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# Syllabus

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- An Introduction to British Poet
- Study of Shakespeare as a sonneteer. Four important sonnets by Shakespeare.
- The Daffodils & Three Years She Grew by William Wordsworth.
- Essay on Man (first 2 verses) by Alexander Pope
- On his Blindness by John Milton
- Valediction Forbidding Mourning by John Donne.
- To a Skylark by P.B. Shelley.
- The Lamb & The Tyger by William Blake.
- Ode on a Grecian Urn by John Keats
- Ode to Evening by William Collins.

## BRITISH POETRY

### Introduction

In so far as the end of the World War II meets-out a kind of crisis in poetry, it is because the opinion of the critics does not match with the taste of the readers. Whatsoever be the reasons – financial or philosophical – the theory of enjoyment, taken as an implicit key to the readers' proper reception of poetry<sup>1</sup> does not work. The 'crisis' exists, and does not curtail the truth of the conviction as enjoyment or delight is not the end or aim of the contemporary poetry. Considering the reader to be the trend- setter of all times, or the 'timeless', and simultaneously, keeping aside the inter-relation of poetry and criticism, the greatest truth about the incidence of its creation would be to know – why does a poet or a writer write at all. The contemporary poetry, in fact, is neither a crisis nor an enjoyment, it is more an adjustment of the self and the society, and himself. No poet on earth is a businessman, and no critic a marketing wizard. If a writer endites, it bears no barriers of taste, class and meaning. All art is produced on account of an impulsive 'synaesthesia' between the self and the loss one undergoes in real life. Any normal being has a balanced set of impulses, such that the exterior values pertaining to either<sup>2</sup> kind of vice or virtue, exhibit the viability of perception in any conducive situation. But the artist, at least, cannot be said a to be normal creature, he has his own personal kind of history. Where a normal personality is the poise between the positive and the negative impulses, the artist of the poetic nature fails to maintain it somewhere.

The fact is that the writer, particularly the poet, has some impulsive lack in his life, which at long last, takes the permanent shape, deep rooted, neither easy to be tolerated, nor to be made public. In such an impulsive state of disorder, there can be just two possibilities. One, that the artist fails to retain the balance and goes insane. Two, he searches for a way out to control the 'impulsive debacle' and succeed in finding the 'poise' by subsiding the rise of his 'wild-impulsive'. It must imply that any artistic creation, primarily poetry, is a job done for self-satisfaction, a type of an action mitigating one's own loss. It is, thus that poetry has none but an individual problem, trasnshumabited on universal plane of thinking than an objective meaning. The actual object the loss the poet tries to recover through words and expressions is not reckoned. Both his disorders and the efforts to balance it remain secret.

Our act of analyzing poetry for a meaning should be short as the impulse causing disorder, as well as the poets approach to counter-act it, is not explicit. The poet writes for himself basically, and not for others. So, there are always and always two meanings of co-existence in a piece of poetry, one for the readers, and another for the poet himself. The sane duty of a student, in a situation like this, automatically becomes to adhere to the possibility of the search for the poets impulsive debacle, the root of creation, and accordingly, reach at a conclusion, and interpretation of the ends, as well as the means employed by him.

Any work of artistic creation, particularly literature, is but an attempt at communicating one's experiences of the world as we see it. Our observations, and observations towards the world, the society, its people, and different human actions and interactions, coloured by our senses and our milieu.

The perception and communication of these kinds of experiences, however, our objective and the individuality, as well as the mental complexity of the writer,

is not reflected in what he writes. In a poem, in fact communication takes the form of a literary experience, a revive experience.

It is not necessary that the poets' experience of the world should be the same as that of other men. He collects experiences which are new and rare, stores them in his mind, in the form of unsettled impressions and finally gives them an outlet in the form of art.

The basic problem, which, interestingly, becomes the inspiring factor for the artist, is how to narrate experiences to people who have never encountered such an experience before. A great artist narrates experience, with all its inner intensity, by expressing it in its most understandable and cognizable form. The difficulty of a literary artist is not the paucity of rare experiences, but the means and methods of achieving a close understanding between himself and his readers. In expressing the experience cogently, the technique of the artist acquires greater significance than the experience itself.

The study of the twentieth century is not like the Chaucerian and the Shakespearian, something like a museum piece, kept in a glass case. In the growing realm of scientific renaissance, the social, moral and the religious values being disconnected from the healthy traditions of the past, human experience becomes intricate and complex.

Human experience in the late twentieth century is incomplete, since the world, in which we are the casts to work and live, is still continuing. Our experience has neither a calculated direction nor does it remain stable with the changing patterns of time and society. What we feel and think about ourselves is not final because it is prone to change.

The analysis of the poet in the twentieth century is more a study of trends and movements rather than of the poet himself. The average twentieth century poet is part of an established trend to which he has contributed. He is an experimenter and his study, therefore, is a study of trends and movements.

No literary movement is abrupt, and no trend is new in itself. One's social values start changing and the elements of art become mundane elements of daily life, its freshness fades away and both the writer and the reader feel bored with the existing pattern. The twentieth century poetry has been thus named not because it describes the present era but because it exhibits fresh trends breaking away from the preceding traditions. The trend so established is yet unsurpassed and holds the sensibility of contemporaneity. The flux of change remains consistent and literature goes on developing in the process. This has been the dominant feature of modern literature.

The beginning of the twentieth century literature can be noticed in the significant displacement of the 'Victorian idea' at the preeminence of the institutions by the sense of our universal mutability. The advent of the new age is hoisted in the restless growth of the restless desire to probe and question against the Victorian idea of authority, on the voice of authority in all matters relating to politics, art and family life. In one way, or the other, the shift of thought from the establishment to the individual acknowledges the cause of the era which is at one's contrary to the traditional and altogether new to the contemporary. The poetry, under the supremacy of the revolt from Victorianism with its ideals of stability, order and dignity, to the world of question, examine and test, leaps into a trend, a century of the common man.

The possibilities of the rise of the modern poetry are foreseen in the failure of the Pre-Raphaelites of the 1848-56. They did not understand the forces opposed to them and so, their aesthetic movement failed completely. Both Meredith and Verlaine realized that the aesthetic movement cut man from real life. The

decadents, popularly known as the poets of tragic generation too do not represent a poetry of balance. The poetry of Swinburne, however is more symbolic than the esoteric poetry of Stephen, Mallarme, Laforgue, and Rimbaud, but it still has not attained perfection in the twentieth century. Oscar Wilde (1856-1900), and Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) tried in vain to establish a trend in poetry. The period 1880 till 1900 is the age of realism the art club of Zola., Maupassant, George More and George Gissing wrote realistic poetry but instead of going forward, they recede backward into the world of Medievalism. If Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) is more modern, his poetry is equally a failure because of its political intents.

The growth of the twentieth century poetry in its cross counting trends is, in fact, traced through Devison (1857-1909) and Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) born in India, Kipling makes poetry rich ballads like 'the marry gloster' and 'the Bolivar'. Davidson shares with Kipling his Calvinist system of Determinism. The chief achievement can be said to the revival of a rough, supple and colloquial verse.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and A.E Houseman (1859-1936) emerged as representative poets. Hardy establishes worth as a poet with his Wessex poem (1890) and the Dynast (1903-08). The chief characteristic of Hardy poetry is the adventure in the world of the spirit as well as among the homespun realities of the village folk of Wessex. His poetry occupies a prime position at the start of the twentieth century as did Wordsworth's poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Human, born and brought up in Worcestershire, was the son of a solicitor and came from a family gifted with artistic tradition. His poems like the 'Shropshire Lad' (1895), present rich trends of verse in pseudo-pastoral fantasy Elizabeth Wordsworth (1842-1932) Robert Bridges (1844-1930) and John Meadefalkner (1858-1922) contribute largely to the trends of Hardy and Housman.

The change of experiments, from the age of Hardy to those of Hopkins, is seen in the abandonment of rhyme and traditional metre. Gerala Manly Hopkins (1844-1889) like, Rudyard Kipling, revives religious poetry, after Milton, in a verse comprising irregular and unrhymed odes. Sir Henry Newvoit (1862-1938), Eden Phillpotts (1862-1960) and Moira O'Niell (1864-1955) keep the tradition going.

The poet who contributes with immensely successful and significant verse is W.B. Feats (1865-1936) member of an Irish protestant family and a great admirer of the Pre-Raphaelites, Feats begins as a later Romantic and Pre-Raphaelites with additional enrichment of Irish mythology traditional and folk. Under the influence of Mallarme, he introduced symbolist tradition as a pure way of projecting the description of nature for the nature, and morality for the sake of morality. Arnold Bennet (1867-1931) T.S Moore (1872-1944) Hill Aire Belloc (1890-1953), J.M. Synge (1871-1909), W.H. Davies (1871-1940), John Masefield (1878-1967) and Walter De La More (1873-1956) take the movement further.

Feats and his symbolist traditions were followed by the Edwardians and the Georgians. The rise of these poets is one cause of eths social schism under Edward VII, the poets of this trend observe the shift of poetry and music of the English proletarians to the life dominated by machine-made amusement, periodicals, music hall, the football match, and the cinema. Imperialism is the only playground of their poetic fancies. In spite of the technical dexterity of the odes written by them, the verse so edited is in a dead language and the rhythm bears no relation to contemporary English life.

Although the literature between 1950 and 1980 presents two types of poetry written by the writers of 'equal distinction by wide separation of purpose and achievements' the chief exponents of the age are the feminists, the Existentialists, and the new-Aestheticians. Edwin Muir's "Collected Poem" (1960) and Williams Empson's "Collected Poems" (1955) seem to display the 'art of poetry'. It is true that

*feminism as an aspect of a dominantly radical movement attracts more the writers of fiction in the age, however, the fact cannot be denied that its shadows over poetry make it a distant affair of nature until the emergence of the new aestheticians.*

# UNIT

## 1

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – SONNET (30, 18, 29, 57)

*William Shakespeare - Sonnet*

#### STRUCTURE

- Life and Works of William Shakespeare
- Introduction to Shakespeare's Sonnets
- How to Analyze a Shakespearean Sonnet
- Major Themes
- Sonnet 30
- Sonnet 18
- Sonnet 29
- Sonnet 58
- Test Yourself

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- Shakespeare as a Sonneteer
- Themes of love in the Sonnets of Shakespeare
- Various structures of Sonnet
- How to Analyse a Shakespearean Sonnet

#### • 1.1. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE LIFE AND WORK

William Shakespeare is the world's most admired playwright and poet. He was born in April, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, about 100 miles northwest of London. According to the records of Stratford's Holy Trinity Church, he was baptized on April 26. As with most sixteenth century births, the actual day is not recorded but people are guessing that he was born on April 23. Shakespeare's parents were John and Mary Shakespeare, who lived in Henley Street, Stratford. John, the son of Richard Shakespeare, was a maker, worker and seller of leather goods like purses, belts and gloves and a dealer in agricultural commodities. He served in Stratford government successively as a member of the Council, constable, chamberlain, alderman and finally high bailiff which is the equivalent of town mayor. About 1577 John Shakespeare's fortunes began to decline for unknown reasons. There are records of debts. William had seven siblings. He was the third child and first born son. In the sixteenth century Stratford-upon-Avon was an important agricultural center and market town. The building in Henley street known today as the birthplace of William Shakespeare was at the time of his birth, two different buildings that John Shakespeare bought at two different times. William went to school at the Stratford Grammar School. He had to show up at six or seven A.M. depending on the season and stay there most of the day, six days a week. William studied many different authors and dramatists including Caesar, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Livy, and Ovid. Ovid was his favorite. Grammar school was the beginning of Shakespeare's career. Almost everything he mastered he learned there. After grammar school, William went to the Warwickshire Countryside. There he played parts in plays and wrote poetry. The years 1594-1599 were momentous for Shakespeare. He produced a steady stream of plays of the highest quality. He continued as a principal actor and manager in the Chamberlain's men,

blessed with a stable work environment in the theater. Finally in 1599, he became part owner in the most prestigious public playhouse in London, the Globe. His first works which were heavily influenced by the classical examples he had learned as a student were *The Comedy of Errors* and *Titus Andronicus*. He invented a new genre called the history play. His early works in this genre were the three Henry VI plays, and *Richard III*. He got his idea for *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece* from his favorite author, Ovid. Over the years 1594-1599 the Chamberlain's Men had become the most popular acting company in London, being invited to perform at court far more often than any other group. Shakespeare must have done a great deal of acting. He is listed by Ben Jonson in Jonson's magnificent 1616 Folio of his Works as having acted as the chief comedian in *Every Man In His Humour* in 1598. The Globe Theater burned down in 1613 and many of Shakespeare's manuscripts were ruined. It was then rebuilt by a carpenter named Peter Rose. Shakespeare's last work before he retired was *The Tempest*. Then he died in 1616 and was then buried in the Parish Church. His death was sudden and they don't know what caused it but they think he could have lived much longer. Almost all his things went to his oldest daughter Susanne. His younger daughter Judith got 300 pounds, and his wife got all the furniture. After he died Judith married John Quiney. He cheated on her and got another girl pregnant. That baby died. Judith and John had three children together. One they named Shakespeare died as an infant. The other two, Richard and Thomas died at the ages of 21 and 19. Shakespeare was one of the greatest playwrights and poets ever. He was a big part in literature. He invented a new genre and made many plays that everybody loves. He was a great man. On his grave it says: GOOD FRIEND FOR JESUS SAKE FOR BEAR TO DIG THE DUST ENCLOSED HEAR BLESSED BE YE MAN WHO SPARES THESE STONES AND CURSED BE HE WHO MOVES MY BONES

### Poetry

It is generally agreed that most of the Shakespearean Sonnets were written in the 1590s, some printed at this time as well. Others were written or revised right before being printed. 154 sonnets and "A Lover's Complaint" were published by Thomas Thorpe as Shakespeare's Sonnets in 1609. The order, dates, and authorship of the Sonnets have been much debated with no conclusive findings. Many have claimed autobiographical details from them, including sonnet number 145 in reference to Anne. The dedication to "Mr. W.H." is said to possibly represent the initials of the third earl of Pembroke William Herbert, or perhaps being a reversal of Henry Wriothesly's initials. Regardless, there have been some unfortunate projections and interpretations of modern concepts onto centuries old works that, while a grasp of contextual historical information can certainly lend to their depth and meaning, can also be enjoyed as valuable poetical works that have transcended time and been surpassed by no other.

Evoking Petrarch's style and lyrically writing of beauty, mortality, and love with its moral anguish and worshipful adoration of a usually unattainable love, the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a young man, sonnets 127-152 to a dark lady. Ever the dramatist Shakespeare created a profound intrigue to scholars and novices alike as to the identities of these people.

### Tragedies

Some probably inspired by Shakespeare's study of Lives (trans. 1597) by Greek historian and essayist Plutarch and Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles (1587). Some are reworkings of previous stories, many based on English or Roman history. The dates given here are when they are said to have been first performed, followed by approximate printing dates in brackets, listed in chronological order of performance.

Titus Andronicus first performed in 1594 (printed in 1594),  
Romeo and Juliet 1594-95 (1597),  
Hamlet 1600-01 (1603),  
Julius Caesar 1600-01 (1623),  
Othello 1604-05 (1622),  
Antony and Cleopatra 1606-07 (1623),  
King Lear 1606 (1608),  
Coriolanus 1607-08 (1623), derived from Plutarch  
Timon of Athens 1607-08 (1623), and  
Macbeth 1611-1612 (1623).

### Histories

Shakespeare's series of historical dramas, based on the English Kings from John to Henry VIII were a tremendous undertaking to dramatise the lives and rule of kings and the changing political events of his time. No other playwright had attempted such an ambitious body of work. Some were printed on their own or in the First Folio (1623).

King Henry VI Part 1 1592 (printed in 1594);  
King Henry VI Part 2 1592-93 (1594);  
King Henry VI Part 3 1592-93 (1623);  
King John 1596-97 (1623);  
King Henry IV Part 1 1597-98 (1598);  
King Henry IV Part 2 1597-98 (1600);  
King Henry V 1598-99 (1600);  
Richard II 1600-01 (1597);  
Richard III 1601 (1597); and  
King Henry VIII 1612-13 (1623)

Comedies, again listed in chronological order of performance.

Taming of the Shrew first performed 1593-94 (1623),  
Comedy of Errors 1594 (1623),  
Two Gentlemen of Verona 1594-95 (1623),  
Love's Labour's Lost 1594-95 (1598),  
Midsummer Night's Dream 1595-96 (1600),  
Merchant of Venice 1596-1597 (1600),  
Much Ado About Nothing 1598-1599 (1600),  
As You Like It-1599-00 (1623),  
Merry Wives of Windsor 1600-01 (1602),  
Troilus and Cressida 1602 (1609),  
Twelfth Night 1602 (1623),  
All's Well That Ends Well 1602-03 (1623),  
Measure for Measure 1604 (1623),  
Pericles, Prince of Tyre 1608-09 (1609),

Tempest (1611),  
Cymbeline 1611-12 (1623),  
Winter's Tale 1611-12 (1623)

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## • 1.2. INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

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The Sonnets are Shakespeare's most popular works, and a few of them, such as Sonnet 18 (Shall I compare thee to a summer's day), Sonnet 116 (Let me not to the marriage of true minds), and Sonnet 73 (That time of year thou mayst in me behold), have become the most widely-read poems in all of English literature.

### Composition Date of the Sonnets

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, probably composed over an extended period from 1592 to 1598, the year in which Francis Meres referred to Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets":

The witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous & honey-tongued Shakespeare, witnesses his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugared sonnets among his private friends, &c. (Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury)

In 1609 Thomas Thorpe published Shakespeare's sonnets, no doubt without the author's permission, in quarto format, along with Shakespeare's long poem, The Passionate Pilgrim. The sonnets were dedicated to a W. H., whose identity remains a mystery, although William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, is frequently suggested because Shakespeare's First Folio (1623) was also dedicated to him.

### Narrative of the Sonnets

The majority of the sonnets (1-126) are addressed to a young man, with whom the poet has an intense romantic relationship. The poet spends the first seventeen sonnets in trying to convince the young man to marry and have children; beautiful children that will look just like their father, ensuring his immortality. Many of the remaining sonnets in the young man sequence focus on the power of poetry and pure love to defeat death and "all oblivious enmity" (55.9).

The final sonnets (127-154) are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman known to modern readers as the dark lady. Both the poet and his young man have become obsessed with the raven-haired temptress in these sonnets, and the poet's whole being is at odds with his insatiable "sickly appetite" (147.4). The tone is distressing, with language of sensual feasting, uncontrollable urges, and sinful consumption.

- For a closer look at the negative aspects of the poet's relationship with the young man and his mistress, please see Sonnet 75 and Sonnet 147.
- For a celebration of the love between the young man and the poet, see Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 29.
- For the poet's views on the mortality of the young man, see Sonnet 73.
- For the poet's description of his mistress, see Sonnet 130.

The question remains whether the poet is expressing Shakespeare's personal feelings. Since we know next to nothing about Shakespeare's personal life we have little reason or right not to read the collected sonnets as a work of fiction, just as we would read his plays or long poems.

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## • 1.3. HOW TO ANALYZE A SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

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Writing an essay on a Shakespearean sonnet can be quite a challenge. The following are a few tips to help you start the process:

## 1. Find the Theme

Although love is the overarching theme of the sonnets, there are three specific underlying themes: (1) the brevity of life, (2) the transience of beauty, and (3) the trappings of desire. The first two of these underlying themes are the focus of the early sonnets addressed to the young man (in particular Sonnets 1-17) where the poet argues that having children to carry on one's beauty is the only way to conquer the ravages of time. In the middle sonnets of the young man sequence the poet tries to immortalize the young man through his own poetry (the most famous examples being Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 55). In the late sonnets of the young man sequence there is a shift to pure love as the solution to mortality (as in Sonnet 116). When choosing a sonnet to analyze it is beneficial to explore the theme as it relates to the sonnets around it.

Sonnet 127 marks a shift to the third theme and the poet's intense sexual affair with a woman known as the dark lady. The mood of the sonnets in this sequence is dark and love as a sickness is a prominent motif (exemplified in Sonnet 147). Often students will be asked to choose one sonnet addressed to the young man and one addressed to his mistress and analyze the differences in tone, imagery, and theme. Comparing Sonnet 116, with the theme of ideal, healthy love, to Sonnet 147, with the theme of diseased love, would be a great choice.

For a complete guide to the theme of each group of sonnets, please see the article "The Outline of the Themes in Shakespeare's Sonnets".

## 2. Examine the Literary Devices

Shakespeare probably did not write his sonnets with a conscious emphasis on literary devices, and early editors of the sonnets paid little attention to such devices (with the exception of metaphor and allusion). However, in the era of postmodern literary theory and close reading, much weight is given to the construction or deconstruction of the sonnets and Shakespeare's use of figures of speech such as alliteration, assonance, antithesis, enjambment, metonymy, synecdoche, oxymoron, personification, and internal rhyme. Much modern criticism also places heavy emphasis on the sexual puns and double entendres in the sonnets (blood warm (2.14) being both blood and semen, etc). For more on this please see the commentary for Sonnet 75.

For examples of Shakespeare's use of antithesis and synecdoche, please see the commentary for Sonnet 12 and Sonnet 116.

For examples of Shakespeare's use of metonymy, please see the commentary for Sonnet 59.

For an example of Shakespeare's use of partial alliteration, please see the commentary for Sonnet 30. Notice the attention to alliteration and assonance in Sonnet 55.

For examples of Shakespeare's use of personification and extended metaphor, please see the commentary for Sonnet 55, Sonnet 65, Sonnet 73, Sonnet 2, and Sonnet 59.

For example of Shakespeare's use of an elaborate metaphor known as a conceit, please see Sonnet 46.

For example of what many consider to be one of Shakespeare's rare failed metaphors, please see the commentary of Sonnet 47.

Once you have identified such literary devices you can explore both how they contribute to a greater understanding of the theme and how they serve to give the sonnet movement, intensity, and structure.

## • 1.4. MAJOR THEMES

### The Ravages of Time

Shakespeare's sonnets open with an earnest plea from the narrator to the fair lord, begging him to find a woman to bear his child so that his beauty might be preserved for posterity. In sonnet 2, the poet writes, "When forty winters shall besiege thy brow / And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field ... How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use / If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine / Shall sum my count and make my old excuse' / Proving his beauty by succession thine!" The poet is lamenting the ravages of time and its detrimental effects on the fair lord's beauty, seeking to combat the inevitable by pushing the fair lord to bequeath his exquisiteness unto a child. By sonnet 18 the poet appears to have abandoned this solution in favour of another: his verse. "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see / So long lives this and this gives life to thee." But the ravages of time return to haunt the narrator: in sonnet 90, the poet characterizes time as a dimension of suffering, urging the fair lord to break with him "if ever, now"; "Give not a windy night a rainy morrow," he writes, pleading with him to end the desperation of hopeful unrequited love. The theme resurfaces throughout the sonnets in the narrator's various descriptions of himself as an aging man: "But when my glass shows me myself indeed / Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity" (sonnet 62); "And wherefore say not I that I am old?" (sonnet 138). It has also been suggested that the poet implies that he is balding in sonnet 73, where he writes, "That time of year thou mayst in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang / Upon those boughs ..."; such an interpretation fits well with the idea that Shakespeare is in fact the narrator of the sonnets, as extent portraits of Shakespeare show the poet to have been balding in his later years.

### Platonic Love vs. Carnal Lust

The divide between the fair lord sonnets and the dark lady sonnets is also a divide between two forms of interpersonal attraction. While the narrator of the sonnets is clearly infatuated with both the fair lord and the dark lady, the language he uses to describe these infatuations shows them to be of desperate nature. The lack of explicit sexual imagery in the fair lord sonnets has led most scholars to characterize this infatuation as an example of Platonic love, i.e., a form of amorous affection bereft of any sexual element. Meanwhile, the dark lady sonnets are replete with sexual imagery, implying an attraction based largely on carnal lust. The poet seems to glorify the former while condemning the latter; his heart is at odds with his libido. If we take the angel of sonnet 144 to be the narrator's fair lord, we see this contrast clearly: "To win me soon to hell, my female evil / Tempteth my better angel from my side / And would corrupt my saint to be a devil / Wooing his purity with her foul pride." It might be argued that this very incompatibility between the two distresses the narrator most as he learns of their affair.

### Selfishness and Greed

The themes of selfishness and greed are prevalent throughout the sonnets as a whole, emerging most perceptibly in the narrator's hypocritical expectation of faithfulness from the fair lord and the dark lady. The poet seems at times to advance a double standard on the issue of faithfulness: he is unfaithful himself, yet he condemns, is even surprised by, the unfaithfulness of others. The rival poet sonnets (79-86), for example, capture the poet's jealousy of his fair lord's having another admirer; dark lady sonnets 133-134 and 144 do the same, and they may even include a reference to an affair between her and the fair lord that perhaps was alluded to previously in sonnets 40-42. (For this reason and others, it is sometimes suggested that the ordering of the sonnets does not wholly parallel the actual

chronology of the events they describe.) Although the narrator does indeed chastise himself for his own unfaithfulness, perhaps in reference to his wife, his distress at the unfaithfulness of those with whom he himself has been unfaithful makes him out as wanting to have his cake and eat it too.

### Self-Depreciation and Inadequacy

Self-deprecatory language frequently appears regarding the poet's various inadequacies, in particular his ability to keep his fair lord's interest. In sonnet 76 the poet basically calls himself a bore. He begins, "Why is my verse so barren of new pride / So far from variation or quick change?" His expressions of inadequacy reach a pinnacle in the rival poet sonnets, where they transform into pathetic outbursts of jealousy. In sonnet 80 we read, "But since your worth, wide as the ocean is / The humble as the proudest sail doth bear / My saucy bark inferior far to his / On your broad main doth wilfully appear"; in sonnet 84, "Who is it that says most? which can say more / Than this rich praise, that you alone are you?" The poet's self-deprecation continues as he blames himself for much of that which he disapproves of both in the fair lord and in the dark lady. He himself is the cause of their abandoning him; his will is inadequate for resisting the temptations of Love.

### Homoerotic Desire

Although a fair number of scholars argue that the sonnets do not reflect any intimation of homosexual desire whatsoever on the part of the narrator, others find sonnets 1-126 rife with homoerotic undertones—at times appearing as explicit expressions of the narrator's love for the fair lord. In sonnet 20, for example, the poet expressly laments the fact that Nature fashioned the fair lord with male genitalia ("she prick'd thee out"). In sonnet 29, the narrator bemoans his "outcast state," perhaps a direct reference to a homoerotic desire he fears cannot be accepted by society. Still, just as it is intellectually necessary to confront the idea that homoerotic desire is prevalent to some extent in the sonnets, it is incumbent on readers not to let the imagination go astray.

Scholars who accept that homoerotic undertones are present in the sonnets are, nevertheless, divided regarding what this desire really means. Unlike the sonnets featuring the dark lady (127-154), the fair lord sonnets contain no explicit reference to sexual desire; even if the narrator lusts for the fair lord, it is debatable whether this lust has as its goal any act of sexual consummation.

### Financial Bondage

Throughout the sonnets there is considerable imagery of financial debt and obligation, bondage and transaction. Many scholars are convinced that the fair lord is not only the object of the poet's affection but also his financial benefactor. Such speculation has led to the identification of the fair lord with the begetter of the sonnets, Mr. W. H. Although this argument is difficult to prove, it certainly has its merits.

In sonnet 4, financial imagery is ubiquitous: "unthrifty," "spend," "bequest," "lend," "frank," "niggard," "profitless," "usurer," "sum," and "audit," and more. Sonnet 79 likewise includes "aid," "numbers," "robs," "pays," "lends," "stole," "afford," and "owes." Support for the hypothesis that the dark lady of the sonnets was in fact a prostitute comes in part from sonnet 134, where the language includes "mortgaged," "forfeit," "bond," "statute," "usurer," "sue," "debtor," and "pays," although it could also be argued that the narrator is merely describing the dark lady as a whore out of jealousy of her affair with the fair lord.

**Colour Symbolism**

This theme emerges most palpably in the dark lady sonnets, where the poet's repeated use of the colour black to describe the dark lady's features, both physical and intangible, ascribes her with the evilness or "otherness" that the colour has place often symbolized in the Western mentality. However, colour imagery is present in the fair lord sonnets as well, especially in conjunction with the theme of passing time. In sonnet 12, for example, the poet draws a parallel between the "aging" of nature with the aging of human life, opposing "the violet" and "summer's green" with the silver and white of age. Note, though, that the opposition here is not between black and white, as might be expected, but rather between colour and absence of colour, the latter of which is a product of passing time. The poet dreads both the passing of time as well as the sinfulness of his dark lady, and it is conceivable that the goal of his symbolism is to represent that which he fears by that which is without colour. This argument is complicated, however, by sonnet 99, where "purple," "red," and "white" appear to take on more convoluted roles. Still, it is possible to find consistencies in the poet's use of colour symbolism: all three instances of "yellow" (in sonnets 17, 73, and 104) are used in the context of passing time, while green is largely symbolic of youth (such as in sonnet 63).

**• 1.5. SONNET 30**

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
 I summon up remembrance of things past,  
 I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
 And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:  
 Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,  
 For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,  
 And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,  
 And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:  
 Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,  
 And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er  
 The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,  
 Which I now pay as if not paid before.  
 But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
 All losses are restored and sorrows end.

SONNET 30	PARAPHRASE
When to the sessions of sweet silent thought	When in these sessions of gratifying silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,	I think of the past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,	I lament my failure to achieve all that I wanted,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:	And I sorrowfully remember that I wasted the best years of my life:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,	Then I can cry, although I am not used to crying,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,	For dear friends now hid in death's unending night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,	And cry again over woes that were long since healed,

And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:	And lament the loss of many things that I have seen and loved:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,	Then can I grieve over past griefs again,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er	And sadly repeat (to myself) my woes
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,	The sorrowful account of griefs already grieved for,
Which I now pay as if not paid before.	Which (the account) I repay as if I had not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,	But if I think of you while I am in this state of sadness, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.	All my losses are compensated for and my sorrow ends.

### ANALYSIS

**sessions (1):** the sitting of a court. The court imagery is continued with 'summon up' in line 2. The court motif is used several times by Shakespeare - note Othello 3.3.140: "Keep leets and law days, and in session sit/With mediations lawful?" (Leets = court sessions).

**old woes (4):** By replaying his 'old woes' over in his mind, the poet is wasting precious time that could be spent thinking more joyous thoughts. Hence 'my dear time's waste.'

**love's long since cancell'd woe (7):** is the sorrow the poet had once felt over the loss of his close friends; loss that has dulled over the years but now returns as he thinks of the past.

**And moan...sight (8):** Some scholars interpret this line to mean 'I lament the cost to me of many a lost sigh.' "'Sight' for 'sigh' was archaic by Shakespeare's time and seems only to have been used for the sake of rhyme (see OED). Sighing was considered deleterious to health; compare 2 Henry VI 3.2.61-3: 'blood-consuming sighs . . . /Look pale as primrose with blood-drinking sighs', and 47.4." (Blakemore Evans, 142). However, the ordinary word 'sight' also makes sense in this context; that is, the poet has lost many things that he has seen and loved.

**dear friend (13):** Shakespeare's first use of the term 'dear friend' in the Sonnets.

**All losses...end. (14):** His friend is as great as the sum of all the many things the poet sought but did not find.

### • 1.6. SONNET 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
 So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

SONNET 18	PARAPHRASE
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	Shall I compare you to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:	You are more lovely and more constant:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	Rough winds shake the beloved buds of May.
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:	And summer is far too short:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,	At times the sun is too hot,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;	Or often goes behind the clouds;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,	And everything beautiful sometimes will lose its beauty.
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;	By misfortune or by nature's planned out course.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade	But your youth shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;	Nor will you lose the beauty that you possess;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,	Nor will death claim you for his own,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:	Because in my eternal verse you will live forever.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,	So long as there are people on this earth,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.	So long will this poem live on, making you immortal.

### ANALYSIS

**temperate (1):** i.e., evenly-tempered; not overcome by passion.

**the eye of heaven (5):** i.e., the sun.

**every fair from fair sometime declines (7):** i.e., the beauty (fair) of everything beautiful (fair) will fade (declines).

**Compare to Sonnet 116:** "rosy lips and cheeks/Within his bending sickle's compass come."

**nature's changing course (8):** i.e., the natural changes which age brings.

**that fair thou ow'st (10):** i.e., that beauty you possess.

**in eternal lines...growest (12):** The poet is using a *grafting metaphor* in this line. Grafting is a technique used to join parts from two plants with cords so that they grow as one. Thus the beloved becomes immortal, grafted to time with the poet's cords (his "eternal lines"). For commentary on whether this sonnet is really "one long exercise in self-glorification", please see below.

Sonnet 18 is the best known and most well-loved of all 154 sonnets. It is also one of the most straightforward sonnets in language and intent. The stability of love and its power to immortalize the poetry and the subject of that poetry is the theme.

The poet starts the praise of his dear friend without ostentation, but he slowly builds the image of his friend into that of a perfect being. His friend is first compared to summer in the octave, but, at the start of the third quatrain (9), he is summer, and thus, he has metamorphosed into the standard by which true beauty can and should be judged.

*William Shakespeare - Sonnet*

### • 1.7. SONNET 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
 I all alone beweep my outcast state  
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries  
 And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
 Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,  
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
 With what I most enjoy contented least;  
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
 Like to the lark at break of day arising  
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
 For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings  
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

#### SONNET 29

#### PARAPHRASE

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,	When I've fallen out of favour with fortune and men,
I all alone beweep my outcast state	All alone I weep over my position as a social outcast,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries	And pray to heaven, but my cries go unheard.
And look upon myself and curse my fate,	And I look at myself, cursing my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,	Wishing I were like one who had more hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,	Wishing I looked like him; wishing I were surrounded by friends,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,	Wishing I had this man's skill and that man's freedom.
With what I most enjoy contented least;	I am least contented with what I used to enjoy most.
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,	But, with these thoughts - almost despising myself,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,	I, by chance, think of you and then my melancholy
Like to the lark at break of day arising	Like the lark at the break of day, rises
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;	From the dark earth and (I) sing hymns to heaven;

For thy sweet love remember'd such For thinking of your love brings such  
wealth brings happiness  
That then I scorn to change my state That then I would not change my  
with kings. position in life with kings.

### ANALYSIS

**in disgrace (1):** out of favour.

**bewEEP (2):** weep over (my outcast state).

**outcast state (2):** The poet's "outcast state" is possibly an allusion to his lack of work as an actor due to the closing of the theatres in 1592 (during an outbreak of plague). It also could be a reference to the attack on Shakespeare at the hands of Robert Greene.

**bootless (3):** useless.

Shakespeare uses the word seventeen times in the plays. Compare *Othello*:

The robb'd that smiles steals something from the thief;  
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief. (1.3.225)

Compare also *Titus Andronicus*

For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain;  
And they have nursed this woe, in feeding life;  
In bootless prayer have they been held up,  
And they have served me to effectless use:  
Now all the service I require of them  
Is that the one will help to cut the other. (3.1.75)

Interestingly, the phrase "bootless cries" appears in *Edward III*, an anonymous play that many now believe Shakespeare wrote.

**look upon myself (4):** i.e., I become occupied with self-reflection.

**Featured like him (6):** i.e., the features (physical beauty) of some other more attractive man.

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### • 1.8. SONNET 57

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Being your slave, what should I do but tend  
Upon the hours and times of your desire?  
I have no precious time\* at all to spend,  
Nor services to do, till you require.  
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour  
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,  
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour  
When you have bid your servant once adieu;  
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought  
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,  
But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought  
Save, where you are how happy you make those.  
So true a fool is love that in your will,  
Though you do any thing, he thinks no ill.

SONNET 57	PARAPHRASE
Being your slave, what should I do but tend	Being your slave, what should I do but wait
Upon the hours and times of your desire? I have no precious time at all to spend, Nor services to do, till you require.	Upon whenever you desire something? I have nothing to do with my time. No services to perform, until you ask me.
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour	Nor do I dare get angry at the tediously slow hours
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,	While I watch the clock for you,
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour	Nor do I dare think bitterly about your absence
When you have bid your servant once adieu;	When you have bid your slave (me) goodbye;
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought	Nor dare I question with my jealous thoughts
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,	Where you may be, or what you could be doing,
But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought.	But, like a sad slave I wait and think of nothing
Save, where you are how happy you make those.	But how happy the people must be around you.
So true a fool is love that in your will,	So loyal a fool is love that, in whatever your choice of action,
Though you do any thing, he thinks no ill.	You may do anything you desire, and he [love] thinks no evil of you.

### ANALYSIS

*precious time* (3) | i.e., no time of any value but the time I spend serving you.

*in your will* (13) | A play on the word 'will', stressed in the original manuscript as 'Will', for William Shakespeare himself.

In the previous sonnet, the poet expressed his deep concern over the potential of lust to destroy his relationship with the young man, and here it appears that his fears have become a reality. The poet is now alone, kept waiting while his dear young friend is out having fun with others. Unwilling to feel anger towards his friend, the poet wallows in his own sadness, longing for the restoration of their relationship. However, in the final couplet we see that the poet understands completely the folly of his submissive behaviour, and his acceptance of love as a "fool" (13) is, in itself, proof that the poet is reprimanding both his lover and himself. In fact, although this poem seems to illustrate the poet's disturbing reliance on his lover, one cannot overlook the possibility that the sonnet is highly ironical and filled with sarcasm rather than self-depreciation. Actually, one could say that both voices are being heard in sonnet 57: "The friend is meant, I think, to take the poem first as an effusive and oh-so-sad compliment, and only later to do the double-take"; Did he really mean that? I don't suppose he was being sarcastic? Precisely, because the sonnet is equivocal its protest is more effective. But, of course, the protest is largely qualified by the fact that what the poet says is quite literally true: he does hang about, watching the clock, waiting for the friend to come. Love has made him a 'sad slave', 'so true a fool'. There is in the poetry a kind of verbal shrugging of the shoulders and a rueful half-smile, especially in the

couplet. It is the fact that the poet sees himself in these two ways at once that makes it possible and even essential to hear the two tones together throughout the poem" (Martin 73).

