

# **POETRY**

**B.A. (English) – First Year**

**Paper – III**

**Paper Code: BAEG 1913**



**PONDICHERY UNIVERSITY**

(A Central University)

**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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## **B.A. ENGLISH - SYLLABUS**

**Paper code: BAEG 1913**

### **PAPER - III**

### **POETRY**

**Objectives:** To introduce students to the poetic thought down the ages. Selections from the 'The Winged Word (Ed. David Greene, Macmillan)

#### **UNIT-1**

1. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds'
2. John Donne, '*A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*'
3. John Milton, 'How Soon Hath Time'

#### **UNIT-2**

4. John Dryden, 'A Song for St. Cecilia's Day'
5. William Blake, 'Chimney Sweeper'

#### **UNIT-3**

6. William Wordsworth, 'On Westminster Bridge'
7. S.T. Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan'
8. P.B. Shelley, 'Ode to the Sky Lark'
9. John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale'

#### **UNIT-4**

10. Robert Browning, 'My Last Duchess'
11. Lord Tennyson, 'Lotus Eaters'

#### **UNIT-5**

12. W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming'
13. Ted Hughes, 'Thought Fox'
14. W.H. Auden, 'Musee De Beaux Arts'



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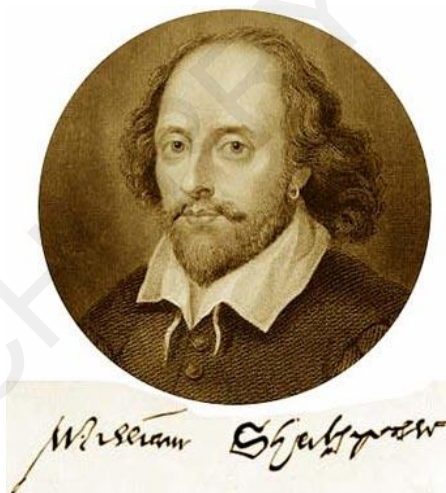
## UNIT - 1

### **LESSON 1: Age of Shakespeare**

#### **Outline:**

- ◆ William Shakespeare: Life and Works
- ◆ Sonnets: Introduction
- ◆ Sonnet 116
- ◆ Learning Objectives:
  - ◆ With this lesson you should be able to
  - ◆ Know about Shakespeare and his importance in the field of literature
  - ◆ Get an understanding of Sonnets
  - ◆ Summarize and analyse Sonnet 116

#### **1.1.1. William Shakespeare: Biography**



William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon. The son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, he was probably educated at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Stratford, where he learned Latin and a little Greek and read the Roman dramatists. At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman seven or eight years his senior. Together they raised two daughters: Susanna, who was born in 1583, and Judith (whose twin brother died in boyhood), born in 1585.

Little is known about Shakespeare's activities between 1585 and 1592. Robert Greene's *A Groats worth of Wit* alludes to him as an actor and playwright. Shakespeare may have taught at school during this period, but it seems more probable

that shortly after 1585 he went to London to begin his apprenticeship as an actor. Due to the plague, the London theatres were often closed between June 1592 and April 1594. During that period, Shakespeare probably had some income from his patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his first two poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). The former was a long narrative poem depicting the rejection of Venus by Adonis, his death, and the consequent disappearance of beauty from the world. Despite conservative objections to the poem's glorification of sensuality, it was immensely popular and was reprinted six times during the nine years following its publication.

In 1594, Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors, the most popular of the companies acting at Court. In 1599 Shakespeare joined a group of Chamberlain's Men that would form a syndicate to build and operate a new playhouse: the Globe, which became the most famous theatre of its time. With his share of the income from the Globe, Shakespeare was able to purchase New Place, his home in Stratford.

While Shakespeare was regarded as the foremost dramatist of his time, evidence indicates that both he and his contemporaries looked to poetry, not playwriting, for enduring fame. Shakespeare's sonnets were composed between 1593 and 1601, though not published until 1609. That edition, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare*, consists of 154 sonnets, all written in the form of three quatrains and a couplet that is now recognized as Shakespearean. The sonnets fall into two groups: sonnets 1-126, addressed to a beloved friend, a handsome and noble young man, and sonnets 127-152, to a malignant but fascinating "Dark Lady," who the poet loves in spite of himself. Nearly all of Shakespeare's sonnets examine the inevitable decay of time, and the immortalization of beauty and love in poetry.

In his poems and plays, Shakespeare invented thousands of words, often combining or contorting Latin, French, and native roots. His impressive expansion of the English language, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, includes such words as: arch-villain, birthplace, bloodsucking, courtship, dewdrop, downstairs, fanged, heartsore, hunchbacked, leapfrog, misquote, pageantry, radiance, schoolboy, stillborn, watchdog, and zany.

Shakespeare wrote more than thirty plays. These are usually divided into four categories: histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. His earliest plays were primarily comedies and histories such as *Henry VI* and *The Comedy of Errors*, but in



1596, Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, his second tragedy, and over the next dozen years he would return to the form, writing the plays for which he is now best known: *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In his final years, Shakespeare turned to the romantic with *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

Only eighteen of Shakespeare's plays were published separately in quarto editions during his lifetime; a complete collection of his works did not appear until the publication of the First Folio in 1623, several years after his death. Nonetheless, his contemporaries recognized Shakespeare's achievements. Francis Meres cited "honey-tongued" Shakespeare for his plays and poems in 1598, and the Chamberlain's Men rose to become the leading dramatic company in London, installed as members of the royal household in 1603.

Sometime after 1612, Shakespeare retired from the stage and returned to his home in Stratford. He drew up his will in January of 1616, which included his famous bequest to his wife of his "second best bed." He died on April 23, 1616, and was buried two days later at Stratford Church.

### **1.1.2. Shakespeare's works:**

Above all other dramatists stands William Shakespeare, a supreme genius whom it is impossible to characterize briefly. Shakespeare is unequalled as poet and intellect, but he remains elusive. His capacity for assimilation—what the poet John Keats called his "negative capability"—means that his work is comprehensively accommodating; every attitude or ideology finds its resemblance there yet also finds itself subject to criticism and interrogation. In part, Shakespeare achieved this by the total inclusiveness of his aesthetic, by putting clowns in his tragedies and kings in his comedies, juxtaposing public and private, and mingling the artful with the spontaneous; his plays imitate the counter change of values occurring at large in his society. The sureness and profound popularity of his taste enabled him to lead the English Renaissance without privileging or prejudicing any one of its divergent aspects, while he—as actor, dramatist, and shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's players—was involved in the Elizabethan theatre at every level. His career (dated from 1589 to 1613) corresponded exactly to the period of greatest literary flourishing, and only in his work are the total possibilities of the Renaissance fully realized.

Shakespeare's early plays were principally histories and comedies. About a fifth of all Elizabethan plays were histories, but this was the genre that Shakespeare particularly made his own, dramatizing the whole sweep of English history from Richard II to Henry VII in two four-play sequences, an astonishing project carried off with triumphant success. The first sequence, comprising the three Henry VI plays and Richard III (1589–94), begins as a patriotic celebration of English valour against the French. But this is soon superseded by a mature, disillusioned understanding of the world of politics, culminating in the devastating portrayal of Richard III—probably the first “character,” in the modern sense, on the English stage—who boasts in Henry VI, Part 3 that he can “set the murtherous Machevil to school.” Richard III ostensibly monumentalizes the glorious accession of the dynasty of Tudor, but its realistic depiction of the workings of state power insidiously undercuts such platitudes, and the appeal of Richard's quick-witted individuality is deeply unsettling, short-circuiting any easy moral judgments. The second sequence—Richard II (1595–96), Henry IV, Part 1 and Part 2 (1596–98), and Henry V (1599)—begins with the deposing of a bad but legitimate king and follows its consequences through two generations, probing relentlessly at the difficult questions of authority, obedience, and order that it raises. (The earl of Essex's faction paid for a performance of Richard II on the eve of their ill-fated rebellion against Elizabeth in 1601.) In the Henry IV plays, which are dominated by the massive character of Falstaff and his roguish exploits in East cheap, Shakespeare intercuts scenes among the rulers with scenes among those who are ruled, thus creating a multifaceted composite picture of national life at a particular historical moment. The tone of these plays, though, is increasingly pessimistic, and in Henry V a patriotic fantasy of English greatness is hedged around with hesitations and qualifications about the validity of the myth of glorious nationhood offered by the Agincourt story. Through all these plays runs a concern for the individual and his subjection to historical and political necessity, a concern that is essentially tragic and anticipates greater plays yet to come. Shakespeare's other history plays, King John (1594–96) and Henry VIII (1613), approach similar questions through material drawn from Foxe's Acts and Monuments.

### **1.1.3. Sonnet:**

A sonnet is a type of fourteen-line poem. Traditionally, the fourteen lines of a sonnet consist of an octave (or two quatrains making up a stanza of 8 lines)

and a sestet (a stanza of six lines). Sonnets generally use a meter of iambic pentameter, and follow a set rhyme scheme. Within these general guidelines for what makes a sonnet, there are a wide variety of variations. The two most common sonnet variations are the Italian sonnet (also called a Petrarchan sonnet), and the English sonnet (also called a Shakespearean sonnet). The main difference between the Italian and English sonnet is in the rhyme schemes they use.

Some additional key details about sonnets:

For hundreds of years, the sonnet form was reserved for poems about unrequited love, but since the 17th century sonnets have been written about a wide variety of subjects. Sonnets have become so popular, and are written in so many places, that over time many, many variations of the sonnet form have evolved.

Sonnets are sometimes written in groups, where each individual sonnet can stand alone but are also linked with the others in the group.

How to Pronounce Sonnet:

Here's how to pronounce sonnet: sahn-it

#### **1.1.4. Meter and Rhyme Scheme**

Many (but not all) sonnets have a strict meter and a defined rhyme scheme. For that reason, it's helpful to have a strong grasp of what meter and rhyme scheme are. We provide more details about these terms on their own pages, but here's a quick primer:

**Meter:** A pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates the rhythm of lines of poetry. The units of meter are called feet. Feet have different stress patterns. For instance, an iamb is a foot with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (de-fine), while a trochee has the opposite: a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable (Po-et). Poetic meters are defined by both the type and number of feet they contain. For example, iambic pentameter is a type of meter used in many sonnets that contains five iambs per line (thus the prefix “penta,” which means five).

**Rhyme scheme:** Poems such as sonnets that make use of end rhymes (rhymes at the end of each line), often do so according to a repeating, predetermined pattern. That pattern is called a rhyme scheme. Rhyme schemes are described using letters of the alphabet, so that each line of verse that corresponds to a specific type of rhyme

used in the poem is assigned a letter, beginning with the letter A. For example, a four-line poem in which the first line rhymes with the third, and the second line rhymes with the fourth has the rhyme scheme ABAB.

**Types of Sonnets:** Sonnets have been written all over the world and in many different languages: French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Russian, Urdu, and German poets have all made significant contributions to the evolution of the form. Since the sonnet's invention in Italy in the 13th century, new variations on the traditional form have been regularly born. Below is a summary of the different types of sonnets, with brief explanations of their particular forms and how each of them arose.

#### **1.1.5. Introduction to Shakespeare's Sonnets**

A sonnet is a 14-line poem that rhymes in a particular pattern. In Shakespeare's sonnets, the rhyme pattern is abab cdcd efef gg, with the final couplet used to summarize the previous 12 lines or present a surprise ending. The rhythmic pattern of the sonnets is the iambic pentameter. An iamb is a metrical foot consisting of one stressed syllable and one unstressed syllable — as in dah-DUM, dah-DUM dah-DUM dah-DUM dah-DUM. Shakespeare uses five of these in each line, which makes it a pentameter. The sonnet is a difficult art form for the poet because of its restrictions on length and meter.

Although the entirety of Shakespeare's sonnets were not formally published until 1609 (and even then, they were published without the author's knowledge), an allusion to their existence appeared eleven years earlier, in Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598), in which Meres commented that Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets" were circulating privately among the poet's friends. Approximately a year later, William Jaggard's miscellany, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, appeared, containing twenty poems, five of which are known to be Shakespeare's — two of the Dark Lady sonnets (Sonnets 138 and 144) and three poems included in the play *Love's Labour's Lost*. Apparently these five poems were printed in Jaggard's miscellany (a collection of writings on various subjects) without Shakespeare's authorization.

Without question, Shakespeare was the most popular playwright of his day, and his dramatic influence is still evident today, but the sonnet form, which was so

very popular in Shakespeare's era, quickly lost its appeal. Even before Shakespeare's death in 1616 the sonnet was no longer fashionable, and for two hundred years after his death, there was little interest in either Shakespeare's sonnets, or in the sonnet form itself.

The text of Shakespeare's sonnets generally considered to be definitive is that of the 1609 edition, which was published by Thomas Thorpe, a publisher having less than a professional reputation. Thorpe's edition, titled *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before imprinted*, is referred to today as the "Quarto," and is the basis for all modern texts of the sonnets.

The Quarto would have lapsed into obscurity for the remainder of the seventeenth century had it not been for the publication of a second edition of Shakespeare's sonnets, brought out by John Benson in 1640. A pirated edition of the sonnets, Benson's version was not a carefully edited, duplicate copy of the Quarto. Because Benson took several liberties with Shakespeare's text, his volume has been of interest chiefly as the beginning of a long campaign to sanitize Shakespeare. Among other things, Benson rearranged the sonnets into so-called "poems" — groups varying from one to five sonnets in length and to which he added descriptive and unusually inept titles. Still worse, he changed Shakespeare's pronouns: "He's" became "she's" in some sonnets addressed to the young man so as to make the poet speak lovingly to a woman — not to a man.

Benson also interspersed Shakespeare's sonnets with poems written by other people, as well as with other non-sonnet poems written by Shakespeare. This led too much of the subsequent confusion about Shakespeare's order of preference for his sonnets, which appear to tell the story, first, of his adulation of a young man and, later, of his adoration of his "dark lady."

The belief that the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a man and that the rest are addressed to a woman has become the prevailing contemporary view. In addition, a majority of modern critics remain sufficiently satisfied with Thorpe's 1609 ordering of those sonnets addressed to the young man, but most of them have serious reservations about the second group addressed to the woman.

Another controversy surrounding the sonnets is the dedication at the beginning of Thorpe's 1609 edition. Addressed to "Mr. W. H.," the dedication has led to a series of conjectures as to the identity of this person. The two leading candidates are Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke.

Because Shakespeare dedicated his long poem "Venus and Adonis" to Southampton, and because the young earl loved poetry and drama and may well have sought out Shakespeare and offered himself as the poet's patron, many critics consider Southampton to be "Mr. W. H."

The other contender for the object of the dedication is William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. Shakespeare dedicated the First Folio of his works, published in 1623, to Pembroke and Pembroke's brother Philip. Pembroke was wealthy, notorious for his sexual exploits but averse to marriage, and a patron of literary men. Critics who believe that Mary Fitton, one of Queen Elizabeth's maids of honour, was the Dark Lady of Sonnets 12–54, are particularly convinced that Pembroke is "Mr. W. H.," for Pembroke had an affair with Fitton, who bore him a child out of wedlock; this extramarital affair is considered to parallel too closely the sexual relationship in the sonnets to be mere coincidence.

In addition to their date of composition, their correct ordering, and the object of the dedication, the other controversial issue surrounding the sonnets is the question of whether or not they are autobiographical. While contemporary criticism remains interested in the question of whether or not the sonnets are autobiographical, the sonnets, taken either wholly or individually, are first and foremost a work of literature, to be read and discussed both for their poetic quality and their narrative tale. Their appeal rests not so much in the fact that they may shed some light on Shakespeare's life, nor even that they were written by him; rather, their greatness lies in the richness and the range of subjects found in them.

#### **1.1.6. Overview of Shakespeare's Sonnets**

Although Shakespeare's sonnets can be divided into different sections numerous ways, the most apparent division involves Sonnets 1–126, in which the poet strikes up a relationship with a young man, and Sonnets 127–154, which are

concerned with the poet's relationship with a woman, variously referred to as the Dark Lady, or as his mistress.

In the first large division, Sonnets 1–126, the poet addresses an alluring young man with whom he has struck up a relationship. In Sonnets 1–17, he tries to convince the handsome young man to marry and beget children so that the youth's incredible beauty will not die when the youth dies. Starting in Sonnet 18, when the youth appears to reject this argument for procreation, the poet glories in the young man's beauty and takes consolation in the fact that his sonnets will preserve the youth's beauty, much like the youth's children would.

By Sonnet 26, perhaps becoming more attached to the young man than he originally intended, the poet feels isolated and alone when the youth is absent. He cannot sleep. Emotionally exhausted, he becomes frustrated by what he sees as the youth's inadequate response to his affection. The estrangement between the poet and the young man continues at least through Sonnet 58 and is marked by the poet's fluctuating emotions for the youth: One moment he is completely dependent on the youth's affections, the next moment he angrily lashes out because his love for the young man is unrequited.

Despondent over the youth's treatment of him, desperately the poet views with pain and sorrow the ultimate corrosion of time, especially in relation to the young man's beauty. He seeks answers to the question of how time can be defeated and youth and beauty preserved. Philosophizing about time preoccupies the poet, who tells the young man that time and immortality cannot be conquered; however, the youth ignores the poet and seeks other friendships, including one with the poet's mistress (Sonnets 40–42) and another with a rival poet (Sonnets 79–87). Expectedly, the relationship between the youth and this new poet greatly upsets the sonnets' poet, who lashes out at the young man and then retreats into despondency, in part because he feels his poetry is lacklustre and cannot compete with the new forms of poetry being written about the youth. Again, the poet fluctuates between confidence in his poetic abilities and resignation about losing the youth's friendship.

Philosophically examining what love for another person entails, the poet urges his friend not to postpone his desertion of the poet — if that is what the youth is ultimately planning. Break off the relationship now, begs the poet, who is prepared

to accept whatever fate holds. Ironically, the more the youth rejects the poet, the greater is the poet's affection for and devotion to him. No matter how vicious the young man is to the poet, the poet does not — emotionally cannot — sever the relationship. He masochistically accepts the youth's physical and emotional absence.

Finally, after enduring what he feels is much emotional abuse by the youth, the poet stops begging for his friend's affection. But then, almost unbelievably, the poet begins to think that his newfound silence toward the youth is the reason for the youth's treating him as poorly as he does. The poet blames himself for any wrong the young man has done him and apologizes for his own treatment of his friend. This first major division of sonnets ends with the poet pitifully lamenting his own role in the dissolution of his relationship with the youth.

The second, shorter grouping of Sonnets 127–154 involves the poet's sexual relationship with the Dark Lady, a married woman with whom he becomes infatuated. Similar to his friendship with the young man, this relationship fluctuates between feelings of love, hate, jealousy, and contempt. Also similar is the poet's unhealthy dependency on the woman's affections. When, after the poet and the woman begin their affair, she accepts additional lovers, at first the poet is outraged. However, as he did with the youth, the poet ultimately blames himself for the Dark Lady's abandoning him. The sonnets end with the poet admitting that he is a slave to his passion for the woman and can do nothing to curb his lust. Shakespeare turns the traditional idea of a romantic sonnet on its head in this series, however, as his Dark Lady is not an alluring beauty and does not exhibit the perfection that lovers typically ascribe to their beloved.

#### **1.1.7. SONNET 116:**

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.*



*Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me prov'd,  
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.*

Sonnet 116 is an attempt by Shakespeare to persuade the reader (and the object of his love) of the indestructible qualities of true love, which never changes, and is immeasurable.

But what sort of love are we talking about? Romantic love most probably, although this sonnet could be applied to Eros, Philos or Agape - erotic love, platonic love or universal love.

#### **Lines 1 - 4**

Shakespeare uses the imperative *Let me not* to begin his persuasive tactics and he continues by using negation with that little word *not* appearing four times throughout. It's as if he's uncertain about this concept of love and needs to state what it is NOT to make valid his point.

So love does not alter or change if circumstances around it change. If physical, mental or spiritual change does come, love remains the same, steadfast and true.

#### **Lines 5 - 8**

If life is a journey, if we're all at sea, if our boat gets rocked in a violent storm we can't control, love is there to direct us, like a lighthouse with a fixed beam, guiding us safely home. Or metaphorically speaking love is a fixed star that can direct us should we go astray.

#### **Lines 9 - 12**

And, unlike beauty, love is not bound to time, it isn't a victim or subject to the effects of time. Love transcends the hours, the weeks, any measurement, and will defy it right to the end, until Judgement Day.

Lines nine and ten are special for the arrangement of hard and soft consonants, alliteration and enjambment:

*Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;*

Love is not harvested by time's sharp edge, it endures. Love conquers all, as Virgil said in his Eclogue.

### **Lines 13 - 14**

And if the reader has no faith in the writer's argument, then what use the words, and what good is the human experience of being in love?

#### **1.1.8. Paraphrase:**

The poet says that he does not want to admit any obstacle in the marriage of true hearts. There is a great difference between true and false love. True love is not the kind of love which changes as soon as it finds some changes on the part of the beloved True love will not yield itself to any opposing force and allow it to destroy it. True love is an ever—fixed mark or the lighthouse which is not shaken even by tempests and Cyclones. Just as the lighthouse, true love is also constant even in times of trials and tribulations, True love is like the pole—star in guiding tile life of people Just as the pole-star guiding the wandering ships to the shore,—true love also guides the human life towards happiness The worth of the pole-star is unknown' to the ordinary people Like that the value of true five is also not know to them, -

True love is not Time's tool Time may make fool of the young and old people by cutting their life with its bending sickle. But it cannot make fool of true love Time cannot change the true love with its brief hours and weeks True love is constant till the doomsday

Finally the poet says that if what he told is not true mid proved that they are not true, then he will never write any poem and it means no man has ever loved in this world.

### 1.1.9. Summary, Analysis, Themes:

Despite the confessional tone in this sonnet, there is no direct reference to the youth. The general context, however, makes it clear that the poet's temporary alienation refers to the youth's inconstancy and betrayal, not the poet's, although coming as it does on the heels of the previous sonnet, the poet may be trying to convince himself again that "Now" he loves the youth "best." Sonnet 116, then, seems a meditative attempt to define love, independent of reciprocity, fidelity, and eternal beauty: "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / within his bending sickle's compass come." After all his uncertainties and apologies, Sonnet 116 leaves little doubt that the poet is in love with love.

The essence of love and friendship for the poet, apparently, is reciprocity, or mutuality. In Sonnet 116, for example, the ideal relationship is referred to as "the marriage of true minds," a union that can be realized by the dedicated and faithful: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments." The marriage service in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer — "If any of you know cause or just impediment" — provides the model for the sonnet's opening lines. In them, we see the poet's attitude toward love, which he proceeds to define first negatively. He explains what love is not, and then he positively defines what it is. The "ever-fixed mark" is the traditional sea mark and guide for mariners — the North Star — whose value is inestimable although its altitude — its "height" — has been determined. Unlike physical beauty, the star is not subject to the ravages of time; nor is true love, which is not "Time's fool."

The poet then introduces the concepts of space and time, applying them to his ideal of true love: "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, / But bears it out even to the edge of doom." Note that the verb "alters" is lifted directly from line 3, in which the poet describes what love is not. "Bears it out" means survive; "edge of doom," Judgment Day. Finally, with absolute conviction, the poet challenges others to find him wrong in his definition: "If this be error and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved." Just how secure the poet is in his standards of friendship and love, which he hopes that he and the youth can achieve, is evident in this concluding couplet; he stakes his own poetry as his wager that love is all he has described it to be.

### 1.1.10. “Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds” Themes

Over the course of Sonnet 116, the speaker makes a number of passionate claims about what love is—and what it isn’t. For the speaker (traditionally assumed to be Shakespeare himself, and thus a man), true love doesn't change over time: instead, it goes on with the same intensity forever. The speaker establishes this argument from the poem’s opening lines, boldly declaring that love isn't really love at all if it bends or sways in response to roadblocks. Instead, he argues that love weathers all storms. It's like a star that sailors use to navigate, providing an unmoving reference point they can use to plot their course across the globe. Love, then, is something that perseveres through "impediments," obstacles, and difficulties without losing any of its passion or commitment.

As the poem progresses, the speaker considers more kinds of change and extends his initial argument. In lines 9-10, he adds that true love doesn't falter even as beauty fades—represented in the poem by the image of youthful, rosy cheeks losing their vitality. Because love isn't primarily concerned with the body, it's not affected by aging. In lines 11-12, the speaker generalizes his argument even further by claiming that love doesn't change under any circumstances. It goes on, he claims, “to the edge of doom.” In other words, only when a lover dies does love finally change or end.

The speaker is so confident in his argument that he’s willing to issue a bet: if he’s wrong, then love itself is impossible, and “no man [has] ever loved.” In making this bet, he puts up his own behaviour as evidence. Here, the speaker acknowledges that he isn't simply an observer of love, but himself a lover. His own relationships might be measured against the standard he's advanced here—and he offers confident assurance that his love does live up to this standard. This means that, beneath the sonnet's generalizations about what love is and isn’t, the poem is itself a declaration of love.

At this point it's important to note that this sonnet is part of a sequence of love poems, traditionally believed to be addressed to a young man. Their relationship, as depicted in the Sonnets as a whole, is tumultuous, full of infidelity and gusts of passion. There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to whether this context should affect the interpretation of Sonnet 116. If it doesn’t, the poem is a

powerful statement about love, addressed to all readers in all times. But if it does, the poem comes across instead as an attempt to repair a damaged relationship, a personal plea directed to a particular person; the speaker is trying to prove to the young man that he does love him in spite of everything, and that his love won't change.

For a generous reader, this will be a romantic statement of affection. For a more sceptical reader, it raises some questions. The speaker hasn't just described love as something unchanging; the poem paints a picture of love as a sort of eternal ideal far from the messy reality of real people's lives. It's a star—unattainable and inhuman. In a way, this image of love ceases to be something that humans can actually build and instead becomes something they can only admire from a distance.

The speaker has engaged in hyperbole to defend his position, invoking all lovers in all times in line 14. This, along with the poem's idealism, might make the speaker feel a bit unreliable; some readers may wonder how realistic the speaker's account of love really is, and find it grandiose instead of intimate. The poem's claims about love can't necessarily be taken on face value, then: they should be evaluated for their sincerity and plausibility—and in these respects, they may be found wanting.

#### **1.1.11. Detailed Analysis of the Poem:**

While this sonnet is clumped in with the other sonnets that are assumed to be dedicated to an unknown young man in Shakespeare's life, this poem does not seem to directly address anyone. In fact, *Sonnet 116* seems to be the speaker's—in this case, perhaps Shakespeare—ruminations on love and what it is. The best way to analyse Shakespeare's sonnets is to examine them line-by-line, which is what will follow.

In the first two lines, Shakespeare writes,

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments.*

These lines are perhaps the most famous in the history of poetry, regardless of whether or not one recognizes them as belonging to Shakespeare. Straight away, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of marriage to compare it to true, real love. He is saying that there is no reason why two people who truly love should not be together; nothing should stand in their way. Perhaps he is speaking about his feelings for the

unknown young man for whom the sonnet is written. Shakespeare was unhappily married to Anne Hathaway, and so perhaps he was rationalizing his feelings for the young man by stating there was no reason, even if one is already married, that two people who are truly in love should not be together. The second half of the second line begins a new thought, which is then carried on into the third and fourth lines. He writes,

*Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.*

Shakespeare is continuing with his thought that true love conquers all. In these lines, the speaker is telling the reader that if love changes, it is not truly loved because if it changes, or if someone tries to “remove” it, nothing will change it. Love does not stop just because something is altered. As clichéd as it sounds, true love, real love, lasts forever.

The second quatrain of Sonnet 116 begins with some vivid and beautiful imagery, and it continues with the final thought pondered in the first quatrain. Now that Shakespeare has established what love is not—fleeting and ever-changing—he can now tell us what love is. He writes,

*O no, it is an ever fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken...*

Here, Shakespeare tells his readers that love is something that does not shift, change, or move; it is constant and in the same place, and it can weather even the most harrowing of storms or tempests and is never even shaken, let alone defeated. While weak, it can be argued here that Shakespeare decides to personify love since it is something that is intangible and not something that can be defeated by something tangible, such as a storm. In the next line, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of the North Star to discuss love. He writes,

*It is the star to every wand'ring bark,*

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

To Shakespeare, love is the star that guides every bark, or ship, on the water, and while it is priceless, it can be measured. These two lines are interesting and worth noting. Shakespeare concedes that love's worth is not known, but he says it can be measured. How he neglects to tell his reader, but perhaps he is assuming the reader will understand the different ways in which one can measure love: through time and actions. With that thought, the second quatrain ends.

The third quatrain parallels the first, and Shakespeare returns to telling his readers what love is not. He writes,

*Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come...*

Notice the capitalization of the word "Time." Shakespeare is personifying time as a person, specifically, Death. He says that love is not the fool of time. One's rosy lips and cheeks will certainly pale with age, as "his bending sickle's compass come." Shakespeare's diction is important here, particularly with his use of the word "sickle." Who is the person with whom the sickle is most greatly associated? Death. We are assured here that Death will certainly come, but that will not stop love. It may kill the lover, but the love itself is eternal. This thought is continued in lines eleven and twelve, the final two lines of the third quatrain. Shakespeare writes,

*Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.*

He is simply stating here that love does not change over the course of time; instead, it continues on even after the world has ended ("the edge of doom").

Shakespeare uses lines thirteen and fourteen, the final couplet of *Sonnet 116*, to assert just how truly he believes that love is everlasting and conquers all. He writes,

*If this be error and upon me proved  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

In this part of *Sonnet 116*, Shakespeare is telling his reader that if someone proves he is wrong about love, then he never wrote the following words, and no man ever loved. He is conveying here that if his words are untrue, nothing else would exist. The words he just wrote would have never been written, and no man would have ever

loved before. He is adamant about this, and his tough words are what strengthen the sonnet itself. The speaker and poet himself are convinced that love is real, true, and everlasting.

#### 1.1.12. Comprehension Questions:

1. *Love is not love*

*Which alters when it alteration finds,*

*Or bends with the remover to remove.*

a) Give the meaning of the first two lines

According to the poet, it is not true love which changes as soon as it finds some changes on the part of the beloved. True love is constant.

b) Explain the words 'the remover' and 'remove'.

The word remover refers to the enemy who tries to spoil the love. The word 'remove' refers, to the destruction of love.

2. *O, no! It is an ever—fixed mark,*

*That looks on tempests, and is never shaken.*

a) What does the phrase, 'an ever—fixed mark' refer to? It refers to the lighthouse.

b) Explain the above lines.

True love is compared to a lighthouse that is not shaken by tempests and cyclones. Just as the lighthouse, the true Jove is also constant even in times of difficulties.

3. *It is the star to every wandering bark,*

*Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken*

a) What does the word 'it' refer to?

'It' refers to the true love.

b) Bring out the comparison in these lines.

Here, true love is compared to the pole—star. Just as the pole—star guides the wandering ships to the shore, true love also guides the human life towards happiness. The worth of the pole—star is unknown to the ordinary people, just like the value of true love is also not known to them.



4. *Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle's compass come.*

a) Give the meaning of the phrases 'rosy lips and cheeks' and 'bending sickle's compass'.

'Rosy lips and cheeks' refers to young people and 'bending sickles compass' refers to the reaping or cutting quality of Time.

b) Give the meaning of these lines

True love is not Time's fool. Time may make fool of the young and old people by cutting their life with its bending sickle. But it can, not make fool of the true love.

5. *Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bear it out even to the edge of doom.*

a) What do the words 'his' and 'it' refer to?

'His' refers to Time and 'it' refers to the true love.

b) Explain these lines.

Time can neither change nor destroy the true love with its brief hours and, weeks. True love is constant till the end of the world.

6. ESSAY: Give in your own words the ideal of love expressed by Shakespeare in his Sonnet 116.

The Sonnet 116 is one of the loveliest sonnets of Shakespeare which express the constancy of true love.

According to the poet one should not create difficulties in the smooth course of true love between two lovers. There is a great difference between the true love and the false love.

The true love is not the kind of love that changes as soon as it gets the slightest chance for the change. The true love does not yield itself to the difficulties and hindrances caused by the enemies or opposing forces. It will not allow any opposing force to destroy itself.

Shakespeare says that the true love is an ever-fixed mark or the lighthouse, which is not shaken by tempests and cyclones. It is as constant as the lighthouse, even in times of trials and tribulations. The poet then compares the true love to the pole-star. True love is like the pole-star in guiding the life of the people. Just as the pole-star guiding the wandering ships to the shore, the true love also guides human life.

towards happiness. The common people do not- know the worth of the pole—star. Like that the value of the true love is not known to them.

The poet says that true love is not time's fool Time may make fool of the young and old people by cutting their life with as bending sickle But it cannot snake fool of the true love The true love does not change from hour-to-hour or year-to-year It remains true, sincere and constant till the doomsday.

Finally Shakespeare challenges the world by saying that if what he told is not true and proved that they are not true then he will never write any poem and it means that no man had ever truly loved in this world

## LESSON 2: Metaphysical Poetry

### OUTLINE:

- ◆ **Introduction to Metaphysical Poetry**
- ◆ **John Donne and his Works**
- ◆ **A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning**

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Understand metaphysical poetry and its characteristics
- ◆ Get an idea of John Donne's poetic techniques
- ◆ Interpret the conceits hidden in the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"

#### 1.2.1. Introduction: Metaphysical Poets

John Donne is classified as a metaphysical poet. The name metaphysical poets refers to an informal group of poets who were influenced by Donne in the seventeenth century. They were referred to be a "loose group" because they had many commonalities while also having numerous distinctions. These poets did not belong to a certain school of poetry, but they shared wit, ingenuity, and a penchant for intricate stylistic tricks. During the neoclassical period, the phrase was used in a derogatory manner. The term "metaphysics" was originally used in the context of Donne's poetry by John Dryden. Before Dryden, William Drummond of Hawthornden, who lived during Donne's lifetime, had mocked poems that used "metaphysical" language. Samuel Johnson coined the term "metaphysical" to describe a group of poets that included Cowley. And in his book *Life of Cowley*, he examined metaphysical imagery.

Metaphysical poets are categorized into four groups. John Donne influenced the group that included Abraham Cowley and Andrew Marvell. The Metaphysical Cavaliers consisted of Robert Herrick and Thomas Carew. The Religious Metaphysicals consisted of George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne. The last of the Metaphysicals was John Cleveland.

### 1.2.2. John Donne: Life and Works

A contemporary of William Shakespeare, John Donne (c.1572-1631) lived during the time of queen Elizabeth and into the Jacobean period. Donne defied the standards of 16th century poetry in a number of ways. There were no imagery of nature in his works, and no references to Greek mythology. Mellifluousness is substituted by a voice that reflects the intensity of a confrontation's emotional resonance. He didn't have the idealised picture of human nature found in Elizabethan literature. Instead, he experimented with genre, form, and images. He turned the conceit into a conduit for a variety of emotions and ideas, some of which were even conflicting. In contrast to Cavalier poets' fluid, regular poetry, he established the existence of a listener (The speaker openly addresses the lady / listener).

His poems frequently display an exhilarating forthrightness of language, such as "For God's sake, hold your tongue, and let me love." His poems evolve from explosive beginnings into carefully thought out arguments or suppositions that heavily rely on the use of the conceit. His poems offer perspicuous psychological insights into a wide range of lovers and sensual feelings. He drew inspiration for his imagery from a variety of sources, including alchemy, cosmology, medicine, ideology, global exploration, and metaphysical debate. His spiritual poems explore his devotion to God intensely, even using sexual figures of speech to depict his love, fears, and feeling of divine unworthiness. His famous poems include "The Flea," "The Sun Rising," "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" *Songs and Sonnets* (1633), Holy Sonnet X "Death Be Not Proud" *Songs and Sonnets* (1633), "The Good-Morrow" and "The Canonization."

Donne wrote the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" for his wife, Anne More Donne, before he left for France in the year 1611. The poet demonstrates the distinctiveness of real love and how it can withstand isolation due to mutual trust and adoration. This separation may be compared to death, but genuine couples are not worried of separation in the same way that good men are not scared of dying. This is not really a goodbye to love, but rather an examination of real and dedicated love that can withstand the shock of momentary separation as it is not dependent physical attraction.

### 1.2.3. Paraphrase: a Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

#### Stanza – 1:

*As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:*

The poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” begins with the image of men dying. The poet specifically talks about men that are “virtuous,” those that are good and have a high moral ground. The death of such men are so quiet that their passing away is barely noticeable. All the good deeds they have done guarantee a death that is mild. Their souls move away from their bodies like a whisper, barely making any discernible noise. By beginning the poem with the simile “As,” he denotes that he is going to be comparing the image of virtuous men dying with something else in the following lines. This keeps the readers on edge as to what he could mean.

When these virtuous men die, they are not alone. Rather, they are surrounded by their friends. Though the friends feel “sad” witnessing the death, they cannot decide if the virtuous men are really dead. This is because there is no outward sign that shows if death has indeed claimed them. Some of the friends agree and say that “The breath goes now,” while the others disagree and say “No:”

The first stanza sets up the stage for an analogy that will be carried on to the next stanza. By not revealing anything concrete here, the readers are made to keep guessing, thus fuelling their anticipation. The end of the stanza is punctuated by a colon, meaning it is the end of an image and a transition to the argument.

#### Stanza – 2:

*So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.*

The second stanza begins with a metaphysical conceit. A conceit is a figure of speech where two very different things are compared in a clever way. They are

often employed elaborately throughout the poem, thus they are also called as extended metaphors. Here, Donne introduces the metaphor of virtuous dying men in stanza one. Instead of further explaining what it means, he uses it to introduce new information about his lover.

He urges his lover to “melt” silently and “make no noise” when they both part. The word “melt” symbolizes the parting of lovers. They gently separate. He doesn’t want any tears to be shed or “sigh-tempests move.” He knows how other couples express their emotions when they are separating and he wants his relationship to be better. It would be a disgrace to their happiness, “profanation of our joys,” to show their emotions in front of common folks or the “laity.” He does not want the outsiders to be privy to their love. He wants to guard their privacy when it comes to expressing their feelings.

The stanza is structured in such a way that it is a continuation of the first stanza. The poet picks up where he left off. It introduces the argument part of the poem.

**Stanza – 3:**

*Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.*

Similar to images of natural disasters in “tear-floods” and “sigh tempests” in the second stanza, the poet uses “moving of th’ earth” to denote earthquakes in the third stanza. These are all exaggerated use of metaphors that are called hyperboles. He says that earthquakes are harmful and fear inducing, and that is what goodbyes mean to normal couples. People get scared and view the separation as harmful to their relationships. They are common responses and are to be expected given the situation. But he says his relationship is unique in that it is akin to celestial bodies or “spheres” that face far greater calamity and still remain steady. Their movement in the cosmos incite intense vibrations that could easily jeopardise their trajectory, but these bodies don’t get rattled easily despite the “trepidation” they face; “Though greater far, is innocent.”

**Stanza – 4:**

*Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.*

Leaving metaphors of natural disaster aside, the fourth stanza of the poem circles back to the argument the poet makes. He calls the love of others as “sublunary,” which means under the moon. It is “dull” or ordinary and earthbound. There is nothing special about a love that dares to be vocal in the face of separation. His love, on the contrary, is otherworldly. He is not ruled by these earthly instincts. By using the parenthetical statement “(Whose soul is sense)” Donne says that ordinary couples are ruled by their senses. They cannot reach beyond the demands of their five senses. They “cannot admit Absence” or bear to be separated from each other, cannot survive in the absence of the other, because they need physical presence to know that they are in love. Their love is not deep enough to survive if one person is bodily removed from the relationship.

