



APPRECIATING LITERATURE

COURSE CODE: B21EG01GE

Generic Elective Course - English
For Undergraduate Programmes
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Appreciating Literature

Course Code: B21EG01GE

Semester - V

Generic Elective Course - English For Undergraduate Programmes Self Learning Material (With Model Question Paper Sets)



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Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University is committed to providing you with a stimulating learning experience. All the UG programmes are designed to align with similar programmes of other state universities in Kerala. The curriculum adheres to the UGC guidelines, emphasizing interdisciplinary learning and offering opportunities for learners to explore diverse areas of interest. The course Appreciating Literature is offered as a Generic Elective in English during the fifth semester of all UG programmes. It is thoughtfully designed to introduce learners to the art of literary appreciation, focusing on key genres such as poetry and fiction. The present material caters to the syllabus with a balanced approach, ensuring both foundational knowledge and critical engagement with texts. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-01-2025

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BLOCK - 01

Introducing Literary Texts: 1



The Last Leaf

- O. Henry

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand the short story “The Last Leaf” by O. Henry in the American Context.
- ▶ analyse the themes and structure of O. Henry’s style of writing.
- ▶ learn the literary terms employed in the story.

Prerequisites

To fully appreciate O. Henry’s “The Last Leaf”, it’s helpful to understand a few important aspects. O. Henry’s works are often grounded in realism, reflecting the lives of everyday people in urban settings during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In “The Last Leaf”, this realism is intertwined with themes of hope, sacrifice, and the transformative power of art, particularly in a society struggling with poverty and illness. The story is set in Greenwich Village, New York City, during a time when tuberculosis was widespread and often fatal, which gives the narrative a sense of urgency and highlights the significance of small acts of kindness. The symbolism in the story, such as the ivy vine representing life and death, plays a key role in deepening the emotional and thematic impact of the story. Finally, O. Henry’s signature style of character development and unexpected plot twists are central to the story, making the conclusion all the more powerful. Understanding these elements helps to appreciate better the themes of hope, selflessness, and sacrifice woven throughout the narrative.

Keywords

Friendship, Hope, Sacrifice, Art, Illness

1.1.1 Discussion

William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), known famously by the pen name O. Henry, was an American Short Story Writer, a local colourist and a licensed pharmacist all combined into a prolific creator of tales which romanticised and chiefly focused on the life of ordinary people in New York City. Though some of his stories are set in South or Central America, he was fascinated with the commonplace culture of the blue-collared people living in New York City. His sympathies mainly lay with the lives of the struggling, underpaid men and women. O. Henry's stories deal with the themes of deception, mistaken identity, the unchangeable nature of fate, and the resolution of unsolvable difficulties separating two lovers, and he always tricks the reader with his surprise endings. We feel we have it all figured out until, in the end, there lies a surprise in the turn of events.

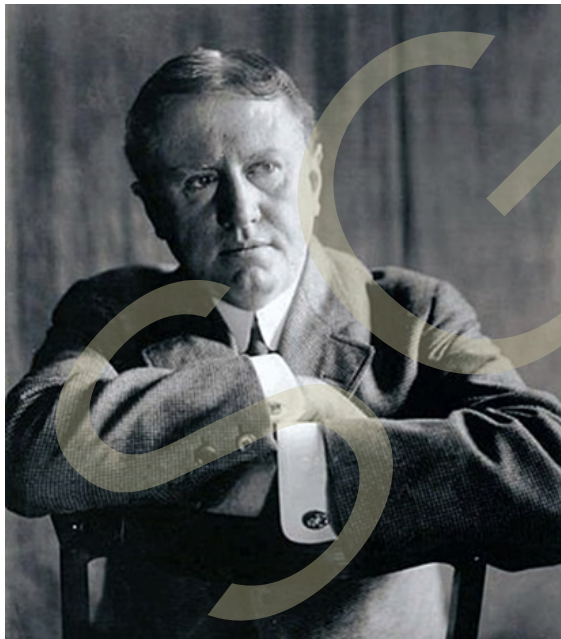


Fig. 1.1.1 Portrait of O. Henry by W. M. Vanderweyde, 1909

O. Henry believed that every house in New York had a drama in it and captured the essence of the common man and characters drawn from different walks of life, such as

a bank clerk, a waitress, a poor couple who wants to share gifts, a homeless vagrant, a safe cracker and many more memorable characters from over 381 different stories he has written. Porter was born in North Carolina, taught by his aunt until the age of 15, clerked in a drug store, wrote for newspapers, and worked at a bank, which subsequently led to his involvement in a charge of embezzlement. He served a three-year prison term and, while in prison, began writing short stories under the pen name O. Henry. Following his release, he spent most of his time writing stories for the Sunday edition of the New York World magazine.

O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" is a masterpiece of American short fiction, celebrated for its exploration of human resilience, selflessness and the transformative power of art. Published in 1907, the story is set in Greenwich Village, a hub for struggling artists, and reflects O. Henry's characteristic blend of realism and sentimentality. The narrative highlights the themes of hope and despair, using vivid imagery and symbolism to create an emotionally compelling tale. Known for his signature twist endings, O. Henry crafts a story that highlights the profound impact of small, selfless acts on the lives of others.

1.1.2 Summary

The story discusses the life of two artist girls, Johnsy and Sue, who live in a small flat in Greenwich Village. Johnsy falls critically ill from pneumonia and remains in her bed with a pessimistic thought that she will no longer live to achieve her dreams. She continuously gazes outside the window, and in her view, she sees an ivy creeper shedding leaves as autumn slowly nears winter. She becomes fixated on the idea that she will die when the last leaf falls from the ivy vine outside her window. Meanwhile, Sue, her friend, worries deeply and calls the doctor. Although the doctor visits

every day, Johnsy shows no sign of improvement. It is quite clear that Johnsy has given up her will to live, thereby making the medicines ineffective in curing her. Sue tries to cheer her up by talking about clothes and fashion and by trying to feed her healthy food, all to no effect. Sue suddenly hears Johnsy whispering and hastily rushes to her bed and finds her counting backwards. Looking out the window, Johnsy says, “Twelve!” However, after a while, she whispers “eleven”, then “ten”, and so on. The old ivy creeper outside the window was shedding its leaves in the strong wind, and with the last leaf down, Johnsy believed it was her last sleep. Helpless, Sue rushes down to her neighbour, a 60-year-old painter named Behrman, whose lifelong dream was to paint a masterpiece, but unfortunately, he hasn’t been able to fulfil it and has been living a drunken life of misery. Upon learning about Johnsy’s condition, Mr. Behrman condemns her for being silly.

That night was a stormy night, and all the remaining leaves of the ivy creeper were expected to fall by the next morning. To Johnsy’s surprise, she finds the last leaf intact on the creeper the next day morning. Filled with sudden hope, she apologises to her friend for being irresponsible to her concerns and realises that it is a sin to want to die. Rising from her bed, Johnsy takes her soup and develops a new desire to live on as the last leaf has withstood the test of the storm. Her health improves with this new will to live. However, when Sue visits Mr. Behrman, she learns that he has been ill for two days and now has passed away due to Pneumonia contracted while out in the storm painting the last leaf for Johnsy. The last leaf clinging on to the creeper was the masterpiece of Behrman, painted with much care and love to reignite the desire to live the life of a depressed soul.

1.1.3 Analysis

O. Henry, as a writer, held on to a philosophy which became a guide to all his writings. “My purpose is to show that in every human heart, there is an innate tendency towards a respectable life: that even those who have fallen to the lowest depths in the social scale would, if they could, get back to a higher life; that the innate propensity of human nature is to choose the good instead of the bad”.

We find that in the short story “The Last Leaf”, he carefully created the artists Sue, Johnsy and Behrman as having an innate tendency towards a respectable life. They arrive in Greenwich to make themselves great artists and have hopes to improve their economic and social conditions. The old artist Behrman, known to be bad-tempered and irritable, has had no commercial success despite his four decades of being in Greenwich, but he still hopes to paint his masterpiece. His innate goodness can be measured in his choice to paint the last leaf and give hope for a younger artist to live on in this world without succumbing to death and, in turn, sacrificing himself in the process. We also find that Johnsy has fallen into the lowest depths due to sickness, and her lack of will to survive in this world has beaten down her friend Sue. Nevertheless, it is that tendency of O. Henry’s characters towards wanting to choose the good instead of the bad that Johnsy decides to move on positively in her life. Henry’s philosophy applies rightly to the characters Johnsy, Sue and Behrman.

His characters, whether thieves, burglars, vagabonds, or gunmen, all have a sense of honour and an innate goodness within them.

Behrman stepping out to paint his masterpiece and sacrificing his life to give hope to Johnsy was an unexpected turn of events. Not just Johnsy, but by extension, we, the readers, too, felt that hope of not giving up in life despite the hardships life could throw upon us. This

taught us the values of life unintentionally and always motivated us to look forward in life.

Setting: The setting of a story is the main backdrop of a narrative. It includes the geographical location and the time expressed in a story. The events of “The Last Leaf” take place in Greenwich Village, in a small apartment, throughout autumn leading to the winter season. Greenwich is not an urban area; it has small lanes that bend and meet once again. Bending lanes ending at the same place represent the stuck future or the lack of movement forward for the characters. The Struggling artists rent apartments at low rates in Greenwich and hope for a better life. Difficult lives and poor economic conditions of the people are clear from the setting itself. Artists in Greenwich are trying to make ends meet. A subtle tone of struggle and suffering is set from the beginning of the story.

Characters: All stories revolve around characters and their actions. In “The Last Leaf”, O. Henry employs only four characters: Johnsy, Sue, Mr. Behrman, and the doctor who checks on Johnsy. O. Henry’s characters are common men and women realistically portrayed. People who belong to the lower strata of society, whose dreams aren’t fulfilled, are in a constant external and internal struggle to move their lives forward. Johnsy, being affected with pneumonia, has a continual wish to die, reflecting on the lack of will amongst the poor sections. On the contrary, we find the old artist, Behrman, despite his struggles, has held on to be a blessing in the life of another young artist. Sue seems to be playing a supporting role in keeping the protagonist alive. All attention here goes to Johnsy, the protagonist or the main character in the story. Her pessimism and depressive outlook can be a reflection of the gloomy condition of the times. Johnsy can be considered a round character as she has undergone personal development throughout the

story. A regaining of lost will to live has taken place, and the character has undergone a positive change in her life.

1.1.4 Themes

Hope and Faith: The doctor, despite trying hard to revive the health of Johnsy, fails in his attempt, as the will and hope to live on is lost in her. If hope is lost, science can fail. During the industrial age, people had tremendously lost hope in the future, mainly due to the meagre income and the chaos in humanity. Once Johnsy sees the last leaf on the ivy vine, her hope renews, and she starts recuperating instantly. Johnson's sickness was more of an illness of the mind than a physical one.

Sacrifice/ The Goodness of Humanity: Once the old artist Behrman learns of Johnsy's silly belief, he takes it upon himself to be the last leaf to help the young artist heal quickly. Behrman’s goodness in going the extra mile and sacrificing himself in the process reveals the goodness of humans in society.

Friendship: The friendship between Sue and Johnsy is very evident in the story. As a roommate and as a caregiver, Sue has supported Johnsy through thick and thin. Her comforting words and cheerful nature have kept Johnsy alive despite her superstition about the last leaf. Another striking friendship is between Behrman and Sue. Behrman, without a second thought, risks his life to save another life only because he values Sue’s words as a good friend. It is these friendships that save the life of Johnsy at the end of the story.

Art: The significance of art and the role art plays as a life-sustaining source is one topic of discussion in “The Last Leaf”. Greenwich is a village where artists come to improve their lives, and all the characters in the story value artistic works and give away the immense value of art as an encouraging entity to look



forward to a brighter future. Behrman's art is what ultimately saves Johnsy from despair. Art, therefore, plays the role of a hope-giving entity in "The Last Leaf"

Recap

- ▶ The story "The Last Leaf" is set in Greenwich Village, where two young women, Sue and Johnsy, live and work as artists.
- ▶ Johnsy falls seriously ill with pneumonia, and her condition worsens as she becomes despondent.
- ▶ Johnsy becomes fixated on the idea that she will die when the last leaf falls from the ivy vine outside her window.
- ▶ Sue tries to comfort her friend, but Johnsy insists that her life is tied to the falling leaves.
- ▶ An elderly artist named Behrman, who lives in the building, hears about Johnsy's condition and decides to help.
- ▶ Behrman sacrifices his health by painting a realistic leaf on the wall, hoping it will encourage Johnsy to fight for her life.
- ▶ The next morning, Johnsy sees the "last leaf" still on the vine, which inspires her to recover and regain hope.
- ▶ It is revealed that Behrman caught pneumonia after painting the leaf in a storm, and he dies, having given his life for Johnsy's survival.
- ▶ Sue later learns of Behrman's sacrifice and is deeply moved by his selflessness and love for the two women.
- ▶ Johnsy fully recovers, and the story ends with the realisation that the "last leaf" was not just a symbol of hope but also a testament to Behrman's unrecognised act of heroism.

Objective Questions

1. Where is the story "The Last Leaf" set?
2. What disease does Johnsy suffer from in the story?
3. What does Johnsy believe will happen when the last leaf falls from the vine?
4. Who is Behrman in "The Last Leaf"?
5. What does Behrman do to help Johnsy?
6. How does Behrman die in the story?
7. What is the significance of the ivy vine in "The Last Leaf"?
8. Who is the narrator of "The Last Leaf"?
9. What does Johnsy see the morning after the storm?
10. How does Sue react to Behrman's death?

Answers

1. The story is set in Greenwich Village, New York City.
2. Johnsy suffers from pneumonia.
3. Johnsy believes that she will die when the last leaf falls from the vine.
4. Behrman is an elderly artist who lives in the same building as Sue and Johnsy.
5. Behrman paints a realistic leaf on the wall to give Johnsy hope.
6. Behrman dies from pneumonia after painting the leaf in the storm.
7. The ivy vine represents life and death, symbolising Johnsy's condition and her hope for survival.
8. The story is narrated by an unnamed third-person narrator.
9. Johnsy sees the "last leaf" still on the vine, which gives her renewed hope.
10. Sue is deeply moved and sorrowful upon learning of Behrman's sacrifice.

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of symbolism in *The Last Leaf*. How does the ivy vine contribute to the story's themes of life and death?
2. Analyse Behrman's character in *The Last Leaf*. What does his sacrifice reveal about his personality and his relationship with Sue and Johnsy?
3. How does the setting of Greenwich Village contribute to the overall tone and themes of the story?
4. What does *The Last Leaf* suggest about the power of hope and art in overcoming despair?
5. In what ways does the ending of *The Last Leaf* challenge the reader's understanding of selflessness and heroism?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ David Stuart. *Biography of William Sydney Porter*. 1990.
- ▶ Harold Bloom. *O. Henry*. 1999.
- ▶ George MacAdam. *O. Henry Papers Containing Some Sketches of His Life Together with an Alphabetical Index to His Complete Works*. Country Life Press, 2018.





The Tyger

- William Blake

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ analyse the themes of creation, divine power, and duality in the poem "The Tyger."
- ▶ interpret William Blake's use of symbolism and imagery in the poem.
- ▶ evaluate Blake's rhetorical techniques and their impact on the poem's meaning.
- ▶ connect "The Tyger" to broader Romantic themes of religion, morality, and human nature.

Prerequisites

Before we analyse the poem "The Tyger," consider for a moment the overwhelming power and beauty embodied by the creature itself. What force could create something so terrifying yet awe-inspiring? What kind of mind would dare to craft such a magnificent and fearsome being whose "burning bright" eyes glow in the darkness of the night? As we confront this question, we must ask ourselves: what does it mean to create? And what does it say about the creator who dares to bring into existence such a creature whose very symmetry seems both perfect and dangerous? "The Tyger" challenges us to think beyond the surface, pushing us to consider the paradoxes of existence- the delicate balance between creation and destruction, innocence and experience. How can the same hand that forms a lamb, a symbol of peace, also form a tiger, a symbol of power and terror? Through these potent rhetorical questions, Blake compels us to reflect on the mysteries of life, divine creation, and the very nature of good and evil. What is the significance of such a creation? What does it reveal about the forces that shape our world? Before reading the poem, prepare to confront these enigmas and the profound implications they carry. Blake does not seek easy answers but invites us to question the very foundation of existence itself.

Keywords

Creation, Divinity, Power, Symmetry

1.2.1 Discussion

William Blake (1757–1827) was an English poet, painter, and printmaker widely regarded as one of the most influential figures of the Romantic Age. His works often blend visionary mysticism with social critique, and he is known for challenging conventional views of religion, morality, and human nature. Blake's poetry is characterised by its imaginative and symbolic depth, using vivid imagery and spiritual themes to explore the complexities of the human experience. His major works, including *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, reveal his concern with the contrasts between innocence and corruption, good and evil, and the tension between the spiritual and the material. One of Blake's most famous poems, "The Tyger," from his *Songs of Experience*, exemplifies his ability to confront profound existential and theological questions. The poem explores the creation of a fearsome, beautiful tiger, which symbolises both power and danger. Through a series of rhetorical questions, Blake delves into the nature of the divine creator who would design such a terrifying yet magnificent creature. "The Tyger" reflects Blake's fascination with the complexities of creation, the sacred, and the dualities of existence, marking it as one of his most celebrated and enigmatic works.

Lines 1-4

*Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

In this opening stanza of "The Tyger", William Blake introduces the central image of the

poem: the tiger. The speaker describes the tiger as "burning bright," a phrase that conveys the animal's vivid, intense, and almost supernatural presence. The image of the tiger is set against the backdrop of "the forests of the night," evoking a sense of mystery, darkness, and danger. The speaker then poses the question of who could have created such a creature, referring to the creator as an "immortal hand or eye," suggesting that this is a divine or supernatural force beyond human understanding. The phrase "fearful symmetry" highlights the tiger's perfect yet terrifying form, implying that its beauty and power are inseparable from its fearsome nature. The stanza conveys both awe and fear as the speaker contemplates the incredible power, precision, and mystery behind the tiger's creation. Blake uses vivid imagery and rhetorical questioning to set the tone of the poem, immediately introducing the complex themes of creation, divine power, and the balance of beauty and terror that are explored throughout the rest of the work.

Line 5-8

*In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?*

In this stanza of "The Tyger", William Blake continues to ponder the origins of the tiger's power and fiery gaze. The speaker asks where the fire in the tiger's eyes came from, wondering if it was ignited in distant "deeps or skies," suggesting both the depths of the earth and the vastness of the heavens as possible sources of its intense energy. The question implies that the tiger's fiery eyes have an almost otherworldly, supernatural origin. The speaker then



questions what kind of creator would have the audacity to reach such great heights or descend to such great depths to bring this creature to life, asking, “On what wings dare he aspire?” This refers to the creator's potential transcendence, suggesting that the act of creating such a powerful being requires immense courage or defiance. Finally, the speaker wonders what kind of hand would be bold enough to “seize the fire” of the tiger, symbolising the dangerous power the creator would need to harness to control and shape such a formidable being. The stanza builds on the themes of awe and fear, exploring the enormity and mystery of the tiger’s creation and the divine forces involved.

Lines 9-12

*And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat.
What dread hand? & what dread feet?*

In this stanza of “The Tyger”, William Blake continues to explore the creation of the tiger by focusing on its inner power and the creator's ability to animate it. The speaker asks, “And what shoulder, & what art / Could twist the sinews of thy heart?” Here, the “shoulder” represents strength, while “art” refers to the skill and precision required to craft the tiger’s heart, its emotional and life-force centre. The “sinews” refer to the tendons that hold the heart together, symbolising the deep connection between the tiger’s physical power and its inner emotional force.

The next question, “And when thy heart began to beat, / What dread hand? & what dread feet?” shifts focus to the moment of the tiger’s animation, when its heart starts beating, and it comes to life. The phrase “dread hand” emphasizes the fear and awe the speaker feels at the creator’s power to give life to such a terrifying creature. The “dread feet” represent the

tiger’s ability to move, its power and grace, as well as the creator’s control over the force that allows the tiger to function. This stanza highlights the immense and almost incomprehensible power needed to give life to the tiger, further building on the themes of awe, fear, and divine creation.

Lines 13 - 16

*What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp.
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?*

In this stanza of “The Tyger,” Blake uses powerful industrial and metallurgical imagery to question the creation of the tiger further. The speaker asks what tools-specifically, “the hammer” and “the chain”- were used in forging the tiger, implying that its creation was not only a delicate artistic process but also one that required immense strength and force. The hammer symbolises the creator’s power to shape, while the chain suggests that even a force as wild as the tiger must be controlled in some way.

Blake continues by asking in which “furnace” the tiger's “brain” was formed, suggesting that the tiger's intense, fiery nature is not just external but also reflected in its intellect and inner power. The furnace represents a place of intense heat and transformation, where raw materials are forged into something powerful. The anvil, a tool used to shape metal, reinforces the idea that the tiger was created through immense force and effort.

Finally, the phrase “what dread grasp” asks who would dare hold the tiger’s “deadly terrors,” emphasising the danger inherent in creating such a fierce and powerful being. This stanza underscores the tiger's terrifying and awe-inspiring nature and the overwhelming power required to shape it.

Lines 17-20

*When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?*

In this stanza from *The Tyger*, William Blake shifts to a more cosmic and celestial perspective, contemplating the creation of the tiger in relation to the divine. The speaker imagines a dramatic scene where “the stars threw down their spears / And watered heaven with their tears,” suggesting a moment of cosmic upheaval or rebellion. The stars, typically symbols of celestial order and harmony, are portrayed as being in turmoil, casting down their spears and shedding tears. This evokes an image of sorrow or conflict in the heavens, perhaps indicating the moral or existential struggle surrounding the creation of such a fearsome creature.

