



SREENARAYANAGURU  
OPEN UNIVERSITY

# Romantics and Victorians

Postgraduate Programme in  
English Language & Literature



**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**

COURSE CODE: M21EG05DC

**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.

**Romantics and Victorians**  
**Course Code: M21EG05DC**  
**Semester-II**

**Master of Arts**  
**English Language and Literature**  
**Self Learning Material**



**SREENARAYANAGURU**  
**OPEN UNIVERSITY**

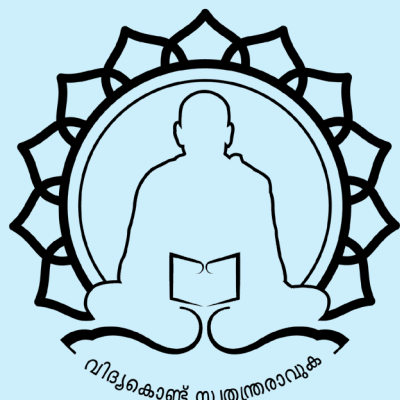
**SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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

# Documentation

M21EG05DC

## Romantics and Victorians



**SREENARAYANAGURU  
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Printed and published on behalf of Sreenarayanaguru Open University by Registrar, SGOU, Kollam.

[www.sgou.ac.in](http://www.sgou.ac.in)



ISBN 978-81-963914-7-8



### Academic Committee

Dr. P.P. Ajayakumar

Dr. B.S. Jamuna

Dr. Lal C.A.

Dr. Premkumar K.P.

Dr. Meena T. Pillai

Dr. C.S. Biju

Dr. Indu B.

Dr. R. Premkumar

Dr. Anitha Ramesh K.

Dr. Pramod K. Nayar

Dr. Sujakurup P.L.

Dr. S. Nagesh

Dr. Fathima E.V.

Dr. K. J. Vargheese

Dr. Habeeb C.

Dr. Sreehari A.C.

### Development of the content

Gayathri Narayanan, Gouri C.S., Swapna N.R.,  
Musammil T.T.

### Review

Content: Dr. Sandhya P. Pai

Format: Dr. I.G. Shibi

Linguistic: Dr. C. Ajayan

### Edit

Dr. Sandhya P. Pai

### Scrutiny

Dr. Vincent B. Netto, Dr. Erfan K., Dr. Sucheta  
Sankar V., Dr. Anupriya Patra, Anfal M.,  
Aravind S.G.

### Co-ordination

Dr. I.G. Shibi and Team SLM

### Design Control

Azeem Babu T.A.

### Production

March 2023

### Copyright

© Sreenarayanaguru Open University 2023



## Message from Vice Chancellor

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual Modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities. The PG programme in English Language and Literature is benchmarked with similar programmes of other state universities in Kerala. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

The University is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The Self Learning Materials have been drawn up with a very clear prescription. It recognizes the autonomy of an adult learner and a journey through the treasures of the curriculum structured with provisions for interactive learning, interrogative reflections on the content and didactic discussion through illustrative scenarios. The University takes a strong position that the learner is to be engaged in a dialogue with the content and the materials are shaped to elicit reflections in the form of questions. The questions of the learner are considered to be the vital milestones in the pedagogy of the system of the University as well as the trajectory of the learner's progression. I would like to request you to bestow your personal attention in generating questions after having an intense dialogue with the content, as it has connection with the internal assessment.

Feel free to write to us about anything that seems relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,

Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha

01.03.2023

# Contents

<b>BLOCK-01    Socio-political and Literary Contexts</b>	<b>1</b>
Unit 1 Romantic and Victorian Period	2
Unit 2 Poetry	22
Unit 3 Drama	50
Unit 4 Prose and Fiction	61
 <b>BLOCK-02    Poetry and Drama</b>	 <b>80</b>
Unit 1 Poetry - Detailed Study	81
Unit 2 The Importance of Being Earnest    - Detailed Study	125
Unit 3 Poetry - Non Detailed	135
Unit 4 The Cenci - Percy Bysshe Shelley    - Non Detailed	154
 <b>BLOCK-03    Prose and Fiction</b>	 <b>161</b>
Unit 1 Prose - Detailed	162
Section - 1    Oxford in the Vacation - Charles Lamb	162
Section - 2    On Familiar Style – William Hazlitt	170
Section - 3    On Books and Reading - John Ruskin	174
Unit 2 Sweetness and Light - Matthew Arnold - Non - Detailed	180
Unit 3 “Preface” from Studies in the History of The Renaissance	
- Walter H. Pater - Non-detailed	187
Unit 4 Fiction - Non-Detailed	193
Section -1    Jane Eyre - Charlotte Bronte	193
Section -2    Great Expectations - Charles Dickens	199
Section -3    The Mayor of Casterbridge - Thomas Hardy	203
 <b>BLOCK-04    Critical Responses</b>	 <b>211</b>
Unit 1 Romantic Poetry in English Literature	212
Unit 2 Aspects of Victorian Poetic Imagination	223
Unit 3 Victorian Novels in English Literature	239



# Socio-political and Literary Contexts

## BLOCK-01

### Block Content

Unit 1 : Romantic and Victorian Period

Unit 2 : Poetry

Unit 3 : Drama

Unit 4 : Prose and Fiction



# Unit 1

## Romantic and Victorian Period

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse the social and cultural influences on the Romantic and Victorian literatures
- ▶ understand the key themes and characteristics of Romantic and Victorian literatures
- ▶ identify the prominent writers and works of the Romantic and Victorian periods
- ▶ evaluate the ways in which Romantic and Victorian literature reflect and respond to the socio-political contexts

### Background

To understand the Romantic literary context, it is essential to consider the intellectual and cultural shifts that preceded it. One of the primary prerequisites is a familiarity with the Enlightenment era, which emphasised reason, science, and rationality. The reaction against the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and logic led to the rise of Romanticism. An understanding of the French Revolution and its aftermath is crucial, as it served as a catalyst for Romanticism by challenging the existing social and political order. In addition to this, an awareness of the changing views towards nature, the sublime, and the imagination is necessary, as these concepts are central to Romantic literature. Lastly, knowledge of influential Romantic figures like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Lord Byron, and their seminal works, such as *Lyrical Ballads* and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," helps in contextualising the literary movement.

Exploring the Victorian literary context requires an understanding of the broader historical, social, and cultural factors that shaped the era. Familiarity with the Industrial Revolution is essential, as it drastically transformed society, leading to urbanisation, technological advancements, and social disparities. This historical context heavily influenced Victorian literature, addressing themes of industrialization, social injustice, and the impact of progress on humanity. Knowledge of the prevailing moral and religious values of the time, with an emphasis on Victorian morality and the influence of Christianity, is





crucial for comprehending the works of writers like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. An understanding of the impact of scientific discoveries, such as Darwin's theory of evolution, and their clashes with religious beliefs is necessary, as Victorian literature often engages with these debates. Finally, awareness of significant Victorian authors like Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Oscar Wilde, and their notable works like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the Victorian literary context.

## Keywords

Romanticism, Imagination, Individualism, Victorian Period, Industrialization, Morality, Aestheticism

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 The French Revolution

The French revolution marks a momentous phase of political, historical and ideological significance in eighteenth-century France. The violent revolution shook the foundations of the ancient regime. The French society of the eighteenth century was divided into three estates and the people belonging to the two estates, the aristocracy and the clergy enjoyed countless privileges whereas the people belonging to the third estate, the peasants and the common people, lived in poverty and deprivation. The suffering masses wanted to bring about a change in their predicament, mainly because of the influence of the Enlightenment philosophers. Enlightenment was a significant philosophical movement of the eighteenth century, so much like the Renaissance a few centuries back. The whole movement focused on the primacy of reason and upheld the ideals of liberty, progress and constitutional monarchy. The Enlightenment philosophers questioned the authority of absolute monarchy and also the extravagant ways of the clergy. The writings of John Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau greatly influenced and spurred the masses, though inadvertently, into rebellion. The motto of the



- Spirit of freedom

revolution, “liberty, equality and fraternity,” was based on the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers which emphasised on the spirit of freedom and enlightenment.



### 1.1.1.1 The Revolution and its Causes

The French Revolution was a watershed moment in the history of not only France but also the whole of Europe. The revolution which began in 1789, ended in late 1794. The revolution uprooted absolute monarchy and ushered in the ideals of democracy and constitutional government. Though the principles of the revolution were lofty, it later on became the bloodiest and the most violent incident in history. The French monarch Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette met their death by the guillotine. There was also the Reign of Terror which was a period of violent acts committed by the revolutionaries against those people like clergy and nobles who were considered the enemies of the revolution. Thousands of people were brutally executed and many others died in prison. Whatever the pitfalls of the revolution, it demonstrated the triumph of human will power.

- Lofty principles

### 1.1.1.2 Aftermath of the French Revolution

A significant outcome of the revolution was that it replaced absolute monarchy with constitutional republic. It was the first of its kind in Europe. The revolution also encouraged many other movements of the similar nature as it influenced the whole world more than any other. The nature of the ownership of land was changed as feudalism lost its authority and grandeur, the power of the clergy diminished and was controlled, and the idea of nationalism was established after the revolution.

- Abolished absolute monarchy



### 1.1.2 Industrialisation and Urbanisation

Nineteenth century was an era of rapid industrialisation and consequent urbanisation in England. The Industrial Revolution was a landmark period in the history of Britain as well as that of the whole of Europe and it changed the world forever. The Industrial Revolution was the period in which the means of production of goods shifted from hand tools to complex machines and from human and animal power to steam power. It began in Britain, between the period of 1700 and 1900 and soon spread to other European countries and the United States. The term "Industrial Revolution" was used by the English economist Arnold Toynbee to characterize Britain's economic development from 1760 to 1840, despite the fact that it had been used previously by French intellectuals. Since Toynbee's time, the phrase has been used to describe a process of economic transformation rather than a specific period of time.

#### ► Industrial Revolution

There are many factors which account for the beginning of the revolution in England. Geography was a significant reason. Britain was an island and was therefore blessed with many natural harbours which was significant in the development of trade and also the many rivers served as the source of power for factories after the invention of steam engines. As an aftermath of reformation and renaissance, there was a great intellectual awakening in the people in the whole of Europe. Many British scientists invented new useful machines which transformed the fate of the country as well as the whole world. The steam engine was the iconic invention of the industrial revolution. James Hargreaves invented a machine which was known as 'spinning Jenny' and Richard Arkwright invented the water frame. Britain also had colonies in different parts of the world and therefore was able to procure raw materials for industries at a cheap rate. For example, cotton for the textile industry was purchased at a low price from India. The manufactured goods were sold in colonies too. In that way, the availability of markets made industries flourish in England.

#### ► Steam Engine

A large number of new factories were established as an outcome of the industrial revolution. Richard Arkwright has been regarded as the first person to establish a factory in England. His factory was situated at Cromford and also employed about three hundred people there. This kind



► Establishment of factories

of establishment of factories and employment of a large number of workers ushered in a new era in the domain of trade and industry and also in the social system in England. Two to three persons working in their own homes were all that was required for the domestic system. By 1789, the Cromford Mill employed 800 people. Majority of the workers in the factories were unskilled labourers and they had to work for a set number of hours. But in the domestic system the workers had more flexibility in terms of the time and work pattern and also they had to be skilled too because they worked without the aid of any machines.

► Mass production

Textile was the dominant industry of that period and also the first one to use modern production methods. Earlier, the clothing industry was a home based-cottage industry. Materials were brought to home and the members of a family worked together to make the finished product. The traders collected these products then. Mechanisation of the textile industries enabled the mass production of goods which were sold at overseas markets. Mechanised looms and frames were used and these factories powered by steam engines, which were operated using coal, were easier to handle and it made the functioning of the factory relatively effortless. These changes resulted in the mass production of goods.