**Stanza – 5:**

*But we by a love so much refined,  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.*

In opposition to the lovers that require constant physical presence, Donne sets himself and his beloved apart by calling themselves “we” and states that their love is so much more “refined” than everybody else’s. It is so far removed from the planes of physical existence that even they do not know what it is. Here the speaker touches upon the comparison of his love to that of the “innocence” of heavenly bodies.

Instead of solely relying on a physical connection, the relationship the speaker shares with his beloved is a mental and spiritual one. Their bond transcends the physical realm. They’re joined to each other through their minds; “Inter-assured of the mind” and thus do not care about missing the other physically. Here the poet uses the literary device called synecdoche. It refers to the use of parts to represent a whole. By “eyes, lips, and hands,” the speaker means the body.

### Stanza – 6:

*Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.*

Marriage is a union between two souls and Donne alludes to the strength of union between couples that is a result of marriage. He states that the soul of his and his beloved are entwined to become one. By saying two equals one, the poet is using a paradox; “Our two souls therefore, which are one.” He assures his beloved that even if he has to leave now, what they’re going to “endure” is not a “breach” but an “expansion” or a continuation. The use of words “breach” and “expansion” are also paradoxical in nature. By adding distance between each other, all they’re doing is expanding the horizons between them. The poet compares this expansion to that of gold being hammered to stretch. Gold is a malleable metal, so it can be stretched thin to make jewellery. At the same time gold is also a metal that is durable and precious, similar to that of the relationship between the speaker and his beloved.

### Stanza – 7:

*If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other do.*

Acknowledging the paradox presented in the line, “Our two souls therefore, which are one,” the speaker demonstrates that they are indeed two individual beings, “If they be two, they are two so.” After distinguishing himself and his lover thus, he goes on to compare them to a compass. These unique use of metaphors are Donne’s specialisation. He is well known for using unexpected and often complex metaphors. He compares himself and his beloved to two legs of the compass; “stiff twin compasses.” They are different units joined at a meeting point.

Though a compass is a mathematical drawing tool, Donne justifies his comparison by explaining further that his wife, based on whom he is believed to have composed the poem, is the “fixed foot.” She does not move. But he moves and when he does, she too moves along with him. She is steady, faithful and her presence is



consistent. By establishing this, the poet shows how strong their relationship is and how much she loves him.

**Stanza – 8:**

*And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.*

Donne focuses on his beloved by saying that even if she stays in the center as the fixed foot of the compass when he roams far (in this case, when he goes away from her on a journey), she leans toward him. As seen when using the compass, the fixed leg tends to slightly lean in the direction of the moving leg. This shows how steadfast she is in her devotion to him. Not only does the fixed leg lean, it also “harkens after it” or listens to it. By this he means the wife yearns for the husband’s return. As the title of the poem suggests, this is what the poet forbids his beloved from doing. He does not want her to mourn his departure.

When the moving leg finally comes to rest in its original place (i.e.) when the husband finally comes home after being away, the leaning leg “grows erect.” The leaning fixed leg also resorts to its original stance. The wife can finally breathe a sigh of relief and rest in the knowledge that her husband has returned home at last.

**Stanza – 9:**

*Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.*

The final stanza is where Donne completes his compass metaphor. He begins the stanza with a firm statement, “Such wilt thou be to me.” He is firm in his argument, saying that he “must” leave for his journey. He thus depends on his wife to remain faithful and be the fixed foot. He describes his movements as “obliquely run;” this can be taken literally, which is “at an angle,” as the moving leg of the compass is always leaning backward towards the fixed foot in the middle. Even as it runs the course, it is always leaning to the center. Similarly, he says that he may travel

anywhere, but he'll still be leaning towards her just as her soul is leaning towards him. The word "obliquely" can also be taken in another sense, such as indirectly or evasively. Since the context of the poem is Donne going to France in a diplomatic mission, he could also refer to the vagueness or unclear nature of his journey.

In the third line of the final stanza, the poet depends on the "firmness" of the beloved to keep him on his journey. When drawing, the fixed point of the compass needs to be steady in order for the moving leg to make a clear journey across. The poet's beloved has to remain similarly steady. Her faithful behaviour will give him the strength and encouragement to continue his course and return back to her later. So long as the fixed leg is firm, the circle will end up being "just" or accurate. Just as a perfect circle starts and stops at the same point, he too will come back to her in the same way he departed from her if she remains "firm." He thus compares his relationship to that of a perfectly drawn circle; complete and flawless.

#### **1.2.4. Summary:**

The poem starts with an image of the quiet death of good men. Their souls are encouraged to leave their bodies. They do not struggle in their death: it is so peaceful because of their virtuous nature that their friends argue if the good men have stopped breathing yet or not.

The speaker asks the goodbye between him and his lover to be similar to the death of the good men, that they should take inspiration from those deaths and gently part ways. Instead of succumbing to the urge to cry and sigh in the face of departure, instead of mourning openly and dragging down their private love and publicizing it to ordinary folks, they should simply be quiet.

It is human nature to be afraid of natural disasters such as earthquakes, to be fearful of the unknown and the level of hurt it could cause us. Normal people see these occurrences and try to decipher what they could mean. On the contrary, heavenly bodies move at a faster pace, and the significance of their movements are also far greater than the earthly disturbances. Yet their activities are seldom noted by most people.

Common people that are in love only feel a kind of sensual connection: their whole relationship is dependent on their physical bond, and because of that they

cannot deal with any form of separation. When they are put in a situation where they have to be apart, their love does not survive in the absence of physical proximity.

But the speaker shares a unique relationship with his lover. Their bond is completely different from the bond boring and ordinary couples share. It is difficult for even themselves to understand, but they are mentally connected. They are aware of each other's presence in the non-physical plane of existence. Due to this special connection, they do not care if their physical selves are split apart from one another.

The speaker and his lady love are connected by their love, their souls tethered. Even if the speaker has to go away from his lover, the connection between their souls cannot be broken apart. All the distance will manage to do is to stretch their souls to cover it, just like when hammered down, metal expands under the stress.

Their souls are representative of themselves and they are linked together like the legs of a mathematical compass. The speaker's lover's soul is similar to the non-moving leg of the compass, which does not move itself but instead directs and responds to the movement of the other leg. The non-moving compass leg stays in the center of the paper. When the mobile foot is in motion and goes away, the stationary foot angles its body in the same direction. It appears as if it is longing to be near its literal other half. When the moving foot comes back and joins with its counterpart, the said counterpart stands straight, looking alert and excited.

The speaker says his lover is similar to the immobile foot of the compass, and he is like that of the moving foot, traveling around her. The position of his lover is stable, so he will be able to form a perfect circle, ending where he began, with her by his side.

#### **1.2.5. Analysis:**

Though he is grouped as a metaphysical poet, John Donne's poems were not published during his lifetime. He shared his works only with friends and select admirers. "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" was written during his marriage to Anne More. He married her secretly in 1601 and had many children. Their relationship was rocky, with both of them suffering from various illnesses. To keep the family financially stable, Donne travelled a lot.

When Donne composed the poem in the year 1611, England politically underwent the changes of the Reformation and the Enlightenment Period. Literary production during Enlightenment had huge traces of scientific advancement. The works of the writers of this age reflected the complications within the political system, and proposed ideas of utopia, egalitarianism, and progress.

“A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” is set in a non-physical plane of existence. It probably happens within the minds of the speaker and his lover, and explores the connection between these two people. The poem touches upon several places in the course of its journey. Starting from the death beds of good people to earthquakes and into the heavenly movement of the bodies in the outer space.

The poem finally moves to the souls of the speaker and his lover, which is described as precious metal that expands to the will of the hammer that beats down on it. The distance the metal covers in its stretch under the hammer metaphorically covers the distance Donne put between him and his wife when he travelled from England to France for work. The last three stanzas are set on a piece of paper, on which a compass traces a circle. The compass also is the metaphorical representation of the link between souls.

The speaker of “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” is a person that is going away on a journey, saying goodbye to their lover who is staying home. There is no direct mention of whether the speaker is male, nor if the lover is female. But it is perceivable to the readers that this poem was written by Donne to his wife when he went on a diplomatic mission. It is not inaccurate to read the poem as such. The readers can assume the male gender for the speaker and female gender for his lover given the circumstances under which the poem was composed by Donne.

The main aim of the speaker is to present an argument about how separation between true lovers should be handled, and to make his lady love realize their connection is strong enough to endure the separation. He doesn't want her to mourn his absence, wanting their feelings for each other to be kept private due to them being a high and remarkable kind of love, too special to be displayed to prying eyes.

A literary conceit refers to a comparison of two completely different and far-fetched things. The main conceit (fanciful extended metaphor) of the poem “A

Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is revealed when the speaker compares his lover and himself to the twin points of a compass. He explains the nature of their love using this conceit. The speaker uses this comparison to tell his lover that their separation will not be damaging to the stability of their relationship, and that he will be faithful to her and return back home once he finishes his journey.

Written when John Donne was away from his wife Anne on a business trip, the poem explores what separation does to couples in love. It also explains how the suffering of the couples doesn’t matter when they are connected spiritually. Their separation should be insignificant to them because what they share is true love, and it can cut across any physical distance.

Valediction means farewell. The title of the poem, however, strongly rejects the idea of expressing grief when bidding farewell. The subtitle of the poem “Forbidding Mourning” cements this idea. The speaker and his sweetheart are so inextricably tied by spiritual ties that their separation has little value. Indeed, the speaker refers to himself and his beloved as “Inter-assured of the mind.” To highlight that the two lovers are joined by a mutual mental certainty when it comes to their love, Donne invented this compound term, which combines the prefix “inter,” which means jointly and reciprocally, with “assured,” which means trustworthy and confident. They are close in this way and so the distance between their bodies doesn’t matter.

The speaker also assures his beloved that their souls are linked, including their minds. Their bond is neither broken nor breached by physical separation. Instead, like a malleable metal being pounded thinly across a wider surface area, their spirits extend outward to cover the distance between them. When the speaker compares his and his lover’s souls to the feet of a compass to describe how they are still united even though they are physically separated, he sets forth the poem’s most comprehensive simile. The poem’s addressee is the compass’ fixed foot, or the point that is stationary in the middle. The point in motion that draws the circle is the speaker. Even if one of the legs of the compass remains stationary, the speaker notes that it “leans” when the other leg moves away farther, creating a broader circle, which “grows erect” as the other leg approaches.

To his moving foot, the speaker says that his beloved will play the stationary foot. Despite the fact that the speaker “must” travel away, he will do so in a “just” and faithful manner. The compass’ legs form a circle when joined together, which resonates with the concepts of spheres in the fourth stanza. These circular shapes symbolized symmetry, balance and unity in popular thinking at the time. Because of the speaker’s belief in his lover’s “firmness,” he shall draw a flawless circular path that will conclude exactly where it began. And since the speaker aims to come back exactly where he started, returning to his beloved after the journey, this end also conveys a promise of return. In conclusion, real love, according to the speaker, can sustain any partition and but will always bring lovers back together.

The speaker in Donne's poem argues that what is apparent is not what is real. Grief at the lovers' separation would be a "profanation of our joys"—that is, mourning aloud would trivialise the couple's love by announcing it to the rest of the world. Even though the poem encourages readers to rely on the power of spiritual connection to ease the anguish of separation, it portrays such connection as uncommon. The speaker dismisses more ordinary, terrestrial love, as well as any outspoken declarations of emotion, as evidence of the desire for physical connection. He raises the quiet certainty he shares with his lover as a sign of deep, spiritual love in this way.

The speaker continues by detailing the virtuous men's silent deaths. The men speak to their souls to depart, signalling their preparation for death with the tiniest sound conceivable, and their deaths are nearly invisible. Because their breathing is already so weak and faint, their onlookers have difficulty determining whether or not they have ceased breathing. The speaker argues that the gentle character of the deaths he portrays should be emulated in his parting with his sweetheart. He warns against "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests," which are common indicators of bereavement, because they make the pain of separation too obvious to others. He claims that letting others know about their special form of love will degrade it. As a result, the separating he desires is unseen to the rest of the world. It doesn't produce a sound or reveal bodily indicators of distress such as tears or sighs.

The speaker also suggests a religious component to the devotion he bears by alluding to the wider world as "the laity" (a term used to juxtapose regular people with clergy). Other people are unable to comprehend his and his lover's intimate

spiritual link. The speaker is also implying that the affection he is referring to is not the ordinary kind. The speaker then compares "trepidation of the spheres" with "movements of the earth" (perhaps speaking of earthquakes and other natural disasters). Disturbances in the earth's surface are quite visible, producing "harms and worries," according to the speaker. This is an indirect metaphor to the problems of ordinary lovers whose breakups are tumultuous and public. People on Earth, on the other hand, are unaffected by the tremor of the universe, which is far more significant. As a result, the speaker's separation from his beloved should follow this pattern. It's a huge event, but it has to be kept hidden from the public eye.

The speaker continues to say that his sophisticated, highly intellectual understanding of love differs from "dull sublunary lovers," who require physical closeness. Both "under the moon" and "mundane" or "worldly" are synonyms for "sublunary." Donne therefore refers to the moon's use as a romantic motif in popular love poetry, but criticises it as earthbound and dull. "Sense," or tactile sensation, is the essence of everyday love. Because it is basically about sharing bodily pleasures, this form of love cannot survive separation.

#### **1.2.6. FORM**

The poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is composed of nine quatrains, totalling 36 lines. The poem does not resemble any specific poetic form, although the length and manner of its stanzas are consistent. Except for the first, all stanzas are grammatically whole. While Donne was known for inventing elaborate structural forms for his poetry, this one is simple and follows the progression of a rhetorical point. The poem's form is simple, removing potential distractions for the reader and focusing solely on the poet's argument and fundamental premise.

#### **1.2.7. POETIC DEVICES**

**Simile:** One simile sticks out as exceptionally straightforward and elegant in a poem full of figures of speech and long, implausible parallels. The speaker discusses the proliferation of spirits that are spiritually connected but physically separated in stanza 6. He demonstrates such extension with a realistic comparison in line 24: *Like gold to airy thinness beat*. Other examples where simile is used in the poem are in the lines *As virtuous men pass mildly away, If they be two, they are two so/ As stiff twin compasses are two*;

**Alliteration:** Alliteration appears several times in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," though most of them are limited to two or three recurring sounds. These are mostly there to provide a lyrical effect in the poem. As this is a poem about the unison of true spiritual connection, it stands to reason to use musical language to emphasise this unity. The poem's final stanza, that is packed of "m" sounds, contain a lot of alliteration: *Such wilt thou be to me, who must, Thy firmness makes my circle just,/And makes me end where I begun.* The "s" sound is used as alliteration in words like *some, sad, say.*

**Conceit:** The basic premise of this poem is the analogy of the compass. Donne's poetry is noted for the use of conceits that he employs to explain or justify something through a strange comparison. The speaker of the poem connects the dual legs of a drawing compass to the souls of genuine lovers in this circumstance. The premise in this poem is to provide a detailed description of what the speaker thinks. It expresses an abstract relationship with a concrete item, making the idea stronger and more compelling to the audience. The poem encourages the reader to envision the soul in a different light and to comprehend the alternatives that this imagination opens up. There is no reason to fear or mourn a parting if two souls function like the needles of a compass. Lines *If they be two, they are two so/ As stiff twin compasses are two;* to lines *Thy firmness makes my circle just,/And makes me end where I begun.*

**Hyperbole:** The speaker employs hyperbole to mock common means of expressing grief at the loss of a loved one. He warns against public displays of grief by referring to "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests." He implies that those who exhibit irrational emotions in the face of separation are not experiencing genuine, spiritual love. Tears do not fall in torrents, and sighs do not produce a forceful storm. The speaker uses hyperbolic words to describe what he observes when he sees ordinary people cry and sigh in their grief. He considers these expressions to be extreme and absurd. These meltdowns are also tied to the earth, as they are associated with mundane natural events. As a result, they contrast with the speaker's and his lover's love, which is more deeply connected to celestial bodies and their motions.

**Metaphor:** Metaphors are an important part of the metaphysical poetry school, and Donne's work is full with them. This is no exception in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." The drawing compass, which is equated to the souls of the



lovers, is the poem's major metaphor. The poem's conceit is defined thus. The comparison between earthly tragedies and heavenly disruptions in stanza 3 is another noteworthy example of metaphor. The speaker makes no obvious link between these incidents and the poem's main theme. He is clearly contrasting the separation of conventional couples with the separation of real spiritual partners, as seen by the circumstances.

"Moving of the' earth," most likely alluding to seismic events and similar disasters, is in the same category as the speaker's warnings about "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests." Common lovers' anguish at the loss of a relationship is exaggerated and damaging. It is the end of the world for them. Earthquakes serve as a metaphor for public mourning, implying that it is damaging, noisy, and distressing to others.

The speaker, on the other hand, describes the "trepidation of the spheres," which refers to old concepts about the universe shuddering. Seasons and planets are moved by heavenly vibrations, which are imperceptible to those on Earth. Similarly, true lovers' separation is a major and essential event that should be hidden from the rest of the world. Metaphor is used in Line 5: "*So let us melt, and make no noise,*" Lines 9-10: "*Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears, / Men reckon what it did, and meant;*" Lines 11-12: "*But trepidation of the spheres, / Though greater far, is innocent.*" Lines 25-36: "*If they be two, they are two so / As stiff twin compasses are two; ...Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end where I begun.*"

**Paradox:** The speaker says that "two souls" can also be "one" in line 21, which is a paradox. This claim necessitates some clarification because two independent entities cannot be one thing simultaneously.

One approach to interpret the paradox is via the lens of religious marriage concepts. Donne was a devout Catholic who eventually became an Anglican priest. His poetry are replete with theological references. As a result, his paradox in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is most likely based on the Biblical concept of two persons becoming "one flesh" after marriage. Donne takes this concept a bit higher, seeing marriage as a union of two souls.

Donne's poetry frequently involves a confrontation between two seemingly contradictory ideas. The paradox in this poetry has the effect of heightening emotion

through seeming contradiction while also moving the argument ahead. The lovers are two independent individuals who believe they are part of the same soul. This is a confrontation between logic and emotional comprehension, which propels the poem forward to its conclusion.

**Personification:** The compass metaphor has a personification component to it. The speaker assigns feeling to the inanimate object's action in order to completely explain the relationship between the feet of the compass and intersection of the two souls. He accomplishes this with a single word: "hearkens," as though one leg of the compass is listening carefully for cues from the other. Because a compass cannot physically listen, this activity is more obviously about the poem's human characters' actions. Nevertheless, if the compass does listen, it is reasonable to assume that its other activities are likewise influenced by emotion. Since it yearns to be re-joined with its twin, one foot "leans" to the path of the other. When the other returns, it "grows upright" because it is attentive and excited to be re-joined. Personifying the compass enables the speaker to make a clearer association between his example and the events he's discussing. It also gives the viewer a deeper cause to be interested in the image by allowing them to interpret the device's motions as an expression of emotion.

**Apostrophe:** This is a poem having a specific target audience in mind. The speaker is speaking to a sweetheart whom he is preparing to abandon on a voyage. The apostrophe's major effect in this poetry is to create a sense of intimacy. It's a love letter, a straight address, and a private argument. The poem is very personal because Donne wrote it primarily for his own private use and not for publication.

The usage of the ancient second person pronoun "thou" heightens the emotional connection between the speaker and his listener. The word "thou" is largely used in religious and formal contexts nowadays, sometimes mockingly. However, as a less formal way of address in the 17th century, the form remained. The word "thou" was used to express affection, familiarity, or contempt. It can be used to speak to one's friends and relatives, as well as one's social inferiors. The speaker indicates that he and his addressee are close and familiar by employing this pronoun for his addressee.

**Enjambment:** The majority of the lines in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" are end-stopped, which means they finish a complete phrase or sentence

with the required punctuation. Enjambment is used infrequently by Donne. Its main purpose when it appears is to keep the poetry continuing. For instance, line 7 says: *'Twere profanation of our joys*. Till the reader proceeds to the next line, which wraps up the sentence, this makes no sense. The brief inquiry keeps the reader guessing as to what will happen next.

Stanza 4 has the most enjambment, which gives the full sentence a sense of ambiguity and instability. In this stanza, hardly any of the lines are grammatically complete on their own. The speaker's "sublunary" love in this verse is also shaky, unable to hold its own without the assistance of physical proximity. The stanza's structure, though only subtly, echoes its content.

The two occurrences of enjambment in verse 7, on the other hand, move the poem's major idea ahead, encouraging the reader to recognise the uniqueness and brilliance of the lovers' analogy to the drawing compass. Enjambment also occurs in the lines *Dull sublunary lovers' love... Those things which elemented it, If they be two, they are two so... To move, but doth, if the other do*.

#### **1.2.8. COMPREHENSION:**

1. Who are the metaphysical poets?
2. What are the characteristics of metaphysical poetry?
3. Give an overview of John Donne's poetry.
4. Write a brief note on the structure of the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning."
5. What is the primary argument of the poet in this poem?
6. In what way is the poet's love unique from the rest?

## LESSON 3: Age of Milton

### OUTLINE:

- ◆ Introduction to John Milton
- ◆ Sonnet as a Religious work of art
- ◆ Analysis of Sonnet VII “How Soon Hath Time”

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Know the theological aspects of Milton’s poetry
- ◆ Understand the speaker’s anxiety caused due to the quick passage of time
- ◆ Identify the literary devices used by Milton in Sonnet VII

#### 1.3.1. John Milton:



"How soon hath Time" been written during a particularly tumultuous period in English history. Charles I became King of England in 1625, and under his reign, religious and political strife erupted across the country. The country had degenerated into civil war by 1642, ten years after Milton composed the poem, and Charles was beheaded in 1649.

Milton was a staunch supporter of the revolution and even championed the King's execution. He did it as a result of his religious beliefs. Milton was a devout Puritan who declined to join the Church of England after qualifying from Cambridge because he disagreed with the Church's position on several crucial topics. The

Anglican Church, for example, continued to offer communion, which the Puritans regarded as idol worship.

As a result, the poem can be placed in the midst of doctrinal debates in England throughout the 17th century. It is located, more broadly, in the wide discussions concerning Christian religion that engulfed Europe following the Protestant Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. Whereas some Protestant sects, like the Puritans, denied the idea of salvation through works, the Catholic Church argued that good deeds, piety, and observance of the sacraments, in other words, works, could influence one's afterlife fate. For Puritans like Milton, the Church of England's rituals were uncomfortably similar to Catholicism, and they tried to purge their religious practise of any leftover traces of Catholicism.

John Milton (9 December 1608 – 8 November 1674) was an English poet, polemicist, man of letters, and public official under Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth of England. He wrote during a period of theological and political turmoil, and is best known for his blank verse epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Milton's poetry and prose depict his strong personal values, a love of liberty and self-determination, as well as the pressing challenges and political turmoil of his time. He acquired worldwide fame during his lifetime, writing in English, Latin, Greek, and Italian, and his celebrated *Areopagitica* (1644), a criticism of pre-publication censoring, is one of history's most important and passionate arguments of free speech and freedom of the press.

He was dubbed the "greatest English novelist" in William Hayley's 1796 biography, and he is still considered as "one of the foremost writers in the English language," though critical opinion has shifted over the years since his death. Milton's poetry took a long time to gain traction, at least under his name. On Shakespeare (1630), an anonymous sonnet contained in the Second Folio edition of William Shakespeare, was his first published work. Milton compiled his work in 1645 *Poems*, in the middle of the enthusiasm around the idea of forming a new English government. In 1637, an anonymous version of *Comus* was released, and in 1638, J. M. published *Lycidas* in *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago*. Aside from that, the 1645 collection was the sole poetry that was printed, until the publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667.

In Sonnet VII “How Soon Hath Time” Milton laments the fact that his years are dwindling, although he hasn't accomplished much in his poetry career. The poem is an early work expressing the poet's strong faith in God. His early regret is overshadowed by his unwavering confidence in God, whom he refers to as his taskmaster. Late or soon, God, like a strict teacher, exacts the obligations of his believer. Furthermore, the sonnet's pictures have created a beautiful blend of paganism and Christianity, demonstrating the poet's unwavering confidence in God.

### 1.3.2. Sonnet VII - Paraphrase:

**How Soon Hath Time** by John Milton

**Stanza 1:**

*How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.*

The poem's basic worries are established in the first two lines, as the speaker, a young fellow of 23, muses on his life. He is dissatisfied with what he has achieved and believes that his life is passing him by. The speaker gets a sensation of loss, as though time had taken away something important and valuable. In this sense, he implies that he assesses his own life against an external standard: he believes that he'd have done more with his childhood, but that time has deprived him of the possibility.

Time, in the opinion of the speaker, is a malignant and dynamic force that makes judgments and has purposes. Furthermore, these aims are sinister: time is portrayed as a thief who steals from the speaker. Time is also shown as a wingless figure. Time acts like a demi-god in the poem, a being with supernatural abilities capable of shaping the world, despite the speaker's refusal to directly associate time with any specific faith. Time is likely most strongly associated with figures from Greek mythology, such as Hermes, a winged prankster deity who frequently meddles in human affairs.

With an enjambment at the ending of line one and an end-stop at the end of line two, the first two lines of form constitute a single grammatical piece. This develops a rhythm of alternating enjambed and end- stopped lines throughout the

first eight lines of the poem. The lines are all written in strong iambic pentameter, indicating a rhythmic consistency. Finally, the poem, which is a Petrarchan sonnet, presents the two rhyme sounds -uth and -ear, which will reoccur all through the poem's first eight lines. The poem's rhythm—and hence its underlying impression of structured time—is further reinforced by the repeated reappearance of these rhymes at precisely the anticipated spacing.

With time, the speaker clarifies his criticism in lines 3 and 4. He begins by remarking that his life is "fly[ing]" past; that his days seem to be passing him by in a hurry, moving quickly, and in a panic. He uses an archaic term to describe their motion: "in full career." The word "career" has two meanings for Milton's speaker. The word's current meaning is that it refers to one's career route in life. A "career" is a technical phrase from jousting, alluding to the dashing advance that soldiers make against each other in a contest, but it also has a more significant, ancient connotation. As a result, it represents a frantic, aggressive moment that is virtually out of control.

Line 4 elaborate on this notion by shifting metaphors. Rather of defining his life in terms of a warrior's attack during a joust, Milton's speaker compares it to the seasons of the year: his childhood is like spring, maturity is like summer, and old age is like autumn. The speaker here employs a common cliché of Renaissance poetry, namely Renaissance love poetry. Milton does not operate in contradiction to worldly, even sensual, precedents; rather, he uses and rethinks those customs for his own purposes, which is a stunning choice for a Christian poem.

Citing springtime as a metaphor for vitality also emphasises a point that has previously been left unspoken in the poem. The speaker is disappointed not just because his youth has passed him by, but also because he has failed to do what he should have accomplished during his youth. In the same way that plants produce buds and blossoms in the spring, he should have started some essential job. The speaker has gotten behind schedule. As a result, he feels there is a timeline that he must follow and that gives his life meaning. Failure to stick to that timetable means he has failed to make his own life worth living in a significant sense.

## **Stanza 2:**

*Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth  
That I to manhood am arriv'd so near;*

*And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.*

In lines 5-8, the poem's speaker elaborates on the fears he expressed in the poem's opening four lines. Rather of being focused with his own achievements, he is preoccupied with how he seems to others. He starts by talking about his physical look, or "semblance." He believes that by appearing young, others would be fooled into believing that he is close to becoming a man. As a result, they may be less likely to condemn him for his lack of success.

The speaker returns to the key metaphor of line 4 in lines 6-7, arguing that while he may not have able to create any visible buds or flowers, he is internally mature. However, because no one can see it and because there are others who do manage to achieve big projects throughout their youth, this internal ripeness isn't worth much.

This is a pivotal point in the poem: the speaker is implying that the value of his life is determined by the job he accomplishes, not by his plans, temperament, or even piety. This position could be interpreted as sympathetic to Catholic Church doctrines, which emphasise that redemption can be attained through certain acts, commonly referred to as "works." Though the poem has so far largely avoided obvious religious references, the speaker's values appear to be quietly linked with a renowned, during Milton's lifetime, especially contentious, theological perspective.

In lines 5-8, the speaker's worries deepen and increase, but the structural pattern of the preceding four lines remains unchanged beneath them. These lines, like the first four lines of the poem, are heavily iambic. They use the same rhyme sounds as the previous four lines and rhyme in the same sequence. This formal consistency feels compulsive, repetitious, and even suffocating, as if the speaker is locked in his worry, watching it grow even as he remains entrenched in the situation that caused it in the first place. The poem thus depicts a recognised, even ubiquitous set of conditions in its first eight lines: practically everyone looks back on their lives with remorse and worry over what they've accomplished.

### **Stanza 3:**

*Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,*



*It shall be still in strictest measure ev'n  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n:*

The word "Yet" begins lines 9-12, signalling to the listener that the speaker is about to contradict or object to his own assumptions from the first eight lines. Indeed, the speaker moves in the poem's final 6 lines to give a resolution to his difficulties, having set out his fears and values in harsh, touching words. The speaker begins by questioning his anxiety's basic premise. The speaker laments in the poem's first lines that he didn't accomplish anything substantial in his youth, and as a consequence, he is out of sync with human life's usual pace. Spring is expected to bring forth buds and blossoms, but there are no buds or blossoms in his spring. The speaker carefully fixes himself in lines 9-12, arguing that there is no such thing as a regular schedule for human life. He will do precisely what God commands him to do, and he'll do it on God's timeframe, doesn't matter if it happens quickly or slowly, or if what he accomplishes is "less" or "more."

The style of Milton's poem evolves as his speaker disproves the notion that underpins his concern. Lines 9-12 are more intricate than the poem's first eight lines, which were well-organized and rhythmically repeating. The rhyming pattern alters, as the previous 8 lines' tight, rigorous iambs begin to soften. It all comes as a complete revelation. The speaker in Milton's poem asserts that the "will of Heav'n" has complete authority over his own life and that it is strictly regulated. The poetry, on the other hand, loosens up just as he presents this concept.

Milton's thesis is that there is a struggle between style and content. In contrast to the predictable, regular rhythms of the poem's first eight lines, the rhythm and rhyme of lines nine through twelve are more difficult to predict. However, this does not imply that it is any less ordered or regulated. Similarly, God's plan for the speaker is not always obvious, but it is just as potent as any programme he has devised for himself.

As a result, the poem runs into some theological issues. If God has so much power over the speaker's life, one could wonder if the speaker has free will and the ability to choose how and if to act. From early verses like this one to his epic *Paradise Lost*, where God knows Adam and Eve will bite the fruit long before they do, free

will is a key theme in Milton's poetry. To comprehend Milton's viewpoint on the subject, one must first rethink what it means to be free. Freedom, according to Milton, does not imply the ability to act on one's own behalf and according to one's desires. Freedom, on the other hand, is defined as aligning oneself with God's will and embracing His favour.

**Stanza 4:**

*All is, if I have grace to use it so  
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.*

Milton's speaker starts to soothe the fears he expressed in lines 1-8 in lines 9-12. He acknowledges that God has a purpose for him rather than stressing over what he hasn't achieved in his short life. The question arises as to how he will come to terms with this idea. The speaker describes this underlying question in the poem's final two lines. His response is that he needs "grace"—the "grace" to follow God's plan. If he does, he will be blessed with clarity: worry and self-obsession will be exchanged for peace and self-surrender. In God's "eye," all will be as it is, has been, and will be.

In the context of the poem's theological interactions, the word "grace" is a meaningful and politically contentious word. If the poem's first eight lines lay out a Catholic theological position, in which a person is saved through works, the poem's final six lines lay out a Puritan theological position, in which one is saved by grace.

The Puritans, like so many other Protestant Faiths, rejected the idea that one may attain salvation via deeds and rather believed that redemption must be bestowed by God. Only a few people were conferred such kindness, according to the Puritans; the rest were destined to fail from the beginning. The faithful's responsibility is to embrace God's grace. In the poem's final six lines, the speaker asserts that he can't achieve anything that God hasn't pre-ordained, bringing the poem back into line with Puritan doctrine while tacitly rejecting Catholic dogma. As a result, the poem engages in and takes a position on one of the 17th century's key ideological controversies. While it is sometimes viewed person narrative as a contemplation on Milton's personal life, it also addresses bigger issues. Milton's goal in the poem is to show his readers how to deal with their anxiety over how to live their lives to the best of their abilities—and to show them how to be properly Christian, in his opinion.

### 1.3.3. SUMMARY:

The speaker laments about time. He compares time to a thief who robs away people's youth and stole his 23rd year. His life flies fast, but nothing substantive was produced. His appearance does not look like the person he is about to become, and despite his potential, he does not look impressive or promising as those who have achieved more in their time. But no matter how big or small it happens, sooner or later, everything he does is tantamount to his destiny. Whether secular or noble, only time and God can decide. If he has the grace to do God's will, everything will be as God created it.

"How soon hath Time" in a way, is a poem about fear of not being able to accomplish meaningful things in life. Major themes of the poem include work, ambition and aging and faith, grace and self-surrender. In the first 8 lines, the speaker complained that he had reached the old age of 23, without doing anything great. When making this complaint, the speaker hinted that the value of his life depends on his actions, and more specifically, on his achievements; although this assertion by him will be complicated at the end of the poem, but he initially believed that his merit as a human being depends on the work he did on his short span on the earth.

### 1.3.4. Analysis:

This poem begins with the speaker announcing his wonderment that his life has moved so quickly. The speaker described time as a "thief" in the first line of the poem and his experience of aging as a loss, even a robbery: some important things have been taken away from him. As the poem continues, it is clear that what he has lost or is losing is the possibility itself: the possibility of accomplishing grand and ambitious things. The speaker specifically described himself as a man about to become a man. However, even though his youth has passed, he has not yet produced "buds" or "blossoms." Here, the speaker used some metaphors from Renaissance poetry, in which youth is often compared to spring. The speaker is somehow out of touch with time: although his spring is almost over, he has not yet to bear any flower. In the density of its symbolic language, this poem poses some hidden questions to the reader. For example, people may wonder what these "buds" or "blossoms" represent, that is, what the speaker wants to accomplish in his life but not yet completed. In this regard, the speaker is cautious and refuses to show his readers his ambitions in detail.

But he did offer some tantalizing hints. For example, he used in line 3, the word “career.” He used it mainly in an obsolete sense, meaning “to dash recklessly” or “out of control”. But the modern meaning of the word also exists: the speaker wants to do something meaningful and influential in his life, and he wants to do it in a way that others will recognize. In line 7, he goes on to point out that he has “inner ripeness”, that is, he is full of inner beauty and potential. However, this inner beauty does not show up like the “buds” and “blossoms” he desires in line 4. No one else can see it or celebrate it. So, the first 8 lines present an ambitious but anxious speaker: someone who is eager to make his mark in the world but feels that his life is slipping away. And He feels that unless he manages to complete some magnificent public projects that others can witness and appreciate, his life will be meaningless.

The first 8 lines of this poem present an ambitious and anxious speaker, eager to make his mark in the world. In the last six lines, after the volta or turn in the sonnet, the speaker thinks about another source of meaning in his life—not work, but faith. The speaker did not actively strive to achieve great results but argued that God would guide him on the right path and the right task. Therefore, this poem implicitly sided with the religious debate that divided England in the 17th century. Instead of advocating salvation through works (which is roughly the same position as Catholicism), Milton—a devout and militant Protestant—seems to adopt a Puritan position: this poem implies that only faith can guarantee salvation. In the last 6 lines of the poem, the speaker made some corrections to the position he established in the first few lines. No matter how hard he tries to accomplish a great thing, he will do it when God wants him to do it. Indeed, he implies that God has determined his “destiny”: God has a plan for him, and the speaker will not do more or less than God's will. Then one might wonder if the speaker has free will. Although the first 8 lines of this poem assume that it's up to the speaker himself will make some contribution to his own life, when “will” enters the poem into line 12, what matters is the will of “heaven,” not the will of the speaker. However, in the end, this poem is less interested in free will than in the idea of grace.

A key issue for the speaker's obedience to God's will is that he can only accomplish God's plan if he receives “grace.” “Grace” is a sinful word in Puritan theology: it separates the elect who will go to heaven from the elect who will not go to heaven. In addition, in many Protestant sects, grace is embodied in secular success:

prosperity in business or politics, or having many children, is considered a sign of grace given to someone by God. So, the anxiety of the speaker in the first 8 lines may not be related to the scale of his accomplishments, but if he has grace. The fact that he has not yet accomplished things indicate that God has not given him grace, or that God's plan for the speaker is humble and quiet; the speaker is not yet sure which is true. Since grace comes from God as a gift, no matter how hard one works or prays, it cannot be obtained. This marks an important difference between the Protestant sects like the puritans and the Catholic Church which believes that people can influence their destiny through acts of piety or charity. So, the stakes of this poem are not just whether the speaker will accomplish something important. The speaker also put himself in the most pressing religious doctrine of his time. In the first 8 lines, he flirted with a Catholic position: implying that the value of his life comes from his works. In the last 6 lines, he returns to the position of a Puritan: the value of his life is given by God, so his task is to surrender himself to God's plan and do his best. In making this correction, the speaker implies that the value of his life depends on God, not himself. So, this poem initially seems to be self-involved: a young man is thinking about the meaning of his life. But its religious arguments show that it has broader ambitions. If readers have similar anxiety about their lives and careers, this poem provides a model in Milton's mind, a theologically reasonable model to deal with this anxiety: by surrendering to God's plan, believing in his grace and only accomplishing his wills.

The poem takes place in England around the 1630s, most probably in the open country, where Milton was staying with his family at the time. The poem, however, has little references to its precise setting—aside from the "buds" and "blossoms" in line 4, the poem makes no references to the outside world. Its true environment, though, is internal: the speaker's psyche, where he grapples with uncertainty, worry, and faith. This adds to the overall impression that the poem's message is global. It locates itself in the concerns and anxieties that everyone shares, rather than attaching itself to a certain moment and location.

John Milton wrote "How Soon Hath Time" in the early 1630s. By then, the poet had written sonnets in English for nearly 100 years. This form has experienced early experiments. Poets such as Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard tried different methods to introduce the original Italian form into English. It went through a very

popular period in the 1590s, and then gradually became obsolete in the early 17th century. When Milton sat down to write his sonnet, he was using a form with a unique history—it was a bit outdated and even exhausted. As a poet, one of Milton's challenges is to find new possibilities and energies for form. Joining the simultaneous experiment of poets such as John Donne and George Herbert, Milton tried to revive the sonnet by changing its content. Sonnets are traditionally used in love poems, through the pain and ecstasy of erotic love, and all the anxiety and happiness. Milton turned it into a poem about the pain and ecstasy of religious devotion. In doing so, Milton retains some key metaphors from the sonnet tradition. For example, Shakespeare also called youth springtime. In Sonnet 3, he reminds his lover: "Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee / Calls back the lovely April of her prime" (9-10). One might imagine that a religious poet like Milton would rush to suppress the secular sources of his sonnets; instead, he both reformed and preserved them, so they stayed in his poems, As if trapped in amber.