Blake then asks, “Did he smile his work to see?” This question reflects on whether the creator was pleased with the tiger, suggesting the possibility of a divine being taking satisfaction in its creation, even though it is dangerous and terrifying. The following line, “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” juxtaposes the innocence of the lamb, often a symbol of purity and peace, with the ferocity of the tiger. This comparison raises profound questions about the nature of the creator: can the same divine being who created something as innocent as a lamb also be responsible for the creation of the fearsome tiger? This tension between innocence and power deepens the poem’s exploration of good and evil, creation and destruction.

Lines 21-24

*Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

The final stanza of *The Tyger* repeats the opening stanza, reinforcing the awe and wonder the speaker feels toward the tiger. The imagery of the tiger “burning bright” in the “forests of the night” is reiterated, emphasising its striking, almost supernatural presence against the darkness. The speaker once again asks, “What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?” The repetition of this question underscores the mystery and complexity of the tiger’s creation, and the speaker continues to wonder about the divine or supernatural force capable of designing such a fearsome yet beautiful creature. This closing refrain ties together the poem’s central themes of creation, holy power, and the paradox of beauty and terror. By echoing the first stanza, Blake leaves the question of the tiger’s creator unanswered, emphasising the enigma and awe surrounding both the tiger and the forces that brought it into being. The repetition also suggests that the mystery of creation- of both innocence and experience, beauty and danger- remains unresolved, leaving the reader to ponder the nature of creation and the creator.

1.2.2 Analysis

William Blake's “The Tyger” from his *Songs of Experience* (1794) is a powerful meditation on creation, divine power, and the paradoxes inherent in existence. The poem opens with a striking image of the tiger, described as “burning bright” in the “forests of the night.” This juxtaposition of light and darkness evokes a sense of awe and mystery, presenting the tiger as a creature that embodies both beauty and danger. The phrase “burning bright” suggests a fiery, supernatural quality, while the setting of the night amplifies the fear and fascination surrounding the animal. Blake’s use of the forest as a backdrop reinforces the sense of the unknown, as it symbolizes an untamed, primal world in which the tiger reigns.

The speaker, overcome with wonder and fear,



repeatedly asks a series of rhetorical questions about the tiger's creator. Phrases like "What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" suggest that the tiger's form is so perfect, yet terrifying, that its creator must be an immortal or divine being beyond human comprehension. These questions reflect the speaker's awe at the tiger's power and beauty, as well as his uncertainty about the nature of the creator who could conceive such a creature. The "fearful symmetry" of the tiger points to the perfect yet dangerous balance between elegance and violence, further emphasising the duality of creation.

Blake's imagery continues with references to industrial tools, such as the "hammer," "chain," and "furnace," which evoke the process of forging or crafting. These terms suggest that the creation of the tiger involved intense power and precision as if it were forged in the heat of a divine workshop. This metaphor extends the idea of the creator as a force of nature, wielding tools of immense power to shape a being capable of both awe and terror. The final question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" underscores the paradox at the heart of the poem: how can the same creator who made the innocent lamb also create the fearsome tiger? This juxtaposition of innocence and power invites readers to reflect on the complexity of creation and the dual nature of the divine. Blake leaves these questions unresolved, encouraging contemplation of the mysteries of existence and the nature of creation itself. Through vivid imagery and probing questions, *The Tyger* challenges the reader to confront the complexities of life, the divine, and the force behind creation.

1.2.3 Major Themes

Creation and the Creator: The poem delves into the mystery of creation, questioning the nature of the divine being responsible for creating such a powerful and fearsome creature.

Through a series of rhetorical questions, Blake asks what kind of "immortal hand or eye" could design the tiger's "fearful symmetry." This theme explores the awe and mystery surrounding creation, suggesting that the tiger's perfection and terror challenge the very nature of the creator, prompting readers to consider the forces behind the act of creation.

Duality and Contradiction: A central theme in *The Tyger* is the duality of existence. The tiger represents a combination of beauty and terror, innocence and danger. Its "fearful symmetry" signifies both perfection and violence, revealing that creation can contain opposing qualities. The question "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" contrasts the innocent lamb with the dangerous tiger, highlighting the tension between good and evil, innocence and experience. This theme reflects Blake's belief in the coexistence of opposites in the world and the divine.

The Nature of the Divine: Blake raises profound questions about the nature of the divine being who could create such a creature. The imagery of industrial tools, such as the "hammer," "chain," and "furnace," suggests that the creator is not only powerful but also capable of great force and precision. This challenges conventional religious notions, suggesting that the divine may not be simply benevolent or nurturing but also capable of creating both beauty and terror.

Innocence vs. Experience: Blake explores the contrast between innocence and experience, a recurring theme in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. While the lamb symbolises innocence, the tiger embodies experience, power, and corruption. The poem questions how the same divine force can create both innocence and terror, suggesting that both aspects of existence are necessary parts of life and creation.

Fear and Awe: Throughout the poem, the speaker expresses both fear and awe in the

presence of the tiger. The powerful imagery of a creature “burning bright” in the “forests of the night” evokes a sense of the sublime, terrifying, and magnificent. This theme reflects the emotional complexity of confronting something so awe-inspiring, suggesting that fear and wonder are intertwined when encountering the mysteries of life and creation.

In William Blake’s *The Tyger*, several literary devices deepen the meaning of the poem and enhance its emotional impact. These devices help convey the central themes of creation, divine power, and the dualities of existence.

1.2.4 Literary Devices

Imagery: Blake uses vivid and striking imagery throughout the poem to create powerful visual impressions. Phrases like “burning bright” and “in the forests of the night” evoke a visual image of the tiger as a radiant and almost supernatural being in the darkness. The tiger’s eyes are described as fiery, and the reference to “fearful symmetry” creates an image of a perfect yet terrifying form. The use of these vivid images helps reinforce the awe and mystery the speaker feels toward the tiger.

Alliteration: Blake uses alliteration, the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, to create rhythm and emphasise certain ideas. For example, in “Tyger Tyger, burning bright,” the repetition of the “T” sound draws attention to the tiger’s power and intensity. This technique adds to the poem’s musicality and helps to reinforce the striking imagery of the tiger.

Symbolism: The tiger is a central symbol in the poem, representing both power and terror. It symbolizes the complex and dual nature of creation—beauty and violence, innocence and experience. The “Lamb” in the final question is another important symbol, representing innocence, purity, and peace. Blake contrasts the lamb with the tiger to explore the tension between opposing forces in the world, such as

good and evil or innocence and corruption.

Metaphor: The tiger is also a metaphor for the mysteries of creation and divine power. By asking what kind of “hand” or “eye” could create the tiger, Blake uses the metaphor of the craftsman or creator to suggest that the divine must possess immense power and mastery. The tools of creation—“hammer,” “chain,” “furnace,” and “anvil”—metaphorically represent the force and precision required to create such a complex being. These metaphors imply that creation is not a gentle or nurturing act but one that involves strength and even violence.

Personification: Blake uses personification, attributing human qualities to the tiger’s creator, to suggest that the act of creation is deliberate and conscious. For example, the rhetorical question “Did he smile his work to see?” personifies the creator by imagining that they might have a human-like emotional reaction to their creation. This device helps to humanise the divine, making the abstract concept of creation more relatable and tangible.

Juxtaposition: The poem juxtaposes the concepts of innocence and experience, primarily through the contrast between the tiger and the lamb. The lamb represents innocence and purity, while the tiger represents experience, power, and danger. This juxtaposition raises important questions about the nature of the creator and the coexistence of opposing qualities in the world. By placing these two symbols side by side, Blake encourages the reader to contemplate the complexities and contradictions inherent in creation.

Anaphora: The poem makes use of anaphora, which is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses. In the first stanza, for example, “Tyger Tyger” is repeated to emphasise the tiger’s power and presence. This repetition also contributes to the poem’s rhythm and reinforces the sense of awe and reverence the speaker feels toward the creature.



Recap

- ▶ William Blake (1757–1827) was a prominent English poet, painter, and print-maker known for his visionary mysticism and social critique during the Romantic era.
- ▶ Blake's poetry often blends symbolic depth with spiritual themes, challenging conventional ideas of religion, morality, and human nature.
- ▶ One of Blake's major works, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, explores the contrast between innocence and corruption, good and evil, and spiritual versus material tensions.
- ▶ *The Tyger*, from *Songs of Experience*, is a famous poem that grapples with existential and theological questions about creation.
- ▶ The poem begins with an awe-inspiring description of the tiger, portraying it as a powerful, almost supernatural creature “burning bright” in the “forests of the night.”
- ▶ Blake uses rhetorical questions to explore who could have created such a terrifying yet beautiful creature, pondering the divine or supernatural force behind it.
- ▶ The speaker contemplates where the tiger's fiery eyes came from and what kind of creator would dare to harness such power, emphasising the enormity of the tiger's creation.
- ▶ Blake uses industrial imagery like “hammer,” “chain,” and “furnace” to suggest the creator's force and precision in forging the tiger, likening it to a powerful, almost violent crafting process.
- ▶ In the question, “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” Blake introduces a duality between innocence (symbolised by the lamb) and experience (symbolised by the tiger), challenging the creator's nature.
- ▶ The poem explores the paradox of creation: how can the same divine being create both the innocent lamb and the fearsome tiger, which represents power, violence, and danger?
- ▶ Themes in “The Tyger” include creation and the creator, the duality of existence, the nature of the divine, innocence versus experience, and the tension between fear and awe.
- ▶ The speaker's repeated rhetorical questions throughout the poem reflect both wonder and fear at the tiger's power and confusion regarding its divine creator.
- ▶ Blake's use of imagery creates vivid visuals of the tiger and its surroundings, reinforcing the themes of beauty, terror, and divine mystery.
- ▶ Literary devices like alliteration, symbolism, metaphor, and personification deepen the poem's meaning and enhance its emotional impact.
- ▶ Through its use of juxtaposition (e.g., the tiger vs. the lamb) and anaphora (repetition of phrases), the poem emphasises the contradictions inherent in creation and the divine's mysterious nature.

Objective Questions

1. Who was William Blake?
2. Which major theme is explored in Blake's poem "The Tyger"?
3. In "The Tyger", what symbolic animal represents innocence and purity?
4. What type of imagery does Blake use to describe the tiger's creation in "The Tyger"?
5. Which of the following is NOT a theme explored in "The Tyger"?
6. What does the phrase "burning bright" in the poem symbolise?
7. What literary device does Blake use by repeating the phrase "Tyger Tyger" at the beginning of the poem?
8. What does the question "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" imply?
9. The use of "hammer," "chain," and "furnace" in "The Tyger" is an example of which literary device?
10. What is the central question the speaker repeatedly asks in "The Tyger"?

Answers

1. William Blake was an English poet, painter, and printmaker.
2. The major theme explored in "The Tyger" is the mystery of creation and the creator.
3. In "The Tyger", the lamb symbolizes innocence and purity.
4. Blake uses industrial and metallurgical imagery to describe the tiger's creation.
5. The journey of self-discovery is not a theme explored in "The Tyger".
6. The phrase "burning bright" symbolises the tiger's fiery eyes and power.
7. Blake uses anaphora by repeating the phrase "Tyger Tyger" at the beginning of the poem.
8. The question "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" implies that the creator is capable of creating both innocence and danger.
9. The use of "hammer," "chain," and "furnace" in "The Tyger" is an example of symbolism.
10. The central question the speaker repeatedly asks in "The Tyger" is, "What immortal hand or eye could create the tiger?"

Assignments

1. Discuss the central theme of “The Tyger” by William Blake. How does the poem explore the paradox of creation, and what does it suggest about the nature of the divine creator?
2. In “The Tyger”, William Blake frequently uses vivid and powerful imagery to depict the tiger. Analyse how Blake's use of imagery contributes to the themes of fear, awe, and the mystery of creation.
3. Examine the role of duality in “The Tyger”. How does Blake contrast innocence and experience, and what message does this contrast convey about the nature of existence?
4. How does the speaker in “The Tyger” question the nature of creation and the creator? Explore the rhetorical questions posed in the poem and analyse their significance in the broader context of Blake’s philosophy.
5. In “The Tyger”, Blake uses metaphors and industrial imagery to describe the process of creation. Discuss how this industrial imagery affects the reader's understanding of the divine power involved in creation and its implications for Blake's view of the creator.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Dover Publications, 2006.
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- ▶ Goodridge, John, ed. *The Poetry of William Blake: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Macmillan, 2001.
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The Oak

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ analyse the symbolism of the oak tree in relation to strength and resilience.
- ▶ examine the use of imagery and personification in the poem.
- ▶ explore the theme of time and change in the natural world.
- ▶ understand Tennyson's moral and philosophical message regarding life and endurance.

Prerequisites

Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "The Oak" uses the oak tree as a powerful symbol of strength, resilience, and the passage of time. The oak, enduring harsh weather and storms, represents nature's fortitude and serves as a metaphor for human perseverance. Tennyson personifies the tree, depicting it as steadfast and unyielding, encouraging readers to reflect on their own ability to face challenges without breaking. The poem begins by showcasing the oak in its prime, standing firm against fierce conditions. As it ages, the tree's decline mirrors the inevitable passage of time. Despite its eventual deterioration, the oak remains a symbol of enduring life and resilience, contrasting its strength with the fragility of human life. Tennyson's vivid imagery emphasises the contrast between the oak's endurance and the vulnerability of human existence.

Tennyson also explores the cyclical nature of life. The oak's growth, weathering of storms, and eventual decline reflect the human experience of youth, struggle, and ageing. Yet, like the oak, humanity continues to endure, finding dignity in overcoming adversity. Ultimately, "The Oak" is a reflection of the strength found in resilience and the inevitability of change. Tennyson highlights how both nature and human life possess the power to withstand the trials of time through endurance.

Keywords

Life, Seasons, Growth, Strength, Resilience



1.3.1 Discussion

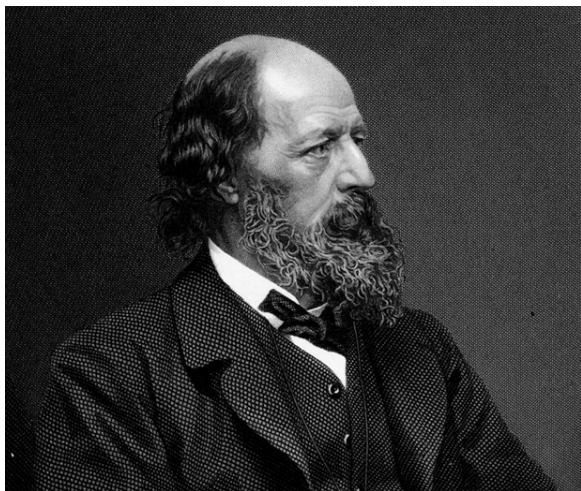


Fig 1.3.1 Alfred Lord Tennyson

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) was a celebrated English poet and the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom for much of the Victorian era. Known for his lyrical verse and deep explorations of human emotions, Tennyson's works often engage with themes of nature, morality, and the passage of time. His poetry is marked by vivid imagery, musicality, and philosophical depth, earning him a prominent place in English literary history. In his poem *The Oak*, Tennyson uses the oak tree as a central symbol of strength, resilience, and the inevitable process of ageing. The poem reflects on the oak's ability to endure fierce storms and harsh conditions, serving as a metaphor for human perseverance in the face of life's challenges. As the oak ages and faces decline, it symbolizes the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life. Despite its struggles, the tree remains steadfast, embodying enduring strength and resilience. Through vivid imagery and personification, Tennyson explores the relationship between nature and human existence. The oak's growth, weathering of storms, and eventual decline mirror the human experience of struggle, ageing, and endurance. *The Oak* ultimately serves as a meditation on resilience, showing how both

nature and humanity can endure the trials of time with grace and strength.

1.3.2 Summary

Lines 1-5

*Live thy Life,
Young and old,
Like yon oak,
Bright in spring,
Living gold;*

In this stanza, Tennyson presents a powerful message about living life with vitality and purpose. The speaker encourages the reader to “Live thy Life” with the same vigor and resilience as the oak tree, symbolizing strength and longevity. The phrase “Young and old” suggests that this advice applies to people at all stages of life, whether in the prime of youth or the later years of age. Tennyson then compares this ideal way of living to the oak tree, which is “Bright in spring,” representing youth and the full bloom of life. The “Living gold” refers to the oak's vibrant, life-filled presence, capturing the idea of living life with energy, richness, and beauty, much like the golden hues of the tree during its most prosperous period. This stanza emphasizes the importance of living fully, embracing each phase of life with strength and vitality. Tennyson suggests that, like the oak, one should endure through the seasons of life, standing resilient and bright, regardless of age. The imagery of spring and gold evokes a sense of renewal and vitality, encouraging readers to live their lives with the same enduring brilliance.

Lines 6-10

*Summer-rich
Then; and then
Autumn-changed
Soberer-hued
Gold again.*

In this stanza, Tennyson further reflects on the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life, using the oak tree as a metaphor. The phrase “Summer-rich” suggests a time of fullness and vitality, symbolizing the peak of life or youth, when everything is abundant and flourishing. The repetition of “Then; and then” emphasizes the progression of time, suggesting the inevitable transitions that everyone faces. “Autumn-changed” marks the shift from the bright vigour of summer to the more mature, reflective period of autumn. This change is associated with “Soberer-hued,” indicating the mellowing, more subdued colours of autumn, which symbolize ageing or the later stages of life. Despite this change, Tennyson highlights that the oak, though altered by time, remains “Gold again,” suggesting that even in ageing or decline, there is beauty and value. The idea of “Gold again” portrays the oak’s enduring strength and timeless worth, much like the dignity that comes with growing older. This stanza underscores the natural cycles of life—youth, maturity, and old age and the beauty that can be found in each phase, encouraging the reader to embrace the changes that time brings while retaining the essence of strength and resilience.

Lines 11-15

*All his leaves
Fall'n at length,
Look, he stands,
Trunk and bough
Naked strength.*

In this stanza, Tennyson reflects on the inevitable process of ageing and the eventual stripping away of life's vitality, using the oak tree as a powerful symbol. “All his leaves / Fall'n at length” signifies the end of the tree’s life cycle, where the leaves, once full of life and energy, have fallen away, symbolizing the passing of time and the onset of old age. The image of the oak “Naked strength” portrays the tree standing bare, without the adornment

of leaves, yet still standing tall and strong. Despite its apparent vulnerability, the oak remains a symbol of enduring power and resilience. This transition from the lushness of spring and summer to the starkness of winter reflects the human experience of ageing, where external beauty or vitality may diminish, but inner strength and character endure. Tennyson’s use of “Trunk and bough” emphasises that, even without the leaves, the oak retains its solid and unyielding structure. The phrase “Naked strength” conveys the idea that true strength lies not in outward appearance but in the core, unshakeable foundation. Through this imagery, Tennyson reminds us that, even in old age or adversity, there is dignity and strength to be found, symbolising the resilience that comes with enduring life's challenges.

1.3.3 Analysis

Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “The Oak” uses the image of the oak tree as a central symbol to explore themes of strength, resilience, and the passage of time. The poem meditates on the life cycle of the oak, which mirrors the human experience, emphasizing the cyclical nature of life, growth, ageing, and endurance. The poem opens with a call to live life fully. The speaker encourages individuals to “Live thy Life, / Young and old” like the oak tree, which is “Bright in spring” and “Living gold.” This initial imagery evokes youth, vitality, and the richness of life. The oak, standing tall and vibrant in its prime, represents the ideal of living with strength and vigour, unburdened by the challenges that will come with age.

As the poem progresses, Tennyson introduces the inevitable passage of time. The oak, while initially bright and full of life, enters the summer and autumn of its life. “Summer-rich / Then; and then / Autumn-changed” marks the transition from youthful energy to a more reflective, mature stage of life. The phrase “Soberer-hued / Gold again” symbolises the oak's ageing process, where the once bright,



golden hue of youth becomes more subdued but still retains a dignified, valuable presence. Through these lines, Tennyson shows that ageing does not diminish the worth of the oak but instead transforms it into something more enduring and beautiful in its maturity.

The final part of the poem describes the oak in its old age, with all its leaves fallen, leaving the trunk and bough exposed. “Look, he stands, / Trunk and bough / Naked strength.” Despite the absence of leaves, the oak remains strong and intact, a symbol of resilience even in the face of decay. This stark image emphasises that, like the oak, human strength is not merely dependent on external beauty or vitality but on an internal, unyielding core. The oak’s “naked strength” represents the enduring power that remains even when external signs of life have diminished.

Ultimately, “The Oak” reflects on the cyclical nature of life, illustrating the stages of growth, maturity, and ageing. Through the oak, Tennyson suggests that resilience and inner strength persist throughout life, even as we encounter change and eventual decline. The poem underscores the dignity that comes with enduring life’s trials and reminds readers that like the oak, strength lies in persistence and the ability to stand firm through all seasons of life.

1.3.4 Major themes of the poem

Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “The Oak” explores several key themes, each interwoven with the symbolic imagery of the oak tree. The major themes in the poem include resilience, the passage of time, growth and decay, the cyclical nature of life, and the dignity of ageing.

Resilience is the central theme of the poem, embodied in the oak tree’s ability to withstand harsh weather, seasonal changes, and the test of time. Throughout the poem, the oak is depicted as an unyielding symbol of strength, its ability to endure various stages of life high-

lighted in both its youthful vibrancy and later age. The oak’s steadfastness in the face of challenges serves as a metaphor for human resilience, suggesting that despite life’s inevitable hardships, one can persist with dignity and fortitude.

The passage of time is intricately explored in the poem. Tennyson tracks the oak’s journey from its prime in spring, when it is “bright” and “living gold,” to its mature stages in summer and autumn, where it transforms. The imagery of the oak shifting from vibrant to “soberer-hued” symbolizes the inevitable ageing process that all living things must endure. Tennyson reflects on how time shapes all, including the natural world, emphasising that growth, change, and decay are inescapable parts of existence.

Growth and decay form another central theme, explored through the stages of the oak’s life. The oak’s youthful, bright spring represents potential and vitality, while its autumnal transformation reflects the maturity and eventual decline that comes with age. However, Tennyson’s portrayal of the tree’s “naked strength” in its old age challenges the negative view of decline. Instead, he emphasises that the oak retains its strength even when stripped of its leaves and external beauty, suggesting that true power lies in endurance and the core of being.

