ENG-02-XV (1)

Institute of Distance and Open Learning

Gauhati University

MA in English

Semester 3

Paper XV

Poetry IV : Modern Poetry

Block 1

Defining the Modern

<u>Contents:</u>

Block Introduction:

Unit 1 : Poetry in the Modern World

Unit 2 : W. B. Yeats: "Sailing to Byzantium"

Unit 3 : T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*

Unit 4 : W. H. Auden: "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

Contributors:

Dolikajyoti Sharma (Unit 1)	Assistant Professor, Department of English, Gauhati University
Dr. Tapati Baruah Kashyap (Unit 2)	Lecturer in English Beltola College
Dr. Uttara Debi (Units 3 & 4)	Assistant Professor in English IDOL, Gauhati University

Editorial Team:

Dr. Kandarpa Das	:	Director IDOL, GU
Dr. Uttara Debi	:	Asstt. Professor in English IDOL, GU
Prasenjit Das	:	Asstt. Professor in English KKHSOU, Guwahati
Manab Medhi	:	Guest Faculty in English IDOL, GU
Sanghamitra De	:	Guest Faculty in English IDOL, GU

Cover Page Designing:

Kaushik Sarma	:	Graphic Designer CET, IITG

July, 2011

© Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. Further information about the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University courses may be obtained from the University's office at IDOL Building, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14.

Published on behalf of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University by Dr. Kandarpa Das, Director and printed at J.S. Printer, Silpukhuri, Guwahati, Assam. Copies printed 1000.

Acknowledgement

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University duly acknowledges the financial assistance from the Distance Education Council, IGNOU, New Delhi, for preparation of this material.

Block Introduction:

With this block we come to the achievements of English poetry in the modern world. Do keep in mind the nuances of the word 'modern' since it undergoes ever so many protean transformations! Here, the exact term with which we shall carry on our celebrations of the word shall be properly yoked to that idea of the "modernist" in the 'modern' world. Our Block, thus, instead of carrying on the dry-as-dust, text-bookish figure of "Modern Poets" which is likely to make you think of dry, old professors who will turn up their noses at your middling examination essay, we have renamed our material in such a way as to remind you that the modern world is so large as to have a little space for an unprofitable activity like poetry! So–"Poetry in the Modern World".

We also need to be reminded that the poets whose work you are welcomed to here – with little savoury pieces, and not whole tomes! – carried on their play with words while bombs whizzed over their heads, grinding machinery hauled skyscrapers to their heights, the poor and the hungry marched in masses forcing government authorities to cram their heads together to find ways of making official, public-pleasing pronouncements, and so on. It may seem even surprising that poetry, which seems such a delicate art at times, went on. At least, we can still thank the poets who believed in the sacredness of words to have sustained their endeavour to forge it into the manuscript of human thought. Let us remember that the modern world has not been, at least in the earlier half of the twentieth century, the most congenial to poetry-writing. And yet the poetic records that survive today show how right perhaps Jacques Lacan is when he welds together the letter and the human Unconscious. The poets of the modern world whom we look at here show the many multiple combinations of meanings that emerge through the trails left behind by a word or even a letter. You can look closely at 'Shantih shantih shantih' to see what it does to the view of human civilization leading up to its imprint. Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium' cannot be thought of without reference to what Auden came to write of him – the words of the dead poet take on new shape in the guts of the living. The meaning of Yeats, then, cannot be understood apart from the statement that came a few months following his death in January 1939.

One could go on – Ted Hughes is not to be confined to mean only a focus on animals. the animals (especially the "Thought-fox") speak to us in strange ways from the lines of his poems. Remarkably they reveal the sources of energy –intense energy – in a world that has concentrated the meaning of energy within the devastating systems of destruction bequeathed by two great wars. It is a similar bated energy, potential and tense below the surface that gives to Larkin's lines their acuity. Heaney, who acknowledges his indebtedness to Hughes, is a sharp witness of what the modern world meant to the Irish sensibility. Thus, from our own Indian, postcolonial position, we can comprehend perhaps even better for the being outside of it, what transpired in the world of letters in the modern world. Whose modernity was it, might be a question, opened up to better linguistic scrutiny and emptied of its answers before we can assert that the old answers are final.

Language thus is an important vessel of the transgressions of history. We refrained from calling this block, "the historical background" because it is not as if history first happens and then come the documents that record the sequence of events. If we turn to American modernism, with Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams, we should not be surprised by what we see there. The Americans, for obvious reasons, looked askance at the "modernism" proposed by T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound. They wanted to shape the meaning of the word in their own terms. We have tried, below, to bring to you all of these possibilities and probable meanings. We have not included all that we think you should know of purely on account of lack of space. And, then, of course, this is not the place for you to start doctoral research! However, we do feel confident that you will feel interested enough to carry on from where we leave you.

Our Block contains the following units:—

Unit 1 : Poetry in the Modern World

Unit 2 : W. B. Yeats: "Sailing to Byzantium"

Unit 3 : T.S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*

U nit 4 : W. H. Auden: "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

Unit1
Poetry in the Modern World

Contents:

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Important Poets

- 1.3.1 William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)
- 1.3.2 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)
- 1.3.3 William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)
- 1.3.4 Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)
- 1.3.5 Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973)
- 1.3.6 Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)
- 1.3.7 Philip Larkin (1922-1985)
- 1.3.8 Ted Hughes (1930-1998)
- 1.3.9 Seamus Heaney (1939-)

1.4 Socio-Historical Context

1.5 The Modernist Modes

1.6 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The present unit aims to familiarise you with the context of modern poetry in general, and *give* a brief introduction to the poets included in your syllabus and their particular themes. However, by the time you finish reading this unit you will have–

- *made* a comprehensive survey of modernism in modern poetry
- *read* about the representative modernist poets
- *grasped* the main ideas behind the kind of poetry they are involved with
- *understood* the significance of the various socio-historical elements which became instrumental in their inception

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The period of modern poetry stretches from around the end of the nineteenth century to contemporary times, as the inclusion of later poets like Hughes and Heaney implies. This means that you have to read many of these poets in a frame of reference that goes beyond the tradition of modernist poetry and that brings in postmodern and postcolonial references as well. In this section, I will give a brief overview of this unit. The next section will give you a short introduction of some major modern poets and their particular styles and preoccupations. Section 1.4 will attempt to present some of the major events of the period that had a significant impact on literature, including poetry, produced during this time. The following section again goes over some of the key themes and concerns common to all the poets discussed in Section 1.3, while the final section will comprise a list of works cited in the unit as well as a few books for further reading.

Stop to Consider:

Modern/Postmodern/Postcolonial Poetry

David Perkins writes: "During the 1950s poets in both England and the United States rejected the styles that were then established. In the continuity of poetry from generation to generation, there had been no comparably sharp break for forty years, since the advent of Modernist poetry just before and after the First World War. The beginning of this new period might be pinpointed in 1954, when Philip Larkin's *Poems* appeared and when, in a completely unrelated event, Allen Ginsberg gave the first public performance of his *Howl*. Other points of departure were Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959) and Charles Olson's 1950 manifesto "Projective Verse," which voiced premises shared by many of the younger poets.

The term "Modernism" derived from poets in the 1910s. It named the new style they hoped to create. In its current senses "Postmodernism" was invented by critics in the 1950s and 1960s. So far as I know, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan are the only poets who often referred to contemporary poetry as "Postmodern." They meant that they and their fellow poets in the 1950s and 1960s were basing their work on the styles of the 1910s and 1920s. Olson's influential essay "Projective Verse" emphasized that this verse develops as a next step from what Olson called the revolution of 1910. As Creeley put it in 1951, "Any movement poetry can now make beyond the achievement of Pound, Williams, et al. must make use of the fact of their work and, further, of what each has stressed as the main work now to be done." Olson also meant by the term

that after the Second World War a new human consciousness was developing. At present the term retains both these implications along with many others, and has, as is normal with such terms, no agreed meaning. It may refer, as it does for Olson, to a new mentality, which is being formed, so the argument goes, by contemporary history and technology—by such influences as the memory of concentration camps, Dresden, and Hiroshima, by travel, cultural eclecticism, ecological activism, communes, the use of drugs, television, computers, and the exploration of space. Those who use the term in this sense believe that there has been a radical break with the past in human sensibility, imagination, and morality. Or the term may be used to refer only to a style in the arts. In the latter case, Postmodernism may be thought to characterize all the arts or only some, and in any one art, such as poetry, it may be applied to the contemporary period as a whole or only to some tendencies within it. Critics variously date the beginnings of Postmodernism from the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s. Some maintain that Postmodernism is a more radical Modernism and others that it negates Modernism, and still others hold that Postmodernism is an altogether different style which flourishes along with Modernism. . . .

Since the Second World War the prevailing style of poetry in Great Britain has been unlike that in the United States, yet it may equally be called Postmodern. For the term Modernism, like all such terms, covers many moments and tendencies, and, on the whole, the contemporary poetries of England and America have been formed in relation to different moments in the Modernist period. In England the new poetry of the 1950s was created in antagonism to the revived Romanticism of Dylan Thomas and of much poetry written during the Second World War, and it was equally created by a decisive rejection of the high Modernism of Eliot and Pound. (Yeats was repudiated more as a belated Romantic than as a Modernist, and Stevens and Williams were hardly known.) The values that inspired the new poetry from Larkin to Geoffrey Hill included rational thought and communication and introspective honesty, with the complexity of perception and attitude that inevitably attends the honesty of the intelligent. These values were associated with the "academic" New Criticism in the United States, but in England they were regarded as elements of native tradition to which English poetry should return."

J.M.Cohen, in *Poetry of This Age*(1960), quotes from T.S.Eliot's 'East Coker' to describe the situation of the modern poet:

"So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt

Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling."

Cohen points out that "Eliot's verdict on his achievement is an excessively severe one. Every poet since Baudelaire has been conscious that the equipment he has inherited from the great poets of the past is shabby, if not worn out. But, . . .new measures have been invented and new resources of vocabulary explored by the poets of the last hundred years. It is not so much that the equipment has deteriorated, but that the demands upon it are very much greater than those made by Wordsworth and Keats, Hugo, Tennyson and Heine. For the poetry of the divided man needs to be psychologically far subtler than that of the outward-looking poets of the past. . . .The last fifty years of European poetry have seen several 'raids on the inarticulate' , attempts like that of the surrealists to tap inspiration at a deeper source than the waking consciousness can comprehend. But on the whole modern poets have probably kept up with the increasing demand on their powers of expression. "

Cohen makes the point that "One of the principal themes of the modern poet has therefore been the break-up of a society from which he has felt himself increasingly alien."

SAQ:

To what extent does "alienation" become a theme central to modern poetry? What kind of "alienation" is foregrounded in modern poetry? (80 + 70 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

John Holloway marks out the importance of Thomas Hardy's poetry in the modern period: "Hardy, it must be remembered, was writing verse steadily from the 1860s; and, with its plain vernacular language, and its strong . . awareness of everyday life, his large body of verse forcibly invites us to see nineteenth-century poetry itself in other than 'dream-world' terms.

Hardy's long period of activity as a poet – from the 1860s to the 1920s – significantly bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and does so not only in the matter of dates, but of outlook, technique and diction as well. In many of Hardy's best poems the dominance of folksong as a model, or of the street-ballad, is clear; this is another respect in which he parted company with the traditions of 'polite letters'. These qualities of language and of technique are not surface qualities. These facts make Hardy a key figure in the whole development of later poetry; and one may note that the poetry of the middle and later twentieth century has probably followed him, consciously or unconsciously, more than anyone else."

Holloway makes the further observation that the poetry of Hardy (discussed above) and other poets like him at the turn of the century—Edward Thomas, and D. H. Lawrence, for instance—was based on experience that was "traditional and rural". In contrast, the "centre of life had moved away from what was rural. Thence, as we learn, the "new poetry which came into being from about 1910 did not modify the English tradition which has just been discussed, but departed sharply from it. Pound called for poetry at "such a degree of development . . . that it will vitally concern people who are accustomed, in prose, to Henry James, . . .and in music to Debussy" . . This new poetry looked not to the countryside, but to the great city." This new poetry, affiliated to the great city, felt the impress of the Continental poets like Laforgue, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Eliot remarked: "[Baudelaire] gave new possibilities to poetry in a new stock of images from contemporary life." London was a visible preoccupation of the poets of this new poetry. In Pound and Eliot, as Holloway continues, "the range of intellectual, cosmopolitan and culturally polyglot interests is far wider than in earlier poets like Henley, Dowson and the rest. Pound's interest in Far Eastern literatures, and Eliot's Sanskrit studies bear witness to that".

The new verse had strong links with Post-Impressionism and even Expressionism, a fact that becomes clear by virtue of "Pound's insistence,

in the 1913 Imagist Manifesto, on the integrated image, stark and clear, and on a maximum economy of words in the poem".

Stop to Consider:

Imagism

"a poetical movement instigated by American poets in London, roughly coterminous with the First World War. There were four numbers of an annual anthology, 1914-17. Its main associates were the Americans Ezra Pound, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), John Gould Fletcher, and Amy Lowell, and the Britons Richard Aldington . . and F.S. Flint.

T.E. Hulme was a seminal figure. Flint describes meetings in 1909 where Hulme, he, and some others discussed how contemporary poetry might be revivified by *vers libre*, by the influence of the *Symbolistes*, and by forms derived from the Japanese tanka and haiku. Among Hulme's circle was Pound, newly arrived from America. Two years later Pound's former fiancée, H.D., also came to London, and with her future husband Richard Aldington began to sculpt poems whose severity Pound admired . . In 1912 Pound told these two that they were '*Imagistes*', and sent their work to Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*. The word *Imagiste* first occurred in print in Pound's prefatory note to the poems of Hulme; and the first statements of an evolving programme appeared in *Poetry* for March 1913: 'Imagisme', printed over Flint's signature and purporting to be an interview with an Imagiste . . ; and 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' signed by Pound himself. The first enumerated the cardinal rules of the movement as '1.Direct treatment of the 'thing' . . .2.To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation. 3. . . to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome'; 'A Few Don'ts', meanwhile, proscribed superfluous words, abstractions, and iambs.

Pound edited the first anthology, *Des Imagistes*, published in March 1914 with poems by himself, Aldington, H.D., and Flint, and one each from Skipwith Cannell, John Cournos, Ford Madox Hueffer . . , James Joyce, Amy Lowell, Allen Upward, and William Carlos Williams, not all of whom would have subscribed in full to Pound's principles. These received a further exposition (by now using the English form 'Imagist') in his essay on 'Vorticism' in the *Fortnightly Review*, September 1914, with its useful distinction between image and symbol: "The symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The Imagist's images have a variable significance like the signs *a*, *b* and *x* in algebra . . .the author must use his *image* because he sees it or feels it, *not* because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics."

By 1917, "the movement was felt to have served its purpose. . . the fulfillment of the Imagist promise may best be located in Pound's *Cantos*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and H.D.'s *War Trilogy*, works which absorb certain elements of Imagist practice into effective larger structures. At the very least, Imagism introduced several of the prominent features of modernist poetics—organic form, elimination of personality, rejection of public themes—to the élite audience it sought for itself." *–Oxford Companion to 20th-century Poetry*

Hugh Witemeyer's commentary can be instructive: "Imagism is probably the most important single movement in English-language poetry of the twentieth century. Hardly any prominent poet of Pound's generation and the next two after it went untouched by Imagist theory and practice. The aesthetic of Imagism might nowadays be called minimalist. It emphasized a romantic return to origins, a simplification of needless complexities, a zealous, Puritanical stripping-away of the excrescences that had attached themselves to the art of poetry like barnacles to a clean hull. Among the luxuries to be relinquished were traditional metre and rhyme, artificial poetic diction, superfluous verbiage, explicit philosophizing and editorializing, rhetoric, and transitional filler. The poem was to be made as economical and functional as possible, and its chief *raison d'être* was to present images unmediated by authorial commentary.

Classic examples of Imagism in action include Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro', H.D.'s 'Oread' and William Carlos Williams's 'The Red Wheelbarrow'. More compact even than these exercises in condensation is a poem by Pound entitled 'Papyrus'.

The new poetry, Holloway makes clear, also repudiated the prosperous urban middle-class and its values. It adopted a decidedly cultural-elite stance. In its avoidance of bourgeois values, the new verse drew on its links with the poetry of the later nineteenth century. The same prosperous middle-class had, we should remember, disgusted Yeats when it had failed to respond to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (Ireland). So, as Holloway notes, "That modern poetry started with this repudiation of the broad city middle class affords a link between the new poets of the 1910s and those of the Aesthetic Movement of the 1890s, and helps one to see how it was natural enough that Pound's earliest verse should have *fin-de siècle* qualities, or that like the nineties poets Pound should have had a special interest in Old French or Provençal."

We can see how the line of modern poetry drew upon a cosmopolitan culture that helped it to eschew bourgeois values and uphold aestheticism. These strains are clear in Yeats' essay of 1901, *What is Popular Poetry?* or even in his *The Symbolism of Poetry* (1900) which was written under the influence of Arthur Symons's book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which introduced English readers to the French Symbolists. Yeats sought to bring together (in the words of Holloway), "poet and peasant . . .but grocer and politician were in another world." The break with the old tendencies consisted thus in a "firm repudiation of what was seen by Yeats as the whole Tennysonian stance, the poet as public figure writing for the broad middle class and diluting his poetry until that class could take it in."

These new social affiliations of the new verse were to be seen reflected in its techniques – "in the demand that social respectability should not be allowed to impose restrictions of subject-matter upon the poet, nor literary convention impose restrictions of diction or emotion." Moreover, "this change in social orientation led to an insistence on the supreme virtue of economy and concentration: poetry was not to be made easy for the relaxed general reader."

In his early essays Yeats lay down these very reasons for refusing to conform to "a sequacious logic, a self-explaining easy-to-follow train of thought." This rejection of neatly logical exposition in poetry thus created in modern poetry one of its most striking characteristics—"a constant laconic *juxtaposition* of ideas" (Holloway) rather than "a banally lucid exposition".

Stop to Consider:

Symbolism

Clive Scott states that for some historians of the modern period it seemed that "the tendency to overlap, to trespass from one art to another, to allow the senses, to usurp each others' functions was accompanied by an attempt on the part of the arts to develop their own peculiar and distinctive assets. For some, poetry was becoming purer; painting was approaching two-dimensional composition of line and colour. Among the names, three stand out: Symbolism, Impressionism and Decadence. . . Those . . .who esteem Modernist literature as a liberation of the text, of the word, will probably point to Symbolism as the

source of the self-subsistent work that lives among the multiple privacies of its language, and side rather with Edmund Wilson who in *Axel's Castle* saw the foundations of modern literature in 'the development of Symbolism and its fusion or conflict with Naturalism'."

What becomes obvious from the above commentary is the preeminence of a movement like Symbolism in the rise of modernist literature, whether as a source of direct inspiration or indirectly, as a source of conflict with the inheritance of Naturalism. Scott places Stéphane Mallarmeé (1842-98) firmly in line with Symbolism, as well as his successor, Paul Valéry (1871-1945) who claimed a shift in reading practices on account of Symbolism: (translation) "For a long, long time, *the human voice* was the foundation and condition of all *literature* . . .A day came when the reader could read with his eyes alone without having to spell things out, or hear them, and literature was completely transformed by this.

Evolution from the articulated to the skimmed over, - from the rhythmic and sequential to the instantaneous - from what is tolerated and demanded by an audience to what is tolerated and assimilated by a fast-moving, rapacious eye, free to roam over the page."

These words from Valéry help us to see the actual transformation in the words on the page. The visual suggestion of the words was reinforced through the influence of Symbolism. Thus Scott points out that the "Symbolist poem is the poem animated, not so much by the voice breathing life into it, as by the mobile eye wandering restlessly forward and back over the page, ensnared in an ever-recurrent and variously momentous instant. Using the words of Mallarmé – (translation) "the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase"—Scott shows that without this constraint, it becomes possible for an "art that owes more to forms than to the poet." With the focus on form, as Scott shows, what occurs is –"Form multiplies meanings even as it articulates them; the poem becomes a multitude of unified, total utterances."

1.3 POETS OF THE MODERN WORLD

1.3.1 WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939)

Yeats was not only a poet but a dramatist as well, and played an important part in the Irish Literary Revival. His volumes of poems include *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914), *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), *Michael Robartes and the*

Dancer (1920), *The Cat and the Moon* (1924), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair* (1929), and *Last Poems* (1939). Some of his best-known plays are *The Countess Kathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *On Baile's Strand* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907), *The Player Queen* (1922), and *The Herne's Egg* (1938).

While talking of himself and his generation as the last of the Romantics, Yeats was, however, keenly aware of the cultural and political contexts of his own time, especially the Irish struggle for independence that manifested itself in a series of rebellions and uprisings in the early 20th century. Thus, in his poetic career, Yeats registers different phases, taking on, initially, the mantle of the Romantic poets with a visionary idea of poetry and the poet's vocation. His later poetry from the transitional *Responsibilities* onwards, takes on a bare style, self-consciously dispensing with romantic trimmings, using a half-colloquial diction, and often, a casual tone. Chris Baldick identifies some of the general and important themes and concerns of Yeats in his poetry as those of "permanence and impermanence ("Sailing to Byzantium", "Among Schoolchildren", "Byzantium"); of the cyclical patterns of world history ("The Second Coming", "Leda and the Swan", "Two Songs for a Play"); of contemplation and action ("An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", "Long-legged Fly"); of body and soul ("Michael Robartes and the Dancer", "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop"); of art and the artist ("Ego Dominus Tuus", "The Circus Animals' Desertion"),the hostility of the philistine modern world to the Artist ("September 1913", "The Fisherman", "Under Ben Bulben"), the gracious patronage bestowed by the landed gentry and aristocracy ("At Galway Races", "Coole Park, 1929", "The Municipal Gallery Revisited"); and the violence, betrayals, and guilt of living Irish history ("Easter, 1916", "Meditations in the Time of Civil War", "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "Parnell's Funeral")" (Baldick 2004: 84-85). Finally Yeats is closely associated with the symbolist technique in modern English poetry, a tradition that goes back to the nineteenth-century French movement of the same name.

Stop to Consider:

Metaphysical Wit

Young readers of modern poetry are often confused as to what gives 'modern' poetry its peculiar distinctiveness except to note the lack of lyricism, the colloquial turns of language, the urban setting, and so on. In this context, you might find it useful to read what Prof. David Perkins has opined on the subject of 'tradition' in modern poetry. He writes: " 'About the beginning of the seventeenth century,' Samuel Johnson explained in his *Life of Cowley*, 'appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets,' and he proceeded to give his remarkable critique of their style. Weary of so much namby-pamby verse in his own generation, he praised these poets because at least they exercised the intellect, though in other respects he was less favorable to them. By 1780, when Johnson was writing, the Metaphysical poets were very little read. There was no revival of interest in the next century, though Coleridge was aware of their virtues. Richard Garnett and Edmund Gosse, in their *English Literature* (1903-04), typically complained of Donne's 'tortured irregularities,' 'monstrous pedantries,' and 'alembicated verbiage': he is 'the father of all that is exasperating, affected, and 'metaphysical' in English poetry'; 'No one has injured English writing more than Donne, not even Carlyle.' As late as 1926 Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian could still speak in their *A History of English Literature* of Donne's 'bad taste and eccentricity, all pushed to such an extreme that the critic's head swims as he condemns.' Yet before the First World War young poets such as Isaac Rosenberg and Herbert Read were reading Donne with pleasure, and after the war he was advocated by Eliot, Graves, Richards, and so down through all the critics I mentioned. The 'Metaphysical revival' was in full swing. One researcher has counted the number of critical and scholarly writings on the Metaphysical poets published each year; they rose from fourteen in 1900 to forty-one in 1923 to seventy-three at the peak in 1934, after which there was a gradual decline to fifteen in 1950. Meanwhile the young poets were reading this formerly neglected 'race,' and, since Metaphysical qualities and characteristics – whatever they might be – were being praised by so many authorities, the young poets tried to emulate them. By 1952 more than seventy living poets had been denominated Metaphysical by one critic or another. If some of these names – Yeats, Cummings, Frost, Rexroth—now surprise, they indicate to what extent 'Metaphysical' had become a synonym for 'modern.' No less surprising are the older poets in whom Metaphysical affinities were found; this list includes Lucretius, Goethe, Blake, Wordsworth, and Emerson. Clearly there was no agreement on just what the 'Metaphysical' qualities were." – *A History of Modern Poetry*: *Modernism and After* – David Perkins

1.3.2 THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT (1888-1965)

A representative modern poet, T. S. Eliot also experimented with drama, reviving the English tradition of verse drama. He was also an important critic who was responsible for a renewed interest in many poets and writers of earlier ages, significantly, the Metaphysical poets. His major poetical works include *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), *The Waste Land* (1922), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), and *Four Quartets* (1943) which was a collection of four earlier works: *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), The *Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942). His dramas include *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932), *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959).

The poems in Eliot's first collection of poetry marked a radical change in English poetry from most models prevailing till the very early part of the twentieth century. In the title poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot adapted the model of the dramatic monologue in order to explore the intricate relationship of the modern subject with her/his self and the outside world. This resulted in a kind of poetry that "disintegrat[ed] character into mood", and combined "comedy and pathos" in the figure of Prufrock – the speaker of the monologue – who is "a painfully hesitant young man, emotionally paralysed by self-consciousness, his sense of self crumbling into disconnected and overpowering images" (Baldick 2004: 97). Eliot also etches out the ennui and tedium of modern urban life in much of his poetry. His major poem, *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, registers the impact of one of the major events of the period: the First World War and the resultant crisis of empire, particularly, the British Empire. As a result, the waste land in the poem is not just a patch of uncultivated land laid waste by war (an image that figures so prominently in the poetry of that group of poets collectively referred to as the War Poets). Instead, it is a symbolic re-creation of a country swept by the annihilating effect and consequences of a pan-European war and a parallel economic dislocation as well as the image of a country having to come to terms with the potential disintegration of its imperial holdings, with rising opposition to imperial rule and colonisation both at home and abroad. The poem is a complex interweaving of a variety of poetic styles and forms from diverse periods as well as numerous motifs

from classical and English literature. It is also an extremely polyphonic text with a number of voices from both past and present – from myth, folklore, and the real milieu of the real urban world – adding to the layers of meaning in the text. It is an evocative account of the cultural, emotional and spiritual desolation looming over Britain, and, by extension, over the European world after the First World War.

Eliot is noted for his extensive use of *vers libre* or free verse in his poetry. However, it is always accompanied by a strong sense of rhythm and metre. Moreover, he also carries on with the tradition of English poetry, particularly in his use of the dramatic monologue, thereby making a attempt to modify and re-create tradition in order to make the past relevant in the present. This is discussed by Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Stop to Consider:

Baudelaire

You might find it worth reading what G.M. Hyde writes of Baudelaire: "It could be argued that Modernist literature was born in the city and with Baudelaire – especially with his discovery that crowds mean loneliness and that the terms 'multitude' and 'solitude' are interchangeable for a poet with an active and fertile imagination". Hyde understands that such terms prefigure Eliot's *Waste Land*. If we relate this to Eliot's "Unreal city" passage, we comprehend just how Eliot views these "urban multitudes" whom he "presses into service as specimens of degeneracy and sterility." Hyde goes on to state that the "dominance of viewpoint over material characteristically Modernist, and in Baudelaire's poetry point of view can be studied as it drags its scaly coils out of the Romantic cavern in which it was engendered. It naturally enough takes up residence in the pluralistic modern city. . . The stance . . .has become the classic pose of Modernist writers, the debate with an imagined, but for that reason has become the very mode of existence of many Modernist works of art ("Let us go then, you and I" –from Eliot's 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock') . Classically dialectic in Baudelaire, it becomes nervous and self-mocking in Laforgue, and reverberates plangently in *Prufrock* and *The Waste Land.* Often it is as much a dialogue with self as a dialogue with an other, and seems to relate to the characteristic disease of modern civilization, schizophrenia. Even Baudelaire, of course, is in fact his own interlocutor."

From the above, we can consider Hyde's point that in Baudelaire we must see not merely the city as centre for poetry but because the city brings together

multiple points of view, Baudelaire's use of the shifting perspective, even moving inwards to set up an inner dialogue. This is visible even in Eliot's 'Prufrock'. Hyde further shows that "Baudelaire's urban poetry is not marked by radical formal innovation". But modernist innovations of form as arising from larger conflicts or tensions or problems are "urgently expressed in his work". These larger conflicts are to be seen as arising "from the problematic relationship of the poet to his audience, to his race, to his cultural inheritance, to his environment, to his reader." Hyde explains, moreover, that "The problems are all . . .essentially problems of relationship in a society which offers only a false and hypocritical account of how its parts inter-relate; the city is the metaphor, the only adequate metaphor, through which relational problems can be expressed."

Hyde describes the situation of the poet in Baudelaire's world: "Exigencies of the market demand that the poet move to the city, like any artisan; and competitive pressures dictate that he shall precariously exist in a state of war with his society and all the other entertainers swuabbling for the surplus cash of the rising *bourgeoisie* who alone guarantee the material basis of art: they are its consumers, and those who pay the piper want to call the tune. Isolated in this way, the poet turns inward with a desperate inwardness different from Romantic subjectivity, and puts together the cultural fragments that give him a private sense of belonging and a sense that an order exists, however, personal. The poet then has his cultural context, even if he has to keep re-inventing it." As Hyde discovers for us, "Baudelaire's poem *Le Cygne* focuses all these issues and anticipates the themes and methods of *The Waste Land*."

Eliot thus marks one of the major moments of modernism through his radical poetic enterprise. Ronald Carter and John McRae summarise what for them are the three major qualities characterising Eliot's poetry:

"[F]irst, his particular sense of the age in which he lived; second, his conviction that poetry, although using the poet's emotions as its starting point, becomes 'impersonalised' by the tradition in which the poet works; and third, his use of quotations from and allusions to other poets' work for reference, parody, irony, and a sense of continuing intertextual communication and community."

(Carter and McRae 2001: 339)

However, Eliot and his colleagues encountered strong resistance in terms of their poetic practice from the poets of the Thirties, especially the group formed around W. H. Auden, who rejected the esoteric and experimental modernism of the former in favour of a simpler, more accessible, socially committed poetry.

SAQ:

Write a brief note on the literary collaborations between Eliot and Ezra Pound. (90 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

1.3.3 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883-1963)

A versatile author, Williams was at once a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist and dramatist. His works include: *Paterson* (1946-58, and a complete edition in 1963), *Collected Earlier Poems* (1951), *Collected Later Poems* (1950), *Journey to Love* (1955) and *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1963) [poetry]; *White Mule* (1937), *In the Morning* (1940) and *The Build-Up* (1952) [novels]; *The Knife of the Times and Other Stories* (1932), *Life Along the Passaic River* (1938), *Make Light of It* (1950), and *The Farers' Daughters* (1951) [short stories and documentaries]; *Many Loves and Other Plays* (1961) [drama]; and *Autobiography* (1951) [life writing].

Williams, along with other members of his group, such as Alfred Kreymborg, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Louise Bogan, attempted to create a poetry that would evoke a specifically American context rather than the Anglo-American modernism of Pound and Eliot, though the latter were undoubtedly influential presences in the formative years of American modernism. Their (Pound and Eliot's) impact was chiefly noticeable in their rejection of bourgeois society and its secular, material and egalitarian ideology. However, as Williams saw it, these poets, particularly Eliot, had ultimately to be rejected because the revolutionary and experimental techniques Eliot used in his poetry were explored ultimately as a means to facilitate the renewal of traditional and chiefly, English and European or Continental values. On the other hand, Williams tried consistently to locate himself and his work in America, primarily by employing the language as it was spoken by the Americans, capturing the flavour of American experience mediated through the consciousness of *being* an American. In this, Williams' career as a physician was of utmost importance to him since through it he gained access

to the private and intimate domestic lives of people. As a result, his poetry permeates with a "matter-of-fact tenderness toward external nature that permeates his work" (Feder in Ford 1995: 320). It is, moreover, an experience that facilitated an exploration of the self through "an apprehension of the physical reality of people in their intrinsic locality" (Feder in Ford 1995: 320).

Some of the other influences on Williams' poetry were Imagism and, later, Dadaism. Under such influences, Williams conceptualised the theory of the poem as an object that, like a Cubist work of art, expresses its meaning through the medium of its form. The poet's role, thereby, is to create a new reality through language that has a consonance with its present and modern cultural and linguistic context (Feder 1995: 320).

In his emphasis on the significance of the local as a representative of the universal (evident in his willingness to incorporate even mundane, ordinary and so-called trivial and everyday episodes or images in poetry shorn of all the embellishments of 'art') Williams also seems to present a return to that egalitarianism and secularism that Pound and, more vehemently, Eliot had rejected.

Stop to Consider:

David Perkins stresses the point that "Williams sympathized eagerly with the Modernist revolution." Perkins names Williams's volume of 1923, *Spring and All* as the one in "Williams entered the high Modernist phase of poetry." He describes the poetic achievement in it –"A myth of spring's coming is implied in many of the poems, and tends to link the separate lyrics. The formal principle is less that of Romantic, continuous transition, articulating somebody's evolving thoughts and emotions, and more that of Modernist composition by juxtaposition." The subject of many of Williams's poems is poetry itself. He knew that the 'modern' in a poem does not lie in the mention of automobiles or jazz. Williams thought that "the poem" had to be restructured if the 'present sensibility' was to be expressed. Perkins says of Williams, that he considered this restructuring to lie in "reshaping the poetic line." For williams, since "the poetry of the past was formed by a different sensibility, it cannot be a model. Europe's "enemy is the past. Our enemy is Europe, a thing unrelated to us in any way."

1.3.4 WALLACE STEVENS (1879-1955)

Wallace Stevens, another major American Modernist poet, also took a position in partial opposition to T. S. Eliot and the modernism he represented, though many of his early poems bore the influence of Eliot. His collections of poems include *Harmonium* (1923), *Ideas of Order* (1935), *Owl's Clover* (1936), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction* (1942), *Parts of a World* (1942), *Transport to a Summer* (1947), *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) and *The Rock* (1955).

Like Williams, who was incidentally a friend of his, Stevens is also concerned with the constant dialogue and at times conflict between the real and the unreal that make the notion of reality itself precarious. However, the difference between the two poets lies in that "[f]or Williams, reality, affirmed by the imagination, is an end product, a 'new object'; for Stevens, it is process, subject, and method" (Feder in Ford 1995: 323). Stevens is more concerned about how one's imagination mediates between the external reality and the inner world of the mind and, by doing so, revises and re-creates one's perception of the real world. Poetry, for Stevens, becomes, again, a medium through which this process can be explored.

For Stevens, such an exploration, moreover, is possible only on the level of the individual, and not by affiliating oneself with any particular group. This leads him to avoid becoming a member of any particular Modernist movement and sharing a common ideology. This is accompanied by a comic sense in Stevens' poetry that counterbalanced the ironic tone of most Modernist poetry. Again, for Stevens, poetry and its forms and language serve to transform reality – whether of the external world or of the self itself – and explore the ways and factors that determine such transformation, so that a newly created poem is also a discovery of some new facet of this 'reality'. It is the mind which, through its conscious and unconscious processes makes the apprehension and re-creation of reality possible. At the same time, however, it itself is always vulnerable to "necessity, change and death"; it constantly invents and re-fashions myths in order to bring upon the "devious ways of self-creation" the "ultimate reality of extinction" that traditional myths themselves seek to evade (Feder in Ford 1995: 324, 325). There is, therefore, in Stevens a deliberately non-conventional attitude to myth that is reinvented in his poetry.

Stop to Consider:

Modernism in America

In the story of the rise of Modernism in America, as Eric Homberger tells us, "The decline of Boston, and the rise of the great commercial centres of New York and Chicago, mark the beginning of 'modern' American culture. Fastidious young men from Harvard, such as Wallace Stevens, who found New York 'fascinating but horribly unreal', were ambivalently absorbed by the spectacle of disorder and energy on such a profuse scale." The sense of being 'American' – a variant of nationalism – seemed to have been at the heart of the modernists in America. As Homberger tells us, the story of the modernists in America is linked with that of the immigrants' experiences who came in between 1890 and 1919, and "deeply altered the culture of New York." "The immigrants felt the pressure to assimilate, to become 'real' Americans, with particular immediacy. But some of them, a small number, of first- and second- generation immigrants were able to act as cultural mediators between Europe and America, and provide a cosmopolitan base for the new developments that were to give American artistic experimentalism an international as well as a nativist spirit."

Homberger narrates that it was the immigrants to America, and the expatriate American as well, "who were aware of the artistic needs of an America on the verge of an international role; these were to contribute to the development of an *American* modernist tradition. Among these were Pound in London, Stein in Paris, and in New York City Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946)". We can note with interest this issue occupying a central place in poetry –"The opposition between the literary nationalists and the *avant-garde* Modernists was latent in the early years". Subsequently, when both Ezra Pound and T.S.Eliot "argued in effect that the really serious artist must be as international, polylingual and professional as a scientist" it became clear that the poet needed to be highly disciplined in his craft. Pound thought that "tradition" was "nothing less than the whole of European literature", while Eliot also echoed similar ideas.

Wallace Stevens, E.E. Cummings, Hart Crane and Marianne Moore, modernist poets in New York, upheld the idea of an "astringent, uncompromising and difficult" poetry which they considered would appeal to a "new audience of fellow artists and those sympathetic to the new experimentalism". The poetic practices based upon such ideas did however help to erect a separate independent tradition. This description by Homberger goes on –"The dialectic between the local, immediate pressures on a writer, and the imperatives of technique, produced in William Carlos Williams one writer capable of using this creative tension."

Ellman Crasnow makes the point that "Modernism, while recognizably an international movement, was not homogenous." Taking up the example of Wallace Stevens, he notes that "Stevens' first publications formed part of the resurgence of american poetry in the second decade of the century; and for a long time he was known primarily as an American stylist and dandy. And he does show the typical concern with local and national identity that preoccupies so many American writers". Crasnow sets Stevens' among the early Modernist generation. He quotes from Stevens' poem ('Of Modern Poetry')

"The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.
Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir."

Central to Stevens is also the notion of the sublime: the question whether it could be experienced in modern America; and his belief, as described by Feder, that "to discover reality through the exploration and invention of its fictive forms is to experience the sublime in its most elemental, inner manifestation" (Feder 1995: 325-26). Into all this, Stevens brings in a self-conscious nature of Modernist poetry, an individual and innovative language, as well as a fresh perspective on nature that gives credence to both human and animal awareness or perception while at the same time the two are seen as similar in some points while essentially different at others.

SAQ:

Do you find any similarities between the 'sublime' propounded by Stevens and 'the sublime' of Longinus? How does Stevens align this concept with 'modernity'? (30 + 70 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

1.3.5 WYSTAN HUGH AUDEN (1907-1973)

Auden and his colleagues (in particular, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice) became prominent as poets in the 1930s and registered a self-conscious divergence from the high modernist poets like Eliot and Pound. They did this by refusing to resort to exoticism and remoteness of their precursors and by bringing back established poetic forms both popular and literary like the ballad, the sonnet and the villanelle. At the same time, they retained the sense and experience of modernity in the subject matter, tone and diction of their poetry. They also favoured a simplicity of technique and diction in contrast to the earlier modernist thrust on experimentation with language and technique, "although their range of reference [was] more modernistic both in embracing the sights and sounds of contemporary urban and industrial life and in maintaining an intellectual detachment that owe[d] something to Eliot" (Baldick 2004: 103).

The Auden group initially published their poems in the anthologies *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933) and subsequently in the journal *New Verse* (1933-9). As Baldick points out, the 'new' was pertinent being born in the twentieth century, they were more at ease with a "post-Victorian culture of monopolized transport, aviation, and mass entertainment than any of their predecessors" and, therefore, unlike Yeats, Eliot and Pound, "were not inclined to bemoan the arrival of their century as a catastrophic Fall from the aristocratic glories of old into vulgar suburbanism" (Baldick 2004: 104). Their poetry possessed a social awareness especially of England and an acknowledgement of the inevitable presence of modern technology and science in contemporary urban life. Marx and Freud were the two great intellectual influences on the Auden group. For Auden, the crisis of modern existence manifested itself particularly in terms of illness and neurosis and "'psychosomatic' illness", a concept he borrowed from psychologists Homer Lane and Georg Groddeck (Baldick 2004: 105-6). His poetry, unlike Eliot's which explored one's private and inner world of experience, tended to concentrate more on a public situation and experience. He wads of the view that the private could no longer remain insulated from the social and the political contexts. Therefore, instead of being obscure and difficult, Auden's poetry strives to become more accessible and popular since this entails a social perspective. However, the affinity of Auden with the preceding modernists lies in the fact that he shares "the same poetic quest for a meaning

to life amidst images of a contemporary world which fail to form a coherent whole" (Carter and McRae 2001: 146). Some of the notable collections of Auden's poetry are *Poems* (1930), *The Orators* (1932), *Look, Stranger* (1936), *Nones* (1951), and *The Shield of Achilles* (1955). Auden also co-authored a few plays with Christopher Isherwood, of which the best-known is *The Ascent of F6* (1937).

SAQ:

What was Auden's view of contemporary society ? Did he share the Eliotian vision of a civilization in crisis ? (70 + 70 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Several comments have to be considered in relation to the kind of poetry that Auden wrote in the 1930s. A critic (Reed Way Dasenbrock) highlights the closeness of poetry to politics in the modern period. The case of W.B.Yeats comes to mind. He says, "Yeats is the central example of a twentieth-century poet whose life and work were caught up in political events from the very beginning." Further, "The Irish Revolution and the cultural revival which preceded it constituted the first important moment in the twentieth century in which poetry and politics are in significant relation and in which the work of a great poet responds to and actively shapes important political events. The political struggle of 1916 to 1923 which won Ireland independence was unthinkable without the cultural revival which came before." We are also reminded that "the Irish literature which created the Irish Renaissance was written in English and Irish was not … restored as the functional national language."

The same commentator goes on: " . . Anglo-American modernism is the second key moment in the literary history of the twentieth century when poetry and politics intersect fatefully. . . .Modernist writers became distinctly more interested in politics after the First World War, as should occasion little surprise, since it seemed only a matter of self-interest to analyse the causes of the war and see what could prevent its reoccurence. . . most modernists who survived the war were left convinced that substantial changes

in the structure of European society were desirable, probably essential. In *Kangaroo* Lawrence wrote of the war-atmosphere in England, 'no man who really consciously lived through this can believe again absolutely in democracy.' "

Thus, as we are told, "Inspired by the Irish example which showed that poets could have an effect on society, modernist writers sought to align themselves with forces of social change which left an important place for art and the artist". It could be stated that "If Yeats is unquestionably the greatest and most influential Irish poet of the twentieth century and Pound is arguably the greatest and unquestionably the most influential American poet of the twentieth century, then one can certainly draw the conclusion that some of the century's most important poetry stands in close relation to to the politics of its time." England must be mentioned because "in the work of the first generation of poets after modernism, the 'Auden generation', who constitute the third and in an important sense the last moment in which a central movement in the literary history of the twentieth century intersects with a central movement in political history." Also, the important fact is that, "It is the orientation towards Marxism, however, which most sharply differentiates the Auden generation from their modernist predecessors."

Check Your Progress:

1. Highlight the literary responses to the great Wars in poetic terms in the early twentieth century.
2. To what extent can 'modernism' be seen as a response to the larger social concerns in the twentieth century? Discuss with reference to the work of Eliot, Yeats and Auden.
3. Relate the work of the modernist poets to the question of perspective and identity. Make a particular reference to the work of Dylan Thomas and Eliot.
4. Attempt an analysis of Auden's *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* in the light of his views on the role of poetry in society and the life-world.
5. Highlight the main concerns of Anglo-American modernism with the reference to the work of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams paying particular attention to their responses to the difficulties of derived traditions.

1.3.6 DYLAN THOMAS (1914-1953)

Born at Swansea, Wales, Dylan Thomas brought into the poetry of the thirties till the early fifties a dissident voice that militated against the constraints of the socially and politically committed poetry of the Auden group. His poems were first published in collected form in *Eighteen Poems* (1934), which was subsequently followed by *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1939), *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1952). Besides poetry, Thomas also wrote short stories, published in two collections, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) and *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1955), as well as the radio play *Under Milk Wood.*

Along with Yeats (as in "Easter, 1916"), Wilfred Owen ("Strange Meeting"), Louis MacNeice ("Bagpipe Music") and Auden ("Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love"), Thomas (in poems such as "And Death Shall Have No Dominion") was part of a revival of half-rhyme (partial consonance of end words in verse line without an accompanying assonance: *love/have*) and pararhyme (full consonance without assonance: *love/leave*) instead of full rhyme. Meanwhile, with Robert Bridges, who, in 1913, broke away from the traditional English metres based on accent or stressed syllables in favour of the French technique of counting only the number of syllables in each line, English poetry began the modern tradition of the English syllabic metre, one which was continued in the 1930s by poets such as Auden, Thomas and Thom Gunn. In fact, the first three collections of Thomas's poetry exhibited all techniques in all but one of the fifty-nine poems comprising these volumes.

In addition to an innovative technique, Thomas brought into his poetry an intensity and a vigour born out of an attempt to strain the limits of language in order to express very powerful feelings. This frequently made his poems (especially the early ones) dense in meaning while his images frequently earned the label 'surreal'. The "Romantic vigour and flamboyance" of Thomas was a strong divergence from "the anxious, uncertain tones of T. S. Eliot, the more cautious Romanticism of W. B. Yeats, and the social preoccupations of W. H. Auden" (Carter and McRae 2001: 146).

Thomas's poetry was also different in its deliberate avoidance of any notion of social or intellectual or rational life and experience in favour of a celebration of the organic processes governing the natural world (including

human beings) and bodily functions. This is re-enacted for Thomas in language as well, whose workings and effects are autonomous and regenerative and as immune from rational rules as the entire creative process.

Childhood is one of the key motifs in Thomas's poetry. Poems like "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill" celebrate the spontaneity of the child who is more organically involved with nature. These poems, therefore, are an adult poet's retrospective re-creation of and an accompanying awareness of the loss of what Walford Davies calls "the child's intimate sense of wonder" (Davies 2003: 51).

Stop to Consider:

Dylan Thomas, the Neo-Romantic Poet

From Perkins' account, we learn "The interplay in twentieth-century poetry of the Modernist mode with Romantic tradition is the subject for many books. Scholars have plausibly argued that Modernism develops out of Victorian poetry as an extension of it. Others have traced the premises of Modernist poetics to the Romantic period. It is easy to show that many modern poets from Eliot to the present are Romantic in some ways. In Wallace Stevens one can cite the play of his mind upon the central Romantic concept of the "imagination". Stevens, Robert Penn Warren, Theodore Roethke, and a great many other modern poets took up the Wordsworthian, Emersonian theme of the solitary mind seeking relation with the cosmos. Romantic convention reprresents the cosmos in nature or landscape, and both the meditation on landscape in A.W. Ammons and the parody of this stock situation in John Ashbery extended the Romantic poetic tradition.

A "Neo-Romantic" style developed in England during the 1930s and was briefly ascendant during the 1940s. Dylan Thomas was its major poet. 'Romantic' was the words used at the time and implied that the Neo-Romantics were challenging the high Modernism of the 1920s and the discursive, intellectual styles of the 1930s. Thomas was typical in this respect. He had the mystical intuitions, emotional intensity, personal utterance, and natural imagery of a poet in the Romantic tradition. But in the same poems he was also a poet of Metaphysical wit and Symbolist technique."

Another aspect of Thomas's poetry is his emphasis on the Welsh milieu, noticeable particularly in his later poems (which he called "place poems")

like the two mentioned above and "Over Sir John's Hill". This has been seen as an individualist and a regionalist response to the cultural and political centralisation in Britain and the larger United Kingdom. At the same time, landscape in Thomas is not a realistic representation of the regional but contains a greater imaginative and metaphorical significance that renders its depiction, in the words of John Goodby, "tactical, politically neutral and consciously hybrid" (Goodby in Goodby and Wigginton 2001: 201). This is consequent to Thomas's avoidance of any kind of propagandist ideology, whether the centralising one of Britain or that of the Regionalist Movement emerging in the 1940s in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England. This is not, however, to say that Thomas was not aware of these contemporary issues and debates, nor that Thomas himself did not subscribe to any political views (in fact he had a strong socialist leaning). What should, however, be taken into account is that place or location in Thomas is more a part of an imaginative geography constructed through and of language in order to combat a sense of dislocatedness (Thomas, for example, was a Welsh who had been educated in English and had his works published in London) and a loss of self-identity consequent to it. It becomes a way of containing and anchoring the threat of lack and absence, the linguistic surplus a displacement of anxiety" (Goodby in Goodby and Wigginton 2001: 201).

The Second World War also profoundly influenced Dylan Thomas, filling him with a deep shock and outrage. However Thomas's response was the affirmation of the cyclic processes of nature and ultimately, therefore, the telescoping of life and death, regeneration and decay into one another, that could hopefully provide a counter to such unnecessary and 'unnatural' destruction brought on by the war. This can be seen in his wartime poems like "Deaths and Entrances", "Ceremony after a Fire Raid", and "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London".

SAQ:

What constitutes the "modernist" elements of Thomas' poetry ? Do you think there is any conflict between the "modern" and the "Romantic"? Does Thomas effect a reconciliation between these seemingly opposed tendencies? (50 + 50 + 60 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

1.3.7 PHILIP LARKIN (1922-1985)

Philip Larkin's name is usually associated with the Movement, a short-lived group formed during the 1950s that took a strong anti-Modernist stand. The term "Movement" was coined by J. D. Scott, literary editor of *The Spectator*, in 1954 to describe the work of writers such as Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings and Robert Conquest. Most of its members came from a lower middle-class background and consciously incorporated this factor in their works that include both prose and poetry. Movement poetry was primarily published in two anthologies: D. J. Enright's *Poets of the 1950's* (1955) and Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956). It was characterised by the presence of an anti-romantic, witty, rational and sardonic observer and speaker. The Movement poets adopted an honest, unsentimental and unemotional approach; reality was by far mundane and ordinary for them, yet it concealed within itself a certain dignity. There was also an emphasis on the clarity of ideas and images, intellectual detachment and formal perfection. While these aspects retained their presence in the work of these writers, the group itself, however, had disintegrated by 1957.

Larkin's poetry is indicative of these attitudes though it nevertheless continues with the tradition of Romantic poets like Wordsworth and the late nineteenth-century poets like Arnold and Hardy in its exploration of the themes of death, change and private disillusionment. In addition, working with "established rhythms and syntax", and "conservative poetic forms", Larkin, like Hardy, "writes about what appears to be normal and everyday, while exploring the paradox that the mundane is both familiar and limited" (Carter and McRae 2001: 439). The influence of Hardy is noticeable in Larkin's later volumes like *The Less Deceived* (1955), *Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974), while his initial poetry (*The North Ship*, 1945, and *XX Poems*, 1951) shows the influence of Yeats.

