her behaviour when playing the part of a young man; and through a series of jokes about the actual gender identity of the actor playing the role of Rosalind/Ganymede's part.

Rosalind uses her double gender identity for accepting greater freedom otherwise denied to her. She undermines the patriarchal constructions of male and female behaviour and when dressed as Ganymede she pretends to be Rosalind and asks Orlando to woo her:

Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a

Holiday humour and like enough to consent. (IV, I, 61-62)

She also arranges a mock marriage with him in Celia's presence. The boldness that we see in Ganymede is only possible because she has taken up the role of a man. Therefore, as the play progresses Rosalind becomes the author of her own drama. As a transvestite, she has devised her own rules to play the game with Orlando as she is pretending to be a man. Jean E. Howard in the essay 'Cross-dressing, the Theater and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England' says, cross-dressing 'reveals the constructed nature of patriarchy's representation of the feminine and a woman manipulating those representations in her own interest, theatricalizing for her own purpose what is assumed to be her innate, teaching her future mate how to get beyond certain ideologies of gender to enabling ones.'

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Cross-dressing may, in some ways, be a reinscription of patriarchy; but much more than that it becomes a medium for questioning and critiquing the prescribed gender roles and to open up new possibilities to view gender identities and behaviours and also to present alternative images of womanhood. It also opens up the possibility for women to show their potential in the space beyond the household and also to voice their desire as Rosalind does to Orlando. Rosalind is lucky that she was in an advantageous position in the Forest of Arden as she could dominate others and could live life according to her own terms. She did not have to fall into Viola's position and lament, 'I am not what I am'. Rosalind could reveal herself in her own chosen time and space to her own people without facing any social stigma, as the play had to have a happy ending since it is a comedy. Otherwise, like Moll Cutpurse in the play *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, she would have to say:

I pursue no pity

Follow the law.

The patriarchal law would have punished Rosalind for transgressing the gender prescribed roles. But Shakespeare is deliberately presenting female transvestism in his comedies as he wants to question the gender roles through his heroines.

### Check Your Progress

10. What does a dress symbolize in a society?
11. What does cross-dressing question?
12. Why is Shakespeare deliberately presenting female transvestism in his comedies?

## 1.5 THEMES IN *AS YOU LIKE IT*

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. Shakespeare's plays have various themes and so does *As You Like It*. The themes of *As You Like It* are discussed in this section.

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## 1.5.1 Theme of Love

The main theme of a romantic comedy is love, where a beautiful and charismatic heroine is the main turner of events and the love affair though does not run smooth, still ends in marriage, overcoming all difficulties. In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, there are four pairs of lovers—Orlando and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, Silvius and Phebe, Touchstone and Audrey. Two of them—Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver—fall in love with each other at first sight. Silvius loves Phebe, but she does not care for his love. Instead she falls in love with Ganymede (disguised Rosalind), but when she finds out the truth, she marries Silvius. Touchstone and Audrey also get married at the end of the play, but they are not in love with each other. Their marriage is like a contract where each gains something from the other.

Orlando's love for Rosalind is stylized on Petrarchan tradition where there is a class difference between the lover and the beloved and the lover never aspires to reach the beloved though he continues to love her from afar. He manifests his love in the form of poems and celebrates the beloved in his verses. Orlando, similarly, writes and hangs his love poems in the Forest of Arden, but never dares to go to Rosalind to confess his love for her. Incidentally, Rosalind finds the verses and after a series of mock courtships, their relationship culminates in marriage. Interestingly, he does not hesitate to talk about his love to Ganymede (disguised as Rosalind). Orlando immediately after falling in love, says:

> What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?
>
> I cannot speak to her, yet she urg'd conference.
>
> O poor Orlando, thou art overthrown!

Throughout the play, Orlando's passion for Rosalind weighs so heavily on his tongue that he never manages to declare his love to Rosalind and sighs for her. However, he does not waver in declaring his love to the whole world through his love poems.

In the Petrarchan tradition, the lover never manages to get his beloved. But in *As you Like It*, Orlando gets Rosalind, as Rosalind makes all efforts to get Orlando. The fruition of their love is incidental as they both by chance land up in the Forest of Arden. Through this play, Shakespeare is mocking the notion of Petrarchan love.

Jacques, throughout the play, satirizes the love of Orlando. Touchstone, the official fool, too mocks Orlando and Rosalind's love. Even the pairing of Touchstone and Audrey mocks the romantic love, as their marriage is basically a contract. Audrey is attracted by courtly manners and as soon as she meets Touchstone, she finds her way to the court and decides to marry him and Touchstone marries her for female company. Thus, the romantic notion of love is thwarted by Touchstone-Audrey.

The other couple—Celia and Oliver—also fall in love at the first sight, which is very sudden and surprising, as Rosalind says:

> Nay, 'tis true: there was never anything so sudden but the fight of two rams, and Caesar's thrasonical brag of 'I came, saw and overcame'. For your brother and my sister no sooner met, but they looked no sooner looked but they loved …

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Celia-Oliver's pair is similar to that of Rosalind-Orlando, as they fall in love at the first sight, but in this case, with Orlando's help, Oliver is able to get his beloved Celia. He did not have to wait like Orlando for the fruition of his love in marriage.

Silvius and Phebe's pair is interesting from this point of view. Silvius is in love with Phebe but she does not care for his love, though she enjoys all the attention. The pride of Phebe is punctured by cross-dressed Rosalind with whom Phebe falls in love. Though at the end of the play when Phebe finds out the truth, she accepts Silvius, as she understands that she probably would not get another chance to be loved in the same manner in which Silvius loves her.

Thus, the play ends with the coupling of the loving pairs as is the norm in a romantic comedy, but Jacques by not being a part of the marriage revelry at the end of *As you Like It* critiques the happy ending of the play. His presence makes it clear that though a romantic comedy may end happily, but it is not the case in real life. Shakespeare, thus, not only writes a romantic comedy with love as its theme, but at the same time critiques romantic love.

## 1.5.2 Theme of Female Bonding

Love is not simply about the attachment between people of two different genders, where lovers express their feelings to each other and end up cementing their relation through marriage. Apparently, in the play *As You Like It* the relationship between Rosalind and Celia celebrates the special bonding between two sisters. They love each other passionately and unconditionally. Charles says, 'never two ladies loved as they do'. Le Beau emphasizes similarly, 'whose loves are dearer than the natural bond of sisters'. There are four pairs of lovers in the play. But their love is something that is seen as a natural manifestation, according to the societal make-up. The love between Rosalind and Celia is unusual, as they portray that the women need to come together not only because they go through similar experiences, but also to fight for each other's rights. Rosalind stays back in the Court because of her love for Celia even while Duke Senior, her father, is banished. Similarly, when Rosalind is banished, Celia argues with her father, Duke Frederick, to undo the order. When Frederick refuses, Celia decides to accompany Rosalind in her exile. Therefore, while going to the Forest of Arden, Celia says:

> Now go in we content
>
> To liberty, and not to banishment

She considers her flight from the court to be liberating, as she thinks her father's court to be too oppressive. Elizabethan court is primarily a male domain, where females have no role to play. Celia's decision to go to the Forest of Arden is not only because of her love for Rosalind, but it can also be analysed in terms of her revolt against the oppressive patriarchal society. Moreover, in Act I, we see Rosalind to be a subdued character, though she becomes the turner of events in the Forest of Arden. Her virtues find true manifestation when she is out of the patriarchal setup. Thus, the love between these two women characters can be seen as a critique of patriarchal oppression.

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The bonding between Rosalind and Celia is also set against the jealous brothers—Oliver and Orlando, Duke Frederick and Duke Senior, who fight among themselves for property and prosperity. One brother's prosperity becomes the reason of envy for the other, as against the sisters, where one's melancholy makes the other sad. Thus, the contrasting parallel is being drawn by Shakespeare in the play to show and critique the gender norms.

### 1.5.3 Themes of Primogeniture and Usurpation

Property dispute and envy between brothers is one of the themes which Shakespeare unfolds as soon as the play begins, which provides a touch of realism to the mirth and comic spirit of the play. By the principle of primogeniture in inheritance, Oliver becomes the inheritor of Rowland de Boys' property and also the nurturer of Orlando. The principle of primogeniture was widely practiced in the sixteenth and seventeenth century England to keep the family wealth consolidated. So Orlando inherits, 'poor a thousand crown' and Oliver is given the duty to look after him. In this social system, the younger sons always suffer, as their lives depend on the whims and wishes of their elder brother (the firstborn). Orlando is brought up as a farm labourer, without any formal education as Oliver did not want his younger brother to ever have the caliber to question him. In other words, Oliver wanted Orlando to be a slave, but things turned out otherwise when Orlando inherits his father's qualities, which makes Oliver envious and he consequently decides to kill him. Though, as it happens in a comedy, Orlando saves Oliver when a lioness attacks him in the Forest of Arden, and Oliver's heart changes and he gives Orlando his due share in the property. *As You Like It* being a comedy resolves the issue of inheritance very easily without causing harm to anyone.

Duke Frederick usurps the Dukedom of Duke Senior and banishes him. Duke Senior goes to the Forest of Arden and stays there with his loyal lords till he gets back his Dukedom. He gets back his Dukedom when Duke Frederick meets a hermit at the outskirts of the Forest of Arden, which changes his whole personality. The theme of usurpation not only highlights the political problem of the court, but also is a structural necessity as that would serve the purpose of introducing the theme of pastoral in the play. Moreover, it also provides a touch of realism to an otherwise romantic play, where all wishes and dreams are fulfilled at the end of the play. The theme of usurpation is also resolved in the play without much political, social and economic justification, as a comedy should end on a happy note.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

13. How is Orlando's love Petrarchan in nature?
14. Why does Celia consider her flight from the court to be liberating?
15. How does Duke Senior get back his Dukedom?

## 1.6 SUMMARY

NOTES

- Shakespeare was the essence of the spirit of the Renaissance. One of the greatest dramatic poets of all times, Shakespeare has immortalized in blank verse all his knowledge and experience of human life in a variety of plays falling into the diverse group of comedies, tragedies, tragi-comedies, histories and dramatic romances.
- There is no unanimity among literary historians regarding the dates and the order of Shakespeare's plays. In fact, it was not until 1623, seven years after his death, that the First Folio edition was printed.
- *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* belong to the Early Comedies. These early plays are rather immature where the plots are less original, the characterization is sketchy and the wit falls flat. Over all, the style is not that of a mature Shakespeare.
- Though the plots of Shakespeare's plays were largely borrowed, with his Midas touch, he turned them into gold impinging on them the mark of his originality by interweaving plot within plot as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by making history glow with the spirit of his imagination in *Macbeth* and by giving each of his plays a uniqueness which has made them immortal in literature.
- Shakespeare's forte lay in characterization and in terms of output and variety, he is unrivalled in literature.
- One of the significant features of Shakespeare's characterization is his objectivity and though many have tried, none has achieved his ability to remain neutral to heroes (Hamlet, Othello and Lear) and villains (Claudius, Iago, Goneril and Regan) alike.
- The blank verse polished by Marlowe attains a brightness and shine in the hands of Shakespeare. He shows more range and variety than any other artist who dabbled in the use of the blank verse.
- Besides his dramatic gift, Shakespeare was essentially a poet. The beautiful songs interspersed in his plays show his poetic genius. His style reveals a consummate craftsmanship and is a combination of versification and rarity of images with accompanying music.
- Shakespeare is, undoubtedly, a universal poet and dramatist. In Ben Jonson's words, he 'was not of an age, but for all time.' His genius has stood the test of time and his plays trace the drama of human life with its share of joys and sorrows.
- A comedy is a work in which the characters and their follies, foibles and discomfitures are presented in such a fashion so as to mock them which would not only entertain the audience or the readers, but at the same time would make them learn through the mistakes of the characters that they

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should never repeat such mistakes or fall into traps because of such follies.

- The Elizabethan Era is the period associated with Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558–1603) and is often considered to be the golden age in the history of English Literature. It was the zenith of the English Renaissance.
- The Renaissance began in the fourteenth century Italy and from there it spread throughout Europe. Renaissance meant rebirth, in European context; Renaissance was the rebirth of the classical learning.
- The Elizabethan era is the greatest age of English literature as plays and poems reached a new height in this age like never before.
- The prominent writers of the age are William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh, among others.
- Shakespeare in *As You Like It* is mingling the genres of pastoral, romance and comedy to create a new genre.
- The play *As You Like It* is written and performed in such a manner that the audience or readers pleasurably engage themselves while watching or reading it.
- Though comedy's chief aim is to amuse the readers, but there is another function that is usually associated with a comedy—to correct the vices and follies of people, by mocking and criticizing those very vices and follies.
- The play is written and performed in such a manner that the audience or readers pleasurably engage themselves while watching or reading it. Though comedy's chief aim is to amuse the readers, but there is another function that is usually associated with a comedy—to correct the vices and follies of people, by mocking and criticizing those very vices and follies.
- William Shakespeare and his contemporaries went beyond the prescribed classical norms of comedy to reinvent a new genre which is usually termed as romantic comedy, where the romantic and the comic elements intermingle to delight the audience.
- *As You Like It* is a typical romantic comedy as the main theme of the play is love and its different manifestations, though there are other elements included within the objective of the play.
- Romantic love is portrayed in the play through the pairs of Orlando-Rosalind, Oliver-Celia and Phebe-Silvius.
- *As You Like It* cannot be called a classical comedy because it does not have a corrective purpose and a satiric tone as classical comedies have.
- In William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, an adaptation of Lodge's *Rosalynde*, the Forest of Arden acts as a foil to the Elizabethan courtly life.
- The character of Jacques is an addition by Shakespeare to Lodge's *Rosalynde,* as it is through Jacques that Shakespeare presents the subversion of the

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sanctified notion of the pastoral as represented by the characters from the court who are taking refuge in the Forest of Arden.

- Rosalind's speech in *As You Like It* rigidly demarcates the social role that dresses play in the society. Dress is symbolic of the 'fashioning of the self' as it presumes certain codified behaviour from the person wearing that particular dress.
- Cross-dressing not only questions the codified behaviour that is related to the dress but also questions the violence that is perpetrated on women which makes them cross-dress.
- The main theme of a romantic comedy is love, where a beautiful and charismatic heroine is the main turner of events and the love affair though does not run smooth, still ends in marriage, overcoming all difficulties.
- Property dispute and envy between brothers is one of the themes which Shakespeare unfolds as soon as the play begins, which provides a touch of realism to the mirth and comic spirit of the play.

## 1.7 KEY TERMS

- **Pastoral:** The word pastoral is derived from the Greek word 'pastor' which meant 'shepherd'.
- **Petrarchan love:** It comes from the Roman poet Petrarch, who wrote love sonnets for Laura, a lady whom he may or may not have in his life.
- **Elizabethan era:** It is the epoch in English history marked by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). Historians often depict it as the golden age in English history.
- **Genre:** It is a form or type of communication in any mode (written, spoken, digital, artistic, etc.) with socially-agreed upon conventions developed over time.
- **Meter:** It is the measure of lines of verse, which in English is basically accentual. Each group of syllables (usually two or three) is a foot.
- **Comedy:** It is a literary work that is humorous and meant to amuse the audience.
- **Dramatic romance:** It is a play which focuses on love between two protagonists.

## 1.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The Renaissance spirit is manifested in the form of a relentless quest for knowledge, the shift towards a secular world and a confidence in the innate nobility and the immense potentialities of man in Shakespeare's plays.

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2. Regarding the merit of Shakespearean drama, Edward Albert once said 'that it is the crown and flower of the Elizabethan literary achievement, and embodies almost the entire spirit both of drama and poetry.'
3. There is no unanimity among literary historians regarding the dates of Shakespeare's plays. However, *The Merchant of Venice* is believed to have been written between 1596 and 1598.
4. Some of Shakespeare's plays which belong to 'The Early Comedies' group are *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* belong to this group.
5. Also called 'Problem Plays' or 'Bitter Comedies', 'The Sombre Plays' show the falsity of romance and the sordidness of reality. They are comedies because they do not end with the death of the chief characters, but reflect a cynical and disillusioned attitude towards life. *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressid* fall in this category.
6. William Shakespeare appeared in the dramatic and literary world of London in 1592 and became an important member of the company of players known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men (called the King's Men after the accession of James I in 1603).
7. *As You Like It* is one of Shakespeare's middle comedies, where the plot of the play is borrowed and adapted from Thomas Lodge's prose romance *Rosalynde*, written in 1590.
8. A comedy, usually, is a play where the characters and their follies, foibles and discomfitures are presented in such a fashion so as to mock them which would not only entertain the audience or the readers, but at the same time would make them learn through the mistakes of the characters that they should never repeat such mistakes or fall into traps because of such follies.
9. The character of Jacques is thought to be the original creation of Shakespeare, as the character does not exist in Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*. Shakespeare deliberately introduced the character in the play to make a critique of romantic love, the main theme of the play.
10. Dress is symbolic of the 'fashioning of the self' as it presumes certain codified behaviour from the person wearing that particular dress.
11. Cross-dressing not only questions the codified behaviour that is related to the dress but also questions the violence that is perpetrated on women which makes them cross-dress.
12. Shakespeare is deliberately presenting female transvestism in his comedies as he wants to question the gender roles through his heroines.
13. Orlando's love for Rosalind is stylized on Petrarchan tradition where there is a class difference between the lover and the beloved and the lover never aspires to reach the beloved though he continues to love her from afar.

14. Celia considers her flight from the court to be liberating, as she thinks her father's court to be too oppressive. Elizabethan court is primarily a male domain, where females have no role to play.
15. Duke Senior gets back his Dukedom when Duke Frederick meets a hermit at the outskirts of the Forest of Arden, which changes his whole personality.

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## 1.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the Elizabethan Age.
2. What classical notion of a comedy does Shakespeare seem to challenge in *As You Like It*?
3. State the chief aim of a comedy.
4. List the features of classical comedies.
5. Write a note on romantic comedy.
6. How does Shakespeare make a radical departure from the mainstream Renaissance use of the pastoral?
7. How does Shakespeare mock the notion of Petrarchan love?
8. Write a short note on the themes of primogeniture and usurpation in *As You Like It*.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss *As You Like It* as a romantic comedy.
2. Do you agree that *As You Like It* is a pastoral comedy where William Shakespeare uses the pastoral as a device to question the dominant ideology of the society? What are your views? Give reasons.
3. Describe cross-dressing as a device used to re-establish patriarchy.
4. Shakespearean comedies are centered on female characters. Discuss with reference to *As You Like It.*
5. 'Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.' Discuss the underlying themes of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.
6. 'The bonding between Rosalind and Celia is also set against the jealous brothers—Oliver and Orlando, Duke Frederick and Duke Senior.' Explain.

## 1.10 FURTHER READING

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**NOTES**

# UNIT 2 BRITISH POETRY–I

NOTES

**Structure**



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a form of literature that uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language—phonaesthetics, sound symbolism, and metre—to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, the prosaic ostensible meaning.

Poetry has a long history, dating back to the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Early poems evolved from folk songs such as the Chinese *Shijing*, or from a need to retell oral epics, as with the Sanskrit *Vedas*, Zoroastrian *Gathas*, and the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Ancient attempts to define poetry, such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, focused on the uses of speech in rhetoric, drama, song and comedy. Later attempts concentrated on features such as repetition, verse form and rhyme, and emphasized the aesthetics which distinguish poetry from more objectively informative prosaic forms of writing. From the mid-20th century, poetry has sometimes been more generally regarded as a fundamental creative act employing language. British poetry is the field of British literature encompassing poetry from anywhere in the British world (whether of the British Isles, the British Empire, or the United Kingdom). The term is rarely used, as almost all such poets are clearly

identified with one of the various nations or regions within those areas. This unit will deal with some of the great poets and their poetry such as Milton, Shakespeare, Donne and Marvell.

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## 2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Assess, the main theme of Shakespeare's Sonnet CXVI
- Discuss the social and political background of Milton's age
- Analyse Donne's poem *On His Blindness*
- Explain John Donne's role as a metaphysical poet
- Describe Andrew Marwell's *To His Coy Mistress*

## 2.2 SHAKESPEARE: *SONNET CXVI*

John Shakespeare, the father of William Shakespeare, was a man of meagre means. But his fortune turned in 1557 after he married Mary Arden, the daughter of a prosperous farmer, and earned him a house, fifty acres of land and money in the form of dowry. In 1564, William Shakespeare was born to John and Mary Shakespeare. Nothing is much known about Shakespeare's early life until 1582 when, as records suggest, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, daughter of Richard Hathaway. The date on Anne's tombstone indicates that she was older to the poet by eight years. By 1590s Shakespeare had already been known as an actor and plagiarist as confirmed by Robert Greene's pamphlet 'Greenes Groatsworth of Witte: Bought with a Million of Repentance'. In 1593 *Venus and Adonis* was published; it was dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. But the dedication does not imply any connection between the poet and the patron. *The Rape of Lucrece* was published in 1594, again dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, indicating that he first achieved his literary distinction through his references.

By 1594-1595, he was already a part of Lord Chamberlain's Company as an actor. In the following years, Shakespeare's name is found registered in some financial ambiguities. But by 1598, Shakespeare seems to have emerged successfully in the professional front as his quarto editions of *Richard II* and *Love's Labour's Lost* appear that year and there is mention of his acting in Ben Jonson's works attached to *Every Man in His Humour*. In the meantime, Shakespeare's reputation as a playwright was increasing so much so that publishers used his name in the first page of the books which was not written by him or were plagiarised texts. In contemporary literature, references to his works are abundant. John Webster, in the acknowledgement to *The White Devil* in 1612, has shown his gratitude to his predecessors and a few contemporary artists including Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's poems earned him well but probably not the plays because a playwright, in those days, gave up all rights of his work by selling his plays to the manager or the company. His investment in real estate in Stratford and London brought him substantial fortune. With the accession of James I after the death of

Queen Elizabeth, his patronizing attitude and inclination towards art and culture turned out to be prospectus for Shakespeare as well as Lord Chamberlain's Company. The Revels Accounts of the Company's identify Shakespeare as one of the prominent actors. The recognition ushered by the court added to Shakespeare's fame. Jonson mentions of Shakespeare playing a role in *Sejanus* in 1603.

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But later his name does not appear among actors suggesting that sometime after Queen Elizabeth's death he gave up acting. Shakespeare died in April 1616. Seven years after his death, Heming and Condell, his former colleagues from the theatre, collected and published the First Folio consisting of thirty-six plays of Shakespeare.

## 2.2.1 Sonnets

Shakespeare's sonnet series contains 154 poems. It was first published in quarto version in 1609. Usually the sonnet sequence is structurally divided into three segments. Sonnets I-CXXVI (1-126) are addressed to a young male. Sonnets (CXXVII-CLII (127-152) are usually addressed as the Dark Lady sonnets. Thematically the sonnets deal with love, beauty, time and death. Each sonnet contains three quatrains and a couplet. They are written in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg,* for all the poems.

The Shakespearean sonnet is also called the English sonnet as opposed to the Petrarchan sonnets that originated in Italy. Some two hundred years before Shakespeare wrote sonnets, the Petrarchan sonnet was introduced by Petrarch. Unlike a Shakespearian sonnet, a Petrarchan sonnet has an eight-line stanza (octave) and a six-line stanza (sestet).

## 2.2.2 Sonnet CXVI

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds*
*Admit impediments. Love is not love*
*Which alters when it alteration finds,*
*Or bends with the remover to remove.*
*O no! it is an ever-fixed mark*
*That looks on tempests and is never shaken;*
*It is the star to every wand'ring bark,*
*Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.*
*Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks*
*Within his bending sickle's compass come;*
*Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,*
*But bears it out even to the edge of doom.*
*If this be error and upon me prov'd,*
*I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.*

'Let me not to the marriage of true minds', popularly known as Sonnet CXVI was first published in 1609. The form and structure of Sonnet CXVI make it an example of Shakespearean sonnet. In the beginning of the sonnet, the poet states that he does not want to come in the way of the 'marriage of true minds'. According

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to the poet, true love does not change by changing circumstances. True love should be constant, even if it faces any kind of difficulty. In the seventh line, the poet makes a nautical reference by comparing true love to be like the North Star which guides sailors in ocean. 'The movement of 116, like its tone, is careful, controlled, laborious…it defines and redefines its subject in each quatrain, and this subject becomes increasingly vulnerable.'

This sonnet states that true love stands firm even in changing times and cannot be fooled by it. It also tells that though outer beauty might change with changing times but true love outgrows everything and never dies. In the couplet, the speaker attests to his certainty that love is as he says: if his statements can be proved to be error, he declares, he must never have written a word, and no man can ever have been in love.

### Check Your Progress

1. How many sonnets are there in Shakespeare's sonnet series?
2. What are the two kinds of sonnets?

## 2.3 MILTON: *ON HIS BLINDNESS*

The period of 1625 to 1660 is generally known as the age of Milton in English literary history. This period marks the end of the Renaissance. It is remarkable for the growth of Reformation and Puritanism. It was an age of political and religious strife and civil war. Mrs Una Former refers to the age of Milton as an age of uncertainty, misgiving, depression, anxiety, frustration, pessimism and inner gloom, and in all these respects a sharp contract to the glorious and exuberant age of Elizabeth when the nation marched ahead in achievements and zest and confidence. Where on one hand the age of Shakespeare lay stress on materialism and power, knowledge and riches, there on the other hand, the age of Milton blended the Renaissance and reformation periods. London still had eminent men of letters, and the court continued to patronize art and learning. But the stress and the strain caused by the civil ultimately led to a decline in literature and later on in social and moral values.

The entire age of Milton is dominated by the civil war. The early years were marked by quarrel and alarms which led up to actual hostilities in 1642; the middle of the period saw occasional fighting that lasted till the execution of Charles-I in 1649; and the last portion covers the establishment of the commonwealth, the rise and disappearance of Cromwell (1653-58), the confusion following upon his death, and the final restoration of monarchy in 1660.

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***Fig. 2.1*** *John Milton*

During this period the decline from the high Elizabethan standard is apparent in several ways. The output of poetry is much smaller, and the fashion is toward shorter poems, the strikingly dignified poetical intensity of the previous age dies. The new poetry plays with fancy and passion and wisdom, blending thought and passion together, bringing to mind far-fetched images, from various ideas. In prose, there is a matured sadness that one is generally associates with advancing years. The poetry of the period is largely lyrical, and Donne and Ben Jonson are the two most outstanding and original lyricists of the age. Milton is in a class by himself.

Nevertheless, there is a marked decay in the exulted poetical fervour of the previous age. There is a marked increase in prose activity. Milton attempted epics too, and it is as an epic poet that he is more widely known than anything else. John Milton was born on 9 December 1608, in London. He was the second child of John and Sara. John Milton Sr, was a legal secretary and also a composer of church music which was how Milton developed his lifelong love of music. The family's financial prosperity made it possible for Milton to be taught classical languages, first privately home, and then at St. Paul's School from age twelve, in 1620. In the spring of 1642, Milton married Mary Powell, who was seventeen years younger to him. Even though it was not a happy marriage, Milton had three children with Mary. In February 1652 Milton lost his eyesight and later that year in May he lost his wife as well. Milton married Katherine Woodcock, but this happiness was short-lived also. Milton's daughter Katherine was born in late 1657, but by early 1658, both mother and daughter had passed away.

In 1663, Milton was married again, to Elizabeth Minshull. It was also the year he finished his life's work, the epic, Paradise Lost. It is considered among the greatest works ever to be written in English, the feat is all the more remarkable as it was written inspite of Milton's blindness — he would compose verse upon verse at night in his head and then dictate them from memory to his aides in the morning.

## 2.3.1 Political and Social Background

1. **James I (1603-1625):** When the Tudor dynasty was brought to a close by the death of Elizabeth in 1603, James VI of Scotland, the son of Mary Stuart,

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Protestant, and descendant of Henry VII of England, ascended the throne as James I. With the declining years of the Renaissance Queen had waned the patriotic unity of the country, and the wisdom necessary to cement the factions and to revive patriotic fervor was not possessed by the new King. The people resented the new taxes made necessary by the Monarch's lavish expenditures and resented the attempted at an alliance with Spain through the betrothal of the King's son Charles. Persecutions of the Catholics by Parliament and of the Puritans by James I led to the establishment at Plymouth (1620) of the first permanent English Settlement in New England, and to the 'Great Emigration' (1630) to Massachusetts. As the middle-class rose to power, it clashed with the Crown, who in turn dissolved three Parliaments (1604, 1614, 1621) over imposition of customs, money grants, and right of free speech. Continuously the defenders of popular privileges endeavored to check the King's prerogative, assigned to himself by his Theory of Divine Right.

2. **Charles I (1625-1649):** At his accession Charles I was popular, but his deliberate deceitfulness and wrongheaded impulsiveness soon turned the people against him. Difficulties with Parliament were increased by his marriage with Princess Henrietta Maria of France, a Roman Catholic, and by his appointment of James's hated favorite Buckingham as Lord Chancellor. Public feeling became further embittered by the King's dissolution of three Parliaments convoked in four years. Finally Charles I was forced to concede the Petition of Right (1628), designed to prevent the abuse of royal prerogative by providing for no taxation without the consent of Parliament no arbitrary billeting of soldiers on the citizenry, and no arbitrary imprisonment without trial.

   Then Charles I dissolved Parliament and had some of the leading members imprisoned. For eleven years he governed without the Parliament, substituting in its place the Star Chamber and Court of High Commission. During these years Archbishop Laud's policy of punishing Puritans caused large emigrations to America, and his attempt to impose episcopacy upon Scotland provoked riots. Refused his demands for money, and urged to conclude a peace with Scotland, Charles I dissolved the 'Short Parliament' (1640). The 'Long Parliament,' Summoned by Charles I after his defeat at the hands of the Scots, impeached both Strafford and Laud, imprisoning the latter and executing the former. By compelling Charles I to confirm a bill by which Parliament was not to be dissolved without its own consent, the actual control of the kingdom was no longer in the hands of the king.

3. **Civil War (1642-1648):** At first the Royalists (or Cavaliers, represented by the Court, the Church, the Catholics, and the northern gentry) were the victors; but the Parliamentary forces (Puritans or Roundheads, represented by the bulk of the middle classes, the merchants, artisans, London, and the southeast, who in contrast to the flowing locks of the Cavaliers cut short their hair), soon acquiring experience, defeated Prince Rupert (1644) and annihilated the royal army (1645). The King, surrendering to the Scottish army, was delivered to the English Parliament. Finally, after his escape from the residence assigned him, he was recaptured, tried, and sentenced to death for murder and treason (1649). Thus at last ended the struggle between Parliament and James I and his son Charles I.

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4. **The Commonwealth (1644-1653):** The country was declared a commonwealth, nominally a republic. When Scotland proclaimed Charles II the King of Ireland, Scotland, and England, Cromwell immediately took steps to break Scotland's resistance, succeeding in his purpose by 1651. The place of the provisional Rump, expelled in 1683, was taken by the Nominated or 'Barebone's' Parliament.
5. **The Protectorate (1653-1658):** When the 'Barebone's' Parliament was voted into dissolution, Cromwell, under an adopted written constitution, called the Instrument of Government, assumed the title of Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He became recognized for his strong foreign policy, which brought the Dutch War to a successful conclusion, and for a dictatorial home policy, which tolerated many sects including the re-admission of the Jews, expelled since 1290. By 1658 the Protectorate had become virtually a monarchy. Upon Cromwell's death (1658) there succeeded a period of strife, under his son Richard. Finally the Parliament voted (1660) to restore the monarchy with Charles II as King.
6. **Social life and temper of the times:** Horse-racing, bear-baiting, the sport of the cock-pit, and the theatrical performance were all condemned by the puritans, who looked upon the Cavaliers as given to profane swearing and sensual excesses. To the King and his courtiers, on the other hand, the Puritan was a symbol of spiritual pride, hypocrisy, rebellion, and tyranny. However, the typical Puritan was a person of high ideals, tolerant of differences of opinion; the spirit of the Puritan was a noble force: it inspired the Commonwealth to safeguard England's national ideals, it gave to the Pilgrim Fathers the courage to search for a land where they could worship in their own manner, it had as its spokesmen, two of the greatest English writers-Milton and Bunyan. Progress should also be noted in several fields—in philosophy by Bacon, in medical science by William Harvey, in mathematics by John Napier. While advances were made in the field of architecture by Inigo Jones, yet in general the fine arts obtained but small patronage. On the whole the nation was prosperous.

## 2.3.2 General View of the Literature

Relaxing in vigor, this period is one of gradual transition from the exuberant gaiety and imaginative freedom of the Renaissance to that of artificial cheer, philosophic melancholy, and puritan sobriety. Often political or religious, the prose is in general either simple or disputatious of florid and oratorical; despite its quaint affected mannerism, the prose displays a new freedom, copiousness, and power. The poetry is marked much less by its originality of thought and impetuosity of emotion than by a correctness of form and an intellectual play of fancy; while fashionably short, its greatest weaknesses are possibly an affected adulatory language for the charms of women and a triviality of subject matter. While the Civil Wars contributed to bringing about the collapse of the drama, now frequently market by a studied indecency, it was the Puritan opposition that affected the closure of all theatres (1642). Not until eighteen years later were the dramatic performances legally permitted. Meanwhile the neo-classicism, fostered by Jonson, was making progress. In conclusion, although Milton is the only great representative in the field of blank verse, and the only writer

of great versatility, he is not altogether representative of his age rather it should be called the Age of the Cavalier and the Puritan.