The cyclical nature of life is another theme Tennyson emphasises. The poem mirrors the natural cycle of seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—as a metaphor for the human life cycle. Just as the oak experiences change, so do humans moving through different stages of life. However, Tennyson points to the fact that, like the oak, humanity can find dignity in each stage, even in old age or decline.

The dignity of ageing is celebrated in the poem. As the oak ages, it does not lose its inherent value or strength. Tennyson suggests

that while external beauty fades with time, internal strength, resilience, and dignity persist, offering a powerful message that one's worth is not solely determined by youth or appearance but by the ability to endure life's challenges.

1.3.5 Literary devices

Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Oak* is rich with literary devices that enhance its thematic depth and emotional impact. Through the use of symbolism, personification, imagery, alliteration, and rhyme, Tennyson conveys the ideas of strength, resilience, and the passage of time. Below is an exploration of the key literary devices used in the poem:

Symbolism

The oak tree is the central symbol in the poem. It represents strength, endurance, and the natural cycle of life. The oak's growth, transformation, and ageing mirror the stages of human life, from youth to maturity to old age. The tree's seasonal changes - its vibrant spring, rich summer, and sober autumn - symbolise the various phases of life, with each season representing different attributes of existence, such as vitality, maturity, and decline. The oak's enduring nature throughout its life also symbolises resilience, showing how inner strength persists even as external forms change.

Personification

Tennyson personifies the oak tree, giving it human-like qualities to enhance its symbolic representation. The tree is not just a passive object but a living, active entity that "lives" and "stands" through time. The oak is described as being "bright in spring" and "living gold," and later "naked strength" as it ages. These personifications suggest that the oak is not only an enduring force in nature but also a metaphor for human perseverance, conveying that the strength of the tree, like the human

spirit, can persist through life's challenges.

Imagery

Imagery plays a key role in evoking the poem's themes. Tennyson uses vivid and sensory-rich descriptions to bring the oak to life and symbolise the passage of time. Phrases like "Bright in spring," "Living gold," and "Autumn-changed / Soberer-hued" create a vivid picture of the oak at different stages of life. The imagery of "naked strength" at the end of the poem emphasizes the oak's bare but enduring power, even after its leaves have fallen, suggesting that true strength lies beneath the surface. Through these images, Tennyson encourages the reader to consider the natural beauty of ageing and the dignity that comes with endurance.

Alliteration

Alliteration, the repetition of consonant sounds, is used strategically in the poem to add musicality and rhythm. For example, in the line "Summer-rich," the repetition of the "r" sound emphasises the richness of the oak during its prime. Similarly, "Autumn-changed / Soberer-hued" uses the soft "s" sound to suggest the mellowing of the oak as it ages. These subtle uses of alliteration contribute to the poem's reflective, almost meditative tone, reinforcing the natural flow of time and change.

Rhyme and Meter

Tennyson employs a regular rhyme scheme and meter to create a musical, rhythmic quality that mirrors the cycle of the oak's life. The poem follows a structured rhyme scheme (ABAB) that enhances its flow and gives it a harmonious, song-like feel. This use of rhyme serves to unify the poem's themes, linking the natural rhythm of life with the regularity of the oak's growth and decline. The meter, often iambic, mirrors the natural ebb and flow of time, reinforcing the cyclical nature of existence.



Contrast

Tennyson uses contrast to highlight the transitions in the oak's life, particularly between youth and old age. The oak is initially described as "bright in spring" and "living gold," full of energy and life. As the poem progresses, however, the oak changes, becoming "autumn-changed" and "soberer-hued," which reflects the inevitability of ageing. The contrast between the bright vitality of the oak's youth and the more subdued strength of its old age emphasises the poem's theme of endurance and the beauty that can emerge from ageing.

Repetition

Repetition is another significant device that enhances the meaning of the poem. Phrases like "Then; and then" and the recurrence of "gold" throughout the poem emphasise the cyclical nature of time. The repetition of these words reinforces the idea that time is an unbroken flow, continuously moving through phases of growth, change, and decline. This repetition mirrors the continuous life cycle of the oak, which is echoed in the human experience.

Recap

- ▶ The oak tree symbolises strength, endurance, and resilience, reflecting the ability to withstand life's challenges.
- ▶ The oak represents the natural cycle of life, growth, ageing, and death, paralleling human experiences.
- ▶ The oak is personified as a living entity, embodying human-like qualities of strength, endurance, and ageing.
- ▶ The poem tracks the stages of the oak's life, from youth to maturity and eventual decline.
- ▶ Tennyson uses rich imagery such as "Living gold," "Bright in spring," and "Naked strength" to evoke the oak's changing phases.
- ▶ The poem contrasts the oak's bright, youthful appearance with its sober, aged state, reflecting the passage of time.
- ▶ The poem emphasises that life follows a cyclical pattern—growth, maturity, and decline—as seen in oak and human existence.
- ▶ The oak's ageing symbolises human ageing, showing that inner strength persists even as external beauty fades.
- ▶ Despite its ageing process, the oak remains strong, symbolising that true power lies in endurance and resilience, not in outward appearances.
- ▶ The poem urges readers to live fully in all stages of life, with strength and dignity, just as the oak stands firm in every season.
- ▶ Time is personified through the oak's transformation, marking the passage of seasons and life stages.
- ▶ The oak's ageing process is portrayed with dignity, encouraging readers to accept ageing with grace and inner strength.

- ▶ The repetition of the word "gold" highlights the value of both youth and age, suggesting that life retains beauty in every phase.
- ▶ Tennyson uses alliteration ("Summer-rich," "Soberer-hued") to enhance the poem's musicality and rhythm, reflecting the flow of time.
- ▶ The oak serves as a metaphor for human life, encouraging readers to stand resilient, face life's challenges, and find strength in all phases of existence.

Objective Questions

1. What is the central symbol used in "The Oak"?
2. How does Tennyson describe the oak at the beginning of the poem?
3. What does the oak represent in the poem?
4. In the poem, how is the oak described in its later stages of life?
5. What natural event marks the transition from youth to maturity in the poem?
6. How does the oak's ageing process mirror the human experience?
7. What does the phrase "Naked strength" symbolise in the poem?
8. How does Tennyson use the concept of seasons in the poem?
9. What is the significance of the repeated word "gold" in the poem?
10. What message does the poem convey about the passage of time and resilience?

Answers

1. The central symbol in "The Oak" is the oak tree itself.
2. At the beginning of the poem, the oak is described as "bright in spring" and "living gold," symbolizing youth and vitality.
3. The oak represents strength, resilience, and the passage of time in the poem.
4. In its later stages, the oak is described as "Autumn-changed" and "Soberer-hued," symbolizing ageing and maturity.
5. The transition from youth to maturity is marked by the changing of the oak's leaves from bright and golden to more subdued, autumn-like hues.
6. The oak's ageing process mirrors the human experience of growing older, with vitality fading but strength and endurance remaining.
7. The phrase "Naked strength" symbolises the enduring power and resilience of the oak, even after it has lost its leaves.
8. Tennyson uses the seasons to represent the different stages of life, with spring symbolising youth, summer representing maturity, and autumn indicating ageing.



9. The repeated word "gold" emphasises the vitality and richness of life, both in youth and in old age, suggesting that both phases hold value.
10. The poem conveys that while time inevitably changes everything, resilience and inner strength remain constant and valuable throughout life's stages.

Assignments

1. Discuss the symbolism of the oak tree in Tennyson's poem. How does the oak represent the themes of strength, resilience, and the passage of time?
2. Analyze how Tennyson uses the changing seasons in "The Oak" to symbolize the different stages of human life. How does this cyclical progression reflect the inevitability of ageing and the beauty in each phase of life?
3. Examine the role of personification in "The Oak". How does Tennyson personify the oak tree, and what effect does this have on the poem's meaning and emotional impact?
4. Explore the theme of aging in "The Oak". How does Tennyson convey the dignity and strength that can come with growing old, and how does this challenge typical views of ageing?
5. Tennyson's "The Oak" reflects on the idea of enduring through life's trials. How does the poem suggest that true strength lies in perseverance and resilience rather than external appearances or fleeting vitality?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *The Oak. The Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, edited by H. W. Garrod, Macmillan, 1908, pp. 201-202.
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- ▶ Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *The Oak. The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, edited by Christopher Hart, Oxford UP, 1995, p. 104.
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Anecdote of the Jar

- Wallace Stevens

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand the thematic and symbolic depth of the poem “Anecdote of the Jar”.
- ▶ analyse the poem’s structure, imagery and language.
- ▶ explore the philosophical implications of the human-nature relationship in the poem.
- ▶ appreciate Stevens’ contribution to modernist poetry.

Prerequisites

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955) was an influential American modernist poet known for his philosophical depth and intricate use of language. A lawyer by profession, Stevens balanced his practical career with a profound literary vision, crafting poetry that explored the intersection of imagination, reality, and art. His works are often celebrated for their intellectual rigour, symbolism, and ambiguity, which invite multiple interpretations. Stevens’ poetry frequently grapples with the human need to impose meaning and order on an often chaotic and indifferent natural world. Writing in the early-to-mid 20th century, Stevens was part of the modernist movement, a period defined by experimentation in art and literature as a response to rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and the aftermath of World War I. Modernist poets like Stevens sought to redefine traditional literary forms, emphasising individual perception and the fragmented nature of modern existence. Stevens’ work reflects these concerns, particularly through his exploration of humanity’s role in shaping, interpreting, and often controlling the natural and external world. His poetry, including “Anecdote of the Jar,” reflects a world where art and human constructs attempt to dominate nature, questioning the implications of this dominance and the disconnection it often creates. Understanding Stevens’ philosophical approach and the modernist context enriches one’s reading of his work.



Keywords

Order, Nature, Transformation, Artifice

1.4.1 Discussion



Fig. 1.4.1 wallace Stevens

Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar" is a modernist poem that explores the dynamic between human creations and the natural world. The poem recounts the simple act of placing a jar on a hill in Tennessee, which transforms the wilderness around it, imposing a sense of order and focus. Through this symbolic interaction, Stevens examines themes of dominance, artifice, and the tension between chaos and control. The jar represents human intervention, highlighting both its power to reshape the environment and its inherent sterility compared to the vitality of nature. With its minimalist language and rich symbolism, the poem invites readers to reflect on humanity's relationship with nature and the impact of art and perception.

1.4.2 Summary of the Poem

Lines 1 - 4

*I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.*

The speaker recounts placing a jar on a hill in Tennessee, an intentional act that immediately alters the wilderness. This act of placing the jar is simple yet profound, initiating the transformation of the wilderness. By choosing Tennessee, a region synonymous with vibrant and untamed nature, Stevens sets up a stark contrast between the jar and its surroundings. The jar's placement imposes a sense of structure on the untamed landscape, transforming the "slovenly" wilderness into something more focused and defined. The word "slovenly" portrays the wilderness as chaotic and disorganised before the jar's arrival, emphasising how the human-made object influences its surroundings. The jar becomes the centre of attention, drawing the wilderness to "surround that hill." This metaphorical "order" imposed by the jar reflects humanity's tendency to reshape and redefine the natural world, whether through physical intervention or conceptual frameworks.

The act of placing the jar may seem trivial, but it has far-reaching consequences. This reflects the broader idea that human actions, no matter how small, can profoundly impact the natural world.

Lines 5 - 8

*The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.*

The wilderness is personified as “rising” to the jar, as if it acknowledges or reacts to its presence. This action suggests that the wilderness loses its untamed essence, becoming less “wild” and more subdued under the jar’s silent dominion. The description of the jar as “round upon the ground” contrasts with the unpredictable shapes and forms of the natural world, symbolising the imposition of human order and rationality. The phrase jar’s “of a port in air” implies dignity and importance, elevating the jar to a symbolic pedestal. This dynamic interplay suggests that human creations, even inanimate ones, can exert a profound influence on the natural world as the wilderness, which previously sprawled freely, is now described as “no longer wild,” representing the clash between nature and human artifice.

Nature’s response to the jar illustrates the duality of human influence: it can bring order to chaos but often at the cost of nature’s authenticity. The jar’s elevated status suggests humanity’s tendency to prioritise its creations over the natural world.

Lines 9 - 12

*It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.*

The jar’s dominance over the landscape is established as total, yet its presence is starkly lifeless. The phrase “gray and bare” underscores its sterility and lack of vitality, suggesting that while human creations can dominate nature, they lack its vitality and richness. The jar, as an artificial object, does not contribute to the ecosystem—it does not produce birds, bushes, or anything organic. This lack of life emphasises the disconnect between human creations and the natural world. In Tennessee,

a state known for its lush and diverse landscapes, the jar’s unnatural and static quality makes it “like nothing else,” signifying the alien nature of human intervention in the wilderness. While it stands apart, its dominance highlights humanity’s broader relationship with nature: one marked by intervention and imposition, often at the expense of harmony and integration. The jar’s sterility highlights the limitations of human creations. While they can dominate and reshape, they lack the life-sustaining qualities of nature. This raises questions about the sustainability and ethical implications of humanity’s interventions in the environment.

1.4.3 Analysis

Title and Symbolism

The title, “Anecdote of the Jar”, suggests a simple, seemingly mundane tale, yet it holds layers of symbolic depth. The word “anecdote” hints at a brief but meaningful story, while the jar serves as a central metaphor for human artifice and intervention in nature. Placing the jar in Tennessee introduces the tension between human-made objects and the wilderness, suggesting how even small actions or creations can disrupt and reshape the natural world. The jar’s simplicity and lifelessness make it a stark symbol of humanity’s desire to impose order on chaos.

Structure and Form

The poem is composed of three quatrains written in free verse, which balances the jar’s ordered symbolism and the wilderness’s unruliness. The absence of rhyme or rigid meter mirrors the wilderness’s organic and untamed quality, while the tight, concise stanzas reflect the order imposed by the jar. The poem’s simplicity in structure and diction aligns with its thematic exploration of perception and dominance, allowing readers to focus on the philosophical underpinnings.



Tone and Perspective

The tone of the poem is neutral and contemplative, inviting readers to reflect on the dynamic between the jar and its environment. The speaker's detached voice emphasises observation over judgment, allowing the jar's symbolism to unfold naturally. This objectivity creates space for multiple interpretations, reinforcing the modernist style of the poem. The perspective remains external, focused on the interaction between the jar and the wilderness rather than delving into emotional or moral commentary.

Language and Voice

Stevens employs simple, unadorned language to emphasise the jar's starkness and its transformative impact on the wilderness. Words like "slovenly," "bare," and "gray" create a vivid contrast between the jar's lifelessness and the wilderness's vitality. The use of declarative statements, such as "It took dominion everywhere," highlights the jar's symbolic power without elaboration. This straightforwardness mirrors the jar's simplicity, reinforcing its role as an imposing yet sterile force within the landscape.

1.4.4 Major Themes

Power and Dominion: The jar symbolizes humanity's power to impose order on nature. Its placement on the hill transforms the wilderness, making it "no longer wild." This act of dominance reflects humanity's desire to control and reshape the natural world. However, the jar's sterility suggests that this power is superficial, altering appearances without contributing to nature's vibrancy.

The Anthropocentric Worldview: The poem critiques humanity's anthropocentric perspective, where human creations are seen as central and superior to the natural world. By imposing the jar on the hill, the speaker mir-

rors humanity's broader tendency to prioritise its own constructs over the intrinsic value of nature.

Nature Versus Artifice: The poem explores the tension between the organic, sprawling wilderness and the lifeless, geometric jar. The wilderness embodies vitality, unpredictability, and growth, while the jar represents human intervention, rationality, and order. This juxtaposition raises questions about the consequences of human influence on the natural world and whether such interventions enhance or diminish its intrinsic value.

The Nature of Creation: The jar, as a human creation, symbolizes art and its capacity to redefine how we perceive the world. By placing the jar, the speaker reframes the wilderness, imposing a sense of focus and structure. However, the jar's inability to "give of bird or bush" highlights the limitations of human creations, which often lack the life-sustaining qualities of nature.

Isolation and Alienation: The jar's stark contrast with its surroundings symbolizes the alienation of human creations from the natural world. While it dominates the wilderness, it remains separate and lifeless, unable to integrate or contribute to the ecosystem. This isolation reflects humanity's broader disconnection from nature, raising questions about the sustainability of such a dynamic.

1.4.5 Modernist Perspective

Typical of modernist poetry, "Anecdote of the Jar" embraces ambiguity, offering multiple interpretations. The jar can symbolize human artifice, art, or even civilization itself, depending on the reader's perspective. This openness reflects modernism's focus on subjective experience and interpretation. The poem emphasises how human perception shapes reality. The placement of the jar changes how the wilderness is seen, reflecting the modernist

concern with the interplay between external reality and internal perception.

The poem also subtly critiques the idea of progress and civilization. While the jar brings order to the wilderness, it does so at the cost of vitality and authenticity, questioning whether human intervention truly improves the natural world.

1.4.6 Literary Devices

Symbolism: The jar is the central symbol of the poem, representing human intervention, artifice, and the imposition of order. Its gray, lifeless nature contrasts with the vibrant wilderness, symbolizing the tension between human creations and the natural world.

Personification: The wilderness is personified as “rising up” and “sprawling around” the jar, emphasizing its dynamic and living nature. This personification highlights the im-

pact of the jar’s presence, as the wilderness adjusts to its dominance.

Imagery: Stevens uses vivid imagery to illustrate the jar’s influence. The wilderness is described as “slovenly” and sprawling, evoking a sense of chaos, while the jar is depicted as round, gray, and tall, symbolizing sterility and control.

Juxtaposition: The poem juxtaposes the jar’s lifeless geometry with the wilderness’s organic vitality. This contrast underscores the tension between artifice and nature, inviting readers to reflect on the implications of human intervention.

Free Verse: The use of free verse mirrors the wilderness’s untamed quality, while the structured quatrains reflect the order imposed by the jar. This interplay between form and content reinforces the poem’s central themes.

Recap

- ▶ The poem describes a jar placed by the speaker on a hill in Tennessee, symbolizing human intervention in the natural world.
- ▶ The jar’s roundness and artificiality contrast with the chaotic, sprawling wilderness surrounding it.
- ▶ Its placement transforms the wilderness, which begins to “surround the hill,” losing some of its wild essence.
- ▶ The jar dominates the landscape, exerting an unnatural order on the untamed environment.
- ▶ Described as “gray and bare,” the jar lacks the vitality and life-giving qualities inherent in nature.
- ▶ The jar is sterile and lifeless, incapable of producing birds or bushes, unlike the natural world.
- ▶ The wilderness responds to the jar but remains distinct, emphasizing the disconnection between human creations and nature.
- ▶ Through the jar, Stevens explores the tension between order and chaos, artificiality and organic life.



- ▶ The poem highlights humanity's power to impose structure on nature but questions the value of this control.
- ▶ Ultimately, the jar symbolizes the alienation and sterility of human creations when compared to the vitality of the natural world.

Objective Questions

1. Where is the jar placed in the poem "Anecdote of the Jar"?
2. What word does the speaker use to describe the wilderness before the jar is placed?
3. What does the jar symbolize in the poem?
4. How does the jar affect the wilderness?
5. What does the poem suggest about human creations in nature?
6. Which quality of the jar emphasizes its artificiality?
7. Why is the jar unable to "give of bird or bush"?
8. Which poetic device is used in the phrase "The wilderness rose up to it"?
9. What central theme does the jar represent in the poem?
10. What is the main theme of the poem?

Answers

1. On a hill in Tennessee
2. "Slovenly"
3. Human artifice and intervention
4. It tames and reorganizes the wilderness.
5. They impose order but lack vitality.
6. Its round shape
7. It is a lifeless object incapable of producing life.
8. Personification
9. The alienation of human creations from nature.
10. The relationship between humans and nature

Assignments

1. Analyse the role of the jar as a symbol in “Anecdote of the Jar”. How does it reflect humanity’s relationship with nature?
2. Discuss the theme of order versus chaos in the poem. How does Stevens portray this tension?
3. Compare “Anecdote of the Jar” with other modernist poems that explore the relationship between art and nature.
4. How does the poem reflect the philosophical concerns of modernism? Provide examples from the text.
5. Explore the tone and mood of the poem. How do they contribute to its overall impact?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Stevens, Wallace. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. Alfred A Knopf, 1954
- ▶ Vendler, Helen. *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens’ Longer Poems*. HUP, 1969
- ▶ Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Northwestern University Press



Because I Could Not Stop for Death

- Emily Dickinson

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand the poem “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson
- ▶ learn the unique structure of the poem
- ▶ interpret literary devices from the text

Prerequisites

Before reading Emily Dickinson’s “Because I Could Not Stop for Death”, consider the concept of death and immortality from a philosophical perspective. Reflect on how death is often personified in literature and culture as a gentle guide, a fearsome force, or an inevitable companion. What emotions does the idea of death evoke: fear, acceptance, or curiosity? This poem invites readers to reimagine death not as an end but as a transition, a journey to eternity. Think about how time slows or becomes irrelevant when contemplating mortality. Also, reflect on Dickinson’s characteristic style, her use of paradox, slant rhyme, and unique punctuation—elements that create a meditative, introspective tone.

Keywords

Journey, Death, Mortality, Immortality

1.5.1 Discussion

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was born in a prominent family in Amherst, Massachusetts, and was widely read and given a proper education at the Amherst Academy, which was founded by her ancestors, where she also taught for a few years. A brief part of her life was also spent at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Dickinson was a prolific writer, and during her lifetime, only 10 of her nearly 1800 poems were published, and most of her writings were discovered and published after her death. During her early years, the death of many people close to her affected her deeply physically and mentally, and she spoke of the deepening menace of death. Her poetry manifests that, at some point, she welcomed death as sweet and gentle, only to be moved from this life to the next life.