Larkin's poetry has also been seen as a response to a perceived national and cultural decline. 'Englishness', thereby, like Thomas's 'Welshness', is a notion that becomes so pertinent in Larkin. In "Englands of the Mind" (published in *Preoccupations*, 1980), Seamus Heaney contrasts the post-War English sensibility in the poetry of Larkin and Ted Hughes in terms of the "Englands of the Mind" each imaginatively re-creates out of England's history (the third poet Heaney considers in this respect is Geoffrey Hill) and sees in both certain continuities of English ways of life and experience from its past history which, however, are disappearing fast in a modern, post-War England. However, while Hughes goes back to a pre-modern England in which Christian elements cohabit with pagan beliefs, Larkin goes back to Anglo-Norman England with its sophistications of manners and language. This is reflected in their specific poetic techniques: the alliterative mode of Old English poetry resonating in Hughes and the Norman cadence in Larkin. While Hughes invokes myth and the elemental presence of nature in order to root his English sensibility, for Larkin, the modern English way of life incorporates a retrospective, "nostalgic pessimism" brought on by several historical factors like Britain's decline as an imperial power and its decreasing political and economic influence (Heaney, quoted in Regan 1997: 15). This leads to a renewed importance of the "native English experience", but at the same time, it is, in Larkin, detached and often disinterested:

"He sees England from train windows, fleeting past and away. He is the urban modern man, the insular Englishman, responding to the tones of his own clan, ill at ease when out of his environment. He is a poet, indeed, of a composed and tempered English nationalism, his voice is the not untrue, not unkind voice of post-War England...."

(Heaney, quoted in Regan 1997: 15)

SAQ:

What could be an adequate description of post-War England ? (70 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Colin Falck points to the anti-romantic element of Larkin's poetry: "by identifying himself with the drab, fantasy-haunted world of the waste land Larkin has not only downgraded the whole of real existence against an impossible absolute standard, but has also cut the ground from under the poet's feet. The fantasy, which he has elected to share has little to do with romanticism, because it destroys the very bridge which romanticism would construct between the ideal and the world which actually exists: the poet can no longer do anything to bring our dreams into relation with reality. The ideal, for Larkin, has become inaccessible, and being inaccessible it can only throw the real world into shadow instead of lighting it up from within. In the typical landscape of Larkin's poems the whole chiaroscuro of meaning, all polarities of life and death, good and evil, are levelled away. Farms, canals, building-plots and dismantled cars jostle one another indiscriminately – the view from the train window, with its complete randomness and detachment, is at the heart of Larkin's vision –and all of them are bathed in the same general wistfulness. There are no epiphanies."

From here it becomes easy to see why Larkin is seen sometimes as a 'realist'. John Holloway includes Larkin's poetry in the literature of "minimal affirmation". Larkin's verse strategy in poem after seems to be to *insure* against anything that might come into his work on too easy terms, anything that could possibly be seen as a lapse into soft-centredness or sentimentality."

Thus it comes as no surprise that pessimism is another characteristic frequently attributed to Larkin's poetry. This is partly because of the apparent passivity of the poetic voice, an unwillingness to interfere with the course of things as they are (in contrast to the Romantic tradition of active involvement). But Larkin frequently invokes ritual and native tradition as a counter to the progressive decline of modern England. This can be seen in his use of certain symbols (like the ritual of going to church and buildings like the hospital and the church) that seem to preserve, in a world where religion has lost its potency, a certain source of faith that despite being secular is still powerful amidst the general disintegration of post-War English culture.

1.3.8 TED HUGHES (1930-1998)

Ted Hughes was much influenced by D. H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas and, like them, focussed largely on nature and its forces. Some of his best-

known volumes of poetry are *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967), *Crow* (1970), *Cave Birds* (1975), *Gaudete* (1977), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *Moortown* (1979), *Rivers* (1983), *Flowers and Insects* (1987), *Wolfwatching* (1989), *Tales from Ovid* (1997) and *Birthday Letters* (1998). In addition, Hughes also wrote stories and poems for children. Hughes was famously married to the American poet and novelist Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1961.

Stop to Consider:

Reading the poems of Ted Hughes:

Writing about two decades ago, in the 1980s, Martin Dodsworth described English poetry as "still a Romantic poetry, one that prefers individual insight to the conventional values of its society, and that tends to see itself as a privileged, indeed sovereign and unique, way of looking at life and judging it. Both aspects of this proposition are reflected in the poems of Ted Hughes and Geoffrey Hill". Dodsworth marks out Hughes's poem, "The Thought-Fox", the first of the animal poems, as "a beautiful, slightly mysterious poem". We also learn that "Seamus Heaney, a poet who has been much influenced by Hughes, has drawn attention to the way in which Hughes's poems depend on the noise of consonants, whispering, clicking, exploding and clotting the poem at the expense of any broad harmonious music of the vowels". More, "Hughes says that "words that live are those which we hear . . .or which we see . . .or which we taste . . .or touch . . .or smell. *Click, chuckle, freckled , veined, vinegar, sugar* are some of his examples. The pronounced quality of sound in his poems is part of the way in which they engage with livingness through the five senses: and many of them are directed, as perhaps *The thought-fox* is, as a renewal of the senses."

John Holloway traces a striking quality of the poems of poets like Dylan Thomas – "a cultivation of intensity, the intensity of the minuscule, the limited, the primitive." In Dylan Thomas, it was evident in one of his poems before the war: "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower/ Drives my green age." As Holloway explains, it is "the intensity simply of growth down in the world of plants." About 1950 we see this again in *Poem on his Birthday*, which "expresses a similar sense of the violent intensity of the energies of the natural world as they are reflected in the poet himself:

"He sings towards *anguish*; finches fly
    In the claw tracks of hawks
On a seizing sky; small fishes glide
    Through wynds and shells of drowned
Ship towns to pastures of otters."

As Holloway comments, " Those last lines are equating energy and destructive violence. They are typical of how it is the predatory energies of Nature that the writer is drawn towards; and one may see this as not only a reaction against more indulgent (or self-indulgent) attitudes in much early twentieth-century verse, but also as a response to the unprecedentedly violent historical dimension of the period." Ted Hughes is counted by Holloway amongst those in whom this kind of writing is constantly and directly be seen. *Crow* (1972) presents such writing in one of its clearest forms.

One of the key concerns of Hughes is the energy and violence existing in nature which he associates with the creative principle. The vigour and force of nature is most noticeable in the animal world for Hughes, as a result of which, many of his poems deal with animals like the hawk, the pike and the jaguar. He also focuses on the single-mindedness of these animals as they ensure their survival through the exercise of their sheer strength and power. Viewed without sentiment, the natural world becomes for Hughes not a symbol of human values or notions but a network that transcends the human – the human, in fact, becomes a mere part of it and is denied of any superior agency. It is in consequence of such a decentred gaze that even a little songbird, the thrush, is seen as a powerful, efficient, ad powerful predator, creating panic among the creatures it hunts. In his later works, Hughes shows a greater preoccupation with myth and legend as the artistic media between human existence and the powerful and uncontrollable forces of nature.

Hughes has also been seen by Terry Gifford as belonging to both the "anti-pastoral" and the "post-pastoral" traditions in English literature – two developments that form a critique of the traditional pastoral and its idealisations even as they emerge necessarily from the tradition itself.

As an anti-pastoral poet, Hughes shows the awareness that the natural world can no longer be considered as an Arcadia immune from the real world as it is, but is, instead, "a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose" (Gifford 1999: 120). This tradition of writing does not totally ignore the pastoral convention but is a more serious engagement with it and its tropes, as can be seen poets like Crabbe and Goldsmith in the eighteenth century, Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Arnold in the nineteenth, and Lawrence, John Clare, Patrick Kavanaugh, Hughes and Seamus Heaney

in the twentieth. Hughes attempts, like Blake, to cut through the "self-protective tendency" of the pastoral that selects elements that are comforting to one's perception of the world and therefore is self-deceiving (Gifford 1999: 135).

As a post-pastoral poet, Hughes work is aligned with authors like Blake, Wordsworth, John Muir, Thoreau, Lawrence, Ursula Le Guin, Gillian Clarke and Adrienne Rich (Gifford 1999: 169). This tradition takes into account the changing cultural context of the modern world and a corresponding change in one's attitudes towards nature that goes beyond the pastoral distinction between the urban and the rural. This, of course, is also a characteristic of the anti-pastoral position. However, along with this, the post-pastoral not only rereads the idealised assumptions of the pastoral but devises a language to sidestep such dangers and envisage a world in which human beings are not alienated from nature but become organically linked to it and to every other creature within it. It is, in other words, a more ecocentric approach that can "both celebrate *and* take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness" (Gifford 1999: 148).

Some of the characteristics accompanying this tradition are a respect for the natural world and its processes; an acknowledgement of the world as cyclic in its processes of birth and death, growth and decay, so that nature is seen employing a creative violence and destruction; the realisation that since human beings are also part of this world, one's inner nature and workings of the mind and body are necessarily reflections of outer or external nature; seeing culture as inevitably determined by nature and, conversely, attitudes to nature as culturally constructed (so that the nature/culture, inner/outer, private/public binaries are considerably diminished); and the belief that one's consciousness can be transformed into conscience that takes responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions towards other species (as in Hughes's "The Otter" where there is an acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of the human consciousness as it creates a picture of humans hunting down the otter, who has now become a king in exile). In most of his poems, Hughes echoes these concerns that make him one of the most individual poets in twentieth-century English literature.

SAQ:

What is the significance of 'intensity' in Hughes's poems, "Thrushes", and "Pike"? In what way does it affect the choice of subject and language? (60 + 80 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

1.3.9 SEAMUS HEANEY (1939-)

Seamus Heaney voices, like Yeats and Thomas, preoccupations that are unique to the cultural background they come from, since all three are not 'English' but rather Irish and Welsh. This is reflected in Heaney who engages constantly with the violence and horror accompanying Northern Ireland's attempts to free itself from British rule. The 1960s Troubles, that forms the background to such poems as "Triptych", parallel the Troubles in the early decades of the twentieth century marking Ireland's struggle for independence from Britain. Consequently, Heaney's vision is not merely limited to Northern Ireland but stretches across the whole island, as can be seen, for example, in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991) and *The Spirit Level* (1996). Apart from poetry, Heaney has earned much critical acclaim for his translation of *Beowulf* (1999).

Heaney uses memory, legend, myth, and elements from Irish history in order to evoke the picture of as it is lived and experienced not only in the context of contemporary violence but also in the context of poetry and the vocation of a poet. Digging and the peatbog are thus two key tropes in his poetry. Digging is significant because the poet "digs into his own memory, into the lives of his family, into the past of Irish history and into the deeper levels of legend and myth which shape the character of the people of his country"

(Carter and McRae 2001: 446). On the other hand, the wild, undomesticated and deep nature of the bog that preserves traces of past life through countless periods of history is a potent site in which the ancient, primordial, pagan and even early-Christian elements come in contact with the present and the contemporary so that what is past (for example, ritualistic sacrifice as alluded to in "The Tollund Man" or the act of revenge) surface even in the present (as can be seen in "Triptych" in which the poet brings in ancient Christian customs centring round the idea of a 'Station' in order to emphasise its weak but still restorative pastoral power even in the midst of ceaseless violence).

In Heaney, as in Thomas, Larkin and Hughes, there is an engagement with place and identity, and consequently, on the use of language to evoke the sense of location and setting. While Thomas evokes a specific notion of Wales in his poetry, Hughes and Larkin both project different versions of England. In like manner, Heaney uses local (Irish) in conjunction with international (from places like Denmark, America, Africa, and ancient Greece) elements (in terms of archaeological discoveries, myths, religious customs or rituals and so on) in his poetry. He, moreover, shows a keen awareness of the English poetic tradition and language in order, however, to assert the Irishness of his poetry. This is accompanied by the precarious figure of the poet himself, "growing up a Catholic in a divided province, then becoming an emblematic exile in England and America" (Carter and McRae 2001: 447).

Heaney's *Preoccupations* (1980), his first volume of essays, is 'preoccupied' with the individual freedom of the poet on one hand and the demands made on one by tradition, history, place, religion, one's community or society, on the other, the tussle between which effectively denies the possibility of adhering to any fixed identity as either poet or Irishman, since these two aspects are frequently contradictory. Many of his poems (such as "Digging") express, therefore, this ambivalence in which the poet shows a "devotion to inheritance, asserting continuity with the past, family, community; the desire for attachment and experience; a sense of guilt for departing from tradition" (Andrews 1998: 41). Heaney's use of nature, and the form of the pastoral explored in a post-pastoral fashion can also, therefore, be read from this perspective.

Stop to Consider:

The Province of Heaney

We need to be aware of the connections between Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes; Graham Martin comments: "Hughes's catalytic effect on Heaney's early writing is, of course, evident in its subject-matter – frogs, bulls, eels, rats – generally in the poet's fascination with 'the slime kingdoms' (*North*) of non-human existence. But where the creatures in Hughes's bestiary signify an abstract natural energy, alien or at least indifferent to man, Heaney's poems in this vein speak of what men and Nature share, a life of the earth"

We also discover that, poems as referred to above—" Cumulatively, such poems render as no English poet in our industrialized century could render, the truth that 'agriculture' is laborious. . .The poet's concern with touch and grasp and immersion points towards the physical demands of farming work . . . but it is not alienated labour", Martin clarifies, "it is felt as productive; it carries its own satisfactions. In one poem, Heaney equates his poetic endeavour with that of his digging and delving forefathers: as they dug with the spade, he will dig with the pen".

The work of Seamus Heaney is important from yet another point of view – postcolonial literature, as well as the engagement of poetry with politics. Dasenbrock emphasizes this; Ireland furnishes the example of just how politics seeps into poetry, although the picture should also be seen in comprehensive terms. Given that northern Ireland has had a bitter political struggle, we are provided with the outer frames of this picture in a broad sweep: "In 1900, English was spoken all over the world, but it was spoken in just two political entities, the British Empire and the United States. English is spoken even more widely today, but . . . the territory which formerly constituted the Empire is now something upwards of forty distinct nations. The sun may have set on the British Empire, but the proud boast can be recast; the sun never sets on countries where they speak and write English as a result of the British Empire. A few of these are the former Dominions, with a population comprised mostly of European immigrants, but the vast majority are former colonies, with a population mostly made up of the people who were there before the British arrived and started to issue imperatives to them in English. These countries are therefore more like Yeats's Ireland than they are like Auden's England: although most of them retain indigenous languages like the former colonies of Austria, Russia and Turkey, nonetheless given English's role as a world language, most have kept an official place for English as well. These nations have rivalled the Irish in using the English language more brilliantly in literature than the English or the Americans, and the 'post-colonial' literature which has emerged – represented by such

writers as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Nuruddin Farah, R.K.Narayan, Salman Rushdie, V.S.Naipaul, Derek Walcott, just to name a few – constitutes the significant literature in English of our time and of the past half-century. . . . it is among these writers that we find the writers significantly engaged with the politics of their place and time. The novel has been the dominant genre of post-colonial literature, not poetry, but Seamus Heaney in Northern Ireland, Wole Soyinka in Nigeria, Kamau Braithwaite in the Caribbean – to name a prominent few – have composed bodies of poetry which intersect profoundly with the political trajectories of their society. . . it has been the Irish of the Literary Revival who have had the most profound influence on these writers, since they find themselves in situations not unlike the Irish one of the first quarter of the twentieth century".

1.4 THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many of the revolutionary developments in nineteenth-century England actually had a far-reaching impact well into the twentieth century. First of all was the Industrial Revolution that reached its peak in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rapid industrialisation in England thereafter saw the end of the pre-industrial economy of Britain finally surrender to a newer way of life (urbanised and more modern) by the end of the century. The sense of community began to lose its ground rapidly, leaving behind a more fragmented society in which one could no longer hold on confidently to any fixed and stable sense of identity. Apart from this there was the impact of Darwin's evolutionary theory that questioned the existence of God; furthermore, there was Marx in the later part of the century whose socio-economic theories sought to interpret the class system emerging under industrialism and capitalism. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, there emerged yet another theorist who was to have a powerful impact (both positively and negatively) on the entire scenario of Modernism: Freud. With Freud came his theory of the unconscious as determining human actions and thoughts through its deep and irrational force; with such a concept, it was no longer possible to hold on to the idea of a stable human subject, since it would always already be divided within itself. All these developments became more evident in the very forms and language adopted by the Modernist poets like T. S. Eliot, for example. Then again, the anthropological work of James Frazer was to have a profound impact on Modernist literature as a whole.

By the end of the nineteenth century the earlier stability of the British Empire in danger of disintegration chiefly from nationalist movements and rebellions against it in the various colonies. The first significant event in this was the Boer War (1899-1902) in South America which turned out to be a hollow victory for Britain. But the greatest event at this point was the First World War (1914-1918).

Stop to Consider:

Ezra Pound and the 1890s

Peter Brooker and Simon Perril make the point that twentieth-century 'modernism' as a category emerged as a belated description of a sometimes violently hetergeneous and unstable set of initiatives. While there were European modernisms (notably futurism) which did indeed cultivate a radical break with the past, the Anglo-American variety was haunted by its relationship to tradition. Ezra Pound's rallying cry of 'make it new' precisely emphasizes the possibilities for reconstruction and 'translation' rather than the destructive joys of Dada or the Italian futurist Marinetti's glorification of modern technology and war. Pound came to London in 1908, as he said, to learn 'how Yeats did it' and there joined an Edwardian literary world in many ways living off the fading inheritance of the Pre-Raphaelites and Rhymers Club of the 1890s. In the words applied to the persona 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' at the point of Pound's departure for Paris in 1920, he was himself in these early days 'out of date': an American specialist in European Romance literatures who stepped out in literary London more as the eccentric bohemian and latter-day troubadour than the radicalizing modernist. He was in his own person, a rather awkward translation across cultures whose practice of 'creative translation' and imitation of earlier literatures helped in the event to create a modernist idiom.

Criticism has been happy to couple Pound and Eliot together as canonic modernisers. Certainly Eliot shared Pound's sense of the modern poet's relation to a revised, living tradition. Beyond this, the traditions which these modernists brought into being ran off in different directions.

This complex relation between Anglo-American modernism and its precursors – as well as its contemporaries – in which different sides wrestled over notions of a received or rebuilt tradition, is suggestive at the same time of a broader, equally complex relationship to modernity. The need to innovate and experiment with new forms and techniques was motivated, Eliot concluded in his 1921 essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets', by the evident complexity of the modern world: "We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at

present, must be *difficult* . . The poet must become more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning."

We can see from all of the above that the question of 'tradition', in relation to the modernist, had more than a single meaning: with Pound, as with Eliot, there was a creative connection to literary precursors. Simultaneously, there was also the need to innovate. The guiding principle was that the poet had to be 'difficult' in the context of the modern world.

Modernism as a trend in twentieth-century English literature was already in evidence before the outbreak of World War. The avant-garde had already established its dominance over earlier developments in art and literature. It was accelerated by the fact that newer education laws and increased literacy brought about a tremendous change in the reading public. Although this resulted in a parallel rise of the press and 'popular' literature, it nevertheless also extended a hand towards the growth of newer media: the radio, the television, cinema and popular music. A section of the intelligentsia saw this as the onslaught of the masses which would vulgarise the taste and appreciation of 'high' literature, and felt themselves alienated in this modern world. As a result the avant-garde, as mentioned earlier, rose with a small target audience of people having a superior education and taste who could identify with this sense of isolation. One has to only go through the poems of Yeats and Eliot and the novels and essays of E. M. Forster, for instance, to gauge this point of view.

With the First World War, however, all these preoccupations underwent a deep change as England, among other European nations, tried to grapple with its magnitude and destructiveness. This was manifested most strongly in the poetry produced during the time. The War gave rise to a group of young poets like Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried Sassoon (many of whom died in action in the battlefield) who are collectively known as the War poets. Then there were Yeats, Pound and Eliot who were already writing during this time. All these poets echoed the starkness of death and the mood of anxiety and uncertainty that they encountered first-hand. England (as the rest of Europe) was seen in terms of a barren, dehumanised dystopia, not only literally (the battlefield images of the War poets), but metaphorically as well. The years after the end of the

War saw the full development of Modernist poetry with one of the major texts, *The Waste Land*, being published in 1922.

The poets of the 1930s however, were more deeply affected by the Second World War (1939-45), the more so because many of these poets were at the formative stage of their careers. This war was more destructive than the earlier one and more importantly, had actually entered Britain through the Blitz in London. The most crucial event in this, however, was America's act of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan; this signalled the end of an era to most writers of the time with the advent of a new atomic age. Eliot's *Four Quartets* was a resonant articulation of this sense of ending and nostalgia, coupled with a stark emptiness. Dylan Thomas, on the other hand, tried to evolve, through the language of poetry, a counter to the deadening effect of war. While most of these poets wrote from a distance about the War and acted thereby as commentators and critics there were a few poets like Alun Lewis, Keith Douglas and Sidney Keyes who had actually fought and were killed in action in the war (Henry Reed was another poet who survived the war). The poems of these, like the earlier War Poets, echoed the extreme nearness of death, though with pessimism. Unlike many of their predecessors (especially during the first two years of the First World War), who were patriotic and enthusiastic in their wartime experiences and descriptions, these poets talked more of the desolation and regret accompanying this war.

Another political event that touched the poetry of the Thirties specifically was the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) between the forces belonging to the Spanish dictator Franco and the Republican army which sought to bring democracy to the nation. Many poets, like Auden, for example, extended their support to the Republican army.

Finally, the Irish struggle for independence in the early twentieth century and the troubles in Northern Ireland during the second half of the century also forms the chief context for the poetry of Yeats and Heaney. Yeats was writing during the time of the Irish literary renaissance and actually was a part of it, though he was against the violence of the Irish revolutionaries. After Ireland secured its independence in 1923, however Northern Ireland still remained under the rule of Britain. For a number of decades during the mid-twentieth century, sectarian violence (between supporters of the British

Government and supporters of Irish autonomy) defined this region, and this becomes the major concern of Heaney.

This is a very brief account of certain key contexts of modern poetry which I have also discussed to some extent in the previous section with reference to individual poets.

1.5 THE MODERNIST MODES

The range of poets we have considered above should not be seen as either compact, unified or uniform, or even as continuous. While our general title, "Poetry in the Modern World" seeks to make this clear, you may yet carry the notion that all poetic responses to the modern world are alike perhaps. We do find that the modern poets share some common themes like place, location, identity, alienation, the fragmented subject, and the dynamic and creative nature of language. Furthermore, in many of the poets, there is a concern with nature and an engagement with the pastoral (whether in its presence or absence) as well. However, if you try to answer the question what, in the final instance, constitutes 'modernism', you will find yourself referring to not only the common themes (listed above) but also the issue of characteristic stance, attitude, and technical strategies. This is what we mean by calling this set of features, 'the modernist modes' or what may even be termed, "languages of modernism". The element that typifies the "modernist" is what can be called the 'language' of modernism.

We can refer to Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane who clarify this topic. They stress their recognition of "the quality common to many of the most characteristic events, discoveries and products of this modern age". This quality is to be found "in the concern to objectify the subjective, to make audible or perceptible the mind's inaudible conversations, to halt the flow, to irrationalize the rational, to defamiliarize and dehumanize the expected, to conventionalize the extraordinary and the eccentric, to define the psychopathology of *everyday* life, to intellectualize the emotional, to secularize the spiritual, to see space as a function of time, mass as a form of energy, and uncertainty as the only certain thing." As we have already seen, aspects of the modern also lie in the characteristic viewpoint or stance.

For the poet or the writer, this "explosive fusion", these critics remind us, "destroyed the tidy categories of thought, that toppled linguistic systems, that disrupted formal grammar and the traditional links between words and words, words and things, inaugurating the power of ellipsis and parataxis and bringing in its train the task . . of making new juxtapositions, new wholes". We can thus understand as to why it is often difficult to read modern poetry in the ordinary sense. It confronts us with a disruptive energy so that even the most familiar words can suddenly seem alien. Bradbury and McFarlane also suggest to us that "the defining event" of modernism is partly contained in "the intensifying discovery that the thrust of modern consciousness raised issues that were more than representational, were crucially aesthetic, problems in the making of structures and the employment of language and the social role of the artist himself." In other words, we cannot assume modernism to arise merely in the adoption of a new style at a certain point of time. It went beyond any superficial train of thought of clothing the familiar in novel ways.

'Modernity' is too commonly seen as standing in opposition to 'tradition'. But as we have seen above, the case is more complex than that. Anglo-American modernism regarded modernity with some suspicion (as described above). As Peter Brooker and Simon Perril stress, "Anglo-American modernism's intended critique of modernity can be contrasted with the more common hostility towards art as an institution in European modernism and the consequent attempt within European avant-garde movements to dissolve the boundaries between art and life. The issues here are complex and diffuse. The examples of Charles Baudelaire – surely the most commonly cited figure in accounts of modernism's originating moment – and of the later French symbolist poets, Stephane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, can nevertheless help identify two key strands in the relation between a modernist aesthetic and modern life. T.S. Eliot's reflections on the Symbolist poets, and on Baudelaire and Mallarmé's acknowledged American precursor, Edgar Allan Poe, are also instructive." In one sense, Baudelaire was read by Eliot to provide a line for his own compulsions. But on the whole, both Eliot and Pound were unable to repudiate the past – instead it was a rehabilitation of much that seemingly belonged to 'tradition'.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the contributions of the Modernist poets to English poetry.
2. How would you describe the relation of 'tradition' to 'modernity' in the context of Eliot's poetry? Support your answer with textual examples.
3. Explain the significance of Ted Hughes' semantic choices in the light of the poems you have been asked to study.
4. Attempt to explain the connotations of the phrase, "canonic modernisers", with reference to the work of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.
5. Write short notes on:

   a) the poetic contributions of Ezra Pound; (b) the achievement of Anglo-American modernism; (c) poetry in the post-colonial world; (d) 'modernity' in Ted Hughes; (e) the 'realism' of Philip Larkin

1.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Andrews, Elmer (Ed.). *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Baldick, Chris. *The Modern Movement* Volume 10: 1910-1940. Oxford: OUP, 2004

Barlow, Adrian. *The Great War in British Literature* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Bradbury, Malcolm, and McFarlane, James, (Eds.). *Modernism 1890-1930*; London: Penguin, 1991 [1976].

Carter, Ronald, and McRae, John; *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland* [2nd Edn. 2001] London: Routledge, 2005. (Ind. Rpt.)

Davies, Walford. *Dylan Thomas*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2003. (Ind. Rpt.)

Feder, Lillian. "The Literary Scene" in Boris Ford (ed.) *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Volume 9: American Literature. 307-353.

Ford, Boris (Ed.). *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Volume 7: From James to Eliot. London: Penguin, 1996 [1983].

———————————. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Volume 8: From Orwell to Naipaul. London: Penguin, 1998 [1983].

———————————. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Volume 9: American Literature. London: Penguin, 1995 [1967].

Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York and London: OUP, 1975.

Goodby, John. "'Very profound and very box-office': the Later Poems and Under Milk Wood" in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (eds.) *New Casebooks: Dylan Thomas.* Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 192-220.

Heaney, Seamus. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. London and Boston: Faber, 1980.

Pinto, Vivian de Sola. *Crisis in English Poetry: 1880-1940*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1972. (5th ed. Rpt.) [1951]

Regan, Stephen (Ed.). *New Casebooks: Philip Larkin*. Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1997.

* * *

Unit 2
W. B Yeats *Sailing to Byzantium*

Contents

2.1 Objectives
2.2 Introducing the Poet
2.3 Works of the Poet
2.4 Critical Reception
2.5 Context of the Poem
2.6 Reading the Poem *Sailing to Byzantium*
2.7 Summing up
2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the unit is to introduce W.B. Yeats, one of the major and Nobel Prize winner modern poets. Yeats used Irish folklore as background material for his early poems. The emergence of Yeats as a poet and thinker can be understood in relation to his Irish background and he can be termed as the pioneer of Celtic revival in Ireland. And as modern poet, his modernity has also been very much connected with his nationality.

By the end of this unit, you will be able to —

- *place* Yeats in the English poetic tradition
- *identify* Yeats as pioneer of Celtic revival
- *have* more insights on Irish history and culture and Evaluate Yeats contribution to English poetry

2.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

W.B. Yeats was born on June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, a seaside suburb of Dublin. The family of Yeats's father was mercantile settlers. He spent his childhood alternately in London and Sligo. Yeats's father John Yeats was

born in 1774 and was sent to the Dublin University, where after winning Bishop Berkley's gold medal for Greek, he took orders in the Church of Ireland. In 1803, he married Jane Taylor, the daughter of a Dublin Castle official, and two years later was appointed in county Sligo, where he remained until his death in 1846. As Joseph Hone says: "It was in this way that the long association of W.B Yeats's family with Sligo began." John Butler Yeats, artist, author and philosopher was born at Tullylish in 1863. Joseph Hone so says—"The married couple settled in a house at the head of Sandymount Avenue, Dublin and their house was called 'Georgeville'. At Georgeville late at night on June 13th, 1865, the poet, W.B Yeats was born. He was given the name of William Butler and baptized a month later at Donnybrook Church."

The first three years of infancy were passed in his birthplace Dublin. But in 1868, the family moved to London so that his father could study to become a professional painter. The family then settled at 23 Fitzory Road, Regent's Park and lived there until 1874.

Sligo, not London was the original home for all the children of John Butler Yeats. For W.B Yeats, the human being who first occupied a special place in his mind was not his father or mother but grandfather William Pollexfen of Sligo, the silent and fierce old man, as Yeats describes in his poem—'In memory of Alfred Pollexfen'.

In 1874, when Yeats was nine years old, the family moved from 3 Fitzory Road, Regent's park, London to 14 Edith villas, West Kensinglon. In 1875, Yeats began to attend the Godolphin School in Hammersmith. But throughout his school days, Yeats felt a yearning for the West of Ireland. The visits to Sligo had become very few, yet Yeats's great love for Sligo remained with him for the rest of his life.

In 1880, when Yeats was fifteen, the family left London for Ireland. Their return to Ireland was mainly for financial reasons. During that period, Yeats's family employed a servant, a fisherman's wife, who was a mine of local lore and whose accounts of supernatural adventures provided Yeats with material for a whole chapter called 'Village Ghosts' in Celtic Twilight—his first published work which appeared in 1893.

Yeats died of heart failure on 28th January and wasburied in accordance with the wishes expressed by him in "Under Ben Bulben" with the inscription: "Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman, pass by."

Stop to Consider:

Celtic Revival in Ireland

The term Celtic Revival applies to a group of writers who had been calling attention to a wealth of unused literary material in Ireland, as Kipling had done for India. The school probably originated in a lecture by Stopford Brroke, a famous historian, on "the need of getting Irish literature into the English language." Its changing centers have been the Irish literary Society, the National Literary Society of Dublin, the Irish Literary Theatre and later Abbey Theatre (1904) The original purpose of the revival was to awaken interest in what was called ancient bardic literature. The bardic tales were first recorded in Latin by missionary monks, who collected enough to fill over a thousand volumes, few of which have been printed.

Yeats is honoured as leader of the Celtic Revival, more so in other countries than in his own. To a certain extent, the literary pursuit of Ireland is reflected in Yeats's own career. The Gaelic period, before the Norman conquest, with all its strange beauty of legend and imagination the Anglo-Irish writings in English with the International outlook of eighteenth and nineteenth century culture; then the Revival blending the two strains, beginning with writings primarily concerned with matters of Irish interest and then becoming of more universal interest; all these have their parallels in Yeats's life. Yeats began to attempt the fusion of Gaelic nationalist and Anglo-Irish elements in Ireland.

2.3 WORKS OF THE POET

At the age of seventeen, Yeats first began to write verses. Although Yeats wanted to be an artist, but he continued to write poetry mostly on romantic subjects in the manner of Shelley. In 1885, Yeats verse appeared for the first time in 'Dublin University Review'. Many of his early ballads reappeared in *The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems'*. In 1887, his verse was published in England for the first time, when his 'The Madness of King Groll', appeared in the magazine *The Leisure Hour*. In the same year, he edited an anthology of poetry, which was published in Dublin under title *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland.*

In 1888, he compiled a volume entitled *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, which was published in London. Thus gradually Yeats' popularity began to grow wider. And he was beginning to be accepted by the public as an authority on Irish folklore and a poet of importance.

In George Pollexfen's house, in 1888, Yeats completed a long poem on a theme from Irish legend: *The Wandering of Oisin and Other Poems*. The lyrics and Ballads contained in this Yeats's first published book of verse—were in due course reprinted under the title *Crossways*.

Yeats in his *Memoirs* wrote: "I was twenty- three years old when the troubling of my life began. I had heard from time to time in letters from Miss O'Leary, John O'Leary's old sister, of a beautiful girl who had left the society of the Vice regal Court for Dublin Nationalism. In after years I persuaded myself that I felt premonitory excitement at the first reading of her name. Presently she drove up to our house in Bedford Park with an introduction from John O'Leary to my father. I had never thought to see in a living woman of such a beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past."

Of course, Maud Gonne became his chief interest. From the moment of their meeting all life for Yeats was changed, changed utterly. But, Maud Gonne did not respond to his passion. She accepted him with delight as a friend and she was obsessed by a burning desire to free Ireland from its seven hundred year's dominion by England.

In 1891, the Rhymer's club was formed and in that year also, Yeats founded, in London, the Irish Literary Society. During that year he returned to Ireland on a visit, in the course of which he asked Maud Gonne to marry him. She refused but begged him for his friendship. Obsessed by her thought he wrote in that year a play—*The Countess Cathleen,* whose heroine was no one but Maud Gonne. The theme of the play was that Cathleen is a beautiful noble woman who, having sold her soul to the Devil so that her people may be saved from starvation, eventually goes to Heaven.

In 1894, Yeats wrote a play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. In 1899, Yeats's third volume of verse, *The Wind among the Reeds* appeared. For a long time, it was widely believed that all the love poems in this book, and in the books which followed it, was addressed to Maud Gonne. Yet there are some poems, which point to another woman, perhaps to more than one. There was a beautiful dark woman to whom Yeats refers in his unpublished autobiography, by the name 'Diana Vernon'.

In 1908 Yeats's *Collected Works* in verse and prose was published in 8 volumes. Then in 1910, Yeats another new volume *The Green Helmet and*

Other Poems was published. The most striking fact to be mentioned here is that now Yeats had changed his style of writing his verse. John Unterecker in his book *A Reader's Guide to W.B. Yeats* said-"The romantic wistfulness, the dreamy, decorative quality of much of his earlier verse now gave way to a manner at once more terse, astringent and masculine, which becomes apparent in this volume." This trend is evident in his next volume *Responsibilities* (1914). In 1919, Yeats's new collection *The Wild Swans at Coole* was published.

From the time of the Easter Rising of 1916 up to the civil War of 1922, Yeats was more affected by public events. His violent romance was replaced then by the bitter realities and that can be ascertained from his *Michael Robertes and the Dancers* (1921), which reflected the clashes of those events. On Easter Monday 1916 the Irish rose in rebellion against the English, and between 1916 and 1921 they fought the English in a guerrilla war. Even after 1921, rival Irish factions fought a civil war about whether to accept the peace Treaty which gave independence to the Irish Free state but separated it from the six counties known as Northern Island.

In 1918, Yeats published a volume of essays on mystical subjects, Per Amica Silentia Luna, which showed his interest in hidden world and mystical things. In 1922, Yeats became Senator of Irish Free State and during that period he delivered several important lectures in Senate. But, before publishing Yeats's most powerful verse collection *The Tower*, Yeats wrote another verse collection *A Women Young and Old*, and all these poems were written during in 1926 or 1927. In 1923, the King of Sweden awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, which was presented to him and two years later he published his appreciation in a short work-The Bounty of Sweden. In 1925, Yeats published his *A Vision*. It is an elaborate book on prose and it records Yeats's astrological, mystical and historical theories. In 1926, Yeats made a translation of Sophocles' Oedipus the King. Yeats presented it at Abbey Theatre. In the same year he wrote a book or a long essay on the death of Synge entitled *The Death of Synge* and other passages from an old Diary.

In 1927, Yeats *The Winding Stair* appeared and in 1928, he completed his other prose work, *A Packet for Ezra Pound*. In 1930, Yeats wrote a play entitled *The Words upon the Window Pan* and in 1933, his new collection

of poems *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* and a new edition of his *Collected Poems* were published and in1934 his Collected Plays appeared. In 1938, Yeats wrote Purgatory, a One Act play and on 28th January, 1939 Yeats died of heart failure.

2.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Yeats's poetry falls roughly into three divisions—the romantic, the realistic and the mystical. In the poetry of the first period, he dwells on love, beauty, nature and Irish mythology and tales of the supernatural, which he weaves into lovely dreams. In the second period, his attention was on the grim reality of the Irish struggle for freedom. In the final period, both the dreams of early youth and realities of the Irish situation are replaced by a mystic contemplation of life, developed from various sources like native, eastern and western. Yeats's poems belonging to his early period dealt with Irish fairies, peasants and materials taken from Irish folklore. His *The Rose* (1893) reflects his use of Irish folk materials. And some of the poems in this collection deal with the legend of ancient pre-Christian Ireland: Cuchulain, the heroic fighter and lover; Furges, the king who abandoned his kingdom to become a poet. According to John Unterecker-"Yeats made ultimately Cuchulain's battle with sea a structure designed to express man's anguish maddened by the complexities of warring emotions."

Stop to Consider:

Yeats's Concept of Mask:

Yeats discovered a technique by which the personal utterances could be given the impersonal appearance. In this connection Yeats used masks of Beggar man, Crazy Jane, Tom the Lunatic, the wild old wicked man and the lovers of the Last poems and so on. Yeats's early poems reflect his use of Irish materials and Gaelic legends, but his style changed in poems of the middle period. In *Responsibilities,* his Irishness became connected with real people.

Although Yeats was a lyricist and symbolist, in his *The Wind Among the Reeds* he tried to help his readers understand the difficult Celtic and Occult material he was working with. Most of the poems of this collection, were written for Mrs Shakespeare or Maud Gonne to such characters as

Hanrahan or Michael Roberts, Yeats could sort out his several selves. Using his feeling of multiple personality, he created poems. Most of the poems here, Yeats assigned to Aed, a character he explained in magical terms as "fire burning by itself". He described Michael Robertes as "fire reflected in water", Hanrahan was "fire blown by the wind." Yeats returned to his earlier method of using Irish materials. His two later volumes *The wild Swan At Coole* and *Michael Robert and His Dancers* show "the reblossoming of his poetry after the cold winter rages of *Responsibilities*," as A. Norman Jeffares says-"The use of Irish materials helps originality and makes one's verses sincere and gives one less numerous competitors. Besides, one should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life."

The Nobel award and the Senatorship crowned Yeats's progress as man and poet. This flourishing life is reflected fully in the 'Tower' poetry.

2.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Yeats's poetry had blossomed in *The Wild Swans at Coole* and *Michael Robertes and the Dancer*, but the real flowering came with *The Tower.*

The Tower represented Yeats in all his moods and vacillations; it was the perfect and unique background for all aspects of his character and interests.

To a certain degree, he became a member of a community, and, paradoxically enough, attempted to graft the old virtues of his own race onto the new experiment of the Free State. The poem 'Sailing to Byzantium' symbolizes the old virtues of his own race on to the new experiment of the Free State.

A.Norman Jeffares in his *W. B. Yeats : Man and Poet* so said- "His experience at the Abbey had given him a tautness of expression that added to the dramatic elements of his own charecter; his study of the eighteenth century Anglo-Irish gave him rhethoric and clarity. The poetry of *The Tower* period is rich because of the fullness of Yeats's life, because his style was reaching maturity at the same time as his life."

The story of *The Tower* is part of Yeats's life and reveals the essentially fresh qualities of his mind and outlook.

The best comment on the poem, however he gave for a broadcast of his poems:(BBC, Belfast, 8Sept,1931)—"Now I am trying to write about the

state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called 'Sailing to Byzanantium'. Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city.

2.6 READING THE POEM "SAILING TO BYZANTIUM"

This poem was written in the autumn of 1926. Yeats's knowledge of the city was largely derived from his reading of *W.G. Holmes, The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905) The symbolic meaning of Byzantium can be discovered in Yeats's prose (Sailing to Byzantium and Byzantium are both complementary poems in many respects). Byzantium is a holy city, as the capital of eastern Christianity and as the place where God exists because of the life after death Yeats imagines existing there. His description of Byzantium shows that he valued the position of the artist in the city. The ancient city of Byzantium was remarkable for the beauty of its buildings and the art of its craftsman. Yeats's city is both historical and ideal. It is a symbol of holiness, of perfection of art, of the world of intellect and spirit as distinct from the world of senses. The poem celebrated the permanence of art against the transitoriness of Nature.

Yeats's poem is a picture of a voyage from the material world to the holy city of eternity In his persona of aging poet, he is one of purgative withdrawal, from that "Country" where "Fish", flesh or fowl commend all summer long/ whatever is begotten, born and dies. In that sensual music of pragmatic illusion and of re-establishment in "the holy city of Byzantium", Yeats achieved unified sensibility and unity of being.

In Septmber 1926, he began "Sailing to Byzantium" in an intensified mood of envy of the young who are not old for love. Love came constantly into his thoughts in 1926, one of his great creative period.

Byantium and Constantinople were two adjacent towns that merged into one city. In 395 the Roman Empire was divided into two, and Byzantium became the capital of the Eastern Empire.It remained the capital of an Empire until the Turks captured it in 1453.

The historic Byzantium was remarkable for the skill of its craftsmen and the beauty of its buildings. But Yeats is writing about an ideal city; Byzantium has become for him a Utopia, a symbol of holiness, of perfect craftsmanship, and of Ireland's future achievement in the arts. It is the world of intellect and spirit as distinct from the world of the senses. Now Yeats's age leads him to a more openly expressed envy of their youth and activity and yet he is not shocked by the events taking place as before. He equates himself with the tower and the lamp and the search for wisdom of antiquity and finds compensation in them.

Stanza I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations- at their songs,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, r fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.

Ireland, the poet feels is a land for young, imaginative artists and not for old men. The young are drawn into the creative cycle while the old continue their songs of youthful reminiscences. One of the central themes of the poem is the opposition between youth and old age. Yeats was preoccupied with the decay and loss due to old age. He resented the loss of youth and physical beauty. Every one who is allured by the natural cycle of birth and death gets trapped within it and life's preoccupations make intellectual life seem relatively worthless in spite of the greater permanence of products of spirit and of art. The poet contrasts the merely sensual with the truly spiritual. Byzantium becomes a symbol of spiritual achievement while the poem becomes a journey towards true spiritual life.

That is the country he is leaving with regrets—the Ireland of his youth, the country of young love and physical vitality. He has grown too old to fit into its life.

The imagery "the salmon falls' refers to Yeats' reminiscence of Sligo. The river drops down through the town in a series of falls up which the salmon leap in the spring when returning to spawn. Salmon are symbols of strength and beauty.

The young man is caught up in the sensual music as surely as fish are caught up in a net.

Though his body is deteriorating with old age, he is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul.

Stop to Consider:

Symbol and Myth in Yeats's Poems

A myth is defined as one story in a mythology - a system of hereditary stories, which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group. In his *Essays*, Yeats describes symbols as "the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist. Moreover symbols themselves emerge from the divine. For the mind of the man is one with the Great Mind of the Universe and the memory of man, one with the same Great Memory. Although he used symbols in the manner of earlier romantics to convey supersensual, visionary truths, Yeats differed significantly from most of the predecessors in deriving his symbols from external traditions. The occult provided a major source of symbols and Irish myth or legend provided another. Symbolism, suggestion and allusion abound in his poetry. Martin Gilkes says—"The only excuse for symbol is that something vital about human life can be better or more fully said in that way than in any other. The danger of it is that it affords of the earliest means of escape into the land of unreality." Yeats uses both the symbolism of sounds and ideas. So, Yeats's poetry is a communication with spirits, with an unseen order of things

Yeats's view of Byzantium is given in his work *A Vision*. "I think that if I could be given a month of antiquity or leave to spend it when I choose, and I would spend it in Byzantium." This poem is representation of the combination and unification of the subjective and objective man, which is in reality impossible to achieve. Symbol and images became more subjective in Byzantium. His aim here is to achieve a unity in being—where subjectivity and objectivity become one.

Stanza II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium

Yeats is grieved at the innumerable problems of old age which affect man's capacity to live life pleasurably and fruitfully. Old age is insignificant like 'A tattered coat upon a stick'. It is as hollow as a scarecrow, with the physical appearance of a human being but lacking the human essence.

Though his body is deteriorating with old age, he is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul. His soul must clap its hands for joy as it realizes it is approaching nearer to perfection. The soul must also sing—an idea which combines the ideas of singing for joy and of writing poetry. To teach his soul to sing he must, metaphorically, sail to Byzantium. The only way in which the soul can learn to sing is by studying monuments of its own magnificence such as Byzantium art.

One needs to look at old age as the liberation of the soul which actively experiences the beauty beyond one's immediate range. Yeats, so seeks fresh stimulus in sailing to Byzantium.

Stanza III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

Yeats refers to the sages in the frieze at St. Appolinaire at Ravenna and invokes them to spiral down the cone to him. A Perne is the spool or bobbin on which the thread is spun. The Perne carried the thread of human life which is unwound within the gyre in the opposite direction to the movement of the gyre. Perne also means a kind of hawk and the image of a bird is like the descent by the sages. It is convincingly linked with the golden bird of the last stanza. By the image 'perne in a gyre' Yeats refers to successive ages as a system of gyres.

In the world of art an image is as holy as a sage. God, the supreme artist and is the artificer of eternity and the holy fire, like the poet with his imagination which makes all artifices.

The image 'God's Holy Fire' refers to Blake's drawing. Blake drew for Dante's poems that show Dante entering the refining Holy Fire.

Stanza IV

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake:
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Yeats seems to refer indirectly to Hans Anderson's tale "The Emperor's Nightingale" in which reference has been made to the Emperor's palace at Byzantium where there was a tree made of gold and silver and artificial birds that sang. It is also possible that Yeats may have had in mind "Ode to a Nightingale" written by Keats, where the latter had referred to "the self same song heard in ancient days by Emperor and Clown." The poet, in case he is born again, wants to take his form from the artist's imagination so that he would be able to defy the transitory quality of all natural things and their impending decay. As an artifice he would become immortal and sing of what is past or passing or to come rather than follow the course taken by fish, flesh and fowl of birth and death.

Thus, by imprisoning his thought in a system, he gained a strong belief that he knew and understood—"What is past, or passing, or to come."

Stop to Consider:

The Concept of Unity of Being

Yeats's theory of history, *A Vision* revealed his concept of the Unity of Being. His Irishness lies in his quest for this Unity of Being. In the book Yeats's biography: Life as a symbolic Pattern, Joseph Ronsley says: "Yeats was candidly eager to blend his life and his art into a single image. He came to feel that he could write with authority only if he were able to bring many interests into conjunction. He himself said that the necessity for hammering his thoughts into Unity began in1888 or 1889. The phrase 'Unity of Being' he heard first from his father, though he attributes his conception to Dante." Thomas Parkinson in *W.B.Yeats*: *The later Poetry* speaks of him as overt dramatist. In his role he is a maker of dramatis personae, the sphere of personification of passions whether in plays or in nominal lyrics." Through his poetry Yeats wanted to achieve 'Unity of Being' and that is the integration of religious and temporal concerns. By his love for Maud Gonne and unable to win her, Yeats sought compensation in perceiving her as an earthly expression of the eternal beauty that can never be fully attained in time.

SAQ:

1. Why does the poet wish to sail to Byzantium? (50 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

2 Consider how sailing to Byzantium moves between contraries such as youth and age, life and death, change and changelessness, nature and art. (80 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

2.7 SUMMING UP

After publishing this collection *The Tower* (1928), Yeats's most significant focus is upon passion - the fact and the idea. Yeats's most significant variations on the theme of passion: passion as Defence, passion as joy, passion s sublimation or Innocence, passion as transcendence or Apocalypse. Passion as fact and idea, practice and concept, is everywhere in Yeats's, as poet and man. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley two years before his death, Yeats says "…my poetry all comes from rage or lust." The Tower is a return to the pole of negation. Here, the bitterness is brilliantly evoked and masterfully controlled.

The poem "Sailing to Byzantium", published in 1928, expresses Yeats's desire for eternity. Byzantium civilization is 'elaborately rich', but represent the perfection of the spirit as opposed to nature. He longs to escape from his own time—a period of confusion and disintegration.

2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Jefferes, A.N. *A Commentary on the Collected Poems* of W.B Yeats, 1974.

Ronsley, Joseph. *Yeats's Autobiography: Life as a Symbolic Pattern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1968.

Stallworthy, Jon (ed). *Yeats: Last Poems* (A Selection of Critical Essays), Macmillan, 1975.

Unterecker, John. *A Reader's Guide to W.B.Yeats,* Thames and Hudson, London, 1977.

Jefferes, Norman.A. *W.B Yeats: Man and Poet*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul ltd, 1962.

* * *

Unit 3
T.S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*

Contents:

3.1 Objectives
3.2 Introducing the Poet
3.3 Works of the Poet
3.4 Critical Reception
3.5 Context of the Poem
3.6 Reading the Poem *The Waste Land*
  3.6.1 The title of the poem
  3.6.2 The epigraph
  3.6.3 The Burial of the Dead
  3.6.4 A Game of Chess
  3.6.5 The Fire Sermon
  3.6.6 Death by Water
  3.6.7 What the Thunder Said
3.7 Summing up
3.8 References & Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

We bring to you here the unit on *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot. You can see that it is massive! But that is necessary because we have to keep abreast of Eliot's famous, allusive style. To use the notes properly, you should do some further explorations of the texts that are alluded since we only bring the bare introductions to you here. However, by the end of the unit you should be able to—

- *write* about Eliot's style of poetry and poetic method
- *explain* the references in *The Waste Land*
- *elaborate* in detail the significance of the range of references in the poem
- *discuss* the meanings embedded in Eliot's poem

3.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

The name of T.S. Eliot is so thoroughly inscribed into the history of modern English poetry that you would probably not need an extensive introduction to him or his poetry.

He is considered to have exercised an influence on contemporary poets (including the younger generation) for about twenty-five years – something that had not happened to any writer before him for about a century. *The Waste Land* stood as a radical, brilliant example of Modernist poetry for about twenty years after it first came out. In the 1940s and 1950s his literary judgments carried profound weight. Poets who succeeded Eliot had to cope with his dominating presence in the struggle to establish their own identity.

Stephen Spender recalled that "Eliot was the poet of poets" to his generation. Archibald MacLeish remarked, in the mid -'twenties, that "after Eliot" nothing more could be written except "more Eliot". William Carlos Williams thought that, following the publication of *The Waste Land*, "the bottom had dropped out of everything" that he had valued in poetry. These are just a few remarks that help you to an understanding of the extent of Eliot's literary standing. Poets writing in the twenties and the thirties had to perforce contend with the standards set by Eliot in the writing of verse.

Some critics in the 1950s and 1960s also held the opinion that Eliot's work came as a kind of disruption in the natural development of English and American poetry. In some senses Eliot helped to effect a transformation in literary taste. We have to agree with Charles Altieri's remark that at one level Eliot was "the American poet who brought Anglo-American poetry into the modern age by forcing it to encounter urban life, by refusing sentimental idealizations in pursuit of the mind's intricate evasions and slippages, and by intensely engaging the various modes of victimage fundamental to contemporary culture." As Altieri understands, Eliot showed newer poets new techniques –"Eliot simply provided new ways of assuming voices, registering details, adapting speech rhythms and putting elements together within poems."