► Urbanisation

A significant consequence of industrialisation was that of urbanisation. The growth of factories resulted in the development of more urban areas, as people migrated to cities seeking better opportunities and better jobs in factories. Feudalism had declined and more and more people shifted to cities and urban areas abandoning farming. Cities increasingly became locations where people of different classes and sorts mixed, resulting in a heterogeneity that has become one of the city's most famous characteristics. The population in cities grew every year in Britain. In 1801 about one-fifth of the population of the United Kingdom lived in towns and cities, by 1851 two-fifths were so urbanised. By 1901, the year of Queen Victoria's death, about three-quarters of the population were living in urban areas. In the course of a hundred years, a predominantly rural population became an urban one. By the 19th century, thousands of industrial workers existed throughout Europe. Many of them had to live in deplorable circumstances.



- Children were forced to work

And they had to work in very dangerous conditions within the factory for long hours. The employers never ensured any kind of safety measures. They also had to work for long hours for low wages. Even children were forced to work for a livelihood and they were denied education. Factory owners readily employed children as they were available for lesser wages. Most of the machines these workers were operating were dangerous. Factories rarely kept any records of the ages of children and adults who worked for them. Due to the difficulty of finding work in cities, many people chose to undergo these sufferings. Children, in particular, suffered under this system. There were not even laws to protect the workers.

- New class structure

Industrialisation again gave rise to a new class structure- upper class, middle class and working class. Many technological innovations happened as a result of industrialisation. A prominent one was the use of basic metals like iron and steel for many industrial purposes. Transportation developed as new roads and railroads were built and the invention of steam powered trains also revolutionised transport facilities. Charcoal and tar were used to build roads. The development of transportation facilities further enhanced trade and industries.

- Capitalism

Capitalism was a by-product of the industrial revolution which significantly contributed to Britain's growth as a great economic power. The industrial progress also made England the greatest colonial power in Europe.

### 1.1.3 Peterloo Massacre

- Universal suffrage

The Peterloo massacre occurred on 16 August 1819. On that day about 60,000 working class people from the towns and villages of Manchester marched to St Peter's Field in central Manchester. Their aim was to fight for political reform. At that time only wealthy landowners could vote. Therefore people wanted political representation in parliament, and argued for universal suffrage. A minority stood for women's suffrage too. This meeting in August was a result of a series of protests and rallies which took place beforehand. The period was a difficult one for the poor people because of the industrial depression and high food prices due to corn laws. The protesters, though influenced by the French revolution, only wanted a peaceful demonstration of their dissatisfaction. The meeting was presided over by Henry Hunt and about

60000 people attended it including a large number of women and children.

The authorities who were already apprehensive about the event, were startled by the gathering and they argued that despite the peaceful appearance they had violent intentions. They ordered the Manchester yeomanry to arrest the speakers as soon as the assembly began. The inexperienced yeomanry (a local force consisting of volunteer soldiers), targeted not only the leaders, instead they launched a wide attack on the people. People who were already cramped panicked as they saw the soldiers, several were crushed as they tried to escape. Soldiers purposefully killed both men and women, particularly those carrying banners. It was later found that their sabres were sharpened immediately before the meeting, suggesting that the massacre had been planned beforehand. The exact numbers of those killed and wounded are not known but it is considered that probably about five hundred people were injured and eleven killed. Hunt and the other radical leaders were arrested, tried, and convicted. Hunt was sent to prison for two years. Many other journalists who were there to report on the events were also arrested.

- Massacre had been planned beforehand

The massacre sparked great public outrage, but the government of the day supported the magistrates and in 1819 passed a new statute, called the Six Acts, to control any future agitation. The populace was so upset by the Six Acts since they allowed the authorities to search any house without a warrant if there was a suspicion that weapons were kept there. Public meetings were effectively prohibited by this law. Along with it, any meeting in a parish with more than fifty individuals was also banned.

- Six Acts



- High tax for periodicals

A heavy tax was imposed on periodicals to make sure that the poor people could not access it, so that they would be kept out of all kinds of news which might provoke them to turn to rebellion. The magistrates were also granted the authority to seize any seditious or blasphemous publications. The Six Acts enforced the greatest censorship on the press in Britain. However, the press people resisted these acts of censorship in many ways. It was as a response to his experiences at the Peterloo that John Edward Taylor established the newspaper *Manchester Guardian*, which later evolved into the most famous national daily in England, *The Guardian*.

- A Reactionary poem by Shelly

P B Shelley wrote the poem "The Masque of Anarchy" as a reaction to the Peterloo Massacre. While the event occurred in England Shelley was in Italy. He wrote the poem and sent it to his friend Leigh Hunt in England. However due to the censorship of that time, Leigh Hunt could not publish it then and it was later published in the 1830s.

### 1.1.4 The Reform Act of 1832

- The Great Reform Act

The reform act of 1832 which is also known as the First Reform Act, The Great Reform Act, or the Representation of People Act in 1832 was an act passed by the British Parliament that fetched major changes in the electoral system of Britain and Wales. The ideals of the French Revolution, 'equality, liberty and fraternity', inspired the English people to stand for the change in the system. The period from 1820 to 1830 was one of great unrest. After the Peterloo Massacre people were not quietened and they wanted radical political and social reforms. They raised their voice for major reforms in the parliament as it did not have equal representation from all the sections of society.

- Suffrage was limited to land-owners

The English parliament consists of two houses, The House of Commons and the House of Lords. House of Lords consisted of and still consists of members of hereditary nobility and church leaders. The members of the House of Commons constitute those elected by the people. The House of Commons was entirely controlled by the wealthy landowners, for at that time suffrage was limited to only those who owned land. A person had to own property to hold offices too. The middle-class and the working-class were left out of the election. This led to unequal representation from electoral districts in Parliament.



► Rotten boroughs

For example, the quickly developing industrial towns like Birmingham and Manchester, despite a population of 144000, did not have MPs in the parliament because the people living in those towns belonged mainly to the middle-class. While the 'rotten boroughs' like Old Sarum in Salisbury had two MPs but only seven voters. (Rotten boroughs were election districts which had lesser numbers of population or were totally depopulated areas due to the population shift caused by industrialisation. The term was coined by English legislative reformers in the early nineteenth century to describe electorates controlled by the crown or an aristocratic patron in the House of Commons.) There were pocket boroughs too which were controlled by one person or family. Fifty-six of such rotten boroughs had only fifty voters. Cornwall with a population of 300,000, had 42 MPs, whereas Lancashire with a population of 1.3 million, had only 14 MPs.

► Problems in the polling system

Apart from this inequality in representation in the Parliament, there were problems in the polling system too. The polling happened in the open and the voters did not have any secrecy while casting their vote. The candidates tried to influence the voters by trying either to bribe or threaten them. These were the many flaws in the governing system of nineteenth century England.

► Restrictions on grain imports

In addition to these problems in the Parliament and electoral system, the new Corn Laws were imposed. Through this law the government put restrictions on grain imports in response to pressure from landed groups selling corn at high prices because of growing demand. This law specified that no imported corn would be permitted into the United Kingdom until home-grown corn reached a price of 80 shillings per quarter. The nobility and other large landholders who owned the majority of profitable farmland were the only ones who benefitted from the Corn Laws.

All this led to an increasing discontent among the emergent middle class. They wanted their growing economic power to be reflected in political power too and after many struggles, the Reform Act was passed in 1832. Redistricting was done and rotten boroughs were disenfranchised. Sixty seven new constituencies were created. The property requirements were broadened and the middle-class also got voting rights. As a consequence,



- Discontent among the middle-class

the male population who could vote increased. Although a number of changes were effected, problems still persisted. Property qualifications still meant that the majority of the male population could not vote. The working class and women were still left out of suffrage. There was also no secret ballot which meant that the MPs could still bribe their voters. However, this act instilled hope in the minds of people that change was possible and the fight for Parliamentary reforms continued later on.

### 1.1.5 The Hungry Forties

- Severe famine

The hungry forties refer to a period in the early 1840s when England experienced an economic depression and severe famine. The existence of the Corn Laws was one of the reasons for this shortage of grains. Those who opposed the law argued that the restrictions on the foreign import that was meant to inflate the price of the English corn, caused the famine. The Corn Law had become very unpopular by this time.

### 1.1.6 Oxford Movement

- National Apostasy

It was a religious movement, the aim of which was to restore Roman Catholic faith in the Church of England as opposed to Protestantism. The supporters of the movement argued that the Church of England was truly catholic. It was formally inaugurated in 1833 by John Keble's famous sermon 'National Apostasy'. The movement was also known as the Tractarian movement because the ideas of the movement were published as *Tracts for the Times*. Cardinal Henry Newman, leading figure of the movement has written about 23 tracts from a period between 1833 to 41. Apart from Cardinal Newman, John Keble, Richard Hurrell Froude, and Edward Pusey were the prominent faces of the movement. These persons were also known as the Tractarians because of their support of the tracts. They asserted the doctrinal authority of the catholic church to be absolute. They also advocated the revival of many of those doctrines which have become outdated.

The tractarians also wanted to protect the authority of the church against the interference of the state. The followers of the movement were also against the liberalism which has become a characteristic of church practices as a result of Reformation. One significant question they raised was about the responsibility of the church at a time when religious faith was constantly put to question. Though



- Influenced literary works

it emerged as a religious one, the Oxford Movement influenced the social and political domains of Britain during the early Victorian era. Above all, the movement greatly influenced the intellectual life of the times and left its mark on many literary works. The movement however was unsuccessful as its aim was to bring about drastic changes in the Church of England.

### 1.1.7 Victorian Era

- Reign of queen Victoria

It refers to the time period of the reign of queen Victoria. However, it covers almost the whole nineteenth century. The period was marked by rapid progress in many areas. A way of life dependent on a modern urban economy that was based on manufacturing, international trade and financial institutions, came into being.

- Stable government

The United Kingdom was one of the first countries in the world to industrialise, create markets, and reinvest revenues in new manufacturing advancements. Britain became the epicenter of the new Free Trade concept, new technology, and ongoing industrial invention. During the period of Queen Victoria's reign, fast railways and ships, printing presses, industrial looms, and agricultural machines all benefited from the important invention of steam power. The telephone was invented, and communications were improved as a result of the development of an effective postal service. Britain soon became a powerful nation with a stable government and a growing economy.

### 1.1.8 Class

- Class structure

The class system, as we see today, was developed in nineteenth century England. There were three major classes. The Upper-class, middle-class and the lower or working class. The upper-class consisted of people belonging to royal families, nobles, lords, ladies, barons, dukes and duchesses. They earned their title and money as a hereditary right. They were land-owners too and did not have to work. Many of them were elected members of the House of Lords and they alone had the right to vote. It was only the upper-class boys who got the privilege to go to school. Girls were educated at home by a governess.

The middle-class people were those who were well-to-do. They earned their money not due to hereditary rights but as a result of their own hard work. They were mainly merchants and factory owners. They also made

► Middle-class people

money by trade in the colonies. The middle-class people also did other jobs like that of lawyers, doctors, bankers, engineers or stockbrokers. The middle-class children were educated at schools and also by governesses.

► Working class

The majority of people in Victorian England belonged to the working class. They were farm labourers, fishermen, mine workers, factory workers, dockers and servants. Their jobs had no security and they always lived in rented houses. The working-class children were rarely educated as they were unable to pay the fees.

► Overcrowded slums

There were remarkable differences in the lifestyles of people belonging to different classes. The high class enjoyed luxurious homes and amenities such as beautiful gardens and servants to cater to their every need. By contrast, poor people from this period had to lead their life in penury and starvation. The working-class people were often forced to live in overcrowded slums, in one small room and going without windows, heat, or even running water. They also did not get the opportunity to have a proper education. Three fourths of the population in England belonged to the working-class.

### 1.1.9 Gender

In the Victorian era, gender roles were clearly and distinctly defined. The Victorians had this notion of 'separate spheres' which the men and women separately occupied. According to this, men and women were entirely different from each other in all aspects and they had different roles to perform both inside and outside the family. It was believed that a 'natural' hierarchy existed between men and women and 'natural' roles were defined and attributed to both men and women. Women were seen to be physically inferior but morally superior to males, and therefore were regarded as most suitable for domestic life. Women should get married only for the purpose of procreation and they were regarded as totally dependent on their husbands whereas the husbands were independent and engaged freely in the public sphere. Furthermore, women were expected to balance the lack of morality which characterised the public sphere in which their husbands worked all day. Those men might be driven by sexual desires, but the women who were supposedly undisturbed by these sexual passions had to protect their husbands from all kinds of evil temptations. Women were also expected to be 'naturally' gifted to look



► Gender roles

after children and do the household chores. This idea that women had such great influence at home was used as an argument against giving them the vote.