### **1.3.5. Form:**

A Petrarchan sonnet written in iambic pentameter, "How soon hath Time" can be separated into two sections. The poem's first eight lines, known as the octave, function as a single entity. The sestet, the poem's final six lines, functions as a separate unit with its own rhyme scheme—and, in many cases, its own concepts. The "turn," or "volta," is the swing among these two components in line 9. The two halves of the poem are used rhetorically by Petrarchan poets, who advance an idea or a statement in the first eight lines, which they typically invert, confound, or refute in the poem's final six lines. After the first eight lines of this poem, one gets the impression that something is shifting, altering.

Thus, Milton heavily employs the sonnet structure in this poem, establishing questions and concerns in the octave, which he settles in the sestet, in part by challenging the assumptions that underpin those concerns.

"How quickly hath Time's" rhyme structure, like that of other Petrarchan sonnets, is divided into two halves. The first eight lines of the poem employ only two rhyme sounds, which are repeated in a pattern: ABBAABBA. The rhyme system loosens and varies in the second half of a Petrarchan sonnet. The rhymes have no established formula, unlike the first half. Cdecde, cdcddc, and cddcdd are some of the

rhyme systems used by poets. In the poem's final six lines, Milton employs an uncommon rhyme scheme: CDEDCE.

### 1.3.6. Poetic Devices:

**Alliteration:** "How soon hath Time" regularly makes use of alliteration. For instance, in the poem's first 5 lines, Milton builds a strong chain of recurring s sound (which is more particularly a representation of sibilance), which appears in "soon," "subtle," and "stol'n." Throughout, he makes repeated f, b, and T noises. At times, the alliteration reveals an underlying link between seemingly unrelated elements in the poem, such as time, thievery, flight, youth, and spring.

The more clear and immediate linkages between alliterating words in the second half of the poem are striking: for example, "grace" and "great" in lines 13-14. God's grace is what makes Him wonderful here, thus it's only logical and even graceful that these two theoretically linked terms should also be acoustically associated. Words like "still," "strictest," "soon," and "slow" all have a conceptual and auditory link to the idea of movement and authority.

As a result, the poem's thesis is embodied in music. The alliteration becomes muddled, full of questions, when the speaker is suffering with worry and bewilderment; it's unclear how. The alliteration becomes seamless, graceful, and fitting as he approaches certainty.

**Metaphor:** "How soon hath Time" uses a variety of metaphors to frame its case. For example, Milton equates time to a "thief" in the first line. Before learning anything about the speaker's specific concerns, one gets a strong feeling of how the speaker feels about time: it has mistreated and deprived him. Line 3 contains another metaphor; days do not actually "fly" by, but the use of this phrase relates their quick transit to the winged Time.

Similarly, in line 4, the speaker describes his youth to the spring. The metaphor conveys the speaker's feelings about his own life: he believes it should follow a predictable pattern, with key events occurring on a set schedule. Any departure from this routine will be excruciating, if not perverse. Each part of the poem, even its pictures and analogies, contributes to structuring and maintaining the case in a poem that is so rhetorical, so preoccupied with presenting a case.

**Assonance:** "How soon hath Time" makes extensive use of assonance in addition to alliteration. For example, Milton returns to a long sound in lines 3 and 4: *My hasting days fly on with full career,/But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.*

The poem demonstrates a strong link between tone and understanding here: the a sound emphasises the connection between "hasting" and "days," the way days seem to rush by. Furthermore, the repetitive sounds speed up the sentence, giving it a fast-paced, rhythmic quality: one reads the line at exactly the anxious tempo described by the speaker.

**Caesura:** In "How soon hath Time," Milton employs caesura numerous times, usually to bring a qualifier or complexity into a statement. For example, in the opening line of the poem, he begins to lament the passage of time, but first describes it, calling it "the subtle thief of youth." The caesura here acts as an elegant rhetorical flourish, but it has little bearing on the poem's message.

Milton, on the other hand, uses caesura later in the poem to confuse his argument. Line 12, for example, is very similar to line 1: Milton makes a claim about time, which he subsequently qualifies: *Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n.*

However, in line 12, the qualifier that appears following the caesura is not the same as the qualifier in line 1. The phrase "the subtle thief of youth" in line 1 teaches readers more about time. The phrase "and the will of Heav'n" in line 12 has an uncertain connection to time at best. The reader can ask if time and "the will of Heav'n" are two separate forces, or if the speaker believes his existence is governed by two divine forces. The caesura thus raises an important interpretive question for the poem at a time when the speaker professes to have answered it. Because of the caesura, the connection between God and time at the end of line 12 is unclear.

**Enjambment:** Milton uses an alternating sequence of enjambed and end-stopped lines in the poem's first eight lines. The poem's opening lines, where line 1 is enjambed and line 2 is end-stopped, demonstrate this pattern: *How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth, / Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!*

In line 1, Milton starts a phrase but doesn't finish it. Despite the comma at the end of line 1, the line's real notion stays logically and semantically incomplete until



the end of line 2. The pattern repeats throughout the octave, providing a feeling of rhythm and control to the poem's syntax.

Line 3, where the enjambment is less apparent, is a source of controversy. In reality, given that line 3 is technically a complete sentence, one could argue that it is end-stopped: *My hasting days fly on with full career,* But the speaker's genuine meaning cannot be fully appreciated without also reading line 4. Because the speaker's pattern is maintained by the core conceptual idea of these lines spilling over from one to the next, this can still be regarded as a type of soft enjambment. In lines 9-12, this arrangement vanishes. Instead of overlapping and end-stopped lines, lines 9-12 form one long sentence that runs down the page before coming to a halt at line 12. The reader is likely to find this abrupt intensity of enjambment upsetting, if not unsettling, after the consistency of the poem's first eight lines.

It's unexpected to come into this bewilderment at this point in the poem. After all, the speaker conveys his doubts and fears in the first eight lines of the poem; in the final six, despite his concerns, he finds reconciliation with God. As a result, one would anticipate the grammar and syntax of the final six lines to be considerably smoother, more regulated, and more regular. The enjambments in this section of the poem, on the other hand, discreetly support the speaker's point. Even though he no longer has a clear sense of control—and even if his poetry is no longer moving in periodic rhythms of enjambment and end-stop—he finds peace in God's grace.

**End-Stopped Lines:** A lot of lines in "How soon hath Time" are end-stopped: "year!" "shew'th." "near;" "endu'th." "Heav'n:" "eye." These end-stops are arranged in a regular sequence in the first eight lines, falling every other line. They function as a kind of time-keeping tool within the poem in this way. The end-stops, like a church bell striking to indicate the flying of the hours, divide the reader's temporal perception of the poem into a succession of regular units.

This temporal regularity, however, dissipates in the poem's final 6 lines: against what one might assume, line 10 concludes with a noticeable enjambment, and the long sentence that begins in line 9 doesn't come to rest until the end of line 12.

This deviation from the poem's structure may be perceived by the reader as a lack of certainty—or, maybe, as a confusion of time itself. The poem's pauses become

unpredictable rather than regular and predictable. In this way, the structure of the poem's end-stops reflects its overall point. The reader of the poem must give up the sense of security supplied by the first 8 lines' rhythmic frequency and trust the poem's capacity to unfold according to its own distinctive reasoning, just as Milton's speaker must give up his anticipations about when he will achieve something and admit defeat to God's somewhat incomprehensible schedule.

**Personification:** The speaker compares Time, which he considers a proper noun, to a robber in the first line of "How soon hath Time." Time takes on human attributes like as agency and desire as a result of this personification. Drawing on this initial parallel, Milton gives Time power all through poem: in lines 2 and 12, he steals things and guides the speaker. Time appears to be a character in its own right at the end of the poem, with its own ideals and goals.

This could be a difficulty when it comes to interpreting a Christian poetry about God's ability to manage and govern the speaker's own life. The reader might ponder if Time is an expression of God's desire, acting under His control, or if Time is autonomous, and hence must be a separate semi-divine entity with which God interacts.

Time appears to be autonomous, or even God's equal, at important places in the poem, typically due to Milton's use of personification. Needless to say, this is a potentially heretical claim: God is the only divinity in the Christian cosmos. Milton's proclaimed religious viewpoints clash with the manner he portrays religious themes, as is often the case in his writing. As a result of such incidents, William Blake famously declared that Milton was a participant of the devil's party without realising it.

**Synecdoche:** Milton utilises an unusual term in the final line of "How soon hath Time": "my great Task-Master's eye." Master's When he says the "great Task-Master," he is alluding to God Himself, but he does it by mentioning only one aspect of God's body: his eye.

This is a stylish and seductive option. In contrast to the other senses, the eye is connected with observation and judgement in Western culture. As a result, Milton's God appears as a creature capable of both observing and judging—indeed, these are

his major responsibilities. Milton advances an assertion on who God is and what he accomplishes by utilising synecdoche to refer to God. He isn't just a "Task-Master" who assigns tasks and responsibilities. He's also a keen observer who keeps track of and evaluates his works.

**Consonance:** Milton uses a lot of consonance throughout his work, especially in the beginning. He makes repeated t and th sounds, which can be heard in words like "time," "thief," "three-and-twentieth," and "truth." Such moments of aural recurrence, like the poem's alliteration, assonance, and sibilance, establish a sense of connectedness between different themes. The concept of thieving, youth in particular, and the speaker's particular age are all intertwined with time.

**Sibilance:** Throughout the poem, there are numerous instances of sibilance. This sibilance, like alliteration, assonance, and consonance, establishes an underlying relationship between seemingly unrelated notions. Time's "subtle" and hurried stealing, for example, is musically linked to the speaker's "spring."

#### **1.3.7. COMPREHENSION:**

1. Describe John Milton as a poet.
2. Why does the speaker lament the passage of time?
3. How does the poet view time?
4. What are the poetic devices employed in the sonnet?
5. How does the tone of the poem reflect the frustrations of the speaker?

## UNIT -2

### LESSON 1: The Restoration Period (1660-1688)

#### OUTLINE:

- ◆ Timeline of the Restoration Age
- ◆ John Dryden as a Poet
- ◆ Poem: A Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1687

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Trace the characteristics of the Restoration Age
- ◆ Understand the socio-political aspects of the period
- ◆ Comprehend the significance of John Dryden as a poet in the English Literary canon

#### 2.1.1. Restoration Period



The Restoration period (1660-1688) refers to the time right after King Charles II was restored to the throne of England. The years prior to the Restoration was politically tumultuous for the people of England. It included the Civil War (1642-1651), where the divide between what people wanted from their government led to eventual clash, culminating in the beheading of King Charles I, following which his son Charles II fled for Europe, seeking asylum in France. With Charles II not being

there to take over his father's throne, it fell into the hands of the Republican Government of England. The period was called the Commonwealth of England (1649-1660), and was ruled by Oliver Cromwell. The whole of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales was governed by Cromwell after the execution of Charles I. Parliament seized power over the states in the following years and commanded a military rule over them. The theatre was called Cromwellian and the agenda pushed through the theatre was Puritan in terms of belief.

After Cromwell's death, the republican rule quickly destabilised and the restoration of monarchy was put into effect. In 1660, Charles II returned from his exile in Europe to reclaim his father's throne. The period from Charles I's beheading to Charles II's ascension marks a period called the Interregnum, at the end of which the Restoration began.

Any literature produced under Charles II's governance was categorised under "Restoration." The duration of literature in Restoration differed from genre to genre. For poetry it lasted until 1666. Poetry was the most important form of literature during the time, producing remarkable lyrical, historical, epic and ariel poems.

### **2.1.2. John Dryden:**

John Dryden was one of the greatest English poets of 17<sup>th</sup> Century. He was also the greatest playwright after William Shakespeare and Ben Johnson. Dryden's sustained contribution to poetry and drama ranks him higher than most other writers of his time or since. His literary significance is threefold, and is expressed in his prose, his dramas, and his verse.

Dryden was born in 1631 in a small civil parish in the eastern part of England. He went to Westminster School, a public school in London, during which he wrote and published his first poem, a royalist elegy about the death of a classmate that allegorizes the execution of Charles I, in 1694. After attending college at Cambridge, Dryden dominated the literary scene of Restoration England. He changed sides as soon as Charles II was restored, welcoming him with the poem "Astrae Redux." He was soon directly commissioned by Charles II to write poems and speeches, and soon wrote famous plays such as *Marriage à la Mode* (1673) and *All for Love* (1678).

Dryden's early verse was unremarkable and uninspiring, but he soon deduced what the people of his time desired to read and began to hone his craft accordingly. He knew that there was a shift from the romantic to the classical manner, and focused his attention on couplets, bringing qualities of ease, flexibility, and lucidity into English verse. Later in his career he prospered in the field of satire; his famous satires include *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), *The Medal* (1682), and *Mac Flecknoe* (1682). His most famous essay is "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," where he tries to defend drama as a legitimate form of art, not just epics. He also tries to defend English drama against French and other ancient dramas. The essay is written in the form of a debate between four speakers, one of whom is Dryden himself.

Dryden depicted several religious controversies of the time, such as the disputes between the Catholics and Anglicans, and the fierce disagreements of the Nonconformists. They are depicted in *Religio Laici* (1683), an argumentative poem coloured by Catholic sympathies; and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), a clever and curious piece of work, with a very elaborate allegorical framework—the Panther being the English Church and the Hind the Church of Rome. Dryden has translated several works from Latin and Greek poets, with the most remarkable work being his translation of Virgil published in 1697.

"A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" is a famous poem of John Dryden, written on the occasion of St. Cecilia's Day, celebrated on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1687. Cecilia was a devout Christian who gave her life for her faith in Rome in 230 A.D. The poem is a tribute to the power of music, and the patron saint of music, Cecilia. It's exulted in a breath-taking tone. Being the British poet laureate, Dryden wrote this poem for the ceremony, which included a feast with concerts and other festivities. The song was to be performed with an orchestra. The celebration of St. Cecilia is a recurring event, and in 1708, British poet Alexander Pope also wrote his poem "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day."

Dryden's poem focuses on the divine features of music and traces its role from the inception through the destruction of the entire universe. It describes how St. Cecilia mesmerized the angels from heaven with her expert use of her organ, making them mistake earth for heaven. The poem is divided into eight parts, with a single voice used in the first seven stanzas and a Grand Chorus taking over the final stanza.

It reads like a song which highlights the importance of St. Cecilia's Day. The poem also has references to historical and religious characters that are well known for their musical abilities, such as Jubal, a biblical character hailed as the father of music, and Orpheus, a classical singer from Greek mythology.

### 2.1.3. PARAPHRASE: A SONG FOR ST. CECILIA'S DAY, 1687

#### Stanza – 1:

*From harmony, from heavenly harmony,  
This universal frame began:  
When nature underneath a heap  
Of jarring atoms lay,  
And could not heave her head,  
The tuneful voice was heard from high,  
'Arise, ye more than dead!'  
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,  
In order to their stations leap,  
And Music's power obey.  
From harmony, from heavenly harmony,  
This universal frame began:  
From harmony to harmony  
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason closing full in Man.*

Written as an ode, the poem was a performance for St. Cecilia's Day celebrated in the year 1687. Dryden begins the poem with the emphasis on how important a role music played in the beginning of the creation of the universe. "*From Harmony, form heavenly harmony,*" the entire frame of the universe began. He says that everything built in this universe began with music. The word "*harmony*" here refers to music. Music is a tool that unites everything. It is harmonious in nature. He uses the word "*harmony*" twice, thus stressing how significant it is. The harmony is "*heavenly,*" meaning it is the pinnacle of everything that is good. It is also a "*universal frame,*" which is to say that there is nothing in this universe that is not touched by music. Though the statement cannot be technically true, it is a common use of rhetoric to elevate the poet's ideas.

*“When nature underneath a heap/Of jarring atoms lay”*—all natural creations were initially haphazard in their structural integrity. There was chaos in creation in the beginning. *“And could not heave her head,”* meaning nature was so overwhelmed that “she” could not even lift her head. The poet here allots a feminine gender to nature. Since nature is often referred to as Mother Nature, it can be reasoned why the poet would deem it appropriate to address her thus. Unable to control everything, nature seemed dead. But the *“tuneful voice,”* which is music, heard from up above ordered her to get up and said that she was *“more than dead!”* And so all the four elements of nature (ice, fire, water and air – *“Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry”*) sprang up to their respective places and stopped their chaotic behaviour. In this stanza, the voice of music is akin to a mother who reprimands her unruly children. The four elements had to bow down to the irresistible power of music: it thus has the capacity to bring order in the face of chaos.

After music finished working its wonders on the rest of natural creations, it came to a resounding stop with man, *“The diapason closing full in Man.”* It ran many of its musical notes through various forms of nature and saved its final note to fall in the hands of man.

#### **Stanza – 2:**

*What passion cannot Music raise and quell?  
When Jubal struck the chorded shell,  
His listening brethren stood around,  
And, wondering, on their faces fell  
To worship that celestial sound:  
Less than a God they thought there could not dwell  
Within the hollow of that shell,  
That spoke so sweetly, and so well.  
What passion cannot Music raise and quell?*

The man referred at the end of the first stanza is spoken of in the beginning of the second stanza as well. The line *“Less than a God they thought there could not dwell”* shows man marvelling at the Godly nature of music. It is so sweet and so great that it can satisfy any and all passions that man may possess. This stanza is about the passions of man and how music can control them. This stanza also mentions the



Biblical figure Jubal in its second line. He is a musician of the Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible. Though he is not mentioned more than once, he is considered by many as the one who invented music. His is a descendant of Adam and Eve's son Cain. Jubal appears in the Book of Genesis 4:21. In it, he is referred as the forefather of musical instruments. There are several translations of the Book of Genesis and in each of these Jubal is said to have played several string instruments and pipes such as lyre, harp, and the organ. He is the one that ventured into creating instrumental music according to the bible.

In the second stanza, the speaker asks if there is any passion that music cannot invoke or regulate. The second line describes how when Jubal played "*the chorded shell*," his peers stood around him entranced by his music. It sounded otherworldly, like "*celestial sound*," and they seemed to worship his music. Their observation initially started with veneration and then over the course of the piece transformed into one of devotion. They decided that the sound was too good for it to have come from anything other than God himself. The listeners could not help but surrender to the mesmerizing quality of the music produced by Jubal.

**Stanza – 3:**

*The trumpet's loud clangour  
Excites us to arms,  
With shrill notes of anger,  
And mortal alarms.  
The double double double beat  
Of the thundering drum  
Cries Hark! the foes come;  
Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat!*

Man's tendency to wage wars signifies an extremely passionate side of his interests, and the musical instruments the poet uses to specify that tendency are trumpet and drum.

This stanza begins with a blaring description of the trumpet. The trumpet is a loud instrument, there is nothing soft about the music it produces. It clues in on what the rest of the stanza is going to denote. The words *loud clangour*, *shrill notes of anger*, *thundering drum*/*Cries Hark*, and *Charge, charge* signifies violence and

harshness. In the line “*double double double beat,*” the poet uses the same word three times, as it is representative of the repetitive beats produced by the drums. It also denotes a sense of urgency. “*Cries Hark! The foes come,*” The voice of the poet asks to listen to the sounds of the enemy and get ready to attack because there is no more time to back down, “*’tis too late to retreat!*” The sense of urgency noted in the previous line continues on with the violent symbolism of war. The words *Charge*, *charge* and *retreat* also symbolize someone about to get into the battle field and attack the enemies. These words evoke emotions such as harshness and bravery.

#### **Stanza – 4:**

*The soft complaining flute,  
In dying notes, discovers  
The woes of hopeless lovers,  
Whose dirge is whisper’d by the warbling lute.*

In contrast to the previous stanza, this stanza switches on to the soft notes produced by the flute. Flutes can produce melancholic and touching sounds. Here the poet talks about the complaints of lovers that are not content with their relationship. The emotions that the instrument evoke are in line with hopelessness, misery and ultimately, death. The line “*In dying notes*” signifies how the relationship of the lovers also is in the brink of death. There is no fire between the lovers, which continues to slowly erode their connection. They have become a couple of “*hopeless lovers,*” who are drowning in sorrow. Just like the softer sounds of the flute, their coupledness is balancing on thin air. Their sorrow is so intense that it has led to their *dirge*, and that death of their relationship is merely *whisper’d by the warbling lute*.

Unlike the shrill notes of the anger and the trumpet’s loud clangour in the previous stanza, here the end is soft and dying. There is no sense of urgency nor excitement to fight back, it’s instead weak and desolate.

#### **Stanza – 5:**

*Sharp violins proclaim  
Their jealous pangs and desperation,  
Fury, frantic indignation,  
Depth of pains, and height of passion,  
For the fair, disdainful dame.*

In complete opposition with the mournful end of the lovers in the fourth stanza, the poet here uses other lively expressions such as jealousy, passion, anger and dejection. Though they are more lively than the previously expressed emotions, they are not necessarily positive in nature. The instrument used here is the violin. The sounds they produce are sharp and cutting. They proclaim the feelings of jealousy the lovers display due to lack of trust. There is a desperate edge to their love, signifying instability. After jealousy, the emotion that follows is anger; "*Fury, frantic indignation.*" These are all violent emotions. Next comes pain, "*Depth of pains, and height of passion,/For the fair, disdainful dame.*" All these spectrum of emotions are proclaimed by the "*Sharp violins.*"

**Stanza – 6:**

*But O, what art can teach,  
What human voice can reach,  
The sacred organ's praise?  
Notes inspiring holy love,  
Notes that wing their heavenly ways  
To mend the choirs above.*

This stanza praises the organ. Its qualities as a sacred instrument aiding in divine worship are so supreme that there is no art form or human voice that can justifiably sing its praise; *But O, what art can teach,/What human voice can reach,/The sacred organ's praise?* The notes produced by the organ inspire what the poet calls as *holy love* and they lead to *heavenly ways* that can *mend the choirs above*.

Dryden has indicated the power of music on an array of human passions such as divine prayers, courage to fight, pining and desolate love, anger brought on by jealousy and finally, religious love.

**Stanza – 7:**

*Orpheus could lead the savage race;  
And trees unrooted left their place,  
Sequacious of the lyre;  
But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder higher:  
When to her organ vocal breath was given,*

*An angel heard, and straight appear'd  
Mistaking Earth for Heaven.*

This is the stanza where Dryden finally introduces St. Cecilia to the readers. But first he refers to Orpheus, who was a great musician from the Greek mythology. He was second to none in his musical talent with his mastery of the lyre. His father was Oeagrus, the king of Thrace and his mother was Calliope, the chief of muse.

Orpheus' immense talent could tame even the untenable nature. He could *lead the savage race* that is human and tame the *trees unrooted* using his undeniable command of music. His mastery of the lyre is infamous and there is no force of nature that could resist falling under his spell.

After thus showcasing the seemingly immeasurably talented Orpheus, Dryden goes on to introduce St. Cecilia. He begins the line with a "but" and says she is one step greater than Orpheus. The wonders he performed with his lyre is bested by the wonders St. Cecilia performed with her musical abilities, *But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder higher.*

When Cecilia performed music using her vocal organ, *When to her organ vocal breath was given*, it was so marvellous that it attracted an angel who mistakenly came down to earth thinking it was heaven instead, *An angel heard, and straight appear'd/ Mistaking Earth for Heaven.*

Placing Orpheus from the Greek mythology next to St. Cecilia and judging them both based on their musical abilities, Dryden elevates St. Cecilia over Orpheus because if the latter could move nature and man, Cecilia could move an angel from heaven. He demonstrates how the Christian music of St. Cecilia is superior to the Greek Orpheus.

**Stanza – 8:**

*GRAND CHORUS.  
As from the power of sacred lays  
The spheres began to move,  
And sung the great Creator's praise  
To all the Blest above;  
So when the last and dreadful hour*

*This crumbling pageant shall devour,  
The trumpet shall be heard on high,  
The dead shall live, the living die,  
And Music shall untune the sky!*

The last stanza of the poem is the *GRAND CHORUS*. It details how the universe originated from music, that the movement of the spheres itself was initiated by the power of music: *As from the power of sacred lays/The spheres began to move*. Music also bestowed praise upon the Creator of the universe and made his presence known to other beings.

On the other hand, the power that music holds will also be representative of, and responsible for, the end of the world. The following lines are prophetic in nature as they describe in detail how music will accompany the eventual reality of the destruction of the universe. When the time comes for the end of days, *So when the last and dreadful hour*, the solid matters will be crushed and swallowed up whole: *This crumbling pageant shall devour*. The sound that will accompany the crumbling of the universe is the trumpet. The sound will be high and victorious, and no one living will be untouched by it: *The trumpet shall be heard on high*. In the end, everyone that had died will be the ones left to live and those that are alive will go on to die. Amidst the death toll, the sound of music will ring high in the sky as the only thing left; *The dead shall live, the living die,/And Music shall untune the sky!* Just like how music brought the world together through its harmonious nature as described in the beginning of the poem, it will also be the one thing that brings everything to a close, forming a full circle.

#### **2.1.4. Poem Summary:**



This is a celebratory poem written in the form of an ode, which is defined as a poem or song sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. “A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day” postulates the idea that the entire universe is set in a stage. Music breathed life into an otherwise nonstructured universe and it will also be the power of music, in the form of a last trumpet, that destroys the very universe it created. In both the beginning and the end of creation, it is the transformative power of music that plays a crucial role. This poem showcases the solid link between poetry and music that was present in eighteenth century England.

In the beginning of the poem, the poet sheds light on the power of music by saying that it brought harmony to the chaos that was the universe. Music here is representative of the rebirth of divinity. It contained the unruly nature and gave it shape “*From Harmony, from Heav’nly Harmony/This universe frame began.*” The subsequent stanzas describe how humans have been stimulated and affected by different kinds of music. The first of which is the biblical musician Jubal, who was quite proficient in playing the lyre and other string instruments. The people around Jubal began to worship the celestial sound he produced. Dryden shows how music has the ability to guide man towards God, thus linking music with divine qualities.

The third stanza links music with more violent and wild emotions such as anger. It has the ability to incite passion, enraging the human heart. The incessant and loud beats of the drums encourage man to fight the enemies. The fourth stanza describes how music can inspire more refined emotions such as hopelessness and longing. In the next stanza, Dryden uses the sharp tunes of the violin to represent jealousy, anger and indignation.

The sixth stanza contrasts the divine musical qualities of the organ with a human voice. Dryden asks, “*What human voice can reach The sacred organ’s praise?*” And through this question the poet introduces the titular character St. Cecilia and her gift of music. He makes use of the Greek mythological character Orpheus and showers praise on how there is no force, not even the unruly nature, strong enough to resist the power of his mastery of the lyre. But then comes Cecilia, the patron saint of music, with her organ. She is even more mesmerizing than Orpheus, to the point

where it catches the attention of heavenly angels, who mistake her music to be coming from heaven and so come down to earth to listen to it.

The conclusive stanza of the poem sounds like a prophecy. It is the grand chorus that declares the end of the universe; prophesying it will be incited by the power of music just as the beginning of the universe was created by its harmony.

#### **2.1.5. Analysis:**

As the title suggests, this ode is a homage to the transformative power of music and is also a celebratory poem written in honour of St. Cecilia. The use of the terms “harmony” and “universal frame” in the first stanza correlates to Pythagoras’ study of music. In his investigations, he used musical instruments, and measured their physical quantities and ratios to understand and explain the aesthetics of musical harmony. Dryden thus derives upon the Pythagorean doctrine, while also reimagining the account of the creation of the world in the book of Genesis. He paints it as a melodic creation. The biblical undertone continues to the subsequent stanzas with mentions of Jubal, angels, and the apocalypse in the Grand Chorus. During the ancient times, dramas were performed with a chorus song and dancing on the side of the orchestra. This type of dramas were called as Strophe. Dryden adapting a Grand Chorus in the last stanza is thus Strophic in structure. With specific rhyming and mirroring of lines, a balanced frame with lyrical effect is achieved.

Human emotions reflected through musical instruments is a major theme throughout the poem. Like notes on a scale, various emotions are reflected by Dryden. Each stanza deals with different emotions from anger and jealousy to worship. They also are represented by respective musical instruments, which produce sounds that mimic those emotions. The trumpet produces clangour, the drums produce double beats, and the violin produces sharp sounds. The way music brings harmony to everything in the beginning of the poem suggests a divine and heavenly association. It is further solidified when St. Cecilia’s organ draws in an angel from up above.

Contrary to harmony and heaven, other opposing aspects of music is also disclosed by the poet. It is anger, jealousy, and destruction. It can manipulate the listener like a sweet talking swindler, “*With the hollow of that shell/That spoke so sweetly and so well.*” It can cause wars, cause the pains of pining lovers, induce anger,

and then in the end it can also destruct everything. This shows that even if music can be soothing and inspire creation, it can also inspire the opposite if desired. In the bible, there is a reference to the Angel Gabriel, who will blow the trumpet on the day of the judgement. It mentions how the living beings will perish and the dead will rise out their graves and appear in front of God for their last judgement, where all the deeds they have done in their entire lifetimes, be it good or bad, will be evaluated and judged by God.

Though not too lengthy, this ode is an intense and thorough celebration of music, about how it affects everything and everyone. It also establishes a moral framework to the readers, just like it establishes a universal frame in the stanzas. The dual nature of music to be a force of harmony as well as a force of destruction is highlighted in the poem.

#### **2.1.6. Form:**

This poem is divided into eight stanzas and is written in a lyrical form. Dryden uses heroic couplets to maintain a uniform structure. A heroic couplet is a form of poetry where the lines rhyme, and are written in iambic pentameter – in iambic pentameter, a stressed syllable is followed by an unstressed syllable. The structural integrity of the poem is quite severe and the tone is serious and universal in nature.

Since this Ode is a praise to music itself, it is also Pindaric in structure: “A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day” is often called a pseudo-Pindaric Ode. Pindaric Ode is a type of poem written in honour of someone, usually the Gods. It’s sung as a song and the stanzas have a set structure of three units which called strophe, antistrophe, and epode.

#### **2.1.7. Poetic Devices:**

In Rhetoric, poetic devices are used to enhance the verse or a sentence, to make it impressive. Poets use them to add more flavour to their writings. Readers can find several literary devices used in this poem as Dryden has used an evident number of figures of speech to effectively make the readers enjoy the experience.

**Metaphor:** Metaphor is an implied simile. It is used to compare things without the words ‘like,’ ‘so’ and ‘as’. Metaphor is identified in Stanza 1: “*a heap/Of jarring atoms lay*” here the poet compares nature as lying under, like that of a heap



of a discordant atoms scattered around each other. It is the power of music which creates harmony and results in the orderly function of the universe which was responsible for creation of life itself.

Similarly, in lines *"Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry, in order to their stations leap"* it's said that all the four seasons or elements of nature (universe) seem to obey music and are enchanted by it. In simple words, the poet means that music is the enthralling object.

In Stanza three, four and five music is compared to a war like thing: *"the trumpet's loud clangor .... Charge, Charge, 'tis too late to retreat"*, *"sharp violins proclaim"* and *"Orpheus could lead the savage race"* all representing the symbols of war.

Finally in the Grand Chorus, the metaphorical representation of universe is used as it is compared to a shadow - a crumbling pageant in the lines: *"So when the last and dreadful hour/This crumbling pageant shall devour"* and music will end this Universe, getting ready for yet another cycle. The soft sound of the flute appears to be imitating a complaining voice in stanza 4. The listeners can imagine the woes of hopeless lovers in its end notes. The speaker means their dirge is whispered by the *"warbling lute."* In this phrase, the poet uses a personal metaphor: *"the soft complaining flute.... Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute"*.

**Alliteration:** In this figure of speech, two or more words begin with the same letter or syllable. There is alliteration in the phrase *"heave her head"*. Here the readers can see the repetition of the "h" sound.

*"That spoke so sweetly, and so well:"* sibilance (alliteration of the "s")  
*"loud clangour:"* consonance of the "l"

*"Charge, charge:"* alliteration of the "ch" through repetition of the same word

*"'tis too late to retreat:"* consonance of the "t"

*"Fury, frantic indignation:"* alliteration of the "f"

*"The soft complaining flute [...] the warbling lute:"* consonance of the "l"

**Polysyndeton:** This figure of speech consists of excessive use of conjunctive particles. It is used in order to give more insistence or emphasis to the particulars which are enumerated, as we can see in the line, “*Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry.*” Readers can very well notice the usage of conjunction ‘and’ to express the four elements of universe.

**Antithesis:** This device represents the contrasted words or ideas that are set against each other in order to strengthen the intention produced by an idea in a balanced form. The contrast is used explicitly to give a forceful expression: “*Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry.*” By looking closely at this line, readers can see there is an antithesis that have been brought forth by the contrasting ideas.

**Palilogy:** It is a repetition of a word for emphasis, repeated twice or more, without intervening word in between the repetitive elements. Dryden uses palilogy by repeating the word “harmony” for emphasizing music’s power.

**Allusion:** Allusion is a figure of speech which gives reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, myths or work of art. Here in this poem, it is the classical musician Jubal (a biblical reference of the Old Testament): “*When Jubal struck the corded shell, His list’ning brethren stood around*” followed by many such in the forthcoming stanza of seven, reference to Orpheus, a figure of Greek Mythology well known for his meritorious work of combining verse with the lyre: “*Orpheus could lead the savage race.*”

**Onomatopoeia:** This is a pretence of language by which the sound of words is made to reflect their sense. The word “clangor” is an example of onomatopoeia as it expresses the sound of the trumpet in stanza three: “*The trumpet’s loud clangor/Excites us to arms.*”

**Personification:** In this figure of speech, lifeless objects or abstract concepts are said or written as if they were living. Humans have an instinct in believing that inanimate objects are endowed with sensibility that they can think, feel and act like human beings. Here in this poem, Dryden personifies nature and says nature could not heave her head higher after its creation. Then unexpectedly, she heard a “*tuneful voice*” from heaven, the sound of which made her rise from her immobile state.

**Imagery:** By this device, the poet or writer opines to create in the minds of the reader a clear mental picture or absent imaginary physical sensation. Here in the fourth stanza, the speaker zooms in to the sound of the flute. Dryden uses auditory imagery throughout this piece for depicting the sounds of the instrument mentioned by him, such as the corded shell, flute, lyre, trumpet and organ.

**Metonymy:** It signifies the name of some person or thing for another man or thing. In stanza 5, on hearing the sound of the flute, the violins seem to be ready to indulge in violence: “*the sharp violin proclaim their jealous pangs and desperation.*” The speaker showcases the violin as if it is desperate to express the player’s fury and frantic indignation. For such a situation, the instrument cannot be offended; the user or the musician is offended. This is how Dryden uses metonymy here.

**Anaphora:** This is a figure of speech which represents the repetition of a word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or verses especially to give a rhetorical or poetic effect. In stanza three, *The double double double beat / Of the thun’ring drum:* it’s easy to note the “double” word being repeated for more emphasis.

#### **2.1.8. COMPREHENSION:**

1. Write a brief note on Restoration Period
2. Compare the music of Orpheus and St. Cecilia.
3. What are the various musical instruments mentioned in the poem?
4. Explain the significance of Jubal in the Bible.

## LESSON 2: William Blake

### OUTLINE:

- ◆ Blake's biography
- ◆ Songs of Innocence and Experience

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Appreciate William Blake as an artist
- ◆ Understand the consequences of Child Labour
- ◆ Deduce the role of religion in poem "The Chimney Sweeper"

#### 2.2.1. BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM BLAKE:

William Blake, born on November 28, 1757, in London, England was a multi-talented sculptor, painter, composer, and great thinker. He has authored exquisite verses in Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794), as well as deep and complicated "prophecies" like Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), The First Book of Urizen (1794), Milton (1804–11], and Jerusalem (1804–20]. With the help of his beloved wife, Catherine, he engraved, reproduced, painted, patched, and published these masterpieces. "The Lamb," "The Tyger," "London," and Milton's "Jerusalem" lyric, which has become a sort of second national anthem in England, are one of his greatest verses still. Blake was recognised as the first and most creative of the Romantic poets in the early twenty-first century, yet he was largely ignored or (unjustly) condemned as insane during his lifetime.

In every meaning of the word, Blake was a visionary poet. He not only proposed a highly unusual spiritual picture of reality, but he also saw angels as well as other spiritual events in his dreams. These visions contribute to his writing's prophetic nature. Blake was historically linked to Romanticism, a movement that included Blake's more well-known contemporaries William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. The Romantic poets, like Blake, held youth, creativity, and the forces of nature in high regard. Blake's art, on the other hand, is so odd and distinctive that calling him a Romantic doesn't do it justice. It's probably easiest to conceive of him as a one-of-a-kind figure in English literature.

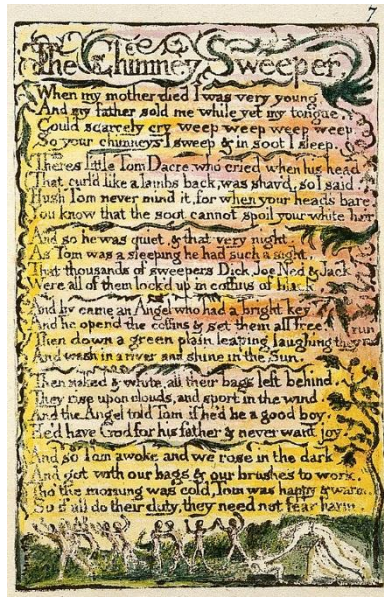
### 2.2.2. THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER:

Chimney sweeping was a dreadful job that was largely done by youngsters. Between the Great Fire of London (1666) and its abolition in 1875, this forced labour was most prevalent. Ironically, it was rules enacted in the aftermath of the Great Fire that left England's chimneys more angular and small, making kids the only ones tiny enough to clean them. The soot was toxic, and sweeps were occasionally burned, trapped, or suffocated while performing their duties.

The speaker and Tom Dacre are most likely what used to be referred to as "climbing boys." A crew of chimney sweepers would be headed by a master sweep, who would be paid by the government to employ minors. These master sweeps were required to provide shelter and meals for their group, but this was an uncontrolled and, as the poem shows, a dismal existence.

It's worth noting that the official Church isn't mentioned in this very religious poetry. Instead, the reader is shown an intimate bond between environment, mankind, and Divinity, as Blake believed religion should be. Blake's defiant streak was influenced by the American and French Revolutions, which provided philosophers with opportunity to imagine better forms of society, albeit the revolutions did not always deliver on their promises. Blake was also composing during the rapid Industrial Revolution, which he saw as a danger to humanity's economical, societal, and environmental transformations. Blake saw the factories of the Industrial Revolution as a sort of physical and mental captivity, referring to them in his poem "London" as "mind-forg'd manacles." Indeed, it was at this time that the demand for chimney sweeping skyrocketed.

### 2.2.3. PARAPHRASE-THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER (SONGS OF INNOCENCE):



(from Songs of Innocence)

#### Stanza 1:

*When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,  
Could scarcely cry "weep! weep! weep! weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.*

"The Chimney Sweeper" jumps right into the grim world of its main characters, two poor young lads working as chimney sweeps in 18th century London. The speaker describes how his mother had died while he was "very young," and how his father sold him into the life he currently lives. The speaker says that he became a chimney sweep before he could even properly speak, before he learned how to "cry 'weep! weep! weep! weep! weep!'" The epizeuxis here—the repeated word "weep"—emphasizes the speaker's impoverishment and suffering.

#### Stanza 2:

*There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd, so I said.  
"Hush Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."*

Tom Dacre, the poem's main character (aside from the speaker) is introduced in the second stanza. The stanza describes what happens when Tom, a new employee, is exposed to the world of chimney sweeping. The adjective "small" emphasises his youth and impotence, while the caesurae all through the stanza interrupt the poem's flow, creating a sense of trepidation and terror.