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• **TEST YOURSELF**

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1. In which sonnet The Poet was left alone while his young friends enjoyed with his friends ?  
(a) Sonnet 57      (b) Sonnet 29      (c) Sonnet 18      (d) Sonnet 30
2. Most of the Shakespearian sonnets were written in :  
(a) 1690's      (b) 1580's      (c) 1590's      (d) 1600's
3. The eye of heaven in Sonnet 18 symbolizes  
(a) The divine light      (b) The sun  
(c) The moon      (d) Burning candle in a dark room

**[B] True or False**

1. Shakespear is known only for his sonnets.
2. Shakespear's attraction towards a young man is depicted in his sonnets.
3. In sonnet 18 Shakespear finds himself alone away from his young friend.
4. Shakespear's love for the young man turns out to be mortal in his later sonnets.
5. Shakespear did not pay much heed to literary devices while writing his sonnets.

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. Discuss Shakespear as a sonneteer ?
2. How is a sonnet different from a poem ? Describe.
3. In most of his sonnets Shakespear seems to be in a sad mood. Why do you think Shakespear is sad and all his sonnets are tragic in nature ?
4. How does Shakespear's sonnets symbolize the ravages of time ?

# UNIT

William Wordsworth :  
The Daffodils

## 2

### WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : THE DAFFODILS AND THREE YEAR SHE GREW

#### STRUCTURE

- William Wordsworth's Life and Works
- The Daffodils : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
  - Test Yourself
- Three Year She Grew : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
  - Test Yourself

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- After going through this unit you will learn :
- William Wordsworth as a poet of Nature
  - Nature as a Friend, Philosopher and Guide
  - Lucy the epitome of Nature
  - Daffodils as inspirational Source
  - Figurative Language

#### • 2.1. WILLIAM WORDSWORTH LIFE AND WORKS

British poet, who spent his life in the Lake District of Northern England. William Wordsworth started with Samuel Taylor Coleridge the English Romantic movement with their collection Lyrical Ballads (1798). When many poets still wrote about ancient heroes in grandiloquent style, Wordsworth focused on the nature, children, the poor, common people, and used ordinary words to express his personal feelings. His definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings arising from "emotion recollected in tranquillity" was shared by a number of his followers.

"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science." (in Lyrical Ballads, 2nd ed., 1800).

William Wordsworth was born in Cocker-mouth, Cumberland, in the Lake District. His father was John Wordsworth, Sir James Lowther's attorney – the fifth Baronet Lowther was the most feared and hated aristocrat in all of Cumberland and Westmoreland, "an Intolerable Tyrant over his Tenants and

Dependents". However, the magnificent landscape deeply affected Wordsworth's imagination and gave him a love of nature. He lost his mother when he was eight and five years later his father.

The domestic problems separated Wordsworth from his beloved and neurotic sister Dorothy, who was a very important person in his life. Dorothy had especially fresh contact to nature from a very early age. Her thoughts and impression were a valuable source of inspiration for her brother, who also introduced himself as Nature's child. The first time she saw the sea, she burst into tears, "indicating the sensibility for which she was so remarkable," Wordsworth remembered.

With the help of his two uncles, Wordsworth entered a local school and continued his studies at Cambridge University. As a writer Wordsworth made his debut in 1787, when he published a sonnet in *The European Magazine*. In that same year he entered St. John's College, Cambridge, from where he took his B.A. in 1791. During a summer vacation in 1790, Wordsworth went on a walking tour through revolutionary France. He also traveled in Switzerland.

On his second journey in France, Wordsworth had an affair with a French girl, Annette Vallon, a daughter of a barber-surgeon, by whom he had a illegitimate daughter Anne Caroline. The affair was basis of the poem 'Vaudracour and Julia', but otherwise Wordsworth did his best to hide the affair from posterity. After his journeys, Wordsworth spent several aimless and unhappy years. In 1795 he met Coleridge. Wordsworth's financial situation became better in 1795 when he received a legacy and was able to settle at Racedown, Dorset, with his sister Dorothy.

Encouraged by Coleridge and stimulated by the close contact with nature, Wordsworth composed his first masterwork, *Lyrical Ballads*, which opened with Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner.' Humphry Davy, a chemist and inventor, edited the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Shortly after discovering "laughing gas" (nitrous oxide), Davy persuaded his literary friends to self-experiment with it. Wordsworth himself looked at science with a critical mind, saying in 'A Poet's Epitaph' (1798): "Physician art thou?—one, all eyes, / Philosopher!—a fingering slave, / One that would peep and botanize / Upon his mother's grave?" About 1798 he started to write a large and philosophical autobiographical poem, completed in 1805, and published posthumously in 1850 under the title *The Prelude*. The long work described the poet's love of nature and his own place in the world order.

"Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society."

The winter 1798-99 Wordsworth spent with his sister and Coleridge in Germany. There he wrote several works, including the enigmatic 'Lucy' poems. After return he moved Dove Cottage, Grasmere. In 1802 married Mary Hutchinson. They cared for Wordsworth's sister Dorothy for the last 20 years of life— she had lost her mind as a result of physical ailments.

Wordsworth's path-breaking works were produced between 1797 and 1803..

Wordsworth was appointed official distributor of stamps for Westmoreland. . Wordsworth abandoned his radical faith and became a patriotic, conservative public man. In 1843 he succeeded Robert Southey (1774-1843) as England's poet

laureate. Wordsworth died on April 23, 1850. In the years of his death, his widow published *The Prelude*, completed already by 1805. It was a part of a huge work, *The Recluse*, which Wordsworth and Coleridge had planned together over 50 years ago. The subject was to be life in general. Comparing his other published pieces with *The Recluse*, Wordsworth paralled "little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses" with the body of a Gothic church.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell summed up the poet's career: "In his youth Wordsworth sympathized with the French Revolution, went to France, wrote good poetry, and had a natural daughter. At this period he was called a 'bad' man. Then he became 'good,' abandoned his daughter, adopted correct principles, and wrote bad poetry."

Selected works:

- AN EVENING WALK, 1793
- DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES, 1793
- THE BORDERERS, A TRAGEDY, 1796
- LYRICAL BALLADS, 1798 (with William Butler Coleridge)
- LINES WRITTEN ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY, 1798
- UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE, 1801
- APPENDIX ON POETIC DICTION, 1802 (Lyrical Ballads, 1802)
- POEMS IN TWO VOLUMES, 1807
- MISCELLANEOUS SONNETS, 1807
- WORDSWORTH'S TRACT ON THE CONVENTION OF CINTRA, 1809
- ESSAY UPON EPITAPHS, 1810 (The Friend, no. 25, 22 Feb. 1810)
- THE EXCURSION, 1814
- THE WHITE DOE OF RYLSTONE, OR, THE FATE OF THE NORTONS: A POEM, 1815
- PETER BELL: A TALE IN VERSE, 1819
- THE WAGGONER: A POEM, 1819
- THE RIVER DUDDON, 1820
- MEMORIALS OF A TOUR ON THE CONTINENT, 1822
- ECCLESIASTICAL SKETCHES, 1822
- YARROW REVISITED, AND OTHER POEMS, 1835
- THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, 1837 (edited by Henry Reed)
- POEMS CHIEFLY OF EARLY AND LATER YEARS, 1842
- THE PRELUDE, OR, GROWTH OF A POET'S MIND: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM, 1850
- ODE: INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD, 1884
- THE RECLUSE, 1888

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• 2.2. THE DAFFODILS

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

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

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

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

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

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• 2.3. EXPLANATION

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(1) I wandered ..... breeze.

**Exp. :** These lines have been extracted from the poem 'The Daffodils' composed by William Wordsworth. Here the poet says that once he was roaming alone like a floating cloud. Suddenly he observed a large number of golden daffodils by the side of the lake under the trees. They were moving to and fro in the soft air. It appeared to him as if they were dancing in joy.

(2) 'Continuous ..... sprightly done.

**Exp. :** Here the poet says that the daffodils were spread in an unbroken endless row by the side of the Ullswater Lake. They appeared like stars which shine in the sky and form a galaxy. The poet saw these daffodils as astronomical figures. They were innumerable in number. They were moving up and down with the gust of the wind. It appeared to the poet as if they were dancing fully and vivaciously.

(3) The waves ..... brought.

**Exp. :** Here the poet says that the waves in the lake by the side of the daffodils were also dancing out of joy. But these flowers surpassed the shining waves in delightful exuberance. In such a joyful company the poet cannot help sharing that happiness and feeling cheerful. He looked greedily at that delightful sight. At that time he could not anticipate that the sight of the daffodils will remain enshrined in his memory and will be a perennial source of joy to him in times to come.

(4) For oft ..... daffodil.

**Exp.** Here the poet says that often when he lies in his bed in an idle and reflective state of mind, the daffodil suddenly appear before his mind's eye and or

imaginary eye. Their recollection gives him the highest pleasure in seclusion when his mind is not distracted by worldly engagements. The heart of the poet gets overjoyed and enthusiastic and becomes as hilarious as were the dancing daffodils seen by him in the past during his visit to the Ullswater lake.

William Wordsworth :  
*The Daffodils*

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#### • 2.4. GLOSSARY

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**Stanza 1 :** (1) Wandered – moved aimlessly (2) floats – sails across (3) on high – in the sky (4) Vales – valley (5) Crowd – a large number (6) Beside – by the side of (7) beneath – under (8) Fluttering – moving to and fro.

**Stanza 3 :** (1) Waves beside them – Waves of the Ullswater lake by the side of which daffodils were growing (2) outdid – surpassed (3) sparkling – shining (4) glee – joy (5) Jocund – merry (6) gazed – looked attentively (7) Little thought – Could hardly realize.

**Stanza 2 :** (1) Continuous – In an unbroken row (2) milky way – the galaxy (3) stretched – were spread over (4) In never ending line – In a long unbroken line (5) At a glance – at one sight (6) Tossing – Moving up and down (7) sprightly – lively.

**Stanza 4 :** (1) For – because (2) Oft – often (3) couch – bed (4) My count lie – When I retire to my bed (5) vacant unoccupied (6) Pensive – thoughtful (7) Flash – gleam (8) Inward eye – imagination (9) Bliss – supreme joy (10) solitude – loneliness.

#### Critical Comments (Daffodils)

1. This poem symbolizes the isolation of man in the world. In this materialistic world man is quite alone. Nature only consoles man in this world.
2. Wordsworth uses 'Ten Thousand' to show that they were innumerable.
3. The line 'Ten Thousand I saw at a glance' is an example of hyperbola.
4. The poet has presented his joy and happiness that he felt to see countless daffodils.
5. Description of the sparkling waves and the dancing daffodils is pictorial.
6. Wordsworth has been called 'The Harbinger of Nature', the high priest of Nature and Mystical Pantheist.
7. This poem confirms Wordsworth's own definition of poetry i.e., 'emotions recollected in tranquillity'.

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#### • 2.5. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Write a critical appreciation of 'The Daffodils'.**

**Ans.** Wordsworth is a devotee of Nature. He regards nature as a store house of infinite joy and delight. It is an article of faith for him that Nature will open the flood gates of joy and happiness to a man who approaches her open heartedly in a proper mood of innocence and receptivity.

"The Daffodils" is one of the most representative and charming lyrical poems of Wordsworth. Its tiny outward form belies the immensity of its content of the depth of ideas dealt with by it. It presents a unique experience. The memory of the daffodils induces a visionary state in which the poet sees into the metaphysical beauties of the daffodils, and his heart joins them in their beautiful dance.

Reminiscences play an important part in Wordsworth's poetry and 'The Daffodils' may easily be called a reminiscential poem which seeks to convey the joy afforded by the memory or the recollection of that moment of experience. Thus, a continuity of the poet's imaginative life is hinted at.

Wordsworth's favourite theme of solitude and joy in solitude is nicely treated in this poem. He is solitary wandering like a lonely cloud and trying to feel the joy of the daffodils. And this joy continues to be felt by him when he lies on his couch in a vacant or pensive mood in solitude. The poet presents himself as a man living in isolation from society and enjoying the pleasure afforded by nature, even if only through recollection.

Wordsworth's love of nature and its various objects, the lake the waves, the winds and the flowers is clearly expressed in this poem. He seems to have a deep feeling of the joy in widest commonalities spread. The tranquilising influence of nature on a mind disturbed by the cares and sadness of life has been acknowledged in this poem. The pictorial description of the dancing waves and daffodils is very fine indeed. Wordsworth's own joy in nature is expressed through the depiction of his heart dancing with daffodils, just as it is expressed when he says that

"My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky"

The language of the poem is plain but conveys the deep feelings and experiences. It is a poem that fully confirms the theory of 'emotion recollected in tranquility'. 'The Daffodils' also deals with the process of poetic creation and the role of imagination in the poem. The poet feels deep joy at the sight of the dancing daffodils and seems to convey the feeling of joy filtered through his imagination and blooded over in solitude, in this poem.

The Daffodils is in short, an example of short lyric which is marked by a typical Wordsworthian simplicity, spontaneity and musical flow. Its rich imagery and pictorial distributions make it all the more appealing. It nicely recaptures an actual experience through senses, and transforms it into a visionary experience in solitude, not very unlike that which Wordsworth sees to present in his poem 'Michael'.

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### • 2.6. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Describe the poetic qualities of the poem 'Daffodils'.**

**Ans.** The Daffodils is one of the most charming poems of Wordsworth. The poem appears to be trivial and simple in thought and meaning but it contains deeper meaning. It shows a unique physical experience of the poet. This experience leads to visionary experience. The poem illustrates Wordsworth's own theory of poetry 'emotions recollected in tranquility' Wordsworth's favorite theme of solitude and joy in solitude is correctly treated in this poem. The poem deals with the relation of man and nature. It shows the healing influence of nature on man.

**Q. 2. What impact does daffodils make on Wordsworth?**

**Ans.** Wordsworth is known as harbinger of nature. He always felt that an invisible power is watching him. While walking along the riverbank Wordsworth notices a sight of Golden daffodils, fluttering and dancing in the breeze. Wordsworth is deeply moved by this vast plot of 8 waving flowers. He could visualize daffodils as dancing merrily with their heads high in the air. The flowers swaying in unison with each other, romantically touched Wordsworth. He just sat there and gazed and thought what immense wealth this dancing of daffodils had brought to him.

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### • 2.7. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :

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**Q. 1. How does the cloud wander in the sky?**

Ans. The cloud wanders in the sky without any hindrance and with a pleasant motion.

**Q. 2. Where were the flowers of daffodils ?**

Ans. The poet found the flowers near the valley and under the trees.

**Q. 3. How does the poet describe the flowers ?**

Ans. The flowers were dancing fluttering tossing their heads and glittering with golden colour.

**Q. 4. What is Milky way ?**

Ans. Milky way is a line of the crowded stars in the sky shining like milk.

**Q. 5. How many flowers did the poet see at a glance ?**

Ans. The poet saw ten thousand flowers at a glance.

**Q. 6. Is the poet happy to watch the beauty of the daffodils ?**

Ans. The poet feels the daffodils as the bliss of solitude and is filled with pleasure.

**Q. 7. Who danced beside the daffodils ?**

Ans. The waves of the lake danced beside the daffodils.

William Wordsworth :  
The Daffodils

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### • TEST YOURSELF

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#### True/False statements :

1. Daffodil is a flower of white colour.
2. Daffodil is a bliss of beauty.
3. Daffodils was published in 1909.
4. Daffodils enjoy a long life.
5. Daffodils look like stars to the poet.
6. Wordsworth feels happy in the company of the flowers.
7. Wordsworth often finds himself in vacant mood.

#### Fill up the blanks :

1. I wandered lonely as a .....
2. Name the figure of speech in the following :
  1. Continuous as the stars that shine.
  2. Ten thousand I saw at a glance.
  3. The waves beside them danced.

#### Multiple Choice Questions :

1. The daffodils are not connected with :
  - (a) dancing
  - (b) tossing head
  - (c) singing song
  - (d) floating
2. What is the condition of the poet with the company of Daffodils.
  - (a) Gay
  - (b) sad
  - (c) lonely
  - (d) indifferent
3. The bliss of solitude means :
  - (a) perfect joy in solitary
  - (b) heavenly delight in woods
  - (c) great delight everywhere
  - (d) great delight in the lonely plac

**ANSWERS**

**True/False Statements :**

1. (F), 2. (F), 3. (F), 4. (F), 5. (T), 6. (T), 7. (T)

**Fill in the blanks :**

1. cloud, 2. 1. simple 2. Hyperbola, 3. personification

**Multiple Choice Questions**

1. (c), 2. (a), 3. (a).

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. What are the four stages of Nature ?
2. How one can remain happy in the 'Company of Nature'.

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• **2.8. THREE YEARS SHE GREW : TEXT**

THREE years she grew in sun and shower,  
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower  
On earth was never sown;  
This Child I to myself will take;  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A Lady of my own.

"Myself will to my darling be  
Both law and impulse: and with me  
The Girl, in rock and plain,  
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower, 10  
Shall feel an overseeing power  
To kindle or restrain.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn  
That wild with glee across the lawn,  
Or up the mountain springs;  
And her's shall be the breathing balm,  
And her's the silence and the calm  
Of mute insensate things.

"The floating clouds their state shall lend  
To her; for her the willow bend; 20  
Nor shall she fail to see  
Even in the motions of the Storm  
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form  
By silent sympathy.

"The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her; and she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place

Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face. 30

"And vital feelings of delight  
Shall rear her form to stately height,  
Her virgin bosom swell;  
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give  
While she and I together live  
Here in this happy dell."

Thus Nature spake—The work was done—  
How soon my Lucy's race was run!  
She died, and left to me  
This heath, this calm, and quiet scene; 40  
The memory of what has been,  
And never more will be.

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• 2.9. EXPLANATION :

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(1) Three years ..... A lady of my own.

**Exp. :** These lines have been taken from the poem "Three Years She Grew" composed by William Wordsworth. Here the poet says that the imaginary child Lucy developed under the benign protection of the forces of Nature for three years. Then Nature found her as the most perfect child born so far in this world, so nature decided to adopt this child as her own and to nurture her like a mother so that this child might grow as an ideal perfect lady under nature's guidance.

(2) Myself will ..... restrain.

**Exp. :** Here nature tells herself that she will hence forth be the guardian angel of Lucy. She says that she will act upon her little darling's mind both as the restraining force and as the impelling force. Thus she will rule over the girl by provoking version and impulsion in her mind. And she will look after Lucy at all times and in all places. She will watch over Lucy in the hilly country, in the plain, in a low place or high one, in an open grany place, in the wood, or in a shady retreat, as her guardean spirit. She will impel or repel the girl, as required by a situation.

(3) She shall be ..... insensate things.

**Exp. :** Here nature says that she will make Lucy as merry and playful as a fawn. Just as a fawn being wild with great joy, runs in jumping motion across on the grassland up or the mourtain side even. So lacy shall also enjoy the beauty of every hook and corner of the wood. She will inhale the fresh fragrance of flower leaves and grass. She will also open her mind to the healthful influence of the mute, lifeless things of nature.

(4) The floating clouds ..... silent sum path.

**Exp. :** Here nature tells herself how she will impart education to little Lucy. She says that Lucy shall learn the dignity of freedom from watching the clouds drifting in the sky. The girl shall learn humility from the bending of Willow plants. She shall also learn fearlessness and graceful manners of moving from the

movements of the storm. The influences of these natural objects will give a good shape to her body silently and sympathetically.

(5) The stars of mid-night ..... face.

**Exp. :** Here nature says that she will impart education to little Lucy. She says that midnight stars and the moon shall fill the girl with the feeling of happiness. Sweet sounds of murmur coming from the small rivers which flow in hidden places, along with their wilful, sound shall fill her with pleasant surprise. The beauty of the stars and the moon as well as the sweet murmur of small rivers shall sink into her mind and body. They will add beauty and grace to her form and face.

(6) And vital feelings ..... this happy dell.

**Exp. :** Here nature says that feelings of pleasure and pain etc. excited by objects of nature exercise deep influence upon the mind and body of man. Nature says that the ingenuous feelings of delight excited by natural objects in Lucy will do great good to the girl. They will cause her virgin bosom swell. Nature further says that she will exercise upon Lucy's mind such other creative influences also, when Lucy will live with lives in that blend small valiancy covered with trees. Nature implies that feelings of delight are all vital and health giving to the body and mind of a child.

(7) Thus nature ..... will be.

**Exp. :** Here nature spells out her detailed plan to educate Lucy in this way. She carried out her plan and accordingly Lucy developed as an accomplished girl. But Lucy's life came to an abrupt and formative end. She expired and left behind this hearth and thin tranquil, scenario of nature, associated with her. Now the poet is left only with reminiscences of past associations with her, which can never be experienced again.

## • 2.10. GLOSSARY

**Stanza I :** (1) She – Lucy, (2) In Sun and shower – under an open sky (3) Nature – Deity (4) lovelier – more beautiful (5) I shall to myself will take – I shall own (6) A lady of my own – a grown up lady of my own dreams and ideals.

**Stanza II :** (1) Impulse – verge (b) Rock – Hills (3) Plain – fields (4) Glade – valley (5) bower – grove (6) kindle – inspire (7) Restrain – check.

**Stanza III :** Sportive – playful (2) Fawn – roe, young deer, (3) glee – joy (4) Lawn – fields (5) Insensate – inanimate.

**Stanza IV :** (1) Lend – Impart (2) Bend – stoop (3) Mould – shape (4) – Maiden's form – the body of the young lady (5) silent sympathy – communion.

**Stanza V :** (1) Lean her ear – listen attentively to (2) Rivulents – small rivers (3) wayward – without any restriction at sweet will (4) pass into her face – transmit into her facial beauty.

**Stanza VI :** (1) vital – wholesome (2) Delight – joy (3) Rear – raise up (4) Form – figure (5) Stately – majestic (6) Swell – grow, (7) Dell – valley.

**Stanza VII :** (1) Thus – In this manner (2) Spake – spoke (3) Health – open cultivated land (4) Calm and quiet – Peaceful and silent setting of nature (5) Memory – remembrance.

### Critical Comments (Three Year She Grew)

1. The poem depicts Wordsworth's romanticism. It is a message to the mankind that nature elevates its best virtues to those who go near Her.

2. Nature has been presented as a teacher in the poem.

3. Wordsworth emphasizes that provocation and supervision are necessary elements of teaching and Nature knows it well.

4. This poem shows Wordsworth's dramatic quality.

5. The poem is divided into seven stanza of six lines. the rhyme scheme in each stanza is aa bc cb. Each line contains ten syllables.

6. The poem shows joy in solitude, relation between Man and Nature and healing power of Nature.

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• **2.11. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :**

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**Q. 1. Give critical appreciation of the poem "Three Years She Grew" or "Education of Nature".**

**Ans.** This poem is one of the most popular among Wordworth's poems, in which he has written about Lucy.

**Nature is the best teacher :** Wordsworth spells out his firm conviction that nature is the best teacher for mankind and can bring about a versatile growth of human personality – physical, moral and spiritual. But this is possible only when a person is exclusively expered to the benign and wholesome influence of Nature sight from the beginning,, gets attuned to nature and learns from her in a proper mood of "Passive receptivity".

Such was the case with Lucy, a three year old child, who caught the fancy and favour of mother nature. Nature resolved to own and adopt this child. Nature took her under her own care and guardianship and decided to educate her in her own way and to nurse and nurture her properly so that this innocent child blooms as an ideal maiden.

**Nature as a Living spirit :** In his poem Wordswhroth personifies nature. She spells out her prepared plan for the ideal education of Lucy by herself.

**Both Law and Impulse :** Nature will serve both as a motivation and as regulation or deterrent for Lucy. Nature will inspire Lucy towards good and check her from evil. She will instill virtuous thoughts and emotions in Lucy and encourage her towards final pursuits. At the same time nature will check her from going astray and will prevent Lucy from wrong and evil.

**Nature will evolve balanced and harmonious personality of Lucy :** Under nature's watchful guidance and supervision Lucy will learn different qualities of body, head and heart from diverse, varied objects and phenomena of Nature. Lucy will pick up vivacity and hilarity from a rose and grace and serenity from the inanimate objects of nature. Then her temperament will be a judicious mix of complementary qualities like seriousness' and gaiety, majesty and niceness. Her personality will be thus balanced, not lop sided.

**Terrible aspects of nature will also teach Lucy :** Even the terrible aspects of nature will give Lucy some valuable lessons. Stars will teach her a peculiar grace of motion.

**Teaching through communication :** However, nature will unlock the secrets of wisdom to Lucy not orally but through silent communication. Nature and Lucy will be feeling and thinking on the same wave length and thus a bond of sympathy will develop between the teacher and the taught. This will enable Lucy to learn the profound wisdom taught by nature.

**Premature death of Lucy :** Nature carried out her plan of educating and guiding Lucy. But Lucy died suddenly and permaturly. Therefore the poet feels sad and bereaved. He is nostalgic.

**Style :** The style of the poem is simple clear and at times suggestive. The language at times becomes lyrical.

**Verse form :** The poem is divided into seven stanzas of six lines each. The rhyme scheme in each stanza is aa bc bc. Each line contains ten syllables.

Wordsworth, in his poetry, does not convey turbulence of passion. He conveys depth of controlled emotion. So his expression of grief over Lucy's untimely death is suggested with force, but in a restrained way.

"The memory of what has been,  
And never more will be."

**Q. 2. Wordsworth as a poet of nature ?**

**Ans.** William Wordsworth is probably the greatest poet of nature in English poetry. His poetic volumes are packed with striking passages on nature or its objects. In Tintern Abbey he tells us that he has been bewitched by the beauty and soul of nature

"Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods  
And Mountains; and of all the mighty world.  
Of eye and ear – both what they half create  
And what perceive ....."

In "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth gives us the impression that his love for nature had passed through four stages before it turned into a mystic passion. At the first stage he got a delight from walking, bathing and leaping in the lap of nature like.

"A naked savage, in the thunder shower  
At this stage he was a child of five to ten years.

At the second stage, the outward appearances of nature began to fill him with delight. It happened when he was a teenager and at school. At the time the beauty of nature began to attract him for its own sake, he writes :

"And all that I beheld  
Was dear, and hence to finer in fluxes  
The mind lay open to a more exact  
And close communion ....."

The third stage occurred years later but during the same school day what happened was that his love for nature turned into a kind of religious love an "Auxilar" light would emanate from his own mind, and bestow new beauty upon the objects of nature to use own words :

An auxiliary light  
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun  
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds  
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on  
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves storm  
Grew darker in the presence of my eye"

The fourth stage began from such absorptions and he began to attain a state which did not take any help of colour from his imagination or thoughts. The state filled him with

" ..... A feeling and a love

That had no need of a remoer charm  
By thought supplied, nor any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye .....

Gradually the fourth stage reached its maturity, when his soul began to see the soul of nature which is

“A presence that disturbs me with a joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is the light of the setting suns .....

He defines the role of nature as :

“A notion and spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought  
And roles through all things .....

A critic observes “Wordsworth is remarkable for the highly religious quality he gives to his interpretation of Nature”. But William Blake and later many other critics questioned the validity of his spiritual interpretation of nature. Those who believe in the supremacy of the human mind regard nature as something inferior to the mind of man. So they attach no value to his spiritual interpretation. But the latest trend considers the human mind a part of nature. According to it, we think because our mind is in harmony with nature. The Vedanta also approve of Wordsworth's spiritual interpretation of nature. In all modesty we agree with his conception of nature.

Wordsworth sincerely belives that nature is a great moral teacher. He writes :

“One impels from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man, of moral evil and of Good  
Than all the sages can”

But Morley does not agree with Wordsworth that nature can be a moral teacher. He obseves “such a proposition can not be seriously taken as more than a half playful sally for the benefit of some too bookish friend” but renowned critics believe that there is some truth in Wordsworth's statement although it is hyperbolic.

But whether it is called pãtheism or mysticism, it was Wordsworth's firm belief that nature is permeated by a universal soul. He looks upon it as :

“The anchor of my purest thoughts the nature  
The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul  
Of all my moral being”

That is why he calls himself “A Worshiper of nature”. De Quincey called him “the high priest of Nature”. Now, his poetry is singular and unique in its spiritual appeal. It lasts an elevating influence upon the readers' mind.

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## • 2.12. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Trace the development of thought in “Three Years She Grew”.**

**Ans.** This is among “Lucy Poems”. Lucy was born and brought up under the wholesome impact of nature. She grew in the lap of nature.

When she was three year old, she caught the fancy and favour of nature who decided to own her as her (nature's) own child and to act as her mother, philosopher and guide.

In this poem nature herself outlines the process by which she proposes to mould the character, temperament and physical fun of her beloved daughter. Lucy, she herself will act as 'both law and impulse'. She will inspire Lucy for noble works and check her from lapsing into error.

Lucy will learn different qualities of head and heart from various objects and phenomena of nature. This education will be imparted by nature not through nature but through silent communion. But Lucy met a sudden and untimely death at an early age. She has left behind a fund of memories. The poet feels bereaved at her death.

The poem expresses Wordsworth's adoration of nature and also his tender sentiments for Lucy. Nature is the ideal perfect teacher for man.

**Q. 2. Give the poetic qualities of the poem "Three Years She Grew".**

**Ans.** Everything in nature is useful for human beings. The poem elevates the idea that nature is a good teacher. The poet believes in the innocence of thought and mind. Language of the poem is extremely simple and meaningful.

The poem is divided into seven stanzas of six lines each. The rhyme scheme is aa bc cb. Each line contains ten syllables. The music is created by the movement of thought from one line to the next.

**Q. 3. Write a short note on Wordsworth's philosophy of nature as reflected in the poem "Three Years She Grew".**

**Ans.** Wordsworth feels a soul in nature and gets a deep consolation in the company of nature. In this poem there is description of nature's constructive power or Wordsworth's philosophy of formation "Education of Nature". The conception proves that child can grow in the lap of nature.

This poem evidences that over seeing power of nature can better look after a child. To a greater extent nature is a faster mother to Lucy. All the elements of nature will cast healthy effect on the development of child.

Wordsworth feels that in the materialistic world, nature is a peaceful and perfect guide.

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### • 2.13. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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1. How will Lucy learn walking ?

**Ans.** From the state of clouds.

2. What object will make Lucy's breath like balm ?

**Ans.** Sweet fragrance of the flowers.

3. What did Lucy leave after her death ?

**Ans.** Lucy left after her death the heath, the calm and quiet scene, along with a memory of what had been and was never to be.

4. Who is the speaker in the first six stanzas of the poem ?

**Ans.** Nature.

5. How does nature teach Lucy ?

**Ans.** Through 'silent sympathy'.

## • 2.14. TEST YOURSELF

William Wordsworth :  
The Daffodils

### True/False Statements :

1. Lucy was Wordsworth's daughter.
2. Lucy is an imaginative child.
3. Vergin stands for the goddess of purity and chastity.
4. Lucy died all of a sudden.
5. The poet has personified nature.
6. Nature is a silent teacher.
7. It was published in the second edition of Lyrical Ballads.

### Fill in the Blanks :

1. Myself will to my darling be, Both law and .....
2. The nature said, "lovelier ..... On earth was sown".
3. The stars of ..... shall be dear to her.
4. Where rivulets dance their ..... round.
5. And feelings of ..... Shall rear her form of stately height.

### Multiple Choice Questions :

1. Nature nourished Lucy but she died due to :  
(a) illness (b) over age  
(c) loneliness (d) all of a sudden
2. Objects to teach Lucy are :  
(a) trees and rivers (b) hills and lawns  
(c) fawn and stars (d) all the above
3. Lucy will not roam in the .....  
(a) Sky (b) Rock and Plain  
(c) glade and bower (d) Secret places
4. Nature will teach Lucy :  
(a) Law (b) Impulse  
(c) bending and playing (d) All of the above
5. Silent sympathy stands for .....  
(a) Magic power (b) Meditation  
(c) a communication between perceptive hearts  
(d) narration of factors.

### ANSWERS

#### True/False Statements :

1. (F), 2. (T), 3. (T), 4. (.), 5. (T), 6. (F), 7. (T)

#### Fill in the blanks :

1. impulse, 2. flower, 3. midnight, 4. wayward, 5. delight

#### Multiple Choice Questions :

1. (a) 2. (d) 3. (a) 4. (d) 5. (c).

#### Answer the following questions in brief :

1. Why did nature adequately Lucy as her own child ?
2. What message does the poem "Three Year She Grew" convey to the reader ?

3

ALEXANDER POPE : ESSAY ON MAN

STRUCTURE

- Alexander Pope's Life and Works
- Essay on Man : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Critical Comments
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Test Yourself

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- After going through this unit you will learn :
- Neoclassical Age
  - Pope as the representative poet of 18th century
  - Wit, Satire
  - Pedantic usage of words

• 3.1. ALEXANDER POPE'S LIFE AND WORKS

English essayist, critic, satirist, and one of the greatest poets of Enlightenment. Alexander Pope wrote his first verse at the age of 12. His breakthrough work, AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM (1711), appeared when he was twenty-three. It included the famous line "a little learning is a dangerous thing." Pope's physical defects made him an easy target for heartless mockery, but he was also considered a leading literary critic and the epitome of English Neoclassicism.

**"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,  
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be"**  
(From *An Essay on Criticism*)

Alexander Pope was born in London, the son of Alexander Pope, a Roman Catholic linen-merchant, and Edith (Turner) Pope, who was forty-four when Alexander, her only child, was born. Edith Pope belonged to a large Yorkshire family, which divided along Catholic and Protestant lines. His early years Pope spent at Binfield on the edge of Windsor Forest, and recalled this period as a golden age : " They forests. Windsor, and thy green retreats, / At once the monarch's and the Muse's seats, / Invite my lays. Be present, sylvan maids! Unlock your springs, and open all your shades." Anecdotes from Pope's life were deemed worthy of collecting during his lifetime. Joseph Spence, a critic, minor poet, and Pope's biographer, tells that Pope was "a child of a particularly sweet temper and had a great deal of sweetness in his look when he was a boy". Due to his melodious voice, he was nicknamed "the Little Nightingale".

Pope's father, the son of an Anglican vicar, had converted to Catholicism, which caused the family many problems. At the time Catholics suffered from repressive legislation and prejudices—they were not allowed to enter any university

or hold public employment. Thus Pope had an uneven education, which was often interrupted. From Twyford School he was expelled after writing a satire on one of the teachers. At home, Pope's aunt taught him to read. Latin and Greek he learnt from a local priest and later he acquired knowledge of French and Italian poetry. Pope also attended Clandestine Catholic schools.

Most of his time Pope spent in reading books from his father's library—he "did nothing but write and read," recalled his half-sister. While still at school, Pope wrote a play based on speeches from the *Iliad*. Samuel Johnson tells that Pope's early epic poem, called *Alexander*, was burnt at the suggestion of Francis Atterbury, who was later exiled for treason is supporting the deposed Stuart monarchy.

In 1700, when his family moved to Binfield in Windsor Forest, Pope contracted tuberculosis through infected milk. It was probably Pott's disease, a tubercular affection of the bones. He also suffered from asthma and headaches, and his humpback was a constant target for his critics in literary battles—Pope was called a "hunchbacked toad". In middle age he was 4ft 6in tall and wore a stiffened canvas bodice to support his spine.

After moving to London, Pope published his first major work, *An Essay on Criticism*. This discussion was based on neoclassical doctrines and derived standards of taste from the order of nature : "Good nature and good sense must ever join; /To err is human, to forgive divine".

Before becoming one of the members of Scriblerus Club, Pope associated with anti-Catholic Whig friends, but by 1713 he had moved towards the Tories. His friends among Tory intellectuals included Jonathan Swift, Gay, Congreve, and Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford. In 1712 Pope published an early version of THE RAPE OF THE LOCK, an elegant satire about the battle between the sexes, and follies of a young woman with her "puffs, powders, patches. Bibles, billet-doux". The work was expanded in 1714. Its first version consisted of two cantos (1712) and the final version five cantos (1714). *Rape of the Lock* originated from a quarrel between two families with whom Pope was acquainted. The cause was not very small—the 7th Lord Petre cut off a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair and, kept it as a trophy. Although Pope did not admit it, the title of the work was most likely influenced by Alessandro Tassoni's mock-epic *The Rape of the Bucket*, from 1622.

Pope's poem recounts the story of a young woman, Belinda. When she wakes up, Pope describes devotedly her exotic cosmetics and beauty aids. She plays cards, flirts, drinks coffee, and has a lock of hair stolen by an ardent young man. "The meeting points the sacred hair dissever/From the fair head, forever, and forever!/The flashed the living lightning from her eyes, /And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies." For this trivial event Pope gives an extended mock heroic treatment which echoed the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, and at the same time comments ironically on the contemporary social world, high-society preoccupations, and perhaps suggests a reform. But in real life there was no reconciliation between Lord and Arabella; Petre married another woman.

Pope admired Horace and Vergilius and valued them as models for poetry. His great achievements were the translations of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into English. The success of the translations enabled him to move to Twickenham from anti-Catholic pressure of the Jacobites. However, Pope remained a Catholic even after the death of his father (d. 1717) and mother (d. 1733). Pope's collected works were published in 1717. He was one of the first professional poets to be self-sufficient as a result of his non-dramatic writings.

In Twickenham Pope studied horticulture and landscape gardening. During his last years, Pope designed a romantic "grot" in a tunnel, which linked the

waterfront with his back garden. It was walled with shells and pieces of mirror. Pope's villa, about fifteen miles from London, attracted also a number of writers, including Swift, whom Pope helped with the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*. With his neighbour, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Pope formed an attachment, but when the friendship cooled down, he started a life long relationship with Martha Blount. Pope had met Martha and her sister Teresa already in 1711. Later in IMITATIONS OF HORACE (1733) Pope referred to his former friend Lady Mary as "Sappho" and wrote : "Give me again my hollow tree. /A crust of bread, and liberty.

In ESSAY ON MAN (1733-34) Pope examined the human condition against Miltonic, cosmic background. Although Pope's perspective is well above our everyday life, and he does not hide his wide knowledge, the dramatic work suggests that humankind is a part of nature and the diversity of living forms : "Each beast, each insect, happy in its own: /Is Heaven unkind to Man, and Man alone?" In MORAL ESSAYS (1731) Pope separated behaviour from character : "Not always actions show the man : we find/Who does a kindness is not therefore kind." Pope prepared an edition of his correspondence, doctored to his own advantage. He also employed discreditable artifices to make it appear that the correspondence was published against his wish. With the translation of the *Odyssey*, Pope was eager to take all the credit, trying to avoid mentioning the contribution of other writers.