Man for the field and woman for the hearth;  
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;  
Man with the head, and women with the heart;  
Man to command, and woman to obey;  
All else is confusion.

This is how the image of a woman was captured by the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, "The Princess" which was published in 1847. However, the women who belonged to the working class were unable to follow these notions of 'separate spheres' as their households could not survive depending only upon the single male income. Therefore these women went out to work and at the same time managed all the household responsibilities.

► Single male income

It was not possible for women to get higher education and employment. It was regarded as important to teach them to become 'good wives.' A woman was supposed to become the 'Angel in the house'. This term refers to the image of an ideal woman conceived by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore in his poem "The Angel in the House" published in the year 1854.

► The Angel in the House

Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf.  
Of his condoled necessities  
She casts her best, she flings herself.  
How often flings for nought, and yokes  
Her heart to an icicle or whim,  
Whose each impatient word provokes  
Another, not from her, but him;

This was the image into which each 'respectable' middle-class woman had to fit herself. She was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. She had to be passive and weak, modest, delightful, graceful, compassionate, unselfish, morally flawless, untainted and chaste. The 'natural' and 'normal' roles for women as emphasised through similar discourses like the above-mentioned poem, was to get married, be submissive to their husband, give birth to and look after children and manage household duties.

► Submissive wives



### 1.1.10 The New Woman

#### ► Social status of women

Apart from the existence of stereotypical roles for women a new concept 'the new woman' was emerging. The term referred to a change in the social status of women. Many women started taking advantage of the educational opportunities, freeing themselves from social restraints. The family structure was patriarchal; the Victorians had to live by strictly adhering to social rules.

### 1.1.11 Science and Technology during the Victorian Era

#### ► Rapid technological innovations

It was an era marked by rapid technological inventions and innovations. Samuel F.B Morse invented the telegraph, Alfred Nobel produced the dynamite, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, Thomas Edison invented the incandescent lamp, Marconi invented the radio and the X-Ray was invented. Steam powered machines changed the nature of production and this in turn helped economic progress. Boats and ships which also used steam engines made worldwide transportation possible for the Victorians. This further helped developments in trade and colonisation.

#### ► Theory of Evolution

The major scientific breakthrough during the Victorian era was Darwin's theory of evolution. It posited a great opposition to the age-old religious beliefs. Most of the Victorians were pious Christians who were shocked by Darwin's theory. So the age witnessed a great conflict between these realms. In the field of medicine too there were tremendous changes. Important information regarding different diseases like Cholera, Malaria and Tuberculosis were also discovered by Victorian scientists. The scientific and technological developments were other factors which enabled England to further expand its Empire.

### 1.1.12 Charles Darwin

#### ► Changed the course of history

Charles Darwin is the father of the theory of evolution and thereby the founder of evolutionary biology. His theory of evolution and natural selection changed the course of history. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection said that humans were descended from a common ape-like ancestor.

The Victorians were astonished by Darwin's theory. It posed a contradiction to the Christian ideals about God



- Controversy in Victorian society

and the creation of the human. Obviously, Darwin's book *The Origin of the Species* (1859) gave rise to a controversy in Victorian society. Most of the Victorians, even scientists and philosophers who were devout Christians rejected Darwin's theory while others supported. The book became a great success. The Victorians who took great pride in their culture were shocked to learn that they evolved from animals.

### 1.1.13 Karl Marx

- Widened the gap between the rich and poor

Marx is one of the greatest thinkers of the modern era. Marx's analysis of society was based on the relationship between social classes. He analysed the industrial revolution and the resultant capitalism in Victorian society. According to him, the industrial revolution had widened the gap between the owners of factories and the working classes. Marx also argued that in the case of capitalism, this was the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Under capitalism, the bourgeoisie owned the means of production while the proletariat did not. The Industrial Revolution had accelerated this process and widened the gap between the two classes. All mechanisms of the state were used to sustain this exploitation.

### 1.1.14 Sigmund Freud

- Human sexuality

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian psychiatrist, has been known as the founder of psychoanalysis. Although the Victorian era was a time of puritanical repression of sexuality, many scholars studied and wrote about it also. Freud's main area of study was human sexuality. Freud was the first thinker to bring the subject of sexuality into the social realm. The Victorians who were ardently devoted to their prudish, repressive values were shocked by Freudian concepts on sexuality. Fundamental to Freud is the belief that civilization is possible only at the expense of repressing and regulating our natural sexual instincts.

### 1.1.15 Victorian Dilemma

The age was characterised by optimism and a sense that everything would continue to expand and improve. Beneath the public optimism and positivism, however, the nineteenth century was also a century of paradoxes, contradictions and uncertainties. The contrast between social unrest, with related moves towards change, and the affirmation of values and standards which are still referred

► A century of paradoxes

to as 'Victorian values,' is an essential part of the paradox of the age. The Victorian dilemma implies a double standard between many things. Britain experienced success as a nation which made her stand at the pinnacle of power, while at the same time, the lower-class workers at home and of colonies overseas were exploited blatantly. On the one hand there was progress brought by the industrial revolution and the rise of the middle class and upper class. On the other hand, there was poverty, deprivation and injustice.

► Hypocrisy of the Victorians

Science and religion were also on opposing sides. This above all caused a great confusion because the Victorians were steeped in religious values but they were fascinated by the rationality of science. On the one side, philanthropy and charity were the watchwords of the times, while on the other side, the workers were exploited. Victorians were hypocritical in terms of sex and human relationships. Generally, the Victorians were prudish in matters of sex in public. However, things were quite different in private. Women's sexuality was erased from the public sphere, while men flaunted it clandestinely.

► Season of light and darkness

The Victorians assumed a high moral stand, while corruption and vices were very much present. Prostitution was rife in Victorian society, as was sodomy, though it was considered a criminal practice. So what Charles Dickens, the greatest novelist of the Victorian Era, says in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* is suitable to describe the time, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair".

### 1.1.16 Victorian Morality

The term Victorian morality is nowadays used in a derogatory sense. The word 'Victorian' refers to a kind of puritanical denial of the existence of sex. However, there were specific social values which existed in the Victorian Era. The values of church, home and family were important. Family consisted of an authoritarian father, a submissive mother and several children. The family system was patriarchal and children had to be brought up in a disciplined way. Women were considered as befitting only for the domestic sphere. It was a taboo to talk about



► Puritanism

sex, and repression of sexual desires was important particularly for women. Thrift, hard work, individualism, evangelical values, and success were all very important for the Victorians. However, there were many who deviated from these values.

### 1.1.17 Public Schools

In Victorian England education was the privilege of rich children. Public schools were the type of schools in England where a fee had to be paid for education. During the beginning of the Victorian Era, only the rich were able to send their children to school. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of public schools were established to enable the middle classes to receive education. Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Rugby, Winchester, Charterhouse, and Shrewsbury, and two London day schools, St. Pauls and Merchant Taylors', were the main public schools of the time. Rugby was the best among these schools. The school focused on giving non-classical education as opposed to the traditional one that emphasised Greek and Latin and was also one of the first to establish house systems, to stress school spirit, with a strong emphasis on football and cricket as a means of improving character. Rugby school thus became a model for other Victorian public schools.

► Education was the privilege of the rich

However, it was only boys who were allowed to attend these schools and the policy followed by these schools was that of educating these young boys to become Christian gentlemen. Many of the schools had hard living conditions and many of the headmasters were very cruel who severely punished the students. However, the middle-class people made use of the public school system for giving better education for their children. The poor children who could not afford the public school entered into Ragged Schools and Parish Schools. Ragged schools were charitable organisations which provided education to destitute children and Parish schools were non-profit institutions associated with the Church. All these schools were meant for boys. Girls were almost totally deprived of education. If the family was wealthy, they could afford a governess. The subjects they learnt were also different from those of the boys. They were taught practical feminine skills like 'sewing'.

► School system





## Summarised Overview

The Romantic literary context, which emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, celebrated individuality, emotions, and nature. Romantic writers emphasised the power of imagination, intense feelings, and the exploration of the supernatural and sublime. They sought to break away from the strict conventions of the previous era and embraced themes of love, freedom, and the inner self. In contrast, the Victorian literary context, prevalent in the mid to late 19th century, reflected the values and social changes of the Victorian era. Victorian literature was characterised by a more realistic and moralistic approach, focusing on social issues, class struggles, and the impact of industrialization. Victorian writers explored themes such as duty, morality, the role of women, and the conflict between tradition and progress, often highlighting the complexities and contradictions of the time.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the impact of romantic ideals on literature and art in the 19th century.
2. Examine the influence of industrialization on the Victorian socio-cultural landscape.
3. Investigate the role of class and social hierarchy in Romantic and Victorian societies.
4. Discuss the changing perceptions of nature and its significance in Romantic and Victorian literature
5. Evaluate the cultural and historical factors that shaped the Romantic and Victorian movements.
6. Assess the representation of gender norms and sexuality in Romantic and Victorian literary works.

## Suggested Readings

1. Mason, Daniel Gregory. *The Romantic Composers*. Macmillan, 1936.
2. Rosen, Charles. *The Romantic Generation*. Harvard U P, 1995.
3. Swisher, Clarice. *Victorian England*. Greenhaven Press, 2000.
4. Wulf, Andrea. *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*. Knopf, 2022.



## References

1. Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Heinemann Education Publishers, 1993.
2. Lang, Paul Henry. *Music in Western Civilization*. W.W. Norton, 1941.
3. Mazzeo, Tilar J. *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period*. University of Pennsylvania P, 2006.
4. Plantinga, Leon. *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. W.W. Norton, 1984.
5. Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Harvard UP, 1989.
6. Ruston, Sharon. *Creating Romanticism: Case Studies in the Literature, Science and Medicine of the 1790s*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse key themes and motifs in Romantic poetry.
- ▶ evaluate the social and cultural contexts of Victorian poetry and its influence on literary movements.
- ▶ assess the impact of Romantic and Victorian poetry on the development of English literature
- ▶ compare and contrast the poetic techniques and styles employed in Romantic and Victorian poetry.

### Background

Romantic poetry emerged as a response to the changing social, political, and industrial landscape of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was characterised by a deep exploration of human emotions, an emphasis on individualism, and a reverence for nature. To appreciate and understand Romantic poetry, it is important to consider certain background information. Firstly, a recognition of the power and significance of emotions is crucial, as Romantic poets sought to tap into the innermost depths of human experience. Additionally, an understanding of the historical context, including the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, provides insight into the poets' reactions against societal norms and their yearning for freedom and individual expression. Moreover, an appreciation for the beauty and power of nature is essential, as Romantic poets often drew inspiration from the natural world to convey their emotions and explore the sublime.

Victorian poetry refers to the poetic works produced during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). This era was marked by significant social, cultural, and technological transformations, including the rise of the industrialised society and the expansion of the British Empire. To delve into Victorian poetry, one must consider several matters. Firstly, an awareness of the Victorian values and moral codes is necessary, as these influenced the themes and subject matters explored by the poets. Victorian poetry often reflected the tensions between tradition and progress, the moral dilemmas of the time, and the changing role of women in society. In addition to this, an understanding of the broader Victorian



literary context, including the prevalence of the novel as a dominant literary form, can provide insight into the poetic techniques and themes employed by Victorian poets. Finally, an appreciation for the complexity of language and form, as well as an ability to decipher the underlying symbolism and imagery used, will enhance the reading and interpretation of Victorian poetry.

## Keywords

Romanticism, Victorian era, Nature, Love, Emotion, Imagination, Longing, Symbolism

## Discussion

### 1.2.1 Romantic Revival

The term romantic revival refers to the profound shift in Western attitudes towards art and literature. The high artificiality of the neo-classical age was replaced with freshness of imagination. Instead of using rhetorical arguments, the romantics infused their poems with dynamic sensations and emotions.

► Imagination

James Thomson's "The Seasons" prophesied the birth of the romantic movement. Considering the subject matter and manner, the work was entirely different from those written during the neoclassical era. It was a nature poem that marked a shift from the Augustan poetry. The poem explores the theme of sorrow and pain, invoking the terrifying manifestations of death and the transitory nature of human life.