To emphasise Tom's innocence, the speaker uses analogy to compare his shaved head to "a lamb's back." Because of its small size and frailty, the lamb is frequently used by Blake as a symbol of innocence. Tom's hair is shaved, symbolically severing him from his innocence and sending him into the dreary and unscrupulous environment of chimney sweeping.

**Stanza 3:**

*And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black;*

The third stanza serves as a bridge between Tom's introduction to the chimney sweepers and his dream later in the night. The sibilance in the first and second lines of the verse aids the transition from reality to dreams.

The /s/ sound is already associated with the smoky world of chimney sweeping, but it has a pleasant, even mesmerising aspect here, as if the sound is enticing Tom to sleep. This demonstrates how much his new predicament weighs on his mind while he tries to sleep. The beginning of Tom's dream is on lines 11 and 12, and it lasts until line 21. A vision of death; Tom's subconscious mind conjuring a picture to match the sweeps' reality's horrors. Sweeps were frequently choked by gases or became caught in tight chimney flutes, resulting in casualties.

Furthermore, line 11's rapid-fire sequence of initial names hints at how common these kinds of deaths were in industrialised London. The monosyllabic names were all common among English boys in the 1700s, but there may have been countless Joes and Neds that perished while working in the chimneys. This collection of common names depicts how unnoticeable these boys were, and how ignored their deaths were.

#### **Stanza 4:**

*And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.*

Tom Dacre's dream, which began in lines 11 and 12, is expanded in the fourth stanza. This dream depicts a fantasy of freedom that contrasts with the chimney sweeps' oppressive reality. The sweeps' coffins are opened by an angel sent by God, and they are released free. This motif implies that religion provides a way out of everyday existence. It's important to note that this poem is from Blake's Songs of Innocence, and not from Songs of Experience. This means that, while the poetry is uttered by a child, it does not have to be interpreted in the same way by readers with more real world experience. To put it another way, readers are not required to accept the poetry at surface level.

#### **Stanza 5:**

*Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.*

Tom Dacre's dream is continued in the fifth stanza, bringing it to a close. In essence, the chimney sweeps ascend to heaven after being freed from earthly existence and having the opportunity to play joyfully on the "green plain." They are "naked & white" since they are purified, both physically and symbolically, by removing their worldly work garments and sooty complexions. It is indeed worth mentioning that if the flues were very narrow, sweeps were occasionally forced to ascend the chimneys naked. Whilst this may have left the children filthy, their ascension to heaven has left them spotless.

The sweeps leave "their bags" in the dream, which are the bags in which the kids would gather the ashes. They also abandon their psychological and emotional burden from their previous lives behind. Furthermore, Blake's indictment of the chimney sweep occupation is bolstered by the common conception of paradise as a location above the clouds. The position arose as a result of the Industrial Revolution,



which engulfed English cities in thick clouds of black smoke. As a result, soaring over them in the dream indicates liberation from a society that promotes enterprise over the wellbeing of children.

**Stanza 6:**

*And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.*

The final verse is about Tom Dacre's dream the morning after. The caesura after the word "awoke" indicates how abruptly the dream ends—probably because Tom gets woken up rather than waking up on his own because it's time to go work the chimneys. The final lines are far more complicated than they seem initially. The prospect of a better quality of life in the afterlife appears to have provided some comfort to the lads. However, part of Blake's brilliance lies in the way this both rings true and doesn't.

On the one hand, Blake believes in God's glory and the way religion provides salvation. Blake's beliefs, on the other hand, frequently conflicted with the organisation and structure of religious institutions of the time—children doing their job by working in appalling conditions is not part of Blake's case for how humankind must conduct its children. In some ways, Tom Dacre and the young speaker may still be rescued in the end by God and angels, but it will be regardless of the Church.

#### 2.2.4. PARAPHRASE-THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER (SONGS OF EXPERIENCE):



(from Songs of Experience)

##### Stanza 1:

*A little black thing among the snow:  
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!  
Where are thy father & mother? say?  
They are both gone up to the church to pray.*

"The Chimney Sweeper" starts out on an enigmatic tone. The child chimney sweep's first appearance is a bleak one, the boy seemingly unrecognisable due to the thick layer of soot that blankets him. He's merely a small black creature among the snow, instead. This ambiguous description has a dehumanising and distancing impact, demonstrating how the boy has been rendered unidentifiable, both physically and metaphorically—as if he is not a kid anymore, but merely a black form, a dark scar on society's conscience.

The softness of this informs the reader that, although being world-weary and seasoned, the kid speaker is still young and sensitive. The small black thing is wailing and sobbing, according to the second line. Considering who the witness is in this; Blake presumably intended to put the reader in that spot as part of the discussion that everyone carries some accountability for how society operates, or, more accurately, does not work. Such that, the reader becomes a bystander to the misery of this young child. Shortly thereafter, however, follows this poem's depiction of utter misery, with the fast recurrence of "weep" hinting it could even be one of the lads from the first poem, with the important distinction that he is now aware of organised religion's lies

and deceit. The assonance of "notes of sorrow" is especially crucial here, making the statement sound like a melancholy melody in its own right. The alliteration of "weep" and "woe" further connects the process of lamenting to the sweep's miserable life.

Line 3 sets the tone for the entire poem, which is structured as an accompanied by a response. "Where are thy father and mother?" the anonymous voice inquires of the sweep regarding his family's location. This also sets the poem's concerns on responsibility and authority, who is at fault for the sweep's poverty and suffering. His parents went "to the church to pray," according to the sweep. Despite the fact that this appears to be a reasonably common activity at the time, it's evident that the sweep has been overlooked. The parents have left their youngster "in the snow" because they are at church. Organized religion allows people to evade their parental responsibilities and duties while exonerating them of their guilt.

**Stanza 2:**

*Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winters snow:  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.*

The chimney sweep begins to explain the circumstances in which he is stuck. He explains it bluntly and pessimistically. The indication of experience can be found in this and the next stanzas. His abuse is directly linked to the fact that he was "happy upon the heath," according to the sweep. It's almost as if he was forced into child labour for being joyful. Because child labour is beneficial to those in positions of power in society, they willfully abuse the underprivileged children, thereby robbing them of their childhood experiences. As a consequence, society diminishes children's fundamental happiness. The word "heath" alliterates with "happy" in a playful way.

Line 6 is substantially the same as line 5, but with the word "heath" replaced by "winter's snow." Children may be happy in any season if they are permitted to play outside, according to the poem. The alliteration of "smil'd" and "snow" connects intuitive enjoyment to the independence of being in nature once more. Lines 6 and 7 carry the poem in a more unclear and grimly enigmatic path, describing the repercussions that the chimney sweep has undergone as a result of his innate, innocent delight. The pronoun "they" is deliberately ambiguous here: "they" could refer to the

sweep's parents, religious officials, society in general, or any combination of these. Polypoton is the device that transforms "clothed" into "clothes." It implies that the person who clothed the sweep in "clothes of death" did it on purpose. "among the [...]" snow" and "sounds of misery" are repeated from the previous stanza in this stanza. These lines serve as a form of refrain, similar to a song's refrain, and are consistent with the sweep's act of singing the notes of grief. This phrase's assonance contributes to the songlike feel.

The expression clothing of death could relate to the child's charred clothes and sooty appearance, which are the result of a profession that will almost certainly kill him. More broadly, the phrase aids in the identification of opposing forces in play in society: vitality and happiness versus death and suffering. While the youngster wishes to have a happy life, society pushes him to live and die in agony. The young boy is trained to perceive that the world is a certain way, and that its cruelty and violence are just a facet of life, similar to the sweeps in the poem's counterpart, *Songs of Innocence*. Nevertheless, the church plays a role here, persuading people that if they don't whine in this life, God will reward them during the next. Which, in effect, discourages people from attempting to change the world. Sorrow and pain are things that the kid must learn, rather than inherent qualities of existence. In reality, the poem contends that structures like the Church purposefully restrict life's most joyous aspects.

### **Stanza 3:**

*And because I am happy, & dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury:  
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.*

Line 9 continues from the second stanza, emphasising the relationship between the child's natural joy and his later corruption by society, especially religious establishments such as the Church. The poem claims that some people in society incorrectly believe they haven't harmed the children because of their young behaviour. However, the boy in this poem dances and sings despite, not because of, his mistreatment. The adult world interprets this singing as a sign that the sweep is joyful, but he instead sings the chords of sorrow. Line 10 clearly expresses how no

one feels responsible for the little chimney sweeps' misery. The /th/ alliteration in "They think they" is soft, mirroring the consonance in line 3, which connects the "they" to the "father and mother." In general, the recurring pronoun "They" has an accusatory tone, with the sweep indicating that he recognizes who is at fault for his sad life from personal experience. The sweep seems to be pleading with the reader to consider who "They" might be. The divide between the Church and the underprivileged children is plain obvious in lines 11 and 12. Those in charge of the sweeps are instead thanking "God and his Priest and King," a line that also contains polysyndeton. The alliteration of "gone" and "God" underscores the connection between social negligence and organised religion. People who worship "God" are, in other words, "gone" from their obligations, such as child care. Lastly, Blake connects religious authority (the "Priest") with political authority (the "King") to paint a fuller understanding of culpability.

By using paradox to undermine the traditional ideas of heaven, Line 12 achieves a great effect. Paradise is meant to evoke feelings of happiness, excitement, and liberty, yet this "heaven" is made of the "misery" of the youthful chimney sweepers. To put it another way, chimney sweepers are a symbol of how society's privileged achieve their luxury and opulence by using others, in this instance the young and impoverished. Chimney sweeps literally give their lives so that the middle and higher echelons of the society might live in cosy, comfortable houses.

#### **2.2.5. POEM SUMMARY:**

"The Chimney Sweeper" is a poem by William Blake published in two parts, "Songs of Innocence" published in 1789 and "Songs of Experience" published in 1794 respectively. The Chimney Sweeper poem is set against the dark background of "Child Labor" which was very prominent during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century of England. Boys who were of age four and five were sold to clean chimneys because they were very small in size. These children were oppressed and had a poor existence which was quite accepted by the society during that time. Children engaged in this job often did not have enough food and wore poor clothes. In most cases, these children left this earth by falling from the chimney or of lung injury, and other terrible diseases caused by inhalation of soot.

In the beginning of the poem, a young chimney sweeper tells the dream of one of his companions in which an angel rescues the boys from the coffin and takes them to a sunny meadow. In the latter part of the poem, the speaker, now a grown up, meets a child who is all alone crying. The child has been left alone in the unforgiving cold snow. The speaker learns that the child's parents have left to attend church, even would have possibly suffered death, and perhaps even when the church refers to being the God.

When my mother died, I was a little boy. Before I could speak, my father sold me to a chimney sweep. Since then, all I have done is sweep the chimney and sleep in the dirt. One day, a new boy arrived; his name was Tom Dyke. When his curly lamb hair was shaved, he cried. I told him not to worry; because with his shaved head, his beautiful hair would not be soiled by the dust of the chimney. Later that night, Tom fell asleep. He saw a vision in his dream. He saw rows of dead chimney sweepers in black coffins. An angel came with a key, opened the coffin, and let the sweepers free. Then they played in the green fields, bathed in clear water and basked in the sun. Naked, clean and tidy, without their working tools, rising up the clouds to the heaven playing in the wind. The angel told Tom that if he behaves well, God will take care of him and make him happy. Tom woke up the next day. We got up before dawn, took bags and chimneys and went to work. It was cold in the morning, but Tom looked fine. If we all work hard, nothing bad will happen.

#### **2.2.6. ANALYSIS:**

In "The Chimney Sweeper" (Songs of Innocence), Blake criticizes the church's view that through work and hardship, one will be rewarded in the afterlife; this leads to the acceptance of the exploitation observed in the concluding remarks, If everyone is responsible, they don't have to be afraid of being hurt. Through this poem, Blake tries to emphasize the danger of an innocent view, showing how this can lead to the abuse of child labour in society.

In "The Chimney Sweeper" of Experience, Blake further explores this erroneous view of child labour in a corrupt society. The poem depicts that this child needs to undergo hardship and sufferings in his life to reach heaven. Blake tries to tell us that this notion is very wrong and creates damage. And Blakes also criticizes harshly the very concept of justifying it as something 'holy.'

One major symbol used in the poem is Tom Dacre's lamb-like hair, which symbolizes the innocence of youth. When Tom Dacre was forced to join the chimney sweep gang, his hair was shaved. His hair is compared to the curls on the back of a lamb. This helps to emphasize Tom Dacre's youth and innocence-like a lamb, he is young and defenceless. Therefore, the act of shaving his hair represents the loss of innocence and the general depreciation of children that occurred in industrialized London. Specific mentions of the lamb also have religious connotations. For example, Jesus is also called Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), and the Lamb is a traditional symbol of Christ. In Blake's own poems, the lamb is an important figure in spirituality, godliness, and natural beauty. Also, the act of shaving can also be seen as an allusion to Samson's biblical story. In "The Book of Judges," Samson had his hair cut off while he was sleeping and lost his great strength. Similarly, Tom Dacre's hair was cut off, and he also lost his youthful happiness.

Major themes of the poem are: Hardship and Childhood & Religion and Redemption. The Chimney Sweeper is not a happy poem by any means. It's told from a chimney sweep's own perspective. Set in 1700s London, the young boy completely relies on cleaning people's chimneys to make a living. This poem makes no effort to romanticize this life, portraying it as extremely impoverished and hard. Indeed, this poem considers it to be a form of exploitation, effectively depriving children of their childhood and stealing their freedom and happiness. In the beginning, the poem established a feeling of the hardships of poor boys in 18th-century London. This is not a task that requires too much imagination-cleaning the chimney is a wasteful, dangerous and exhausting job for children. Readers soon know that the speaker's mother has passed away and he was sold to work by his father. Tom Dacre may have a similar growth experience. Now, he has been forcibly shaved his head to improve his efficiency of sweeping. Then both children are forced into a miserable world. In fact, chimney sweeping constitutes almost all of the boys' lives. They sweep the floor all day and sleep in "soot", not only because they are dirty when they go to bed, but also because their daily hardship affects their dream.

The poem is set in London during the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s. This London, as described by Blake here and in other poems, is full of pollution, corruption and poverty. The poem itself was mainly set in the course of a night, telling the story of Tom Dacre, a newcomer to the chimney sweeping gang, the speaker is

also a member of the gang. The most important aspect of the background of this poem is the way it contrasts dreams with reality. The beginning and end of this poem depicts real suffering (Stanza 1 and 6). The Sweeps starts the poem in misery and ends with it too. Though they do have some hope. Meanwhile, stanzas 3-5 are set in Tom Dacre's imagination. They depict his desire for a more free and happy childhood. Then, the setting changes to pastoral, depicting idyllic nature, where children would like to play. Industrial London gives way to green fields, clean rivers and a divine "ride above the clouds." This vision can be interpreted as ending in heaven, because the children "sport in the wind" of the sky and the angel assures Tom that "he'd have God for this father." However, in general, the poem takes place in a ruthless industrial urban landscape. Although the vision in the middle stanza represents the escape from that landscape, the poem seems to imply that this escape may be just an illusion-the boys will only leave London in the black coffins. This is not a task that requires too much imagination-cleaning the chimney is a wasteful, dangerous and exhausting job for children.

#### **2.2.7. FORM:**

Six quatrains make up "The Chimney Sweeper" (Songs of Innocence). Blake's poems, particularly those in Songs of Innocence and Experience, are known for their format. The form's simplicity and consistency lend themselves to a topic of childhood, almost as if it were a lullaby or tale. The poetry is easy to read and flows like a child's voice.

The poem is divided into four portions. The speaker introduces the reader to the anguish and suffering of a chimney sweep's existence in the first line. The entry of Tom Dacre into the chimney sweep crew, followed by the shaving of his head, is the subject of the second stanza. All the stanzas from three to five are about Tom Dacre's dream, which features pastoral poetic aspects. It also incorporates what could be construed as a form of indoctrination. That is, Tom Dacre's dream confirms what he has been hearing from the adults in control of him, such as the master sweep and Church supervisors: that he ought to be a nice boy and go about his task. The final verse depicts Tom and the speaker leaving for work the next morning after the dream.

Three quatrains make up "The Chimney Sweeper" (Songs of Experience). The format is characteristic of Blake, with the page's simplicity hiding



the intricacy of the concepts present therein. The poem is divided into two sections. The first is when the "little black thing" is first seen in the snow. An unidentified speaker overhears the youngster crying and inquires about his parents' location. This builds up the second and primary half of the poem: the child's reply. This allows the little kid to demonstrate his understanding of his own situation by describing how he came to be in such a state of anguish and suffering.

#### 2.2.8. POETIC DEVICES:

**Assonance:** Throughout "The Chimney Sweeper," assonance is used. The poem, on the whole, is written in basic language, which fits the speaker's role as a young sweep. The assonance has a gentle, light-hearted tone to it, which complements the poem's focus on childhood themes.

Line 4 is an early example of assonance: *So your chimneys I sweep, & in soot I sleep*. The /ee/ vowel echoes the word "weep" from the previous sentence, connecting the act of sobbing to the drudgery of chimney cleaning. The /ee/ signifies that chimney sweeping is a recurring labour because it is a repeating sound. Assonance and consonance are employed in line 12 of Tom Dacre's dream to form an illusion of lifeless chimney sweeps *locked up in coffins of black*. The regularity of the vowel sounds shows how many innocent youngsters have suffered the same fate. Lines 15 and 16 are also from Tom Dacre's dream, and they use delicate assonance to evoke childish playfulness: *Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run, /And wash in a river and shine in the Sun*. The vowels /ee/ and /i/ have a bouncing, playful tone to them. These sentences, in contrast to the previous instances, evoke a sense of delight—a joy that is far apart from the children's daily life.

**Caesura** is employed throughout "The Chimney Sweeper," as is typical of Blake's poetry. Exclamation marks, for example, are used as caesura in line 3 to emphasise the repeated word: "cry! weep! weep!" These caesurae refer to the speaker's sad predicament as a child without a mother, but with an uncaring father, placing emphasis on the poem's tragic opening. It's worth noting that the poem is sometimes printed without these markings; in any case, the epizeuxis of this line gives credibility to the poem's frantic tone; *That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack, Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run*.

**Sibilance** is the repetition of "s" sounds creates a hissing sound inside a set of syllables. Because it is connected with the sound of sweeping, the poem's powerful sibilant presence echoes the speaker's and his friend Tom Dacre's lives, where chimney sweeping is basically all they do. Many /z/ and /sh/ sounds appear throughout the poem, which are frequently regarded a sort of sibilance and help to complement the more prominent sibilance. In the lines *So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep* (line 4), *As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight!* (line 10) sibilance is most notable.

**Simile:** "The Chimney Sweeper" contains one simile. It's on line 6 and compares Tom Dacre's current recruit of the chimney sweeping group's hair to lamb's fur: *There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head / That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved.* This analogy is employed to create a distinct visual image of little Tom, who had pale, wavy hair similar to that of a lamb. However, it also contributes to his childlike innocence. He's crying because he's being forced to have his head shaved against his will—and it's worth recalling that he's being sheared like a lamb so he can sweep chimneys most effectively.

**Epizeuxis:** Epizeuxis is when a word or phrase is echoed without any intervening words in a rapid succession. In "The Chimney Sweeper," epizeuxis is only used once, yet it's a pivotal scene. This can be found in line 3: *weep! weep! weep! weep!*

The major purpose of these "weep[s]" is to convey the speaker's life's utter sorrow. His mother is no longer alive, and his father would rather sell him into work than care for him. It's no surprise he can't stop weeping! The speaker's circumstance is tragic, and he is entitled to "weep[ing]."

**End-Stopped Line:** Throughout "The Chimney Sweeper," end-stops are employed. Lines 2, 5, and 21 are the only ones that don't have any punctuation at the conclusion. For example: *So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.*

**Consonance:** The poem relies heavily on consonance. The poem makes extensive use of /s/ sounds, a technique known as sibilance, which is discussed in its own section. Lines 5 and 6 provide an early and crucial example: *There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head / That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I*

said, and after that in lines 11 and 12 *That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack, Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;*

**Alliteration:** Throughout "The Chimney Sweeper," alliteration is used. Line 2 of Songs of Experience contains the first example: Crying "weep! weep!" in notes of woe!

The /w/ sound of "woe" resonates with the recurrence of "weep," officially known as epizeuxis, to relate the act of weeping with the chimney sweeper's condition of suffering. This contributes to the poem's tragic tone, a tragedy that appears easily avoidable yet is horribly inescapable for the sweepers. There is very little they can do to alter their destiny without the assistance of adult forces.

**Paradox:** The poetry Songs of Experience features one major paradox, which appears in the poem's final line. But, before we get to that, it's worth observing how everything in the chimney sweep's life appears to have been a paradox. That is, his natural state of being—a desire to be happy, free, and playful—has only resulted in sorrow and punishment. As Blake sees it, childhood has been transformed into an unnatural state of anguish and unhappiness.

This really establishes the reasoning that underpins the poem's central paradox, which is quoted with the rest of the last stanza for context: *And because I am happy and dance and sing,/They think they have done me no injury,/And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King, /Wo make up a heaven of our misery.*

**Polysyndeton:** From the second stanza onwards, there is polysyndeton in "The Songs of Experience" as the word "and" appears in lines 6, 8, 9, and 10. This partially aids the poem's onward flow by supporting the metre. Most of these repeats are also examples of anaphora, which adds to the poem's dynamism. The polysyndeton, on the other hand, gently conjures a very distinct sound: the tone of the King James Version of the Bible. The KJV Bible is one of the most well-known and most familiar-sounding translations of the Bible into English, and it's chock-full of polysyndeton thanks to its frequent use of the word "and."

### 2.2.9. Comprehension:

1. Explain William Blake as a visionary poet.

2. Why are children chosen for the job of chimney sweeping in the poem?
3. In what way does Tom Dacre's dream differ from his reality?
4. What is the central idea of the poem "The Chimney Sweeper?"
5. List out the differences between Songs of Innocence and Experience.
6. What does William Blake use as the symbol of innocence?

## **UNIT – 3**

### **LESSON 1: Romantic Age**

#### **OUTLINE:**

- ◆ **Features of the Romantic period**
- ◆ **William Wordsworth's life and works**
- ◆ **Central idea of Wordsworth's poetry**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Comprehend the contribution made by the Romantics to the history of English Literature
- ◆ Understand the significance of the use of imagination in Romantic poetry
- ◆ Appreciate William Wordsworth's description of the landscape of London

#### **3.1.1. ROMANTICISM:**

The age of imagination that begins in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and extends till 1850 approximately. It rejects the neo-classical ideology and highlights the medieval philosophy. Literature is filled to the brim with feelings, emotions and intense thoughts. Spontaneity matters more than adherence to rules of poetic diction. A strong sense of individualism of the artist and aesthetics in its original form is celebrated. The writers are in awe of the nature and the co-existence of nature and human. Common man is regarded. A creation from an insignificance in the language of the common man is aesthetically moulded to form a sublime art. The beauty of the nature, everyday actions of a common man, an artistic inspiration, flow of thoughts, intense feelings, emotional writings, and subjectivity in the creation, lyric poetry and a sublime experience constitutes Romanticism. It is the reaction to the Age of Enlightenment (Age of Reason), Industrial Revolution and scientific revolution.

Romanticism opposes rationalism and classicism of the enlightenment. It revives medievalism, hates urban sprawl (unrestricted economic growth and physical expansion of urban areas) and fears the alienation of nature because of rapid industrialisation. Influence of French Revolution (revolution for the abolition of slavery and the right to vote for everyone) is prevalent. Romantics are

more into solitude in the surroundings of nature. A need to break the conventions, strange necessity to verbalise the inner turmoil, the compulsion to adapt to the rapid changes, to liberalise the art from the hold of classic rules, to infuse it with intense emotions with an awareness of the environment and to assert the aesthetics in simplicity. Main themes of romantic age are beauty of nature, aesthetics in the flow of language, history, supernatural elements, spirituality, self-importance, exoticism, imageries, and personification of nature, low life and outburst of emotions.

Imagination and the thought process are verbalised into a lyric without any consideration of the antique rules with vivid descriptions of the landscape with zero efforts to ensure reason is the path chosen by the Romantics to liberalise the art and provide it with a sensibility.

### **3.1.2. Key figures of the period:**

- ◆ Famous poets of the romantic age are William Blake, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Clare.
- ◆ Walter Scott and Mary Shelley are the prominent novelists of this age.
- ◆ Well-known essayists are William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb.
- ◆ Romanticism pervades visual arts in the form of landscape painting.
- ◆ Gothic architecture and gothic themes lure the creative arena of this age. Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" and Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" are in gothic themes.

### **3.1.3. William Wordsworth:**



William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 - 23 April 1850) inaugurates the Romantic Age in the English literature with the publication of "Lyrical Ballads" (1798) along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It is a reformation in poetic diction and prescribes the poet as a unit of the society and thereby his responsibility in the society. Famous poem of Wordsworth in the "Lyrical Ballads" is "Tintern Abbey" and of Coleridge is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". It is in the language really used by men. His father is John Wordsworth and his mother is Ann Cookson Wordsworth. The poet is close with one of his sisters, Dorothy Wordsworth.

In the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads", Wordsworth states that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity". His poems captures the transient visuals of the thoughts as is the memory and the surge of emotions triggered by insignificant actions. Wordsworth laments the loss of connection with the nature. Nature is looked upon as a resource or a raw material. It is exploited and destroyed for the human greed. This outlook on the nature that is changed from admiration for the beauty to a source to be utilised. It is pointed out by Wordsworth with the help of the poetry.

His poems are mostly about villages, rustic life and natural scenes. They are written in a language understandable to common men which is simple and lucid that can be more intense and thoughtful. The sublime experience advised by Wordsworth is in the understanding that existence of nature not only in the outer realm but also in our inner nature.

The magnum opus of Wordsworth is "The Prelude"(1850), an autobiographical writing previously titled as "Poem to Coleridge." It was published three months after the death of Wordsworth because of pleurisy. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey are the 'Lake Poets' as they are from the Lake District. They break the norms and shatter the confines of prescribed rules that kills the essence of the feeling. According to them, fitting to the convention makes the art artificial losing his originality. Wordsworth reminiscences his early childhood in "Poems, in Two Volumes – Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood."

Wordsworth becomes close to the nature when he visits his maternal grandfather's house where he is hostile to the humans and exposes himself to the moor. He romanticizes the nature, personifies it, and remembers it when he is alone

and creates a poem with the fleeting memory of his former encounters to beautify the then considered ugly ones. The visuals of his poem are seen by the readers through his eyes in all its glorified beauty. Famous poems of Wordsworth are “Lines Written in Early Spring” (1798), “We are Seven”, “Expostulation and Reply,” “Lucy Gray,” “The Solitary Reaper” and “Resolution and Independence.” He separated from Coleridge because of the opium addiction of Coleridge. Wordsworth is married to Mary Hutchinson who is also close to Dorothy Wordsworth when they are doing their graduation. When Wordsworth is in France in November, 1791, he has a relationship with Annette Vallon. Their daughter is Caroline Wordsworth.

“Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802” is written when he is on the way to France from London to meet Caroline Wordsworth along with Dorothy Wordsworth. Westminster Bridge is one of the bridges constructed over the River Thames in London which connects Westminster and Lambeth.

#### **3.1.4. Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802**

This poem is from “The Collection Poems, In Two Volumes” (1807). It was composed when Wordsworth was traveling towards France one fine early morning to see his illegitimate daughter with his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. The skyscape lures him and triggers a poem. It is uncommon for Wordsworth to praise a city as he is the personification of romanticism himself as Wordsworth’s poems are mostly to caution about the monstrosity of progress in Industrialisation and the dangerous speed in new inventions.

“Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802” is written in the form of Petrarchan sonnet. A sonnet is a fixed verse of fourteen lines with a formal rhyme scheme and in iambic pentameter. There are three types of sonnets. They are the Petrarchan sonnets, the Shakespearean sonnets and the Spenserian sonnets. Petrarch is an Italian poet. Petrarchan sonnet consists of an octave, an eight lines stanza and a sestet, a six lines stanza in iambic pentameter.

#### **3.1.5. POEM – PARAPHRASE:**

##### **Lines 1-8:**

*“Earth has not any thing to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by*



*A sight so touching in its majesty:  
This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air."*

The poet says that there is nothing more beautiful than this city's view in the early morning in the whole world. Those who can't appreciate this vista must be a dull person. Its view is more deeply felt because of its grandeur. This city London appears to be wearing a garment of early morning. It is bare as it is free of pollution it is calm and harmonious with the poet's soul. The poet admires the skyscape of the city and points to ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples which appear to be sleeping in the early morning. The view is merging its boundaries with the fields and the skyscape. Due to the lack of pollution caused by smoke, everything looks clear and bright. They glitter when the sunlight grazes them.

**Lines 9-14:**

*"Never did sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still!"*

The sun has never risen damn beautiful like that of now says the poet. It sheds light and shares splendour over valley, rock and hill. The poet has seldom felt the calmness that is so deep in his heart. The Thames River is flowing in its own course at its own pace. The poet couldn't resist exclaiming how the view is beautiful just because everything in his is still inactive as it's the early morning which might not be beautiful if it is awake and thriving for the rapid progress.

### 3.1.6. Summary:



The poet describes the early morning vista of London City before the city is awake for the daily calamities begin. The poet is travelling to France to see his daughter with his sister. He is inspired by the view from the Westminster Bridge across the river Thames. The scenery in the poet's view is aesthetically visualised for the readers. For the poet, he has not seen such a beauty that is magnificent and intense anywhere else in the whole world. Those who couldn't admire this beauty are just dull soul. The city is silent and asleep.

London has worn the beauty of the morning as its garment. The streets are empty without any crowd or traffic. Lack of pollution brightens the environment. The city with all its elements appear one with nature as it extends its horizon unto the fields and the sky. The sun gallantly rises and spreads its light on the mountains and valleys providing a glow. The poet juxtaposes the view of a city and a village to prove the indifference. A poem feels the calmness in the inner and the outer nature as the river flows through its own course with its free will. Its calm because all the people, industries and inventions are all resting.

### 3.1.7. Analysis:

The first eight lines describes the beauty of London in the silent early morning. The last six lines juxtaposes the nature on the outside and the inside. The city encompasses nature too. The poem is optimistic. Though the poem describes the

beauty of the city, the beauty is time bound. It is bright, glittering, bare and calm because of the lack of pollution, traffic and crowd. The poet subtly hints the effect of greediness in achieving economic growth and mass production. When the crowd is resting, the industries are closed, the mad rush towards an anonymous change is absent and the pollution is not visible, the beauty is magnificent. When the city comes alive, the beauty will be gone.

Wordsworth marvels the beauty of the nature when he is crossing a man-made bridge. It's a view which dates half a century back then but the encounter is still new to the poet. The poet might be hinting at the pollution curtain. The poet tries to make the readers aware of the idyllic state of the city if there is no industrial revolution.

The brutal reality of the London city is masked by the sublime experience created by the poet with his aesthetically equipped lyric. There are orphaned or abandoned children who live scraping the mud of the dirty water in Thames for pennies. Thames is also polluted but portrayed to be guided only by the nature and its course. Expectation exceeds in mass production, paves way for the inevitable hazardous pollution of air, water and also noise. Diseases like measles and cholera kill many people.

Wordsworth describes the city as if it's a memory that is fleeting and not clear anymore to state what the impending danger is then. The romantic poets are considered as angels who views the world with the screen of imagination that beautifies the ugly and sees the magnificence in the insignificance.

The poet searches the sensibility in beauty in both the inner and the outer nature. The poet tries to dilute the difference between the city and the village, nature's splendour and the man-made wonders, inner and outer nature, perception and the reality and the slow pace of the idyllic state and the and rush as he is witnessing the urban sprawl. The personification of the city provides a scary image than a visual to be awe at. The city is viewed as a whole entity composed of dissimilar varied units.

### **3.1.8. Form:**

The poem is in the form of Petrarchan sonnet in 14 lines with an octave (8 lines) and a sestet (6 lines). Its rhyme scheme is abbaabba cdcdcd with only one in

line in the traditional iambic pentameter. Caesura is utilised to bring out the desired effect.

### 3.1.9. POETIC DEVICES:

**1. Simile** – “*This City now doth, like a garment, wear*” –the elusive beauty of the early morning is compared to a garment

**2. Personification** – “*This City now doth, like a garment, wear*”- the city is imagined to be wearing a garment. The city is personified.

**3. Alliteration and Consonance** – Wordsworth infuses the poem with a musical quality.

**4. Imagery** - “*This City now doth, like a garment, wear*”

*The river glideth at his own sweet will:*

**5. Symbolism** – The Westminster Bridge is used as a symbol. It actually separates the people and the nature that is the water but symbolises a connection between the man and the nature as this is where the poet saw the beautiful vista described in the poem.

**6. Irony** – the bridge separating the man and the nature is connecting the poet with the nature and also provides him with new perspective.

**7. Enjambments** – a verse that doesn’t come to an end in a line break.

“*A sight so touching in its majesty:*”, “*This City now doth, like a garment, wear,*”, “*Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie*”, “*Never did sun more beautifully steep*”

**8. Hyperbole** - (an exaggeration) “*Earth has not any thing to show more fair:*”

### 3.1.10. COMPREHENSION:

1. What is Romanticism a reaction to?
2. How does Wordsworth describe London in the poem?
3. What is the significance of the title of the poem?
4. London is a busy city. How does the poet associate it with tranquillity?

## LESSON 2: Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

### OUTLINE:

- ◆ Notes on S. T. Coleridge
- ◆ His contribution to English Literature
- ◆ Central idea of “Kubla Khan”

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Have an understanding of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s role in the Romantic Age
- ◆ Grasp the meaning of the various terms he has coined
- ◆ Know the history of Kubla Khan
- ◆ Understand the symbolism present in the poem “Kubla Khan”

#### 3.2.1 Biography:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) was the founder of the Romanticism along with his friend William Wordsworth. He was also one of The Lake poets. The famous works of Coleridge are “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798), “Christabel” (1797 & 1800), “Kubla Khan” (1816) and “Biographia Literaria” (1817). His critique of William Shakespeare also earned him fame. He introduced German Idealist Philosophy (the characteristics assumed by us of an object is just what we perceived it to be but not what it actually is – the comprehensive relation between the thought and the being) to English people and Transcendentalism (a belief that the society and its institutions have corrupted the individual’s purity who is inherently good in nature).

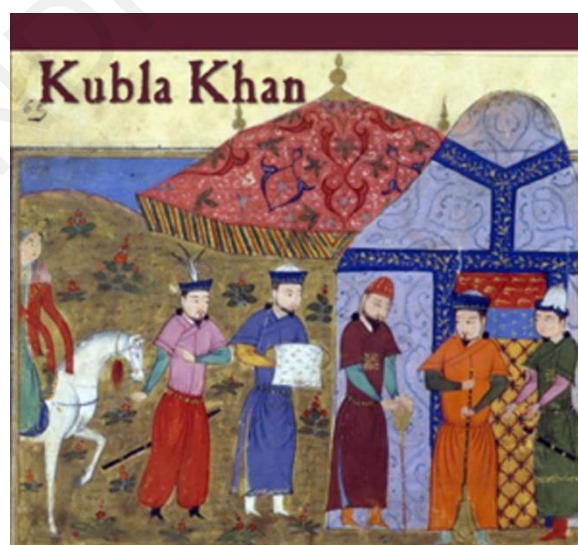
He coined the phrase “suspension of disbelief” (1817). We believe an unreal fantasy intentionally avoiding the logical thinking and reasoning for the sake of enjoyment is called as ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’ Coleridge justified that if a writer could infuse a “human interest and a semblance of truth” into a fantasy, the reader would avoid criticism even if it’s an impossibility. In “Biographia Literaria”, he coined the term ‘esemplastic’ which means moulding into one that is to make

imagination a functioning unit in the real world. “Biographia Literaria” is a literary criticism with a tinge of philosophy.

Charles Lamb was a schoolmate of Coleridge in Jesus College. He develops political, radical and theological ideas there. With Robert Southey Coleridge considered a Utopian scheme called Pantisocracy (equal power for all units in a governance). In collaboration with both of them Coleridge published “Poems on Various Subjects” (1796). Along with Wordsworth, he published “Lyrical Ballads” (1798). Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” got all the attention among all the poems. The writing of a poetry in the language of the common man is considered to an idea of Coleridge. Conversational poems are introduced by Coleridge to the world of poetry where real events from the poet’s life is discussed to make it more personal and emotional. His journal was “The Friend” which comes out once in eight days.

In 1800, he started to live in Wordsworth’s house in Lake’s District. In 1808, he got separated from his wife and in 1810, he got separated from Wordsworth because of his laudanum (opium) addiction. He had a bout of rheumatic fever (inflammatory disease) and a childhood illness which required treatment with laudanum that paved the way for addiction. He died of heart failure and lung disease before which he was working on a post-kantian work.

### 3.2.2 Kubla Khan:



*Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.*

“Kubla Khan” was created in an opium induced reverie about the mythical city Xanadu kingdom of Kubla Khan completed in 1797 but published in 1816. After consuming an anodyne, a pain killer, the poet fell asleep for three hours. He was reading a story of Kubla Khan in “Purcha’s Pilgrimage,” an emperor ordering to build a new palace before going to sleep. In his dream, he had a vision with a simultaneous composition of a poem without any manifestation. He woke up, he started to write the poem. He wrote the first three stanzas furiously (54 lines) but he was interrupted by “person on business from Porlock.” The visit continued for an hour. The poet couldn’t recall the vision after that.

“A person from Porlock” becomes a person who interrupts the poetic inspiration and the genius thereafter. The poem is not finished or completed. It’s a fragment of a vision. “Kubla Khan” is a symbolic and enduring poem.

This poem’s key figure is a dictatorial Oriental King Kublai Khan, a Mongolian emperor. Mongols are from Mongolia, the world’s largest land locked country in East Asia. Ulaanbaatar is its capital. In 1206, Genghis Khan, the first Great Khan emperor, found the Mongol Empire, one of the largest Empires. His grandson is Kublai Khan. He conquered China and established the Yuan Dynasty (China, Mongolia and Korea) which was the dream of Genghis Khan. Xanadu is its capital. He tried to build the new capital with grand infrastructures.

### **3.2.3 POEM – PARAPHRASE:**

#### **STANZA – 1:**

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

Kubla Khan (Kublai Khan) is a Mongolian King in Xanadu. He orders to build a grand pleasure dome. The geographical scenario of Xanadu is described by the poet. Alph, a river flows through the city which is not a real river but an imagination of Coleridge. It flows through huge caverns and flows down to a dark sea.

The poet is creating an alien atmosphere. The whole ten miles of fertile and lush land is protected by huge walls and watch towers. It encompasses beautiful gardens, streams, blossomed aromatic trees, ancient forests like that of the hills and sunny green spots.

## **STANZA – 2:**

### **Lines 12-16:**

*“But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!”*

Now the poet brings a deep chasm into the view which is cut by the river in Xanadu. It's a steep slope down the valley. It appears green as there is abundant growth of cedar trees throughout the slope. It is viewed as a holy and enchanting entity. It looks as if its haunted by a woman crying for her lover who is a demon in the night time when the moon is diminishing.

### **Lines 17-24:**

*“And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.”*

From the chasm, endless upheavals of tumult is heard as if the earth is panting with heavy breaths. Intermittently a fountain is burst out. The force of the burst



fountain can throw boulders like that of a hail or a chaffed grain flying after getting hit by a flail. The fountain crashes on the rocks causing a cavern underneath it. The river is considered sacred by the poet.