Stop to Consider:

The Biographical Context

This is just a brief account of the biographical facts of Eliot's life which should be filled up in detail with further reading. Born in America, on 26 September 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, Eliot had his childhood summers spent on the Northeast coast of the United States. He was educated in St. Louis, at Milton Academy, then at Harvard, one year in Paris with return to Harvard, then in Oxford on further study. He married Vivien Haigh-Wood in London; worked as a school-master, as Extension Lecturer, and then in Lloyd's Bank, in its foreign department. Following the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* Eliot became the centre of London literary circles. The coming out of *The Waste Land* in 1922 was a sort of climax, as was the founding of *The Criterion*. He moved into publishing in 1925 in the house of Faber and Gwyer where he remained for the rest of his life and in due course becoming "the preeminent man of letters of his time". He formally converted to Christianity and took up British citizenship in 1927. He delivered the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1932-33 and formally separated from his wife. *The Criterion* came to an end in 1939, and he gradually turned to drama thereon from poetry. Vivien Eliot died in 1947, while Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948. He remarried in 1957, Valerie Fletcher. Eliot died in 1965. As James Olney observes, "Throughout this public career of some fifty-five years there were frequent, regular publications; lectures and criticism, individual poems and collections, drama—the visible production of a professional man of letters. These biographical details are all there now, immensely fleshed out in the biographies by Peter Ackroyd and Lyndall Gordon, as a kind of given: they are public property, public knowledge."

3.3 WORKS OF THE POET

To help us understand the impact that Eliot's poetry had on his contemporaries, Altieri suggests that "we must place ourselves within the world of late Victorian and Georgian poetry, as if for the first time confronting the opening of "Prufrock" : "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table; / Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, / The muttering retreats / Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels . .". "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is the poem we often remember Eliot by because it has such a startlingly new pattern of imagery and emotional progression. It is the predominant lyric of the early volume of 1917, *Prufrock and Other Observations*. The

same volume contained poems like "La Figlia Che Piange", "Portrait of a Lady", "Preludes", "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", and "Morning at the Window".

In 1920 the volume with other now-familiar poems like "Gerontion", "Sweeney Erect", "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", "Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service", "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar", "Whispers of Immortality", "The Hippopotamus", to name some, came out. The four parts of his *Four Quartets* actually came out singly prior to their being joined as a single, long poem: *Burnt Noron* in 1936 in the volume *Collected Poems 1909-1935*; *East Coker* in the *The New English Weekly* of 1940('Easter Number'); *The Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942) in *The New English Weekly* and then as separate poems in pamphlets. The encompassing title, *Four Quartets*, was given in 1943.

Eliot is also to be remembered for his work in the theatre—from *Sweeney Agonistes* (1926-27) to *The Elder Statesman* (1958). In a sense, Eliot's poetry shows the signs of drama in the making: "It might even be better to consider the printed verse as itself a series of gestures, speeches, quasi-theatrical occasions" (Robin Grove). Among his plays are *The Rock* 1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958).

Eliot, as some have pointed out, belonged to a line of poet-critics –John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, and Matthew Arnold. As a critic, Eliot wrote his essay, "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" for the *Egoist* which brought it out in 1917, while "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was brought out in 1919. His first major volume of criticism came out as *The Sacred Wood* in 1920; the famous article on "Hamlet and His Problems" in the *Athenaeum* in 1919, and the essay "The Perfect Critic" in 1920 (as the opening essay of *The Sacred Wood*). The essay on "The Metaphysical Poets" first came out in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1921. In "Hamlet and His Problems", Eliot introduces his famous idea of the "objective correlative" while 'tradition', which is so central to his critical program, came up in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". "Criterion" was also another concept

crucial to Eliot's ideas of art and it was in relation to this concept that Eliot helped to found the journal, *The Criterion*, in 1922. The aims of this journal are stated in "The Function of Criticism" printed in the October 1923 issue. This essay introduced a debate on the contesting claims of Classicism and Romanticism which was to continue over many years. Eliot gave many lectures in America after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, in 1933, published as *After Strange Gods*: *A Primer of Modern Heresy*. Towards the later part of his career, Eliot subscribed increasingly to the idea that great literary art needed more than just a rich literary tradition, needed larger standards of judgment outside the strictly literary tradition.

Stop to Consider:

It is surely going to be useful for you to know from David Perkins, how Eliot's significance can be estimated in the larger picture of modern English poetry. Perkins writes:

"We may ask, …why it was Eliot, so much more than these other poets [Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens], who loomed in the path of his immediate successors. During the first period of Pound's strong influence on modern poetry, roughly from 1912 to 1925, Pound and Eliot were a front, and Eliot's impact was augmented by this alliance. Their critical statements spread the demand that poetry should "modernize" its style, and their own poetry exemplified what was meant. Yeats, Hardy, and Frost did not seem comparably "modern" in the period when this adjective acquired a special cachet. Recognition of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams was delayed by Eliot's ascendancy, and Pound's influence waned after 1921, when Pound left London. Living in Paris and, after 1924, in Italy, Pound could no longer be a personal force. Meanwhile in London Eliot founded and edited *Criterion* magazine and became an editor at the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. Most younger poets in England and the United States were published by Eliot or hoped to be."

You may gauge from the above commentary how 'modernity' in verse came to be defined and how the names of the poets came to be categorized on the basis of this kind of artistic demand. Eliot's reputation was closely linked to that of Ezra Pound's and the existence of the magazine, *Criterion*.

With reference to Eliot's artistic dominance, Perkins reminds us that "With poets younger than Eliot it was at its height from 1922, when *The Waste Land* was published, into the 1930s."

3.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

From what Perkins has to tell us, Eliot's artistic fame was not comprehensible to poets and critics older than him. These included names like H.L. Mencken, Harriet Monroe, Van Wyck Brooks, Louis Untermeyer, Harold Monro, Amy Lowell, John Crowe Ransom, and W.B. Yeats. Among academicians, F.O. Mathiessen was the first to publish significant commentary on Eliot in a book brought out in 1935.

Eliot's own critical contributions went a good way towards augmenting his fame in the literary world.

We may note, with the helpful review written by Prof. Jewel Spears Brooker, that the "history of Eliot criticism from the 1920s until the present can be charted dialectically. Major critics in the first generation (say, from the late twenties to the fifties) accepted Eliot into the canon and anointed him as the greatest poet of his age; many critics in the next generation (say, from the sixties to the eighties) rejected him and heaped contempt on his art, his literary theories, his religion, and his politics; a number of present critics, younger and trained in philosophy as well as literature, have returned to him with fresh appreciation and understanding. The negative criticism was part of a larger reaction against modernism and the New Critics, but the attacks on Eliot went far beyond the attempt to historicize him and to judge him by standards other than his own. Attacks on Eliot and modernism abated in the 1980s; he is returning as a positive reference point in modern letters and his position as one of the century's finest poets is secure."

It helps us to know that *The Waste Land* has aroused puzzlement among its readers from its very publication. As Harriet Davidson comments, "the poem's lack of thematic clarity and its careful refusal of connections between images, scenes and voices, makes *The Waste Land* particularly open to different interpretations. In fact, it is a measure of the poem's indigestibility that many of the controversies surrounding the poem when it was published in 1922 persist today. Readers in the twenties argued over whether the poem was too radical and meaningless or too conservative and tied to traditional values. New readers are still likely to come away from the poem bewildered by the many voices, allusions, and shifting tones of the poem. And professional critics still argue over the most basic of issues: what voice, if any, dominates the poem, what themes control the poem, and what values are upheld by the poem?"

Davidson continues to say –"Given these unresolved questions, it seems surprising that the poem has come to seem such a monolithic representative of the long dominant New Critical values.

3.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

In 1919 we find the first mention of *The Waste Land* as a poem that Eliot had had in mind. But it was almost a decade in the making as Eliot wrote fragments that later went into making up the complete poem. Eliot seems to have worked consistently on the poem around 1921, under difficult personal circumstances, at first calling it, 'He do the Police in different voices'. It finally came out in full form in the *Criterion* in October 1922, having been through the hands of Ezra Pound. The American edition came out in December 1922; in September 1923, the Woolfs brought it out under the imprint of the Hogarth Press. Regarding Eliot's notes to the poem, Manju Jain tells us, "The published editions of the poem differed from the magazine versions by the addition of Eliot's notes. Eliot had at first intended only to put down all the references for his quotations to avoid the charges of plagiarism which had been levelled at his earlier poems. But the poem was still not long enough for publication as a book, so he expanded the notes, to which he later mockingly referred as his 'remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship'. . . Pound's editing streamlined the poem, and gave it greater unity and coherence. He cut away material that he thought extraneous, and located the underlying rhythm and music of the poem. Pound did not add anything to the poem. His main contribution, as Moody suggest, was to discriminate between what was veritable and genuine, and the false or factitious writing, and so to elicit what Eliot had actually achieved."

If we choose to read the poem in autobiographical terms, we still come up with Eliot's deep concern with the crises surrounding him. Jain informs us, that "Eliot was deeply affected by the political and economic crisis in Europe during and after the First World War. During the War, he wrote to his father (23 December 1917), 'everyone's individual lives are so swallowed up in the one great tragedy that one almost ceases to have personal experiences or emotions, and such as one has seem so unimportant . . . I have a lot of things to write about if the time ever comes when people will attend to them' ". Jain also remarks that "Recent criticism has emphasized the

confessional, autobiographical aspects of *The Waste Land*. The poem's critique of the contemporary post-War scene has been interpreted as a strategy Eliot used for presenting indirectly his spiritual autobiography in an age that was not conducive to the genre." However, the personal autobiography cannot be set apart from how he felt profoundly disturbed by the larger circumstances of his time.

3.6 READING THE POEM

3.6.1 THE TITLE OF THE POEM

Eliot said in his notes that he took the idea from *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) by Jessie Weston. Together with *The Golden Bough* (1890) by Sir James Frazer, these two works of anthropology gave to Eliot the main ideas behind the poem. Frazer's work was a study of myth and ritual in primitive society and exerted an enormous influence on Eliot's generation, especially in literary circles. Without going into too much detail, we have to note Frazer's findings that the myth of the dying and the resurrected god was important in primitive rituals of fertility. The god, who is central to this cult, is the god of the vegetative world and his death and resurrection enacts the yearly cycle of seasons. Primitive religions saw life and fertility as being indivisible thus linking variations in the processes of growth and decay, as also in reproduction and degeneration, to the death, rebirth and marriage of the gods. By performing certain rites believed to hold magical powers, such societies hoped to help the god, who was the principle of life. These rituals were enactments of the death, or the burial, or the drowning, or the resurrection of the god.

Jessie Weston's study of the Grail legend in *From Ritual to Romance* contained her discussion of the striking resemblances between some features of the legend and the primitive cults of the dying and the resurrected god of the vegetative world. Weston observed that no Christian legend surrounding Joseph of Arimathea (a disciple of Christ) and the Grail existed. According to her, in some versions of the legend the ruler of the Waste Land also appeared as the Fisher King. As per Christian interpretations, the name of the Fisher King harked back to the fish symbol of early Christianity, as seen in such epithets as 'Fishers of Men' by which the Apostles were to be known. The fish, as Weston confirms, was an ancient symbol of 'Life' and

thus the title of the Fisher has been associated with the deities who were connected with the generation and preservation of life. The Grail legend, seen against this background, appears to be a surviving version of the ancient rite that promised the secret of the physical and spiritual sources of life. Through various transformations, the god of the 'Life Principle' and the accompanying symbolism came to be taken over by the legend of the Christian faith.

Stop to Consider:

The Grail Legend

"The Grail was the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. According to the legend, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Christ, caught the blood from the wound made in Christ's side at the crucifixion in this cup and brought it to Glastonbury in the West of England. The scriptures, however, only mention that Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Christ, wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid it in a tomb hewn out of a rock. The Grail was subsequently lost, and the search for it became an archetypal symbol of the quest for spiritual truth, especially in medieval romances about King Arthur and his knights. . . The search for the Grail is undertaken by a knight whose quest takes him to a land which has been laid waste. The ruler of the land suffers from impotency, either by illness or by maiming. His infirmity brings about a suspension of the reproductive processes of nature, and there is a prolonged drought. The knight meets with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious chapel – the Chapel Perilous – where he is expected to put certain questions about the Grail and another holy relic, the Lance which pierced Christ's side. The effect of the hero's questions is to restore the rivers to their channels – the 'Freeing of the Waters' – and render the land once more fertile. In some versions of the legend the king is also restored to health and vigour. Jessie Weston concludes that the task of the Grail hero in this respect is no mere literary invention, but a heritage from prehistoric times, going back to the Rig Veda." (Manju Jain: *T.S. Eliot*: *Selected Poems and A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*)

There are other possible associations that link the title of the poem to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine where it is written: "I wandered, O my God, too much astray from Thee my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to myself a waste land." There are also references in the Bible to images of

the vineyard that will become a waste land through the wrath of God: "And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it" [Isaiah v, 6]. But as Manju Jain suggests, the title also resonates with ideas of the wasting of contemporary of Europe, or the waste regions of the human psyche and consciousness, the idea of sterility which is both physical and emotional, and even spiritual.

For Ezra Pound *il miglior fabbro* : Ezra Pound was one of the founding figures of the modernist movement, an American poet and critic. "il miglior fabbro" is taken from Dante's *Purgatorio* (xxvi, 117) in the tribute to Arnaut Daniel, the twelfth-century Provençal poet. Eliot's explanation for this phrase was that "I wished ...to honour the technical mastery and critical ability manifest in his own work, which had also done so much to turn *The Waste Land* from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem".

3.6.2 THE EPIGRAPH

It is taken from a satire, the *Satyricon*, of the 1st century AD, written by the Roman writer Petronius. These words are spoken by Trimalchio who is drunkenly boasting. His words, as translated, are: "For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, "Sibyl, what do you want?" she answered, "I want to die."

The Sibyls, in Greek mythology, were women with prophetic powers. The Sibyl who lived at Cumae (the ancient city close to Naples) was granted long life by the god, Apollo, as she had been granted the boon by him. While she had asked for as many years of life as the number of grains of sand that her hand held, she had not cared to ask for eternal youth. Through these words, Eliot is able to bring in the idea of death-in-life.

In the poem, the Sibyl evokes associations with both Tiresias and Madame Sosostris. While these figures all share the idea of prophecy and clairvoyance, you can see that they also carry ideas of aging and decline.

SAQ:

What kind of mythical associations does Eliot seek to bring to mind with the words, 'the waste land'? (90 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

3.6.3 THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

The title of this first section of the poem echoes the title of the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer – 'The Order for the Burial of the Dead' – in the Church of England.

"April is the cruellest month, breeding . . .

A little life with dried tubers." We normally think of April, the month of the season of spring, as a time of joy and celebration after the harsh coldness of winter. But here this is reversed as if to say that the return to life and growth is painful because in many ways, to many people, oblivion and ignorance of reality is preferable to being painfully aware. Eliot is being perhaps ironical by echoing a common feeling – that consciousness is difficult and therefore to be like the dead even while living, is better. Setting this in the context of what the title gives us, the growth of lilacs in a land already known to be dead, the stirring to life of roots dulled in aridity with the falling of spring rain, the removal of the blanket of forgetfulness brought by the snow, all these images pronounce the pain of life and growth amidst death-dealing waste. Moreover, April is the month of Easter when Christ was crucified and then resurrected. So Eliot begins with the theme of death-in-life and the pain of the renewal of life.

To see snow as keeping us "warm" is only apparently contradictory because under the layer of snow, life is maintained. The mixing of memory with desire may allude to a novel by Charles-Louis Philippe, as well as 'Weddah and Om-el-Bonain' by James Thomson (1834-82), a narrative poem centred on death and burial. A poem by James Thomson, 'To Our Ladies of Death' contains the lines: "Our Mother feedeth thus our little life,/ That

we in turn may feed her with our death" which then proceed with speculation on the way in which the dead body will later mingle with the soil, "One part of me shall feed a little worm . . . One thrill sweet grass, one pulse in bitter weed." In a deadened, apathetic life consciousness acts unwillingly, in small parts.

SAQ:
Who is the "us" in these lines ? Is it the same "us" that appears in the later line, "we stopped in the colonnade" ? Would you call it the same as the one that speaks in German in line 12 ? (30 words)
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Hofgarten: in Munich, a public park

"Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Lituaen, . . .

I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter." Jain suggests Eliot had met the Countess Marie Larisch, writer of *My Past* (1913), and the description of the sledding probably came from this meeting. However, as we read these lines we are also led by the poet to imagine the contemporary European scene with its decadence.

"Bin gar keine. . .": this is a quotation from the Countess Marie's conversation and refers to the question of racial purity that had become an issue of great moment among Germans. It says, "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am a real German". In the background of such a statement lies the subjection of Lithuania to Russia, which Germany claimed and occupied briefly in 1917. So the Countess here is claiming a German identity; such identity would not have been of much consequence then but it does go to show the simmering political tensions lying below the surface in Europe in the period of the world wars.

What are the roots that clutch, . . .stony rubbish ? The image here, of roots clinging to an arid life is an allusion to the Book of Job viii, 11-13, 16-17: "Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water . . His roots are wrapped about the heap, and seeth the place of stones."

Son of man: Eliot refers us here, in his notes, to Ezekiel ii, 1, where God addresses the prophet, Ezekiel, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee." Ezekiel had to spread the word of God among the unbelieving, rebellious people of Israel.

broken images: a biblical allusion to Ezekiel vi, 6, to God's pronouncement on the Israelites who worshipped idols –" and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down".

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief: Eliot refers us to Ecclesiastes xii, 5 where the preacher preaches of the vanity of life and that the faithful must remember God even in their youth.

There is shadow under this red rock . . . Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you: In an early poem ('The Death of Saint Narcissus'), Eliot had written –

"Come under the shadow of this grey rock
Come in under the shadow of this grey rock
And I will show you a shadow different from either
Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak . . ."

There are also biblical resonances: Isaiah ii, 10, "Enter into the rock, and hide there in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty". In Isaiah xxxii, 2, "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". In Corinthians x, 3-5, Christ is described as the 'spiritual Rock'. But in *The Waste Land* the shadow of the rock only reminds us of our mortality, it does not give shelter or comfort. There is an insistence on "shadow"; on the one hand, the allusion to Job viii, 9, "we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow", and also we have the vision of mortality in the shadow of the rock, that negates the Romantic notion of the individual self.

I will show you fear in a handful of dust: dust symbolizes physical mortality as the body turns into dust after death. In Ecclesiastes xii, 5,7, the preacher emphasises that the physical being will return to dust. John Donne, in Meditation IV of *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), "what's become of man's great extent and proportion, when himself shrinks himself, and consumes himself to a handful of dust . . .". Marlow, in Conrad's story, 'Youth', is nostalgic about youth's illusions: "the heat of life in a handful of

dust". But Eliot changes this to fear being revealed in a handful of dust. We must also remember the Sibyl's request for immortality based on the grains of sand she held in her hand.

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind

Wo weilest du? Eliot's shows this allusion to refer to Richard Wagner's opera, *Tristan und Isolde* (*Tristan and Isolde*), I, 5-8. A sailor's song which begins the opera, "The wind blows fresh to the homeland. My Irish girl, where are you lingering?" does not refer to Isolde, she supposes that it does and is enraged. We can detect a subtle hint of foreboding in these lines. In the story, Isolde is brought by Tristan from Ireland to Cornwall to marry his old uncle, the king of Cornwall. On the voyage, Tristan falls in love with Isolde having accidentally drunk of a magical potion. Eliot's quotation is aimed in evoking the entire romance and act a prelude to the lines that follow describing the events in the hyacinth garden. Hyacinths symbolize the resurrected god of the fertility rites. The Greek mythological figure, Hyacinth, was killed in an accident and a flower grew from his blood. In the play, *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) by August Strindberg, a final scene takes place in a room full of hyacinths. Hyacinths also evoke emotional feelings of desire and poignancy.

—Yet when we came back, late, . . .seems to refer to the recollections of a passionate romantic moment. But that moment was full of contradictions –both rapture and the suspension of feeling.

Oed' und leer das Meer. : "Desolate and empty the sea". This is taken from the last act of Wagner's opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, where Tristan is lying wounded and waiting for Isolde. The shepherd who is keeping a watch looking out to sea for signs of her arrival, can see no sail approaching. The speaker in the poem is desolate, in a fashion similar to the speaker in the opera, as desolation marks both the situations of the two speakers.What is highlighted is the sense of desolation but unlike the story of Tristan and Isolde where love is exalted through death, the situation of the speaker in the poem does not hold out the possibility of such transcendence.

Madame Sosostris contains a reference to *Crome Yellow* (1921) by Aldous Huxley in which a male character dresses up as a gypsy woman

calling himself, 'Sesostris', who tells fortunes. Eliot may have aimed at ridiculing Madame Blavatsky, the Russian spiritualist, and the practice of fortune-telling. The Anglican burial service pleaded for foresight ("Lord, let me know mine end.") and Eliot seemed to have considered fortunetelling as a parody of this plea. So Madame Sosostris does not have spiritual powers and cannot find the 'Hanged Man'. Eliot, in his notes, identified the Hanged Man with the hooded figure of Christ.

wicked pack of cards: the Tarot pack of cards, made up of 22 picture cards, of which 21 are numbered, allegorically representing material forces, virtues, vices, and natural elements. The last card is the fool (precursor of the joker). Later, 56 numeral cards were combined, thus bringing up the total to 78. These cards were the first playing cards in Europe but were probably first used in telling fortunes. In divination, meaning was assigned to the cards, while the meaning got modified in combination with other cards and with how the client appeared to the seer. Weston, in her study, surmised that the original use of the Tarot was to foretell the rise and fall in the waters which brought fertility to the soil.

Phoenician Sailor symbolising the fertility god. The image of this god used to be thrown into the sea at the end of summer symbolizing its death. The image would later be reclaimed to symbolize his resurrection, the renewal of life with spring. In section IV this figure reappears as Phlebas. Phoenicia, in ancient times, was the region that now is Lebanon adjoining modern Syria and Israel.

(Those are pearls that were his eyes . .) In Shakespeare's *Tempest* these lines are from Ariel's song in Act I, sc.i. They refer to the fears of Ferdinand that Alonso, his father, has drowned and Ariel then consoles him with these words.

Belladonna: in Italian, 'beautiful lady'; also the name of a poisonous plant an extract from which is used by women to enlarge the pupil of the eye. Belladonna was also one of the three Fates of classical legend. Combined with these various associations, the **Lady of the Rocks** brings in an allusion to Walter Pater's discussion of da Vinci's famous portrait 'Mona Lisa' (or La Gioconda). The discussion shows the lady to be mysterious, darkly secretive, like a vampire. In Eliot's poetry "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks" is the image of a dangerous and seductive woman, a threat to the speaker or persona.

Man with three staves; Wheel; one-eyed merchant; Hanged Man : figures in the Tarot pack. Where the speaker (Madame Sosostris) says that the card is blank, it could be that she is just speculating because there is actually no blank card in the Tarot pack and if she is being forbidden to see what is the 'something' that the merchant is carrying on his back, it shows her limitations as well as surrounding her with a mysterious world of the occult. As for the hanged figure, Eliot says in his notes that he is referring to the Hanged God mentioned by Frazer. Eliot, tries to conflate this figure with that of the hooded figure in lines 362 – 363 in part V of the poem, the figure of Christ who was crucified on a cross. The Tarot-card figure of the hanged man shows a youth hanging by one foot from a T-shaped cross.

Mrs Equitone: Eliot interposes a name which is satirical; one of Madame Sosostris's clients.

Unreal City : Eliot's note quotes from Charles Baudelaire's poem in French 'Les Septs Viellards' (or, The Seven Old Men) the opening lines – "swarming city, city full of dreams, / Where in broad daylight the spectre stops the passer-by". Eliot acknowledged his debt to Baudelaire for having been shown "the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic."

I had not thought death had undone so many : Eliot refers us to Dante's *Inferno* iii, 55-7, "so long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone so many". In Dante's poem, this is the scene when the poet sees on the outskirts of hell all those souls who had displeased God, having lived without praise or infamy, having chosen neither the good or the evil and thus welcome neither in heaven or in hell. They "never were alive", nor had they "hope of death". But in Eliot's poem, this is the description of the workers on their way to work in the City district of London, the commercial heart of London.

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled : Eliot recalls Dante's *Inferno*, iv, 25-7 –"Here there was no plaint, that could be heard, except of sighs, which caused the eternal air to tremble". These sighs emanate from the souls in Limbo; souls unbaptized though virtuous, not redeemed by worship of God, condemned not to be saved but to live without hope.

Jain tells us that Eliot explained his use of Dante's lines with these words: "Readers of my *Waste Land* will perhaps remember that the vision of my city clerks trooping over London Bridge from the railway station to their offices evoked the reflection 'I had not thought death had undone so many'; and that in another place I deliberately modified a line of Dante by altering it—'sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled'. And I gave the references in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it." Eliot also said that he borrowed lines from Dante 'in the attempt to reproduce, or rather to arouse in the reader's mind the memory, of some Dantesque scene, and establish, a relationship between the medieval inferno and modern life.'"

King William Street; Saint Mary Woolnoth: London landmarks

'Stetson!' : American hat manufacturing company thus the name of the broad-rimmed, high-crowned hat worn especially by cowboys of the American mid-West; Stetson was also the name of the hat worn by the Australian and New Zealand forces; Ezra Pound is also known to have favoured a sombrero-stetson. One reading of this is that Stetson is the persona's 'alter ego', suggesting a split self.

Mylae : in 260 BC, Mylae (ancient city in north Sicily) was the site of a battle between Rome and Carthage.

That corpse you planted last year . . .the sudden frost disturbed its bed? : there is an association here with Frazer's account of the priests who buried effigies, made of corn and earth, of Osiris at the festival of sowing. Later, when the effigies were brought up, the corn would have sprouted from the body of Osiris, thus the sprouted grain were hailed as the cause of the crop. But the metaphor of the corpse also points to the buried self, the hidden parts of the self, the life within unseen by others.

Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men : the ordinary idea of the dog being friends with men is also combined with the idea present in the Old Testament that the dog is a threat. In the Bible, Psalms xxii, 16-20, the Lord's help is sought –"For dogs have compassed me: The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: They pierced my hands and my feet . . .Deliver my soul from the sword; My darling from the power of the dog". Eliot's note refers us to John Webster's *The White Devil*, Act V, iv, to the dirge

sung by Cornelia for her son – “But keep the wolf far thence, that’s foe to men, / For with his nails he’ll dig them up again”.

You! hypocrite lecteur! –mon semblable, —mon frère! :Eliot mentions in his notes Baudelaire’s poems *Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil), and quotes the final line of the prefatory poem –‘Au Lecteur’ (To the Reader) ‘O hypocrite reader, my fellow-man, my brother!’ Baudelaire’s attempt is to make the reader confront within himself the spiritual emptiness, the vice of ennui, which is common to both reader and poet.

SAQ:

How important is it for the reader to know of the Old Testament, the Bible, the story of Tristan and Isolde, Dante’s great poem, and other literary sources, in order to adequately respond to Eliot’s characteristic mode of poetic construction ? Give your opinion. (80 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Stop to Consider:

Allusions in Eliot’s Poetry

“Allusions was one of the badges of Eliot’s professionalism.” James Longenbach’s statement here is part of his explanation as to why Eliot made use of allusions in his poetry. Longenbach infers that “Eliot self-consciously made his poetry difficult, the property of a specialist, in order to increase the status of poets”. Further, Longenbach leads us to understand that “In more ways than one, . . Eliot’s allusions were part of a self-consciously political program. . . Despite the ways in which Eliot manipulated allusions in his poems, the practice of allusion came naturally to him, and he often expressed his deepest feelings through allusions.”

Longenbach goes on to comment: “Throughout *The Waste Land* Eliot’s allusions generally do not seem simply ironic (contrasting past and present) because they are presented in dramatic contexts: the allusions are spoken by dramatic voices in particular scenarios, and the aural quality of the poem often makes the echoes seem less learned than ghostly – as if other voices were speaking from the past.”

Longenbach’s explanation may be helpful in understanding how the allusions

work –"In the Unreal City" passage which concludes the first part of *The Waste Land* (lines 60-76), for instance, Eliot begins by alluding to Baudelaire's "Les sept Vieillards," moves on to the *Inferno* ("I had not thought death had undone so many"), then to the hour of Christ's crucifixion ("a dead sound on the final stroke of nine"), to the Punic Wars ("You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!"), to Webster's *White Devil* ("Oh keep the Dog far hence that's friend to men"), and finally back to Baudelaire's preface to the *Fleurs du Mal* ("You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, - mon frère!"). All these references are folded into what begins as a naturalistic description of the City of London . . but then becomes an increasingly horrific city of dreams. The allusions, by relating modern London to medieval Florence, ancient Greece, and nineteenth-century Paris, suggest that this condition is neither unique nor insurmountable. In *The Waste Land* . . .the wide field of references are folded into the present to remind us of historical continuity and show us the way out of our predicament – they are "fragments . . shored against my ruins".(line 430)

3.6.4 A GAME OF CHESS

One of the main themes in this section is, as Jain suggests, the negation of romantic love. Three sources are suggested for the title of the section: the play *A Game at Chess* by Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) as well as another by him, *Women Beware Women*; 'In the Cage', a short story by Henry James. In line with the theme of the section, —the "predicament of the trapped characters" – we refer also to the passage from Petronius which depicted the Sibyl hanging from a cage and then also to Virginia Woolf's story, 'An Unwritten Novel'. Eliot refers to *Women Beware Women*, in which the game of chess is played in the foreground by the duke's accomplice, Livia, with Bianca's mother-in-law to distract her while Bianca is forcibly seduced by the duke in the background. Every move in the game has its counterpart in the manoeuvres of the duke. The original title of the section was suggested by the passage from Petronius, while in James' story the heroine is a young woman who works in a telegraph office making her feel as though she is a guinea-pig trapped in a cage.

From the line **The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne** till the line **In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam**, we are given (as Jain reads) "the literary tradition of fatal romantic passion. The artificial, stilted, cloying style and diction satirize the sensibility and mode of expression of this tradition".

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne Eliot's note refers us to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, II,ii –"The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne". But Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra's grand barge and the meeting with Antony is not ironical as in the passage here but you should be familiar here with the story of the famous love affair of Antony and Cleopatra and how it brought a tragic end to its protagonists.

From satin cases ... the image of the woman at the dressing-table also is reminiscent of a similar description of Belinda in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. Pope's poem is a satire so the depiction of Belinda was satirical.

laquaeria: Eliot alludes to Virgil's *Aeneid*, i, 726, which reads "flaming torches hang from the golden-panelled ceiling, and the night is pierced by the flaring lights" –lines relating to the banquet given by Dido, Queen of Carthage, in honour of Aeneas. Aeneas finally deserts Dido who then destroyed herself on a funeral pyre.

The lines of this section thus evoke associations of stories of love and passion which end in death and destruction. We have to read the lines against what follows, beginning with the rape of Philomela, preceded by Eliot's reference (in the words **sylvan** scene) to the lines in *Paradise Lost*, Canto IV, when Satan arrives at the garden of Eden.

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king : Eliot refers us to the Roman poet, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which recounts the Greek myth wherein the tongue of Philomela was torn off by King Tereus of Thrace, to prevent her from telling others of his raping her. When she revealed the violation to her sister Procne by weaving words into a garment, Tereus pursued her with an axe, whereupon the gods changed her into a nightingale.

And still she cried, and still the world pursues note the abrupt change from past tense to present continuous highlighting the continuity between past and present. Eliot is suggesting here that the plight of Philomela continues into the present.

'Jug Jug' to dirty ears: Jain's reading of this line will help you —"A conventional way of representing bird-song in Elizabethan poetry; it was also a crude joking reference to sexual intercourse. The contrast here is between the pure song of the nightingale which cannot be violated or profaned, as was Philomela, and the vulgar interpretations of the song. Paradoxically, however, the song is violated by the crude interpretations given to it."

SAQ:

The reference to Philomela highlights an important aspect of Eliot's thoughts regarding society and culture – how would you frame this ? (70 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

'What is that noise?' /The wind under the door . . . Is there nothing in your head?'

Several associations come in here : *The White Devil* by John Webster contains the lines –

"Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle questions, — /I am i'th' way to study a long silence,/ To prate were idle, —I remember nothing. / There's nothing of so infinite vexation / A man's own thoughts." Also, in *King Lear*, I, i, Lear warns Cordelia: "Nothing will come of nothing." In *Hamlet*, III, ii, Ophelia tells Hamlet, "I think nothing, my lord".

The wind under the door: Eliot refers us to a line from John Webster's *The Devil's Law Case*, III, ii : "Is the wind in that door still?" (spoken by one surgeon to another when he hears the groan of a man assumed dead.).

I remember/ Those are pearls that were his eyes: Eliot's note to the line **Are you alive . . .'in your head?'** refers us back to the hyacinth garden. We can even presume that the speaker here is the same as the woman in the hyacinth garden in the first section.

Jain's reading of these lines is:

"There is an implied allusion to Paolo and Francesca, who are in the second circle of Dante's *Inferno*, which contains the souls of those who had subjected reason to lust. Francesca tells Dante: 'There is no greater pain than to recall a happy time in wretchedness' (*Inferno* v, 121-3). The earlier drafts make the allusion more explicit. In response to the woman's distraught question, 'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?' (l.119), the persona silently comments, 'Carrying / Away the little light dead people.' This alludes to Dante's desire to speak to Paolo and Francesca: 'Willingly

would I speak with those two that go together, and seem so light upon the wind' (*Inferno*, v, 73-5) The souls of the lustful are carried along by an infernal hurricane which never rests. Dido and Cleopatra, alluded to in the opening passage of 'A Game of Chess', also inhabit this circle of hell. Francesca and Paolo are condemned to be eternally bound to each other, as are the couple in 'A Game of Chess'."

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—/It's so elegant/ So intelligent: 'Rag' is the name given to one form of jazz music for dancing, very popular about the time of the First World War. There was an American ragtime hit of 1912 which Eliot draws upon ("That Shakesperian Rag/ Most intelligent, very elegant,/ That old classical drag,/ Has the proper stuff . . .") 'O O O O' echoes both Hamlet's last utterance (in the Folio version) and Othello. This line is a retort to the earlier taunt of the woman –'Is there nothing in your head?' – but it also brings out the inner torment of the persona.

I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/ With my hair down, so.: in the line earlier (92) where there was an allusion to the banquet scene in the *Aeneid*, in honour of Aeneas, a correspondence was already set up between the woman of this section and Dido, Queen of Carthage. The correspondence is ironic and here Dido's frenzy on Aeneas deserting her is recalled through this line. Dido is in her palace in Carthage.

demobbed: slang, abbreviation of "demobilized", meaning, released from military service

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME: call of the bartender at closing time in British pubs (a pub is a kind of restaurant which serves liquor and snacks). But here we can also hear echoes of Andrew Marvell's poem, 'To His Coy Mistress' which contains the lines "But at my back I always hear / Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near"

gammon ham or bacon.

Good night, ladies, . . . good night: echoing Ophelia's last words in *Hamlet* (IV, v) when she drowns herself. There is less of an ironic contrast here between the suffering of Ophelia and the woman of the passage – both are victims. The other women in this section were also victims. Lil's story may sound coarse but it is one of pain and suffering. The whole passage relating to Lil does not really reflect natural speech rhythms but is better viewed as

stylized utterances in the manner of music-hall comedy. We have seen here in this section two contrasting couples, one neurotic and locked in a sterile relationship, the other locked in physical fecundity. The title is applicable to both the couples – neither relationship is fulfilling to the couple. However, Lil and Albert have more companionship. As Jain reads, "Eliot is concerned with the problem of sexual morality, and with relationships without love, irrespective of class."

Stop to Consider:

European civilization and Eliot

Eliot's deep concern with the state of society in Europe is apparent in *The Waste Land*. We learn from Manju Jain that some interpreted the poem as "an imperial epic" or "an image of imperial catastrophe". But in a 1919 review, "Eliot distanced himself from imperialism and drew a connection between Romanticism and imperialism. . . . Eliot went on [with reference to George Wyndham's *Essays in Romantic Literature*] to suggest tentatively the political ramifications of the relationship between Romanticism and imperialism: 'It would be of interest to divagate from literature to politics and inquire to what extent Romanticism is incorporate in Imperialism; to what extent Romanticism has possessed the imagination of Imperialists, and to what extent it was made use of by Disraeli'. Given Eliot's distrust of Romanticism for its self-evasion, individualism and lack of restraint, it would be easy to infer that he extends his criticism to imperialism as well. The naive Romanticism of attitudes such as those of Wyndham, Eliot suggests, were exploited by imperialist politicians such as Disraeli.

In a later essay Eliot asserted a continuity between the Roman empire and the contemporary civilization of Europe: 'We are all, so far as we inherit the civilization of Europe, still citizens of the Roman Empire.' However, Eliot went on to emphasize the disparity between the ideal of the Roman empire which Virgil imagined, and the political reality—'the Roman Empire of the legionaries, the pro-consuls and governors, the business men and speculators, the demagogues and generals.' Virgil's concept, according to Eliot, 'remains an ideal', the highest for 'any merely temporal empire'. It was left to Christianity to develop and to cherish this ideal, for the Roman empire 'was transformed into the Holy roman Empire'."

You can see for yourself the characteristics of Eliot's sweeping gaze over history and over civilizations. With regard to his critical view of the past, Peter Dale Scott notes: "Eliot's remapping of the past helped authorize his famous question, still unanswered, in response to England's capitulation at Munich in 1938: "Was our society . . . assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of

banks, insurance companies, and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends?" One need not be an Anglo-Catholic to share this cultural anxiety, which as Eliot noted was not a simple criticism of a government, but a doubt about the validity of a civilization".

Another critic writes, "Eliot's awareness of tribal cultures, their religious sensibilities and their potential for art was also intense but critical, engaging him both at the intellectual and the emotional levels, but almost always with an awareness of countervailing points of view. Eliot's reading in anthropology provided him not simply with material for cross-cultural comparison but with the concrete details of cultic observances from which he constructed virtual worlds of belief and sensibility. . . .By undertaking a serious "suspension of belief" in the presuppositions of his own culture, and by regarding these other points of view as genuinely *possible*, Eliot was able to explore with authenticity and conviction worlds of otherness closed to many of his predecessors and contemporaries."(Cleo McNelly Kearns)

Check Your Progress:

1. Explore with close textual analysis the basis of the view that "in general, the allusions in *The Waste Land* disperse clear meanings into other contexts, undermine the notion of authentic speaking, and blur boundaries between texts."

2. Elaborate the ways in which the persona in the *The Waste Land* becomes a device to foreground historical continuities as well as historical dislocations. What is the role assigned to the figure of Tiresias and the voice of the thunder in this connection?

3. Write explanatory notes on (i) 'Desolate and empty the sea', (ii) '*Da*'; (iii) I had not thought death had undone so many; (iv) 'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, — mon frère!'

3.6.5 THE FIRE SERMON

The Fire Sermon was preached by the Buddha (c.563 BC – c. 483 BC) "against the fires of passion, hatred and infatuation".

The river's tent is broken : at one level this is a naturalistic description of the leafy cover over the river now broken because summer is over. The leaves are now fallen; we find a suggestion of something of value having

been lost, perhaps something precious enough to be sacred. But the word 'tent' in the Old Testament also referred to the 'tabernacle' (Jain: "a wooden framework covered with curtains, carried through the wilderness in the Exodus by the wandering tribes of Israel as a place of sacrifice and worship"). Jain reads into these lines a "contrast between the violation of the river's tent which the speaker mourns, and the permanence and sanctity promised in Isaiah xxxiii, 20-1: 'Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.' "

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song. . . Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed." Eliot refers us, in his notes, to Edmund Spenser's 'Prothalamion' which was written to celebrate the joys and ideals of marriage, in honour of the double wedding of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester in 1596. The scene is set on the Thames strewn with flowers from the nymphs of the river ('All lovely Daughters of the Flood') on the bridal day. Eliot underlines the contrast between the sordid filthy present and the pastoral vision of Spenser but this contrast is not absolute. Jain points to an ambivalence in it –"It preserves an elegiac feeling for what is lost and also undercuts Spenser's idyllic world. We are reminded, too, of the drowned Ophelia, who was to have been Hamlet's bride. The nymphs – those of Spenser's poem, and the girls in the modern city deserted by the heirs of city directors—are departed because summer is over and because Spenser's world no longer exists. The equation of Spenser's nymphs with those of the modern city suggests that Spenser's pastoral world existed only as a literary artifact, and was an idealized poetic fancy. Spenser, too, postulated a future golden world, and realized that it was imperilled."

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept. . . Psalms cxxxvii, 1-4, where the psalmist laments recalling the Israelites longing for their homeland as they wandered in exile in Babylonia –"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion". As Leman can also stand for one who is the object of illicit passion, 'the waters of Leman' brings in associations with the fires of lust. But here it is joined to the Thames both of Spenser's imagination as well as of contemporary London. A feeling

of alienation of the persona from the contemporary scene enters through the biblical reference, and a longing for a different world. From November 1921, while recovering from a nervous breakdown in Lausanne, the town close to Lake Geneva (Lake Leman in French) in Switzerland, Eliot continued with the writing of *The Waste Land.*

But at my back in a cold blast I hear. . . spread from ear to ear.: ironic parody of the line in Marvell's poem, 'To His Coy Mistress', "But at my back I always hear . . hurrying near" . This reverses the lyrical imagery of the preceding lines, drawing on Spenserian resonances.

While I was fishing in the dull canal: the speaker makes an ironic identification with the Fisher King

Musing upon the king my brother's wreck/ And on the king my father's death before him. Eliot refers to ***The Tempest*** I,ii, where Ferdinand mourns his father's death. As Jain points out, the Fisher King begins to be identified now with the brother instead of with the persona, shifting again to his father, while the persona becomes identified with Ferdinand.

White bodies naked on the low damp ground. . . year to year: the speaker continues with the idea of death but in contrast to the images in Ariel's song or the vision of death in the fertility rites as the prelude to new life

SAQ:

What is the poetic strategy by which Eliot sustains, without losing sight of it, the recurrent strain of the associations with the fertility rite, the cycle of birth and death, the renewal of life, and the god of life and death? (90 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

But at my back from time to time I hear: again the reference to Marvell's lines

The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring/Sweeney to Mrs Porter in the spring: Eliot's reference is to *The Parliament of Bees* by John Day (1574-1640?) wherein occur the lines:

'When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,
A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
Where all shall see her naked skin.'

In the Greek legend, Actaeon was the huntsman who came Diana (the goddess of chastity) bathing with her nymphs. He was thus turned into a stag as punishment, then was torn to pieces by his own hounds. We also have to refer to Eliot's response to Stravinsky's music which, he thought, transformed the "barbaric cries of modern life" into music. Here Sweeney will come upon Mrs Porter; Sweeney figures in other poems by Eliot as the "natural, sensual man".

O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter /And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water: Eliot writes in his note that these lines are from an Australian ballad in Sydney, sung by Australian troops in the First World War – "O the moon shines bright on Mrs Porter / And on the daughter of Mrs Porter. / And they both wash their feet in soda water / And so they oughter / To keep them clean". In some versions of the ballad, it is pointed out by Jain, Mrs Porter was a legendary brothel-keeper in Cairo.

Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!: Eliot points to Paul Verlaine's (1844-96) sonnet, 'Parsifal' –"And, O those children's voices singing in the dome." Manju Jain explains in detail: "Parsifal, having conquered the temptation of lust and cured the king of his wound, adores the Grail and hears the voices of children singing in the dome. Verlaine is referring to Wagner's *Parsifal* and its music, where the voices in the dome and the knights join in a song of praise and gratitude to Christ the Saviour. Before he heals Amfortas, the king, Parsifal's feet are bathed with water from the holy spring by the now repentant temptress Kundry. The ceremonial washing of feet is parodied in the preceding lines on Mrs Porter. The quotation evokes the indescribable yearning expressed in Verlaine's poem. There is also an ironic awareness that such aspiration perhaps exists only in poetry, and that it may be merely a rhetorical device."

Stop to Consider:

Meaning by Allusion

Harriet Davidson, a critic, observes that "The function of allusion in *The Waste Land* has been much debated; allusion can be considered a metaphoric device, which depends on similarities between the text alluded to and the present text. But allusion is also a dispersive figure, multiplying contexts for both the present work and the text alluded to and suggesting a cultural, historical dimension of difference. For instance, the jolting allusion to *Tristan und Isolde* . . has a certain propriety for the poem because of its theme of tragic love and its images of fresh wind and water complementing the stirrings of April. But the reader is first struck by the different, perhaps unfamiliar, language and scene, which needs translation, interpretation, and contextualizing. While it is surely a relief to turn away from the chilling symbolism of the "handful of dust" . .the reader ends up in a land of confusing particularity and unfulfilled desires."

So rudely forc'd: referring to the rape of Philomela

Tereu: the Latin vocative form of Tereus, the violator of Philomela. John Lyly (1554-1606?) gives this interpretation in *Alexander and Campaspe* of the nightingale's song –'Oh, 'tis the ravished nightingale. / *Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu!* she cries'.

Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant: one of the early seats of Christianity, it is modern Izmir in Turkey, a great trading port of Asia Minor once upon a time; one of the seven churches in Asia named in the New Testament. As Eliot composed his poem, Smyrna was of great interest being taken over by Greek forces in May 1919 but recaptured by the Turks in 1922. Through parody Mr Eugenides is associated with the Fool in the Tarot pack of cards, and also with the Syrian merchants who spread knowledge of the Attis and Mithra cults across the Roman empire.

Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants. . . weekend at the Metropole: Eliot claimed that this was based on an actual experience.

C.i.f.: "Cost, insurance and freight"

documents at sight: relating to the business transaction in the course of which "the documents of ownership and transport would be handed to the purchaser in exchange for a bank draft payable on sight."

demotic French: French as popularly spoken. Mr Eugenides's name means 'the well-born'; he speaks demotic French, sells currants in London, comes from Smyrna – he is cosmopolitan.

Metropole: fashionable hotel in the south of England, on the coast, in Brighton. A "weekend in Brighton" implied an invitation to casual sex.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back. . . Her stove, and lays out food in tins.:

in the background we have Dante's *Purgatorio*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the seventh century BC poetess, Sappho's fragment, 'Hesperus', as well as resonances from 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' by Thomas Gray (1716-71), 'Requeim' by R.L.Stevenson (1850-94). Tiresias is a central figure here, from the ancient myths and legends whose sight was the sight of the prophet who can see into time. Tiresias is the blind prophet. We find Tiresias even in Tennyson's poem. Manju Jain's notes here are comprehensive –

the evening scene as Dante's *Purgatorio*, canto viii, opens is described thus, " 'Twas now the hour that turns back the desire of those who sail the seas and melts their heart, that day when they have said to their dear friends adieu, and that pierces the new pilgrim with love, if from afar he hears the chimes which seem to mourn for the dying day'. Jain reads –"Echoes from this scene heighten the tone of melancholy and pathos in this passage. . . In Eliot's poem this is the hour when 'the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk.' In Dante it is the hour when the supplicant soul in Purgatory joined and raised both its palms and devoutly sang the '*Te lucis ante*' , the hymn for the last service of the day: 'Before the close of light, we pray thee, O creator, that through thy clemency, thou be our watch and guard.'

In his note Eliot emphasizes Tiresias's bisexuality, quoting specifically from the Latin text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's version of the legend, Tiresias was transformed into a woman for hitting with his staff two snakes copulating in a forest. Seven years later, when he came across the same pair of snakes, Tiresias hit them again and, as he had hoped, was turned back into a man. . . In the myth, Tiresias was successively male and female. In *The Waste Land* he is specifically hermaphroditic.

In his representation of Tiresias Eliot is also aware of other legends associated with him. One legend attributes Tiresias's blindness and prophetic powers to Athena, whom he saw bathing. . . Tennyson uses this variation of the legend and assimilates Tiresias to Actaeon in his poem, 'Tiresias': 'Henceforth be blind, for thou hast seen too much, / And speak the truth that no man may believe.' Eliot's earlier oblique allusion to Actaeon . . .indicates that he had this legend and Tennyson's poem in mind. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus is sent to Hades to consult Tiresias as to the manner of his returning home to Ithaca . . In *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* by sophocles (495-406 BC) Tiresias is the blind, withered prophet who knows that Thebes has been cursed because of Oedipus's patricide and subsequent incestuous marriage to his mother, despite the fact of his ignorance of the identity of both his parents. . . Dante placed Tiresias in Hell with the augurs and diviners who, because they wished to peer into the secrets of the future, have their faces turned so that they can only go backwards, because looking forward was denied to them (*Inferno* XX). Eliot took the phrase 'Tiresias' from Swinburne's 'Tiresias', a poem in which Dante figures.

In *The Waste Land* Tiresias is associated with the Sibyl of the epigraph through his longevity and gift of prophecy. In some versions of the myth Tiresias has a speical staff to guide him in his blindness. This staff, and that with which he struck the serpents, connect him with 'the man with three staves' of the Tarot pack . . , and with the fisher King. Tiresias's sterility, too ('Old man with wrinkled female breasts') links him symbolically with the Fisher King. His bisexuality highlights the theme of the mobility and indeterminacy of sexual identity.

Tiresias, however, is not the unifying consciousness of the poem, as Eliot's note would have it. His point of view, too, is subject to scrutiny . . .In fact, the voyeuristic Tiresias with his desiccated sensibility is symptomatic of the moribund civilization of which he is a spectator. He represents a state of mind prefigures in 'Gerontion' which Eliot had considered using as a prelude to *The Waste Land*. Like Dante's augurs and diviners, Tiresias can only look back and is denied a vision of the future. Eliot's representation also stresses the simultaneity of time. the episode of the typist and the clerk is set within the temporal perspective offered by Tiresias's encompassing consciousness, so that the mythical past is reduced to the level of this episode."

We should keep in mind Eliot's own note on Tiresias – "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem."

SAQ:

How does Eliot connect the idea of the seer (Tiresias) with the perspective upon the 'waste land'? What is encompassed by Tiresias' vision ? (60 + 60 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

the young man carbuncular: a carbuncle is a pimple or red spot on the face, often due to drinking; according to Jain, "Eliot said that he intended the phrasing of 'the young man carbuncular' to echo 'that old man eloquent' in Milton's sonnet 'To the Lady Margaret Ley'. Recognition of the echo reinforces the effect of burlesque."

Bradford millionaire : Bradford, an industrial town in the north of England, produced many millionaires. Eliot is mocking the millionaire as much as the clerk.

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all . . walked among the lowest of the dead): the bisexual Tiresias of *Odyssey* and *Oedipus.*

When lovely woman stoops to folly: Eliot refers to *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74) in which Olivia sings the song beginning with this line. There does not seem to be any ironic contrast between Olivia and the typist. Jain remarks, that Eliot here "continues his critique of the sentimental style of the eighteenth century." This episode, as the one in the pub, is stylized, and not naturalistic or realistic.

'This music crept by me upon the waters': Eliot refers us to *The Tempest* I, ii. Ferdinand utters these words as he remembered the allaying of his grief at his father's supposed death. There are two references here – the typist's gramophone record and Ariel's song in *The Tempest*. It also looks forward to the mandoline's whining in l.261, and the song of the Thames daughters.

Strand, Queen Victoria Street, Lower Thames Street: streets in London

fishmen: Jain points out that these are not fishermen but workers from the fish market at Billingsgate

where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold : Eliot's note says –"The interior of St.Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among Wren's interiors." This is the church near London Bridge and the fish market, which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723). Eliot decried the possible loss of such churches. Together with the Doric and the Corinthian, the Ionian was one the three ancient architectural styles.

This passage re-creates a sense of sadness and alienation in the persona who remains detached from the noise and bustle.