In his time Pope was famous for his witty satires and aggressive, bitter quarrels with other writers. When his edition of William Shakespeare was attacked, he answered with the savage burlesque THE DUNCIAD (1728), which was widened in 1742. It ridiculed bad writers, scientists, and critics. "While pensive poets painful vigils keep,/Sleepless themselves to give their readers sleep." Pope died on May 30, 1744. Pope left his property to Martha Blount. Before his death, Pope was delirious for a period of time, and he claimed to see an arm coming through the wall. His last epic poem, *Brutus*, was left unfinished.

With the growth of romanticism Pope's poetry was increasingly seen as outdated and the "Age of Pope" ended. It was not until the 1930s when serious attempt was made to rediscover the poet's works.

**Pope's most memorable creations are :**

- (1) The pastroal (1709)
- (2) Essay on criticism (1711)
- (3) The Rape of the Lock (1712)
- (4) The winds or Forest (1713)
- (5) The Translation of Homer (1715)
- (6) Edition of Shakespeare (1725)
- (7) The Dunciad (1728-29)
- (8) First Epistle (1729)
- (9) Seema Epistle (1731)
- (10) Prologue to the Satires (1733)
- (11) Essay an Man (1735)
- (12) Other Epistles (1734)
- (13) Later Epistles (1738)
- (14) Enlargement of the Dunciad (1742-43)

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### • 3.2. ESSAY ON MAN : KNOW THEN THYSELF

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Alexander Pope : Essay on Man

OF THE NATURE AND STATE OF MAN WITH RESPECT TO HIMSELF, AS AN INDIVIDUAL

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,  
The proper study of mankind is man.  
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;  
In doubt to deem himself a God, or beast;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;  
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little or too much:  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd;  
Still by himself abus'd or disabus'd;  
Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

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### • 3.3. EXPLANATION

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(1) Know then ..... rudely great. (Lines 1-4)

**Exp.** These lines are extracted from the poem 'Essay on Man' Epistle 2 composed by the famous neoclassical poet Alexander Pope. Here the poet asks man to know himself and not to think that God will criticize or examine him. The proper study of mankind is man. He should understand that God helps those who help themselves. He says that man finds himself in the middle position. He finds himself hanging between two extremes of divinity and beastiality. He is neither in the lower world of water nor in the upper world of air but is on the earth. He is darkly wise on the one hand *i.e.*, filled with reason and on the other hand he is always standing on the fear of beastiality.

(2) With too much ..... or beast. (Line 5-8)

**Exp.** In these lines the poet says that man is a mysterious creature. He may claim to be great, powerful and cultured but when his passions are high he becomes a beast. He thinks that he has taken much knowledge and this knowledge has made him confused. Due to this he has become a sceptic, who maintains doubts. He is a bundle of weakness it also therefore a stoic finds himself helpless before him because he smiles at joys and weeps in pain therefore stoics speech falls flat. The poet further says that man hangs between doubt and belief. He fails to understand whether he should take rest or act. Sometimes he feels that he should do work but on the very next moment he feels that when everybody is doing rest then why should he work hard? Sometimes man feels that as he was created by God so he considers himself God but the idea of primary sin compels him to think that he is no better than a beast

(3) In doubt ..... disapused (9-14)

**Exp.** In these lines the poet says that man is doubtful about himself. He does not know whether he is God or Demon because he has both angelic and beastly qualities. He is also doubtful whether he prefer sensual pleasures or intellect. He is lost so much in material pursuit that he forgets he is to die ultimately. The poet further says that man is ignorant. He fails to direct himself towards the right path whether he thinks too little or too much, He has both thought and passion, intellect and emotion head and heart. Thus he is a bundle of confusions. He is the maker of his own destiny. He is responsible for his misfortunes and fortunes inspite of ups and downs he remains at the same place where he was earlier.

(4) Created half to rise ..... world (16-18)

**Exp.** In these lines the poet says that man is made of air, fire, earth and water. The first two elements i.e. air and fire lift him upwards but on the other hand earth and water drag him down to fall. Man thinks that because he is created by God that is why he is the master of all the things. He considers himself the reflection of God, but his weakness i.e. inclination towards materialistic things make him a victim to evil things. His reasoning makes him able to understand the truth yet he commits mistakes after mistakes because he is subject to mistakes. Man feels proud to think that he is the supreme creation of God but as he is made of dust he has to die ultimately and this transience of life makes him glory test and riddle of the world.

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• **3.4. GLOSSARY**

(1) Prescence—to take for granted (2) Scan—to scrutinize (3) Isthumus—small piece of land joining two large pieces of land (4) Darkly—full of secret.

(2) Err—to commit mistake (2) Chaos-disorder (3) Passion- Emotion.

(4) Jest—to mock (2) riddle—puzzle

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• **3.5. CRITICAL COMMENTS**

(1) 'Essay on man' is mainly a philosophical poem in which the poet expresses his contempt for neo-platonic speculations.

(2) Pope feels that man should be independent.

(3) 'Essay on man' presents the mysterious nature of man.

(4) In this poem Pope's treatment of the subject matter reaches metaphysical poetry.

(5) This poem is remarkable for brevity and condensed thoughts.

(6) 'Essay on Man' is written in heroic couplet.

(7) The diction of the poem is artificial.

(8) The rhyme seheme of this poem is aa bb ...

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• **3.6. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

**Q. 1. Write critical appreciation of the poem "An esay on Man".**

**INTRODUCTION**

The philosophical poem *An Essay on Man* consists of four verse epistles, each of which was published separately and anonymously between February 1733 and January 1734 by a bookseller not previously associated with Pope's writings. Attesting to his belief that "the life of a Wit is a warfare upon earth," Pope contrived the elaborate ruse partly to defuse the hostility provoked by his recent satires, notably *The Dunciad* (1728) and his *Epistle to Burlington* (1731), and partly to secure an impartial audience for the poem. Pope eventually identified himself as

the author when he collected the epistles under the subtitle "Being the First Book of Ethic Epistles." He had originally conceived of *An Essay on Man* as the introduction to an opus magnum on society and morality, but he later abandoned the plan. To this end, the poem addresses the question of human nature and the potential for happiness in relation to the universe, social and political hierarchies, and the individual. Articulating the values of eighteenth-century optimism, the poem employs a majestic declamatory style and underscores its arguments with a range of conventional rhetorical techniques. *An Essay on Man* met with international acclaim upon publication and generated no small share of controversy in ensuing decades. During the succeeding centuries, however, critics have perceived Pope's poem as fundamentally flawed, both aesthetically and philosophically. Nearly three hundred years after its publication, the poem generally merits distinction as, in David B. Morris's phrase, "a forlorn classic of ratiocination."

### Plot and Major Characters

Pope addressed *An Essay on Man* to Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who served briefly as secretary of state and prime minister under Queen Anne. Previously acquainted with Pope by mutual association with Jonathan Swift, Bolingbroke retired in 1723 to Dawley, a farm neighboring Pope's Twickenham, and quickly befriended the poet, whose personal beliefs neatly coincided with his own. The friends often discussed much of the subject matter expressed in both Pope's poem and Bolingbroke's own amateur philosophical writings, usually as they walked the grounds of their properties. Divided into four parts, *An Essay on Man* explicates ideas commonplace among eighteenth-century European intellectuals concerning human nature and humanity's role in the universe. Proposing to "vindicate the ways of God to man," the first epistle attempts to show the underlying harmony and virtue of the universe and the propriety of humanity's place in it, despite the presence of evil and apparent imperfection in the world. Each of the remaining epistles draws upon this premise, describing potential improvements to some aspect of human nature and society with the implicit understanding that the universe is divinely ordered and essentially perfect. The second epistle discusses human as unique beings and shows how the psychological balance between self-interest and the "passions," or emotions, under the guidance of reason, promotes virtuous living. The third epistle addresses the role of the individual in society, tracing the origins of such civilizing institutions as government and the class system to a constant interaction between the selfish motivations and altruistic impulses of individual human. The fourth epistle frames the struggle between self-love and love of others in terms of the pursuit of happiness, arguing that any human can attain true happiness through virtuous living, which happens only when selfish instincts yield to genuine expressions of benevolence toward others and God.

### Major Themes

Throughout the epistles of *An Essay on Man* Pope surveys such grand themes as the existence of a Supreme Being and the behavior of human, the workings of the universe and the role of human in it, and the capacity of government to establish and promote the happiness of its citizens. Consequently, the poem is one of Pope's most thorough statements of his philosophical, ethical, and political principles, which, however, were generally neither unique, radical, nor systematic. A practising Catholic and instinctually conservative in his politics—each position precarious to acknowledge in Pope's time—Pope carefully avoids explicit references to specific church doctrines and political issues in the poem. Implicitly assuming such Christian notions as fallen man, lost paradise, and a beneficent deity, the poem presents an eclectic assortment of both traditional and current

philosophical ideas that attempt to explain the universal characteristics of humankind. The poem borrows ideas from a range of medieval and renaissance thinkers, although Pope somewhat modifies them to suit his artistic purposes. The underlying theme of the poem is the idea that there exists an ordered universe which possesses a coherent structure and functions in a rational fashion, according to natural laws designed by God. The description of its structure derives from the metaphysical doctrine of the Great Chain of Being, which explains the fullness and unity of the natural world in terms of a hierarchy that ranges from plants and insects at one end to human and angels at the other. As a creation of God, the universe ultimately is a perfect design that appears imperfect to human because the ability to perceive its order correctly is diminished by pride and intellectual limitations. If humanity were to acknowledge with humility its insignificant position in the greater context of creation, Pope reasons, then humanity's capacity to live happily and virtuously on earth would be possible. Pope expresses many of his main ideas regarding human nature in language so indelible and pithy that some phrases from the poem have become commonplace in the English language.

### Critical Appreciation

Upon publication, *An Essay on Man* made Pope the toast of literature everywhere, including his inveterate foes in London, whom he deceived into celebrating the poem, since he had published it anonymously. His avowed enemy Leonard Welsted, for instance, declared the poem "above all commendation." This assessment typified the initial critical and popular response in England, which was generally echoed throughout Europe over the next two decades. Such notable figures as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant rhapsodized about the poem's literary aesthetics and philosophical insights. However, the early universal appeal of *An Essay on Man* soon gave way to controversy inspired by a small but vocal community of metaphysicians and clergymen, who perceived challenges and threats in the poem's themes to their respective authority. These critics determined that its values, despite its themes, were essentially poetic and not coherently philosophical by any means. Within fifty years of its publication, the prevailing critical opinion of the poem mirrored that of Samuel Johnson, who noted, "Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised." This consensus persisted throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, as commentators also trivialized the work's poetic achievements—as they generally did Pope's other writings. Widely neglected and relegated to the dustbin of literary history, *An Essay on Man* has been often perceived as historical curiosity disconnected from contemporary concerns, literary and otherwise. However, a number of recent critics have sought to rehabilitate the poem's status in the canon by focusing on its language and ideas in terms of the genre of philosophical poetry. Other commentators have attempted to reevaluate the poem's ideas within the context of early eighteenth-century thought in an effort to demonstrate that Pope derived his theodicy—or explanation of the ways of God—from the various philosophical and theological positions held by his intellectual peers.

In 'Essay on Man' Alexander Pope, the poet assumes the role of man as the main subject. He tries to analyse man's nature and existence. He says that man is confused in between what to do and what not to do.

"He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;

In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;"

The Essay is a classic book of morals. The present piece is remarkable for brevity and condensed thought and mastery of the heroic couplet. Man is a mysterious creature. He can be understood neither by the sceptic nor by the stoic.

He has too much knowledge to be understood by a sceptic. He has too much weakness for a stoic to take pride. He is both a god and a demon and hangs between doubt and belief, action and dullness. He is born to die. He is rational creature to err.

"In doubt his mind a body to prefer.

Born but to die and rasuring but to err"

Man has been created half to rise, and half to fall. He has to see both rise and fall, fortune and misfortune happiness and sadness. Though he is a great master of all things, he is a prey to all (shave) though man in the sole judge of truter, he less has been thrown into endlles error. Man's dueins life is transitory and this made him the glory first and riddle of the world.

"Sole judge of truth, in endless error build:

The glory, yest and riddle of the world.

The language of the poem is simple and refined. Diclian is artificial. Pope is the representative poet of 18th century hence his language is replete with pure poetic dichan of the 18th century aeoclanical poetry.

'Essay on man' is full of proverbial beauty and epigrammatic charm. The beautiful variations can be seen in the weight of the stresses and pauses and the modulation of the vowels censonants in response to the variations of the output and emotion. There is a careful weighing and variation in the in tenity of the stresses on stemes as the syllables in the line.

## **Q. 2. Discuss Pope as the Representative of the 18th Century**

**Introduction :** A great work of art, though universal in its appeal, is the most typical product of its time. It is rooted in the contemporary social and cultural life and reflects, implicitly or explicitly, that life in its essence and totality. It is an indispensable prerequisite for the greatness of a work of art. If it fails to be of its own age, almost as a rule, it will also fail to be universal in its appeal. It is a great poem by all canons of art and it does all that admirably. Its focus mainly captures the typical features of the aristocratic class of its time.

The Rape of the Lock gives a complete and graphic picture of the 20th century. The Rape of the Lock is concerned with the aristocratic society and presents a charming portrait of its features. This portrait is not presented in word-pictures of descriptive passages; but is richly suggested through the mock-epic adventures of Lord Petre and Belinda—the representative figures of the society. The aristocratic of the 18th century English was a newly formed class, having emerged out of the commercial prosperity of England since the exploits of the Armada victory. The aristocratic people were primarily urban people with easy flow of money from trade and commerce and in some classes from the hoardings of land. They were luxury loving people enjoying life in idle games and fun and frolic. Being wealthy with a new-found just for money and craze for fashion, mostly imitated from the French whose influence had come through the Restoration. They got themselves preoccupied in trivialities. Gossips, sex-intrigues and courting ladies. The ladies of the time loved being wooed and playing coquets to the gentlemen.

**Mirror to the 18th century :** The Rape of the Lock is a mirror to this kind of society of which Lord Petre and Belinda are the representative figures. Belinda is presented as dazzling charming like the sun, and lap-dogs were another indispensable ingredient of their lives.

*Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake,*

*And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:*

It is significant that how Pope brackets lap-dogs and lovers as though lovers were no better than lap-dogs. Glittering fashion, celebrations in the form of parties, dances with amorous intentions beneath, were the typical features of the people belonging to the aristocratic class. Ariel's speech that Belinda hears in a state of dreaming portrays the sex-intrigues of the dancing balls. The ladies spent more time applying to themselves beauty aids, a large variety of cosmetics from distant lands. They were always burning to win the heart of their lover. They spent hours at the toilets, played card games, danced and considered the dressing table a place of worship. Coquetry was the only art that these ladies practised sedulously : rolling the eye ball for furtive glances or winking in a *debonair*. apparently indifferent manner, blushing at the right moment to attract the admiring eyes, were the manners that they worked hard to acquire. The ladies as well as the gallant young men were fickle-minded, inconsistent, unreliable frankly trivializing valuable human relationship. Pretension, dissimulation and hypocrisy constituted their way of life. *Levity was their common characteristic. The following shows their picture.*

*On the rich guilt sinks with becoming woe,  
Wrapt in a gown, for sickness, and for show.  
The fair ones feel such maladies as these,  
When each new night-dress gives a new disease*

Pope gives minute details of the ladies' constant concern for enhancing their beauty effect with artificial means. For these ladies, the conventionally serious things of life had lost their importance. Their moods and passions were ruled by trivialities. Trifles would make them anxious or angry. These ladies, in other words, were devoid of any real moral sense, or any serious, meaningful purpose in life. To them, the death of husbands affected them only as much as that of their lap-dog or breaking of China jars. Honour, to them, was almost equal to nothing. The loss of chastity was no more serious than staining of brocades. To them Church meant nothing. Missing a church congregation was not a serious affair, but missing a ball was considered an important thing. Losing heart or indulging in sex was less important than the loss of a necklace.

All this goes to show that utter moral confusion prevailed in the aristocracy of the eighteenth century. Serious purpose had evaporated from their lives. Men were chiefly concerned with getting richer and carrying on sexual adventures with fashion-frenzy coquettish ladies. Their love letters were more sacred to them than the Bible. In the *Rape of the Lock*, the adventurous Baron builds an *Altar of Love*: it is built of twelve voluminous French romances and all the prizes gained from his former love; and significantly, the fire at the altar is raised with the heaps of love-letters that he had received. Lord Petre's sense of victory at the cutting of Belinda's lock is symbolic of the shallowness, triviality, in fact, the emptiness of the youths of the contemporary aristocratic class.

*Shallowness of Judges, the fashion of coffee-taking.  
The hungry judges soon the sentence sign  
And wretches hang that the jury-men dine  
"Coffee, (which makes the politician wise,)  
and see through all things with half-shut eyes".*

The *Rape of the Lock* is an epitome of the eighteenth century social life. In this poem, Pope has caught and fixed for ever the atmosphere of the age. No great English poet is at once so great and so empty, so artistic and yet so void of the ideal on which all high art rests. As Dixon asserts : *Pope is the protagonist of a whole age,*

of an attitude of mind and manner of writing. Hence, the poem is highly arresting because of its presentation of social life of the age. It reflects and mirrors the contemporary society.

**Conclusion :** Pope fully bears the witticism of its age. In his conception of theme and selection of the title, Pope displays his unsurpassable wit. This was the kind of life led by the fashionable people of the upper classes in the age of Pope, and Pope has described it in gorgeous colours on the one hand and with scathing satire on the other. While it shows the grace and fascination of Belinda's toilet, he indicates the vanity and futility of it all. There is nothing deep or serious in the lives and activities of the fashionable people, all is vanity and emptiness and this Pope has revealed with art and brilliance. The Rape of the Lock reflects the artificial age with all its outward splendor and inward emptiness. It the mirror of a particular aspect of life in the age of Pope. *It was, says, Lowell, a mirror in a drawing room, but it gave back a faithful image of society*

### • 3.7. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

**Q. 1. Write the theme of the poem 'Essay on man'.**

**Ans.** The *Essay on Man* is a philosophical poem, written in heroic couplets and published between 1732 and 1734. Pope intended this poem to be the centrepiece of a proposed system of ethics that was to be put forth in poetic form. It was a piece of work that Pope intended to make into a larger work; however, he did not live to complete it.

The poem is an attempt to "vindicate the ways of God to Man," a variation on Milton's attempt in *Paradise Lost* to "justify the ways of God to Man" (1.26). It challenges as prideful an anthropocentric world-view. The poem is not solely Christian; however, it makes an assumption that man has fallen and must seek his own salvation.

It consists of four epistles that are addressed to Lord Bolingbroke. Pope presents an idea or his view on the Universe; he says that no matter how imperfect, complex, inscrutable and disturbing the Universe appears to be, it functions in a rational fashion according to the natural laws. The natural laws consider the Universe as a whole a perfect work of God. To human it appears to be evil and imperfect in many ways; however, Pope points out that this is due to our limited mindset and limited intellectual capacity. Pope gets the message across that humans must accept their position in the "Great Chain of Being" which is at a middle stage between the angels and the beasts of the world. If we are able to accomplish this then we potentially could lead happy and virtuous lives.

The poem an affirmative poem of faith : life seems to be chaotic and confusing to man when he is in the centre of it, but according to Pope it is really divinely ordered. In Pope's world God exists and is what he centres the Universe around in order to have an ordered structure. The limited intelligence of man can only take in tiny portions of this order and can experience only partial truths, hence man must rely on hope which then leads into faith. Man must be aware of his existence in the Universe and what he brings to it, in terms of riches, power and fame. It is man's duty to strive to be good regardless of other situations : this is the message Pope is trying to get across to the reader.

**Q. 2. What are the poetic qualities of 'Essay on Man'?**

**Ans.** 'Esasay on Man' is full of proverbial beauty and epigrammatic charm. It displays the delicacy, subtlety and flexibility of Pope's artistry. Pope achieves great subtlety of musical effect by careful weighing and variation in the intensity of the stresses on the syllables in the line. The glimpse of the gleams of Pope's poetry through the present passage, entitled 'the proper study of mankind is man'.

• 3.9. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q. 1. Who composed 'Essay on Man'?

Ans. Alexander Pope

Q. 2. What does the word 'Isthmus' mean?

Ans. Neck of land connecting two larger land masses.

Q. 3. Who is darkly wise and rudely great?

Ans. Man

Q. 4. What is the meaning of darkly wise?

Ans. Full of secret knowledge.

Q. 5. Who is all confused, according to Pope?

Ans. Man

• TEST YOURSELF

True/False statements :

1. Stoic is one who remains calm both in pleasure and pain
2. The proper study of mankind is God
3. 'Essay on Man' is written in epigrammatic style
4. The Poem reveals the philosophy of the poet.

Fill up the blanks :

1. The proper study of ..... in man.
2. A being darkly ..... and rudely .....
3. Born but to ..... and reasoning but to .....
4. Great ..... of all things, yet a pray to all.

Multiple Choice Questions :

1. What should be known according to Pope :  
(a) Oneself (b) God  
(c) Nature (d) Science
2. Who is the being that is Darkly wise and rudely great?  
(a) Donkey (b) Monkey  
(c) Criminal (d) Man
3. To err means  
(a) To be rational (b) To be practical  
(c) To commit mistake (d) None of these
4. Man is the glory, jest and ..... of the world.  
(a) Soul (b) Mind  
(c) riddle (d) Fun

ANSWERS

True/False Statements

1. (T), 2. (F), 3. (T), 4. (T)

Fill in the blanks :

1. Mankind 2. wise, great 3. die, err 4. Lord

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (a) 2. (d) 3. (c) 4. (c)

**Exercise (Do yourself)**

1. Write a short note on heroic couplet.
2. What is the meaning of solitude?
3. Write a note on Pope as a Neo classical poet
4. What is the real aim of Alexander Pope behind the poem 'Proper study a Mankind in man'.

4

JOHN MILTON : ON HIS BLINDNESS

STRUCTURE

- John Milton's Life and Work
- On His Blindness : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Critical Comments
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Test Yourself

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- After going through this unit you will learn :
- Milton's grand style
  - Milton's elevation towards God
  - Various figures of speech

• 4.1. JOHN MILTON'S LIFE AND WORK

One of the greatest poets of the English language, best-known for his epic poem *PARADISE LOST* (1667). Milton's powerful, rhetoric prose and the eloquence of his poetry had an immense influence especially on the 18th-century verse. Besides poems, Milton published pamphlets defending civil and religious rights.

"Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden."

(from *Paradise Lost*)

John Milton was born in London. His mother, Sarah Jeffrey, a very religious person, was the daughter of a merchant sailor. At the age of twelve Milton was admitted to St Paul's School near his home. Five years later he entered Christ's College, Cambridge. While considering himself destined for the ministry, he began to write poetry in Latin, Italian, and English. One of Milton's earliest works, 'On the Death of a Fair Infant' (1626), was written after his sister Anne Phillips had suffered from a miscarriage. 'In inventorem bombardae' (On the inventor of gunpowder), a piece in a series on the occasion of the Gunpowder Plot, contains Milton's first portrayal of Satan.

Milton did not adjust to university life. He was called, half in scorn, "The Lady of Christ's", and after starting a fist fight with his tutor, he was expelled for a term. On leaving Cambridge Milton had given up his original plan to become a priest. He adopted no profession but spent six years at leisure in his father's home, writing during that time *L'ALLEGRO, IL PENNEROSO* (1632), *COMUS* (1634), and *LYCIDAS* (1637), about the meaning of death, which was composed after the death

of his friend Edward King. Milton wrote in Latin as was usual for the time. His first published poem was the sonnet 'An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatic Poet, W. Shakespeare', which was printed anonymously in the Second Folio of Shakespeare's works (1632).

In 1635 the Miltons moved to Horton, Buckinghamshire, where John pursued his studies in Greek, Latin, and Italian. He traveled in France and Italy in the late 1630s, meeting in Paris the jurist and theologian Hugo Grotius and the astronomer Galileo Galilei in Florence - there are references to Galileo's telescope in *Paradise Lost*. His conversation with the famous scientist Milton recorded in his celebrated plea for a free speech and free discussion, *AREOPAGITICA* (1644), in which he stated that books "preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect bred in them." Milton returned to London in 1639, and set up a school with his nephews and a few others as pupils. He had planned to write an epic based on the Arthurian legends, but then gave up his literary pursuits, partly due to the Civil War, which divided the country as Oliver Cromwell fought against the king, Charles I.

Concerned with the Puritan cause, Milton published a series of pamphlets against episcopacy (1642), on divorce (1643), in defense of the liberty of the press (1644), and in support of the regicides (1649). He also served as the secretary for foreign languages in Cromwell's government. After the death of Charles I, Milton expressed in *THE TENURE OF KINGS AND MAGISTRATES* (1649) the view that the people have the right to depose and punish tyrants.

In 1651 Milton became blind, but like Jorge Luis Borges centuries later, blindness helped him to stimulate his verbal richness. "He sacrificed his sight, and then he remembered his first desire, that of being a poet," Milton was married three times. His first marriage started unhappily; this experience prompted the poet to write his famous essays on divorce. He had married in 1642 Mary Powell, seventeen at that time. She grew soon bored with her busy husband and went back home where she stayed for three years. Their first child, Anne, was born in 1646. Mary died in 1652 and four years later Milton married Katherine Woodcock; she died in 1658. For her memory Milton devoted the sonnet 'To His Late Wife'. In the 1660s Milton moved with his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, again a much younger woman, to what is now Bunhill Row. The marriage was happy, in spite of the great difference of their ages. Milton spent in Bunhill Row the remaining years of his life, apart from a brief visit to Chalfont St Giles in 1665 during a period of plague. His late poems Milton dictated to his daughter, nephews, friends, disciples, and paid amanuenses.

In *THE DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE OF DIVORCE* (1643), composed after Mary had deserted him, Milton argued that a true marriage was of mind as well as of body, and that the chaste and modest were more likely to find themselves "chained unnaturally together" in unsuitable unions than those who had in youth lived loosely and enjoyed more varied experience

Milton died on November 8, 1674. He was buried beside his father in the church of St Giles, Cripplegate. It has been claimed that Milton's grave was desecrated when the church was undergoing repairs. All the teeth and "a large quantity of the hair" were taken as souvenirs by grave robbers.

Milton's achievement in the field of poetry was recognized after the appearance of *Paradise Lost*. Before it, the writer himself had showed some doubt of the worth of his work: "By labor and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die." (from *The Reason of Church Government*, 1641) Milton's cosmic vision has

occasionally provoked critical discussion. Even T.S. Eliot has attacked the author and described him as one whose sensuousness had been "withered by book-learning." Eliot claimed that Milton's poetry "could only be an influence for the worse."

**Selected works:**

- ODE ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY, 1627
- L'ALLEGRO, 1632
- IL PENSEROSO, 1632
- EPITAPH ON SHAKESPEARE, 1632
- ARCADES, 1633
- COMUS, 1634
- LYCIDAS, 1637
- THE REASON OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT, 1641
- AN APOLOGY FOR SMECTYMNUUS, 1642
- THE DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE OF DIVORCE, 1643
- OF EDUCATION, 1644
- AREOPAGITICA, 1644
- POEMS, 1645
- THE TENURE OF KINGS AND MAGISTRATES, 1649
- EIKONOKLASTES, 1649
- PRO POPULO ANGLICANO DEFENSIO, 1651
- DEFENSIO SECUNDA/THE SECOND DEFENCE OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND, 1654
- A TREATISE OF CIVIL POWER IN ECCLESIASTICAL CAUSES, 1659
- THE READY AND EASY WAY TO ESTABLISH A FREE COMMONWEALTH, 1660
- PARADISE LOST, 1667 - Kadotettu paratiisi (suom. Yrjö Jylhä, 1933)
- HISTORY OF BRITAIN, 1670
- SAMSON AGONISTES, 1671
- PARADISE REGAINED, 1671
- A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOSCOVIA, 1682
- DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA, 1825
- COMMONPLACE BOOK, 1874
- COMPLETE ENGLISH POEMS, OF EDUCATION, AREOPAGITICA, 1919

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• **4.2. ON HIS BLINDNESS**

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When I consider how my light is spent  
Ere 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

My true account, lest he returning chide,  
 "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"  
 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  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
 Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest:  
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

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#### • 4.3. EXPLANATION

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(1) When I consider ..... I fondly ask.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that God gave him the power of writing poetry and he was fully determined to use that power in the service of God. He hoped that when he returns to God i.e. after death, he would show Him what he had done with his skill so that God will not be displeased with him but he became blind at the middle of his life. The world appears to him dark and wide. Now in this state he can not use his skill i.e. composing poems, which is so important. He fears the scolding by God when he will present himself face to face in front of God after death. These thoughts were haunting in the mind of the poet but soon he recollects and asks himself foolishly, whether God expects jobs even from those whom the eyesight has been denied for.

(2) But Patience ..... him best.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet complains about two things. He was determined to serve God by writing poetry but his eyesight was taken away. He asks if God is so cruel that He will force him to do the work that can be done only with clear eyesight. But soon his patience awoke and consoled him by saying that God never needs the services of man. He does not want even those gifts which he had given to human beings. God treats every one equally. It does not matter who did what or what not. The persons who bear the mild strokes of God perhaps serve him best. The persons who are incapable to do anything due to some physical ailments. They are also devotees of God.

(3) His state ..... wait.

**Explanation :** In these lines Milton says that God is majestic. He has thousands of angels who run over ocean and land without taking rest at his commands. He does not need either man's services or his gifts. He has innumerable angels to serve him. He further says that willingness is all necessary to please God. God recognizes those people as his servant who are always willing to serve him.

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#### • 4.4. GLOSSARY

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**Stanza (1) :** (1) Consider – think (2) Ere – before (3) half my days – before the half of the total age (4) Dark world – World is full of darkness of ignorance (5) one talent – composing poems is the talent which Milton thinks God had granted him to remove the ignorance of the world (6) which is death to hide – only death could hide his talent of composing poems but now his blindness has hidden it (7) Lodge – dwelling (8) Chide – to scold (9) Day labour – activities in the life time (10) Fondly – foolishly.

**Stanza (2) :** (1) Patience – courage (2) Prevent – to check (3) Murmur – self complaint (4) His own gifts – everything in the universe has been made by God (5) Bear – tolerate (6) Mild – gently yoke – strokes.

**Stanza (3) :** (1) His – of God (2) State – Position (3) bidding-command by signal (4) speed – to run (5) Post – to come and go.

**Critical Comments :**

(1) The poem is a self explanation. It is universal as well as autobiographical.

(2) The word talent has pun.

(3) The sonnet is a great soliloquy that the poet talks to himself.

(4) This poem is didactic. It teaches mankind that everyone should face his own problems bravely.

(5) Milton says that man can not do anything at his own will. His each and every action is governed by God, who has gifted certain responsibilities to every human being.

(6) Milton has personified 'Patience'.

(7) The position of God has been compared with the great position of king.

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• **4.5. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

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**Q. 1. Give a critical appreciation of the poem "On His Blindness".**

**Ans.** "On His Blindness" is a Petrarchan sonnet, a lyric poem with fourteen lines. This type of sonnet popularized by the Italian priest Petrarch (1304-1374) has a rhyme scheme of ABBA, ABBA, CDE and CDE. John Milton wrote the poem in 1655.

**Theme**

God judges human on whether they labour for Him to the best of their ability. For example, if one carpenter can make only two chairs a day and another carpenter can make five. They serve God equally well if the first carpenter makes his two chairs and the second makes his five. If one carpenter becomes surely disabled and can not make even a single chair, he remains worthy in the sight of God. For as Milton says in the last line of the poem, "They also serve who only stand and wait".

There are four main themes in "On His Blindness". One is limitation, Milton believes that his blindness will ruin his chances for using his talents as he once could have done. Without his sight, it becomes even more difficult to create poetry or even write it down for others to read. The light in the poem becomes another theme. The reader "Only need(s) to notice he importance that he put on light after his sight was gone to see what it meant to him". Not only does it represent the light that is seen with the eyes but also the spiritual light and the light of life. The day can be a metaphor for life and "Our lives are limited and once night comes that day is gone forever". Though Milton's life has not expired, his life of poetry has died. Duty and submission are the last two themes. His duty is to make use of the "talents" that have been given to him. At the end, he realizes that God does not need man to do work for Him and that he will be able to serve God in another way other than how he had served Him before.

**Meter**

All the lines in the poem are in iambic pentameter. In his metric pattern a line has five lines of stressed and unstressed syllables for a total of ten syllables.

## Figures of speech

Alliteration – My days in this dark world and wide (Line 2)

Metaphor – though my soul more bent/To serve there with my maker (lines 3-4).

Personification/Metaphor – But patience to prevent/That murmur soon replies.

Paradox – They also serve who only stand and wait.

Thus the poem 'On His Blindness' is highly didactic and full of morality. According to Milton all of us are part of God. A human being is a mixture of qualities of Good Angel and nobilities. This quality shows him the way to God and virtuous life. By gifting so many virtues and characteristics God never accepts any return. If we get benefit of his gifts we too should get ready for His sufferings that are His mild yoke.

### Q. 2. What moral message does Milton's "On His Blindness" convey ?

Ans. Though blind when he composed his greatest poetry, John Milton could think in iambic pentameter. Over a period of four or five years he dictated to one or another of his daughters the epic poem *Paradise Lost*. A shorter sequel *Paradise Regained*, and the drama *Samson Agonistes* followed soon after Ludwig van Beethoven stone deaf, wrote and orchestrated symphonies he could hear only in his mind. One wonders if Michelangelo, sightless could have sculpted the Pieta and the status of David using only his hands to feel the marble he was shaping to exquisite perfection.

It seems false modesty when, in the sonnet "On His Blindness". Milton refers to his genius and virtuosity as mere talent. But that would be to restrict the galaxies of meaning revolving around the word "talent" and other deceptively ordinary words such as "prevent" and "wait".

The poem commences with the poet's consideration of the second half of his life, which will be spent in darkness. He began to lose his sight in his early 30s. Doctors warned him against persisting in the eye-straining labour of writing pamphlets and public statements in defense and support of Oliver Cromwell's Puritan regime in which he served as Latin Secretary, a post similar to our Secretary of State Milton chose to continue He went totally blind in 1651 at age of 43.

This poem was written in either 1652 or 1656, while he was still active in the Cromwell regime. We find him torn between the need to contribute his literary mastery to matters political and the wish to fulfill the plan that the Almighty had in mind when He gifted him with his literary talent.

In the gospel of St. Mathew, chapter 25, are parables involving preparation for Judgment Day and the second coming of Christ. We know not when that day will come but we must be ready. In the main parable a lord goes off on a lengthy journey after distributing money (talents) to the servants. The servant who received five talent treaded, invested made loans with usurious interest and doubled their worth. So also did the one who was given two talents. But he who received just one talent buried and hid the money for safekeeping. When the lord returned, he blessed and rewarded those who had doubled their money. But the man who in fear buried his money was called wicked and slothful, and he was told to give that money to the man who had ten talents. The unprofitable servant was then cast into other darkness, where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

The central lesson is that men must actively perform as they have seen their master perform, even if such activity involves usually and less-than-fair dealing.

We see also that the term talent has its narrow modern denotation but also means money (in Biblical times a talent was a coin) and also faith.

Milton knows that despite his physical debility, it is spiritual death not to actively employ his God-given talents "lest He returning, chide". He is about to ask foolishly ("fondly") if God expects "day-labor" of one who is blind. But Patience silences his complaint ("murmur"), and declares that those who silently bear their misfortunes serve God in doing so. Then comes the well-known concluding line with its myriad of interpretations "They also serve who only stand and wait".

In the sonnet's octave the poet misinterprets the Biblical parable and querulously argues that God should not expect the labour of an ordinary man from one who is blind. The pivotal Volta meaning emerges with the final word "prevent" Patience intervenes with "prevenient grace", a term rarely heard today that means a divinely bestowed power that operates on the human will when one is about to reject God. It is this providence that forestalls the rebellious complaint before it can be uttered. He "consider(s)" in line one, but the sextet is a reconsideration lending a sense of circularity to the poem.

The concluding word "wait" means simultaneously to "await" expectantly and inactively to "attend" or serve as a waiter or waitress; to "be available" as in "coffee and brandy wait your pleasure in the drawing room", and to "pause and consider". That last verb provides closure to the verse. The word "verse" comes from Latin and means a turning, as in "reverse" and "converse" and completes the circle by its near repetition of the verb in the poem's first line.

**Q. 3. Write a short note on Milton as a poet ?**

*Or*

**Write a note on the poetic characteristics of John Milton.**

*Or*

**Write a note on Milton's grand style ?**

**Ans.** Milton was truly the great "Organ Voice of England". His poems have moral and religious earnestness. His learning was deep and vast and his poems are full of Biblical, classical and literary allusions. He has various qualities but he does not belong to any school.

Milton's style has been called grand, because of its majesty and power to move the readers. According to Wordsworth, it has the voice of the sea. He selects lofty matter. Even when he speaks of common things, he lifts them to lofty heights. He uses the best word in the best order.

The effect of Milton's poetry is produced more by what it suggests than by what it expresses Milton uses every word very carefully. Sir Walter Raleigh says, "Every word is of value. There is no mortar between the stones, each is held in place by the weight of others and helps to uphold the building". Milton changes the natural English order of adjectives and nouns. This gives a greater emphasis to the adjective. For example, in the sonnet, "On His Blindness" he says

When I consider how my light is spent

Ere half my days in this dark world and wide

Milton had a keen sense of beauty. He loved beauty in all its forms. He sought the idea of the beautiful in all forms. Whatever he wrote has perfect artistic beauty. He was deeply sensitive to the beauties of external nature. We can see it in

'L' Allegro' and L Penseroso

A daughter fair

So buxom, blithe and debonair – L'Allegro

Milton's style was built on classical models. All his poetry has a wealth of allusions of classical mythology. His poems are charged with classical atmosphere. He made a very apt use of these allusions to impart charm and suggestiveness to his poetry and not for show.

Emile Legouis says, "No other poet has been at once so deeply religious and so great an artist.