Fig. 1.5.1 Emily Dickinson

Dickinson's period was shaped by certain political, sociological, Religious and literary movements. At the backdrop of Emily Dickinson's literary scene was a major political event. The American Civil War was fought

during 1861-1865 between the Northern States and the Southern States of America. The practice of slavery was a major political issue during the 19th Century in America. The Main cause of the war was over whether the enslavement of black people in the Southern States should continue. The Northern States of America wanted to put an end to slavery. Still, the Southern states, which had sugar and cotton plantations, wanted enslaved people to work in their fields and saw slavery as an integral part of their system. In the 1860 presidential election, Abraham Lincoln, who led the Republicans, wanted to put an end to slavery, which appeared to the Southern States as a violation of their constitutional rights. This political clash regarding slavery sparked the Civil War in America, which led to a large number of casualties. This war was also one of the industrial wars where technological might was used to achieve military supremacy. In Emily Dickinson's writings, the war imagery is touched upon, and she is well-informed about the events of the war around her through extensive reading of periodicals. Another important event during this period was the social and religious movement called the Great Revival. This religious conviction mandated a recommitment to Jesus Christ and the tenets of Christianity. Dickinson viewed this with a lot of scepticism, though many among her circles took it up with a lot of enthusiasm. Alongside this, a philosophical and literary movement called Transcendentalism took root in America, the central precept of which focused on the divinity of man and his relationship to Nature.

1.5.2 Summary

"Because I Could Not Stop for Death" is a poem of six stanzas divided into sets of four lines called quatrains.

Stanza 1

*"Because I Could Not Stop for Death"
He kindly stopped for me*

*The Carriage held but just Ourselves And
Immortality*

In the opening stanza, the speaker, who is assumed to be a woman, is too busy for death that death stops for her. Death here is seen as a gentlemanly figure who kindly takes her into his carriage and courteously guides the speaker to eternity. There is no fear in this woman, as she sees it as an act of kindness for death to stop for her. The pleasant tone of the poem suggests that the speaker is quite comfortable with death. She climbs the carriage of death, and we see that the speaker is communicating from beyond the grave.

Stanza 2

*We slowly drove
He knew no haste And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too.
For His Civility-*

In the second stanza, we see that the speaker is carried by death. It is quite symbolic of the author's departure from life. Death slowly carries her without any hurry, and the speaker has come to terms with her mortality. She has entered into the carriage with death willingly by putting aside her work and every aspect of her life. Death is patient and treats her with kindness, gently driving her without taking her captive. Once again, personification has been employed in the lines, 'He knew no haste... For His civility'. Death is compared to a gentle and kind person without any hurry.

Stanza 3

*We passed the School
Where Children strove At Recess in the Ring
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain
We passed the Setting Sun*

The speaker is given a few moments to remember her childhood at school as the carriage passes by the school, where children are playing during their recess. After that, they pass by the fields of grazing grain, allowing the speaker to reminisce about the prime of

her life. Driving past the setting sun symbolizes the speaker's death. This journey of passing from life to eternity is portrayed beautifully.

Stanza 4

*Or rather He passed Us-
The Dews drew quivering and Chill – For
only Gossamer, my Gown- My Tippet-only
Tulle –*

Once the sun has set, the speaker realises that she is cold and shivering. She suddenly becomes aware of her delicate clothes. Initially, when the journey starts, she feels comfortable with death and immortality. Still, as the poem progresses, we feel the speaker experiencing a sinister mode as she feels uncomfortable and underdressed in her light clothing, which cannot fend off the cold.

1.5.3 Analysis

In "Because I Could Not Stop for Death", Emily Dickinson personifies Death as a gentleman caller who arrives to escort the speaker on a final journey. The speaker reflects on how Death's arrival was not a sudden, fearful event but a calm, inevitable encounter. The opening lines describe how the speaker was "too busy" with life to pause for Death, yet Death patiently waits and initiates the journey. The carriage ride itself becomes a metaphor for the transition from life to death, moving through various symbolic stages: a school, a grain field, and a setting sun. Each of these images represents stages of human life—childhood, adulthood, and the decline of life—indicating the passage of time. The speaker's calm acceptance of the journey contrasts with the common fear of death, suggesting a different perspective on mortality. As the poem progresses, Dickinson introduces the idea of eternity through the "House" that the speaker reaches at the end, which symbolizes the grave. However, the speaker also hints that death is not an end, as the final line suggests a timeless continuation

of existence, implying that death leads not to oblivion but to an eternal afterlife. Dickinson's exploration of death is not morbid but meditative, offering a nuanced understanding of death as a natural, though inexorable, aspect of human existence. The poem uses a restrained, almost tranquil tone, underlining that death, while inevitable, is not something to be feared but instead accepted as part of the broader cycle of life.

1.5.4 Themes

Mortality and Death: The central theme of the poem is mortality, as Dickinson explores the inevitable arrival of death. Death is not portrayed as a terrifying or violent force but as a quiet, patient figure who comes for the speaker when she is "too busy" with life to stop for him. This approach to death challenges traditional depictions of death as something to fear. Instead, Dickinson emphasises death's inescapability and the idea that it comes when it is time, not before or after. The speaker's acceptance of death's inevitability is conveyed throughout the poem, highlighting the inevitability and naturalness of this aspect of life.

Time and Life's Stages: The poem also touches on the theme of time and how it progresses inexorably toward death. As the speaker travels with Death, they pass through different stages of life represented by vivid images: the "School" (childhood), the "Grain" (adulthood, fertility), and the "Setting Sun" (old age, decline). These images suggest the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life. The mention of these stages in a detached, almost neutral manner reflects how time continues to move forward, with death simply being the final stage of the journey. The speaker does not resist time's passage, which emphasises the idea that life, like death, moves steadily forward without interruption.

Eternity and Immortality: At the end of the poem, the speaker reflects on the eternal nature

of death. The "House" the speaker arrives at symbolises the grave but also signifies a continued existence beyond death. This suggests the idea of immortality, or at least an eternal afterlife. The idea that the journey with Death leads to a home that is "still" and "eternal" reflects Dickinson's contemplation of death as a transition into another, more permanent state. The speaker suggests that the experience of death is not an end but a passage to something that transcends the physical world, implying that death is part of an ongoing, eternal process.

The Inescapability of Death: The poem illustrates that death is not something that can be avoided or postponed indefinitely. The speaker, who was once too busy for death, is now journeying with it. This conveys the idea that death will come to everyone, regardless of whether or not they are ready. The inevitability of death is reinforced by the description of the carriage ride as an unstoppable journey. Dickinson's portrayal of death is not one of violence but of an inevitable, predestined encounter, emphasising the inevitability of this transition.

1.5.5 Literary Devices

Personification: One of the most striking literary devices in the poem is the personification of Death. Rather than being a formless, terrifying abstraction, Death is depicted as a polite, almost gallant figure who comes to escort the speaker. This reimagining of Death as a respectful suitor transforms it from a fearsome event into an inevitable, almost kindly experience. By giving human qualities to Death, Dickinson challenges traditional perceptions of it as a grim, aggressive force.

Imagery: Dickinson uses rich imagery to convey the passage of time and the stages of life. The "School" represents childhood and innocence, while the "Grain" symbolizes maturity, work, and the harvest of life. The "Set-



ting Sun” evokes old age and the waning of life, reinforcing the natural cycle of birth, life, and death. These vivid images draw the reader into the speaker’s journey and emphasise the theme of life’s inevitable progression toward death.

Symbolism: Several elements in the poem serve as symbols for larger concepts. The carriage itself symbolizes the journey toward death, as the speaker is carried along by this means of transport toward her final destination. The “House” at the end of the journey is a symbol of the grave. Yet, it also represents eternal rest or the afterlife, suggesting that death is not merely a conclusion but a transition to a different kind of existence. The passing scenes of the “School,” “Grain,” and “Setting Sun” symbolize the different stages of life, illustrating the inevitable march of time and how death intersects with every stage.

Metaphor: The central metaphor of the poem is the journey with Death. The carriage ride symbolizes the passage from life to death, and the events and scenes along the way reflect the stages of human existence. The “Setting Sun” metaphorically represents the approach of death, marking the end of the day and suggesting the gradual approach to life’s end. The “House” is also a metaphor for the grave,

serving as a final destination in the speaker’s journey.

Alliteration: Dickinson uses alliteration to create a rhythmic flow, enhancing the poem’s tone and structure. Phrases like “We passed the School, where Children strove” provide a smooth, almost melodic quality to the poem, reinforcing the measured, calm journey the speaker is on with Death.

Tone: The tone of the poem is paradoxical—on the one hand, it is calm, serene, and accepting, but on the other, it also conveys an underlying sense of inevitability and finality. The speaker does not fear death but recognizes it as a part of life, an event to be accepted rather than resisted. This tone of quiet acceptance contrasts with the typical cultural portrayal of death as a frightening or traumatic event, offering a more meditative and reflective view of mortality.

Rhyme Scheme and Meter: The poem follows a regular quatrain structure with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter. This regular meter reflects the steady, unhurried pace of the speaker’s journey with Death. The rhyme scheme is ABAB, which further contributes to the rhythmic, almost ritualistic tone of the poem, reinforcing the idea that death is part of a natural, inevitable order.

Recap

- ▶ Emily Dickinson’s “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” personifies Death as a polite suitor who comes to escort the speaker on a journey toward the afterlife.
- ▶ The speaker reflects that she was “too busy” with life to stop for Death, but Death patiently waits for her when the time comes.
- ▶ The journey takes place in a carriage, symbolising the transition from life to death, and the scenes along the way represent stages of life.
- ▶ The “School” symbolises childhood, the “Grain” represents adulthood, and

the “Setting Sun” indicates old age and the approach of death.

- ▶ As they travel, the speaker realizes that Death is a natural part of life, not something to be feared but accepted.
- ▶ The destination, referred to as a “House,” represents the grave, but it also implies an eternal existence beyond death.
- ▶ The poem suggests that death is not an end but a transition to an afterlife or eternity.
- ▶ Dickinson’s use of calm, patient imagery and personification of Death conveys the inevitability and peaceful acceptance of mortality.

Objective Questions

1. What literary device does Emily Dickinson use to describe Death in “Because I Could Not Stop for Death”?
2. What does the “School” represent in the poem?
3. What is the significance of the “Grain” in the journey with Death?
4. How does the poem portray the passage of time?
5. What does the “Setting Sun” symbolize in the poem?
6. What does the “House” at the end of the poem symbolize?
7. What is the central theme of the poem “Because I Could Not Stop for Death”?
8. How does the tone of the poem change as the speaker progresses through the journey?
9. How is death personified in the poem, and what effect does this have on its portrayal?
10. What message does Dickinson convey about the relationship between life and death?

Answers

1. Emily Dickinson personifies Death as a courteous suitor in the poem.
2. The “School” symbolizes childhood or innocence in the speaker’s journey.
3. The “Grain” represents adulthood, productivity, and maturity.
4. The poem portrays the passage of time through imagery of the stages of life (childhood, adulthood, old age) and the journey toward death.



5. The “Setting Sun” symbolizes the decline of life, old age, and the approach to death.
6. The “House” symbolizes the grave or the final resting place but also suggests eternity or the afterlife.
7. The central theme is the inevitability of death and the peaceful acceptance of it as a natural part of life.
8. The tone starts calm and contemplative, then becomes more reflective and resigned as the journey progresses, ultimately accepting death.
9. Death is personified as a polite, patient suitor, which makes it appear as a natural and inevitable part of life, not something to fear.
10. Dickinson suggests that death is not an end but a continuation of existence, part of the natural cycle of life.

Assignments

1. How does Dickinson’s portrayal of Death in “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” differ from traditional depictions of death in literature?
2. Explain the significance of the poem’s conclusion. What is the final message Dickinson conveys about life and death?
3. Discuss the theme of immortality in “Because I Could Not Stop for Death.” How does the poem suggest a life beyond death?
4. How does Emily Dickinson’s “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” challenge the conventional understanding of death as a fearful or tragic event?
5. In what ways does the poem suggest that the speaker’s journey with Death is not just physical but also a metaphor for the broader human experience of mortality?

Suggested Reading

- Miller, Cristanne. *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the 19th Century*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.
- Franklin, R.W. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and The American Sublime*. Oxford University Press, 2015.



When I Hid My Caste

- Baburao Bagul

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ gain a nuanced understanding of the caste system and its socio-political implications
- ▶ appreciate Baburao Bagul's literary style and his contributions to Dalit literature
- ▶ analyse the themes of identity, dignity, and resistance in the essay "When I Hid My Caste"
- ▶ examine the intersection of personal narratives and systemic oppression
- ▶ reflect on the relevance of Bagul's essay in contemporary discussions on caste, privilege, and social justice

Prerequisites

The caste system is a traditional social hierarchy that divides people into rigid categories based on birth and often dictates their social, economic, and political roles. At the bottom of this system are the Dalits, previously referred to as "untouchables," who have historically faced severe discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion. This deeply entrenched system persists in many parts of India despite legal frameworks that outlaw caste-based discrimination. Dalits have been subjected to social and economic exclusion for centuries. They were denied access to education, basic rights, and even public spaces, such as wells or temples. Caste-based violence and prejudice are still widespread in rural and urban India, affecting Dalits in all spheres of life. The protagonist in Bagul's story embodies the trauma and survival mechanisms of a Dalit navigating a world where caste determines one's worth and opportunities.

This unit explores Baburao Bagul's essay "When I Hid My Caste," one of the pioneering voices of Dalit literature. This autobiographical essay examines the psychological and social dimensions of caste oppression in India. Bagul's narrative is both intensely per-



sonal and profoundly political, offering a scathing critique of the entrenched caste system while reflecting on the internal struggles of individuals who navigate its harsh realities. Through this essay, Bagul provides a compelling account of how caste-based discrimination shapes identity, social relationships, and opportunities. By recounting a moment where he chose to hide his caste to escape humiliation, Bagul lays bare the cost of survival in a deeply stratified society. At the same time, he highlights the importance of reclaiming one's identity as an act of resistance and empowerment.

Keywords

Discrimination, Caste, Social Inequality, Untouchability

Discussion

1.6.1 Introduction

Baburao Bagul was one of the pioneering Dalit writers in Marathi literature. He used his writing to critique the systemic oppression faced by Dalits and bring attention to their struggles. Bagul was part of the Dalit Panther Movement in the 1970s, which sought to address caste-based discrimination through literature and activism. His works often depict the harsh realities of Dalit life and challenge the cultural narratives that sustain caste inequality.

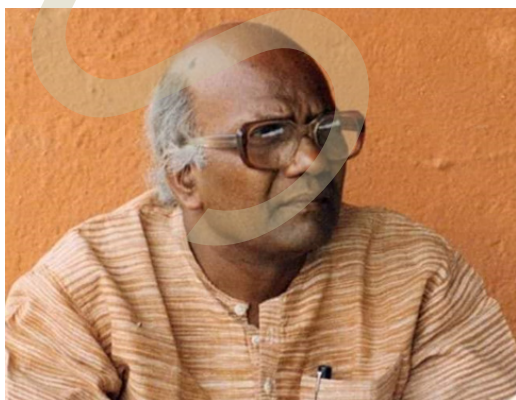


Fig. 1.6.1 Baburao Bagul

"When I Hid My Caste" is one of the most evocative and impactful essays in Indian Dalit literature. Written by Baburao Bagul, a prominent Dalit writer and social activist, it narrates a moment of deep internal conflict and societal critique. Bagul recounts an incident in which he concealed his caste identity to avoid discrimination, a decision that left him grappling with feelings of guilt, shame, and self-betrayal.

Set against the backdrop of a caste-dominated society, the essay is both a personal confession and a political statement. Bagul uses his lived experience to expose the dehumanizing effects of caste discrimination, critiquing the systemic inequalities that deny marginalized communities their dignity and humanity.

The essay is emblematic of Dalit literature's mission to challenge oppressive structures and amplify the voices of the oppressed. It is not merely a recounting of an event but a call to action, urging readers to confront the harsh realities of caste and work toward a more just and egalitarian society. It is a deeply personal yet profoundly political essay that lays bare the realities of caste-based discrimination in India. Through his narrative, Bagul not only critiques the caste system but also emphasizes

es the importance of reclaiming one's identity and dignity as a form of resistance. The essay is a powerful reminder of the resilience of marginalized communities and a call to action for a more just and equitable society. The Dalit community has been grappling with the dilemma of caste identity for centuries. On the one hand, Dalits have been forced to hide or downplay their caste to avoid discrimination, while on the other, a growing movement among Dalits advocates for embracing and celebrating their identity. Kashinath, the character in the story who proudly acknowledges his caste, symbolizes this new form of resistance against caste shame. The story explores the internal conflict that Dalits often face: whether to hide their identity for personal security or to challenge the system and risk retaliation. The story critiques the illusion of social mobility within a caste-divided society. The protagonist, who is trying to build a career in the railways, is initially allowed to live and work without the constraints of his caste. However, as soon as his caste is revealed, he is reminded that caste, rather than merit or ability, defines his place in society. This reflects a broader critique of caste-based barriers that continue to exist, even in modern, ostensibly neutral environments like workplaces. The protagonist's decision to conceal his caste reflects a survival mechanism, a way to avoid the psychological and social trauma of caste-based violence. However, the eventual discovery of his caste exposes the deep scars left by such discrimination. The story explores the internal conflict that Dalits often face: whether to hide their identity for personal security or to challenge the system and risk retaliation.

1.6.2 Summary

“When I Hid My Caste” explores the experiences of an unnamed Dalit protagonist navigating the pervasive caste system in India. The protagonist secures employment with the railways in Gujarat, where, in an attempt to

evade caste-based discrimination, he decides to hide his Dalit identity. At first, his decision seems to pay off, as his colleagues treat him with respect and camaraderie, unaware of his caste background. This temporary escape from prejudice gives him a glimpse of a life unburdened by social hierarchies, a privilege he has rarely experienced. However, the veneer of acceptance is shattered when his caste is inadvertently revealed. The revelation sparks outrage among his upper-caste colleagues, who immediately ostracize him, refusing to share food or even interact with him. The hostility escalates into physical violence, illustrating the ingrained hatred and fear of caste equality in the minds of the privileged castes.

Amid this hostility, Kashinath, another Dalit worker, emerges as a pivotal character. Unlike the protagonist, Kashinath does not hide his caste. Instead, he confronts discrimination with defiance and pride, embodying the resilience and dignity of the Dalit struggle for equality. Kashinath intervenes during the protagonist's assault, risking his own safety to protect him. This act of solidarity underscores the importance of collective resistance against systemic oppression and highlights the internal strength required to combat entrenched social injustices. Through Kashinath, the story critiques the notion of concealing one's identity as a means of survival, suggesting that such strategies often perpetuate the very systems of oppression they seek to escape.

The narrative poignantly mirrors historical and personal experiences, notably those of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who faced similar caste-based discrimination while working in Baroda. By invoking such parallels, Bagul emphasizes the enduring nature of caste oppression and the persistent challenges faced by Dalits in asserting their humanity and dignity. The story also sheds light on the psychological toll of hiding one's identity. The protagonist's initial relief transforms into guilt and shame



as he grapples with the moral implications of his decision. His internal conflict reflects the broader struggle of Dalits in a society that forces them to choose between survival and self-respect. This duality is further complicated by the betrayal of trust and camaraderie he initially experienced with his colleagues, who quickly turn against him once his caste is exposed.

Bagul's unflinching portrayal of caste violence is matched by his nuanced exploration of Dalit resilience. The protagonist's eventual realization that hiding his caste only perpetuates systemic inequalities serves as a call to action for Dalits to assert their identity and demand their rightful place in society. The story's raw and visceral prose captures the everyday realities of caste oppression, challenging readers to confront their own biases and assumptions. It also critiques the complicity of the privileged castes in maintaining oppressive structures, urging them to acknowledge and dismantle their own prejudices.

"When I Hid My Caste" is more than a tale of personal struggle; it is a searing indictment of a society built on exclusion and inequality. Bagul uses the protagonist's experience to expose the moral and ethical bankruptcy of the caste system, emphasizing the urgent need for social transformation. Through its vivid characters, stark realism, and profound empathy, the story resonates as a timeless critique of systemic injustice and a powerful call for human dignity and equality.

1.6.3 Analysis

1. Themes of Identity and Stigma

At the heart of Bagul's essay is the theme of identity and the stigma associated with caste. Concealing his caste identity reveals the psychological toll of living in a society that devalues individuals based on their birth. Bagul's narrative captures the internal conflict

between the need for survival and the desire for self-respect.

The essay also highlights the concept of internalized oppression, where individuals from marginalized communities internalize societal prejudices, leading to feelings of inferiority and shame. Bagul's decision to hide his caste is a manifestation of this internalized oppression, reflecting the profound impact of systemic discrimination on personal identity.

2. Critique of the Caste System

Bagul's essay is a scathing critique of the caste system and its dehumanizing effects on individuals and communities. He exposes the ways in which caste hierarchies shape every aspect of life, from social interactions to access to education and employment. The essay highlights how caste discrimination perpetuates inequality, depriving marginalized groups of their dignity and basic rights. Through his narrative, Bagul challenges the notion of caste as a natural or immutable social order. He portrays it as a man-made system of oppression that must be dismantled to achieve social justice.

3. Intersection of Personal and Political

One of Bagul's essay's strengths is its ability to seamlessly blend the personal and the political. While the narrative is rooted in Bagul's personal experience, it also serves as a broader critique of the caste system and its impact on Indian society. By centring his lived experience, Bagul underscores the systemic nature of caste oppression and its far-reaching consequences.

4. Reclamation of Identity

The essay concludes with a powerful affirmation of Dalit identity. Bagul's decision to embrace his caste, despite the stigma attached to it, is an act of defiance against the oppressive social order. This reclamation of identity is not just a personal act but a political state-

ment, reflecting the broader Dalit movement's emphasis on dignity, pride, and resistance.

Bagul's narrative resonates beyond its immediate context, addressing universal themes of dignity, justice, and resistance. The essay

challenges readers to confront their own biases and reflect on the structural inequalities that shape society. It is a call to action, urging individuals and communities to work toward a more just and equitable world.