## 2.3.3 *On His Blindness*: Text and Explanation

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*WHEN I consider how my light is spent*
*E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,*
*And that one Talent which is death to hide,*
*Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent*
*To serve therewith my Maker, and present* 5
*My true account, least he returning chide,*
*Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,*
*I fondly ask; But patience to prevent*
*That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need*
*Either man's work or his own gifts, who best* 10
*Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best, his State*
*Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed*
*And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:*
*They also serve who only stand and waite.*

*On His Blindness* is an autobiographical account of John Milton in which he meditates on the loss of his sight. The sonnet is divided into an eight-line 'octave' and a six-line 'sestet'. The rhyme scheme of octave is a/b/b/a/a/b/b/a. The rhyme scheme of sestet is c/d/e/c/d/e. Thus the sonnet is written in the 'Petrarchan' rhyme scheme which mostly revolved around the conventional theme of love. However, Milton departs from the theme of love and discusses a more practical problem which left serious implications on his spiritual life.

The tragedy of Milton's life is that he lost his sight at a comparatively early age due to which he feels that he has failed miserably to utilize his talent. By the loss of sight, the world has turned into a darker place for him, both literally and figuratively. The world is no longer physically visible and he feels that sin and spiritual darkness has endowed upon it. Milton has a strong urge to serve Almighty by writing great works and 'present his true account' as mentioned in the sonnet. Despite a strong desire to do so, he fails at paying such a service due to visual impairment.

The sonnet begins on a note of helplessness and regret. However, by the end of the sonnet Milton adopts a positive tone and believes in the power of God. He concludes that God does not need man's services or gifts. Milton feels that even the slightest gestures of a man who is willing to serve God is visible to Him.

### Check Your Progress

3. What dominated Milton's life?
4. What does Milton meditate on in his sonnet *On His Blindness*?

## 2.4 JOHN DONNE: *THE GOOD-MORROW*

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John Donne (1572-1631) was born into a religious Catholic familyin Elizabethan England in 1572. He was an extremely devout man who was persecuted as he was a Catholic living in Anglican England. Though Donne is reputed for his sonnets and love song, he had, in his early life, written religious poetry as well. His love poems and sonnets are marked by multiplicity of attitudes and moods. Metaphysics is a part of philosophy dealing with any subject that surpasses its traceability through the senses. Therefore, the mind, the time, free will, God and here, love, are all matters of metaphysical thought. *The Good-Morrow* is a key sample of one of Donne's metaphysical poems.

***Fig. 2.2*** *John Donne*

According to John Dryden, Donne affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of love. Probably, the only writer before Dryden to speak of a certain metaphysical school or group of metaphysical poets is John Donne; Drummond of Hawthornden (1585–1649), who in one of his letters speaks of 'metaphysical ideas and scholastic quiddities'.

John Donne is renowned for using conceits in his poetry. In *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, Donne tells his beloved not to shed tears and sighs because when she sheds tears she actually sheds her lover's blood and when she sighs, she sighs his soul away. Thus, the use of conceits leaves unforgettable impact of a poem. Donne incorporates the Renaissance conception of the human body as a microcosm into his love poetry. The Renaissance saw several people thinking that the macrocosmic physical world was reflected in the microcosmic human body. They believed that the body is ruled by the intellect just like a land is ruled by a king or queen.

He has also written Holy Sonnets. John Donne makes a plea to God which paradoxically mingles destruction and creation:

*Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You*
*As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend:*
*That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend*
*Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.*

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Here, paradox compels readers to think differently about the relation of God to men and women. In this, it serves an intellectual function: to adjust the beliefs and values according to which the paradox first appeared contradictory.

Donne uses the analogy to express the extent to which the lovers are involved with each other. They are so engrossed that they forget their surroundings and behave as if they are the only people in existence. It is natural for Donne to use his religious poetry to romanticize the Christian love for God. However, the neo-platonic concept of love is seen in his love poetry in a slightly tweaked manner. For instance, in *To His Mistress Going to Bed*, the narrator claims to be madly in love with a nude woman stating that his love is much beyond the pictorial representations or illustrations of scenes from the Bible.

### Metaphysical Poetry

Metaphysical poetry is a kind of poetry that lays stress on the belief that the logical aspect rules the emotional; it is signified by sarcasm, absurdity and extraordinary comparisons of unlike features; the latter often being fanciful, to the limit of peculiarity. 'Metaphysical poets' was a term used for the first time by the eighteenth century poet and critic Dr Samuel Johnson. He considered a certain group of poets, metaphysical, because he wanted to portray a loose group of British lyric poets who belonged to the seventeenth century. These poets were generally interested in metaphysical issues and had a common method of examining them. Their writings were marked by the innovativeness of metaphor (these included comparisons known as metaphysical conceits). The changing times had a significant influence on their poetry.

The discovery of the new sciences and the immoral scenario of the seventeenth century England were also other factors influencing their poetry. Metaphysical poets dealt with topics like God, creation and the afterlife. The most popular metaphysical poets are John Donne, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan among others.

Most of Donne's poems, such as *The Sun Rising, The Good-Morrow* and *A Valediction: Of Weeping* are based on the theme of love and involve a pair of lovers. They are represented as complete worlds unto themselves. The lovers are deeply in love with each other and oblivious to the world around them. Donne uses the analogy to express the extent to which the lovers are involved with each other. They are so engrossed that they forget their surroundings and behave as if they are the only people in existence. Nothing else matters to them except they themselves.

In *The Sun Rising*, the poet ends the poem by requesting the sun to shine only on his beloved and himself. He tries to convince the sun by saying that by shining on the two of them he will actually be shining on the whole world.

## 2.4.1 Neo-Platonic Conception of Love

The neo-platonic concept of physical and religious love was seen as a manifestation of the same desire. In the *Symposium,* physical love is described by Plato as the lowest rung of a ladder. According to him, an individual is first taken in by a single good looking person; he is then attracted by pleasing personalities in general; then he

is drawn towards great minds, great ideas and finally by beauty itself which becomes the highest rung of the ladder.

This idea was adapted by Christian Neo-platonists several centuries later that in such a way the series of love built up to love for God and spiritual beauty. It is natural for Donne to use his religious poetry to romanticize the Christian love for God. However, the neo-platonic concept of love is seen in his love poetry in a slightly tweaked manner.

For instance, in *To His Mistress Going to Bed*, written in 1669, the narrator, as stated before, claims to be madly in love with a nude woman stating that his love is much beyond the pictorial representations or illustrations of scenes from the Bible. Many love poems reflect the superiority of the narrator's love to ordinary love claiming the narrator's love to be more pure and platonic. This love is described as divine.

### Religious Enlightenment

Donne has always imagined spiritual upliftment and religious enlightenment as a form of sexual pleasure. He says that the satisfaction gained from religious devotion is comparable to the pleasure that results from lovemaking. Considering the age to which he belonged, his thoughts were rather radical. In *Holy Sonnet 14*, for example, the poet asks God to abuse him sexually so as to release him from worldly bonding. He believed that rape could make him chaste, which is rather ironical. In *Holy Sonnet 18*, the narrator compares the entry into the church with a sexual intercourse with a woman. These poems were as good as blasphemy. The religious passion they exuded saved them from being labelled as profane or scandalous.

### Search for the One True Religion

The narrators of Donne's poems are shown as wondering which religion to select from the several options available. There were many churches that claimed to be the one true religion. In 1517, Martin Luther initiated many debates that resulted in the founding of Protestantism, which was considered to be a reformed version of Catholicism. This period was labelled as the Reformation. During this period, the mushrooming of various sects and churches led the common man to wonder which religion to follow, which was true or which was false. Donne also abandoned Catholicism to adopt Anglicanism. During this transition period he wrote 'Satire', which reflected these concerns. Here, the poet wonders how it would be possible to choose the appropriate church with so many choices available and with all claiming to be true. None of the poems directly claim one church to be the true representative of religion. Not one church outrightly rejects the idea of a true church or religion.

## 2.4.2 Motifs

Just like other metaphysical poets, Donne used vanity and analogies to build thematic relations between dissimilar objects. In *The Good-Morrow*, for instance, the orator uses metaphors brilliantly and employs spheres to jump from the description of the world to a description of globes before going on to describe his beloved's eyes and the flawlessness of their romance. Going beyond mere praise of his lover, the orator

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compares her to the sphere, which is a shape without faults; a shape that is without corners or edges. By comparing her to a sphere he also draws attention to the way his lover's face now means the world to him, or has come to represent the world. In his work *A Valediction: Of Weeping*, the orator uses sphere-shaped tears to establish a connection with pregnancy, the moon and the world. As the orator weeps, each tear comprises a tiny reflection of his lover. This is yet another example of the use of the sphere to demonstrate the perfect personality and physicality of the person being addressed.

In Donne's romantic poetry, journeys of discovery and conquest describe the orator's mysterious and magnificent love affairs. European explorers began arriving in the Americas in the fifteenth century. They returned home with treasures and fabulous tales. During Donne's times, many settlements had been established in North and South America, and English society progressed due to the wealth that flowed back.

In *The Good-Morrow* and *The Sun Rising,* the orators wish to discover adventure in the company of their beloveds. These works show how the beloved's body and personality are capable of mesmerizing a lover always. The orator of Elegy 19 calls his beloved's body 'my America!' or his 'new-found land'. He compares the subjugation of exploration with the subjugation of seduction. He compares his sexual escapade with his beloved to voyages of discovery. He highlights not just how spontaneous his act is but also how inevitable his act is. He states that his beloved will also be discovered and conquered in due time just like the Americas.

In most of his works, Donne describes the 'reflection' seen in eyes and tears. He uses this motif to emphasize on the flawlessness of their love and how it would contain their love to form a complete world. *A Valediction: Of Weeping* depicts the process of bidding good-bye. As the orator weeps, he realizes that his tears are reflecting his beloved's image. Just like the tear falls away, his beloved will also go away. The expressions in their eyes are representative of the strong link between the lovers in *The Good-Morrow* and *The Ecstasy*. The lovers find each other's images in each other's eyes. They see themselves safely enclosed in each other's eyes. They stare at each other mingling their souls as if expressions alone would suffice to access a person's innermost self.

Donne used many symbols such as angels and the compass in his works. His beloved appeared to be divine and therefore, angels acted as messengers from God. They helped in bringing the humans close together and closer to divinity. The orator compared his lover with an angel in *To His Mistress Going to Bed*. There, the beloved as well as his love for her brings the orator close to God. Along with her he is able to find paradise on earth. Angels were believed to administer the spheres and make it possible for the earth to rotate.

In *Air and Angels*, the orator uses Ptolemaic concepts to establish a relationship between his beloved and the angels. His lover's love rules him just like the angels reign over the spheres. When the poem ends, the orator discovers that there is a slight variation between a woman's love and the love felt by a man. The compass symbolizes the comparison between lovers—two individuals but joined bodies. The pictogram of the compass is an example of Donne's usage of the language of journey and conquest to explain the relationships between the emotions of lovers.

Compasses assist sailors in navigating the sea, and, also help lovers stay in touch even when they are not together physically or not in each other's presence.

In *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, the orator compares his soul and the soul of his beloved to a twin compass. Also referred to as a draftsman's compass, a twin compass has two legs, one that is fixed and one that moves. The orator considers himself the movable leg, while his beloved is the fixed leg. As per the poem, their point of union and the stability of their love, makes it possible for him to trace an ideal circle even when he is located far from her. Though he can only trace this circle when the two legs of the compass are apart, in due time, the compass can be closed up, and the two legs pressed together again, once the circle has been located. Blood usually symbolizes life, and Donne uses it to describe various experiences in life, from erotic fervour to spiritual devotion. In *The Flea*, a flea creeps over a pair of would be lovers, biting them and sucking their blood. The orator imagines that the blood of the pair has blended together, and therefore their physical union is a must as they are already fused together or wedded within the flea's body. All through the Holy Sonnets, blood signifies passionate devotion to God and Christ. Christ is believed to have shed blood on the cross and died just so that mankind could be forgiven and saved. In the *Holy Sonnet 7* the narrator requests Christ to teach him to be apologetic, so that he is made worthy of Christ's precious blood.

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## 2.4.3 *The Good-Morrow:* Text and Explanation

*I wonder by my troth, what thou and I*
*Did, till we loved? Were we not wean'd till then?*
*But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?*
*Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?*
*'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be;*
*If ever any beauty I did see,*

*Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.*
*And now good-morrow to our waking souls,*
*Which watch not one another out of fear;*
*For love all love of other sights controls,*
*And makes one little room an everywhere.*
*Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone;*
*Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown;*
*Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one.*
*My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,*
*And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;*
*Where can we find two better hemispheres*
*Without sharp north, without declining west ?*
*Whatever dies, was not mix'd equally;*
*If our two loves be one, or thou and I*
*Love so alike that none can slacken, none can die.*

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## Summary of the Poem

*The Good-Morrow* is a metaphysical poem consisting of twenty-one lines, divided into three stanzas. The poet speaks to the woman he loves as they wake up after spending the night together. The poem starts with a direct question from the poet to his love. The poet maintains that he and his lover started living only when they fell in love. Earlier, they were just infants at their mothers' breasts or were involved in childish 'country pleasures'.

Michael Hall is of the view that *The Good-Morrow* is a chronological and spatial poem. It is with the aid of this poem that the orator exposes his increasing maturity and awareness of his love as a reply to his thrilling passion. The musical theme of the poem reinforces this union. There are few examples that prove that the poem is sequential, such as it goes on from a metaphorical phase of early life in the first stanza, to the dawn of the present in the next stanza and finally in the final stanza, to a never-ending point of view of their association in the times to come.

The poetry indicates that it also considers space, as love is at first represented as being confined to 'one little roome', or a cave, and later it is expected to expand to fill the whole 'world', and thereafter contracting all this love into an influential force that is contained in the lovers' eyes. One can also consider the poem as the achievement of maturity by the storyteller, which can be witnessed in the succession of his life of physical pull to that of pure love, which in the end eagerly waits to conclude in being joined with his lover for perpetuity. Furthermore, a rising awareness is experienced by the storyteller about his love for the beloved. At first, he was in the company of other ladies, and he almost immediately realized that all these ladies just reflected the one that he was in fact looking for—the one true lady in his life. Also, the poetry is based on a subject of initiation.

The poem starts with the speaker characteristically sleeping in a cave, just like Plato's analogy. Though, he is lastly released by his woman who makes him go into the daylight, or *The Good-Morrow*. He is now a changed man who is getting increasingly aware of his love for the woman. Furthermore, the narrator stresses this union through the musicality of the verse. At first, the poem is concentrated on the couple with references that highlight 'we', but ends with a sound that highlights 'I'. This is a symbol of the union of the two separate beings into a single 'I'.

Donne's poetry is typically dramatic. A fine method of observing this is to see how the poems begin. In *The Good-Morrow,* the 'I' voice keeps putting forth questions to which he insists for an answer. Although the question put is a semi-rhetorical question—the other person is never allowed a moment to reply! This is in striking contrast to the much gentle second stanza. It begins with a note of confined triumph and finishes with a convincing plea to enjoy their world. There are no uncertainties any more. Michael Hall, while analyzing the poem, says that, there are but a few people who express love as completely as John Donne. Donne, in this poem, makes full use of the innumerable devices of poetry for communicating his appealing message to his beloved. He makes use of structure, symbolic language, perspective and tone that supports the speaker in his undertaking, in a creative manner. In any case, all the characteristics of the poem are not completely evident because of the perceptive references and allusions by the knowledgeable poet.

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Instances of these elements which have not been clearly brought forth can be seen in the use of 'seven sleepers den' in the first stanza, the discovering metaphors of the second stanza and the semi-circular images used in the last stanza. Superficially, these allusions may appear to have been aimlessly made a part of the central concept. However, as the poem progresses, we will be able to understand that these allusions contribute immensely to further support the poet's message. We will find out that Donne's poetry is of the genre that effectively makes use of the devices in order to increase the poetic capacity of the verse. The intellectual allusions and references enhance the narrator's message to his lover.

**Structure**

The structure of the poem is such that it enhances the poet's message to his beloved. It contains three stanzas, each including seven lines. Besides, every stanza has been further divided into a quatrain and a triplet. In his book, *John Donne and the Metaphysical Gesture*, Judah Stampfer notes that each 'iambic pentameter quatrain is rounded out, not with a couplet, but a triplet with an Alexandrine close a, b, a, b, c, c, c'. This division is not solely reflected in the rhyme scheme, but also in the verse. For example, the quatrain is made use of for revealing the poet's state of mind; whereas, the triplet permits him to ponder on that outlook. Besides, the first stanza methodically makes use of the assonance for reinforcing the term 'we', which is achieved by the long 'e' sound being repeated through different words. For instance, each of these terms have been taken from the first stanza: 'we', 'wean'd', 'countrey', 'childlishly', 'sleepers', 'fancies', 'bee', 'any', 'beauty', 'see', 'desir'd', 'dreame', 'thee'. It is evident that far from being a coincidence this is an incredible technique to lay further stress on the two lovers being united as one. In any case, Donne makes use of the assonance for the reverse influence in the final stanza. Rather than concentrating on the couple, the narrator concentrates on himself by the reinforcement of the term 'I'. This is achieved by the long 'i' sound being repeated. For instance, each of these terms can be seen in the third stanza: 'I', 'thine', 'mine', 'finde', 'declining', 'dyes', 'alike', 'die'. Undoubtedly, the long 'e' sound has been used in the third stanza, but it is the long 'i' sound that rules. This results in an evident contradiction to that which the narrator says, besides the musical nature of the poem. From a musical perspective, instead of being primarily focused on the union, the narrator seems to be increasingly concerned with himself.

The symbolic language that Donne uses coupled with the narrator's perspective and the tone, add beauty to the poem. First, one can see the presence of sexual symbolism in the first stanza. For instance, terms like 'wean'd' and 'suck'd' bring out breast symbols. Such weighty words even enable the identification of 'country pleasures' in the form of a metaphor for breasts. One more metaphorical example is the term 'beauty' in line 6 that in fact is a representation of the woman. One can even notice the presence of 'metaphysical conceits' in the poem. An instance is the semi-circular imagery that represents the lovers in the final stanza. In the next stanza, there is an instance of hyperbole where the narrator says 'makes one little room, an everywhere'. This is evidently exaggerated and is physically impossible as well.

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Paradox has also been used in the poem. As an instance, where the speaker says: 'true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest'. Evidently, this phrase is paradoxical since it is impossible for hearts to be resting in faces. One can also find an instance of metonymy in the final stanza with the narrator stating:

'My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears'.

The narrator here does not actually mean that his face literally appears in his lover's eye, but that she is aware of him. Again, one can see the presence of two allusions in the poem, one with the 'seven sleepers den', the other with the 'hemispheres'. Moreover, an excellent instance of imagery in the poem exists. One can find an appearance of this in the poem itself, and in the title *The Good-Morrow*. Besides representing the actual sunrise, it also depicts the birth of *The Good-Morrow*. This not only represents the physical sunrise, but also symbolizes the birth of an awakened person. Besides, the speaker's perspective is from the first-person viewpoint. In spite of the presence of two persons in the poem, it is only the voice of the male narrator that is prominent. Lastly, the tone is that of casual intimacy. There are hints pertaining to the casual atmosphere of the poem. This is made evident by taking a glance at the rough language that the narrator uses, like: 'suck'd,' 'snorted' and 'got'. In spite of the roughness, the narrator is evidently infatuated with the women being addressed.

It is possible to interpret the phrase 'seven sleepers den', which is first brought in the poem, in several ways. This phrase may most directly be hinting at a 'Christian and Mohammedan legend of the seven youths of Ephesus who hid in a cave for 187 years so as to avoid pagan persecution during the dawn of Christianity'. Surprisingly, these young people, instead of dying, continued to sleep for the entire period. Therefore, the narrator may possibly be drawing a comparison between the time before they became aware about their love through the term the 'seven sleepers' by saying that they both 'snorted', or continued to sleep, in that which seemed to be a seemingly unending amount of time and between the time when they fully became aware about their love and confessed it to one another. In any case, besides line 4, no allusions exist to carry the comparison further. There is, however, another possibility. In his article, 'Plato in John Donne's, *The Good Morrow*', Christopher Nassar makes a proposal that this reference could be exactly referring to Plato's Cave Allegory. Book VII of *The Republic*, gives a description of an earth in which humanity has been held as a prisoner in a cave since the time that it was born. These 'prisoners' have been held in chains, which have been tied around their legs and neck. They can merely see the reflections on the wall caused by themselves and other objects that block the firelight. Therefore, all that the prisoners feel is real is actually all an illusion. They are committing a mistake of thinking about shadows as being 'shadows of shadows for reality'. The analogy goes on with the release of a prisoner and his ascension from the cave to the external world. It is here that he ultimately discovers God, the world's actual fact, as well as the illusionary character of the cave.

Donne's narrator continues to draw comparison between his life before love with the imprisonment of Plato's prisoners. Typically, when comparisons are drawn against their present love, 'all past pleasures have been merely fancies, and the

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women he 'desir'd, and got' were merely a 'dream of this one woman'. Finally, on ascending from the cave, he realizes the supreme fact of his lover and no longer has the desire to go back to the lustful cave of the previous times. The main objective of the exploration metaphors in the second stanza is to continue revealing that the narrator prefers his newly-built association instead of earthly and carnal things. The triplet of the second stanza sees the narrator stating that:

*Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,*
*Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,*
*Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.*

This evident digressing from the topic, in fact, goes on to support the Platonic relationship of the first stanza. Firstly, we should keep in mind the fact that the worldly chasings of Elizabethan England happened to be very different as compared to the current times. Constantly exploring the world happened to be one of the main activities that largely interested the people. Despite its continuing for quite a period of time, it was actually in the 'Elizabethan-Jacobean era' when discovery 'saw its really great florescence'. Moreover, 'with the Thames, the most popular of local thoroughfares and with sailors scattered throughout the city, the average Londoner of Elizabeth's day could hardly help knowing something of ships and sea travel' (Rugoff, 129).

However, there were several people of this period who had knowledge about the Americas; however, only some had actually gone there. Whatever know-how they had was insubstantial. This knowledge resulted in the Elizabethans possessing an unclear view of the New World. Thus, such 'new worlds' signify a kind of dream, with them desiring to follow these dreams being directly associated with the illusions of the cave. The narrator sees this famous pastime merely as something being used to pacify slaves. He believes that this is far from being an activity for a liberal person like himself. He does not anymore feel that he needs to be searching for a 'new world' as he claims to have already found it in his being united with his lover:

'In possessing one another, each has gained world enough'.

The semi-circular imagery in stanza three can be translated as something that is both acute in the spatial sense, and associated with a ridiculous Platonic perspective on the basis of mankind. Donne 'collapses his geographical metaphor into the tiny reflection of each lover's face in the other's eye' (Holland, 63). Therefore, while he openly confesses his love for his beloved in stanza two, the narrator also goes on to state that it is their eyes which contain their entire world of love. In any case, this perspective turns out to be very tough to be supported on seeing the lines that follow. This is due to Donne's narrator symbolically describing the pair as two different 'hemispheres'. What could also be possible here, could be the fact that these two 'hemispheres' in fact signify the eyes. In any case, as the narrator is describing the couple, what might have been more exact would have been the narrator mentioning the four couples instead of two. Moreover, the cardinal point imagery is unclear when this interpretation is being used. Moreover, the semi-circular imagery even bears allusions to an absurd speech that Aristophanes makes in Plato's *Symposium*.

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In his speech, Aristophanes is seen to relate a humorous legend of how mankind originated. Typically, Aristophanes is seen to state that in the beginning, human beings assumed the shape of a globe. Every 'individual' had four legs, four arms with a single head and a face on each side. According to the story, the Greek God Zeus as a punishment for annoying him made two divisions of every individual, thereby separating them into two different beings. However, in spite of being different human beings, they continued to be divine halves who unendingly sought to reunite as one body. This instinct which comes naturally to that of reuniting the halves is how Aristophanes explains love. Thus, Donne's narrator is under the belief that he has found his other half in his beloved, and together they form the original whole. Moreover, this interpretation clarifies the cardinal point metaphor. For instance, the narrator states: 'Where can we finde two better hemispheares/Without sharpe North, without declining West'. The narrator here states the absence of 'North' and 'West' in their new united spherical world. The association will be all but cold, or 'sharpe', it will not diminish or be 'declining'. Rather, their relationship will be one which would be warm and filled with eternal love.

On the whole, the poem brings the poetic tools and learned allusions that Donne has so beautifully used, supporting the speaker. First of all, we carried out an analysis of the unique structure and musical elements in the poem. Then we went on to examine the way Donne has made use of the figurative language, perspective and tone for creating a narrator that readers would find easy to believe. Then, we looked closely at 'seven sleepers den' phrase, discovering that it has its roots in both Christian mythology and Platonic allegory. Then, we went on to gain a clearer comprehension of how Donne has used exploration metaphor in stanza two. Then we examined the Platonic base for the semi-circular metaphor in stanza three. Lastly, we investigated the poem from a holistic viewpoint and realized as to how each of these various elements had their own contribution to the entire message. Therefore, we can conclude that Donne's *The Good-Morrow* is a poem that effectively makes use of tools for maximizing the poetic capacity of the verse. It consists of intellectual references that go on to support the message of the speaker for his lover.

## Uncertainty

The poem seems to conclude on a note of some uncertainty: 'If … or ...' Perchance after all Donne cannot any longer keep up the vanity that nothing will come to change their love or encroach upon it.

## Explanation of the Passage

*I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I*
*Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then,*
*But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?*
*Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?*
*'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.*
*If ever any beauty I did see,*
*Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.*

**Explanation**: In the above lines, the speaker is addressing his lady love after they have spent an entire night together. The poem starts with the poet questioning his lady love, asking her that he wonders what they did before they met and fell in love. He asks her if they had not completed weaning till then. Another option that he thinks they may be doing could have been that they were sleeping in the 'seven sleeper's den'. Here, 'seven sleepers den' could have more than one interpretation. According to the critic Harold Bloom, a Christian and Muslim legend has it that seven youths of Ephesus hid in a cave for 187 years in order to escape from participating in persecuting the pagans during the dawn of Christianity. Surprisingly, these youths did not die, but kept sleeping for the complete period. Thus, the poet may be comparing the period before they grew aware about their love to the 'seven sleepers' in which they both 'snorted', or slept, in what seemed to be an infinite period of time. However, besides line 4, there are no other references that take the analogy further. The poet also feels if ever he desired anything beautiful in past, it was only a dream of his beloved. She is his actual dream.

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**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

5. What do you understand by metaphysical poetry?
6. Mention some of the factors which influenced metaphysical poets.

## 2.5 ANDREW MARVELL: *TO HIS COY MISTRESS*

The son of a priest, the poet Andrew Marvell was born on 31 March 1621, in the church house of a vineyard near Hull of Yorkshire, England. He was the fourth child and the first son of his parents. The fifth and last child of the family, a boy, died at the age of one, and Andrew therefore grew up as an only son with three sisters, Anne, Mary and Elizabeth.

Andrew Marvell's contributions to literature may be classified as follows:

- Poems which, for the most part, belong to the years 1650-1652
- Satires, which he wrote on public men and public affairs during the reign of Charles II
- Newsletters which he regularly addressed to his constitutes in Hull after his election as Member of Parliament for that borough in 1659, and which extend from 1660 to the time of his death in 1678
- His controversial Essays on ecclesiastical questions written at intervals between 1672 and 1677

### 2.5.1 Marvell as a Poet of Nature

One group of poems by Marvell shows him as an ardent nature lover. These poems include *Upon Appleton House*, *Upon the Hill, Grove at Bilbrough*, *The Garden, On a Drop of Dew, Bermudas, The Picture of Little T.C*, and *The Nymyh*

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*Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn*. Then there are the four *Mower* poems which are more or less in the tradition of pastoral poetry though the principal character in these poems is a mower, not a shepherd. All these poems show Marvell's detailed and loving observation of the scenery of nature. Nature, indeed, casts a spell upon him. He finds the appeal of nature to be simply irresistible, and he surrenders to her charm with the utmost willingness and joy.

*Upon Appleton House* provides the finest examples of his precise description of nature. In this poem we have detailed pictures of the flower-garden in Lord Fairfax's estate, followed by equally graphic descriptions of the meadows, the river in flood and after the flood. These descriptions are followed by perfectly realistic and vivid pictures of the wood into which the poet withdraws in a contemplative mood. In this part of the poem, the realism and accuracy with which Marvell describes the activities of the nightingale, the doves, and the wood-pecker have been admired by every critic and reader. Here he identifies himself with the birds and growing things:

*Thus I, easy philosopher,*
*Among the birds and trees confer.*

Here he can, 'through the hazels thick, espy the hatching throstle's shining eye.' He has dialogues with the singing birds. The leaves trembling in the wind are to him Sibyl's (mystical or spiritual) leaves. To be covered with the leaves of trees is a delight to him:

*'Under this antic cope I move,*
*Like some great prelate of the grove.'*
*In more than forty stanzas of this poem Marvell shows that he is familiar with all aspects of the countryside, the trees and birds and that he has attentively listened to and compared the songs of birds. He feels so happy and peaceful in the midst of these scenes of nature that he calls upon the trees and the plants to cling to him and not to let him leave this place:*
*'Bind me, ye woodbines, in your twines,*
*Curl me about ye, gadding vines.'*

This is the exalted love for nature of a romantic poet. Joined with this love for nature and for birds, is Marvell's feeling for animals. His suffering when they suffer is voiced with infinite gracefulness in his semi-mythological poem, *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn*. Here, the girl utters a pathetic lament over the death of her pet animal and this lament is so touching that it cannot but have come from the heart of the poet himself.

In *An Horatian Ode* we have the picture of a falcon thrown casually into the poem in order to convey the idea of Cromwell's obedience to the Commons in spite of his fierce nature. The behaviour of the falcon in returning from the sky and perching on the branch of a tree in response to the lure is depicted in just a few lines and shows the accuracy of Marvell's observation. In *Eyes and Tears* there is in the last but one stanza, a series of brief pictures of nature: two clouds dissolving into two raindrops; two fountains trickling down, and two floods over-flowing the banks of the two rivers.

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The finest examples of Marvell's sensuous Nature-imagery are to be found in *The Garden* and *Bermudas*. In *The Garden*, ripe apples drop about the poet's head, the luscious clusters of grapes squeeze their juice upon his mouth; the nectarine and the peach reach his hands of their own accord; he stumbles on melons; and he is ensnared with flowers. These lines make the reader's mouth begin to water. In *Bermudas* we have an equally alluring description of fruits. Here we have bright oranges shining like golden lamps in a green night; the pomegranates containing jewels more rich than are found in Hormuz; the figs meet the mouths of the visitors without any effort on the part of the latter. The visitors find the melons thrown at their feet. The apples here are of such exquisite quality that no tree could ever bear them twice. The cedars here have been brought from Lebanon. The presence of ambergris on the sea-shores is proclaimed by the roaring waves. This whole description makes an irresistible appeal to our senses of taste, smell, and sight. It is a richly colourful and sumptuous description. (In the same poem, *Bermudas*, there is a two-line picture of whales which is extremely realistic and highly poetic. The huge sea-monsters are imagined as lifting the sea upon their backs).

In certain poems Marvell's way of looking at natural scenes and phenomena shows his spiritual approach to nature and arouses corresponding spiritual feelings in the reader. *The Garden* is one such poem. Here, after describing the rich fruits growing in the garden, the poet tells us that his mind withdraws from the sensuous pleasure of the fruits into its own happiness. The natural environment puts Marvell into a contemplative mood in which his mind can create worlds and seas transcending the actual worlds and seas, and in this mood his mind annihilates everything 'to a green thought in a green shade'. At this time, while his body lies somewhere close to the fountains and the fruit trees, his soul glides into the branches and sits there like a bird singing and combing its silver wings in order to prepare itself for a longer flight. The spiritual tranquility and bliss which Marvell experiences here remind him of Adam's bliss in the garden of Eden before Adam's tranquility was broken by his being provided with a companion in the shape of Eve. In the poem *On a Drop of Dew*, again, a natural phenomenon suggests a spiritual significance, or we might say a spiritual experience of the poet lends a new significance to a dew-drop. The poet first gives us a picture of a dew-drop, investing this tiny drop of water with a life and a soul, and then goes on to describe the human soul which, he says, comes from Heaven and which is anxious to go back to that original abode. The soul of man, says the poet, remembers its previous exalted status and shuns the pleasures of this world. The soul is ever ready to go back to Heaven: 'How girt and ready to ascend'! The pleasures of the earthly world are here referred to in terms of the beauty of nature: 'the sweet leaves and blossoms green'.