Milton was a great scholar of Latin language. One feature of his grand style is the use of words taken from the Latin language. He makes these words naturalized in the English language. Their Latin sense gives them the original meaning. At one occasion he says :

Find some occasion to infest our foes, He makes his English preine and brings back words to their original meaning.

Milton as primarily an epic poet. He uses similies in their concrete form. In "Paradise Lost Book-I he compares the fallen angels to :

Autumnal leaves that straw the brooks  
In vallombrasa, where Etrurian shades  
High over arch'd embower.

Milton had great logical genius. Macaulay and Mark Pattison agree that Milton's genius was essentially lyrical. His sonnets are perfect. They are highly typical. We do not feel any lack of human sympathy and human emotions in them.

Thus, Milton's diction makes "Paradise Lost' highly suggestive and full of deep meaning. He uses Blank verse in a musical and rhythmical manner. Somilies used by him have a dignity of their own. All these make his style sublime and grand. Recently, whatever he wrote and how-so-ever he work was and still is unattempted in prose or rhyme.

Milton's poetic style has music, dignity, gravity and delight. He is fitted to the subject and the verse music is well adapted to the emotion and mood of the moment. Milton's style has been called grand because of this majesty. As Wordsworth says, it has *the voice of the sea*'. It has a devoting effect upon the reader. His subjects are lofty. Even when he speaks of common things he lifts them to lofty heights. He uses the best words in the best order.

#### • 4.6. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

**Q. 1. Does the poem give any idea of how God conveys His will to His subjects ? How do people know how to do his "bidding" ?**

**Ans.** John Milton was a Puritan who supported Oliver Cromwell's republican commonwealth after the execution of King Charles I of England. During this period, politics and religion were tied closely together, so that being "useful" to the government meant being "useful" to God, at least for Milton. The poem displays Milton's encyclopedic knowledge of he Bible but also his reforming instincts. Milton is not afraid to challenge the supposed moral of he New Testament "Parable of the Talents" by pointing out the difference between God and the lord from the story. The sonnet gives expression to intense religious emotions, but its rational and rhetorical qualities are equally important.

**Q. 2. Do you think the speaker is guilty of being prideful at the start of the poem ? What about at the end ?**

**Ans.** We have all heard the homespun wisdom "Patience is a virtue", which sounds almost mystical but is really like saying. "Blue is a colour". The more interesting question is, what's a virtue ? A virtue is a character trait that helps you achieve some desired good o outcome. Virtues are central to Christian theology. The

speaker desires to serve God, but his impatience and sense of wounded pride threaten to get in his way by leading him to rashly criticize his "Maker". The virtue of patience helps him to remember that it's not all about him. Just because he thinks he has something to offer doesn't mean that God needs him to act right away.

**Q. 3. What is the speaker supposed to wait for at the end of the poem? Is he waiting for the eternal judgment or just for further instructions from God?**

**Ans.** Before going blind the speaker has high hopes for what he might accomplish in the future. He says he would have been a supremely useful servant of God. But we can't know if his motives are truly selfless, or if he is an ambitious guy who now struggles to come to terms with a personal upheaval. As he looks to the future, he compares his situation to the third servant from the New Testament "Parable of the Talents" in Mathew 25. Because he has not increased his master's wealth, this servant is cast into the darkness. Considering that the speaker already feels he lives in the darkness, what further punishment does he expect? At the end of the poem, patience gives him a new plan that he should wait until God calls on him to serve.

**Q. 4. How does the poem "On His Blindness" justify that God is supreme.**

**Ans.** In "On His Blindness" Milton asserts that all human beings are part of God's body. Therefore everybody should avoid sinful acts otherwise God will chide. God wants only good deeds God is Omnipotent and he rules over the whole of the universe. One should not be disgusted with the sorrows. One should be truthful to obey His orders. There are several persons who might have been better if they had been given a chance by the destiny. Such persons should not grieve for their bad luck; they should rather try to take it honestly and they should wait for their own luck because, "they also serve who only stand and wait".

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• **4.7. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :**

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1. What do you mean by "Talent" ?

**Ans.** The word "talent" stands for an ancient coin and indicate money and decently it means "abilities".

2. Explain "and present my true account".

**Ans.** Bible says that every man soul is asked for the account of good and bad deeds by God in Heaven.

3. Who is the best devotee of God ?

**Ans.** The persons who wait for their turn of good luck and bear their sufferings calmly are the best devotees to God.

4. When was "On His Blindness" composed ?

**Ans.** 1655.

5. Why is the world dark and wide for Milton ?

**Ans.** Because he has lost his eyesight.

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• **TEST YOURSELF**

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**True/False Statements :**

1. The poem " On His Blindness" is an elegy.
2. The word "Talent" has pun.
3. God asks return gifts from man.
4. Milton wants to serve God.

5. Milton does not want to serve God.
6. Man "Should not bear God's Mild yoke".
7. God has thousands of angels.

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. "When I consider how my light is ..... Ere half my days".
2. "Though my soul more bent/To serve therewith my .....
3. But patience to prevent/That ..... soon replies.
4. God's servants are .....
5. And that one ..... which in death to hide.

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. God can send his angels over :  
(a) land (b) ocean  
(c) sky (d) everywhere
2. The poem "On His Blindness" is :  
(a) an ode (b) a sonnet  
(c) elegy (d) an epic
3. The serial number of the sonnet "On His Blindness" is :  
(a) XX (b) XXV  
(c) XVI (d) XXIII
4. "On His Blindness" was composed in :  
(a) 1652 (b) 1655  
(c) 1658 (d) 1850
5. Milton is curious to scatter ..... on the earth.  
(a) light of eyes (b) light of truth  
(c) money (d) pleasures

**ANSWERS**

**True/False Statements :**

1. (F), 2. (F), 3. (F), 4. (T), 5. (T), 6. (F), 7. (T).

**Fill in the blanks :**

1. spent, 2. maker, 3. Murmur, 4. angels, 5. talent.

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (b), 2. (b), 3. (a), 4. (a), 5. (b)

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. How many sonnets has Milton written ?
2. Write a short note on autobiographical element' in the poem "On His Blindness".

## JOHN DONNE : VALEDICTION FORBIDDING MOURNING

## STRUCTURE

- Life and Works of John Donne
- Valediction Forbidding Mourning : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
  - Test Yourself
- Go and Catch a Falling Star : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Questions and Answers
  - Test Yourself

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- After going through this unit you will learn
- Characteristics of Metaphysical poetry
  - Donne as a metaphysical poet
  - Colloquialism, Wit, Fun, Satire, Pun

## • 5.1. LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN DONNE

John Donne was the son of an iron merchant. He was born in London, on January 22, 1672. Donne's parents were Roman Catholics who were disliked by most British people in those days.

After his early education, he was admitted to Hart Hall, Oxford in 1584. Then he entered as a law student at Thavies, Inn, in 1591 and at Lincoln's in (1592). Afterwards he left the church in which he was born and called himself a Christian. At this time Donne started to compose poetry. He shared his property with the Catholics. In 1596 he joined the expedition of Essex and went to Cadiz. In 1597 he went to Azores. On his sea voyages, he used to compose poems. His two poems 'The Storm' and 'The Calm' belong to this period. Afterwards he travelled in Europe for three years. There he busied himself in studies.

When Donne returned from his journey, he became personal secretary of Lord Egerton. He fell in love with Anne More, niece to Lord Egerton and married her secretly. Donne was thrown into jail for this. During this period Donne composed highly ascetic poetry Donne composed "Pseudo Martyr" which pleased James I.

Anyway, Donne remained out of job even after the favour of the king and father-in-law. When his wife died, he was left in poverty along with seven children.

His wife's allowances also ceased with her death. He became a preacher and rose rapidly by his sheer intellectual force. Within four years he became an evident preacher. In 1631 he died of fever.

Donne wrote twenty elegies. The Progeny of the Soul was written in 1601. Donne is the first realist in English poetry. He founded the metaphysical school of poets. His divine poems are perfect. Donne's love poems consist of fifty five songs and sonnets.

His poems depict either the most heterogeneous ideas yield by violence forgetness as they are at their best in the balance reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.

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• 5.2. A VALEDICTION : FORBIDDING MOURNING : TEXT

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As virtuous men passe mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls, to gay,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
The breath goes now, and some say, no:  
So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tears-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,  
T'were prophanation of our joys  
To tell the layetie our love.

Moving of th'earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did and meant,  
But trépidation of the spears,

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• 5.3. EXPLANATION

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(1) As virtuous ..... And some say, no.

**Explanation :** These beautiful lines have been extracted from the poem "A valediction : forbidding mourning" composed by John Donne, a great metaphysical poet. Here the poet persuades his unhappy wife not to feel grief at his going abroad. He gives an argument in support of this advice. He says that when righteous men be dying, some of their friends are filled with sorrow. They also say that the souls of the dying are about to leave. Some other friends are more unhappy, burst into exclamations of sorrow. They wish their dear are on death bed should not die and leave. But the virtuous are calm and quiet. They say goodbye to life calmly, signal their souls to leave, and breathe their last peacefully. Even so the poet and his wife should take leave of each other, when he goes abroad. Donne implies that both of them are 'virtuous', i.e. high righteous and spiritual lovers. So they stand on a higher level than that on which lovers of physical beauty stand. The virtuous can leave calmly even the world, nothing to speak of saying good-bye to each other cheerfully.

(2) So let us ..... of our love.

**Explanation :** These lines have been taken from the poem 'A Valediction'. Forbidding mourning composed by John Donne. Here the poet persuades his unhappy wife not to grieve at his going abroad. He gives an argument in support of his advice. In the foregoing stanza, he says that the virtuous say good by to life calmly and quietly. They should make no noise out of grief. She should neither weep bitterly nor sigh sorrowfully, while she goes to see him off. The reason is that her grief will also affect him. And their sorrow will lead the laymen to believe that their

love for each other is sensual and carnal. It will be dishonourable to the holy souls of both of them. For their love for each other is spiritual and sublime : Donne implies that as lovers. they stand on a higher level than ordinary lovers. First both of them are righteous and conscious of their holy souls. Second they are husband and wife devoted to each other to the last degree. Third, they are two souls loving each other. Evidently it will be desecration of their divine souls, if they behaved like ordinary persons or the occasion of leave taking.

**(3) Moving of the ..... is innocent.**

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that the earthquake causes fear and harm. The people make estimates of the losses caused by it. The movement of the spheres is a far greater thing than an earthquake, yet it is noiseless and harmless. The poet means that separation of one worldly lover from his sweet heart causes an earthquake in their lives. But when two spiritual lovers like the poet and his wife take leave of each other, it should cause no earthquake in their life. Their leave taking is like the movement of the spheres. As such, it should be noiseless and harmless. Donne implies that sincere love for each other is platonic. And their two souls are like two coordinating spheres.

**Comment :** Donne has based his argument on Plato's philosophy of Platonic love and Ptolemy's theory of the movement of spheres. According to the latter, the universe is divided in two, and coordinating, each other. The outer most sphere is called the Primum mobile. Its movement gives movement to the next one. When the next one moves, it causes the third one to move, and so on.

**(4) Dull sublunary ..... which elements.**

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet tells his beloved wife that love based on physical beauty lights a fire of severance when one lover is separated from the other. He says that the lovers who love each other on account of physical beauty are sensual lovers. They are dead to spiritual love. Their love is excited by the physical beauty of their beloved persons. So when these beloved persons are separated from them, they are drowned in grief. The absence of the beloved excites a rise of separation in the hearts of both the lovers. The poet then tells his wife that their own love for each other is free from sensuality. Their two souls are interconnected with spiritual ties. Therefore their love for each other is spiritual. So each of them can endure physical absence of the other.

**(Stanza V) But we by a ..... And hands to min.**

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet implies that his love for his wife and vice-versa is spiritual. It is too refined to be called sensual. It has connected his soul with her and vice-versa. It is something divine and he and she can never know what its real nature is. But it has bound the soul of the one to that of the other. So neither of them should be affected by the physical separation of the other. The poet implies that each of them can endure the physical absence of the other's body.

**(Stanza VI) Our two souls ..... airy thinners beat.**

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that their two souls are essentially two in one. So if one of them goes out on a journey, the unity of their souls can suffer an expansion. He implies that their two connected souls stand on the ground of spiritual gold. Just as heated gold is expanded to airy thinness by beating, even so their spiritual unity will suffer an expansion by his making a journey. There will be no splitting, no separation of the two souls. He means that if each of them always keeps the other in mind, he or she cannot feel the pain of separation. Physically they may be away from each other, but spiritually they will be united. The mind of one will keep the other within its bounds.

(Stanza VII) If they be two ..... If the other do.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet tells his beloved wife that their souls are two, they are two like the two joined legs of a pair of compass. He says that her soul is like the fixed leg of such compass and his soul is like its moving leg. If he moves and goes abroad, she will also be affected, although she does not seem to be affected.

**Stanza VIII :** And though it ..... As that comes none.

**Explanation :** Here he says that the fixed leg stands on a point in the center. When the moving leg moves around to describe a circle, the fixed leg also leans towards it and spins with the other's motion. But when the moving leg comes back home the fixed one also becomes straight and gets united with it. The poet implies that his beloved wife should also lean towards him mentally. When he goes abroad. For their love for each other is spiritual, not physical. So she should not weep and wait. On the other hand she should keep his image in the mind and imagine his presence in a particular country.

**Stanza IX :** Such wilt thou ..... where I begun.

**Explanation :** Here the poet tells his gloomy wife that she should behave in the manner of the fixed leg now that he has to go abroad and move around like the moving leg of a pair of compasses. If he remains fixed at home like the fixed leg, he will be able to bring the journey to a successful end, like the moving leg. Just as the moving leg comes round to the point whence it started, so he will come back home after completing his journey.

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#### • 5.4. GLOSSARY

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**Stanza I :** (1) A valediction – A bidding farewell (2) Mourning – sorrow (3) Virtuous – righteous (4) Pass mildly way – die calmly (5) Whisper – signal (6) Whilst – while (7) The breath – life.

**Stanza II :** (1) Melt – take leave of each other (2) Tear clouds – streams of tear (3) Sigh tempests – storms of signals (4) Profanation dishonour (5) laity – the layman.

**Stanza III :** (1) Moving – Quaking (2) Trepidation of the spheres – Movement of the planets.

**Stanza IV.** (1) Dull – Insensible of the soul (2) Sublunary – earthly (3) Soul – mind (4) Sense – Sensual (5) admit – endure (6) absence – separation (7) remove – want (8) elemented – caused.

**Stanza VI :** (1) Refined – Purified (2) Inter assured of the mind – assured of each other's love (3) Careless – without any care.

**Stanza V :** (1) Endure – Experience (2) breach – separation (3) Expansion – stretching (4) avies – the thinness of the air.

**Stanza VII :** (1) they be – are (2) stiff – joint (3) twin – two (4) doth – does.

**Stanza VIII :** (1) Roam – move (2) leans – sloping position (3) hearkens – seeks (4) erect – straight.

**Stanza IX :** (1) Obliquely – slantingly (2) Firmness – faithfulness (3) begun – begin.

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#### • CRITICAL COMMENTS

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1. This poem was composed in 1611. It is addressed to his wife Anne Donne.
2. The unagrey is learned and metaphysical.
3. The poem is made up of nine four line stanzas. The rhyme scheme is ab ab.

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**• 5.5. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**


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**Q. 1. Give a critical appreciation of the poem "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning".**

**Ans.** "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is one of John Donne's most famous poems. It was composed in 1611, at that time Donne was about to go to France. His wife was very unhappy at his going abroad. So Donne composed the present poem, and through this advised his beloved wife to say farewell to him without any unhappiness. Thus it is addressed to his beloved wife Anne Donne.

The theme of the poem is subtle. The poet indirectly tells his unhappy wife that spiritual love something divine and holy. It is quite independent of the body, so two real spiritual lovers can never feel the pain of physical separation from each other. Their two souls are invisibly connected with each other by the ties of spiritual love. Physically they are in touch through mind. When one of them is physically away from the other, he or she is present in other's mind. So there is constant mental unity of the two.

The poet's feeling is genuine, intense but tender. Nevertheless it is subject to his poetic wit and power of reasoning. The result is that there is blending of passion and thought, strong feeling and reason.

The imagery is learned and metaphysical. Two souls connected by spiritual love are first represented as heavenly spheres then as a sheet of gold, and finally as two legs of a pair of compasses. Further, the image of the compass describing a circle has been employed to represent the poet's soul making a journey around the beloved soul. The firmness of the central leg will help the moving leg to complete its circle well.

The poem is made up of nine four line stanzas. The first two stanzas are separated by a colon. For the idea of "divine and laity" runs through both of them. The rest are neatly separated from one another. The metre of the poem is iambus. But the accents are uncertain here and there. According to Coleridge, it is "an admirable poem which none but Donne could have written."

**Q. 2. Discuss Donne as a Metaphysical Poet.**

**Introduction :**

The term "metaphysical" can be interpreted as beyond (meta) physical nature (physical). Dryden was the first to use the term in connection with Donne by saying that he "affects the metaphysics". Dr. Johnson later described Donne and his followers as the metaphysical poets. However, we cannot call Donne's poetry metaphysical if the term is to imply the exposition of some philosophical system of the universe, or speculation about the nature of things. Furthermore, though Dr. Johnson used the term in a derogatory sense for Donne, the qualities which are enumerated about Donne's poetry are valid.

**What is metaphysical poetry ?**

In brief, the term "metaphysical poetry" implies the characteristics of complexity, intellectual tone, abundance of subtle wit, fusion of intellect and emotion, colloquial argumentative tone, conceits (which are always with and sometimes fantastic) scholarly allusions, dramatic tone, and philosophical or reflective element.

Concentration is an important quality of metaphysical poetry in general and Donne's poetry in particular. In all his poems, the reader is held to one idea or line or argument. His poems are brief and closely woven. In *The Eestasu*, for instance, the principal argument is that through the different acts of love the function of man

as man is being worthily performed. The poet develops the theme without digression.

*An expanded epigram* would be a fitting description of a metaphysical poem. No world is wasted, and nothing described in detail. There is a sideway strength in the style. Verse forms are usually simple, but always suitable in enforcing the sense of the poem.

*Fondness for conceits* is a major characteristic of metaphysical poetry. Of course, all comparisons discover likeness in things unlike : but in a conceit we are made to concede the likeness even while being strongly conscious of the unlikeness. Donne often employs fantastic comparisons. The most famous and striking one is the comparison of a man who travels and his beloved who stays at home for a pair of compasses, in *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*. A clever, though obviously frivolous conceit is employed in *Thy Flea* where the insect is called the marriage-bed and the marriage-temple of the lovers because it has bitten them and sucked their blood. In his religious poetry, too, Donne uses far-fetched conceits. In the Holy Sonnet *If poisonous minerals*, there is an image of the poet's tears mingling with Christ's blood and taking the form of a learned conceit of the sphere and its intelligence with its "correspondence", between microcosm and macrocosm. While these conceits evoked Dr. Johnson's displeasure they are fairly well enjoyed by modern readers.

*Wit striking and suitable marks* metaphysical poetry, Indeed, the conceits especially display a formidable wit. So do the various allusions and images relating to practically all areas of nature and art and learning. Allusions to medicine, Cosmology, ancient myth, contemporary discoveries, history, law all abound in Donne's poetry. The hard core of logic is undeniable in *The Flea*, for instance, though the poem is obviously light-hearted. Donne's wit assumes different moods and attitudes reflecting his perception of the complexity of life. Wit makes itself evident in the paradoxes employed in the poem. In *The Legacy* the lover is his own "executor and legacy". Such paradoxical statements are to be found in several poems. In *Death be not proud*, he says : "Death thou shall die". *Batter my heart* is also full of such paradoxical statements.

*Combination of passion and thought* is a peculiar characteristic of metaphysical poetry, and is another form of wit. Thus there is a "unification of sensibility", to use T.S. Eliot's phrase, in metaphysical poetry. There is in Donne's poems an intellectual analysis of emotion. Every lyric arises out of some emotional situation, but the emotion is not merely expressed; It is analysed. *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning* proves that lovers need not mourn at parting : *The Canonization* establishes that lovers are saints of love : *The Good Morrow* asserts that lovers are the best possible hemispheres who make up a complete world.

Argumentation and reasoning balance the passion in Donne's poems. No one can deny the passion in *The Sun Rising*, but there is also plenty of argumentation to prove that the sun has no power over the lovers, as love knows no season or clime. Similarly, in *the Canonization*, there is passion expressed through beautiful metaphors :

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;

Call her one, another fly,

We are tapers too, and at our own cost die.

But at the same time, the tone of the poem is intellectual and there is plenty of complexity involved in the conceits and allusions, such as the Phoenix riddle. *Aire and Angles* is highly refined in thought and subtlety, even while being a passionate

utterance. In *A Valediction : Of Weeping* we have an exquisite blend of intense concentrated passion and profound thought.

The use of colloquial speech marks metaphysical poetry, as far as Donne is concerned. This is specially apparent in the abrupt, conversational opening of many of his poems, for instance :

For God's sake hold by tongue, and let me love

(The Canonization)

Busy old fool, unruly sun (*The Sun rising*)

Donne arrests our attention both by the content and the dramatic style of his poetry.

Donne's love poems are especially entitled to be called metaphysical in the true sense. Poems such as *The Good Morrow*, *The Anniversary*, *The Canonization* and *The Ecstasy* raise, even though they do not explicitly discuss, the great metaphysical question of the relation of the spirit and the senses. They raised it not as an abstract problem. But in the effort to make the experience of the union of two human powers involve, and the union of two human beings in love, apprehensible. Often Donne speaks of the soul and of spiritual love. *The Ecstasy* speaks of the souls of the lovers which come out of their bodies to negotiate with one another.

### Conclusion

Intellect and wit blending with emotion and feeling mark metaphysical poetry, especially that of Donne. Indeed Donne represents very well the school of poetry somewhat vaguely called "metaphysical". He brought the whole of his experience into his poetry. He is erudite, "the monarch of wit", colloquial, rhetorical or familiar. He chooses his language from the court or the camp, the jargon of law, study, or the market place. These qualities are present in Donne's poetry—in the earliest of his love poems as well as in his later religious poems. Grierson aptly sums up: "Donne is metaphysical not only by virtue of his scholasticism but by the deep reflective interest in the experiences of which his poetry is the expression, the new psychological curiosity with which he writes of love and religion".

### Q. 3. Discuss Donne as a Love Poet.

**Introduction :** The variety and scope of Donne's love poetry is really remarkable. He hinges between physical and holy love, between cynicism and faith in love and above all the sanctity of married life. He was born at the time when writing love-poems was both a fashionable and literary exercise. Donne showed his talent in this genre. His poems are entirely different from the Elizabethan love lyrics. They are singular for their fascination and charm and depth of feeling.

When by they scorn, o murderess,

I am dead

And that thou think'st thee free

From all solicitations from me,

Then shall my ghost come to thy bed.

Donne does not lay stress on beauty or rather the aesthetic element in passion. His poems are sensuous and fantastic. He goes through the whole gamut of passion. Dryden writes : *Donne affects the metaphysics not only in his satires but in his amorous verses where nature only should reign. He 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”.*

*Valediction Forbidding  
Mourning*

Tenderness and sentiment are not the qualities to be found in Donne's poetry. Donne is Lover's Infiniteness, pleads with his beloved that she should give him a part of her heart. After she has given him the part, he demands the whole heart. His is the goal and consummation of love. He then startles and outrages the expectations of his readers.

*I long to talk with some old lover's ghost;  
Who did before that God of love was born,  
Twice or thrice had I loved thee,  
Before I knew they face or name.*

Donne's love poems can be divided into three heads,

Poems of moods of lovers, seduction and free love or fanciful relationship

Poems addressed to his wife Anne More (his wife) before and after his marriage.

Poems addressed to other noble ladies.

**Three Strands of his poetry :** Firstly, there is the cynical which is anti-woman and hostile to the fair-sex. The theme is the trail of man – a matter of advantages for lovers who liked casual and extra-marital relations with ladies. Secondly, there is the strand of happy married life, the joy of conjugal love in poems like A Valediction : forbidding mourning. Thirdly, there is a Platonic strand, as in the Canonization where love is regarded as a wholly emotion like the worship of a devotee to God. Donne's treatment of love-poems is realistic and not idealistic because he knows the weakness of the flesh, pleasures of sex, the joy of secret meetings. However, he tries to establish the relationship between body and soul. True love doesn't pertain to the body; it is the relationship of body and soul to the other soul, Physical union may not be necessary as in A Valediction : a Forbidding Mourning. However, in the Relic, the poet regarded physical union as the necessary complement. Despite the realistic touches. Donne nowhere seems to draw the physical beauty or contours of the female body. Rather, he describes its reaction on the lover's heart. It is highly surprising that a poet so fond of sex, be restrained from describing the physical patterns of the female body.

**True Sex is holy :** That sex is holy whether inside or outside marriage is declared by Donne in his love-poems. If love is mutual, physical union even outside marriage cannot be condemned. As a Christian, he may not justify extra-marital relationships, but as a lover and poet, he does accept and enjoy this reality Donne feels that love-bond is necessary for sexual union otherwise mere sex without any spiritual love for the partner is degrading and mean. However, true love can exist outside marriage, though moralists may sneer at this idea of Donne. He doesn't feel that woman is a sex-doll or a goddess. She is essentially a bundle of contradictions. He believes in 'Frailty, they name is women'. His contempt for woman is compensated by his respect for conjugal love. At times, he regards woman as the angel who can give him ultimate bliss. The two-fodd attitude is Donne's typical quality as the poet. The poems referring to his wife, Anne More reflect true serenity and consummation of love.

**Donne's uniqueness :** While the Elizabethan lyrics are by large limitations of Petrarchan traditions, Donne's poems stand in a class by themselves. He broke away from the traditional concept of poetry as was Petrarchan in nature. The

concept of woman in Petrarchan and in that of Donne is totally different. Another quality is his passion and though, he doesn't allow his passion to run away with him. Grierson writes : *Donne's poetry is a very complex phenomenon, but the two dominant strains in it are just these : the strains of dialectic, subtle play of argument and wit and fantastic; : and the strain of vivid realism and a record of passion.* Donne shows the supremacy of love.

*Love, all like, no season knows nor clime,*

Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time, in fact true love is the merger of two souls. Donne has certainly been an innovator of a new kind of love-poetry. What surprises the readers is the variety of different moods and situations of the theme of love – sensual, violent, and full of vivacity of life. There is scorn cynicism, bitterness and sarcasm but the force of love is genuine and unquestionable. Donne is one of the greatest English love-poets. In fact, among all the English love-poets, he is the complete amongst them.

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• **5.6. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :**

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**Q. 1. Write a short note on the poem "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning" as a love poem.**

**Ans.** Love is the central theme of the poem "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning". From the very beginning of the poem Donne claims a difference between the common and refined person. The poet and his beloved are refined, it is true that the thought of physical separation is affecting their souls but their love is not carnal rather it is spiritual and two souls united by true or spiritual love become two in one soul. So the separation of the bodies should not affect the spirituality of love. Value of Gold never comes down after its expansion to airy thin-ness.

In brief Donne's love is not dogmatic. It is usual on the ground of reality and the poet reaches high in love. The poem is based upon the subject of love and its spiritual, mystic physical and spiritual aspects are amirable.

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• **5.7. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

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1. What is the theme of the poem "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning" ?  
**Ans.** True lovers do not weep when separated due to physical separation.
2. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem ?  
**Ans.** aabb.
3. To whom is this poem addressed ?  
**Ans.** To his beloved wife.
4. What do carnal lover do when they get separated ?  
**Ans.** They make a flood of tears and sigh heavily.
5. What is the meaning of "Dull Sublunary lover".  
**Ans.** Carnal lovers.
6. What kinds of similies are there in the poem ?  
**Ans.** Far fetched and uncommon.

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• **TEST YOURSELF**

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**True/False Statements :**

1. Subtle love is the main thought of the poem.
2. John Donne and his wife are carnal lovers.
3. Gold plate expands while it is beaten.

4. Donne compares himself and his wife with compasses.
5. Moving of the earth is beneficial.

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. This poem is ..... poem.
2. Metaphysical means .....
3. So let us ..... make no noise.
4. The sublunary lovers can not accept .....
5. As stiff twin ..... are two.

**Multiple Choice Questions**

1. God love :  
(a) truthful person                      (b) hypocrites  
(c) devils                                      (d) lazy person
2. Metaphysical poetry is :  
(a) uneven                                      (b) Fantastic  
(c) uncommon similies                      (4) All of these

**ANSWERS**

**True/False Statements :**

1. (T), 2. (F), 3. (T), 4. (T), 5. (F)

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. Metaphysical, 2. beyond the unit of body, 3. melt, 4. absence, 5. complexness

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (a), 2. (b).

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. What is refined love according to John Donne ?
2. What is metaphysical poetry ?

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**• 5.8. GO AND CATCH A FALLING STAR**

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- I. Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root'  
Tell me, where all past years are,  
or who cleft the Devils foot,  
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,  
o to keep off envoy's stinging.  
And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.
- II. If thou be'st born to strange sights  
Things invisible to see.  
Ride ten thousand days and nights,  
Till age show white hairs on thee,  
Thou, when thou return'st wilt tell me  
All strange wonders that befall thee

And swear

No where

Lives a woman true and fair.

III. If thou find's one, let me know,

Such a Pilgrimage were sweet

You do not, I would not go,

Though at next door we might meet;

Though she were true, when you met her,

And last, till you write you litter,

Yet she

Will be

False, be I come, to two or three.

• 5.9. EXPLANATION

Stanza (3) (1) Go, and catch ..... an honest mind.

Explanation : In these lines a friend of the poet tells him that there are a lot of constant beauties in the world. Challenging his friend to find out a single constant beautiful woman, the poet tells him that it is impossible. He might just as well go and catch a falling star in mid-air or make a mandrake root fragrant with child. He may as well become a seer to tell the poet where all the past years are, who cleft the devil's feet. Nax he may as well teach the poet how to acquire the power to hear the song of mermaids, or the rise of mermaids, or to rise above envy, or to see what heavenly influence causes a mind to keep to honesty.

(2) If thou be'st ..... fair.

Explanation : Here the poet says that if the friend is both with an angel's power to see strange sights and invisible things, he may side the wind waves throughout the universe till age turns his have snow while, on ten thousand day and nights, when he returns, he should tell the poet all the strange things that happened to him. He will also swear that there lives in the world no woman who is both beautiful and true.

(3) If thou ..... two or three.

Explanation : Here these lines the poet says that if the friend finds a constant beauty, he should write to the poet about her. A journey to see her would be sweet like a pilgrimage. Yet the poet would not go to see her even if one lived next door. For she might be constant when the friend met her, or even when he wrote the letter to the poet. Yet she will become a mistress of two, or rather than three, men before the poet comes to see her.

• 5.10. GLOSSARY

Stanza (1) : (1) Mandrake root – Root of a poisonous plant called mandrake. It is supposed to have womanly qualities (2) Devil's – satan's (3) Mermaids – Water beings, half fish half woman.

Stanza (2) : (1) Strange shifts – Things which are quiet unnatural (2) Invisible – which can not be seen (3) befall – Happened (4) True – faithful or chaste.

Stanza (3) : Pilgrimage – journey (2) go – yet I would not go (3) though – even (4) Ere – before.

**Comments :**

- (1) The poem gives expression to the belief that beautiful woman can never be chaste.
- (2) The poetic feeling is genuine and sincere.
- (3) The poem is replete with prejudice and betterment against the constancy of beautiful women.
- (4) The imagery of the poem comes from nature, myths and the contemporary society.
- (5) The rhythm of the poem is colloquial.
- (6) The verses are bimeters, trimeters and tetrameters.
- (7) The language of the poem is simple.
- (8) The poem is a pretty dramatic lyric of the first water.

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• **5.11. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTION**

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**Q. 1. Give a critical appreciation of the poem "Go And Catch A Falling Star".**

**Ans.** The poem entitled "Go And Catch A Falling Star" is one of Donne's well known lyrics. Probably it belongs to the group of poems composed by him before 1597. At the time Donne was a rake. His first beloved were women without virtue of faith. So, somehow or other, he came to believe that beautiful women can never be constant. The present poem has been composed to give expression to that belief. The poem is built on the paradox that a beauty whether married or unmarried cannot remain constant.

The background of the poem is drawn by an implied statement of a friend of the poet. He may be supposed to have told the poet that there are a lot of constant beauties in the world. The poet is filled with irritation to hear it. He challenges his friend to find a single beautiful woman who is true to her husband, or to her chastity, if unmarried.

He is also filled with a poetic emotion. It consists of the following interpretation :

It is impossible to find a virtuous beauty. The poet's friend may feel as well go to catch a falling star in mid air, or to make a mandrake root pregnant, or to find out a beautiful woman who is virtuous. He may as well become a see to the poet where all the past year are, or who cleft the devils feet. Even if the friend were born with mystic powers to see invisible or strange things, or to side the wind-waves and thus live over the universe for thousands of years, in search of a virtuous beauty, he can never find one anywhere. If he finds a virtuous beauty, he should write to the poet about her. A journey to see her will be sweet and like a pilgrimage. Yet the poet will not go to see her even if one or two exist. She might be constant and virtuous when the friend met her or even when he wrote to the poet. Yet she will become a mistress of two or rather three men before the poet goes to see her.

The poetic feeling is genuine and sincere. It is replete with prejudice and bitterness against the fidelity of beautiful women. The imagery of the poem comes from nature, myths and the contemporary societies.

The metre of the poem is based on the variety of pitch and number of syllables to a line, rather than on the accent. The 27 lines of the poem have been divided in three stanzas of nine lines each. The verses are diameters, trimeters and imeters. The rhythm of the poem is colloquial, the most impressive onrs are those which are dramatic speech rhythms.

The poem is marked by an abrupt, dramatic, opening intense lyricism and speech rhythms of dramatic appeal. The language is simple, urban English of the middle class society of Donne's day. It is also characterized by brevity, lucidity and clarity. The poetic thought reveals the poet's cynical attitude towards the beauty of his day. On the whole, the poem is a purely dramatic lyric of the fresh water.

**Q. 2. What belief does John Donne has presented in the poem "Go and Catch A Falling Star" ?**

**Ans.** John Donne expresses the belief that social virtues such as honesty and female constancy are just as mythical as mermaids. With this work the poet laments the fact that people fall short of the social ideals of Jacobean England and of Christian decline and demonstrates the lack of connection between those ideals and beauty.

In the first stanza he equates the avoidance of envy one of the seven deadly sins to such impossibilities as catching celestial bodies and impregnating vegetable matter. He dismisses as well the idea that one with an honest mind naturally thrives, implying that only through dishonesty can one get ahead. Donne proclaims that pursuit of Christian values such as honesty and lack of envy is first as unprofitable as pursuit of the impossible and the mythical.

In the second stanza Donne writes that it is impossible to find a virtuous woman anywhere in the natural and supernatural world. A mystical seer could not find a virtuous woman, nor could a traveller who search the world for twenty seven years.

The third stanza counters those who would claim to know a virtuous woman stating that such a virtue is short lived. He staunchly believes that all virtuous women come to cheat on man sooner than later, and for that reason he refuses to go chasing after such women should they be found.

On the surface, this poem reads like the bitter diatribe of a man wronged in love. The exaggerated claim that never in the history of mankind has a truly virtuous woman existed smocks of the resentful thinking of the wronged man. A deeper examination of this poem, however reveals that the primary target of Donne's criticism is not the unfaithful woman, but rather the Christian society of Jacobean England that places its members under unrealistic expectations. This is most clear in the first stanza; envy and dishonesty are traits as natural and necessary to success in human societies, while avoiding them is just as impossible as remembering the entire history. It is, therefore, disingenious to expect people to behave without envy, the spur of which drives people to seek economic and political gain, and dishonesty, which provides some individuals with advantage over others.

In this poem just as dishonesty and envy are natural and necessary, so too is female infidelity. While women were expected at this time to adhere to a strict code of behavior shaped by conservative sexual mores, such mores contradict human nature if it is truly impossible to find a single woman who lives up to the ideal. Thus, to Donne, the pilgrimage to meet a faithful woman, though sweet, is an undertaking just as doomed to failure as a quest to catch a falling star. Donne depicts a world in which no one lives up to the social and religious ideals of fidelity lodging a scathing critique of the Christian values that lender all people who profess to adhere to a hypocrites

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#### • 5.12. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. What is the theme of the poem "Go and Catch a Falling Star" ?**

**Ans.** In this masterful short poem "Go And Catch A Falling Star". John Donne displays many of the traits that have made him an enduring literary figure. He

certainly undermined the traditional notion of poetry during his era. Though he crafts the poem in the same flowering stanzas that were popular at the time, he uses this technique to make the cynical statements contained therein all the more powerful.

With the title and first stanza of the poem we are led to believe this will be a wondrous statement about the beauty of life. Instead it takes a dark turn at the following stanza :

“And wear  
No where  
Lives a woman true, and fair”.

This statement blindsides most readers upon first viewing, seeming completely out of concert with what came before it. The rest of the poem verifies that the narrator either does not know much of women, or more likely, and less misogynistically love itself.

The last line is a poignant statement that love does not last. The woman will be pure at the time his friend writes him the first letter but she will turn false by the time he gets to subsequent writing. Everything that came before will be undermined.

This poem above all challenges the notion of it being better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. The author of the poem views the losing part as inevitable and figures that since this is obvious from the outset, the trip is not worth it, the trip being not to a place but a state of mind. This is the sort of pessimistic genius that we do not often see in poetry and for that Donne will never be forgotten.

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• **5.13. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :**

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1. Who is the writer of the poem “Go And Catch A Falling Star” ?

Ans. John Donne.

2. What is the main theme of the poem ?

Ans. It is impossible to find virtuous beauty.

3. What is “Mandrake root” ?

Ans. Mandrake root is a root of a poisonous plant. It is supposed to have some womanly qualities.

4. What is the meaning of ‘mermaids’ ?

Ans. Water beings, half fish – half woman.

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• **TEST YOURSELF**

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**True/False Statement :**

1. Go And Catch a Falling Star is a romantic poem.
2. Donne belongs to metaphysical age.
3. All the beauties in the world are constant.
4. In this poem the poet praises the virtue of women.

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. .... are half fish – half woman.
2. Devil’s feet are .....
3. According to poet all women are .....