► Shift from the Augustan poetry

Thomas Gray, William Collins and William Cowper continued to follow the path of Thomson. William Blake was the most radical among the precursors of romantics. and his two publications *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) were milestones in the evolution of the romantic spirit in English poetry.

► Precursors of romanticism

These poets were together called 'the transition poets' because they represented a period just before the great romantics. The romantic outlook emphasised spontaneity of expression and encouraged man's right to utter his



► Ordinary people

thoughts without restrictions. It was known as a cult of sensibility which pursued the sublime in literature. This concept of sensibility was widely dispersed in the romantic era as opposed to the Augustans. The cult began with the publication of James Thomson's "The Seasons". A path-breaking work in this tradition was Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751). Gray ponders over the theme of human mortality. Death, the great leveller, renders all humans equal, no matter what their respective roles were in life. While reflecting on the ordinary people buried in the churchyard, the speaker observes how they have attained the same status as the more important figures who overshadowed them in life. Gray's poem set forth a break from the artificial, intellectual and overtly rationalised poetry of the Augustan Era, as it dealt with the common folk and encompassed intense private thoughts and passionate feelings.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

► Forerunners of romanticism

These lines in which the "Elegy" upholds the simple lives and their value in simple language, met with the mid-century mood and became highly popular. In contrast to the themes of the Augustan writings, William Collins in his poems, "Ode to Evening" and "The Passion", deal with themes such as transition, death and life. William Cowper has also been regarded as a forerunner of the romantic poets as his verses deal with rural life and his sympathies are always with the poor and the downtrodden. Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770), William Cowper's "The Task" (1785), and George Crabbe's narrative poems of rural life, such as "The Village" (1783) and "The Borough" (1810) all carried on with the concerns that Gray expressed in "Elegy."

Romanticism is the manifestation of enhanced perceptions and heightened imaginative feelings. It found solace in going back to the ancients both in mythology and history. It was also a return to nature. Romanticism was not only concerned with beauty and inner life but also added strangeness to beauty. Other aspects of

- Added strangeness to beauty

romanticism are a subtle sense of mystery, an exuberant intellectual curiosity, and an instinct for the elemental simplicities of life. Thus the Romantic Revival brought back many of the characteristics of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The dignity and importance of man were recognised and the emotions and feelings of even the humblest human being were recognised as worthy of artistic and literary expression.

### 1.2.1.1 Lyrical Ballads

- Everyday life of people

Themes for poems were chosen from unsophisticated common life and he insisted on using a kind of language that is close to the everyday life of people. He argued that ordinary words should be included into the language of poetry. *Lyrical Ballads* opens with Coleridge's long poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and closes with Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey".

- Emotions recollected in tranquillity

In the "Preface" Wordsworth attacked the artificial poetic diction used in neoclassical poetry. The poetry of the age of Pope and Dryden used an elevated diction as though to reflect the loftiness of thoughts and feelings of writers. But Wordsworth and Coleridge found this too remote from the language of common men. In the "Preface" he claimed that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and he reveals that his own poetic process involves, "emotions recollected in tranquillity." Following poetic lines of Wordsworth may bring you a familiarity with the ordinary language employed in poetry.

In the sweet shire of Cardigan,  
Not far from pleasant Ivor-hall,  
An old man dwells, a little man,  
I've heard he once was tall.  
Full five and twenty years he lived  
A running huntsman merry;  
And, though he has but one eye left,  
His cheek is like a cherry.  
(William Wordsworth, "Simon Lee")

### 1.2.1.2 William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) was one of the central figures of English romanticism. Among the romantic poets he has been regarded as the most radical



- Unique experiences

one, for he strongly advocated the use of the language of the ordinary folk and his poems focused on unique experiences of mostly solitary and isolated figures.

- Lake District of England

Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland, located in the Lake District of England. The place later became a celebrated one through the poems of Wordsworth. He was educated at St. Johns College, Cambridge and he became interested in the French revolution. During his summer vacation in 1790 Wordsworth made a walking tour to France. France was then in the ripples of enthusiasm following the fall of Bastille. Wordsworth too was caught in this ecstatic mood and it is chronicled in the following lines written by him.

“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven.”

- Manifesto of romanticism

Wordsworth returned to France in 1792 and then what he saw there was an entirely different dimension of the revolution. The sights and stories which welcomed him there after the September massacre shook his faith in the political doctrine of the revolution. However, he had to return to England shortly and later on he settled with his sister Dorothy who exercised a great influence on the works of Wordsworth. In 1797 Wordsworth met Coleridge and a strong friendship grew between them and it later resulted in the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, which is regarded as the manifesto of romanticism.

- *Lyrical Ballads*

Wordsworth's early poems were “Evening Walk” and (1793) and “Descriptive Sketches” (1793), which were published while he was still at the university. The epoch-making work *Lyrical Ballads*, which was jointly written by Wordsworth and Coleridge was published in 1798. A few notable poems which Wordsworth wrote during the 1800s are “Michael,” “Old Cumberland Beggar” and “She dwelt among the untrodden ways.”

- “High Priest of Nature”

Wordsworth was influenced by the countryside of the Lake district. His philosophical musings on the natural beauties earned him the title the “High Priest of Nature.” A major work of Wordsworth which occupied him for the next forty years, was “The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind”. The poem, comprising fourteen books, is written in blank verse and traces his development as a poet.





► Lyrics

He intended to make “The Prelude” a part of *The Recluse*. But it was never finished and the three parts which were completed were published in 1814 as *The Excursion*. Two volumes of poems were published in 1807 and it had great lyrics like “The Solitary Reaper,” “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality,” “Resolution and Independence,” and “Ode to Duty.”

### 1.2.1.3 Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry

In the *Preface* to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth put forward his theory of poetry. He regarded poetry “as the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge”, which is also the product of “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. He states, “Poetry originates from emotions recollected in tranquillity” and according to Wordsworth the poet is a man who possessed more than usual organic sensibility and one who has also thought long and deeply. Wordsworth also gave his views on the subject and the style of poetry in the *Preface*. Regarding the subject of poetry Wordsworth says that “incidence and situations from common life should be chosen and to obtain such situations humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find the better soil in which they can attain their maturity.” Wordsworth’s ideas on poetic style are also revolutionary; he insists that his poems contain little poetic diction and are written in a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation. He says this about poetic diction, “there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.”

► Subject of poetry

### 1.2.1.4 Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Coleridge (1772 – 1834) was a multifaceted personality. He was a poet, philosopher, literary critic, orator and theologian. His first published book was *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796). Then in collaboration with Wordsworth, he produced the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). This remarkable work contained nineteen poems by Wordsworth and four by Coleridge. The most noteworthy among them is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The voyage described in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, is based on a dream of his own. It is his most famous poem that is written in the form of a ballad. It narrates the story of a sailor who commits a



- Death of the albatross

crime by killing the albatross and later suffers physical and mental torments as a result of the curse that the dead bird brings upon him. It was Wordsworth who suggested the details that can be added to the poem. Some of the magnificent visual images that are given in the poem are the voyage through the polar ice, the death of the albatross and the scenes during the storm.

- Supernatural atmosphere

In 1797 the first part of *Christabel* was written. Second part was added in 1800 but remained unpublished till 1816. It narrates the story of a witch who after disguising as a beautiful lady wins the confidence of the heroine Christabel. The poem reveals Coleridge's power as a poet of superior sensibilities. As in *The Ancient Mariner*, a brilliant supernatural atmosphere is created. Coleridge had also invented a new meter for the poem, known as the Christabel meter in octosyllabic couplets.

- A dream vision

Similar to *Christabel*, "Kubla Khan" was written in 1798 and remains an unfinished poem. It was also published only in the year 1816. Coleridge himself has said about the poem which is subtitled as a "Vision in a Dream", that he had written it under the influence of opium, the drug. He had a vision of the poem in a dream, but before he could complete it, he was distracted and the poem remained unfinished. The poem comprises splendid images like the pleasure-dome built by Kubla Khan in Xanadu. The poem is notable for its enchanting verbal qualities and sensual features.

- Imaginative quality

His other noteworthy works are "Frost at Midnight and France: An Ode". Greatest of his odes is "Dejection: An Ode". The poem laments the loss of the spirit of imagination and his inability to write poems. He wrote the famed critical treatise *Biographia Literaria* and a play titled *Remorse*. The most important quality of Coleridge's work is its superior imaginative quality. He gives a special treatment to nature and also to the supernatural and the obscure. The language he makes use of in his poems is aesthetically alluring.

### 1.2.1.5 Lord Byron

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788 – 1824) is one of the leading figures of Romanticism. His most significant work is *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812). He was born into a noble family and was educated at Trinity College, London. His first published work was *Hours of Idleness*

#### ► Political Satire

(1807). In retaliation to a very sarcastic critique of the work in *The Edinburgh Review*, he wrote a satire in the style of Pope, titled *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in 1812. Byron had become exceedingly famous in the English literary circles. *Childe* is a title used during the medieval times to refer to a young noble. Disillusioned by his aimless life, Childe Harold undertakes solitary pilgrimages and the poem focuses on those journeys. He travels to different places like Portugal, Spain, Albania, Greece, the Alps, Venice and Florence. Byron also includes comments on artists and historical figures associated with these places. The idea of a Byronic hero is from the figure of Childe Harold. A Byronic hero is a social outcast, yet arrogant as well as intelligent. He disregards social conventions. Poems like *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Siege of Corinth* (1815) and *Parisina* (1816). All these poems deal with romantic tales of the East and have Byronic heroes. During this time due to the many problems in his personal life, Byron had to leave England and he travelled through Europe. The major works he wrote during this time were *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816) and *Mazeppa* (1819). He also wrote a number of satirical poems, the most notable of which are *Beppo* (1818) and *The Vision of Judgement* (1822). *The Vision of Judgement*, which is an attack on another romantic poet Robert Southey, has been regarded as one of the finest pieces of political satire, in the tradition of Dryden and Pope. *Don Juan* is regarded as the greatest satirical poem in English. The work published in parts from 1819 to 1824 is a picaresque novel written in verse, the hero of which undergoes many adventures. When published, it shocked the literary world, as the reading public regarded it as vile and immoral.

#### 1.2.1.6 P. B. Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was born in Sussex as an heir to a baronetcy. He was educated at Eton and Oxford. From a very young age his interests proved strange and eccentric like visiting the graveyard and studying alchemy. He was later expelled from Oxford for writing the pamphlet “The Necessity of Atheism”. His first marriage caused many problems in his personal life and later on he married Mary Godwin, who became famous as Mary Shelley. Shelley's early death at the age of



► Lyrical Drama

thirty was a great loss to literature. His earliest poem was *Queen Mab* (1813). The poem written in blank verse was a political epic that reflected his views on atheism. *Alastor or The Spirit of Solitude* (1816) was the next poem. It is a kind of spiritual autobiography which is an exploration of self-identity. The poem abounds in Shelleyan imagery, and also expresses a quest for ideal beauty. Poems like *Laon and Cythna* (1817) and *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) followed. Shelley's lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* was published in 1820. The play is considered as a reply to Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. The play narrates the torments experienced by Prometheus who steals fire and gives it to humans. When Zeus punishes him for that, Prometheus fights against the oppression. *The Cenci, a verse tragedy in five acts*, was published in 1819. Written in the tradition of Elizabethan tragedies, the play however received a lot of censure because of the many shocking themes.

► Revolutionary political views

*Julian and Maddalo* (1818) and *The Masque of Anarchy* (1819) were two poems published during this time. *The Masque of Anarchy* is inspired by the news of the Peterloo Massacre, and it expresses Shelley's revolutionary political views. *Adonais* (1821) is an elegy written on the death of Keats. It is written in Spenserian Stanza and reveals the splendid poetic genius of Shelley. During this time Shelley also wrote a number of short lyrical poems, "To a Skylark" and "The Cloud". Some of the other lyrical poems are "The Indian Serenade", "Music When Soft Voices Die", "On a Faded Violet" and "To Night". Among his odes the most brilliant one is "Ode to the West Wind" which comprises some of the finest poetic lines of Shelley.