The river sweats / . . To Carthage then I came: Eliot explains in his notes, that 'the song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 they speak in turn.'

The river sweats / Oil and tar / . . .Wallala leialala: compare this with the description of the Thames at the opening of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and note the similarities. In Conrad's novel, the Thames leads into the heart of great darkness.

Greenwich reach : the Thames at Greenwich

Isle of Dogs: the banks of the Thames opposite Greenwich

Weialala leia / Wallala leialala : the Rhine maidens' lament

Elizabeth and Leicester: Eliot refers, in his notes, to the *History of England*, Vol.I, ch.iv, by J.A.Froude, quoting the letter of De Quadra to King Philip of Spain in which he describes Queen Elizabeth flirting with Lord Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, while watching games on the river Thames.

Beating oars /. . .Rippled both shores: comparable to Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra's barge in line 77 ('A Game of Chess').

White towers : perhaps the stone towers of the Tower of London

Highbury, Richmond, Kew: districts of London

Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me.: Eliot refers to Dante's *Purgatorio* v, 133 –"Remember me, who am La Pia: Siena made me, Maremma unmade me." As Jain explains, La Pia was the Lady of Siena, an Italian town, who was reported to have been murdered on her husband's orders by being pushed out of the castle window at Maremma. In Dante's poem, she narrates her story to the poet and appeals to him to convey news of her to her friends on earth. She is one of those souls in Purgatory who met with a violent end but made their peace with God through repentance.

Moorgate, Margate Sands: the first is a poorer locality of London with which Eliot was familiar while he worked at Lloyds Bank. The second is a seaside resort on the Thames estuary, in Kent. Eliot recuperated from illness and wrote one draft of *The Waste Land*.

To Carthage then I came: we are referred by Eliot to the *Confessions* of St.Augustine –"to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." Augustine's lines tell of the temptations (sensual) in his youth. From (modern) Algeria, where he was born, Augustine went to Carthage at the age of sixteen.

Burning burning burning burning: Elito's notes says in his notes—"The complete text of the Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in the late Henry clarke Warren's *Buddhism in Translation*. . Mr.Warren was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident." Jain gives us the text of the Sermon –"All things, O priests are on fire . . .The eye, O priests, is on fire; forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire, impressions received by the ey are on fire . . . With the fire passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair are they on fire."

O Lord Thous pluckest me out: Eliot, referring us to the *Confessions* of St.Augustine, notes –'The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western ascetisism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.' We learn from Jain the significance of Augustine's words ("I entangle my steps with these outward beauties, but Thou pluckest me out, O Lord, thou pluckest me out!") that they are "illuminated by God's vindication of Joshua the high priest in Zechariah iii,2. Joshua is accused by Satan but vindicated by God: . . Joshua's filthy garments are removed and he is reclothed. This is symbolic of the removal of the iniquities of Joshua and his people and the restoration of Jerusalem to peace, harmony and prosperity. Eliot also seems to have had in mind the words of the prophet Amos, castigating Israel's failure to believe in God: 'I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord' (Amos iv, 11)

Jain further tells us – that both the Buddha and St. Augustine look upon sensual temptation as a burning fire. "The Buddha advocates the cultivation of an aversion for the pleasures of the senses, which will lead to freedom from passion, and thence from rebirth. St. Augustine trusts to the grace of God for salvation."

SAQ:

How effectively does Eliot use the symbolism behind the "fires" in this section, 'The Fire Sermon'? Which associations are brought in to amplify the deficiencies of past figures? (70 + 80 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

3.6.6 DEATH BY WATER

Phlebas the Phoenician: associated with the "drowned Phoenician Sailor", the "one-eyed merchant" and with Mr Eugenides, the merchant of Smyrna. Jain feels that Eliot may have also sought to relate, through the use of the

name, with Plato's dialogue, *Philebus*, the discussion of the relations of pleasure and wisdom to the good. Philebus supports enjoyment, delight and pleasure while Socrates points out that wisdom and intelligence, added to right opinion and honest reasoning, are better than pleasure. 'Death by Water' is perhaps a criticism of the position held by Philebus.

A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell: echoing the words of Alonso in *The Tempest* –"O thou mine heir /Of Naples and of Milan, what strange fish Hath made his meal on thee?" Alonso believes Ferdinand, his son, to be drowned. What is brought out here is the image of physical dissolution.

Gentile or Jew: as in the Bible a Gentile is one of a non-Jewish nation or belongs to a non-Jewish faith, the phrase includes all of mankind. A possible reference to St.Paul's condemnation of sinners is here, sinners of all hues, Gentile or Jew. (Romans II, 9-11)

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward: "The wheel of fortune, which was one of the cards in the Tarot pack . . In Greek mythology Ixion, in the underworld as a punishment for his crimes, was bound on a wheel that turned for ever. Possibly the wheel is also the incessant cycle of death and rebirth. Perhaps the line mocks the illusion that human beings can control their fortunes. The image of the whirlpool and the wheel is illuminated later in *Ash-Wednesday* . . [and] *Murder in the Cathedral*..." (Jain)

Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you: "In *Philebus* Socrates comments on self-deception: 'people who think themselves taller and more handsome and physically finer . . . than they really are." (Jain)

Stop to Consider:

Sounds as place in *The Waste Land*

You should have noticed by now that Eliot's poem has many references to place, or location. As much as the many 'voices' and sounds that make up the poem's minute details, the landscapes that the poem situates these voices in, give to the poem its peculiarly striking quality—the sea, rivers, deserts, snow on the ground, city-dwellings, hyacinth garden, cities, mountains ('Himavant') –all contribute to the total effect of the poem. In this connection it has been remarked, by Alan Marshall, that "the city that Eliot *sees* is a much less animated

affair than the one that he listens to. . . In Eliot's waste land most of the individual details about people and place are supplied by the ear, a phenomenon which coincides with the stress he later put on what he called the "auditory imagination" . . . London exists most frequently as a place that Eliot hears"

Consider the lines—

" 'This music crept by me upon the waters,'
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon:" (lines 257-63)

3.6.7 WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

According to Manju Jain, Eliot thought of this section as "not only the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all". Eliot's note for this section "states that in the first section of part V, three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous, and the present decay of eastern Europe. The story of the journey to Emmaus is told in Luke XXIV, 13-31. Two disciples were travelling on the road to Emmaus (a village near Jerusalem) on the day of Christ's resurrection and discussing the events that had happened. The risen Christ joins them and explains to them all the things in the scriptures concerning himself in order to convince them that his death and resurrection were in full accord with the divine plan. However, the disciples do not recognize him until he blesses their evening meal, and he then vanishes out of their sight. The approach to the Chapel Perilous, described by Jessie Weston, is the final stage of the Grail quest. The quester meets with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious chapel before going on to the Grail Castle itself. Sometimes there is a 'Dead Body' laid on an altar; sometimes a 'Black Hand' extinguishes the tapers; and there are strange and threatening voices. This is apparently an adventure which is fraught with extreme danger to life, and in which supernatural and evil forces are engaged. The decay of eastern Europe is a reference to the Russian Revolution.

None of the three themes achieves dramatic resolution. The third figure remains unrecognized; the quester is left in the chapel—the Castle does not appear, nor does the Grail; and the refugees do not find a haven. The three journeys merge and remain inconclusive." (Jain)

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces . . . He who was living is now dead: reference to the events from the betrayal and arrest of Christ following the night of prayer and agony in the garden of Gethsemane, till the moment of crucifixion. Christ's arrest in Gethsemane is recalled here.

After the frosty silence. . . agony in stony places: the scene of Christ's prayer and agony before the arrest (Matthew, XXVI, 36-46); also recalling Golgotha, 'the place of a skull', the site of Christ's crucifixion.

Prison and palace and reverberation / Of thunder of spring over distant mountains: after his arrest, Christ was taken to the Palace of the High Priest of the Jews for a public interrogation; then he was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor of Jerusalem, in the Hall of Judgement; Christ's death was followed by a cataclysmic earthquake

He who was living is now dead/ We who were living are now dying: Luke XXIV, 2-5 –"Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen"; Christ's followers saw two men in shining robes who said these words.

With a little patience: the word has special meaning here signifying suffering, endurance, both of which qualities also are to be found in passion; there is a connection here with the state of Christ who endured suffering between the last supper and the crucifixion, including the agony he endured in Gethsemane.

Here is no water but only rock . . . Who is the third who walks always beside you?: Jain tells us: "Eliot thought that these twenty-nine lines of 'the water-dripping song' were the only '*good* lines in *The Waste Land*', and that the rest was ephemeral . . . Eliot believed that 'the less "realistic" literature is, the more visual it must be . . .Dreams, to be real, must be seen. In this passage clear visual images and precise representations of sound are evoked by hypnotizing, incantatory rhythms to create a visionary effect."

cicada: the insect which produces a high-pitched prolonged drilling sound

Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees: based on Eliot's actual experience in Quebec, Canada. A literary reference may be here, according to Jain, to Whitman's poem, 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd' –"Solitary the thrush, / The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements, / Sings by himself a song."

When I count, . . . But who is that on the other side of you ?: Eliot here evokes the journey of the disciples to Emmaus even while his notes say that he was influenced by the account of an expedition to Antartica. The members of the expedition were haunted by the delusion that one member more had joined them than they could count. Jain's comments say: "The allusion to the Arctic expedition helps to explain the hallucinatory effect of the passage and the indeterminate identity and gender of the hooded figure. However, Eliot is perhaps also deliberately mystifying the reader by veiling the reference to the risen Christ.

Grover Smith points out that the strange event recounted here forms an interesting parallel to a Buddhist legend in Warren's *Buddhism in Translations*, which may have influenced the passage."

Stop to Consider:

Voices, identity and perspectives in *The Waste Land*

Eliot felt that "You cannot create a very large poem without introducing a more impersonal point of view, or splitting it up into various personalities" as he wrote the poem. By splitting the interior monologue (as he had used it in 'Prufrock') into many fragmentary monologues, Eliot revealed his preoccupation with ideas of shifting, discontinuous identities. Manju Jain points to this aspect of the poem –"The different voices and points of view shift, merge, dissolve, collide, so that the boundaries between them cannot easily be demarcated. The pronouns, too, are indeterminate displacing the reader and making it difficult to assign a fixed identity to the speaker or to the addressee. . . the plurality of voices in 'The Burial of the Dead' cannot be unravelled with any degree of certainty. In 'What the Thunder Said', the identity of the 'you' is ambiguous— is the same 'you' being addressed in lines 359—65 ('Who is the third who walks always beside you?') and in lines 420-2 ('your heart would have responded / Gaily, when invited, beating obedient/ To controlling hand')? Whose heart would have responded ? And whose are the controlling hands? Any interpretation of the passage will depend upon the identity given to them which, however, remains ambiguous.

The 'I' of the poem, too, does not have an autonomous, determinate identity. It is fractured into a number of personae. . . The poetic persona also encompasses multiple voices from the past in the form of quotations and allusions. It does not, however, consist only of a tissue of quotations; it also speaks with the immediacy of personal experience which is not derived from texts . . The self is thus not a unified entity but is fluid and shifting, and consists of a plurality of voices. Besides the poetic persona, the pronoun 'I' is used also to designate Marie, Tiresias, and the woman in the pub. Although they are relatively more distinctive as 'characters', they remain fragments of consciousness and can also be interpreted as roles assumed by the persona. . .

.......To read *The Waste Land*. . as a poem in which the several voices and points of view merge into a single identity would be to discount its complexity of tone and feeling. The text is a site where a plurality of voices and meanings cross and recross without necessarily being resolved into a unity in which differences are submerged."

Murmur of maternal lamentation: recalling the "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children', the words of Christ to the bewailing women who lamented his taking away (Luke XXIII, 27-8)

What is that sound high in the air . . .Ringed by the flat horizon only: Eliot's notes refers us to *Blick ins Chaos* (A Glimpse into Chaos), by Herman Hesse (1872-1962), translated: "Already half of Europe, already at least healf of Eastern Europe, on the way to Chaos, drives drunkenly in spiritual frenzy along the edge of the abyss, sings drunkenly, as though singing hymns, as Dmitri Karamazov [in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1821-81] sang. The offended bourgeois laughs at the songs; the saint and the seer hear them with tears."

Jain informs us: "During world War I Hesse lived in neutral Switzerland and wrote denunciations of militarism and nationalism. Hesse's work is a meditation on how Dostoevsky's insights in *The Brothers Karamazov* prefigure the collapse of Europe. Hesse views the maintenance of civilization as a conflict between man's higher faculties and his repressed, primeval instincts which he now sees emerging as a result of the decay and exhaustion of European culture. For these visionaries, however, the decay is the prelude to a new birth. It is a period of anarchic spiritual experiment which Hesse associates with a longing for the east, for Russia, and for a new type of man – the ideal of the Karamazov, primeval, Asiatic and occult. This new type

would be imaginative, powerful, spiritual, defying bourgeois values. Eliot shares Hesse's vision of the decay and collapse of Europe but not his answers. He visited Hesse at Montagnola, near Lugano, on 28 May 1922. In a letter of 13 March 1922 to Hesse Eliot expressed his admiration of *Blick ins Chaos*, finding in it a seriousness the like of which had not yet occurred in England.

The word 'horde' came into the European languages from the steppes of central Asia. It signified a mass of creatures on the move, a blind menace, less human than animal. The derogatory connotations of the word here are qualified by the adjective 'hooded', which associates the refugees with the hooded figure of Christ. The Biblical echo of the 'murmur of maternal lamentation' also arouses feelings of pity and compassion. Eliot was deeply distressed by the destitution in central Europe after the First World War."

What is the city over the mountains . . . Unreal: As Jain comments — 'The present decay of eastern Europe' is seen within the perspective of the rise and fall of civilizations throughout history. No temporal city endures or offers a lasting home. Eliot's vision of the 'unreal' cities of temporal civilizations may have been intended as a contrast to the ideal city imagined by Plato, which inspired St Augustine's vision of the City of God. In Plato's *Republic* Glaucon tells Socrates: "you mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is in the ideal; for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth.'

And bats with baby faces . . .voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells: the 'surrealistic' imagery came, according to Eliot from a painting by Hieronymous Bosch, the 15th-century Dutch painter. Bosch's paintings were visual allegories of hell, invented with strange forms combining parts of real beings, and related to the real through allusive elements.

reminiscent bells : bells of churches in London,; 'falling towers' of other imperial cities; there is also reference to Browning's poem, 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' which Eliot had praised in his Clark Lectures of 1926 for creating the sense of a "double world". Browning's poem has a dream-like narrative which parallels the "hallucinatory terrain" of 'What the Thunder Said'. Jain further adds: "It has been suggested that there is an allusion to Jessie Weston here—a bell was rung at the Chapel Perilous to signal that the Knight had survived his ordeal."

empty cisterns and exhausted wells: in the Old Testament these signified loss of faith and worship of false gods.

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home: Chapel Perilous of the Grail legends

although it could be any chapel "in the visionary landscape of the poem".

Only a cock stood on the roof tree: in biblical terms, the cock is associated with betrayal as, upon Christ's being arrested, Peter thrice denied knowing Christ, and the cock crowed immediately after the denial. Peter thereupon remembered Christ's words: Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matthew xxvi, 69-75) But the cock also has positive connotations as it heralds morning. Jain marks that "Eliot's onomatopoeia reproduces the sound of the crowing of the cock. This is the French rendering of the English 'Cock-a-doodle-do'.

Himavant: "The Sanskrit name for high, snow-covered mountains in the Himalayan ranges".

Check Your Progress:

1. The use of myth in *The Waste Land* has a structural as well as a critical function. Expatiate upon this statement.
2. Examine Eliot's critique of contemporary society as being based on a sense of 'cultural alienation'. Does it add to or detract from his modernist cosmopolitanism?
3. Eliot's concern with religion and its myths in *The Waste Land* was allied to his view of cultures as alternate perspectives which were under threat in contemporary modern civilization. Examine the validity of the statement in relation to the different sections of the poem.
4. Analyse the role of the quest motif in *The Waste Land* in connection with the Grail legend, the figure of the Fisher King, and the god of renewal of life.

Then spoke the thunder / DA: Jain's comments will be useful for you—

"Eliot refers the reader to the Fable of the Thunder in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* V, 2. The threefold offspring of the creator Prajapati, gods, men and demons, approach Prajapati for instruction after completing their formal education. To each group he utters the syllable '*da*'. Each group interprets this reply differently. The gods interpret it as '*damyata*' ('control yourselves'). The men interpret it as '*datta*' ('give'). The demons interpret it as '*dayadhvam*' ('be compassionate'). When the groups, in turn, give their interpretations, Prajapati responds with '*Om*' signifying that they have fully understood. The parable concludes: 'This very thing the heavenly voice of thunder repeats, *da*, *da*, *da*, that is, control yourselves, give, be compassionate. One should practise this same triad, self-control, giving and compassion.

Eliot's attention was first drawn to this passage in May 1912 by Charles Lanman, his Sanskrit teacher at Harvard, who gave him a copy of Vasudev Laxman Shastri Phansikar's Sanskrit edition of *The Twenty-Eight Upanishads*.

In the original text, '*da*' is interpreted differently by three orders of existence—gods, men and demons. This sequence provides an orderly descent through the scale of existence and gives an indication of the shortcomings of each of the three orders. The fable concludes, however, by exhorting men to practise all the three injunctions for it is suggested that there are no gods or demons other than men. Eliot, too, sees them as pertaining to the human condition. He altered the original sequence possibly because he believed that the two imperatives of 'give' and 'sympathize' are necessary prerequisites for the attainment of self-control. In the original passage, the triple injunction is itself an interpretation of the thunder's utterance, even though it is validated by Prajapati's response. Eliot, in turn, adapts that interpretation and gives to it his own meaning."

***Datta*: what have we given? . . . an age of prudence can never retract**: a recurrent theme in Eliot's poetry , as Jain points out; connect this with the earlier section on the hyacinth garden. Eliot interprets the thunder as an injunction to self-surrender.

memories draped by the beneficent spider: Eliot refers us again to Webster's *The White Devil*, to Flamineo's speech warning against against

unfaithfulness.; Jain reads—"Although the allusion introduces a darker, disturbing note, the emotionally charged passage is a negation of Flamineo's cynicism."

***Dayadhvam*:** Eliot reads this as 'sympathize' although some versions look on it as meaning 'be compassionate'. Eliot's note refers us to Dante's *Inferno*, xxxiii, 46 –"and below I heard the outlet of the horrible tower locked up" spoken by Ugolino della Gherardesca, an Italian noble of the thirteenth-century who recalls his imprisonment with his two sons and grandsons in a tower. Ugolino heard the key 'turn once only' once they were locked up. The keys to the prison were thrown into the river and the prisoners left to starve. As Jain remarks, "The allusion communicates a sense of finality and suggests the terrifying consequences of imprisoning oneself within one's own ego or consciousness."

Eliot also quotes from *Appearance and Reality* (1893) by the philosopher F.H.Bradley (1864-1924) on whom he had written his Harvard doctroal dissertation . . . In the quoted passage Bradley writes of the impossibility of communicating with others, since each self is enclosed within its own privately apprehended experience . . The injunction of the thunder to sympathize affirms both the possibility and the necessity of communicating with others, . . The injunction of the thunder is seen as a desired necessity, as opposed to an actual state of being. The ability to sympathize and so to escape from the prison of the self is held out only as a tenuous, momentary possibility."

Coriolanus: the hero of Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus*, a Roman general who would have been consul but was later banished from Rome due to his contempt for the Roman mob. He took his revenge by leading the Volscians, (whom he had earlier defeated on behalf of the Romans) against Rome. However, a Volscian general, Aufidius, finally conspired against Coriolanus and slew him with the accusation that Coriolanus had betrayed the Volscians. Jain remarks that Eliot's allusion to Coriolanus is unclear –"Perhaps Eliot's lines suggest the very tenuous possibility of reviving for a moment a Coriolanus who has learnt to sympathize, rather than a recovery of the earlier, unbroken, self-sufficient man. Possibly, the memory of a broken Coriolanus serves as a reminder to those who are self-sufficient and lacking in sympathy."

Damyata: Eliot's translation of the word is "control"; some translations give it as 'restrain/control'.

I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me: Eliot refers us to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the figure of the Fisher King.

Shall I at least set my lands in order?: In Isaiah xxxviii, 1, the prophet Isaiah says to King Hezekiah, whose kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians –"Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live". Jain reads: "Eliot's line suggests the need for setting the waste regions of the self in order." She also suggests another allusion to the prayer of the Italian poet, Jacopone da Todi (1230- 1306), which Dante "prefixed to the *Purgatorio*: 'Set my love in order, O thou who lovest me'.

London Bridge is falling down: refrain of the familiar nursery rhyme – 'London Bridge is falling down, falling down,/ London Bridge is falling down, / My fair lady.' Connecting this with the earlier," Falling towers/ Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London", we can turn to the suggestion by Moody that "there could be a mocking glance through the nursery rhyme at the builders of bridges, entered in Frazer's records, who buried a living person in the foundations to appease the river god and keep the bridge from falling." Jain thinks that "the line evokes the collapse of civilization' it also suggests the disintegration of the self."

Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina /—Eliot's note refers to Dante's *Purgatorio* xxvi, 145-8 –' "And so I pray you, by that Virtue which leads you to the topmost of the stair—be mindful in due time of my pain". Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.' Dante meets the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, who is suffering punishment for lustfulness, in Purgatory, to be purged of his sins, who pleads for Dante's prayers.

***Quando fiam uti chelidon* —O swallow swallow**: line from an anonymous Latin poem (perhaps of the second century) 'Pervigilium Veneris' (The Vigil of Venus). The poem is an invocation, Jain tells us, to "love and springtime, . . The quoted phrase comes at the end: "Now the raucous swan song sounds on the lake: the girl of Tereus pours forth her music from the poplar shade, as if moved to tell of love, not to lament her sister and the barbarous husband . . Hers is the song, and we are silent: when will my spring come? When shall I become as the swallow that I may cease to be silent?" Procne,

Tereus's wife, was transformed into a swallow, and Philomela into nightingale, when they were pursued by Tereus, who had raped Philomela. . . .

'O Swallow, Swallow, opens the Prince's song in section iv of Tennyson's *The Princess*. The Latin phrase from 'Pervigilium Veneris' is amalgamated with an echo from Tennyson's poem, written nearly two thousand years later . . to evoke an unbearable yearning for release and transformation, together with an anguished recognition of its impossibility."

Stop to Consider:

Dante's *Purgatorio* – *Purgatorio* (Italian for "Purgatory") is the second part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It is an allegory telling of the climb of Dante up the Mount of Purgatory, guided by the Roman poet Virgil. In the poem, Purgatory is depicted as a mountain in the Southern Hemisphere, consisting of a bottom section (Ante-Purgatory), 7 levels of suffering and spiritual growth, and finally the Earthly Paradise at the top. It was written in the early 14th century.

Gerard Nerval - Gérard de Nerval (1808 – 1855) was the *nom-de-plume* of the French poet, essayist and translator **Gérard Labrunie,** one of the most essentially Romantic French poets.

Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*

Tristan und Isolde (*Tristan and Isolde*, or *Tristan and Isolda*) is an opera, or music drama, in three acts by Richard Wagner to a German libretto by the composer, based largely on the romance by Gottfried von Straßburg. It was composed between 1856 and 1859 and premiered in Munich on 10 June 1865 with Hans von Bülow conducting.

These explanatory notes are from the 'Wikipedia' on the Internet. You should find them useful even they are very brief.

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie: a line from 'El Desdichado', a sonnet by Gerard de Nerval (1808-55). Jain's explanation –"Aquitaine was the region in southern France where the troubadour poets, writing in the Provençal language, flourished from the late eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. The medieval concept of courtly love, which deeply influenced later European lyrical poetry, first appeared in troubadour poetry. Physical passion is idealized and sublimatec in the cult of courtly love. The culture of which the troubadours were a part was destroyed by the Albigensian

Crusade against heresy in southern France (1208-13). By that destruction de Nerval's persona, the Prince of Aquitaine, felt himself disinherited of the tradition of the troubadours. Eliot appropriates Nerval's voice and persona to lament the decay of his culture. The 'ruined tower' fuses the earlier images of falling towers, signifying the disintegration of civilization and of the self."

Why then Ile fit you: Eliot refers to *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd (1557?-95), the subtitle of which "Hieronymo is Mad Againe". Jain points to a closer connection with the words of Hieronymo (the hero of the play): "Hieronymo, frantic with grief because of the murder of his son. plans the destruction of the murderers. He is asked to write a court entertainment and replies, 'Why then Ile fit you!' His answer is double-edged, meaning that he will write something suitable for the occasion, and that he will punish the murderers fittingly. he arranges that the murderers, who act in his play, are themselves killed during the performance. Hieronymo's play was composed of fragments of poetry in unknown languages: 'Each one of us / Must act his part in unknown languages,/ That it may breed the more variety.' The allusion to Hieronymo's play, therefore, evokes the cultural fragmentation which is enacted in the preceding lines.It also hints at a major strategy of *The Waste Land*—the playing of roles in different languages whereby the author's intentions are masked. In the guise of Hieronymo the poet here seems disconcertingly to threatenthe reader . . or himself. The quotation of the subtitle of Kyd's play . . suggests the precarious nature of the poet/ persona's mental equilibrium."

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata: Jain thinks that the triple injunction of the thunder appears as a possible way of countering madness.

Shantih shantih shantih: Eliot finds the equivalent of this in 'the Peace which passeth understanding', and refers to the words of Paul with which he addressed the early Christians –'And the Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' (Philippians iv, 7). We can agree that Eliot's attempt was to find a word or phrase which conveyed the profundity and thus he went outside European tradition to find one. The spelling here was perhaps to approximate as closely as possible to the Sanskrit word. Jain adds: "The ending of Eliot's poem is hedged with uncertainty. Moody suggests that the invocation may have meant for Eliot himself, as he completed the poem, 'a moment of exhaustion, of

appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation, which is in itself indescribable.' Or as Rajan points out, the final benediction may be read as 'reflecting the peace of enlightenment, or as indicating no more than exhausted subsidence into a consolatory formula, a termination rather than an ending.' The invocation seems to articulate a desire rather than affirm than achieved state."

3.7 SUMMING UP

You should be overwhelmed by now – by the mass of detailed explanations of the references needed to properly read *The Waste Land.* However, you should also have realized by this time that Eliot's work is hugely comprehensive and sweeping in its canvas. In fact, you should be interested by all that is hidden in a line of words. In a sense, you need to be a scholar—Eliot would have been most happy with that—to read all that lies below the surface of a line of Eliot's poetry. He does not merely confine himself to the adroit quibbling of words that often stands in for verse.Yet it is also true that none outside the scholarly circuit can get to the heart of Eliot's poetry. The ideology tugs both ways. *The Waste Land* makes it clear to all of us that there is no simple vision that will answer the grave doubts regarding Western civilization. You should find it interesting –even excited – to know that Eliot dared to go outside his own culture to draw in widely different perspectives on the cataclysm that the Western world faced in the third decade of the twentieth century. The references therefore should make this absolutely clear to you. If as a student, you are worried by the mass of notes, just give the poem one thorough reading, to be followed up by a more informed survey later on. The explanations above mean that you at least have an idea of the main features of the texts Eliot refers to – for instance, what is Dante's *Purgatorio* all about? That will be of immense help in your final understanding. By the end of your having worked through the unit, you should be able to write at least a thousand-word essay on the subject!

3.8 REFERENCES & SUGGESTED READINGS

David Perkins – *A History of Modern Poetry - Modernism and After* ; The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1987

A. David Moody, (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to T.S.Eliot*, Cambridge University Press, 1994

Jain, Manju, *T.S.Eliot*: *Selected Poems* (With A critical Reading and Comprehensive Notes), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, by arrangement with Faber & Faber, 1992

Leavis, F.R. *New Bearings in English Poetry* University of Michigan Press, 1932, 1936

Cox, C.B., and Arnold P.Hinchliffe, '*The Waste Land*': *A Casebook* , Macmillan, London, 1968

* * *

Unit 4
W H Auden "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

Contents:

4.1 Objectives
4.2 Introducing the Poet
4.3 Works of the Poet
4.4 Critical Reception
4.5 Context of the Poem
4.6 Reading the Poem
4.7 Summing up
4.8 References & Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

We bring to you in this unit an approach to W.H. Auden's famous elegy, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats". Proverbially, one poem alone cannot tell us the range of a poet's work, especially with respect to a poet like Auden's who ranged over many forms of writing in poetry. Also, this poem being one of his well-known compositions, indicates many of the issues that can be traced through Auden's whole corpus. We have tried here to help you to an appreciation to these subtleties by including related writing or commentary. We believe thus that by the end of the unit, you will have –

- *gained* a sufficiently nuanced reading of the poem
- *learnt* just how the poem is a sensitive response to Auden's times
- *discovered* some ideas regarding the poem's artistic merits, and
- *found* the best way to explain the complexities of the poem

4.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

If you consider the dates of Auden's life – February 21st, 1907, to September 28th, 1973, you should be able to easily visualise the fact that he was a

contemporary of some famous twentieth-century names and lived through some infamous dates and events. Auden is often named together with his two famous contemporaries, T.S.Eliot and W.B.Yeats. In the history of English poetry, poetry of the Anglo-American world that is, these three names are normally linked to each other in a line despite the fact that the three poets developed and worked in their own highly individual ways.

The experience of reading the three poets is always marked by palpable differences. To state it very briefly, Eliot's poetry is evocative of the modernist world of 'the wasteland' vision, while Yeats's vision is built around the Irish world of political struggle and hope as well as Georgian and Imagist moments. On the other hand, Auden's work confronts almost analytically the world of wartime destruction and the prospects for twentieth-century society.

In a broad sweeping view of Auden's career what is most noticeable is that he moved from an 'English' beginning to a more 'American' phase which then becomes more of an 'international' phase. The Auden of the 'English' phase is conventionally held to be a 'political' poet, different from the later 'religious' believer. This view however appears to be limited to a superficial consideration of the poet since Auden himself resisted this neat division and perhaps it does not help us with the complex subtleties that the poetry often contains.

One critic (Richard Davenport-Hines) says of Auden: "He was an encyclopaedist who liked to collect, classify and interpret large amounts of information, and strove to integrate natural phenomena, spiritual experiences, human history and intimate emotions into a system in which both body, spirit, feelings and intellect cohered. His poems drew ideas from the work of other poets as well as novelists, historians, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, political scientists and anthropologists. He was the first great English poet to be born in the twentieth century, and the first whose work was profoundly influenced by psychoanalytical and Marxist theories."

Stop to Consider:

Biographical

Wystan Hugh Auden's early education was in St. Edmund's School at Hindhead, Surrey, and then at Gresham's School at Holt in Norfolk. As a schoolboy, Auden displayed a sensibility that made his parents think that he would specialise in

the science subjects. In 1925 Auden went up to Christ Church College, Oxford. By this time Auden was already writing poetry and held his own opinions about poetry and poets. Humphrey Carpenter's biography of the poet describes his homosexual encounters during his college-days. This was the time when Auden met many others who would later become the generation named through him: Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, for example. Christopher Isherwood, with whom Auden would later collaborate, had already known him from their time at St.Edmund's.

Auden's father was a doctor of varied interests from whom he inherited an interest in the new subject, psychology, and in mythological legends and tales as well as in the Icelandic sagas. Auden's mother played an influential role in his life especially in bequeathing to him a love for music.

Early in his life Auden showed a social awareness beyond his years. As an undergraduate he worked on the side of the workers in the General Strike of 1926 although, as Allan Rodway points out, this was not any radicalism at work. It was the 1930s, with the Great Slump or Depression which heightened his social awareness. Already, in 1928 he had chosen to go to Berlin for a year. He discovered the work of Brecht while there just as he also came across John Layard, an anthropologist and psychologist who had been a pupil of Homer Lane, an American psychiatrist.

Returning home after Berlin, Auden tutored in London and taught in private schools till 1935. During these years he wrote his most explicitly political poems, plays with Christopher Isherwood, as well as his most famous poem of the time, 'Spain 1937', the result of his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Auden traveled considerably in this period: to Iceland from July to September 1936 and then to China between January and July in 1938, besides the earlier brief trip to Spain. On his journey to Iceland with Louis MacNeice, Auden wrote his long "Letter to Lord Byron", an accomplishment in light verse. The China sojourn with Christopher Isherwood produced *Journey to a War* which includes the sonnet sequence, 'In Time of War' together with a verse commentary. His volume *Look Stranger!* had already been published while he travelled. Unhappy with the name given to it by the publishing house of Faber, Auden renamed the volume, *On This Island*, in its American version. *Another Time* was another volume of 1940 which contained some of his most interesting verse.

Auden wrote plays, some in collaboration with Isherwood, which were taken up for performance by the avant-garde experimental Group Theatre. *The Ascent of F6* was enacted in 1936 and *The Dance of Death* in 1935. A critic (Christopher Innes) records: "Auden's connections with Eliot were particularly close on the theatrical level. Eliot published Auden's earliest play, 'Paid on Both Sides' . . .Both were centrally involved with the Group Theatre, which produced *Sweeney Agonistes* and Auden's *Dance of Death* . . in 1935."

SAQ:

1. After which poet/poets does Auden's name appear in standard histories of English Literature? (20 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

2. Which important events occurred between 1907 and 1973 which affected Auden? (30 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Relating the poetry to the concerns that the poet thought important for his times gives us a special insight into Auden's poetic qualities. If we try to highlight Auden's purely aesthetic experimentation or innovations we might begin to underestimate the impact he had on his contemporaries. It was probably the particular flavour of the 1930s, and the '40s that compelled intellectuals in the Western world to be involved with the catastrophic times that society then was passing through. As a poet, however, Auden's contribution was to search out the poetic forms which could shape literary responses to the world economic crises of 1929, the inter-war developments from the beginning of the 1930s to the outbreak of the second world war in 1939, the years of actual conflict till 1945, and the aftermath in the late 1940s and the 1950s.

The poem that you are about to read here, dedicated to W.B.Yeats, is a fine example of the manner in which Auden foregrounds this range of ideas or issues that make his poetry so highly evocative and so deeply engaging.

Stop to Consider:

The Auden Generation

This was the descriptive term coined by the critic, Samuel Hynes, to mark the extent of Auden's influence during his early career in England. Besides his friends and contemporaries who came under his spell at Oxford, Auden's stature

as a model poet was widely acknowledged. In 1980, John Ashbery, the poet, told an interviewer, "Forty years ago when I first began to read modern poetry . . .he was *the* modern poet." This is augmented by Ian Sansom who traces Auden's defining influence over several generations of English and American poets, and who thus finds it more appropriate to pluralize Hynes' phrase and write of the "Auden Generations".

It is equally important to understand that this influence was not just poetical but that it was also ideological and Marxist. Auden's Marxism has come in for much debate and criticism, but his poetry of the 'thirties was decidedly the poetry of the 'Court Poet of the Left' (E. Mendelson). Even though his brand of Marxism was idiosyncratic, Auden was sensitive to the sweeping political troubles of the time including the rise to power of Hitler, the acute effects of the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the moral debasement of public life which induced him to oppose established bourgeois values. This sense of political radicalism lies behind many poems of the 1930s like 'A Communist to Others'(1932), and 'Spain 1937'.

New Signatures*, *New Writing

In 1937, Geoffrey Grigson named the double number of his periodical *New Verse*, the 'Auden Double Number' which contained tributes by a host of contemporary names including Dylan Thomas, George Barker, Herbert Read, Edwin Muir, Sir Hugh Walpole, and even Ezra Pound.

4.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Auden's range of writing extended over categories of both poetic and prose productions. At the height of his fame he belonged to the 1930s in England when he invited critical attention with the publication of *The Orators* in 1932. You have already read above about some of his major achievements. His work is most memorable both for its range of experimented forms and for the manner in which he formulated the hopes and desires of his times. In the 'English' phase, Auden voiced all those concerns which troubled the whole of the "Auden Generation". Some of the poems stand out with their social themes while others, like the satirical *Letter to Lord Byron*, reach out even to the casual reader. In the anthology *The Poet's Tongue* of 1935, Auden declared that those "who try to put poetry on a pedestal only succeed in putting it on the shelf. Poetry is no better and no worse than human

nature; it is profound and shallow, sophisticated and naïve, dull and witty, bawdy and chaste in turn".

Many of Auden's long poems were written after his move to America (excluding 'Letter to Lord Byron', *The Orators* and the plays for the Group Theatre). These included *New Year Letter* (1940; containing around 1,300 lines in simple English), 'For the Time Being', and 'The Sea and the Mirror'.

Peter Porter comments that Auden wanted to make modern poetry accessible to the modern reader rather than obscure and difficult. This led him to revive many of the older inherited English poetic forms: ballads, Pindaric odes, alliterative verse, threnodies, aphorisms, sapphics, villanelles, sonnets, sestinas, cabaret songs, catalogues, terza rima and ottava rima, rhyme royal, and American syllabics.

The Enchafèd Flood (1951), *The Dyer's Hand* (1963), *Secondary Worlds* (1968) and *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973) contain most of Auden's collected prose work. We might note with interest what Tony Sharpe conjectures: that Auden might be "surprised to observe how much prose he had ended up producing: for he valued his output in this medium much less than his poetry . . . If, as he asserted, art creates its 'secondary' world out of elements found in the 'primary' phenomenal one . . then writings about writing might be deemed to offer no more than a tertiary world."

The Later Auden:

From the summer of 1948 Auden began to visit Italy regularly. The volume *Nones* (1951) is of this period. It was followed by *The Shield of Achilles* in 1955. The poems of these volumes showed Auden's continued experimentation with style and metrics. You will find 'The Shield of Achilles' frequently anthologized. In this connection, you may find it interesting to note what Edward Mendelson has to say: " 'The Shield of Achilles', the opening poem of the middle section of the book of the same name, has become an anthology piece thanks to its apparently straightforward sentiments against war, cruelty, impersonality and regimentation, but the poem is more subtle than its overt sentiments. Its hidden subject is the way in which impersonal speech makes possible inhuman actions. The stanzas in which Thetis watches Hephaestos create Achilles' shield report on actions

for which neither is personally responsible: until the final stanza (where Hephaestos hobbles away from his creation and Thetis cries out in dismay at it), 'she' looks at what 'his hands' do, but neither is an 'I' or 'you' and neither chooses anything. The shield made by 'his hands' portrays equally impersonal scenes of a barren landscape with an army of 'A million eyes, a million boots', but no individual persons except for the 'ragged urchin, aimless and alone', who lives in a solitude where individuality is meaningless because it can imagine no relations to other individuals. The poem became popular partly because it could be read as flattering its readers with the assurance that they are not unjust like faceless authorities and violent youths; but, as always in later Auden, the poem is a deeply unflattering portrait of the reader as the passive, observing Thetis, and of the poet as the indifferent craftsman Hephaestos, each allowing the worst to happen by their failure to protest against it in first-person speech.

The overt themes of *The Shield of Achilles* are large matters of war and injustice, but the covert themes are Auden's arguments with himself about his art and his relation to it."

The volume *Homage to Clio* belonged to 1960 and contains a moving work in prose, 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' (the title of Goethe's autobiography, meaning "poetry and truth"), which is subtitled, 'An Unwritten Poem'. About the year 1957, Auden settled down in the village of Kirchstetten in Austria. In America Auden had been lecturing for nearly two decades and in 1956 he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford a professorship which ran its term till 1961. *About the House* was the volume which appeared in 1965 while *City Without Walls* came out in 1969. This last volume showed Auden at his most autobiographical though also at one of his most inventive phases, while also returning to political themes in such poems as 'August, 1968' much as he had done in 'September 1, 1939'. Auden also wrote in the Japanese poetic form, the haiku, as in 'Et in Arcadia Ego' (in *About the House*). *Epistle to a Godson* was out in 1972 while *Thank You*, *Fog* was brought out posthumously in 1974. He died in his sleep in Vienna in September in 1973.

Stop to Consider:

From 'The Shield of Achilles'

"The mass and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weighs the same,
Lay in the hands of others; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came:
What their foes liked to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.
She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
But there on the shining shield
His hands had set no dancing-floor
But a weed-choked field.
A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept
Or one could weep because another wept." (1952)

4.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, Richard Hoggart, Randall Jarrell, Joseph Warren Beach, Monroe K. Spears, Edward Mendelson, Edward Callan, Samuel Hynes, and Stan Smith are some critics and scholars whose critical comments

and scholarship have determined the shape of Auden's critical heritage. Auden received much critical disdain from the Leavisite critics while he was often assailed for what was conservatively thought to be superficial poetic brilliance. However, as Stan Smith records, "From his first public collection, *Poems* (1930), Auden was everywhere in the 1930s, both text and talisman. Naomi Mitchison in *The Week-end Review*, 25 October 1930, welcomed the volume as the harbinger of 'the New Generation', proof that 'the country is not going to the dogs after all'. . . In 1932 John Hayward, the keeper of T.S.Eliot's critical conscience, wrote of *The Orators* as 'the most valuable contribution to English poetry since *The Wasteland*'. Smith further stresses that the 'Auden effect' lay in that ability to catch the changing moods of the time in luminous images, magical phrases and breath-taking apercus, expressing sentiments that people were unaware they shared until they read him."

4.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

On 26 January 1939 Auden arrived in New York, U.S.A., together with his friend, the writer Christopher Isherwood, as the result of a decision he had previously taken, of moving to America. Auden's biographer tells us, "the snow was falling heavily in New York City. It was the coldest day so far that winter, blocks of ice were seen floating in the Hudson River. About the middle of the day news came that, in Spain, Barcelona had fallen to Franco, and the Spanish Republicans had in effect lost the war." Both features of such an arrival in New York city are carried forward in the poem you are about to read - intense cold, and news of defeat. But why, Yeats?

Arriving in New York, Auden sent some poems to be published and among these were many that were concerned with the failures or successes, and the character, of other writers. For instance, one poem was on Matthew Arnold, another on Voltaire. As a young poet, Auden had looked up to Yeats and had been influenced by him. Yeats had edited, in 1936, Auden's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. In the same year as the poem, in 1939, Auden also wrote a piece entitled, "The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats" in the form of a trial conducted in a court of law. Among the many hostile charges brought by the "prosecution" against the "accused", the poet is found to be guilty of not understanding his age, of being indulgent

towards myths and fairies. The 'defence' is not specially strong in making out a case against these charges. Auden makes some points regarding the role and function of poetry in society which reveal some reservations in his praise for Yeats. Auden writes here, of Yeats's poems: "From first to last they express a sustained protest against the social atomisation caused by industrialism, and both in their ideas and their language a constant struggle to overcome it. The fairies and heroes of the early work were an attempt to find through folk tradition a binding force for society . . .For art is a product of history, not a cause."

The middle section of the poem was added only in the second edition printed in April in the *London Mercury*.

Stop to Consider:

Spanish Civil War

The year 1936 was an important one for the 'New Country' or the left-wing poets among whom Auden stood out. The Spanish Civil War helped to crystallise the prevailing attitudes. On the one hand, the world was gradually pulling itself out of the Great Depression; on the other, the second world war loomed menacingly near. Many of those on the Left felt it was necessary to take decisive action to stop dictators before they proceeded further. On the Right, there was a tendency towards fascism. Those on the Left, working-class or middle-class, fought on the side of the Republicans with the International Brigade in Spain.

At home in England, the Left dominated public opinion. As Allan Rodway remarks, "In that they were communists, or fellow-travellers, Auden and the poets associated with him were logically but uncomfortably aligned with the war party. The importance of the Spanish Civil War for their poetry, however, is not that it made it more warlike, but rather that it gave it a sharper focus. Until that time the 'social' poetry of the Thirties, including that of Auden, had tended to be new and exciting but bitty. The myths of Romanticism and Christianity, so long the standby of literature, had been replaced by a creakingly-working model put together from *Boys' Magazines* stories, spy novels, Norse sagas, and a selection of the doctrines of Freud and Marx. The attempt to make a new myth fit for the new age, to break, in particular, from the bookish and somewhat snobbish modes of Eliot, Pound and Yeats, gave their poetry a certain liveliness and sense of relevance . . . .The Spanish Civil War gave the new myth drama, simplicity, and above all a more evident and urgent relevance"

4.6 READING THE POEM

First section:

Perhaps the readiest description of the poem for you would be to say that it is an elegy. What do we expect when we use the term, 'elegy'? Look at what M.H. Abrams says in his *Glossary of Literary Terms*: "in England, until the seventeenth century and even later, the term was often applied to any poem of solemn meditation. In present critical usage, however, an elegy is a formal and sustained poem of lament for the death of a particular person, such as Tennyson's *In Memoriam* on the death of Arthur Hallam and W.H.Auden's "In Memory of W.B.Yeats." Sometimes the term is more broadly used for meditative poems, such as Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," which deal with the passing of men and the things they value." In the case of Auden's poem perhaps you can use the term in the broader sense that Abrams describes.

SAQ:

Would you find a ready comparison between Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and this elegy? Does Auden express a sense of loss in the poem? (50 + 50 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

The poem, as you find out upon reading it, embraces more than just the loss of the poet, Yeats, especially in the middle section which begins, "You were silly like us . . ". Auden is lamenting the loss of more than the poet; he is lamenting the passing of a phase in the history of contemporary society. This would lie behind lines of the first section like:

"Now he is scattered among a hundred cities

And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections;

To find his happiness in another kind of wood

And be punished under a foreign code of conscience"

The stress is on the 'foreign-ness', the unfamiliar feelings within which the dead poet's poetry will have to find its place. In other words, the context in which the poet had written his lines will no longer be there for them to have meaning. It will be a new set of conditions which will test the power of Yeats' lines. To some extent then, Yeats symbolizes for Auden an age, now vanished: "it was his last afternoon as himself". Auden is suggesting here that the change that has come is an essential one, not a cosmetic one - Yeats would not be himself any more. Seems obvious, but the meaning goes deeper to say that even the essence of Yeats would not be recovered any more. This understanding is important because it brings to us how the widespread awareness during 1939, that a war was imminent, created a sense of deep foreboding. In fact, the two world wars did actually cause upheavals in Western society and brought in changes that made it impossible to turn the clock back, as it were.

The reference to place (city, suburb, ranch, farm, vineyard, desert, town, valley), or geography, follows as the survey of a changing scene. In several of his poems landscapes play a prominent role. In an earlier poem, 'Paysage Moralise' of 1933, Auden describes the conflict of beliefs and goals in terms of geographical units such as valleys, islands, cities, mountains, and so on. Another poem of the 1930s, begins, "The Summer holds: upon its glittering lake / Lie Europe and the islands; many rivers / Wrinkling its surface like a ploughman's palm." What is the role that geographical references play in Auden's poetry? The role is symbolic rather than being limited to just a setting.

SAQ:

How appropriate is the word, "disappeared" in the first line? Does it point to any significant usage of the word? (20 + 50 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Look at the first two stanzas of "In Memory . . ": Yeats has disappeared in the "dead of winter", a winter desert almost when the "mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day". The day was dying, like a patient in whose mouth the thermometer registered no warmth at all. Linking the words, "dead of winter", "deserted", "sank", "dying day" and the last line, "The day of his death was a dark cold day" underlines a sepulchral atmosphere of death, doom and even a spiritual darkness or an enveloping darkness in reference to the sub-zero temperatures that January brings to those latitudes. The second stanza provides a contrast and turns our attention to yet another prospect, to places where the death of the poet has had no effect - the poems, represented by the "evergreen forests", the "peasant river". The countryside represents the limits of the dead poet's fame and renown, those living spaces where Yeats' poetry made no difference. There is an unbroken divide between the urban environment where poetry (like that by Yeats) casts its influence and the rural where life proceeds at it own pace. However, the reader is made to recognize that the poetry cannot die as those who mourn the death of Yeats keep his poetry alive. By reordering some common beliefs, in our ideas of landscape and of death and fame, Auden succeeds in helping us to a judicious consideration of Yeats. Rather than placing town and country equally, he shows them to be separate spheres in terms of what Yeats' influence could mean and then draws a line between the pervasiveness of death and fame. Death is mastered, in the context of Yeats' poetry by "mourning tongues" who renewed the life of Yeats' poems in contrast to the question of his fame which could not penetrate the country:

"Far from his illness / The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests " . The mention of wolves brings a reference to the presence of evil forces in the world against which Yeats's poetry is here understood to have been ineffective. Presumably the "fashionable quays" where the influence of Yeats was to be found were not attractive for the "peasant river". Yeats may have been limited in the extent of his influence but his poems would remain alive in the recitations of his mourners.

SAQ:

Do you think Auden is being very 'modern' in his refusal to be overwhelmed by the extent of Yeats' fame? (60 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

The third stanza talks of the moment of transformation; there is a symmetry in beginning the stanza by pointing out that the moment of death was important for the poet himself because "it was his last afternoon as himself", and then ending with the observation that at the moment of death, the poet "became his admirers". This is another way of amplifying the sense of profound change already being built up in the first two stanzas. Death means not the final end for a great poet like Yeats but a critical moment of absolute change — but also continuity. The proposition is most striking and Auden's metaphors here are equally striking: "The provinces of his body revolted, / The squares of his mind were empty. / Silence invaded the suburbs". A moment of such metamorphosis can only be rendered as cataclysmic; thus it is like an invasion, or a revolt. This is in continuation of the earlier imagery drawn from the urban landscape and so the moment of death gives way to a new form in which Yeats will be encapsulated:

"Now he is scattered among a hundred cities . . . "

Yeats cannot remain as he had been; death transforms a poet such that what had been his expressions now circulate among "unfamiliar affections" . Auden uses the pronoun, "his" ("find *his* happiness") with regard to the dead Yeats perhaps to emphasize what comes at the end of the stanza — "The words of a dead man /Are modified in the guts of the living." This again modifies the common notion of death as absolute end: it is also the change that comes over poet and poetry. So what belongs to the poet — *his* words — are "given over to unfamiliar affections, / To find his happiness in another kind of wood / And be punished under a foreign code of conscience". We may also understand that Auden believes that the poet still 'exists' because he will face these unfamiliar feelings. Death is, indeed, merely a moment of extreme change in the world of poetry and poets.

Auden enters a note of pragmatism in the last stanza of the section as he sets the day of Yeats' passing away amidst the hurly-burly of the living world. The Bourse, or the stock exchange, is the hub of capitalist finance where brisk trading is the order of the day and the brokers show their animal drive. Auden makes the reference to "beasts" not merely to describe this animal drive but even perhaps because trends in the stock exchange are described as being either "bull-ish" or "bear-ish". Juxtaposed with this, the world of the poor is that of forbearance since they have no means to remedy their situation. The important feature of this capitalist world is that all are self-regarding, turned in upon themselves and even convinced of being 'free'. However, individuality and freedom are only relative as commonalities do show up in the normal way that each will remember this day as one marked by something having been done a bit differently. This is Auden's psychological insight into the ways we tend to mark out some important day in public life with reference to some small detail in our own private lives. The reference to 'freedom' is undercut by this insight as if Auden means to say that the freedom of the single individual is an illusion if we consider that there is no freedom from being similar to "a few thousand" other people who experience life in just the same way that their neighbours do. The day of Yeats's death will be remembered differently by each one but all — rich or poor —commonly marking it as "as a day when one did something slightly unusual", a day that was not really unusual in a stark sense.