**Objective Type Questions**

1. Who tells poet that there are lot of constant beauties in the world :
- (a) A friend (b) A seer  
(c) the King (d) The Peat himself

**ANSWERS**

**True/False Statements :**

1. (F), 2. (T), 3. (F), 4. (F)

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. Mermaids, 2. Cloven, 3. infidel.

# UNIT

## 6

### P.B. SHELLEY : TO A SKYLARK

P.B. Shelley : To a Skylark

#### STRUCTURE

- P.B. Shelley's Life and Works
- To a Skylark : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Critical Comments
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Test Yourself

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- Shelley's Lyricism
- Various smilies
- Figurative language/Shelley as a love poet.

#### • 6.1. P.B. SHELLEY'S LIFE AND WORK

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on August 4, 1792 in Horsham, Sussex, England. He was the eldest of the seven children of Elizabeth Pilfold and Timothy Shelley, a country squire who would become baronet in 1815 on the death of his father. Young Percy attended Sion House Academy before entering University College, Oxford, in 1804. These years in a conventional institution were not happy ones for Shelley; where his idealism and controversial philosophies were developing. At this time he wrote such works as the Gothic *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811); "If the knowledge of a God is the most necessary, why is it not the most evident and the clearest ?

After Shelley's expulsion from school for expressing his atheistic views, and now estranged from his father, he eloped with sixteen-year old Harriet Westbrook (1795-1816) to Scotland. They married on August 28, 1811 and had two children, daughter Lanthe born in 1813 (d. 1876) and son Charles born in 1814. Inviting college friend Thomas Hogg into their household, Shelley attempted an open marriage to the consternation of Harriet, which led to the demise of their marriage. For the next three years Shelley made several trips to London to the bookshop and home of atheist journalist William Godwin, the father of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (1797-1851). Influenced by William Wordsworth, he continued to write poetry including *Queen Mab : A Philosophical Poem* (1813) and participated in various political reform activities. He was also studying the writing of Godwin's and embracing his radical philosophy.

Percy Shelley's forays to the Godwin's also resulted in his acquaintance with his daughter Mary, who almost immediately proved to be his intellectual equal. The poets' fondness for each other soon grew and in 1814, Shelley eloped a second time with Mary and her stepsister Claire in tow, settling in Switzerland. This action drew the disapproval of both their fathers, and they struggled to support

themselves. The Shelley's were spending much time with Lord George Gordon Byron who also led a controversial life of romantic entanglements and political activity. Shelley was passionate about life and very generous to his friends, which often caused him financial hardship. They passed their days sailing on the lake and telling each other ghost stories. Mary overheard Percy and Byron speaking one night of galvanism, which inspired her most famous novel *Frankenstein or; The Modern Prometheus* (1818) for which Percy wrote the introduction.

In 1815 the Shelley's moved back to England and settled near London. The same year Percy's grandfather died leaving him a lucrative sum of \$ 1000 per annum. The year 1816 was filled with highs and lows for Shelley. His wife Harriet drowned herself in the Serpentine river in Hyde Park, London and Mary's half sister Fanny committed suicide, but son William was born (d. 1819) and he and Mary wed on December 30. "Alastor or; The Spirit of Solitude" was published in 1816 and their joint effort based on their travels *History of Six Weeks Tour* was published in 1817.

In 1818, the Shelley's moved to Italy and their son Percy Florence was born a year later. Advocates of vegetarianism, the Shelley's wrote numerous articles about the subject. Percy was working on his tragedy in five acts *The Cenci* and many other works including "Men of England" and his elegy for **John Keats** "Adonais" (1821). Mary too was busy writing while they lived in various cities including Pisa and Rome. Shelley continued to venture on sailing trips on his schooner 'Don Juan'. It sank on 8 July 1822 in a storm and Shelley drowned, at the age of twenty-nine. His body washed ashore and he was cremated on the beach near Viareggio. His ashes are buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, Italy.

The Shelley Memorial now stands at University College, Oxford, England, in honour of one of their most illustrious alumni. It features a white marble statue depicting Shelley as he appeared when washed ashore. **Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley**, having moved back to London with her son Percy Florence, devoted much of her time after her husband's death to compiling and publishing his works. Her fondness and respect for her husband is expressed in her extensive notes and introduction to his works contained in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe* (1824).

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• 5.2. TO A SKY LARK

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**Text of the poem**

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!  
 Bird thou never wert, I  
 That from Heaven, or near it,  
 Purest thy full heart  
 in profuse strains of unpremeditated art -5.

Higher still and higher  
 From the earth thou springest  
 Like a cloud of fire;  
 The blue deep thou wingest,  
 And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest 10

In the golden lightening

Of the sunken sun,  
O'er which clouds are brightening,  
Thou dost float and run;  
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun 15  
The pale purple even  
Melts around thy flight;  
Like a star of Heaven,  
In the broad day-light  
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight, 20

Keen as are the arrows  
Of that silver sphere,<sup>3</sup>  
Whose intense lamp narrows  
In the white dawn clear Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there 25

All the earth and air  
With thy voice is loud,  
As, when night is bare,  
From one lonely cloud  
The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflow'd 30

What thou art we know not;  
What is most like thee ?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
Drops so bright to see  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody. 35

Like a Poet hidden  
In the light of thought,<sup>4</sup>  
Singing hymns unbidden,  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not : 40

Like a high-born maiden  
In a palace-tower,  
Soothing her love-laden  
Soul in secret hour  
With music sweet as love which overflows her bower : 45

Like a glow-worm golden  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering un beholden

Its aerial hue Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view :	50
Like a rose embower'd In its own green leaves By warm winds deflower'd, Till the scent it gives Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves :	55
Sound of vernal showers On the twinkling grass, Rain-awaken'd flowers, All that ever was Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.	60
Teach us, Sprite or Bird, Wheat sweet thoughts are thine : I have never heard Praise of love or wine That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.	65
Chorus Hymeneal, 6 Or triumphal chant, Match'd with thine would be all But an empty vaunt, A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.	70
What objects are the fountains Of thy happy strain ? What fields, or waves, or mountains ? What shapes of sky or plain ? What love of thine own kind ? what ignorance of pain ?	75
With thy clear keen joyance Languor cannot be : Shadow of annoyance Never came near thee : Thou lovest : but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.	80
Waking or asleep, Thou of death must deem Things more true and deep	

Than we mortals dream, Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream ?	85
We look before and after, And pine for what is not : Our sincerest laughter With some pain is fraught; Out sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.	90
Yet if we could scorn Hate, and pride, and far; If we were things born Not to shed a tear, I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.	95
Better than all measures Of delightful sound, Better than all treasures That in books are found, Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground !	100
Teach me half the gladness That thy brain must know, Such harmonious madness From my lips would flow The world should listen then, as I am listening now.	105

### • 6.3. EXPLANATION

(1) Hail to thee ..... unpremeditated art.

**Explanation :** These lines have been taken from the poem "To A Skylark" composed by P. B. Shelley. Here the poet addresses the bird as a delightful spirit. He says that she is not a mere bird, but an ethereal spirit or soul of the high heavens, who thence pours down the torrents of her spontaneous music out of the fullness of her heart.

(2) Higher still ..... ever singest.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet addresses the bird and says that it flies higher and higher and leap forth from the earth like an imprisoned flame, the smoke of which (flame) is dissolving into the clouds. Flying across the azure (blue) sky it goes on singing and soaring simultaneously.

(3) In the golden ..... just begun.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that the bird appears like a spirit of happiness in the rays of the sun, which is just about to rise above the eastern horizon and among the clouds which are lit up with the impending sun rise. He says that the bird has just started its flight of spiritual career. Here the poet

compares the skylark to the pure spirit of delight, free from any physical or bodily bondage.

(4) The pale purple ..... shrill delight.

**Explanation :** Here poet says that the pale twilight of the evening makes way for its upward flight and closes in upon it so as to hide it from spectators sight. It becomes invisible in the pale light of the evening, just as a star cannot be seen in the sky in the daylight. Though the bird is not seen, but its loud joyful music is still audible to him. He says that now he is unable to see the bird, but he can still hear and enjoy its, delightful song.

(5) Keen as ..... it is there.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that the distinct music of the bird is as sharp as the rays of moon till they fade away after sunrise and the disc of the moon becomes invisible, though its presence can be felt in the sky in the same way the high soaring bird also becomes invisible, but its music is clearly audible.

Here the skylark is compared to the luminous and sharp beams of the moon.

(6) All the earth ..... is overflow'd.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that the whole earth and air are overflowing with the music of the bird. Just as one solitary cloud in an otherwise clear sky, only hides the disc of the moon from the sight, but it can intercept its light. The light of the moon floods the whole sky. Similarly the skylark is not seen, but its song is resounding and engulfing the atmosphere.

(7) What thou ..... rain of melody.

**Explanation :** Here the poet admires that he does not know what the bird is and what is it most like. But the music of the bird is more delightful and illuminating than the shining rain drops falling from the shining clouds which reflect the colours of the rainbow. The shower of music coming from the skylark is better than the showers of rain.

(8) Like a poet ..... needed not.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that the bird invisible in daylight, is like a poet shrouded in the glow of his own luminous ideas and fancies. He *i.e.*, the poet sings spontaneously out of his own sweet will and not at the behest of any external authority. He continues to sing or compose poems which at long last succeed in converting the world at large to his own viewpoint. His poems force the people to listen to his own aspirations and apprehensions to which they had earlier been insensitive and unresponsive.

(9) Like a high-born ..... her bower.

**Explanation :** In these lines the bird is compared to a love lorn damsel of noble family who, in order to assuage her ruffled feelings; sings in the seclusion of her inner chamber a sweet song which saturates that chamber.

(10) Like a ..... the view.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet compares the skylark to a golden glow worm which remains concealed by flowers and grass in a valley full of dew. Yet casts blue ethereal light all around in those very flowers and grass which veil its body.

(11) Like a rose ..... thieves.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that the song of the skylark is like the fragrance of the rose encased in its green leaves. This rose is robbed of its perfume by the summer winds. Leaves went on winds loaded with fragrance become languid

like the thieves burdened with booty. The winds become slow in their movement due to the burden of fragrance they carry, like thieves running away with a heavy booty.

(12) Sound .....surpass.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that the song of the bird excels all delightful, sweet and fresh objects in the world, like the noise of the spring showers on grass of blossoming fresh flowers.

(13) Teach us ..... so divine.

**Explanation :** Here the poet addresses the bird and says that whatever it is, spirit of bird, but atleast it should let others know what pleasant thoughts it possess which inspire its exquisite song. No poem praising love or wine has ever ventilated such a heavenly ecstasy, as distinguishes its enchanting song. He feels that human song can never reach such heights and depths of passionate ecstasy.

(14) Chorus ..... want.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that when he compares the song of bird with the songs or marriage of marital songs they sound hollow. Marriage and conquest are happiest occasion in human life. Therefore poems celebrating these most joyous events are supposed to be most delightful. But their delight pales into insignificance before the rapturous song of the skylark. Then these human songs appear deficient.

Human happiness is always imperfect unlike the perfect divine bliss represented by the song of the skylark.

(15) What objects ..... ignorance of pain.

**Explanation :** Here the poet asks the bird to disclose the sources of its inspiration for singing. He asks, does it feel inspired by the ordinary objects of nature or does the view these from a different perspective or standpoint ? Does the consummate perfection of its song spring from its love for its own species? Does the sweetness of its song arise from its blissful unawareness of sufferings and sorrow?

(16) With the dear ..... sad satiety.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that no tiresome or weariness can co-exist with such intense delight as the bird conveys in song. It has never experienced the slightest tinge of trouble. Its love is never spoilt by experienced love, but it has not known the weariness and desires which come in the wake of excessive love. The bird's exquisite song may be due to love which remains ever fresh and constant.

(17) Waking of asleep ..... stream.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that the song of the bird would not have been so clear, perfect and delightful at all times and in all seasons of its knowledge about death had not been more correct and more profound than man's. The bird has a deeper perception and understanding of death than human beings and therefore its song is infinitely more delightful than that of ordinary mortals.

(18) We look ..... thought.

**Explanation :** In this stanza the poet explains the reason why a human song cannot attain the unalloyed delight and the undiluted sweetness of the song of the skylark.

We never feel contented with the present. We are dissatisfied with our present condition. Therefore we seek an escape from the unpleasant present either by visualizing anticipating a rosy future or by nostalgically harking back a golden part. We either dream of a glorious future or wishfully recall the sweet by gone

days. But the future is unpredictable and the past is irrevocable. Thus we always yearn for something which is unattainable even ones genuine joy is not pure, it is tinged with some sorrow.

(19) Yet if ..... come near.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that if it were possible for man to abandon hate, pride and fear, if he had no occasion in life to feel pain, even then perhaps he would not be as happy as the skylark's unalloyed delight is not human lot. This is the destiny of the skylark.

(20) Better ..... found.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that the song of the skylark is a more powerful inspiration to the poet than any melody or bookish learning. Only the bird can ignore the ground realities of this world and soar higher and higher into the ethereal realm of divine rapture and melody.

(21) Teach me .....listening now.

**Explanation :** The poet implores the skylark to inspire him with its song, melody and rapture. The poet wants to receive a small position of the rapturous joy which the skylark experiences. Then he would utter such ecstatic music or exposed poetry, which humanity would hear with the same rapt attention with which he is heaving the song of the skylark at present. In other words, if the bird teaches him even half of the delight which it feels he would be able to pour forth such enraptured verse which would charm and spell bound mankind.

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#### • 6.4. CRITICAL COMMENTS (TO A SKYLARK)

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1. Here by pointing out the spontaneity and ease of the bird's song Shelley is spelling out the hallmarks of true lyric poetry.

2. The style of the poem is luminous, "the verse moves with a radiance, lightness, a rapidity that are in perfect accord with the theme".

3. The poem is almost a procession of appropriate, suggestive similes.

4. The poem has short five line stanzas. The fifth line called Alexandrine expresses the eagerness and continuity of the lark.

5. The bird is a symbol of spiritualism.

6. The poem is a mixture of romanticism and idealism.

7. The poet expresses that the perfection of joy only be enjoyed by skylark. Human beings are not capable of enjoying such ecstasy of sweetness.

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#### • 6.5. GLOSSARY

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**Stanza I.** (1) Hail – Welcome (2) Blithe spirit – joyful soul (3) Pourest thy full heart – sing whole heartedly (4) In profuse strains – copious or plentiful times (5) unpremeditated – spontaneous (6) art – music.

**Stanza II.** (1) Still – continuously (2) springest – rise suddenly (3) leap forth – suddenly (4) Blue deep – the azure sky (5) wingest – flies across.

**Stanza III.** (1) Golden lightening – crimson rays of the rising sun (2) The sunken sun – the sun still under the eastern horizon before rising (3) unbodied joy – spirit of delight unhindered by bodily bondage (4) Race – flight.

**Stanza IV.** (1) The pale purple even – twilight faintly bright evening (2) Melts around thy flight – gives way to your upward flight (3) thou art unseen – you become invisible in the sky (4) Shrill – distinct and joyful music.

**Stanza V.** (1) keen – sharp (2) arrows – sharp rays of the moon (3) silver sphere – moon (4) Intense lamp – luminous light (5) narrows – fade (6) In the white dawn clear – at sunrise.

**Stanza VI.** (1) with thy voice – with your song (2) loud – resound with (3) bare – clear (4) rains out – showers (5) overflowed – enveloped.

**Stanza VII.** (1) Rainbow clouds – clouds reflecting a rainbow (2) rain of melody – torrent of music.

**Stanza VIII.** (1) Hidden – lost (2) Hymns – songs (3) hopes and fears – aspirations (4) heeded not – did not care for.

**Stanza IX.** (1) High born – of noble, aristocratic (2) Maiden – an unmarried girl (3) laden soul – love sick heart (4) overflows her bower – floods her chamber.

**Stanza X.** (1) Glowworm – firefly (2) scattering – shedding (3) unheeded – invisible (4) aerial hue – airy and faint blue light (5) screen – veil.

**Stanza XI.** (1) empowered – encased (2) scent – fragrance (3) there heavy winged thieves – honey bees.

**Stanza XII.** (1) vernal – of the spring season (2) twinkling grass – blades of grass shining with the rain drops (3) surpass – excel.

**Stanza XIII.** (1) Sprite – spirit (2) that panted forth – which is expressed with intense passion (3) a flood of rapture so divine – torrential rain of divine ecstatic music.

**Stanza XIV.** (1) choral hymenal – a nuptial song (2) Triumphant song – song celebrating a victory (3) Matched – compared (4) But an empty vaunt – only a hollow boast.

**Stanza XV.** (1) Happy strain – delightful music (2) love of thy own kind sympathy between bird and bird (3) Ignorance of pain – unawareness of sorrow.

**Stanza XVI.** (1) Clear keen joyance – pure intense delight (2) languor cannot be – weariness (3) shade of annoyance – trace of irritation (4) Love's sad satiety – excess of love.

**Stanza XVII.** (1) waking of asleep – in all conditions (2) deem – think (3) crystal stream – uninterrupted current of joy (4) mortal – human being.

**Stanza XVIII.** (1) Before and after – future and past (2) sincerest laughter most genuine delight (3) fraught – filled with (4) saddest ..... most acute pain.

**Stanza XIX.** (1) Scorn – abandon (2) come near – approach.

**Stanza XX.** Measures – melody (2) Treasure – the store of learning.

**Stanza XXI.** (1) Teach – communicate (2) harmonious madness – frenzied music (3) would flow – would pour forth (4) the world – mankind.

## • 6.6. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

### 1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'To A Skylark'.

(A) This is art of the finest lyrics of Shelley. The poem is remarkable for "ebullient lyricism" or lyrical intensity and order.

The poem conveys the essential traits of Shelley as a poet, which he attributes to the skylark and its song.

The skylark represents the 'winged desire' of the poet. It sings and soars simultaneously.

"And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest". It soars "higher still and higher" and becomes invisible. The upward flight of the bird signifies two essential traits of Shelley's poetry soaring imagination and limitless aspiration.

Melancholy and sadness as a result of limitless desire which cannot be fulfilled due to human limitations.

"We look before and after  
and pine for what is not".

Pessimism as a result of unfulfilled longing is a pervading element in his poetry.

Shelley lyrics are written at white heat of passion. These are spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

Romantic poets seek the origin of poetry in a rapture of fine frenzy. The song of the bird arises from unalloyed joy. The poet seeks a position of this joy of the bird to create enchanting poetry of his own. *For him poetry is an ecstasy or frenzy.*

Shelley has a tendency to etherialise the objects of nature to treat as abstract those natural objects which are concrete.

The poem is almost a procession of appropriate similes. The poet envies the skylark, its unrivalled wealth of song its power atonce to soar and to sing; which seemed to him a fit emblem of his own upward striving after love and beauty. It has no care to depress it, no fear to hamper it. It sings from the mere love of singing and from the joy that fills its heart. Its song would be to the poet more than all the treasures of learning. If he had but half of the beliefs genuine gladness, he would entrance the world as he entranced by the skylark.

The poem was written as true spur of the moment when Shelley actually heard the song of a skylark and watched its flight.

Its short five line stanzas quite fit with the poem. The earenest hurry of the four short lines, followed by the long effusiveness of the fifth line called Alexandrine expresses the eagerness of the lark.

Luminousness is the distinguishing trait of the style of this poem.

This is an exquisite lyric, "It senses the active power of imagination, clothes itself in radiant imagery and rises into the complemented and sustained melody of the highest lyrical art".

### Q. 2. Discuss Shelley as a lyric poet ?

1. Shelley is a celebrated lyrical genius. There are many lyric poets who handle successfully the lyrical impulse in their shorter poems but they tend to grow monotonous in the longer poems. Shelley's case is different; both in shorter as well as longer poems, he exhibits a lyrical impulse of sustained quality.

Shelley's lyrics are an expression of ecstatic feelings either of depression or delight, or of a passionate idea that overpowers the mind of the poet so intensely that the poet bursts out singing as in "A Lament".

"Out of the day and night  
A joy has taken flight,  
Fresh spring and summer and winter roar,  
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight  
No more—oh, never more !"

Shelley has an exquisite command of "Melopoeia" or the musical suggestion which characterizes all his poem long and short, narrative and dramatic. In "With a guitar to Jane" he acknowledges :

"Ariel to Miranda : take  
This slave of music, for the sake

Of him, who is the slave of thee,  
And teach it all the harmony”.

No doubt the most delicate music in his lyric is the outcome of his genius, but it will be an over-simplification to deny conscious efforts that Shelley put pains – takingly in giving the final shape to his seemingly.

“Unpremeditated Art” to Shelley rhythm or order is of fundamental importance; in poetry he combined the outward rhythm of verse with the inner rhythm of thought and change the rhythm not only from stanza to stanza but from word to word according to the slightest variation of emotion and feeling. Bridges called him ‘A perfect singing god’. Symonds hails him ‘As the most spontaneous singer in English language’.

Another cause of the supremacy of Shelley among lyricist is the intensity, and the consequence. A simplicity of the lyrics. S. A. Brooke says “In Shelley the fire of lyric burns slowly for a time, then flares to heaven in a hush of flame, then sinks and dies as swiftly as it flames. It is as momentary as a meteor in him and its substance is vaporized by its own heat”. Since this lyric fire is momentary, the lyric is dominated only by one emotion or one thought the pure lyric is simple both in theme and form.

The two divisions of his lyrics are :

**(1) Personal lyrics :** The range and variety of Shelley’s lyrics is impressive sometimes the impulses which gave rise to lyric passion came from within, while at other times it was received from nature or from the evil or the good in many. Thus, his lyrics may be divided in two broad classes – The personal and the impersonal. Of the personal lyrics some of the finest express a mood of despondency and are piercing and poignant. In them he is a singer of endless sorrows. They are the outpourings of his wistful yearning and sense of loneliness. His love lyrics, too are generally for an ideal or a vision to perfect to be realized in life. Some of his best lyrics deal with the future emancipation of mankind from the tyranny of convention and wickedness : These lyrics voice his aspirations for the regeneration of mankind, and he confidently hopes for a millennium when liberty, equality and virtue would reign supreme as in “The West Wind” he is optimistic of the future of mankind

“O wind

If winter comes, can spring be far behind”

**(2) Impersonal lyrics :** Of his impersonal lyrics, his nature lyrics are the best. They are eloquent witnesses not only to his sense of the loveliness of nature and the joy he found in her, but also of his intense consciousness of a life in nature. Such poems as “The Cloud” “The West Wind” etc. are the best examples of his curious myth making faculty in which Shelley is unique among English poets Shelley’s best lyrics arise when one of his major passions finds its symbol in nature. Thus “The Skylark” symbolizes his yearning for

“..... something a far

From the sphere of out sorrow”

Thus Shelley was both a lyricist and a thinker, and just as the lyric strain marks even his longer works, so also his philosophy frequently enters his lyrics. His lyrics are very charming because they share the charm of his great personality. Prof. Elton remarks “Shelley’s genius was essentially lyrical All his poetry is really lyrical, for his lyrical impulse penetrates into even his unlyrical verse”.

**Q. 3. Shelley as a pessimist poet ?**

Ans. The note of melancholy is predominant in several great poets like Spenser, Gray, Keats, Byron etc. but perhaps in no other poet it is so passionately poignant as in Shelley. He is a devotee of the Goddess of melancholy. In his 'Skylark', he attributes the excellence of its song to its melancholic vision :

“Waking or asleep  
Thou of death must deem  
Things more true and deep  
Than we mortals dream,  
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream” ?

Melancholy is an essential trait of romanticism. According to Victor Hugo, “Melancholy is the salient characteristic of romantic art”. The note of melancholy in Shelley's poetry is a typical romantic feature of his poetry. Shelley is an idealist. He is a day dreamer. He is haunted by visions of a golden age. But whenever he became conscious of his sordid surrounding he felt a rude shock. The hard and harsh facts of actual life presented a sad contrast to his utopian abstract ideals. This contrast between the ideal and the real filled Shelley with despair and melancholy which he reflected in his poetry. Thus the note of melancholy and pessimism in his poetry was the anguished cry of a frustrated idealist. He always aspired for the unattainable and therefore always felt dejected as he himself stated he was consumed by

“The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the night for the morrow,  
The devotion to something a far,  
From the sphere of our sorrow”

Three types of melancholy in his poetry :

**Personal :** Whenever the poet talks of himself, his poetry becomes poignantly pathetic. Wherever his poetry becomes subjective and personal it invariably expresses despair and dejection. He cries out

“O world ! O life ! O time !  
Out of the day and night  
A joy has taken flight”.

**Social :** When he leaves his own personal life and looks at society he finds injustice exploitation, oppression, rampant in society, man has become corrupt.

“Crime and misery are in yonder earth  
Falsehood, mistake lust”.

The sordid state of human affairs saddens him :

**Philosophical :** When Shelley broods over world and life, he is depressed by the fleeting nature of worldly pleasure and the momentariness of human life. He is oppressed by “Paled sphere and cold tranquility”, when he realises that human life and its joys are so poignantly short lived; these are mere transient dreams.

“What is this life that we should cling to it ?  
A phantom haunted frenzy, a fowls nature  
A vain and empty shadow .....

Thus, Shelley's melancholy has three aspects : personal, social and philosophical.

Shelley was a born rebel. He was an iconoclast. He revolted against social conventions and religious traditions. Society did not forgive him and turned him into an outcast. He felt lonely and neglected. He suffered at the hands of society at Oxford he wrote a pamphlet on the 'Necessity Of Atheism' and was therefore expelled from the university. His first wife Harriet; committed suicide and the Court of Chancery punished him by depriving him of the guardianship of his children by the first wife. He pursued one woman after another to find the ideal beloved but always felt disillusioned and dejected. This sense of unjust persecution, desolation and loneliness made his poetry pathetic and gloomy.

However, his melancholy was less the product of external factors and more a tendency inherent in his temper. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. The grandson of a prosperous country Squire, Shelley never suffered from extreme poverty therefore his external conditions were not adverse. It was primarily innate melancholy of his nature, which makes his poetry so gloomy and pessimistic.

To sum up the cause of Shelley's melancholy—"It is the melancholy of art and artist, a principal that has persisted in Tectonic literature. Its roots perhaps, are three : Recognition of the incompleteness of human life, inability to express a thought or truth, and failure to secure more than a very slight share of the responsive sympathy of men and women".

**Q. 4. Give poetic commentary on the poem : To a Skylark.**

If the West Wind was Shelley's first convincing attempt to articulate an aesthetic philosophy through metaphors of nature, the skylark is his greatest natural metaphor for pure poetic expression, the "harmonium madness" of pure inspiration. The skylark's song issues from a state of purified existence, a Wordsworthian notion of complete unity with heaven through nature; its song is motivated by the joy of that uncomplicated purity of being, and is unmixed with any hint of melancholy or of the bitter sweet, as human joy so often is. The skylark's unimpeded song rains down upon the world, supplanting every other beauty, inspiring metaphor and making the speaker believe that the bird is not a mortal bird at all, but a "Spirit" a "sprite," a "poet hidden/in the light of thought".

In that sense, the skylark is almost an exact twin of the bird in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"; both represent pure expression through their songs, and like the skylark, the nightingale "wast not born for death." But while the nightingale is a bird of the sky. The nightingale inspires Keats to feel "a drowsy numbness" of happiness that is also like pain, and that makes him think of death; the skylark inspires Shelley to feel a frantic, rapturous joy that has no part of pain, and that makes him think of death; the skylark inspires Shelley to feel a frantic, rapturous joy that has no part of pain. To Keats, human joy and sadness are inextricably linked, as he explains at length in the final stanza of the "Ode on Melancholy". But the skylark sings free of all human error and complexity and while listening to his song, the poet feels free of those things, too.

Structurally and linguistically, this poem is almost unique among Shelley's works' its strange form of stanza, with four compact lines and one very long line and its tilting, songlike diction ("profuse strains of unpremeditated art") work to create the effect of spontaneous poetic expression flowing musically and naturally from the poet's mind. Structurally, each stanza tends to make a single, quick point about the skylark or to look at it in a sudden, brief new light; still, the poem does flow, and gradually advances the mini-narrative of the speaker watching the skylark flying higher and higher into the sky, and envying its untrammelled inspiration — which, if he were to capture it in words, would cause the world to listen.

## • 6.7. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

**Q. 1. What are the various similes used by Shelley to explain the nature of the skylark ?**

(A) The lyric is remarkable not only for its 'ebullient lyricism' but also for its beauty of metaphor and simile. In the skylark the poet has found a kindred soul and this has kindled his faculty of conjuring up a long train of appropriate similes and images to describe skylark's real nature and talent.

In the opening stanza the bird is compared to 'ablithe the spirit'. In the second stanza it is compared to cloud of fire. In the morning it appears like an unbodied joy. In the evening it appears like an invisible star in daylight. The bird's music is as keen in delight as are the rays of the moon. In the next stanza it is compared to love loin maiden. The skylark is compared to 'embowered rose'. However he finds that the skylark's song surpasses every object in its delight and freshness.

The similes used in this poem are remarkable for their appropriateness as well as their romantic Glow and charm. These similes highlight the spontaneity, ease, sweet melody of the lark's song and the bird's invisibility in the sky and its soaring faculty.

**Q. 2. What is the theme of the poem 'To a Skylark' ?**

The speaker, addressing a skylark, says that it is a "blithe Spirit" rather than a bird, for its song comes from Heaven, and from its full heart pours "profuse strains of unpremeditated art". The skylark flies higher and higher, "like a cloud of fire" in the blue sky, singing as it flies. In the "golden lightening" of the sun, it floats and runs, like "an embodied joy". As the skylark flies higher and higher, the speaker loses sight of it, but is still able to hear its "shrill delight," which comes down as keenly as moonbeams in the "white dawn," which can be felt even when they are not seen. The earth and air ring with the skylark's voice, just as Heaven overflows with moon beams when the moon shines out from behind "a lonely cloud".

The speaker says no one knows what the skylark is, for it is unique : even "rainbow clouds" do not rain as brightly as the shower of melody that pours from the skylark. The bird is "like a poet hidden/in the light of thought," able to make the world experience "sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not". It is like a lonely maiden in a palace tower, who uses her song to soothe her lovetorn soul. It is like a golden glow-worm, scattering light among the flowers and grass in which it is hidden. It is like a rose embowered in its own green leaves, whose scent is blown by the wind until the bees are faint with "too much sweet". The skylark's song surpasses "all that ever was, joyous and clear and fresh", whether the rain falling on the "twinkling grass" or the flowers the rain awakens.

Calling the skylark "Sprite or Bird," the speaker asks it to tell him its "sweet thoughts," for he has never heard anyone or anything call up "a flood of rapture so divine." Compared to the skylark's, any music would seem lacking. What objects, the speaker asks are "the fountains of the happy strain ?" Is it fields, waves mountains, the sky, the plain, or "love of thine own kind" or "ignorance or pain"? Pain and languor, the speaker says, "never came near" the skylark : it loves, but has never known "love's sad satiety." Of death, the skylark must know "things more true and deep" than mortals could dream : otherwise, the speaker asks, "how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream ?"

For mortals, the experience of happiness is bound inextricably with the experience of sadness : dwelling upon memories and hopes for the future, mortal men "pine for what is not"; their laughter is "fraught" with "some pain"; their "sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought". But, the speaker says, even if men could "scorn/Hate and pride and fear", and were born without the capacity to

weep, he still does not know how they could ever approximate the joy expressed by the skylark. Calling the bird a 'scorner of the ground', he says that its music is better than all music and all poetry. He asks the bird to teach him "half the gladness/That thy brain must know," for then he would overflow with "harmonious madness," and his song would be so beautiful that the world would listen to him, even as he is now listening to the skylark.

From the eccentric, songlike, five-line stanzas of "To a Skylark" — all twenty-one of them follow the same pattern : the first four lines are metered in trochaic trimeter, the fifth in iambic hexameter (a line which can also be called an Alexandrine). The rhyme scheme of each stanza is extremely simple : ABABB.

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#### • 6.8. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :

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##### 1. *What is the cloud of fire ?*

(A) The skylark is flying high while singing sweet song. Its substance seems to the poet to be the cloud of fire.

##### 2. *What is the source of inspiration to the bird ?*

(A) The poet thinks that she may be unaware of the sufferings of life if her love is of different kind.

##### 3. *Why the skylark is compared with a rose ?*

(A) Because just as a rose whose scent has been stolen by the wind, On the same way bird's song is audible to him.

##### 4. *What does the skylark do when it roars ?*

(A) sings .

##### 5. *When and where is the skylark unseen in the sky according to Shelley ?*

(A) The skylark is unseen in a pale purple sky in the evening.

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#### • TEST YOURSELF

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##### True/False statements

1. The art of skylark is well planned.
2. The poet sees the skylark in the sky.
3. Skylark is ignorant of pain.
4. Mankind has grown too materialistic.
5. The bird has been compared with a cloud of fire.

##### Fill in the Blanks

1. Like a rose empowered in its.....
2. Like a poet hidden in the light of .....
3. Like a star of heaven, in the broad .....
4. Like an ..... joy where race in just begin
5. In the golden lightening of the sunken .....

##### Multiple Choice Questions

1. Skylark is not a
 

(a) Spirit	(b) Poet
(c) Scorer	(d) Preacher
2. Which object has not been wanted in the poem

(a) River

(b) Wave

(c) Heaven

(d) Fountain

3. 'To a skylark' is one of the first

(a) Lyric

(b) Elegy

(c) Ode

(d) Lament

**ANSWERS**

**True/False statements**

1. (F), 2. (F), 3. (T), 4. (T), 5. (T)

**Fill in the Blanks**

1. green leaves, 2. thought, 3. daylight, 4. unbodied, 5. Sun.

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (d), 2. (c), 3. (c)

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. "Shelley as a lyric poet". Explain.

2. Write a short note on Idealism in the poem' – To skylark.

# UNIT

## 7

### WILLIAM BLAKE : THE LAMB & THE TYGER

*William Blake : The Lamb &  
The Tyger*

#### STRUCTURE

- William Blake's Life and Works
- The Lamb : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Critical Comments
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- The Tyger : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Critical Comments
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Test Yourself

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- After going through this unit you will learn :
- Two aspects of soul : The meek and the ferocious one
  - Blake's Mysticime and lyrical quality mysticesive
  - Easy vocabulary, hidden meanings

#### • 7.1. WILLIAM BLAKE LIFE AND WORKS

William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757 to James, a hosier, and Catherine Blake. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke having visions – at four he saw God “put his head to the window”; around age nine, while walking through the country side, he saw a tree filled with angels. Although his parents tried to discourage him from “lying”, they did observe that he was different from his peers and did not force him to attend conventional school. He learn to read and write at home. At age ten, Blake expressed a wish to become a painter, so his parents sent him to drawing school. Two years later, Blake began writing poetry. When he turned fourteen, he apprenticed with an engraver because art school proved too costly. One of Blake’s assignments as apprentice was to sketch the tombs at Westminster Abbey, exposing him to a variety of Gothic styles from which he would draw inspiration throughout his career. After his seven-year term ended, he studied briefly at the Royal Academy.

In 1782, he married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and to write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship. Later, she helped him print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today; the couple had no children. In 1784 he set up a printshop with a friend and former fellow apprentice, James Parker, but this venture failed after several years. For the remainder of his life, Blake made a meager living as an engraver and

illustrator for books and magazines. In addition to his wife, Blake also began training his younger brother Robert in drawing, painting and engraving. Robert fell ill during the winter of 1787 and succumbed, probably to consumption. As Robert died, Blake saw his brother's spirit rise up through the ceiling, "clapping its hands for joy". He believed that Robert's spirit continued to visit him and later claimed that in a dream Robert taught him the printing method that he used in *Songs of Innocence* and other "illuminated" works.

Blake's first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III's treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it, in 1794, with *Songs of Experience*. Some readers interpret *Songs of Innocence* in a straightforward fashion, considering it primarily a children's book, but others have found behind it parody or critique in its seemingly naive and simple lyrics. Both books of *Songs* were printed in an illustrated format reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts. The text and illustrations were printed from copper plates and each picture was finished by hand in watercolours.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of 18<sup>th</sup> century neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. He declared in one poem, "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's". Works such as "The French Revolution" (1791), "America, A prophecy" (1793), "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793), and "Europe, a Prophecy" (1794) expresse his opposition to the English monarchy, and to 18<sup>th</sup> century political and social tyranny in general. Theological tyranny is the subject of *The Book of Urizen* (1794). In the prose work *The Marriage o Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), he satirized oppressive authority in church and state, as well as the works of Emanue Swedenborg, a Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted his interest.

In 1800 Blake moved to the seacoast town of Felpham, where he lived and worked until 1803 under the patronage of William Hayley. He taught himself Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian, so that he could read classical works in their original language. In Felpham he experienced profound spiritual insights that prepared him for his mature work, the great visionary epics written and etched between about 1804 and 1820. *Milton* (1804-08), *Vala or The Four Zoas* (1797; rewritten after 1800), and *Jerusalem* (1804-20) have neither traditional plot, characters, rhyme, nor meter. They envision a new and higher kind of innocence, the human spirit triumphant over reason.

Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by common people, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. In 1808 he exhibited some of his watercolors at the Royal Academy, and in May of 1809 he exhibited some works his brother James's house. Some of those who saw the exhibit praised Blake's artistry, but others thought the painting "hideous" and more than a few called him insane. Blake's poetry was not well known by the general public, but he was mentioned in *A biographical Dictionary of the living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1816. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had been lent a copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, considered Blake a "man of Genius", and Wordsworth made his own copies of several songs. Charles Lamb sent a copy of "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence* to James Montgomery for his *Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boys' Album* (1824), and Robert Southey (who, like Wordsworth, considered Blake insane) attended

Blake's exhibition and included the "Mad Song" from *Poetical Sketches* in his miscellany, *The Doctor* 91813-1837).

*William Blake : The Lamb &  
The Tyger*

Blake's final years spent in great poverty, were cheered by the admiring friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves "the Ancients". In 1818 he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. It was Linnell who, in 1825, commissioned him to design illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

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• **7.2. THE LAMB**

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

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

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• **7.3. EXPLANATION :**

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(1) Little Lamb ..... mead.