Marvell was the first to sing about the beauty and glory of gardens and orchards. In them he tastes his dearest delights. *The Garden* forestalls Keats' style by its sensuousness, and Wordsworth's by its optimistic and serene meditative mood. Yet Marvell preferred nature in its wild rather than cultivated form. It is in the spirit of charming Perdita in Shakespeare's *The Winters Tale* that Marvell protests, in *The Mower Against Gardens*, against artificial gardening processes such as grafting, budding and selection.

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The feeling for nature is sometimes introduced by Marvell into poems which are otherwise inspired by Christianity or by love. In *Bermudas,* Marvell imagines that he hears a Puritan refugee from the Stuart tyranny singing praises to God as he rows along the coast of an island in the Bermudas, safe from the storms and the rage of **prelates**; and then the singer mentions the sensuous delights provided by nature on this island. Sometimes Marvell returns to the pastoral, but he gives it a new emphasis of truth, and of realism. The short idyll *Ametas and Thestylis* is very original and graceful and there is also the touching complaint of *Damon the Mower* who, working beneath a burning sun, laments his Juliana's hardness of heart. Nor can we ignore *The Mower to the Glow-Worms* in which Marvell gives us delightful pictures of the light shed by the glow-worms and concludes with a reference to the Mower's disappointment in his love for Juliana. The fanciful picture of the nightingale studying late into the night and composing her matchless songs is especially very pleasing. Then there is the poem called *The Fair Singer* in which the wind and sun image lends the required magnitude to the overpowering appeal of the eyes and the voice of the beloved. Likewise the image of the lovers placed as far apart as the two Poles imparts the necessary magnitude to the situation in the poem *The Definition of Love*. The mention of the Indian Ganges and the English Humber in *To His Coy Mistress* enhances the humour of the opening passage.

## 2.5.2 Marvell as a Poet of Love

Marvell's love-poems constitute an important division of his lyric poetry, the other two important divisions being poems dealing with the theme of religion and those dealing with the theme of nature. His love-poems include *The Fair Singer, The Definition of Love, To His Coy Mistress, Young Love, The Unfortunate Lover, The Picture of Little T.C., The Mower to the Glowworms, and Damon the Mower*. Then there are poems in which the theme of love occurs as a subsidiary subject, poems like *Upon Appleton House* and *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn*. According to one critic, the least satisfactory of the poems of Marvell are those whose theme is love. In the opinion of this critic, Marvell's love-poetry has, with the exception of *To His Coy Mistress*, as little passion as Cowley's, while it is as full of conceits. *The Unfortunate Lover*, says this critic, is probably the worst love-poem ever written by a man of genius, while *The Definition of Love* is merely a study in the manner of Donne's *Valediction Against Mourning*. Cleverer and more original, and somewhat more successful, is *The Gallery*. The two opposite sides of one long picture-gallery into which the chambers of the lover's heart have been thrown by breaking down partitions are supposed to be covered with portraits of his lady. On the one side she is drawn in such characters as Aurora and Venusand on the other as an enchanteress and a murderess.

The charge of a want of passion in the love-poems of Marvell has been confirmed by some other critics also. The abundance of conceits in all the poems of Marvell, whether of love or religion or nature, is a fact which every reader knows. As for the adverse opinion about *The Unfortunate Lover*, most readers might agree. But to say that Marvell's poems of love are, on the whole, the least satisfactory may be too sweeping a statement. *To His Coy Mistress* is, as even this critic agrees, a masterpiece. About it, this critic says that here passion is allowed to take its most

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natural path, that as a love-poem it is unique, and that for sheer power it ranks higher than anything Marvell ever wrote.

In certain respects, Marvell in his love-poems adopts the established Petrarchan approach, while in other respects his treatment of love, like his technique or style of expression, is wholly unconventional. The Petrarchan mode, which became very popular with the Elizabethan poets, was to exalt the beloved and to shower glowing and eloquent praises on her beauty and charm. The Petrarchan lover was given to sighing and weeping over the indifference and callousness of his beloved and over the disappointment he felt as a consequence of her attitude. Now, we have these Petrarchan elements in at least three of the above-mentioned love-poems, namely, *The Fair Singer*, *To His Coy Mistress*, and *The Unfortunate Lover*. In the first of these poems, the lover praises the beauty of his mistress's eyes and voice in extravagant terms, and speaks of her total and complete conquest over his mind and heart. In *To His Coy Mistress* the lover speaks of the beauty of his mistress's limbs in exaggerated terms, asserting that he needs hundreds and thousands of years to be able to praise them adequately. In *The Unfortunate Lover*, the lover has learnt from the winds and the waves to sigh and to shed tears.

In these three poems the passion of the lover is as intense as in any Elizabethan love-poem. The statement that Marvell's love poems are cold is certainly not true of these three poems. In *The Fair Singer*, the lover says that both beauties of his mistress (the beauty of her eyes and the beauty of her voice) have joined themselves in fatal harmony to bring about his death, and that with her eyes she binds his heart, and with her voice she captivates his mind. He then goes on to speak of the 'curled trammels of her hair' in which his soul has got entangled, and the subtle art with which she can weave fetters for him of the very air he breathes. If a lover can thus speak about his feelings, we cannot say that he is a cold kind of lover. In the poem *To His Coy Mistress*, the passion is equally ardent. While the lover adopts a witty and somewhat sarcastic manner of speaking in the first two stanzas, he becomes truly ardent and spirited in his passion in the last stanza. In this final stanza he becomes almost fierce in his passion when he suggests that he and she should roll all their strength and all their sweetness up into one ball and should tear their pleasures with rough strife through the iron gates of life. In *The Unfortunate Lover* also the passion is intense, almost red-hot. The lover is here hit by 'all the winged artillery of Cupid' and, like Ajax, finds himself between the 'flames and the waves'. The lover is then depicted as one 'dressed in his own blood'. It is true that the unfortunate man's plight in love is only briefly described, because his other misfortunes too form an important part of his story, but his love is certainly not of the lukewarm kind. It is his disappointment in love which constitutes his real tragedy and which brings his life to a painful close.

In the other poems, the passion of love is certainly not very intense, and therefore T. S. Eliot is right in speaking of 'a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace'. The intellectual element in some of the poems is so strong so as to push the passion of love into the background. These poems have an argumentative quality which has the effect of diminishing the passion. In such poems the lover feels his love to be very strong. No doubt he gets so entangled in arguing his case

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that the passion is almost forgotten. *The Definition of Love* is an outstanding example of the argumentative love-lyric. The poem begins with a highly intellectual conceit. His love, says the poet, was begotten by despair upon impossibility. 'Magnanimous Despair' alone could show him so divine a thing as his love. He could have achieved the fruition of his love, but fate drove iron wedges and thrust itself between him and the fulfillment of his love. The poet then goes on to say that fate grows jealous of two perfect lovers and does not permit their union because the union of two lovers would mean the downfall of the power of fate. Fate, the poet goes on to say, has placed him as far away from his beloved as the two Poles are from each other, i.e. the North Pole and the South Pole. This love can be fulfilled only if the earth undergoes some new convulsion and if the world is cramped into a plan sphere. The poet next compares his and his mistress's loves to parallel lines which can never meet even if stretched to infinity. Finally, the poet describes the love between him and his mistress as the 'conjunction of the mind' and the 'opposition of the stars'. The whole poem is a kind of logically-developed argument in which the passion itself is almost forgotten and the speaker's chief concern is to establish the utter hopelessness of true love, the villain in the case being fate. The conceits in the poem are audaciously far-fetched. It is a learned poem in which every subject of the academic trivia is exploited in turn. Marvell, here, has made the fullest use of the logic which he had learnt at Cambridge. Geometry and astronomy are pressed into the service of logic here. It is a thoroughly unconventional kind of love-poem, and it occupies a unique position in the whole range of English love-poetry.

Even *To His Coy Mistress* possesses this intellectual quality, though the passion here manages to burst through the restraints of logic and reasoning. This poem has a syllogistic pattern so far as its construction is concerned. A syllogism develops through three stages: 'if', 'but', 'therefore'. This poem begins with if ('Had we but world enough, and time '). We are then told in the first stanza what the consequences would be if the lovers had enough space and time at their disposal. The second stage of the syllogism begins with the second stanza: 'But at my back I always hear...'. The rest of this stanza tells us why the lovers cannot spend their time and the space (if they had enough of it) in the manner in which they would have liked to make use of them. The third stanza of the syllogism begins with the first line of the third stanza: 'Now therefore,...'; and the conclusion is reached at the end of this same stanza. There are plenty of conceits in this poem also, but these are of the more popular kind, and can be appreciated even by the average reader, except the conceit in the closing eight lines which may perhaps create a problem.

There is another poem in which the argumentative quality is paramount and the passion of love is therefore superseded by the logic which dominates the poem. This poem has an absolutely unconventional theme. Its title is *Young Love*, and here a grown-up man has conceived a passion for a little girl (of about thirteen or fourteen). The lover proceeds to persuade the young, immature girl to love him in return, and he gives all kinds of arguments to convince her. He would like her to make up her mind quickly and not to wait till she attains the age of fifteen. There is a possibility that fate might afterwards thwart them in their desire to love each other; now is therefore the time and the opportunity for them to crown each other with their loves. The whole poem is one extended argument, and the originality of the poem lies in the

manner in which the argument is developed. The response of the girl is not a part of the poem, but we can imagine that she could not have resisted such a persuasive and persistent lover.

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Disappointment in love is briefly introduced in the poem *The Nymph Complaining*, the main subject of which is the death of the pet fawn. However, the theme of love there cannot be ignored. The wrong which the Nymph suffered at the hands of her false lover Sylvio was as grave as the one she has now suffered at the hands of the wanton troopers who have killed her pet fawn. The Nymph is certainly not a cold-hearted girl. She loved Sylvio intensely, and her suffering when he deserted her was intense also. Equally strong must have been the love of the first Fairfax for Miss Thwait whom he was able ultimately to win as his bride in spite of the opposition of the nuns and her own excessive modesty, as related in the poem, *Upon Appleton House*. In these two poems, however, the passion of love is not much dwelt upon; it is merely indicated, and we have ourselves to imagine its intensity.

In the pastoral poems, too, the passion of love does not find any direct expression. For instance, in *The Mower to the Glow Worms,* the speaker mentions his love only in the last stanza, as a kind of after-thought. So it could be regarded as a cold poem.

### 2.5.3 Elements of Wit in Marvell's Poetry

The word 'wit' has several meanings. It means intelligence or understanding; it also means the capacity to amuse others by an unexpected combination of ideas or a contrast between ideas or expressions. These are the two most common meanings of the word 'wit'. In the second sense, wit is allied to humour. But the word 'wit' has had certain other connotations as well, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance, Pope described 'wit' as being that which has been often thought but was never before so well expressed. Dr Johnson described wit, in relation to the metaphysical poets, as a kind of Discordia concurs or a combination of dissimilar images. The metaphysical poets, according to Johnson, put together the most varied ideas by violence; and they ransacked both nature and art for illustrations, comparisons, and illusions. This was Dr. Johnson's way of explaining the kind of conceits which are found in abundance in the poetry of Donne and his followers. Then, in the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot has used the word 'wit' in relation to Marvell in his own way, meaning by it 'a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace'. Now, the poetry of Marvell contains all these kinds of wit, and contains them in abundance.

Wit in the sense of the capacity to amuse or entertain by employing words in unexpected combinations or by means of unexpected comparisons and contrasts or by means of ingenious ideas is to be found to a most striking degree in Marvell's poem *To His Coy Mistress*. We are here amused, in the opening passage, by the very idea that, if the lovers had enough space and enough time, the mistress could easily search for rubies by the Indian Ganges, and the lover could complain by the banks of the river Humber in England. We are amused by the idea that the lover would love her from ten years before the Flood, and that she could refuse his love till the conversion of the Jews; and that the lover would be able to spend hundreds and

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thousands of years in praising the beauty of the mistress's limbs. Here 'wit' arises from what is known as hyperbole or an exaggerated manner of speaking. The notions stated by the lover here tickle our minds, and we smile with amusement. In the second stanza, we have an example of wit in the lover's remark that, in the grave, worms would try the long-preserved virginity of the mistress. Here wit arises from the very unexpectedness of the possibility which the lover visualizes, because ordinarily we never think of worms in the context of the seduction of a woman. Then the lover makes another witty observation when he says that the grave is a fine and private place but that nobody can enjoy the pleasure of embracing his beloved there. Here we are amused by the lover's sarcastic remark.

The same kind of wit may he found in *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*. Here we feel amused by the manner in which the Soul and the Body attack each other. The very idea of the two being regarded as separate entities is funny. Then the manner in which the complaints and grievances are given vent to is quite entertaining, in spite of the serious intention of the author in writing the poem. For instant, we feel greatly amused to read the Soul describing itself as a prisoner who stands fettered in feet and handcuffed, with bolts of bones; here blinded with an eye, and there deaf with the drumming of an ear. The Body amuses us equally by its retort when it complains that the Soul, stretched upright inside the Body, impales the body in such a way that the Body goes about as 'its own precipice'. It may be pointed out that the speakers themselves are not to be regarded here as being consciously witty, but somehow their attacks and counter-attacks do produce the effect of wit. There is no such wit or amusing effect in *A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*, the whole of this poem being characterized by an atmosphere of solemnity.

In *An Horatian Ode*, we have a couple of examples of wit arising from the use of irony. When the poet uses the phrase 'wiser art' in connection with the role of Cromwell in the flight of King Charles I from Hampton Court, he is employing irony. Apparently Marvell here pays a compliment to Cromwell but actually he is hinting at Cromwell's cunning and crafty nature. Similarly Marvell seems to be ironical when, at the end of this poem, he says that the same arts, through which Cromwell gained power, will be required to maintain or retain that power. Thus a **paradox** may serve as a source of wit. The best example of this is to be found in the following two lines from The Garden:

*Two paradises 'twere in one*
*To live in Paradise alone.*

Then we come to Marvell's use of wit in the sense of unexpected metaphors, the putting together of heterogeneous ideas and images, and ingenious or far-fetched notions. Actually, the wit in the poem *To His Coy Mistress* proceeds from conceits of this kind, because Marvell makes use of certain fantastic assumptions such as the lovers having enough time and space at their disposal. But all metaphysical conceits are not witty in the sense of having the capacity to amuse or entertain. We have, for instance, a metaphysical conceit in the poem *On a Drop of Dew*, but the conceit here is of a kind that produces the effect of sublimity. The conceit in this poem lies in the connection which the poet establishes between a dew-drop and the human soul, a connection which normally we would never think of. The poet here first

describes a dew-drop lying lightly on a rose-petal, and then expresses the unexpected idea that the dew-drop is gazing wistfully upon the sky, and is shining with a mournful light because it feels sad at having been separated from Heaven. In this context, the dew-drop is 'like its own tear'. Then the poet proceeds to describe the human soul which also, according to him, feels sad in this world because it recollects its original abode in Heaven. Both the dew-drop and the soul will ultimately dissolve, like Manna (mentioned in the Bible), and 'run into the glories of the Almighty Sun.' In this poem the word 'wit' therefore means a fantastic and far-fetched notion or idea or comparison. In *The Coronet*, we also have an example of wit of this kind in the poet's idea that his garlands would at least crown the feet of Christ, though they could not crown his head. We also have the same kind of wit in the conceited notion that the poet's motives of fame and self-interest in offering his tribute to Christ represent 'the old serpent' which, says the poet, should be crushed by Christ's feet. Wit of the same variety is to be found in the metaphysical conceits of the poem *Eyes and Tears*. Here tears are compared to watery lines and plummets. Then we have the conceited notion that two tears have long been weighed within the scales of the poet's two eyes and then been paid out in equal poise. Another example of wit, in the sense of ingenuity and the unexpectedness of the image, is found in the idea that the sun first makes the water on the earth evaporate and then sends it back to the earth out of a feeling of pity. Next, two eyes swollen with weeping are compared to full sails hasting homewards, to the chaste lady's pregnant womb, and to 'Cynthia teeming' that is, the full moon. And the poem goes on like that, one witty image following another, not witty in the sense of amusing or entertaining, but in the sense of far-fetched, original, and clever.

*The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn* is a serious and poignant poem. But there are certain lines here which can be cited as examples of metaphysical wit (in the sense of ingenious metaphors or images). Thus the Nymph, in the course of her lament, says that if her fawn had lived long it would have been 'lilies without, roses within'. On seeing tears come out of the fawn's eyes, the Nymph compares them to the dropping of gum, and goes on to say: 'So weeps the wounded balsome; so the holy frankincense doth flow.' Then the Nymph goes on to say that she will keep these two crystal tears in a golden vial which she will fill to overflowing with her own tears, and then place the vial in Diana's shrine. The poem closes with yet another witty or ingenious image, the image of the weeping statue of the Nymph. More examples of wit of this kind (in the sense of originality and the unexpectedness or far-fetched quality of the images or notions) are to be found in *The Definition of Love*. Here the poet describes his love as having been 'begotten by Despair upon Impossibility'. Then the poet says that he and his beloved have been placed as far apart as the Poles and that Fate would not permit their union because their union would mean the ruin of Fate. The lover finally compares his and his mistress's loves to parallel lines which can never meet even when stretched to infinity.

Then we come to T. S. Eliot's conception of wit in relation to the poetry of Marvell. Of course, Eliot admits that he has not been able to think of a really suitable term to define the special quality of Marvell's poetry, but he thinks that the word 'wit' will serve the purpose. Wit, according to Eliot, involves recognition, implicit in

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the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible. Eliot illustrates this quality of wit from the poem *To His Coy Mistress*. He quotes lines from this poem to point out that Marvell here plays with a fancy which begins by pleasing and leads to astonishment. He then quotes the closing lines and comes to the conclusion that nobody will deny that this poem contains wit. He adds that the wit here forms the crescendo and diminuendo of a scale of great imaginative power. Furthermore, the wit is here not only combined with, but fused into, the imagination. There is a witty fancy in the successive images ('my vegetable love', 'till the conversion of the Jews'), but this fancy is not indulged for its own sake; it is structural decoration of a serious idea. Eliot also gives examples of wit in this sense from *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn*.

### 2.5.4 Blend of the Elizabethan and the Metaphysical Style in Marvell's Poetry

Marvell certainly belongs to the category of the metaphysical poets; he was the last of the metaphysical group of poets. His poetry has the distinctive stamp of metaphysical poetry. But at the same time he was not a thoroughbred rebel against the Elizabethan style of writing poetry. His verse shows the influence of the Elizabethans, and certain characteristics of his work are clearly Elizabethan. In fact, in his work the metaphysical and the Elizabethan styles mingle with each other, and are to be found in a mutually cooperative combination. For this reason critics have said that Marvell's poetry is a fine blend of these two styles and represents a mix of the two.

In the first place we find in Marvell's work a return to the pastoral kind of poetry which had been written by Elizabethans, notably by Spenser. Marvell also recaptures the lyric intensity of the Elizabethans, at least in some of his poems. Then we find in Marvell the sensuous kind of imagery which was a characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. The poetic diction of Marvell also shows the Elizabethan influence in so far as we have here an abundance of rich and gorgeous phrases. Some of the conceits employed by Marvell are, too, of the Elizabethan variety, being simple and straightforward instead of being over fantastic and far-fetched. With these Elizabethan characteristics are blended some of the most distinctive metaphysical qualities. Many of the conceits in Marvell's poems are simply amazing because of their novelty and originality. His lyrics are unmistakably and highly argumentative; they are examples of what has been called 'passionate thinking', with the emphasis on thinking. Then, his manner of expression shows terseness and compression. Many of his poems have religious and metaphysical themes, being concerned with the problems which the human soul has to face in this world.

The pastoral note in Marvell's poetry is represented by such poems as *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Ametas and Thestylis*, *A Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda*, and the four *Mower* poems. Not only is *Daphnis and Chloe* a pastoral poem, but it expresses a hedonist point of view characteristic of the Renaissance. *Ametas and Thestylis* ends in the two lovers deciding to put aside their rope-making, and enjoying themselves with kissing within the hay. *Damon the Mower* is a pastoral poem in which Damon laments the indifference of his beloved, Juliana, towards him. *The Mower to the Glow Worms* is another pastoral poem in which the Mower

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utters a complaint about his beloved's callousness towards him, but it is also a poem in which the beauty of the glow-worms has been described in the truly romantic, Elizabethan manner. At the same time, these pastoral poems, suggestive as they are of the Elizabethan standards have been written in a style which is more or less metaphysical. Some of the conceits here are metaphysical (such as the nightingale studying till late in the night and composing her matchless songs); and the style is highly condensed. The various speeches by the lovers in the dialogues of these poems show a brevity and compactness. The speakers are by no means garrulous as they might have been in the Elizabethan pastorals.

In some of his love-poems, Marvell shows the Elizabethan influence by following the Petrarchan convention. In these poems, he shows a tendency to dwell on the charms of the beloved in extravagant terms, as was the case with Elizabethan love-poets who followed the Petrarchan mode of love-making. In these poems by Marvell, we have the same sighs and tears, and the same exaltation of the beauty of the beloved as we find in the Elizabethan love lyrics. Thus, in *The Unfortunate Lover*, we are told that the tyrant god of love used 'all his winged artillery', and the lover found himself between 'the flames and the waves'. The lover was forced to live in storms and wars; he was torn into flames, and ragged with wounds. He was a lover 'dressed in his own blood'. In *The Fair Singer*, the poet speaks of the two beauties of his beloved joining together to bring about his death. He speaks of the 'curled trammels of her hair', and of her having the double advantage of the wind and the sun. The beloved has 'bound his heart' with her eyes and 'captivated his mind' with her voice. The extravagance employed here is characteristic of Elizabethan poetry, and the conceits are Elizabethan also, though they just fall short of becoming metaphysical. The conceits in this poem are on the borderline of the two kinds, as it were. But the style of the poem is clearly metaphysical in the sense of being very compressed and condensed The ideas have been expressed in the minimum possible number of words. *To His Coy Mistress* is another poem in which the Petrarchan exaggerations and Elizabethan conceits combine with a metaphysical condensation of style which is almost to the point. The lover here needs a hundred years to praise his mistress's eyes and to gaze on her forehead; he needs two hundred years to adore each of her breasts; and he needs thirty thousand years to praise the remaining parts of her body. The passion of the Elizabethan lyric is also to be found in this poem, and it finds a notable expression in the closing six lines where the lover suggests that he and she should roll all their strength and all their sweetness up into one ball and tear their pleasures with rough strife through the iron gates of life. But, although the passion is certainly Elizabethan in its intensity, the conceit employed to express the passion is thoroughly metaphysical. As for the condensed style, it becomes very to the point in such lines as these:

*The grave's a fine and private place,*
*But none, I think, do there embrace.*

While the Petrarchan ardour, extravagance, and exaggeration are prominent in *The Fair Singer* and in *To His Coy Mistress*, these lyrics have a metaphysical stamp in another respect also, besides the metaphysical qualities pointed out above. Both these lyrics represent a fusion of thought and feeling; they are intellectual lyrics characterized by a close and logical reasoning. In *The Fair Singer*, the argument

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is that, if the mistress had been 'singly fair', the lover might have disentangled his soul from the mesh of her hair, but that now 'all resistance against her is vain' because she combines in herself two beauties, the beauty of eyes and the beauty of voice. *To His Coy Mistress* is an even more intellectual lyric. Its construction is that of a **syllogism**. The argument here begins with 'if' ('Had we but world enough and time'). The next stage of the argument begins with the word 'but' ('But at my back I always hear'). The final stage of the argument begins with the word 'therefore' ('Now therefore, while the youthful hue'). A mingling of the emotional and the intellectual elements is found in several other poems also. In *The Picture of Little T.C.*, for instance, the argument is developed in a logical manner, but otherwise the poem could have been written by an Elizabethan poet, because the conceits are not too fantastic or too ingenious and the feeling is intense also. *Young Love* is another example of the argumentative lyric.

Yet another Elizabethan quality of all the poems that have been mentioned above is their smoothness of versification. We do not have any jarring rhymes, or any discordant technical devices. All these poems show harmonious numbers; and the pace of such a poem as *To His Coy Mistress* is brisk and pleasing. This quality of smooth numbers is also shared by *The Nymph Complaining* which has, too, a certain pastoral quality, especially in the passage beginning: 'I have a garden of my own.' Even the language at many places in all these poems has the **felicity** of Elizabethan poetry. This is particularly true of *The Mower to the Glo-Worm*, *The Picture of Little T.C.* and *The Fair Singer*. Another noteworthy poem in this context is *Bermudas*, where the music, the felicity of word and phrase, and perfect rhyming all combine to give it an Elizabethan character. However, this poem has its metaphysical qualities also: it is a religious poem with its holy and cheerful note, and it is written in a condensed style.

The religious poems of Marvell again stamp him as a metaphysical writer. He is preoccupied with the soul and its relationship to this world and to the world beyond. From this point of view the poem *On a Drop of Dew* is perhaps the most notable. The soul here is depicted as unhappy in this world and longing to go back to its original abode in Heaven. This poem is metaphysical also because of its conceits, the most memorable and the most striking of which is the comparison of the soul to a dew-drop. The condensation of style is also remarkable in this poem. But the intensity of emotion, which is almost an ecstasy, is again reminiscent of Elizabethan poetry, though the religious nature of emotion is a metaphysical quality. The two *Dialogues* (between the Soul and Body and between the Soul and Pleasure) go back to the Middle Ages, but the manner of expression and the conceits give them both a metaphysical quality.

Another example of Elizabethan qualities mingling with metaphysical ones is provided by *The Garden*. Here the richness of sensuous imagery is strikingly Elizabethan, but the terseness of style and the conceits mark it as a metaphysical poem. The accumulation of the delicious fruits has a richly sensuous appeal, but the poem as a whole is characterized by the metaphysical style. The following lines, for instance, have an almost to the point quality:

- *Society is all but rude,*
  *To this delicious Solitude.*

- *Two Paradises 'twere in one*
  *To live in Paradise alone.*

A metaphysical quality also marks the two stanzas in which the poet speaks of pleasures which the mind can enjoy in a garden and the bliss which the soul can experience there.

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Another striking example of sensuous imagery which is reminiscent of Elizabethan poetry is to be found in the poem *Bermudas*, where we have several lines describing the mouth-watering fruits of the island. But this poem too is characterized by a condensed style of expression. Much is conveyed through a poem which is quite short. Several ideas have been packed into the poem. This economy and compactness lend a metaphysical character to the poem.

## 2.5.5 *To His Coy Mistress*: Text and Explanation

*Had we but world enough and time,*
*This coyness, lady, were no crime.*
*We would sit down, and think which way*
*To walk, and pass our long love's day.*
*Thou by the Indian Ganges' side*
*Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide*
*Of Humber would complain. I would*
*Love you ten years before the flood,*
*And you should, if you please, refuse*
*Till the conversion of the Jews.*
*My vegetable love should grow*
*Vaster than empires and more slow;*
*An hundred years should go to praise*
*Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;*
*Two hundred to adore each breast,*
*But thirty thousand to the rest;*
*An age at least to every part,*
*And the last age should show your heart.*
*For, lady, you deserve this state,*
*Nor would I love at lower rate.*
*But at my back I always hear*
*Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;*
*And yonder all before us lie*
*Deserts of vast eternity.*
*Thy beauty shall no more be found;*
*Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound*
*My echoing song; then worms shall try*
*That long-preserved virginity,*
*And your quaint honour turn to dust,*

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*And into ashes all my lust;*
*The grave's a fine and private place,*
*But none, I think, do there embrace.*
*Now therefore, while the youthful hue*
*Sits on thy skin like morning dew,*
*And while thy willing soul transpires*
*At every pore with instant fires,*
*Now let us sport us while we may,*
*And now, like amorous birds of prey,*
*Rather at once our time devour*
*Than languish in his slow-chapped power.*
*Let us roll all our strength and all*
*Our sweetness up into one ball,*
*And tear our pleasures with rough strife*
*Through the iron gates of life:*
*Thus, though we cannot make our sun*
*Stand still, yet we will make him run.*

## Summary of the Poem

In this poem a lover addresses his beloved who refuses to grant him sexual favors on account of her modesty and her sense of honour. The lover says that her coyness or sexual reluctance would have been justified if they had enough space and time at their disposal. If they had enough space at their disposal, she could have occupied herself by searching for rubies on the banks of the Indian River, the Ganga, while he would complain about his unfulfilled love on the banks of the river Humber in England. If they had enough time at their disposal, he would have started loving her ten years before the great flood (mentioned in the Bible) while she could refuse to satisfy his desire till the Judgment Day when the Jews might agree to be converted to Christianity. If they really had enough time, he would spend a hundred years in praising her eyes and gazing on her forehead; he would spend two hundred years in admiring each of her breasts; and he would spend thirty thousand years in praising the remaining parts of her body. She really deserves so much praise and adoration, says the lover.

But all this is not possible; the lover goes on to say. Time is passing at a very fast pace, and eventually they have to face the 'deserts of vast eternity'. After some years, her beauty will no longer be found on this earth. She will lie in her marble tomb, and he would no longer be there to sing his love-song. There, in the grave, worms will attack her long-preserved virginity. Her sense of honour will then turn to dust, and his desire to make love to her will then turn to ashes. The grave is a fine and private place, but nobody can enjoy the pleasure of love-making there.

Therefore, it would be appropriate for both of them to enjoy the pleasures of love when there is still time, when her skin is still youthful and fresh, and when her responsive soul is still burning with a desire for lovemaking. They should, like amorous birds of prey, devour the pleasures of love, which now time still permits them to enjoy, rather than that they should suffer the pangs of unsatisfied love. They should

roll all their strength and all their sweetness into one cannon-ball and shoot it through the iron gates of life. (In other words, they should enjoy the pleasure of love-making with all their energy and vigor, and they should even become fierce in extracting the maximum pleasure from their love-making). If they cannot arrest the passage of time, they can at least quicken time's speed of passing.

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## Critical Appreciation

This is probably the best-known poem of Andrew Marvell and his most popular one. It is a love-poem in which the speaker offers a strong plea for the beloved to soften towards him and to relax her rigid attitude of Puritanical reluctance and to grant him sexual favors. The lover, who may be the poet himself, builds up a really strong case and supports it with arguments which no sensible woman can reject. The poem has thus what is known as a carpe diem theme. (Carpe diem is a Latin phrase meaning: 'seize the day'. The full Latin sentence is: 'Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero' which means: 'Enjoy the present day, trusting the least possible to the future'.

The poem is written in the form of what is known as a syllogism. A syllogism means an argument developed in a strictly logical form and leading to a definite conclusion. In a syllogism there are three stages which may be indicated by three words initiating each stage in the argument. These three words are: 'if' , 'but'; 'therefore'. This poem is divisible into three clearly marked sections. The first section begins with 'if : 'Had we but world enough, and time.' In this line the word 'had' conveys the sense of 'if', and the line means: 'If we had only enough space and time at our disposal.' The second section of the poem begins with the word 'but': 'But at my back I always hear' (Line 21). And the third section begins with 'therefore': 'Now, therefore, while the youthful hue' (Line 33). Thus the poem begins with the statement of a condition; then reasons are given why that condition cannot be fulfilled; and finally a conclusion is drawn. The conclusion of the poem is that the lovers should lose no time in enjoying the pleasures of love. The conclusion justifies us in saying that the theme of the poem is that of carpe diem which means that one should enjoy the present day.

There are a number of concrete pictures in the poem, and a whole series of metaphysical conceits. The very notion of the lover that, having enough space and time at their disposal, they would be able to wander as far apart as the Indian Ganges and the English Humber is fantastic. Then the lover's saying that he would love his mistress from a time ten years before the Flood and would spend hundreds and thousands of years in admiring and adoring various parts of her body constitutes another metaphysical conceit. The picture of Time's winged chariot hurrying and coming closer and closer to overtake the lovers vividly brings before our minds the rapid passing of time. Here an abstract idea has been made concrete by means of a **metaphor**, and this is a realistic picture in contrast to the metaphysical conceits noted above, though there is a conceit in the image of Time as having a winged chariot. The pictures of the woman lying in her grave and the worms attacking her long preserved virginity and her honour turning to dust are conceits because worms are regarded here as being capable of seducing a woman and a dead woman at that. Then we have metaphysical conceits in the concluding stanza, where the mistress's

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willing soul is depicted as giving out instant fires at every pore and the lovers are imagined as rolling their strength and their sweetness into one ball and tearing their pleasures with rough strife through the iron gates of life.

The witty manner in which the poet argues his case is note-worthy. In fact, the whole poem is characterized by metaphysical wit, and a streak of irony runs through it. The lover is mocking at his mistress's coyness. If the lovers had enough time, the beloved would be in a position to refuse till the conversion of the Jews. This is a witty and ironical remark. Then the lover speaks of his 'vegetable love' growing vaster than empires. The manner in which the lover would have spent hundreds and thousands of years to admire her beauties is also wittily described. Here we have an example of a witty exaggeration.