**Lines 25-30:**

*“Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;  
And ’mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!”*

The fountain on reaching down, flows like a river slowly for five miles. It finds its way through the woods and valleys. The sacred river reaches the caves at last and then flows down towards the dark ocean. It appears lifeless in contrast the river that just flows to it.

Kubla Khan is witnessing all these and hears the roar of the river from afar. The tumult appears to him as if he is hearing the voices of his ancestors. They foretell the future about the upcoming wars and the doom that follows it.

**Lines 31-36:**

*“The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!”*

The shadow of the dome of pleasure is seen on the waves as if it is floating along with it. The sound from the rush of the water from the fountain and inside the caves is heard like a rhythmical music. It is a miracle that is very rare because the dome is sunny which has the icy caves inside it.

**STANZA – 3:**

**Lines 37-41:**

*“A damsel with a dulcimer*

*In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid  
And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora."*

The poet is reminded of another vision. It is an young girl from Abyssinia (now, Ethiopian Empire) playing a dulcimer, a stringed musical instrument singing about Mt. Abora, a mythical mountain created in the imagination of Coleridge.

**Lines 42-47:**

*"Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!"*

The poet thinks that if he can revive the girl's music he will be real happy. He can create the same pleasure dome in air delightfully with all its aspects with the same hot dome and the icy caves if that music is heard aloud for a long time. The poet isn't describing about the pleasure dome but about a divine inspiration with an unrestricted flow of poetry.

**Lines 48-54:**

*"And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise."*

Whoever hears the poet's inspirational aspired song will witness the same. The poet in the trance will look scary with flashy eyes and uplifted hair. They will caution others of the poet. They will create three circles around as if invoking the

spirit. They will close their eyes in veneration and fear. They might think that the poet is high on honey-dew and has drunk the milk of paradise to get into such an oblivion.

#### **3.2.4 Poem Summary:**

Kubla Khan orders to construct a pleasure dome in Xanadu. Alph, a mythical sacred river runs through the cave towards the ocean inside the chamber itself. Old forests, gardens, streamlets, and aromatic plants are inside the high walled and towered dome. A rift appears green because of the mosses and the cedar trees lining the steep slope lushly because of the sun shine. The rift is created by the strong falls which is also very loud.

That holy river runs through the woods and valley to the ocean. It is scary as if it is haunted by a girl wailing for her demonic lover. Kubla hears prophecies of war from his ancestors from the roar of the falls. The reflection of the dome is seen on the waves. The sound of the caves and the falls is heard as a music. It's a miracle because the dome is sunny while the cave under it is cold.

The poet is reminded of a dream from long ago. It's a vision of an Abyssinian maid with a dulcimer singing about Mt. Abora. The poet asserts that if he could remember her song completely, he can create the same type of dome with his musical lyrics to make him attractive as a creator of wonder. The onlookers will be scared of him because of his appearance with flashy eyes and haggard floating hair as a wizard. They might think he is intoxicated with either honey-dew or the milk of paradise.

#### **3.2.5 Analysis:**

The first part of the poem is the description of Kubla Khan's pleasure dome. The second part of the poem is about the power of creation by a poet and his poetry. It's not a complete poem as it is just a fragment of a vision. The poet is trying to reach the realm of permanence, the afterlife. The poetry is a means to reach the unreachable that is the paradise. The description of Xanadu doesn't fit in the range of a normal city. It has a palace which is circulated by Alph river with a mighty spring and caves measureless to man. It is more colourful than the reality. It is an exotic landscape with a tinge of mystery described to make it feel as a dream territory. Its pictorial and descriptive.

As stated before, this poem is a symbolic poem. The poem cannot be comprehended with rational thinking or logical reasoning. It is a dream constructed with the power of imagination with the help of a melancholic melody. The river that surges through the woods and valleys is the life with all its complexities. The river of life flows towards a lifeless sea that is the death. Endless turmoil is vividly placed in the course of the river like the sound of the caves, the gush of the fountain and the boulders bouncing like the hails striking. Pleasure and violence are juxtaposed.

The spiritual ecstasy that is sought by the poet is compared to the materialistic pleasure dome. The pleasure dome with its warm exterior and icy interior represents the physically alluring persona with a spiritually cold interior. The pleasure dome is the creativity of the poet in imagination where the poet creates an alternative world with strange and measureless geographic structures contrasting irrational and the rational. Xanadu is the fact. Alph river is fictitious. Coleridge also states the shortcoming of the creative imagination which is lost and its memory is also in fragments.

The description of the “*A damsel with a dulcimer*” is stuffed with thoughts of beauty, pleasure and violence giving out a feel of exoticism. The exotically intense description is highlighted by the demonic lover of the damsel. It’s a poetic creation sensuous and suggestive. It shows off the potential of poetry enriched by a celestial symphony.

The poem is nourished with contrasts like nature (streams, rivers, seas, oceans, etc.,) and man-made (pleasure dome), sunny warm dome and icy caves, symmetrical dome and irregular river, dome above and the cave below and romantic images and exotic feelings and the dome for pleasure along with cold and frightening caves.

### **3.2.6 Form & Poetic Devices:**

The whole poem is written in iambic tetrameter with alternating rhyme schemes.

**Simile** – “*Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,*” - the bouncing rocks are compared to the striking hail.

**Personification** – “*As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,*” – the intermittent gushing of the fountain is compared to the panting of the earth thereby personifying it.

“*And mid these dancing rocks*” – dancing is an attribute of humans but it is used to describe rocks.

**Assonance, consonance and alliteration** - the poet uses these poetic devices in abundant to sustain the aesthetics with a rhythm.

**Symbols** – Alph river – complexity of life, power of the nature, constant pursuit  
The ocean – gloom, lifeless, distant, death  
Xanadu – Mankind’s Excellency in creation  
Pleasure Dome – poetic creativity with a divine inspiration to achieve the spirituality to comprehend the paradise  
Caverns – cold, fear, inevitable obstacles in creation  
Damsel with dulcimer – creation within a creation  
Demonic lover – mystery, supernatural element

**Allusion** – The River Alph – Greek river Alpheus  
The pleasure dome of Kubla Khan – the palace of Kublai Khan, a Mongolian Emperor

### 3.2.7 Comprehension:

1. What does Coleridge mean by “suspension of disbelief?”
2. How is the poem “Kubla Khan” a reflection of the unconscious?
3. How does the poem end?
4. What figures of speech does Coleridge employ in the poem?

## LESSON 3: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

### OUTLINE:

- ◆ Biography of P. B. Shelley
- ◆ His famous works
- ◆ Ideas of nature in “To a Skylark”

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Understand Shelley as a Romantic Poet
- ◆ Have an idea on the radical views of Shelley
- ◆ Appreciate the beauty of the poem “To a Skylark”

#### 3.3.1 LIFE OF SHELLEY:

Percy Bysshe Shelley (4 August 1792 – 8 July 1822) is an English poet with an idealistic and materialistic nature. His works are with liberal views, natural imageries and blissful mood. Because of his atheistic ideology, there is always a problem in the family. His political views and opposition of social conventions exiled him from his family and also the society so he ends up with permanent self-exile from 1818. He died in a boating accident at the age of 29 in 1822.

During his childhood, he was constantly bullied in school and so he was raging always ending up with a name ‘mad Shelley’. It may be because he always refused to run errands for seniors. Because of these happenings, he had nightmares, sleep walking and hallucination which lasted till the end of his life. He was interested in science and occults so he read mystery, romance and supernatural books. His experiments with science and occults caused many accidents even his sisters were afraid of him. He was rebellious, restless and free spirited with a tendency to question the authority. He also played a role in Irish rebellion.

With the friendship of Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Shelley is infused with politics like thoughts of radical thinking, liberal thoughts and anti-Christian ideologies. He wrote “Necessity of Atheism” and was expelled from college and from home. Shelley is associated with Southey, William Godwin, Byron, Thomas Love

Peacock, William Hazlitt and John Keats. Shelley is married to Harriet Westbrook and Mary Godwin. Harriet Westbrook committed suicide when Shelley was with Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*. The liberal views were not only introduced in his poetry but also with the relationship he has with his wife and friends. Shelley shared his voice for parliamentary reforms, extension of franchise and the freedom of speech.

His recognition is posthumous as he was constantly in debt and was taking loans. He died drowning when he was travelling in his boat *Don Juan* in an accident because of the inexperienced sailors. His body came ashore after ten days. He had a copy of Keat's "*Lamia*" in his pocket. His affair with Elizabeth Hitchner (a school teacher whom he called "my second self", Harriet Boinville (a widow), Claire (Mary's step sister, whose affair with Byron cost the friendship between Shelley and Byron) and Sophia are all cause of the his poems and his search towards an ideal love.

### **3.3.2 Notable works of Shelley:**

Famous works of Shelley are "*Ozymandias*" (1818), "*Ode to the West Wind*" (1819), "*To a Skylark*" (1820), "*The Mask of Anarchy*" (1819), "*The Cenci*" (1819), "*Adonais*" (1821), "*Prometheus Unbound*" (1820), "*Mont Blanc*" (1816) and "*Revolt of Isken*" (1818). His first novel is "*Zastrozzi*."

The poems of Shelley are his exploration of beauty and passion. He views poetry as a substitute for the religion. Beauty is his key to reach the truth that is beyond the reach of human imagination. His pursuit towards his ideals with a passionate commitment is obvious in his subjective poem. His themes are artistic and optimistic. He tried to achieve the desired liberty with the poetry.

### **3.3.3 To a Skylark: introduction**



It's a poem from the collection, "Prometheus Unbound Collection" (1820). The skylark is a ground nester bird with the capability to mimic. The poet is walking with his second wife Mary Shelley in Italy during a summer evening. They hear the carol of the skylark among the myrtles. They see some fireflies too. That is the inspiration for this poem. In this poem skylark is compared with a spirit. It is joyous and free and whatever a human is not. It's a supernatural bird in the poem and so it is special. The potential of the poetry to transcend and to change lives is its concept. The bird is omnipotent while the human is inadequate. It's a spiritual transcendence in search of the inner knowledge.

### 3.3.4 Poem – Paraphrase:

#### Stanza - 1

*"Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!  
Bird thou never wert,  
That from Heaven, or near it,  
Pourest thy full heart  
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."*

The speaker reverently greets a skylark. The skylark seems to be from either heaven or a place nearby heaven. The bird's song is an effortlessly spontaneous art as if it is from the depth of the heart. It is a romantic ideal.

#### Stanza – 2

*"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."*

The skylark is ascending as if it is catapulted from the earth towards the sky like "cloud of fire". It can't be stopped. It is singing and rising higher and higher. When the skylark is flying towards the sky its merging with the colour of the sky.

#### Stanza – 3

*"In the golden lightning  
Of the sunken sun,*



*O'er which clouds are bright'ning,  
Thou dost float and run;  
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun."*

The bird is flying towards the golden sun which is setting at the end of the day. Its light is brightening the clouds. In that skylark looks as if its floating or running like that of an abstract joy itself whose race has just started. It's a pure emotional joy as the bird is a boundless spirit.

#### **Stanza – 4**

*"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,"*

In the purplish hue of the setting sun, the skylark is not seen clearly as the light is dim. The skylark appears as if it is melting with the hue. The poet compares the skylark to a star in the broad daylight. It may not be seen but it is certain it is in existence.

#### **Stanza – 5**

*"Keen as are the arrows  
Of that silver sphere,  
Whose intense lamp narrows  
In the white dawn clear  
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there."*

In this stanza, the skylark is compared to the moon light or the light from the planet Venus. The moon or the Venus is bright at night but in the daylight it can hardly be seen but we feel its presence because of the cool beam.

#### **Stanza – 6**

*"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."*

The whole world is made great by the presence of the skylark's song according to the poet. It is like the moon's ray rushing from behind a cloud that lights up the night as if its overflowing from the heaven itself.

**Stanza – 7**

*"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."*

The poet can't figure out what is it. It is an embodiment of joy. He is thinking of an analogy. The first thing is the alluring "rainbow clouds" but the drops from it is nothing compared to the musical melody shower from skylark's song's mere presence.

**Stanza – 8**

*"Like a Poet hidden  
In the light of thought,  
Singing hymns unbidden,  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:"*

The poet is still perplexed about what to metaphorise the bird with. The bird is like that of a poet who sings songs as if it's a poetic impulse that can't be restricted. It is continuing till the whole world is moulded to sympathize and empathize to have a hope and to feel the dread that they have never felt before. The poet is capable to create an emotional response which we never knew whether it exists or not.

**Stanza – 9**

*"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:"*

In this stanza, the skylark is compared to a girl from the noble family. She is locked in a tall solitary tower singing to console her soul for her unrequited love. The poet is the lover and the bird is the maiden. The music is as sweet as love that overflows from her solitary confinement.

#### **Stanza – 10**

*“Like a glow-worm golden  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering unbeholden  
Its aëreal hue  
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:”*

Here, the bird is compared to a glow worm in a valley among the trees in a garden, scattering its light but still hidden in the flowers and the grass. The bird's song scatters its essence of joy in the same way from a hideout as it can't be seen.

#### **Stanza – 11**

*“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:”*

Again a comparison is observed by the poet. the bird is compared to a green leaves covered rose whose scent is carried away the warm wind. The scent of the blown-off petals is damn sweet that it faints the bees too. The bees are described as “heavy-winged thieves”.

#### **Stanza – 12**

*“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.”*

In this stanza, the poet lists out the beautiful things that the bird has surpassed. The music of the spring rain when it falls on the glittering grass and the flowers that

crops up after the rain and everything that is happy, pure and fresh. The poet is creating a romantic pastoral image.

### Stanza – 13

*“Teach us, Sprite or Bird,  
What sweet thoughts are thine:  
I have never heard  
Praise of love or wine  
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.”*

After running out of metaphors, the poet addresses the skylark. He wants to learn from the skylark or the spirit (according to the poet) about the thought that induces such a divine flow of beauty, an unearthly music or an art. The poet has never heard of an inspiration like this which neither love nor wine could achieve. Hitherto the poet has thought the intoxication of love and the wine is adequate to reach the truth with beauty using the poetic sensibility.

### Stanza – 14

*“Chorus Hymeneal,  
Or triumphal chant,  
Match'd with thine would be all  
But an empty vaunt,  
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.”*

A song sung in chorus by a choir during a wedding or a victory song after a success in the war are nothing but a vain boasting when they are compared with song of the skylark. Even if they aren't lacking anything, it will feel as if it is missing out something so it's not wholesome.

### Stanza – 15

*“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?”*

The poet enquires after the source of inspiration that triggers the ethereal song of happiness. The poet tries to give options like fields, waves, mountains, shapes seen in the sky, a plain, a love affair among its own species or an absence of pain or suffering. The poet sounds desperate.

#### **Stanza – 16**

*“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.”*

The poet asserts that if someone has ever felt exasperation or lethargy, he or she can never create this much of happiness in an aesthetic art of imagination. The poet wishes that these negative things would never touch the skylark. The poet comprehends that the bird has experienced love but will never experience the sated feeling that the poet and the other human feel after being in love for some time. The poet indirectly hints the problems in his love life.

#### **Stanza – 17**

*“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?”*

The poet wonders about the inner thought process of the bird. He is sure that the bird is beyond dream and death. It is capable of comprehending things that is beyond human imagination or his level of knowledge. Otherwise such a clear flow of poetic stream is impossible to gain. The bird is certainly a heavenly blithe spirit. It doesn’t fear death as it knows what is beyond that and that is much better life than the worldly parameters.

#### **Stanza – 18**

*“We look before and after,  
And pine for what is not:  
Our sincerest laughter*

*With some pain is fraught;  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."*

The poet makes a claim about the human's knowledge of death. We conceive death as a state before and after life. We ruminate in worry of the past and fear of the future without considering the present. Without proper understanding, we long for or think a lot about what we don't have or what we aren't. Our laughter is hindered by an anxiety of pain. Our happiest sweetest song will be pregnant with the once sad thoughts. Our creation doesn't have the unrestrained joy of the bird.

**Stanza – 19**

*"Yet if we could scorn  
Hate, and pride, and fear;  
If we were things born  
Not to shed a tear,  
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near."*

Regardless of disdaining hatred, pride and fear from the life of human or being born with no capacity to shed tears that is like no ability to feel sad, humans will never feel the joy of the skylark. They can't even come near such a jubilation.

**Stanza –20**

*"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!"*

The poet says that the bird's ability to attain nirvana is the desire of the poet. It is better than any other exuberant music or a treasure guided through a book. It looks as if the bird looks down upon the humans. "Measures" represent the music composed by man.

**Stanza –21**

*"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."*

The poet pleads for just half of the exuberance of the skylark without being affected by the mundane life. An ethereal insane euphony would glide from the poet's lips if he got it. the whole world will listen him as he is listening to the skylark.

### **3.3.5 SUMMARY:**

The speaker calls the skylark as a free spirit. It's song seems to be from the heaven and it is a spontaneous art created effortlessly. The skylark rises towards the sky like a fire cloud like a joyous spirit glistening in the sun. When it flies higher, the poet couldn't see it but could hear its joy that comes down like a cool moon beam that can only be felt. When the moon peeps outside the cloud, it's like a moon light overflowing from the heaven and the skylark's voice is ringing everywhere.

The melody of the skylark is brighter than the rainbow clouds. The skylark is like a poet who hides behind his poetic thoughts trying to make people empathize, still fearing the negligence. The bird is compared to a maiden in a lonely tower singing to console her heart for her lost love, glow-worm's light scattering from among the grass and flowers and to a completely blossomed rose whose scent is spread by the wind fainting the bees.

The song is clear, fresh and joyous than the grass and the flowers after a shower of rain. The speaker asks the bird about its thoughts that can provide this much divinity and joy. All other music lacks something. The speaker tries to find its inspiration for such a music whether it's a natural element, love or pain. He later convinces himself that the pain wouldn't have touched it. The love of the bird knows no sad sated feeling. The bird knows beyond death otherwise it won't be this clear like a clean stream. Human's happiness is just measured by the lack of sadness so they can't measure skylark's level of joy. The speaker pleads to teach atleast half of the happiness. He wants to overflow with harmonious madness so that the world would listen how he is listening to the skylark.

### **3.3.6 ANALYSIS:**

This poem is an ode as an ode is a lyrical poem sung to praise a person or a thing. The skylark, though mentioned or named only in the title, is the prevailing spirit

throughout the poem. The skylark is the poetic inspiration desired by all the creative minds much needed for the world of imagination. It's a romantic ode to an embodiment of joy. The happiness of the bird is attainable only in the absence of pain, worldly obstacles and a fear of death.

The poet wants to enter the spiritual realm with the help of the poetry that can only be created if the creator is as happy and free as the bird. The optimistic paint on the song of the bird is to induce sweet thoughts and to stop fearing death. For the poet, death is just a phase before the afterlife that is the spiritual realm.

It's a romantic approach on an inspiration from nature within a desire for divinity. It portrays the bird, a spiritual entity as a boundless creation while the man is an inadequate and lacking creator. The bird paves way to transcend the earth and identify the inner nature of our knowledge.

The bird and the poet represents the contrast of common life and a spiritual existence to differentiate the shortcoming of human knowledge and an existence beyond the reach of humans. It also presents us with the concept of divine poetry. It's a creative aesthetic art of verse attained in transcendence. The poem reinforces that the nature is a perfection.

The skylark is a metaphor of nature. It's the "harmonious madness" of purity in the poetic inspiration. The divinity is achieved through the purity without any manifestation. He is trying to reach heaven through the nature. It reminds us Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." In both the poems the poet uses the bird as the representative of nature who is described mostly as the spiritual hermit.

The skylark is compared to a maiden, the moon, a glow worm and a rose. Though it appears as if nothing is common them but all these are in an enclosure. They can't be seen. The maiden is locked up in a tower. The moon is behind the clouds. The glow-worm is hidden among the flowers and the grass. The rose is covered by green leaves. They outshine their confinement with their maddening senses.

### **3.3.7 Form:**

It is written in the form of an ode. It has a total of 21 stanzas with 105 lines. The first four lines of a stanza is in trochaic trimeter and the fifth line is in iambic



hexameter called as alexandrine with two hemistichs and a caesura in between. The rhyme scheme is ABABB.

### 3.3.8 POETIC DEVICES:

1. **Allusion**— “hymeneal” – hymen in ancient Greece, God of marriage  
“Like a star of Heaven,” – Christian vision of Heaven.
2. **Caesura**– (a pause in the middle of the line) – “*Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!*”,  
“*And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.*”...
3. **Enjambment** – line running to next line without punctuation. Eg., “*All that ever was/*  
*Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.*”
4. **Simile**- *Like a cloud of fire; ,Like an unbodied joy, Like a star of Heaven,...*
5. **Apostrophe** – a speaker directly addressing someone or something that is not present or can’t respond in reality.  
“*Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!*”, “*Teach us, Sprite or Bird,*”
6. **Imagery** – “*Golden lightening*”
7. **Metaphor** – “keen arrows” – the moon beam is compared to arrows.
8. **Synaesthesia** – we see music in the poem and we hear the colours.
9. **Personification** – bees as thieves, rain waking up the flowers, skylark’s capacity to love
10. **Oxymoron**- “harmonious madness”
11. **Alliteration** – “sunken star”, “pale purple”, “silver sphere”, “dell of dew”,  
“soul in secret”

### 3.3.9 COMPREHENSION:

1. What kind of poet is Shelley?
2. How does Shelley describe the song of the skylark?
3. Shelley interprets the skylark as a spirit. Explain.
4. What are the major themes of the poem?

## LESSON 4: John Keats (1795-1821)

### OUTLINE:

- ♦ **Life of Keats**
- ♦ **In-depth analysis of “Ode to a Nightingale”**

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ♦ Trace the life of John Keats as a poet
- ♦ Understand his affinity towards realism
- ♦ Grasp how Keats employs different elements of poetry on “Ode to a Nightingale”

#### 3.4.1. Life and Works: John Keats

John Keats (31 October 1795 – 23 February 1821) is a second generation romantic poet. His works become famous posthumously. He has written 54 poems in total. He died at the age of 25 because of tuberculosis. His works are published only in the last four years of his life. He influences the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood that supports medievalism and realism. It is based on Nazarene Movement that concentrates on spirituality in art. Their works are heavily loaded with sensuality with extreme emotion and natural imagery.

Keats' father died of skull fracture and his mother died of tuberculosis immediately after the death of the father. Keats lost many of his siblings to consumption as there is no proper cure for tuberculosis then. Consumption was a taboo then as those who died of it are considered to be sexually deprived and weak so Keats never named his illness in his writings. He is both indolent and fighting in extreme.

Keats was a surgeon. His first poem was “An Imitation of Spenser” (1814). He was an intern in Guy's Hospital of Thomas Hammond. In 1816, he got his Apothecary's license but he chose to be a poet. Sonnet is his form of interest in poetry. His friends were Leigh Hunt and Charles Cowden Clarke. He was also trying to enter “Royal College of Surgeons” but he was constantly in debts. “Poems” is the first

volume of Keats' verse. Leigh Hunt's "Three Young Poets" included Shelley, Keats and Reynolds. Hunt introduced Thomas Barnes, Charles Lamb, Vincent Novello, John Hamilton Reynolds (close friend) and William Hazlitt to Keats. Hunt forms "a new school of poetry". In 1818, Keats met Coleridge and was walking with him talking about Nightingale and other stuffs. Through William Hazlitt, he also met Charles Wentworth Dilke.

Keats' 'Endymion' received a severe backlash of criticism because of the political undercurrents calling it "on the cockney school of poetry". It's on the trial of power of imagination. Famous works of Keats are 'Ode to a Nightingale'(1819), 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'(1819), 'Sleep and Poetry'(1816), 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'(1816), 'Ode to Psyche', 'Lamia,' 'Isabella', 'The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems' and 'Ode to Melancholy'.

A tryst with Isabella Jones is the reason for "Bright Star" in May, 1817. It is later revised for Fanny Brawne. She is introduced to Keats in November, 1818 but Keats is preoccupied in taking care of Tom Keats, his brother. Again they meet in May, 1819. His life is mostly in debts and loans. He suffers from depression, disease and weakness. That is when he writes, 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.

As the tuberculosis grew worse, the doctors advised him to move to warmer place. Keats decided to move to Rome. Severn and Dr. James Clark were his doctors. He grew weaker as they bled him because that was the mode of treatment. The doctors refused to give Laudanum as a pain killer as they thought he will get addicted. His death was also painful. The doctors wrote later that Keats cried sometimes when he is awake in the morning that he is alive still. His tombstone wisdom is "Here lies one whose name was writ in water". After his death, Shelley wrote "Adonais" on Keats.

Wilfred Owen, Yeats and T.S.Eliot were influenced by Keats. Many wrote after his death that the criticism on 'Endymion' is the reason for his death. His works were with vivid imagery and great sensuous appeal.

### **3.4.2. ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE**



This poem is published in ‘Annals of the Fine Arts.’ According to Brown (in whose home Keats was staying), in 1819 spring time, a nightingale built a nest in his garden. Keats was joyous and in tranquillity because of its songs. One fine morning, Keats dragged a chair and sat under the plum tree for two to three hours. When he came inside his house again, he thrust some four to five papers behind the books. It was retrieved by Brown later. This statement is said to be false as it may also be an inspiration in Spaniards Inn. Keats used “Negative capability” in this poem. It’s an intellectual confusion and uncertainty in the pursuit towards artistic beauty. It is used to elaborate on the truth beyond the reach of logical reasoning, an opposition to the certainty established by philosophy.

It’s an ode that is a lyrical poem praising a person or a thing with an emotional appeal to it. Strophe, Antistrophe and Epode are parts of a classical ode. There are basically three types of ode. They are Pindaric Ode, Horatian Ode and Irregular Ode. This poem has elements of Petrarchan Sonnets and Shakespearean Sonnets. It’s one of the famous ‘1819 Odes’ of Keats. It consists of 6 odes.

### 3.4.2 POEM – PARAPHRASE:

#### Stanza-1

*“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees*

*In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease."*

The poet's heart is aching and all his senses are numb as if he has just consumed hemlock (a poisonous European plant), it's a painful pleasure. It's like the trance induced by Opium or like being drunk of water from Lethe, a river in Hades in Greek mythology, it is used to make people forget their memories. He assures the nightingale that the pain is not because of jealousy of the happiness of nightingale. He is actually happy for the bird. The nightingale is compared to 'Dryad' (nymph of trees in Greek mythology) which is small and light weight. It is creating a musical enclosure among the green beech trees. It is singing loud without any hesitation about the summer time.

#### **Stanza-2**

*"O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stained mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:"*

The poet yearns for a barrel of vintage(wine) that has been cooled for years in cellar of the earth that tastes like flowers, plants, dance, song from Provençal in Southern France (famous for wine and Troubadour poetry) and happiness of the summer. The poet needs a bottle filled to the brim with warmth and Hippocrene (a fountain of muses in Mt. Helicon sprung out by the hoofs of Pegasus, a winged horse symbolising poetic Inspiration).

The poet aspires for an inspiration that blushes him like a red wine when it comes. The wine is bubbling to the brim and its bursting bubbles are compared to winking eyes. It stains his mouth in purple. The poet wants this divine wine to escape the reality and disappear into the realm of fantasy that is the dark forest of the nightingale.

### Stanza-3

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

The poet wants to dwindle and disappear from the world to forget about everything that the bird among the leaves never needs to worry about as it doesn't know it existed. It needs not care about stresses and bondages of human society. According to the poet, the world is abundant with tiredness, disease and worries where men just idly complain about life. The poet says palsy (a disease causing involuntary tremors or paralysis) makes the few grey hairs left in an old man's head to fall while the youth grows pale and thin. They eventually die. The poet poses time as a villain. In this world, whatever we think will ultimately lead to a sorrow or a worry. These despair makes our eyelids heavy as it tires us down. The time kills the beauty and the love that comes by the beauty with the help of stress or the old age.

### Stanza-4

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

The poet fancies an escape from this depressing world and reach the nightingale but it can't be done with the help of inebriated drinks so he states Bacchus,

the Greek God of wine or his followers are of no use to him. To transcend, he is going to use his poetry whose wings can't be seen. His brain isn't co-operating in doing so as it confuses him and holds him back from entering the world of imagination. Then all of a sudden, the poet is with the nightingale in the night time dark forest and perhaps the moon has appeared. The moon is compared to the queen on the throne surrounded by her fairies which is the stars here but there is no light in the dark forest. The light from the heaven is filtered by the lush leaves of the green trees. It appears gloomy with the breeze and the curvy mossy paths.

#### **Stanza-5**

*"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves."*

The speaker can't see the flowers or the trees as he is still in dark night time forest of the nightingale but he can smell the fragrance from them. The darkness itself is fragrant. The smell of the fauna with the season so he is trying to guess. He smells the grass, shrubs, bushes, and wild trees laden with fruits, white hawthorn and the eglantine (wild roses in the meadows). He also sees Violets, a summer plant that is covered with its own leaves and musk rose whose dew is intoxicating and he hears the humming of the flies of summer evening. The poet feels both the summer and spring at once.

#### **Stanza-6**

*"Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,*

*While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.”*

The poet says that he is listening the nightingale (darkling – offspring of darkness). He states that he is comfortable with death as it's easy. May be the poet considers it as a way to reach the epitome of permanence. The poet is romanticizing death by romancing with death. He creates many thoughtfully aesthetic lyrical cajoling death with sweet names to take his breath away with the air. The poet considers death to richness (verses with air) though death is a separation from worldly richness to divinity. He longs for a death in midnight while sleeping without any pain while the nightingale is singing as if it is pouring its soul through the song in such an ecstasy. The poet and the nightingale are throwing their creation of artistic beauty in the air to attain the eternal truth. Even after death, the nightingale's requiem for the poet will be listened by the poet as a sod after his death.

#### **Stanza-7**

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

The nightingale is immortal. It is not born to die. It can't be over ruled by any future generations who are hungry for more. The voice of the nightingale that haunts him at that night has been heard by emperors and clowns in ancient time also. The same music would have reached Ruth. Ruth is from The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament. Ruth's husband died and her mother-in-law asked her to go back home again and remarry but Ruth stayed with her helped her in the fields but later remarried. Keats thinks that on hearing the nightingale's song in the fields of a foreign place. She would have missed her home and would be weeping. The same has happened



often. The song has cast its spell on many casements which opens to a dangerous sea full of foam in a fairy land. Now the nightingale is alone.

### Stanza-8

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

The word ‘forlorn’ brings him back to the reality that he is alone and is abandoned by the nightingale itself. The realm of fantasy doesn’t cheat the reality as it is said to be. So the poet calls it as a ‘deceiving elf’. The poet bids farewell to the nightingale whose song is fading away. It is going past the meadows, stream, uphill and the valley till the poet could hear no more. Now the poet is left in a confusion of whether it’s a dream or a real escape from reality, a vision. He is baffled if he is sleeping or awake.

### 3.4.3 SUMMARY:

The poet feels baffled on hearing the song of the nightingale as if he has consumed a drug. The nonchalance of the nightingale leaves the poet with a joy tinged with a sadness. The speaker yearns for a wine directly from the bowels of the earth. Drinking which, the speaker could dissolve into the fancy realm of the nightingale which fades into the forest. The speaker tries to escape the worries of reality.

The poet utilises his art of poetic beauty to reach into the deep dark forest to dwell in the world of the nightingale at the night time in the absence of the moonlight. He can’t see any plants or flowers in the dark but the fragrance is reaching his nostrils. The poet plunges into reality as he fears a death with no man around alone with the nightingale’s song. There is no death for nightingale. It is definitely immortal as the bird’s song is heard by many people throughout the history. It is heard by kings, clowns, emperors, biblical characters, legends and all.

The nightingale flies away leaving the poet alone so his vision is stopped. The poet feels deserted and upset that his imagination is not capable of creating a reality. Now the poet is perplexed without knowing the difference between reality and dreams.

#### **3.4.4 ANALYSIS:**

‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is the poetic expression of the beauty of nature and its communication with the ‘beyond’. The mortality of human life is portrayed as if it is scorned upon by the nature. The transience of life which is the tragedy is a threat to the poet. The nightingale is an enchanting presence to liberate the poet from the holds of the reality. He tries to escape it with the joy of poetic expression. It is an escapist poem as the poet tries to escape the worldly threats of sadness, death, separation, temporary existence, violence and fear. The equipment to escape the world for the poet is the poetic inspiration.

The flow of the verses mingled with the music of the bird with no consciousness of the surrounding is depicted as the poet’s pursuit towards the dark forest of the nightingale. The reality as expressed by the poet is harsh as it possess depression, disease and mortality. Death is inevitable here but the world of trance induced by the song of the nightingale is devoid of death, disease and depression.

The poem is also a way to connect man with the natural world with the promise of eternity in transience and happiness. It is the dream of escapism. It is journey in trance towards the acceptance of death and an understanding that the pleasure in life is temporary. It is a pessimistic poem about the artistic pursuit towards happiness. The nightingale in the poem is remembered in different ages but it still dies in the poem. It continues to live through music but anyway death is also a part of the nightingale.

The nightingale continues its song even after the death while the poet becomes a sod upon which the bird stands. It shows the unavoidable stance of the mortals. The poem transcends the time with the presence of summer and spring simultaneously. The concept of time is viewed by the poet as deceiving thing.

The self-awareness of the poet makes union with nature impossible to achieve. The song of the bird doesn’t provide the happiness but helps him to forget the desire. The poet tries to escape the guilt of his brother Tom’s death whom he feels that he didn’t take care properly.

The list of contrasting presence constructed by the poet are the pleasure and the pain, ideal and the actual, imagination and the reasonable common sense, permanence and change of nature and human, the art and the life, freedom and the bondage and the vision and the dream.

### 3.4.5 FORM & POETIC DEVICES:

The poem in the form of Horatian Ode with 8 stanzas of 10 lines each. All the lines are in iambic pentameter except the eighth line which is in iambic trimeter. The rhyme scheme is ABABCDECDE.

**1. Allusion** – a) the nightingale is an allusion to Philomel from the Greek mythology. Her tongue was cut out to stop her from telling about her rape. She became the nightingale later to escape the death and the rapist.

b) Lethe – River in Hades. If we consume the water from this river, we will forget all the memories for the afterlife.

c) Dryad – a female spirit in the trees.

d) Hippocrene – It is the spring created by the hoofs of Pegasus, a winged horse. Its drunk to get the poetic inspiration.

e) Bacchus – the Greek God of wine

f) “*tender is the night*” – F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel ‘Tender is the Night’

g) Ruth – ‘The Book of Ruth’ in “The Bible”

**2. Hyperbole** – the nightingale’s song echoes through the history outliving the bird itself.

**3. Metaphor** – “*But on the viewless wings of Poesy,*” – metaphorical wings

“*And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,*” – moon and the queen

**4. Personification** – i) “*Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well*

*As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.*” - The imagination is compared to elf.

ii) “*Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,*

*Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.*” - both beauty and love is personified.

iii) “*Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme,*” - death as a man.

**5. Apostrophe** - the poet is addressing the nightingale directly.

**6. Rhetorical Questions** - *Was it a vision, or a waking dream?*

*Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?”*

**7. Symbol** – Nightingale – beauty and immortality

**8. Image** – the description of the wine from the earth.

**3.4.6 COMPREHENSION:**

1. Justify “Ode to a Nightingale” as a Romantic poem.
2. What sensuous elements does Keats include in the poem?
3. What are the themes of the poem?

## **UNIT - 4**

### **LESSON 1: Victorian Age**

#### **OUTLINE:**

- ◆ **Brief overview of Victorian Age**
- ◆ **Victorian Poets**
- ◆ **Dramatic Monologues**
- ◆ **Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Know the characteristics of the Victorian Era
- ◆ Have an understanding of Dramatic Monologues
- ◆ Identify Browning's use of monologue form in "My Last Duchess"
- ◆ Understand the historical significance of the setting of the poem

#### **4.1.0 ART AND SOCIETY DURING VICTORIAN AGE:**

**Victorian era** is the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901 in the history of the United Kingdom. Colonization, military expansion, discoveries and attraction towards science make Britain a supreme power because of rapid industrialisation and rise in economy. Inventions like telegraph and steamship are the proof of technological advancements. Doctors also opt for scientific solutions and medicine instead of traditional forms. Unanticipated change in class structure is seen, as industrialisation and trade lead to a rise in middle class and a mass movement from middle class to upper class. Their wealth is mostly from trade and skill not by inheritance. The political and religious views of people are changed. The church sets higher morality standards and there is a significant rise in non-conformists.

The glossy morality, status, values and progress of Victorian society hide the disease prone years, poverty, social unrest and injustice that prevails during the same age. Poor people are more or less thrown on the road in the cities. Rapid growth of industries induces mass movement to cities. People are made to stay in clusters a lot putting an end to hygiene, resulting in exposure to many diseases. Industries exploit

the working class men to keep up with the progress. Children are made to work in textiles and mine. They are hired for the debts of their parents. Women are considered as possessions for an authoritative male not as an individual. Even female writers have to use male pseudonyms. To adhere to the strict rules, Victorians have to accommodate the loss of their voice and individuality. It is called as ‘Victorian compromise.’

The literature and art of Victorian era is influenced by romanticism, mysticism, exposure to other cultures because of colonization, stressful work in industries and mine, Pre-Raphaelites, theory of evolution, socio-economic conditions of the society and reconceived rules of church, status, sexuality and class structures. Novel becomes the pre-dominant genre. Poetry is hybridised and upgraded to fit in the trend. Poems are imbued with music, lyric and theatrical qualities.

**Victorian poets** concentrate on literary history by absorbing the history and the myths. They voice their thoughts in the guise of historical persona or a mythical legend with a dramatic enactment. Their poems reflect the struggle of a common man and the everyday reality in a poetic grandeur. The characters are braver and bring out the voice of the voiceless which is otherwise silenced.

Some of the famous Victorian poets are Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Mathew Arnold and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Their poems are pregnant with music, imagination and lyrical flow. Both Robert Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson blend drama, fiction and poem to shape the dramatic monologue form.

#### **4.1.1 DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES:**

**Dramatic monologue** is a long speech of a speaker like that of a one-sided conversation. It has a dramatic quality with or without a silent listener or listeners. The speaker’s character will be revealed in the course of his/her speech.

Robert Browning is the master of this art. Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses”, Robert Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover”, Sylvia Plath’s “The Applicant” and T.S.Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady” are some of the famous dramatic monologues.

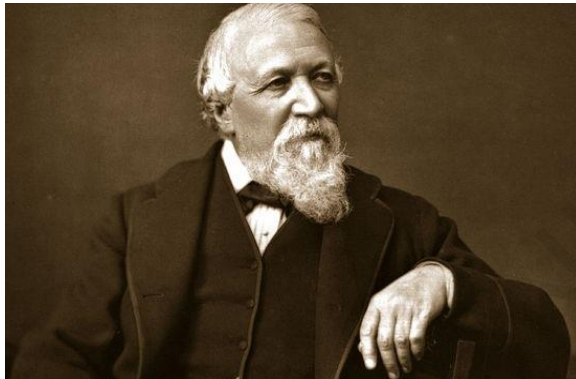
There are three types of dramatic monologues,

- a) Romantic monologue – e.g. Anthony Hecht’s “Dilemma”
- b) Philosophical and psychological monologue – e.g. William Wordsworth’s “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Alley”

c) Conversational monologue – Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp”

Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess” is the first dramatic monologue of the Victorian era and it is a psychological monologue. This inspires many Victorian writers to take up this genre.