**Explanation :** These lines have been taken from the poem "The Lamb" composed by William Blake. The poem occurred in the volume songs of Innocence. The poet asks the lamb that the maker breathed life into it and signalled him to feed near the streams and meadow. The poet says that Lamb is innocent. He does not know anything yet he knows how to eat by birth as if he had been given training for it. Here poet in the form of child asks many questions from Lamb. He is quite astonished at the creation of God.

(2) Gave thee ..... Rejoice.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet proceeds the same notion of asking the Lamb different questions. He is amazed at the creation of God. God created lamb as a symbol of innocence. The Lamb does not know anything about this materialistic world but he knows the feelings and sentiments of this world. He further says that

as the lamb is always ready to receive bliss in the same way, his delicate wool is also a source of bliss for mankind. The poet further asks from the Lamb who gave him such a shining cloth and melodious voice. The poet means to say that it is only Omnipotent God who made such a innocent creature like Lamb.

(3) Little Lamb ..... tell thee.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet who presents himself as a child says that Lamb is the embodiment of innocence, simplicity and mildness. He asks him whether he knows who made him. Then he himself gives the answer and tells the Lamb that he feels that the Lamb does not know his creator, so he will tell him who made him.

(4) He is ..... child.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that he will tell the Lamb who made him. He says that his creator is God and God is also known by the name of Lamb because just as Lamb is innocent and mild in the same way God is also innocent and mild. Here the poet means to say that Lamb is the symbol of Christ and Christ is the son of God. So God and Lamb are one. He further says that God presents Himself not only in the form of Lamb but also in the form of child just as children are innocent and free from evil in the same way God is also innocent and simple.

**Stanza V :** I a child ..... thee.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet says that he is a little child and Lamb is also young and both of them are equal because both are innocent and mild and they represent God. The child wishes from God that he should give his blessings to the lamb as he is the symbol of God. The poet wants to say that God has created all the creatures and that is why God does not consider any distinction between Himself and His creation.

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• **7.4. GLOSSARY**

**Stanza I :** (1) Lamb – Little one of sheep (2) Gave thee life – how were you born (3) Bid – to signal (4) Feed – to graze (5) stream – flow of river (6) Mead – Meadow.

**Stanza II :** (1) Clothing of delight – woollen clothes (2) Tender – Melodious (3) Rejoice – Celebrate.

**Stanza III :** (1) Dost – does, (2) thee – you.

**Stanza IV :** (1) He – God (2) Meek – Void of proud (3) Mild – tender in voice.

**Stanza (IV) & (V) :** (1) His – God (2) Bless – thank.

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• **7.5. CRITICAL COMMENTS**

(1) William Blake is a mystic poet and he has shown his mysticism in almost every poem.

(2) This poem is taken from the collection of "Songs of Innocence".

(3) In this poem the Lamb is a symbol of Christ.

(4) The language of the poem is simple and easy to understand.

(5) The poem appears to be child-like but it has hidden meaning.

(6) The rhyme scheme of the poem is aa, bb, aaaa, abcc, abcc.

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• **7.6. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

**Q. 1. Write critical appreciation of the poem "The Lamb".**

**Ans.** The Lamb is one of the simplest songs of innocence composed by William Blake. In his collection "Songs of Innocence" Blake deals with pure innocence of children and the heavenly and pastoral world of sports and merry making.

"The Lamb" is divided into five stanzas. In the first stanza few questions are asked by child and the rest of the poem answers these questions. A child put up several questions to the lamb as to who his maker is, how he came to know of its food and eating etc. Benefits which are given by the lamb are useful without feeling proud of them. As in the opening stanza the poet asks :

"Little Lamb, who made thee ?

Dost thou know who made thee"

Human beings rejoice the useful wool of the Lamb. Lamb does not know the answers of those questions. So the poet replies to it in the way that it is lamb because God likes to be called Himself by the same name. We say that he is also a Lamb. He wishes the Lamb to live long.

"I a child, and thou a lamb,

We are called by His name".

The songs of innocence are the poems of Christian thoughts. The poet calls God, Lamb and himself by the same name. He finds the same life among every creature. Every object of the universe is made by the hands of God. Symbolically the theme of the poem is the innocence and purity of heart of human being. The aim of the poet is to reveal the real nature of the soul of a man.

The Lamb is a symbol of the child. Moreover it is a symbol of God who takes away sins of the world by shedding his blood on the mortal earth. The poem appears to be a child like poem but it is full of mysticism.

The language of the poem is simple. The rhyme scheme of the poem is a a b b. Third stanza rhymes with aaaa scheme and the fourth one rhymes as a b c c. The repetition of the poem is suggestive to its deep meaning of symbolism.

This poem exhibits Blake's mysticism as well as lyricism. His vocabulary is as simple as that of the child's. His poetic work embodies one of the most perfect lyricism. His lyrics are windows into the imaginative world.

### **Q. 2. Discuss William Blake as a Lyric Poet ?**

William Blake was a lyric poet. He was born in the neo-classical age, but the things that distinguish him from other poets of his age are the lyrical qualities of his poetry. By the lyrical qualities we understand such poetic features as subjectivity, melodiousness, imagination, description and meditation. Moreover, a lyric poem is usually short and may fall into such genres as elegy, ode, ballad, sonnet etc. A lyric poem expresses a poet's private thoughts and emotions rather than telling a story. From all these perspectives the poems of Blake in Songs of Innocence and Experience are lyrics.

The first quality that makes his poem lyric is subjectivity. The neo-classical approach to poetry was objective. Blake on the other hand took a subjective approach. Blake was a disturbing prophet who desired social change. He was personally against all kinds of repressions, materialism, institutional corruption, racism, worship of money and hypocrisy.

Blake voiced against repression and constraints. He did not follow the neo-classical restraints of writing poem. He also expressed his hatred towards institutional and personal repressions in such poems as - The Holy Thursday, The Nurse's Songs (Experience).

In Blake's time many children had to depend upon charity. In his poem 'Holy Thursday', Blake raises his voice against such repression.

And their sun does never shine,  
And their fields are bleak and bare,  
And their as are filled with thorns  
It hands eternal winter there.

Blake means here that all children are angels, not scapegoats to be butchered on the altar of the society. How can England call herself rich and fruitful land if she has hungry children waiting for food from the so-called benefactors of society ?

Blake believes that children should be free and their life should be colourful. But the guardians always try to restrict them. Blake opposes such kind of restriction. In Nurse's Songs, the nurse keeps a constant watch over the children and her instincts reflect her disposition. From her angle of view, life is aimless, a useless waste of time in childhood and in old age, a shame. It has no purpose as she says :

Our spring and our day are wasted in play,  
And your winter and night in disguise.

She sets all her views in a depressing back ground such as winter, night, and dew darkness and so on. She looks back with frustration on her childhood, and instead of feeling merry she grows pale. Her 'spring' and "day" seem to express the agony of growing up to a regretful maturity. She is hostile and insensitive to innocence. She takes the children back home, leaving them unable to protest, to play and enjoy.

William Blake dislikes Industrial Revolution and in his poems he focuses how the Industrial Revolution represents the devil and that it must be purged. Blake focused on child labour and prostitution-the two adverse effects of Industrial Revolution in his poem 'The Chimney Sweeper and London'.

Blake hated the exploitation of children's labour because of Industrial Revolution. Blake believed in the innocence of childhood pleasures. The Chimney Sweeper by William Blake expressed the difficult lives of working children. As the title reveals it, the children are cleaning chimneys all day long in unimaginable conditions. Blake gives his readers a clear understanding of the harsh conditions of these young chimney sweepers. He says :

"There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curl'd like a lamb's back," (lines 5-6)

Blake focuses how badly these children are left powerless and with no escape. On another instance, the poem relates the misery felt by these children when it says :

"A little black thing among the snow  
Crying" weep, 'weep", in notes of woe!" (lines 1-2)

Blake is here pointing out that man is responsible for evils of society. The picture drawn by Blake is disturbing and heartbreaking at the same time.

In his poem "London", from his work Songs of Experience, Blake describes the woes of the Industrial Revolution. He describes the Thames River and the city's streets as "chartered", or controlled by commercial interest. He refers to "mind-forged manacles"; he relates that every man's face contains "Marks of weakness, marks of woe", and he discusses the "every cry of every Man" and "every Infant's cry of fear".

In "London" Blake describes a world during and after the industrial revolution in which there had been many ill-fated side effects as people moved away from the traditional farming families and their beliefs.

Blake vividly portrays another worse effect of Industrial revolution, "prostitution", in his poem "London". A prostitute or an unwed mother is unable to rejoice in her child's birth. It tells of a married couple looking down upon her for what she does in order to make a living. This is ironical because the business of prostitution is caused in part by the restrictions placed upon the married man. It is also ironical because the married man is what has created the need for, and use of prostitutes. The harlot curses the respectable and polite society because it is they who have created the demand for her, and then look down upon what she does. "Blights with plagues" implies that perhaps she also infects them with some sort of venereal disease. The final words of the poem, "Marriage hearse" compares marriage to death. The narrator sees marriage as another type of restriction placed upon man by society, marriage is a sort of earth in man's ability to be free to do as he wishes.

Blake believed in equality for all men, and this is reflected in his poem. William Blake's *The Little Black Boy* revolves around the theme of slavery and the ideal slave's mentality. Blake wrote about a black African-American and his experience with slavery. Blake probably expressed his own feelings towards the whites' racism and suppression acts towards African-Americans through the black boy, which is the speaker of the poem.

The poem is about an African-American, who is the speaker of the poem, who remembers his childhood with his mother where she used to indoctrinate her child with the racist beliefs of slavers. The black boy has a dream, that all human will be equal.

Blake stands against puritan hypocrisy. Two of his poems from *Songs of Experience* present his views on the matter : "The Chimney Sweeper" and "The Garden of Love". In "The Chimney Sweeper", the child (Blake) is telling society that his pain is being caused by those in whom he put his trust — his parents. They abandon him and go ... To praise God & his Priest & King (Blake, 11). Perhaps they do this, because on the outside their child looks happy and they probably think that they are helping him more than anything :

'And because I am happy, & dance & sing  
They think they have done me no injury',

In the meantime, the church is also playing a part in his misery. How ? Because it allows the parents to come inside its building to pray when they should be protecting their child from all harm :

"They are both gone up to the church to pray

.....  
.....

A heaven of our misery."

In another of his poems, "The Garden of Love", Blake portrays religion as the oppressor of human kind. Blake sees the church as an obstacle between men and God. He attacks the Priests because, instead of offering God's comfort as they were meant to do, they become like judges or police officers telling men that they can or cannot do.

"And priests in black gowns were walking their round  
And binding with barriers my joys and desires".

Blake asks society to take a second look at the way the church treats them and to realize that God cannot be found among oppressions.

All of Blake's poems are short, some very short indeed. All are written in apparently simple style, and the most usual verse form in the rhymed quatrain.

(stanza of four lines). A lyric poem is usually melodious. In many of Blake's poems like "The Tyger" we find melodious tone.

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

For Blake "imagination" is that gift in man, which can hear the prompting's of 'God, or "spiritual sensation". 'Introduction' is a canonical poem of the romantic period. In it lies the key romantic element : imagination, emotion, idealism. In "Introduction" to Songs of innocence Blake as a poet, playing his simple and innocent music attracts the attention of a muse or spirit that appears to him as a child on a cloud. The child encourages him to play a song about a "Lamb" and being impressed with the musician asks him to drop his pipe and write a book "that all may read". In this way the spirit is asking Blake to share his inspiration with a wider audience, an audience that would not depend on his presence to experience the happiness his imagination can bring.

Sometimes Blake asks question about creation : how can we understand a God who is capable of creating the innocence of the lamb and the fury of the tiger ? The Tyger (Songs of Experience) is Blake's famous meditative poem. The tiger is Blake's symbol for the "abundant life", and for regeneration. Centrally, it Tyger ! Burning bright.

In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand of eye  
Dare frame they fearful symmetry ?

Nature was not the central focus of Blake's poems, but it was a theme that did occur in many of his works, such as "Nurse's Song", "the Lamb", "Earth's Answer", "The Garden of Love", "To Spring" and "To the Evening Star".

In "Nurse's Song" (from Songs of Innocence), Blake describes children playing outside, enjoying nature and having the time of their lives. In this verse, time is marked by songs in the natural world. The nurse implores : "[t]hen come home, my children, the sun is gone down/And the dew's of night arise ..." (lines 5-6). Nature acts as a gentle guide for the children. Their only concept of time comes from the luminaries and the light they give. The children respond to the nurse, wanting to play until the last lights in the sky are gone. Again, scenes from nature appear.

"Besides, in the sky the little birds fly/  
And the hills are all covered with sheep".

Each of his poems is a vehicle of expressing his personal emotion. It seems his art had been too adventurous and unconventional for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and we may even say he was ahead of his time.

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### • 7.7. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Discuss how "The Lamb" is a symbolic poem ?**

**Ans.** The poem "The Lamb" by William Blake, is a meditation poem written in 1789. It is about a physical object, an animal, but is addressed to much grander topics of God and creation. It asks rhetorical questions to a lamb in the first half and then answers the question in the second half of the poem. The author begins the question in the second voice little lamb, Who made the end then ends in the first voice, 'Little Lamb I'll tell thee'. It is an inquisitive poem in which the author explains how a higher power has created something. The lamb is a symbol of the

child. Moreover it is a symbol of God who takes away sins of the world by shedding His blood on the mortal earth. The Lamb seems child like poem, but slowly it shows hidden deep meaning. This poem compels man to brood over the philosophy of life, God and Heaven.

*William Blake : The Lamb &  
The Tyger*

**Q. 2. Write a note on the spiritual themes in the poem "The Lamb".**

**Ans.** The themes of this poem are spirituality, creation and peace. The theme is clearly stated with the use of the name of God and words and phrases like "bliss thee" and "give thee life" Christianity is full of allusions to lamb such as lamb as God, Christ as the shepherd, and the lamb that "lays with the lion" as a sign of peace. The lamb has strong connotations with peace and meekness. Since it is common to capitalize a regular noun when it is used as synonym for God, Blake capitalizes "Lamb" when he refers to Christ and says, "For He calls himself a Lamb". He also states that. He is called by thy name. The familial nativity story is recalled with his reference. "He became a little child". The lamb is a traditional symbol of peace.

**Q. 3. Write a short note on the poetic style of "The Lamb".**

**Ans.** The poem is written in a formal grammatical style. The author does not use slang but rather has standard vocabulary. The subject verb agreement is standard and the vernacular is common for the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When it was written. The author's references to 'mead', vales and 'stream' conjure clear images of this lamb grazing through beautiful colored postures in the English country side.

The poem is written in cleaned verses that changes slightly. The first and last two lines of each stanza have one syllable and the middle six lines each stanza has seven syllables. Each stanza contains five couplets ending in a rhyme.

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#### • 7.8. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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1. Who made the lamb ?

**Ans.** God.

2. When was 'Songs of Innocence' published ?

**Ans.** In 1789.

3. What does Lamb symbolize ?

**Ans.** Innocence.

4. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem ?

**Ans.** AA BB CC DD AAAA EE GG FE AA

5. How does the poet feel for Lamb ?

**Ans.** The poet wishes long life for Lamb.

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#### • TEST YOURSELF

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**True/False Statement :**

1. Image and symbol are one element.
2. The poet loves the sweet sound of the Lamb.
3. God takes Himself as the Lamb.
4. Lamb is the symbol of experience.
5. The poet thinks that God is the creator of everything.
6. 'The songs of Innocence' suggests a vision of paradise.
7. The lamb possess ferocious look.

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. .... is the maker of Lamb.
2. He is meek and He is mild'  
He became a little .....
3. Every creature is a single aspect of ..... Himself.
4. The poem is divided in two stanzas of ..... lines.
5. Blake calls Lamb as the symbol of .....

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. Which thing does not match Lamb :  
(a) Wool (b) Melody  
(c) Message of mild life (d) Pride
2. God has been compared in the poem with :  
(a) man (b) lamb  
(c) child (d) all of the above
3. How many lines does the poem consist of ?  
(a) 14 (b) 104  
(c) 20 (d) 108
4. Jesus came in this world as :  
(a) a man (b) a lamb  
(c) a child (d) god

**ANSWER**

**True/False Statements :**

1. (F), 2. (T), 3. (T), 4. (F), 5. (T), 6. (T), 7. (F)

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. God, 2. Child, 3. God, 4. ten 5. innocence

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. Find out the images in the poem "The Lamb".
2. Discuss the element of mysticism in the poem "The Lamb".

**• 7.9. THE TYGER**

TYGER, tyger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?

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

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

What dread hand and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?

In what furnace was thy brain?

What the anvil? What dread grasp

Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears.

And water'd heaven with their tears,

Did He smile His work to see?

Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Tiger, tiger, burning bright

In the forests of the night,

What immortal hand or eye

Dare frame thy fearful symmetry ?

William Blake : *The Lamb &  
The Tyger*

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#### • 7.10. EXPLANATION

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(1) Tyger ..... symmetry.

**Explanation :** These lines have been taken from the poem "The Tyger" composed by William Blake. Here the poet invokes the tiger that has burning eyes. His eyes are bright and in the forests, even in the night these eyes shine like burning fire. Further, the poet asks the tiger who is his creator. What supernatural power has constructed tiger's ferocious body. The poet is amazed at the ferocious congruity of the body of the tiger.

(2) In what ..... fire.

**Explanation :** The poet imagines that God might have used some instruments in the construction of tiger's body. He does not know where and in what kind of blazing fire God might have built the eyes of tiger, whether this considerable fire burnt in the deep earth or somewhere open in the sky. The poet feels amazed at the strong desire of God during the creation of tiger's eyes. If his eyes were made of the fire burning in the open sky, how he would have flown very high and checked this fire where these eyes had been built.

(3) And what ..... dread fact ?

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that only God can make such fearful creation i.e. tiger. He says who made his shoulders so strong and wide. His heart is the biggest one among the creatures on the earth. The strong and wide structure of tigers body is not the creation of feeble hands. What happened when He made his wide heart and it began to throb. How did he control the tiger ? What strong hands and feet were used to control tiger when the life was inferred into the organs of tiger's body ? The poet appreciates not only tiger but also the supreme power of God, who created him.

(4) What the ..... clasp ?

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet talks of the workshop of God. He asks which kind of hammer was used in beating the metal of his body to give shape and what kind of chain was used to control and balance the substance of his mighty

body. The poet can not imagine the anvil used in beating the substance of his body. The hands which caught his large and heavy body are expected to be strong and broad.

(5) When the stars ..... thee ?

**Explanation :** This stanza is based on the description of Milton's fall of angels in his *Paradise Lost* Book VI, when Satan along with the other angels fell down on the earth. The state of chaos came to an end. After it the stars at morning sang together and all the joys of God shouted together. Blake describes this situation in a way that after chaos God smiled at every object of universe turned to harmony. The poet reminds us of the notion that God made innocent creatures like lamb as well as furious creatures like the tiger. He is creator as well as destroyer.

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### • 7.11. GLOSSARY

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**Stanza I :** (1) Tyger – tiger a symbol for fierce force of natural energy lying in the soul (2) Burning bright – shining red eyes (3) Immortal hand or eye – some kind of super natural power of God (4) Frame – construct (5) Symmetry – Congruity of parts of body.

**Stanza II :** (1) Distant – Far away (2) Deeps – volcanoes of chaos (3) Burnt the fire of thine eyes – God is fearful as well as merciful (4) Dare – to be courageous (5) aspire – to desire extremely (6) What the hand – which power (7) seize – catch.

**Stanza III :** (1) Art – art used in making tiger (2) Twist – to construct and mould (3) Sinews – strong organs of body (4) Beat – throbbing of the heart (5) Dread – fearful.

**Stanza IV :** (1) Hammer – a tool used to beat the metal (2) Brain – mind (3) Anvil – an iron block on which black smith works (4) Furnace an apparatus– for fire place (5) Grasp – tight catching (6) Clasp – contrivance for fastening.

**Stanza V :** (1) stars – Rebel angels (2) Threw down their spears – accepted their defeat against God (3) spears – A pance (4) His work – work of making the universe (5) Mark thee – God found the tiger and lamb lying beside.

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### • 7.12. CRITICAL COMMENTS

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(1) The poet takes the idea of universe from the scheme which claimed that God made innocent creatures as well as fearful creatures. God is both – innocent and fearful.

(2) The sense of the poem is religious. Blake suggests God as a divine Blacksmith who is the maker of lamb as well as tiger.

(3) Every object of universe is a symbol of God's different quality.

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### • 7.13. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Discuss the element of mysticism in the poem 'The Tyger'.**

**Ans.** Tyger belongs to songs of Experience which were composed by William Blake. The romantic poet published his collection of poems himself in London, in 1794. The poet came up with technique called 'relief etching' to be able to add his illustrations.

The poem contains six quatrains; and its rhyme is assonant, and follows perfectly the pattern aabb in the case of the first and the sixth stanzas, the word 'symmetry' is pronounced in such a way that it rhymes with 'eye'.

With regard to semantic fields, there are words related to the tools used by an ironsmith for instance, 'hammer', 'chain', 'furnace', and 'anvil', in the fourth stanza. Also, we can find a semantic field related to Nature for example, 'forests' (line 2),

'skies' (line 5). 'Tyger' (line 1 and 21), and 'Lamb' (line 20). But above all, the poet used a semantic field related to Creation when he writes words or phrases like :

What immortal hand and eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry ?

The simple structure and the vocabulary help the reader to understand the main topics or concepts, which are Evil, Good, and God.

The first impression that William Blake gives is that he sees a terrible tiger in the night, and, as a result of his state of panic, the poet exaggerates the description of the animal when he writes :

'Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright  
in the forests of the night ...'

However, paying more attention to what comes next, the author talks about Evil, and Good, as said above. These two essential ideas are symbolized in the 'Tyger' and the 'Lamb', respectively (notice that both words have capital letters).

Immediately after seeing the 'Tyger' in the forests, the poet asks it what deity could have created it :

'What immortal hand and eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry ?'

The word 'immortal' gives the reader a clue that the poet refers to God. Then, in the second stanza, the author wonders in what far-away places the tiger was made, may be, referring that these places cannot be reached by any mortal. In the third stanza, the poet asks again, once the tiger's heart began to beat, who could make such a frightening and evil animal. Next, in the fourth stanza, William Blake asks questions about the tools used by God, and he names the hammer, the chain, the furnace, and anvil. All these elements are used by an ironsmith. Thus, according to the poet God is a kind of craftsman. After that, in the fifth stanza, the poet asks two significant questions. The first one refers to God's feelings :

'Did he smile his work to see ?

In other words, was God happy with his creation ? The second is :

'Did he who made the Lamb make thee ?'

William Blake does not understand why or how the deity who is responsible for good and innocence, is, at the same time, inserts violence and evil in this world. However, the poet does not make any statement at any moment. He only asks questions which invite the reader to think about. Finally, the last stanza is the same as the first one which may indicate that the author is not able to understand the world where we live.

To conclude, William Blake wrote the poem with a simple structure and a perfect rhyme to help the reader see the images he wanted to transmit. Above all, the description of the tiger is glaringly graphic essentially due to the contrast between fire and night.

## **Q. 2. Give critical Appreciation of "The Tyger".**

**Ans.** 'The Tyger' is an interesting and wonderful short poem by 'William Blake'. William Blake is a symbolical poet. His collection of songs "Songs of experience" was published in 1794. This collection was in contrast to the collection of 'Songs of Innocence'. This poem gives a true knowledge and inspiration about the creation of God. This poem has been composed when the poet thought that God has created both kinds of creatures good as well as bad on this earth. This poem 'The Tyger' arouses the question for the readers that God can create every kind of creature in this universe.

In this poem the poet has described the horrible personality of a Tiger.

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright  
In the forests of the night”

He says that tyger is the symbol of force, power, energy and strength. This poem is a description of the symmetry of a tiger, he describes the burning eyes, powerful organs and fearful construction of the tiger. Blake remarks in this poem that the tiger has a very amazing personality and it can make everyone afraid. He feels that this tiger might be created in the workshop of God and God has used many types of instruments and tools to construct it. He says

“What the hammer ? What the chain ?  
In what furnace was Thy brain  
What the anvil ? What dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp ?”

This poem presents a comparison with the poem of Lamb. The Lamb is a symbol of innocence, tenderness and softness but quite the contrary, the Tyger is the symbol of cruelty, ferociousness.

The substance of the poem is based on the legend that God is the creator of both good and bad things. In this poem the poet has presented God as a divine smith Who created His ferocious creation in His workshop and it is only God who can create such a terrible creation.

“In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the flame of thine eyes ?  
On what wings dare he aspire ?  
What the hand dare seize the fire ?  
And what shoulder and what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart ?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand ? and what dread feet ?”

This poem is objective in style and the rhyme scheme of this poem is aa, bb, ..... metaphor and Hyperbole are the main figures of speech in this poem.

“In what distant deeps or spies  
Burnt the flame of thine eyes ?”

We find hyperbole. This poem is full of symbolism and imagery. Here the poet has given the image of Divine smith. And, through stars he has given the image of rebel angels.

In this poem we find alliteration as the first stanza is again repeated at the end of the poem. The language is simple and full of mysticism. The diction of the poem is also perfect. The poem is very attractive and it can easily capture the attention of the reader.

“The Tyger” is a short poem and has extra ordinary qualities. This poem presents comparison with the poem Lamb. This poem is highly appreciated by the critics and the students of literature.

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• 7.14. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTION

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Q. 1. What themes do you find in the poem “The Tyger”.

## The Existence of Evil

"The Tyger" presents a question that embodies the central theme. Who created the tiger? What is the kind and loving God who made the lamb? Or was it Satan? Blake presents his question in Lines 3 and 4.

What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Blake realizes, of course, that God made all the creatures on earth. However, to express his bewilderment that God who created the gentle lamb also created the terrifying tiger, he includes Satan as a possible creator while raising his rhetorical questions, notably the one he asks in Lines 5 and 6.

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of the eyes?

Deeps appears to refer to hell and skies to heaven. In either case, there would be fire — the fire of hell or the fire of the stars.

Of course, there can be no gain saying that the tiger symbolizes evil, or the incarnation of evil, and that the lamb (Line 2) represents goodness, or Christ. Blake's inquiry is a variation on an old philosophical and theological question. Why does evil exist in the universe created and ruled by a benevolent God? Blake provides no answer. His mission is to reflect reality in arresting images. A poet's first purpose, after all, is to present the world and its denizens in language that stimulates the aesthetic sense; he is not to exhort or moralize. Nevertheless, the poem does stir the reader to deep thought. Here is the tiger, fierce and brutal in its quest for sustenance, there is the lamb, meek and gentle in its quest for survival. Is it possible that the same God who made the lamb also made the tiger? Or was the tiger the devil's work?

### The Awe and Mystery of Creation and the Creator :

The poem is more about the creator of the tiger than it is about the tiger itself. In contemplating the terrible ferocity and awesome symmetry of the tiger, the speaker is at a loss to explain how the same God who made the lamb could make the tiger. Hence, this theme : humans are incapable of fully understanding the mind of God and the mystery of his handwork.

**Q. 2. Compare and contrast the central themes of poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger".**

**Ans.** Blake said, "Without contrasts, there is no progression. The poems, 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' composed by William Blake differ from each other as white differs from black. The Lamb is based on blissful innocence whereas 'The Tyger' represents ferocious side. But the poems are different in all aspects that God's creation is of all varieties. God is the maker of innocent as well as ferocious creatures.

**Q. 3. What does Blake want to say in the poem "The Tyger"?**

**Ans.** William Blake's "The Tyger" is a form of social protest, in much the same theme as the French Revolution, that protestant Christians should be critical of faith that has, at its center, a God that chooses to punish so readily the creatures he brings into existence. God created the Lamb, but he also created tiger, and is so directly responsible for the misery some of the lambs of the hands of the tyger that would prey upon it. God created Satan, and in doing so readily damned him to Hell for acts that in his omnipotence. God was very much in control and could have prevented : The Tyger is such an enthralling theological critique because it has, forged in the depths of hell or monster to be unleashed upon mankind, not the Devil, but the protestant God himself. The creator of the Tyger as well as the Lamb.

**• 7.15. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

1. What is the meaning of the "forest of the night" ?  
**Ans.** It stands for confusing state of ignorance and restlessness.
2. How does the Tiger look ?  
**Ans.** Fierce and mighty.
3. Why did God make the tiger ?  
**Ans.** To show His power and agony of soul.
4. "When the stars threw down their spears". What for 'stars' stand in this line.  
**Ans.** Rebel Angels.
5. How did God feel after chaos ?  
**Ans.** God smiled when the chaotic situation came to an end.

**• TEST YOURSELF**

**True/False Statements :**

1. The tyger is a symbol of God's power.
2. The tiger is as meek as Lamb.
3. The Tiger is created by Devil.
4. The Tyger is a reverse of the Lamb.
5. God is cruel like the tiger.
6. The tiger stands for restlessness and ignorance.

**Fill up the blanks :**

1. What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful .....
2. Did he who made ..... Make thee ?
3. In what ..... was thy brain.
4. Tyger! Tyger ..... in the forest of the night.
5. What the ..... ? What the chain.

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. The tiger is a symbol of .....  
(a) ignorance (b) God's might  
(c) fierce power (d) all of the above
2. Which instrument has not been described in the poem ?  
(a) anvil (b) hammer  
(c) file (d) chain
3. The Tyger is a song of .....  
(a) innocence (b) power  
(c) natural beauty (d) experience
4. How many lines does the poem (the Tyger) contain ?  
(a) 16 (b) 14  
(c) 24 (d) 15

**ANSWERS**

**True/False Statements**

1. (T), 2. (F), 3. (F), 4. (T), 5. (F), 6. (T)

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. symmetry, 2. Lamb, 3. furnace, 4. burning bright, 5. Hammer

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (d), 2. (c), 3. (d), 4. (c).

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. What does the tiger symbolize ?
2. Why did God smile to see His work ?

*William Blake : The Lamb &  
The Tyger*

8

JOHN KEATS : ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

STRUCTURE

- John Keat's Life and Works
- Ode on a Grecian Urn : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Critical Comment
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
  - Test Yourself
- Ode on a Melancholy : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Question and Answers
  - Test Yourself

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- Keats sense of beauty
- Figurative Language
- Enriched vocabulary

• 8.1. JOHN KEATS LIFE AND WORKS

John Keats (1795-1821), a renowned poet of the English Romantic Movement, wrote some of the greatest English language poems including "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", "Ode To A Nightingale", and "Ode On a Grecian Urn".

*O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with breed  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity; Cold pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou salt teaming, in nudist of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou says,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."*

John Keats was born on 31 October 1795 in Moor Gate, London, England, the first child born to Frances Jennings (b. 1775-d. 1810) and Thomas Keats (d.1804),

an employee of a livery stable. He had three siblings : George (1797-1841), Thomas (1799-1818), and Frances Mary "Fanny" (1803-1889). After leaving school in Enfield, Keats went on to apprentice with Dr. Hammond, a surgeon in Edmonton. After his father died in a riding accident, and his mother died of tuberculosis, John and his brothers moved to Hampstead. It was here that Keats met Charles Arbitrage Brown (1787-1842) who would become a great friend, Remembering his first meeting with him, Brown writes "*His full fine eyes were lustrously intellectual, and beaming (at that time!)*". Much grieved by his death, Brown worked for many years on his memoir and biography, *Life of John Keats* (1841). In it Brown claims that it was not until Keats read Edmund Spencer's *Faery Queen* that he realized his own gift for the poetic Keats was an avid student in the fields of medicine and natural history, but he then turned his attentions to the literary works of such authors as William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer.

Keats had his poems published in the magazines of the day at the encouragement of many including James Henry Leigh Hunt Esq. (1784-1859), editor of the *Examiner* and to whom Keats desistence his first collection Poems (1817). It includes "To My Brother George", "O Solitude! If I Must With thee Dwell", and "Happy is England! I Could Be content". Upon its appearance a series of personal attacks directed at Keats ensued in the pages of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Despite the Controversy surrounding his life, Keats's literary merit prevailed. The same year Keats met Percy Bysshe Shelley who would also become a great friend. When Shelley invited the ailing Keats to stay with him and his family in Italy, he declined. When Shelley's body was washed ashore after drowning, a volume of Keats's poetry was found in his pocket.

Having worked on it for many months, Keats finished his epic poem comprising four books, *Endymion, A Poetic Romance*— "*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever*"—in 1818. That summer he travelled to the Lake District of England and on the Ireland and Scotland on a walking tour with Brown. They visited the grave of Robert Burns and reminisced upon John Milton's poetry. While he was not aware of the seriousness of it, Keats was suffering from the initial stages of the deadly infectious disease tuberculosis. He cut short his trip and upon returning to Hampstead immediately tended to his brother Tom who was then in the last stages of the disease. After Tom's death in December of 1818, Keats lived with Brown.

Early one morning I was awakened in my bed by a pressure on my hand. It was Keats, who came to tell me his brother was no more. I said nothing, and we both remained silent for awhile my hand fast locked in his. At length, my thoughts returning from the dead to the living, I said—Have nothing more to do with those lodgings, -and alone too. Had you not better live with me? He paused, pressed my hand warmly, and replied,—I think it would be better. From that moment he was my inmate— *Life of John Keats*.

Around this time Keats met, fell in love with, and became engaged to eighteen year old Frances "Fanny" Brawne (1800-1865). He wrote one of his more famous sonnets to her titled "Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art". While their relationship inspired much spiritual development for Keats, it also proved to be tempestuous, filled with the highs and lows from jealousy and infatuation of first love. Brown was not impressed and tried to provide some emotional stability to Keats many for a time were convinced that Fanny was the cause of his illness, or used that as a excuse to try to keep her away from him. For a while even Keats entertained the possibility that he was merely suffering physical manifestations of emotional anxieties-but after suffering a hemorrhage he gave Fanny permission to break their engagement. She would hear nothing of it and by her word provided much comfort to Keats in his last days that she was ultimately loyal to him.

Although 1819 proved to be his most prolific year of writing, Keats was also in dire financial straits. His brother George had borrowed money he could ill-afford to part with. His earning Fanny's mother's approval to marry depended on his earning as a writer and he started plans with his publisher John Taylor (1781-1864) for his next volume of poems. At the beginning of 1820 Keats started to show more pronounced signs of the deadly tuberculosis that had killed his mother and brother. After a lung hemorrhage, Keats calmly accepted his fate, and he enjoyed several weeks of respite under Brown's watchful eye. As was common belief at the time that bleeding a patient was beneficial to healing. Keats was bled and given opium to relieve his anxiety and pain. He was at times put on a starvation diet, then at other times prescribed to eat meat and drink red wine to gain strength. Despite these ill advised good-intentions, and suffering increasing weakness and fever, Keats was able to emerge from his fugue and organize the publication of his next volume of poetry.

*Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820) includes some of his best-known and oft-quoted works: "Hyperion", "To Autumn", and "Ode to a Nightingale". "Nightingale" evokes all the physical anguish he saw as a young apprentice tending to the sick and dying at St. Guy's Hospital, the death of his brother; and ultimately his own physical and spiritual suffering in love and loss. Keats lived to see positive reviews of *Lamia*, even in Blackwood's magazine. But the positivist was pole to last long; Brown left for Scotland and the ailing Keats lived with Hunt for a time. But it was unbearable to him and only exacerbated his condition—he was unable to see Fanny, so when he showed up at the Brown's residence in much emotional agitation, sick, and feverish, they could not refuse him. He enjoyed a month with them, blissfully under the constant care of his beloved Fanny possibly bolstered by his finally having unrestricted time with her, and able to imagine a happy future with her, Keats considered his last hope of recovery of a rest cure in the warm climes of Italy. As a parting gift Fanny gave him a piece of marble which she had often clasped to cool her hand. In September of 1820 Keats circumstreted with Fanny and the gravity of his health.

Keats put on a bold front but it soon became apparent to Severn that he was terminally ill. They stayed in rooms on the Piazza Novena near the Spanish Steps, and enjoyed the lively sights and sounds of the people and culture, but Keats soon fell into a deep depression. When his attending doctor James Clark (1788-1870) finally voiced aloud the grim prognosis, Keats's medical background came to the fore and he longed to end his life and avoid the humiliating physical and mental torments of tuberculosis. By early 1821 he was confined to bed, Severn a devoted nurse, Keats had resolved not to write to Fanny and would not read a letter from her for fear of the pain it would cause him, although he constantly clasped her marble. During bouts of coughing, fever, nightmares, Keats also tried to cheer his friend who held him till the end.

John Keats died on 23 February 1821 in Rome, Italy and now rests in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, by the pyramid of Caelius, near his friend Shelley. His epitaph reads "here lies one whose name was writ in water", inspired by the line "all your better deeds, shall be in water writ" from Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher's (1579-1625) five act play *Pilaster or Love Lies A-bleeding*. Just a year later, Shelley was buried in the same cemetery, not long after he had written "Adonais" (1821) in tribute to his friend;

I weep for Adonais—he is dead!  
O, weep for Adonais though our tears  
Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!  
And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years

To mourn our loss, rouse they obscure compeers,  
And teach them thine own sorrow, say: "With me  
Died Adonais, till the Future dares  
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light unto eternity!"

Fanny Brawne married in 1833 and died at the age of sixty-five English poet and friend of Brown's Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885) wrote *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains, to John Keats* (1848). During his lifetime and since, John Keats inspired numerous other authors, poets, and artists, and remains one of the most widely read and studied 19<sup>th</sup> century poets.

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• 8.2. ODE ON GRECIAN URN

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Thou still unravished bride of quietness!  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flow'ry tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but more endeared,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal-yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! More happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,  
For ever panting and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,

A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
What little town by river or sea-shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity : cold pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou sayst,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,-that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

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• 8.3. EXPLANATION

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In this poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" John Keats reflects upon a rare and valuable object of observation, the images of which offered him tremendous poetic inspiration. In accordance with the subject matter that relates a great work of art, the poet draws attention, through his poetic devices, to the fact that his poem is a work of art, too. It is consciously and artfully constructed by the effective use of assonance, parallelism, paradoxes and the series of apostrophes which constantly personify the urn, allowing the poet to present the urn as a re-occurring motif of perpetuality and eternity of art.

(1) Thou still ..... ecstasy.