The style of the poem is marked by compression and economy in the use of words. There is a concentration of meaning in the lines, and the poet shows a remarkable skill in compressing his ideas in the fewest possible words. The idea of time passing rapidly has admirably been compressed in four lines, and the idea of all the beauty and charm of the woman coming to nothing has also been stated in only a few words. Some of the lines have an epigrammatic quality, for example:

- *Thy beauty shall no more be found;*
  *Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound*
  *My echoing song.*
- *The grave's a fine and private place,*
  *But none I think do there embrace.*

Even the two opening lines of the poem have an **epigrammatic** quality.

## Important stanzas for explanation

1. *I would love you ten years …….. Jews*

   These are very amusing lines, like those which follow. The lover says that he would have started loving his mistress from a time ten years before the Flood. This Flood is mentioned in the Bible and is believed to have occurred in the year 2354 B.C. The conversion of the Jews is expected to take place only a little before Doomsday. This means that the lover would have started loving nearly 2500 years ago, and the mistress would be free to refuse his love till a little before Doomsday. According to the calculations of a critic, the period of the lover's love would extend over 30,600 years. The phrase 'the conversion of the Jews' implies impossibility.

2. *Let us roll all our strength the iron…… gates of life*

   Several interpretations of the word 'ball' have been suggested by critics. But the most satisfactory interpretation is to regard the ball as a cannon-ball which crashes through the iron gates of a town. The whole idea in these lines, therefore, is that the lovers would invade life and time with the violence of their love-making. Their love-making is not to be of the ordinary, common kind which is generally characteristic of weak, anaemic people. The passion of the lovers in the poem is intense and ardent. They will tolerate no obstacle in their way, but would extract the maximum possible pleasure from then love-making; and their pleasure, like their passion, would be of a fierce kind.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

7. When was Andrew Marvell born?
8. What is the main theme of Andrew Marvell's poem, *To His Coy Mistress*?

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## 2.6 SUMMARY

- John Shakespeare, the father of William Shakespeare was a man of meagre means. But his fortune turned in 1557 after he married Mary Arden, the daughter of a prosperous farmer, and earned him a house, fifty acres of land and money in the form of dowry.
- Shakespeare's sonnet series contains 154 poems. It was first published in quarto version in 1609. Usually the sonnet sequence is structurally divided into three segments. Sonnets I-CXXVI (1-126) are addressed to a young male.
- Sonnets CXXVII-CLII (127-152) are usually addressed as the Dark Lady sonnets. Thematically the sonnets deal with love, beauty, time and death. Each sonnet contains three quatrains and a couplet. They are written in iambic pentameter.
- The Shakespearean sonnet is also called the English sonnet as opposed to the Petrarchan sonnets that originated in Italy. Some two hundred years before Shakespeare wrote sonnets, the Petrarchan sonnet was introduced by Petrarch. Unlike a Shakespearian sonnet, a Petrarchan sonnet has an eight-line stanza (octave) and a six-line stanza (sestet).
- 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds', popularly known as Sonnet 116 was first published in 1609. The form and structure of Sonnet 116 make it an example of Shakespearean sonnet. In the beginning of the sonnet, the poet states that he does not want to come in the way of the 'marriage of true minds'.
- This sonnet states that true love stands firm even in changing times and cannot be fooled by it. It also tells that though outer beauty might change with changing times but true love outgrows everything and never dies.
- In the couplet, the speaker attests to his certainty that love is as he says: if his statements can be proved to be error, he declares, he must never have written a word, and no man can ever have been in love.
- The period of 1625 to 1660 is generally known as the age of Milton in English literary history. This period marks the end of the Renaissance. It is remarkable for the growth of Reformation and Puritanism.
- John Milton was born on 9 December 1608, in London. He was the second child of John and Sara. John Milton Sr, was a legal secretary and also a composer of church music which was how Milton developed his lifelong love of music.

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- *On His Blindness* is an autobiographical account of John Milton in which he meditates on the loss of his sight. The sonnet is divided into an eight-line 'octave' and a six-line 'sestet'.
- The tragedy of Milton's life is that he lost his sight at a comparatively early age due to which he feels that he has failed miserably to utilize his talent.
- John Donne (1572-1631) was born into a religious Catholic family in Elizabethan England in 1572. He was an extremely devout man who was persecuted as he was a Catholic living in Anglican England.
- Metaphysical poetry is a kind of poetry that lays stress on the belief that the logical aspect rules the emotional; it is signified by sarcasm, absurdity and extraordinary comparisons of unlike features; the latter often being fanciful, to the limit of peculiarity.
- The neo-platonic concept of physical and religious love was seen as a manifestation of the same desire. In the *Symposium,* physical love is described by Plato as the lowest rung of a ladder.
- *The Good-Morrow* is a metaphysical poem consisting of twenty-one lines, divided into three stanzas. The poet speaks to the woman he loves as they wake up after spending the night together.
- The poem starts with the speaker characteristically sleeping in a cave, just like Plato's analogy. Though, he is lastly released by his woman who makes him go into the daylight, or *The Good-Morrow*.
- The poem seems to conclude on a note of some uncertainty: 'If … or ...' Perchance after all Donne cannot any longer keep up the vanity that nothing will come to change their love or encroach upon it.
- The son of a priest, the poet Andrew Marvell was born on 31 March 1621, in the church house of a vineyard near Hull of Yorkshire, England. He was the fourth child and the first son of his parents.
- Marvell's love-poems constitute an important division of his lyric poetry, the other two important divisions being poems dealing with the theme of religion and those dealing with the theme of nature.
- In the poem *To His Coy Mistress,* a lover addresses his beloved who refuses to grant him sexual favours on account of her modesty and her sense of honour. The lover says that her coyness or sexual reluctance would have been justified if they had enough space and time at their disposal.

## 2.7 KEY TERMS

- **Satire:** It refers to the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.
- **Paradox:** It refers to a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.

- **Enlightenment:** It (also known as the Age of *Enlightenment*) was an intellectual movement which dominated the world of ideas in Europe in the 18th century.
- **Syllogism:** It is a kind of logical argument that applies deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more propositions that are asserted or assumed to be true.

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## 2.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. There are 154 sonnets in Shakespeare's sonnet series.
2. The two kinds of sonnets are English sonnet and Petrarchan sonnet.
3. The entire age of Milton is dominated by the civil war.
4. *On His Blindness* is an autobiographical account of John Milton in which he meditates on the loss of his sight.
5. Metaphysical poetry is a kind of poetry that lays stress on the belief that the logical aspect rules the emotional; it is signified by sarcasm, absurdity and extraordinary comparisons of unlike features; the latter often being fanciful, to the limit of peculiarity.
6. Some of the factors which influenced metaphysical poets were the discovery of the new sciences and the immoral scenario of the seventeenth century England.
7. Andrew Marvell was born on 31 March 1621, in the church house of a vineyard near Hull of Yorkshire, England.
8. *To His Coy Mistress* is a love-poem in which the speaker offers a strong plea for the beloved to soften towards him and to relax her rigid attitude of Puritanical reluctance and to grant him sexual favours.

## 2.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Shakespearian sonnets.
2. What do you understand by Neo-platonic conception of love?
3. How does the structure of the poem, *The Good-Morrow*, enhances the poet's message?
4. How is Andrew Marvell's contributions to literature classified?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. How has Shakespeare portrayed true love in his Sonnet CXVI? Discuss in detail.
2. Critically analyse John Milton's *On His Blindness*.

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3. Why is John Donne considered a metaphysical poet? Write a detailed summary of the poem *The Good-Morrow* by John Donne.
4. Describe Marvell as a poet of nature. How has he portrayed this peculiarity in his poem, *To His Coy Mistress*?

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# UNIT 3 BRITISH POETRY–II

NOTES

**Structure**



## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

Poetry, if simply put, can be said to be any literary work which is used to express feelings and ideas. The use of a distinct style and the play of words to form a pleasing rhythm makes reading poetry a very pleasant experience. This genre of literature has evolved over the years showing a marked difference in the works of modern poets and ancient poets. The Victorian Era marked the beginning of English poetry, which continued through the Romantic period and reached an all-time high in the eighteenth century. Drama was also popularized in this era. It was represented through performance by various actors on stage, before an audience, which led to a collective form of reception.

This unit also deals with poetry and describes the famous poems of Matthew Arnold, Browning, Owen and Eliot.

## 3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Distinguish between the various forms of poetry
- Analyse Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*

- Assess Robert Browning's *Porphyria's Lover* as a monologue
- Discuss T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* as a symbolic poem

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## 3.2 FORMS OF POETRY

There are various forms of poetry that have emerged over a period of time.

### 1. Ode

The root of the word 'ode' lies in the Greek word 'aeidein' which means 'to sing' or 'to chant'. This form is a part of the lyric poetry tradition. An ode is a poem that has a formal poetic diction, sometimes addressed to an absent person, or an object, and dealing with a subject which is serious is nature.

An ode usually has three segments: strophe, antistrophe, and epode. In the earlier days odes were accompanied by music and dance. The performance involved two choruses or individuals. The first chorus / individual recital or singing of the strophe, followed by the second chorus or individual reciting /singing of the antistrophe and then both together singing the epode. Romantic poets used this lyrical form to express their strongest sentiments.

There are three varieties of odes, distinguished by form and structure: the Pindaric, the Horatian, and the Irregular.

The Pindaric ode is named after the classical Greek poet Pindar, who is acknowledged with introducing the ode form. It was performed by a chorus and accompanied by dancers. These performances consisted of strophe, antistrophe, and epode. Pindaric odes were performed to commemorate victories related to athletic pursuits.

William Wordsworth's poem, *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* is an excellent example of a Pindaric ode in English. It begins with a formal opening, the middle segment mirrors the opening; and the ending—that is of varying length—is composed with a variety of metrical structures:

*There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,*
*The earth and every common sight*
*To me did seem*
*Apparelled in celestial light,*
*The glory and the freshness of a dream.*
*It is not now as it hath been of yore;—*
*Turn wheresoe'er I may,*
*By night or day,*
*The things which I have seen I now can see no more.*

The Horatian ode owes its name to the Roman poet Horace. It is more informal, less elaborate and more tranquil and meditative in tone than the Pindaric ode. This

form is more apt when one is reading or writing for personal pleasure, rather than for theatrical performances. The Horatian ode has a regular pattern of stanza. An example is Allen Tate's poem *Ode to the Confederate Dead*:

*Row after row with strict impunity*
*The headstones yield their names to the element,*
*The wind whirrs without recollection;*
*In the riven troughs the splayed leaves*
*Pile up, of nature the casual sacrament*
*To the seasonal eternity of death;*
*Then driven by the fierce scrutiny*
*Of heaven to their election in the vast breath,*
*They sough the rumour of mortality.*

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The third variety of ode, the irregular ode, is formal in manner and has the characteristics of the classical ode in terms of its thematic value. One of the well-known examples in this form is, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* written by John Keats. The other examples of this kind of ode are Robert Lowell's *Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, and Robert Creeley's *America*. It is important to mention here that the 'qasida' form found in Persian poetry has similarity with the ode form.

### 2. Lyric

Lyric is a form of poetry that addresses emotional and personal matters. We will talk more about it in the section on lyric poetry.

### 3. Haiku

A 'haiku' is a very short poem. It consists of only seventeen syllables. Its subject matter revolves around a natural object and the poem's aesthetic appeal is of great importance. In a 'haiku', one does not encounter a distinction between form and content, a feature that is common in western literature. The writer becomes a part of the scene s/he is representing.

According to some experts, the length of a 'haiku' is usually the tenure of a single respiration. For example let's take the 'haiku' below:

*yellow leaves*
*on branches overhead –*
*now falling*

These lines narrate the specific moment that captures the fall of leaves from the tree and touching the ground. With the exhaustion of breath the moment has elapsed. This very short form depicts the short-lived momentary experiences of human lives. Hence, the interlinking of form and content in a 'haiku'.

The subject matter in a 'haiku' is mundane and commonplace, something that is perceived by the sensory organs of the author, but it turns out to be an awe-inspiring experience. It usually lacks the general rhetorical devices like rhyming,

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simile and metaphor. Juxtaposition of two seemingly different ideas is found which have their connection in the essence or theme. A 'haiku' is mostly descriptive - describing something that has caught the poet's fancy, and is not intellectually binding.

In the English literary scenario, poets began to experiment with the 'haiku' from early 1900s. As English is a different language than Japanese and because the contact and interaction with pristine nature is different, that's why the English haiku emerged in its own way. In English, a 'haiku' is usually around ten to fourteen syllables. The English language 'haiku' does not follow the Japanese syllable count.

During the early twentieth century, a number of mainstream poets, like Ezra Pound wrote a five-seven-five syllable form poem which they called 'hokku'. Poets like W. H. Auden, Donald Hall, Ruth Stone, John Ashbery and others too composed haiku without adhering to the Japanese form, content or subject matter. Richard Wright, the African-American novelist, composed many 'haikus' towards the fag end of his life. The following is an example from his book *Haiku: This Other World*:

*Whitecaps on the bay:*
*A broken signboard banging*
*In the April wind.*

In 1956, the first English-language Haiku Society was founded in America. Robert Spiess is one of the prominent American 'haiku' writers. One of his 'haikus' from *Red Moon Anthology* reads like this:

*an aging willow—*
*its image unsteady*
*in the flowing stream*

Some English-language haiku magazines are *Modern Haiku, Frogpond, Mayfly, The Heron's Nest* etc.

Monoku is a one-line variation of the three-line standard format. One example is:

*pig and i spring rain*
*Another example is a 'haiku' of four lines:*
*she watches*
*satisfied after love*
*he lies*
*looking up at nothing*

Some prominent contemporary 'haiku' writers in English are Lenard D. Moore, Alan Pizzarelli, Paul Reps et al.

### 4. Tanka

Tanka is a type of Japanese poetry. It is the oldest form of poetry in Japan, having originated in the seventh century. Tanka means 'short song'. It is composed of five lines. The first and third line consists of five syllables and the rest of the three lines

are of seven syllables. It is a thirty-one syllable composition. One example of Tanka is the poem *To live is to break* written by Ueda Miyoji:

*To live is to break*
*One's heart for the sake of love;*
*A couple of doves,*
*Beaks touching on their way,*
*Are stepping out in the sun*

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Tanka usually adheres to a 5,7,5,7,7 syllable count. The tanka's varied scope and spectrum of expression made it ideal for communication and became popular in the royal court as well as among the masses. The Japanese tanka has a resemblance with the English sonnet form in terms of subject matter. It starts off with a serious matter and by the time it reaches the concluding lines there is a transition in the tone.

Lady Akazone Emon and Yosano are a couple of women poets who compose in the tanka form. *The Tale of Genji* composed by Akiko and Lady Murasaki Shikibu contains over 400 tankas.

In the English language there are a few tanka writers. Some of them are Amy Lowell, Kenneth Rexroth, Sam Hamill, Cid Corman, and Carolyn Kizer. Some tankas available in translation are *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese, One Hundred More Poems from the Japanese* and *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems* by Ono Komachi and Izumi Shikibu, etc. The modern English-language tankas are quite different in form, technique, and subject matter, in comparison to their Japanese counterparts. They do not follow any rigid rules, even composing tankas in free-verse.

The following tanka written by Ruby Spriggs deals with traditional subject matters of love, sorrow, nature etc.

*a sudden loud noise*
*all the pigeons of Venice*
*at once fill the sky*
*that is how it felt when your hand*
*accidentally touched mine*

Let us consider another tanka, Geraldine Clinton Little's poem:

*ah, summer, summer,*
*how quickly you fade. I cut*
*rusted zinnias;*
*place them on a glassed table-*
*top, as if time could double*

This tanka is more complicated in structure and has three parts and makes use of enjambment. Robert Kusch's tanka is more minimalist in approach:

*Lightning on*
*the horizon*
*my child*
*takes a huge*
*bite from a pear*

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## 5. Jintishi

In Chinese language the word 'jintishi' means 'modern-style poetry'. But one can trace back the usage of this form of poetry to AD 222-589. This poetic form is based on a series of set tonal arrangements which are modelled on the four tones existing in classical Chinese language. Every couplet consists of the level, rising, falling and entering tones. There exists a predominant grammatical relationship among the words used in the poem.

The two basic varieties of 'jintishi' are *lüshi* meaning 'regulated verse', and *jueju meaning* 'truncated verse'. *Lüshi* can be further sub-categorised into two forms:

- *Wulü: is* an eight-line poem with five characters in each line.
- *Qilü:* is an eight-line poem with seven characters to in each line.

*Jueju* can also be sub-categorised into the following two forms:

- *Wujue:* is a four-line poem with five characters in each line.
- *Qijue:* is a four-line poem with seven characters in each line.

The poems incorporate vibrant poetic diction that is full of allusion ranging from the mundane to history and politics. One of the greatest writers of this form was Du Fu, who wrote during the eighth century.

## 6. Ghazal

A 'ghazal' is a form of poetry which is found in the verses of Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages. It is usually composed of five to fifteen rhyming couplets. There is a refrain at the end of every second line. Each couplet is complete in itself. It is a composite whole in terms of subject matter and thought. A 'ghazal' usually deals with love or God. The last couplet usually bears the name of the poet who has composed the 'ghazal'. The form is ancient, originating in sixth century Arabic verse. In its style and content it is a genre which has proved capable of an extraordinary variety of expression around its central themes of love and separation. It is one of the principal poetic forms which the Indo-Perso-Arabic civilisation offered to the eastern Islamic world. The ghazal spread into South Asia in the 12th century under the influence of the new Islamic Sultanate courts and Sufi mystics. Although the ghazal is most prominently a form of Urdu poetry, today it is found in the poetry of many languages of Indian sub-continent.

## 7. Rubai

Rubai is also referred as Rubaiyat in Urdu-Persian poetic form. Each stanza of the 'rubai' is of four lines. And every first, second and fourth line rhymes. The first three lines contains all the ornamentations and poetic devices and the fourth line completes the meaning and the poem. In an 'Interlocking Rubaiyat', the third line of each stanza rhymes with the first, second and fourth line of the next stanza. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* is one of the most popular rubaiyats.

## 3.2.1 Genres of Poetry

A poetic genre is a classification of poetry based on the subject matter, style, or other broader literary characteristics. Described below are some common genres of poetry.

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### 1. Narrative poetry

A narrative is a story and any poem that tells a story is called 'narrative' poetry. Like every story, a narrative poem has a beginning providing the background of the story, a middle that narrates the course of action and a conclusion that tells how the story ends. Poems of this genre involve events, characters and actions.

Narrative poetry is the oldest form of poetry, having its origin in oral history. Before the advent of paper and the art of writing, people used to recall and narrate important events and lives of historical figures through songs. The incorporation of music, rhyme and rhythm into the narrative made it easier to recall; thus, laying the foundation for narrative poetry.

Narrative poems may have many characters but there are many verses which have only one character. There are some poems where the setting is not directly or clearly laid down, but it is just hinted upon. It might not always be related to external agencies and the focus can well be on internal dilemmas. Poems of this genre include epics, ballads, idylls and romances.

An 'epic' is a long narrative poem which talks at length about some serious heroic achievement which is important from the perspective of culture or state. For example the epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—both composed by Homer—are based on Greek mythology. Ramayana and Mahabharata written by Valmiki and Veda Vyasa respectively hold a significant value in the Indian context. The oldest known surviving epic is the old English text *Beowulf*. Virgil, Dante Alighieri, John Milton, Giovanni Boccaccio are some of the well-known epic writers. One can find epics written in modern times as well, like, *Genesis: An Epic Poem* by Frederic Turner (1988), *Omeros* by Derek Walcott (1990), *The Descent of Alette* by Alice Notley (1996).

A 'ballad' is an orally transmitted song which narrates a story. It is mostly restricted to folk people who are literate or semi-literate. Though one can trace back the use of ballads to The Middle Ages, yet the first attempt to record it in written and preserve it came in as late as the eighteenth century in England with Thomas Percy publishing his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765)*. The literary ballad is also a form of song narrative but it is influenced by the traditional ballad in form, language and essence. Some popular examples include S. T. Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* and Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Goal*. With the advent of the twentieth century, ballad lost its appeal but made its way into the music scenario through Jazz, Blues, Pop and Rock in the form of slow, sentimental love songs. Johnny Green's *Body and Soul*, Cole Porter's *Every Time We Say Goodbye* and the Beatles *The Ballad of John and Yoko* belong to this category.

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**Idyll:** In subject matter and treatment these poems are completely different from epics. Idylls are short pastoral poems dealing with the regular and mundane life of the country folk or the peasants.

Romance is a form of narrative that was considered a part of the high culture of Medieval and Early Modern Europe. They depict tales of the aristocratic, chivalrous, and adventurous knights who go on quests. In most of these poems the Arthurian legends have been used.

Some narrative poetry like Robert Browning's *The King and the Book* is a verse novel. It is a long narrative of 21,000 lines containing a lot of drama.

M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* identifies 'epic' or 'heroic poem' as a work which is a '…long verse narrative on a serious subject told in formal and elevated style and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or … the human race'.

Epics can be classified into:

**(a) Traditional epics:** These are also known as 'primary epics' or 'folk epics'. Traditional epics are not credited to any specific author(s) because they are just a written version of what has been orally passed down to generations. They were recorded in writing form centuries after they originated and became popular in oral culture, an example being the old English epic *Beowulf* or the Greek epic *Iliad.*

During their original composition they were designed to be crooned along with music. The opening lines of *Iliad* by Homer says:

*—sing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles…*

The divine, quasi-divine and other non-earthly elements reflect an inherent interest in human life. As Homer inquires in the *Iliad* (line 9):

*Which of the gods incited these two men to fight?*

These writings are always of national importance, highlighting a significant national figure or an incident and tend to have a bias towards the culture they represent. They are based on myth, history, legend, folk tale and carry with them values for society.

In *Turbulent Times* there is a general lack of stability on the social and political fronts, a struggle for survival continues and a war is fought in order to restore peace and order. *Song of Roland* or *La Chanson de Roland* in old French, narrates the story of the Muslim invasion of Europe and epicenter of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is the Trojan War.

**(b) Literary epics:** The scholarships of these epics are attributed to one author, like Virgil's *Aecia* in Latin or John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) in English.

Apart from these elementary differences both forms of epic follow the same conventions. They are as follows:

- The central theme is always serious.
- The language used is often oratorical in style and decorous. For example, Achilles is addressed as 'Son of Peleus'.

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- The epic hero is always given a demigod stature; hence attaining vital significance and importance. Achilles was born to the sea-nymph Thetis. Goddess Aphrodite was the mother of Aeneus.
- The geographical setting of an epic always covers a large canvas. For example, in the *Paradise Lost* the story involves Heaven, Earth and Hell.
- Gods and supernatural elements are active participants in the progression of events. Typically, there are two simultaneous plots. The chief characters are epitomes of ideal human behaviour and conduct. Beowulf represented selflessness; Odysseus stands for endurance; Achilles possesses virtues and Adam advocates Christian love.
- The consequences of the performance of the hero have an effect on a large number of people and at times an entire race. For example, the future of the human race is under threat in *Paradise Lost.*
- The protagonist's quest for the goal makes him undertake a very difficult journey, sometimes making him go through the underworld: both Aeneas and Odysseus undertake journeys to the realm of death.
- The epics start 'in media res', i.e., in the middle of the action. The circumstances leading to the current course of action is conveyed through flashbacks.
- The epic usually employs the technique of invoking a muse at the very beginning of the poem and asking for her blessings to carry forward creativity with perfection. Milton in his *Paradise Lost* has used three invocations each at the starting of Book I, III and IX.
- The action performed by the hero is so powerful and extraordinary that it is difficult for an ordinary human being to undertake and perform it, for example, Achilles' achievements in the Trojan War.
- Every epic employs a number of extended similes, known as epic similes, to produce a greater effect in the storytelling.
- Epics usually contain a catalogue of characters which has figures from royalty and warrior groups and is devoid of commoners.
- Epic is usually an act in a mythical past whose chronological sequence of events is more or less known by everyone.

Apart from this, the term 'epic' has been applied to those works which invoke the spirit of a classical epic but deviate in many ways, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*; Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) chronicles the events of a day in an ordinary man's life but it is fashioned after Homer's *The Odyssey*, thus gaining an epic status. The term and concept of bourgeois epic was introduced by George Lukas. He considered any novel which depicted the capitalist life and society encompassing all aspects of capitalist world as a 'bourgeois epic'. 'Mock epic' or 'Mode heroic' is a form of

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satire. It uses the elevated ground and the style of a classical epic but it has a trivial subject matter as its central theme. This form gained popularity in England during the neo-classical period. Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* narrates the cutting of Miss Arabella Fermor's lock of hair by Lord Petre without her permission is an example of mock-heroic poem.

The term 'epic' finds its reflection in cinema as well. In the context of cinema, a film is categorised as 'epic' if it has explored the multiple facts of human existence in a magnificent and ambitious drama. There are various kinds of epic sub-genres in movies: historical epics, religious epics, romantic epics, war epics, crime epics etc. *Cabiria* (1914), *Gone With The Wind* (1939), *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), *The Godfather* (1972), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *Titanic* (1997), *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) are some notable films in the epic genre.

### 2. Dramatic poetry

Dramatic poetry uses the verse form to narrate the story of an individual or elaborate some situation. It can also be described as a drama written in poetry form where the characters involved carry on verbal exchanges in verse and their conversations rhyme unlike a normal discourse, which is prosaic.

Dramatic poetry appears in various forms like Poetic Drama, Closet Drama, Dramatic Monologue. Poetic Drama is also referred to as Verse Drama. This form is very old. The ancient dramas composed in both European and non-European cultures used verse as the medium to compose and communicate drama. Tragedies were mostly composed in verse form starting from Greek tragedies and continuing even at the time of Shakespeare; long after prose had made itself popular and common. Eventually prose became the vehicle for less serious compositions like comedies, and as a symbol of low life, as in Shakespeare's work.

Even during the seventeenth century domestic tragedies like *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608) or *A Woman Killed With Kindness* (1603) by Thomas Heywood were composed in blank verse. But George Lillo's middle-class tragedy written in prose—*The London Merchant or The History of George Barnwell*—turned out to be a turning point, bringing in a departure and a warning signal for the verse dramas which were still being composed by Lillo's contemporaries like Thomson (*Sophonisba,* 1730) or Johnson (*Irene,* 1749).

Eventually prose, the language of the masses, took over as the language of plays. Some verse dramas, like Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* (1886), Tennyson's *Becket* (1893) stirred some interest, but the public's interest was gradually being captivated by prose dramatists like Sheridan Knowles. Stephen Philips was probably the last major nineteenth-century verse dramatist who tried to mesmerise the public with his blank-verse poetic dramas.

In the early phase of the twentieth century, poetic drama revived itself after coming in contact with the French movements of 'Symbolism' and 'Realism' and the Japanese 'No Plays'. J. M. Synge and Sean O' Casey, the prominent figures of Irish literary revival, wrote plays whose language was prose but had poetic appeal to them and followed a coherent dramatic structure.

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In the English literary scenario, The *Tragedy of Non* (1908) by John Marefield Flecher's *Hassan* (1923) and Gordon Bottomley's *Gruach* (1923) saw a revival in poetic drama. But it is T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) which is the most prominent example of poetic drama of the twentieth century employing free verse and the concept of symbolism. W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood incorporated criticism, humour and satire in their works.

William Vaughan Moody and Maxwell Anderson tried to incorporate poetic drama into the American stage but they did not gain much popularity. There were a few achievements at the individual level, for example when Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1953) was broadcast on radio.

The Poets Theatre was founded in 1951 in Cambridge and it became the flagship organisation to commission and produce poetic dramas. Its founder Richard Eberhart successfully staged his poetic drama under this banner, *The Apparition* (1951) and *Visionary Farm* (1952). The 1950s and 1960s saw performances of adaptations of Anouilh and Giraudoux. Samuel Beckett and Ionesco were well-received—critically and commercially—both in the UK and the US and they incorporated surrealism into their poetic dramas. But for the last few years, poetic dramas have been more synonymous with experimental dramas.

The other form of dramatic poetry is 'closet drama'. These are also dramas in verse but meant to be read rather then acted or performed on stage and among the classical writers, Seneca's works are in this category. In the English literary scenario, closet dramas were popular in the nineteenth century. There was a conscious attempt made by the poets of the period to revive the dramatic standards because melodrama and burlesque had populated the stage. Attempts were made by Byron in *Manfred* 1817, and by Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound*—which was based on the Greek tragedy of Prometheus.

Another form of dramatic verse is the 'dramatic monologue'. Dramatic monologue is a lyric poem in which only one person speaks (hence, monologue) but it is implied that he is addressing his speech to a single person or many people around him who is /are silent listeners. As the protagonist speaks, he unfolds distinctive characteristic features of his own and provides the reader with an insight to judge him on certain parameters. Every dramatic monologue opens at a crucial juncture of the narrative.

For example, in *The Bishop Orders His Tomb* the Bishop is waiting for his impending death as he unfolds his past secrets. In *My Last Duchess* the Duke reveals his autocratic nature while narrating his 'last duchess' to the person who has come with a proposal for his second wife. But in *Caliban Upon Setabos* there is no listener but the character is revealed through the monologue and the poem has a dramatic opening. Thus, the listener can be optional but the rest of the features are mandatory for a dramatic monologue. M. H. Abrams points out that although Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* has a few salient features of a dramatic monologue: a silent listener, an opening at an important juncture—yet it is not one, because the poet and the speaker are the same person and the monologue does not focus only on the speaker's 'temperament' but moves around his experiences, memories, reflections etc.

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*Ulysses* (1842) by Lord Tennyson has the distinction of being the first proper dramatic monologue. The other prominent writers of this form are Matthew Arnold (*Dover Beach*), Robert Browning (*Men and Women*), DG Roselti (*The Blessed Damozel*), Robert Frost, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.

### 3. Satirical poetry

Verse can be used for attacking a person or idea in the form of satire. The word 'satire' is derived from the Latin 'satira', meaning 'medley'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines satire as … 'a poem or in modern use sometimes a prose composition, in which prevailing vices or follies are held up to ridicule'.

Satire has permeated the literary scene since time immemorial. In the Classical age, Aristophanes, the dramatist, criticised Socrates and the judicial system of Athens in his *The Clouds* (423 BC) and *The Wasps* (422 BC). The Roman poets Horace and Juvenal became inspirations for their successors, leading to the establishment of two distinct forms of satire—Horatian satire and Juvenalian satire. Horation satire is dignified and polished in its presentation whereas Juvenalian satire is crude and scathing.

The tradition of satire in English literature was introduced by Chaucer. Influenced by Chaucer many wrote poets satirical poems: John Skelton (1460-1529) who was the tutor of Henry VIII, wrote *The Bowge of Courte* (1498). It was a satire on the functioning of the court of Henry VII. In this work the poet used the octosyllabic meter.

During the Elizabethan period a few notable poets like George Gascoigne wrote satirical verse. Most of the other satirists like George Gascoigne, David Lodge, and Joseph Hall experimented with prose forms. But satire form reached its zenith in the seventeenth and eighteenth century England. Satires were composed in both prose and verse during this period. Jonathan Swift, Henry Fielding, Richard Steel, John Wilmot, John Dryden and Alexander Pope were significant contributors in English while Voltaire and Moliere wrote in French.

John Dryden, the first poet Laureate of England, wrote his satirical poem *Mac Flecknoe* in 1682. The subject matter was directed towards Thomas Shadwell, his political rival, a member of the Whig Party. Dryden had subtitled the poem as *A Satire on the True Blue Protestant Poet, TS*.

Alexander Pope's first major attempt in satirical poetry took the shape of *An Essay in Criticism,* first published in 1711. Though it is an essay, it is written in verse form. It is written in a heroic couplet; a form of rhyme used in epics, having lines in iambic pentameter. Pope's criticism is directed less towards the authors and more towards the critics.

The other non-English poets who earned fame as great satirical poets are Ignacy Krasicki and Manuel Maria Barbosa du Bocage, the latter popularly known as Bocage.

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## 4. Lyric poetry

In Greece during ancient period any poem which was accompanied by a lyre (a musical instrument) was called a Lyric. Lyric Poetry is an umbrella term for any poem which is short and conveys personal feelings opinions has a single speaker and possesses a song like quality. It could be elegy, ode, sonnet song or hymn.

Lyrics in Latin literature are found as early as in first century BC by Catullus and Horace. In the Middle Ages in England 'lyric' poetry manifested itself through folk songs, hymns (a lyric with religious subject), songs of the troubadours (the poet and musicians of aristocratic origin in France). Lyric found its existence in other non-English counter parts of the globe.

'Eihazal' originated in Persia around tenth century. Thematically this poetic form always centers on love and contains couplets. Omar Khayyam, Amir Khusrau, Alisher Navoi are proponents of this form. In China, 'sanqu' poetry, written in regional dialects gained prominence. Petrarch developed sonnet style in Italy which was later used by many writers. The word 'sonnet' in Italian means 'little song', a fourteen line rhyming song following the iambic pentameter. Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two sections an 'octet' (first eight lines) and a 'sestet' (last six lines). 'Bhajan' in the Indian context refers to short religious poems; some exponents of these writings were Tulsidas, Kabir, and Surdas.