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!  
A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd  
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies  
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!





► Genius among English poets

Shelley has been considered as a genius among English poets because of the loftier poetic qualities and revolutionary traits of his poems. He is a visionary in the choice of subjects .

### 1.2.1.7 John Keats

John Keats (1795 – 1821) was born in London. He became friends with the writer Leigh Hunt first, and later with Shelley and other romantic poets of the time. Keats died at the very young age of twenty-five. The poems which he wrote before were all of great literary merit. At the age of seventeen Keats happened to read the works of Spenser and he became so fascinated by them. His first poem was “Imitation of Spenser” published in 1813 when he was eighteen. His first volume of poems was titled *Poems* (1817). This collection includes his first mature work “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”. Keats was inspired to write this poem after reading George Chapman’s translation of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Another notable poem of this volume is “Sleep and Poetry” which includes a predictive narration of the progress of Keats’ poetic career. This poem and another one titled “I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill” shows a marked influence of Spenser and also that of the poet Leigh Hunt to whom this volume is dedicated.

► Keats’ poetic career

Keats’ first long poem, *Endymion* (1818) is partly based on Michael Drayton’s *The Man in the Moon* and John Fletcher’s *The Faithful Shepherdess*. The poem focuses on the love of the moon-goddess, (who is known variously as Diana, Selene, and Artemis; and also identified as Cynthia by Keats) for a shepherd named Endymion. Keats transformed the Greek myth into an intricate love poem, an allegorical one of about four thousand lines. Critics have found many flaws and weaknesses in the poem, but it also contains many passages of exquisite beauty. The first line, which is an oft quoted one, underlines Keats’ poetic philosophy.

► Keats’ poetic philosophy

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever”

His next poem, *Isabella or The Pot of Basil* (1818), is an adaptation of a story from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. The poem is set in the Middle Ages in Florence, Italy. Isabella is the heroine of the poem. Her brothers want her to get married to a high noble. But she instead falls in love with Lorenzo, an employee in their house. Her brothers, who



- Adaptation from Boccaccio's Decameron

are much concerned about the honour of their family, kill Lorenzo and bury his body in the forest. Isabella is later informed by Lorenzo's ghost about the murder. She then exhumes the body and buries his head in a pot of Basil which she nurtures later.

Some of his great works are *Lamia*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the odes like *Ode on Indolence*, *Ode on A Grecian Urn*, *Ode to Psyche*, *Ode on Melancholy*, *Ode to Nightingale*, *To Autumn* and *Hyperion*. *Hyperion* is an epic poem by Keats in two versions. The first version was published as an unfinished one in 1820. The second one was a revised one titled, *The Fall of Hyperion*. This one was too left unfinished and was published only posthumously in 1856. In the poem Keats narrates the story of the conflict between the older race of gods such as Saturn and Hyperion and the younger ones like Apollo. The poem written in blank verse is modelled on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Some critics even regard this work as Keats' greatest. Some of the passages in this work are of striking poetic quality. For example, the beginning lines of Book I are:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,  
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence round about his lair;  
Forest on forest hung about his head  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,  
Not so much life as on a summer's day  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.  
A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more  
By reason of his fallen divinity  
Spreading a shade: the Naiad 'mid her reeds  
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips.

- Conflict between gods

*The Eve of St. Agnes* (1819) is regarded as the finest narrative poem of Keats. Written in Spenserian stanza, the poem deals with the theme of elopement of two lovers. The poem has many passages that abound in colourful images and descriptions. The first lines are an example:

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
 As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;  
 Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,  
 And on her silver cross soft amethyst,  
 And on her hair a glory, like a saint:  
 She seemed a splendid angel, newly drest,  
 Save Wings for heaven: --Porphyro grew faint:  
 She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.  
 Elopement of two lovers

- A poem about a beautiful enchantress

Another poem *Lamia* (1819) is based on a story from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which is about a beautiful enchantress. In the poem, Lamia and Lycius, a young man from Corinth, fall in love. At their bridal feast Lycius's friend Apollonius recognises Lamia as an evil sorceress and calls her by name. Lamia utters a dreadful scream and vanishes. Heartbroken, Lycius falls dead. Modelled on the heroic couplet of Dryden, the poem shows a brilliant use of the couplet form.

- Transience of youth and beauty

His odes are still unparalleled ones in English Literature. They are poetic meditations on an object or some kind of an abstract quality. In "Ode to Nightingale" Keats expresses his views on the transience of youth and beauty and the permanence of art. This theme is more elaborately dealt with in "Ode on Grecian Urn". The figures of the lovers painted on the Urn is a symbol of eternal and enduring passion. The poem has the much-celebrated concluding lines 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'.

- Theme of sadness

"Ode on Melancholy" deals with the theme of sadness as an inevitable aspect of human life and the transience of joy and happiness. "To Autumn", the last major poem of Keats, was written shortly before his death. The poem is a celebration of the season of Autumn which the poet regards not as time of deterioration but one of ripeness and fertility. The poem also has the finest and sensuously beautiful lines of poetry.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;  
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,



And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
 Until they think warm days will never cease,  
 For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

- A ballad in the lyrical form

One notable shorter poem of Keats is *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, which is a ballad in the lyrical form. He has also written a number of remarkable sonnets like *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, *Bright Star*, *Would I were as Steadfast as Thou Art*. Keats was a true representative of the romantic spirit whose poems mainly dealt with myth, romance and chivalry. Keats has also had considerable influence on later poets like Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites.

### 1.2.1.8 Women Poets of Romantic Era

There were only a few women writers at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But by the end of the century the number rose. Many of the early writers wrote about subjects such as the loss of a child, frustration at an unhappy marriage, difficult servants, the tedium of housework. Mary Leapor (1722 – 1746) was the first poet from the lower-class, a kitchen maid from Northamptonshire. Her work *An Essay on Woman* dealt with many issues faced by women of the time.

- A poet from the lower-class

### 1.2.1.9 Charlotte Smith

Charlotte Smith (1749 – 1806) stood above all the other women poets of the era. Her poems which celebrated the ordinary rural life of England were in the same tradition as that of Gray, Thomson and Cowper. She had published *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays* in 1784. *Emmeline; or, The Orphan of the Castle* (1788) and *Ethelinde; or, The Recluse of the Lake* (1789) are translations of French novels. Her novel *Desmond* (1792) which deals with the innocent love of a man for a married woman, upheld the idea of class equality as she was hugely inspired by the French Revolution. However, in the poem *The Emigrants* (1793) she expressed her disillusionment with the revolution. *The Old Manor-House* (1793) is her most successful work.

- Idea of class equality





### 1.2.1.10 Anna Laetitia Barbauld

Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743 – 1825) was a British poet and editor. She started writing under the encouragement of her brother John Aikin. It was in 1773 that Barbauld published her first significant work, *Poems*, which became highly successful. Anna along with her husband Rochemont Barbauld established a boarding school for children. Though they did not have children of their own, they had considerable experience with children through this school. So she published works like *Devotional Pieces* (1775) and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781), and also wrote several books on the education of children. Her later works focused mainly on social and political concerns like the freedom of religion, revolutionary politics, and international policy. She published her work *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* in 1791. The controversial book *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* in 1793, came in response to the declaration of war by England on the French Republic. Her political statements were fiery and many times it gave shock to the readers for at that time people never expected such boldness from a woman. Later on for a few years she contributed to her brother's Monthly Magazine. She served as the editor of six volumes of Samuel Richardson's *Correspondence* (1804). *The British Novelists* (1810) was a 50-volume compilation that comprised biographical articles and critical reviews. The last of Mrs. Barbauld's writings to be independently published was *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, A Poem* in which she criticised Britain's involvement in the Napoleonic War. She ended her career abruptly with that poem because of the many criticisms that she had to face.

► Napoleonic War

Two of her works *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, with a Memoir by Lucy Aikin* (1825) and *A Legacy for Young Ladies* (1826) were published after her death in 1825 by her niece Lucy Aikin. In her work *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld* Barbauld's great-niece Anna Laetitia LeBreton included a number of her works. Her works belonged to multiple genres on a variety of themes and concerns. Her essays on political themes showed that women could also write about such serious themes and in this way she became a model for other women writers of her time. Her poems contributed greatly to the emergence of romanticism and though they were disdained in the beginning, at a



- Contributed to the emergence of romanticism

later period Wordsworth and Coleridge were much inspired by Barbauld's poetry during their youthful years. Gradually her name was forgotten and later on she was remembered only as the author of children's books. After the advent of feminism, however, critics started giving serious attention to her works which were brave and vigorous.

#### 1.2.1.11 Elizabeth Benger

Elizabeth Benger, (1775 – 1827) British biographer and poet, was a contemporary and a friend of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Her major works are *Marian* (1812) and *The Heart and the Fancy, or, Valsinore* (1813). Successful biographical works include *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton* (1818), *Memoirs of the Life of Anne Boleyn* (1821) and *Memoirs of the Life of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1823).

- Biographical works

#### 1.2.1.12 Aestheticism

Aesthetic movement was a popular literary and artistic tendency in the late nineteenth century. It was a kind of continuation of the ideals of Romanticism, and a reaction against practical or moral considerations in art. In order to escape from the dullness induced by industrialisation, the followers of the movement focused on producing beautiful art which did not have any specific social or moral functions to perform. Proponents of Aestheticism were influenced by the theories of German philosophers including Immanuel Kant who separated art from practical purposes. In 1835 Théophile Gautier introduced the idea of Aestheticism as artistic independence. The idea was adopted by writers like Charles Baudelaire and Flaubert in France and also the symbolists. In England, Water Pater and Oscar Wilde were staunch supporters of the movement. "Art for art's sake" was their motto.

- Influenced by theories of German philosophers

#### 1.2.1.13 Decadent Poetry

Decadence was a literary movement which was of French origin in the nineteenth century. The founders of this movement were the French proponents of the aesthetic movement which had become prevalent in England at the fag end of the nineteenth century. Charles Baudelaire was the most prominent among the founders. The exponents of the movement chose the term to refer to the literary works of ancient Hellenistic Greek and

► The French origin

Roman writings after the death of Emperor Augustus. A characteristic feature of a decadent writer is the highly stylistic form and bizarre subject matter. According to them, these literary works had a refinement and delicate beauty. The decadent tradition was discernible in England in the writings of Algernon Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symonds, Ernest Dawson and Lionel Johnson.

### 1.2.1.14 Elegy

Elegy is a kind of lyrical poem in which the poet laments the death of a friend or a public figure. Or sometimes the poet reflects on a serious subject. A masterpiece of the elegiac form in English is Tennyson's *In Memoriam* written on the death of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam. Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (1865) and W H Auden's "In Memory of W B Yeats" (1939) are written on the death of famous public figures Abraham Lincoln and W B Yeats respectively. Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* contains sad reflections on the transience of human life. A subgenre of elegy is pastoral elegy of which Milton's "Lycidas" is the most famous. Two other poems in English which follow the pastoral conventions are "Adonais" (1821) written by Shelley on the death of Keats and Mathew Arnold's "Thyrsis" on the death of his friend Arthur Hugh Clough. In the pastoral elegy the friend whose death is mourned by the poet is presented as a shepherd and even nature mourns his death. This tradition of pastoral elegy is derived from the Greek poems of Theocritus and a number of other Roman poets of second and third century BC.