#### 4.1.2 ROBERT BROWNING:



Robert Browning (7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889) was called as the Victorian Sage for his philosophical thoughts. His father was an abolitionist (one who wants to abolish slavery) and his mother was a non-conformist (a member of a protestant church). He was tutored at home by his father and his extensive collection of books at the home library. Browning started writing poem at the age of 12. He was an admirer of Shelley so he became an atheist and a vegetarian. His family supported him financially during the early days of his career as his father wanted to provide his son with what he was denied at the same age.

Browning was famous for his dramatic monologues and his psycho historical epic, “The Ring and the Book” (1866-1869). He was not successful during his initial days when he strictly followed the footsteps of Shelley but later when he identified his strength in a new genre, he made his mark in the history of English literature. He composed “The Pied Piper of Hamelin” at the request of his friend’s sick son who wanted to illustrate Browning’s poem. It became a famous children’s literature later. He married Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Mr. Barrett, father of Elizabeth Barrett is the inspiration in the characterisation of Duke of Ferrara in Italy, Alfonso II d’Este infamous for the imprisonment of Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso. Mr.Barrett refused to consent for the marriage and was a sadist. His poems were seasoned with philosophy, aesthetics, moral, sensuality, sex and violence which is not the Victorian style of writing. He subtly broke the conventions for good.

Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" is a dramatic monologue of a duke who unknowingly or intentionally exposes the murder of his former better half to a representative of his prospective bride's family asserting his status and hinting on his dowry expectancy by just using an artefact and in the meanwhile threatens the guest of what will happen if things are not in his control.

A duke is a male holding the highest rank in a country. The five titles of peerage according to the order are Duke, Marquess, Earl, Viscount and Baron. A duke's wife or widow is a duchess. The duke in "My Last Duchess" is the Duke of Ferrara in Italy, Alfonso II d'Este (1533-1597). He is a historical figure. His first wife Lucrezia di Cosimo de' Medici or the duchess has died two years after marriage at the age of sixteen who is suspected to be poisoned. After that he is married twice but is childless.

#### **4.1.3 MY LAST DUCHESS – PARAPHRASE:**

##### **Lines 1-10:**

*"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)"*

The speaker of the poem is a duke who shows off a painting to a listener. It's the painting of his former wife or his last duchess. He admires the liveliness of the painting. It makes us wonder whether the duchess is alive or not. For the speaker, the art piece is a wonder. It is painted by a fictitious painter Fra Pandolf who strenuously paints it for one whole day to create the life size painting of the duchess. The speaker extends his hospitality by asking the listener to sit and then admire the picture. It may be to control the situation. The look of the duchess that is earnest, blushed and entertaining makes the onlookers question it. The painting is restricted for viewers as



it is covered by a curtain which can only be revealed by the duke. The duke leaves no chance to assert his control over others.

**Lines 11-24:**

*“And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ’twas not  
Her husband’s presence only, called that spot  
Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek; perhaps  
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, “Her mantle laps  
Over my lady’s wrist too much,” or “Paint  
Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
Half-flush that dies along her throat.” Such stuff  
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,  
Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er  
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.”*

All those permitted visitors who see the painting wonders about duchess’ countenance but only some of them dare to enquire upon whom the glance of the duchess is directed at. The duke says if this guest also wants to ask the same question, the duke’s answer would be that, her joyous look of admiration and her blush is not reserved for her husband alone. It might be because Fra Pandolf would have said that her shawl covers her wrist too much just to flirt with the duchess otherwise such a “faint Half-flush” can never be reproduced in a painting. The duke is clearly not pleased that such a blush is caused by some other men and not him. The duchess thinks of it as a basic courtesy to smile at someone’s joke. According to the duke, the former duchess smiles at everyone. She can be impressed easily with just a small gesture as her heart is easy, she appears to like everyone and everything. Both her eyes and heart are not reserved for the duke alone but that is what the duke demands. He is clearly irritated about it.

**Lines 25-35:**

*“Sir, ’twas all one! My favour at her breast,  
The dropping of the daylight in the West,*

*The bough of cherries some officious fool  
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
She rode with round the terrace—all and each  
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked  
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked  
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
This sort of trifling?"*

The duke accuses that for the duchess the expensive gift of duke (a piece of jewellery (a necklace maybe)), sunlight, a bough of cherries and her mule are all same and she will be happy equally for all the gifts even if it's trivial. She extends words of appreciation for all the gifts. The duke is offended that she not only thanked everyone but also blushed. The duke couldn't make out how she valued his gifts as she reacts alike for his 900 years old title of peerage and anybody else's gift. The duke considers even discussing this issue with duchess as stooping low from his status.

**Lines 35-47:**

*"...Even had you skill  
In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let  
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—  
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
As if alive."*

The duke explains that he won't stoop low to explain this to the not so intuitive duchess. To tell her that a particular act of hers disgusts him or to appreciate her

sometimes would make her learn a lesson or she may wittily retaliate and excuse herself but all these actions are below his stature. The duke chooses not to stoop to her level. The duchess smiles pleasantly whenever the duke passes her but as usual she smiles the same at whoever passes by according to the duke. This never seems to change but grows more frequent so the duke commands to stop it altogether. (It may be a death sentence or an exile).

The duke now directs the guest's attention toward the portrait of the duchess again and tells that she looks alive in the painting. It proves that she is dead now.

**Lines 47-56:**

*"...Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
The company below, then. I repeat,  
The Count your master's known munificence  
Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!"*

Then the duke asks the guest to stand and come with him to meet the other guests. He repeats to stress his expectations of dowry as the count (equal to an Earl, a mid-level nobility), his prospective father-in-law is famous for his generosity so whatever the duke requests should be given. The duke asserts that he has promised to take the count's daughter as his possession. Then he calls the guest to go downstairs along with him. On the way, he points out a statue of Neptune, a Greek God, taming a sea-horse which is not common place. It is made in bronze by the fictitiously famous Claus of Innsbruck just for the duke. He likes to point out that he is superior.

**4.1.4 SUMMARY:**

Alfonso II d'Este, the duke of Ferrara is the speaker of the poem. The poem is set during the period of Italian Renaissance. The duke gives a tour of his home to an emissary representing the family of a prospective bride for him. He especially concentrates on the collection of artworks as it shows off his status. The duke removes the curtain covering a painting which he later reveals as his former wife. This painting

is restricted by the duke to be viewed only if he is pleased to do so. The guest is asked to sit and listen the Duke's story before the painting. The Duke reminisces the time when the picture is painted. Though the smile of the duchess is happy and cheerful, the reason of the smile is not the Duke alone, may be the famous artist Fra Pandolf. She is kind in nature so she smiles appreciatively at everyone. It irritates him so he does what should be done to stop it permanently. It can either be a death sentence or a command to stop smiling. She is no more. She values equally both his grandeur and silly things. Now she is a proud artefact.

When they start the tour around the house again, the Duke points out another artefact, a bronze statue of Neptune, a God taming a sea-horse. It is a unique work made just for him alone by Claus of Innsbruck. He openly demands a grand dowry from the prospective family.

#### **4.1.5 ANALYSIS:**

"My Last Duchess" is an ekphrastic (graphic dramatic description of a visual art) poem. It is a life size painting of a duchess. The smile and her blush is restricted to the duke and his permitted audience alone with the assistance of a curtain under the complete control of the duke. The duke couldn't keep the duchess's smile in his control so he orders to stop it most probably a command to kill her. The dominant nature of the duke is obvious when the duke decides where the guest has to sit, when he has to get up, where he has to go later, what is expected of the guest and even how the guest has to think.

The duchess is portrayed more like a possession than a woman with a thinking of her own. For the duke, the duchess is also a piece of art to show off. When the artefact is not upto his expectations, he discards it. In the poem, the duchess is portrayed as an object without an independent thought, maturity or logical sense. He uses the death of the duchess as a weapon to threaten the prospective bride's family. Dehumanizing of women by objectifying women as a status symbol, pride possession or as a sex slave is common in the Victorian era. Browning reflects the societal construction on a woman who are not allowed to be completely independent. The death of duchess is to eternally silence her. The statue of the Greek God Neptune taming the seahorse subtly hints the dominant nature of the duke and his love for control.

The duchess doesn't fit correctly in the criteria of a trophy wife as conceived by the duke. The duke demands from his wife complete attention, loyalty, and submission with no idea of her own and to remain as an inanimate object. The duke wants a puppet like wife who just does what he wants it to do. The sole crime committed by the duchess is spreading out an appreciative smile as an act of kindness. The duchess is not given a voice either by the duke or the poet. What we see of her is what the duke wants to portray. It is unacceptable for the duke that the duchess considers to appreciate others or to compliment.

The duke poses his status, title, exclusive artefacts and wealth as his pride. Status is his weapon to intimidate. His 900 years old title helps him to assert his control. The duke is arrogant, egotistical and conceited. Hubris is the flaw in his character. It's the snobbish nature of elites to look down on every other person of lower status. The duke even considers talking to his wife to clear the misunderstandings as stooping low. He finds it repulsive when his wife, the former duchess treats him equally with others. The painting of the duchess by a famous painter and the statue of Neptune by a famous sculptor exclusively just for the duke are status symbols. The way he demands dowry shows that the duke considers his alliance with the count's family is honourable advantage for them. An uncontrollable possession is muted to become a proud artefact to be exhibited but not as a memory of a wife.

It is not the morality that gives the status but the possession of wealth does. The duke is not guilty of his crime but proudly narrates it as a story to the emissary. Killing a woman, assassinating her character and muting her eternally as he finds her inadequate is an unforgivable sin. The duke doesn't hesitate to expose the murder of his former duchess to family of prospective bride shows that it is not an unusual occurrence during his age. Morality stands different to those with wealth according to the poem. The character of the duke is aesthetically coloured to cover up the lacking morality.

The fundamental concept of the Victorian era is the unit of a family. The family consists of a dominant and dictatorial father or a husband, a submissive, subdued and voiceless wife, the first born as an heir and the other children. This structure is disturbed in the family of duke as the duchess seems to reciprocate the flirting of other men by smiling and is not under the complete dominance of the duke. The "fallen woman" is to warn the society of what happens if the woman is against

the norms stipulated by the male dominant society. The insecurity of a Victorian male because of the rapid changes in the society, conception of sexual orientation, technologies breaking the conventions and other progress is also depicted through the character of the duke.

#### 4.1.6 FORM AND POETIC DEVICES:

The poem contains 28 rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter. The poet uses **enjambment** (a line break without any pause) to construct the arrogant characterisation of the duke.

**1. Simile** – “*There she stands / As if alive.*” – The painting is said to be looking alive

**2. Personification** – Throughout the poem, the painting is personified as the duchess

**3. Alliteration and Assonance** – the poet uses these devices to provide an aesthetic appeal

**4. Caesura** – A pause in the middle of a line of verse in poetry.

*...There she stands*

*As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet*

**5. Symbolism** – 1. Bronze statue of Neptune taming a sea horse – the dominant nature of the duke trying to tame the duchess

2. White mule – white represents innocence and purity; mule symbolizes slavery or victimisation

3. Painting – confinement and complete submission

4. Curtain – control

**6. Irony** – the characterisation of the duke itself is an irony. He is both liberal and strict. He appears sophisticated but debased.

#### 4.1.7 COMPREHENSION:

1. Write about literature and art during the Victorian Era.
2. What are dramatic monologues?
3. What is the significance of the art on the Duke's wall?
4. What are the symbols used in the poem “My Last Duchess?”
5. Analyse the character of the Duke.

## **LESSON 2: Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)**

### **OUTLINE:**

- ◆ **Tennyson as a Victorian poet**
- ◆ **His major works**
- ◆ **“The Lotos-Eaters” and Greek mythology**
- ◆ **Analysis of the poem**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Get an idea of Tennyson’s poetry
- ◆ Trace out the Greek mythological influence of the poem “The Lotos-Eaters”
- ◆ Understand the various symbols used by Tennyson in the poem

### **4.2.0 INTRODUCTION:**

Victorian Age (1837 – 1901) is the second quarter of the nineteenth century under the monarchy of Queen Victoria. It’s the bridge between the Romantic Age and the Modern Age. It upholds a positive attitude towards the changes in science, art, virtue, class structure and also nature. Industrialisation posed Britain as the supreme power during this period. Victorian literature directed its attention towards the strains in factory work, lower class people, science, technology, politics and economy. Victorian writers opted for romanticism, mysticism and utilitarianism to express their ideology. Famous writers during this era are Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Alfred Tennyson, and Robert Browning along with others.

### **4.2.1 ALFRED LORD TENNYSON:**

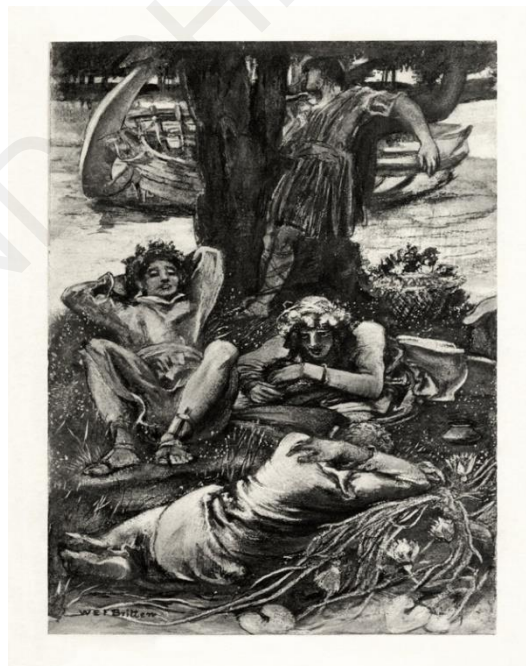
Alfred, Lord Tennyson (6 August 1809 – 6 October 1892), an English poet, a poet laureate infuses his writings with intellectuality and spiritualism. He has studied science and philosophy which is obvious in his writings. His writings are about mythical medieval legends, common people and nature. Though his poems are long, its focus will be on any one purpose. His characters have their own mind and judgement. His major works includes “The Princess” (1847), “In Memoriam A.H.H” (1849), “Maud, and other Poems” (1855), “Idylls of the King” (1859-1885), “The Lotus-eaters (1832)” among others.

According to Greek mythology lotus-eaters are the people living on an island with abundant lotus fruits and flowers after eating which people forgets the past. The lotus fruit gives a numbing effect if it is consumed. Instead of continuing on their path, people yearns to live an epicurean life in the island itself. Odysseus, from the Odyssey encounters lotus-eaters while returning to his country Ithaca.

The Odyssey is a Greek epic poem depicting the return of Odysseus after the Trojan War. He is the king of Ithaca. On his way back to Ithaca from Troy after ten years, because of the curse of Gods he is made to suffer and experience loss for ten more years. During those years of perils, he meets the languid lotus-eaters which further delays the journey as his crew lose their interest in hard-work, toil or any kind of physical exertion after eating the lotus. The stoned crew members don't care about their return to home. Odysseus happens to drag them off the island and fasten them to the rowing bench to escape the harmless lotus-eaters.

"The Lotus-eaters" is written in 1832, about some sailors who land in a mysterious lazy land where it's perpetually afternoon. After eating lotus which is their staple food, the sailors are enchanted. They no longer want to travel to their destination but to stay there in a trance without worrying about anything.

#### **4.2.2 PARAPHRASE: THE LOTOS-EATERS**



#### **The Lotos-eaters**

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson



**Stanza – 1:**

*““Courage!” he said, and pointed toward the land,  
"This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."  
In the afternoon they came unto a land  
In which it seemed always afternoon.  
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,  
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.  
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;  
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream  
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.”*

The speaker persuades his crew to be brave by promising them that they will reach home soon with the help of the waves. On that afternoon, they reach an island where it seems to be always afternoon. The air itself is lazy, breathing which leaves the inhalers in a sleepy haze. The full moon appears above the valley that has a thin smoke like stream.

**Stanza – 2:**

*“A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,  
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;  
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,  
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.  
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow  
From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,  
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,  
Stood sunset-flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,  
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.”*

Another speaker describes the scenery of the island. There are a lot of streams in the mountains of the island which is compared to smoke or a thin fabric dropping down. The stronger streams flow fast by shattering the lights and breaking the shadow thereby causing a sheet of foam where they fall. The river then flows towards the sea. In the distance, there are three mountains topped with melting snow. The sun-set illuminates the mountains though it's foggy with the dew. The pine trees grove covers the valley like a green fabric.

**Stanza – 3:**

*“The charmed sunset linger'd low adown*

*In the red West: thro' mountain clefts the dale  
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down  
Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale  
And meadow, set with slender galingale;  
A land where all things always seem'd the same!  
And round about the keel with faces pale,  
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,  
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotus-eaters came."*

The sun as usual sets in the west but strangely it lingers for a while as if it is reluctant to set down. Through the clefts of the mountains a valley is seen in the island. A field bordered with palm trees, many more valleys and a meadow with ginger plants are also in sight. It's a land that never changes as it escapes time. The sailors could see some dark faces under their ships whose faces appear pale in the light. They are the melancholic lotus-eaters.

**Stanza – 4:**

*"Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,  
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave  
To each, but whoso did receive of them,  
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave  
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave  
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,  
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;  
And deep-asleep he seem'd, yet all awake,  
And music in his ears his beating heart did make."*

The lotus-eaters, the people of the island, offer each of them with lotus fruits and flowers from the enchanted lotus tree. Some of them accept it and taste the lotus fruits or the flowers and are immediately blitzed. For the drunken soldiers the sound of the waves is like a mourning or an incoherent speech in some foreign shore. Their fellow soldiers' voice seems to be so low as if it is from the grave. They are all awake but seem to be in deep sleep. Their own heart beat is now like a music for them.

**Stanza – 5:**

*"They sat them down upon the yellow sand,  
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;  
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,*

*Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore  
Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,  
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.  
Then some one said, "We will return no more";  
And all at once they sang, "Our island home  
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam.""*

The tipsy sailors get settled down on the shore of the island. Though it is good to return home to their family, they are tired of the sea, roaming, rowing and the frothing oceans. Someone among them proclaims that they will never return. Later all the intoxicated sailors chorus that their home is far and they can't travel anymore. The Lotus-eaters desire the same effect from their guest according to the Greek mythology. The mariners sing their decision to stop wandering altogether as follows.

**Choric Song – 1:**

*"There is sweet music here that softer falls  
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
Or night-dews on still waters between walls  
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;  
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,  
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;  
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.  
Here are cool mosses deep,  
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,  
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,  
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.""*

The music that the sailors hear is softer than the fall of a rose petal on the grass or the dew in the morning. The music is gentle like that of a drooping tired eyelid on a languid eye. The poet stresses on the fatigue. It induces sleep as if it's a lullaby from the happy skies. They see mosses with ivy creepers. The flowers bow down as if they are weeping. The poppies also sleepily hang from the ledge.

**Choric Song – 2:**

*"Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,  
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,  
While all things else have rest from weariness?  
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,*

*We only toil, who are the first of things,  
And make perpetual moan,  
Still from one sorrow to another thrown:  
Nor ever fold our wings,  
And cease from wanderings,  
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;  
Nor harken what the inner spirit sings,  
"There is no joy but calm!"  
Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?"*

In this stanza the sailors feel bad about the harsh life. The sailors start to complain about distress and upsetting livelihood. They whine for not being able to rest like other creatures in the world. They are annoyed that the mankind alone toils a lot when compared to other creatures. The sailors lament that though mankind is the prime creature, they are in constant misery one after the other. They desire to rest like birds folding their wings. They yearn to cease roaming and just sleep as they see it as a cure. Even if they don't feel ecstatic, they are calm and peaceful in the island. They question why mankind, the first and best of creations, have to strain.

**Choric Song – 3:**

*"Lo! in the middle of the wood,  
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud  
With winds upon the branch, and there  
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,  
Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon  
Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow  
Falls, and floats adown the air.  
Lo! sweeten'd with the summer light,  
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,  
Drops in a silent autumn night.  
All its allotted length of days  
The flower ripens in its place,  
Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,  
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil."*

The besotted lotus consumed mariners are now jealous of the plants. In the middle of the wood, the wind woos the leaf out of the bud which grows big and green.

It nourishes itself with the sun and the nightly dew. Later it turns yellow and floats down dead falling from the branch. A juicy apple sweetened by the sunlight drops down dead in the autumn when it is ripened too much. Even a flower blooms, fades and falls in its place. They have a stipulated time in a fixed place to live and die without any reason to work hard. The mariners are worn out by wars and voyages.

**Choric Song – 4:**

*“Hateful is the dark-blue sky,  
Vaulted o’er the dark-blue sea.  
Death is the end of life; ah, why  
Should life all labour be?  
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,  
And in a little while our lips are dumb.  
Let us alone. What is it that will last?  
All things are taken from us, and become  
Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.  
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have  
To war with evil? Is there any peace  
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?  
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave  
In silence; ripen, fall and cease:  
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.”*

The wasted sailors hate the idea of sailing again with the sky as roof and the sea as the base. They sing that if they are destined to just die at last, why should they bother being diligent. They want to be alone and relaxed because time passes quickly assuring that the death is imminent. Nothing seems permanent for them as they have lost so many things which makes their memory of the past dreadful. Fighting with evil is needless for them. There is no peace in braving the waves while all the fellow creatures just rest, sleep, fall and die. The mariners lust after the eternal silence in peace. They pray for death in ease not in struggle.

**Choric Song – 5:**

*“How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,  
With half-shut eyes ever to seem  
Falling asleep in a half-dream!  
To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,*

*Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height;  
To hear each other's whisper'd speech;  
Eating the Lotos day by day,  
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,  
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;  
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly  
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;  
To muse and brood and live again in memory,  
With those old faces of our infancy  
Heap'd over with a mound of grass,  
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!"*

The mariners' fancy is living in a delusionary state hearing the murmur of the stream, to just dream on and on similar to the lingering sunset that still lights up the myrrh-bush on the mountain top. To spend the day lazily in eating lotus and gossiping on the beach while watching the waves is their craving. They offer their heart and soul to the stupefaction of the lotus eaters. They itch for a restful life to live in just the memories of their dead dear ones who are either buried or remain as a dust in an urn.

#### **Choric Song – 6:**

*"Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,  
And dear the last embraces of our wives  
And their warm tears: but all hath suffer'd change:  
For surely now our household hearths are cold,  
Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange:  
And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.  
Or else the island princes over-bold  
Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings  
Before them of the ten years' war in Troy,  
And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things.  
Is there confusion in the little isle?  
Let what is broken so remain.  
The Gods are hard to reconcile:  
'Tis hard to settle order once again.  
There is confusion worse than death,*

*Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,  
Long labour unto aged breath,  
Sore task to hearts worn out by many wars  
And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars."*

The intoxicated sea-farers confess that home comforts are close to their heart as they still remember the warmth of the last hug and tears of their wives but they now suppose that their family would have forgotten them. Their sons would have inherited their wealth. Their own looks have changed that they would be more like a disturbing guest than a warm part of the family. Maybe, the ruler of the homeland would have seized their wealth while the court minstrel sings praise of the Trojan War that the mariners fought in Troy. That too most of their deeds would have been forgotten. The poet makes us identify that the captain and the sailors are none other than Odysseus and his mariners in this line only. Albeit there is struggle in Ithaca, they want it to remain as it is.

The Greeks blame Gods and Goddesses for their struggle who are difficult to please. For them death is better than being in trouble, pain or in labour until they age and die. Working their fingers to the bone even after being worn out by many wars is hard. The sailors' eyesight dim by staring long at the stars for direction.

**Choric Song – 7:**

*"But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,  
How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly)  
With half-dropt eyelid still,  
Beneath a heaven dark and holy,  
To watch the long bright river drawing slowly  
His waters from the purple hill—  
To hear the dewy echoes calling  
From cave to cave thro' the thick-twined vine—  
To watch the emerald-colour'd water falling  
Thro' many a wov'n acanthus-wreath divine!  
Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,  
Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine."*

The sailors prefer to lie on the bed of plants in a half-sleep under the blue sky watching the river being filled with water from the streams and hearing the sounds of the cave that is covered with vines. They seek the tranquillity of the nature in water

and plants. They will be happy if they are just relaxing in the beach while staring at the far off sea or by just by hearing the sound of the sea while stretching out under the pine trees.

### **Choric Song – 8:**

*“The Lotos blooms below the barren peak:*

*The Lotos blows by every winding creek:*

*All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone:*

*Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone*

*Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotus-dust is blown.*

*We have had enough of action, and of motion we,*

*Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free,*

*Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea.*

*Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,*

*In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined*

*On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.”*

The inebriated sailors' new home is full of lotus both on top of the mountains and down the valley. The calming sound of the wind travels through the cave and alley. Even the pollen dust of the lotuses are in motion as they are blown by the wind everywhere but the mariners have no plan to move thereafter. They are fed up with the sea-sickness when they are thrown here and there by the huge waves and of the whales jetting water in the air. They promise to stay and rest stoned in the land of lotus-eaterslike that of the Greek Gods.

*“For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurl'd*

*Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curl'd*

*Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world:*

*Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,*

*Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,*

*Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.*

*But they smile, they find a music centred in a doleful song*

*Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,*

*Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong;*

*Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,*

*Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,*

*Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil;*



*Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whisper'd—down in hell  
Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,  
Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel.  
Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore  
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;  
O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more."*

The Greek Gods and Goddesses sit on top of Mount Olympus without caring much about humans, drunk with nectar and hurl bolts down the valleys below them for fun. Clouds are twined around their home which has the world as their belt. They make fun of people's plight after all the catastrophes, calamities, tragedies or ruins caused by the Gods themselves. They listen to humans' lamentation and sad songs as melancholic music as it doesn't mean anything to them. Those are the cries of exploited race of people.

The toilers in the field sow, reap, strive and endure to get some types of yields to store every year until they die. After death, if some of them go to hell, the suffering will continue. If they reach Elysian valley (the heaven according to Greek myth) they will rest on the Asphodel (a mythical plant in Elysian). Surprisingly, that is what the sailors do in the island of lotus-eaters, their new home. Slumbering is more convenient than toiling. Instead of sweating blood and tears amid ocean with the terrible strong wind and giant waves, they opt to repose. They assert at last that they will wander no more.

#### **4.2.3 SUMMARY:**

Tennyson introduces us to a captain and his crew members returning home. Later in the poem, they are identified as Odysseus and his sailors. Odysseus assures the sailors that they will reach Ithaca soon but they land in an island where it is always afternoon. It has snow-capped mountains, pined valley, many streams, meadows, fields, a river that runs to the ocean and a full moon. It's a mysterious place. Lotus-eaters, people of the island offers them lotus fruit and flower. It makes them feel as if they are in deep sleep though they are awake. The mariners forget their past. They become weary and languid. The mariners want to be enchanted blissfully rather than pursuing their destination to strive again. They desire to stay there in a peaceful ignorance.

The sound of the waves is like a music to them. They want to continue to be in the trance in complete rest. They seek a permanent place to reside and die

peacefully as they hate to roam, struggle, row, travel or working hard. The sailors are jealous of the fellow creatures which need not work at all like plants, fruits and flowers. Their past is dreadful for them because of the losses which may continue in their return to Ithaca so they opt for the eternal silence than braving the ocean.

They are satisfied with relaxing in the beach while hearing the murmurs of the waves reminiscing about their dead dear ones. Though they miss their family in Ithaca but they feel negative about the passage of time and possible changes in their appearances and also the people at home. They don't want to disturb the situation at home even if it is bad as they are worried about the Gods and Goddesses who are difficult to fight with because of their past experiences. Instead, they imagine a life like that of Gods as their intoxication makes everything possible at least in their dreams. The Greek Gods and Goddesses never bother about the condition of the people even if they cry for help so the sailors decide that the life in heaven is similar to that of the life in the lotus-eaters' island and to continue to live there itself in inebriation.

#### **4.2.4 ANALYSIS:**

Tennyson has got his inspiration for this poem from his visit to Spain with his friend Arthur Hallam. Though this poem is published in 1832, it is later edited and published again in 1842 by the poet himself after inserting a new stanza before the last stanza said to be written about the loss of his friend Arthur Hallam in 1833.

The First Reform Bill is passed on in the year 1832 which is the reason for many subsequent reforms. This bill increases the number of voters. Women are given importance but exploitation of women and children are also on the rise during that period. Child trafficking for labour and sexual abuse have gained ground. Similar theme is found in the novels of Charles Dickens.

Rapid changes and progress in the Victorian society pressurize the people especially working class who tries to fit in. The poet brings out their desire to escape reality and to enter a fantasy at least by the usage of drugs like opium. It may also indicate the drug induced romantic ideologies distancing the outside world treading into the poetic realm for the poets during that era.

Industrialization, urbanisation, commercialism and utilitarianism marks the Victorian era which makes exploitation of manual labours inevitable, thereby reducing the standards of morality and humanity. Lower class people suffers so that they hate the never-ending toil that is reflected through the mind-set of the sailors.

The sailors are even envious of the certainty in the life of the plants that just live and die without any worries about the future or labour.

During the Victorian Era, many skilled middle class have moved to upper class just by their talent and trading not by the birth right. The progress in science and economy is profitable for them. They keep on their endeavours like Odysseus. Odysseus doesn't fall for the temptation of lethargy and he is the one who drags his sailors out of the island of the Lotus-eaters.

This poem on the whole is an allusion to Homer's Odyssey right from the title. The Lotos-eaters are also an obstacle for Odysseus when he returns to Ithaca after ten years of Trojan War in Troy. The Lotus-eaters represent slothfulness, one among the seven-deadly sins. The sailors grow weary after eating the lotus. The voyage fascinates them no more. There is also an allusion to the Biblical Eden Garden. Both in the island of Lotus- eaters and in the Garden of Eden consumption of a fruit reverse the existing condition. An inversion of effect is obvious as in the Odyssey after eating the fruit, the sailors are enchanted but in the Garden of Eden, after devouring the fruit, they are enlightened.

Though the mariners are bewitched, they are very much aware of their identity and their responsibility back in Ithaca. Shutting themselves away from the outside world through the lotus induced trance to evade the harsh reality is not permanent. The only certainty that they are aware of, is death. For them their past along with their losses is more dreadful than the never changing conditions of the island.

Throughout the poem, Tennyson never fails to insinuate that the island is mysterious. Ceaseless afternoons, hypnotic air, bright moon in the afternoon, lingering sun-set and narcotic fruits are not common.

#### **4.2.5 FORM AND POETIC DEVICES:**

'The Lotus-eaters' poem is divided into first half and the second half. The first five stanzas are Spenserian stanzas. Spenserian stanzas are the stanzas with nine lines each. The first eight lines will be iambic pentameter and the ninth line will be iambic hexameter called as alexandrine, the remaining stanzas don't conform to any particular pattern.

Tennyson employs ample figures of speech embellishing the romantic fantasy of the euphoric world created by himself in this poem. The poet garnishes the poem with **similes** and **metaphors** by comparing stream with smoke or fabric, air with

sleepy person, sleep with balm, forgetfulness with coldness and so on. **Personification** develops the mystic nature of the poem by attributing characteristics of humans to non-humans. The poet makes the air to swoon, waves to mourn and rave, wind to woo the leaves, flowers to weep and poppies to sleep. **Analogy**, a rhetorical device, is a comparison between dissimilar things to support an entirely different concept. It is also used by the poet when the sailors point that the music in the island is soft by comparing it to the fall of a bloomed rose petal blown by the wind on the grass. “*What pleasure can we have to war with evil?*” and “*Is there any peace in ever climbing up the climbing wave?*” are **rhetorical questions** as they are not asked to demand an answer but to keep up the dramatic effect created by the poet.

The dramatic effect is also created by a pause in the continuous flow. If it is made in the middle of a line of verse in poetry, it is called as **caesura**. “*A land of streams! Some, like a downward smoke,*” “*From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,*” and “*And their warm tears: but all hath suffer'd change:*” are the lines with caesura using punctuations. If there is a line break without any pause, it is called as **enjambment**. “*In the red West: thro' mountain clefts the dale,*” - this line starts with a description about the sunset but immediately shifts to the valley seen through the clefts in the mountain. Similarly, enjambment is made use of in line 116, 121 and also in line 157.

The spontaneous overflow of imageries and poetic devices is an attribute of our poet Tennyson. He utilizes imageries to bring out the required emotion. In this poem, the visual description of the Lotus- Island as a dreamland stuffed with **images** of tiredness, mystery, sleep and dream in all the natural sceneries created by the poet makes the readers feel the same. Brilliant alliterations are drizzled by the poet from the beginning to the end of the poem like, “*slumberous sheet,*” “*sweet sleep,*” “*sun steep'd,*” “*death, dark death,*” “*mild-minded melancholy*” and “*blooms below the barren.*”

**Oxymoron** is the juxtaposition of contradicting words. “*Dark faces pale...*” – in this phrase, the sailors describe the lotus-eaters as dark complexioned people and immediately contradict themselves by calling them pale against the light. The poet has also taken advantage of **repetitions** to establish the required effect.

**Allusions** - The Lotus-eaters – Homer's Odyssey

Poppies – opium

Troy – Trojan War that is fought for ten years - Homer's Odyssey

#### **4.2.6 SYMBOLS:**

Lotus-eaters – slothfulness

Island of Lotus-eaters – dreamland

Waves – pain and struggles in reality

Lotus-fruit and lotus-flower – drugs like opium, cocaine and cannabis

Amaranth – it's a legendary flower that never withers and it symbolizes permanency and freedom from hard work.

Moly – it's an herb used for medicinal purpose according to a myth, an antidote for poison of Circe.

Acanthus – a divine plant that represents power.

Poppies – Opium is obtained from this plant which is used to ease pain and to induce sleep – it symbolizes intoxication. It's used by Victorians to escape the tiresome reality.

#### **4.2.7 COMPREHENSION:**

1. What are the sufferings of the mariners in the poem “The Lotos-Eaters” by Tennyson?
2. Critically analyse the poem “The Lotos-Eaters.”
3. How are the sailors are hypnotised by consuming the Lotos? What do they see?
4. Describe the island the sailors land on their way home.

## **UNIT - 5**

### **LESSON 1: Modernism, W. B. Yeats**

#### **OUTLINE:**

- ◆ **A brief outline of Modernism**
- ◆ **W. B. Yeats and his major works**
- ◆ **“The Second Coming” as a Post-War poem**
- ◆ **Analysis of Religious Prophecy in the poem**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Understand Yeats as a Modern Irish Poet
- ◆ Know his most influential works
- ◆ Trace the influence of WWI in the poem “The Second Coming”
- ◆ Figure out the religious imageries present in the poem

#### **5.1.0 INTRODUCTION TO MODERNISM:**

Modernism or the Modern Age started by the end of 19th century and continued close to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The modern age broke the tradition of literary style and techniques. It delineated the societal change in strike of the First World War and continued experimenting with the technical advancement in the Industrial Revolution. It originated mainly in Europe and North America.

Modernism is an artistic literary movement comprising of a number of literary movements like Expressionism, Surrealism, Imagism, Symbolism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Experimentalism and so on. The nuances of an individual became a fascinating eccentric focus of Modernism. More than the cumulative experiences of a societal group, the exclusive experience of an individual's life became the literary plot of this age. Modernists focus on the characters' consciousness and inner self. The interpretation in the field of psychology and philosophy in the works of Sigmund Freud and Ernst Mach propelled the beginning theory of modernism in literature. T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra

Pound, E. M. Forster, William Faulkner, D.H. Lawrence, Ted Hughes, W. B. Yeats, and W. H. Auden are some of the significant writers of the era.

### 5.1.1 W. B. YEATS



William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), alongside Seamus Heaney, is one of Ireland's most well-known poets. He was born in 1865 and started writing at the age of seventeen, and this poem comes in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, a collection he published in 1921. The English Romantics, such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Keats, as well as the French Symbolists, such as Stephen Mallarmé and Arthur Rimbaud, influenced Yeats greatly. His writing was heavily influenced by Irish mythology and folklore, which was especially important given his goal for Ireland's political emancipation from England.

His literary muse is Maud Gonne, whom he met when he moved to London from Ireland and tried to marry desperately, but she believed it would better serve him if she simply remained his muse. His later works were politically charged. He was the 1923 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Yeats is one of twentieth century's most significant poets. He wrote poems that were predominantly Irish influenced. Some of his famous poems include "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), "Easter, 1916," "The Wild Swans at Coole," "A Prayer for My Daughter," "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," and "Long-Legged Fly."

### 5.1.2 "THE SECOND COMING"

W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" is one of his most well-known works. It portrays a very enigmatic and compelling alternative to the Christian belief

of the Second Coming—Jesus' anticipated return to the Earth as a saviour declaring the Kingdom of Heaven—in 1919, shortly after the end of World War I.

The first stanza of the poem depicts a world of turmoil, bewilderment, and misery. The speaker is given an outlook in the second, longer verse, but this glimpse replaces Jesus' glorious arrival with what appears to be the coming of a monstrous beast. "The Second Coming" is one of Yeats' most quoted poems, due to its striking imagery and realistic picture of society's downfall.

Mysticism and the occult have also been passions of Yeats. This poem reflects that interest by employing the "gyre" metaphor that Yeats addresses in *A Vision*, a sprawling tome that lays out Yeats' "System." Yeats believed in a collective consciousness of humanity, the "Spiritus Mundi," from which poets may draw powerful, but not always easy-to-understand, imagery and symbols. Georgie Hyde-Lees, Yeats's wife at the time, had a key role in this element of his work, acting as a psychic channel via which he felt he could find spiritually meaningful poetic ideas.

In addition, one major literary influence runs throughout the poem from beginning to end and that is the biblical Book of Revelation. Jesus is said to return to Earth in the Book of Revelation, ushering in a new age of peace, happiness, and unity with God. This poem is a parody of that narrative, with a strange beast taking the place of the traditional hero. Although the author of the Book of Revelation declares himself to be John of Patmos, the book's authenticity and relevance to the rest of the Bible are hotly debated. The book is full of bizarre prophetic vision.

Despite the fact that "The Second Coming" avoids being too explicit about its setting, most reviewers believe the composition date is significant. Having written just after World War I ended, during which millions of people killed in battle and millions more died as a result of the war's aftermath. This massive damage served as a sobering reminder of humanity's ability to destroy itself. Indeed, some interpret the poem as a chilling foreshadowing of World War II, partly because Adolf Hitler so closely resembles the poem's concept of "worst" individuals who are "full of passionate intensity."



### 5.1.3 PARAPHRASE:

“The Second Coming”

by W. B. Yeats

#### Stanza 1:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*

*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,*

*The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere*

*The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst*

*Are full of passionate intensity.*

The poem begins with a strange metaphor: a "falconer" hunts a "widening gyre" for his missing falcon. Because of the way the environment is "widening," the falconer is unable to hear the bird. It's crucial to understand Yeats' "System" of viewing the world in this context. He saw history as a motion of "gyres," which are formations that resemble cone swirls or vortexes. Each period of history, according to Yeats, is in opposition to the next, in a plane that is ultimately beyond human comprehension. The poem sees the twentieth century as the time at which one historical gyre gives way to another. This new period is far more difficult to identify, yet it appears to be foreboding. The imagery of the falconer losing control of his surroundings represents the transition from one historical period to the next. In the first stanza, the speaker's tone is controlled and dispassionate, implying little of the horrific vision to come in the second. However, the poem's core assumption of a lack of control has now been stated, and while the poem's meaning is vague, it appears plausible that this lack of control is humanity's over its civilizations.