Lyric poem in sixteenth century gained prominence through sonnets composed by Sir Philip Sydney and Shakespeare. The early Romantics as well as the late Romantics like Wordsworth, Shelly, Byron, and Keats also used this form in various experimental ways. Lord Tennyson was another major poet during the Victorian era. His poetry collection like *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) was well appreciated. *In Memorium* (1850) and *Maud* (1855) both written by Tennyson contains 133 and 27 lyrics respectively. There have been a few experiments with this genre in the modern period as well.

## 5. Prose poetry

Prose poetry is a poem written as prose. It is a mixed genre that possesses the qualities of both prose and poetry. It is different from the micro-fiction or very short story. Many critics point out that it qualifies as poetry because of its succinct and terse length, use of metaphor, and special attention given in selecting language.

The birthplace of prose poetry is nineteenth-century France. Some prominent names in this form are Aloysius Bertrand (*Gespard de la Nuit* in 1842), Charles Baudelaire (*Petis Poemes en Prose*, 1869) Arthur Rimbaud and Stéphane Mallarmé et al. This genre latter gained popularity among writers of other parts of the world like English (Oscar Wilde, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Allen Ginsberg, Seamus Heaney, Russell Edson, Charles Simic, Robert Bly, James Wright); French (Francis Ponge); Polish (Boleslaw Prus); Portuguese (Fernando Pessoa, Mário Cesariny, Mário De Sá-Carneiro, Eugénio de Andrade, Al Berto, Alexandre O'Neill, José Saramago, António Lobo Antunes); Spanish (Octavio Paz, Ángel Crespo); Russian; and Japanese.

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Examples of prose poetry can be found in the King James' version of the *Bible* in the *Book of Psalms*. In 1988 came out the long work written by Heathcote Williams called *Whale Nation* that is a prose poem and revolves around the celebration of whale life.

The following is an example of a prose poem:

**The Port**

*A Port is a delightful place of rest for a soul weary of life's battles. The vastness of the sky, the mobile architecture of the clouds, the changing coloration of the sea, the twinkling of the lights, are a prism marvelously fit to amuse the eyes without ever tiring them. The slender shapes of the ships with their complicated rigging, to which the surge lends harmonious oscillations, serve to sustain within the soul the taste for rhythm and beauty. Also, and above all, for the man who of mysterious and aristocratic pleasure in contemplating, while lying on the belvedere or resting his elbows on the jetty-head, all these movements of men who are leaving and men who are returning, of those who still have the strength to will, the desire to travel or to enrich themselves.*

**- Charles Baudelaire**

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Define an 'ode'.
2. What is dramatic poetry?
3. What is a 'narrative' poetry?

## 3.3 MATTHEW ARNOLD: *DOVER BEACH*

Matthew Arnold was born in 1822 at Laleham in England. He was educated in Winchester and Oxford. In 1841, he won an open scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. His poem *Cromwell* won the Newdigate prize in 1843. In 1845, he started teaching at Rugby. In the same year, after a short interlude of teaching at Rugby, he was elected as the Fellow of Oriel College, distinction at Oxford. In 1847, he became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, Lord President of the Council of UK. He remained loyal to France and French connection throughout his life. He died in 1888.

He represented his age in a profound manner by being the true voice of sensitive Victorian intellectual brooding over inevitable loss of faith and the meaning of life. Nineteenth century Hellenism, romantic interest in folk tales and legends, the preference for solitary mediation in evocative surroundings—these elements give distinctive character to his poetry. His first volume was *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, which was published in 1849 anonymously but was immediately withdrawn from circulation. In 1852, Arnold published his second volume of poems,

*Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. But he did not reprint the long title poem because situations 'in which suffering finds no vent in action, in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance, in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done' are not fit subjects for poetry. 'What are the eternal objects of poetry and at all times?' Arnold asked in his 1853 preface and he replied, 'they are actions, human actions, possessing an inherent interest in themselves and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet'. Arnold is as great an exponent of Victorian elegiac as Tennyson. According to him, the main duty of a writer is to present his criticism of life in whatever medium he can as richly, luminously and broadly as possible. In his poem *Dover Beach*, he reflects the Victorian problems. Loss of faith is given its most memorable utterance; public values have disappeared and all that is left are the private affections, little society of love and friendship. His two best known poems are *The Scholar Gipsy* (1853), which is about the poet himself and his generations, and *Thyrsis* (1866), which is an elegy to Arthur Hugh Clough who died in 1861.

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## 3.3.1 *Dover Beach*: Text and Interpretation

### Text

*The sea is calm tonight.*
*The tide is full, the moon lies fair*
*Upon the straits; on the French coast the light*
*Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,*
*Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.*
*Come to the window, sweet is the night air!*
*Only, from the long line of spray*
*Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,*
*Listen! you hear the grating roar*
*Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,*
*At their return, up the high strand,*
*Begin, and cease, and then again begin,*
*With tremulous cadence slow, and bring*
*The eternal note of sadness in.*

### Interpretation

*Dover Beach* is one of the most admired of Arnold's poems today. *Dover Beach* is the Victorian lyric of painful doubt and disorientation. First published in 1867, this poem has always been regarded as a representative poem of Arnold, typical of his outlook on life. The general decline of faith and melancholy constitute the theme of the poem. Samuel Barber, an American composer of orchestral, opera, choral, and piano music, composed a musical setting to it which has been recorded.

Arnold tries to show the lack of faith and certitude in a world which is materially expanding. The poem opens with an image of the sea, which is a recurring feature in most English Literature. As we know that England is an island, the sea is

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never far away. But the sea can mean different things to different poets and writers. For Byron, in his poem *Ocean*, the sea is an angry potent force that punishes man for his pettiness. The sea can be bountiful; it can be benevolent as it brings 'the sailor home from the sea'. It can also separate lovers as it does in the context of Arnold's poem *To Marguerite*. Let us now see how sea is handled in *Dover Beach*.

Although Arnold completed the poem *Dover Beach* in 1851 or 1852, it only appeared in a collection entitled *New Poems*, published in London. In fact, a manuscript of part of *Dover Beach* dates back to June 1851 when Arnold went on his honeymoon with his wife Lucy, after they were married on 10 June 1851. Nature is at its best as Lucy and Arnold look at the moon and the calm sea, and on this clear night can see the light on the French coast. Yet this perfect setting does not evoke any romantic feelings in the poet. On the other hand, the mood is of melancholy and nostalgia for the loss of faith. Once again, Arnold outlines the human condition and feels that love alone can somewhat lessen the pain of isolation and suffering.

One of Arnold's most celebrated lyrics, the tone of this poem is almost conversational.

According to literary critic J. D. Jump, *Dover Beach* 'is a short poem, but it embraces a great range and depth of significance'. What is Arnold's main pre-occupation in this poem? He ruminates on the loss of religious faith and the subsequent vulnerability of human beings to the sufferings and pains of life. It is only through a satisfying love-relationship that one can wrest a meaningful existence in an otherwise meaningless and hostile universe.

Arnold spent a night in Dover while on his honeymoon trip with Lucy. Here, he is standing at the window with Lucy by his side on exceptionally clear night looking at the sea. Not only is it clear but Arnold's opening lines suggest calmness and stability: a kind of poise that Arnold desires for himself.

Arnold observes that the sea is calm, the tide is high and the moon is shinning on the English Channel. On the distant French coast, he can see a slight flicker of light, which shines briefly and then disappears. The white cliffs of Dover can be seen large and shinning in the curve of shore. The poet tenderly beckons his wife to the window where she too can enjoy the pleasant breeze. Up to this point, nature is calm, beautiful and soothing. But from here on, the poet discerns the underlying grating sound, which he describes at some length till the end of the first stanza. The poet draws his wife's attention to the moonlit beach and to the point where the waves lap the shore and the sound of the pebbles as they are dragged along the beach by the receding waves. These pebbles are once again pushed up the sloping beach as the tide returns. Thus, there is constant sound and motion that begins and ceases, and begins again. The trembling rhythm seems to symbolize some kind of unending sorrow.

**Text**

*Sophocles long ago*
*Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought*
*Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow*
*Of human misery; we*

*Find also in the sound a thought,*
*Hearing it by this distant northern sea.*

**Interpretation**

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Lines 14-20 carry forward this notion of eternity by harking back to the time of Sophocles. This 'grating roar' was probably also heard by Sophocles long ago on the shores of the Aegean sea, and it was this that perhaps induced in his mind the sense of miseries in human life, which are reflected in his great tragedies. Just as the sound of the ebb and flow of the waves was able to evoke the feeling of human miseries in Sophocles' mind, so also it evokes similar thoughts in the mind of Arnold and his wife who stand much further north, separated from him by time and space.

**Text**

*The Sea of Faith*
*Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore*
*Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.*
*But now I only hear*
*Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,*
*Retreating, to the breath*
*Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear*
*And naked shingles of the world.*

**Interpretations**

From this reference to Sophocles and the past, Arnold returns to the immediate present ruminating philosophically on the spiritual decline that had besieged human beings. But this thinking is done in the shape of images. Arnold explains that at one time religious faith supported and helped mankind, and was at its strongest. This religious faith was like a beautiful garment that engirdled the earth. In short, this faith was universal. But now the poet can only hear the receding tide, which draws back with a sad sound to the music of the night winds leaving the beach exposed and uncovered. Similarly the poet is aware of the fact that people have lost faith in religion, which has withdrawn from everywhere like the outgoing tide. This spiritual decline has left human beings vulnerable and exposed to the sorrows of life.

**Text**

*Ah, love, let us be true*
*To one another! for the world, which seems*
*To lie before us like a land of dreams,*
*So various, so beautiful, so new,*
*Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,*
*Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;*
*And we are here as on a darkling plain*
*Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,*
*Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

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## Interpretation

What can one do in such a situation? The poet appeals to Lucy once more. He believes that if they love each other truly, they will be able to discover some value in life. Loss of religious faith had made it impossible to believe that the universe was to some extent adjusted to human needs. He says that the world they can see before them is beautiful like a dream. But in spite of its varied beauty, it cannot offer joy, love, hope or certainty to anyone. People can have no peace and continue to suffer pain.

From the image of the sea, the poet moves in the final lines to a startling new image—that of a field with the battle raging in the dark where it is not clear who is the friend or who is the enemy or why they are fighting at all.

The melancholy tone of the poem arises from a feeling of deep despair. The stanzas are of different length and the lines move with a steady and poised rhythm.

*The sea is calm tonight*

*The tide is full...*

The ebbing and flowing of the waves and the consequent 'grating roar' is evoked vividly in 'draw back', 'fling', and 'begin and cease, and then again begin'. J. D. Jump calls this 'a combination of metrical and syntactical means', a combination of sound and sense to present this wonderfully rich image.

*But now I only hear*

*Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar*

*Retreating, to the breath*

*Of the night- wind....*

According to literary critic Miriam Allot, the above lines are 'probably the most musically expressive passage in all of Arnold's poetry and a valid poetic equivalent for his feelings of loss, exposure and dismay'.

The image of the sea is present throughout the poem. But in the last three lines, we are taken to a 'darkling plain'. The sea is calm at the outset. Slowly a 'grating roar' is discernable, an ebb and flow that turns the poet's thoughts to meditate on the loss of faith with which humanity is now beset. This loss of religion is depicted by the image of the receding tide with 'its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar'. What is the result of the loss of faith? Without religious faith, which invests in life with some meaning and sense of value, the world is like an anarchic battlefield in the dark where people ignorant of their friends and foes are engaged in a hideous clash. As we know, poems with philosophic meditations are usually not very lyrical or appealing. However, *Dover Beach* is both. How has Arnold succeeded in creating this rich lyric? He has worked in images which have given a concrete aspect to his thought. These images then evoke delightful feelings in the reader who responds to the sheer visual power of the metaphors used.

In most of Arnold's poems, we have noticed a melancholy strain. Arnold's poetry appeals primarily to the intellect but it also appeals to our senses through the use of power images, chief of which is the sea.

### 3.3.2 Terms to Know

NOTES

- Straits: The English channel separating France and England
- Gleams: Shines
- Tranquil bay: Calm sea enclosed by the wide curve of the shore
- Sweet: Pleasant
- Long line of spray: Beach; where water hits the land
- Moon-blanched: Lit up by the moon
- Grating roar: Harsh sound caused by the pebbles being moved by the incoming and receding waves
- High strand: High beach
- Tremulous cadence: Trembling/wavering rhythm
- Sophocles: (Circa 496-406 B.C.): In *Antigone*, the Greek dramatist likens the curse of heaven to the ebb and flow of the sea. Sophocles is famous for the great tragedies Antigone, Electra, Oedipus, among others
- Aegean: The part of the Mediterranean Sea near Greece where Aegis jumped and committed suicide is called Aegean
- Turbid: Muddy (unclear tide)
- Distant northern sea: The English Channel which is to the north of the Mediterranean
- Sea of faith: Faith of religion
- Girdle: Belt, but here-bright clothing
- Furl'd: folded/compressed /at ebb tide, as the sea retreats it is unfurled and spread out
- Drear: Dull
- Shingles: Small pebbles on the shore
- Naked shingles: Gravel beaches
- Love: Refers to Lucy
- Certitude: Certainty
- Darkling: Darkened
- Ignorant armies clash by night: The image of a battle by night, when both friend and foes are confused in the darkness and it is not clear who is fighting whom and for what!

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

4. When and where was Matthew Arnold born?
5. Name the first volume of poems by Matthew Arnold.

## 3.4 ROBERT BROWNING: *PORPHYRIA'S LOVER*

NOTES

In a dramatic monologue, even though there is only one speaker speaking (therefore monologue), it is still dramatic as there is an actual or implied listener whose questions and queries are anticipated by the speaker and answered making the monologue dramatic. It is an unusual form of poetry in the sense that it is dramatic and yet there is only one speaker. The silence of the listener is not a problem for the readers as the listener's presence is manifest in the poem through the speech of the speaker.

It is similar to soliloquy in some sense, but in a soliloquy there is no implied or actual listener in front of the speaker. In a soliloquy the speaker talks to himself at a critical juncture of his life when he is undecided about what action he or she should follow thereafter; whereas in a dramatic monologue, the speaker not only talks to himself but also to the speaker at the same time. Thus, this form of poetry is interesting at it allows readers to find out what the speaker is telling himself and what he intends the listener to understand.

For example, in *Porphyria's Lover*, Browning's dramatic monologist, the lover is speaking to the readers explaining why he has murdered his beloved and at the same time making himself understand that he is justified in his actions. As mentioned before, the monologist enters the scene at a critical juncture of his life to justify some act that he has committed. The action of the monologist is mental, psychological and verbal, that is, the speech includes pleading, informing, reminiscing, meditating and justifying oneself. The monologist asks the readers to suspend his or her sense of judgment as it thrives on reader's sympathy. In most cases, we see that the Browning's dramatic monologist is an obsessive and neurotic character suffering from 'I' syndrome and has great rhetorical capability. The dramatic monologue form is 'a fusion of two kinds of poetry into one—the lyric and the dramatic, subjective and pictorial.'

Browning's dramatic monologues are not just concerned with passions, but with the 'psychology of passions' of unstable characters who at some critical point of their life sets into a rhetorical mode to justify his action through a dramatic monologue. Browning's monologues grow out of some critical situation in the life of the principal figure and embody the reactions of that figure to that particular situation. Placed in such a situation, the speaker indulges in self analysis and self introspection and in this way his soul is laid bare in the poem.

Let us take two examples: *Porphyria's Lover* and *My Last Duchess*. Both the dramatic monologues deal with man-woman relationships, both the speakers are male and murderers. Porphyria's lover is a soliloquy in isolation as there is no listener though the lover speaks dramatically. The lover of Porphyria lives in a world of obsession and nightmare. He kills his beloved for he suspects her fidelity. To him, she is a 'bee' and the moment this 'bee' surrenders and begins to worship him (the bud)—her deity—he shuts her forever. She is strangled to death. He justifies his crime by saying that he strangled his beloved while she did not feel any pain and her smiling head was glad to rest itself on his shoulders. He fondly believes that god by remaining silent has accepted his superiority and condoned this sinister act. But the

readers are able to discern that in his attempt to reassure himself the mad lover has betrayed his anxiety, his sullenness and his vexation. We get to know that he has not only a great rhetorical competence but also suffers from the 'I' Syndrome.

In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke, the dramatic monologist, is a polished, sophisticated Italian aristocrat, an autocrat, a product of renaissance, arrogant, avaricious, status-conscious, and connoisseur of art. Like all the other speakers of dramatic monologue, the Duke is aggressive, socially and intellectually superior to his listener. From the very beginning he asserts his superiority over the listener by forcing him to observe the last duchess' portrait, to hear what he has to say and not to read the meaning of her life, like painted countenance with passionate glance and cheerful blush and half flush. The Duke in his own typically narcissistic self delineation puts himself in the spot light and turns the listener into a shadow. The envoy is compelled to listen to his story suspending all his power of judgment. The dramatic monologues are basically concerned with human psychology. George Santayana thought that Browning's personae always displayed 'traits of character and never attains character at all.'

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## 3.4.1 *Porphyria's Lover:* Text and Critical Appreciation

*The rain set early in to-night,*
*The sullen wind was soon awake,*
*It tore the elm-tops down for spite,*
*And did its worst to vex the lake:*
*I listen'd with heart fit to break.*
*When glided in Porphyria; straight*
*She shut the cold out and the storm,*
*And kneel'd and made the cheerless grate*
*Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;*
*Which done, she rose, and from her form*
*Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,*
*And laid her soil'd gloves by, untied*
*Her hat and let the damp hair fall,*
*And, last, she sat down by my side*
*And call'd me. When no voice replied,*
*She put my arm about her waist,*
*And made her smooth white shoulder bare,*
*And all her yellow hair displaced,*
*And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,*
*And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,*
*Murmuring how she loved me—she*
*Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,*
*To set its struggling passion free*
*From pride, and vainer ties dissever,*

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*And give herself to me for ever.*
*But passion sometimes would prevail,*
*Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain*
*A sudden thought of one so pale*
*For love of her, and all in vain:*
*So, she was come through wind and rain.*
*Be sure I look'd up at her eyes*
*Happy and proud; at last I knew*
*Porphyria worshipp'd me; surprise*
*Made my heart swell, and still it grew*
*While I debated what to do.*
*That moment she was mine, mine, fair,*
*Perfectly pure and good: I found*
*A thing to do, and all her hair*
*In one long yellow string I wound*
*Three times her little throat around,*
*And strangled her. No pain felt she;*
*I am quite sure she felt no pain.*
*As a shut bud that holds a bee,*
*I warily oped her lids: again*
*Laugh'd the blue eyes without a stain.*
*And I untighten'd next the tress*
*About her neck; her cheek once more*
*Blush'd bright beneath my burning kiss:*
*I propp'd her head up as before,*
*Only, this time my shoulder bore*
*Her head, which droops upon it still:*
*The smiling rosy little head,*
*So glad it has its utmost will,*
*That all it scorn'd at once is fled,*
*And I, its love, am gain'd instead!*
*Porphyria's love: she guess'd not how*
*Her darling one wish would be heard.*
*And thus we sit together now,*
*And all night long we have not stirr'd,*
*And yet God has not said a word!*

## Critical Appreciation

The poem *Porphyria's Lover* begins with a description of the tumultuous weather of the night when it was raining and windy, and the lover was waiting for Porphyria

in a cabin in an unnamed place. She finally arrives and we come to know that she has transcended her class expectations to visit him. She is wet and cold, so she comes near the fire to dry herself. She leans against the narrator and professes her love. The lover looks into her face and realizes that she 'worshipp'd' him in this moment'. Taken by the purity of the moment, he decides to take her hair and strangle her to death with it. He then assures that she died painlessly. After she dies, he unwinds her hair and lays her corpse out in a graceful pose with her eyes opened and her lifeless head on his shoulder. He justifies his action by saying that he has done the right thing by murdering her and ends by remarking that God 'has not yet said a word' against him.

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In *Porphyria's Lover*, Robert Browning is dealing with an unstable lover's passion who is mentally not stable and finally kills his beloved to make her to be his own forever. Like almost all the dramatic monologist of Browning, Porphyria's lover too is an obsessive neurotic character who is self obsessed and thinks that his way of thought and action are justified in every sense. Therefore, we find no sense of remorse in the lover even after he kills his lovely beloved. Moreover, he proudly pronounces that he is quite justified in what he has done. The monologue is occasioned by the fact that he has committed the murder and therefore is at a critical juncture of his life when he needs to get into a dramatic monologue. He needs to reassure himself, while reassuring the readers that what he has done is no crime. Like the Duke of *My Last Duchess* the lover here claims his superiority and in that tone claims his innocence.

The interesting fact is that the logic that he provides for his act of murder is that women are transgressive in nature. This idea is nothing new. Patriarchy has always believed that women have always tried to break free of the clutches of males to discover themselves. Furthermore, patriarchy believes that women, as they are of inferior intellect than men, should be under the guidance of men. Many a times during the history of mankind we have seen that women are treated as inferior citizens only because of their gender. The view that women have the propensity to become infidels, if not checked by males, is taken a step further by the neurotic lover of Porphyria as he decides to end her life at a moment when the beloved is showing her fidelity, so that the moment of fidelity gets fixed forever and she does not get a chance to show her infidelity.

The logic of the lover is absurd but all Browning's dramatic monologues use this kind of absurd logic as Browning's monologues deal with the absurdity of the passions of abnormal characters. It is this absurdity that makes Browning's dramatic monologues so interesting and intriguing. One needs to keep in mind here that no matter how absurd the lover might sound in his logic; it is based on the patriarchal construction which allows the women to be seen as secondary. Therefore the absurdity does not only lie in the lover's part, but in the whole of patriarchy and its ways of gender stereotyping. There is nothing in women which makes them born infidel; there is nothing in them which makes them secondary and second grade. But patriarchy prefers to think so as that is the way males can rule over females. In the larger context of world politics, this is what is happening when feminist movements across the world are questioning males for their limited mindset.

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From this point of view, it would be unfair to call Browning a patriarchal male-chauvinist writer as he is deliberately portraying these kinds of characters in his monologues to make readers aware of dubious constructions about gender they are living their life with, without insight and reflection. From that point of view, Browning's dramatic monologues are not merely beautiful pieces of poetry, but at the same time upholds a social message—to question the patriarchal constructions.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

6. What are Browning's dramatic monologues concerned with?
7. How is the Duke portrayed in Browning's *My Last Duchess*?

## 3.5 WILFRED OWEN: *STRANGE MEETING*

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (18 March 1893 – 4 November 1918) was a poet of the Georgian Age, that is, the early twentieth century. Wilfred Owen was a poet who wrote about the effects of World War on the soldiers. He portrayed the inhuman aspects of war. Similar to Wilfred Wilson Gibson, he portrayed the gory aspects about wars (especially World War I) and through his poetry tried to create awareness about the puniness and meaninglessness of war. Usually, it is the traditional norm that to fight for one's country is heroic. War was viewed form a romantic point of view traditionally where heroism in war was celebrated and most of the literary and other writings portrayed war to romantic affair; but those who have experienced wars from close quarters and participated in wars by being in the trenches have experienced the horrors of war. They know that war is a futile thing where people lose their near and dear ones. We saw in the last poem *The Stone* by Wilfred Wilson Gibson where the beloved of the boy suffered immensely because of his death. The futility and meaninglessness of such human activity is discussed in detail by Wilfred Owen in his poems and *Strange Meeting* is no different as it deals with a situation when two soldiers of opposite camps meet at hell (after death) and discuss the futility of killing each other. One should also note here that George Bernard Shaw in the play *Arms and the Man,* also dealt with similar notions. Though he did not show the gory details about war in his play, but he critiqued the romantic notion of heroism in battlefield. Thus, Georgian age is seen to have criticized the futility of warfare.

The narrator of the poem *Strange Meeting* is a dead soldier who is speaking to us. It seems apparently absurd that we are made to look at the futility of the war and horrors of trenches through the dead soldiers' experiences. After death, we see him in a long tunnel which is of ancient granite formations and as he is passing through the tunnel, he can hear other dead soldiers who are groaning about their experiences in the trenches even after death. The horror of war has impacted them so much that they are not able to get over it even after death. It is a significant way of describing the horror of war as we see that the soldiers cannot sleep properly as

they are physically and psychologically traumatized by the experiences of war and trench life.

### About the Poet

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Wilfred Owen is an English war poet and soldier who participated in World War I and saw the life of the trenches from close quarters. The shocking, realistic war poetry on the horrors of trenches by Wilfred Owen was heavily influenced by his friend, another significant war-poet, Siegfried Sassoon. Their poetry was in stark contrast both to the public perception of war of that time. His best-known works are *Dulce et Decorum Est*, *Insensibility*, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, *Futility*, *Strange Meeting* and others.

Wilfred Owen was born at Plas Wilmot, a house in Weston Lane, near Oswestry in Shropshire, on 18 March 1893, of mixed English and Welsh ancestry. He was the eldest of four children. Wilfred was educated at the Birkenhead Institute and at Shrewsbury Technical School. Wilfred Owen figured out his poetic faculty in 1903 or 1904 while he was on a holiday spent Cheshire.

In 1911, Owen matriculated from University of London. Thereafter, Wilfred Owen worked as lay assistant to the Vicar of Dunsden near Reading. When war broke out, he did not rush to enlist - and even considered the French army - but eventually returned to England. On 21 October 1915, he enlisted in the Artists' Rifles Officers' Training Corps. For the next seven months, he was trained at Hare Hall Camp in Essex. On 4 June 1916 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant (on probation) in the Manchester Regiment. Initially, he held his troops in contempt for their loutish behaviour and in a letter to his mother described his company as 'expressionless lumps'. But soon the bitter traumatic experiences that he went through in the trenches made him neurotic and he was diagnosed with neurasthenia or shell-shock. He was shifted to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh for treatment where he supposedly met his fellow poet Siegfried Sassoon. This encounter changed Wilfred Owen's way of thinking and expression. Therefore he did not leave his regiment but carried on working and carried on writing poems denigrating the romantic notions about war as it was written down in narratives about war. He almost survived the war, but just a week before the war ended, he was shot and killed.

## 3.5.1 *Strange Meeting*: Text and Interpretation

*It seemed that out of the battle I escaped*
*Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped*
*Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.*
*Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,*
*Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.*
*Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared*
*With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,*
*Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.*
*And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;*
*By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.*

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**Interpretation:** The speaker escapes from the battlefield and proceeds down a long tunnel through ancient granite formations. Along his way he hears the groan of sleepers, either dead or too full of thoughts to get up. As he looks at them one leaps up; the soldier has recognized him and moves his hands as if to bless him. Because of the soldier's 'dead smile' the speaker knows that he is in hell.

*With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;*
*Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,*
*And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.*
*"Strange friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn."*
*"None," said the other, "Save the undone years,*
*The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,*
*Was my life also; I went hunting wild*
*After the wildest beauty in the world,*
*Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,*
*But mocks the steady running of the hour,*
*And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.*

**Interpretation:** The speaker tells the soldier that there is no reason to mourn, and he replies that there is –it is the 'undone years' and the 'hopelessness'. The soldier says his hope is the same as the speaker's.The soldier feels nostalgic about what has happened, he had suffered a premature death and feels that his life is unfulfilled as he has already entered hell. The speaker tells him he once went hunting for beauty in the world, but that beauty made a mockery of time. Beauty grieves as war ravages her and she cries and keeps moaning for the passing away off youth. Beauty grieves, but perhaps, it grieves more richly on earth than here in hell. It is grieving at the spectacle of time and of war.

*For by my glee might many men have laughed,*
*And of my weeping something has been left,*
*Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,*
*The pity of war, the pity war distilled.*
*Now men will go content with what we spoiled.*
*Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.*
*They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,*

**Interpretation:** To this point, probably, the poem is an expression for a kind of optimism as however much war inflicts pain and suffering, it nevertheless teaches us pity for one another. But as the poem proceeds, it admits a slight hope that although man's understanding of war—its pity—has been lost, there are the readers who will foster the idea. The soldier's feelings that he would be buried without being able to narrate the story of war fully is the paradox as even if they survive they are silent, they do not narrate the untold suffering. Owen indicates bitterly and scornfully how little we have learnt from the lessons of war. The 'swiftness of the tigress' alludes to the Russian Revolution (1917).

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*None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.*
*Courage was mine, and I had mystery;*
*Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;*
*To miss the march of this retreating world*
*Into vain citadels that are not walled.*
*Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels*
*I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,*
*Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.*

**Interpretation:** The poet describes the contrast between the people who possess a collective will to hold on to power (None will break ranks), and the vitality and dynamic nature of the soldier who says 'Courage was mine and I had mastery/ Wisdom was mine and I had mystery.' The soldier on the one hand has an insight into deeper knowledge because of his experience; on the other hand, he is wiser as he is sadder due to his experiences of war. The soldier then refers to the ages of dictatorship when he talks about 'vain citadel' which produces the reactionary forces causing irreparable damage to an onward march of the society. But there is no hope of going forward, it is a march firmly backwards and the word 'miss' carries the implication that even if he was alive, he would not have taken any active part in the march. When the soldier ants to 'go up and wash' the blood which had clogged due to mass slaughter, he turns into a prophet, a seer and a reformer. He proposes to heal society with truths so pure that they can never be soiled.

*I would have poured my spirit without stint*
*But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.*
*Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.*
*I am the enemy you killed, my friend.*
*I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned*
*Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.*
*I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.*
*Let us sleep now. . . .'*

**Interpretation:** The warrior-poet wants to undergo spiritual upliftment himself but not by being a second martyr but by taking recourse to the path of peace and non-violence. The next few lines bring us back to the immediate context and the horrors of wars demands that the poet must talk about it. 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend' is tragically achieved only through and after death. Owen implies that although there is reconciliation in death that is the only place where it can be achieved. The need for it was undoubtedly great, but it could not only be understood and gained through death; the tragedy is that it was needed before death – 'we die with the knowledge and it dies with us.'

## 3.5.2 War Poetry and Wilfred Owen

War is a gory (violent and causing bloodshed) and glorious affair. Those who win wars present its glorious aspect in terms of heroism, nobility, etc., but losers are

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kept under cover from the common people as the description is nothing but gory. Traditionally, heroism and war were closely connected and the narratives about war emphasized on the romanticized versions of war, presenting it to be a noble affair. But in reality, as we see in Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting*, it is exactly the opposite. It is about the suffering, pains and trauma of the people fighting the war and the tensions and suffering of the relatives and well-wishers of the soldiers.

It was only with the war veterans of the First World War that the poems written on war, about the soldiers' life in the trenches, in the battle fields were portrayed in gruesome realistic details. This made people know about the physical, emotional and psychological sufferings of the soldiers. Poets like Wilfred Owen and others portrayed the trauma of war and for the first time the notion of heroism and nobility of war were questioned. For many war poets, war is unnatural, meaningless, foolish and brutal enterprise in which there can be no winners as soldiers of both the parties or countries suffer a similar fate in the warfront. It is in no way a noble and heroic enterprise.

It is usually thought the Owen was heavily influenced by the Romantic poets in taking up poetry writing and some of the significant influences are John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Of his contemporaries, Siegfried Sassoon, a friend of Owen and himself a great war-poet, was a significant influence. Some people even ascribe the status of Owen's mentor to Sassoon.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

8. Name the age to which Wilfred Edward Salter Owen belonged.
9. Name any two poets who influenced Wilfred Owen's poetry.

## 3.6 T. S. ELIOT: *THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK*

Thomas Stearns Eliot has been a popular name in English poetry since the early 1920s. He had ruled the age in which he lived with absolute authority. The twentieth century cannot be signalled by a single voice or authority. Still, T. S. Eliot might be considered as its best spokesperson in English literature, probably more than any other literary figure. Amongst the post-war poets, playwrights as well as critics, who have enjoyed honour and prestige, Eliot can be seen as a towering celebrity. He alone could face and enjoy the life of austere and harsh realities. He would never sit back and ignore the complicated and confusing problems being faced by people of his time. He always wanted to come forward as one of us and give a first-hand report on the difficult issues of the age.

As a poet, Eliot drew from many different sources to gather his material. He was deeply influenced by some famous personalities of the past and of the modern scene. Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Arnold, etc. in general, and Donne

and the metaphysical poets particularly added up in shaping Eliot's mind. Many French symbolists such as Laforgue and Gautier, German philosophers such as Hegel, Meinong and Bradley and the Indian religions and philosophies also influenced him. By accepting the influences so wide and varied in nature, Eliot significantly increased his knowledge and augmented his susceptibility. This is also why he is a universal poet.

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Eliot was a versatile genius. He was a very talented man. His appeal was not just limited to the English or to the European tradition. Instead, he was a rather universal poet.