► Laments the death

### 1.2.1.15 Dramatic Monologue

A dramatic monologue is a literary form in which a character speaks directly to the audience or an imagined listener. It allows the character to express their thoughts, emotions, and motivations, often revealing their innermost secrets and conflicts. Through the power of a single voice, dramatic monologues can captivate and engage readers, providing a unique insight into the character's psyche. Through the words of this character, the poet expresses his own thoughts. Robert Browning is the most famous writer of dramatic monologues in English. "Andrea del Sarto", "Fra Lippo Lippi", "My Last Duchess", and "Porphyria's Lover" are some of his



- Revealing innermost secrets and conflicts

famous dramatic monologues. Other Victorian writers who wrote dramatic monologues were Alfred Lord Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

## 1.2.2 The Victorian Era

### 1.2.2.1 Alfred Lord Tennyson

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892) was regarded as the chief representative poet of the Victorian Era. He was born as the son of a clergyman in Lincolnshire. He studied at the University of Cambridge and while there, won the Chancellor's Medal for a poem on Timbuctoo. When he was seventeen years old he published in collaboration with his brother Charles, the collection, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827). During his early years of poetic career, he was greatly influenced by the poet Lord Byron. It was at Trinity College, Cambridge that he met Arthur Hallam. Their friendship became deep and, on his death, Tennyson wrote his magnificent elegy, *In Memoriam. Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, was published in 1830. The collection contained mainly experimental verses, poems like "The Owl" and "The Kraken" and some of Tennyson's best-known shorter poems, including "Claribel: A Melody", "Mariana", and "A Spirit Haunts the Year's Last Hours". The collection, *Poems* (1832) contains many more of his notable poems like, "The Lotus-Eaters", "The Palace of Art," and "The Lady of Shalott." In 1842 he published his next two collections of poetry. He was going through the roughest period of his life as his friend Arthur Hallam died suddenly in Vienna and three of his brothers were suffering from mental illness. However, these collections comprised his most admirable works like "Morte d'Arthur", "Ulysses", "Locksley Hall", which secured him a place among the greatest poets of the generation. In 1847 he published his first long poem, *The Princess*, in blank verse. It is a serio-comic poem on the notion of 'new woman' which was popular then. Tennyson describes a lady's academy with an intellectual princess as the head of it. The poem consists of many beautiful lyrics: "Sweet and Low", "The Splendor Falls", "Tears, Idle Tears," and "Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal".

- Serio-comic poem

- Elegy on the death of his friend

*In Memoriam*, his magnum opus created a great excitement when it was published first in 1850. It is an elegy on the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. The poem has a series of meditations on themes like life and death and discusses them in connection with the intellectual problems of the Victorian Era. It has been regarded as the most deeply emotional work, which at the same time is a greatly philosophical one. The new metre and stanza introduced by Tennyson for the poem are now known as *In Memoriam* metre and stanza. The poem also helped him to win the friendship of Queen Victoria and he was made poet laureate the same year.

- Allegory on the soul of man

*Maud and Other Poems* (1855) a monodrama however shocked the readers because of its morbidity and the theme of the glorification of bloodshed and war. Series of his other great poems, *Idylls of the King*, were published in the years 1859, 1869 and 1889. It is based on the myth of King Arthur and the Round Table. Many critics regarded the poem as an allegory on the soul of man. His last long poem was *Enoch Arden* (1864). It became a very popular poem and was translated into many languages.

- Historical plays

Tennyson has also written a few plays. Among them, three are historical plays, *Queen Mary* (1857), *Harold* (1876) and *Becket* (1884). *The Falcon* (1879) is a comedy based on a story from Boccaccio. *The Cup* (1881) is based on a story from Plutarch. *The Foresters* (1892) is based on the legend of Robin Hood.

- Reflected the characteristics of his age

Many critics were of the opinion that Tennyson lacked originality of thought and that he just reflected the characteristics of his age. But the most notable feature of his poem is its excellent craftsmanship. He has also experimented with different metres in his poems. The poems also have rich imagery and beautiful lyrical passages which deal with beautiful natural descriptions and other scenes.

- Acceptance of the evils of his time

Though he was much celebrated during his lifetime, his poetic reputation declined after his death. Robert Browning and Charles Algernon Swinburne were poets of equal talent. Though Tennyson was a godly figure for the older poets of his generation, the younger generation found many faults with him, particularly in his acceptance of the evils of his time. However, his work still has an exceptional place in English Literature.





### 1.2.2.2 Robert Browning

Robert Browning was a major Victorian poet who is always remembered for his brilliant dramatic monologues. His first important work, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833) clearly shows the influence of the romantic poet Shelley. It is about the many adolescent anxieties and passions. John Stuart Mill, severely criticised Browning for expressing personal matters through poems. After that Browning took the decision to write poems objectively. *Paracelsus* (1835) tells the story of a man with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. The poem is an example of a brilliant use of blank verse. Next he wrote a drama *Strafford* (1837).

- Dramatic monologues

*Sordello* (1840), his next poem, which deals with the relationship between art and life. The work which has multiple layers of meaning and many allusions, has been considered the most unintelligible work of Browning. From 1841 to 1846, he published a series of pamphlets *Bells and Pomegranates*. He then wrote seven more plays in verse, including *Pippa Passes* (1841), *A Blot in the Scutcheon* (produced in 1843), and *Luria* (1846). However, he was not very successful in theatre, so he turned his attention back to poetry.

- Relationship between art and life

In 1845 he met Elizabeth Barrett Browning and they married in 1846. He did not write much during the years of his marital life. *Dramatic Lyrics* was published in 1842 and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* in (1845). These works show his talent being directed towards dramatic monologue. *Men and Women* (1855) contained some of his best poems like "Fra Lippo Lippi", "Andrea del Sarto" and "Cleon". Most of them are written in blank verse. His greatest work *Dramatis Personae* was published in 1864. There is again in it a number of brilliant dramatic monologues like "Caliban upon Setebos", "A Death in the Desert", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", and "Abt Vogler". His next work was *The Ring and the Book*, which was published in 12 books. Written in blank verse, the work is based on the proceedings of a Roman murder trial in 1698, in which a lady called Pompilia was murdered by her husband.

- Blank verse

Most of Browning's works dealt with themes of philosophical nature, religion and love. The central belief that was expressed through his poems was that life must always be striving for something beyond our reach. He

- Philosophical themes



was also interested in the human soul and he made his characters mouthpieces to express his own philosophy.

### 1.2.2.3 Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barret Browning (1806 – 1861) was the wife of Robert Browning. She started writing poems at quite a young age. Her first published work of merit was *An Essay on Mind: with Other Poems* (1826). Her other important works are *Prometheus Bound* (1833), *The Seraphim and Other Poems*. (1838), *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847), *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851), *Aurora Leigh* (1857) and *Last Poems* (1862). *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is a collection of love sonnets. It is considered as one of the best collections of love poems in English. The poems record the early days of her courtship with Robert Browning, her reluctance to get married because of her illness and her yielding to his love despite her father's objections, and their happy life finally. *Aurora Leigh* is a novel-like poem in blank verse. The poem follows the growth of the main character Aurora who abandons her independent spirit and gets married to a faithful suitor.

- Wife of Robert Browning

### 1.2.2.4 Pre-Raphaelites

The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood was founded by a group of artists including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Millais in 1848. They founded the society as a protest against the artificial and dull style of the current academic world and wanted to bring back the truthfulness and simplicity that characterised the works of the painters before the time of Raphael in Italy, hence the name Pre-Raphaelite. The members of the group were much influenced by the philosopher John Ruskin who urged artists to 'go to nature' and in almost all of their paintings they depicted natural scenes with truthfulness.

- Bringing truthfulness and simplicity back



- Accurate depiction of minute details

For example, in this painting John Millais has abundantly incorporated natural elements. One characteristic trait of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings was the use of bright and brilliant colours and the rich and accurate depiction of even minute details. The sensualism they displayed gained them the derogatory nomenclature the “Fleshly School of Art.” The paintings were mainly on religious and medieval subject matter. The Pre-Raphaelites faced much criticism from many quarters, but later it became a very influential movement in literature and painting. The group was separated after five years, however, many of the members followed the principles of the brotherhood in their own way.

### 1.2.2.5 Dante Gabriel Rossetti

D G Rossetti (1828 – 1882) was an acclaimed painter and poet who was the foremost among the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. He started writing poems at the age of six. Later he studied painting at the Royal Academy School. By the time he was twenty years of age, he had translated the poems of a few Italian writers and written a number of poems of his own. Shortly after he completed his studies at the Royal academy, he met William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Ford Madox Brown. Their friendship led to the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. Ruskin, Swinburne and William Morris joined later in the group. Through their work, Pre-Raphaelitism came to be identified with romanticised mediaeval past. Rossetti wrote only a few poems. Among his published works, the most important are *Poems* (1870) and *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881). His true genius is however visible in the poem *The Blessed Damozel* (1850). The theme of the poem is undying love and it is notable for the verbal beauty and the use of symbols. The poem was first published in the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ*. Rossetti was a poet and painter who broke away many conventions and made many kinds of innovations and brought a freshness into the literature of the time.

- Formation of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood

### 1.2.2.6 Christina Rossetti

Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1894) was the younger sister of D.G. Rossetti. Her major works are *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1864), *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866), *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881) and *Verses* (1893). “Goblin Market” is her most famous work.

- The younger sister of D.G. Rossetti

It is a narrative poem about two sisters Laura and Lizzie. Laura succumbs to the temptation and tastes the fruit sold by the goblins in the market. The poem abounds in different symbols and it is also instructive in nature because of its emphasis on the idea of women's chastity.

### 1.2.2.7 William Morris

- Descriptions of medieval scenes

William Morris (1834 – 1896) was one of the significant poets in the mid-Victorian period. *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) is rich in colourful descriptions of medieval scenes. *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) is a heroic poem. *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70) is a collection of medieval and classical tales. His finest long narrative poem *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* is based on Norse mythology. "The Haystack in the Floods" is one of his most anthologised poems.

### 1.2.2.8 Algernon Charles Swinburne

- Recreating an ancient tragedy in English

Swinburne (1837 – 1909) was born into an aristocratic family and was educated at Eton. He left Oxford without taking a degree. He met William Morris and D.G Rossetti and became interested in the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. His first successful work was *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865). It is an attempt at recreating an ancient tragedy in English. The poem became noticeable for its poetic qualities. His next collection *Poems and Ballads* (1866) attracted much criticism as it dealt with unconventional subjects, carrying elements of masochism and paganism. The book was severely criticised for the wickedness of the subjects. Next collection *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871) consists of poems which contain poems in Italian Liberty. *Erechtheus* (1876) is another retelling of a Greek tragedy.

- Suitable for stage performance

Swinburne also wrote plays of remarkable qualities. Notable ones are *Queen Mother and Rosamond* (1860) and three plays on Mary, Queen of Scots; *Chastelard* (1865), *Bothwell* (1874) and *Mary Stuart* (1881). His dramas were notable for their lyrical qualities and brilliant use of blank verse and they were suitable for stage performance similar to the plays written by his contemporaries and predecessors during the Romantic era. He has produced most significant critical works on Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Most important of these are *William Blake* (1868), *A Study of Shakespeare* (1880) and *A Study of Ben Jonson* (1889).





- Sexual and sadistic themes

Pathological sexual themes were a dominant feature of his writings. The explicit sadism and anti-Christian ideologies shocked the readers. His writings also carry an erotic charge which is new in Victorian verse, and led to accusations of obscenity when it was identified as 'the Fleshly School of Poetry'. However later critics considered Swinburne as the greatest poet of the Victorian era; even greater than Tennyson.

### 1.2.2.9 Fleshly School of Poetry

- A derogatory term

'Fleshly School of Poetry' is a derogatory term used by the Scottish poet and critic Robert Buchanan, writing under the pseudonym Thomas Maitland, in his review of the fifth edition of Rossetti's *Poems* (1870) in *The Contemporary Review* (1871) to describe the artists and writers D G Rossetti, A C Swinburne, and William Morris and their followers, especially, Philip Marston, and the poet and translator John Payne.

- His criticism caused considerable controversy

Buchanan regarded these writers as decadent, morally irresponsible, aesthetic (in the pejorative sense), and overtly interested in the carnal or sensual. Buchanan was a misguided man and his attacks caused considerable controversy. He subsequently withdrew from the criticisms it contained, and his criticism is chiefly remembered by the replies it evoked from Rossetti in a letter to the *Athenaeum* (December 16, 1871), entitled *The Stealthy School of Criticism*, and from Swinburne in *Under the Microscope* (1872).

### 1.2.3 Precursors to Modernist Poetry

#### 1.2.3.1 Gerard Manley Hopkins

- Great religious poet in English

Hopkins (1844 – 1889) adorns a unique position in English literature. He has been considered as the first great religious poet in English. While studying at school and college he made extraordinary achievements. He was born an Anglican but joined Roman Catholicism and subsequently, the Jesuit Order in 1867. It was as a result of the Oxford Movement that he decided to join Roman Catholicism. He was received into the Roman Catholic Church by Cardinal Henry Newman. He entered a profession of preaching in 1822. Though he started writing poetry at school itself, he burned all those writings when he entered the church.