Recap

- ▶ Baburao Bagul's story "When I Hid My Caste" highlights the struggles of a Dalit protagonist who conceals his caste identity to avoid discrimination in his workplace in Gujarat.
- ▶ Initially, the protagonist enjoys camaraderie and respect from his upper-caste colleagues, as they are unaware of his Dalit background.
- ▶ The revelation of his caste, however, leads to immediate ostracisation and violent backlash from his coworkers.
- ▶ The protagonist's experience reflects the deeply ingrained caste prejudices that persist even in professional settings.
- ▶ Kashinath, a fellow Dalit worker who openly acknowledges his caste, intervenes to protect the protagonist from a violent attack.
- ▶ Kashinath's defiance and pride in his identity contrast sharply with the protagonist's attempt to conceal his caste, showcasing two different approaches to confronting systemic oppression.
- ▶ The story draws parallels to historical incidents, such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's struggles with caste discrimination, to emphasize the broader societal implications.
- ▶ The protagonist's internal conflict, guilt, and eventual realisation underscore the psychological toll of hiding one's identity.
- ▶ Bagul critiques the caste system and suggests that concealing identity only perpetuates the inequalities it seeks to escape.
- ▶ Through its raw and unflinching narrative, the story powerfully reflects on caste-based oppression and the need for dignity, pride, and resistance among marginalized communities.

Objective Questions

1. What is the central theme of the story "When I Hid My Caste"?
2. Where does the protagonist work in the story?



3. Why does the protagonist hide his caste identity?
4. Who helps the protagonist during the violent attack by his colleagues?
5. What emotion does the protagonist feel after hiding his caste?
6. What does Kashinath represent in the story?
7. What happens after the protagonist's caste is revealed?
8. What literary device is predominantly used in the story?
9. What aspect of Dalit life does the story emphasize?
10. What ultimate realization does the protagonist come to?

Answers

1. Caste discrimination
2. Railways in Gujarat
3. To escape from caste discrimination
4. Kashinath, a fellow Dalit worker
5. Guilt and shame
6. Rebellion and Dalit pride
7. He is ostracized and attacked
8. Symbolism
9. The psychological toll of caste oppression
10. That concealing identity perpetuates the caste system

Assignments

1. Discuss the psychological conflict Bagul experiences in concealing his caste. How does it reflect the larger societal issue of caste discrimination?
2. Analyze Bagul's critique of the caste system in "When I Hid My Caste". How does his narrative expose systemic inequalities?
3. Compare Bagul's narrative with other works of Dalit literature in terms of themes and style.
4. How does "When I Hid My Caste" challenge dominant narratives about caste in Indian society?
5. Explore the role of identity and self-respect in Bagul's essay. How does his narrative align with the broader Dalit movement?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Bāgula, Bāburāva, and Pinto, Jerry. *When I Hid My Caste: Stories*. India, Speaking Tiger, 2018.
- ▶ Mangubhai, Jayshree P. & Joel G. Lee (editors). *Dalit Women Speak Out: Caste, Class and Gender Violence in India*. N.p., Zubaan, 2012.
- ▶ Gurawa, Anju & Ashish Gautam. “How caste hides in a caste-ridden society: Dalit aesthetics and politics in Baburao Bagul’s *When I Hid My Caste*.” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Trends*, 2023; 5(2), 38-44. <https://www.multisubjectjournal.com/archives/2023.v5.i2.A.261>

BLOCK - 02

Introducing Literary Texts: 2



The Adventure of the Dancing Men - Arthur Conan Doyle

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ appreciate Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" as part of mystery fiction
- ▶ understand the characteristics and style of detective fiction
- ▶ analyse the use of cryptography to produce literary meaning in the mystery genre

Prerequisites

"The Adventure of the Dancing Men" by Arthur Conan Doyle is one of the short stories in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* series, featuring the iconic detective Sherlock Holmes and his companion Dr. Watson. To fully appreciate the story, it is helpful to understand the Victorian era's fascination with cryptography, mystery, and logic, as well as the character of Holmes himself—a master of deduction and observation. The story revolves around a seemingly innocent series of coded messages in the form of dancing stick figures, which leads to a tale of intrigue, danger, and hidden connections. Understanding Holmes's methodical approach to problem-solving and the importance of seemingly trivial clues is essential to following the plot and appreciating the clever resolution. Additionally, the story reflects themes of love, jealousy, and the consequences of past secrets, making it both a gripping mystery and a character-driven narrative.

Keywords

Sherlock Holmes, Mystery, Murder, Cipher



2.1.1 Discussion

When language is altered in some way or another, it can become a code that hides meaning. It, thus, becomes a code or a cipher. Though used synonymously, codes and ciphers are not the same. Codes and ciphers are part of a practice known as cryptography. It is the method by which an ordinary text is made incomprehensible and vice-versa. Or, in simpler terms, it is the altering of ordinary language to hide meaning that can be retrieved later only by the intended persons.



Fig. 2.1.1 Arthur Conan Doyle
(Portrait BEF 1904)

What has literature in common with cryptography? Both use alterations in language to produce meaning. In literature, the authors use literary language (with imagery, symbols, literary devices, and techniques) that can contain the meaning that the readers would understand, meanwhile making the process of reading an enjoyable exercise. As in cryptography, the author encrypts the meaning in literary

language which the reader can decipher. Apart from this similarity, literature makes explicit use of cryptography in some of its forms- especially in the genre of mystery fiction. Mystery fiction has several subgenres, and we need to concentrate on detective fiction. The story we are about to discuss is a part of detective fiction and features Sherlock Holmes, the most famous detective character ever created. Before we move any further, it is important to discuss the person who created Sherlock Holmes. Arthur Conan Doyle was a 19th-century British author and physician who is known for the character he created- Sherlock Holmes. Apart from detective fiction, science fiction, and fantasy, he also penned plays, poetry, humour, non-fiction and historical fiction. He wrote when detective fiction was still in its infancy. Sherlock Holmes first appeared in 1887 and was featured in a total of four novels and 56 short stories. He is known for his skills in observation, deduction, reasoning and forensics. A private detective who lives at 221B Baker Street with Dr Watson, he is portrayed as having an affinity towards addictive drugs and indifference towards womankind. Watson, who mostly functions as the narrator of the stories, assists him in his cases and is the detective's best friend and biographer.

2.1.2 Summary

The story begins with Sherlock Holmes being visited by Mr. Hilton Cubitt, a gentleman from the English countryside, who is deeply troubled by mysterious occurrences at his home. Cubitt's wife, Elsie, who is American, has been receiving strange drawings—figures of dancing men—on scraps of paper that are left around the house. These drawings are of stick figures in different poses, and Cubitt has no idea what they mean. The drawings seem to be connected to his wife's past, and he fears that someone is trying to intimidate her. Cubitt, believing that the drawings are some

secret code, turns to Holmes for help. Holmes, along with his faithful companion Dr. Watson, agrees to investigate. Upon reviewing the drawings, Holmes quickly realises that they are a form of cypher, a cryptic code used for communication. However, the meaning of the code remains unclear at this point, so Holmes sets out to decipher it. Holmes and Watson travel to the Cubitts' home in the countryside to investigate further. They find that Elsie is acting unusually nervous and uneasy, and her behaviour becomes more suspicious as the investigation progresses. She tries to explain away the drawings, but it becomes evident that they are more than random scribbles. Holmes surmises that the dancing men are part of a message from someone connected to Elsie's past. As Holmes works to crack the code, he uncovers that Elsie was once involved with a man named Jacobs, an American who had been a part of a criminal gang. The drawings are part of a warning system that Jacobs and his associates used to communicate. This information causes Holmes to realise that Elsie is in danger, as Jacobs is trying to reconnect with her. The tension builds as the story nears its climax. Cubitt, unaware of the full scope of the situation, is increasingly distressed by his wife's odd behaviour and the drawings. One day, he confronts her about the drawings, and she becomes panicked. In a tragic turn of events, Elsie, fearing for her safety and that of her husband, accidentally shoots and kills him. Holmes uncovers the truth behind the dancing men's drawings, realising they are not just a cryptic message but a warning from Elsie's past. He reveals that Jacobs, who had been using the drawings to communicate with her, had intended to harm her. Elsie's desperate attempt to protect her husband and herself led to her tragic actions.

The story concludes with Elsie's arrest, though it is clear that she acted out of fear and desperation, not malice. Holmes's investiga-

tion solves the mystery, but it highlights the destructive impact of unresolved pasts and the ways in which fear can drive people to make tragic decisions.

2.1.3 Characters

Sherlock Holmes: As always, Holmes is a brilliant detective who relies on his powers of observation, logic, and deduction. In this case, he quickly deduces that the dancing men's drawings are a code and sets out to break it. His calm and methodical nature allows him to uncover the truth behind the mystery.

Dr. Watson: Watson acts as a narrator and foil to Holmes, offering a more grounded and empathetic perspective. He is loyal to Holmes and often admires his friend's ability to solve complex problems. In this story, Watson's perspective provides an emotional lens to the case, particularly in his sympathy for the victim.

Hilton Cubitt: The central character's husband is a well-meaning, though somewhat gullible, man. His sense of loyalty and love for his wife leads to his tragic death. He is deeply concerned about the strange drawings and his wife's actions but is ultimately powerless to prevent the outcome.

Elsie Cubitt: The wife of Hilton Cubitt, Elsie is a tragic figure who is haunted by her past. She is initially seen as a mysterious figure whose behaviour triggers Holmes's investigation. Her past involvement with a man named Jacobs and the dangers he poses lead her to make fateful decisions that result in her husband's death.

2.1.4 Themes

The Power of the Past: The story explores how the past, particularly unresolved issues and relationships, can haunt and influence individuals in the present. Elsie's past with Jacobs and the subsequent fear of exposure affect her actions and lead to tragic conse-



quences.

Code and Communication: The mystery revolves around a cryptic code — the dancing stick figures. This emphasises the theme of hidden messages and the complex ways in which people communicate. It also reflects the detective genre's fascination with puzzles and deciphering mysteries.

Jealousy and Obsession: The destructive force of jealousy and obsession is evident in Hilton and Elsie's actions. Hilton's obsessive

concern for his wife and her past leads to his downfall, and Elsie's obsession with keeping her past secret drives her to kill.

Tragic Fate: The story has an underlying theme of fate and inevitability. Despite Holmes's intervention and logical deductions, the sad events unfold due to the characters' pasts and the decisions they make, suggesting that some outcomes are unavoidable.

Recap

- ▶ Mr. Hilton Cubitt seeks Sherlock Holmes's help after finding mysterious drawings of dancing stick figures around his home.
- ▶ The drawings seem to be a code, and Cubitt fears they are connected to his wife Elsie's past.
- ▶ Holmes and Watson investigate, and Holmes quickly realises that the dancing men are part of a cipher.
- ▶ Elsie, an American woman, becomes increasingly nervous and evasive, suggesting a deeper connection to the drawings.
- ▶ Holmes deduces that the dancing men are a warning system used by Elsie's former lover, Jacobs, a criminal from her past.
- ▶ The drawings appear in various locations, suggesting that someone is attempting to communicate with Elsie, possibly threatening her.
- ▶ Cubitt, unaware of the full context, becomes distressed by his wife's behaviour and confronts her about the drawings.
- ▶ In a moment of panic, Elsie accidentally shoots and kills her husband, fearing for her safety.
- ▶ Holmes uncovers the truth that Jacobs used the drawings to communicate, and Elsie's past with him was the cause of the conflict.
- ▶ The story ends with Elsie's tragic actions being revealed as a desperate attempt to protect herself, and she is arrested.

Objective Questions

1. What is the main reason Mr. Hilton Cubitt seeks Sherlock Holmes's help in "The Adventure of the Dancing Men"?
2. What type of code is central to the mystery in the story?

3. Who is Elsie Cubitt, and what is her role in the story?
4. What does Holmes immediately recognise about the drawings of the dancing men?
5. Who is Jacobs, and what is his connection to Elsie?
6. How does Holmes crack the code of the dancing men's drawings?
7. What is Elsie's emotional state throughout the story?
8. How does Mr. Hilton Cubitt react when he learns about the drawings?
9. What tragic event occurs as a result of the tension surrounding the drawings?
10. How does Holmes reveal the truth behind the dancing men's drawings in the end?

Answers

1. Mr. Hilton Cubitt seeks Sherlock Holmes's help because he is concerned about strange drawings of dancing men found around his home, which seem to be linked to his wife's past.
2. The mystery revolves around a cipher made up of dancing stick figures.
3. Elsie Cubitt is Hilton Cubitt's wife, whose past with a criminal named Jacobs becomes central to the mystery.
4. Holmes recognises that the drawings are not random but part of a code or cipher.
5. Jacobs is a man from Elsie's past who is involved in criminal activities and uses the drawings to communicate with her.
6. Holmes cracks the code by carefully analysing the dancing men's figures, which turn out to represent letters and words.
7. Elsie is nervous, fearful, and evasive throughout the story, clearly troubled by the drawings and the threat from her past.
8. Mr. Hilton Cubitt becomes increasingly distressed and confused, suspecting his wife's involvement in the mystery, but he remains unaware of the full context.
9. In a moment of panic, Elsie shoots and kills her husband, fearing for both her life and his due to the threat from Jacobs.
10. Holmes reveals that the dancing men's drawings were a warning from Elsie's past, used by Jacobs, and that Elsie killed her husband in a desperate attempt to protect them both.

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of past relationships in shaping the events in “The Adventure of the Dancing Men.” How does Elsie Cubitt’s past impact the story’s outcome?
2. Analyze the significance of the dancing men cipher. What does it represent in the context of communication, secrecy, and danger?
3. How does Sherlock Holmes’s method of investigation reflect the themes of logic and reason in the story? Compare this with the emotional responses of other characters like Elsie and Hilton Cubitt.
4. Examine the tragic elements of “The Adventure of the Dancing Men.” How does the story explore the consequences of fear, obsession, and misunderstanding?
5. The story portrays a complex relationship between Elsie Cubitt and her past. How do her actions and motivations reflect the broader theme of personal guilt and its repercussions in the narrative?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*. The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes, George Newnes Ltd, 1927.
- ▶ Sutherland, John. *The Sherlock Holmes Companion: An Encyclopedia*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- ▶ Innes, Brian. *The Detective’s World: The Evolution of Detective Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 2017.



The Looking Glass

- Kamala Das

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ analyse the themes of gender, desire and loneliness in “The Looking Glass.”
- ▶ interpret Kamala Das's poetic style, including her use of vivid imagery and confessional tone.
- ▶ evaluate the feminist perspective reflected in the poem and its impact on societal norms regarding relationships and sexuality.

Prerequisites

Before engaging with “The Looking Glass”, reflect on societal expectations surrounding relationships and the gender roles often assigned to women. Imagine a woman standing before a mirror with her partner, observing the physical contrasts between them. How do these differences shape the dynamics of their relationship? How does the act of “giving oneself” emotionally and physically to another affect one’s sense of identity? Kamala Das challenges conventional notions of love, desire and emotional dependence, compelling us to explore the complexities of intimacy, the fragility of the male ego and the enduring loneliness that often accompanies emotional vulnerability. As you read the poem, consider the ways in which societal norms shape the experiences of women and their relationships with men.

Keywords

Gender, Desire, Sexuality, Loneliness, Relationship, Feminism



2.2.1 Discussion



Fig. 2.2.1 Kamala Das

Kamala Das, familiar to Keralites as Madhavikutty, was renowned for her exceptional writing in both English and Malayalam languages. She shocked the Indian literary milieu of the 60s with an unprecedented frankness in writing. She wrote in English and Malayalam and was fluent in Hindi. In her poem “An Introduction”, Kamala Das said, “I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one.” Even though Kamala Das’ poetic contributions are comparatively limited in the English language, whatever she has written is outstanding literature that has impacted modern Indian poetry in English. She had the legacy of Literature as she was the daughter of the famous Malayalam poet Nalapat Balamani Amma and the grandniece of Nalapat Narayana Menon. The influence of these renowned writers, combined with access to a great number of literary works early in her childhood, helped her to hone her skills and develop an inclination towards writing. Controversies haunted Kamala Das throughout her career. Her conversion to Islam and subsequent name change into Kamala Surayya in 1999 created an uproar in Kerala. Despite all that, she was

a natural at her craft, and her exceptional talent landed her a place on the shortlist of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. Her poetry was so intensely personal, intimate and searing with emotions that it earned her comparisons with American confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Ann Sexton. We can observe a strong female perspective and a clear sense of self in all her poems. This form of writing was revolutionary and unheard of before her time. It won’t be an exaggeration if we say that she introduced Indian readers to the concept of female sexuality. However, the unrestrained way in which she talks about desire often leads people to think that her writing is all about ‘sex.’ But her writing is about the volatility of human emotions, love, loneliness, complexity of the self, yearning for security, guilt and much more.

“The Looking Glass”, taken from her collection *The Descendants*, offers a candid exploration of gender dynamics and women's emotional and physical vulnerabilities. Through its unapologetic tone and raw imagery, the poem challenges traditional notions of femininity, masculinity, and love, presenting a poignant commentary on the complexities of human relationships.

2.2.2 Summary

Lines 1-6

*“Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself as the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier.”*

In the opening lines, Kamala Das introduces the theme of gender dynamics by addressing women directly. She presents the act of seduction as simple, requiring only honesty about one’s desires. The image of standing naked before the mirror symbolises vulnera-

bility and the societal expectations placed on women to emphasise their softness, youth and beauty. The suggestion that a man “believes himself the stronger one” reflects the poet’s subtle critique of the male ego, which thrives on comparison and validation.

Lines 7-14

*“Admit your admiration. Notice the perfection
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
The shower, the shy walk across the bathroom
floor,
Dropping towels and the jerky way he
Urinate. All the fond details that make
Him male and your only man.”*

Here, the poet advises women to admire and affirm their partner's physical attributes. By focusing on the man’s body and habits, Kamala Das highlights the male need for affirmation and uniqueness. The details, ranging from his “reddening eyes” to his “jerky way” of urinating, paint an unembellished and intimate portrait of masculinity, unmasking its inherent fragility.

Lines 15-20

*“Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the
breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all
your
Endless female hungers.”*

In this stanza, the poet emphasises the act of giving as central to a woman’s identity. She lists the physical and sensual aspects of femininity, the fragrance of hair, the warmth of menstrual blood, and unending desires as gifts that define a woman’s role in a relationship. The imagery is raw and unfiltered, reflecting Kamala Das’ bold approach to exploring female sexuality.

Lines 21-28

*“Oh yes, getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterwards may have to be
Faced. A living without life when you move
Around, meeting strangers, with your eyes
that
Gave up their search, with ears that hear
only
His last voice calling out your name.”*

Das shifts from the initial act of seduction to the aftermath of emotional dependence. She explores the desolation a woman feels when the man she built her world around is no longer present. The recurring motif of “living without life” captures the hollowness of such an existence, where memories of the man overshadow all else.

Lines 29-33

*“...and your
Body which once under his touch had gleamed
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute.”*

The concluding lines reinforce the theme of loss and loneliness. The woman’s body, once radiant under the man’s touch, now feels dull and abandoned. The metaphor of “burnished brass” conveys the fleeting nature of passion and the deep emotional scars left behind by unfulfilled love.

2.2.3 Analysis

“The Looking Glass” is a poem taken from Kamala Das’ poetry compilation titled *The Descendants*. In this poem, Kamala Das is giving sexual advice to fellow women. She doesn’t shy away from explicitly talking about how to make a man feel good. This poem boldly explores the raw truth about male and female bodies, desires, women’s emotional and physical dependence on men and lastly, the loneliness which we will suffer in the absence of a man. Quite obviously addressing the women,



the poet says that making a man fall in love with you is easy because all you have to do is to be forthright about your womanly sexual desires. She goes on and advises the woman to stand nude in front of the mirror with the man so that he can see the contrast between the male and female bodies. The woman would seem soft, young and lovely, while the man would look strong. A woman has to admire his body openly, and the poet paints an erotic picture of how it should be done. She tells us to start with his limbs and appreciate their perfection. Then, notice the way his eyes redden while he is in the shower. You have to observe his shy walk and the way he strips his towel, and you have to admire the peculiar way in which he urinates. A woman has to appreciate all those aspects that make a man feel as masculine as possible, and that too in a monogamous way. The man has to feel that he is the only man for the woman. She is subtly poking fun at the male ego. She is insinuating that a woman should do all those things which keep a man's fragile ego secure. She tells the women that another way to entice a man and captivate his love is to gift him all those feminine qualities that make you a woman, like the fragrance of your hair and the musky scent of your sweaty breasts. The warmth of the woman's menstrual blood will shock him, and lastly, the woman should gift him with ceaseless female sexual desires. That's how easy it is to make a man fall in love with you, but the hard part is to live a life without him. Here, the poet is shedding light on how a woman whose world revolves around a single man can face challenges once he is gone from her life. It is hard for a woman to move on from a man if she has experienced these intimate and pleasure-filled moments with him. Her eyes will search for him in every stranger that she meets. Her ears will yearn for his voice calling her name, and without his touch, her body will feel unalluring and drab. The irony of the women's situation is quite clear. They

seek love and end up receiving lust along with an exhausted body and a broken spirit. The poem ends on a lonely note and reminds us of the plight of an ordinary woman in our society without companionship.

2.2.4 Major Themes

Gender and Power Dynamics: The poem critiques the imbalance in relationships where women are expected to validate male strength and dominance. By standing “nude before the glass” with their partner, women are advised to highlight their softness, beauty, and vulnerability while reinforcing the man's sense of power and masculinity. Kamala Das exposes how societal norms place the burden on women to nurture the male ego, catering to his need to feel superior and irreplaceable. The phrase “so that he sees himself the stronger one” reveals the societal expectation of male dominance and female submissiveness in relationships.