Therefore, it might be correct to say that Eliot was aware of a vastly rich tradition that was not just English or European, but had a wider application. He derives knowledge not just from the best that is known and thought in the Bible, or Christian theology, but also from Buddhism and Hinduism and many other religions. That is the reason why Eliot's outlook was neither just catholic, nor insular and neither national; his outlook was international, applicable to all tribes and peoples. For him creed and caste did not matter; he was only concerned with the best. This also explains another stand taken by him, that of a classicist in literature.

T. S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri (the US). His family was of Devonshire origin, traditionally interested in trade and commerce and academics. He was an undergraduate at Harvard during 1906–1909. Here, he came under the influence of the symbolists and Laforgue. During 1909–1910 he was a graduate student at Harvard and completed his early poems, including *Portrait of a Lady* and began *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In the years 1910 and 1911 he went to France and Germany and spent a year at Oxford reading Greek philosophy. Again he was back to Harvard University as a graduate student. It is then that he started work on the philosophy of Francis Herbert Bradley, whose *Appearance and Reality* influenced him a lot. During 1914–1915 he resumed his study in Germany, which was cut off by the First World War. After this, he took his residence at Oxford, and worked on some short satiric poems. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was published in Chicago in June 1915 and his marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood took place in July 1915.

After a brief experience of teaching at Highgate School, Eliot entered business in 1916. He also completed his thesis in that year. Then he spent eight years as an employee of Lloyd's Bank. He took up various reviewing and editorial assignments. During 1917–1920 he wrote many poems in quatrains after the French fashion. *Gerontion* deserves special mention in this connection. He was an assistant editor of *The Egoist* (1917–1919) and also published a collection of poems and *The Sacred Wood* in 1920.

Eliot was the London correspondent for *The Deal* during 1921–1922 and *La-Nouvelle Revue Trancaise* during 1922–1923. In October 1923, he began his career as an editor of *The Criterion*. His epoch-making poem, *The Waste Land*, appeared in public in 1922. It is a much discussed poem with five movements. In it, the poet has displayed fears, doubts and distrust of the post-war generation. The poem won for him the Dial Award. In 1925, his many poems appeared which included *The Hollow Men* that was written in the spirit of *The Waste Land*.

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During 1926–1927 came out his satiric pieces *Fragment of a Prologue* and *Fragment of an Agon*. In 1927, Eliot declared himself to be an Anglo-Catholic and assumed British citizenship.

The year 1934 saw a huge change in the poet's attitude. He had now sided with the poetic drama, which he renovated and energized during the later years of his life. Eliot's first work in this direction was *The Rock* (1934). Since then a wave of publications flooded the dramatic field. *Murder in the Cathedral* appeared in 1935. *The Family Reunion* in 1939 was a stage failure, but the dramatist remained unshaken. During the years 1940–1942 appeared *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*. These three and *Burnt Norton* were combined together to form *Four Quartets* (1943).

The year 1947 brought a disaster for Eliot. His first wife died after a long illness. In 1948 he wrote *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. Till now he had been honoured by his fellow poets, writers, literary associations and clubs on many occasions. Among the many literary honours bestowed upon him, the main ones include the following:

- Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard (1932–1933)
- Classical Association
- Nobel Prize for Literature (1948)
- Order of Merit (1948)

He also received honorary degrees from twelve universities in Europe as well as America.

T. S. Eliot wrote *The Cocktail Party* in 1950, *The Confidential Clerk* in 1955 and *The Elder Statesman* in 1959. After *Four Quartets* poetry was almost untouched by him, though poetic element was indisputably retained in all his dramas. Eliot's chaotic literary life came to an end on 4 January 1965, and the news of his death was received by the world with a sense of deep loss and sorrow.

### 3.6.1 Eliot: A Prophet of Chaos?

The twentieth century is quite a complex and problematic age. It cannot be represented by a single voice or character. You cannot call it the Age of Science as it is not even humanistic, nor classical, nor scientific, nor romantic and nor one of the compromise. You cannot just sum up an age by a single charming description, as was the case with the previous eras, such as the Age of Chaucer, the Age of Milton, the Age of Dryden, the Age of Pope, the Age of Wordsworth and so on and so forth.

Surrounded by a hostile world, Eliot became impatient to form new devices of speech and rhythm in English poetry. When he began writing verses, at that time Georgian poetry was in progress and the poets had forgotten their declared aims and had begun doing the same as the romantic corrupts, against whom they had risen in revolt.

In order to understand the greatness of T. S. Eliot, it is important to throw light on the Georgian school of poetry, as it was this school against which he stood firmly and contributed something concrete to the growth of English poetry. The

Georgian school of poets published five volume of *Georgian Poetry* between 1912 and 1922.

In these volumes appeared the poems of following poets:

- R. Brooke
- E. Blunden
- W. H. Davies
- Walter de la Mare
- L. A. Bercrombie
- Gordon Bottomley
- John Drinkwater
- J. E. Flecker
- John Freeman
- W. W. Gibson
- Ralph Hodgson
- Edward Shanks
- Sir John Squire
- Alfred Noyes
- G. K. Chesterton
- Hilaire Bellock

**NOTES**

These poets had recognizable features, but they were alike in the rejection of the decadent ideals of art and literature. They cultivated such qualities as reality, simplicity, love of natural beauty and adherence to the major traditions of English poetry in form and technique. With the passage of time, they turned away from real life and, like the Romantics, sought shelter in old, unhappy, far-off things and in old battles. Hence their revolt against the decadents proved to be no more than a re-statement of 'what had already been said perfectly'. They wrote for the popular taste and their 'exoteric' poetry tended to be 'flat and thin, or shallow and shadow less… an evasion like the phrase, 'Not at Home'. This is the reason that led the Roy Campbell and the others to attack their poetic practice.

T. E. Hulme (1883–1917) led the reaction against the Georgian poetry. Through his impressive lectures and five short poems, Hulme stressed that poetry should solely confine itself to the world perceived by the senses, and to the presentation of its themes in a succession of concise, clearly visualized, concrete images, accurate in detail and precise in significance. He also stressed the employment of *vers libre* with its unlimited freedom of expression and its rhythms approaching those of everyday speech. Hilda Doolittle and Ezra Pound offered their generous support to Hulme, and they jointly launched an attack on Georgian poetry and brought into being the literary movement, known as imagism. In 1914 appeared *The Egoist* and *Des Imagistes.* The imagist poets went on with their job with a missionary zeal and succeeded in producing three collections of poems under the title *Some Imagist*

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*Poets* (1915–1917) and the final *Imagist Anthology* (1930). Although the imagist movement grew weak by the neglect of its certain members and by the fixation of its practitioners to follow the sequence of very exact and concise images but the movement was in full swing after the first Great War. It exerted deep influence upon Eliot and Richard Alidington. Eliot could never shake off its collision and it made sure to him the use of real images.

When Eliot came from the New England to Europe, the condition of the English poetry was not very bright, American poetry was defunct and French poetry had begun to draw inspiration from Symbolism, which influenced writers like Arthur Symons and W. B. Yeats in its wake.

Two eminent poets of Eliot's time were Yeats and Ezra Pound. WhileYeats was devoted whole-heartedly to 'the stuff of dreams' and to the Irish questions and Pound was devoted to his idiosyncracies about art and politics, Eliot alone showed in poetry the 'complex intensities of concern about soul and body'. Yeats could only be a realist and an over-all metaphysical seer towards the close of his career. Moreover, the best utterance of Yeats philosophy is *A Vision* (1925 and 1937), which is in itself an obscure work of prose and not of poetry.

Eliot's best religious and philosophical work is *Four Quartets*. This book describes the poet's genius. Despite Eliot's proclaimed gratefulness to Pound, who was his technical adviser and to whom he dedicated *The Waste Land*, 'the influence of Mr Pound that can be observed from outside is secondary to Mr Eliot's. So, it can be safely assumed that Eliot is the truest poet of his time, only next to none.

Being conscious of the 'failings' of the Georgians, Eliot set out to introduce new ways of thought, new modes of approach, new patterns of expression and new rhythms. He succeeded wonderfully in his job as a poet for that simple reason that he had the modesty to admit the great value of tradition. It indeed is the permanent mark of a true genius as a true genius does not invent or discover so much as he creates or changes the borrowed material. In Shakespeare's hands the material drawn from other sources suffered a major change.

Eliot wanted to evolve and practice certain standards; he was a traditionalist through and through. He wanted to absorb in his works the best of the European tradition, of which the British was a part. Even though he was a poet of the English language, Eliot was first and foremost a European poet. He went towards Christianity in order to satisfy his longing for European tradition and culture, as Christianity was 'the most effective measure against the corruption of totalitarianism' and could 'save the modern man from being completely atomized and becoming aimless'.

Correlated to this traditionalism was Eliot's concept of art. His most remarkable contribution to modern literature is the impersonal theory of poetry. *Tradition and the Individual Talent* is a very good essay in which Eliot says that the poet and the poem are two separate things. He elucidates the matter by examining the relation of the poem to the past and then the relation of the poem to its author. He thinks that the past is never dead as it lives in the present. The poet should draw his model and ideas from the past to shape the future. He takes much from the stored wisdom of

the ancients and gives comparatively less to the tradition. In this usual barter system, he has to eliminate himself greatly or undergo the process of a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. Personality, therefore, finds no room in his theory of poetry. In this respect, he is very different from the romantic conception of art, and his declaration in 1928 that he was classicist in literature, Anglo-Catholic in religion, royalist in politics is fully vindicated.

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Thus, you see that Eliot was not only an innovator in poetry but also in criticism. His multi-pronged genius indicated the dawn of a new era in the field of English poetic drama too. As Eliot thought, certain emotions and feelings visit us only in moments of inaction, the moments frequently symbolized in Eliot's work by a scene in a rose-garden or apple orchard. These can only be expressed in the language of poetry. But at the same time the contact with the ordinary, everyday world must be organically related to each other. They should look as the integral products of an act of imagination.

Eliot, beyond doubt, was 'an integral poet' who had been searching for a form of poetry as well as for a form of life. He could make the search easy by means of symbols and images, which synthesized his disparate experiences, and which came up to fill in the gap created by the absence of connections and transitions. But if 'he omits the grammatical signs of connection and order, he preserves the psychological or poetic signs.' Eliot's employment of 'broken images', his abrupt transitions from one thought to another, his wit-flashes, his overimplication, his allusiveness, his elliptical style that are so evident in his works are all indicative of his permanent concern to convey the genuine whole of tangled feelings.

Some critics have charged Eliot of being unclear and indirect in his poetry, particularly so in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. Though the charge may not be rejected totally, the age itself he was living in was such. Eliot did not believe in producing work haphazardly; he worked with thoroughness and artistry. In one of his essays he tried to clarify his stand in the matter:

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

Eliot was fully convinced of 'the uselessness of wide appeal to an audience incapable of full appreciation.' He was also fully convinced of the demands of our civilization being much more complex than in any previous era. As art is the reflection of the spirit of the age, it requires the rebirth of the lost and the development of new artistic devices. Esotericism, as opposed to exotericism of the Georgian poetry, was at once 'a discipline for the easier desires of the artist and of the audience' and 'a necessary result of the conditions in which the poet's sensibility had to operate.' The esoteric poet aims at 'cultivating all the possibilities of words as a medium' and 'when the speech of one sense is insufficient to convey (the) entire meaning, (using) the language of another'.

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Paul Elmer More labeled Eliot as a lyric prophet of chaos. When he attributed this epithet to him, he simply meant that Eliot had dealt with 'the confusion of life' in his poetry. In 1922, a new star became lord of the ascendant. Eliot's *The Waste Land* was hailed by the literary world as a landmark in the English poetry as comparable to the *Lyrical Ballads.* The poem was written under the shadow of post-war horror and despair. *The Waste Land*, in method as well as in mood, is a continuation of *Gerontion*; it is in genre the same as *The Hollow Men*, which is the next to follow it. This poem has surpassed even Laforgue in technique and symbolic expression.

Most of the 'modernist' trends of poetry—the new psychology, anthropology, symbolism and metaphysics—are described in the work of T. S. Eliot and it contributes most towards its surprising success. The years 1919–1929 were 'a confused' and 'a barren decade' but not for Eliot.

Eliot is much loved and liked today due to his flourishing at a time when there was a vacuum in English poetry. Critics like Yvor Winters should have done well for themselves and to the literary world at large by greeting the 'ascendant' star instead of labelling him as one who 'surrenders his form to his subject', and thereby becomes chaotic.

For Eliot, the past or tradition is the best form of the universality. But this past or tradition does not involve the imperfect outlook of the Europeanism. It exceeds the limitations of space and time. Eliot is a 'universal' poet of the first rank. He is not 'the great minor poet of twentieth century as David Daiches characterized him in his Delhi Seminar address. One must bear in mind that 'Eliot's universality is a progression of the concept of Europeanism and not retrogression.' It highlights his readiness to accept the best that is known and thought in the world. Octavio paz has expressed this idea in the following memorable manner:

> Eliot is universal in the sense in which all great poetry, from the funeral chants of the pygmies to the Hai-ku of the Japanese, is the common heritage of all men; and he is universal also because of his influence in world literature of our time, comparable to that of Klee in painting or that of Sxtravinsky in music: an influence which differs from others because it is a critical influence.

As a true 'universal' poet, Eliot included, at least, six foreign languages in his works such as in *The Waste Land.* He would be remembered as a scholar who was totally dedicated to the betterment of English poetry by plumbing new depths and by exploring new prospects. A famous critic has said that Eliot has given English poetry a new intellectual dignity, new forms arising out of sincerity and a new spiritual depth. Just like Dryden after the Restoration age and Wordsworth towards the end of the eighteenth century Eliot has also given English literature a new guideline.

### 3.6.2 Eliot's Contribution towards English Poetry

As a poet, Eliot belongs to the Classical tradition. He has nothing to do with the Romantic excesses and 'purple patches'. A classicist remains crystal clear and controlled in his expression, and his guiding force is reason. He exalts head over

heart, objectivity over subjectivity and reason over emotion. He owes allegiance to an external authority, like that of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Homer, Virgil or the three great tragedians of Greek literature, whereas a Romantic listens to his own 'inner voice'. No one can make such a threadbare distinction between 'classicism' and 'Romanticism' as R. A. Scott – James has done in his brilliant book, *The Making of Literature*.

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Form is the first distinctive element in classicism, and it helps in increasing the beauty of the outwards appearance, with its attributes towards symmetry, balance, order, proportion and reserve. As opposed to this, the romantic tends to focus on the spirit behind the form. Spirit does not imply the formless. It implies the freedom that is not content with any one form, but experiments and expresses itself in different ways as the spirit dictates. The former tends to emphasize the 'this – worldliness' of the beauty that we know; the latter, it's 'other – worldliness'…. While the form always seeks a mean; the spirit seeks an extremity.

Form satisfies the Classic whereas the spirit attracts the Romantic. Form appeals to tradition while the spirit demands the novel. On the one side you may range the virtues and defects that go with the notion of fitness, propriety, measure, restraint, conservatism, authority, calm, experience, comeliness on the other, those that are suggested by excitement, energy, restlessness, spirituality, curiosity, troublessness, progress, liberty, experiment, provocativeness.

Eliot has paid utmost attention to verbal precision, which demands a conscious choice of words and phrases and a thoughtful construction of sentences. The verbal precision needs the utmost care in making use of words and the placing of words flawlessly. Eliot has hinted at it in the following lines:

*(Where every word is at home,*
*Taking its place to support the others,*
*The word neither diffident nor ostentations,*
*An easy commerce of the old and the new,*
*The common word exact without vulgarity,*
*The formal word precise but not pedantic,*
*The complete consort dancing together)*
*Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,*
*Every poem an epitaph.*

*('Little Gidding,' Four Quartets).*

The poet's emphasis here is on verbal precision, which must not give the impression of stiffness or inaccuracy.

Eliot's search for precision and accuracy makes room for clarity and propriety in poetry. You have already seen that in Eliot's concept of poetry—which is the classical concept—the poet is a mere medium of expression. Eliot has also given his views about the role of emotion and the role of thought in the poetic process.

Eliot emphasizes the role of emotion in poetry. But how should it be expressed? It cannot be simply transmitted from the mind of the poet to the mind of the reader. It has to turn itself into something concrete—the picture of a person, place or thing—in order to convey effectively the same emotion in the reader.

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Eliot makes use of the phrase 'objective correlative' in his famous essay, *Hamlet and His problems*. He clarifies how an emotion can be best expressed through poetry. He remarks that 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative' in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events that shall be the formula of that emotion such that even the external facts that must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion immediately evoked.'

In Eliot's view, Shakespeare was though a consummate artist in his plays, he failed in finding an 'objective correlative' to express the tortuous emotions of Hamlet. Eliot thinks that Shakespeare has superbly succeeded conveying the raging malady in Lady Macbeth's mind by making her repeat the past actions in the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*.

Critics like Eliseo and Vincent Buckley have found fault with Eliot's theory of objective correlative for conveying emotion in poetry. They say that Eliot develops the formula of an objective correlative in order to avoid a direct utterance of emotion, but he makes the issue difficult by praising Dante for his view of life and Shakespeare for his emotional maturity.

What Eliot is concerned with is the expression of emotion in an objective way. He is opposed to the direct expression of emotion, and hence he propounds the theory of 'objective correlative'. He is concerned with art–emotion, not with raw emotion that bursts forth spontaneously. Eliot also gives his mind to the question of the role of 'thought' in poetry. The poet confronts a thought in the same way as you confront a man; he accepts or rejects it to build his artifice, to suit his poetic purpose. What comes to us is the semblance of thought, not thought at first hand, but the result of his conscious selection or rejection.

According to Eliot, the poet who thinks is merely the poet who can express 'the emotional equivalent of thought'. Thus, what Eliot means by thought is its 'emotional equivalent'. Like 'significant emotion' serving the poetic purpose, 'significant thought' (or 'art – thought') is the objective of Eliot as a poet. If a distinction could be drawn between 'imaginal thinking' and 'conceptual thinking,' you can say that the former is the privilege of a poet while the latter is that of a philosopher or scientist. In imaginable thinking the poet expresses his ideas in a state of illumined consciousness.

Further, Eliot maintains that a synchronization of emotion and thought affects the poetic sensibility. In his well-known essay, *The Metaphysical Poets*, Eliot is clutched with this matter. In this essay, he speaks of the dissociation of sensibility as well as of the unification of sensibility. By the latter phrase Eliot means 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling'. When the unification of sensibility is found, as in the poetry of Chapman and Donne, the result is good poetry. Then, thought is transformed into feeling to steal its way into the reader's heart. It is the union of thought and feeling that constitutes poetic sensibility. But when the poet's thought and is unable to transform itself into feeling, the result is the dissociation of sensibility. For good poetry, it is essential that thought must issue forth as sensation. According to Eliot, the Victorian poets Tennyson and

Browning do not pass this test, as 'they think, but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose'. The poet's function is not to versify ideas but to convert them into sensations.

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As Eliot imagines susceptibility, it is the faculty that enables a poet to respond to diverse experiences in a unified manner. In its function, it is close to Coleridge's concept of 'Secondary Imagination', which also gives form to the shrubby undergrowth of experiences in life. The noted critic, F. W. Bateson, subjects Eliot's concept of sensibility to a strict inspection. He opines that Eliot's concept of sensibility is a synonym for sensation, and if it is so how can it contain the element of thought? He sees a paradox in Eliot's concept of sensibility.

It would be, perhaps, in pace to draw a distinction between 'sensibility' and 'imagination'. For one thing, the faculty that shapes experience is sensibility and not imagination. Eliot's sensibility is a unifying faculty for disparate experiences. For Cloridge, imagination is a reconciling agent aiming at 'recreation' after dissolving, diffusing and dissipating the material at hand. Imagination does not allow a place to memory that plays a vital role in Eliot's poetry. Eliot speaks of 'mixing memory and desire' in the beginning of *The Waste Land*.

Eliot's poetic technique is compatible with the spirit of his time. Like the time itself, his technique is bare and stark, direct and unadorned. Eliot was highly impressed by the technical discoveries of John Donne. He thought that Donne's greatest achievement lay in his ability to convey 'his genuine whole of tangled feelings'. Like Donne and his school of poets, Eliot aimed at the 'alliance of levity and seriousness.' The use of irregular rhyme, which was to Eliot's taste, was actually inspired by Donne. Eliot largely used free verse in his practice, instead of conventional metric verse; his versification is essentially 'a disturbance of the conventional'. His technique is, for the most part, allusive and suggestive. This sort of technique suits a poet of scholarly temperament.

One can easily understand it when one keeps in mind the vast number of allusions and references used by Eliot in *The Waste Land.* No fewer than thirty five authors and six foreign languages have been alluded to or used by him in this difficult poem. Such a technique lends obscurity and complexity to the poem. According to Eliot, this kind of technique suits the temper of the age. In his brilliant essay on the metaphysical poets, Eliot remarks that 'Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity', and he tailors his technique to catch up this great variety and complexity of the modern age. The employment of apt images and suggestive symbols by Eliot in his poetry consolidates his technique to a great extent. Eliot had learnt a good deal from the French symbolists, and shaped his symbolist and allusive technique under their irresistible influence.

### 3.6.3 Themes, Motifs and Symbols in Eliot's Poetry

Eliot is a representative poet of the twentieth century and hence he has voiced forcefully the moral and spiritual degradation of modern man, the loss of human values and the prevalence of chaos, confusion and tension in the human world. His poetry is an expression of the age in which he lived. It does not take recourse to the

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past or the medieval age. It tries to feel the pulse of man and articulate his problems and tensions in a touching way.

A critic has rightly pointed out that Eliot's early poetry is the poetry of suffering and tension. As you know, he began his poetic career with *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and this poem brings to the fore the dilemma and the pangs of a middle aged man in the presence of beautiful movement. The question that haunts him incessantly is: 'Do I dare disturb the universe?' Similarly, the poem *Portrait of a Lady* highlights the same kind of dilemma and sense of futility in the life of a lady advancing in years 'I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.' In fact, all the protagonists of Eliot-Prufrock, the Lady, Gerontion, Mr Apollinax, Tiresias, etc. are great sufferers in the drama of life.

In his early poetry, Eliot portrays persons and scenes full of disillusionment, repulsion and horror. His awareness of 'the universe panorama of futility and anarchy' in the human world is quite acute and intense. The imagery of the poems prior to *The Waste Land* is modern, urban and even cosmopolitan and it habitually tends to highlight the boredom of modern urban life. The boredom of life, even the meaninglessness of existence, may be marked in the following extract from *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*:

*So the hand of the child, automatic,*
*Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was summering along the quay. I could see nothing behind that child's eye.*

Here, you have a glimpse of the utter emptiness and the lack of fulfillment in the child life. A grown-up man's or woman's life is no better in any way. The life of the middle-aged lady is painted as a follows:

*And I must borrow every changing shape To find expression… dance, dance Life a dancing bear, Cry life a parrot, chatter like an ape. Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance*

Clearly, her life is meaningless and no better than that of an animal. Prufrock is also faced with 'the overwhelming question' of seeking meaning in life. Gerontion, an old man, is also preoccupied with a sense of loss and nostalgia, of failure and frustration:

*Here I am, an old man in a dry month, Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.*

The 'sign' of Christ given in the poem is not taken by man. With 'Gerontion' onwards, Eliot's poems deal with the depths of human depravity. In these poems, animal images become frequent, emphasizing thereby the bestiality and immorality of man. There is Princess Volupine, whose name suggests both a consuming wolf and a voluptuary. There is Bleistein, like some creature from a primitive swamp; there is Sweeney, the 'Apeneck', who is 'clawing' at the pillow slip', while a cosmopolitan woman associated with him is:

*Rachel nee Rabinovitch*
*Tears at the grapes with murderous paws.*

In *Whispers of Immortality* Grishkin is seen in a drawing soon, distilling a rank 'feline smell'. *The Waste Land* (1922) employs the theme of 'the divitalization

of human civilization' and 'the destabilization of human society'. Critics like F.R. Leavis and Paul Elmer More think that the poem begins with a description of a cruel season and a dead land, and that it ends on a chaotic note. But these critics have not been able to grasp the full implication of the Sanskrit words properly. The poem is highly suggestive of the loss of spirituality in the modern world; that is why London is called an 'unreal city' and the London Bridge is depicted as 'falling down'. The poem has a mythical structure.

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The Fisher King of the Grail legend suffers from a mysterious sickness, as a result of which the land he rules over becomes a waste land and suffers from infertility. This infertility can be healed and removed by the Deliverer. The subject matter concerns the entire humanity, though the focus is on modern London. The overall mood of the poet is one of despair and not of excitement over the potential dawn of a better future. *The Hollow Men* continues the mood and ironic vision of *The Waste Land*. It is replete with sardonic tone and pessimism. The hollow men are the empty or stuffed men, with no bright hope. The poet's vision comes out vividly in the following lines:

*This is the way the world ends*
*Not with a bang but a whimper.*

Up to *The Hollow Men* the note of suffering and pessimism is predominant, but after this poem the Christian hope returns to the poet. *The Ariel* poems definitely mark the break, and the dark vision of the poet yields place to a brighter vision.

The Ariel poems consist of *Journey of the Magi*, *A Song for Simeon*, *Animula and Marina*. These poems make use of the religious theme connected with the life of Christ. The Magi travel a long way to see the infant Christ. The narrator, who is one of the Magi, is sure that he has seen the saviour. In *A Song for Simeon*, Simeon also has the impression of having seen the saviour, but he feels that he is not to be redeemed. 'Animula' is somewhat gloomy in outlook. It paints a process of degeneration—from innocence to irresolution and selfishness and then to death. This poem asserts that the new life after death is the gift of Christ. The poet is acutely conscious of time here. The fourth of the Ariel poems, *Marima* is based on the reunion of Pericles with his daughter and subtly shows the graceful life leading to salvation through the intervention of Christ.

Thus, you have noticed that Eliot's poetry written since 1927 breathes in fresh air of religious certainty and spiritual discipline. The poem *Ash Wednesday* (1930) is precisely steeped in spiritual atmosphere of self–abnegation. The earlier atmosphere of chaos and confusion, doubt and distrust, has now disappeared. By this time, the poet has achieved a new religion and a new hope for the salvation of man.

*Four Quartets* (1943), which is a bunch of four poems–*Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*-–is the summit of religious meditation and eventual salvation. The poem combines in its texture the deep reflections on time and eternity, word, speech and silence, attachment and detachment, love, human and divine etc. It achieves a contemplative depth that English poetry has hardly ever witnessed.

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Eliot has also written some poems on the political theme. The different themes have surprised many of Eliot's readers, as they deviate from the mainstream of his poetry of the two fragments; the first one exalts the hero of the triumphal march at the expense of the admiring crowds. The second one mocks at the very democratic system. Eliot had announced in 1927 that he was a royalist in politics, and hence his anti-democratic stance should be taken as deliberate and purposive.

The themes mentioned above are all related to human life. Eliot is also a poet of nature, though his treatment of Nature is neither Wordsworthian nor Shelleyan. To him, nature is the bare phenomenon of the human world, as it was to Pope in the eighteenth century. Man is the supreme consideration in Eliot's scheme of things. Eliot describes natural beauties in relation to the urban surroundings rather than to rural countryside. He is concerned with the civilized rather than with the wild aspects of natural beauties. No doubt, he is a poet of towns and cities and of crowds to be seen there. Nature is nothing more to him than a scenery, a mere phenomenon, an object for sensual and concrete imagery—an evening 'spread out against the sky' and an afternoon 'grey and smoky'.

Nature is neither spiritual, nor ethical or metaphysical entity. She lacks any order or plan, which she had in store. Nature contains no 'healing balm' for Eliot; neither does she have a plan or design for man's development. She is no longer a shelter or solace for the afflicted mind, as it is now controlled by the rational man. This idea is clearly ventilated in the following lines of *The Dry Salvages (four quartets)*:

> *I do not know much about Gods, but I think that the river Is*
> *a strong brown God – sullen, untamed and intractable*
> *Patient to some degree…. The problem once solved, the*
> *brown God is almost forgotten By the dwellers in the cities –*
> *ever….*

Thus, nature is harnessed to serve the utilitarian ends of man. In fact, Eliot was so much preoccupied with the problems of life, death, of man's moral and spiritual degradation, of the intersection of tirelessness with time, of God and the Universe, that he had hardly any time to get interested in natural descriptions, in some of his poems, Eliot uses the garden–scene (or, simply the garden) to symbolize the moment/place of illumination. According to a scholar, A formal garden is an admirable symbol for man's attempt to impose a pattern on his experience and to discipline nature. Eliot's treatment of nature is quite in keeping with his classical leanings.

### Motifs and Fragmentation

Eliot used fragmentation in his poems both to display the disorganized state of modern existence and to contrast literary texts against one another. According to Eliot, humanity's consciousness had been shattered by World War I and by the British Empire's collapse.

Collaging bits and pieces of dialogue, images, scholarly ideas, foreign words, formal styles and tones within a poetic work was Eliot's way to represent humanity's hurt psyche and the modern world, with its onslaught of sensory awareness.

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Critics read the following line from *The Waste Land* as a statement of Eliot's poetic project: *These fragments I have shored against my ruins*. Almost every line in *The Waste Land* shadows an academic work or literary text. Many lines have long footnotes written by Eliot as a hint for explaining references and for encouraging the readers to tutor themselves by researching deeper in his sources. These echoes or references are fragments of themselves, as Eliot includes only parts, instead of the whole from the canon. By using these fragments, Eliot tries to emphasize recurring themes and images in the literary tradition, as well as to place his ideas about the current state of humanity along the range of history.

### Mythic and Religious Ritual

Eliot's tremendous knowledge of myth, religious ritual, academic works and key books in the literary tradition informs every aspect of his poetry. He filled his poems with references to both the obscure and the well known, thereby teaching his readers as he writes. In his notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot explains the crucial role played by religious symbols and myths. He drew heavily from ancient fertility rituals, in which the fertility of the land was linked to the health of the Fisher King, a wounded figure who could be healed through the sacrifice of an effigy. The Fisher King is, in turn, linked to the Holy Grail legends, in which a knight quests to find the grail, the only object capable of healing the land. Ultimately, ritual fails as the tool for healing the wasteland, even as Eliot presents alternative religious possibilities, including Hindu chants, Buddhist speeches and pagan ceremonies. Later poems take their images almost exclusively from Christianity, such as the echoes of the Lord's Prayer in *The Hollow Men* and the retelling of the story of the wise men in *Journey of the Magi* (1927).

### Infertility

Eliot envisioned the modern world as a wasteland, in which neither the land nor the people could conceive. In *The Waste Land*, various characters are sexually frustrated or dysfunctional, unable to cope with either reproductive or non-reproductive sexuality: the Fisher King represents damaged sexuality (according to myth, his impotence causes the land to wither and dry up), Tiresias represents confused or ambiguous sexuality and the women chattering in *A Game of Chess* represent an out-of-control sexuality. World War I not only eradicated an entire generation of young men in Europe but also ruined the land. Trench warfare and chemical weapons, the two primary methods by which the war was fought, decimated plant life, leaving behind carnage.

In *The Hollow Men*, the speaker discusses the dead land, now filled with stone and cacti. Corpses salute the stars with their upraised hands, stiffened from rigor mortis. Trying to process the destruction has caused the speaker's mind to become infertile: his head has been filled with straw, and he is now unable to think properly, to perceive accurately or to conceive images or thoughts.

### Symbols: Water

In Eliot's poetry, water symbolizes both life and death. Eliot's characters wait for water to quench their thirst, watch rivers overflow their banks, cry for rain to quench

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the dry earth and pass by fetid pools of standing water. Although water has the regenerative possibility of restoring life and fertility, it can also lead to drowning and death, as in the case of *The Waste Land*. Traditionally, water can imply baptism, Christianity and the figure of Jesus Christ, and Eliot draws upon these traditional meanings: water cleanses, water provides solace and water brings relief elsewhere in *The Waste Land* and in *Little Gidding* the fourth part of *Four Quartets*.

Prufrock hears the seductive calls of mermaids as he walks along the shore in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, but, like Odysseus in Homer's *The Odyssey*, he realizes that a malicious intent lies behind the sweet voices. Eliot thus cautions us to beware of simple solutions or cures, for what looks harmless might turn out to be very dangerous.

### Music and Singing

T. S. Eliot was quite interested in the divide between high and low culture, which he symbolized with the help of music. He believed that high culture, which included art, opera as well as drama, was declining where as popular culture was constantly rising.

In his poem, *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot merged high culture with low culture by putting together lyrics from an opera by Richard Wagner with some popular songs from pubs, American ragtime and Australian troops.

Eliot merges nursery rhymes with phrases from the Lord's Prayer in *The Hollow Men* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is, as the title describes, a song, with different lines repeated as refrains. It ends with the song of mermaids who lure humans to their deaths by drowning them. It is a scene that hints towards Odysseus's interactions with the Sirens in his book *The Odyssey*. Eliot uses lyrics as a type of chorus, seconding and describing the action of the poem, just like the chorus functions in the Greek tragedies.