► Use of sprung-rhythm

His early poetic works consist of sensuous descriptions of nature in a Keatsian manner. In 1875 he broke his non-writing period by writing the poem "The Wreck of the Deutschland,". The poem is based on the tragic sinking of the ship Deutschland. In the ship there were five Franciscan nuns and a few refugees of religious persecution. Hopkins used an innovative poetic technique of eight-line stanzas. The poem is remarkable for many other revolutionary technical innovations like the sprung-rhythm, counterpoint rhythm, alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, and deliberate coinages. The poem was refused by the editor of the Jesuit journal *The Month* because of the many unconventional methods used in it.

► Sonnets

Though Hopkins continued to write poems till the end of his life, he wrote only little and most of his writings were religious ones. He also wrote a series of sonnets. Among them, "The Windhover," is considered one of the most remarkable poems. His other notable poems include "Felix Randall" "Pied Beauty" and "Carrion Comfort".

► Nature a manifestation of God's beauty

A deep, sensuous love of nature is the significant feature of Hopkins' writings. For him nature was the manifestation of the beauty of God. He regarded the growth of industrialism as an evil, man's falling off from God. He also invented ideas like 'inscape' and 'instress'.\* Hopkins' use of language was also of remarkable quality. He believed that the language of poetry should be different from the language of prose. For his vocabulary Hopkins chose from the archaic, colloquial and dialectal words. This rendered a unique quality to his poetry. He has also invented and experimented with sprung rhythm. It has been invented to imitate the rhythm of natural speech. These features of his poems secured him a prominent position among the poets of the late. [\* Elaborate a little more on "inscape," "instress," and "sprung rhythm."]

"Inscape," "instress," and "sprung rhythm" are three literary concepts coined by Hopkins. "Inscape" refers to the unique essence or individuality found within natural objects or beings. It captures the intrinsic qualities that make something distinct and separate from everything else. On the other hand, "instress" represents the energy or force that connects the inscape to the observer. It is the act of perceiving and experiencing the inner essence of an object or phenomenon. Lastly, "sprung rhythm" is



- Celebrates the beauty and uniqueness of the world

a poetic technique that emphasises the natural stress patterns of language, allowing the poem's rhythm to flow spontaneously and organically. It creates a vibrant and dynamic rhythm, mirroring the pulsating energy of the observed inscape. These concepts intertwine to form a poetic framework that celebrates the beauty and uniqueness of the world around us while inviting the reader to engage with and appreciate its intricate details. Hopkins was a modernist poet in many respects. Mainly he was a master of technical innovations. Hopkins' poetry had multiple layers of meaning, but they still retained unity as a whole. This was a typical feature of modernist poems.

### 1.2.3.2 Thomas Hardy

- Man's struggle against a cruel fate

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928) had started his literary career by writing poetry. And he wrote only verse during the final phase of his life. His poetic collections are *Wessex Poems* (1865-1870), *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901), *The Dynasts part I* (1903) II (1906) and Part III (1908), *Time's Laughing Stocks* (1909) *Satires of Circumstance* (1914). Like his novels the poems also have a pessimistic tone which deal with the theme of man's struggle against a cruel fate. Hardy also made many technical experimentations in his poems. Hardy has been considered as the first among the English modernist poets.

### 1.2.3.3 Rudyard Kipling

- Technical mastery and craftsmanship

Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936) was the most popular English writer from the 1890s to the 1920s. He published hundreds of short stories and poems, four novels, and volumes of pamphlets, speeches, and journalistic pieces. He also won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907. He is now chiefly remembered as the author of books *Kim* and *Jungle Book*. Poems of Kipling were noted for their technical mastery and brilliant craftsmanship. He is also credited with introducing realism into poems. He has also made numerous experiments in verse forms and rhythms. His major poetical works are *Departmental Ditties* (1886), *Barrack-room Ballads* (1892), *The Seven Seas* (1896), and *The Five nations* (1903).

## Summarised Overview

Romantic poetry emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a reaction against the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment rationalism, emphasising emotions, individuality, and the sublime beauty of nature. It celebrated imagination, passion, and the supernatural, with poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge exploring the inner world of human emotions. Victorian poetry, on the other hand, thrived during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) and reflected the values and social concerns of the time. It was characterised by moral earnestness, a strict adherence to traditional forms, and a focus on social issues such as industrialization, poverty, and the role of women. Poets like Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning explored themes of love, loss, and the changing social landscape, while often employing intricate language and symbolism. Both Romantic and Victorian poetry have left an indelible mark on the literary canon, shaping our understanding of the human experience and offering profound insights into the complexities of life and society.

## Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the themes of love and nature in Romantic and Victorian poetry.
2. Discuss the role of imagination in the works of Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
3. Analyse the depiction of women in Romantic and Victorian poetry, exploring the similarities and differences.
4. Examine the use of symbolism in the poetry of the Romantic and Victorian eras, focusing on specific examples.
5. Discuss the influence of social and political changes on Romantic and Victorian poetry, and how it is reflected in the works of poets like Lord Byron and Alfred, Lord Tennyson.
6. Explore the concept of individualism in Romantic and Victorian poetry, with reference to poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley and Robert Browning.
7. Investigate the treatment of death and mortality in Romantic and Victorian poetry.
8. Compare the poetic styles of Romantic and Victorian poets, analysing distinctive characteristics of each era.
9. Discuss the impact of industrialisation on the representation of nature in Romantic and Victorian poetry.



## Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, Meyer H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Oxford UP, 1971.
2. Barzun, Jacques. *Romanticism and the Modern Ego*. Brown and Company, 1943.
3. Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism*. Chatto and Windus, 1999.
4. Longo, Mariano. *Fiction and Social Reality Literature and Narrative as Sociological Resource*. Ashgate. 2015.
5. Stewart, Gail B. *Understanding World History Victorian England*. Reference Point Press, 2014.

## References

1. May, Trevor. *The Victorian Schoolroom. Great Britain*. Shire Publications, 1994. 2011.
2. Plunkett, John, et al., eds. *Victorian Literature: A Sourcebook*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
3. Swisher, Clarice. *Victorian England*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





## Unit 3

# Drama

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse the themes and characteristics of Romantic and Victorian drama
- ▶ compare and contrast the literary techniques and stylistic elements used in Romantic and Victorian drama
- ▶ evaluate the historical and cultural contexts that influenced Romantic and Victorian drama
- ▶ detail on the representations of gender roles and relationships in Romantic and Victorian drama.

### Background

Romantic drama emerged during the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a reaction against the rationality and orderliness of the Enlightenment period. It was characterised by an emphasis on emotion, individualism, and the celebration of nature. Romantic playwrights, such as William Shakespeare, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Lord Byron, sought to explore the depths of human emotion and the power of love. The themes often revolved around passionate, forbidden, or unrequited love, and the protagonists were typically portrayed as complex and tortured individuals. Romantic drama embraced the supernatural, the sublime, and the imaginative, incorporating elements such as ghosts, dreams, and the supernatural into the narratives. It aimed to evoke strong emotions in the audience and inspire a sense of awe and wonder.

Victorian drama refers to the theatrical productions and plays that were written and performed during the reign of Queen Victoria in the mid-to-late 19th century. It was influenced by the Victorian era's societal and moral values, characterised by a sense of moral rectitude, duty, and propriety. The Victorian playwrights, such as Oscar Wilde, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw, explored a wide range of themes, including social class, gender roles, and the impact of industrialisation. Victorian drama often depicted the conflicts and contradictions of the era, highlighting the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. While some plays adhered to Victorian morals and upheld traditional values, others challenged the prevailing norms



and sought to expose societal injustices or advocate for social change. The style of Victorian drama was often characterised by wit, satire, and sharp social commentary, reflecting the evolving cultural landscape of the time.

## Keywords

Romance, Victorian drama, Love story, Forbidden love, Elegance, Passion, Social class, Tragedy

## Discussion

The Romantic Era was predominantly a period of poetry, however there were significant literary productions in the genre of drama too. As in the case of poetry, the French Revolution had a considerable impact on the drama too. It was mostly revolutionary plays that were published during the period. In a different vein, Victorian drama, popularised during the reign of Queen Victoria in the 19th century, was characterised by its moralistic themes, social commentary, and elaborate theatrical productions. It often explored conflicts between societal norms and individual desires, showcasing the era's strict social hierarchies and constraints on personal freedom.

### ► The Romantic and Victorian dramas

A remarkable feature of the dramatic productions during the Romantic period were that they mainly belonged to the genre of closet dramas. Closet dramas were those plays which were not meant for performance but mainly for reading. Plays written by most of the major writers were verse dramas. Verse dramas are dramas written in verse form so that they are also called poetic dramas. Such plays are mostly written in blank verse. The golden age of verse dramas was the Elizabethan period. Shakespeare and Marlowe and their many other contemporaries wrote excellent plays. Verse drama flourished during the Romantic period as poets sought to combine the intensity of emotions with the lyrical beauty of language, resulting in works like Byron's "Manfred" and Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." These plays presented grand themes, evocative imagery, and

### ► Verse drama



heightened passions, captivating audiences with their poetic eloquence and exploration of the human spirit.

### 1.3.1 Lord Byron

George Gordon Byron was the most successful playwright among all the romantic writers. His play *Cain* (1821), a closet drama, is an adaptation of the biblical story of Cain and Abel. In theme and its treatment, the play, it seems, has been inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. *Manfred* (1817) is yet another closet drama in verse. The play focuses on the life of the main character of the play Manfred and his tragically flawed romantic relationship with Astarte. Critics have found the play to have autobiographical features as the protagonist Manfred is a dark and rugged man like Byron himself and many of his characters in his poems. The play also has many supernatural elements which were a common feature in many romantic works.

► Closet drama

*Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice* is a blank verse tragedy in five acts by Lord Byron, published and first performed in 1821. Marino Faliero, an Italian was a leading official in Venice who was executed for conspiring against the ruling people. Byron's historical play is based on this story. *The Two Foscari: an Historical Tragedy in Five Acts* (1821) was another play by Byron. The play is about the trial for treason of Jacopo Foscari by Doge, his father. The play is set in fifteenth century Venice. *Sardanapalus* (1834) is also a historical tragedy in blank verse by Byron. It deals with the downfall of the Assyrian monarchy and its last ruler Sardanapalus.

► Historical play

### 1.3.2 William Wordsworth

*The Borderers, a Tragedy in Five Acts*, was Wordsworth's only dramatic work. It was a tragic verse drama set in the England of Henry VIII and speaks about the travails of Border Reivers who had to suffer due to constant skirmishes and feud. Though historically placed, the play had autobiographical resonances, and is considered a catharsis of Wordsworth's experience and disillusionment with the French Revolution. However, it was rejected and was not performed in the theatres.

► Disillusionment with the French Revolution

### 1.3.3 Samuel Taylor Coleridge

S.T Coleridge wrote the play *Osorio* in 1797. But as the Drury Lane Theatre rejected it, it was not available in stages. Following the rejection, Coleridge revised the

- Gothic and supernatural elements

play and gave it the new title *Remorse* which was then performed for the first time in 1813. The play became a moderate success at the theatre. But critics considered it as having little merit. The play is written in blank verse. Coleridge includes many gothic and supernatural elements like castles, dungeons and caves. The story set in the sixteenth century Granada, focuses on the character of Osorio and his gradual downfall.

- Closet drama

*The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) is a closet drama written by Coleridge and Southey together. It is a three-act play published in 1794. The play deals with the beheading of the French lawyer and statesman Maximilien Robespierre who was also the most influential figure of the French Revolution. Written in verse, it was not meant to be performed on stage as many other romantic plays.

- Revolt against Roman emperor

### 1.3.4 John Keats

Keats was one of the greatest poets of the romantic era. However, he could not excel as a dramatist. The only play that he wrote was *Otho the Great*. It is a tragedy that deals with the revolt against the tenth century Roman emperor Otho. It was a failure on stage and failed to receive the attention either of the critics or of the viewers.