The poet starts the poem by addressing the urn directly as if he was having a conversation with it. In the very metaphorical and paradoxical opening four lines, the urn is depicted as a "still unravish'd bride of quietness". Here the word "still" has multiple meanings, suggesting the motionless and silence of the urn-it is still, pure, virginal and perfect, just as a bride, as is backed up by the word "quietness". The silence and stillness of the urn is further reinforced by the "foster-child of silence". The poet in these lines also gives a sense of historical mystery surrounding the urn, with the urn being a "Sylvan historian" telling puzzling historical mysteries like "A flowering tale more sweetly than our rhyme." Keats offers a great paradox here, built up by the fact that the urn is silent and quiet, but a historian that can communicate effectively, hence fostering the ambivalence that seems to dominate the poem as a whole. In these four opening lines, the assonance of the

long drawn out "I" sound emphasizes the urn's formal status in this poem. In the second half of the first part, closely related with the use of a colon, the poet asks a series of questions about the scenes drawn on the Grecian Urn, while showing his marvel at historical and artistic mystery, and also at the beauty embodied in the urn itself. These questions also give a historical and outlandish sense, which is typical of Romantic poets looking for inspiration. The questions of scenes on the urn described more clearly in later parts build up a panoramic view that comprises many figures both mundane ("mortals") and supernatural ("deities"), both physical ("mad pursuit?) and spiritual ("wild ecstasy").

(2) Heard melodies ..... fair!

In these lines Keats describes in greater details the scenes that he was questioning earlier, contrasting the perfection of the static art with the imperfection, transience and sorrow of human life. The "unheard" melodies depicted on the urn are sweeter than heart music because it is "Not to the sensual ear" but more to please the supernatural "deities", far beyond the mundane earshot. Now Keats introduces the important idea of frozen moment of time with this steadfast image, which transcends time, giving a sense of perpetuity and eternity as the "sweet" music on the urn plays on and the trees remain forever green. Since all are fixed in one moment of time, even the lovers described on the urn will always remain a blissful anticipation. Here Keats celebrates the idea of love, as represented by the girl, who is always there to acquire, because everything is perpetuated by the drawing of the urn.

(3) Ah, Happy ..... cloned.

In these lines, the poet's conversation with the urn now seems to focus on a different part of the picture showing a young boy "piping songs for ever" to a girl. By talking reassuringly to the boy, the poet shows his understanding about the idea of true love—"more happy, happy love!/For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,/for ever panting and for ever young". Keats talks of love as immortalized, just as the perpetual images of the urn. He imagines the physical conditions of love and the youth's heart as he tries to imagine the painted figure's exact status, applicable to his own feelings—"heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd"

(4) Who are there ..... return.

In these lines, the poet again asks a series of questions, this time concerning a new scene of sacrifice on the urn, where many people arrive to the altar with the "mysterious priest" leading "that heifer lowing at the skies". The poet speculates about the now empty, "silent" urn from which all these people have come to attend the ritual of the sacrifice. The town is described beautifully with images "by river or sea shore,/Or mountain built with peaceful citadel?". Thus in the last two parts, the poet, looking onto different parts of the urn, not only describes the beauty he sees, but also praises its eternity.

(5) Osttic shape ..... know.

In these lines, the poet carries on describing the people and procession on the urn. Keats describes Athens with "Fair Attitude!" with "marble man and maidens overwrought" giving a sense of praise upon the urn as if the pictures on the urn are sculptures so delicately made, that even their facial expressions of tension and woe can be seen clearly. Such praises of the fine drawing on the urn is reinforced with the descriptions of "forest branches and trodden weed". The fine drawing on the "silent" urn "teases us out of thought" and fills the poet with the wondrous feelings about the eternity of art. These thoughts cause the poet to re-address the urn and talk to it now as "Cold Pastoral!" He tells the urn that time has changed since the urn was first made; the idyllic pastoral lifestyle of hymn and odes is forever lost in the industrial revolution. The new name of the urn as "Cold Pastoral" also could

express Keats' romantic woes-even if art is the ultimate reminder of the historically cherished lifestyle, art is nevertheless death-like, and "cold"-it offers no movement, no change and no fulfilment. Such eternity of art of the urn introduces a new and less positive perspective of the poet, who becomes more detached. He now sees the urn as limited-it never changes, and the human feelings and actions it depicts never experience the fullness and fulfilment of life. Nevertheless, when Keats draws conclusion to the urn, it still remains "a friend to man [...] in midst of other woe". The ode concludes with the two most debated lines in Keats' poetry, 'that is all/ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' Here Keats' final statement highlights the strong contrast between art and life as he sees. The urn, a work of art, seems to represent perfect enduring beauty, while human life, in contrast, is imperfect and transient.

#### • 8.4. GLOSSARY

**Stanza (I) :** (1) Sylvan – pertaining to of living in the woods (2) unravished – chaste (3) Foster – help develop (4) Deities – Gods (5) Tempe – A beautiful valley in Greece (6) Arcady – the literary word for Arcadia, in the central Peloponnesus (7) Timberls – Ancient tambourines.

**Stanza (II) :** (1) Sensual Ear – ear of the senses (2) Endear'd – make attractive (3) Ditty – A short simple song (4) Bliss – A state of extreme happiness.

**Stanza (III) :** (1) Boughs – branches of tree (2) Adieu – adarewell remark (3) unwearied – with unreduced energy (4) Panting – breathing heavily (5) Cloyed – Cause surefeit through excess though initially pleasing.

**Stanza (IV) :** (1) Hwidwe – young cow (2) Flanks – the side between ribs and hipbone (3) citadel – a stronghold into which people could go for shelter during a batter.

**Stanza (V) :** (1) Attic – Grecian (2) Brede – Embroidery (3) Overwrought – covered with (4) Cold partoral – partoral story in marble.

#### • 8.5. CRITICAL COMMENTS

- Rhyme Scheme : *ababcdedce, ababcdeced, ababcdedce, ababcdedce, ababcdedce*

- Rhythm : iambic pentameter

- The poem begins with an apostrophe to "thou still unravish'd bride of quietness" (1). This is a metaphor comparing a maiden to the urn, which has not been tainted by neither impurities nor, as the next line implies, time. The urn is then compared to a woodland historian, who is able to tell a tale much more clearly than even a poet.

- The poet uses rhetorical questions in the second half of the first stanza, questions he attempts to answer in the remainder of the poem.

- The poem's structure reminds one of a five paragraph essay : (1) The first stanza introduces us to the topic, the picture on the urn, and presents several questions; (2) The second stanza speaks of music and love; (3) The third stanza continues with music, nature and love; (4) Stanza four deals with religion and sacrifice; (5) Stanza five gives a recap of the problem and the descriptions, followed by the truth revealed by the Urn-that beauty outlasts all.

- "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter" (1.2). This reminds me of Plato's forms. There is a perfect music in existence somewhere; all other music seeks to replicate it, yet falls short. This perfect music exists on the urn. It is not the sensual ear that perfection appears to, but the soul (13).

- Lines 15-20 give a description of the idol. It is the form of beauty, of youth, of music that remains engraved upon the urn, the enacting of which would lessen its perfection. It's a beauty that has existed before objects.
- Stanza 3-The trees will never go old and deteriorate. The picture on the urn is Edenic. Evil has not been introduced, it does not go through the cycle of life where all deteriorates.
- Eternity speaks in the final size lines of the poem : the entire scene is beauty, which has no beginning and no end, just like truth.
- The last two lines : "that is all/Ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know." Does this indicate that there is more we learn after our life.

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## • 8.6. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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### *Q. 1. Give a critical appreciation of the poem Ode on a Grecian Urn*

**Ans.** "Ode On a Grecian Urn" is a romantic ode, a dignified but highly lyrical (emotional) poem in which the author speaks to a person or thing absent or present. In this famous ode, Keats addresses the urn and the images on it. The romantic ode was at the pinnacle of its popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was the result of an author's deep meditation on the person or object. The romantic ode evolved from the ancient Greek ode, written in a serious tone to celebrate an event or to praise an individual. The Greek ode was intended to be sung by a chorus or by one person to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The odes of the Greek poet Pindar (circa 518-438B.C.) frequently extolled athletes who participated in athletic games at Olympus, Delphi, the Isthmus of Corinth, and Nemea Bacchylides a contemporary of Pindar, also wrote des praising athletes. The roman poets Horace (65-8 B.C.) and Catullus (84-54 B.C.) wrote odes based on the Greek model, but their odes were not intended to be sung. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, English romantic poets wrote odes that retained the serious tone of the Greek ode. However, like the Roman poets, they did not write odes to be sung. Unlike the roman poets, though, the authors of 19<sup>th</sup> Century romantic odes generally were more emotional in their writing. The author of typical romantic ode focused on a scene, pondered were more emotional in their writing. The author of a typical romantic ode focused on a scene, pondered its meaning, and presented a highly personal reaction to it that included a special insight at the end of the poem (like the closing lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn").

In the first stanza, the speaker stands before an ancient Grecian urn and addresses it. He is preoccupied with its depiction of pictures frozen in time. It is the "still unravish'd bride of quietness," the "foster-child of silence and slow time." He also describes the urn as a "historian" that can tell a story. He wonders about the figures on the side of the urn and asks what legend they depict and from where they come. He looks at a picture that seems to depict a group of men pursuing a group of women and wonders what their story could be : "What made pursuit? What struggle to escape?/What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

In the second stanza, the speaker looks at another picture on the urn, this time of a young man playing a pipe, lying with his lover beneath a glade of trees. The speaker says that the piper's "unheard" melodies are sweeter than moral melodies because they are unaffected by time. He tells the youth that, though he can never kiss his lover because he is frozen in time, he should not grieve, because her beauty will never fade. In the third stanza, he looks at the trees surrounding the lovers and feels happy that they will never shed their leaves. He is happy for the piper because his songs will be "for ever new," and happy that the love of the boy and the girl will last forever, unlike moral love, which lapses into "breathing

human passion" and eventually vanishes, leaving behind only a "burning forehead, and a parching tongue."

In the fourth stanza, the speaker examines another picture on the urn, this one of a group of villagers leading a heifer to be sacrificed. He wonders where they are going ("to what green altar, O mysterious priest...") and from where they have come. *imagines their little town, empty of all its citizens, and tells it that its streets will "for evermore" be silent, for those who have left it, frozen on the urn, will never return.* In the final stanza, the speaker again addresses the urn itself, saying that it, like Eternity, "doth tease us out of thought." He thinks that when his generation is long dead, the urn will remain, telling future generations its enigmatic lesson. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." The speaker says that that is the only thing the urn knows and the only thing it needs to know.

### Form

"Ode To a Grecian Urn" follows the same ode-stanza structure as the "Ode to Melancholy," though it varies more the rhyme scheme of the last three lines of each stanza. Each of the five stanzas in "Grecian Urn" is ten lines long, metered in a relatively precise iambic pentameter, and divided into a two part rhyme scheme, the last three lines of which are variable. The first seven lines of each stanza follow an ABABCDE rhyme scheme, but the second occurrences of the CDE sounds do not follow the same order. In stanza one, lines seven through ten are rhymed DCE; in stanza two, CED; in stanzas three and four, CDE; and in stanza five, DCE, just as in stanza one. As in other odes (especially "Autumn" and "Melancholy"), the two-part rhyme scheme (the first part made of AB rhymes, the second of CDE rhymes) creates the sense of a two-part thematic structure as well. The first four lines of each stanza roughly define the subject of the stanza, and the last six roughly explicate or develop it. (As in other odes, this is only a general rule, true of some stanzas more than others; stanzas such as the fifth do not connect rhyme scheme and thematic structure closely at all.)

### Themes

If the "Ode to a Nightingale" portrays Keats's speaker's engagement with the fluid expressiveness of music, the "Ode to a Grecian Urn" portrays his attempt to engage with the static immobility of sculpture. The Grecian urn, passed down through countless centuries to the time of the speaker's viewing, exists outside time in the human sense—it does not age, it does not die, and indeed it is alien to all such concepts. In the speaker's meditation, this creates an intriguing paradox for the human figures carved into the side of the urn: They are free from time, but they are simultaneously frozen in time. They do not have to confront aging and death (their love is "for ever young"), but neither can they have experience (the youth can never kiss the maiden; the figures in the procession can never return to their homes).

The speaker attempts three times to engage with scenes carved into the urn; each time he asks different questions of it. In the first stanza, he examines the picture of the "mad pursuit" and wonders what actual story lies behind the picture "What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?" Of course, the urn can never tell him the whos, whats, whens, and wheres of the stories it depicts, and the speaker is forced to abandon this line of questioning.

In the second and third stanzas, he examines the picture of the piper playing to his lover beneath the trees. Here, the speaker tries to imagine what the experience of the figures on the urn must be like; he tries to identify with them. He is tempted by their escape from temporality and attracted to the eternal newness of the piper's unheard song and the eternally unchanging beauty of his lover. He thinks that their love is "far above" all transient human passion, which, in its

sexual expression, inevitably leads to an abatement of intensity—when passion is satisfied, all that remains is a wearied physicality, a sorrowful heart, a “burning forehead,” and a “parching tongue.” His recollection of these conditions seems to remind the speaker that he is inescapably subject to them, and he abandons his attempt to identify with the figures on the urn.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker attempts to think about the figures on the urn as though they were experiencing human time, imagining that their procession has an origin (the “little town”) and a destination (the “green altar”). But all he can think is that the town will forever be deserted : If these people have left their origin, they will never return to it. In this sense he confronts head-on the limits of static art; if it is impossible to learn from the urn the whos and whers of the “real story” in the first stanza, it is impossible ever to know the origin and the destination of the figures on the urn in the fourth.

It is true that the speaker shows a certain kind of progress in his successive attempts to engage with the urn. His idle curiosity in the first attempt gives way to a more deeply felt identification in the second, and in the third the speaker leaves his own concerns behind the things of the processional purely on its own terms, thinking of the “little town” with a real and generous feeling. But each attempt ultimately ends in failure. The third attempt fails simply because there is nothing more to say—once the speaker confronts the silence and eternal emptiness of the little town, he has reached the limit of static art : on this subject, at least, there is nothing more the urn can tell him.

In the final stanza, the speaker presents the conclusions drawn from his three attempts to engage with the urn. He is overwhelmed by its existence outside the temporal change, with its ability to “tease” him “out of thought/As doth eternity.” If human life is a succession of “hungry generations.” As the speaker suggests in “Nightingale.” The urn is a separate and self-contained world. It can be a “friend to man.” As the speaker says, but it cannot be mortal; the kind of aesthetic connection the speaker experiences with the urn is ultimately insufficient to human life.

The final two lines, in which the speaker imagines the urn speaking its message to mankind.

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” Have proved among the most difficult to interpret in the Keats canon. After the urn utters the enigmatic phrase “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” No one can say for sure who “speaks” the conclusion, “that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” It could be the speaker addressing the urn, and it could be the urn addressing mankind. If it is the speaker addressing the urn, then it would seem to indicate his awareness of its limitations. The urn may not need to know anything beyond the equation of beauty and truth, but the complications of human life make it impossible for such a simple and self-contained phrase to express sufficiently anything about necessary human knowledge. If it is the urn addressing mankind, then the phrase has rather the weight of an important lesson, as though beyond all the complications of human life, all human beings need to know on earth is that beauty and truth are one and the same. It is largely a matter of personal interpretation which reading to accept.

### Structure and Meter

“Ode to a Grecian Urn” consists of five stanzas that present a scene, describe and comment on what it shows, and offer a general truth that the scene teaches a person analyzing the scene. Each stanza has ten lines written in iambic pentameter, a pattern of rhythm (meter) that assigns ten syllables to each line. The first syllable is unaccented the second accented, the third unaccented, the fourth accented, and so on. Note, for example, the accent pattern of the first two lines of

the poem. The unaccented, syllables are in lower-cased small letters, and the accented syllables are in upper-cased big letters.

Thou STILL : | un RAV | ished BRIDE | of QUI | et NESS

Thou FOS | ter CHILD | of SI | lence AND | slow TIME

Notice that each line has ten syllables, five unaccented ones in *blue* and five accented ones in *red*. Thus, these lines-like the other lines in the poem-are in iambic pentameter. *Iambic* refers to a pair of syllables, one unaccented and the other accented. Such a pair is called an *iamb*. "Thou STILL" is an iamb, so are "et NESS" and "slow TIME." However, "BRIDE of" and "FOS ter" are not iambs because they consist of an accented syllable followed by an unaccented syllable. Pentameter-the first syllable of which is derived from the Greek word for *five*-refers to lines that have five iambs (which, as demonstrated, each has two syllables)." Ode to a Grecian Urn," then, is in iambic pentameter because every lines has five iambs, each iamb consisting of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. The purpose of this stress pattern is to give the poem rhythm that pleases the ear.

### Figures of Speech

The main figures of speech in the poem are apostrophe and metaphor in the form of personification. An apostrophe is a figure of speech in which an author speaks to a person or thing absent or present. A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things without using the word like, as, or than Personification is a type of metaphor that compares an object with a human being. In effect, it treats an object as a person-hence, the term personification. Apostrophe and metaphor/personification occur simultaneously in the opening lines of the poem when Keats addresses the urn as "Thou," "bride," "foster child," and "historian" (apostrophe). In speaking to the urn this way, he implies that it is a human (metaphor/personification). Keats also addresses the trees as persons in Stanza 3 and continues to address the urn as a person in Stanza 5. Other notable figures of speech in the poem include the following :

#### Assonance

Bride of quietness,/Thou foster-child of silence and slow time

#### Alliteration

Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,/Sylvan historian, who canst thus express

#### Anaphora

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

#### Paradox

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? (The images move even though they are fixed in marble)

#### Oxymoron

Those [melodies] unheard

Peaceful citadel (*citadel* : fortress occupied by soldiers)

#### Q. 2. What is the central idea of "Ode On a Grecian Urn"?

The poem by John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn", is one of the most memorable and enduring of all the poems to come from the Romantic Period." Ode on a Grecian Urn" is notable for its profound meditation and persuasive conclusions

about the nature of beauty, particularly as beauty is portrayed in artistic media. The meaning of the poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn" by John Keats conveys, perhaps paradoxically, the "speechlessness of the true language of art" (Klaus 251). In doing so, it demonstrates "the most universal power [of all nineteenth-century poets] to move readers in our own time" (Bloom & Trilling 494). This effect is achieved through the cohesive development of the meaning of the entire poem, but is especially concentrated in the concluding lines that have become so well-loved and often recited: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (ll. 49-50). In these two seemingly simple lines, Keats conveys his entire philosophy about art, beauty, and life to the reader so that he or she can offer an interpretation. While it should be noted that these concluding lines of the poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn" frequently appear alone, the true meaning of them is not lost without the rest of the poem to compliment them, but the gravity of what Keats is trying to suggest is certainly diminished.

It makes sense, structurally speaking, that the stanzas of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which precede these two closing lines build up, both thematically and formally, to the assertive declaration made by the speaker. After spending four full stanzas each of ten lines, contemplating the characteristics of the Grecian urn in careful detail, the speaker, Keats himself, answers the ten questions that he has posed earlier in the poem with the simply and directly worded phrase, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (l. 49). This part of the final two lines is compelling for a number of reasons. First, its apparent simplicity belies its latent symbolic meaning. One of the first superficial qualities that the reader notices in this phrase is the economy of language that characterizes this part of the line. Keats avoids extraneous words, such as an "and" to connect the two parts of the statement, and a second "is." Instead, he favors a pared down, streamlined statement that facilitates easy recall and repetition. When compared to the rest of this poem from the Romantic Period, particularly in terms of language and form, these final lines strike the reader, not only because of what they mean, but because there has been a formal attempt to attract the reader's attention through structure. The poetic phrase, a formal attempt to attract the reader's attention through structure. The poetic phrase, then, becomes a maxim that can move beyond the poem and circulate in a wider social and artistic dialogue. As Bloom and Trilling observe, the enduring popularity of this poem seems to suggest that the maxim has a certain timelessness and universal appeal about it as well (494).

When offering a summary of the poem "Ode to Grecian Urn" by John Keats and attempting to discern the meaning of the poem, the reader must move farther into the poem. The second part of the line—"that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (ll. 49-50)—also seems simple enough but is one of the important quotes from "Ode to a Grecian Urn" by Keats. First, it is important to point out that this part of this important line from "Ode to a Grecian Urn" is divided from the first by hyphen, which forces the reader to pause between the two interrelated conclusions Keats wishes to convey to the reader. The fact that the first part of the line is also enclosed within quotation marks, as if it came from a source outside the poem itself, and the fact that this second part of the line is not, also calls the reader's attention to the matter of differences and similarities in the concluding lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn." While—"that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (ll. 49-50) is more verbose than the "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (l. 49) sentiment, its parallel construction helps reinforce the lesson it contains. The parallel construction also serves to imitate the similar construction of the first part of the line. The repetitive structure of both components of these last two lines is an important formal poetic device. The fact that this repetition occurs at the end of the poem, and not any other point—at least not in quite the same way—earlier in

the ode also underscores that Keats expected the reader to take away a particular message from the poem. The repetition makes the message memorable and transportable. In addition, again this is a direct effort to engage the reader at the end of the poem and through this repetition, reinforce the point and perhaps give one cause to go back up and reread previous stanzas with a fresh eye now that the poet's message seems clearer. While this is certainly speculation on why Keats chose this structure and closing lines, it did have this effect after reading it several times through each time.

Moving to a deeper analytic level, however, yields even more compelling observations about these apparently simple, almost sing-songy lines. Beyond functioning effectively as a formal poetic device, the parallel construction of both parts of the lines reveals two paradoxes Keats wishes the reader to consider. Upon a second reading and a reconsideration of these beguilingly easy lines, the reader might notice that Keats might not mean what he is saying at all. At this interpretive level, the poem yields up at least one alternate meaning. If the reader understands the lines "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (l.49) on a level that is only superficial, then he or she might react to the lines with admiring and assenting sentiment. However, if one studies the lines beyond and beneath the first impression that they evoke, the paradoxes become evident. These lines, as is true of the poem itself, must be considered within the broader historical context of the Romantic movement. The lines must also be considered against the knowledge of Keats's own concerns and preoccupations. When this information is considered along side a reading of the poem, then it is possible that the reader may react and respond very differently to these lines, which seemed so optimistic and positive on the first reading. In fact, this second reading, in which the paradoxes are identified and considered, may provoke a sense of existential despair in the reader. Keats is suggesting that beauty can only truly exist in an artificial state, such as on the frozen, immutable, lifeless form of the Grecian urn.

Such an argument may raise a number of provocative and uncomfortable questions. The reader may ask, what is the reason for living, then? Why continue to pursue and attempt to create and define beauty? One may even ask, why go on living? Beauty is so central to human most cherished beliefs and pursuits, that Keats's forceful lines seem to challenge important aspects of our very selves. Once the reader moves beyond this reaction, though, it becomes possible to see that Keats's truth is liberating. If humans no longer need to strive to create the perfect beautiful form in whatever medium, then it frees them to be imperfect. Imperfection, in turn, liberates humans to make and remake art, and to recognize that one form dies with each individual death, and is then born again with each new birth—a common theme in poetry from the Romantic period. Bloom and Trilling refer to this realization as Keats's "gift of tragic acceptance" (495), which the poet hands to the reader and urges him or her to accept and then contemplate.

Such tragic acceptance did not cause pain or persistent despair for Keats, nor should it cause such feelings in the reader, although it might evoke a temporary sense of "unbearable ecstasy" (Mitrani 102). This ecstasy, though, is itself paradoxical because it is, eventually, bearable. In fact, this ecstasy is at the root of the perpetual "aesthetic conflict" identified by psychoanalysts (Mitrani 102), a subject which has also preoccupied poets and artists since the beginning of human attempts at artistic expression. The aesthetic conflict, as it is represented by Keats in "Ode on a Grecian Urn", is this: the art object does not reflect reality as we experience it. The art object only reflects ideals, ideals which are never achievable in real life. Keats describes the beautiful urn by sharing his detailed observations, noting its decorations and conveying its scenes to the reader. The urn is made of marble, a precious material, and it is etched with carvings of sacred gods. By

referring to the mythological heroes of the past, Keats evokes a particular nostalgia for the supposed perfection of the preceding ages, a nostalgia which will be contested and then swept away in the declarative concluding lines.

The overall sense, at least until the concluding stanza, suggests feeling of pleasure, bliss, and eternity, rather than of death. At the end of the poem, though, Keats returns himself—and the reader—to reality by noting that the world is a “Cold Pastoral !” (l.45). The eternity initially suggested by the urn exists only artistically; it does not reflect life, which is not eternal. This is the aesthetic conflict Keats provokes and also resolves in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”. These paradoxes suggest that the urn discloses a particular truth to man. The urn’s truth lies in its beauty. Yet that truth is that perfect beauty can only exist as it does on the urn : captured, frozen, artificial. The beauty in this truth is that we do not have to strive for perfection, then, because it is not possible for mortals. It was only possible in a world populated by deities.

“Ode to a Grecian Urn”, then, is a journey into the interior of Keats’s mind and the soul, as well as a disclosure of his most closely held beliefs. The poet uses an external object, a Grecian urn, to provoke the reader to contemplate the same aesthetic conflict which has preoccupied him and his fellow Romantic poets so deeply. This particular ode, among all of his oeuvre, shows Keats in a particularly contemplative state. His observations of the urn have provoked considerations about the nature of truth, beauty, and the function of art, all of which were the primary concerns of the Romantic poets. While the urn keeps the reader grounded in the realities of the outside world, the reader is a companion to the poet, who manipulates extreme emotions and ultimately concludes that life can only be captured by living it experimentally, not trying to replicate it in art forms. The ultimate irony, of course, is that Keats uses one art form, the poem, and specifically, the ode, to achieve the transmission of this artistic philosophy.

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### • 8.7. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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#### *Q. 1. What is the theme of the poem Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

Ode on a Grecian Urn was written by one of the most prolific of the Romantic Poets, John Keats, in 1819 and was first published in January 1820. Structurally the Ode is a form of Lyric poem and is divided into the Strophe, the Antistrophe and the final Epode and is addressed directly to someone, in this case the recipient being a Grecian urn. Divided into the distinct stanzas it explores beauty through each of the images portrayed on the urn. Each of the five stanzas is ten lines long and is metered in a precise iambic pentameter which is divided into a two part rhyme scheme with the first several lines following an ABABCDE pattern but the last three lines vary by stanza (DCE, CED, CDE, CDE, DCE). The inspiration for this poem is believed to have come from a visit to the British Museum and in particular the artifacts which were on display alongside the Elgin Marbles.

In the first stanza he tries to understand the story behind the pictures “ What men or gods are these ?” The speaker speculates on the origins of the images and describes the urn as a “historian” that through its image can tell a story. The idea that it is a story frozen in time helps to develop the concept further. He wonders about the truth behind the image of a group of men seemingly pursuing a group of women” What mad pursuit ? What struggle to escape ? What pipes and tumbrels ? What wild ecstasy ?”

In the second stanza he turns his attention to another of the images, that of a young man lying with his lover whilst playing a pipe, and again speaks of the idea of beauty being frozen in time and therefore never fading.

In the third stanza he explores the idea that mortal love is something that after the initial passion vanishes, leaves only a "burning forehead and a parching tongue".

In the fourth stanza the speaker's imagination wanders further and tries to imagine where the group of villagers are taking the heifer to be sacrificed and from where they have come. He begins to imagine what their village may be like and comments that for those depicted on the urn their moment is permanently frozen in time a theme which occurs again and again in this poem.

In the fifth and final stanza he further ponders the origin of the urn and comments that the urn will forever be there allowing generation after generation to wonder about its heritage and the identity of the anonymous images. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" in the mind of the speaker this is all that is necessary although what Keats really meant in these last two lines has always been somewhat unclear. The overall theme of the symbolic yet immobile sculpture allows Keats to engage with something that essentially exists outside human reality with images frozen in time' and passed down through generation after generation who in turn impose their own interpretation on the images which are captured in a perpetual state of perfection never to age, alter or diminish as we do.

### Q. 2. What symbols do you find in 'Ode on a Grecian urn'?

John Keats wrote "Ode to a Grecian Urn" about an imaginary urn and three images he sees on the urn. The scenes are about revelry and sex, a piper and a lover's pursuit of a fair maid, and a sacrificial ritual. All the scenes depict some form of human emotion, particularly love and desire. However, the overall theme of the poem is about the importance of beauty. The figurative language in the poem illustrates Keats' view of the importance of beauty.

Keats uses a lot of imagery from Greek culture to illustrate the importance of beauty. In the first stanza, he speaks of the places in Greece known for their beauty and serenity. He speaks of the "leaf-fringed legend haunts about the shape of deities or mortals or of both, in Tempe or the dales of Arcady" (lines 4-7). According to legend, Tempe and Arcady are places where both human and gods had the opportunity to experience the beauty of these places. Thus, Keats is showing readers that enjoying the beauty that surrounds us is not a divine privilege.

The pictures on the urn represent lasting beauty because it is as if they are frozen in time. He speaks of the unchanging scenery, speaking of the images as "though winning never the goal" (line 18). Readers can almost picture the chiseled images of men running around the urn, never getting a prize. Keats illustrates the desire to live forever, just as the unchangeable images on the urn.

Additionally, Keats uses the example of the connection between beauty and young love. Most people think that such love will never end. He calls it "happy love! For ever warm and still to be enjoyed, for ever panting, and for ever young" (lines 25-7). When a writer repeats a word or phrase, they are illustrating the importance of the context. The use of the words for ever repetitively exemplifies the importance of the theme of lasting beauty. Everyone hopes to be young for all eternity; therefore, beauty should be an eternal hope as well.

Furthermore, Keats emphasizes the fact that the beauty around us is not just for aesthetic purposes. It should go deeper than an outward examination of things such as branches and weeds. He says that "silent form, dost tease us out of thought as doth eternity" (lines 44-5). He says these things make us think, allow the reader's thoughts to produce. Nevertheless, beauty around us should influence the mind. His conclusion to all of this is "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (line 50). That is important to life. Keats' brief career produced some of the most memorable lines in

poetry. He was contemporary of other poets who thought that poetry was not just supposed to be read for enjoyment, but the beauty was a representative of life, had meaning. "Ode to a Grecian Urn" demonstrated his belief in this concept. He will always be remembered for his belief in beauty and truth.

**Q. 3. What does the poet want to say in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'?**

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

When a poet, no matter how famous, makes an absolute statement such as the above, he leaves himself open to criticism. John Keats is no exception. No less a critic than T. S. Eliot considered these lines to be a blight upon an otherwise beautiful lyric poem. Yet they will remain in most famous and most quoted lines. It is noteworthy that the concepts of beauty and truth are associated several times in Keats's letters written just before he wrote this poem, and preserved for posterity. For example, "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth" (Nov. 22, 1817) and "in close relationship of Beauty and Truth" (Dec. 21, 1817).

More recent literary critics, bearing in mind the direct contrast between the wording of this ending couplet and many of Keats' poems (for example, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", written one year later in which a man is deceived by a woman's beauty? Believe that here the poet is displaying both pity yet admiration toward the urn. Ultimately, all it will ever need to know is that beauty is truth and truth is beauty. At the same time he is jealous of this simplicity. He admires the characters painted on the urn, who will remain forever frozen in time.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" was the third of Keats' five great odes written in 1819. The urn is apparently a relic of ancient Greek civilization, painted with two scenes from Greek life, the first depicting musicians and lovers in a setting of rustic beauty. The poet/speaker attempts to identify with the characters because to him they represent the timeless perfection only art can capture. Unlike life, which in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is characterized by "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" brought on by humanity's awareness of its own passing, the urn's characters are frozen time. Whilst the speaker admires this state of existence, in the end it leaves his "heart high-sorrowful" (Line 29). This is because the urn, while beautiful and seemingly eternal, is not life. The lovers will always love, though they will never consummate their desire. The musicians will always play beneath trees that will never lose their leaves. Their music, while beautiful in the abstract, plays "not to the sensual ear" and is in fact "of no tone".

In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" Keats concludes that the ultimate experience of the love of a man for a woman is not worth experiencing, for once one touches and completes that experience nothing remains but desolation and death. However, in "Ode to a Grecian Urn" the poet's conclusion is more complex. On the one hand he extols the beauty of a moment frozen in time, while on the other he identifies its limitations. There is safety in cherishing the ideal, but there is a time to live dangerously.

This poem is filled with dualities (time and timelessness, silence and sound, the static and the eternal) and ultimately remains a riddle that has "teased" (drawn out beyond the limits of thought) the speaker into believing that beauty is truth. In life, however, beauty is not necessarily truth, and the urn's message is one appropriate only in the rarefied, timeless world of art. The ode ultimately deals with the complexity of art's relationship with real life.

Like most great literary works, this poem does not present cut-and-dried facts. At its conclusion it allows the reader to find his/her own answers to questions that arise. Was the urn an escape, however temporary, from the pains and

problems of life? Are the concluding lines a philosophical statement about life or do they make sense only in the context of the poem? Is art (can art ever be) a substitute for real life?

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• **8.8. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

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1. What does the speaker refer the urn to?

**Ans.** An unravished bride of quietness.

2. What does citadel mean in the context of the poem?

**Ans.** The city the Urn depicts.

3. Whom does Keats address as "Sylvan historian"?

**Ans.** To Urn

4. Whom does Keats address as "Attic Shape" and why?

**Ans.** Keats addresses the Urn as attic shape because the composition of the Urn decidedly displays Hellenic qualities.

5. Explain the "Foster child of silence and slow time"?

**Ans.** Keats finds the Urn in a perfect condition of peace and quietness. The clamorous changes in the human world have not left any impact on it. It has remained preserved from the eyes of men in the lab of time, which moves very slow for it, as a child is preserved by its mother.

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• **TEST YOURSELF**

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**True/False statements :**

1. In ode on a Grecian Urn Keats ponders over war.
2. The urn is a sylvan historian.
3. The final stanza contains the beauty truth equation.
4. The speaker is a middle age woman who is historian.
5. The meter of the poem is iambic tetrameter.

**Fill in the blanks :**

1. The urn recites "beauty is truth, truth beauty to .....
2. The overall tone of this poem can be described as .....
3. Thou still ..... bride of quietness
4. In Temple or the dales of .....
5. Heard melodies are sweet but ..... are sweets.

**Multiple Choice Questions**

1. Fair attitude refers to :  
(a) Historian (b) Urn  
(c) Bride (d) None
2. What animal is sacrificed in the fourth stanza ?  
(a) Pig (b) Cow (c) Lamb (d) Tadpole

**ANSWERS**

**True/False Statements :**

1. (F), 2. (T), 3. (T), 4. (F), 5. (T)

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. to the speaker and all other human that it meets.

2. emotional, 3. unraished, 4. Arcady, 5. unheard

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (b), 2. (b)

**Answer the following questions in brief :**

1. Whom does Keats refers as 'Cold Pastoral' and why ?
2. Explain the metaphor "unravish'd bride of quietnen"?

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**• 8.9. ODE ON MELANCHOLY**

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1 No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist  
Wolfs-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;  
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd  
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;  
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,  
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be  
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl  
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;  
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,  
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

2 But when the melancholy fit shall fall  
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,  
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,  
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;  
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,  
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,  
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;  
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,  
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,  
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

3 She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;  
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,  
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips :  
Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
Veil'd Melancholy has her Sovran shrine,  
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue  
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;  
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,  
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

• 8.10. EXPLANATION

In "Ode on Melancholy" Keats accepts the truth he sees : joy and pain are inseparable and to experience joy fully we must experience sadness or melancholy fully. This ode expresses Keats's view wholeheartedly; it differs significantly from "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode to a Grecian Urn," in which the poet-dreamer attempts to escape from reality into the ideal and unchanging world of the nightingale and the urn. Keats valued intensity of emotion, intensity of thought, and intensity of experience; fulfilment comes from living and thinking passionately. Keats does not shrink from the implication that feeling intensely means that grief or depression may well cause anguish and torment.

This poem has a logical structure or progression. Stanza I urges us not to try to escape pain. Stanza II tells us what to do instead—embrace the transient beauty and joy both of nature and of human experience, which contain pain and death. Stanza III makes clear that in order to experience joy we must experience the sorrow that beauty dies, joy evaporates.

Ours is a world of change, of flux; the "pure wine/Of happiness" (Keats's phrase) does not exist. Melancholy has her shrine in the temple of delight precisely because melancholy and delight are inseparable. The more intensely we feel happiness, the more subject we are to melancholy. Unless we immerse ourselves in process (which I have also called flux and change), our sensitivity to life and our ability to experience life fully will be deadened.

Much of the effectiveness of this poem derives from the concrete imagery. Throughout the poem, Keats yokes or joins elements which are ordinarily regarded as incompatible or as opposites. How is this technique appropriate for the theme of this poem ? How, in fact, does this technique illustrate that theme ?

(1) No, no ..... soul.

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet expresses how to cope with sadness. he says that the grieved person should not go to lethe or forget his sadness. He should not commit suicide by consuming poison. He says that all these things will make the anguish of the sould drowsy, and the sufferer should do every thing he can eb remain aware of alert to the depth of his suffering. he feels that the anguish is wakeful, because the sufferer still feels and so still has the capacity to experience joy.

(2) But when ..... peerless eye

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet tells the sufferer what to do in place of the things he forbade in the previous stanza. he says that when afflicted with the melancholy fit, the sufferer should instead overwhelm his sorrow with natural beauty, glutting it on the morning rose, or in the eyes of his beloved. he describes the physical circumstances, literally and the emotional circumstances figuratively. He says that the clouds are weaking, an appropriate action for melancholy. But it is surprising to find that these weeping clouds ffoster the flower. He means to say that negative things do contain positive thing i.e. melancholy is fruitful because it purges the feelings of the grieved.

(3) She dwells ..... hung

**Explanation :** In these lines the poet refers 'she' to both, the belloved and the melancholy. He says that beauty is transitory it dies with the passing of time. Joy and pleasure both ae painful because everything is short lived. But melancholy is soverrighn, it is found in pleasure in delight. It is vieved became it is hidden from us during pleasure, which is generally what we are aware of and one absorbed. The man wo remains happy in sadness can win from melancholy. Here the poet offers

synthesis of melancholy and joy, in a way that takes in the tragic mortalities of life but lets help remain connected to his own experience.