## 3.6.4 *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*: Text and Analysis

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse*
*A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,*
*Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.*
*Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo*
*Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,*
*Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*
*Let us go then, you and I,*
*When the evening is spread out against the sky*
*Like a patient etherized upon a table;*
*Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,*
*The muttering retreats*
*Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels*
*And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:*
*Streets that follow like a tedious argument*

*Of insidious intent*
*To lead you to an overwhelming question ...*
*Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"*
*Let us go and make our visit.*

*In the room the women come and go*
*Talking of Michelangelo.*

*The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,*
*The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,*
*Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,*
*Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,*
*Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,*
*Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,*
*And seeing that it was a soft October night,*
*Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.*

*And indeed there will be time*
*For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,*
*Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;*
*There will be time, there will be time*
*To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;*
*There will be time to murder and create,*
*And time for all the works and days of hands*
*That lift and drop a question on your plate;*
*Time for you and time for me,*
*And time yet for a hundred indecisions,*
*And for a hundred visions and revisions,*
*Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

*In the room the women come and go*
*Talking of Michelangelo.*

*And indeed there will be time*
*To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"*
*Time to turn back and descend the stair,*
*With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —*
*(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")*
*My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,*
*My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —*

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*(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")*
*Do I dare*
*Disturb the universe?*
*In a minute there is time*
*For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.*

*For I have known them all already, known them all:*
*Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,*
*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;*
*I know the voices dying with a dying fall*
*Beneath the music from a farther room.*
*So how should I presume?*

*And I have known the eyes already, known them all—*
*The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,*
*And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,*
*When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,*
*Then how should I begin*
*To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?*
*And how should I presume?*

*And I have known the arms already, known them all—*
*Arms that are braceleted and white and bare*
*(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)*
*Is it perfume from a dress*
*That makes me so digress?*
*Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.*
*And should I then presume?*
*And how should I begin?*

*Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets*
*And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes*
*Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...*

*I should have been a pair of ragged claws*
*Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.*

*And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!*
*Smoothed by long fingers,*
*Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,*

*Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.*
*Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,*
*Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?*
*But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,*
*Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,*
*I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;*
*I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,*
*And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,*
*And in short, I was afraid.*

*And would it have been worth it, after all,*
*After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,*
*Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,*
*Would it have been worth while,*
*To have bitten off the matter with a smile,*
*To have squeezed the universe into a ball*
*To roll it towards some overwhelming question,*
*To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,*
*Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—*
*If one, settling a pillow by her head*
*Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;*
*That is not it, at all."*

*And would it have been worth it, after all,*
*Would it have been worth while,*
*After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,*
*After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—*
*And this, and so much more?—*
*It is impossible to say just what I mean!*
*But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:*
*Would it have been worth while*
*If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,*
*And turning toward the window, should say:*
*"That is not it at all,*
*That is not what I meant, at all."*

*No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;*
*Am an attendant lord, one that will do*
*To swell a progress, start a scene or two,*
*Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,*

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*Deferential, glad to be of use,*
*Politic, cautious, and meticulous;*
*Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;*
*At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—*
*Almost, at times, the Fool.*

*I grow old ... I grow old ...*
*I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*

*Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?*
*I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.*
*I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.*

*I do not think that they will sing to me.*

*I have seen them riding seaward on the waves*
*Combing the white hair of the waves blown back*
*When the wind blows the water white and black.*
*We have lingered in the chambers of the sea*
*By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown*
*Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*

In the drafts, the poem had the subtitle *Prufrock among the Women*. Prufrock may be said to have been derived from Eliot's unconscious memory of the name of a furniture wholesale firm in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was born and bred. But J. Alfred is poet's own invention of a fatuous-sounding prefix. Eliot said The Love Song of portion of the title came from *The Love Song of Har Dyal* a poem by Rudyard Kipling.

In a 1950 letter, Eliot said, 'I did not have, at the time of writing the poem, and have not yet recovered, any recollection of having acquired this name in any way, but I think that it must be assumed that I did, and that the memory has been obliterated.' It has also been suggested that Prufrock came from the German word *Prüfstein* meaning touchstone (cognate to *proof-stone,* with *stone* changed to *rock*).

Maybe, it was the pattern of sound in 'J. Alfred Prufrock' suggesting ridiculousness that appealed to Eliot. The addition of 'Love Song' is full of implications and stirs the whole scope of feelings associated with the theme of love poetry since Spenser.

Thus, an irony already lurks in the title, an irony that comes from the collocation of love song and J. Alfred Prufrock. This irony deepens further when you proceed to read the poem and find that the poem could be anything but a love song. The irony that may appear simplistic in the title turns into a complex one as the poem proceeds.

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## Epigraph

In context, the epigraph refers to a meeting between Dante and Guido da Montefeltro, who was condemned to the eighth circle of Hell for providing counsel to Pope Boniface VIII, who wished to use Guido's advice for a wicked undertaking. This encounter follows Dante's meeting with Ulysses, who himself is also condemned to the circle of the Fraudulent. According to Ron Banerjee, the epigraph serves to cast ironic light on Prufrock's intent. Like Guido, Prufrock had intended his story never be told, and so by quoting Guido, Eliot reveals his view of Prufrock's love song.

Frederick Locke contends that Prufrock himself is suffering from multiple personalities of sorts, and that he embodies both Guido and Dante in the *Inferno* analogy. One is the storyteller; the other the listener who later reveals the story to the world. He opines, alternatively, that the role of Guido in the analogy is indeed filled by Prufrock, but that the role of Dante is filled by you, the reader, as in 'Let us go then, you and I'. In that, the reader is granted the power to do as he pleases with Prufrock's love song.

Although he finally chose not to use it, the draft version of the epigraph for the poem came from Dante's *Purgatorio* (XXVI, 147-148):

*'sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor'.*
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina.*

Eliot provided this translation in his essay *Dante* (1929):

*'be mindful in due time of my pain'.*

*Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.*

He would eventually use the quotation in the closing lines of his 1925 poem *The Waste Land*. The quotation that Eliot did choose comes from Dante also. *Inferno* (XXVII, 61-66) reads:

*S`io credesse che mia risposta fosse*
*A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,*
*Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.*
*Ma perciocchè giammai di questo fondo*
*Non tornò vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,*
*Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

One translation, from the *Princeton Dante Project*, is:

*If I thought my answer were given to anyone who would ever return to the world, this flame would stand still without moving any further.*
*But since never from this abyss has anyone ever returned alive, if what I hear is true, without fear of infamy I answer you.*

## Form

Prufrock is a variation on the dramatic monologue, a type of poem popular with Eliot's predecessors. Dramatic monologues are similar to soliloquies in plays. Three

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things characterize the dramatic monologue, according to M. H. Abrams. Those three things are as follows:

- First, they are the utterances of a specific individual (not the poet) at a specific moment in time.
- Second, the monologue is specifically directed at a listener or listeners whose presence is not directly referenced but is merely suggested in the speaker's words.
- Third, the primary focus is the development and revelation of the speaker's character.

Eliot modernizes the form by removing the implied listeners and focussing on Prufrock's interiority and isolation. The epigraph to this poem, from Dante's *Inferno,* describes Prufrock's ideal listener: one who is as lost as the speaker and will never betray to the world the content of Prufrock's present confessions. In the world Prufrock describes, though, no such sympathetic figure exists, and he must, therefore, be content with silent reflection. In its focus on character and its dramatic sensibility, 'Prufrock' anticipates Eliot's later, dramatic works.

The rhyme scheme of this poem is irregular but not random. While sections of the poem may resemble free verse, in reality, 'Prufrock' is a carefully structured mixture of poetic forms. The bits and pieces of rhyme become much more apparent when the poem is read aloud. One of the most prominent formal characteristics of this work is the use of refrains. Prufrock's continual return to the 'women [who] come and go/Talking of Michelangelo' and his recurrent questionings ('how should I presume?') and pessimistic appraisals ('That is not it, at all.') both refer to an earlier poetic tradition and help Eliot describe the consciousness of a modern, neurotic individual. Prufrock's obsessiveness is aesthetic, but it is also a sign of compulsiveness and isolation. Another important formal feature is the use of fragments of sonnet form, particularly at the poem's conclusion. The three-line stanzas are rhymed as the conclusion of a Petrarchan sonnet would be, but their pessimistic, anti-romantic content, coupled with the despairing interjection, 'I do not think they (the mermaids) would sing to me,' creates a contrast that comments bitterly on the bleakness of modernity.

## Commentary

'Prufrock' displays two most important characteristics of Eliot's early poetry. First, it is strongly influenced by the French symbolists, like Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Baudelaire, whom Eliot had been reading almost constantly while writing the poem. From the symbolists, Eliot takes his sensuous language and eye for unnerving or anti-aesthetic detail that nevertheless contributes to the overall beauty of the poem. The symbolists, too, privileged the same kind of individual Eliot creates with Prufrock—the moody, urban, isolated-yet-sensitive thinker. However, the symbolists would have been more likely to make their speaker himself a poet or artist, Eliot chooses to make Prufrock an unacknowledged poet, a sort of artist for the common man.

The second defining characteristic of this poem is its use of division and combination. Eliot sustained his interest in division and its applications throughout his

career, and his use of the technique changes in important ways across his body of work: Here, the subjects undergoing breakup are mental focus and certain sets of imagery; in *The Waste Land,* it is modern culture that splinters in the *Four Quartets* we find the fragments of attempted philosophical systems. Eliot's use of bits and pieces of formal structure suggests that fragmentation, although anxiety-provoking, is nevertheless productive; had he chosen to write in free verse, the poem would have seemed much more nihilistic. The kinds of imagery Eliot uses also suggest that something new can be made from the ruins: The series of hypothetical encounters at the poem's center are iterated and discontinuous but nevertheless lead to a sort of epiphany (albeit a dark one) rather than just leading nowhere. Eliot also introduces an image that will recur in his later poetry, that of the searcher.

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Prufrock thinks that he 'should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.' Crabs are scavengers, garbage-eaters who live off refuse that makes its way to the sea floor. Eliot's discussions of his own poetic technique suggests that making something beautiful out of the refuse of modern life, as a crab sustains and nourishes itself on garbage, may, in fact, be the highest form of art. At the very least, this notion undermines romantic ideals about art. It suggests that fragments may become reintegrated, that art may be in some way therapeutic for a broken modern world. In *The Waste Land,* crabs become rats, and the optimism disappears, but here Eliot seems to assert only the limitless potential of scavenging.

'Prufrock' ends with the hero assigning himself a role in one of Shakespeare's plays: While he is no Hamlet, he may yet be useful and important as 'an attendant lord, one that will do/To swell a progress, start a scene or two...' This implies that there is still continuity between Shakespeare's world and ours, that *Hamlet* is still relevant to us and that we are still part of a world that could produce something like Shakespeare's plays. Implicit in this, of course, is the suggestion that Eliot, who has created an 'attendant lord' may now go on to create another Hamlet. While 'Prufrock' ends with a devaluation of its hero, it exalts its creator. Or does it? The last line of the poem suggests otherwise—that when the world intrudes, when 'human voices wake us,' the dream is shattered 'we drown'. With this single line, Eliot dismantles the romantic notion that poetic genius is all that is needed to triumph over the destructive, impersonal forces of the modern world. In reality, Eliot the poet is little better than his creation: He differs from Prufrock only by retaining a bit of hubris, which shows through from time to time. Eliot's poetic creation, thus, mirrors Prufrock's soliloquy: both are an expression of aesthetic ability and sensitivity that seems to have no place in the modern world. This realistic, anti-romantic outlook sets the stage for Eliot's later works, including *The Waste Land.*

### The Character 'Prufrock'

Prufrock's consciousness forms the core of the poem. His consciousness impresses us as a representative consciousness of our time. 'We suspect', as Joseph Margolis says, he is Everyman, and thus his malaise comes to be seen as the affection of everyman in the contemporary society.

But for all that, Prufrock is not an abstract character: he is concretely realized, the product of a felt experience, so much so that many have been inclined to identify

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Prufrock with Eliot. No doubt, Prufrock is Eliot in a way, for after all he is the latter's creation after his own image. But, at the same time, it must be understood that Prufrock is a person like Pound's Mauberely. As we proceed with the poem, he gradually emerges as a distinct character in his own right revealing a multi-dimensional nature.

Prufrock is a man in his own forties, or rather dressed as a man in the forties. The lines which suggest this are as follows:

*Time to turn back and descend the stair,*
*With a bald spot in the middle of my hair……*
*(They all say :'How his hair is growing thin !')My morning*
*coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,*
*My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin……*

The growing baldness suggests the middle-age and the carefully planned dress is designed to conceal the middle-age, though, at the same time, he knows such an effort will be worthless. The parenthetical line, 'they will say……', suggests Prufrock's fear and anxiety but Prufrock is not an hypocrite. He is not trying or posing to be young. He wishes he could behave as a young man, but he knows he cannot. He knows that it is worthless: the memory of youthful days gives him no pleasure at all. He would not be young again, for it will be the repetition of the same cheerless, routine, meaningless relationships with the women. The lines which suggest this boredom of Purfrock's experience with women are to be found in the three stanzas beginning with:

'For I have known them all already……..' It is clear that Prufrock is an extremely sensitive, rather hypersensitive person, given to reflecting, silently debating within him implications of this or that action, this or that word. He is highly cultured and widely read in literature and fine arts, as in obvious from the mention of Michelangelo, Lazarus, Hamlet and so on.

The melody that has afflicted him is not frustration or anger; he is rather bored with life. Hence he considers no action, not even so much as making his proposal of love, worth anything. He has had experiences of action, and they have bred only boredom. So, he flinches from the occasion that will require him to act: that is to make a choice and say it to the women.

Prufrock's melody is not physical, but deeply psychological, or spiritual, like Baudelaire's characterized by total lack of will power and sterility of emotion. Prufrock is hypersensitive both intellectually and emotionally, but the intellectual hypersensitivity has sapped all life out of emotion. Dr. Grover Smith calls him a defeated 'idealist'.

## A Critical Appreciation of the Poem

*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is a monologue, and as such it owes a good deal to Robert Browning. It has 'you' and 'I' in the very first line. Although it is not needed to assume the presence of a second person and explicate its relationship to Prufrock in order to understand the meaning of the poem, the 'you' is significant in ascribing the character of a monologue to it. For one thing, the 'you' never speaks in the poem ; it is the 'I' who does all the speaking from the beginning of the end. That is why the term 'dramatic monologue's may, strictly speaking, be inappropriate for

the poem. In a dramatic monologue, the presence of the other character or characters is always felt: one character is speaking to the other, even though the latter may be silent. In this poem, Prufrock is more speaking to himself than to anyone else. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to call the poem on 'interior' monologue' than a 'dramatic monologue'. Prufrock's consciousness is the focal point here.

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The poem consists of a number of sections put together in a manner which looks forward to *The Waste Land.* Sections are rearranged, lines put in, others taken out and yet the poem does not suffer, for its coherence depends on consistency of feeling and not on a fixed sequence of idea or event.

The poem would appear as Eliot's first attempt to explore the nature of the spiritual state of the contemporary man. This is the germinal theme that is developed and presented in a pattern of opposites. In the words of Joseph Margolis, 'And its themes, which are remarkably diverse, are offered in contrary pairs: youth and old age, work and idleness, spiritual life and death, commitment and loneliness, pride and disgust in the self, sincerity and hypocrisy, interest and boredom.' These 'contrary pairs are not stated clearly; nor is one thing of a pair set in apparent conflict with the other.

On the surface level, the entire poem deals with one set of themes associated with the spiritual sickness of Prufrock. Whether he flinches from asking 'the over whelming question' or escapes into his own fantasy of fog or the party of his own self, he is a man who has totally lost his will to party of his own self, he is a man who has totally lost his will to action, is symbolic of his spiritual sickness. Each image, each picture—fantasy, reiterates with sharper precision, this theme of Prufrock's sterility. Eliot has not described how or why has Prufrock become spiritually sterile, though there are some hints to suggest that the roof of his malaise is his being over intellectualized and hypersensitive to things of emotional life. He is given to analysing too deeply the pros and cons of his actions and others' reactions.

Eliot's diagnosis of the contemporary human personality bears a slender resemblance to D. H. Lawrence's. For Lawrence too believed that the real evil of the contemporary, mechanized, commercialized society was the morbid growth of intellect, which had sapped the vitality out of man–woman, and through it, man–world, relationship.

Though the themes of Eliot's poems are not immediately related to the First World War, the outbreak of war did lend urgency to the poem. Prufrock personified or symbolized a state of mind in which a war could break out. It is significant to note that whenever Prufrock escapes from the monotony and boredom of the human company into fantasy, his mind conjures up scenes or symbols of death or death-like situations. The evening is like a patient etherized for a serious operation struggling between life and death. The nights are restless; the restaurants are cheap where acts of violence are common. The cat itself is associated with ferocity and destruction. Prufrock imagines himself 'sprawling on a pin' and 'wriggling on the wall'. He compares or contrasts himself to John the Baptist, Lazarus and Prince Hamlet, who were involved in violent or tragic deaths. Only in the last few lines, his fantasy brings into play the sea image, which is symbolic of life and yet the last line brings in the image of death.

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It is evident that Prufrock is fascinated by the idea of death, and this is because he is irreparably bored by the contemporary life. In such a morbid spiritual state, war may even be welcome as it brings death home.

The poem is rich in literary allusions. Michelangelo, for instance, stirs up the rich image of the mediaeval passionate love of God and man, the image of an artist who turned his sufferings into material of great art. But the women talking of him do not properly understand his value as an artist, and they are chattering about him as though he were a detective film hero. The other significant allusions in the poem are: John the Baptist, Lazarus and Hamlet. These allusions tend to highlight certain inherent characteristics of the protagonist.

The drama of the poem is presented through soliloquy, the action being limited to the interplay of impressions, including memories, in Prufrock's mind. By a distinction between 'I' and 'you', he differentiates between his thinking, sensitive character and his outward self. Prufrock is seen addressing, as if looking into a mirror, his whole public personality. His motive seems to reject the motionless self, which cannot act, and to assert his will. The ego alone 'goes' anywhere, even in fantasy, but it cannot survive the disgrace of personality, and at the end of the poem it is 'we' who drown. The personal has become the general.

It is not so much the far-fetchedness of the objects of comparison but their opposition, contrariness, to one another that creates the dramatic tension and communicates the point sharply and precisely. In fact, each image follows the same pattern. In the oft-quoted image: 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;' the first part is serious, noble and poetically grand, 'I have measured out my life,' but the other part, 'with coffee spoons' demolishes all the anticipation the first part raised. One would say, 'with coffee spoons' is Eliot's or Prufrock's way of ridiculing of the seriousness of the first part. It is again the same structure in another oft-quoted image:

*I grow old……I grow old……*
*I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*

One common function of all these images is to play down whatever is romantic, serious, noble, extravagant and conservatively attractive. Therefore, the images are wholly functional as they are integrated with the nature of the themes dealt with.

Trivialization is the general feature of all the contemporary culture, trivialization of all values, faiths and beliefs, trivialization of love, passion, sex, art and human relationship. Each image trivializes something considered to be grand and noble valuable.

What remains to be considered is the diction of the poem, for apart from its imagery, much of the novelty of the poem in 1915 or 1917 was seen to lie in the strange use of words and phrases. It was the language of actual everyday conversation which Eliot had used so boldly in the poem. The Georgian poets too had tried to use the real speaking language in their poems. Important contributions in this direction were made by Rupert Brooke, Seigfried Sarseon and Wilfred Owen. But their efforts were limited to using a word here and a phrase there, while by and large the language remained conventionally poetic both in the choice of idioms and rhythm. Eliot's

revolutionizing contributions lay not in using part or snatches but the whole of the contemporary idioms and speech–rhythm.

It may be noticed clearly that the language of the poem is bare of any symbolic features and devoid of any complicated structures. The words in general are most common, though the objects juxtaposed may be far-fetched. There can hardly be more commonplace language than:

*In the room the women come and go*
*Talking of Michelangelo.*

But the effect it exerts is stronger, deeper and at the same time more intimate than any rhetorical or conventionally poetic language is capable of. The complexity of Eliot's does not lie in the language he uses but in the complexity of his feeling the endeavors to communicate. 'Prufrock' is a poem of a feeling, of a mood and all the words and phrases and images are used to create, strengthen and deepen the prevailing feeling or mood. Certain key words are repeated, certain phrases recur so do certain images. Reception is a feature of everyday conversation, and so repetition very closely approximates the speech rhythm. Take the following lines, for example:

*And indeed there will be time*
*For the yellow smoke that slides along the street*
*Rubbing its back upon the window panes;*
*There will be time, there will be time*
*To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;*
*There will be time to murder and create*
*And time for all the works and days of hand.*
*That lift and drop a question on your plate,*
*Time for you and time for me,*
*And time yet for a hundred indecision's,*
*Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

But Eliot exploits the repetition of certain words for his own purpose; he repeats the key-words that suggest the central feeling or mood of the poem. Here 'time' is the key-word, as it is the key-word in the whole poem, and it is always the future time, and postponement of any action in the present time.

Thus, though these are repetitions and elements of long-windedness in the poem, each word and each phrase has a precise function to perform. As Hugh Kenner says 'Every phrase seems composed as though the destiny of the author's soul depended upon it. Yet it is unprofitable not to consider the phrases as arrangements of words before considering them as anything else. Like the thousand little gestures that constitute good manners, their meaning is contained in themselves alone. Eliot is the most verbal of the eminent poets: more verbal than Swinburne. If he has carried verbalism for beyond the extirpation of jarring consonants, it is because of his intimate understanding of what language can do……'

In Swinburne, language is an end in itself; in Eliot it is a means to an end. His verbalism evokes and contributes to the feeling, the mood; it is an instrument of evocation, suggestion and implication. It is a deliberately created verbalism in which

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each word has significance beyond itself, and each phrase a resonance beyond itself.

Generally, metaphor and symbol replace direct statement in Eliot. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* you have what comes to be a familiar compound, observation, memory, and reflection in which observation becomes symbol. The doctrine of the objective correlative means not only that the subjective is projected into the objective, or by means of it, but that it is expressed in other means—metaphor; objects become symbols, and personal feeling is set apart from the poet.

Connection through imagery is characteristic of Eliot, who is likely to exploit a kind of imagery, not to use it at random. A particular kind of imagery becomes the expression of a particular kind of feeling, not only in the same poem but in different poems. Recurrent imagery may not only repeat a theme, but provide a base for variations, or development; its recurrence usually is accompanied by a deeper plumbing or a richer exploration of its significance.

Such a method of indirection is appropriate to a character that never really faces his inner conflict or his frustrated self, and hence is capable of a direct expression of it, to say nothing of a solution. Here the most revealing lines in the poem are: Is it perform from a dress

*That makes me so digress?*

But the observation 'downed with light brown hair' is no digression from the arms or from Prufrock's problem. This is why the epigraph, with its conditioned response, provides an important clue to the intention of the poem; and the title shifts its context significantly. The title suggests the question for this song of indirection, made such by repression. The mock-heroic tone is not merely in the author's treatment or in his character's conception of the problem, but finally even in Prufrock's evasion of himself.

This kind of imagery is more than usually dependent upon arrangement. But the order of parts will reveal an implicit method in an Eliot poem that is essential to its meaning. The going is developed and dramatized even by verb tenses, the time element. The 'drown' submerges again what has emerged in the 'going', which is never directly said and concludes the imagery of his submerged life. To this arrangement the author helps the reader in other ways. His punctuation, for example, is functional and not conventional. Verse, too, is a kind of punctuation, as Eliot has remarked, and he comes to rely upon it more and more as a poet. In the present poem, the phrasal separation in the short lines may be studied, and the effective chimes of the mock-heroic rhyme.

All verse-even nonsense verse is not quite free-depends upon an order and organization capable of being followed and understood. It requires an implicit, if not an explicit, logic–connections, which can be discovered in the terms of the poem. If the words of a poem have syntax, they make sense and have logic. Otherwise the poet has no control over his material except that exerted by meter. Only an ordered context can control the range of meaning set off by the single word; and relevance to this context must be the guide for any reader in determining the range of meaning or the logic involved. William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a misleading

book in the manner that it explores possible meanings without proper regard to their limitations by the context.

Lastly, why is the poem called a 'Love Song'? In truth, the theme of love is so much subdued in it that it is difficult to say whether it is at all about love, and whether there is any evidence in it of the presence of Prufrock's beloved. The phrase 'you and I' has been variously interpreted. Eliot himself is reported to have stated that 'you' is 'some friend or companion of the male sex,' if so, then how to justify the title of 'Love Song'? If it is suggested that love is not the theme of the poem, then why call it 'Love Song'? But 'Love' is certainly the underlying theme of it; although it is a fruitless, sterile yearning for love and not the vital positive passion for love. There is nothing in the poem to suggest either that relationship between 'you and I' is anything like homosexual, but it cannot be ruled out as absurd in the light of Eliot's own remarks and the suggestion of coldness, laziness and boredom in 'I's' attitude to 'you'. Yet, the suggestion does not seem to posses an acceptable soundness.

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## Explanation of the Poem

The epigraph is taken from Dante's *Inferno,* Canto XXVII, lines 61–66. Its English rendering goes thus: 'if I believed my answer might be heard by anyone who could return to the world, this flame would leap no more. But since no one ever, returned alive from these depths, as far as I know, then I answer without fear of infamy.' It emphasizes the lack of communication from which Prufrock also suffers. In the Inferno, the flame of Guido is asked to identify him, and he replies in the words of the epigraph.

*You and I*: I refers to the speaker and you describes the lady, as the title indicates, but the epigraph hints at a scene out of the world.

*When the evening is…….the sky*: It is describing the evening tea-time as you shall see later on. The lines hint towards a sick world.

*Like a patient etherised……table*: Here you can study the startling modern imagery. The speaker sees the evening with the aspect of etherization, and the metaphor of etherization hints towards the desire for inactivity to the point of enforced release from pain.

*Let us go, through certain…… Retreats*: After you assess the time of going, you can understand the way of going. Retreat here means retiring to corners.

*Of restless nights……. with syster-shells*: It describes a surprising way through a cheap section of town and here 'sawdust restaurants' means restaurants made of fine wood fragments and 'oyster' is a kind of fish.

*Streets that follow……overwhelming question*: The way looks as miserable as a tedious argument striking of a treacherous purpose, and leads to an 'over-whelming question'. In the words of George Williamson, 'The streets suggest the character of the question at their end as well as the nature of the urge which takes this route'. There is an abrupt break after the mention of the question, which suggests an emotional block on the part of the speaker.

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*Oh, do not ask*: The speaker declines to recognize the 'over – whelming question.' Unreservedly, it is his emotional urge that he conceals, and that belongs to the 'you'.

*Let us go……our visit*: After repressing the real urge, the speaker deflects the attention by pointing out towards another object or purpose of going in, i.e., 'our visit'.

*In the room……talking of Michelangel*: Where do they have to pay the 'visit'? To the room, where women come and go and gossip about Michelangelo or to a man of violent personality, an artist of epic grandeur and a typical figure of the great creative period of the Renaissance. The slum of the town is associated with the insignificant conversation of women.

*The yellow fog that rubs its back……window panes*: With this line you find more of the twilight atmosphere–the smoke as well as fog settling down. You can personify the image of the fog as cat, hinting towards 'desire which end in inertia'. The cat-image also suggests the greater desire of inactivity.

*The yellow smoke……of the evening*: The stanza describes the yellow smoke, which is like the gathering fog that stole its way from the window panes to the corners of the room, and the evening slipped in.

*Let fall upon its back…….. from chimneys*: The twilight world now changed in the dark world.

*Slipped by …… and fell asleep*: The image of the fog-cat continues. The fog or smoke, slipping by the row of houses ('terrace'), leapt up suddenly, and seeing that it was a pleasant October night, sleepily lapped the house. The speaker or Prufrock cannot think of nature except in terms of a cat rubbing its back and muzzle upon the window panes, licking the dirty drain water, allowing the chimney soot to settle on its body, and finally falling asleep. On the one hand, Prufrock finds an escape from human company by thinking of the fog or smoke while on the other hand he discovers, to his discontent, that the world he wishes to escape into is the world of stealthy behaviour.

*And indeed there……..the window panes*: Here Prufrock decides to postpone taking interest in natural scenery, such as that of the yellow fog or smoke.

*There will be time…….faces that you meet*: Here the design of appearance and reality appears. It is clear that Prufrock prepares a mask for the world in order to lay a plot of momentous effect or to make small talk over tea. His thoughts then turn to the members (women) of the salon party.

*There will be time…… create*: It is now time for Prufrock to kill his natural self and create a concocted one.

*And time for all the works…… on your plate*: It is the time for toast and tea and dishes. Morsels are lifted and dropped on the plate, indicating that the party is now in full swing. The phrase 'drop a question on your plate' indicates the hesitation of Prufrock in entering in a conversation with the people in the drawing-room (for that is the scene) or even with his companion. The 'over-whelming question' of the first paragraph has returned to the speaker with a renewed tension and anxiety.

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*Time for you and…… me*: Prufrock hopes to find time for the two, him and his lady love, before the toast begins.

*And time yet for …….. Toast and tea*: Before the actual event begins, there will be time for a number of indecisions, dreams and revision of previous decisions.

*In the room the women…….. Michelangelo*: Inside the room women keep on talking of Michelangelo, the great sculptor.

*And indeed there will be time…….. 'Do I dare?'*: The time motif returns here. Prufrock is now taken into fear of the mocking and hostile eyes of the world that will keenly note all defects and failings. This section increases the tension of the speaker by raising the question of daring.

*Time to turn back……. Of my hair*: Prufrock's 'terrified self-consciousness' (Grover Smith, p. 18) is exposed in these lines. He is thinking of turning back from the room and going down the stairs, with all his weakness of the unromantic middle-age. He is afraid of his baldness.

*My morning coat…….. A simple pin*: Here one notices the mock-heroic touch in the speaker's 'collar mounting firmly' and the 'assertion' of his simple pin. He is also conscious of his morning coat and necktie. The suggestion here seems to be that even his dress does not allow him to introduce himself to the women in the room.

*[They will say…….. Legs are thin!']*: Like his baldness the thinness of this arms and legs makes Prufrock a misfit in the company.

*Do I dare……. The universe?*: His fear has now mounted to the image of daring to 'disturb the universe.' He cannot do so.

*In a minute……. Will reverse*: The wavering nature of Prufrock is obvious here. In a minute he might make some important decisions and revised ideas that will be reversed in the next minute.

*For I have known them…… all*: In this section Prufrock tries to explain as to why he dare not disturb the universe. In this line, he asserts that the present company of women does not at all enthuse him as he is already familiar with them.

*Have known the evenings……..afternoons*: He is quite familiar not only with the women present there but also with what they do at different periods of the day.

*I have measured out……..coffee spoons*: Prufrock is disgusted with his tired and trivial life.

*I know the voices dying……. a farther room*: He knows about the voices gradually dying out with a highly vocal music from a distant room. In other words, he is within sound and 'within the range of the other senses'.

*So how should I presume?*: He has known all this without doing what he now considers ; so how should he presume to disturb the accepted order?

*And I have known the eyes……them all*: He has already known the inimical eyes.

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*The eyes that fix you……..phrases*: Now the eyes fix him, give him his place in the accepted order, with a formulated phrase.

*And when I am formulated…….. On the wall*: 'Sprawling' and 'wriggling' describe the image of an insect. When Prufrock has been classified like an insect, how can he deny his classification and break with his past? These lines also recall to our minds the austerities practiced by a hermit. It is not unlikely that the speaker, who has met failure in life, should have turned to the austere practice for his consolation. Sprawling means crawling and wriggling means struggling.

*Then how should I begin……..days and ways?*: The speaker cannot change his days and ways.

*So how should I presume*: So how can Prufrock declare his love to his beloved?

*And I have known …….. brown hair !*: Prufrock has known the arms already, the arms that are ornamented, white coloured and bare, but that are covered with light brown hair in the evening.

*Is it perfume……..so digress?*: He is distracted for a moment by the erotic symbol contained in 'downed with light brown hair' and 'perfume from a dress'. The 'arms' and the 'perfume' together create aromatic atmosphere. 'Digress' suggests 'giving up his intention to speak out about his love'.

*Arms that lie…….. a shawl*: The places where the arms may be found lying.

*And should I …….begin?*: The insistent problem with the speaker is that of communication or 'beginning'.

*Shall I say……..of windows?*: For a moment prufrock gathers all his powers to 'begin'. But he soon digresses in fancying what he might say or might not say. These lines emphasize the loneliness and depression of the speaker.

*I should been……..silent seas*: These lines indicate the kind of creature Prufrock should have been–'a pair of ragged claws' in 'silent seas' and not Prufrock in a drawing room. 'A pair of ragged claws' means 'a kind of sea species with rough claws' and scuttling means moving quickly.

*And the afternoon……..beside you and me*: The scene is once more the drawing room where the afternoon, the evening, sleeps peacefully, or it pretends to sleep stretching on the floor beside the speaker and his companion.

*Should I, after tea……..to its crisis ?*: Prufrock does not, after the party is over, have the strength to force or precipitate the crisis.