SAQ:

Trace the line of insistence on the idea of 'freedom' in the poem. What kind of freedom is being referred to? (40 + 60 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Second Section

This section is short, consisting of only a ten-line stanza in free verse. The word, "silly", takes on a special meaning here in the light of Auden's association with its older sense of innocence. To be silly means, in common parlance, to be foolishly innocent, not aware of realities. That sense is uppermost here as Auden goes on to sum up the significance of Yeats's poetic achievement. Auden's admiration for the older poet stopped short of what he had considered to be unacceptable in Yeats - his occultism and his romantic conception of the poet as inspired bard. In a sense, Auden thought Yeats was not alive to the realities of the time and therefore did not offer the right resistance to the forces of evil as he should have. Yet Auden held up Yeats as a great poet.

"The Public v. the late Mr.William Butler Yeats"

Auden's views toward Yeats and his work were never one-sided. Although he felt tremendous admiration for the older poet's technical ability, he was never able to support Yeats' understanding of the poet's larger role and his view of the aims and purposes of poetry. To some extent, this poetic memorial to Yeats is an attempt to confront this contradiction and to clarify the confusion surrounding it. As Richard Ellmann states it, for Yeats magic provides the metaphor for poetry: the "evocation of disembodied powers which . . effect changes in the world". For Auden, on the contrary, poetry's work is to tell the truth, "to disenchant and disintoxicate". Yeats regards the poet in the highest terms, the "highest man", a hero. With Auden, the poet is, the modern citizen obliged to vote in elections. Auden reposed no faith in the Romantic conception of the poet which fed the roots of Yeats' poetry.

Auden had the highest regard for Yeats' linguistic mastery and his gift for metrics. The ultimate homage that Auden pays to Yeats in this connection is by using a characteristically Yeatsian diction in the first stanza of the elegy. But Auden's rejection of the Yeatsian love of magic is based on the idea that it is opposed to rationality; it appeals to the same source of feelings in individuals that underpins a childlike silliness and that lets in the effects of dark, evil forces in the world that are real or natural rather than supernatural. Auden saw this Romantic notion of the poet in line with the "bardic notion of the poet" held by the Romantics and adopted by Yeats. As Edward Callan sees it, Auden was moved by "an almost obsessive fear of the danger of Yeats's kind of outlook" because he realized its close relationship with the cult

of the " 'inspired' national leader – Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin – that threatened the survival of European democracy in the thirties." How justified Auden was in this realization is borne out by Yeats' leaning toward fascism late in life.

Edith Whitehurst Williams, from whose 1981 essay the commentary above is taken, adds:

"These questions preoccupied Auden not only during Yeats's lifetime, but long after, and in a 1948 essay, referring to the occult notions set forth in *A Vision*, he is still pondering impatiently: "How on earth, we wonder, could a man of Yeats's gifts take such nonsense seriously?" The central question is not so much how Yeats could take it seriously, but how a man of his, Auden's, intellect, who detested the nonsense, could so wholeheartedly admire the gifts. This is the problem with which he is struggling at the time of the older poet's death, and in the whimsical pair of prosecution-defence essays, "The Public vs. the Late W. B. Yeats," written virtually at the same time as the elegy, he arrives, at least for the time being, at a satisfactory answer."

The troubles of Ireland had provided the themes of Yeats's poetry which also made place for "rich women" and "physical decay". This is a reference to Yeats's passion for Maud Gonne and his friendship with Lady Gregory both of whom provided both the themes and the resources for his poetry. Auden is suggesting here that if Yeats drew upon Irish national traditions for his poetry, he also did not spurn his own attachments as the subject of his writing. But, as we read, Yeats' poetic gifts were larger than what they often turned to — "your gift survived it all". Yeats's best work related to the Irish struggle: "Mad Ireland hurt into poetry". Yeats's poetry is finally more transient than Ireland — "Ireland has her madness and her weather still". The next line makes clear what is Auden's real point; poetry is of no real use to anyone, so it has no permanent value. It "makes nothing happen" and therefore, —to pursue Auden's own logic — why should a poet like Yeats be remembered? Auden repeats the two words, "it survives", to stress its enduring power; it survives because it is "a way of happening", an alternate mode of occurrence, an alternative, "a mouth".

Poetry endures in a landscape that looks like America — ranches, and "raw towns" through which poetry flows like a river. We should note here that the image of the river in this section with which poetry is equated, is a river that is first seen in the beginning of the poem, to be frozen ("the brooks

were frozen") possibly straight and unmeandering. If considered as the fount of inspiration, the river resumes its flow in a landscape less demanding – so, "it survives /In the valley of its making . . . flows on south / From ranches of isolation . . ." This fount of inspiration reappears at the end, as a "healing fountain". By imaging poetry as a river that has resumed its flow in a new landscape, and by using the typically American words, "ranches" and "raw towns", Auden's own relocation to America is brought in. His emigration to America on the brink of imminent war had made him extremely controversial in England with the matter even being brought up in parliament. Auden was identified as the leader of a generation of English poets in the period between the two great wars and his name became a synonym for a set of attitudes which were largely predisposed towards communism. From this point of view it was perhaps already inevitable that Yeats' ideas should confront him with a host of difficult issues but Auden does the older poet the honour of acknowledging his gifts.

SAQ:

Which lines in the poem highlight the difficulty of adopting an appropriate perspective on the dead poet? (70 words)

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Final Section:

The next section thus expands the range of ideas and issues that Yeats' death had placed before him for an intellectually honest appraisal. So the line, "Earth, receive an honoured guest" comes with grace and compassion. When Auden exhorts that Yeats the man be separated from his gifts, ("Let the Irish vessel . . . its poetry.") he is maintaining his favoured view that the

private and the public be distinguished from each other. Yeats' political stance conflicted with Auden's own, in the later phases of Yeats' life in particular, and this difficulty runs through the veins of the elegy. For Auden, Yeats' poetic diction and style contained what he thought to be the linguistic parallels of a democracy – "strength and clarity".

The next two stanzas highlight the grim political catastrophes facing poet and poetry in 1939. This "nightmare" was the apprehended destructive violence of the world war which would break out within the year over Europe. He returns to the virtues of the dead poet, asking him, "With your unconstraining voice / Still persuade us to rejoice" and then to "Teach the free man how to praise", the 'free' individual now imprisoned by the period's nightmarish closeness to apocalypse. We should note here that if we bring in a Romantic sense of Yeats as inspired teacher who teaches us through poetry, we will be reading Auden inappropriately. We have to remember that Auden ascribed to language the potency of creating new realities. So when he urges the poet to "follow right / To the bottom of the night" Auden is bringing up the idea that the poet should delve into the evil configurations that become the settings for poetry and then to supply the kind of alternative vision that celebrates the individual voice to override all that threatens life and joy in the present. The poet thus has a social responsibility that depends on the power of language – "With the farming of a verse / Make a vineyard of the curse". When Auden regards Yeats, it is neither with unstinting admiration, nor is it to reject. Auden recognized elsewhere that Yeats' poetry showed the diction of "a just man". Auden also recognized Yeats' sterling adherence to the potentialities of language; the poetry constituted a different matter because a poem reaches out to the audience. Within the circumstances of the time, where the "seas of pity lie / Locked and frozen in each eye" Yeats' poems, Auden felt, could commit the error of supporting the dark forces of fascism. Of course, we could also read this in conjunction with the earlier assertion that poetry "makes nothing happen". However, poetry is also the symbol of the "healing fountain", the power of creativity, which sustains human society. In order that society lives on, then, this fountain must flow on. The pattern is traced out in the metaphorical line from the frozen "seas of pity" to the flowing fountain towards the end. That human source of compassion can be tapped when the poet does not forget the importance of being in society.

Stop to Consider:

In another earlier version of the elegy, three stanzas relating to the power of language, the status of the poet and the question of social responsibility read thus:

"Time that is intolerant

Of the brave and innocent,

And indifferent in a week

To a beautiful physique,

Worships language and forgives

Everyone by whom it lives;

Pardons cowardice, conceit,

Lays its honours at their feet.

Time that with this strange excuse

Pardoned Kipling and his views,

And will pardon Paul Claudel,

Pardons him for writing well."

4.7 SUMMING UP

This unit should have incited your interest in the poetry of W.H. Auden. We have provided you with an explanation of the poem prescribed for your study so that you can at least state its salient features. How much historical material went into the writing of the poem has also been brought to you. While Auden would have approved an innovative reading of the poem since he considered poetry to be an epistemological source which gives us knowledge of the world, it is also important that we should know for certain some of the complex history that gave life to the elegy to Yeats so that the contextual meaning of each word in the poem is recovered. That way our own readings here will be found to be nuanced and sensitive.

Check Your Progress:

1. 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' reveals the dilemmas of conflicting perspectives. Examine the validity of this statement.

2. Would you agree with the view that Auden's elegy explores continuities rather than death? Support your answer with examples from the poem.

3. Explain the significance of the line "You were silly like us". How does Auden attempt to support this view in the rest of the poem?

4. Show how Auden 'contemporizes' the elegy as he pays homage to Yeats. To what extent does Auden's brand of modernity make the elegy a 'popular' form?

4.8 REFERENCES & SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Auden, W.H. *Selected Poems* (New Edition); edited by Edward Mendelson, New York: Vintage International, December 1989.

2. Rodway, Allan *A Preface to Auden* ; Longman, New York, 1984.

3. Smith, Stan *The Cambridge Companion to W.H.Auden*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K.2004.

* * *

ENG-02-XV (2)

Institute of Distance and Open Learning
GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

MA in English
Semester 3

Paper XV
Poetry IV - Modern Poetry

Block 2
More Modern Explorations

Contents:

Block Introduction:

Unit 1 : **William Carlos Williams: "Spring and All"**

Unit 2 : **Wallace Stevens: "Emperor of Ice cream"**

Unit 3 : **Philip Larkin: "Church Going"**

Unit 4 : **Ted Hughes: "Thrushes", "Pike"**

Unit 5 : **Dylan Thomas: "Poem in October"**

Unit 6 : **Seamus Heaney: "After a Killing"**

Contributors:

Saradashree Choudhury (Unit 1)	:	Assistant Professor in English Morigaon College, Morigaon
Binita Sarmah (Unit 2)	:	Academic Counsellor in English IDOL, Gauhati University
Mahashweta Datta (Units 3 & 5)	:	Academic Counsellor in English IDOL, Gauhati University
Jayshree Borthakur (Unit 4)	:	Assistant Professor in English B. Borooah College, Guwahati
Dr. Tapati Baruah Kashyap (Unit 6)	:	Academic Counsellor in English IDOL, Gauhati University

Editorial Team:

Dr. Kandarpa Das	:	Director IDOL, Gauhati University
Dr. Uttara Debi	:	Asstt. Professor in English IDOL, Gauhati University
Prasenjit Das	:	Asstt. Professor in English KKHSOU, Guwahati
Manab Medhi	:	Guest Faculty in English IDOL, Gauhati University
Sanghamitra De	:	Guest Faculty in English IDOL, Gauhati University

Cover Page Designing:

Kaushik Sarma	:	Graphic Designer CET, IITG

August, 2011

© Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. Further information about the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University courses may be obtained from the University's office at IDOL Building, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14.

Published on behalf of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University by Dr. Kandarpa Das, Director and printed at J.S. Printer, Silpukhuri, Guwahati, Assam. Copies printed 1000.

Acknowledgement

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University duly acknowledges the financial assistance from the Distance Education Council, IGNOU, New Delhi, for preparation of this material.

Block Introduction:

The group of poets that comes to you in this Block is unified only by our own compulsions to get everyone together under one heading! Looking closely at all of these poets, you will find out the near-irrationality of this very peculiar arrangement by which we cobble together a few names so that you can study all of them by opening the pages of one book. For instance, the experience of reading the work of Dylan Thomas is quite at variance from the one of going through the lines of poets like, either William Carlos Williams, or even of Seamus Heaney. But we must also be careful to remind ourselves that we are indeed looking at a very wide field of literary work – "Poetry in the Modern World". From our immediate perspective, this "modern" world goes back about a hundred years, or fifty, at the very least. The poetry that came from the minds grappling with the cataclysms of their time and the social fabric (torn apart by two great wars) that provided less and less scope to the writing of poetry, comprises the documents of an age that seems almost to have metamorphosed into a vastly different one.

That brings us to the problem of the disjunctions that are written into the poems of the modern period. The poetry of the modern world is probably special in that it does not attempt to hide behind a seamless façade all that forced it into its existence. What is meant by this is that whether in the poetry of Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, Stevens, William Carlos Williams, or even Heaney, we are always made abundantly aware that the poet sets beside the conception of the ideal world the disjunctions of experience which cannot be sewn into the sinews of a mellifluous, harmonious sequence of lines. There is indeed transparently available the consciousness of the poet deeply disturbed, embarking on a quest for new meanings, whether through recurring thematic patterns or through the semantic experimentation which is the hallmark of the modernist poet. When Ted Hughes explores the poetic realm through his empathy with the world of animals, we are not given to be complacent about the kind of discovery that should ensue. Rather, with Hughes we embark on a journey to the unknown where new values should be encountered.

Something of this quality lies with Larkin, as with the others included here. We had to take care not to commit the error of clubbing together the writers we present here as "Modern Poets". "Poetry in the Modern World" encapsulates the range of meanings, and articulations that the poets put into

words. Also, the modern world is a major obsession with these poets; even where it is the self that animates the lines, the ultimate quest for meaning reigns over all as the poetry had to contend with the absence of the older theories of the world and the universe. Projections of either the past or the future seem to be ever-present in the lines of the modern poets – in "Church going", "Spring and All" and most of all "Poem in October". Other kinds of energy sustain the emotions in the rest of the poems brought to you here.

Poetry gives us a heightened awareness of the relationship between language and external reality. Even where it is able to circumvent its own constraints, the language of poetry tends to get submerged into the business of artifice. However, the poets of the modern world appear to have held up a compulsive struggle against this tendency to involve words in the making of an artifice. The struggle is intense because words are not stable quantities or fixed ciphers. The tendency to formal artificiality also gets broken with the breaking of generic forms. You should be able to get to these attributes of modern poetry by reading closely through the units on the different poets of this block. Meanwhile, you must carry on with reading outside the prescribed poems as well.

This block has the following units—

Unit 1 : William Carlos Williams: "Spring and All"

Unit 2 : Wallace Stevens: "Emperor of Ice cream"

Unit 3 : Philip Larkin: "Church Going"

Unit 4 : Ted Hughes: "Thrushes", "Pike"

Unit 5 : Dylan Thomas: "Poem in October"

Unit 6 : Seamus Heaney: "After a Killing"

Unit 1
William Carlos Williams: "Spring and All"

Contents:

1.1 Objectives
1.2 Introducing the Poet
1.3 Works of the Poet
1.4 Critical Reception
1.5 Context of the Poem
1.6 Reading the Poem "The Emperor of Ice-Cream"
1.7 Summing up
1.8 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to introduce you to one of the important American poets of the twentieth century, William Carlos Williams. Attempts have been made to familiarize you with the poet's background as well as the various literary, social and cultural concerns that informed his works. After reading this unit, you should be able to–

- *situate* the poet within his proper historical context
- *understand* the nature of his literary preoccupations
- *appreciate* his style and use of imagery; and
- *explore* the possible range of meanings in the text

1.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

The American poet William Carlos Williams pursued two parallel vocations in life—that of a physician and a poet. Born in Rutherford, New Jersey, in 1883, he took his medical degree from University of Pennsylvania in 1906 and published *Poems*, his first volume of poetry in 1909. Williams "worked harder at being a writer than he did at being a physician" writes biographer Linda Wagner Martin.

Recognized as one of the most original and influential poets of the twentieth century, his poetry is deceptively simple. As critics have often noted, no object or occasion was 'unpoetic' to him: 'No ideas but in things', Williams declared, and he found his subjects in such homely things as 'refrigerated plums' and 'wheelbarrows'. His early work shows the influence of Imagism in its objectivity and precision; his later poems however move beyond the interest of the movement, and become more personal.

Stop To Consider:

Williams on the Making of the Poem

"By listening to the language of his locality the poet begins to learn his craft. It is his function to lift, by the use of his imagination and the language he hears, the material conditions and appearances of his environment to the sphere of the intelligence where they will have new currency. Thus anything that the poet can effectively lift from its dull bed by force of the imagination becomes his material. Anything. The commonplace, the tawdry, the sordid all have their poetic uses if the imagination can lighten them. This broadening of the choice in the materials of poetry has great modern significance; there is an older parallel to it in painting where by dwelling upon light itself the artist has often drawn many otherwise unsightly objects into his works.

Emotions cluster about common things, the pathetic often stimulates the imagination to new patterns—but the job of the poet is to use language effectively, his own language, the only language which is to him authentic. In my work it has always sufficed that the object of my attention be presented without further comment. This in general might be termed as the objective method. But all art is sensual and poetry particularly so. It is directly, that is, of the senses, and since senses do not exist without an object for their employment all art is necessarily objective. It doesn't declaim or explain; it presents.

But an image is not a poem, for that would leave the language and the form of the poem at loose ends. A poem is a whole, an object in itself, a 'word' with a particular meaning old or new. The whole poem, image and form, that is, constitutes a single meaning. This is the full meaning of the term 'objective' as I employ it." (William Carlos Williams, "A Note on Poetry" included in *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press)

Although primarily a doctor, Williams had a remarkable and vigorous literary career. He wrote short stories, poems, critical essays, a biography and

translations. In the early part of this poetic career, he was influenced by the Imagist Movement but soon developed ideas that differed from those of poets like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Unlike Pound and Eliot, Williams did not favour use of allusions to foreign languages and classical sources. Instead, Williams preferred to draw his themes from what he called "the local". He advocated that poets should leave aside traditional poetic forms and unnecessary literary allusions and try to see the world as it is. His poems also display his metrical invention 'the variable foot', which he felt approximated colloquial American speech more closely than did traditional meters.

During the First World War, Williams came into contact with avant-garde artists like Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and with a group of New York artists and writers known as "The Others". It is through such associations that Williams was acquainted with the literary and artistic movements of the period like Dadaism and Surrealism. Williams' most anthologized poem "The Red Wheel Barrow" is considered as one of the supreme examples of the style and principles of the Imagist Movement.

Stop to Consider:

Williams's Contemporaries

Although T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were strong influences in the literature of the modern period, a number of important poets in the generations that followed were either personally trained by Williams or referred to Williams as a major influence. The American Literary Movements of the 1950s: poets of the Beat Generation, the San Francisco Renaissance, the Black Mountain School— Williams had significant influence on all these. Poets like Charles Olson, Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov, who were instrumental in developing the poetry of the Black Mountain School, studied under Williams. Another of Williams' dynamic relationship as a mentor was with the New Jerseyite poet Allen Ginsberg, who claimed that Williams essentially freed his poetic voice.

He considered himself a socialist and an opponent of capitalism, and in 1935 published "The Yachts", a poem which indicts the rich elite as parasites and the masses as striving for revolution. The poem features an image of the ocean as the "watery bodies" of the poor masses beating at their hulls "in agony, in despair", attempting to sink the yachts and end "the horror of the

race”. Furthermore, in the introduction to his 1944 book of poems *The Wedge*, he writes of socialism as an inevitable future development and as necessity for true art to develop.

In 1949, Williams suffered a cardiac attack and subsequently his health began to decline; he underwent treatment for clinical depression in a psychiatric hospital during 1953. At the age of seventy nine, on March 4, 1963, Williams died at his home in Rutherford, New Jersey. In the month of May, he received posthumously both the Pulitzer Prize and the gold medal for poetry of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

1.3 WORKS OF THE POET

William Carlos Williams is a major poet of the modern period and his poetic oeuvre has enriched the gamut of American poetry. In this section, I shall give you a brief account of his poems, which has to be supplemented by your own readings of Williams:

1. Paterson: *Paterson* is considered to be Williams’ epic-poem. This poem is composed of five books and a fragment of a sixth book. The five books of *Paterson* were published separately in 1946, 1948, 1949, 1951, and 1958, and the entire work was published as a unit in 1963. Williams’ book *In the American Grain* is claimed to be *Paterson’s* abstracted introduction involving a rewritten American history. It is a poetic monument to, and personification of, the city of Paterson, New Jersey. However, as a whole the three main themes of the poem are Paterson the Man, Paterson the City, and Identity. The poem is centered in an in-depth look at the process of modernization and its effects. As a critically analytic presentation of an American city, *Paterson* is realistic in its approach to humanity.

Paterson has not been among Williams’ more popular works but it has been respected in the literary circles. It is a kind of epic of a city, working in the history of the city, its mythology. Discussing Paterson in the essay “William Carlos Williams: The Unity of his Art”, Linda Welshimer Wagner opines that the culmination of Williams’ experimentation with prose and poetry is achieved with *Paterson*:

"and the guys from Paterson
beat up
the guys from Newark and told
them to stay the hell out
of their territory and then
soaked you one
across the nose…"

The lines quoted above readily testify to this feature of Williams' use of colloquial and local idiom in *Paterson* as highlighted by Wagner. The first idea centering upon the poem *Paterson*, as Williams declares in *The Autobiography* is to "find an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world about me. The longer I lived in my place, among the details of my life, I realized that these isolated observations and experiences needed pulling together to gain profundity. I already had the river…I wanted if I was to write in a larger way than of the birds and flowers, to write about the people close to me: to know in detail, minutely what I was talking about—to the whites of their eyes, to their very smells." Paterson shows that the magnitude of Williams' subject matter in his poetry ranges from ordinary commonplace things of day-to-day life to encompass the nature of existence in a city.

2. "The Red Wheelbarrow": "The Red Wheelbarrow" is perhaps one of the best-known poems by William Carlos Williams. This poem exemplifies Williams' Imagist-influenced philosophy of "No ideas but in things". The style of the poem forgoes traditional British stress patterns to create a typically American image. "The Red Wheelbarrow" was published in Williams' 1923 anthology of mixed prose and poetry titled *Spring and All*. It was originally simply entitled "XXII", denoting its place within the anthology. Referring to the poem as "The Red Wheelbarrow" has been frowned upon by some critics, including Neil Easterbrook, who said that it gives the text "a specifically different frame" than that which Williams originally intended. The poem is removed from its place in the anthology, and takes on a different meaning on its own:

"so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens"

The pictorial style in which the poem is written owes much to the photographs of Alfred Stieligtz and the precisionist style of Charles Sheeler, an American photographer-painter whom Williams met shortly before composing the poem. The poem represents an early stage in Williams' evolution as a poet. It focuses on the objective representation of an object, in line with the Imagist philosophy that was only ten years old at the time of the poem's publication. Williams' later works sacrifice some of this objective clarity in order to personalize the image for the reader. This is clearly illustrated in the poet's longest piece, *Paterson*, the first book of which was published in 1942. In this later work, Williams writes a prose-like monologue, which stands in stark contrast to the brief, haiku-like form of *The Red Wheelbarrow.*

The Red Wheelbarrow represents Williams' desire to raise the individual "to some approximate co-extension with the universe...to refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live". He wanted to "escape from crude symbolism, the annihilation of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate work from reality". The first line of the poem is open-ended. Sandra K. Stanley wrote that it represents a "demand that the reader confront the text".

Much attention has been given to the word "glazed" in the fifth line of the poem. It is the only word in the poem that can be said to carry an aesthetic meaning. The French literary critic and theorist Michael Riffaterre says that this word is "the real agent of the poem's efficacy", because it transforms the wheelbarrow into an object of aesthetic contemplation.

The subject matter of *The Red Wheelbarrow* is distinctive and striking. Williams lifts a brazier to an artistic level. Exemplifying the importance of the ordinary; as he says, a poem "must be real, not 'realism', but reality

itself." In the poem, the image of the wheelbarrow is introduced starkly. The vivid word "red" lights up the scene. The monosyllabic words in line 3 elongate the line, putting an unusual pause between the word "wheel" and "barrow." This has the effect of breaking the image down to its most basic parts. The reader feels as though he or she were scrutinizing each part of the scene. Using the sentence as a painter uses line and colour, Williams' breaks up the words in order to see the object more closely. The word "glazed" in line 5 evokes another painterly image. Just as the reader is beginning to notice the wheelbarrow through a closer perspective, the rain transforms it as well, giving it a newer, fresher look. This new vision of the image is, perhaps, what Williams is aiming for.

SAQ:

"so much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow / glazed with rain / water / beside the white /chickens". In these lines, study the attempt at precision of visual detail. Does the style convey emotion or pure description? Would you call this imagery or description? (30 + 50 words)

....

....

....

....

3. "The Yachts": In "The Yachts," Williams' imagistic presentation coexists with a tendency toward symbolism. The occasion is a yacht race in a bay protected from the "too-heavy blows/ of an ungoverned ocean" (2-3). During the preparations for the race, the speaker is impressed by the physical beauty of the graceful craft, "Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute/ brilliance of cloudless days, with broad bellying sails" (6).

The problem of interpreting "The Yachts" arises with the shift, in the last three stanzas, from objective description to a fantastic picture of the stormy waves as either consisting of or filled with human bodies in agony. This shift is abrupt even though the sea's destructive power has been introduced into the opening lines. The wild symbolic picture at the end could represent human suffering that is felt to underlie the perfection and luxury symbolized by the yachts. The strangeness of the passage lies in its composite visual image of sea resembling bodies and bodies resembling sea:

> "It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair
> until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind,
> the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies
> lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold…" (27-30).

Some critics like Christian Leed and Yi-Ling Lin interpret the poem from a Marxist perspective such that the yacht race becomes symbolic of the lack of class mobility in American society and the wide gulf that exists between upper and lower classes. He presents a picture in which the yachts survive stormy waves and keep on racing without taking note of the large number of people who fall into the sea and struggle to clutch at the prows of the yachts. The "well made" smooth indestructibility of the yachts suggests how difficult it is to redistribute the social resources between the rich and the poor. The drowning scene further suggests that any attempts at social equality would be futile.

Luxurious yachts are symbolic of the rich at leisure. Williams describes how the yachts are surrounded and followed by both larger and smaller craft, each sycophantic and clumsy by comparison. The rich occupy a similarly sheltered and enviable position in society, their power and wealth insulating them against bad weather.

In contrast to the leisure that the rich enjoy, the crew—representatives of the working class—takes care of these toys of the rich, crawling over them "ant-like, solicitously grooming them" (line 10). In fact, the dockworkers and the crew of these yachts are only two representatives of many groups of people in the working class that is referred to as "the biggest hulls" (4). That these people's lack of wealth and privilege leads to insecurity is suggested by the scene in which the sea that devours even the biggest hulls is unable to harm the yachts. The sea "tortures the biggest hulls," sinking them "pitilessly / Mothlike in mists" (5-6). But when the waves strike at the yachts, "they are too / well made, [and] they slip through" (23-24). Even if the poor were to seek to seize some resources from the rich, they are doomed to failure: the yachts would relentlessly "cut aside" their bodies (26). Finally, the corporeal fragmentation of the poor in the last three stanzas merely highlights their weakness and their failure to protect themselves or to survive:

"…Broken/ Beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up/ They cry out, failing, failing! Their cries rising/ in waves still as the skillful yachts pass over" (30-33).

4. "To Elsie": "To Elsie," Williams' poem about America, reflects the concepts about the nature of life in that country and which Williams was to reiterate in *In the American Grain*. The poem begins with the famous declaration "The pure products of America / go crazy—" and then immediately starts offering examples of the "products" in question: "mountain folk from Kentucky /or the ribbed north end of / Jersey. . . ." These phrases are wholly generic in their reference and the poem continues at this level for several stanzas, speaking of "devil-may-care men" and "young slatterns" without fully individuating them. The reason why "the pure products of America," such as Elsie Borden, "go crazy," is because they are rootless. They have "imaginations which have no / peasant traditions to give them / character." Consequently they have no emotion

> "save numbed terror
> under some hedge of choke-cherry
> or viburnum—
> which they cannot express—…" (24-27).

Williams here left the reference of "which" deliberately ambiguous, so that it becomes clear that not only the numbed terror is inexpressible to them but also the hedge of 'choke-cherry' and the 'viburnum'. They are incapable of seeing, of understanding nature, the organic object. Girls like Elsie, who have a slight, instinctive longing for contact, for an understanding of the objective world, will go insane due to their inability to establish this contact, due to the desolation, disease, and murder within which they are placed. But such an Elsie can, "with broken brain," express the truth about us, showing us how we behave

> "as if the earth under our feet
> were
> an excrement of some sky . . ." (49-51).

"To Elsie" focuses three of Williams' main concerns: a despoiled America, the alienated and self-alienating human condition, and the ravished Eden of

the imagination. The considerable power of this poem resides neither in the summary image of Elsie herself, which occupies so few lines, nor in any texture of precise particulars. The diction is often general and seemingly flaccid: "devil-may-care men who have taken / to railroading / out of sheer lust of adventure," or "young slatterns, bathed / in filth." As a dramatic monologue, however, the poem surmounts such language. Its major focus is the speaker himself, who sums up—in swift, passionate, and broken utterance—the human condition in which he participates.

"To Elsie" expresses the truth about a culture in which aspirations are not fed by an organic relation to the physical environment. At the end of "To Elsie," Williams delineates his culture with the image of a driverless car.

5. "The Widow's Lament in Spring Time": In another spring poem, "The Widow's Lament in Spring Time," the confrontation with the awakening life is extremely painful because it throws the woman (in the poem) back on her own deprivation, this confrontation culminates in the experience of the overwhelming 'whiteness' of the blossoming trees.In this poem, 'white' is a symbol of a world from which all colours as material attributes have disappeared. 'White', therefore, acts upon our psyche as a great, absolute silence:

"The plumtree is white today/with masses of flowers/…/load the cherry branches/and colour some bushes/ yellow and some red/but the grief in my heart/is stronger than they…" (9-16).

The paradox of flaming 'cold fire' foreshadows the conflict between bright colors and the drabness of the woman's life; the enclosure of the same 'cold fire' foreshadows the conclusion, in which she is smothered both physically and emotionally by whiteness. The widow tries to speak in short restrained sentences but her emotion breaks through three times—once in the initial metaphor (around line 6), then more forcefully midway through the poem (line 19), and finally in the last sentence, where the two '*ands*' imply a death wish:

"I feel that I would like/ to go there/and fall into those flowers/ and sink into the marsh near them" (25-28). The new life around the lady serves only to exacerbate her wretched condition.

The simplicity of the vocabulary also adds poignancy; it reveals the woman as distraught and inarticulate. One could notice the starkness implied "Thirtyfive years/ I lived with my husband." The contrast of "formerly" and "before" with "this year" and "today," the last used three times in the short poem, stresses the immediacy of the widow's loss.

Besides poetry, Williams also composed a few plays. Drama, as Williams saw it, was one of the most flexible of forms. *Many Loves*, (earlier titled *Play Horse No.1*) makes use of both prose and poetry, and play within the play. *A Dream of Love, The Cure*, and *Tituba's Children* are three-act plays. Williams' introduction to the libretto for his opera about Washington, the first president, is one of the most thorough statements on drama. In many ways Williams seemed to consider drama, poetry and prose interchangeable. His short stories are often evocations of ordinary American reality. Many have to do with his relation as a doctor to poor folk and their children in the industrialized section of New Jersey in which he lived and had his practice.

Check Your Progress:

1. Explain the poem 'Spring and All' in terms of Williams's use of familiar objects of daily life as images.

2. Comment on Williams' negotiation with the tenets of modernism in his view of poetry. Does he attempt a social critique in his poems?

1.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

William Carlos Williams shared the general modernist hatred of the industrial-urban debasement of traditional culture and art. It is he, more than any other recent American poet, who bridged the gulf between technical innovation in modern poetry and the particulars of ordinary life. As a modernist poet, he remained an innovator throughout; like Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens, he too expected his work to be a new extension of reality and to unravel a new dimension of reality. The resulting poems fascinated the readers with familiar moods, things and speech expressed in a new mode of technical artistry. Williams uses forms developed by avant-garde craftsmanship which are also addressed to the common reader:

"All this—
was for you old woman
I wanted to write a poem
that you would understand
For what good is it to me
if you cant understand it
But you got to try hard—" ("January Morning")

Lines such as these evoke a feeling of intimacy, which according to the critic Neil Myers, would be inconceivable in modernist poets like Eliot and Pound. Myers also notices a strain of sentimentalism in Williams' poetry and draws a parallel with Whitman: "Williams is constantly working out material on his own body, using his personal history with a self-conscious honesty close to narcissisms. Much of his work is a continuing song on himself. Like Whitman, he [Williams] can dote on himself":

"If I admire my arms, my face,
My shoulders, flanks, buttocks
Against the yellow drawn shades,
Who shall say I am not—
The happy genius of my household? " ("Danse Russe")

At a time when such influential poets as Yeats, Eliot, Ezra Pound were asserting aristocratic refinement, impersonal reserve, and formal elegance as the primary values in life and art, Williams defiantly asserts himself in an attitude of radical independence, emotional exuberance, bodily energy, and self-admiration. But while celebrating his uniqueness (in the above quoted lines), Williams acknowledges his implication in an ordinary, domestic world; he is not a godlike figure, but the "happy genius" of his "household". This involvement in the ordinary not only suggests how Williams may be distinguished from his more refined contemporaries.

The basic principles of Williams' poetic theory as pointed out by Linda Welshimer Wagner are: (1) his insistence on the use of American idiom as distinct from the British; (2) his devotion to his own local as a means of attaining a valid universal; (3) his premise of "No ideas but in things", the need to communicate through tangible situations and objects; (4) his rationale

of organic form, the art object as a machine made of words, searching for its own autonomous shape.

Williams' antagonism toward all things British—intensified by the expatriation of Pound and Eliot—was only a small part of his insistence on the use of American speech in American art. As a doctor, he was surrounded with the vernacular—sometimes crude, sometimes impassioned, but always real. The greatest example of Williams' use of idiomatic American speech is *In the American Grain*:

"History, history! We fools, what do we know or care?...No, we are not Indians but we are men of their world. The blood means nothing; the spirit, the ghost of the land moves in the blood, moves the blood. It is we who ran to the shore naked, we who cried, "Heavenly Man!" These are the inhabitants of our souls, our murdered souls that lie…agh. Listen!" ("The Fountain of Eternal Youth" from *In the American Grain*).

"life isn't anymore poetry than prose", Williams muses in *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, "prose emphasizes a metrical continuity between all word use…prose and verse are all writing". Stressing the unity between the forms of writing, Williams calls for a "prose construction" for his poetry—the use of normal syntax, colloquial vocabulary and direct statement. When he speaks of new measure for writing poetry, Williams opines that "speech, nascent prose holds within it that which measured in more simple fashion might make it a verse". Williams' view of the reciprocity between poetry and prose is of great importance to an understanding of his works.

A number of critics hail Williams as an arch-imagist. However, his poems are not simply collocations of hard, external images. They have a quality of internal happening, as Myers says, of an "inward structural event that somehow manages to convey a sense of the mystery of objects and relationships, and that makes the orderly contrast of conventional imagist poems like H.D.'s "Orchard" or Eliot's "Preludes" seem relatively static".

Williams attacked the traditional order by breaking the syntactic conventions that enabled writers to link dissimilar things:

> "We must break down
>
> the line
>
> the sentence
>
> to get at the unit of the *measure* in order to build again." ("An Approach to the Poem" in *English Institute Essays*, 1947).

By breaking down the line and the sentence, William hoped to write a poetry that would emphasize the dissimilarity of things, and thus their particular perfections. Patrick Moore in his essay "William Carlos Williams and the Modernist Attack on the Logical Syntax" urges: "Good poems…will not use the medieval logic of 'is' and the traditional poetic comparison of 'is like' to join dissimilar things to express an idea. Instead good poems will appear broken". The syntax of Williams' poetry expresses the deforming impulses expressed in his prose, impulses that were shared by other poets of his time. Donald Davis argues that "what is common to all modern poetry is the assertion or the assumption (most often the latter) that syntax in poetry is wholly different from syntax as understood by logicians and grammarians". Williams separated syntax from logic. Williams preferred not to use syntax in his poetry to assign a single meaning or a related set of meanings to a thing and then to use the newly assigned meanings to prove a point or convey an idea. If grammar means the traditional rules of language, then Williams abandoned grammar to create a poetry that was full of fragments and floating phrases. As Hugh Kenner observes: "The sentence offered, not really finished, becomes a prime Williams strategy." Patrick Moore observes several techniques of syntactic deviations in Williams' poetry. He points out that in some of the poems Williams avoids the use of finite verbs to suggest the progressive movement of thought to a conclusion. For instance, a finite verb does not appear until line 15 of "Spring and All", which hints at the coming of spring:

> "Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
> dazed spring approaches" (14-15).

Williams evolved his version of modernist technique to render feeling directly and luminously. For Williams the poet, everything has a 'look' sharply different from whatever one usually expects; he constantly refers to suddenly caught glances, expressions, stares—the look on his son's face, an old woman eating plums, even a red wheelbarrow or a green bottle between walls. His cubism reflects provincial American art, it frees objects, moments, relationships of stock response; it allows him to cultivate an alertness which sees everything as new, full of puzzling, unpredictable clarity.

1.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Widely recognized as one of the most influential poet of twentieth century poetry, William Carlos Williams' poetic oeuvre eschews the influences of imagism as well as his appropriation of colloquial American speech. According to Albert Gelpi, 'this poem is a fine example of Williams' verbal Cubist Realism' and shares certain similarities with T. S Eliot's *The Waste Land* in terms of the depiction of bleak and barren landscape. Beginning with impressions that gets transformed into a quickened vision of existence lurking beneath the surface, "Spring and All" is the first poem in the volume *Spring and All* (1923). Combining prose and free verse and commonly described as a manifesto of imagination, this volume is one of the most original modernist works. Williams here plays with the possibilities of renewing language in terms of multiple ways and the prose passages coupled with the poems exemplify the recreation of the world in both their form and content. The opening lines of "Spring and All" also epitomize the physician's vision as the poet's vision: "by the road to the contagious hospital" helps us to situate the poem literally in a medical context.

1.6 READING THE POEM

Spring and All

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast—a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees
All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches—

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind—

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf

One by one objects are defined—
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance—Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken [1923]

William Carlos Williams' "Spring and All" is the first poem in the volume *Spring and All* (1923). It begins with a straight forward set of impressions that moves into a quickened vision of what is stirring into being beneath the surface. The poem expresses tones of wonder, awe, respect before the process of life taking on form—of new form emerging from the apparently formless mud and compost of a landscape on the verge of a significant change. The opening lines also epitomize the physician's vision as the poet's vision: "by the road to the contagious hospital" perhaps places the poem literally in a medical context. The adjective contagious suggests that the hospital itself is contagious, that sickness is an ever-present state in this bleak landscape.

SAQ:

Consider the adjectives used in the first two stanzas, to describe the objects within the field of vision: *mottled*, *cold*, *waste*, *muddy*, *brown*, *dried*, *fallen*, *patches of standing water*, *dead*, *leafless*. What kind of cumulative effect do they have on the total visual image? Does the poet subvert the promise of the title of the poem? (30 + 30 words

....
....
....
....

In the fifth stanza, a subtle change in tone signals a shift in perspective:

> "Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
> dazed spring approaches" (14-15)

The poem, however, does not simply present a set of images; in its centre, is an act of perception, "the stark dignity of/ entrance", the slow penetration of a desolate landscape by an observer. We, as readers, follow the thrust of his imagination to a new union with the physical environment. The progression in the poem is literally downward: the observer goes from the "blue/mottled clouds", across a distant view of "broad, muddy fields", to the quickening plant life right before him—and then penetrates even further downward, into the dark earth, as he imagines the roots taking hold again. The panoramic view with "muddy fields, dried weeds" and "patches of standing water", offers nothing with which the imagination might joyously connect itself. In the beginning, an apparently blank and lifeless nature invites the observer to passivity and despair; but Williams moves beyond the gloomy ambience to uncover dormant life:

> "But now the stark dignity of
> Entrance - still, the profound change
> has come upon them: rooted, they
> grip down and begin to awaken" (24-27).

What we find by the road to the contagious hospital is a desolate landscape. But the awakened consciousness, focused sharply and including everything in the scene, discovers novelty and life.

SAQ:

What is the effect of the change in tone in the third stanza of the poem? Is it dramatic or is it realistic? (50 + 60 words)

....
....
....
....
....
....

The fifth stanza onwards one could find a kind of clarified vision of the observer's mind, within whose consciousness the scene appears and develops over the first four stanzas. The description of a late winter landscape metamorphoses, once the poet apprehends the quickening of incipient life. In stanzas six and seven, the process through which "dazed spring approaches" displays unmistakable dramatic elements; as a consequence, life in the poem bursts imaginatively into being:

> "They enter the new world naked,
> cold, uncertain of all
> save that they enter. All about them
> the cold, familiar wind—
> Now the grass, tomorrow
> the stiff curl of wild carrot leaf"

Moreover, the above lines also contain Williams' retort to Eliot's more pessimistic vision; when in Williams' landscape spring arrives, life is renewed. The indefiniteness of the pronoun in "they enter the new world naked" allows the process of birth in the vegetative realm to be associated with that of human birth as well. Williams could also have in mind the birth of new forms of poetry. The same creative force operating biologically in nature functions at a higher level in human consciousness to create art.

Stop to Consider:

The critic Philip Bufithis opines that this poem is Williams' "rewriting of Eliot…unlike Eliot's waste land spring lines, which are all memory, a meditating back in time, "Spring and All" is remarkably devoid of memory". It is poetry as transcript, poetry as unreeling film which means to tell us that the essential reality of spring is its newness. Image follows image until we visualize a particular American landscape impelled into the present moment. Eliot does the opposite. He distances spring; it was in the hyacinth garden; further back it was in *Tristan and Isolde*; further back it was in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. The more distanced by memory, the more steeped in literary associations, the less specific becomes the location of Eliot's images. Where, for example, is the hyacinth garden? And who has ever heard of one? The images in Eliot's spring lines are sharp and forceful, yet there is no specific setting that gives them locality. Eliot's purposes, of course, are not Williams' and it would obviously be unfair to evaluate one poet in terms of the other. The point is that to read Williams' poetry as a response

to Eliot's is appreciably to increase our understanding of Williams. The opening and closing of his poem recall the cadences and imagery of *The Waste Land*. Reading *The Waste Land* (which was published just a year before Williams' poem), Williams must have found it too strong a presence to throw off. It opens in aural measures similar to Eliot's and with an Eliotic counter-sublime treatment of spring, and the poem's closing—

"…rooted, they

Grip down and begin to awaken"

—corresponds to Eliot's line, "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow" (*The Waste Land* 474).

The poem's lineation compels us to notice the singularities and connections of the series of the roadside images. There is no punctuation at the ends of lines, and the syntactic sense often precludes an expected end stop. For example, in the lines "under the surge of the blue/mottled clouds driven from the/northeast", "blue" and "mottled" are separated by the line break, yet they are semantically fused. The lineation produces the effect of a windy spring sky, the "blue mottled clouds" changing so rapidly that one must pay close attention to distinguish "blue" from "clouds". Again, consider the lines "purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy/stuff of bushes and small trees": here the adjectives are separated by commas. The constant shifts in perspective, from the clouds to the fields to patterns of landscape to details of the roadside growth—all are portrayed without grammatical connectives.

The late winter wasteland will give birth to spring. Williams's physician's vision of examining the world is rendered empirically, rather than symbolically: "One by one, objects are defined— / It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf". These lines are a pointer to Williams's rejection of simple symbolism and that the world must be viewed as it is and not to be attached to the symbols made up by someone.

The author constantly discovers things throughout the poem, just like the doctor with a patient "Still, the profound change has come upon them: rooted they grip down and begin to awaken". He realizes that the movement of life never stops and that the new born have to grip to what they see and struggle to survive. He has no romantic thoughts about realities of life and views spring more as a physical act of nature.

Check Your Progress:

1. Explain the significance of the phrase, "the stark dignity of entrance". Does Williams succeed in incorporating the diction and syntax of spoken language on his poetry?

2. Does "Spring and All" bear out Williams' belief that "Speech is the fountain of the line…and it is in the newness of a live speech that the new line exists"? Analyse with textual examples the role of the speaking 'voice' in the poem.

5.7 SUMMING UP

Williams is a careful workman in language, in the rhythm of speech, in the quality of sound. In this unit, you have been given detailed account of the poetry of William Carlos Williams, his biography, the concerns that inform his poetry as well as a critical appraisal of his poetry. He has during two generations been thought of as a thought proving and influential poet. It is expected that after reading this unit you will be able to appreciate his poetry in all its nuanced details.

1.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Moore, Patrick. "Willaim Carlos Williams and the Modernist Attack on Logical Syntax". *ELH*. Vol. 53, No. 4 (Winter, 1986), pp. 895-916.

Oliver, Egbert S. ed. *American Literature 1890-1965: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House, 2000.

Quinn, Bernetta M. "William Carlos Williams: A Testament of Perpetual Change". *PMLA*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Jun., 1955), pp. 292-322.

Rosenthal, M.L. ed. *The William Carlos Williams Reader*. New York: MacGibbon and Kee: 1966.

Wagner, Linda Welshimer. "William Carlos Williams: The Unity of his Art". *The Bulletin of Midwest Modern Language Association*. Vol. 2, No.1 (1969), pp. 136-144.

Weatherhead, Kingsley. "William Carlos Williams: Poetic Invention and the World Beyond". *ELH*. Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1965), pp. 126-138.

* * *

Unit 2
Wallace Stevens: "The Emperor of Ice cream"

Contents:

2.1 Objectives
2.2 Introducing the Poet
2.3 Works of the Poet
2.4 Critical Reception
2.5 Context of the Poem
2.6 Reading the Poem "The Emperor of Ice-cream"
2.7 Summing up
2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

Wallace Stevens is presented here as a representative of the movement of Modernism in America. Together with the work of William Carlos Williams, Stevens' work brings to us the poetic world of the modernist, away from the lines along which modernism developed in England and Europe. From your reading of this unit, you will be able to–

- *gather* up the associations entering the poem into a complete essay of your own
- *explain* the various layers of meaning that the poem holds out to the reader
- *read* further into the work of Stevens

2.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Critically regarded as one of the most significant American poets of the 20th century, Stevens largely ignored the literary world and received widespread recognition as a poet only after the publication of his *Collected Poems* (1954).

Stevens was born in 1879 in Reading, Pennsylvania. His family belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church. At the age of twelve, Stevens entered public school for boys and studied the classics in Greek and Latin. In high school he became a prominent student, scoring high marks and distinguishing himself as a skilful orator. A prominent student and a skilful orator in his childhood, Stevens showed early promise as a writer by reporting for the school's newspaper. He did his graduation from Harvard University where he got involved in literary pursuits.

At Harvard Stevens became interested in verse-writing and was soon contributing to *Poetry* (Chicago). His first book, *Harmonium*, was published in 1923 by the distinguished firm of Alfred A. Knopf. Though he was always much admired by his contemporaries , Stevens felt that the reviews of his 1923 book were less than what they should have been and wrote nothing through the 1920s. For a second edition of *Harmonium*, he added only eight more poems.

For most of his adult life, Stevens pursued contrasting careers as an insurance executive and a poet. In 'Man Carrying Thing', Stevens wrote, "The poem must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully". All his life Stevens collected art from abroad. Although he regularly travelled to Florida and the Florida Keys and Cuba, he never ventured abroad and his cosmopolitan yearnings were amply satisfied by regular jaunts to New York City.

In 1946 Stevens was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, while in 1950 he received the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, and in 1955 he was awarded both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

Stevens is remembered by David Perkins in these terms—"Stevens was unlike any other American poet in the combination of qualities shaping the poems of *Harmonium*—irony, deliberate affectation, humorous fantasticality, obliquity, lightness, brilliance, and cool, impersonal performance as of a show arranged . . . . His work seemed exotic, Parisian, and thus for some readers acquired an extra cachet." But, we are also reminded, that "his manner kept his matter at an enormous distance also troubled readers from the start. . . To relishers of character and action his poems seemed glassy glitters of a kaleidoscope." We are referred to the brilliant avant-gardish accomplishment of 1917, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black-bird". But the lines such as in "The Comedian as the Letter C" show Stevens as "formidable and impressive":

"What is one man among so many men?
What are so many men in such a world?
Can one man think one thing and think it long?
Can one man be one thing and be it long?"

2.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Stevens published his first collection of verse, *Harmonium* (1923), at the age of forty-four and the collection is regarded as one of the great works of American poetry. *Harmonium* included 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream', one of Stevens's own favorite poems, 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle', 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad', and 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'. They were partly autobiographical, referring to the failure of the author's marriage.

Owl's Clover (1937) contained a reaction to the criticism of politically committed critics. From the early 1940s Stevens entered a period of creativity that remained until his death in Hartford on August 2, in 1955. He turned gradually away from the playful use of language to a more reflective and abstract style.

Among his acclaimed poems were 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', 'The Auroras of Autumn', 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', and 'The Planet on the Table'. He had a keen interest in music. With "Ideas of Order"(1935) he inaugurated a period of great creative productivity. Stevens has clearly explicated his notion of creative imagination in "The Idea of Order in Key West," among the few invigorating poems in *Ideas of Order*. *Ideas of Order* offered him increasing recognition as an important and unique poet. Nevertheless he was criticized for his ambiguity and gaudiness of language. He kept himself relatively detached from politics and world affairs and contended that his art actually constituted the most substantial reality. "Life is not people and scene," he argued, "but thought and feeling. The world is myself. Life is myself."

SAQ:

"Life is not people and scene, but thought and feeling. The world is myself. Life is myself." Point out the distinctions here that the poet seems to be insisting upon. Granting that the poet is justified, what is the special message that he seems to be sending out?(40 + 70 words)

....

....

....

....

....

Stevens' *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,* which is usually considered his greatest poem on the nature of poetry, is more an exploration of a definition and exemplifies the tenets of supreme fiction. The poem is comprised of a prologue, three substantial sections, and a coda. The first main section, entitled "It Must Be Abstract". Abstraction is necessary, Stevens declares, because it fosters the sense of mystery necessary to provoke interest and worship from humanity. The second long portion, "It Must Change" and "It Must Give Pleasure," Stevens expresses his conviction that poetry must always be "a thing final in itself and, therefore, good. *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* concludes with verses describing the poet's pursuit of supreme fiction as "a war that never ends." He also reaffirmed his contention that poetry was the supreme fiction, because "the essence of poetry is change and the essence of change is that it gives pleasure."

2.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

F.O. Matthiessen comments, "A final testimony to the poetic vitality that has been possible in our time, despite all the crippling circumstances of disorder, is provided by Wallace Stevens."

It can be said that Stevens participated in the great artistic revolutions and aesthetic experimentation that marked the 1920's in America. Giving strength to the experimental tradition Wallace Stevens and other writers like Ezra pound, Robert Frost, T.S Eliot sought to rediscover and reconstruct the artistic possibilities. Steven's poetic vitality lies in his treatment of the two modernist traditions - cosmopolitan and native, the pessimistic and the hopeful.

As Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury say, Stevens' poetry was poetry of meditation which made him the natively American poet of the generations. His poetry was the poetry of intelligence and was engaged with the abstract conception of imagination, the 'Real' and the 'present'. The mood of the 1890's 'decadent' period and the post-war, post- religious impulse is quite evident in Stevens' poetry. He rested his faith in imagination's restorative power and believed that imagination is real so long as the real is imaginary. As it is quite evident in *Harmonium,* his poetry is a celebration of the imagination's "esemplastic" power that can construct reality. The sensual aesthete here creates his own universe and art's eternal spirit is well acknowledged in these poems. Peter Bayson identifies that Stevens' poetry proves art as a subjective endeavour, an art of mind. Critic like Helen Vendler observes that Stevens' poetry (specially with reference to *Harmonium*) throws light on the forced choice between the gross physicality of death and the animal greed of life. Commenting on "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" he writes that the poem symbolically represents the bitter moment of choosing life over death at a time when life seems lonely, self-serving, sordid and lustful.