Line 3 builds on the notion of a loss of control presented in the prior two lines. "Things are falling apart," says the narrator. "The centre cannot hold" implies that these "things" are on the edge of collapsing, as though the links that hold reality together are loosening. Already, there is a conflict between the title and the content of the poem. The "Second Coming" commonly refers to Jesus' return to earth, when he will fulfil religious scripture prophecies concerning him. When mankind reaches the end times—a dreadful apocalyptic era in which the world is controlled by evil—

His return is expected to be an act of rescue. The gloomy present tense depictions in this first stanza, on the other hand, give little indication that such a hero is on the way—and, fact, the poem turns this image of a rescuer over its head in the next stanza.

Lines 4–6 go into greater depth regarding what happens when "Things fall apart," stating that "pure" (pure) anarchy has now been unleashed "on the world," accompanied with a "blood-dimmed tide," a reference to the Book of Revelation. Given that this poem was written just after the end of World War I, which resulted in the deaths of millions of people, this "flood" is most likely a reference to the gory repercussions of human aggression and hatred.

The speaker relates this "blood-dimmed tide"—and everything that has come before in the poem—to a loss of "innocence" after the caesura that follows "loosed" in line 5. Perhaps this naivety stems from false notions about civilization, development, and morality, especially the notion that humanity is on an upward path in which things improve. In fact, the sentence implies that this innocence was merely a "ceremony"—a type of performance or pretence rather than a genuine dedication to the world's virtue.

The first stanza's final two lines, which are actually one continuous sentence, establish a contrast between the "best" and "worst." These polarities are described in a hazy way in connection to what the poem has so far portrayed. They appear to be either a source of "pure anarchy" or side effects of whatever is generating this historical transition. The words "conviction" and "passionate intensity" clearly indicate that this antithesis is about individuals as these are human traits. In the face of impending collapse, the "best" people lack the courage of their convictions, whereas the "worst" remain at ease. Though the poem does not clarify what makes people the "best" or "worst," given that phrases like "anarchy" and "blood-dimmed" sea have previously suggested societal dissolution and mass death, it appears likely that the antithesis speaks to a form of moral integrity. When reading line 8, it's difficult not to think of Adolf Hitler, despite the fact that the poem was written far before the outbreak of World War II.

The poem has painted a difficult and misleading picture by the conclusion of the first stanza using language that is actually fairly simple and strong. In a literal sense, it's simple to comprehend what the poetry is saying, but it's much more difficult to pin down exactly what it means. There are two main elements to consider in this situation. For starters, Yeats thought that symbolism might be used without needing

to be explained or interpreted. The symbols and images' structural integrity generates truths that may be sensed and comprehended on a subconscious level without having their mysteries explained away. As a result, it's possible that Yeats meant the deeper connotations of this stanza's powerful imagery to be vague.

Furthermore, the poem's subject is enormous, for lack of a better phrase. It refers to the entire human race as well as thousands of years of history. So it's understandable that the poem doesn't make clear historical references; previous draughts did, in fact, name the Russian Revolution and individual politicians, but Yeats altered the poem to remove these references. As a result, the poem has a purposefully bizarre sensation of being outside of time, making it feel as important to this day as it was in 1919.

**Stanza 2:**

*Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

The beginning of the second stanza signals a significant change in the poem. While the first eight words have a distanced and controlled tone, the speaker becomes more personally interested in the following lines.

The first word of the second verse marks the start of the transition. "Certainly" is a subjective term that is used to emphasise a point of view. The speaker is responding to the first stanza's list of turmoil and confusion, almost as if stanza 1 is a news flash, and stanza 2 is an individual's reaction to that news. In view of the terrible situation mentioned in stanza 1, the speaker rather imploringly concludes that

"revelation" and/or the "Second Coming" are long overdue. The "Second Coming" is a biblical event promised in the Book of Revelation, hence the two terms are synonymous. In reality, the poem's use of epistrophe makes them actually go hand in hand: the repeated "at hand" at the end of each line emphasises how close the speaker believes the revelation/Second Coming is, or, more precisely, how close it should be. The speaker claims that the current status of the globe can only signify that the Second Coming will occur shortly. However, the repeated "hand" and anaphora of the recurrent "Surelys" have a desperate quality to them, as if the speaker is scared that this conclusion will be proven incorrect. The speaker's tension reaches a crescendo in a combination of fear and exhilaration in line 11, which ends with an outburst. This high point is indicated by the caesura exclamation mark.

However, the speaker suddenly experiences a vision. After briefly considering the thought that the Second Coming is approaching, an event that will fulfil Bible predictions and finally repair the connection between God and humans, the speaker quickly reconsiders his opinion that this will "certainly" occur. The vision appears to be involuntary, as if it was imprinted on the speaker's mind by some external force. This source is referred to as the Spiritus Mundi by the speaker. This is a Latin phrase that means "world spirit," and it is Yeats' name for a sort of global collective consciousness of humanity. In essence, the speaker is obtaining a vision that is not found in the Book of Revelation.

The poem shows that it is composed in the first person, with the image bothering "my sight" in line 13. The poem foreshadows the beast's entrance by using extended assonant /a/ sounds in the build-up to this new vision. These vowels have a sluggish aspect to them, as if they're just starting to come to life.

However, when the vision clears, the /a/ disappears in the second half of line 12 and through line 13. As the beast appears and carries a sense of horror with it, the poem's sounds change to reflect the shift in the speaker's emotional experience. The speaker explains the vision that came from the Spiritus Mundi from the colon caesura in line 13 until the end of line 17. It's a horrific, heavily symbolic vision of a creature awakening. First, the speaker defines the setting: a desert with no specific location ("somewhere"). This conjures up images of a harsh environment, a "place" that could be home to "something" inhuman. The alliterative and consonantal /s/ sounds bring the desert to life, evoking the sound of sand sweeping across the landscape: *Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert.*

The creature then uses the enjambment from line 13 to line 14 to unexpectedly intrude on the poem, squeezing its way into the reader's gaze with no punctuation to warn them. This creature has a man's head and a lion's body, but it's also just "a shape," a phrase that deliberately obscures the view (similar to "somewhere" in line 13 and "things" in line 3). The word "beast" isn't even used by the speaker until line 21. It is described as a "shape" here, maybe because it is still in the process of being born and is enigmatic.

It's worth noting that this beast isn't given a name in the poem. This creature most closely matches the sphinx or the mantichora among mythological and folkloric creatures. The sphinx is often depicted as a cruel creature, and the mantichora's name literally means "man-eater," thus neither has very positive connotations. There is no single interpretation for Yeats' beast, although it might be interpreted as a metaphor for how civilization and human development have been a type of delusion. The man-head may represent human intelligence and capability, but the beast-like body is more likely to depict humans' proclivity for uncontrolled aggression and disorder.

Even if this creature is sentient, it is nonetheless terrifying and cruel. In fact, if this beast is a metaphor for what humanity is becoming, its unusual shape could be taken as humanity's brilliant talent for devising new ways to carry out one of its oldest habits: murdering. While line 14 depicts the beast's fundamental physical appearance, line 15 focuses on its expression in order to convey its personality. The beast's visage is "blank," and it is "pitiless as the sun." This implies that it is cold and unforgiving, incapable of empathy, which may be related to the concept of a moral breakdown in the first stanza.

It's also important to mention that the sun isn't frequently depicted as "pitiless," but rather as a symbol of hope and wisdom in poetry. The sun is widely used as a symbol of Jesus, partly because it sounds like "son." The poem may be implying that Christ isn't truly a source of strength; Christian morality is meaningless in this failing world through this unique depiction.

The narrator explains just how creature is progressively coming alive, "moving its slow thighs," as if its time has at last arrived in lines 16 and 17. The /l/ consonance in these lines ("slow," "while," "all," "reel") emphasises the feeling of slow movement. "Desert birds" are seen flying about the monster, and while they aren't identified, it's plausible that they're vultures or something similar. They're likely the sort of birds that have to forage for food if they dwell in the desert. The

implication is that they are existing due the creature's emergence ushers in a new period of carnage.

The speaker's sight comes to an end on line 18. The "darkness" that "drops" refers to the monster's disappearance from view, but it also refers to the "darkness" that is draped over mankind as it passes through this tremendous historical upheaval. The caesura produces a dramatic pause during which the speaker collects their ideas and the reader has a chance to consider what has just been stated.

After this caesura, the poem's next major transition occurs. The speaker now believes they have new understanding regarding the world's fate as a result of their glimpse. The poem more strongly links itself to the twentieth century in line 19, with the phrase "twenty centuries of stony sleep" plainly refers to the calendar system that begins with Christ's birth year. The phrase "stony sleep" is also a reference to William Blake's *The Book of Urizen*, in which it first appeared. The poem appears to be implying that the 2,000 years following Christ's birth have been a kind of waking dream, implying that the beliefs that have defined those two millennia have been false in some way.

This "sleep" has now become irreversibly disrupted, "vexed" into a "nightmare." That is, some power has been enraged, possibly as a result of humanity's actions or simply as part of the "gyres' organic evolutionary cycle." At this point, the poem effectively becomes a prophesy, and part of its potency comes from the fact that its general predictions may be applied to a wide range of scenarios. For instance, the poem could be seen as a foreshadowing of future world conflict or as a response to 21st-century issues such as global warming.

The metre of line 20 lends itself to the idea of a broken rocking cradle. Though the metre of the poem is inconsistent throughout, it is primarily constructed in iambic pentameter. The metre, on the other hand, is severely broken here to depict the cradle's disruption: *Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle.*

The cradle image here is a clear allusion to the birth of Christ, as evidenced by the title, the phrase "twenty centuries," and the following mention of Bethlehem. The Second Coming is supposed to be a form of rebirth, and the cradle suggests that something is actually being born, but what the poem seems to foreshadow is a far cry from Jesus' glorious return.

Finally, the speaker alludes to the frightening condition that has been depicted thus far in the poem. Whatever "rough beast" is emerged here will usher in a new age,

one driven by all of the anguish and misery mentioned previously. The poem implies that the monster has been waiting for ages to be awakened, and that the time has finally come. This is a macabre satire of the Christian Second Coming, and despite the poem's ambiguity, it seems safe to infer that the poem's prognosis for the future is bleak. It's evident at this point that this new species isn't only unusual; it's also "rough" and it's ready to fight.

The poem concludes with a chilling rhetorical question: What is this beast "Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" It's unclear whether the beast named here is the same as the one saw in the vision, or if it's a different, even more enigmatic beast. But, in either case, it moves at a snail's pace (it moves at a snail's pace) "Slouches") and a "rough" look. Of course, Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus. As a result, this beast is coming to replace or take the place of Jesus, signifying the end of Christian ideals and lifestyles. Perhaps mankind might not receive the Second Coming it aspires for, but rather the one it deserves, according to the poem.

In these last two lines, assonance aids in conveying the beast's slow but deliberate movement: *And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?* These vowels have a prolonged tone that suggests slowness, but they also develop steadily until the final recurrence in the word "born," the poem's concluding phrase. The heavy /b/ alliteration ("beast," "Bethlehem," "be," "born"), moreover, gives the impression that something is taking shape, as if the "rough beast" is putting together its many body parts.

The poem then finishes on a terrifying suspense, with the sinister creature on its way to giving birth to itself. The fact that it hasn't even been born yet echoes Jesus' claim to be an incarnation of God, and so to have lived prior to his earthly body was conceived. This creature appears to live on a comparable spiritual or global dimension, and is now assuming its physical form. The question mark at the end of line 22 ends the poem on a note of uncertainty, mirroring how the first picture of the "widening gyre" implied the end of one period and the onset of another.

#### **5.1.4 SUMMARY:**

A falcon can no longer hear its owner's call as it whirls around in an ever-widening spiral. Things are falling apart, and their basis is crumbling. Devastation and anarchy have swept over the globe, as has a massive wave of bloodshed. This

tide has eaten all of the naive rites. The best people aren't inspired to act, whereas the worst are zealous and willing to do so.

Some sort of revelation must occur shortly, and the Second Coming must be approaching. "The Second Coming!" shouts the speaker, ecstatically. But, when the speaker says this, an image emerges from the collective consciousness of the entire world. The speaker sees a bleak desert landscape where a monster with the head of a man and the body of a lion is awakening. Its expression is empty and without pity, like the sun. Its legs are moving slowly, and there are shadows of agitated desert birds all around it. Everything goes dark again, but the speaker notices something new: a cradle's rocking has irreversibly disturbed two thousand years of peace. What beast, whose moment has finally arrived, is pushing itself towards Bethlehem, where it will be born, questions the speaker.

### **5.1.5 ANALYSIS:**

The speaker portrays human beings' increasing loss of control and proclivity toward violence and disorder in "The Second Coming," which depicts a nightmare apocalyptic scenario. Surreal pictures swarm the reader, producing an unpleasant atmosphere that portrays a world on the verge of collapse.

Despite its metaphorical richness, "The Second Coming" has a straightforward message: it simply forecasts that humanity's time is up, and society as we know it is about to be destroyed. This poem was written just after World War I, a global nightmare that murdered millions. It's only somewhat surprising, however, that the poem offers a pessimistic view of humanity, implying that civilization's sense of progression and control is really a mirage.

With this in mind, the hard imagery of the opening stanza begins to make sense. In the turning "gyre," the "falconer," who represents humanity's endeavour to govern its world, has lost its "falcon." The gyre is a spiral that Yeats employs to represent enormous, sweeping historical movements. These first sentences could also be interpreted as a metaphor for how the contemporary society has separated humans from nature which is represented in the poem by the falcon. In any case, the link that formerly existed between the symbolic falcon and falconer has broken, and the human world is now descending into anarchy.

Indeed, the poem suggests that, while humanity appeared to be progressing over the past "twenty centuries" through seemingly ever-increasing knowledge and



scientific developments, the First World War demonstrated that humans are just as capable of self-destruction as they have always been. "Anarchy" was "loosed upon the world," accompanied with bloody floods, vividly evoking war's immense destruction. "Innocence" had been merely a "ceremony" that had now "drowned." The "best" people lack "conviction," implying that they are unconcerned about this nightmare reality, whilst the "worst" people appear ecstatic and eager for destruction. And according to speaker, the current status of the planet demonstrates that society's "centre," or foundation, was never really solid.

The poem concludes with this vision of the beast, implying that, while humanity appeared to become more civilised in the 2,000 years following Christ's birth, people had been planting the seeds of their own destruction the entire time. This "rough beast" is now slouching "pitilessly" toward Jesus' birthplace, most likely to usher in a new era of "darkness" and "nightmare."

"The Second Coming" portrays Christian morality in an uncomfortable light, implying that it is not the steady and reliable force that many think it to be. From the beginning, the poem makes a clear reference to the biblical Book of Revelation, in which Jesus returns to Earth to save the righteous. This is supposed to happen when mankind reaches the end times, which is described in the Bible as an era of utter conflict, starvation, devastation, and hostility. The poem implies that the end times are already here since humanity has lost all sense of ethics, and that this moral code may have been an illusion all along.

The speaker discusses the anarchy, uncertainty, and moral failure that have caused "things" to "fall apart" in the opening stanza. The poem makes it obvious in the second that the morality being ruined is a specifically Christian morality. The poem wonders if Christian morality was established on unstable ground in the first place, or if mankind was never truly moral, but only appeared to be.

"The Second Coming" is a poem with a lot of ambiguity. Indeed, before to publication, Yeats removed particular cultural references from the poem. But there's no denying that this is a pessimistic view of humanity's future, one that portrays morality as a shared dream that is now transforming into a nightmare.

#### **5.1.6 FORM:**

"The Second Coming" is divided into two stanzas of eight and fourteen lines. There is no standard pattern for this form. Both stanzas, however, have a vague

resemblance to the sonnet form. The first stanza is an octet, and the second is a sonnet with the same amount of lines. The similarities end here, and it's unclear whether Yeats meant the structure as a nod to sonnets. If he did, the likeness could be Yeats' means of implying a departure from tradition. Perhaps the poem tries to be contained in sonnet form, but the power of the vision and the beast itself are too strong to handle, and the structure collapses.

They fulfil extremely different duties in terms of the two stanzas. Despite the "anarchy" and seeming anguish it recounts, the first is written in an impersonal and controlled tone. At the opening of stanza two, the poem starts its second phase, with the speaker appealing to an unnamed authority. "Surely," the speaker says, given the grave circumstances described in the previous stanza, the Second Coming is near. This change in the speaker's objective voice signifies a transition to the subjective, making it appear as if the second stanza is a personal remark on the generic facts of the first verse. The speaker is then effectively stopped by their own vision, which is spelled out in terrifying detail in lines 13 to 17.

The visual fades away in line 18, yet the speaker retains a vivid remembrance of it. The speaker does not yet know the exact nature of what will occur in the future, but he or she senses that a huge shift in the world is on the way—and it will not be good. The poem closes on an air of dread and uncertainty, leaving the reader with the suspense of the beast's creeping approach.

### 5.1.7 POETIC DEVICES:

**Alliteration:** Alliteration is used infrequently throughout "The Second Coming." It's initially heard in the first three lines, where the /t/ and /f/ sounds are repeated. The speaker narrates the revelation that came from the Spiritus Mundi in line 13, which is the next prominent occurrence of alliteration. *Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert.* As the poem nears its end, it ramps up the alliteration: *Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,/And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

**Allusion:** "The Second Coming" is full of allusions, some more obvious than others. To begin with, the term references to the Christian belief in Jesus' return to earth. Varied schools of Christianity have different interpretations of what this means for humanity, but in general, Jesus' return is meant to bring about the final judgement, in which true Christians will be saved and everyone else will be damned. This is a

form of the apocalypse that refers to the Book of Revelation, the Bible's final book. The opening line's gyre is a reference to Yeats' personal belief system, which is a complex blend of magic, mysticism, and occultism. The speaker sees a vision in the second stanza that is based on the "Spiritus Mundi," which is Latin for "world spirit." Finally, by the end of the second stanza, the poem makes it apparent that the poem's main subject is Christianity. The poem is linked to the birth of Christ by the phrase "twenty centuries of stony sleep," the last two lines of which are an allusion to Romantic poet William Blake.

**Antithesis:** "The Second Coming" is, in a sense, a protracted antithesis between what the "Second Coming" is meant to be and what it will actually be, according to the speaker's strange vision. That is, the Second Coming is commonly considered to refer to Jesus' return to earth as the rescuer of the righteous, but the poem suggests that what's on the horizon is a monster that will rip Christian morals apart. There are a few other instances of antithesis in the poem as well. Lines 7 and 8 are the first of these. The speaker distinguishes between the "best" and the "worst" here. The speaker experiences a vision later in the poem. This, too, is an antithesis, albeit one based on well-known mythology. The monster seen by the speaker is half-human, half-beast. The animal component, the lion body, does, in fact, represent the so-called "king of beasts." As a result, there is a dichotomy between human and animal nature, with the implication that, despite its seeming progress and civilization, humanity is still very much a beast.

**Anaphora:** Four of the eight lines in the first verse begin with the definite article: "the." This anaphora contributes to the tone of the opening verse, which is methodical and reserved. Surprisingly, the anaphora at the beginning of the second verse undoes all of the preceding. There is a strong difference between two stanzas, which is aided by the use of anaphora in both. The recurrence of "Surely" at the opening of lines 9 and 10 brings in the speaker's characteristics to the poem, whilst the anaphora in the first stanza created a regulated tone.

**Assonance:** "The Second Coming," like many of Yeats' poems, makes good use of assonance throughout. In the opening line, assonance is utilised for the first time. The poem is attempting to create a picture of bewilderment by depicting a falcon and a falconer who are unable to locate one another. The speaker's vision of a slow-moving beast is foreshadowed in lines 11 and 12, when slow vowels in the shape of

two slightly different /a/ sounds anticipate the slow-moving beast ...*Hardly are those words out/When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi.*

Lines 16–19 use a similarly extended /o/ sound to represent the new creature's clumsy movement as well as its continuous development toward the prophecy at the poem's end: *Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it/Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds./The darkness drops again; but now I know/That twenty centuries of stony sleep.* Finally, assonance is used in the poem's final two lines. It arrives through two more identical long vowel sounds, the first of which connects the beast's "Slouch[ing]" movement to the "hour" coming "round." Then, a slightly altered /o/ sound reinforces the feeling of impending movement by stating that the beast is travelling "towards Bethlehem to be born."

**Caesura:** Caesura appears eight times in "The Second Coming," and it has multiple functions. Line 3 contains the first example. It helps to quietly reinforce what the speaker is expressing in both lines 5 and 7. The comma after "loosed" adds some room to the sentence, whereas the comma in line 7 accentuates the contrast between the "best" and "worst" people. Line 11 contains the poem's next caesura, which marks the poem's rhetorical peak. The caesurae in lines 16, 18, and 21 all serve to establish a sense of the beast's unsightly and heavy form from the speaker's perspective.

**Consonance:** Throughout "The Second Coming," there is a lot of consonance. When the falcon and the falconer lose track of one another in the first few lines, repeated /n/ sounds help convey repetitive and confused movements. This associates the falcon and falconer with "anarchy" and the concept of a collapsing "centre." In those same lines, the alliterative consonance on /f/, /t/, and /th/ further connects these principles.

The next two lines incorporate a variety of /d/ sounds, as well as continuing the /n/ in a few places. In the recounting of the speaker's vision, the poem returns to the /n/ sound. In lines 17 and 18, the /d/ reappears (while the /n/ continues), implying that the "blood-dimmed tide" will really overpower everything.

**Enjambment:** Enjambment appears numerous times in "The Second Coming," mainly to change the flow of the poem and emphasise its significance. Line 1 contains the first occurrence of enjambment. The end of line 5 contains the second occurrence of enjambment. The speaker is portraying a world engulfed by a "blood-dimmed tide," and the enjambment after "everywhere" gives the impression that the phrase has overflowed into the next, much like the "tide." Lines 11 to 20 are the most

evident examples of enjambment, with six out of 10 lines enjambed. They assist the speaker in bringing his or her vision to lyrical life.

**Epistrophe:** The repeated "is at hand" at the ends of lines 9 and 10 is an example of epistrophe in "The Second Coming." The repeated "Surely" at the beginnings of these lines likewise uses anaphora, resulting in two parallel lines.

The repeat signals a relatively abrupt shift towards a less regulated, more intimate tone after the objective and calculated tone of the first stanza, in which a pretty grim and anarchic world is portrayed in general but unnerving terms. The epistrophe helps prepare the reader up for what's to follow by continuing with this fresh perspective for the whole of the second verse.

**Metaphor:** "The Second Coming" is a poem that extensively uses metaphor and symbolism, although it isn't always apparent what those analogies represent. The way the metaphors feel substantial without being forced down to a single interpretation is part of the poem's strength. A metaphor begins the poetry. A falcon and its falconer lose communication with one another in a "widening gyre."

The term "centre cannot hold" is also a metaphor, and it's just as ambiguous as the previous one ("things fall apart"). Another metaphor, the "blood-dimmed tide," may illustrate the reader how this collapse can occur, and it suggests some form of mass death. Another metaphor is the creature at the speaker's centre of view.

**Rhetorical Question:** While many poems end on a rhetorical high note, "The Second Coming" does so in an unexpected way, in a rhetorical question.

What beast will arrive in the Second Coming? This is a question for both the reader and the speaker. Primarily, this inquiry is aimed at discrediting the Christian narrative that Jesus will reappear to save mankind at some point in the future.

**Diacoep:** Diacoep appears for the first time in the first line. "Turning" is echoed here with merely "and" as a word between them. The poem's design provides conjuring up images of chaos, uncertainty, and confusion. Lines 4 and 5 contain another diacoep moment with the phrase "loosed." "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," says line 4, and "the blood-dimmed tide is loosed," says the next line. Later, in lines 10 and 11, the term "the Second Coming" is repeated in rapid succession. The fact that this sentence is repeated two times discreetly reflects its content; admittedly, this is the second coming, not first.

#### **5.1.8 COMPREHENSION:**

1. Is religion the major theme of the poem? Explain.
2. What do the falcon and the beast symbolize?
3. Why does the speaker have visions? What do they mean?
4. How much do you think the First World War shaped the poem?

## LESSON 2: Ted Hughes

### OUTLINE:

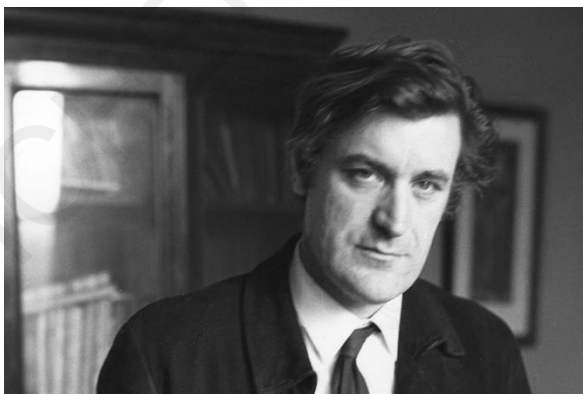
- ◆ Ted Hughes and his works
- ◆ Animal Imagery in his works
- ◆ Analysis of “The Thought Fox”
- ◆ Major themes of the poem

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ◆ Know the characteristics of Ted Hughes’ poems
- ◆ Understand his use of animal imagery
- ◆ Analyse the elusive nature of creative process
- ◆ Figure out how Hughes uses various literary devices in the poem

### 5.2.0 INTRODUCTION: TED HUGHES



"The Thought Fox" is one of Ted Hughes' most well-known poems, first appearing in his debut collection, *The Hawk in the Rain*, in 1957. Hughes was raised in a rural area of Yorkshire, where he established an active interest in animals and nature. Animals occur frequently in Hughes' poetry, most notably in the "Crow" sequence. According to Hughes, "The Thought Fox" was inspired in part by a dream in which a fox-like figure visited him and advised him to avoid highly analytical or academic writing in favour of a more instinctual (or, fox-like) attitude to creativity.

Hughes drew on a wide range of literary inspirations, including Gerard Manley Hopkins and William Blake, as evidenced by this poem. Blake frequently noted a psychological link between animals and creativity in his writings in the 18th and early 19th centuries, most notably in "The Tyger." That piece, such as this one, occurs in a night forest.

Hopkins, on the other hand, penned poems that celebrated the magnificence of God's creation by bringing nature to life. Hughes has a similar eye for natural detail, and it's likely that the first line here is a reference to one of Hopkins' most famous poems, "The Windhover." For a more recent forerunner to Hughes's animal-inspired poetry, readers should look at D.H. Lawrence's animal poems. The poem is also part of the meta-poetry style. That is to say, this is a poem about poetry itself.

"The Thought Fox" can also be understood as an *ars poetica*, a form that analyses the how and why of composing poetry, as a discourse of the poetic technique. The Roman poet Horace wrote his "Ars Poetica" about the year 19 B.C.E., suggesting that poets should avoid unnecessarily flowery language, among some other things.

Archibald MacLeish, a 20th-century poet, wrote another renowned "Ars Poetica," in which he asserts that a poem "should not mean / but be." Similarly, "The Thought Fox" suggests that throughout the creation process, poets should follow their instincts and intuition rather than being too scholarly or unduly intellectual. As previously stated, a dream in which a fox-man urged Hughes to do just that was a source of inspiration for the poem.

### 5.2.1 PARAPHRASE:

"The Thought Fox"

by Ted Hughes

#### Stanza 1:

*I imagine this midnight moment's forest:*

*Something else is alive*

*Beside the clock's loneliness*

*And this blank page where my fingers move.*

The poem starts with the phrase "I imagine," which establishes a first-person perspective and immediately immerses the reader in the speaker's thoughts. The



speaker appears to be in a room with a clock and, possibly, a desk, and the setting is totally dark and silent..

It's late in the evening, the middle of the night, to be exact. In the poem, time operates in odd ways, beginning with this: a single "moment" owns or makes a forest (it's "midnight's forest"). There could be a real forest outside the speaker's window, or this could be a forest of the imagination, a metaphor for the speaker's unconscious mind's enigmatic, untamed universe. In any case, the alliteration and consonance between "midnight" and "moment," two distinctly poetic elements, give beauty to the sentence itself.

"Something else is alive / Besides" the clock and the blank paper, the speaker believes. "Besides" could simply mean "next to" in this context. There's another live presence physically near the clock and page that isn't the clock or the page. The clock and page, according to this second reader, are both alive. Personifying the clock as lonely means that there is no other sound but its ticking, emphasising the speaker's isolation.

However, the speaker isn't the only live object in the room. The stage is created for "something else" to emerge, but the nature of that "something" is purposefully left unsaid at this point in the poem. It's worth observing how the usage of end-stop and enjambment in the poem thus far affects the reader's perception of time. The colon after "forest" in line 1 provides a noticeable pause, implying that everything that follows originates from the speaker's thoughts, that it's all part of his imagination.

The dynamic flow of the three lines that follow contrasts with the end-stopped line. Lines 2-3 ("Something else [...] loneliness") flow fast down the page until, strangely, they come to a halt after the word "move" in line 4, where they rest on the image of the blank sheet. It's as if the speaker senses artistic inspiration brewing but is unable to control it. This rhythm also foreshadows the fox's stop-start motions, which are brilliantly depicted in the next stanza, as well as the poet's tension between passivity and movement as he waits for creativity to emerge.

#### **Stanza 2:**

*Through the window I see no star:*

*Something more near*

*Though deeper within darkness*

*Is entering the loneliness:*

Lines 5-8 continue to build the setting before the poem's main character, the "thinking fox," enters. The lone speaker waits in "loneliness" for "something," and line 5 adds to the feeling of isolation—the speaker looks out the window but doesn't even have the stars to keep him company!

The speaker's view via the window could be literal, metaphorical, or both. It could be a metaphor for the speaker's own thinking, which is currently "blank." The speaker appears to be staring into his own psyche in this reading, hoping for inspiration. People don't just look into windows; they also glance out of them at the same time. The speaker may not be looking for inspiration in his own thoughts, but rather in the outer world, where he has failed to find it. Importantly, there are no stars visible in the window. Because stars are frequently associated with the heavens, the poem rejects the notion that creativity is some sort of heavenly gift bestowed from on high. The poem depicts creativity as unusual and mysterious, but it's a mystery based on the speaker's perseverance and desire to sit down and work, and wait. It doesn't appear to him like a bolt of divine lightning.

Whatever was "coming to life" in line 2 is now "getting closer" and the readers would be right to assume by now that this something is the "thought fox" itself. This "something" is "deeper within darkness" at the same time. Consider the fox as both real and fictional, as an actual fox as well as something the speaker has thought into existence to symbolically reflect the creative process. The seamless enjambment between lines 5-8 gives the impression that thinking fox is stalking the speaker, or, alternatively, that the speaker is stalking the thought fox. Hughes has stated that his early hunting memories are present in the background of this poem, and the poet/speaker, like a hunter, plays a waiting game. Maybe no creature, or poetry, will appear, or maybe the thought fox is about to make an appearance. It also is worth observing how the colon punctuation indicates this "deeper" mental process. A colon frequently precedes a detailed description of something, which aids the reader's comprehension. That's clear what's happening with the end-stop in line 8: the thought fox hasn't shown up yet, but it's on its way.

The poem must also strike the reader's imagination through the magical conjuring power of its words in order for the thought fox to live in the reader's mind. The speaker must use lyrical inspiration to bring the fox to life. This end-stop, which indicates the speaker's progress into the subconsciousness, functions similarly to a

magician's revelation, in which the consequences of poetic skill will be evident as a fox on the page after a few moments.

**Stanza 3:**

*Cold, delicately as the dark snow*  
*A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;*  
*Two eyes serve a movement, that now*  
*And again now, and now, and now*

The thought fox finally comes on the scene. Because the comma in line 8 introduces this stanza, it's evident that the fox is the "something" referenced previously in the poem.

The title has already hinted that this fox isn't a genuine fox, but rather a lyrical inspiration spirit animal. Of all, part of poetry's allure is to make what's on the page seem real, to breathe life into language and conjure up an entire universe in the mind of the reader. This and the following two stanzas avoid directly discussing metaphor in order to achieve this. Instead of a poem that employs the figure of a fox to study the way that creative idea occurs in the mind, the poem could just be a magnificent nature poem called "The Fox" in these stanzas. The poem assumes that the reader will recognise what it is about real foxes that is relevant to the art of writing.

The fox's activities are thus vividly shown in this stanza. The language is subtle, careful, and methodical, evoking the fox's timid, deliberate motions. The fox is completely absorbed in its gloomy, icy surroundings, navigating the woodland with deception and instinct. It constantly scans its environment using sensory data, with its nose, eyes, and ears analysing everything afresh every moment. Lines 9 and 10 use precise sound patterning to portray this twitchy attentiveness: *Cold, delicately as the dark snow/A fox's nose touches twig, leaf.*

These sentences are jam-packed with alliteration, consonance, and assonance, much like the fox's surroundings are jam-packed with sensory data. Take note of how most of the sounds, such as the /t/ in "touches twig" and the harsh /c/ in "cold" and "delicately," have a twitchy, even spiky feel. The fox touches a twig and, without pausing in the poem for that "and," a leaf in line 9, which again employs asyndeton to demonstrate that this is all happening instinctively. To explore how this figuratively works, it appears that this is a conversation about the poet's need to trust their instincts, to write using their basic intuition. The fox's eyes are the centre of lines 11 and 12. Foxes have excellent eyesight, which is comparable to that of cats and allows

them to see in the dark. Foxes are usually active at night, therefore having good eyesight is essential! It's worth noting that the speaker is also working in the dark—literally, because it's midnight, and symbolically, because he's inspecting his subconscious mind.

The speaker's eyes service his lyrical movements just as the fox's eyes "serve its movement": each moment necessitates a fresh intake of details and a quick recalibration with that information. Out of the corner of its eye, a fox can see a possible prey and modify its pace accordingly.

A poet, too, alters the poem in real time, making many choices about which words go where, where the line should split, how to arrange the tones, and so on.

The repeating of "and now" in this part (especially, the epizeuxis) illustrates this heightened level of innate awareness, with each moment indicating a fresh present. With all of these "now[s]" necessitating a verb to make sense of them, the enjambment at the conclusion of line 12 builds tension.

#### **Stanza 4:**

*Sets neat prints into the snow  
Between trees, and warily a lame  
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow  
Of a body that is bold to come*

The thought fox makes clean prints into the snow between trees in the next stanza, using this verb. The poet's movements are very similar to those of the fox. In truth, there's a pun here: "prints" refers to both the fox's footprints and the speaker's pen's ink impressions on the blank sheet. Similarly, the snow's blank whiteness depicts the page's untapped potential, which, by the end of the poem, is printed.

The line "sets neat prints" is a well arranged consonance at the opening of the stanza. Three words in a succession with similar sounds, laid out in the snow like a fox placing one paw in front of the other. The poet composes the poetry one step at a time. The speaker continues to develop the vivid image of a fox in the snow after the caesura in line 14. Keep in mind that all of this is part of a larger metaphor for "thought" which is creative inspiration. The poetry, on the other hand, takes care to treat its metaphorical creature as if it were real, demonstrating the poet's inventive capacity and inviting the reader to participate in their own critical analysis of the poem. If the poetry has so far represented the thought fox cautiously arising, similar to the speaker's initial words on the page, these three lines or so represent a period of

doubt and indecision. Like the poet, the fox depends on intuition. Although the fox is a predator, it is equally vulnerable to the unpredictability of its surroundings. The speaker, on the other hand, recounts how the fox's "lame / Shadow" follows the fox around, almost as if it is hesitant to stay with it. This shadow could indicate a period of creative doubt, a period of self-reflection during which poetry appears to be nearly impossible.

Perhaps the darkness represents the speaker's conscious mind trying to destroy the unconscious's good work. Though the unconscious is usually depicted as a darkness, the speaker's innate creativity is represented by the fox's "bold" body, while the fox's shadow is that small voice that tells him he doesn't have what it takes to create the poetry.

In this separation between shadow and body, alliteration plays a significant role. The shadow is hesitant—it is "lame" and "lags" behind, as if it were a wounded animal on the verge of death. These /l/ sounds slow the poetry down, as do the consonant /l/ sounds in "warily" and "hollow." In contrast, the "body that is bold" has a more plosive—explosive—/b/ sound. The body, which operates on instinct, is ready to leave, but not without paying attention to the surroundings. The shadow has no forced to follow the body in the end. This little pause was overwhelmed by the poem and its thought fox. The abrupt enjambment between stanzas depicts the speaker moving past this impediment, travelling "across" stanzas, much like the metaphorical flight of the fox over "clearings," which generally represent danger to animals because that's when they're most out in the open.

**Stanza 5:**

*Across clearings, an eye,  
A widening deepening greenness,  
Brilliantly, concentratedly,  
Coming about its own business*

One of the fox's eyes is brought into focus by the speaker. The fox is now so close that the speaker can see every feature of it, even how its eye "widens" in response to the light. All of this, of course, is part of the poem's broader metaphor. This fox represents a concept, a spark of poetic inspiration that leads to the creation of a poem, and its closeness to the speaker indicates that his poetry is taking shape.

The "greenness" of the fox's eye is not only "widening," but also "deepening." The speaker's own studies of the depths—the trek into the instinctual, primitive,

unconscious part of his mind—are alluded to in line 7, where the poem plays on this figurative sense of depth. A poem comes to life on the page from here, thanks to "brilliant" and "concentrated" dedication.

Line 20 implies that the poet's job is to let the poem "come about its own business" and follow the unconscious' direction without crushing it beneath the weight of the conscious, reasoning intellect. In other words, knowing what the poem will say before it is written is not the poet's "business."

It's worth noting that this stanza continues a single long statement that began on line 11. Though it technically begins on line 9, the semi-colon on line 9 effectively serves as a full stop. The poem has been delving further and deeper into its analysis of the artistic process in one essentially consistent stretch, and is about to hit its conclusion. The speaker's attempt to delve deeper into his head is symbolised by the recurring consonance of the /n/ sound throughout the verse, which is dull but persistent. "Widening, deepening greenness," for example.

**Stanza 6:**

*Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox*

*It enters the dark hole of the head.*

*The window is starless still; the clock ticks,*

*The page is printed.*

The poem's longest sentence, in line 22, is ultimately brought to a close in the last stanza, which picks up where the preceding one left off. This sentence has spanned more than ten lines, indicating a period of undivided focus, which the poem argues is necessary for writing poetry. The end-stop at the end of line 22 after "head" indicates that this is a finished process.

Then it all comes together. The fox is established as the thought fox of the title, despite the poem's vibrant and emotive realistic qualities in the middle three stanzas. The fox, in other words, is a symbol for cognition, and more particularly, lyrical creativity. Otherwise, the speaker's skull would be invaded by an actual fox, which would be alarming to say the least.

It's worth noting how it gets into the speaker's head: with a "sudden sharp hot stink of fox." These monosyllabic words have a lot of power, and they can create numerous stresses in a row: "sudden sharp hot stink of fox". The fox comes to life on the paper with these choppy yet forceful phrases, making the space stink with its foxy scent. This metaphorically symbolises the apparent suddenness with which a poem

appears on the paper. Of course, the speaker was to blame, but it's as though the poetry leapt upon that paper like a predator on its prey.

Though the poem stresses how the speaker's creative inspiration looks to have originated from somewhere else, "the page is printed" only because the speaker has sat down in a condition of readiness and willingness. He wasn't hit by a bolt of supernatural inspiration, but by something worldlier, a mix of the unconscious mind, hard effort, and dedication: The speaker's creative deed was not sent down from the skies, as evidenced by the lack of stars in the window. The clock continues to tick, signalling the flow of time.

"Clock ticks" is nearly onomatopoeic, and the vowel sound of "clock" subconsciously repeats the vowel of tick's twin: tock. The reader isn't supposed to know how much time has gone because the speaker's intense focus on the lyrical work in front of him has distorted time.