*But though I have wept…….. And here's no great matter*: Although Prufrock had been remorseful for his misdeeds, and although he has seen his bald head cut and dished, he is no prophet, as John the Baptist was, for we know that Baptist's head was demanded by Salome because he had rejected her love.

*After the cups……worthwhile*: He thinks that the 'crisis' will not have been worthwhile after taking tea and jam and participating in a social gathering. Marmalade is a kind of jam while porcelain is crockery or china-ware.

NOTES

*To have bitten off……with a smile*: Should he have spoken of his love quickly with a smile? It would have been improper.

*To have squeezed……a ball*: Prufrock is presently out of the room in the street, and thinking about his failure at the party. He now feels that to force the 'crisis' would have meant to attempt an impossible task, for it is not possible to 'squeeze the universe into a ball.'

*To roll it…….question*: It will not have been worthwhile for him to rush towards the 'crisis' (which is real love).

*And would it have been……and as much more*?: Prufrock is struck by his own inadequacy. He feels that it would have been unwise for him to force the 'crisis' after attending the evening party.

*But as if a magic lantern…… a screen*: Though Prufrock is unable to state precisely his feelings, he can still form vague ideas or patterns about them, which are not unlike 'a magic lantern' throwing pictures on a screen.

*Would it had been…..... at all*: Once again Prufrock is afraid of the unfavorable reaction of the lady. The passage beginning with these lines provides, as Joseph Margolis says, 'the only occasion on which Prufrock has attempted to sustain an exact evaluation of his entire career, and the statement — including his denial of heroic pretensions–forms a part of a larger and most remarkable unity.' Prufrock asserts that he is not Prince Hamlet, though indecision might suggest it. One should remember that Hamlet proposed to Ophelia, but postponed the 'crisis.'

*As an attendant lord……. the prince*: Instead he is cautious attendant like Polonius, a courtier of King Claudius; he is the attendant who will be fit to increase the number of a procession, to begin a scene or two, and to advise the Prince.

*No doubt, an easy tool……the Fool*: Certain characteristics of a good attendant are detailed herein,–he will be compliant, easy to handle, respectful, useful, courteous, careful, full of wise words but a little dull, sometimes laughable and at other times playing the role of a fool (used in the Shakespearean sense).

*I grow old…….trousers rolled.*: Here Prufrock assumes the role of a careful character and indulges in self-mockery. There is a sense of weariness in the repetition 'I grow old… I grow old…' Though he is resigned to his sad role and unromantic character, he resolves to be a little sportive in dress (by wearing his trousers cuffed).

*Shall I part my hair behind?…... a peach?*: Having resigned to his sad role. Prufrock would raise 'the overwhelming question' no more. Now the problem before him whether he should try to hide his baldness, whether he should dare to eat a peach.

*I shall wear white flannel trouser…….beach*: The rising tempo of the lines suggests Prufrock walking hastily to the sea-beach after he has put on white woolen trousers. 'Flannel' means 'woolen'. *I have heard the mermaids…….sing to me*: Prufrock is an aging man standing on the sea-beach and wistfully watching the girls, who pay no heed to him. He is sunk into a vision or dream of beauty and vitality.

NOTES

These girls become mermaids riding triumphantly seawards into their creative natural element and singing to each other. But the mermaids, like the lady, probably will not sing to him.

*I have seen them……white and black*: The reference here is to the mermaids riding seawards on the waves and floating on the white foam at a time when the wind blows the water white and black.

*We have lingered…. and we drown*: The concluding lines (129 – 131) take us to the mermaids, reminding us of Prufrock's original situation. He has 'lingered', not in the drawing room surrounded by the women talking of Michelangelo, but in the 'chambers of the sea' surrounded by 'sea girls', who are garlanded with red and brown seaweed. But such an experience is possible only in dream: '…human voices wake us'. To wake is to return to the human world of suffocation and death: 'and we drown.'

The dawn of reality on Prufrock and his friends, who are lost in visions so far, disturbs them and renders them sad and frustrated.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

10. Name the glorious personalities who influenced T. S. Eliot.
11. Name any two eminent poets of Eliot's time.

## 3.7 SUMMARY

- There are various forms of poetry that have emerged over a period of time. A poetic genre is a classification of poetry based on the subject matter, style, or other broader literary characteristics.
- Matthew Arnold was born in 1822 at Laleham in England. He was educated in Winchester and Oxford. In 1841, he won an open scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford.
- *Dover Beach* is one of the most admired of Arnold's poems today. *Dover Beach* is the Victorian lyric of painful doubt and disorientation. First published in 1867, this poem has always been regarded as a representative poem of Arnold, typical of his outlook on life.
- Arnold tries to show the lack of faith and certitude in a world which is materially expanding. The poem opens with an image of the sea, which is a recurring feature in most English Literature.
- In a dramatic monologue, even though there is only one speaker speaking (therefore monologue), it is still dramatic as there is an actual or implied listener whose questions and queries are anticipated by the speaker and answered making the monologue dramatic.

NOTES

- It is an unusual form of poetry in the sense that it is dramatic and yet there is only one speaker. The silence of the listener is not a problem for the readers as the listener's presence is manifest in the poem through the speech of the speaker
- For example, in *Porphyria's Lover*, Browning's dramatic monologist, the lover is speaking to the readers explaining why he has murdered his beloved and at the same time making himself understand that he is justified in his actions.
- Browning's dramatic monologues are not just concerned with passions, but with the 'psychology of passions' of unstable characters who at some critical point of their life sets into a rhetorical mode to justify his action through a dramatic monologue.
- The poem *Porphyria's Lover* begins with a description of the tumultuous weather of the night when it was raining and windy, and the lover was waiting for Porphyria in a cabin in an unnamed place.
- In *Porphyria's Lover*, Robert Browning is dealing with an unstable lover's passion who is mentally not stable and finally kills his beloved to make her to be his own forever.
- Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (18 March 1893 – 4 November 1918) was a poet of the Georgian Age, that is, the early twentieth century. Wilfred Owen was a poet who wrote about the effects of World War on the soldiers. He portrayed the inhuman aspects of war.
- The narrator of the poem *Strange Meeting* is a dead soldier who is speaking to us. It seems apparently absurd that we are made to look at the futility of the war and horrors of trenches through the dead soldiers' experiences.
- Thomas Stearns Eliot has been a popular name in English poetry since the early 1920s. He had ruled the age in which he lived with absolute authority. The twentieth century cannot be signalled by a single voice or authority.
- As a poet, Eliot drew from many different sources to gather his material. He was deeply influenced by some famous personalities of the past and of the modern scene.
- T. S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri (the USA). His family was of Devonshire origin, traditionally interested in trade and commerce and academics.
- Eliot is a representative poet of the twentieth century and hence he has voiced forcefully the moral and spiritual degradation of modern man, the loss of human values and the prevalence of chaos, confusion and tension in the human world.

NOTES

## 3.8 KEY TERMS

- **Hellenism:** It refers to the national character or culture of Greece, especially ancient Greece.
- **Soliloquy:** It is a device often used in drama when a character speaks to himself or herself, relating thoughts and feelings, thereby also sharing them with the audience, giving off the illusion of being a series of unspoken reflections.
- **Renaissance:** It was a period in European history, from the 14th to the 17th century, regarded as the cultural bridge between the Middle Ages and modern history.
- **Theology:** It is the critical study of the nature of the divine. It is taught as an academic discipline, typically in universities, seminaries and schools of divinity.

## 3.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. An ode is a poem that has a formal poetic diction, sometimes addressed to an absent person, or an object, and dealing with a subject which is serious is nature.
2. Dramatic poetry can be described as a drama written in poetry form where the characters involved carry on verbal exchanges in verse and their conversations rhyme unlike a normal discourse, which is prosaic.
3. A narrative is a story and any poem that tells a story is called 'narrative' poetry.
4. Matthew Arnold was born in 1822 at Laleham in England.
5. The first volume by Matthew Arnold was *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*.
6. Browning's dramatic monologues are concerned with 'psychology of passions' of unstable characters who at some critical point of their life sets into a rhetorical mode to justify his action through a dramatic monologue.
7. In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke, the dramatic monologist, is a polished, sophisticated Italian aristocrat, an autocrat, a product of renaissance, arrogant, avaricious, status-conscious and connoisseur of art.
8. Wilfred Edward Salter Owen belonged to Georgian Age.
9. Wilfred Owen's poetry was influenced by John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.
10. T. S. Eliot was deeply influenced by certain glorious personalities of the past and of the contemporary scene. Some of them were William Shakespeare, John Milton and John Dryden.
11. Two eminent poets of Eliot's time were William Yeats and Ezra Pound.

## 3.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

NOTES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the various forms of poetry?
2. Write a short note on Matthew Arnold's life.
3. How is *Porphyria's Lover* established as a dramatic monologue by Robert Browning?
4. What are Wilfred Owen's contributions to war poetry?
5. Why is Eliot considered to be a prophet of chaos?
6. What are the major symbols used in Eliot's poetry?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyse the poem *Dover Beach* by Matthew Arnold.
2. What is a dramatic monologue? How can Robert Browning's works *My Last Duchess* and *Porphyria's Lover* be compared as forms of dramatic monologue?
3. Interpret Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting* in the light of war poetry.
4. What are the major contributions of T. S. Eliot towards English poetry? Discuss in detail.
5. Discuss the major themes and motifs used in Eliot's poetry.
6. Give a critical appreciation of the poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T. S. Eliot.

## 3.11 FURTHER READING

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# UNIT 4 SUBSTANCE AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

NOTES

**Structure**



## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

The initial writings in English, which were in Old English, made their appearance in the early Middle Ages. The most ancient work that is known to have survived in Old English is the *Hymn* of *Cædmon*. The oral culture is known to have been extremely popular in the ancient English culture with maximum literary works being written with a motive of being enacted on stage. Epic poems, therefore, gained great popularity with several such poems that included *Beowulf*, surviving to the present day. They exist in the rich corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature which bear much resemblance to the present day's Icelandic, Norwegian, North Frisian and the Northumbrian, and Scots English dialects of modern English. The earliest dramatic representation in England was in Latin. It was performed by priests who used it as a means of conveying the truth of religion to the illiterate masses.

This unit deals with selected passages and their explanation of various poems by famous poets.

## 4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Assess the significance of *Paradise Lost*
- Discuss the use of mock-heroic verse in *The Rape of the Lock*
- Analyse the two main literary figures of the twentieth century
- Describe Wordsworth's contributions as a poet

## 4.2 UNSEEN VERSE PIECE

This section discusses the unseen verse pieces from various poems.

NOTES

### 4.2.1 Selected Passages from *Paradise Lost*

*(i)*

*Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit*
*Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast*
*Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,*
*With loss of EDEN, till one greater Man*
*Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,*
*Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top*
*Of OREB, or of SINAI, didst inspire*
*That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,*
*In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth*
*Rose out of CHAOS:*

**Explanation**: These are the beginning lines of the poem, *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton. In these lines, he is talking about Man's first disobedience. Man here refers to Adam and the first disobedience refers to not obeying God's command when He forbade Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the Tree of Life. The mortal taste of this fruit brought death into the world, besides bringing great miseries and woes to mankind. He says in the fourth line that 'one greater man' restored to mankind the blissful seat. This 'greater man' was Jesus, the Son of God. Milton here is referring to the supreme sacrifice that Jesus made by shedding His precious blood by dying on the Cross of Calvary for the sins of mankind. This sacrifice helped mankind regain its lost seat in heaven.

In the next few lines, Milton is invoking his heavenly muse. He calls for her help in writing this epic. This muse is the same as Urania, traditionally the muse of astronomy. However, several theories have it that Milton could be invoking the holy spirit in helping him write this epic.

In asking the heavenly muse, Milton asks her to sing as she is the same muse who inspired the shepherd Moses on top of Mt. Horeb or Sinai. It was that shepherd, Moses, who first taught God's ways to the chosen seed. The chosen seed here refers to the people of Israel. The people of Israel have been referred to as the chosen people all through the Bible. It was Moses who taught the Israelites about how the heaven and the earth were created out of what was chaos.

*(ii)*

*A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round*
*As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames*

NOTES

*No light, but rather darkness visible*
*Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,*
*Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace [ 65 ]*
*And rest can never dwell, hope never comes*
*That comes to all; but torture without end*
*Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed*
*With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:*
*Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd [ 70 ]*
*For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd*
*In utter darkness, and thir portion set*
*As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n*
*As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.*

**Explanation**: Milton in the given lines is describing hell. He describes hell as being a dungeon that has been covered by flames. It had flames and only flames all around it, yet those flames gave out no light. They only had the power to burn but did not give out any light, due to which the dungeon remained dark. There were only sights of cries and groans. They are places of immense sorrow and grief where peace and rest never come. It is endless torture which remains unconsumed by ever-burning sulphur. This is the kind of place that God has prepared for those who are rebellious and do not obey God's word and command. It is into this prison that he will throw such people. The place is filled with utter darkness with their portion set. This place is thrice as far removed from God and the light of heaven as the distance between centre of the earth and the utmost pole.

### 4.2.2 Selected Passages from *The Rape of the Lock*

*Sol thro' white Curtains shot a tim'rous Ray,*
*And op'd those Eyes that must eclipse the Day;*
*Now Lapdogs give themselves the rowzing Shake,*
*And sleepless Lovers, just at Twelve, awake:*
*Thrice rung the Bell, the Slipper knock'd the Ground,*
*And the press'd Watch return'd a silver Sound.*
*Belinda still her downy Pillow prest,*
*Her Guardian Sylph prolong'd the balmy Rest.*
*'Twas he had summon'd to her silent Bed*
*The Morning-Dream that hover'd o'er her Head.*
*A Youth more glitt'ring than a Birth-night Beau,*
*(That ev'n in Slumber caus'd her Cheek to glow)*

*Seem'd to her Ear his winning Lips to lay,*
*And thus in Whispers said, or seem'd to say.*
*(Canto 1)*

NOTES

**Explanation:** Following his invocation of the muse, the poet says that the sun through the white curtain has shot a ray. It has initiated the happenings of a day in a rich household. Lapdogs are seen shaking them out of sleep, bells begin to ring, and though it is already noon, Belinda is still sleeping. She is dreaming, and we learn that it is 'her guardian Sylph', Ariel, who is responsible for sending this dream. The dream is about a handsome young man, informing that these are 'unnumber'd spirits' protecting her. These spirits are an army of supernatural creatures who once were known to be living on earth as human women. The young man explains that they are the ones who invisibly guard the chastity of women. The credit for this although is generally by mistake given to 'Honour' instead of their divine stewardship. Out of these creatures, one specific group—the Sylphs that live in the air—serve as Belinda's personal guardians; they are devoted, lover-like to any woman that 'rejects mankind', and they understand and reward the vanities of a beautiful and playful woman, such as Belinda. Ariel, the chief of all Belinda's puckish protectors, gives her a warning in this dream that 'some dread event' will happen to her that day. He can tell her nothing more besides this and concludes by saying that she should be 'beware of Man'! It is now that Belinda wakes up, when her lapdog, Shock, licks her. When a billet-doux, or love-letter, is delivered to her, she forgets all about the dream. She then goes to her dressing table and goes through an elaborate ritual of dressing. Here, her own image in the mirror is described as a 'heavenly image', a 'goddess'. The Sylphs, invisible, assist their charge as she gets ready for the activities of the day.

### 4.2.3 Selected Passages from *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*

*(i)*
*My heart leaps up when I behold*
*A rainbow in the sky:*
*So was it when my life began;*
*So is it now I am a man;*
*So be it when I shall grow old,*
*Or let me die!*
*The Child is father of the Man;*
*I could wish my days to be*
*Bound each to each by natural piety.*
*'The Child is father of the Man;*
*And I could wish my days to be*
*Bound each to each by natural piety.'*

NOTES

**Context**

The above lines were written by William Wordsworth in 1802 and published as an epigraph of the poem *Ode to the Intimations of Immortality* in 1807. Wordsworth bought a completely new approach to the writing of English poetry.

**Explanation**

Wordsworth's objections to highly stylized poetic diction, his attitude to nature, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects of his poetry are some of his achievements. Poetry for him was primarily the record of a certain kind of state of mind and the value of poetry for him lay in the value of that state of mind that the poet recorded. As a poet, Wordsworth was a man of unusual emotional vitality.

In these lines, the speaker expresses his connection to nature. Nature has the power to stir him. He has always been influenced by nature, even when he was a baby: 'So was it when my life began; / So is it now I am a man.' He says that this closeness will continue till he grows old. He prefers death over discontinuance to this connectivity to nature. He says children are above men as they are in closer proximity to nature and God. He wishes to remain in touch with this aspect of his childhood. 'Child is father of the Man'— This line is often quoted as it is able to convey a complicated idea in a few words.

## 4.2.4 Selected Passages from *Ode to the West Wind*

*A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed*
*One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.*
*Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:*
*What if my leaves are falling like its own!*
*The tumult of thy mighty harmonies*
*Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,*
*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?*

### Context

The above lines are from Shelley's poem *Ode to the West Wind*. In Shelley's words, 'This poem was written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by the magnificent thunder and lightening peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.'

The Ode is charged with speed, force and energy like the tempestuous wind itself. The powerful movement of the verse is carried on by the use of a series of images thrown up in rapid succession. The movement is not just confined to the elemental forces of nature; it is also to be seen in the emotions roused in the poet's mind by his contemplation of the wind. The movement slows down in Section 3 and then gains rapidity in line with the poet's impetuous spirit, as he drives to the close.

There is, in this poem, a blend of natural and spiritual forces. The West Wind is a force of Nature, but it also symbolizes the free spirit of man, untamed and proud. Shelley's great passion for the regeneration of mankind and rebirth of a new world finds a fitting symbol in the West Wind, which destroys and preserves, sweeps away the old and obsolete ideas and fosters fresh and new ones.

### Explanation

The concluding lines are magnificent expressions of hope and exultation, 'tameless, swift and proud'. As Shelley's spirit is like the spirit of the West Wind, he cannot despair. The imagery, in earlier sections of the poem confined to earth, air, and water, now aspires to the fourth element of fire. Certainly first person pronouns and adjectives are frequent here but they are more positively linked to the second person pronouns and adjectives of the larger forces to which the poem addresses itself. One can observe the juxtapositions of 'me thy' in line 57 and 'thou me' in line 62. Stanza 4 had articulated the self as essentially singular: 'a leaf, 'a cloud', 'a wave', which led to painful doubt ('I fall-I bleed') and to a despair which allowed the once 'tameless and proud' mind to imagine itself as powerfully chained and bowed'. By contrast, in stanza 5, the recovery of freedom and pride is sought through a redefinition of the self in plural terms ('my thoughts', 'my words') as one component in a mass movement. The Wild West Wind inspires Shelley to write poetry and this poetry, in turn, serves as an inspiring message to humanity. This message would fire human hearts kindling the desire for progress and a better world. Thus, the poem closes on a note of ardent hope.

## 4.2.5 Selected Passages from *Ulysses*

### Text

*This is my son, mine own Telemachus,*
*to whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—*
*Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill*
*This labor, by slow prudence to make mild*

*A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees*
*Subdue them to the useful and the good.*
*Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere*
*Of common duties, decent not to fail*
*In offices of tenderness, and pay*
*Meet adoration to my household gods,*
*When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.*

NOTES

**Interpretation**

The above lines have been taken from 'Ulysses' written by Alfred Lord Tennyson. The above stanza is spoken in praise of Ulysses' son Telemachus. Ulysses bequeaths his kingdom and royal powers to his son. He has great affection for his son and expects him to hold the same for his subjects. He wants him to make them know as to what is good for them. He assigns him duties and responsibilities, and himself takes up the pursuit of knowledge.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Who has written *Paradise Lost*?
2. What does West Wind symbolize in *Ode to the West Wind*?

## 4.3 UNSEEN VERSE PIECE FROM *THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK*

**Selected Passages from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock***

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse*
*A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,*
*Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.*
*Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo*
*Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,*
*Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

The epigraph is taken from Dante's *Inferno,* Canto XXVII, lines 61–66. Its English rendering goes thus: 'if I believed my answer might be heard by anyone who could return to the world, this flame would leap no more. But since no one ever, returned alive from these depths, as far as I know, then I answer without fear of infamy.' It emphasizes the lack of communication from which Prufrock also suffers. In the Inferno, the flame of Guido is asked to identify him, and he replies in the words of the epigraph.

NOTES

**First Paragraph**

' LET us go then….. make our visit.'

'You and I' refer to the speaker and 'you' describes the lady, as the title indicates, but the epigraph hints at a scene out of the world. The poem begins with the evening tea-time. The speaker sees the evening with the aspect of etherization, and the metaphor of etherization hints towards the desire for inactivity to the point of enforced release from pain. In a strange manner, the speaker describes the restaurants made of fine wood fragments as 'sawdust restaurants.' The way looks as miserable as a tedious argument striking of a treacherous purpose, and leads to an 'over-whelming question'. In the words of George Williamson, 'The streets suggest the character of the question at their end as well as the nature of the urge which takes this route.' There is an abrupt break after the mention of the question, which suggests an emotional block on the part of the speaker. After repressing the real urge, the speaker deflects the attention by pointing out towards another object or purpose of going in, i.e., 'our visit'.

**Second Paragraph**

' In the room…. and fell asleep.'

The speaker and the lady will have to pay visit to the room, where women come and go and gossip about Michelangelo or to a man of violent personality, an artist of epic grandeur and a typical figure of the great creative period of the Renaissance. The slum of the town is associated with the insignificant conversation of women. The speaker can personify the image of the fog as cat, hinting towards 'desire which end in inertia.' The cat-image also suggests the greater desire of inactivity. The stanza describes the yellow smoke, which is like the gathering fog that stole its way from the window panes to the corners of the room, and the evening slipped in. The twilight world now changed in the dark world. The image of the fog-cat continues in this stanza. The fog or smoke, slipping by the row of houses ('terrace'), leapt up suddenly, and seeing that it was a pleasant October night, sleepily lapped the house. The speaker or Prufrock cannot think of nature except in terms of a cat rubbing its back and muzzle upon the window panes, licking the dirty drain water, allowing the chimney soot to settle on its body, and finally falling asleep. On the one hand, Prufrock finds an escape from human company by thinking of the fog or smoke while on the other hand he discovers, to his discontent, that the world he wishes to escape into is the world of stealthy behaviour.

**Third Paragraph**

'And indeed there will be….of a toast and tea.'

In this stanza, Prufrock decides to postpone taking interest in natural scenery, such as that of the yellow fog or smoke. It is clear that Prufrock prepares a mask for the world in order to lay a plot of momentous effect or to make small talk over tea. His thoughts then turn to the members (women) of the salon party. It is now time for Prufrock to kill his natural self and create a concocted one. It is the time for toast and tea and dishes. Morsels are lifted and dropped on the plate, indicating that the party is now in full swing. The phrase 'drop a question on your plate' indicates

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the hesitation of Prufrock in entering in a conversation with the people in the drawing-room (for that is the scene) or even with his companion. The 'over-whelming question' of the first paragraph has returned to the speaker with a renewed tension and anxiety. Prufrock hopes to find time for the two, him and his lady love, before the toast begins. Before the actual event begins, there will be time for a number of indecisions, dreams and revision of previous decisions.

**Fourth Paragraph**

'In the room the women come …. a minute will reverse.'

Inside the room women keep on talking of Michelangelo, the great sculptor. The time motif returns in this stanza. Prufrock is now taken into fear of the mocking and hostile eyes of the world that will keenly note all defects and failings. This section increases the tension of the speaker by raising the question of daring. Prufrock's 'terrified self-consciousness' is exposed in these lines. He is thinking of turning back from the room and going down the stairs, with all his weakness of the unromantic middle-age. He is afraid of his baldness. Here one notices the mock-heroic touch in the speaker's 'collar mounting firmly' and the 'assertion' of his simple pin. He is also conscious of his morning coat and necktie. The suggestion here seems to be that even his dress does not allow him to introduce himself to the women in the room. Like his baldness the thinness of this arms and legs makes Prufrock a misfit in the company. His fear has now mounted to the image of daring to 'disturb the universe.' He cannot do so. The wavering nature of Prufrock is obvious here. In a minute he might make some important decisions and revised ideas that will be reversed in the next minute.

**Fifth Paragraph**

'For I have known them already….So how should I presume?'

In this stanza, Prufrock tries to explain as to why he dare not disturb the universe. He asserts that the present company of women does not at all enthuse him as he is already familiar with them. He is quite familiar not only with the women present there but also with what they do at different periods of the day. Prufrock is disgusted with his tired and trivial life. He knows about the voices gradually dying out with a highly vocal music from a distant room. In other words, he is within sound and 'within the range of the other senses'. He has known all this without doing what he now considers; so how should he presume to disturb the accepted order?

**Sixth Paragraph**

'And I have known the eyes already…And how should I presume?'

He has already known the inimical eyes. Now the eyes fix him, give him his place in the accepted order, with a formulated phrase. –'Sprawling' and 'wriggling' describe the image of an insect. When Prufrock has been classified like an insect, how can he deny his classification and break with his past? These lines also recall to our minds the austerities practiced by a hermit. It is not unlikely that the speaker, who has met failure in life, should have turned to the austere practice for his consolation. Sprawling means crawling and wriggling means struggling. The speaker cannot change his days and ways. So how can Prufrock declare his love to his beloved?

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### Seventh Paragraph

'And I have known the arms already…And should I then presume?'

Prufrock has known the arms already, the arms that are ornamented, white coloured and bare, but that are covered with light brown hair in the evening. He is distracted for a moment by the erotic symbol contained in 'downed with light brown hair' and 'perfume from a dress.' The 'arms' and the 'perfume' together create an aromatic atmosphere. 'Digress' suggests 'giving up his intention to speak out about his love'. 'Lie along a table or wrap about a shawl' seems to suggest the places where the arms may be found lying.

### Eighth Paragraph

'And how should I begin?...here beside you and me?'

The insistent problem with the speaker is that of communication or 'beginning'. For a moment Prufrock gathers all his powers to 'begin'. However, he soon digresses in fancying what he might say or might not say. These lines emphasize the loneliness and depression of the speaker. These lines indicate the kind of creature Prufrock should have been–'a pair of ragged claws' in 'silent seas' and not Prufrock in a drawing room. 'A pair of ragged claws' means 'a kind of sea species with rough claws' and scuttling means moving quickly. The scene is once more the drawing room where the afternoon, the evening, sleeps peacefully, or it pretends to sleep stretching on the floor beside the speaker and his companion.

### Ninth Paragraph

' Should I after tea and cakes and ices…Almost at times, the Fool.'

Prufrock does not, after the party is over, have the strength to force or precipitate the crisis. Although Prufrock had been remorseful for his misdeeds, and although he has seen his bald head cut and dished, he is no prophet, as John the Baptist was, for we know that Baptist's head was demanded by Salome because he had rejected her love. He thinks that the 'crisis' will not have been worthwhile after taking tea and jam and participating in a social gathering. Marmalade is a kind of jam while porcelain is crockery or china-ware. Should he have spoken of his love quickly with a smile? It would have been improper. Prufrock is presently out of the room in the street, and thinking about his failure at the party. He now feels that to force the 'crisis' would have meant to attempt an impossible task, for it is not possible to 'squeeze the universe into a ball.' It will not have been worthwhile for him to rush towards the 'crisis' (which is real love). Prufrock is struck by his own inadequacy. He feels that it would have been unwise for him to force the 'crisis' after attending the evening party. Though Prufrock is unable to state precisely his feelings, he can still form vague ideas or patterns about them, which are not unlike 'a magic lantern' throwing pictures on a screen. Once again Prufrock is afraid of the unfavourable reaction of the lady. The passage beginning with these lines provides, as Joseph Margolis says, 'the only occasion on which Prufrock has attempted to sustain an exact evaluation of his entire career, and the statement — including his denial of heroic pretensions– forms a part of a larger and most remarkable unity.' Prufrock asserts that he is not

Prince Hamlet, though indecision might suggest it. One should remember that Hamlet proposed to Ophelia, but postponed the 'crisis.' Instead he is cautious attendant like Polonius, a courtier of King Claudius; he is the attendant who will be fit to increase the number of a procession, to begin a scene or two, and to advise the Prince. Certain characteristics of a good attendant are detailed herein,–he will be compliant, easy to handle, respectful, useful, courteous, careful, full of wise words but a little dull, sometimes laughable and at other times playing the role of a fool (used in the Shakespearean sense).

**Tenth Paragraph**

'I grow old….and we drown.'

In this stanza, Prufrock assumes the role of a careful character and indulges in self-mockery. There is a sense of weariness in the repetition 'I grow old… I grow old…' Though he is resigned to his sad role and unromantic character, he resolves to be a little sportive in dress (by wearing his trousers cuffed). Having resigned to his sad role, Prufrock would raise 'the overwhelming question' no more. Now the problem before him whether he should try to hide his baldness, whether he should dare to eat a peach. The rising tempo of the lines suggests Prufrock walking hastily to the sea-beach after he has put on white woolen trousers. 'Flannel' means 'woolen'. Prufrock is an aging man standing on the sea-beach and wistfully watching the girls, who pay no heed to him. He is sunk into a vision or dream of beauty and vitality. These girls become mermaids riding triumphantly seawards into their creative natural element and singing to each other. But the mermaids, like the lady, probably will not sing to him. The reference here is to the mermaids riding seawards on the waves and floating on the white foam at a time when the wind blows the water white and black. The concluding lines, take us to the mermaids, reminding us of Prufrock's original situation. He has 'lingered', not in the drawing room surrounded by the women talking of Michelangelo, but in the 'chambers of the sea' surrounded by 'sea girls', who are garlanded with red and brown seaweed. However, such an experience is possible only in dream: '…human voices wake us'. To wake is to return to the human world of suffocation and death: 'and we drown.'

The dawn of reality on Prufrock and his friends, who are lost in visions so far, disturbs them and renders them sad and frustrated.

### Check Your Progress

3. What is the source of epigraph of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*?
4. Who has written *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*?

## 4.4 SUMMARY

- *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton, begins with talking about Man's first disobedience.

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- 'Man' in *Paradise Lost* refers to Adam and the first disobedience refers to not obeying God's command when He forbade Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the Tree of Life. The mortal taste of this fruit brought death into the world, besides bringing great miseries and woes to mankind.
- Wordsworth bought a completely new approach to the writing of English poetry.
- Wordsworth's objections to highly stylized poetic diction, his attitude to nature, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects of his poetry are some of his achievements.
- Poetry, for Wordsworth, was primarily the record of a certain kind of state of mind and the value of poetry for him lay in the value of that state of mind that the poet recorded. As a poet, Wordsworth was a man of unusual emotional vitality.
- The *Ode to the West Wind* is charged with speed, force and energy like the tempestuous wind itself. The powerful movement of the verse is carried on by the use of a series of images thrown up in rapid succession.
- The concluding lines of *Ode to the West Wind* are magnificent expressions of hope and exultation, 'tameless, swift and proud'.
- As Shelley's spirit is like the spirit of the West Wind, he cannot despair. The imagery, in earlier sections of the poem confined to earth, air, and water, now aspires to the fourth element of fire.
- There is, in this poem, a blend of natural and spiritual forces. The West Wind is a force of Nature, but it also symbolizes the free spirit of man, untamed and proud.
- Shelley's great passion for the regeneration of mankind and rebirth of a new world finds a fitting symbol in the West Wind, which destroys and preserves, sweeps away the old and obsolete ideas and fosters fresh and new ones.
- The epigraph of The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is taken from Dante's *Inferno,* Canto XXVII, lines 61–66.

  Its English rendering goes thus: 'if I believed my answer might be heard by anyone who could return to the world, this flame would leap no more. But since no one ever, returned alive from these depths, as far as I know, then I answer without fear of infamy.'

## 4.5 KEY TERMS

- **Muse:** In mythology, the Muses were nine goddesses who symbolized the arts and sciences. Today, a muse is a person who serves as an artist's inspiration.
- **Epigraph:** In , an epigraph is a phrase, , or that is set at the beginning of a document or component. The epigraph may serve as a preface, as a summary,

as a counter-example, or to link the work to a wider , either to invite comparison or to enlist a conventional context.

- **Ode:** An Ode is a type of . A classic ode is structured in three major parts: the , the , and the . Different forms such as the homostrophic ode and the irregular ode also exist. It is an elaborately structured poem praising or glorifying an event or individual, describing nature intellectually as well as emotionally.

## 4.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. *Paradise Lost* is written by John Milton.
2. West Wind symbolizes the free spirit of man, untamed and proud.
3. The epigraph of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is taken from Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XXVII, lines 61-66.
4. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is written by T.S. Eliot.

## 4.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the theme of *Paradise Lost*.
2. What does Wordsworth portray in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*?
3. Discuss the first paragraph of The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the concept of Hell in *Paradise Lost.*
2. How was *Rape of the Lock* regarded by the critics of the eighteenth century?
3. Describe the significance of nature in *ode to the West Wind.*

## 4.8 FURTHER READING

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