Kia Penso draws attention to the lively wordplay that has carefully crafted the problem of reality. J Hillis Miller talks about difficulty in making paraphrase of his poems. Part of the ambiguity lies in the use of symbols like 'a few glass knobs', 'a dead woman's protruding feet'.

2.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

So far as the context of the poem is concerned, Helen Vendler writes that the poem derives its resonances from Stevens' mother's death ten years earlier. The poem symbolically represents the bitter moment of choosing life over death at a critical hour and art is exposed as a scanty cover to hide death. Death is not condoled, but threatened.

In the larger context, the poem reflects, as it partakes of, the period which gave it life.

In the period between 1912 and 1914, the entire temper of the American arts altered, heralding a new era. By 1912, the radical change in the arts that had been sweeping across Europe was finding its way into America. An avant-garde spirit gripped the American conscience. From 1905, Alfred

Stieglitz promoted the French and German art movements through his Photo Secession Gallery in New York. After 1908, the influence of Freud cannot be negated and there was a growing importance of psychology and psychoanalysis. People were also influenced by George Bernard Shaw, Dostoevsky and D. H Lawrence's ideas and views.

Stop to Consider:

The Avant Garde in America

The year, 1912, was the time of the avant garde in America because of the conflation of political and artistic radicalism. Besides the paintings of the American naturalist "Ashcan School" and the post- impressionist works of Cezanne, Picasso and Duchamp received wide publicity and the dawn of the 'New' swept across America. Its tremendous impact can be noticed in American arts and architecture, on American style and the modernist experiments. Even experimental theatres like Maurice Browne's Little Theatre and Province town players of New York and Cape Cod offered work by Eugene O'Neill. From 1919, the theatre guild contributed to the transformation of American drama. Again in fiction, the novels of James and the works of Gertrude Stein practiced artistic radicalism.

America's entry into the war in April 1917 divided the radicals and weakened the progressive spirit. The horrors of mechanical life, warfare, mass slaughter, the disintegration of the European empire and the rise of Bolshevism in Russia — everything affected the national temper adversely.

The First World War had a tragic impact on aesthetic sensibility among young American writers who served in Europe. For many American writers the war marked a cut-off point from the past and the dawn of modernity. In the mood of nihilism and decadence, the spirit of aesthetic revolt survived despite the waning of political radicalism. This was followed by the era of major American writing. The pre-war generation was largely founded in the poetry of Pound, Eliot, Frost, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore, while the post- war generation included Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Kenneth Burke, Edmund Wilson.

Political magazines like *The Masses* (1911), *The New Republic* (1914) and little magazines like *Poetry* (1912) gave scope to new talents. Gertrude Stein and Henry James gave a boost to artistic radicalism resulting in the

end of provincialism. In this respect Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming of Age* (1915) can be mentioned as it called for an era of independent and creative living.

As Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury write, two different versions of the modern era can be experienced in America where one drew on the cosmopolitan inheritance with its decadent feelings, symbolism and quest for a new supreme fiction, while the other stood on native ground, specially Walt Whitman and Emerson who nourished a 'progressive romantic confidence'.

Stop to Consider:

American Modernism

American Modernism encompasses many political, cultural and artistic movements rooted in the changes in Western society at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Modernist art is typically abstract, innovative, aesthetic, futuristic and self-referential. And modernist tendencies were quite evident in art, literature and music. In the case of fashion, photography, painting and the visual arts, modernist innovations were made. Modernist literature in America dealt with topics like racial relationships, gender roles and sexuality which reached its climax in the 1920's. Among the representative figures were Ezra Pound who was a remarkable assimilator of experimental ideas and techniques, W.C. Williams, F.S. Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Henry James, Gertrude Stein. Along with that, American poetry was nourished by a host of black writers such as Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes. It became the responsibility of the modern American writer to break with the mediocre social values and check the commercialism of culture. For it, a changed version of aesthetic and cultural definition was needed. Thus with a modernist enterprise the poet became the ironist, the skeptic and the critic of culture and artistic endeavour. In this respect the role of the American little magazines cannot be negated.

2.6 READING THE POEM

'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' is a poem about death seen in harsh light - 'If her horny feet protrude, they come / To show how cold she is, and dumb"- and respect in front of too-short life - "Bring flowers in last month's newspapers." These poems were written after the poet's parent's and sister's death. And here despair receives a rich and sensuous treatment.

The text of the poem

"The Emperor of Ice-Cream"

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.
Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

The poem begins with a call for the 'roller of big cigars' which is depicted as a symbol of celebration. The setting surrounds a funeral scene. What is vague about the setting is that there is no mourning or sympathy on the part of the attendants. He then imparts a major philosophical question, the problem of appearance and 'reality'. The symbol of 'concupiscent curd' suggests the heavy element of lust and human desire. The women entering the funeral are wenches in their usual dresses, all in pursuit of self-satisfaction.

In earlier times, a wake took place in the home of the dead. Besides paying the last respects, the visitors often ate, drank and told stories. Thus a wake was sometimes a festive occasion and Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-cream" tells us about what will happen before and during the wake. Ice-creams will be provided to the people as a part of the celebration and male and female will get involved in flirting. The visitors will get engaged in socializing. Death

is picturised in the most terrific way. This is very much evident in the following poignant expression,

"Let the boys bring flowers in last month's news papers"

You might begin your reading of the poem by first being clear what is meant by a 'roller' of cigars, 'concupiscent', 'wenches', 'dawdle', 'finale', 'dresser of deal', 'fantails', 'horny' – a list of terms that may be not so familiar to us in our local environment. A word like "concupiscent" or "wench" seems to interfere with all the associations of ice-cream. Ice-cream normally spells for most of us – as it does for many Americans – lazy, sunny weather, indulgent luxury, friendliness, and most of all, ephemerality or transitoriness. Ice-cream seems here to be an essential ingredient in the scene etched out. As the poet begins with an instruction to "Call" it seems like an injunction to the reader to participate in the reconstruction of the scene which will include both ice-cream and the images of death ("that sheet . . ."). There is almost an insistence on the signs of enjoyment –call the one with big muscles, who rolls the big cigars – with the curds, the flowers, the dawdling girls.

What is the effect of combining "concupiscent" with curds, apart from the fact that alliteration is created? Calling the curds concupiscent could be seen as a transferred epithet –after all, curds cannot have desire and sexual desire in particular. We could read this as transferred epithet and say that curds are being called 'concupiscent' because they are being made to symbolize passionate, sexual desire. Perhaps such a reading may not be inappropriate because the other references to flowers, girls, cigars all call to mind a scene of indolence and comfort.

The next line, "Let be be finale of seem" is the voice of the poet almost exhorting us to let things be. Translating the line in prosaic terms, it seems to be said that what appears on the surface to be, should be allowed to be really so in substance. Or, in other words, being-so should be the last part of, or the final notes of, "seem" or appearance. How does this line relate to what goes before it ? Desire runs strongly through these early lines; the girls should wear what they are comfortable in ("used to wear") thus implying that their wishes be granted. The curds too stood for desire; while, for the boys to bring flowers in old newspapers (very old! but allow them to) seems to indirectly connect some latent desire not to surrender to some formal requirement to be up-to-date. Thus to say, that 'be' *can be* the ending to 'seeming' suggests the satisfaction of desire.

The last line of the stanza stands like a refrain wherein the voice of the poet seems to announce that only one who is the 'emperor' of something as fleeting as ice-cream stands over it in control. Does 'ice-cream' stand in for death and mutability? Perhaps, and the typically urban, even American, scene points up to an immutable truth, the truth of change, and impermanence.

The second stanza urges someone – the reader, perhaps – to cover the corpse with the sheet now on the dresser (a chest of drawers doubling up as a dressing-table) made of deal (a kind of wood from fir trees or pine trees), and to cover the dead woman's face. The sheet has fantail pigeons embroidered all over it by the dead subject. We could even point to the fantails being reminiscent of fairytales or dreams. Perhaps, we could speculate, that the dead woman had had desires left unfulfilled and the reference to fantails brings in an ironic reference to the permanence of unfulfilled desires. By that logic, ice-cream can also symbolize unfulfilled desire – desire in all its various shapes, posthumous even. The cold, dead woman, whose dreams remain as they had been, cannot give life to her dreams any more, being dumb and far from the state of beauty that her embroidery had sought to give expression. The feet are "horny" not merely because she is dead, but because this is evidence of stalled or frozen change. (We may infer the reference to desire through the use of 'horny' as slang for sexual arousal). When the poet exhorts that the lamp be allowed to "affix" its beam, the meaning seems to be that light be shed on what is, and what is not. Where is the light to originate? Art, or the poem itself. These are possible interpretations in the light of the finally "somber vision of things" that Stevens articulated in his volume, *Harmonium*.

It becomes possible to agree with David Perkins that Stevens "was never sentimental, but neither was he tough-minded in a simplistic or reductive way." The vision we are given here in this short poem is almost pragmatic – to envisage ice cream as representing even a tawdry sort of momentary pleasure. But it does also reveal a kind of irony which undercuts the seeming affirmation.

In his works Stevens explored, within a profound philosophical framework, the dualism between concrete reality and the human imagination. He wrote poems of pleasure and its subtle and gloomy underside. The opposition between bare reality and imaginative endeavour seems to be a persistent subject in his poetry. His poetry makes an inquiry into the relation between imagination and reason.

SAQ:

What kind of dualism do we note in this poem, 'The Emperor of Ice-cream'? Do you think it is a dualism of desire plus death, pleasure plus the profoundly unpleasant, material comfort plus the discomfort of the metaphysical? (80 words)

....
....
....
....
....

Art is celebrated and the poet believes that art leads us to a heightened reality. His poetry gives special emphasis on the nature of art and his meditative poems mark his rich sensibility. Stevens' poetry is graded in difficulty because of the sheer difficulty of apprehending meaning, lack of paraphrase and the technicality of language. Thus his poetry demands deep concentration. As Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury write, Stevens' poems were always based in acts of thought and always turned as instruments of aesthetic delight. His poems explore the value of poetry and the impenetrability of most human relationships. Stevens offers a crafted work and his work suggests the importance of the artist's craft. A heavy philosophical intention is evident in his poetry.

Stevens treats poetry in terms of human performance. The poet experiences the heightened power of imagination and makes poetic synthesis possible. The poem, according to Stevens, is the cry of the occasion and it is part of one's life. The poet looks for the sufficing words and audience. In the poem, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven", Stevens speculates on the creation of poetry.

We keep coming back and coming back
To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns
That fall upon it out of the wind. We seek
The poem of pure reality, untouched
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object
At the exactest point at which it is itself,
Transfixing by being purely what it is

A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye,
The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight
Of simple seeing, without reflection. We seek
Nothing beyond reality.

To some extent we might find similarities between the nineteenth-century Romantic insistence on the powers of imagination and Stevens' own conception that poetry could be equated with the imagination. But, as Perkins discerns, "the enormous difference was that the earlier Romantics held, though with many doubts, that the imagination could embody knowledge, whether of immediate, particular things or of ultimate truth. A hundred years later Stevens could seldom credit this. The purpose or end was imagining, the activity itself, not whatever might be imagined. Imagining is happiness, and happiness justifies itself. Having composed a poem, or read one, we can only go on to another. So long as we are imagining, life is heightened, and the only thing to do is to keep on heightening life from moment to moment until it ends."

Stevens' early poems were collected in his first volume *Harmonium* in 1923 and here the world of imagination is celebrated in a carnivalesque setting in the decadent fashion. Critics like Harold Bloom and Vendler have commented on the elegiac dimension of the poems in *Harmonium.*

SAQ:

Does the poet in 'The Emperor of Ice-cream' insert a sense of dichotomy between perceived reality and the reader's apprehension of a deeper reality? How would you term the device by which Stevens makes this point visible? (70 + 70 words)

....
....
....
....
....

Like many other modern poems, these poems celebrate the horror of death and the problem of conscience. But what is unique about Stevens is his attempt to conflate irony and pathos in the poems. They do not follow the

format of the traditional elegy. Stevens displays his elegiac sensibility as a response to twentieth-century realities. The upheavals of war left a tremendous impact on American writing. War was followed by an era of extreme materialism and transformation of consciousness. Besides, the media played a vital role in problematizing reality. And subsequently the idea of the 'real' and the ' fictional' became core points of research for the philosophers, historians and even the journalists. Wallace Stevens wrote,

"To see the gods dispelling in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences….it was their annihilation, not ours, and yet it left us feeling that in a measure, we too had been annihilated."

He experiences the disappearance of God and the loss of a non-violent reality. Stevens' poetry makes an attempt to seek 'a consolatory substitution of an aesthetic object' for the things lost. Hence art becomes a compensation for the poet as a means for survival. He sees the vision of a fragmented and rotten world where words and emotions are falling apart — a decline of the historical process and Stevens shows concern over the death of the universe. What is crucial about Stevens is his attempt to see things in pure presence and his deliberate attempt to mock the conventional elegiac norms. The interplay between the elegiac and the anti-elegiac, which are violently opposed, suggests the horror of reality.

SAQ:

Do you think that there is the trace of an elegiac note in 'The Emperor of Ice-cream'? What kind of emotion is uppermost in the poem ? Does Stevens attempt to preclude any sense of the horrors of death in the poem? (30 + 30 + 30 words)

....
....
....
....
....

Discussing the modernist impulse in Stevens' poetry Jahan Ramajani in his "Elegy and Anti-elegy in Stevens' *Harmonium* : Mockery, Melancholic and the pathetic fallacy" writes that Stevens brandishes his rejection of the two primary consolations of pastoral elegy: the association of dead person

with a vegetation god that dies and revives and the alignment of the human with sympathetic nature.

Here Stevens exemplifies a transition in the treatment of elegiac sentiments and shares a tension between sadness and jubilation. His other poems like "Two at Norfolk" , and "The Worm at Heaven's Gate" depict a fusion of sorrow and satiric anger and melancholia that offers the paradigm for mental dilemma.

In 'The Emperor of Ice-cream' the interrelation between life and death is explored and the poem exhibits a psychological design in itself. The elegiac note is presented in a disguised form hidden under the gaudiness of words. The poem leaves a paradoxical impact due to the celebration of non-relations. The withered corpse is placed against the muscular ice-cream man rolling phallic cigars to the wenches dawdling around. The boys have brought flowers not to mourn the death of the woman, but to please the wenches.

Life's futility and horror of existence are well acknowledged in the succeeding lines. Death is the ultimate reality and it cannot be denied. The sheet on which she once embroidered was her effort at doing something substantial in life, but the same sheet was used to cover her body and unfortunately it fails to cover her 'horny' feet, the reality of her bodily existence. She had to bow in life to the emperor of bodily pleasure which melts away. She meets the reality of a wasted life in her death.

Words are subtly chosen by Stevens to convey the truth of existence. Words like 'muscular', 'ice-cream', 'wenches' suggest death. After life's struggle she is now cold and dumb. But there is another truth and that life must go on. The poet believes that one should enjoy life while it lasts.

> "Let be be finale of seem."
>
> "Let the lamp affix its beam".

The poem affirms the futility of earthly affairs and expects a better vision of the future. The appetite of earth and the people's hedonistic endeavour is put to scrutiny. The image of ice is subtly used in the poem. Ice melts quickly and the symbol of time refers to the healing power of time. Time spares none and life is futile. The structure of the poem is concerned with the structure of reality. The symbol of ice also refers to the question of life

itself. The question brings forth the issue of the way in which man knows his world. His insights encompass the world of metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics and results in a metamorphosis of ideas that is quite functional in his poetry.

Stop to Consider:

Wallace Stevens is said to have remarked once that "Felicidad . . . [is] after all . . . the great subject". David Perkins tells us that Stevens "almost never budged from [facing up to things in life] . . . in moments of difficult decision in his personal life he asked himself what "reality" dictated and took, however sadly, that path. . . . His poems express rival premises and opposed emotional needs, going back and forth or hesitating between. . .

From one point of view reality was the facts—winters, roses, machine guns, oceans, hunger, clouds, aging, death. In other words, things and conditions existed objectively, could be known, and had consequences. Did the sum total of the facts make, in most cases, for more pleasure than pain? For "felicidad"? Can human beings hope to find "the honey of common summer" enough? Stevens dearly wanted to say so. But obviously he could not forget all the "mal" of existence—the limitation, pain, moral evil, death. Life was not summer, reality not framed for our happiness:

"From this the poem springs: that we live in a place

That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves

And hard it is in spite of blazoned days." "

Ice-cream as symbol: sensuality, pleasure; seizure of the moment, the here and now. Ice cream melts quickly and in the poem it suggests time and the opportunities it presents.

Missing knobs: the symbol suggests impoverishment or negligence.

Embroidered fantails: The fantails may symbolize the futility of earthly endeavors because they end up on a sheet that covers a corpse.

Lamp: the light of life that shines on those who live for the moment. A note of optimistic impulse is indicated here.

His poems have much to say about the relations of experience and its representations. Commenting on the relevance of Stevens's poetry in the contemporary world, Tim Morris writes,

"Stevens is still important to us today because of the scope of his ambition and because his poetry concerns itself with issues and problems which cannot be separated from any poetic enterprise."

Morris further observes that Stevens' unwillingness to follow grammatical forms of substitution or celebration of uncertainties or incompleteness allows the readers to drift towards some impossible place where a synthesis of contradictions become possible. Stevens' poetry aims at this synthesis of reality and imagination which results in moments of illumination. Denying the textual possibilities, Stevens' poetry celebrates the contradictions and the text becomes a ground for pleasure, experience and surprise.

Check Your Progress:

1. Elaborate on the use of irony in the poem, 'The Emperor of Ice-cream', with special reference to the word, "Emperor", in the title. Does the poem bear out the associations with immense power that the word brings in?

2. Show the extent to which Stevens's poem, 'The Emperor of Ice-cream' encapsulates the idea that "we relate different objects or sensations, spontaneously ordering whatever the world brings." Give examples from the text.

3. Comment on the view that imagination is assigned a superior role in the world of Stevens's poetry. Trace the concern with imagination in 'The Emperor of Ice-cream'.

2.7 SUMMING UP

Stevens' poetic theory brought a major transition in the realm of modernist practices. A master-stylist and a philosopher of aesthetics who explored poetry as the supreme fiction of the creative imagination. With an extraordinary vocabulary and rich, powerful symbols he tried to reflect the contradictory impulses of his time .his interest in the poetic persona suggests his strong passion in human endeavour. The poetic self becomes the organic self and he makes his journey in search of its identity and existence. Poetry becomes a vehicle for distributing the products of imagination and his texts allow the readers to participate in the war of meaning and existence.

2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Ruland, Richard & Malcolm Bradbury. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism- A History of American Literature*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991

High, Peter. B. *An Outline of American Literature*.London & New York: Longman, 1986

Ramazani, Jahan. "Elegy and anti-Elegy in Stevens' "Harmonium": Mockery, Melancholia and Pathgetic Fallacy". Journal of Modern Literature, Vol-17, No.4 (Spring, (1991), Indiana University Press. Pp. 567-582,

Matthiessen, F.O. "American Poetry, 1920-40", *The Sewanee Review*, Vol-55, No.1(Jan-mar,1947), The Johns Hopkins University.pp.24-55,URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27537712

Vendler, Helen, *On Extended Wings; Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (Cambridge,

Mass., 1969).

— *Wallace Stevens; Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1984).

Morris, Tim. *Wallace Stevens: Poetry and Criticism*, Great Wilbraham PDO: Cambridge University Press, 2006

* * *

Unit 3
Philip Larkin "Church Going"

Contents:

3.1 Objectives
3.2 Introducing the Poet
3.3 Works of the Poet
3.4 Critical Reception
3.5 Context of the Poem
3.6 Reading "Church Going"
3.7 Summing up
3.8 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you will be able to—

- *read* the nuances of the contemporary post-war situation of England
- *familiarise* yourself with the influences that shaped Larkin's corpus
- *relate* Larkin's main ideas with the prescribed poem
- *formulate* alternative ideas on Larkin's poetry after reading the poem

3.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Philip Arthur Larkin (9 August 1922 – 2 December 1985), has garnered for himself the rank of a star poet amongst the literary greats of the latter half of the twentieth century. Not only did Larkin straddle the roles of a poet, a novelist and a zazz critic with great elan, he also encapsulates many cross currents within himself. In his introduction to the 1966 edition of the *North Ship* he vocalizes the presence of "…not one abandoned self but several – the ex-schoolboy for whom Auden was the only alternative to 'old – fashioned' poetry, the undergraduate whose work a friend characterised as Dylan Thomas … and the immediately post- Oxford self, isolated … with a complete Yeats stolen from the local girls school."

Larkin is accredited in almost all literary circles as a representative poet of his age, his style and content being propelled by a deep understanding of the tumultuous changes that came in the aftermath of the World Wars and the Fall of the Empire.

Stop to Consider:

The Aftermath of the Second World War

When the Second World War ended in Europe in the summer of 1945, much of Britain was in ruins. British cities as diverse in character as Glasgow, Coventry, Canterbury, Bristol, Exeter, and Portsmouth had had to bear the brunt. London, in particular, had been universally pock-marked and dotted by absences. Whole districts were in ruins and most streets somehow bore the signs of blast, shrapnel, fire-bombs, or high explosives. This landscape of ruins must also be recognized as forming an integral part of much of the literature of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. It was a landscape which provided a metaphor for the inscape – for the lives and spirits, and, in some remoter and less defined sense, for the ruin of Great Britain itself. One sometimes gets the impression that the Second World War was Britain's last great communal experience. Certainly, neither the readjustments demanded by the steady loss of an overseas Empire nor the equally radical challenges presented by a belated entry into the European community seems to have rivaled the prominence in the popular imagination of Britain at war. It should, however, not be sidelined that in the immediately post-war years , the Empire melted into the larger concept of the 'Commonwealth' and a granting of independence to former colonies in Asia, Africa, West Indies and the Pacific.

(Adapted from Andrew Sanders' *A History of English Literature*)

Larkin's work characterized the mainstream of English poetry in the 1950s and 1960s and was a typical of a new breed of articulate university graduates. As the key poet of the post-war decades he was also to chart other social and cultural changes with a sardonic insight. Larkin was the most significant of a loose group of writers known in the early 1950s as 'The Movement', a group assumed by those who disliked what it stood for to be the typical product of wartime planning and the Welfare state.

'The Movement', which also included the novelist Kingsley Amis (1922-95), the poet and critic Donald Davie (b. 1922), and the poet and novelist

John Wain (b. 1925), was united not so much by its class origins but by a sensibility shaped by a shared antipathy to the cultural pretensions of Bohemia and Bloomsbury and to what it saw as the elitism of much Modernist writing. Some of the key figures in these partially overlapping groups were: Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, John Wain, D. J. Enright, Thom Gunn, Donald Davie, Alan Sillitoe, John Osborne, Arnold Wesker. Others with the same general aims and assumptions as these writers, or contributed to the formation of a distinctively 1950s *ecriture*, were William Cooper, C. P. Snow and his wife Pamela Hansford Johnson, Colin McInnes, Angus Wilson, John Braine, Stan Barstow, Thomas Hinde, Keith Waterhouse, David Storey and, in precept if not in practice, Iris Murdoch.

The 1950s writers were suscpicious of, and often positively hostile to the modernist movement, and certainly opposed to any further efforts at 'experimental' writing. Dylan Thomas epitomized everything they detested: verbal obscurity, metaphysical pretentiousness, self-indulgent romanticism, compulsive metaphorising. According to David Lodge they aimed to communicate clearly and honestly their perceptions of the world as it was. They were empiricist, influenced by logical positivism and 'ordinary language' philosophy. Their originality was largely a matter of tone and attitude and subject matter, reflecting changes in English culture and society brought about by the convulsion of the Second World War – roughly speaking, the suppression of a bourgeois-dominated class-society by a more meritocratic and opportunistic social system. "The poets dealt with ordinary prosaic experience in dry, disciplined, slightly depressive verse. In short, they were antimodernist, readerly and realistic, and belong on the metonymic side of the bi-polar scheme."(Lodge, 72, "Larkin, The Metonymic Muse)

Stop to Consider:

Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) was one of the most powerful minds in twentieth century intellectual history. According to Jakobson, language like all other sign systems, has a two fold character, involving two distinct operations, selection and combination. Metonymy corresponds to the combination axis, as its expressed through contiguity and metaphor corresponds to the selection axis, and depends on similarity between things not normally contiguous.

Instead of claiming to enlist all the traits of the Movement school, an exercise that is limited by concerns of space and saturating your minds to the prospect of the excess that always lives on, I am going to limit myself to valorizing the poetic exercises of this school as a act of self - persuasion. The choice also rests on the nature of your prescribed poem – "Church Going", a poem that dwells in uncertainties and contingent rhetorical devices if only to impart a sense of constant endeavor to get out of it. The Movement poetry emphasized the fallibility of the poet's venture. This is a point made by Larkin's poem "Ignorance", which suggests that conversational hesitations ensue, not from a desire to hit the right note with others, but because of our deep uncertainty about the world in which we live:

> Strange to know something, never to be sure
> Of what is true or right or real… ("Ignorance")

"Ignorance" is an important defense of Movement poetry, for it implies that since "(we) spend all our life on imprecisions", phrases like "perhaps" are bound to figure in poetic diction: they do not require apology, and the poet need not eschew them.

This inevitably met with resistance in the 1950s, for received Romantic and Modernist theory grants the poet the more exalted status of prophet or seer – a being who is raised above the common herd. According to such theory the reader is spared the slack and awkward ponderings of the poet, and is presented instead with refined wisdom, an intellectual emotional complex in an instant of time. The hesitations and self-qualification of Movement verse not only express uncertainty but reflect the poet's struggles to find a way out of uncertainty, and to persuade himself that something is the case.

Many of Larkin's poems are, in particular, exercises in self-persuasion. "Since someone will forever be surprising/ A hunger in himself …"(Church Going") - his verse dramatizes an act of self-discovery: polemics being the road to an elusive homecoming. Several of Larkin's poems are constructed as this kind of debate between two voices. One consequence of such a construction is that the reader is drawn into the concerns of the poem to a surprising extent: there is an implicit invitation for the reader to 'become' one of the voices, and to participate in an argument with the poet. This is perhaps the most important function of the conversational asides which

Larkin and other poets make use of : words and phrases such as 'yes', 'if you like', 'true', and so on, not only record the development of the poet's thought, but keep track of the reader's likely responses, answer or anticipate his comments, and grant him the right to converse and pass judgment. Two of Donald Davie's poems, for instance, begin in mid-conversation:

> You call my poems 'contrived': they are indeed.
> Whoever heard of springes raised from seed?
>
> ("Rejoinder to a Publisher's Reader")

Stop to Consider:

To say that the Movement poets were usually preoccupied with the matter of an audience is to invite a further question. For what kind of reader was their work intended? Their works, interestingly, had a desire to reach two seemingly different audiences – one a small intellectual circle, the other a large body of 'common readers'. With Larkin one is confronted with the presence of the latter: the desire to write pleasurable and 'accessible' poetry that might reach a wide audience. Larkin's feelings on this subject are set out very clearly in " The Pleasure Principle", an extended review written for George Hartley's *Listen* magazine in 1957. He argues there that the principal function of poetry – to give pleasure to others – seems to have been forgotten by his contemporary poets.

Compare this aspect of the Movement with the ideal readership of the Moderns. For instance, Longenbach infers that "Eliot self-consciously made his poetry difficult, the property of a specialist, in order to increase the status of the poets."

SAQ:

Highlight instances of the rhetorical devices that promote uncertainty and initiate the reader into the literary proceedings (a hallmark of the Movement poets) in the poem prescribed for you. (80 words)

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

3.3 WORKS OF THE POET

The six volumes of verse that Larkin published in his lifetime were modest in size. His first, *The North Ship*, appeared in 1945; it was succeeded by *XX Poems* (published in a tiny edition in 1951), by a slim pamphlet containing five further poems in 1954, and in 1955 by the volume that first made his name as a poet, *The Less Deceived*. His earliest published poem, 'Winter Nocturne' (printed in his school magazine in 1938), clearly shows the influence of Yeats, an influence, 'as pervasive as a garlic', which Larkin claimed could also be felt in the poems in *The North Ship*. From the mid 1940s, however, he discovered a new model of poetic restraint in Hardy. It is Hardy's example which seems to inform even the title of *The Less Deceived*. Much of Larkin's subsequent poetry was to bypass Modernist experiment and high-flown language in favor of traditional metrical forms and a precise and plain diction. The two later collections, *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974), point not simply to the sharpness of Larkin's ear for the inflexions of his own age, but also to a new and, at the time, deliberately provocative frankness. His output, albeit considered to be narrow in size, is by all means the handiwork of an excellent craftsman. Although his poetry projected dissipated energies, there is in each of his three mature books - a striking poem, longer than the rest, that provides a centerpiece and that dwells on large and perennial human themes: death and religion in "Church Going" in *The Less Deceived*; love and marriage in the title poem of *The Whitsun Weddings*; death, again, in "The Building" in *High Windows.*

An appraisal of Larkin's poetic oeuvre would be incomplete without an understanding of his poetic style. It is very interesting to note the changes that mark the transition of his phases – my enquiry in this rubric will focus on the energies that moulded his specific brand of verse. It was defined by a quality that dodged pre-existing categories albeit marked as belonging to the disillusioned, stark poetry of the Movement, Larkin had momentary absolutions (especially in poems like "Churchgoing") that staged a deviant. Taken as a whole, Philip Larkin's poetry has the effect of a sustained attack upon the philosophical idealism of romantic literature, and more specifically upon its decadent stepchild, modernism. For virtually his entire career he has been writing at least implicitly on this subject, sometimes openly attacking modernism in poetry and jazz music, presenting himself as a skeptical, 'less

deceived' observer of contemporary life. In 1945, just after he graduated from Oxford, he published *The North Ship*, a volume of poetry which was superficially written in a bardic style he would later reject completely. Clearly, the beauty of Yeats's music, its impassioned quality, was influencing the young Larkin almost in spite of himself. Indeed *The North Ship* is so immersed in this romantic style that it might be mistaken for a latter-day version of *fin de siecle* Nature poetry. The prevailing tone is sorrowful, and the snowbound, north-of-England landscape is usually made to seem wild and splendid. Larkin explains that his subsequent reaction against this apparent bout of "Celtic fever" was "undramatic, complete, and permanent" (*NS*), and his account of how he found a new manner has become a familiar item of current literary history.

Sometime during 1946 he read Thomas Hardy's poetry, was especially struck by "Thoughts of Phena at News of Her Death," and began writing with a wry, detached voice, skeptical almost to the point of misanthropy, which made him one of the most important literary figures in postwar England. But Larkin did not reject his past so radically or so comfortably as he sometimes implies. The traditional view of his development has him casting aside romanticism in favor of an empirical, Movement poetic; thus the British critic Colin Falck has described the progress of his poetry since *The North Ship* as a repudiation of an "impossible idealism" and an "ever-deepening acceptance of the ordinariness of things as they are."

This view needs qualification to the extent that Larkin was probably never a romantic in the technical, philosophical sense; he did not foster a deep liking for Yeats – the poet or his mystical ideas, he was rather drawn to the cadence of his verse. From the beginning, Larkin's work has manifested a certain coolness and lack of self-esteem, a need to withdraw from experience; but at the same time it has continued to show his desire for a purely secular type of romance. The conflicting strains in Larkin's personality are perhaps most evident in two poems he wrote during 1946, the year he read Hardy. One of these has been added as a coda to the 1966 edition of *The North Ship*, to announce the change that had come over his style. The other does not appear in any of the published volumes of Larkin's work. It is called "Sad Steps" and I quote it here:

High and preposterous and separate-
Lozenge of love! Medallion of art! ...
…A reminder of the strength and pain
Of being young; that it can't come again

The moon in this poem is just as beautiful as it was in "The Dancer," (then the moon would go raving/ the moon, the anchorless/ Moon go swerving/ Down at the earth for a catastrophic kiss.") but if the speaker of the earlier poem was suspicious of that beauty, the speaker here is defensively cynical. The moon, which was previously described as "anchorless," is now a "Lozenge of love," a "Medallion of art." In other words, Larkin implies that the superficial romanticism of his earlier verses was part of the "strength and pain" of being young - a feeling that won't come again, however much he half- consciously longs for it. For while *The North Ship* represents a striving after romance, it also reveals moments of emotional impotence, periodic frustrations of desire. The gulf between Larkin's works and that of the Romantic period, which he so held in disdain, can be deciphered by analyzing a cross-section from a romantic poem like Wordsworth's "Strange fits of Passion Have I known" (*Lucy's Poems*) where the speaker says "In one of those sweet dreams I slept/ Kind Nature's gentlest boon!/ And all the while my eye I kept/ On the descending moon". Through a reading of the aforesaid lines we get an idealized treatment of the same 'moon'. The 'moon' other than being "Kind Nature's gentlest boon", is also merged with the speaker's beloved, each reinforcing the other through overt comparisons.

Larkin also dabbled in prose in his career. One of Larkin's first and better known works in this strand is *Jill* (1946): a novel remarkable not simply for its picture of an Oxford forced into a dispirited egalitarianism by the War, but also for its introduction of what became a common theme in the literature of the 1950s and 60s, the awkward self-consciousness of a provincial, lower middle class England and the upward mobility of a grammar school educated intelligentsia. His non-fictional works include *All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961–1971, Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955–1982, Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews 1952–1985.*

Stop to Consider:

Larkin's later reflection on his youth was that it was his particular bliss to have been young at the only time he could have experienced the pleasure of jazz. Had he died on 9 August 1922 instead of being born then, or had he been born a decade or so later, he would have missed it all since, he notes, jazz was the "emotional excitement" peculiar to one generation, his own, that "came to adolescence" between the two World Wars. "In another age," he suggests, "it might have been drink or drugs, religion or poetry" (*Letters*). Larkin has given his readers enough cause to think that the popular music of his time was a part of the climate in which his conception of poetry took shape.

Jazz was a form of Afro-American popular music that flourished between 1925 and 1945, more than that, it was an unpretentious art built on a simple and direct emotional appeal that did not depend on an extensive musical education. Jazz was a "…form ideally suited to those with enough-but no more-music in them to respond intensely to a few strong simple effects," A. T. Tolley characterizes Larkin's love of jazz as a kind of "cultural iconoclasm," and he observes, correctly, that "the sense that one valued something, not because it was felt to be culturally important, but because it spoke to one with immediacy, was to remain for him a touch- stone of the arts". Amis agrees that the appeal of jazz lay somehow in its lack of cultural authority, the fact that its commentary had not yet been written. His generation was the first to encounter it, and there were no precedents. Jazz was a "world of romance," he writes, "with no guide, no senior person to point the way" ("Farewell to a Friend") [excerpt from B.J.Legget's – "Larkin's Blues: Jazz and Modernism": Albeit the "cultural iconoclasm" of Jazz has been stressed upon, the connection between the particular form of music and Larkin's poetry has been left fuzzy. This is to encourage you students to internalize and analyze the true spirit of the aforesaid forms of art.

7.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

At the time of his death in 1985, Philip Larkin's reputation as a writer seemed unblemished and secure. Although his high esteem rested largely on the slim volumes of poetry – Larkin enjoyed both critical acclaim and immense popularity. Widely acknowledged as the nation's unofficial Poet Laureate, Larkin came to be identified with an essential and enduring Englishness. The formal achievements of his verse – its colloquial tenor, its ironic humor and its clear sighted realism – were construed as civic virtues. In the decade following his death, however, Larkin's reputation underwent a profound and dramatic transformation. With the publication of the *Collected Poems*

in 1988, *Selected Letters* in 1992 and the authorized biography, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's life*, in 1993, the abiding interests and concerns of Larkin's scholarship were radically and decisively altered. The two-part chronological arrangement of the *Collected Poems*, edited by Anthony Thwaite, had a significant effect on the critical perception of Larkin's development as a writer. A quite substantial *Collected Poems* immediately contradicted the notion that Larkin's 'spareness' and 'sparseness' were defining characteristics of his art. The precise dating of individual compositions in the *Collected Poems* considerably eased the critical task of contextualizing the poems, providing new opportunities for socio-historical enquiry, but also encouraged an unhealthy biographical speculation that impatiently awaited the publication of Andrew Motion's *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life* (1993). By the time Andrew Motion's biography of Larkin was published in 1993, the terms of the ensuing critical debate were already established. In his preface to *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Motion explained that his own difficult task of describing the 'dismal ground' from which the poetry blossomed would 'necessarily alter the image of Larkin that he (Larkin) prepared so carefully for his readers. Many of the reviews that followed seemed intent on relegating Larkin to the league of minor poets. For James Wood, Larkin was 'a minor registrar of disappointment, a bureaucrat of frustration'. For Peter Ackroyd, he was not only 'a rancid and insidious' philistine and 'a foul-mouthed bigot', but 'essentially a minor poet who acquired a large reputation.

Larkin's *Selected Letters*, edited by Anthony Thwaite and published in 1992, met with mixed reviews. There was much that was genuinely interesting and revealing in the letters, but also much that was offensive and disturbing. Larkin's complaint to Kingsley Amis in 1943 that 'all women are stupid beings' and his encouragement to Amis in 1978 to 'keep up the cracks about niggers and wogs' are characteristic of his cheap relentless jibes. Thwaite's selection of letters was meant to be a "first presentation rather than a complete and exhaustive archive." Future critics of Larkin's work were unlikely to pass judgement on the poetry without some recourse to the letters. A few critics and reviewers tried to excuse or explain the letters in terms of their author's habitual self-dramatization, but Larkin's reputation as a poet continued to be questioned.

The battle of critical thought on Larkin can be divided into two equally potent and illustrious forces-the 'aestheticist' and ideological readings of the poems. The growing popularity and appeal of linguistic criticism, especially from the 1970s onwards (The resurgence of a new formalism in 1990s) helped to promote the aestheticist camp by focusing on issues of style and structure and revealing inherent contradictions within Larkin's poetry that deviated from the transparently 'realist' and narrowly expressive of its poet's attitudes and opinions. Bakhtinian readings of his poetry reveal the dialogic nature of his texts and the understanding of dialogue as 'dialectic' or 'internal polemic' greatly assist this kind of rhetorical analysis. The conflation of different voices and linguistic registers in his literary works highlights the prevalence of dual-voiced and split personalities especially in a poem like "Church Going". The ideological readings, however, promote the principal concerns of feminist criticism and historical, postcolonial critique of Larkin's poems. Issues of Larkin's 'Englishness' and his responsiveness to the fractures and collisions in post war English culture invariably surface in these readings. As Seamus Heaney explains, "…words are not just articulated noise but are a symptom of human history, memory and attachments." (*New Casebooks*, Introduction, 17)

SAQ:

What is a Bakhtinian reading likely to reveal in a poem? Is it distinguishable from an ideological one? (60 + 60 words)

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

Critics like Stan Smith promote an enduring interest in Larkin's 'Englishness'. They argue that there is no such thing as an 'innocent poem' and that all poetry at its deepest levels is structured by the precise historical experience from whence it emerged. The critique of Larkin's poetry in terms of national character began as early as 1955, with the publication of *The Less Deceived.*

A. Alvarez, introducing *The New Poetry* anthology in 1962, berated the limiting of Larkin's 'gentility', which he felt was best summed up in terms of those familiar English virtues, 'politeness' and 'decency'. For him Larkin's neatly ordered verse compared unfavorably with the more 'urgent', experimental poetry being produced by American writers. These queries into the emergence of a specific English national character were later allayed. It was not till after the 1970s that the critical consensus took a turn and recognized him as a poet who aspired for the transcendental moments of "sacred time and space". This idea of a 'transcendental' element in Larkin's work began to emerge in critical essays, along with the related idea of a 'symbolist' dimension in the poetry. Critics like Seamus Heaney and Andrew Motion attribute much of the symbolist potential to the enduring influence of W.B. Yeats and that of Thomas Hardy and show how the contradictory presence of both the poets produced in Larkin's work a fierce debate between hopelessness, fulfillment and disappointment. Barbara Everett, however, unleashes a fresh line of argument. In her essay "After Symbolism" she qualifies Larkin as not only an anti-modernist but in many respects as a post-modernist – who both employs and rejects the themes and techniques of Symbolist poetry. In other words, Larkin's work engages with symbolism while simultaneously providing a critique of its basic assumptions and ideals.

In 1980 Neil Powell could write that "It is probably fair to say that Philip Larkin is less highly regarded in academic circles than either Thom Gunn or Donald Davie". But after that Larkin's standing increased. "Philip Larkin is an excellent example of the plain style in modern times," writes Tijana Stojkovic. Robert Sheppard asserts that "It is by general consent that the work of Philip Larkin is taken to be exemplary". Larkin is the most widely celebrated and arguably the finest poet of the Movement, states Keith Tuma, and his poetry is "more various than its reputation for dour pessimism and anecdotes of a disappointed middle class suggests" (Keith Tuma).

Stephen Cooper's book *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer* suggests the changing temper of Larkin studies. Cooper argues that "The interplay of signs and motifs in the early work orchestrates a subversion of conventional attitudes towards class, gender, authority and sexual relations". Cooper identifies Larkin as a progressive writer, and perceives in the letters a "plea for alternative constructs of masculinity, femininity and social and political organization". Cooper draws on the entire canon of Larkin's works, as

well as on unpublished correspondence, to counter the oft-repeated caricature of Larkin as a racist, misogynist reactionary. Instead he identifies in Larkin what he calls a "subversive imagination". He highlights in particular "Larkin's objections to the hypocrisies of conventional sexual politics that hamper the lives of both sexes in equal measure". In similar vein to Cooper, Stephen Regan notes in an essay entitled "Philip Larkin: a late modern poet" that Larkin frequently embraces devices associated with the experimental practices of Modernism, such as linguistic strangeness, self-conscious literariness, radical self-questioning, sudden shifts of voice and register, complex viewpoints and perspectives, and symbolist intensity.

Check Your Progress:

1. Identify the elements in Larkin's poetry that show his particular sensibility regarding the contemporary post-war situation.

2. What are the major influences that work 'in' Larkin's poetic oeuvre with reference to his stand on the modernist principles of poetry?

3.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

In his essay on "Varieties of Religion," published in his collection on English society and literature between 1945 and 1970, Sinfield surveys the literature of the twentieth century and identifies the 1950s as a period of accelerated decline in faith. Television, advertising, and modern economic practices all contribute towards this growing secularization, while technology and bureaucracy require that individuals "develop a fluency and sophistication incompatible with a single worldview". Thus, Christianity loses its relevance for a modern society. With the tumbling down of one of the most important blocks of an unitary social vision, the feeling of skepticism prevailed and became the hallmark of literature of the 1950s and the moment that occasioned the prescribed poem.

3.6 READING THE POEM "CHURCH GOING"

Indeed, there is a great deal of 'church going' in the poetry of Philip Larkin (1922-85): out of the 166 pieces in his *Collected Poems*, no fewer than 34 contain overt references to religion. Reread through the prism of his

life's work, Larkin's "Church Going" becomes not so much an expression of outright scepticism towards Christianity, as a desperate struggle to understand an intangible need. His treatment of orthodox belief falls into a distinct and discernible pattern, which usually concludes with the speaker's rejection of faith because it cannot save him from suffering and death. Throughout his poems, Larkin's poetry contains the idiom of Christianity. A brief review of Larkin's poetry reveals much about his familiarity with faith and its accessories, and provides the psychological context for "Church Going."

Larkin's frustration with religion's inability to counter death is already evident in his early poetry. "A Stone Church Damaged by a Bomb" (1943) presents Larkin's argument against faith in concrete and visual terms. If the church itself is not immune to destruction, how can it offer safety to others? Larkin's description is characterized by a kind of pained realization: "Planted deeper than roots,/ This chiselled, flung-up faith/ Runs and leaps against the sky,/ A prayer killed into stone/ Among the always dying trees....." The description concludes with the speaker's disillusionment - "I have worshipped that whispering shell" - and the final stanza is an emotional eulogy for the structure.

SAQ:

Compare Donne's idea of religion and death (in "Around the Round Earth's Imagined Corners" and "Death be not Proud") with Larkin's. Make a comparative summary of the difference. (80 words)

....
....
....
....

In "Church Going" all of Larkin's doubts, fears, and frustrations are explored in a single visit to an empty church. Each line of the poem magnifies the tension in the speaker's response to the building. The opening line already poses a challenge to faith: the speaker only goes inside when he's "sure there's nothing going on" presumably there is always something going on in a house of God on some level. In contrast to his outside perspective in other poems, Larkin steps inside and is momentarily isolated from the world as the door shuts with a thud. "Another church" suggests the unremarkable

nature of the scene, a description reinforced with Larkin's catalogue of the contents: "matting, seats, and stone, / And little books ... some brass and stuff / Up at the holy end". He comments in a wry tone that the tense, musty silence of the place has "brewed God knows how long", only to take off his bicycle clips "in awkward reverence".

"Church Going" has been discussed and explicated in numerous scholarly articles, many of which are substantive and few of which are exclusive of additional readings. Unlike the other references to religion in Larkin's poetry, "Church Going" is more ambiguous and less certain concerning faith's disservice. Although an entirely positive reading of religion in this poem is tempting, it cannot be fully defended, especially in the light of Larkin's other works. But neither can one argue that the poem rejects faith in any absolute sense. The visitor goes through the motions of attendance: he signs the book, makes a modest donation, and reflects "the place was not worth stopping for". His actions, socially appropriate but spiritually devoid of conviction, are emblematic of the function of religion in all of Larkin's poems - an intangible and mysterious system that promises to meet the needs of its faithful but rarely does so in visible terms.

Larkin's speaker follows prescribed behavior because at times that is all a soul knows to do, and whether he believes it or not is too complex a matter for him to discern. Larkin presents the situation in dramatic terms, essentially summarizing the poem: "For, though I've no idea what this accoutred frowsty barn is worth, It pleases me to stand in silence here...." The poem, then, becomes an internal monologue, the raw footage of a spirit in struggle, sensing something greater than itself but unable to embrace it. [Herein, I have used the word "internal monologue" interchangeably with "interior monologue": the latter is used to qualify that strategy on the part of the poet which presents to the reader the course and rhythm of consciousness precisely as it occurs in a character's mind.] The ambiguity of the last line - "If only that so many dead lie round"- is consistent with the speaker's wonderment throughout the poem. Even his purposefully dismissive language and reasonable speculations suggest that something like faith may already exist. The poem reflects the visitor's struggle to find something unknown, unspecified and unidentified, not unlike that endless nowhere in *High Windows*. One gets the sense that the speaker is 'less deceived', but sadder for it. And yet, in that sadness lies a powerful affirmation.

Albeit fraught with uncertainty Larkin's oeuvre has moments of absolution - the chief examples of these momentary absolutions are Larkin's two most successful longer poems, "Church Going" from *The Less Deceived* and the title piece from *The Whitsun Weddings.* In both cases the speaker's initial detachment and irony give way, and though he remains essentially outside the life he observes, he responds with a deep emotional sympathy to the values he finds there. Of the two poems, "Church Going" is easily the most famous, perhaps because it illustrates so perfectly all the conservative, empirical attitudes that Robert Conquest polemicized in the first *New Lines* anthology: a traditional versification, an implicit suspicion of rhetoric and high emotion, and a refusal to treat religious experiences in anything but secular terms. Yet in spite of all these rather "anti-poetic" qualities, "Church Going" is extremely moving.

Larkin's true subject is not religion but "marriage, and birth, / And death, and thoughts of these," the elemental rituals which the church symbolizes and to which the poem pays a quiet tribute. The presumably "bored, uninformed" speaker, a lonely cyclist who stops to wander through an empty church, is forever "surprising / A hunger in himself to be more serious," and his mood changes from a sort of nervous irony to an undisguised respect for the church's decaying presence. "Church Going" reflects this change of attitude in the effortless, expert way that it moves between two quite different levels of diction. At one extreme is an idiomatic, Movement style, verging on fake toughness, and at the other is a simple but grand language that almost belongs in the pulpit. The idiomatic talk is shown most clearly in the first stanza, where the speaker, having made sure that nobody is around, steps into the church. He finds "sprawlings of flowers," "some brass and stuff / Up at the holy end," and a "tense, musty, unignorable silence, / Brewed God knows how long."

SAQ:

Which words and phrases in the poem express

a. skepticism

b. ironic self-mockery

c. hesitation

d. practical realism (8+8+10+10 words)

....
....
....

In some of Larkin's contemporaries, poets like Kingsley Amis, the verse will seldom rise above this safe, adolescent stage; but Larkin gives the prosaic language a valid dramatic context, suggesting an awkwardness and discomfort behind the speaker's joking. The wry, sacrilegious tone of the early stanzas is clearly a defense rising out of a fear of sentiment. Indeed the speaker himself is conscious of this defensiveness and directs as much irony toward his own behavior as toward the church. When he reads a few "Hectoring large-scale verses" from the Bible, pronouncing them "much more loudly than I'd meant," the echoes "snigger briefly" in return. Finally, just at the point where he has begun to note that the church was "not worth stopping for," his attitude takes a different turn. Our first impressions are thrown into doubt and the language gradually becomes more contemplative, lofty. The speaker does not entirely abandon his previous mood, and occasionally he returns to a purely colloquial diction. In general, however, the poem moves toward expansive, "poetic" feelings, and the end has a very different style from the beginning:

> A serious house on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
> Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
> And that much never can be obsolete,
> Since someone will forever be surprising
> A hunger in himself to be more serious,
> And gravitating with it to this ground,
> Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
> If only that so many dead lie round.

The first three lines of this final stanza, with their slightly Latinate diction and their touches of old-fashioned nobility, are nearly as obsolescent in character as the church itself. But Larkin has been able to rescue the power of such language by holding it at bay as long as possible with the skeptical joking and the flat, plain diction of the earlier stanzas. Ultimately he shows us that there is a value in the ritual of "marriage, and birth, / And death" which "never can be obsolete," and the strong emotion at the end of the poem is all the more effective because it seems to have broken through the innate defensiveness.

SAQ:

Consider the tone of the extract given here. How would you describe this term 'tone'? (50 words)

....
....
....
....

The same process is at work in "The Whitsun Weddings," the key poem in Larkin's third collection of verse. Here the subject is marriage, though the cycle of birth and death is also suggested. The poem gives an account of a Whit-Saturday train journey to London, and it draws heavily on an industrialized landscape which "Church Going" described merely as "suburb scrub." The plain, almost lifeless scenery acts as a correlative for the speaker's general lack of emotion, but at the end of the poem he forsakes his detached, ironic attitude and is deeply moved by what he calls a "Travelling coincidence" (WW). Anthony Thwaite says that prior to the first BBC reading of "The Whitsun Weddings," Larkin wrote asking him to try and get from the actor "a level, even a plodding descriptive note, until the mysterious last lines, when the poem should suddenly lift off the ground. Palpable fear of death is very often countered by small but precise epiphanic recognitions of transcendent and spiritual values. The effect is a surprising graciousness that moderates and in some cases displaces his characteristic tone of sarcasm and irony, thereby undermining the nihilism and pessimism that are his trademarks.