Female Desire and Sexuality: Das openly celebrates female sexuality, acknowledging the natural desires of women and their physical allure as integral to their identity. However, the poet also critiques how these aspects of femininity are often commodified or used to feed the male ego. Through vivid imagery, “the musk of sweat between the breasts” and “the warm shock of menstrual blood”, Das reclaims the physicality of women, making their bodies not a site of shame but one of power and vitality.

Loneliness and Loss: The poem addresses the emotional devastation women face when relationships, which they have invested in emotionally and physically, come to an end. Kamala Das describes a woman's “living without life,” emphasising how a partner's absence leaves her hollow, searching for echoes of the past in strangers and yearning for the intimacy and validation she once received. The metaphor of the body “drab and destitute”

contrasts the earlier vibrancy of the woman under her partner's touch, reflecting the profound emotional and physical void created by his departure.

Feminism and Critique of Patriarchy: Das critiques the patriarchal notion that women must shape their identities around male desires. The poem's candid tone challenges traditional gender roles and presents the struggles of women navigating a world where their worth is often defined by their relationships with men. By subtly mocking the fragility of the male ego, the poet encourages women to see beyond societal expectations and confront the realities of emotional and physical dependence.

Love as a Paradox: The poem explores the contradictory nature of love. While it is portrayed as something fulfilling and passionate, it also becomes a source of pain and disillusionment. The poem exposes how women, in seeking love and intimacy, often find themselves consumed by the emotional cost of these relationships, leaving them "destitute" and broken when love fades or is unreciprocated.

2.2.5 Key Literary Devices

Imagery: Das uses explicit, sensory imagery to vividly depict intimacy and its aftermath. These images evoke raw emotions, creating a stark contrast between physical closeness and emotional desolation.

Example: "The musk of sweat between the breasts" evokes sensuality, while "body... now drab and destitute" conveys emptiness and loss.

The vivid depiction of male vulnerability, "the jerky way he urinates,"—humanises men, revealing their ordinariness despite their perceived dominance.

Juxtaposition: The poem juxtaposes moments of passion and vibrancy with later despair, emphasising the transient nature of love and physical intimacy.

Example: The body "gleamed like burnished brass" under his touch but becomes "drab and destitute" after his absence.

Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds adds musicality to the poem and underscores its key ideas.

Example: "Burnished brass" highlights the physical vibrancy of a woman under love.

Metaphor: The transformation of the woman's body from "burnished brass" to "drab and destitute" symbolises the emotional and physical toll of unbalanced relationships, where love fades, but its scars remain. The mirror serves as a metaphor for societal expectations and self-reflection, forcing women to confront their roles in relationships.

Symbolism: The Mirror symbolises societal standards and the woman's act of conforming to expectations of beauty and submission. It also represents self-awareness, as the woman metaphorically examines her role in sustaining relationships. Elements like "long hair," "menstrual blood", and "endless hungers" symbolise the natural and sensual essence of femininity that women are expected to offer as a "gift" in relationships.

Irony: The poet highlights the irony in relationships; while love may seem easy to achieve (through physicality and admiration), the emotional cost of such love is enormous, especially for women.

The mockery of the male ego "so that he sees himself as the stronger one"—exposes the fragility behind societal constructions of masculinity.

Confessional Tone: The deeply personal tone mirrors the style of confessional poetry, making the reader feel as though they are privy to intimate truths. This approach not only humanises the speaker but also universalises her experiences, reflecting the struggles of women at large.

Repetition: The repeated idea of "getting a man to love you is easy", juxtaposed with the challenges of "living without him", reinforces



the paradoxical nature of relationships.

Raw and Explicit Language: Kamala Das does not shroud her exploration of love, desire, and loss in euphemisms. Instead, she

uses direct and unfiltered language to emphasise the rawness of human emotion and physicality.

Recap

- ▶ The poem begins with advice to women, suggesting that making a man fall in love is easy by openly expressing their desires and embracing their femininity.
- ▶ Kamala Das emphasises the physical contrasts between men and women, encouraging women to highlight their softness and beauty while admiring the man's masculinity.
- ▶ The poet uses vivid imagery to describe the male body and its vulnerabilities, subtly mocking the fragility of the male ego.
- ▶ Women are advised to offer their femininity, symbolised by their scent, menstrual blood, and desires, as gifts to satisfy men and affirm their dominance.
- ▶ The poem highlights the paradox of love; while it may appear easy to achieve, it often leaves women emotionally dependent and vulnerable.
- ▶ After the man's absence, the woman is depicted as hollow and desolate, searching for him in strangers and yearning for his touch and voice.
- ▶ The poet critiques societal norms that condition women to define themselves through their relationships, leaving them broken when love fades.
- ▶ The poem ends on a sombre note, portraying the woman as emotionally and physically drained, a victim of unbalanced love and societal expectations.

Objective Questions

1. Where is the poem "The Looking Glass" taken from?
2. What are three qualities that a man sees in a woman when she stands nude before the mirror with him?
3. What does the mirror symbolise in the poem?
4. Name two key themes of "The Looking Glass".
5. How does the poet describe the male ego in the poem?
6. What does Kamala Das mean by "gift him what makes you woman"?
7. What happens to a woman's body in the absence of the man?
8. What does the metaphor "burnished brass" signify?
9. Which poetic device is used in the line "burnished brass"?
10. Why is the title "The Looking Glass" significant?

Answers

1. The poem “The Looking Glass” is taken from Kamala Das’ poetry collection The Descendants.
2. Softer, younger, lovelier.
3. The mirror symbolises societal expectations, self-reflection, and the roles women are expected to play in relationships.
4. Key themes include gender dynamics, female desire, loneliness, and emotional dependence.
5. The poet subtly critiques the male ego as fragile and reliant on constant validation from women.
6. Kamala Das refers to offering elements of femininity, such as physical beauty, scent, and sexual desire, to satisfy and captivate the man.
7. The woman’s body becomes “drab and destitute,” reflecting emotional and physical emptiness.
8. “Burnished brass” signifies the woman’s vitality and radiance under the man’s touch.
9. The poetic device used is a metaphor.
10. The title "The Looking Glass" represents both a literal mirror and a metaphorical reflection of societal norms and women’s roles in relationships.

Assignments

1. Critically analyse the role of gender and power dynamics in “The Looking Glass.”
2. Discuss how Kamala Das portrays female desire and its complexities in the poem.
3. How does the poet use imagery to contrast intimacy and loneliness? Provide examples from the text.
4. Evaluate “The Looking Glass” as a feminist poem. How does it challenge traditional gender roles?
5. Explore the significance of the mirror as both a literal and metaphorical element in the poem.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.
- ▶ Rao, Vimala. "The Poetry of Kamala Das: Limits of Overexposure." *Functional Criticism: Essays in British, American, and Commonwealth Literature*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2004. Print.
- ▶ Sarangi, Jayadeep, ed. *Kamala Das: The Great Indian Trend-setter*. New Delhi: Authors Press, 2013. Print.
- ▶ Weisbord, Merrily. *The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das*. Montreal [Que.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010. Print.



I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

- Maya Angelou

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ appreciate Maya Angelou's "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" as a political poem featuring the voice of the marginalised.
- ▶ understand the characteristics and style of Black American Literature.
- ▶ critically analyse themes of freedom, rights, privilege, racism, slavery, identity and transgenerational trauma in a multi-ethnic society.

Prerequisites

To fully understand and appreciate Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", it is important to consider its historical and social context. The memoir is set in the racially segregated American South during the 1930s and 1940s, a time when systemic racism and the Jim Crow laws profoundly affected the lives of African Americans. The book explores themes of identity, resilience and overcoming trauma, particularly as they intersect with issues of race, gender and class. Angelou's narrative style, which blends poetic language, vivid imagery and autobiographical storytelling, adds a unique depth to her portrayal of personal struggles and triumphs. Central to the memoir is the metaphor of the caged bird, symbolising oppression and the longing for freedom. Understanding this metaphor, along with the broader struggles faced by Angelou as a Black woman in a deeply divided society, enriches the reading experience. Additionally, the memoir speaks not only to Angelou's journey but also to universal struggles for dignity and self-worth, making it a powerful and timeless work.

Keywords

Freedom, Black American Literature, Racism, Discrimination, Privilege, Trauma



2.3.1 Discussion

Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Annie Johnson, is an African-American poet and civil rights activist who is considered to be a spokesperson of the Blacks. She is hailed as 'Black Woman's Poet Laureate'. Her works feature the experience of living as a black in the American South post-Reconstruction. She has written seven autobiographies, many poems, plays and screenplays. She is also a public speaker and actor. Her works have given visibility and agency (capacity to act independently and make choices) to Black American women. She wrote about themes of identity, racism and the essential experience of being a Black American. "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" is a symbolic poem which features the contrasting experiences of two birds, one free and the other caged. It denotes the differences in experiences between the two races, the whites and the blacks.



Fig. 2.3.1 Maya Angelou

"I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" is a poem of six stanzas in free verse, which uses iambs (unstressed syllables followed by stressed syllables) and half-rhymes (stressed syllables of consonants in the end match, but not the preceding vowels) in between for musi-

cal effect. It employs devices like alliteration, enjambment and repetition to enhance the poetic effect (see Glossary). The poem blends different tones to suit the moods created by contrasting the lives of the two birds. As we said, the poem features the contrast between two birds, one free and the other caged. The free bird flies, enjoying the aspects of nature, claiming its freedom in the sky. The caged bird cannot do anything but sing of freedom. The free bird is a metaphor for the dominant whites, and the caged bird represents the oppressed blacks. The whites, with their privilege, know that freedom is their right and have the cultural capital to assert it. The blacks, with the history of oppression in their veins and the trauma of past generations in their psyches, cannot claim their freedom. Though slavery ended, discrimination has not. The blacks are not considered equal by the whites, and somewhere deep inside, the blacks know it. It is the cage that Angelou speaks about. It is the chains within that restrict their dreams. When their voices are unheard, their slavery gets aggravated.

2.3.2 Summary

Stanza 1

*The free bird leaps
On the back of the wind
And floats downstream
Till the current ends
And dips his wings
In the orange sun rays
And dares to claim the sky.*

The poem begins with the mention of a free bird which floats in the wind and claims the sky as his own. Here, the bird is personified, evident in the use of the personal pronoun "he". The tone of the stanza is peaceful and happy. The bird enjoys freedom in its natural state. In other words, the bird is so used to freedom that he realises it to be his right. The

poet mentions the beauty of nature when she describes the orange rays of the sun. Orange colour is symbolic of warmth, energy and happiness. The whites, the privileged race, and the free individuals could enjoy their lives, and they could appreciate the beauty around them and claim it to be theirs. Enjambment is used in the lines to enhance the flow. The description of how the bird dips his wings in the orange rays of the sun is strikingly poetic.

Stanza 2

*But a bird that stalks
Down his narrow cage
Can seldom see through
His bars of rage
His wings are clipped and
His feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.*

The poet presents a stark contrast in this stanza. The tone of the poem changes from brightness to darkness. She begins the stanza with the word 'but which brings out the contrast. A caged bird is portrayed in the stanza whose movement is restricted by the cage. Note how the poet uses the image of the bars of the cage in a symbolic manner. She transfers the frustration of the bird into the bars. The bird is not just physically confined in the cage. He is frustrated to the core. His feet are tied, and his wings are clipped as well. He cannot fly across the sky, like the bird mentioned in the previous stanza, and hence, he sings. It is the only natural expression that the bird can make. The blacks led a life of oppression and slavery that restricted even their psyches.

Stanza 3

*The caged bird sings
With fearful trill
Of the things unknown
But longed for still
And his tune is heard
On the distant hill for the caged bird
Sings of freedom.*



The caged bird does not know what freedom is, but he sings about it. His voice is described as fearful. The restricted existence of the bird is portrayed in this stanza. Note the use of rhyming: *The caged bird does not know what freedom is, but he sings about it.* His voice is described as words which add to the musical quality of the poem. The blacks, who had been suffering for centuries, produced works of art from their suffering. It was the only mode of self-expression they could make use of.

Stanza 4

*The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing
trees and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-
bright lawn and he names the sky his own.*

The free bird has the freedom to make choices. He can think of the breeze and winds and also of the worms that he can prey on. He is so confident of his right that he calls the sky his own. The whites, due to the racial privilege they had enjoyed for centuries, could assert their rights and also explore many possibilities. Note how the poet personifies the trees when she compares the sound of wind passing through them as 'sighs'. It is an instance of personification. The mention of worms symbolises the territorial expansion of the American settlers into lands owned by others. The blacks, on the other hand, who suffered oppression and segregation for centuries, have the yoke of slavery on their backs, which restricts them. They cannot assert or claim what they deserve as they are not used to it.

Stanza 5

*But a caged bird stands on the grave of
dreams
His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
His wings are clipped, and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing*

The caged bird's pathetic existence is portrayed in the stanza using powerful images like

‘grave of dreams’, ‘shadow shouts’, etc. Notice the use of alliteration, too. The bird lives a frustrated existence without freedom. It is poetically portrayed as ‘the grave of dreams’. The last couplet is a repetition of lines from the second stanza, which helps to enhance the emotion of frustration and reflect the monotony of the bird’s servile existence. The pathetic existence of the blacks who cannot attain their dreams is portrayed effectively in the stanza.

Stanza 6

*The caged bird sings of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
For the caged bird
sings of freedom.*

The last stanza is a repetition of the third. The poem presents the voice of the marginalised using a metaphor. It effectively uses the medium of poetry to convey the pathetic situation of subalternity. It also touches upon how privilege works in a dominant group. Maya Angelou lived at a time when institutional slavery was illegal, but there were elements of discrimination and segregation in all walks of life. When we speak of racism or any discrimination, there are different perspectives that crop up. Some, mostly the privileged, do not acknowledge the subtle nuances of discrimination that exist today. For them, slavery was a thing of the past. The privilege of being part of the dominant group can result in such perspectives. They do not realise why a section of people. Those who were oppressed in the past cannot claim their rights now, even if they are available to them. They cannot understand what the trauma of oppression does to the minds of people and how it can get transmitted through generations to become part of their sense of identity. They will not know why some people do not consider themselves free. The chains that bind them are invisible to the privileged eyes.

2.3.3 Analysis

Maya Angelou’s “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” is a poignant metaphorical poem that contrasts the lives of two birds—one free and one caged—to explore themes of systemic oppression and the longing for freedom. The free bird, representing the privileged class (historically the white population in America), enjoys unrestrained liberty, claiming the sky and embracing life’s opportunities. The caged bird, symbolising the oppressed Black community, is confined within the physical and psychological “bars of rage,” reflecting generational trauma and systemic racism.

Angelou’s use of vivid imagery emphasises the disparity between the two birds. The free bird floats effortlessly, a symbol of entitlement and privilege, while the caged bird struggles, its wings clipped and feet tied, expressing its anguish and hope through song. The caged bird’s song, despite being “fearful,” represents resilience and the indomitable human spirit. This duality—freedom versus captivity and despair versus hope—underscores the ongoing struggles against racial inequality and discrimination. Through the repetition of stanzas and recurring metaphors, Angelou captures the monotony of oppression while reinforcing the unwavering desire for liberation, making the poem a powerful voice for the marginalised.

2.3.4 Themes

Freedom and Oppression: The central theme contrasts the unrestrained freedom of the privileged (symbolised by the free bird) with the physical and emotional captivity of the oppressed (symbolised by the caged bird). The caged bird’s song reflects the universal longing for freedom.

Racism and Privilege: The poem critiques systemic racism and the generational privilege of dominant groups. The free bird’s dominance and the caged bird’s entrapment high-

light these inequalities.

Resilience and Hope: Despite being confined, the caged bird continues to sing, symbolising the resilience of oppressed individuals and their hope for a better future.

Generational Trauma: The “bars of rage” and the caged bird’s clipped wings symbolise not only physical restrictions but also the psychological impact of generational oppression, which continues to restrict dreams and aspirations.

Voice of the Marginalized: Angelou emphasises the importance of the oppressed speaking out, as the caged bird’s song represents the power of expression to challenge injustice.

2.3.5 Literary Devices

Metaphor: The free bird and the caged bird serve as extended metaphors for the privileged and the oppressed, respectively.

Imagery: Vivid imagery, such as “bars of rage,” “grave of dreams,” and “sighing trees,” contrasts freedom and confinement, evoking strong visual and emotional reactions.

Symbolism: The cage symbolises systemic

oppression, while the bird’s song symbolises hope and resistance. The sky and orange sun rays represent freedom and opportunity.

Alliteration: Phrases like “shadow shouts” and “grave of dreams” create a musical rhythm while emphasising the bird’s frustration and despair.

Enjambment: The continuation of lines without punctuation mirrors the flow of the free bird’s movement and contrasts with the confined rhythm of the caged bird.

Repetition: The repeated stanzas about the caged bird’s song emphasise the monotony of its existence and its persistent longing for freedom.

Personification: Nature is personified, such as when the “sighing trees” reflect the harmony of the free bird’s surroundings, contrasting with the caged bird’s turmoil.

Tone: The tone shifts between celebratory (for the free bird) and melancholic (for the caged bird), enhancing the emotional impact of the poem.

Juxtaposition: The poem juxtaposes the lives of the free bird and the caged bird to highlight privilege versus oppression.

Recap

- ▶ The poem contrasts two birds: a free bird that enjoys freedom and a caged bird that yearns for it.
- ▶ The free bird represents the privileged white community enjoying life without restrictions.
- ▶ The caged bird, symbolising the Black community, is confined by systemic oppression.
- ▶ Despite its clipped wings and tied feet, the caged bird sings of freedom.
- ▶ The free bird claims the sky and explores nature, highlighting the arrogance of privilege.
- ▶ The caged bird’s song, though fearful, resonates far and wide, symbolising resilience.
- ▶ Angelou uses powerful imagery like “grave of dreams” to portray the frustration of oppression.



- ▶ The repetition of lines underscores the monotony and unchanging nature of the caged bird's plight.
- ▶ The poem serves as a critique of privilege and systemic discrimination in society.
- ▶ Through the caged bird's song, Angelou emphasises hope, resilience, and the fight for freedom.

Objective Questions

1. What does the free bird symbolise in the poem?
2. What does the caged bird sing about?
3. What literary device is used in the phrase "bars of rage"?
4. How many stanzas are there in the poem?
5. What does the cage represent in the poem?
6. What historical system of oppression is indirectly referenced in the poem?
7. What is the primary tone of the caged bird's song?
8. How does the free bird assert its dominance?
9. What does the repetition of stanzas symbolise in the poem?
10. How does Maya Angelou portray the trauma of the caged bird?

Answers

1. The free bird symbolises the privileged white population.
2. The caged bird sings about freedom.
3. The literary device is metaphor.
4. There are six stanzas in the poem.
5. The cage represents systemic oppression and discrimination.
6. The poem indirectly references slavery and segregation.
7. The tone of the caged bird's song is both fearful and hopeful.
8. The free bird asserts its dominance by claiming the sky and enjoying nature.
9. The repetition symbolises the monotony of oppression and the resilience of hope.
10. Angelou portrays the trauma through vivid imagery and metaphors of confinement.

Assignments

1. Discuss the symbolic significance of the caged bird and the free bird in Maya Angelou's poem.
2. How does Maya Angelou use literary devices to highlight themes of freedom and oppression?
3. Analyse the impact of repetition and imagery in conveying the plight of the caged bird.
4. Explore the connection between generational trauma and the identity of the caged bird.
5. How does "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" critique systemic privilege and societal inequalities?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- ▶ Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935.
- ▶ Glaude, Eddie S., Jr. *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- ▶ Painter, Nell Irvin. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2006.





The Unknown Citizen

- WH Auden

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ appreciate W H Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" as a Modernist poem.
- ▶ understand the characteristics and style of the Modern Age in literature.
- ▶ critically analyse themes of conformity, institutional authority, and individualism in the modern era and compare them with those of the contemporary scene.
- ▶ analyse the poem as the narrative of a dominant voice that dictates the meaning of the subject's life.

Prerequisites

The poem "The Unknown Citizen" by W.H. Auden explores the concept of individuality versus conformity in a bureaucratic, modern society. It satirises the dehumanising effects of state control and excessive reliance on statistics, reducing people to mere data points. Through the depiction of a seemingly "ideal" citizen, Auden critiques a society that values obedience and compliance over personal freedom, individuality, and genuine happiness. To fully appreciate the poem, it is helpful to understand the historical context of the early 20th century, particularly the rise of totalitarian regimes, the influence of bureaucracy, and the growing reliance on surveillance and social metrics in governance.

Keywords

Identify, Satire, Bureaucracy, Conformity Society

2.4.1 Discussion

The poem “The Unknown Citizen” was penned by W H Auden, one of the prominent poets who belonged to the Modern Era. Wystan Hugh Auden was a 20th-century Anglo-American writer who is associated with modernist literature. Much of the recognition and popularity he garnered were posthumous (i.e. after death). He has written over 400 poems and about the same number of prose, too. He has written essays, reviews, plays, documentary film scripts, and opera libretti, as well as experimented with traditional and modern forms. He had romantic and literary collaborations with important figures like Isherwood

and Kallmann. Though he began writing in a style similar to that of the Romantics, he later developed his own. He wrote a lot about the psychological effects that the ancestors had on individuals (he called them ‘family ghosts’) during the initial stage. He later became political, expressing leftist views. He used a succinct style, using common language, and had a keen interest in Marxism and Psychoanalysis. His immigration to the United States, as well as his religious conversion to Christianity, was a turning point in his literary career. He won many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize (1947).



Fig. 2.4.1 W.H. Auden

The poem “The Unknown Citizen” was composed in 1939 and published in 1940. This satirical elegy of 32 lines features a government erecting a monument for an ordinary citizen. The poem is a parody of the concept of the tomb of the unknown soldier, which appeared

in many countries after the World Wars to mourn the death of anonymous soldiers. Why does a government honour a commoner, that too for being ‘normal’? The oddity increases as we proceed through the lines.