John Keats : Ode On A Grecian  
Urn

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## • 8.11. GLOSSARY

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### Stanza I

Line 1, *Lethe* : river in the underworld Hades in which souls about to be reborn bathed to forget the past; hence, river of forgetfulness.

Line 2, *Wolf's-bane* : poison.

Line 4, *nightshade* : poison.

*Proserpine* : the queen of the underworld. Proserpine was kidnapped by Pluto and taken to Hades, his kingdom. Her mother Demeter, the goddess of fertility and grain, grieved for her loss and the earth became sterile. Proserpine was returned to her mother for six months each year when Demeter's joy is reflected in fertility and crops. Proserpine's story, with its connection to the change of the seasons, is appropriate for this poem.

Line 5, *yew-berries* : symbol of mourning. The yew is traditionally associated with mourning.

Rosary : prayer beads.

Line 6, *beetle* : The Egyptians regarded the beetle as sacred; as a symbol of resurrection, a jewel-beetle or scarab was placed in tombs.

*Death-moth* : the death's head moth, so called because its markings resemble a human skull.

Line 7, *Psyche* : in Greek, the soul or mind as well as butterfly (used as its emblem).

Line 8, *mysteries* : secret rites.

### Stanza III

Line 8, *palate* : the roof of the mouth, hence, the sense of taste; sometimes, intellectual or aesthetic taste.

*fine* : refined, sensitive.

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## • 8.12. CRITICAL COMMENTS

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1. Ode on Melancholy proves that Keats love for beauty and nature is not merely sensuous but also intellectual.
2. In this Ode the speaker urges action rather than passive contemplation.
3. The language of the poem is figurative.
4. In 'Ode On Melancholy' Keats has used Greek Allusions.

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## • 8.13. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1.** Give a critical appreciation of 'Ode on Melancholy'.

**Ans. Summary :** The three stanzas of the "Ode to Melancholy" address the subject of how to cope with sadness. The first stanza tells what not to do : The sufferer should not "go to Lethe", or forget his sadness (Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology), should not commit suicide (nightshade, "the ruby grape of Proserpine", is a poison; Proserpine is the mythological queen of the underworld); and should not become obsessed with objects of death and misery (the beetle, the death-moth, and the owl). For, the speaker says, that will make the anguish of the soul drowsy, and the sufferer should do everything he can to remain aware of and alert to the depths of his suffering.

In the second stanza, the speaker tells the sufferer what to do in place of the things he forbade in the first stanza. When afflicted with "the melancholy fit", the sufferer should instead overwhelm his sorrow with natural beauty, glutting it on the morning rose, "on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave", or in the eyes of his beloved. In the third stanza, the speaker explains these injunctions, saying that pleasure and pain are inextricably linked: Beauty must die, joy is fleeting, and the flower of pleasure is forever "turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips". The speaker says that the shrine of melancholy is inside the "temple of Delight", but that it is only visible if one can overwhelm oneself with joy until it reveals its center of sadness, by "burst[ing] Joy's grape against his palate fine". The man who can do this shall "taste the sadness of melancholy's might and "be among her cloudy trophies hung".

**Form** : "Ode on Melancholy", the shortest of Keats's odes, is written in a very regular form that matches its logical, argumentative thematic structure. Each stanza is ten lines long and metered in a relatively precise iambic pentameter. The first two stanzas, offering advice to the sufferer, follow the same rhyme scheme, ABABCDECDE; the third, which explains the advice, varies the ending slightly, following a scheme of ABABCDEDCE, so that the rhymes of the eighth and ninth lines are reversed in order from the previous two stanzas. As in some other odes (especially "Autumn" and "Grecian Urn"). The two-part rhyme scheme of each stanza (one group of AB rhymes, one of CDE rhymes) creates the sense of a two-part thematic structure as well, in which the first four lines of each stanza define the stanza's subject, and the later six develop it. (This is true especially of the second two stanzas).

**Themes** : Of the "Ode to Psyche" is different from the other odes primarily because of its form, the "Ode on Melancholy" is different primarily because of its style. The only ode not to be written in the first person, "Melancholy" finds the speaker admonishing or advising sufferers of melancholy in the imperative mode; presumably his advice is the result of his own hard-won experience. In many ways, "Melancholy" seeks to synthesize the language of all the previous odes—the Greek mythology of "Indolence" and "Urn"; the beautiful descriptions of nature in "Psyche" and "Nightingale", the passion of "Nightingale", and the philosophy of "Urn", all find expression in its three stanzas—but "Melancholy" is more than simply an amalgam of the previous poems. In it, the speaker at last explores the nature of transience and the connection of pleasure and pain in a way that lets him move beyond the insufficient aesthetic understanding of "Urn" and achieve the deeper understanding of "To Autumn".

For the first time in the odes, the speaker in "Melancholy" urges action rather than passive contemplation. Rejecting both the eagerly embraced drowsiness of "Indolence" and the rapturous "drowsy numbness" of "Nightingale", the speaker declares that he must remain alert and open to "wakeful anguish", and rather than flee from sadness, he will instead glut it on the pleasure of beauty. Instead of numbing himself to the knowledge that his mistress will grow old and die (that "Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes", as he said in "Nightingale"), he uses that knowledge to feel her beauty even more acutely. Because she dwells with "beauty that must die", he will "feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes".

In the third stanza, the speaker offers his most convincing synthesis of melancholy and joy, in a way that takes in the tragic mortality of life but lets him remain connected to his own experience. It is precisely the fact that joy will come to an end that makes the experience of joy such a ravishing one; the fact that beauty dies makes the experience of beauty sharper and more thrilling. The key, he writes, is to see the kernel of sadness that lies at the heart of all pleasure — to "burst joy's grape" and gain admission to the inner temple of melancholy. Though the "Ode on

Melancholy" is not explicitly about art, it is clear that this synthetic understanding of joy and suffering is what has been missing from the speaker's earlier attempts to experience art.

"Ode on Melancholy" originally began with a stanza Keats later crossed out, which described a questing hero in a grotesque mythological ship sailing into the underworld in search of the goddess Melancholy. Though Keats removed this stanza from his poem (the resulting work is subtler and less overwrought), the story's questing hero still provides perhaps the best framework in which to read this poem. The speaker has fully rejected his earlier indolence and set out to engage actively with the ideas and themes that preoccupy him, but his action in this poem is still fantastic, imaginative, and strenuous. He can only find what he seeks in mythical regions and imaginary temples in the sky; he has not yet learn how to find it in his own immediate surroundings. That understanding and the final presentation of the odes' deepest themes will occur in "To Autumn".

**Q. 2. Keats as a sensuous poet ?**

Ans. Keats is primarily a sensuous poet. Sensuousness is a paramount bias of his genius. Infact, sensuousness is a striking characteristic of his entire poetic output. As Mathew Arnold observes, "Poetry according to Milton's famous saying, should be simple, sensuous impassioned. No one can question the eminence in Keats' poetry of the quality of sensuousness. Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous. One might quote examples from his poetry to show that he was completely under the domination of his senses and was nothing else. In a letter he exclaims : "O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts". Whether Keats truly confined himself merely to the worship of beauty as perceived by the senses or come to the realization of the beauty of human action or of the soul is the sensed filled a very significant part in his perception of beauty.

*Sense of sight* : When we say that he is the poet of —

"Light foot, dark violent eyes, and parted hair  
soft dimpled hands, while neck and creamy breast".

We only focus attention on the dominance of sight of beauty as perceived by the eyes. But in the case of Keats, it is not sight alone, not the eyes alone but all the senses, contributed to his perception of the beautiful his poetry has rarely been equaled in description of the beauties perceptible to the senses such as form, colour, perfume or music. It was his mission to interpret the highest type of sensuous beauty.

*Sense of touch* : What Milton precisely meant by his definition that poetry, is a sensuous art, is easily classified by examples from Keats' poetry. Keats could not stay long in the domain of the abstract and as in Spenser's images, all abstractions give place to the concrete, the opening of "The eve of St. Agnes" illustrates the point

"St. Agnes' Eve—An bitter chill it was !

The owl for all his feathers was a cold;

The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass"

The cold touch of the chilly January night could not have been better communicated, there is the language of pure poetry, that is, poetry as a sensuous art as Milton meant it.

*Sense of smell* : Owing to the dense foliage of the beech trees, Keats can not see what flowers are at his feet, but by smell he can guess each sweet plant or bosom with which the month has endowed the grass, the thicket and the wild fruit trees and he can guess what soft incense hangs upon the boughs in the scented darkness. He says :

I can not see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But in embalmed darkness queu use.  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves"  
In this stanza four out of the five senses.

*Sense of taste* : The tongue is one of the most sensitive organs and in the case of Keats, it was still more so as will be evident from the passage. In 'Ode to a Nightingale' where Keats describes the taste of choicest wine :

"O, for a beaker full of the warm south !  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene".

*Sense of hearing* : The ear is as much an inflect of beauty as the eye to the poet. His ear missed nothing from the voice of the grasshoppers in summer to the shrill of crickets' song. That is why the poetry of earth is never dead to him. The nightingale has inspired many poets from Milton to Robert Bridges but Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' is deservedly the most well known. This romantic ode has made the song of the nightingale as immortal as the poet himself the bird is the dryad of the trees which has made the beechen plot melodious and the bird makes the poet forget all the fever and the fret, and the poet passes into a blissful union with spirit, but this Devine spell unfortunately can not last forever and the poet is brought back to his sole self, as the passionate antheme of the bird fades away in the vernal valleys his perfect ear could hear the pattering of the sleet just as much as the humming of the flies on summer eves :

"Meantime the frost wind blows  
Like loves alarum, pattering the sharp sleet'  
Against the window panes"  
Thus, it is seen

That Keats is a poet of perception rather than of contemplation "In his maturer poetry, sensuousness is penetrated by sentiment, voluptuousness is permitted by vitality, and aestheticism is tempered by intellectualism". In Keats' palace of poetry, the nucleus is sensuous, but the superb structure has chambers of more abiding things and more permanent colours. His poetry is not a mere record of sense impressions, but it is a spontaneous overflow of imagination kindled by the sense.

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#### • 8.14. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Keats' representation of melancholy in "Ode on Melancholy".**

Ans. John Keats "Ode on Melancholy" truly proves that Keats' love for beauty and Nature is not merely sensuous but also refined by imaginative and intellectual perception, as he really knows how to look for and appreciate the beautiful. In the poem we find Keats perfectly convinced that true melancholy doesn't lie in the sad and ugly things of life, but in the joyous and beautiful objects of our earthly existence.

The opening stanza is more of suggestion wherein Keats is welcoming melancholy. He is highlighting the equanimity that it brings and believes that it must be enjoyed and experienced alone. One should keep his share of melancholy to himself only and not let anyone else become a partner in his sorrows. One must not resort to ways of getting rid of melancholy by going to Lethe or having poisonous wine. According to Keats one must not even let death omens "drown the wakeful

anguish of the soul" that only and only melancholy can bring. Keats has presented melancholy as a very unique and somewhat sacred sensation and has somewhat exalted it to a great extent.

Further, Keats says that when a melancholic fit befalls a person, like the rain that pours down from the clouds and that fosters and nourishes the drooping flowers, bringing them back to life. Keats is convinced that melancholy comes like a veil shrouding the greenery of April. So when one is in a melancholic mood he must not try to rid himself of it. Instead, he must further feed and nourish this melancholy on the beautiful things around him like the blooming roses, vibrant rainbow or the vivid flowers. Or if one's beloved is angry then one must hold her hand and grasp this chance of getting closer to her and feed this melancholy on the beauty of her "peerless eyes".

Keats then adopts a more realistic stance and declares beauty to be immortal, impermanent and subject to decay. He personifies melancholy into a goddess, who is enshrined in a beautiful temple, and dwells there along with beauty, joy and pleasure. All of them are inseparable and they share an unbreakable bond with melancholy. None of the three—beauty, joy or pleasure can be experienced or anticipated without first experiencing melancholy. In fact, melancholy is to be found at the very heart of delight. Only a very sensuous person, who has first experienced and appreciated melancholy can truly understand and cherish the feelings brought by joy and pleasure. Melancholy lives there in her shrine, and is veiled, and only those can unveil to see her who first can 'burst Joy's grape against his palate fine'. It is only this soul who will have the honour of experiencing the intensity of a feeling as purely sacred as melancholy. Such an effective and optimistic presentation of melancholy has established it as a truly magnificent and pleasurable sensation. Keats has revealed the other side of this apparently gloomy feeling and unveiled its significance as a pre-requisite to experiencing joy and pleasure. Such a magnificent and catch representation would mean that every reader would now crave for a melancholic fit !

**Q. 2. Discuss the development of thought in 'Ode on Melancholy'.**

**Ans.** John Keats is one of the greatest poets of the 19th century. This is quite remarkable since he only lived to be 25. In one famous poem that he wrote, "Ode on Melancholy", Keats raises many questions for the reader. What is melancholy ? Why does Keats decide on an ode ? How does Keats react melancholy ?

Keats urges his reader not to think about suicide when melancholy is about. He warns them not to take poisons such as Wolf's-bane, nightshade, and yew berries. He believes that such things will ameliorate melancholy, and melancholy is not an emotion that should be ameliorated. Instead, when one is melancholic one should "glut thy sorrow" on the beauty of a rose or the rainbow of salt and sea. It is interesting that Keats uses these objects to represent beauty, for they are short-lived. Roses are beautiful for only a short period of time, and then they wilt or fade away. When one thinks about the rainbow of salt and sea, they envision a beach where the tide brings in what appears to be oil stained water, wherein, a rainbow appears, but then is swept away again by the receding tide. The rainbow, like the rose, holds only temporary beauty. Perhaps by using these images, Keats is implying that what makes these things all the more beautiful is that man can not grasp their beauty for long.

Keats uses an "objective correlative" in which he created a situation that made the reader feel what he wanted him to feel rather than simply telling the reader the emotion directly. T. S. Eliot coined the term "objective correlative" in order to express the idea that a writer, in order to express an emotion, must use events or objects that form a "formula for that particular emotion". He does this by drawing

the reader into the poem, since everyone has at some point experienced melancholy. He draws upon the reader's own personal experience with melancholy in order to express his emotion. He does this in quotes such as, "and drown the wakeful anguish of the soul".

An ode is a poem of celebration or praise. In an "Ode to Melancholy", Keats is praising melancholy instead of viewing it as a burden. In this poem, Keats uses contrast as the key to pleasure. Melancholy is not the moment for death, but an opportunity for a new experience. It is the fine balance between pain and pleasure that is ideal. The final stanza emphasizes this idea : Beauty is always ephemeral; joy is always about to leave, but these are man's most intense moments. With the realization that beauty is indeed fleeting comes intense melancholy, which Keats defines as the "wakeful anguish of the soul".

Keats does not suggest that one should avoid melancholy, or one should try to cheer themselves up. He urges them instead to balance their pain with tremendous pleasure and relish the contrast.

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• 8.15. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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1. What is the subject of 'Ode on Melancholy'.

Ans. How to cope with sadness.

2. What should a person do when he is affected with the melancholy fit ?

Ans. He should overwhelm his sorrow with natural beauty.

3. How many lines does each stanza contain ?

Ans. 10 lines.

4. What is "Lethe".

Ans. Lethe is the liver of forgetfulness in Greek mythology.

5. Who is Proserpine ?

Ans. Proserpine is the mythological queen of the underworld.

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• TEST YOURSELF

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True/False Statement :

1. Shelley is the writer of 'Ode on Melancholy'.
2. Stanza I urges readers not to try to escape pain.
3. This poem says that in order to experience joy we must experience the sorrow.
4. Melancholy has her shrine in the temple of delight.
5. The poem is full of imagery.

Fill in the Blanks :

1. Lethe is the river of .....
2. Wolf's bone is .....
3. Nightshade is .....
4. Yew berries are the symbol of .....
5. .... regard Bethe as sacred.

Multiple Choice Questions :

1. Rorary means :  
(a) River (b) Mountain  
(c) Prayer beads (d) Prayer

2. Proserpine is :  
(a) The queen of underworld (b) The queen of Sheeba  
(c) Both a and b (d) None of the above
3. Psyche means :  
(a) Soul (b) Butterfly  
(c) Psychology (d) None of these

### ANSWERS

#### True/False Statements :

1. (F), 2. (T), 3. (T), 4. (T), 5. (T)

#### Fill in the blanks :

1. forgetfulness, 2. poison, 3. person, 4. mourning, 5. Egyptian

#### Multiple Choice Questions :

1. (c), 2. (a), 3. (a)

#### Answer the following in brief :

1. Discuss Keats as a poet.
2. Write a short note on the imagery of "Ode on Melancholy".

## 9

## WILLIAM COLLINS : ODE TO EVENING

## STRUCTURE

- William Collin's Life and Works
- Ode to Evening : Text
- Explanation
- Glossary
- Long Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
  - Test Yourself

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- After going through this unit you will learn :
- Collin realism and fancy
  - Different Melaphors to Evening

## • 9.1. LIFE AND WORKS OF WILLIAM COLLINS

William Collins, English poet, was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December 1721. He deserves with Gray the glory of being the greatest English lyricist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After some childhood studies in Chichester, of which his father, a rich hatter, was the mayor, he was sent, in January 1733, to Winchester College, where Whitehead and Joseph Warton were his schoolfellows. When he had been nine months at the school, Pope paid Winchester a visit and proposed a subject for a prize poem; it is legitimate to suppose that the lofty forehead, the brisk dark eyes and gracious oval of the childish face, as we know it in the only portrait existing of Collins, did not escape the great man's notice, then not a little occupied with the composition of the *Essay on Man*.

In 1734 the young poet published his first verses, in a sixpenny pamphlet *The Royal Nuptials*, of which, however, no copy has come down to us; another poem, probably satiric, called *The Battle of the Schoolbooks*, was written about this time and has also been lost. Fired by his poetic fellows to further feats in verse, Collins produced, in his seventeenth year, those *Persian Eclogues* which were the only writings of his that were valued by the world during his own lifetime. They were reprinted for some years, and meanwhile Collins sent, in January and October 1735, some verses to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which attracted the notice and admiration of Johnson, then still young and uninfluential.

In March 1740 he was admitted a commoner of Queen's College, Oxford, but did not go up to Oxford, until July 1741, when he obtained a demyship at Magdalen College. At Oxford he continued his affectionate intimacy with the Wartons, and gained the friendship of Gilbert White. Early in 1742 the *Persian Eclogues* appeared in London. They were four in number, and formed a modest pamphlet of not more than 300 lines in all. In a later edition, of 1759, the title was changed to *Oriental Eclogues*. Those pieces may be compared with Victor Hugo's *Les Orientales*, in which, of course, they are greatly inferior. Considered with regard to the time

which they were produced, they are more than meritorious, even brilliant, and one at least – the second can be read with enjoyment upto the present day. The rest, perhaps, will be found somewhat artificial in effect.

In November 1743 Collins was made bachelor of arts, and a few day after taking his degree he published his second work, *Verses* humbly addressed to Sir Thomas Hammer. This poem, written personifying qualities of the mind, the riper lyrics of its author. For the rest, it is an enthusiastic review of poetry, culminating in a laudation of Shakespeare.

It is supposed that he left Oxford abruptly in the summer of 1744 to attend his mother on death-bed, and did not return. He is said to have now visited an uncle in Flanders. His indolence, which had been no less marked at the university than his genius, combined with a fatal irresolution to make it extremely difficult to choose for him a path in life. The army and the church were successively suggested and rejected; and he finally arrived in London, bent on enjoying a small property as an independent man about town. He made acquaintance with Johnson and others, and was urged by those friends to undertake various important writings – a *History of the Revival of Learning*, several tragedies, and a version of *Aristotle's Poetics*, among others – all of which he began but lacked force of will to continue. He soon squandered his means, plunged, with most disastrous effects, into profligate excesses, and sowed the seed of his untimely misfortune.

It was at this time, however, that he composed his matchless *Odes* – twelve in number – which appeared on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1746, dated 1747. The original project was to have combined them with the odes of Joseph Warton, but the latter proved at that time to be the more marketable article. Collins's little volume fell dead from the press, but it won him the admiration and friendship of the poet Thomson, with whom, until the death of the latter in 1748, he lived on terms of affectionate intimacy.

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## • 9.2. "ODE TO EVENING"

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If aught of oaten stop, or past'ral song,  
 May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,  
 Like thy own solemn springs,  
 Thy springs and dying gales,  
 O nymph reserved, while now the bright-haired sun  
 Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,  
 With brede ethereal wove,  
 O'erhang his wavy bed;  
 Now air is hushed, save where the weak-ey'd bat  
 With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,  
 Or where the beetle winds  
 His small but sullen horn  
 As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path  
 Against the pilgrim, borne in heedless hum:  
 Now teach me, maid composed,  
 To breathe some softened strain,

bers stealing through thy dark'ning vale  
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,  
As musing slow, I hail  
Thy genial loved return.  
For when thy folding star arising shows  
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp  
The fragrant Hours, and elves  
Who slept in flowers the day,  
And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge  
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and lovelier still,  
The pensive pleasures sweet  
Prepare thy shad'wy car.  
Then lead, calm votress, where some sheety lake  
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallowed pile  
Or upland fallows grey  
Reflect its last cool gleam.  
But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain,  
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut  
That from the mountain's side  
Views wilds, and swelling floods,  
And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,  
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all  
Thy dewy fingers draw  
The gradual dusky veil.  
While Spring shall pour his showers, as oft he wont.  
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve;  
While Summer loves to sport  
Beneath thy ling'ring light;  
While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;  
Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,  
Affrights thy shrinking train  
And rudely rends thy robes;  
So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,  
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,  
Thy gentlest influence own,  
And hymn thy fav'rite name!

### • 9.3. EXPLANATION

(1) If aught ..... dying gales.

**Explanation :** These lines have been taken from the poem "Ode To Evening" composed by William Collins. Here the poet addresses evening as a pensive eve. The poet is not confirmed as to which kind of music may please the Goddess of Evening. He feels that it may make her happy if some music is played on the petty musical instruments made of oaten plant. He wants to play some song on his flute and he hopes that his song may please Goddess. She likes to hear the music of slowly declining motion of the winds.

(2) O Nymph be reserved ..... Bed.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that the Nymph is extremely silent. He personifies sun in a charming way that he rays of the sun piercing through the clouds hanging at the end of the sky. These sun rays are standing and multi-coloured it appears to poet the hair of the sun. The clouds are looking like the skirt of the tent. The air is not blowing very fast. So the waves of the ocean are calm. The waves making a bed sheet on the bed and the large ocean is the bed of the sun.

(3) Now air ..... Horn.

**Explanation :** Here Collins says that there is complete peace in the evening now. The blowing of the air has stopped. A bat is flying here and there with slow sounds of its leather wings. Besides, a beetle too is flying in the evening with its short and melodious sound. Its sweet music is breaking the complete silence of the evening.

(4) As Oft ..... strain.

**Explanation :** Here the poet says that while flying the the beetles crosses the way of the passenger but the passenger is busy in his own thoughts. He does not pay heed towards the hum of beetle. The poet requests the goddess of evening that it is a suitable time for the creation of new songs and music. It is twilight and all around a calmness pervades. So the poet wants to be blessed by the Goddess evening.

(5) Whose numbers ..... selurn.

**Explanation :** The poet feels happy with the evening stillness. He wishes to compose a poem for which he would like to be inspired from the valley drowning in the darkness. He listens to the music of stillness at the place where he is standing. No requests the dairy that the music of his own poem should not differ from the music of the valley. The poet delves deep into the pleasant meditation and welcomes the return of the evening in his own feelings.

(6) When ..... car.

**Explanation :** The poet is in search of suitable time for the composition of sweet poetry and music. He says that the queen of the evening is going to start her journey of night. Hesperous is her attendant and it summons the raires. Hours and Elves to come out of the flowers and decorate her car and atmosphere. Other Nymphs too come out for their job. First of all they wear the wreaths of the water grass upon their heads and they wander to scatter the dew. In this way they make the atmosphere fresh and pleasant. Other Nymphs prepare the car of the queen. This car is like shadow. Thus the melancholic pastures are made sweeter by these dairies.

(7) The lead calm ..... cool gleam.

**Explanation :** The poet admits that evening is the queen of the pleasant sights and scenes. She is the developer of peace. So she knows better about the pleasant phenomena. This is the reason why the poet requests her to lead him to such place where a lake of peaceful waves may be seen. There may exist some useless fields filled with the shrubs and grass, or a building of old value may be seen there. There may be a ploughed best unsown field also. All these things may be found reflecting the brightness of the water in the lake.

(8) If chill ..... Floods.

**Explanation :** The poet requests the Queen of the evening to go to the places where he may watch its pleasant beauty and he may compose a beautiful poetry to appreciate the evening. He wants to wander in the evening at the time when he can face the cold wind blowing with the gusts. He would also like to face the forceful rain so that it may check the speed of walking poet. If he is stopped by the heavy rain, he may stay in a hut which he has found all of a sudden. He will stay in this hut watching the beauty of the wild signs and large rivers flooded with water.

(9) And Hamlets brown ..... veil.

**Explanation :** Here the poet imagines that his walking in natural beauty is discontinued and he stays in a hut from where he looks at the brown Hamlets. He is at the top of the mountain. So he looks in dim light some domes of the churches located in the village. He hears the bells ringing in these simple churches. Now the rain stops and the water lying on the leaves is finished. There was a mist in the atmosphere during the rain but now it is also ending. The poet finds the nature pretty like a bride who is now pulling back her veil of mist slowly and she is displaying her face. Everywhere all around, he finds the nature pretty like a bride.

(10) While string ..... light.

**Explanation :** Here the poet looks at the evening of different seasons in different figures. In the spring season the showers of the rain water may be seen frequently. In the rainy season the bride of the evening opens her fragrant locks to wash it in the rain water. The poet regards and likes this figure of the attractive evening. Further the poet narrates the evening of the summer season. The evenings in summer are longer. It is because the evenings like to play longer under her longer light.

(11) While fallow ..... robes.

**Explanation :** Here the poet expresses the pathetic aspect of evening. She is happy in every season but she becomes sad during winter. The autumn season provides evening the leaves of yellow colour. The winter comes with the rustling chilly winds and misbehaves with the maid of the evening. Winter tears the clothes of this maid ruthlessly.

(12) So long ..... name.

**Explanation :** Here the poet bids good-bye to Goddess evening and says that she is to be loved for a longer time by everyone. Everybody will like her peaceful administration and pay regards to it. Evening is suitable for every kind of person. It is a suitable time for every job. The poet further says that the people will adopt her influence in their character and everybody will remember the favourite name of evening forever.

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#### • 9.4. GLOSSARY

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**Stanza I :** (1) Aught – any song (2) Pastoral song – a song related with the life of shepherds (3) Pensive eye – spirit of evening is thoughtful and sad (3) Soothe – to make happy (4) Solemn – pompous (5) Dying gale – declining motion of the wind.

**Stanza II :** (1) nymph – fairy (2) Yon – there at some distance (3) Ethereal – Fine air of the sky (4) Wavy bed – the sun is setting at the end of the ocean.

**Stanza III :** (1) Hushed – still (2) Flits – the wings of the bat are plain without plumes. So they look as if they were made of leather (3) Horn – Sound.

**Stanza IV :** (1) Rises – to play upward (2) Heedless – without paying attention (3) Maid – Damsel (4) Strain – songs or music.

**Stanza V :** (1) Darkening vale – the valley is also downing in the darkness and it has its own solemn music (2) Amusing – seeking the enjoyment of Meditation (3) Hail – Welcome (4) general – pleasant.

**Stanza VI :** (1) Paly – of yellow colour (2) Warning lamp – As her personal is the attendant of the queen of evening, he warns the fairy courtiers for the arrival of the queen in the court of the sky. (3) Hours and Elves – According to Pagan theory every natural activity is represented by particular dairy (4) Wreath – wear a wreath (5) fedge – grass that grows in the water.

**Stanza VII :** (1) Vortress – devotee (2) Time hallowed pile – old monuments are important and great for the future (3) Fallows – fields without vegetation (4) Gleam – Brightness.

**Stanza VIII :** (1) Blustering winds – Fast wind blowing with gusts. (2) swelling – large floods.

**Stanza IX :** (1) Hamlets Brown – small villages can be seen in brown colour (2) Spires – high towers of any churches or buildings (3) Gradual – of slow motion (4) Dusky – of black colour.

**Stanza X :** (1) Spring – beauty of the evening in summer (2) Poir – to throw out (2) Tresses – open locks of hair (4) Ungerling – continue for a longer time.

**Stanza XI :** (1) Sallow – yellowish colour of dried leaves (2) Yelling – shouting (3) Affrights – make fearful (4) Rends – tears (5) Robs – dress.

**Stanza XII :** (1) Regardful – she is to be regarded for ever (2) Rule – administration (3) Fancy – imagination (4) Favourite – lovely and pleasant.

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#### • 9.5. CRITICAL COMMENTS

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1. The poet summons Goddess Evening Calling her pensive because she is silent and melancholic.

2. The ode starts in a traditional way by addressing 'Evening'.

3. Evening has been personified as Goddess.

4. Collins' use of phrase like 'bright haired sun'. 'Western Tent, Cloudy skirts and 'wavybed' is extremely somantic, and metaphorical.

5. Collins has decorated Evening with the ornaments of his poetic talents.

6. The poet present Pagan theory of objects.

7. This poem is a wonderful combination of classicism and romanticism.

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**• 9.6. LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**


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**Q. 1. Give critical appreciation of the poem 'Ode to Evening'.**

**Ans.** Ode to Evening appeared in "Odes on several descriptive and allegorical subjects (1747). It is one of the first lyrics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The poet asks the chaste evening to soothe her with the pleasant music of his poetry in the fashion as she likes to hear the music of her streams and echoes. The sun has entered into the tent of the woven clouds.

"O Nymph reserved, while now the bright haired sun  
Sits in Yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,  
With brede ethereal wove,  
O, erhang his way Bed"

The ocean waves are preparing bed for him. In the mean-time the wind becomes silent and the bat becomes active in the atmosphere. Beetle and pilgrims are busy in their own work. The poet again asks the Hymph of the Evening to bless him with a talent of composing good poetry and amuse her. Evening has been presented as Queen also who wanders throughout the night. The poet calls the hours and Fives to shed freshness of smell and dew in the atmosphere and in the meantime Queen's chair of is made ready. The poet wanders along with the Queen in the old monuments and wild sights, valleys and hamlet. He is stopped by the heavy rain to stay in a hut from which he watches the beauty of evening in the shape of a Maid and bride.

"Thy dewy fingers draw  
The gradual dusky veil"

He narrates the beauty of the Evening in autumn, spring, summer and winter season. In the last stanza Collins concludes his ode with the appreciation of evening that she is suitable to every kind of person and she will be remembered for ever by everybody.

The ode starts with the problem of the poet that he wants to seaka the poetic excellence to compose a musical poetry able to soothe the ears of evening. Collins creates a music played on the flute in quiet silence of evening on the bank of the valley.

Collins starts the ode with a request to evening to make him able to compose sweet poems. During this appreciation and request the poet has a wide range of imagination. He enjoys the beauty of the speety lake, lone neath, time hollowed pile, fallows, blustering winds, driving rains swelling floods and Hamlet brown. He concludes the poem with an oath that every kind of humble man would like to love and remember the calm evening Ode to evening is a fine descriptive ode. The whole of the poem surrounds the beauty of different landscapes. He finds twilight in the nature and it is present in his rhyming sineme also. Though the phrases used in the poem are not new ones, the romantic pleasures and imagination are new and poet is able to constitute a relation between nature and man.

According to Collins nature is a guide, a goddess a fairy and a beloved. Landscapes, scenery and man's liberation in the lap of nature is the starting of Romantic revival in Collins poetry. Collins is the poet of prosaic simplicity. The use of imagination, melancholy, antimaterialism, simplicity and love for nature led him to be the poet of romantic revival.

**Q. 2. Discuss Collins as a poet.**

*William Collins : Ode to Evening*

*Or*

**The poetry of Collins presents a fusion of realism and fancy. Discuss.**

*Or*

**Discuss the fusion of classicism and Romanism in the poetry of Collins.**

**Ans.** Collins was romantic by nature and classicist by learning and the temper of the age. According to Dr. Johnson "Collins was a man of extensive literary and of vigorous faculties. He was acquainted not only with the learned languages (Greek and Latin), but with the Italian also.

Collins takes his inspiration from the real world i.e. works out primal emotions like those of pity, fear, simplicity, pensiveness, meditation etc. in relation to an external world as the Romantic poets do. His poetry is different from metaphysical poetry in the sense that he comes out of his self and describes things and emotions as they are with poetic sensibility. Collins presents emotion or thought.

"Now air is hushed save where the weak eyed bat  
with short shrieks flits by on leathern wing  
Or where the beetle winds  
Her small but sudden horn"

The poet tries to make us see something which he insists is there in the real world. The weak eyed bat fluttering on leathern wing or the beetle droning sullenly are not a momentary product of the mind or emotion, but an observed reality such as we find in Wordsworth.

Collins like other Augustan poets has the power to create or recreate all kinds of reality. According to Doody 'The very power that animates, the power that bears the poet to consecrated walks', is the power of Fancy, to the power that makes one see more than one really feels. To many Augustans Fancy is the faculty that ranges free, whereas imagination related to memory, often means only the faculty to recall and recreate image". Fancy makes the poet see various realities, the divinely beautiful and mysterious scent, the vision created by the poet's sensibility, the apprehension of the truth etc. Collins pays a tribute to fancy by calling it the child of simplicity and pleasure. He says in his 'Ode to simplicity'

'O thou, by Nature thought  
to breathe her genuine thought  
In numbers warily pure and sweetly strong  
Who first on mountains wild  
In Fancy loveliest child  
Thy Babe and pleasure's nursed the power of song".

It is by the power of fancy that Collins makes it us see the dewy fingers draining the dusky veil on the evening's face or transports us to the classical age and makes us hear the love corn woe, which - transports

"In Evening Musings slow

soothed sweetly sad Electra's poets Ear"

He possesses the Romantic sense of wonder. In the Ode to Evening, he describes the gradual darkening of the sense and reflects on elves and nymphs coming out of the buds to dance on the green. All these scenes pass before our eyes in quick succession. They are scenes created by the poet's fancy but they are both fanciful and real.

Like other Augustan poets, Collins frequently employs personification. According to Davies, Augustan poets could find in their readers "a ready allegorical imagination, such as seems to us today. The loss is certainly ours". Collins personifies Evening and implicitly in his two odes, but in them there are many minor personifications also. In the ode to Evening the poet personifies Evening as a pensive Nymph who is modest and chaste. She is the mistress of the darkness vale. She sits in a carriage prepared by pensive and sweet pleasures Nymphs breathe her brows with sedge. In spring the poet addresses Evening as -

"The dewy fingers draw

The gradual dusky veil

While spring pour his showers as oft he went

And bathe thy breathing beneath meekest eve"

Summer lovers to sport beneath her lingering light and autumn fills her lap with yellow leaves winter rudely tears off her robes. She is a benevolent goddess under whose quiet rule, Collins's mastery of the Ode is evident. In his Ode to Evening and Ode to Simplicity. Collins do not follow the Pindaric pattern Ode to Evening is an achievement in reconciliation of (classical beauty and (English language). It has been called the greatest of the odes between Dryden and Wordsworth.

Collins' classicism lies in his selection of the Pindaric ode as a means of poetical expression, his creation of the pastoral scene in imitation of Virgil and Horace his classical simplicity resulting from his concentration on one mood or one theme and his attempt to follow the allegorical method of classical poets, specially Milton. His skill lies in writing Pindaric odes with irregular numbers of stanzas, irregular numbers of lines in a stanza and disregard of the proper use of apostrophe and antistrophe and the abode, in creating a pastoral scene based on his personal observation of Nature in using considerable liberty in imitating in classical masters like Virgil-Horace, Milton.

#### • 9.6. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :

Q. 1. Write how Collins has given a description of Natural beauty in "Ode to Evening".

Ans. Collins "Ode to Evening" is a fine piece of musical poetry. This is a masterpiece of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Collins opens the poem with a request before the Nymph of evening asking for the poetic music. He calls evening by several names like Nymph, Queen of the night etc.

Evening is the queen of Night because she has her attendants like the stars, elves and fairies come out of the buds to prepare her shadowy car. Collins looks at evening as a bride.

It is very enchanting to note the romantic beauty of nature when the poet finds evening as the beloved of the season. Collins admires the quiet rule of the Nature. Moreover the natural beauty of evening is lovable for every kind of person. Its peaceful and pleasant beauty suits to the poets, scientists lovers and all.

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• **9.7. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS :**

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1. How does Collins call Eve in his poem "Ode to Evening".

**Ans.** Pensive Eve.

2. Who sits in "Yoh Western Tent" ?

**Ans.** The bright haired sun

3. What is the central theme of the poem "Ode to Evening" ?

**Ans.** Every one loves evening and it will be remembered by everybody.

4. Who are busy in preparing the shadowy car of evening ?

**Ans.** The fragment hours, Elves, Nymphs and "The pensive pleasures".

5. What is personified as Goddess by poet ?

**Ans.** Evening.

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• **TEST YOURSELF**

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**True/False Statements :**

- Ode to evening is a lyric.
- The most attractive source of pleasure to Collins is the 'quiet rule' of the nature.
- Collins describes the beauty of evening only in summer.
- The Ode starts with a request to evening by the poet.
- To Collins nature is a Guide, a Goddess, a fairy and a beloved.

**Fill in the Blanks :**

- Collins has addressed evening as ..... eve.
- Ode to Evening is full of ..... description.
- May hope, O pensive ..... to soothe thy
- His small but ..... hour.
- The gentlest influence own, and love thy .....

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

- Ode to Evening has been composed by :
 

(a) Thomas Gray	(b) Ben Jomson
(c) William Collins	(d) Robert Hardy
- Where do Elves sleep during day time according to Collins ?
 

(a) In cave	(b) in trees
(c) in buds	(d) in the graveyard

**True/False Statements :**

1. (F), 2. (T), 3. (F), 4. (T), 5. (T)

**Fill in the Blanks :**

1. Pensive, 2. Natural, 3. eve, 4. Sullen, 5. Favourite name

**Multiple Choice Questions :**

1. (c), 2. (c)

**Answer the following question in brief :**

1. Write short note on Romantic feature of the poem 'Ode to Evening'.