The textual and subtextual strategies Larkin uses to exemplify his modulated vision of human interconnectedness are consistent with the major effort of the Movement writers of the fifties to bring poetry back to a popular readership, an audience they felt had been alienated by the highly cerebral and academic modernists. And, although Larkin's subject matter is so often focused on man's failure and loss within specifically postwar English settings, his evocation of the emotional conflicts common to all people engages and attracts readers from a far larger arena. This point is supported by the appearance of his *Collected Poems* on the *Washington Post*'s hardback-bestseller list shortly after publication. That he is able to make his particularly British sensibility seem so familiar and universal is a testament to his power

and stature as a poet. If he is the man who penned every line reeking with nihilism, there is still another Larkin who lurks behind the gloom, constructing textual and subtextual bridges that connect the poet with his readers, the man with his world.

SAQ:

Is Larkin able to mediate between a 'popular' readership and an elite one? Does this adjustment lead him to an adjustment of theme and subject, or only of language? (60 + 70 words)

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

In general, however, the judgment of Larkin as a poet of despair prevails because critics give so little attention to his technical and rhetorical methods of developing a countertext. Yet it is just this element of resistance in his poems, I would argue, that gives Larkin's work a rich complexity he himself disingenuously denied. Underlying the technical virtuosity and splendid formal achievement of his work is a whole complex of contradictions that cast doubt on or entirely deconstruct his primary statements. From a sort of island of loneliness and isolation, the poet builds communal bridges to his readers through the use of anecdote, interior monologue, humor, grammatical ingenuity, and invitations to identify with the speaker- all of which cleverly subvert or compromise the surface text. As a correlative to this narrative stratagem, Larkin uses a confessional or intimate voice that engages his audience in a confiding relationship. His rhetorical use of the pronouns "you" and "we," for instance, establishes our complicity with the action.

This subversive counter text makes its presence felt in Larkin's poems again through the presence of a multiplicity of tonal registers which undermine authorial stability. In a simple sense, as Andrew Swarbick in his essay "Larkin's Identities" puts it, his poems – together or separately–are

multivocal. Explicitly or implicitly, an 'I' addresses a 'you' and they take on the condition of speech acts. They are constructed with an explicit consciousness of the impression they are creating; their voices sometimes ecstatic (as in "Solar" and "Water"), often mocking and frequently epigrammatic in pursuing a philosophical 'truth'. Even at their most declarative the poems carry a highly self-conscious rhetorical persuasiveness.

Stop to consider:

Speech Acts

The English philosopher J.L. Austin thought of all language as 'performative', that is, not so much involved in making statements as in making gestures of intention and producing calculated effects. According to Terry Eagleton although literature might appear as describing the world, and sometimes actually does so, its real function is performative: it uses language with certain convention in order to bring about certain effects in a reader. Refer back to the uses of 'you' and 'we' to understand better.

Proceeding on the ideas of Swarbick – the development of Larkin's poetry is intricately related to the creation of fictional identities and repeated experiments in dramatizing different 'voices'. Insisting from the outset on a careful distinction between the personality of the poet and the personae in the poems he envisages the 'selves' who inhabit the poetry as essentially rhetorical constructions, the products of language, and what the poems aspire to is some imagined fullness of being or complete selfhood which remains forever 'out of reach'. The poems, thus being regarded as dramatized speech acts, remain skeptical of any critical attempt to impose upon themselves a single, unified identity consistent with that of Larkin himself. Gathering support from the critical writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, the multiplicity of tonal registers (the presence of which has been explained in my prior readings of the poem) which undermine authorial stability also resist and seek to uncover a dominant ideology such as 'Englishness'. Even so, the question of national identity in Larkin's poetry will not disappear. One reason, perhaps, for the enduring interest in Larkin's 'Englishness' is not that his poems dutifully parade some ideal conservative vision of the nation, but that they prove in the end to be so responsive to the fractures and collisions in postwar English culture.

Stop to Consider:

On Bakhtin

Fundamentally, the construction of 'selves' is a function of the way language operates in Larkin's poetry and his work represents a striking instance of Mikhail Bakhtin's descriptions of dialogic discourse. Bakhtin came to doubt that any literary text could be purely monologic, and to conclude that all literary discourse is to some extent inherently dialogic. [*The Dialogic Imagination*]

Check Your Progress:

1. Read "Church Going" as a 'debate between a poet and a persona.' (2005, GU)

2. What is meant by 'countertext'? Explain the importance of 'countertext' within Larkin's poetry. Illustrate with the help of the poem "Church Going".

3. Elaborate the idea with examples from "Church Going", of how Larkin's poetry has more than one register.

Alternative Readings of the Poem:

An interesting series of repetitions emerged in my readings of the poem: it was more like the ritualistic repetition of a loss that had happened sometime in the past, but the process of acclimatization was still on. The poem can be read as couched in extravagant fantasy, the actions taking place in the mental realm out of the need to drive home a sense of loss. The very act of the persona in stopping by the church is a point in the chain that links up many such visits. In fact, the entire poem can be read as a visit to arrive at a more pronounced outline of one's spiritual status.(" Yet stop I did: in fact I often do" and the next line only reinforces it: " And always end much at a loss like this,")

There are instances in the poem that further subscribe to this element of repetition, repetition to familiarize. Like when he talks about "A few cathedrals chronically on show". I would like you to dig out other instances of repetition from the poem keeping in mind the fact that repetition also evokes the sense of constant self-discovery. The man who returned is not the boy who left.

3.7 SUMMING UP

In the previous sections, an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the literary opus that is Larkin. Although the nuances between the man and his work should never be sidelined, the study has been presented here from the perspective of multiple schools of criticism – so that the import of one is not lost out on you in the exhaustive perusal of another. The readings should not, however, be considered as conclusive and sufficient, they have been designed to acquaint you with the prevalence of multiplicity in current critical studies and detract you from adopting any unitary mode of 'doing' a literary work. Choice is omnipresent.

In the introductory sections, I have tried to estimate the greatness of Larkin by referring to the various influences that molded his artistic sensibilities. In surveying his literary career, special attention has been given to the post-war decades which prompted an uncertainty that manifested itself not only in the content but also the style of his poetry. The main purpose behind introducing interdisciplinary concepts like Jazz is to enable a broader spectrum from which you can judge the underpinnings of artistic work that emanated in his era. This is followed by a brief overview of how the poet has been received down the ages right to the recent times. While in the section entitled "Reading the Poem" the prescribed poem is seen through the prism of readings that illumine separate and may be at times conflicting regimes of thought.

3.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Regan, Stephen. *New Casebooks : Philip Larkin*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature.* Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Philip Larkin's "Cut-Price Crowd: The Poet and the Average Reader." Author(s): Mike Tierce. *Source: South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Nov., 1986), pp. 95-110 Published by: South Atlantic Modern Language Association Stable URL:http://www.jstor.org/stable/3199759 Accessed: 28/02/2009

"Living by Bridges: Philip Larkin's Resisting Subtext." Author(s): Patricia Ross French. Source: *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 85-100 Published by: South Atlantic Modern Language Association Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3201102 Accessed: 28/02/2009

Philip Larkin's "Lost World" Author(s): James Naremore and Philip Larkin. Source: *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer, 1974), pp. 331-344 Published by: University of Wisconsin Press Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207744 Accessed: 28/02/2009

* * *

Unit 4
Ted Hughes "Thrushes", "Pike"

Contents:

4.1 Objectives
4.2 Introducing the Poet
4.3 Works of the Poet
4.4 Critical Reception
4.5 Context of the Poems
4.6 Reading the Poems
4.6.1 Reading "Thrushes"
4.6.2 Reading "Pike"
4.7 Summing up
4.8 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the unit is to introduce the poet Ted Hughes to you and make a detailed study of the poems prescribed in your syllabus.

By the end of your reading the unit you should be able to–

- *place* Ted Hughes in the English poetic tradition
- *explore* Hughes' singular treatment of the innocent savagery of the world of Nature
- *analyse* critically and enjoy reading Hughes' poems
- *evaluate* Hughes' contribution to English poetry.

4.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

One of the liveliest poets writing in Britain since 1945, Ted Hughes came into the poetry scene when British poetry was largely dominated by the Movement Poets. Ted Hughes (Edward James) was born on 17th August,

1930 in Mytholmroyd, a small town in west Yorkshire and raised among the local farms in that area. His childhood was dominantly rural. According to Hughes his first nine years shaped everything. His father, William Hughes, was a carpenter who fought in the First World War and he happened to be only one of seventeen survivors of an entire regiment who perished at Gallipoli. When Hughes was seven, the family moved to Mexborough, a coal-mining town in South Yorkshire and the harsh landscape of the moors of that area is predominant in his poems. His parents opened a newsagent's and tobacconist's shop out there. He did his early education in Mexborough Grammar School. As a boy he spent much time on shooting and fishing expeditions with his brother, and his consequent obsession with animals and his sense of the beauty and violence of the natural world serve as a theme in his poetry again and again.

In 1948 he joined Pembroke College, Cambridge on a scholarship. The English, archeology and anthropology he studied here enabled him to write in systematic details about the brutal life force that he so glorified. He also specialized in mythology. Here he met the American poet, Sylvia Plath, but before joining the University he did National Service by joining the RAF for two years. After graduating from the university, he worked as a rose-gardener, a night-watchman, a script-reader, a zoo attendant and a teacher. In 1957 he moved to the USA after marrying Sylvia Plath the previous year. The couple returned to England in December 1959. In 1962, Hughes left Plath for Assia Gutmann Wevill. Less than a year later, Plath committed suicide. Like Plath, Wevill too committed suicide, after killing their four year old daughter, Shura. In 1970, Hughes married Carol Orchard, with whom he remained married until his death. Hughes's writings have been often overshadowed by his tortuous marriage with Plath. While at US he taught English and creative writing at Amherst College, his wife taught literature at Smith College.

In 1957 he published his first volume of poems, *The Hawk in the Rain* and its terse celebration of raw natural energies and its stress on the physical, animal and subconscious in a vigorous vernacular which was in total contrast to the urbane, restrained, rational, disillusioned, ironic setting and tones of the Movement poets won him immediate recognition. This recognition led him on to write profusely for readers who were awaking to a renewed vogue for topographical poetry that arose in the environment-conscious second half of the 20th century.

He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1984 after John Betjeman's death and he remained in this capacity till his death. He received the *Order of Merit* from Queen Elizabeth II just before he died in 1998.

SAQ:

What kind of associations are brought in by Hughes' writings on animals?–energy, bestiality, brutal honesty and ferocity? (80 words)

....
....
....
....
....

4.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Hughes' Writings:

Hughes' started writing poetry when he was about fifteen and his first volume of poems *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) won him immediate accolades and marked the beginning of a prolific writing career. It was followed by *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967) and several books of children's verse. *Crow* (1970) is a sequence of poems in which he introduces the central symbol of the crow. This symbol of the dark subconscious side of human nature is repeated frequently in subsequent volumes. In this volume Hughes retells the legends of creation and birth through the dark vision of the predatory, mocking indestructible crow, 'screaming for blood' amidst 'the horror of creation'. Later volumes include *Cave Birds* (1975), *Season Songs* (1976). and *Moortown* (1979). He also published plays for children, a version of Seneca's *Oedipus* (1968) and edited various anthologies, *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *River* (1983) being two of the more popular ones. Some of his more recent volumes are *Wolf watching* (1989), *Rain-Charm fot the Duchy and Other Laureate Poems* (1992) and *New Selected Poems* (1995). *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992) and *Winter Pollen* (1995) contain some of his prose works. *Tales from Ovid* contain a selection of free verse translations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In *Birthday Letters* he has published poems describing his relationship with Plath.

Hughes and the English Poetic Tradition:

In the works of Ted Hughes which he wrote as a reaction against the post-war poetry of the Movement poets, we find traces of the influence of several older and earlier native British poetic traditions. If in a few poems like "The Horses" we find closeness with the serene Wordsworthian Nature in most of his other poems he reveals the violence and irrationality that belongs to the Tennysonian world of Nature. His attachment to anthropology made him look at the world of myth in a new, modern way. Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* had a strong influence on him during his early poetic career. His training in anthropology attracted him to ancient European, oriental and American myths. At each stage in his development, Hughes has of course tried to transcend these influences and emerge as a poet with a distinctive singular style. In his early works we can clearly see the influence of Hopkins, Lawrence, Yeats and Dylan Thomas. We can also trace in his work the lasting influence of Greek tragedy, medieval alliterative poetry, Shakespeare, Donne and the English Romantic Poets more specifically Blake, Wordsworth and Keats. Conceptually Hughes' poetry owes much to Freud and Darwin. In his verse we find that violence and human repression are inextricably part of the same mechanism, civilization engendering a more insidious violence born of repression itself.

Stop to Consider:

Ted Hughes on Poetic Influence:

in the way of influences … everything goes into the stew … Donne I once learned as many of his poems as I could and I greatly admired his satires and epistles. More than his lyrics even. As for Thomas, *Deaths and Entrances* was a holy book with me for quite a time when it first came out. Lawrence I read entire in my teens … except for all but a few of his poems. His writings coloured a whole period of my life. Blake I connect inwardly to. Yeats spellbound me for about six years. I got to him not so much through his verse as through his other interests, folklore and magic in particular. Then that strange atmosphere laid hold of me. I fancy if there is a jury of critics sitting over what I write, and I imagine every writer has something of the sort, then Yeats is the judge. There are all sorts of things I could well do but because of him and principles I absorbed from him I cannot. They are principles that I have found confirmed in other sources … but he stamped them into me. … There are others. One poet I have read more than any of these is Chaucer. And the poet I read more than all other literature put together is Shakespeare. …

I read Lawrence and Thomas at an impressionable age. I also read Hopkins very closely. But there are superficial influences that show and deep influences maybe are not so visible. It's a mystery how a writer's imagination is influenced and altered. Up to the age of twenty-five I read no contemporary poetry whatever except Eliot, Thomas and some Auden. Then I read a Penguin of American poets that came out in about 1955 and started me writing ... Crowe Ransom was the one who gave me a model I felt I could use. He helped me get my words into focus. … But this whole business of influences is mysterious. Sometimes it's just a few words that open up a whole prospect. They may occur anywhere. Then again the influences that really count are most likely not literary at all. Maybe it would really be best of all to have no influences. Impossible of course. But what good are they as a rule? You spend a lifetime learning how to write verse when it's been clear from your earliest days that the greatest poetry in English is in the prose of the Bible. … Influences just seem to make it more and more unlikely that a poet will write what he alone could write.

Source: Ekbert Faas's interview with Hughes in 1970, reproduced in Appendix 2 of Faas"s *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, California, 1980), p 202.

Hughes on Poetry and the Role of the Poet:

Hughes had some very definite ideas about poetry and its functions and about his role as a poet. He has written and spoken a great deal about these ideas and, as might be expected, he deplored the sentimental, artificial approach to poetry. He reacted against the genteel statements of the rational and common-sense experience of the Movement writers and formulated a poetics of irrationality and violence adopting modernist techniques to write confessional poems scornfully abandoning Georgian moderation in favour of more primal passions.

Hughes believes that poetry is a magical and powerful way of reaching our feelings and emotions - our subconscious, natural energies. He believes that these energies have been repressed by an emphasis on the scientific approach to life and teaching. We are taught, he says, that emotions are dangerous and that they can distort our judgment and should not be relied upon when we have decisions to make, and that they have nothing to do with truth.

Creativity is necessary for survival and it requires both imagination and logic. Hughes sees it as the job of any kind of artist to help release our suppressed creative energies and he believes that poetry is particularly effective for this purpose. He nursed a shaman like conception of his poetic mission and often he sees himself as a shaman, a kind of tribal medicine man who makes symbolic journeys to the underworld of the subconscious to bring back lost souls and to cure sick people. The words, the symbols, the images and the musical rhythms of the poetry, are, for him, like the shaman's magic drum which helps him on his journey. It is these which stir our imagination, and the effect is a magical release of emotional energies**.**

In *Poetry in the Making* (1970) Hughes states that there is no ideal form of poetry or writing. His poetry ranged from free verse to highly structured forms and rhyme schemes. He gradually abandoned traditional forms and stated that the "very sound of metre calls up the ghosts of the past and it is difficult to sing one's own tune against the choir." In his poetry we find that he matches form, diction and style to the subject matter. Hughes considers the aural quality of a poem important than the visual impact it makes through the images and metaphors. In an interview he expressed his preference thus, "I prefer poems to make an effect on being heard, and I don't think that's really a case of them being simple because for instance Eliot's poems make a tremendous effect when you hear them, and when I first heard them they did, and when I was too young to understand very much about them they had an enormous effect on me …. It's just some sort of charm and series of operations that it works on you…"

SAQ:

Define in clear terms Hughes' approach to the world of Nature. Would you call it one of neutrality, of scientific objectivity, of empathy, of superciliousness, or of antipathy? (80 words)

....
....
....
....
....
....
....

Violence in Ted Hughes's Poetry:

The consistent strain of violence in the poetry of Ted Hughes has often prompted critics to pounce on his works and convert them into evidence in a sociological study of the perpetual tortures, terrors and mass massacres prevalent in society in the post-World Wars era thus often overlooking the poetic merits of his works. Hughes agrees that post-war poets were indeed greatly influenced by the meaningless violence and wrote frequently using violence as a theme but he also states that violence as a theme was nothing new in literature and can be traced down to the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Dante Shakespeare, Blake and can also be found in the *Bible*, the various epics and *Beowulf*. In an interview, talking about violence in poetry, Hughes says,

"When is violence 'violence' and when is it great poetry? Can the critic distinguish? I would say that most critics cannot distinguish. The critic whose outlook is based on a rational skepticism … simply cannot distinguish between fears for his own mental security and the actions of the Universe redressing a disturbed balance. Or trying to. In other words he is incapable of judging poetry … because poetry is nothing if not that, the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error. … Violence that begins in an unhappy home can go one way to produce a meaningless little nightmare of murder etc. for TV or it can go the other way and produce those moments in Beethoven. …" (Source: Ekbert Faas's interview with Hughes in 1970, reproduced in Appendix 2 of Faas"s *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, California, 1980), pp 198-99)

Admittedly, Hughes's poetry is replete with violence, brutal violence at that. He writes about violence in love and in hatred, in the battlefield, in the animal kingdom and in human society. But from Hughes's perspective his poems are 'not about violence but vitality'. Violence though painful and very often fatal, is also a guarantee of energy and of life. He says,

Stop to Consider:

'Violence' in Ted Hughes

"… Any form of violence – any form of violent activity – invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe. Once the contact has been made it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond ordinary human activity enters. When the wise men know how to create rituals and dogma, the energy can be contained. When the old rituals and dogma have lost credit and disintegrated, and no new ones have been formed, the energy cannot be contained, and so its effect is destructive – and that is the position with us. And that is why force of any kind frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook. In the old world God and divine power were invoked at any cost – life seemed worthless without them. In the present world we dare not invoke them – we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them from destroying us. We have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination – anything bigger introduces problems the demons get hold of it. That is the psychological stupidity, the ineptitude of the rigidly rationalist outlook – it's a form of hubris, and we're paying the traditional price. If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? You accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control – rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one. …"

SAQ:

Show the allusions to violence in the poems, 'Thrushes' and 'Pike'. (70 + 70 words)

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

Animals and Nature in Hughes's Poetry:

Hughes' earlier poetic work is rooted in nature in general and, in the innocent savagery of animals in particular. Tennyson's phrase "nature, red in tooth and claw" could be aptly applied to him. Hughes is acutely aware of the mixture of beauty and violence in the natural world, and writes of it with fascination, fear and awe which arises from a colonial defensive love of his territory. He finds in animals a metaphor for his view on life. In his poems he expresses a rapt fascination with animal energy which he developed from

his exposure to the world of nature and animals in his early childhood days. Observing the world of Nature from close quarters he became aware of the affinities that exist between animal and human life. In the world as he saw it, animals live out a struggle for the survival of the fittest in the same way that humans strive for ascendancy and success. Yet he presented the animal world as alien and opposed to the civilized human consciousness and for that reason peculiarly close to sub-rational instinct in the self.

Reorienting the beast fable to emphasize the possibilities of the conflict that exist between civilization and beastly elements Hughes has written poems like *Pike*, *An Otter*, *The Bull Moses*, *View of a Pig, The Jaguar, Hawk Roosting, The Hawk in the Rain*. He fills these poems with the animals' physical presence and, endows their natural strength with mythic power. The characteristic theme of violence is evident in them. In many of his animal poems he sets the savagery of nature against the pretensions of civilization. However, in "The Horses" he writes about the passivity and gentleness of a group of ten horses at a particular moment in their existence.

Stop to Consider:

Hughes and the Tradition of Nature Poetry

Continuing the tradition of Nature poetry which started with the pastorals and continued through the times of Shakespeare, Blake, Wordsworth and Tennyson till his times Ted Hughes, in his works, explored the relationship that exists between Nature and Man. Shakespeare in his works showed that as long as there is harmony between the human world and the world of Nature, everything is right with the world.

Wordsworth, the greatest Nature poet, had a rather limited view regarding Nature. He believed that 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her' and to prove his point he often chose a favoured corner in his own countryside to write about. To quote Wordsworth's own words, in his poetry he 'refers to the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to invest the material universe, and the moral relations under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances.'

After Wordsworth came Tennyson who was aware of the existence of a terrible force in Nature that was 'red in tooth and claw' and who was not a moral teacher, nurse and guardian. This view was similar to that of Schopenhauer's which saw Nature as a nightmarish force. Much earlier Hume had spoken of blind Nature:

Look around this Universe. What an immense profusion of Beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them are for their own Happiness! How contemptible or odious to the Spectator! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind Nature impregnated by a great vivifying Principle, and pouring forth from her Lap without Discernment or Parental Care, her maim'd and abortive Children.

But Ted Hughes considers Nature an ambivalent force and looks at her with various different attitudes. In some of his works he writes about the violent side of nature – 'Pike', 'Crow', 'Hawk' 'Roosting' - and at other times in poems like 'The Horses', 'The Wind' and 'October Dawn' his description of the natural landscape is as vivid and pictorial as Wordsworth's.

SAQ:

Comment on the exclusive focus on animals in Hughes's poetry. (60 words)

....
....
....
....
....

Hughes's War Poetry:

Being still a child when the Second World War ended Hughes did not experience first-hand life in the trenches. However, his father had fought in World War I and happened to be one of the seventeen lucky men of his regiment to have survived death in the Gullipoli battle and it was from him that he heard several tales of mental and physical horrors experienced by the soldiers. He felt a revolt against the man-made calamity, the dropping of the atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the large scale massacre of the Jews by the Nazis. These narrations left a permanent impression on the mind of the young, sensitive poet and he recalls them in *Out*, *Six Young Men*, *Bayonet Charge, Crow's Account of the Battle* and *Grief for Dead Soldiers.* In these poems Hughes shows a rare boldness in expressing the horror that war had created. Unlike the Movement Poets who benumbed by the war avoided talking about it and wrote poetry depicting urban reality,

he felt that one could not avoid the problem by shutting one's eyes to it. Therefore, without being sentimental and in a matter-of-fact manner Hughes depicts faithful pictures of the nightmare that the World Wars had created and the vision of a nightmarish world it had left behind.

Death:

Interwoven with Hughes' theme of violence is death. Hughes examines the various manners in which death strikes – death in war, death of animals by animals, death brought about by men. While writing about death he avoids sentimentality, pathos and morbidity and draws objective, realistic and grim pictures of the sorrow associated with the death process. Death means the fulfillment of a life process to him. *In The Pig, Grief for Dead Soldiers, Six Young Men, Bishop Nicholas Ferrar etc.* Hughes sometimes celebrates the death of a martyr, sometimes draws an ironical contrast between the remembering of war heroes and the grief and despair which they leave behind for the widows and orphans and yet at other times he explores the mystery of death.

Use of Myth in Ted Hughes's Poetry:

Stop to consider:

Myth: In general a myth is a story which is not 'true' and which involves supernatural beings – or at any rate supra-human beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. Myth explains how something came to exist. Myth embodies feeling and concept – hence the Promethean or Herculean figure, or the idea of Diana, or the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Many myth or quasi-myths are primitive explanations of the natural order and cosmic forces.

Classical writers had a 'ready-made' mythology. Others have not been so fortunate and some have felt a great need to invent or somehow contrive a mythology which shall be a vehicle of their beliefs. Poets, especially, have continued to fall back on the Greek and Roman myths and, to a lesser extent, upon Germanic and Scandinavian myths, and in some cases, upon Chinese, Indian, Egyptian and Latin American myths. … A good example of a poet who has 'invented' a mythology akin to the traditional kind is William Blake. He said that he felt obliged to create a system: otherwise he would be enslaved by

someone else's. … A more recent example is W.B. Yeats. …Herman Melville (*Moby Dick*), James Joyce (*Ulysses*) and D.H. Lawrence (*The Plumed Serpent*) have also used a variety of mythical materials, for the most part those which belong to what Jung described as the 'collective unconscious'.

(**Source**: Cuddon J.A., *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Penguin Books,1979, pp 408 -09.)

Myth: In classical Greek "mythos" signified any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology – a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. Most myths are related to social rituals – set forms and procedures in sacred ceremonies – but anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals. If the protagonist is a person rather than a supernatural being, the traditional story is usually not called a myth but a legend. If the story concerns supernatural beings who are not gods and the story is not a part of a systematic mythology, it is usually classified as a *folktale*.

It can be said that a mythology is a religion in which we no longer believe. … The term 'myth' has also been extended to denote supernatural tales which are deliberately invented by their authors. … The German romantic authors F.W.J. Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel proposed that to write great literature, modern poets must develop a new unifying mythology which will synthesize the insights of the myths of the Western past with the new discoveries of philosophy and the physical science. …

Myth has become a prominent term in literary analysis. A large group of writers the **myth critics –** including Robert Graves, Francis Fergusson, Maud Bodkin, Richard Chase, and the most influential Northorp Frye – view the genres and individual plot-patterns of many works of literature including what on the surface are highly sophisticated and realistic works, as recurrences of basic mythic formulas. …

A reader needs to be alert to the bewildering variety of applications of the term 'myth' in contemporary criticism. In addition to those already described, its uses range all the way from signifying any widely held fallacy … to … denoting the solidly imagined realm in which a work of fiction is enacted … .

(**Source:** Abrams M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* Prism Books Pvt Ltd, Bangalore,1993, pp121-23.)

Objective imagination, in the light of science, rejected religion as charlatanism, and the inner world as a bundle of fairy tales, a relic of primeval superstition. Religious negotiations had formerly embraced and humanized the archaic energies of instinct and feeling. They had conversed in simple but profound terms with the forces struggling inside people, and had civilized them, or attempted to. Without religion, those powers have become dehumanized. The whole inner world has become elemental, chaotic, continually more primitive and beyond our control.

Hughes believed that through myth man could access and find a cure to the inner world which had become discontinuous, fragmented and chaotic. He continues:

A mentally sick person is sick, says [Freud's] theory, because there is something in his mind which he refuses to face, which he has by some means or other cut himself off from and which he represses into the cellars of his mind, down into the nervous system where he plays havoc. And this devil of suppressed life stops making trouble the moment he is acknowledged, the moment he is welcomed into conscious life and given some shape where he can play out his energy in an active part of the personality. The best way to welcome him and to release him, it is reckoned, is within the framework of fantasy. Once the fantasy has made connection with the demon and given him a role, the person feels cured.

From this it then emerges that myth according to Hughes is the "objectified story of a psychic healing, a taming of the dragon, a coming-to-terms with drama. As tragedy, myth aims to expel or accommodate some evil …. The poet, according to Hughes, is the healer of the community as well as of himself, a medicine man … a shaman".

Ted Hughes' work is deeply reliant upon myths. In his verse he has constructed a myth in which the Germanic / puritan / masculine is eternally at war with the Celtic/ catholic / feminine. His poems are written to the moment in an absolute present tense. Animals appear frequently throughout his work as deity, metaphor, persona, and icon. Perhaps the most famous of his subjects is "Crow," an amalgam of god, bird and man, whose existence seems pivotal to the knowledge of good and evil.

Language and Style in Ted Hughes's Poetry:

The maturity and originality of his style has contributed largely to Hughes' greatness as a poet. Hughes has experimented with several different styles of writing, ranging from the Wordsworthian and the metaphysical to the modern East European poets but each time he has adapted these styles and made them his own. What is more remarkable is that each time he has adjusted his style to suit the subject matter. Commenting on his style Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts have said, "Hughes is a great poet, in whose hands our language is both familiar and different from anything we had thought possible. He reminds us that we still speak the language of Shakespeare, that locked within the words we use is an instrument capable of registering the reality of things and of inner states".

Hughes is a renovator of language and his style can be best described in words which he had used to describe the style of a fellow poet, Keith Douglas. Hughes writes, "It is not that he uses words in jolting combinations, or with titanic extravagance, or curious precision. His triumph is in the way he renews the simplicity of ordinary talk. It is a language for the whole mind, at its most wakeful, and in all situations. A utility general purpose style … that combines a colloquial prose readiness with poetic breadth, a ritual intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with clear direct feeling, and yet in the end nothing but casual speech".

An analysis of Hughes' poetic style will reveal a dexterous use of words and rhythm and a bold use of metaphor. His imagery and factual descriptions which are vivid original, arresting and intense are characteristically rich and sensuous. His use of onomatopoeia, condensation, colloquial words and phrases, the capacity to express elusive or shadowy thoughts and a frequent use of conceits and hyperbole, a narrative element, dramatic effects and ironical humour can seldom be surpassed.

Check Your Progress:

1. How would you place Ted Hughes in the context of modern English poetry? How unique or special would you call his preoccupation with animals in this context?

2. Write a short essay on the major influences on Ted Hughes's poetic style.

3. Ted Hughes has often been described as a poet of 'violence'. Examine the validity of such a statement.

4. Write short notes on Hughes's views on (i) war (ii) death

(iii) animals and (iv) nature.

4.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Winner of many literary awards, critics have routinely ranked Hughes as one of the best poets of his generation ever since the publication of his first collection of poems *The Hawk in the Rain.* This volume won him immediate acclaim and as he continued spinning out volume after volume of poetry. He began to be regarded as a poet who wrote about the raw, wild and savage energies of the natural world rather than society in a vigorous vernacular. This view about Hughes poetry is not entirely correct because in many of his poems we find that underneath the wild and savage forces that he celebrates disguised metaphors echo and reverberate on issues related to a series of historical struggles like the Reformation, Industrial Revolution, and the First World War

Ted Hughes is frequently described as a difficult poet. His poetry is not easily understood like that of his popular predecessor, John Betjeman. Also, he is still frequently described as a poet of blood and violence, which is not quite the expected style of the official poet laureate. Hughes is far from the conventional public figure.

One of the common allegations against Hughes' poetry is that they do not develop. He appears to be endlessly re-drafting the same poem. In spite of his earnestness his visionary spontaneity is repetitive. His poems may (in spite of their fascination with elemental energies) also be read as protests against the post-war consensus which was challenged by the election of a radical conservative government in 1979. Underlying is a desire of human beings to occupy a primal natural world before industrial servitude.

His most significant work is perhaps *Crow* (1970), which whilst it has been widely acclaimed also divided critics, combining an apocalyptic, bitter, cynical and surreal view of the universe with what appears to be simple, sometimes (superficially) badly constructed verse.

Stop to Consider:

Critics on Hughes

David Daiches: … an element of brash humour in Hughes' imagery that is often arresting and refreshing. His poems show an inventiveness, a joy in the exercise of his art, that exist side by side with … a compassionate curiosity. Sometimes he adopts the quiet, off-hand posture…. But when he does so … the subject of the poet demands a … rapid opening out, (and) is more immediately evocative ….

Harry Blamires: In poetry a dominant voice, that of Ted Hughes suddenly made understatement and genteel versification seem insipid. Hughes brought a new stridency, a rasping sinewiness, to replace the formal graces of "Movement" poets, a new awareness of untamable energy and rawness in the natural world to replace their suburban intimacy with bars and shops, trains and hospitals.

Stan Smith: Hughes's poetry broke upon a dead decade in English literature; into the social-democratic sheepishness of *The Movement* and the New Lines anthology, it brought "a sudden sharp hot stink of fox" (The Thought-Fox), reiterating the perennial Romantic notion of poetic inspiration as something atavistic and instinctual, a thing of the blood and gut. This was a poetry harsh, jagged and abrasive, which though it often rhymed, apparently did so as a kind of disdainful concession to order - where downbeat, unstressed, half - or near-rhymes suggested the recalcitrance of a turbulent, energetic world reluctant to be constrained by considerations of urbanity or the kind of formal nicety dear to *The Movement.* This was clearly a poetry that had been shaped by the Cambridge English School's predilection for the muscularity, the wrenched syntax and scansion, and the extraordinary yokings of vocabulary and image in John Donne's verse.

4.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEMS

Both 'Thrushes' and 'Pike' have been taken from Hughes second volume of poems *Lupercal* published in 1960 after his US sojourn with wife Sylvia Plath. The title *Lupercal* is derived from the Roman festival of *Lupercalia* celebrated on the 15th of February. Lupercal was a temple in Rome and it suggests the elemental forces worshipped by the Romans in the form of the wolf. It also shows Hughes's use of archetypal symbols borrowed from classical mythology and his tendency to vest it with new meaning. Many of the poems in this volume are technically and stylistically better crafted than those in the earlier volume, *The Hawk in the Rain.* The poems in this collection deal with man's confrontation with Nature and the animal world.

An interesting and important feature of most of these characteristically good early poems is the role of protagonist as perceiver. These protagonists register some startling or frightening quality or energy in the world, but make no claim to embody their own personality.

4.6 READING THE POEMS

4.6.1 READING "THRUSHES"

In 'Thrushes' Hughes paints the small, harmless songbirds one sees hopping around on their delicately shaped legs, in the lawns of gentlefolk's, in search of their daily food from a perspective which is characteristic of him. There is nothing Wordsworthian or sporting about Hughes' birds pouncing on and eating the *writhing thing*s. Contemplating on these birds, he paints an exaggerated terrifying aura around the Nazi-like senseless attitude of the *attent sleek* thrushes as they *murderously* go about the essential task of feeding themselves with a *streamlined efficiency*, a *start, a bounce* and *a stab.* "Triggered to stirrings" by *Blood is the belly of logic* (*An Otter*), the thrushes have no mercy for the weak and the defenseless. They exercise their power in a playful, arbitrary manner within an inexplicable order. We cannot miss out altogether the idea that our civilization is deadly especially in the way that that the natural world has begun to imitate the man-made. So the thrushes become akin to our weapons.

In the second stanza Hughes compares the Thrushes' single mindedness to Mozart's quickness and efficiency of brain and the shark's mouth hungry for blood even if it is from a leak in his own body.

Despite the above allusion comparing Mozart's brain to the murderously triggered thrush, the poem ends by saying '*with man it is otherwise*'. Time and waste, depths of destruction, and the essential destruction between man himself and his acts are, he tells us, characteristic of human effort. So we must distinguish between the implications of Hughes's most telling poetic method (the comparison of Mozart with the thrush and the shark gives away the feeling about existence with which he must deal as an artist) and his thought outside the context of that method. The statement that "*with man it is otherwise*" issues from the realization that the man-made world exists on a principle distinct from the world of nature. The poet appears to imply that efficiency of purpose is not inherent in the human ethos as the last

five lines seek to mean. The chaos and mixture of things, "orgy and hossannah", is perhaps redeeming; art consists in the conflicting distractions.

4.6.2 READING "PIKE"

> **"The Pike"**
>
> Pikes are a kind of fresh water fish. They can grow to a maximum recorded length of 6 feet, reaching a maximum recorded weight of 35 kilograms. They have been reported to live for 30 years. They have the elongated, torpedo-like form of predatory fishes, with sharply-pointed heads and sharp teeth. Their coloration is typically grey-green with a mottled or spotted appearance. The pike's marking is like a finger print, each with different patterns.
>
> The pike feeds on a wide range of food sources. Their primary prey is other fish, including their own kind. They devour fish up to one-third of their own size. Pike are cannibalistic; some 20% of their diet consists of pikes smaller than themselves. Pike have little respect for relative size and they can be potential pests when introduced into alien ecosystems.

"Pike" is one of Hughes's best poems where he describes the pike from recollection of the fish from childhood fishing expeditions in his native Yorkshire. In the poem besides describing the predatory nature of the fish he narrates two marvelously economical anecdotes and impressions from his past to substantiate the perfection this fish has attained as a predator and weaves them into a single theme. Here, Ted Hughes challenges the reader to view nature in a totally new perspective by exploring the power and violence in it. We find Hughes totally obsessed with the devouring ferocity lurking in every depth and crevice of life. In spite of its cannibalistic traits the narrator's empathy with the pikes is so thorough and so concretely specific that the effect is of magical incantation. The pike even though it can be killed by man, is given supernatural attributions by the language that Hughes sometimes employs in describing them, and by his awestruck feeling of the mystery of their existential reality, so different from our own though constantly suggestive of the human. While describing the animal's physical presence he has also endowed its natural strength with mythic power in Lawrentian passages which are yet pure Hughes.

When, at the end, the narrator fishes in terror at night he is no longer fishing for pike, but for the nameless horror which night's darkness frees to rise up from the legendary depth of his dream, his unconscious.

Check Your Progress:

1. From your reading of 'Pike' and 'Thrushes' write a critical note on Ted Hughes perspective on animals.

2. Would you subscribe to the view that Ted Hughes is a poet of violence? Discuss the theme of violence in Ted Hughes's poetry with reference to 'Pike' and 'Thrushes'.

3. Do you agree with the view that in his poems Hughes unites admiration and horror to give a characteristic tension to his animal and nature poems? Discuss with reference to the poems prescribed in your syllabus.

4. Discuss with suitable illustrations from the prescribed poems Hughes's treatment of Nature. How is his treatment of Nature different from that of Wordsworth's?

5. Write a note on Hughes' use of nature and animal imagery with reference to any one of the prescribed poems.

6. Write a critical essay on Hughes' language and style with reference to the poems prescribed in your syllabus.

4.7 SUMMING UP

Ted Hughes is best described in Stan Smith's words, "the noble poetic savage, warbling his native woodnotes wild to an appreciative audience". From all that we have discussed so far we can surmise that in his poetry Ted Hughes is not concerned with the reality of a superficial urbanity but with the material reality that governs larger questions of life and death, Nature, the animal world and the inner world of man. In his poetry he tried to go to the bottom of the metaphysical and spiritual questions about life. Like Blake we find in his work a progress from knowledge of the superficial seen from a singular, one-sided perspective to the core of the matter.

Beginning as an observer of animals in his childhood, we find him at first fascinated by their energy. In later poetry he finds a kinship between this animal energy and the vast reservoirs of inner energy that mankind has suppressed. Though his love for Nature began more or less on

Wordsworthian lines, we observe that Hughes concept of Nature matured sufficiently during his later years. His view is a comprehensive one which simultaneously accounts for the Wordsworthian, Schopenhauerian and Darwinian aspects of Nature. He traces a close kinship between the ambivalent but powerful forces within man and the inscrutable and terrible working of the world of Nature. Equally remarkable is the fact that Hughes has dealt with many modern concerns, like war and violence, with an awareness which is lacking in many of his contemporary poets. No wonder than that Hughes was appointed the Poet Laureate.

GLOSSARY

Thrushes

Thrushes: a type of song-bird with brownish back and speckled breast.

Line 1:

attent: severe, ruthless, stern, cruel

lawn: It is a middle class symbol of gentility and refinement. The green, grassy lawn, which is calm and peaceful, stands in contrast to the sharp, predatory, ferocious purpose of the thrushes.

Line2:

More coiled steel than living: the thrushes are comparable to the inanimate coiled metallic guns (man-made weapons of war) that can be activated into lethal action by pressing the trigger.

Line 4:

beyond sense: meaningless

Lines 6-8:

The poet analyses the difference between a man's way of acting and a thrush's.

Line 8:

ravening: plundering, preying, predatory

Lines 9-12:

The poet wonders what is it in the thrushes that give them their single-minded, unwavering energy to bounce and stab their *writhing* prey. Is it their mind, genius, nature (trained body), or concern for their young ones?

Line12:

Mozart: eighteenth century Austrian musician and composer.

Lines11-12:

this bullet and automatic/ Purpose: murderous function of the bird

Lines 15-16: It is the human mind that is inflicted with doubts and gets deflected from its purpose when it encounters any obstruction.

Line 17:

With a man it is otherwise: a man in a man-made world exists on a principle that is distinct from the world of nature.

Lines18:

Outstripping his desk-diary at a broad desk: surpassing the events recorded in his desk diary

Line 19:

Carving at a tiny ivory ornament: Locked up in his ivory tower man often leads a sterile life worshipping an ornamental piece commemorating an event of the past.

Line 20:

his act worships itself: Man worships the rites and rituals associated with an act

Lines21-24:

Even when a man is praying he is not in complete control of his mind. The distracting devils /Orgy and hosannah in the form of obstructions, temptations, sin, guilt and despair haunt his mind. He drops out of the divine circuit from which alone come the energies to destroy or to create.

Pike

Stanzas one to four:

Hughes describes the Pike, what it looks like and it's predatory nature.

Line 1

perfect: Being *perfect* the pike requires no evolutionary change. Hughes says the pike has been designed perfectly as a predator and will never need to change as it will always remain supreme in its habitat.

Line 2:

tigering: Morphological deviation. Hughes often coins words to highlight particular ideas which he wants to lay emphasis on. Here he wants to convey the ferocious look of the pike by correlating the striped look of the pike with that of the tiger.

Line 8: In this hyperbolic construction the poet exaggerates the size of the full grown pike. There is exaggeration in line 38 when Hughes writes hair frozen on my head.

Line 19:

fry: young freshly spawned fish

Line 30: is dream, his unconscious.

tench: a variety of European fish belonging to the carp family

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Sylvia Plath: Journals 1950-62, foreword by Ted Hughes (1982)

The Silent Woman by Janet Malcolm (1994)

Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet by Elaine Feinstein (2001)

Three Contemporary Poets Thomas Gunn, Ted Hughes & R.S. Thomas, A Casebook edited by A.E. Dyson, Macmillan (1990)

Eight Contemporary Poets by C. Bedient (1974)

The Art of Ted Hughes by K. Sagar (1978)

Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe by E. Faas (1980)

* * *

Unit 5
Dylan Thomas "Poem in October"

Contents:

5.1 Objectives
5.2 Introducing the Poet
5.3 Works of the Poet
5.4 Critical Reception
5.5 Context of the Poem
5.6 Reading "Poem in October"
5.7 Summing up
5.8 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 OBJECTIVES

Dylan Thomas is one of the leading post war poets of England. By the end of this unit you will be able to—

- *locate* him as a 'neo-romantic' poet
- *read* his poems in between high modernist poetry and the Movement poetry
- *relate* his poems to various ecclesiastical ideas which affected him as a poet
- *grasp* the significance of his apparent verbal obscurity in his poems

5.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

The very name 'Dylan Thomas' conjures up the image of a poet who has written some of the most passionate, immortal lines in English language: "I sang in my chains like the sea", "I advance for as long as forever is". Yet, his work has received extreme reactions like that of Donald Davie who accused him of foregoing articulation in favour of crafting a hotchpotch that resists any attempt at identification of the individual objects. Sisson contends,

“Thomas is historically important as the prototype of much of the literary pretension of the 1940s.” [C. B. Cox, “Welsh Bards in Hard Times: Dylan Thomas and R. S. Thomas”] There are, and thankfully so, critics of an other order; John Wain opines that the resistance to Thomas on the path of the English critics results from his all so apparent Welshness, “…the open emotionalism, the large verbal jesters which seem to them mere rant, the rapt pleasure in elaborate craftsmanship, and above all the bardic tone.”

Thomas, who grew up in Wales, spent his childhood in Swansea, interspersed, at regular intervals, with visits to his maternal aunt Carmarthenshire dairy farm. These rural sojourns provided an impetus to much of his later literary energies.

From the outset Dylan Thomas rejected the poetic model whereby rhyme and metre, image and metaphor are employed primarily as means of shaping and ‘dressing’ – as one might dress a hedge or a person – observations and reflections derived from ordinary experience. Thomas earned his poetic creed out of words rather than working towards words; to bring to light a submerged, ‘unsentimental’ reality through his ‘craft or art’ rather than using poetic devices to shape and dress essentially mundane or prosaic thoughts. He was fascinated with words, with their sensory qualities, meaning and connotations.

Finnegans Wake, he later said, is the greatest work of our time, and though there is no evidence that he had read much of the book, he imitated the hypnotic incantation and density of Joyce’s language.

Hopkins’ poems were “obscure” to him, but Thomas loved them for the lavish, patterned use of sound he caught from them. Hopkins’ sprung rhythm extended his own rhythmic resources. The vivid imagery of nature in both Hopkins and Lawrence, whose collected poems Thomas read from cover to cover, impressed him greatly; both poets presented a nature charged with sacred being, and Lawrence especially provided Thomas with his vocabulary of archetypal images. He read Eliot and Auden, and though he rebelled against them, they also influenced his style, and he was led by Eliot’s critical essays to read in Herbert Grierson’s anthology of English poetry of the seventeenth century. He admired the complex metaphors and puns, and was moved also by Donne’s pervasive sense of morality.

Thereafter there was a considerable lull in his career. For he had no regular job and what he obtained through short stories, reviewing, film scripts, poetry readings, and sponging slipped through his fingers. He had spectacular quarrels with his wife. His talent was deserting him; at least, he found it increasingly difficult to compose, and months would pass with nothing to show for them. He died in New York of over drinking at the age of thirty-nine.

Placing him in the English literary tradition is an enterprise that will count when you proceed with your reading of the poem. In placing him within the canon, it has to be mentioned that the readers rejoiced in Thomas' style because he challenged the dominant tendencies of the 1930s. Not that Eliot, Auden, Empson, and Ransom were passé but while the intellectual discourse and sparkling wit of these poets were revered there was this wistful longing for strong, direct emotion. No poet in the 1930s and 1940s, not even Spender, released emotion – moreover, affirmative emotion – in greater force and volume than Thomas. Technically the means to this included sweeping, unqualified assertion, traditionally rhetorical syntax with much repetition and apposition, lavish alliteration and assonance for emphasis, immensely energetic diction and rhythm, semantic vagueness, and a bardic or vatic pose. "And death shall have dominion"; "That force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age."; "Light breaks where no sun shines." Such assertions may not completely satisfy the intellect as its sifts the texts to discover their exact meaning. But they are glorious.

SAQ:

Attempt to name the typical features of Thomas's poetry. (60 words)

....

....

....

....

....

5.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Thomas wrote half of his poems and many short stories whilst living at his home, *And death shall have no dominion* is one of his best known works

written at this address. His highly acclaimed first poetry volume, *18 Poems*, was published on 18 December 1934, the same year he moved to London. The publication of *18 Poems* won him many new admirers from the world of poetry. Again, the publication of *Deaths and Entrances* in 1946 was a major turning point in his career. Thomas was well known for being a versatile and dynamic speaker, best known for his poetry readings. His powerful voice would captivate American audiences during his speaking tours of the early 1950s. He made over 200 broadcasts for the BBC. Often considered his greatest single work *Under Milk Wood*, is a radio play featuring the characters of Llareggub, a fictional Welsh fishing village (humorously named; note that 'Llareggub' is 'Bugger All' backwards, implying that there is absolutely nothing to do there).

Thomas progressed through a period of "occasional" verse in which he focused his general notions on particular incidents and situations to give a grave and formal ceremonial poetry ("A Refusal to Mourn", "Do not go gentle into that good night", "On the Marriage of a Virgin," etc.) to a period of more limpid, open-worked poetry in which, instead of endeavoring to leap outside time into a pantheistic cosmos beyond the dimensions, he accepts time and change and uses memory as an elegiac device ("Poem in October," "Fern Hill," "Over Sir John's Hill," "Poem on His Birthday"). But these divisions are not strictly chronological, nor do they take account of all the kinds of verse he was writing. There is, for example, "A Winter's Tale," a "middle" poem, which handles a universal folk theme with a quiet beauty that results from perfect control of the imagery.

There are several critics who consider Thomas' war poems to be his major achievement; and without necessarily endorsing this, it is clear that the poems in question perform the extraordinary feat of holding the self as performance and physical destruction within – a telling war-time coinage – the theatre of war.

Thomas first appeared, to readers thereby trained to regard Eliot's dry gentlemanliness as the approved poetic stance, to be a prophet of wild new romanticism, challenging the cerebral orderliness of the fashionable poetry of the time. His breathless and daring imagery, with its skulls, maggots, hangmen, wombs, ghosts and thighs, his mingling of biblical and Freudian imagery, of the elemental world of nature in the raw with the feverish internal world of human desires, human secrets, human longings and regrets, his

compound adjectives ("sea-sucked," "man-melted," "tide-tongued," "man-iron," "altarwise") – all this suggested a great liberating verbal energy.

Stop to Consider:

Neo-romanticism:

"Neo-Romantic" style developed in England during the 1930s and was briefly ascendant during the 1940s. Dylan Thomas was its major poet. "Romantic" was the time, and implied that the Neo-Romantics were challenging the high Modernism of the 1920s and the discursive, intellectual style of the 1930s. Thomas was typical in this respect. He had the mystical intuitions, emotional intensity, personal utterance, and natural imagery of a poet in the Romantic tradition. But in the same poems he was also a poet of Metaphysical wit and Symbolist technique. Other poets of the Romantic revival similarly absorbed Modernist influences while also rebelling against them. Vernon Watkins was a disciple of Yeats. If we accepted Roland Barthes' description of Modernist poetry as an "explosion" of autonomous words, the paradigmatic English Modernist would be David Gascoyne in his youthful Surrealist phase. In short, the interrelations between Neo-Romantic style and other tendencies of the age defy brief or simple description. No minor part of the problem is that Neo-Romantic style varied from poet to poet as much as Modernist styles did.

In fact, however, though some of Thomas's poetry of the 1930's had over-excited imagery, a closer look at his poems revealed not only that they were constructed with enormous care and the images were most carefully related to each and to the unfolding meaning, but also that these images were put at the service of a number of clearly conceived themes – the relation between man and his natural environment, the problem of identity in view of the perpetual changes wrought by time, the relation of the living to the dead and of both to seasonal change in nature.

> The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
> Drives my green age; that blasts the root of trees
> Is my destroyer

The natural processes that linked past with present and man with nature gave him comfort. As Thomas developed, and his imagery became more disciplined, the theme of the unity of all life and of life and death as part of a

continuing process in which the whole world of nature was involved became steadily more discernible. So did the ritual and sacramental element in his poetry. "After the Funeral" (1938), an elegy on an aunt in which he sees the sad shabbiness of her life and environment transfigured by love, is a triumph of compact emotional suggestion, every image having its place in building up the transition from mourning to comfort. Many of his poems of the 1940s are more open worked than his earlier productions, and sometimes possess a rhythmic fluidity that sweeps on the meaning with fine effect. "Poem in October," for example, begins:

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron
Priested shore
The morning beckon
With water praying and call of seagull and rook
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall
Myself to set foot
That second
In the still sleeping town and set forth.