The alliteration between "page" and "printed" in the final line lends the finish a sense of finality, two plosive /p/ sounds signifying that the speaker has put his imprint on the page with the assistance of the thought fox. And that's what this was all about: crafting a poetry where there had previously been simply blank space. Or, to use the poem's metaphor, urging the thought fox to come to life so that it might be tracked along the snow's page-like whiteness.

### **5.2.2 SUMMARY:**

The speaker all alone in the dead of the night, flanked by a woodland that is either real or imagined. As the clock ticks in the solitude and his fingers pause over an empty page, he feels that something other than himself is living. Through the window, he can't see any stars, but he senses that something is nearing him from the depths of the night, moving towards this secluded setting.

In the dark, a fox carefully touches twigs and leaves with its cool nose. From time - to - time, its eyes explore its environment over and over again.

As it moves between the trees, the fox leaves neat paw tracks in the snow. Like an injured animal, its silhouette follows behind it. The fox's body, on the other hand, travels confidently and intentionally through forest clearings.

As it focusses on what's ahead, the fox's eye opens wider, its green colour getting more intense and vivid—until its scent gets urgent and visceral, and the fox

penetrates the shadows of the speaker's mind. Through the glass, the speaker is still unable to see any stars. The poetry has been written, and the clock is still ticking.

### 5.2.3 ANALYSIS:

The poem "The Thought Fox" is about composing poems. The poem figuratively represents creative inspiration as a fox that travels sneakily through the shadows of the psyche, enigmatic, restless, and capricious. The poem illustrates the importance of patience, attention, instinct, and a little luck in writing through this metaphor. The poem thus emphasises both the unconscious mind's part in creativity and the poet's need to deliberately (or consciously) create the correct conditions in order to entice a poem into being.

Writing is a type of long game for the speaker. The poem implies that while creativity and imagination work in strange ways, they can't work at all if the creator doesn't sit down and avoid interruptions. As a result, the speaker is alone at his desk on a chilly night, with only the ticking clock for company. There are no stars in the speaker's window, implying that he isn't about to be hit by heavenly inspiration in a lightning bolt.

Rather, writing, as represented here, necessitates the discipline and silence of a hunter. The speaker senses "something else [...] alive" nearby, emphasising that creative impulse is an enigmatic force with its own will. However, writers can't force an idea into the open any more than a fox can compel its prey can; all they can do is make sure they're ready for it when it arrives.

The speaker then waits for the "thought fox," indicating creativity and inspiration, to arrive when the stage has been arranged. And sure enough, the thought fox comes over the gloomy, snowy woodland (possibly representing the speaker's subconscious mind's obscurity and uncertainty) step by cautious step.

The speaker's vivid depiction of the fox, with its sensitive manoeuvres and keen awareness of its environment, is reminiscent of the creative process. The poet follows the trail of a poem with instinct, much like a fox on a journey to find prey or a mate. The indirectly tells that a poet does not always know what a poem will say before it is written, and instead relies on instincts similar to those of a wild animal. A poem, like a fox, can go about its business—until it pounces—through attention and a kind of faith in the human psyche. The fox "enters the dark hole" of the speaker's thoughts, and the poem "is printed"; it appears to have written itself.



The poem does a fantastic job of bringing what appears to be a genuine fox to life for the reader, while also demonstrating the speaker's inventive prowess through the fox. The fox is a creature thought up in the speaker's mind to symbolise how that mind works its magic. The thinking fox, in a sense, produces itself. Even as that creature is the wellspring of creativity, the poem lives and breathes, propelling its creation to life.

The poem portrays creativity as a combination of the writer's conscious decisions (the speaker's desire to remain at the desk and wait) and a very enigmatic process that occurs outside of the writer's conscious control. Readers may go through a similar process when they use their imaginations to bring the poetry to life, discovering a thinking fox where there was nothing just seconds before.

On the surface, the poem takes place at night-time in a quiet room. There's a window, but the speaker can't really see stars through it. A ticking clock is the only sound, and the speaker sits with his fingers positioned over a "blank page" ready to write.

Stanzas 2-4 have a real feel to them, as if they're portraying a real fox cautiously slinking across the snow, across clearings in a dark woodland, and drawing nearer and nearer to the speaker. As the speaker describes the fox in extraordinary detail and brings the animal to life on the page, the barrier between the real world and the speaker's imagination fades. The poetry, for the most part, takes place in the speaker's head.

It's also important to keep in mind that, as is typical of Ted Hughes' poetry, the poem has minimal historical detail. Aside from a sheet of paper, a clock, and a pen or a typewriter, the poem is set in a dreamy depiction of the natural world, and it experiments with a sense of timelessness. There's no sense that the era's prominent technology, such as television or radio, are threatening to intrude on the poem's environment. The figure of the thought fox has an everlasting and primal quality about it, which the poem indirectly associates with the act of producing poetry.

#### **5.2.4 FORM:**

"The Thought Fox" is composed of 24 lines divided into an eight-line stanza and four quatrains. The poem's otherwise unrestricted, uncertain nature is given structure by the steady shape. The fact that the first stanza is lengthier than the others

could indicate how long the speaker awaits poetic impulse to emerge, and how once it does, the actual process of writing accelerates.

"The Thought Fox" is also an excellent example of meta-poetry, or poetry about poetry writing. It could even be considered an *ars poetica*, a type of poem that expressly addresses the topic of how and why to produce poetry.

### 5.2.5 POETIC DEVICES:

**Alliteration:** Alliteration, in general, contributes to the poem's distinct musicality. The poem is, in a sense, about itself, the speaker uses poetry to reflect on the act of composing poetry. Alliteration and other lyrical devices serve to distinguish this text.

The poem's first line has the first example of alliteration: "midnight's moment." This could be an allusion to Gerard Manley Hopkins, one of Hughes' primary influences, aside from signalling that this is language ordered through sound as well as sense. Alliteration emphasizes the difference between the fox's silhouette and its figure in the third stanza. The shadow is hesitant to move forward, describing itself as "lame" and "lags." The strong tone of "body" and "bold" in line 16 contrasts with the soft, timid /l/ sounds, quietly supporting the poem's point that poets, like foxes, should trust their instincts and primitive impulses. Alliteration can also seem unexpected and sudden, as in the words "sudden" and "stink" in line 21.

**Assonance:** The poem's unique lyrical musicality is due to assonance. It functions similarly to the poem's use of alliteration in this regard. In addition, assonance has a hypnotic effect on the poem, which aids in evoking the speaker's acute focus. The speaker is patiently awaiting inspiration—the arrival of the thought fox. Observe how the brief /ih/ sounds in lines 7 and 8 function almost as a mantra, lulling the speaker into a hypnotic state of heightened, instinctual poetic consciousness. Going "deeper" into the speaker's head allows him to let the poem come to him and eliminates mental obstructions. The "widening deepening greenness" of Line 18 produces a similar effect by focusing on the thought fox's mesmerising eye as it approaches the speaker's consciousness.

**Asyndeton:** The poem employs asyndeton three times, the first of which is in line 10: *A fox's nose touches twig, leaf*; The absence of a conjunction depicts the fox's instinctual link with its surroundings as well as its swift, speedy instincts. The lack of a conjunction in this line makes it feel jittery and unstable, similar to how foxes look

to move. Because the fox lives in the moment, the lack of "and" gives the line a sense of urgency, as if it's happening right now. Lines 17-20's asyndeton ("Across clearings [...] business") works in a similar way, implying the fox's rapid, covert movements as it goes about its job. Finally, in lines 23-24, asyndeton brings the poem to a close: *The window is starless still; the clock ticks,/The page is printed.*

**Caesura:** Caesura is used to control the poem's rhythms and tempo. The poem can sometimes run in a continuous stream. The idea fox, for example, is still a "something" in the first stanza, meaning it hasn't been fully conjured up on the page by the speaker. The instances where it is actually used are: "Cold, delicately," "twig, leaf," "movement, that," "now, and now, and," "trees, and," "clearings, an," "Brilliantly, concentratedly," "Till, with," "still; the."

**Consonance:** Consonance abounds in "The Thought Fox." Consonance, like alliteration and assonance, establishes sound patterns and gives the poem its characteristic poetic music. Because this is a poem about poetry and the motivation needed to write it, it's only natural that it features the kind of linguistic music that is so important to the art form.

Consonance, for instance, marks the page in the third verse like the fox's paws imprint the snow. Practically every word in line 13 is dominated by the /S/, /t/, and /n/ sounds, impressing themselves on the line and implying the care, craftsmanship, and delicacy of writing/creeping through the forest.

**End-Stopped Line:** End-stopping is mostly used in "The Thought Fox" to regulate the poem's tempo. The poem begins with a scene of quiet, with the speaker sitting at his desk late at night, waiting for inspiration. After line 1, a colon serves as an end-stop, implying that everything that follows is part of the speaker's "imagin[ing]." The full stop following line 4's "move" appears almost ironic, bringing the poem to a stop as the speaker's fingers hang over an empty page, waiting for inspiration. After "loneliness," another end-stop prepares the reader for the entrance of the fox, after which the poem starts to flow more effortlessly down the page. The end-stops that do appear throughout the poem are much gentler than those in the opening stanza, and are usually punctuated by a comma's gentler pause. Lines 11 to 22 ("Two eyes [...] head.") are actually one long line, and the repeated enjambment here conveys both the fox's sneaky manoeuvres and the flow of inspiration.

**Enjambment:** Enjambment, like end-stop, affects the tone and rhythm of the poem. The speaker is waiting for inspiration—for the thinking fox of the title to come

to life in his mind—in the opening stanza. But it's a solitary, quiet situation, with a mix of boredom and excitement. The fox is awakening, but it isn't fully awake yet; for the time being, it is only "something" in the "darkness."

By altering the pace and switching between enjambment and end-stop, the poem conveys this in-between situation. Lines 1-4 ("Something else is alive [...] fingers move.") and 6-8 ("Something more near [...] loneliness.") are end-stopped, implying stillness, whereas lines 2-4 ("Something else is alive [...] fingers move.") and 6-8 ("Something more near [...] loneliness.") are enjambed, implying dynamism and mobility.

**Extended Metaphor:** "The Thought Fox" is nearly entirely made up of a series of extended metaphors. The speaker is waiting for a creative thought in the first verse, and lines 9 to 22 depict the idea taking the metaphorical form of a fox and entering the speaker's mind.

The significance of the poem's title in this context cannot be emphasised. If readers only read stanzas 2–4, this could be a straightforward nature poetry, one that cleverly and admirably describes a real fox making its way through a snowy forest. In some ways, the poem achieves this by treating the fox as real rather than imagined by the speaker for a large portion of the poem.

**Personification:** This is used in line three of the poem: *Beside the clock's loneliness*. This is an example of projection, often known as the sad fallacy. The speaker, who is alone in "this midnight moment's jungle," reflects his loneliness onto the ticking clock. The speaker's loneliness is thus the clock's loneliness. And, as the poem suggests, this is a vital aspect of the creative process. The speaker is alone with his thoughts, therefore calling the clock lonely implies that there are no other sounds to divert him. The distinct, repetitive sounds of the clock are possibly more audible in the silence, and inform readers that the speaker is all alone his thoughts.

It's also worth noting how this personification occurs before the thinking fox appears on the page, who, while impressively fox-like, is still the speaker's fabrication. When the poem's creative labour is through, the poem references the clock once more, but this time it isn't personified and simply ticks away as expected. It's as if the speaker is flexing his literary muscles in preparation of what's to come, and that once the "page is printed," the clock no longer has to be viewed as lonely. In fact, considering he now has the thought fox for companionship, the speaker may no longer be lonesome.

**Repetition:** The form of "The Thought Fox" is built on repetition. The speaker's creative act is sandwiched between the first and last stanzas. A clock, the page in front of the speaker, and a starless sky are all mentioned in the first stanza. The poem comes back to these components once the creative exercise is completed and the thinking fox has emerged. Instances where repetition occurs in the poem: (Line 2) "Something" (Line 3) "the clock's" (Line 4) "this blank page" (Line 5) "Through the window I see no star:" (Line 6) "Something" (Line 11) "now" (Line 12) "And," "now, and now, and now" (Line 23) "The window is starless still; " (Lines 23-24) "the clock ticks, / The page is printed."

#### 5.2.6 COMPREHENSION:

1. How does Ted Hughes use Animal Imagery in the poem?
2. Is the fox a metaphor for something else? Explain.
3. With reference to the poem, what is the relation between creativity and inspiration?
4. What does the forest symbolize?
5. What are the major themes of the poem?
6. How is the tone of the poem?
7. How does the fox move about the forest?

## LESSON 3: W. H. Auden

### OUTLINE:

- ♦ Auden and his major works
- ♦ References of different paintings in “Musée des Beaux Arts”
- ♦ Human suffering in “Musée des Beaux Arts”

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

With this lesson you should be able to

- ♦ Know about W. H. Auden and his poetry
- ♦ Form connections between historical works of art and modern issues
- ♦ Understand Auden’s theory on human suffering as seen in the poem “Musée des Beaux Arts”

### 5.3.0 W. H. AUDEN AND HIS WORKS:

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907- 1973), also known as W. H. Auden, is a British-American poet. Though he was born in England, to escape the reputation of being regarded as a left-wing political writer, he moved to the United States of America. He was a versatile intellect, with strong political and psychological interests. His poems are fragmentary and terse in their style. He has published nearly four hundred poems. Auden’s first published book is *Poems* (1930). In 1948, Auden won the Pulitzer Prize for his work *The Age of Anxiety*. The eclogue form of the poem deals with the exploration of man’s identity in the industrialised world.

He has collaborated with Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice and Chester Kallman. Auden had his education in Oxford where he became an important member of the “Auden Group” or the “Auden Generation,” which included Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis. The group heeded to the ideas of Marxism, anti- fascism, economic and socio-political concerns in their writings. Auden is called an anti-romantic poet who needs order and clarity in human existence. Love, politics, religion, social concerns, personal morals are the major themes in Auden’s works.

*Journey to a War* (1939), *Another Time* (1940), *The Double Man* (1941), *For the Time Being* (1944), *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (1945) are some of the

notable works of Auden. The poem *Musée des Beaux Arts* (“Museum of fine Arts”) is a free verse which describes the impact of suffering of mankind through a specific art form.

The poem begins with Auden praising historical painters like Bruegel, who recognised the nature of misery and humanity's indifference to it. This fact is well-illustrated by a number of works by Flanders' most famous painter. His painting demonstrates that, while individuals suffer, the regular rhythm of life continues unaffected. Even in the midst of such a big tragedy as Christ's crucifixion, people eat, drink, and entertain themselves, dogs go about their business, and children play unconcernedly. According to the poet, human pain is a curious phenomenon in that it elicits so little pity or even compassion in kindred hearts.

### 5.3.1 PARAPHRASE:

“Musée des Beaux Arts”

By W. H. Auden

#### Stanza 1:

*About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position: how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;  
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.*

The speaker begins the poem by establishing the poem's theme and setting. The poem is on display at the Old masters Museum, one of Belgium's Royal Museums of Fine Arts. The speaker makes an immediate remark about the artists in this gallery that will drive the rest of the poem: the Old Masters were constantly aware of how people react to hardship.

The metre of these opening lines emphasises essential words even more: *About suffering they were never wrong/The old Masters: how well they understood/Its human position: how it takes place.* "About suffering" is a very strong phrase, as it opens the poem and is stressed twice in a succession.

In addition, the speaker employs unusual grammar to make sure that the poem's subject is clearly identified from the start. The complicated phrase construction also lends an academic tone to the speaker and evokes the flowery language linked with poetry, which the speaker would embrace and reject. Furthermore, the assertion that the Old Masters are "never wrong," rather than always right, lends a negative tone to the poem from the start. It also implies that others have misinterpreted the actual human attitude toward suffering.

The terms "Old Masters," "never wrong," "well they understood," and "human position" also get a lot of emphasis, gently highlighting the speaker's key concerns. The poem isn't just "about suffering," but also about art's potential to express human feelings about it. The poem's first three lines, in general, have a far greater concentration of emphases than the rest of the poem, making for a dramatic start. These lines also have a better feeling of metrical regularity, as they are in an approximate pentameter with 10 syllables and five stresses per line.

Lines 3 and 4: *Its human position: how it takes place/While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;*

This section establishes the poem's two main features. First, it confirms the speaker's allusion to particular artworks, with the details serving as instances of "how well [the Old Masters] grasped" the human attitude toward misery. Second, it creates the speaker's distant, calm tone, which is suggestive of the speaker's mindset.

Line 4 opens the speaker's allusions to Pieter Breughel the Elder's work *The Census at Bethlehem* from the Northern Renaissance. As the Virgin Mary, pregnant with God's son, and her spouse, Joseph, arrive in a busy Bethlehem, where Jesus would be born, the picture represents everyday life. The allusion builds a cultural tie between the audience and the speaker for those who are familiar with the picture. This point also indicates that the poem will use ekphrasis, which is a form of writing that reflects a piece of art. Various paintings will aid the speaker in thinking about perception toward misery throughout the poem.





Rather than pointing to Mary and Joseph, the speaker points to various vignettes inside the picture that depict folks going about their daily lives. These minor subtleties, discernible only after much thought, serve as proof that individuals tend to carry on with their lives even when events of ostensible importance occur. The speaker's narrative is linked to "how well [the Masters] understood" suffering's "human position," since the recurrence of "how" is highlighted by caesurae. Similarly, line 4 finishes on "along," which rhymes with "they were never wrong" from line 2. Both of these passages connect the imagery of the poem to the comprehension of the Old Masters.

Line 4 is also significantly longer than the three preceding lines, which each include 10 syllables, whereas line 4 has 22. It also lacks spondees (stressed-stressed) in comparison to the preceding lines: *While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;*

Unlike lines 1-3, where each stress is separated by at least one unstressed syllable, here each stress is separated by at least one unstressed word, resulting in a cadence that rises and falls frequently. As a result, the monotonous cadence of this sentence, combined with its length, makes it appear to drone on, mirroring the mundane action it depicts. Furthermore, polysyndeton is mentioned in the speaker's extensive description of the picture. The plethora of conjunctions (particularly, "or") further stretches the line and adds to its monotony.

In this passage, the speaker's casual, detached demeanour begins to emerge, as evidenced by the flippant rhythm of the painting's portrayal. The speaker goes on to say that pain occurs while someone else is eating or... at this point. The term "someone else" implies that there is another character in distress, but it does not name

that individual. By speaking in this manner, the speaker, like the villagers, overlooks human misery.

Finally, lines 3-4, unlike the rest of the poem, generate a melodious ambience. Notice the smooth sibilance and calming consonant /l/ sounds in addition to the assonant long /ay/ sounds indicated above:

*... how it takes place*

*While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;*

As the speaker narrates mundane daily living, the repetitive, pleasant noises soften the ambience. The speaker's unconcerned tone reflects the town's laid-back mentality.

The speaker selectively portrays the scenery of The Census at Bethlehem in the next four lines, continuing the allusion to The Census at Bethlehem. This text, in particular, contrasts a picture of elderly, religious people excitedly anticipating Christ's arrival with an image of toddlers who are entirely uninterested in the matter.

The poet begins by describing the old with very vivid terminology, such as "reverently, passionately," and "miraculous birth." This latter phrase is highlighted by a caesura. The use of such surprising heated rhetoric adds drama to the poem's otherwise laid-back tone. Line 5 also has a repeated metrical pattern of trochees (stressed-unstressed) after the first two feet: *How, when the / aged are / rever- / ently, / passion- / ately / waiting*. This line's strong and regular rhythm evokes both the hope and the emotion of the "aged" as they await Christ's arrival. Line 5 also breaks on "passionately waiting," the enjambment building tension as the viewer must read on to find out what these figures are excited about.

In lines 5-6, there are several brief examples of assonance, particularly among the short /e/, short /a/, and long /a/ sounds: *How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting/For the miraculous birth...*

Consonant /r/ and /n/ sounds appear throughout the verse, but the compressed collection of different assonant sounds is distinctive to this paragraph. These interlocking sound chains promote a smooth transition from one sentence to the next, increasing the tempo. When the speaker shifts to the "Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating / On a pond at the edge of the wood." all of that tension disappears. The scene's sheer insignificance and the children's casual demeanour parody the dramatic setting, which vanishes as fast as it was created. Indeed, the speaker looks to be speaking in a childish manner, dropping the first "e" in

"particularly." Meanwhile, the children appear to be uninterested as a result of the juxtaposition.

A brief metrical consistency in the shape of anapaests, unstressed-unstressed-stressed, appears in the children's description: *On a pond / at the edge / of the wood:* The metre, in fact, provides a repeating rising and falling cadence that is rather tedious. In "On a pond," the assonance of lengthy, quiet /ah/ sounds is similarly pleasant and comforting.

Because lines 5 and 7 are virtually equal in length and are only separated by one line, the end rhyme between "waiting" and "skating" is highly visible, making this one of the poem's most prominent examples. This rhyme creates comparison between old and young by linking these two terms, emphasising the poem's juxtaposition. The speaker's analogies to youth and age emphasise the children's naiveté and the believers' long-term dedication.

Following Jesus' birth, all male children under the age of two were massacred, as the following scripture (lines 9-13) informs readers. As a result, this incident could be read as an omen that those who are aware of impending misery would die away before it occurs, leaving behind generations of uneducated people.

The juxtaposition that runs through this text emphasises the speaker's thesis that, even though one group is concerned about (impending) misery, "there must always be" another that is unconcerned. In other words, the speaker's contention that apathy to misery is universal is strengthened by juxtaposition. As a result, "how" is repeated in line 5 as a type of anaphora, as it is in lines 2 ("how well they understood") and 3 ("how it takes place"). Furthermore, "wood," the last word in this paragraph, rhymes with "understand" in line 2. As a result, anaphora and rhyme connect the speaker's insight by presenting two concrete examples of the Masters' profound knowledge of human attitudes toward suffering.

Line 9-13:

*They never forgot*

*That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course*

*Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot*

*Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse*

*Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.*



The speaker's gaze switches to another Breughel picture, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, starting in line 9, the version in the Old masters Museum is really a copy by Breughel's son, Pieter Breughel the Younger. While *The Census at Bethlehem* portrays the community prior to Christ's birth, the speaker here refers to a painting depicting the consequences. As per the New Testament of the Bible, when Herod the Great, then King of Judea, heard that a messiah had been born, he felt threatened. He dispatched soldiers to Bethlehem and the surrounding villages, ordering the execution of all children under the age of two. As a result, the murdered children are regarded as the first Christian martyrs.

Line 9 is also the shortest of the stanza, with only 5 syllables, providing a visual marker of the poem's transition. The speaker also begins this passage with a nod to the Old Masters ("They never forgot"), implying that no matter what he was painting, Breughel was always sure to include violence in the background. Furthermore, consonant /r/ sounds reappear in these lines: *They never forgot/That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course*. The consonance produces a harsh growling sound, which adds to the mood shift.

The juxtaposition of the tumultuous, horrific slaughter site with the "pond at the edge of the wood" indicates that serene, lovely backdrops may always be found within a larger environment that also contains awful brutality. The Old Masters' proficiency in illuminating this fact is reinforced by the final rhyme between "they never forgot" and "some untidy spot." Furthermore, the speaker's choice to draw emphasis to two events involving children emphasises the gap between those who suffer and those who continue on with their lives. It also implies that people are assigned to one of two camps at random.

The speaker's casual, detached tone is especially noticeable in these words, which contain two examples of understatement: the massacre is described as

"dreadful martyrdom [that] must run its course," and the slaughter location is reduced to "some untidy spot." The speaker's oblique depiction of the mass death of young children dramatically minimises the violence depicted in the painting. The speaker also skips over scenes of mothers clutching their kids, citizens pleading for compassion, and military vandalising the town. As a result, the background becomes "untidy," a little disorganised.

Instead, the speaker's sight is drawn to the creatures on the image's periphery. The speaker's tone is so nonchalant while presenting this horrible sight that it borders on amusement, a horse scrapes its derrière, and the dogs are, well, "doggy." The speaker implies that humans' perspective toward observed pain is similar to that of animals by dwelling on these visuals rather than individuals. Additionally, the speaker says that the violence "must run its course," implying that misery is commonplace and would unavoidably occur no matter how quiet a region was previously. The speaker's use of the word "must" indicates both confidence and resignation in this as a universal reality.

Line 12 is much longer and enjambed than the others, giving it the appearance of lingering in space. It also lacks caesurae, giving the impression of going on indefinitely. It has 1 stressed syllable and 1-2 unstressed syllables in its metre: *Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse*. As a result, the rhythm rises and falls continuously, accentuating the speaker's unfazed tone and matching the animals' monotony. The horse is described as "innocent" by the speaker, which appears to free it of any culpability. This would imply that anyone who witnesses violence but does not participate or intervene is "innocent." In this way, the speaker expresses compassion for the spectators mentioned throughout the poem, emphasising that suffering is so prevalent that no one should be held accountable for going about their business. Despite this, the speaker states that the horse belongs to a soldier known as "the torturer," implying that the events are terrible. In one breath, the speaker proclaims the horse's innocence while also casting doubt on it. Additionally, "horse" rhymes with "must run its course," and "tree" rhymes with "there always must be." As a result of the rhyme, the speaker associates the horse with unavoidable misery. The speaker, on the other hand, absolves that horse of blame.

As the stanza comes to a close, the reader sees that the entire stanza has been one long sentence. As a result, the speaker uses this image to end both the first stanza

and the first phrase of the poem. As a result, the audience is left wondering how innocent the horse is.

**Stanza 2:**

*In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.*



The second and last stanzas describe another picture, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, which was credited to Breughel the Elder at the time but is most likely an early copy of his original version. The speaker's narration of the image alludes to a well-known story from Greek mythology in which a young boy named Icarus is locked in a tower on Crete island with his skilful inventor father, Daedalus. Daedalus creates two pairs of wings out of feathers, wax, and thread in order for the two to flee their captivity. Icarus ignores his father's cautions and soars too close to the sun, causing his wings to melt. Icarus falls to his death in the sea.

The speaker calls this artwork "Breughel's Icarus," referring to it more openly than the others. This painting's depiction is also enclosed within its own stanza, implying that it is particularly relevant to the speaker's interpretation. The stanza break also serves to distinguish this narrative from the biblical stories that came before it. Furthermore, the speaker's references to persons in the painting are obvious, but the vignettes identified before take time to assess and, even still, it is hard to



ascertain the precise characters that the speaker refers to. Nonetheless, the speaker describes the brutality depicted in Breughel's painting with a broad-ranging terminology: *everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster*, the speaker says. The dry tone, as well as the indirect manner in which he refers to Icarus' demise, are examples of understatement.

In the second half of the line, *the ploughman may / Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry* of the falling Icarus, the speaker speculates. So, despite the speaker's description of a painting, this tale of Icarus' demise is more about sound than sight, as the onomatopoeic "splash" emphasises. As a result, the speaker, like the characters shown, fails to properly address the brutality depicted in the paintings. Icarus's lament was apparently heard before he fell into the ocean, but it is included after the "splash." The two noises, "splash" and "cry," which allude to the same image, are interchangeable because of asyndeton, which allows them to be placed side by side without a conjunction. Despite the fact that "the ploughman may / Have" witnessed Icarus' death, the speaker states unequivocally that it was not an important failure for him. As a result, the speaker implies that the ploughman's understanding of suffering has no bearing on his actions. The harshness of the word "not an important" is highlighted by the consonant /n/ and rough /t/ sounds. This unconcerned observer is aware of the violence taking place around him but turns aside. The speaker brings the reader's attention to further imagery within *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* as the poem comes to a close, beginning with the light shining down on the dying Icarus. The speaker goes on to say that the sun "had to" do so, implying that life carries on even when catastrophes occur. Two accents land on "had to," emphasising the inevitability of human pain, which also indicates acceptance and a lack of choice—people are forced to go on with their lives in the face of it since it is pervasive.

This image gets a huge amount of metrical stress in general, particularly because it includes spondees (stressed-stressed), which were previously only used in the opening three lines of the poem. Icarus' "white legs," which are enveloped by "green / Water," are highlighted by the metre. The speaker's sole realistic depiction of the violence portrayed in the painting is the contrast of white legs and green water, which provides a powerful image. Icarus' writhing limbs provide a brief glimpse of his suffering before he vanishes completely from vision. Nevertheless, while the sunlight reveals Icarus's misery, it does so passively and only at a juncture when his death is unavoidable, having been overlooked by spectators throughout the event. The

speaker goes on to describe a "expensive delicate ship that must have seen" Icarus' death yet "sailed calmly on." Personification is demonstrated by the speaker's description of the ship. The fact that people on board the ship watch his killing and do nothing about it is obvious to the reader. Finally, metrical weight is applied to the poem's final few words, giving them rhythmic force: "sailed calmly on." As a result, the reader is left with a vivid image of the poem's disdain toward human suffering.

### 5.3.2 SUMMARY:

Upon looking through a gallery of works by well-known pre-19th-century painters, the speaker observes that these artists accurately depict misery, particularly humankind's mindset toward others' misery. The speaker elaborates on this point by referring to Pieter Breughel the Elder's picture *The Census at Bethlehem*, and stating that suffering happens while individuals go on about their daily lives. While a pregnant Mary and Joseph arrive to register for the census, the speaker draws attention to people eating, somebody unlocking a window, and others strolling around. While elderly individuals excitedly await the birth of Christ, the speaker points out that there will always be younger people who are less interested in such an occasion, such as the youngsters in the painting, who play games and glide on a pond in a forested region. The artists, as per the speaker, are aware that violence occurs in a hidden, chaotic location while life goes on around it. The speaker alludes to *The Massacre of the Innocents*, a painting depicting the execution of the first Christian victims. In this image, animals act indifferently as the massacre takes place, with dogs performing doglike things and a slaughterer's horse calmly rubbing its back on a tree.

The speaker uses another Breughel painting, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, as an example, observing that everything in the painting seems to ignore Icarus's tragic demise. And according to speaker, the farmer driving a plough in the painting's background may have overheard Icarus fall into the water and call out, but the incident is irrelevant to him. The sun in the artwork shines brightly, as all suns must. As Icarus descends into green water, the speaker calls attention to its reflection on his pallid legs. The speaker ends the poem with an image of a luxury ship that must have seen Icarus fall from the sky, but had a journey to complete and thus sailed onward peacefully.



### 5.3.3 ANALYSIS:

"Musée des Beaux Arts" was written by Auden in December 1938, barely a year before World War II broke out. During this time, global and political tensions rose as several conflicts erupted around the world, revealing disparities between world powers' political views. Shortly before composing this poem, Auden had witnessed two similar battles. He'd just returned from a six-month stay in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War, a terrible battle that has been blamed for sparking World War II. Auden, like many other young left wing supporters, came to Spain to assist the Republic during the Spanish Civil War. This poem reflects Auden's real life experience as an eyewitness to historic events of violence, as well as his fears about war and its moral ramifications. Indeed, the poem's speaker becomes fixated on "its human position"—people's proclivity to turn away from misery while life goes on. "Musée des Beaux Arts," one amongst Auden's most well-known poems, first appeared in the modernist magazine *New Writing* in the Spring of 1939, and was later included in Auden's book *Another Time*, published in 1940. The "Musée des Beaux Arts" is an excellent example of his work as a reaction to Romanticism. Auden valued logical analysis and felt that the world is governed by universal patterns—truths that are intelligible, every day, and worthy of investigation.

The poem takes place in Brussels, Belgium, at the Old masters Museum, which is located in the main building of the *Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*. The poem's title is a condensed version of the museum's name, stressing the poem's major theme, "Beaux Arts," or Fine Arts. The narrator of "Musée des Beaux Arts" goes around a gallery, admiring pieces of art by some of history's greatest painters, including Pieter Breughel the Elder and Breughel the Younger. The speaker retells two iconic stories depicted in the paintings—the birth of Christ and the fall of Icarus—drawing emphasis to the onlookers' cluelessness and apathy. Furthermore, the speaker appears unconcerned about the catastrophes detailed, implying that the commonplaceness of human misery makes everyone's reaction to it less intense.

The speaker uses the poem's gallery backdrop as a springboard for philosophical reflection, praising the capacity of individual paintings to reveal an important truth about humanity—a reality that the speaker then attempts to transmit through poetry. As a result, "Musée des Beaux Arts" reveals how art has the capacity

to highlight fundamental, lasting truths that might otherwise go unnoticed by using the gallery setting, individual paintings, and poetic approaches.

Throughout the poem, the speaker praises specific works for their ability to express human disinterest towards misery. The speaker illustrates this argument by describing minute aspects in the paintings, emphasising how the artworks themselves convey this universal reality. In Breughel the Elder's *The Census at Bethlehem*, for example, the speaker gestures to someone who is "opening a window." The speaker then leads the reader over the image to "children... skating / On a pond at edge of the wood." The speaker moves on to Breughel the Younger's *The Massacre of the Innocents*, pointing out dogs who "go on with their doggy life" and a "torturer's horse" who "scratches its innocent behind on a tree."

Finally, the speaker mentions *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Breughel the Elder, highlighting "the ploughman," "the sun," and "the expensive delicate ship." The speaker emphasises the power of art to portray the world as it is—so full of sorrow that humans grow unsympathetic to the suffering of others, even in historical moments—by continually drawing the reader's attention to the uncaring onlookers depicted in the paintings.

In this approach, the "Musée des Beaux Arts" offers a more realistic alternative to traditional depictions of horrific occurrences throughout history, one that reflects bystanders' proclivity to disconnect. The poem stresses how art may convey this reality by presenting specific instances of paintings at the museum. Furthermore, the poem is a manifestation of this fact. As a result, the poem might be viewed as a multi-faceted tribute to art's ability to communicate important realities that would otherwise go unnoticed.

#### **5.3.4 FORM:**

This free verse composition is split into 2 stanzas: a 13-line stanza and an octave, which is an 8-line stanza. The length of the lines varies widely, ranging from 5 to 22 syllables. In addition, the majority of lines are enjambed, which means that line breaks appear in the middle of sentences and phrases. As such, the line breaks seem random at first inspection, serving simply to create end rhymes. While the line breaks do create a complex network of rhymes, they also offer subtle structure to the work and lend to the speaker's detached, observing tone.

### 5.3.5 POETIC DEVICES:

**Allusion:** Throughout the poem, the speaker makes three allusions, each of which relates to a picture in the Musée des Beaux Arts. They occur in the lines 4-8, 10-13, and 14-21. The speaker begins by describing specifics of these paintings, citing them as evidence, after claiming that the Old Masters have a strong knowledge of humans' attitudes toward the misery of others. The speaker refers to numerous onlookers in well-known moments of pain, such as Christ's birth and Icarus' fall. Rather of emphasising the historical and cultural significance of these paintings, or the brutal severity of the suffering depicted, the speaker adopts a calm demeanour, inspecting the works and highlighting isolated vignettes of everyday life.

**Assonance:** Multiple times throughout the poem, assonance appears momentarily, typically in conjunction with consonance. The resonating vowel sounds, in particular, shape the poem's tone and draw attention to keywords. Assonant /e/ sounds emerge beside consonant /r/ sounds in the poem's first lines, amplifying their growling effect. Assonance usually results in smooth, melodic choruses of sound, which is the case in a few of places—see "As it had" in line 18 and "calmly on" in line 21. The majority of assonance examples in this poem, on the other hand, enhance the poem's bleakness. As a result, the poem embraces and rejects musicality—just one of the numerous ways in which the speaker combines poetic and common language to investigate the link between art and life.

**Caesura:** There are multiple caesurae in this poem, which combine clauses and other parts into long, complex sentences. The caesurae and enjambment work together to govern the poem's rhythm, allowing sentences to flow across line breaks before being met by precisely timed pauses. Because there are no full stops in the internal punctuation, the commas, colons, and semi-colons mitigate the poem's rapid pace without totally breaking it. As a result, the text has a conversational cadence, as if it is a record of the speaker's ideas as they emerge in real time.

**Consonance:** Consonance pervades each line of this poem, establishing its mood despite its subtlety. The most common consonant sounds are /r/ and /s/, with the former's harsh growl frequently clashing with the latter's delicate hiss. Take a closer look at lines 14-15, for example: *In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away/Quite leisurely from the disaster;*

Lines 1-3 have a similar effect, with sibilance being in the side-line and the /n/ and /ng/ sounds taking centre stage: *About suffering they were never wrong, The Old Masters: how well they understood Its human position ...*

**Enjambment:** Most lines in this poem split in the middle of clauses and phrases, resulting in a lot of enjambment. Enjambment helps the speaker to produce nuanced end rhymes since they tend to fall on phrases that aren't preceded by a natural break and aren't always the most intriguing words in the line. Lines 5-7 are an excellent example: *How, when the aged are reverently, passionately **waiting/For** the miraculous birth, there always must **be/Children** who did not specially want it to happen, skating.*

**Juxtaposition:** The speaker uses juxtaposition to contrast the tremendous sorrow experienced by certain people with the callous disregard shown by spectators. For example, the second half of verse 1 juxtaposes a pond where children play with a "untidy spot" where infants are killed. Conjunction accentuates the gap between the experiences of the two groups of children by abruptly altering the environment from a charming, recognizable sight to the site of a tragedy. As a result, the new-borns' deaths appear even more unjust, while the other children's free, cheerful mood takes on a dark hue. When depicting Icarus's drowning body, the speaker employs juxtaposition: *... the sun shone/As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green/Water...* The poem's only clear portrayal of the brutality represented in the paintings is these lines. It gives the reader a brief view into Icarus's struggles, focusing on the fact that he is "disappearing"—his agony becomes unseen as the thick water conceals his pale form. As the poem comes to an end, the disparity between Icarus' "white legs" and "the green water" creates a dramatic, heart breaking image.

**Personification:** Lines 19 to 21 are the only examples of personification present in the whole poem, where the ship is personified by the speaker as the passengers on board. The poet may have done so because the painting depicts boats but not their occupants, and the speaker wanted to be faithful to the image. Second, there is a historical tradition of anthropomorphizing ships. Captains refer to their ships as "she" and "her," and good ships are recognised for being stoic—resilient boats that are unaffected by storms. The fact that ships are built to sail easily through rough seas might be interpreted as a reflection of the mentality portrayed throughout the poem, such as the townspeople's natural propensity to go about their daily lives despite human pain.

**Repetition:** There occurs repetition of the words how, or and anyhow in lines 2-5 and 11 and 14. It is used by the poet primarily to structure the poem. In line 4, there is a single instance of polysyndeton. The word "how" begins three consecutive clauses on lines 2-5, resulting in anaphora. Anaphora compares the phrases that appear after each instance of "how." As a result, the Old Masters' keen grasp of human attitudes toward suffering is clearly linked with two features from Breughel's paintings that exhibit this insight via repetition.

**Understatement:** The speaker's indifferent tone is mostly due to understatement, which reflects the townspeople's stance regarding the suffering they witness. The town people and animals in the painting "turn away/ quite leisurely" from Icarus, with his limbs thrashing in the ocean as he dies. The speaker describes his death as "the disaster" at first, then as "something amazing" later. While these sentences acknowledge Icarus' pain, the speaker's tone is dry, as if "the disaster" is nothing more than a humiliating mishap—"not an important failure." This understatement minimises both Icarus' agony and the event's significance.

#### 5.3.6 COMPREHENSION:

1. How does the poem portray human reaction to suffering?
2. What are the specific works of art the poet uses to expose reality?
3. What are the poetic devices employed in the poem?
4. Explain the unusual grammar the poet employs to get his point across.

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