The individual is celebrated for his conformity to authority and being 'normal'. An intense subject is portrayed lightly, that too witty and ironic at times. Lack of individuality in a dystopian realm of total conformity and fascist surveillance are the central themes of the poem. The poem is reminiscent of George Orwell's novel 1984, with a government 'watching' its citizens all the time. The poem features a monument erected by the state to commemorate the life of a citizen who lived an 'ideal' life. The citizen is not named in the poem. He is identified using a number. The citizen is no longer alive, and his life is tracked through the records kept by different departments of the government. Every aspect of his life is strictly monitored by the government. We can see how different departments monitored the life of the citizen in its entirety.

2.4.2 Summary

Stanza 1

(To JS/07/M/378/ This Marble Monument
Is Erected by the State)

*He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,*

*And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word,
he was a saint.*

*For in everything he did, he served the
Greater Community.*

The poem begins with an epitaph (inscription written in memory of a dead person), and in the place where the name of the person is expected, we see a number. It is a unique identification number, like the Social Security Number in the US and Aadhaar in India. The state is not interested in the citizen as an individual. It doesn't even bother to name him. Assigning only a number to one's identity is dehumanising. The monument, in marble, is

erected by the state (or government) in memory of a citizen who is identified by the number. The citizen is a male, as we can infer from the pronouns used, but no other personal detail is provided. The government provides its perspective on the life of the individual, and it is based on the reports it receives from the many bureaucratic departments. The individual is said to be someone against whom there were no formal complaints. There were reports on his conduct that the government collected from the various departments, and all of them were positive. There is not a black mark in the individual that the state uses the word 'saint' to describe him. A saint is someone who does only good deeds and serves the community. Here, the word 'saint' from religion is used symbolically to denote the calm and helpful nature of the individual. We know that a saint is someone who renounces his desires and serves the community. In a society where individualism is scorned, selflessness is considered to be a quality. At this juncture, it would be interesting to know about two kinds of cultures prevalent in societies- individualistic and collectivistic. Individualistic societies value the choices and well-being of the individual, while collectivistic societies place importance on groups. Indian society is collectivistic, and hence, we tend to value institutions like family above individuals. Sacrificing one's wishes for the common good is a virtue in such cultures.

Stanza 2

*Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked
a drink.*

We understand that the individual worked in a factory named Fudge Motors Inc., and his employers were satisfied with his work. He paid his dues to the workers' union on time and never entertained any 'odd' views on any subject. The state relies on his union reports and is also convinced that he belongs to a union, which is not problematic. The state also knows about the social life of the individual from the reports it received from workers of social psychology. He was popular among his friends and liked to have a drink, too. When we come to know that his social life, too, is under surveillance, we realise the intensity of a dire situation that is hidden behind these monotonous lines. There is an irony in the mention of Unions. A Union is formed to ensure the well-being of the workers. It works against the exploitative practices of a firm. Here, the Union is under surveillance, too.

Stanza 3

*The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.*

The individual's choice of newspaper and his reaction to advertisements are also monitored. The state considers his reactions to be 'normal'. His health status and insurance policies are also mentioned. He enjoyed good health and was admitted to the hospital once but came out cured. The similarity to the Orwellian world of Oceania is striking, though the situation is not as bad here. The unknown citizen's state might be a nation on the way to becoming yet another Oceania. The word 'normal' is subjective. In an authoritarian society, being submissive is normal. It is the society that decides the norms of normalcy.



Stanza 4

*Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigid-
aire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace:
when there was war, he went*

He lived comfortably and had all the necessary equipment needed for a modern lifestyle. He bought everything using the instalment plan of payment and owned a phonograph, radio, car and refrigerator. The state also monitors his opinions on public matters and is happy that he has 'proper' opinions. When there was a war, he went for it, and during peacetime, he lived suitably. Here, we can see how the state decides yardsticks for measuring the quality of the life of its citizens. Through the 'instalment plan', the citizen is always bonded to authority and is in a subservient position. The necessities of modern man are defined by the state, and individualistic concerns are conspicuous in their absence.

Stanza 5

*He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.*

His married life and the number of children are also ideal, and the state considers reproduction an exercise that adds to the gene pool. The individual did not interfere with what

the teachers taught either. The reference to Eugenics adds another layer to the dystopian horror presented in the poem. It is reminiscent of Adolf Hitler's obsession with Aryan identity. Education is the best way to disseminate ideologies, and we understand that it is not questioned by the ideal citizen.

Stanza 6

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

The poem ends with two important philosophical questions. Whether the individual lived a free and happy life was, according to the state, an absurd query. The state is sure that it would have known if anything had gone wrong. The concepts of freedom and happiness do not suit the overall ambience of the poem. The authoritarian state considers such concepts to be a novelty, and it may mean that the institution pretends to be liberal, which is worse. There would be no rebellion when the citizens are conditioned to believe that they live in a liberal environment. Notice how the questions on happiness and freedom become rhetorical. The authorities do not require answers to these questions as they are too sure of themselves.

2.4.3 Analysis

W.H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" is a sharp critique of modern bureaucratic societies that reduce individuals to mere data points, stripping away their humanity and individuality. The poem takes the form of a mock epitaph, resembling an official report written by government authorities to commemorate a citizen whose life was exemplary by societal standards. It highlights the absurdity of a world where institutions, such as the state, corporations, and social organisations, use statistics and bureaucratic measures to assess a person's worth. The citizen in the poem is

described as someone who lived an unremarkable yet "perfect" life by conforming to societal norms, fulfilling expectations, and avoiding rebellion or deviation. However, Auden leaves a haunting ambiguity by asking whether the citizen was truly happy or free—questions left unanswered because such personal aspects are deemed irrelevant by institutional systems. The poem's irony lies in its ability to celebrate the citizen while simultaneously criticising the cold, impersonal lens through which his life is viewed.

2.4.4 Themes

Conformity vs. Individuality: The citizen is portrayed as a model of societal conformity, obeying all rules and expectations. However, this conformity comes at the expense of individuality and self-expression. Auden critiques a society that values obedience over personal uniqueness, suggesting that the citizen's true self remains unknown, even in death.

Dehumanisation by Bureaucracy: The citizen's life is described entirely through statistics and institutional records, reducing his identity to quantifiable achievements. This dehumanisation reflects the dangers of bureaucratic systems that strip away individuality and treat people as faceless entities within the machinery of governance.

Irony of Modern Progress: While the poem celebrates modern systems of organisation, consumerism, and social control, it also exposes their emptiness. Auden critiques the idea that progress in technology, economics, and social structure automatically leads to human well-being, as these advancements often fail to address deeper questions of purpose and happiness.

Surveillance and Control: The poem reflects a world where every aspect of life is monitored, recorded, and judged by institutions. The citizen's compliance with societal norms is tracked through his job, consumer habits, and even his participation in social organisa-

tions. This theme critiques the invasive nature of state and corporate oversight.

Hollow Metrics of Success: The citizen's life is deemed a success because he "served the Greater Community," "paid his dues," and "had everything necessary." However, these metrics overlook the immeasurable aspects of life, such as love, creativity, and personal fulfilment, raising questions about the true meaning of success.

2.4.5 Literary Devices

Irony: The poem is deeply ironic, as the tone of praise contrasts with the underlying critique of the citizen's meaningless existence. The institutions laud him for his conformity, but the reader is left questioning whether such a life is truly admirable.

Satire: Auden satirises the bureaucratic obsession with control and documentation. By using the format of an official report, he mocks the detachment of such systems from the human experience.

Symbolism: The "Unknown Citizen" symbolises the average person in a modern, bureaucratic society—anonymous, obedient, and indistinguishable. He represents the loss of individuality in a world dominated by institutional power.

Repetition: The repetition of phrases like "he was found" and "had everything necessary"

emphasises the monotony and mechanical nature of the citizen's life as seen through institutional records.

Juxtaposition: Auden juxtaposes the citizen's supposed perfection with the unanswered questions of his freedom and happiness. This contrast highlights the superficiality of institutional measures of success.

Imagery: The poem's imagery, such as "everything necessary to the Modern Man" and "proper opinions for the time of year," evokes a world where individual desires and beliefs are dictated by external authorities.

Ambiguity: The closing lines of the poem deliberately leave the citizen's happiness and freedom uncertain. This ambiguity forces the reader to reflect on whether societal approval truly equates to a fulfilling life.

Paradox: The citizen is praised for being "normal" and adhering to societal norms, yet the title "unknown" suggests that his identity and personal essence remain unrecognised, creating a paradox between societal acceptance and personal erasure.

Personification: Institutions like the State, Social Psychology, and Public Opinion are personified, giving them an active role in controlling and evaluating citizens' lives. This device highlights their dominance over individual lives.

Recap

1. The poem "The Unknown Citizen" is written as a satirical epitaph for a man celebrated for his conformity to societal norms.
2. The citizen is praised for being a "model" individual who never caused trouble and followed all rules.
3. His life is described entirely through data collected by institutions, such as his employment record, consumer habits, and social activities.
4. He was considered a loyal worker, dutiful taxpayer, and responsible citizen, fulfilling all societal expectations.



5. The citizen's opinions were deemed "proper" and aligned with public sentiment, ensuring he never challenged the status quo.
6. He participated in social organisations and consumed products as expected of a modern man.
7. The poem questions whether the citizen was truly happy or free, but these concerns are dismissed as irrelevant by institutional standards.
8. The tone of the poem is formal and detached, mimicking bureaucratic language, which enhances the satire.
9. Auden critiques the dehumanising effects of a society that reduces individuals to statistics and measures success through conformity.
10. The poem ultimately reflects on the loss of individuality and personal meaning in modern bureaucratic systems.

Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of "The Unknown Citizen"?
2. What literary form does the poem resemble?
3. How is the citizen's life assessed in the poem?
4. What does the citizen symbolise in the context of modern society?
5. Which institutions are mentioned as having records of the citizen's life?
6. What key questions about the citizen's life remain unanswered at the end of the poem?
7. What does the phrase "everything necessary to the Modern Man" imply in the poem?
8. How does the poem reflect the role of bureaucracy in modern life?
9. What is the tone of the poem, and how does it contribute to its meaning?
10. What aspect of individuality does the poem critique?

Answers

1. The author of "The Unknown Citizen" is W.H. Auden.
2. The poem resembles an epitaph or an official bureaucratic report.
3. The citizen's life is assessed entirely through institutional records and statistics.
4. The citizen symbolises the average person in a bureaucratic society who conforms to societal norms but loses individuality.
5. Institutions mentioned include the State, Social Psychology, Producers Re-

search, and Public Opinion.

6. The question of whether the citizen was happy or free remains unanswered.
7. The phrase implies that the citizen fulfilled all material and societal expectations but neglected his emotional and personal needs.
8. The poem highlights how bureaucracy reduces human life to data, ignoring individuality and personal essence.
9. The tone is ironic, detached, and formal, mimicking the language of official documents to satirise bureaucracy.
10. The poem critiques the loss of individuality in favour of societal conformity.

Assignments

1. Discuss how “The Unknown Citizen” critiques the role of bureaucracy and statistics in modern society.
2. Analyse the use of irony in “The Unknown Citizen” and how it enhances the poem’s central themes.
3. How does W.H. Auden portray the conflict between individuality and societal conformity in the poem?
4. Explore the significance of the unanswered questions about freedom and happiness in the poem.
5. Compare the portrayal of modern life in “The Unknown Citizen” with another poem or text that critiques bureaucracy or conformity.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Auden, W.H. *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays*. Random House, 1962.
- ▶ Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Harper Perennial, 2006.
- ▶ Orwell, George. *1984*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949.





Hunger

- Jayanta Mahapatra

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ appreciate Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "Hunger" as a part of Indian English Literature.
- ▶ Understand the characteristics and style of Indian Writing in English.
- ▶ Critically analyse the theme of poverty and marginalisation against the backdrop of Indian society.

Prerequisites

To fully appreciate Jayanta Mahapatra's poem Hunger, it is essential to understand its socio-cultural and psychological context. The poem, written by one of India's most prominent English-language poets, reflects the harsh realities of poverty, human desire, and moral conflict. Set against the backdrop of rural India, it captures the interplay between physical hunger and emotional or sexual hunger, presenting them as interconnected yet conflicting forces. Mahapatra's use of stark imagery and minimalistic language intensifies the poem's raw, visceral impact. Familiarity with the themes of economic disparity, exploitation, and the human condition enriches the reader's understanding of the poem's layered critique of society. The poem is also deeply introspective, questioning the ethical compromises people make when faced with desperate circumstances. Recognising Mahapatra's unique poetic style, which blends modernist techniques with Indian themes, helps in grasping the poem's profound and unsettling commentary on human vulnerability.

Keywords

Poverty, Desperation, Exploitation, Fishermen, Humanity

2.5.1 Discussion

The poem “Hunger” was first published in Jayanta Mahapatra’s 1976 anthology titled *A Rain of Rites*. Thematically, it features two kinds of hunger, one sexual and the other in the literal sense of the term, both basic animal desires. The flesh-related and poverty-related hunger converge at a point of realisation, and one ends in the other. In the beginning of the poem, hunger is shown as the sexual desire of the narrator, which is later transformed into physical hunger or a craving for the stomach.



Fig. 2.5.1 Jayanta Mahapatra

“Hunger” is a poem of 21 lines, divided into four stanzas of five lines each, with an extra line in the last. The poem does not follow any rhyme scheme. The title can mean the two kinds of hunger- physical or sexual. The imagery used in the poem conveys the emotions with all its depth. The poet uses similes and metaphors. When the narrator says that the hut opened like a wound, it clearly signifies the pain of poverty within. The narrator compares himself to the wind, the physical sensation in the stomach due to hunger to a slithering fish, darkness to hopelessness, the body to a house,

and many more. The poem opens with the narrator meeting a poor fisherman who unscrupulously offers his teenage daughter to gratify his lust. The man followed the fisherman to his hut, the door of which was ugly and reminded of a wound. The young daughter of the fisherman was to be the sexual partner of the stranger. The shack was dark, and a lamp flickering with a sooty flame was fastened to the wall, and there was darkness inside the small, roughly made hut. The narrator finds a young, malnourished girl inside the hut who mechanically gets ready to have sex with him. He realises how the hunger from poverty is well above his lust.

2.5.2 Summary

Stanza 1

*It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.
The fisherman said: Will you have her; carelessly,
Trailing his nets and his nerves as though his words
Sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.*

The first stanza opens with the narrator, who can hardly believe he is feeling lustful. The flesh in the sling denotes his sexual desire. A fisherman offers his daughter to the narrator, but he seems to be careless and is trailing his net. He tries to justify himself, and his words seem to sanctify his purpose. A father pimping his daughter is something very rare, but the careless way in which he asks cannot hide his real situation. They are so impoverished and may not have anything to eat. The use of the word ‘flesh’ in the first line to denote lust is poetic. The fisherman trailing his nerves is also a symbolic representation of his pathetic condition.

Stanza 2



*I followed him across the sprawling sands,
my mind thumping in the flesh's sling.
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived
in.
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed
at the froth
his old nets had only dragged up from the
seas.*

The narrator follows the fisherman walking through the sandy beach. His mind is throbbing, and he has a guilty feeling of sin. He wishes his body to support his mind. He thinks that the sin he was going to commit would be forgiven if he had burnt his own house where he lived (that is, his carnal desire). There was complete silence, and he felt it gripping his sleeves. The fisherman is looking at his old net, which has nothing but some foam from the sea. The metaphorical use of the word 'house' to denote body intensifies the poetic effect. Silence is personified as it is said to grip the narrator's sleeve.

Stanza 3

*In the flickering dark, his hut opened like a
wound.
The wind was I, and the days and nights be-
fore.
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the
shack
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to
those walls.
over and over the sticky soot crossed the space
of my mind.*

They reach the hut, and its condition is deplorable. The door opens like a wound. The hut is sordid and filthy, like a wound. It is dark inside, and there is wind outside. The wind symbolises the storm in the mind of the protagonist and his incessant feeling of guilt. When he enters the hut, the leaves of the palm tree used to make the hut scrape his body as if preventing him from doing the sin. There is

an oil lamp fastened to the wall. It seems that the lamp has confined time. It may also refer to a clock on the wall, with its hands splayed. The sooty flame seems to fill his mind, making him helpless. The dirty interiors of the hut increase his uneasiness. The poet uses vivid images to bring out the narrator's mental state. The hut opening like a wound denotes the pain in the lives of the fisherman and his daughter. He compares the narrator's mind to the wind.

Stanza 4

*I heard him say: My daughter, she's just turned
fifteen...
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at
nine.
The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted
wile.
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the
hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning in-
side.*

The narrator hears the fisherman say that the girl is only fifteen. He asks the narrator to feel her and leaves the hut, saying that he will come back soon. Before leaving the hut, the fisherman reminds the narrator that his bus will leave at nine. The father tried to make a living in vain, and poverty has made him pimp his daughter. The narrator feels as if the sky has fallen over his head. He poetically describes his feelings, using vivid imagery. The girl was lean, and she was cold as rubber, without any expression. When her father walked away from the spot, the girl kept her long, lean, wormy legs wide apart. The narrator also feels the other hunger, the slithering fish-like movements in the stomach due to starvation, which forces her to sell her body.

2.5.3 Analysis

The poem is based on a unique theme. The background of the poem is the poverty and starvation of the deprived fisherfolks who de-

pend on the sea for their living. This predicament has driven many fisherwomen towards prostitution. The poem is influenced by the truth that hunger can result in any compromise on morality and human relationships. The poet presents it as a great lesson that humankind should learn.

It is because of hunger that the fisherman offers his teenage daughter to a stranger to satisfy his lust. The visitor, who is burdened by lust and guilt at the same time, needs her to fulfil his carnal desire but cannot face the pricking of his conscience. The narrator is a symbol of the moral hypocrisy found in Indian society, which considers sex to be a sin. His sense of guilt is accentuated when he enters the hut. The soot from the oil lamp in the hut also conquers his mind. Here, the consent of the poor girl is never sought, and she is only an instrument. A woman's body is objectified in patriarchal societies, and here, the father makes it into a means to make money. His situation does not sanctify his purpose, for why should a fisherman not go to any other job and earn money? Why should he try to stick to fishing when all he can get from the sea is froth? It is not easy to judge lives.

The poem can also be read as the narrative of a privileged voice. The narrator longs to quench his lust when the other two characters in the poem, the father and the daughter, do not have anything to eat. It portrays how the emotion of hunger is different for people who belong to different strata of society.

2.5.4 Themes

Physical and Emotional Hunger: The central theme of the poem is the experience of hunger, both literal and metaphorical. The poem vividly describes the physical suffering of hunger but also extends this to symbolise deeper emotional and spiritual deprivation.

The hunger experienced by the speaker is not

just a bodily need but also a craving for connection, meaning, and fulfilment.

Isolation and Desperation: The poem touches on the loneliness and despair that accompany hunger. The speaker is isolated in their suffering, and this loneliness is amplified by the bleak surroundings and sense of hopelessness. The experience of hunger is not only physical but also social, as it can lead to feelings of abandonment and alienation.

Societal Indifference: Mahapatra also critiques social structures that allow such hunger and deprivation to exist. The poem may be seen as a commentary on poverty, inequality, and society's apathy toward those who suffer. The focus is not only on the personal agony of hunger but also on the larger social forces that contribute to such states.

Existential Struggle: The poem has a philosophical undertone that links hunger to the human condition. Hunger, as portrayed in the poem, represents an existential crisis, an endless quest for meaning in a world where survival often overshadows deeper spiritual or emotional fulfilment.

2.5.5 Literary Devices

Imagery: Mahapatra uses vivid imagery to evoke the intense physical sensations of hunger. Descriptions like “the gnawing hunger,” “aching bones,” and “empty stomachs” paint a clear picture of deprivation, making the reader almost feel the emptiness the speaker experiences.

Metaphor: The metaphor of hunger extends beyond the physical act of needing food. It symbolizes a yearning for something more profound—whether it be love, purpose, or fulfilment. Hunger in the poem becomes a metaphor for all the things humans are deprived of, both materially and spiritually.

Juxtaposition: Mahapatra often juxtaposes physical hunger with emotional or existential hunger, emphasising how the two are inter-



twined. This device highlights the complexity of the human experience, where material suffering is connected with deeper, unseen emotional suffering.

Personification: Hunger is personified in the poem, giving it an almost living quality. The speaker's hunger is not just an abstract idea but an active force that gnaws at them, suggesting its relentless nature and its power to control the individual.

Symbolism: Hunger itself powerfully symbolizes the broader issues the poem addresses. It symbolises the struggle for survival, the inequalities in society, and the deeper, universal human need for connection and meaning.

Alliteration and Repetition: The poem's use of alliteration and repetition enhances its rhythmic quality and reflects the continuous, cyclical nature of hunger. These devices also emphasize the relentless, unending nature of the speaker's physical and emotional suffering.

Contrast: Mahapatra contrasts physical hunger with the idea of spiritual fulfilment. Where the body is empty, the soul yearns for something more significant. This contrast deepens the poem's exploration of existential and social issues.

Recap

- ▶ Jayanta Mahapatra's "Hunger" critiques poverty, marginalisation, and human vulnerability in Indian society.
- ▶ The poem explores two kinds of hunger: physical (starvation) and sexual, showing their interconnection.
- ▶ The narrator is offered a poor fisherman's teenage daughter, which symbolizes the impact of poverty on morality.
- ▶ The stark imagery, such as the "hut opening like a wound," conveys the harshness of poverty and emotional despair.
- ▶ Themes of guilt, human exploitation, and ethical compromises emerge as central to the narrative.
- ▶ The poem uses minimalistic language, similes, and metaphors to deepen its emotional impact.
- ▶ The girl's consent is ignored, reflecting the objectification of women in patriarchal, poverty-stricken societies.
- ▶ The narrator experiences moral conflict, symbolised by vivid descriptions like "sooty flames" and "slithering fish."
- ▶ The fisherman's desperation highlights systemic economic failures and social inequalities.
- ▶ "Hunger" critiques the privileged indifference to the struggles of the impoverished, making it a profound social commentary.

Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of the poem “Hunger”?
2. In which anthology was the poem “Hunger” first published?
3. What are the two types of hunger depicted in the poem?
4. How does the narrator describe the hut in the poem?
5. What role does the fisherman play in the poem?
6. What is the age of the fisherman’s daughter mentioned in the poem?
7. What does the “sooty flame” symbolize in the poem?
8. What imagery is used to describe the girl in the poem?
9. How does the poem reflect on the theme of poverty?
10. What does the metaphor of “flesh in the sling” signify?

Answers

1. Jayanta Mahapatra.
2. A Rain of Rites (1976).
3. Physical hunger (starvation) and sexual hunger.
4. The hut is described as “opening like a wound.”
5. The fisherman offers his daughter to the narrator for money.
6. Fifteen years old.
7. It symbolises guilt, hopelessness, and moral burden.
8. The girl is described as “long and lean” with “wormy legs.”
9. It portrays poverty as forcing people into unethical compromises like prostitution.
10. It signifies sexual desire and the weight of guilt.

Assignments

1. Critically analyse how “Hunger” portrays the relationship between poverty and morality.
2. Discuss the role of imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra’s poem “Hunger”.
3. Explore the feminist critique present in Hunger, particularly regarding the objectification of women.
4. How does the poem depict the narrator’s moral conflict? Use textual evidence to support your answer.
5. Compare and contrast the different forms of hunger portrayed in the poem.



Suggested Reading

- ▶ Mahapatra, Jayanta. *A Rain of Rites*, University of Georgia Press, 1976.
- ▶ The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Themes and Imagery by Vivekanand Jha (2013).
- ▶ Mahapatra, Jayanta, '*Hunger*'. The Oxford Authority of Modern India Poetry, Edited by Vinay Dharwadker and A.K. Ramanujan, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 37-38.



Hawk Roosting

- Ted Hughes

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ recognise how literature can explore themes of authority, dominance, and the effects of power.
- ▶ become aware of how Hughes uses the hawk's perspective to explore the themes in the poem.
- ▶ examine how the free verse form and cold, confident tone contribute to the poem's portrayal of the main themes.
- ▶ identify how the poet uses symbols to represent complex ideas in the poem.

Prerequisites

Imagine a creature perched high above the world, with the sun behind it, calmly surveying its domain. In Ted Hughes' "Hawk Roosting," this hawk speaks not just as a predator but as a figure of absolute power and control. It claims dominion over its surroundings, stating that nothing has changed since it began and intends to maintain this unchallenged position forever. The hawk's confident declaration that the world exists to serve its needs raises essential questions: What does it mean to wield such complete authority? What does it feel like to be so isolated in your supremacy that nothing and no one can challenge you? Through the hawk's voice, Hughes explores the essence of power, dominance, and the alienation that often accompanies unchecked control. As we analyse the poem, we'll see how the hawk's unflinching belief in its superiority mirrors the dangers of absolute power and the cold, isolating nature of dominance.

Keywords

Dominance, Power, Control, Permanence, Perspective, Predatory Voice



2.6.1 Discussion

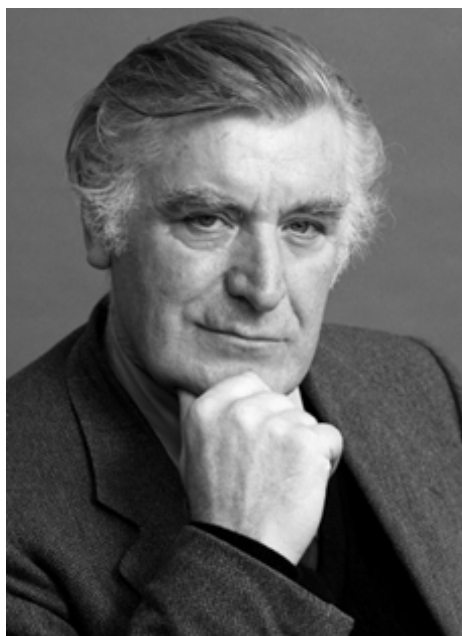


Fig. 2.6.1 Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes is one of the most powerful and provocative voices in twentieth-century poetry. Known for his intense imagery and fascination with the natural world, Hughes often explored the raw, untamed forces of nature and the complexities of human life within it. Born in Yorkshire, England, in 1930, Hughes grew up surrounded by the rugged countryside, which profoundly influenced his writing and gave his poetry a visceral, earthy quality. He was not just a poet but also a storyteller of nature's brutality and beauty, often writing about animals with striking intensity, as if inviting readers to experience their primal instincts firsthand. His works, like "Hawk Roosting" and "The Thought-Fox," draw us into a world where animals and landscapes come alive with fierce autonomy. Hughes' ability to fuse myth, nature, and psychology made him a unique and sometimes controversial figure, and his legacy continues to impact poetry and literature even today.

2.6.2 Summary

Lines 1 - 4

*I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.*

The opening lines of "Hawk Roosting" by Ted Hughes depict a hawk resting at the top of a tree, entirely at ease and in control. The hawk describes its state of "inaction" as it perches, with its "eyes closed," indicating a sense of calm and confidence in its environment. The hawk is so assured of its power and security that it does not need to be vigilant or constantly alert. It has no illusions or "falsifying dream" between its "hooked head and hooked feet," showing its straightforward, unembellished view of its purpose as a predator. Even in sleep, the hawk's instincts remain sharp. It describes itself as being able to "rehearse perfect kills and eat." This line displays the hawk's singular focus on its role in nature. Its thoughts are filled with visions of hunting, which, for the hawk, is both natural and necessary. These opening lines set the tone for the hawk's perspective as a creature entirely comfortable in its predatory role, conveying a sense of self-assurance, power, and instinctual purpose.

Lines 5 - 8

*The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.*

The hawk speaks about how its surroundings are ideally suited to its needs. The hawk appreciates the "convenience of the high trees," which provide a vantage point to observe its territory. The air's buoyancy helps it fly effort-

lessly, and the sunlight offers clarity and visibility for hunting. Each element of nature—trees, air, and sunlight—seems designed to serve the hawk’s purpose, enhancing its sense of power and control.

The hawk also notes that “the earth’s face (is) upward for my inspection,” suggesting that it views the entire world as being at its disposal, positioned solely for observation. This conveys the hawk’s perception of itself as dominant, central, and in command, as if all of nature is oriented around it. These lines showcase the hawk’s strong sense of self-importance, with its environment catering to its every need and reinforcing its position at the top of the natural hierarchy.

Lines 9 - 12

*My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot*

The hawk describes its sense of power and control over the natural world, reflecting on its role as a supreme predator. The lines “My feet are locked upon the rough bark” show the hawk perched firmly, suggesting strength and stability. The hawk believes it is a pinnacle of nature’s design, declaring, “It took the whole of Creation / To produce my foot, my each feather.” Here, the hawk implies that every part of it was carefully crafted, as if all of nature exists to create and support its being.

As the hawk continues, it states, “Now I hold Creation in my foot,” displaying its dominance. By clutching the bark with its feet, the hawk feels it has control over life itself, symbolising its position at the top of the natural order. The hawk’s sense of self-importance and power is unchallenged, reflecting a worldview in which it is the ultimate authority, and all aspects of creation exist to serve or enhance its existence. The hawk’s belief in its supremacy

and purpose is evident through these lines.

Lines 13 - 16

*Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads -*

The hawk confidently describes its dominion over its environment. When it says, “Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly,” it indicates how it views the world from above, surveying it with a sense of ownership and control. The line, “I kill where I please because it is all mine,” further emphasises its belief that everything around it belongs to it, granting it the freedom to act without restriction or consequence.

The hawk then states, “There is no sophistry in my body,” meaning there is no pretence or subtlety in its existence. It is straightforward and unapologetic about its nature, living purely by instinct and power. The phrase “My manners are tearing off heads” bluntly expresses the hawk’s unfiltered approach to life. It kills directly and without remorse, adhering to its primal nature.

Lines 17 - 20

*The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:*

These lines reflect the hawk’s perspective on power and control over life and death. “The allotment of death” suggests the hawk’s authority in deciding who lives and dies, showing nature’s raw, instinctual hierarchy. The line “For the one path of my flight is direct / Through the bones of the living” illustrates the hawk’s unyielding and predatory purpose, moving straight toward its prey without hesitation. The final line emphasises that the hawk’s dominance is unquestioned and intrinsic, not requiring justification or debate; its might alone is its authority.



Lines 21 - 24

*The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.*

These lines present the hawk as an assertive, dominant figure. The hawk speaks of the sun being behind it, portraying its power and position of control. It asserts that nothing has changed since it began, emphasising a timeless, unwavering existence. It claims control over its environment, suggesting that its vision will dictate reality. Finally, the hawk intends to maintain the status quo, presenting its sense of authority and permanence in nature.

2.6.3 Analysis

The title “Hawk Roosting” suggests a literal image of a hawk perched and a symbolic representation of the bird in a state of stillness and self-assurance. The word “roosting” implies rest but also a sense of control and dominance, as the hawk is in its element, overseeing its surroundings. The speaker of the poem is the hawk itself, and its perspective is central to the meaning of the work. Hughes imbues the poem with an inherently predatory and authoritative voice by choosing a bird of prey. The poem is composed of eleven brief, unrhymed lines written in free verse. This lack of a rigid structure mirrors the hawk’s dominance and unchallenged existence. The straightforwardness of the language, coupled with the concise form, reflects the hawk’s simplicity in thought. There is no unnecessary elaboration, just the clear expression of its control. The free verse structure also suggests the idea of freedom from external constraints, reinforcing the hawk’s independence and self-reliance.

The tone of the poem is one of cold confidence and detached authority. The hawk’s voice is self-assured, almost arrogant, and completely

uninterested in anything outside of its domain. Its speech is declarative and imperious, suggesting a being who views itself as superior and unconcerned with any moral implications. This tone creates a sense of isolation, as the hawk is so enmeshed in its worldview that it does not even acknowledge the possibility of change or opposition.

Hughes’ use of language in the poem reinforces the hawk’s domineering personality. Phrases such as “Nothing has changed since I began” and “My eye has permitted no change” suggest an unyielding force that dictates the flow of time and nature. The hawk’s perception is presented as an absolute reality, with no room for modification or challenge. The language also conveys a sense of detachment from the human experience. There are no emotions or moral reflections in the hawk’s statements. It simply exists to assert its superiority.

The imagery in the poem is stark and vivid, with the hawk’s power symbolised by its physical presence and ability to control its environment. The mention of the sun being “behind me” can be interpreted as a symbol of light and life, with the hawk standing in a position shielded from the chaos or turmoil that might come from the outside world.

2.6.4 Major Themes

Power and Domination: The hawk’s voice reflects a world of absolute control, where it exerts power over its surroundings without question or remorse. The idea that the hawk “kills where I please” emphasises the stark reality of predation and the hawk’s belief in its inherent right to dominate life and death. This can be read as a commentary on the nature of power and how it is maintained and justified through absolute authority.

Nature and Survival: The hawk embodies the primal instincts of survival. Its detached view of nature as something to be controlled

and conquered presents the reality of the animal kingdom, where the law of the strong prevails. The hawk's unbothered attitude to its violent actions, expressed in "I kill where I please because it is all mine," reflects the animalistic nature of life, which is driven by the need to dominate for survival.

Isolation and Alienation: The hawk's perspective is solitary and self-centred. It distances itself from human notions of morality or empathy. The hawk's control over its environment is so complete that it does not recognise the possibility of change or interaction with others. The idea of "permitting no change" reflects an inherent alienation, suggesting that once power is achieved, it creates an isolated worldview where nothing else matters.

The Nature of Power: Through the hawk's reflections, Hughes explores the nature of power itself. The hawk's view of power is absolute and devoid of compassion or consideration for others. This sense of power is not earned or justified but assumed, as the hawk simply exists to dominate. Its perception of

itself as the ultimate being can be seen as a metaphor for the dangerous and isolating effects of unchecked authority.

2.6.5 Literary Devices

Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds in phrases like "I kill where I please because it is all mine" creates a harsh, aggressive rhythm that mirrors the hawk's assertive nature.

Metaphor: The hawk itself is a metaphor for absolute, unquestioned power. Its physical presence, especially its eyes, symbolises control, vision, and dominance, suggesting that those who hold power only see the world as a means to maintain their authority.

Imagery: Hughes uses vivid and stark imagery to convey the hawk's ruthless power, particularly through the bird's view of the world. The hawk's "eye" serves as a tool of dominance, controlling not only its immediate environment but also the perception of reality itself.

Recap

- ▶ The hawk rests at the top of a tree, confident and in control, not needing vigilance
- ▶ It instinctively rehearses hunting even at rest, displaying its predatory focus
- ▶ The hawk sees its surroundings as perfectly designed for its needs, enhancing its sense of power
- ▶ It views the world as its domain, with all elements serving its purpose
- ▶ The hawk feels superior and created for this role, as every part of it is crafted for dominance
- ▶ It believes it holds control over life and death, exercising freedom and authority without remorse
- ▶ The hawk's self-assurance is evident in its belief that nothing will change
- ▶ It is the supreme ruler of its world
- ▶ The title suggests both stillness and dominance
- ▶ The free verse structure reflects the hawk's autonomy and straightforward mindset



- ▶ The tone is confident, cold, and detached
- ▶ The language reinforces the hawk's dominance
- ▶ The imagery conveys the hawk's power, particularly in its view of the world
- ▶ The major themes are power and domination, nature and survival, isolation and alienation, the nature of power
- ▶ The main literary devices used are alliteration, metaphor and imagery

Objective Questions

1. What is the central theme of the poem "Hawk Roosting"?
2. What does the hawk claim about its position in the world?
3. What is the tone of the poem?
4. What does the phrase "Nothing has changed since I began" reflect?
5. What does the hawk's declaration of "Nothing has changed" emphasise?
6. In the poem, what does the hawk see as its "will" in the world?
7. What is the significance of the hawk saying, "The sun is behind me"?
8. What does the hawk's declaration that "I kill where I please because it is all mine" demonstrate?
9. What is implied by the phrase, "My feet are locked upon the rough bark"?
10. Which literary device is most prominent in the line "I kill where I please because it is all mine"?
11. What does the free verse structure of the poem symbolise?
12. What does the hawk mean when it says, "There is no sophistry in my body"?
13. What does the hawk mean by "I hold Creation in my foot"?
14. What does the imagery of the hawk's "eye" symbolise?
15. What does the hawk's view of the world suggest about its personality?

Answers

1. Power and Domination
2. It controls everything around it
3. Cold and detached
4. Timeless existence
5. A permanent, unchallenged position
6. The force that dictates reality

7. It is in control and shielded from chaos
8. Ruthlessness and domination
9. The hawk is firmly grounded in power
10. Alliteration
11. The hawk's independence and self-reliance
12. The hawk is direct and unapologetic
13. It has control over all of nature
14. Vision and dominance
15. It is isolated and unapproachable

Assignments

1. How does Ted Hughes use the hawk as a metaphor for absolute power and dominance in "Hawk Roosting"? Discuss with reference to specific language and imagery.
2. How does the hawk's perspective on control and permanence reflect Hughes' views on power and authority?
3. Analyse how Hughes uses structure and free verse to reflect the hawk's independence and unchallenged dominance.
4. Examine the hawk's perception of itself in "Hawk Roosting" and discuss what this reveals about Hughes' views on the nature of power and self-assurance.

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Gifford, Terry. *Ted Hughes*. Routledge, 2009.
- ▶ Roberts, Neil. *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- ▶ Sagar, Keith. *The Art of Ted Hughes*. Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- ▶ Faas, Ekbert. *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*. Black Sparrow Press, 1980.

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No:

Name:

SET -A
UNDER GRADUATE PROGRAMMES
END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION
GENERIC ELECTIVE COURSE
B21EG01GE APPRECIATING LITERATURE
(CBCS – UG)

2022-23 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence. (10×1=10)

1. Who is the author of *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*?
2. What does the “House” symbolise in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*?
3. Name the illness Johnsy suffers from in *The Last Leaf*.
4. What does the ivy vine represent in O. Henry’s *The Last Leaf*?
5. What is the free bird a metaphor for in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?
6. Who are the three main characters in *The Last Leaf*?
7. Who is the protagonist in *The Last Leaf*?
8. What does Kamala Das mean by “gift him what makes you woman”?
9. What is the significance of the mirror in Kamala Das’ *The Looking Glass*?
10. What literary device is used in the phrase “bars of rage” in Angelou’s poem?
11. How does Emily Dickinson personify Death in her poem?
12. What does Behrman sacrifice in *The Last Leaf*?
13. Who painted the last leaf in O. Henry’s story?
14. What does Emily Dickinson compare death to in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*?
15. How does Kamala Das describe a woman’s body after love fades in *The Looking Glass*?

Section B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences.

(5×2=10)

16. How does Because I Could Not Stop for Death challenge the conventional view of mortality?
17. Discuss the symbolism of the “Setting Sun” in Dickinson’s poem.
18. What role does Sue play in saving Johnsy in The Last Leaf?
19. Explain the significance of the caged bird’s song in Angelou’s poem.
20. How does The Last Leaf convey the theme of sacrifice?
21. What is the tone of The Looking Glass, and how does it reflect gender dynamics?
22. How does The Caged Bird critique systemic racism and privilege?
23. What is the role of friendship in O. Henry’s The Last Leaf?
24. How does Emily Dickinson depict eternity in Because I Could Not Stop for Death?
25. Explain the significance of the caged bird’s “fearful trill” in Angelou’s poem.
26. What is the role of imagery in Because I Could Not Stop for Death?

Section C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph.

(6×5=30)

27. Analyse the metaphor of the carriage ride in Emily Dickinson’s Because I Could Not Stop for Death.
28. Discuss the theme of hope and despair in The Last Leaf.
29. How does Angelou use vivid imagery to contrast the free bird and the caged bird?
30. Evaluate the emotional dependence of women portrayed in Kamala Das’ The Looking Glass.
31. How does O. Henry use realism to depict the struggles of artists in The Last Leaf?
32. Explore the theme of generational trauma in Maya Angelou’s I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.
33. Discuss the representation of death as a journey in Dickinson’s poem.
34. How does Kamala Das highlight the fragility of the male ego in The Looking Glass?
35. How does the title The Looking Glass reflect the central theme of the poem?
36. How does The Last Leaf explore the theme of resilience through art?
37. How does I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings highlight the contrast between freedom and captivity?

Section D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words.

(2×10=20)

38. Compare and contrast the portrayal of mortality in Emily Dickinson's *Because I Could Not Stop for Death* and O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*.
39. Examine the feminist critique of relationships and societal norms in Kamala Das's *The Looking Glass*.
40. Discuss how Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* symbolises the struggles of the marginalized.
41. Evaluate the themes of sacrifice and hope in O. Henry's *The Last Leaf* with textual references.



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SET -B
UNDER GRADUATE PROGRAMMES
END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION
GENERIC ELECTIVE COURSE
B21EG01GE APPRECIATING LITERATURE
(CBCS – UG)

2022-23 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence. (10×1=10)

1. Which war serves as a historical backdrop for some of Dickinson's themes?
2. How does Kamala Das describe the "male ego" in The Looking Glass?
3. How does Johnsy's belief about the falling ivy leaves affect her recovery in The Last Leaf?
4. What artistic aspiration does Behrman achieve in The Last Leaf?
5. How does Angelou portray the psychological impact of oppression on the caged bird?
6. Name the primary literary movement influencing Dickinson's time.
7. What emotion does the caged bird's song primarily convey in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings?
8. What does Kamala Das highlight as central to a woman's identity in The Looking Glass?
9. How does Dickinson use paradox in Because I Could Not Stop for Death?
10. What does the phrase "grave of dreams" symbolise in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings?
11. How does the free bird view the sky in Angelou's poem?
12. What is the tone of Kamala Das's poem The Looking Glass?
13. Why is Greenwich Village significant in The Last Leaf?
14. What societal norm does Kamala Das critique in The Looking Glass?
15. How does Dickinson depict immortality in her poem?

Section B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences.

(5×2=10)

16. How does Kamala Das's *The Looking Glass* portray female vulnerability and empowerment simultaneously?
17. How does Maya Angelou contrast the caged bird's struggles with the free bird's freedom?
18. How does Sue contribute to Johnsy's recovery in *The Last Leaf*?
19. What role does memory play in *The Looking Glass*?
20. How does Angelou critique systemic privilege in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?
21. What is the significance of the final resting place in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*?
22. How does Behrman's sacrifice affect the story's message in *The Last Leaf*?
23. Explain how the journey in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death* reflects the passage of life.
24. What major historical event influenced Emily Dickinson's writings during the 19th century?
25. What rhyme scheme is used in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*?
26. How does Kamala Das describe the "male ego" in *The Looking Glass*?

Section C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph.

(6×5=30)

27. Discuss the cyclical stages of life as depicted in Dickinson's *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*.
28. Explore the role of resilience in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.
29. How does Kamala Das critique societal expectations about love and desire in *The Looking Glass*?
30. Examine the theme of selflessness in O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*.
31. What does the metaphor of the "cage" in Angelou's poem reveal about systemic oppression?
32. How does Dickinson use personification to redefine the concept of death?
33. Analyse the use of art as a transformative force in *The Last Leaf*.
34. How does Angelou use repetition to emphasise the caged bird's plight in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?
35. Discuss the emotional and physical toll of unbalanced relationships as portrayed in *The Looking Glass*.
36. Evaluate the imagery used by Dickinson to depict eternity in her poem.
37. Discuss the role of art and its impact on life and hope as portrayed in O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*.

Section D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words.

(2×10=20)

38. Compare and contrast the depiction of mortality in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death* and *The Last Leaf*.
39. How does Kamala Das explore the paradox of love and loneliness in *The Looking Glass*?
40. Discuss the role of friendship in O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*.
41. Analyse the interplay of freedom, privilege, and resistance in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യായാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
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ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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