Here the compound adjectives ("Mussel pooled," "heron priested") and the sacramental suggestions ("priested," "praying,") are carefully placed in the run of the stanza and the uneven line-lengths give a reckoning motion that helps to involve the reader emotionally in the poem. *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1953) show clearly that Thomas was capable of finely disciplined effects in both language and movement, and that, in spite of a tendency to overdrive favourite images and to confuse poetic gesturing with the poetic achievement, he was not a shouting madman but, at his best, a highly craftsman like poet. His popular adulation followed by his early death evoked a reaction, and the charge of empty verbal posturing was brought against him by some of the younger poets of the mid-1950s who were seeking a new chastity of diction and economy of effect [The Movement is a typically low-key, yet ironically aggrandizing label applied to themselves by a group of poets who emerged in the early 1950s, among them Philip Larkin, D.J. Enright, Donald Davie, Anthony

Thwaite and Kinsley Amis himself. Their reaction against their 1940s predecessors was manifested in a plain style, a disdain for rhetoric or ostentation and a commitment to discursive realism – all clearly at odds with what Thomas seemed to stand for.] But though Thomas's reputation is not as high now as it was in the few years immediately before his death, his place is secure – not as the neo-romantic overdose he was once thought to be, but as a thoughtful, indeed a cerebral, poet who sought to put new drive and passion into the language of English poetry and who in his brief life left a handful of poems that will be read and remembered outside the classroom and the critic's study.

An appreciation of his poetic style would be incomplete without recording the attendant critical pressures ladled on it by the critics. Andrew Sanders notes that the association of the work of the Anglo-Welsh poet with a lush kind of surrealism has more often been assumed than proved. As his ambitious and uneven first volume, *18 Poems* (1934), suggests, Dylan Thomas (1914-53) had begun to mould an extravagant and pulsatingly rhetorical style before he became aware of the imported innovations of international surrealist writing. He was, however, decidedly a poet who thought in images.

Stop to Consider:

On Donne

If there is a kinship evident in Thomas's verse it is with the 'difficulty', the emotionalism, the lyric intensity, and the metaphysical speculation of the school of Donne. It is Donne's 'Death's Duel' which is cited in the title of Thomas' volume *Deaths and Entrances* of 1946 ('our very birth and entrance into this life, is exitus a morte, an issue from death') and it is Donne's ghost that broods over the poem written in memory of Thomas's aunt Ann Jones. "In memory of Ann Jones", published in *The Map of Love* in 1939, is, however, specifically Welsh in terms of its local reference and in the claims that Thomas makes for himself as 'Ann's bard on a raised hearth'. In considering the coffined corpse laid out in the farmhouse parlor it evokes a memory of a gush of love in the past (Ann's 'fountain heart once fell in puddles / Round the parched worlds of Wales and drowned each sun') and it yearns for a future universal release from death.

5.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Thomas' work was in the first place (around the 1930s) received as 'formless' writing - critics like H.G. Porteus reviewing his work, had spoken of an "unconducted tour of Bedlam". The opinion, however, shifted in the period following his death. It was more widely acknowledged to be tightly controlled and shaped. Crucial to this process was the publication of Thomas' letters to his fellow Swansea poet Veron Watkins in 1957. This showed Thomas to be a painstakingly conscientious craftsman striving deliberately even agonizingly for his effects. These letters were complemented by a sympathetic and illuminating study by Ralph Maud, one of the doyens of Thomas' criticism, *Entrances to the Poetry of Dylan Thomas* in 1963 and by his publication of Thomas' early note-books in 1968 (*Poet in the Making*). The notebooks are an extraordinary record of poems written between the ages of 16 – 20, revealing the strikingly precocious, yet consistent, evolution of the unique stylist – poet. A *Select Letters,* edited by Constantine Gibbon in 1967, and a *Collected Letters*, edited by Paul Ferris in 1985 added further weight to the argument that Thomas was thoroughly aware of what he was doing, even in his most seemingly obscure pieces.

Many earlier commentators focused on the importance of Thomas' Welshness: indeed, this – together with speculation concerning the 'true' origin of Llareggub, the town in *Under Milk Wood* – has now become one of the dominant and more depressing features of the cottage industry that is Dylan Thomas today. This is of course which – like the focus on the character of the poet it resembles in some ways – is dangerously susceptible to simplification and stereotyping. A reductive policy of race and place a dot to dot psychoanalysis in which pre-determined drives 'explain' everything, overriding more complicated understandings of the self as produced by, and interacting with complex societies historically mutating through time. Both societies and selves are structures which are defined by their capacity for change and claims for their fixed character must be treated with suspicion. And it is precisely the notion of unitary subjectivity which is so problematized in Thomas' writing, particularly in the early poetry and short fictions. And when new theory made its foray into the scene around the 1960s, it was precisely this concept of the unitary self, the 'I' as coherent and issuing from an organically whole identity. At precisely the time when Thomas' work

could have been read as anticipating such ideas, in the early 1970s, it was being isolated and side-lined in a debate about belonging and identity that were inappropriate to its strategies. However, the entire rhetoric changed with the coming of texts like Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The new critical light shed on the conceptions of national identity and cultural otherness shifted the larger framework within which Thomas was viewed. He was no longer just the bardic other of the thin-lipped London literati nor the deviant Welshman. With the onset of Said's work and following him that of Homi Bhabha, among others, more nuanced ways of reading marginalized or non-metropolitan writings occurred.

Check Your Progress:

Analyse the significance of 'Welshness' in the poetry of Dylan Thomas.

Thomas' work was in the first place (around the 1930s)received as 'formless' writing - critics like H.G. Porteus reviewing his work, had spoken of an "unconducted tour of Bedlam". The opinion, however, shifted in the period following his death. It was more widely acknowledged to be tightly controlled and shaped. Crucial to this process was the publication of Thomas' letters to his fellow Swansea poet Veron Watkins in 1957. This showed Thomas to be a painstakingly conscientious craftsman striving deliberately even agonizingly for his effects. These letters were complemented by a sympathetic and illuminating study by Ralph Maud, one of the doyens of Thomas' criticism, *Entrances to the Poetry of Dylan Thomas* in 1963 and by his publication of Thomas' early note-books in 1968(Poet in the Making). The notebooks are an extraordinary record of poems written between the ages of 16 – 20, revealing the strikingly precocious, yet consistent, evolution of the unique stylist – poet. A *Select Letters,* edited by Constantine Gibbon in 1967, and a *Collected Letters*, edited by Paul Ferris in 1985 added further weight to the argument that Thomas was thoroughly aware of what he was doing, even in his most seemingly obscure pieces.

Many earlier commentators focused on the importance of Thomas' Welshness: indeed, this – together with speculation concerning the 'true' origin of Llareggub, the town in *Under Milk Wood* – has now become one

of the dominant and more depressing features of the cottage industry that is Dylan Thomas today. This is of course which – like the focus on the character of the poet it resembles in some ways – is dangerously susceptible to simplification and stereotyping. A reductive policy of race and place a dot to dot psychoanalysis in which pre-determined drives 'explain' everything, overriding more complicated understandings of the self as produced by, and interacting with complex societies historically mutating through time. Both societies and selves are structures which are defined by their capacity for change and claims for their fixed character must be treated with suspicion. And it is precisely the notion of unitary subjectivity which is so problematized in Thomas' writing, particularly in the early poetry and short fictions. And when new theory made its foray into the scene around the 1960s, it was precisely this concept of the unitary self, the 'I' as coherent and issuing from an organically whole identity. At precisely the time when Thomas' work could have been read as anticipating such ideas, in the early 1970s, it was being isolated and side-lined in a debate about belonging and identity that were inappropriate to its strategies. However, the entire rhetoric changed with the coming of texts like Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The new critical light shed on the conceptions of national identity and cultural otherness shifted the larger framework within which Thomas was viewed. He was no longer just the bardic other of the thin-lipped London literati nor the deviant Welshman. With the onset of Said's work and following him that of Homi Bhabha, among others, more nuanced ways of reading marginalized or non-metropolitan writings occurred.

Stop to Consider:

Post Colonial Thought

Said had written of the ways in which the West had established, over the course of centuries, a specific discourse dealing with the East by marginalizing it as an Other, perceived often in self evidently contradictory terms as exotic, barbers, cowardly, obscurantist and so on. For Bhabha, however, the central term in analyzing post colonial literatures is 'hybritity'. Writings which are 'hybrid' cannot be described in terms of a 'discourse' and the 'counter-discourse' it invites; as Bhabha points out, to simply oppose the prominent discourse is to risk remaining tract within its binary structure, opposing the identity imposed with another constructed. Inverting the binary terms of an unequal relationship

between cultures and nations, however unequal that relationship may be, is to remain within the limits said by those terms. Abandoning the dichotomies of Said, Bhabha argues that post colonial writing derives from a refusal to belong to any essential identity and not from a compromise between cultures; a recognition that such a concept of identity is an imperial construct in the first place.

5.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Celebrating the convivial ruptures and innocent joys of childhood, Dylan Thomas's 'Poem in October' can easily be contextualized in the tradition of Traherne and Vaughan. Reminiscent of the poems/plays/novels exploring the theme of renewed existence on one's birthday, this poem is best contextualized in the context of childhood memories. Here, Thomas celebrates his thirtieth birthday and the very first line of the poem "It was my thirtieth year to heaven" refers to temporality and the positing of the year thirty invokes a feeling of being straddled in-between two time-zones. This poem is an example of the occasional poems meant to celebrate different occasions and exemplifies the poet's use of surrealistic imagery. Although not expressed overtly, here Thomas' religiosity lies in his acceptance of the cycle of birth and decay, i.e. "a mysticism of the senses that transcends the sensuality with which he began" (J.M. Cohen).

5.6 READING "POEM IN OCTOBER"

This is a poem that explores in luminous imagery, the many joys of childhood, communicating a special sense of the holy in the wonder of the child. The occasion of the thirtieth birthday is seen as an affirmation and celebration of the sensual joys of living, an occasion which connects the immediate experience to the intimate absorption of a "child's / Forgotten mornings". However, the thoughts of death are intermittently sensed as morphing the dynamics of a mere rejoicing in life's sensory pleasures. Thomas's poetry returns to the same large themes over and over. He asserts a Blakean-Wordsworthian-Whitmanian intuition of the unity and holiness of all existence. He wants to celebrate the life-process totally. But individuation, time, and death are involved in the process, and force him into ambivalence and paradox.

On Death

If death is a return to the whole, it is a positive. If it is extinction, it is dreadful. Hence,

> Do not go gentle into that good night
> Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

If "good night" is the phrase said at parting for sleep, the metaphor deprives death of terror. But "that good night" is final; hence the urgent imperative, "Do not go…" But "that good night" asserts that night is desirable, presumably as a return to the all. Thomas delighted to dwell on childhood because children have, he believed, no consciousness of being separate from the world. Or reaching further back before the tragic fall into individuation and separateness, he tried to reenter in imagination the being of an embryo, or even of the first germinal life before the embryo is formed. Taking death as an aspect of the ongoing process of life, he denied its ultimate reality. We return he said, with the daisies.

In fact, the poem stands as testimony to Thomas' acknowledgement of his in-between status. The very first line of the poem "It was my thirtieth year to heaven" refers to temporality and the positing of the year thirty invokes a feeling of being straddled in-between two time-zones. The line, moreover, is in the confessional strain – a mark of the poem being written in the emerging realms of maturity. It has to be noted that in Larkin's era when the average mortality rate was not more than seventy, thirty was accepted as the onset of middle age.

The first stanza of the poem evokes the pristine morning of the poetic speaker's birthday: an experience that is marked by the prevalence of sensory delights. The auditory and visual images reign supreme: the poet actually wakes up to his "hearing from harbour…". The first strains of a being waking up to the most pristine of all mornings - the morning of his nativity is aptly construed in images that concur with the actual process of our registering sounds before opening the peepers to the material world. The use of words like "knock of sailing boats" and "water praying" conveys this very sense of auditory impressions. Sanctification of an ordinary sea-scape is evoked through the use of the words that bear the imprint of biblical influences – "heron / Priested shore" and "water praying". The entire stanza sounds like an incantation with the call of the birds present in the earliest of biblical

documents (thus evoking a sense of the primeval) and the knock of the boats on the "net webbed wall". The juxtaposition of the words "net-webbed" is interesting, because there is this play with the word "webbed"- a trait that Thomas was so fond of—which conjures pictures of the watery universe and again, it refers to the fishing boats with their nets that are perhaps tied to the walls of the harbor.

Stop to Consider:

Sacramental Imagery

The import of these words is simply that these are sacramental images intended to give a sacramental meaning to the statement. It is a kind of imagery of which Thomas is very fond (one can find numerous other examples, among them such a phrase as "the parables of sun light" in "Poem in October". Examples abound from his other works: the water bead and the ear of corn are symbolic primal elements, to which all return at the end. But the reason behind the use of "Zion of the water bead" and "synagogue of the ear of corn" is not lost on us if we consider the poetic intention. The word sacrament refers to the ritual of receiving grace in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. By partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, the faithfuls remind themselves of Christ's grace and the sacrifice he made for the human kind. The word sacramental is used here to signify Thomas' tendency to deify and unravel Christian notes in every act of creation. Can you look for more of such instances from the prescribed poem and that of "Fern Hill"?

The appraisal of the other stanzas is left undone primarily for reasons of shortage of space and the concurrent utilization of the same in the discussion of larger frameworks. The surrealistic tenor in this poem is a point that has been reiterated by critics time and again. Thomas, however, argued that his poems were not automatic writing and therefore not surrealist. This kind of response to protest that it was painstaking craftsmanship – is understandable.

Surrealism and Dylan Thomas:

It cannot be missed that Thomas was, after all, an avid reader of the avant-garde periodical *Transition*. Surrealism, whose project, according to Walter Benjamin, was 'to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution', was in fact a complex set of artistic practices which went far beyond voluntarism or associationism, as

a glance at the variety of surrealist visual art – say, Salvador Dali's hallucinatory realism and the collage of Max Ernst's *La Semaine de Bonté* – reveals. More importantly, to the extent that surrealism had affinities with the Metaphysicals' "violent yoking together of heterogeneous images" there was a link between surrealist practice and the climate created earlier by Eliot and Herbert Grierson. Thomas, an avid reader of Donne, exploited such similarities to forge a semi-surrealised Metaphysical mode, a form of Gothic, from a marginalized and belated Welsh modernism. In this – as with Freudianism – he was pragmatic and ambivalent rather than systematic.

In the lines : "…birds of the winged trees flying my name/ Above the farms and the white horses" "With its horns through mist and the castle/ Brown as owls", his poetry at times can be read as furnishing a visual confirmation of Surrealist-type images. Thomas almost mimics the attributes of the metropolitan style where it can be made to coincide with his poetic tactics. And in both embracing and rejecting surrealism he created a provincial simulacrum of surrealism, or what has been called *surregionalism.*

In an appraisal of Thomas, the impact of the biblical theme can hardly be over-looked. Despite its appearance as a miscellaneous collection of lyrics, Dylan Thomas' poetry is a closely unified body of work. Poetic unity customarily reveals itself in cohesive imagery (what Kenneth Burke calls "symbolic equations"), and in the repetition and development of related themes. In his world of creation, for example, Thomas describes not an Edenic universe, but - as Blake does - a world which falls in the very moment of creation. As the poetry moves along, from *Incarnate Devil* to *Fern Hill*, furthermore, he comes to align his concept of creation more with the Biblical story - he supplies an "Eden" to precede the "Fall." And it is, finally, in the poem written to introduce *Collected Poems* that he comes - with hesitation, self-consciousness, and some self-depreciation - to assume the Noah persona, a persona which epitomizes his regenerative vision. Regardless of Thomas' intentions and regardless of chronological imprecision, his poetry is unified by a "Biblical rhythm." The details of that rhythm can be clearly established by a consideration of the images and themes of (1) creation, (2) fall, and (3) redemption or regeneration.

Thomas, however, did not conceive of the universe as entirely anthropomorphic. While his view was generally identical with Blake's view that "God only Acts and Is, in existing beings and men," his poetry never completely discarded the transcendent and autonomous God of the Welsh chapel.

It is not necessary to postulate a specific relationship of Thomas to any doctrinal or theological position regarding the Fall, or the Garden of Eden. As far as his poems go, he could just as well have used classical allusions to the Golden Age, or accounts of the fabled Hesperides, or Freud's first unweaned state, in order to emphasize the imperfection of his world. But the fact of the symbolism remains that it was primarily derived from an imaginative re-creation of the Bible. The idea of Eden which is important to the symbolism is related to the "Edenic" states known to living man-childhood and rare moments of tranquillity in nature, and even rarer moments of sexual bliss. Referring to childhood, before the "rumour of manseed / Within the hallowed gland," Thomas can say, "Green was the singing house". This is also the condition in the later Edenic descriptions of "Fern Hill" where the memory of childhood "was all / Shining, it was Adam and maiden". This joyful memory of Eden's green persists in spite of the fact that the poet now realizes he was "green and dying," now realizes the inevitability of the Fall, of suffering and death. Thomas' best picture of the unfallen state is another description of childhood in "Poem in October".

"And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's/ Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother/ Through the parables of sun light/ And the legends of the green chapels."

The last stanza of the poem stages an attempt to play out the various contraries present all throughout the body. The idea of transience that seeks to reside through regular repetitions emerges from the line "O may my heart's truth / Still be sung / On this high hill in a year's turning." Poetic exercise is the only way left to absolve oneself in a world plagued by the vagaries of impermanence.

SAQ:

What special attributes are recalled in “a child’s forgotten mornings” (70 words)

....
....
....

It is worth stressing this at the outset, because there are still some people who talk of Thomas as though he were a writer of an inspired mad rhetoric, of glorious, tumbling, swirling language, which fell from his pen in magnificent disorder. He has been held up by some as the antithesis of Eliot and his school, renouncing the cerebral orderliness of the 1920s and the 1930s in favor of a new romanticism, an engaging irresponsibility. And on the other hand there are those who discuss his poems as though they are merely texts for exposition, ignoring the rhyme scheme and the complicated verbal and visual patterning to concentrate solely on the intellectual implications of the images. The truth is that Thomas is neither a whirling romantic nor a metaphysical imagist, but a poet who uses pattern and metaphor in a complex craftsmanship in order to create a ritual of celebration. He sees life as a continuous process, sees the workings of biology as a magical transformation producing unity out of identity, identity out of unity, the generations linked with one another and man linked with nature. Again and again in most of his poems he seeks to find a poetic ritual for the celebration of this identity: Man is locked in a round of identities; the beginning of growth is also the first movement towards death, the beginning of love is the first move to- wards procreation which in turn moves towards new growth, and the only way out of time’s menagerie is to embrace the unity of man with nature, of the generations with each other, of the divine with the human, of life with death, to see the glory and the wonder of it.

I am herein going to attempt a cursory stylistic appreciation of the poem, a feature introduced to encourage you to do many more of the same. The nature of Thomas’s poetry demanded severe prosodic regulation. A typical Thomas poem does not move careful along grammatical articulation but is carried headlong by highly formal rhythmic patterns. Rhythm in a Thomas poem is sounding rhythm – rarely the hard to hear-to-hear music inspired syntax. We are hardly aware that the opening stanza of “Poem in October”

proceeds along a series of shifted constructions; the images are separated by a very acute sense of metrical timing. Typography, syllable count, and a texture of interior rhymes and alliteration allay the feeling of incompleteness occasioned by the lack of exact grammatical relationships.

> **SAQ:**
>
> How does the style of the poem "Poem in October" augment the main ideas embedded within it? (60 words)
>
> ....
> ....
> ....

His best work lies in those spacious stanzas where the long-breathed rhythms can rise and fall, move up to a climax, and dwindle to silence. The stanza of "Poem in October" is a beautiful prosodic mechanism. In it he crowds his stresses together "And the twice told fields of infancy". Although Thomas truculently denied any knowledge of Welsh and its highly formal metrical systems, his lines chime with internal consonantal correspondence, or *cynghanedd*, a prescribed feature of Welsh versification:

*W*oke to my *h*earing from *h*arbour and neighbor *w*ood…(Italics mine)

> **Stop to Consider:**
>
> The correspondence in this line forms *cynghanedd croes*: a pattern of alliterated syllables in symmetrical arrangement (*w…h:h…w*). "Fern Hill" abounds in such permutations:
>
> And the *l*ilting *h*ouse and the *g*rass was *g*reen…
> And *g*reen and *g*olden I was *h*untsman and *h*erdsman…
>
> Look for more of such lines with alliterated syllables in the parallel poem mentioned. Would you let this Welsh trace suggest Thomas' idea of nationality? Another feature of Welsh versification in the aforesaid is the rich use of internal rhyme and assonance. Thomas often rhymes from middle of the line to the middle of the next, or from middle to end.
>
> Now as I was young and *easy* under the apple boughs
> About the lilting house and *happy* as the grass was green,
> The night above the dingle *starry*...

Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party*

Inferences can be drawn from a play like *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter. My intention behind introducing the play goes deeper than noting the apparent echo that the title has to the cause that occasioned the present poem. According to Pinter's official biographer, Michael Billington, in *Harold Pinter*, echoing Pinter's own retrospective view of it, *The Birthday Party* is "a deeply political play about the individual's imperative need for resistance," yet, according to Billington, though he "doubts whether this was conscious on Pinter's part," it is also "a private, obsessive work about time past; about some vanished world, either real or idealized, into which all but one of the characters readily escapes. ... From the very outset, the defining quality of a Pinter play is not so much fear and menace — though they are undoubtedly present — as a yearning for some lost Eden as a refuge from the uncertain, miasmic present". Pinter's play opens the door to another world, cogent and familiar, the part we hide from ourselves. And in the projection of the arbitrary treatment meted out by the authority figures – there emerges a striking similarity, if we consider the ravages of time that the poet reiterates time and again. This work, which apparently belongs to another genre altogether, is introduced here to show an alternative treatment of the same thing of desire for a pre-lapsarian past which continually evades us, but for moments of a return.

5.7 SUMMING UP

In the sections, an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the literary opus that is Thomas. In the introductory sections, I have tried to estimate the greatness of Thomas by referring to the various influences that molded his artistic sensibilities. In surveying his literary career, special attention has been given to the themes which prompted the unique style manifested not only in the content but also the style of his poetry. In a reading of Thomas the issue of his poetic style can never be ignored. This is followed by a brief overview of how the poet has been received down the ages right to the recent times. While in the section entitled "Reading the Poem" the prescribed poem is seen through the prism of readings that illumine separate aspects of the poem whilst garnering connections with other pieces of literature.

5.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Goodby, John. *New Casebooks : Dylan Thomas*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Perkins, David. *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*. Cambridge: Belknap Press,1999.

The Poetry of Dylan Thomas Author(s): David Daiches. Source: *College English*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Oct., 1954), pp. 1-8 Published by: National Council of Teachers of English. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/371613 Accessed: 28/02/2009

Dylan Thomas and the "Biblical Rhythm" Author(s): William T. Moynihan Source: PMLA, Vol. 79, No. 5 (Dec., 1964), pp. 631-647 Published by: Modern Language Association Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/461150 Accessed: 28/02/2009.

* * *

Unit 6
Seamus Heaney "After a Killing"

Contents:

6.1 Objectives
6.2 Introducing the Poet
6.3 Works of the Poet
6.4 Critical Reception
6.5 Context of the Poem
6.6 Reading the Poem "After a Killing"
6.7 Summing up
6.8 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are designed to help you to —

- *obtain* clear ideas about Heaney's life and the context of his works
- *identify* the main impulses behind his works
- *relate* Irish culture and history and politics to the poem prescribed
- *explain* the meanings that enrich his work

6.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Seamus Justin Heaney is one of the living, major and well-known Nobel Prize winner modern poets. It was in 1995 that Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for his works composed during what he called, in his Nobel Lecture, 'a quarter century of life waste and spirit waste'. ("Crediting Poetry", the Nobel Lecture 24). Seamus Heaney is also a representative of Irish tradition and culture. His poetry reflects his love for Irish culture. His first volume of poetry is about 'digging' in the sense that the act of writing is for him an unearthing of his past and the historical roots of his nation. By taking his own materials and myths from his Irish background, he has also

been able to achieve universality as a modern interpreter of ancient myth as significant for modern age.

Heaney belonged to a place called Northern Ireland where till recently violence was the order of the day. So, it is quite natural for Heaney to refer to that turmoil through his writing. Heaney's Irishness was made strong by the sense of his own place. Heaney, in his essay "The Sense of Place" says—"Irrespective of our creed or politics, irrespective of what culture or subculture may have coloured our individual sensibilities, our imaginations assent to the stimulus of the names, our sense of the place is enhanced, our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind is cemented."

Heaney was born on 13th April 1939, at Mossbawn, near Castledawson, county Derry in Northern Ireland. His father, Patrick Heaney, a Roman Catholic was a cattle-dealer and his mother was Margaret Kathleen McCann. Heaney was the eldest of nine children. Margaret Heaney, along with her sister-in-law, Mary, who lived with the family, formed a special bond with the eldest child. The family as well as his birth-place, Mossbawn, helped form young Heaney's personality.

Heaney's father, Patrick Heaney, was a cattle-dealer who owned a forty-acre farm. Patrick Heaney served as a member of the rural council. The two poems in Heaney's first volume of poetry— 'Digging' and 'Follower' refer to the poet's father. 'Digging' is about discovering the poet's connection between his vocation and his inherited traditions. Although he has come away from his father's ways of living, yet he does dig on with his pen. In his memoir, *Preoccupations*, Heaney laments—"When I was learning to read, towards the end of 1945, the most important books in the house were the ration books—the pink clothes coupons and the green points for sweets and groceries." Thus from his early childhood, he made it a promise to stick to the pen and to dig with it.

> "Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests. I will dig with it." ('Digging', *The Death of a Naturalist*.)

His first volume explores the transformation of the boy into man, farmer into poet and the whole volume is 'digging' in the sense that the act of writing is an attempt to explore the poet's past and the historical roots of his society.

The other poem "Follower" is an apology to his father that he is not, nor can ever be, truly like him.

In the Irish psyche, ancestry is a potent force, steadying the individual and shaping his or her sense of identity. It is perhaps even more important in the north of Ireland. Michael Parker in his book, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet* says—"It is perhaps even more important in the north of Ireland where the Catholics are a minority 'in a province that insists that it is British', and where the notion was pronounced that British and Protestant cultures was superior. Though breaking with family tradition by working the field of literature, Heaney maintains his links with 'the energies of generation' in celebrating his forbears."(p 6).

Michael Parker says—"Ancestry, like history and myth enabled Heaney to connect the current of past and present." Heaney is always true to his own place and he had a special bond with his place and ground. So in his poem 'Kinship', Heaney asserts— "I step through origins like a dog turning its memories of wilderness on the kitchen mat. ("Kinship", *North*).

The frequent tributes in poetry and prose to neighbours from his home-ground reveal the debt he feels he owes to them, and his desire to fuse his achievements with theirs. In "A Poet's Childhood" (1971), we meet Joe Ward, a carpenter and 'a kind of poet too', since 'making a rhyme is like making a joint' and an unnamed young girl to who came to darn old socks, whose needle-work also provides a metaphor for the 'stitching and unstitching' of the poet's task.

In his earliest poem we meet Dan Taggart, Big Jim Evans and Henry Mcwilliams, the 'Achilles', 'Ajax' and 'Nestor' of the local 'epic' world. In the community in which Heaney grew up, Protestants and Catholics "lived in proximity and harmony with one another" and generally showed tolerance and courtesy to each other, such as that displayed in "The Other Side" in *Wintering Out* and 'Trial Runs' in *Stations*. In the latter, a protestant neighbour returns from Italy with a particularly imposing set of rosary beads for his father. Heaney won scholarships at St. Columb's college, before being appointed lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast. He worked as an English teacher at St. Thomas Secondary school, Belfast and at St. Joseph's College, before being appointed lecturer at Queen's University. He was guest lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1970-71 and in

1976 settled in Dublin to work as part-time lecturer at Carysfort, a college of education. He began teaching at Harvard University in 1982, becoming Boylstan professor of Rhetoric, Harvard, in 1984. From 1989 to 1994, he was professor of poetry at Oxford University. Heaney, who now lives in Dublin, drew on his farm childhood and wrote about nature in his early poetry. In the 1970s he began writing about the political turmoil of Northern Ireland in such works as *North* and *Field Work* and *The Sunday Times* of London described Heaney as 'the finest poet writing in English'. Heaney has been writing extensively and it is Heaney whose poems carry a universal appeal to the problems of Northern Ireland. In 1995, Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Stop to Consider:

Heaney's Language

Heaney's language is unusually rich in simplicity as well as ornate, each word where it suits; his syntax is sinuous and expressive, whether it is sternly terse or restlessly mobile; and his highly-developed sense of internal structure gives his poems a satisfying musical rightness as they unfold. 'Feeling into Words', the title of an early essay by Heaney, can be taken as the motto for all his work. In this essay "Feeling into Words", Heaney says--"Poetry is as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity, with the aura and authority of archaeological finds; the buried shard has an importance that is not diminished by the importance of the buried city; poetry as a dig, a dig for finds that end up being plants. "Digging", in fact, was the name of the first poem I wrote where I thought my feelings had got into words, or to put it more accurately, where I thought my feeling had got words."

For Heaney, poetry has some legislative power. In his essay, "The Government of the Tongue" Heaney says, "What I had in mind was this aspect of poetry as its own vindicating force. In this dispensation, the tongue (representing both a poet's personal gift of utterance and the common resources of language itself) has been granted the right to govern. The poetic art is credited with an authority of its own."

In an interview in *Irish Times* in 1972, Heaney said—"I have been writing poems lately that grow out of words and ways of talking."

Heaney's 'etymological' poems are rituals that recreate the bond between word and root, place-name and sacred earth. Etymologist, in fact, means a "studier of roots". Latin Stoics such as Varro during the first century A.D claimed that by discovering the original forms of words, called *etyma* or roots, the precise correspondence between reality and language could be ascertained.

Heaney as a Poet of Public and Private Life:

Heaney in *Preoccupations* says "My first literary frisson, however came on home ground. There was an Irish history lesson at school, which was in reality a reading of myths and legends. A textbook with large type and heavy Celticized illustrations dealt with the matter of Ireland from the *Tuatha De Danaan* to the Norman Invasion. I can still see Brian Boru with his sword held like a cross reviewing the troops at Clontarf."

Irish culture and history had a major impact on the works of Heaney. The condition of Northern Ireland forced Heaney to become a poet of public as well as private life. His poetry has reached a large public as well as private life. His poetry has reached a large public in Ireland and abroad and that public extends to all classes. It is a poetry in which readers can recognize profound family affections, eloquent landscapes and vigorous social concern. It tells an expressive autobiographical story reaching from boyhood to Heaney's present age of sixty, a story which includes a childhood at home with parents, relatives, siblings; adolescence with a marriage and children; a displacement from Northern Ireland to the public; travels; sorrows and deaths. As each decade of poetry unfolds, it illuminates and corrects the previous ones. Within its autobiographical circuit, it is also an oeuvre of strong social engagement, looking steadily and with stunning poetic force at what it means to be a contemporary citizen of Northern Ireland—at the intolerable stresses put on the population by conflict, fear, betrayals, murders. Heaney has made one imaginative cast after another in an attempt to represent the almost unrepresentable collective suffering of the North, yet he has tried, equally consistently to bring intellectual reflection to the emotional attitudes that too often yield the binary position taking of propaganda." Helen Vendler in *Seamus Heaney* says that the most important point to be remembered is that Heaney was both a poet of the public, as well as the private self.

SAQ:

Given that poets who write during times of great political turmoil are often faced with the choice of writing about self, or writing about the community (as also in the cases of W.H. Auden, or W.B. Yeats), do you think this difficulty of choice is to be seen in the poetry of Heaney ? (80 words)

....
....
....
....
....

He used politics in his poems in a detached manner. In his *The Government of the Tongue* (1988), Heaney examines the role of poetry in modern society. Poetry, Heaney states, is essentially an answer to the conditions of the world given in poetry's own terms. Heaney so says—"When I thought of 'the government of the tongue' as a general title for these memorial lectures, what I wanted to explore was the idea that poetry vindicates itself through the exercise of its own expressive powers. In this context, the tongue (representing both a poet's personal gift of utterance and the common resources of language itself) has been granted the right to govern.

This view, he illuminates in his essay 'The Redress of Poetry' by saying 'Poetry is a force capable of transforming culture and the self.' Like W.B. Yeats, Heaney's poetry has a political strain but in both of them, we see that poetry transcends politics. In his Nobel Lecture, Heaney declares his belief that: "Poetry can create an order, which is at once true to the impact of external reality and sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being".

Heaney's political poems take several distinct forms, of which the three most important are—(a) the poems that directly refer to the political situation in the Northern Ireland (b) the poems that refer to the situation by implication and (c) poems about linguistic imperialism, the problem of the Irish writer forced to use the English language as his vehicle of expression. The 'bog poems' of Heaney are overtly political. This series of poems from *Wintering Out* and *North* was suggested by the discovery of a number of ancient bodies preserved in the peat bogs of Denmark. At the time scientists speculated that the bodies, some of which had their throats slashed, were

those of sacrificial victims. The 'bog people' offered Heaney various possibilities for poetic treatment.

When Heaney was at St Columb's, his political consciousness over-powered his being. He also came to realize the pitiable conditions of the Catholics. Another important aspect was that Heaney's love for the poetry of Kavanagh helped ignite his own sense of Irish Catholic identity. Kavanagh's famous book *The Great Hunger*, which was mostly the record of the great famine, attracted Heaney very much.

Although Heaney writes from a unique Irish tradition, he still manages to avoid writing pure propaganda. Instead of writing a poem about a specific group of people who were wronged by one side or the other, Heaney always described the scene without party affiliation or with equal blame spread to all practitioners of violence. In his Nobel Lecture, Heaney says—"A group of workers were returning home in a minibus when they were held up at gunpoint by armed and masked executioners who said to them 'Any Catholics among you, step out here!" The group included only one Catholic and the general assumption was the 'masked men were Protestant paramilitaries looking for revenge by killing the lone Catholic in the group'. The one who would have been presumed to be in sympathy with the IRA and all its actions started to step forward when he felt the hand of the protestant worker next to him take his hand and squeeze in a signal that said no, don't move, we will not betray you, nobody need know what faith or party you belong to.' The Catholic man stepped forward anyway and the masked men opened fire killing all the Protestants. The story is like Heaney's poetry. It is political but at the same time above politics. His poetry tries to reach both sides of a conflict in almost the same way." A perfect example of Heaney's poem being above politics, and above political influence is 'Digging'. "Between my finger and thumb the squat pen rests; snug as a gun." ('Digging', *Death of a Naturalist*)

In this poem, Heaney compares his pen to a gun. Heaney says that his ancestors used their strength to fight their battles. But Heaney, however, must fight the battle in a different way. Heaney intends to fight the battle with his pen. The only way Heaney can have a relationship with the land is through his writing.

Another very important aspect of Heaney's poetry is that he tries to write for the benefit of all of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant alike. This is very

much explicit in his poem 'Whatever you say, say nothing.'(*North*) In this poem, Heaney delivers a strong political message for all of Ireland without supporting either side. That may be the reason when he says—-

> "Religion's never mentioned here," of course.
> 'You know them by their eyes', and hold your tongue."
> "One side's as bad s the other', never worse.
> Christ, it's near time that some small leak was sprung."
> ("Whatever you say, say nothing", *North*)

SAQ:

Which strategies are likely to render Heaney's poems above political affiliation and impartial or neutral? What role is symbolism or imagery like to play here? (70 + 60 words)

....
....
....
....
....
....

Check Your Progress:

1 What role does "Ireland" play in Heaney's work? Is it to be seen merely as a source for his themes?

2. How much significance does Heaney attach to political violence in his poetry? Does it receive the same weightage as the Irish heritage?

6.3 WORKS OF THE POET

Seamus Heaney drew his poetic inspiration from different ends. It is clear that his ancestors as well as his neighbours helped him form his poetic sensibilities. Several names of his neighbourhood so appear in his poems, like Dan Taggart, Big Jim Evans and Henry Mc Williams, the 'Achilles', 'Ajax' and 'Nestor' of the local world. Heaney grew up in a community in which Protestants and Catholics lived in harmony with one another. This can be ascertained from the poems like "The other Side" in *Wintering Out* and" Trial Runs" in *Stations.*

Mossbawn pump, Heaney's birthplace, appears as a source for Heaney's creativity. The pump appears in "Rite of Spring" and "Mother" in *Door into the Dark*, in "Sinking the Shaft" in *Stations,* in "A Drink of Water" and "The Toome Road" in *Field Work* and in "Changes" in *Station Island* and in several poems of his other books.

Heaney published his first collection of poems *The Death of a Naturalist* in 1966. This collection shows the influence of Kavanagh's faith on Heaney, that the local could articulate the Universal. Heaney's own place, Mossbawn, provided Heaney with a source for creative energy in this path of poetry.

Heaney, from the early collections, tried to combine in his work personal memories with images of Irish heritage and the landscape of Northern Ireland. There are also references to English-Irish and Catholic-Protestant conflict. His second collection, *Door into the Dark*, was published in 1969 and his early collections were praised as nature poetry of the kind written by Ted Hughes. *Wintering Out* in 1972, *North* in 1975 established him as a more substantial writer, engaging with serious cultural and political issues of Irish identity in a territory torn by dispute. With *North* he began to explore themes of violent Irish history ("Mother ground/ sour with the blood/of her faithful") that he confronted with a more urgent and autobiographical emphasis in *Field Work,* which contains public and political poems of great achievement. Heaney's other published works are *Poems* 1965-1975 in 1980, *Sweeney Astray* in 1983, *Station Island* in 1984, *The Haw Lantern* in 1987, *The Cure of Troy* in 1990, *Seeing Things* (Collection of Poems, in 1991), *Beowulf* (Translation of *Beowulf* from Old English to modern English by Seamus Heaney, 1999) *The Spirit Level* in 1996, *Electric Light* in 2001. The increasing violence from 1969 onwards and the sufferings of his community, however, made it necessary for Heaney to probe more deeply and critically into his catholic origins from *Wintering Out* onwards.

And his prose works are *Preoccupations* (Selected Prose, 1968-78), *Government of The Tongue* (Essays, 1988), *The Place of Writing* (Richard Ellmann Lectures, 1989), *The Redress of Poetry* (Oxford Lectures, 1995), *Finders Keepers* (*Selected prose*, 1971-2001) in 2001. Heaney's *Preoccupations* traces how "his roots were crossed with his reading".

Stop to Consider:

The Bog Myth

The most powerful symbol Heaney used in his poems is –the exhumed bog bodies in the North. Heaney in his book *Preoccupations* says, "Mossbawn lies between the villages of castle Dawson and Toome. I was symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between 'the demesne' and 'the bog'.

"The demesne was Moyola Park, an estate now occupied by Lord Moyola, formerly Major James Chister- Clark, ex-Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. The bog was a wide low apron of swamp on the west bank of the River Bann, where hoards of flints and fishbones have been found, reminding me that the Bann Valley is one of the oldest inhabited areas in the country. The demesne was walked, wooded, beyond our ken; the bog was rushy and treacherous, no place for children." Heaney refers to-"They said you shouldn't go near the moss-holes because 'there was no bottom in them". Heaney's spirit was always true to his own places and he always refers to in his works. Although he was physically away from his own hometown, yet his original home was always within his heart.

In *North*, Heaney says—

"I step through origins

Like a dog turning

Its memories of wilderness

On the Kitchen mat."

('Kinship', *North*)

Heaney in his poem "Digging" engages in an act of reconciling the gap between the past familial tradition and present discontinuity or, — to bridge the gap.

Heaney's reflections on his childhood have given way to darker aspects of the social and political problems of Northern Ireland. In his *The Government of the Tongue* (1988), Heaney examines the role of poetry in modern society.

The central symbol in his work is the bog, the wide unfenced county that reaches back millions of years. The bog is the starting point for the exploration of the past, and in several works Heaney has returned to the 'bog people, bodies preserved in the soil of Denmark and Ireland'. Michael Parker thus says – "While from *Door into the Dark* onwards Heaney was to elevate the bog into a symbol of Irish identity, this poem renews a received symbol, the humble potato, as an

emblem of his race's suffering." So, the bog is the starting point for the exploration of the past and in several works Heaney has returned to the 'bog people', bodies preserved in the soil of Denmark and Ireland.

P.V, Glob's *The Bog People* influenced Heaney to a great extent. Although the first of the well-known *Bog* poems appeared in *Wintering Out,* Heaney continued the sequence in *North,* published in 1975. Michael Parker also says—"Heaney's bog poems, according to Murphy, trace modern terrorism back to its roots in the early Iron Age, and mysterious awe back to the 'bonehouse' of language itself…. At our funeral rites and our worship of the past… the central image of this work, a symbol which unifies time, person and place, is bog land; it contains, preserves and yields terror as well as awe." Thus for Heaney, bog is an answering Irish myth. But after the publication of *North*, Heaney dropped the bog imagery in his poetry.

It is a point to be seriously remembered — the significance of bog myth throughout Heaney's poems. At the same time one can analyze the rich Irish materials of Gaelic heritage and how Heaney used them in his poetry. Gaelic is any of the Celtic languages used in parts of Ireland, Scotland and in other parts of the British Isles. Heaney, as an adherent of Gaelic cultures and traditions in his essay "Something to Write Home About" says—"The river Moyola flows southeast from a source in the Sperrian Mountains down through county Derry and enters Lough just a few miles from where I grew up….I knew in my bones from very early on that the Moyola itself was a very definite terminus, a marker off of one place from another. I knew when I stood on the stepping stone—on one side of me was the village of Castledawson, where my mother's people lived in a terrace house, and all that was mentally on one side of the river, on the other, there was father's side of the family, the Heaneys and Scullions had lived for generations. Somehow, even at that early age, I knew the Bellaghy side of my life was not only in a different physical location but in a different cultural location as well. In my mind, Bellaghy belonged not only to Gaelic football but to the much old Gaelic order of Cattle herding and hill forts. On the other hand, Castledawson was a far more official place altogether, more modern, more a part of the main drag. The very name of the place is from the orderly English world of the eighteenth century, whereas Bellaghy is from an older, more obscure origin in Irish. So, as I once said in a poem—poem called' Terminus"—I grew up in between. I grew up between the predominantly

Protestant and loyalist village of Castledawson and the generally Catholic and nationalist district of Bellaghy, in a house situated between a railway and a road and the old sounds of a trotting house and the newer sounds of a shunting engine". Heaney says—

"Two buckets were easier carried than one I grew up in between". ("Terminus", *The Haw Lantern*)

Stop to consider:

Violence in Northern Ireland

Ireland or Eire is an island in the North Atlantic lying west of Great Britain. The earliest history of Ireland is not very clear. Before the coming of the Celtic people, a large number of Neolithic people inhabited Ireland. By the sixth century BC, waves of Celtic invaders from Europe began to reach the country. By the beginning of the Christian era, Ireland was populated by Celts and Neolithic people.

Irish historians say that the country had reached a high state of civilization at the coming of St Patrick. From the fourth to the eighth century, the political history of Ireland is a story of uninterrupted tribal warfare. The first invasion of the Norsemen occurred towards the end of the eighth century. The Norwegians were the first to come and the Danes followed them. In 1014 AD, the famous battle of Clontarf broke the power of the Danes. The history of Ireland from the battle of Clontarf o the Anglo-Norman invasion is a record of continual strife.

In 1169, the Anglo-Norman Conquest of Ireland took place and the arrival of the Normans, who had earlier settled in England and Wales, shattered the progress of Ireland. For the next 400 years, the Normans and their descendants were an influential presence in Ireland. But during the reign of Henry VII, the famous Poynings law was passed and that gave control of the Irish legislature to the English Council. That gradually led to a period of almost eight centuries of British rule in Ireland.

In 1921, Great Britain recognized Ireland as a more or less independent unit within the commonwealth and the country was known as the Irish Free State. The Independent state of Ireland consists of only 26 counties out of the 32 that make up the whole island. The 6 remaining counties form the area known as Northern Ireland, which is directly administered by the United Kingdom.

In 1937, a new Constitution was adopted which made Ireland effectively a Republic. In 1949, Ireland formally declared itself a Republic and ceased to be a member of the Commonwealth.

Northern Ireland comprises the 6 northeast counties of Ireland; Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry ad Tyrone including the border counties of Belfast and Londonderry. It is sometimes referred to as 'Ulster', although three counties of the ancient province of Ulster belong to the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland is bounded on North by the Atlantic, on the northeast and East by the North Channel and the Irish Sea and on the South and west by the Republic of Ireland.

Under the government of Ireland Act, 1920, as amended by the Free State Act, 1922, a separate government and a separate parliament were established for Northern Ireland.

6.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Seamus Heaney is generally considered as the next great poet of Ireland after W B Yeats. Like Yeats, Heaney has touched several aspects of Irish culture, history, folklore, song, myth and religion and has written a kind of poetry that embodies the experiences and emotions of the Irish people. But critics like Terry Eagleton say—"There are two particular reasons, among thousands others, why the comparison of Heaney with Yeats is inept. Yeats's conception of poetry was a fairly commonplace Romantic inspirationalism, entailing an irrationalism not unconnected with his politics. Heaney, by contrast, conceives of art as labour, craft and production, precariously analogous to manual labour, traffic with Nature mediated by verbal rather than material instruments." On the contrary, critics like Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson accuses Heaney of distorting history with myth. Henry Hart in his book says- "Mythopoetic poets are usually autobiographers in disguise, yet Heaney is not simply promoting Catholic and nationalist ideologies by linking his Irish roots with a prelapsarian Eden. He dwells on those place-names and archaeological names with English, Scottish and Irish origins, records a pastoral Gaelic past that perhaps never existed and laments social and personal falls that certainly did. While British planter plays antithesis to Irish native, Heaney always aims for a dialectical synthesis. His allegorical symbols and etymological myths are meant to highlight the present troubles against a more fertile, unified background." Heaney has been compared with the great Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, and in fact several critics have called Heaney "the greatest Irish Poet since Yeats."

6.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

A recurring theme of the collection *Field Work*, is Heaney's concerns between song and suffering. He is in a dilemma: strung between his spiritual harmony achieved through his artistic growth and severe violence or 'implacable, disconsolate wailing' of sirens continued in his place. During their last two years in Glanmore, 1975 and 1976, killings in the province totalled 247and 297 respectively—amongst the victims, his second cousin, Colum McCartney, killed in a random sectarian attack wherein over 5,000 people received major injuries.

With this context of all pervasive violence in his mind, Heaney utters poetically, over the horrible deaths and justification in contemporary Ireland. In this context, the poems of *Field Work* are exploratory and a projection of the contemporary violent situation of Northern Ireland.

Field Work is indeed Heaney's most questioning book. Seeing the innocent children, men and women being crushed, shot or blown to bits, Heaney asks himself, "might not song constitute 'a betrayal of suffering?'', 'Who will be sorry for our trouble?" and "what will become of us?". This self-questioning attitude makes Heaney follow the instances of Wilfred Owen, W.B Yeats, Osip Mandelstam and to trust in the clear light.

'After a Killing' reflects Heaney's poetic utterance accompanied by a sense of a political undercurrent that used to grip his country quite devastatingly.

6.6 READING THE POEM "AFTER A KILLING"

'After a Killing' was written after the murder, in Dublin, of Christopher Ewart-Biggs, the British Ambassador to Ireland, on 21 July 1976, by the provisional IRA. So the poem is embedded in a politicalcontext. The opening image picks out the shapes of two gun-men on a hill-side. The unquiet atmosphere of Northern Ireland, reflected in the image, brings to readers mine-horror and the bitter realities of life. Their bracing to the guns and instruments epitomizes the situation.

Although they seem at first like the ghosts of 'the unquiet founders' of the Irish Free State, the IRA of 1919-1921, their deeds have made them all too real. Heaney describes these figures as 'profane and Bracing' as they symbolize terror for these deadly actions of the IRA.

> "There they were, as if our memory hatched them;
> As if the unquiet founders walked again:
> Two young men with rifles on the hill,
> Profane and bracing as their instruments."

This image of the two gunmen also brings to Irish minds the gory past of Northern Ireland. The image of 'an unquiet founder 'also evokes a sense of horror that continued to haunt their place and mind. Despite their resemblance to apparitions of' 'the unquiet founders' of the Irish Free State, their robust appearance, their rifles and their deeds have made them all too real.

> "Who is sorry for our trouble?
> Who dreamt that we might dwell among ourselves
> In rain and scoured light and wind-dried stones?
> Basalt, blood, water, headstones, leeches."

SAQ:

Comment on the voice of the 'persona' in these lines. With which political side is it to be identified? Or does it elude identification? (50 + 10 + 30 words)

....

....

....

....

....

Then a note of deep sadness begins, with an expression of condolence in Ulster—"Who is sorry for our trouble?" The answer, of course, is the people of Ireland themselves, who face the trouble. But the English also now share in the suffering because it would not suffer the Irish to 'dwell among ourselves/ in rain and scoured light and wind-dried stones?" By using different nouns, Heaney identifies key features in the Irish landscape-'Basalt, blood, water, headstones, Leeches' that refers to gruesome violence. The last image illustrates Heaney's doubts about the future. Will the blood-letting prove purgative, or will the patient die from so much loss? Will peace be possible after sacrificing so many lives and blood?

"In that neuter original loneliness
From Brandon to Dunseverick
I think of small-eyed survivor flowers,
The pined-for, unmolested orchid."

In the next stanza, Heaney turns back from blood and reaches towards innocence. The backward look can only offer the 'neuter original loneliness' of ancient Ireland, which once stretched from Brandon on the West Coast to Dunseverick in the North. Even then, before native borders were supplemented by imported varieties, only 'small-eyed survivor flowers' flourished and which are not to be found anywhere.. And the delicate 'unmolested orchid'—an emblem of integrity—is now nowhere to be found. The memory of the vanishing past is reflective of loneliness that started with the stanza.

"I see a stone house by a pier.
Elbow room. Broad window light.
The heart lifts. You walk twenty yards
To the boats and buy mackerel."

Turning away from the memory of the garden's past and current stock, the poem's vision expands to take in the solidity of" 'a stone house by a pier', to consider the spaciousness such a desirable property can provide for a large family, 'Elbow room or an artist, 'Broad window light'. The tone of the poem then starts to take on a note of hope. The images bring to readers' minds hopes for a bright future.

"And today a girl walks in home to us
Carrying a basket full of new potatoes,
Three tight green cabbages, and carrots
With the tops and mould still fresh on them."

In the final stanza, one perceives that Heaney's strategy for overcoming the 'insoluble conflict' inherited from history will be, to outgrow it, and to develop "in the process" "a new level of consciousness". The image of the girl with a basket full of potatoes affirms a sense of hope at the end. For the Irish people potatoes, the staple food brings hope and life. All these days of wretched violence will definitely end with a positive note which he has visualized through his poetic art.

Check Your Progress:

1. How far does Heaney adopt the local form of spoken language in his poem? Comment on his construction of the Irish ambience in his work.

2. Relate "After a Killing" to the central concept of "digging" in Heaney's poetry. Assess the significance of the "bog" myth in this connection.

3. Explore Heaney's concern with violence in "After a Killing". How does it help to represent the shape of conflict in Ireland? Assess the importance of the word, "profane" in the opening lines.

6.7 SUMMING UP

Heaney's poem 'After a Killing' reflects the political turmoil in Northern Ireland. Heaney, as an impartial poet (neither a catholic nor a Protestant), tries to show us the aftermath of violence and implications of a brutal killing in the society. He thus acknowledges the grip history retains on his island 'of comfortless noises' and upon his way of viewing events. This collection *Field Work* maintains to its very end the interpenetration of domestic and political experience.

6.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Parker, Michael. Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet. Macmillan,1993.

Morrison, Blake. Seamus Haeney, Routledge, 1993.

Vendler, Helen. Seamus Heaney, Harper, 1998. Hart Henry. Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions, Syracuse University Press, 1993.

www.heritageireland.ie

www.ireland.com

* * *