- Prometheus as a character

### 1.3.5 P. B. Shelley

Shelley wrote verse dramas in the closet drama tradition. *Prometheus Unbound*, a four-act play, is considered as his masterpiece which is regarded as a reply to Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. The story focuses on Prometheus who has stolen fire and given it to humans. Thus, he incurs the wrath of Zeus. Shelley presents his hero Prometheus as fighting against a despotic Zeus.

- Themes of incest and patricide

*The Cenci* (1819) is another verse tragedy by Shelley modelled on Shakespearean tragedy. The story centres on Count Francesco Cenci. He is a cruel man who after continuously abusing his family members, kills his sons and rapes his daughter. The play was not considered as suitable for performing on stage because of its themes of incest and patricide. However, it is now considered to be a tragic masterpiece.

- Notable plays

The other notable plays of the time were *Faulkner* (1807) by William Godwin, *The Island of St. Marguerite, an Opera, in Two Acts* (1789), by John St John, and *John Woodvil* (1802) by Charles Lamb.



### 1.3.6 Oscar Wilde

- Interested in the aesthetic movement

Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900) was born in Dublin as the son of a famous Irish surgeon. Both his mother and father were writers too. During his youth he was a man of brilliant capabilities. While at Trinity College he won a gold medal. In 1878 he won the coveted Newdigate Prize for the long poem, *Ravenna*. It was when he was studying at Magdalen College, Oxford that he became interested in the aesthetic movement initiated by Walter Pater.

- Decorative style

In his poems and plays, the influence of Walter Pater and the Pre-Raphaelites is evident. The subject matter of the works has little to do with realistic ordinary matters and they have much ornate decorative style and lack deep emotions. *Poems* (1881) shows clear influences of poets like Algernon Swinburne, D G Rossetti and Keats.

- Gothic and supernatural elements

His important works other than poems, include stories like *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1887), *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), and *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888). Oscar Wilde's fame chiefly rests on his philosophical fantasy novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The novel is an elucidation of Wilde's theory of aestheticism. Wilde incorporated gothic and supernatural elements into the novel. The novel, once public, shocked Victorian society with its immorality. *De Profundis* (1890) which he wrote while he was in prison, is a long introspective work. It was published posthumously in 1949.

Wilde proved himself to be an exceptionally talented dramatist. His first play was *Salomé* (1892), a tragedy written in French. It was not staged because it was based on biblical characters. However, the works which brought immense success to him were his plays belonging to the genre of Comedies of Manners. The epigrammatic wit with which he wrote the plays was totally new to the nineteenth century viewers. His first successful play was *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892). His other popular and successful plays were *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). All these plays expose satirically, and sometimes in a farcical way, the hypocrisies of Victorian upper-class society. In his personal life, Wilde garnered notoriety as a homosexual which was a taboo subject and crime in Victorian England. Consequently, he had to undergo severe trials including imprisonment,





- Epigrammatic wit

social ostracism and financial hardships. It was during his prison term that he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) exposing inhumane prison conditions. After much suffering, Wilde died at the age of forty-four.

### 1.3.7 Comedy of Manners

- Satirised the hypocrisy

It is a kind of comedy, which in a witty and light hearted way, satirises the manners and pretensions of contemporary society. It originated in ancient Greece in the plays of Meander. Later the form was perfected by Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence. One of the greatest proponents of the comedy of manners was Molière, who satirised the hypocrisy and pretension of 17th-century French society in such plays as *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*) and *Le Misanthrope* (*The Misanthrope*) published in 1662 and 1666 respectively.

- Intrigues of men and women

In England the comedy of manners found expression in the plays of Restoration dramatists. The plot of these plays often centred around the intrigues of men and women living in an upper-class society. Comic effect in dialogue was created by wit and repartee. There were also a number of stock characters. Famous examples are William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675). A more refined form of comedy of manners was practised by Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*, 1773) and Richard Sheridan (*The Rivals*, 1775; *The School for Scandal*, 1777). Oscar Wilde later carried on with the tradition of comedy of manners through his plays *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Wilde satirised many hypocrisies and double standards of Victorian society like the attitude towards sexuality, class conflicts, marriage and courtship through his plays. Twinning or double identity is a technique used by Wilde in his play *The Importance of Being Earnest* to generate comic effect.

### 1.3.8 Decline of Drama during the Romantic and Victorian Era

During the Romantic period, poetry was the dominant literary genre while poetry and fiction became equally predominant during the Victorian Era. So there were very few notable plays written till the mid Victorian times. However, theatres were never closed as they continued to stage Shakespeare's plays. Two prominent playwrights of



- Stage Shakespeare's plays

the pre-romantic era were Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan who excelled in sentimental comedies and comedy of manners. Though most of the Romantic writers tried their hand at writing plays, most of them wrote closet dramas and these were not suited for performance on stage.

- Meant for reading and not for performance

Wordsworth's *Borderers*, Coleridge's *Osorio*, Byron's plays, Shelley's *Cenci* were all good pieces of literary work but not very successful as drama. Browning's *Stratford* (1837), Tennyson's *Queen Mary* (1875), *The Cup* (1881) and *Becket* (1893) were the major plays written during the Victorian Era. Another remarkable play was *Mary Stuart* by Swinburne. Most of these were written mainly for reading and not for performance. All these factors led to a fallow period in the English dramatic scene during the Victorian Era. The English theatre was at an ebb during this time. And the audience too were reluctant to go and watch these performances. Melodramas, farces and sentimental comedies dominated the stage. They relied more on spectacular elements than on literary qualities.

### 1.3.9 Victorian Melodrama

- Musical plays

The term melodrama was originally applied to musical plays including operas as the term 'melos' in Greek means music. The term is now used to refer to a certain characteristic that marks the plays of the Victorian Era. The main features of a Victorian melodrama are as follows: improbable plot, generous and noble hearted hero, long suffering heroine who is purity personified, and a villain who is an embodiment of all vices. There will be other stock or type characters too. The plot revolves around intrigues, violent actions and sensational events and spectacular and thrilling elements like shipwreck, snowstorm, train wreck, battles etc.

- Working-class people

Dion Boucicault (1820 – 1890) was the famous writer of melodramas during the Victorian Era. His best-known works are *The Octoroon* (1859) and *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). They are the truly representative Victorian melodramas. *The Poor of New York* (1857), *London by Night* (1844), and *Under the Gaslight* (1867) are other examples. Their spectacular and thrilling nature greatly appealed to the working-class people. Critics regard this as the reason for the great success of melodramas during the Victorian Era.

### 1.3.10 T. W. Robertson

Later on, the melodramas saw a decline. It was the playwright T W Robertson (1829 – 1871) who brought about minor changes which later led to a revival of English Theatre in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He, along with Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero, are considered the forerunners of modern theatre. T W Robertson continued to write plays in the tradition of melodramas and sentimental comedies. However, he introduced certain changes. For instance, he treated serious themes in a humorous way. He introduced realism and satire in the plays. The major change that he brought to the dramatic scene was that he stripped the dialogues off the excessive dramatic elements, and made them natural. His noteworthy play is *Society* (1865), *Caste* (1867), *Play* (1868), and *School* (1869). These plays influenced later playwrights like John Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw.

- Forerunners of modern theatre

Henry Arthur Jones (1851 – 1929) also wrote sentimental and melodramatic plays but he also discussed serious problems through his plays. He considered realism as more important in drama than spectacles. His views are expressed in the Preface to the play *Saints and Sinners* (1884). His ideas significantly influenced the modernisation of the English stage. His other plays of importance are *The Tempter* (1893), *The Liars* (1897). *The Liars* paved the way for the later comedy of manners. His true genius lies in the fact that he opened a door to a new era of theatre.

- Realism in Drama

Arthur Wing Pinero (1855 – 1934) was the first one among these playwrights to use more realistic elements in his plays. He discussed contemporary social problems through his plays. He started writing light comedies. Later he wrote a number of remarkable satires like *The Weaker Sex* (1888). *Sweet Lavender* (1888) is a sentimental play. His best plays are social problem plays, like *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895). His plays introduced realism and naturalism as significant elements in English theatre which later became the main feature of plays written by the greatest twentieth century playwrights Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy.

- Realism and naturalism

### 1.3.11 Problem Play

The Problem play is a kind of drama which was popularised by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.



► Social problems

Problem plays discussed contemporary social problems and exposed social evils, stimulating thought and discussion among the audience. The author spoke out his thoughts and voiced his opinions through a character, and proposed a solution through the evolution of the plot. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* dealt with the position of women in the middle-class family in the nineteenth century. The morality of prostitution was discussed in Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

## Summarised Overview

Romantic drama, a genre that emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, focused on intense emotions, individualism, and the power of nature. It celebrated passion, imagination, and the pursuit of personal freedom, often depicting forbidden love, tragic endings, and societal conflicts. Romantic drama highlighted the complexities of human relationships and the struggles individuals faced in defying societal norms. On the other hand, Victorian drama, prevalent during the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, reflected the values and concerns of the Victorian era. It emphasised social order, morality, and the rigid expectations of society. Victorian dramas often explored themes of morality, virtue, and the consequences of transgressing societal boundaries. They portrayed complex social hierarchies, gender roles, and the conflicts between personal desires and societal expectations, offering a critical lens into the strict Victorian society.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the themes of love, nature, and individualism in a drama from the Romantic period.
2. Compare and contrast the portrayal of social hierarchy and class conflicts in two dramas from the Romantic period.
3. Examine the use of symbolism and metaphor in a Romantic drama and its impact on the overall meaning of the play.
4. Analyse the role of social class in Victorian dramas and its impact on character relationships and conflicts.
5. Discuss the portrayal of gender roles and expectations in Victorian dramas, highlighting the ways in which female characters challenge or conform to societal norms.



6. Examine the theme of morality and its presentation in Victorian dramas, exploring the moral dilemmas faced by characters and the moral lessons conveyed to the audience.
7. Compare and contrast the use of symbolism and imagery in Victorian dramas, focusing on how these literary devices contribute to the overall meaning and interpretation of the works.

## Suggested Readings

1. Gillie, C. *Longman Companion to English Literature*. Longman, 1972.
2. Reynolds, Nicole. *Building Romanticism: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-century Britain*. University of Michigan Press, 2010.
3. Rosenblum, Robert. *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*. Harper & Row, 1975.
4. Turley, Richard Marggraf. *The Politics of Language in Romantic Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

## References

1. Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Longman Group Limited, 1959.
2. Chesterton, G.K. *Robert Browning*. MacMillan, 1961
3. Coats, Karen. *Looking Glasses and Never Lands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*. University of Iowa Press, 2004.
4. Cohen, J.M. *Robert Browning*. Longmans, 1964.
5. Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Avon, 1971.





## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

## Unit 4

## Prose and Fiction

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ identify key themes and characteristics of Romantic and Victorian prose and fiction.
- ▶ analyse and interpret literary techniques employed in Romantic and Victorian prose and fiction.
- ▶ evaluate the social and cultural context influencing Romantic and Victorian prose and fiction.
- ▶ demonstrate critical thinking skills through the comparison and contrast of Romantic and Victorian prose and fiction.

### Background

During the Romantic period, which spanned from the late 18th to the early 19th century, prose and fiction underwent significant transformations. Romantic prose embraced the ideals of individualism, imagination, and emotional expression. Writers sought to break away from the rationalism of the Enlightenment and explored themes of nature, passion, and the supernatural. One of the key figures of this period was the English poet and essayist William Wordsworth, whose collection of autobiographical poems, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), marked a shift towards a more personal and imaginative approach to writing. Wordsworth and his contemporaries, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Lord Byron, challenged traditional forms and styles, experimenting with new narrative techniques and exploring the depths of human emotions.

The Victorian period, which followed the Romantic era and lasted from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, witnessed a shift in the focus and tone of prose and fiction. Named after Queen Victoria, this era was characterised by a strong moral and social consciousness. Victorian prose often reflected the values of the time, such as industrialisation, social class, and the impact of scientific advancements. Realism became a prominent literary movement, with writers like Charles Dickens and George Eliot capturing the realities of everyday life in their novels. Dickens, in particular, exposed the social injustices and inequalities prevalent in Victorian society through his works,



such as *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Great Expectations* (1861). While fiction during the Victorian period addressed a wide range of subjects, moral dilemmas and societal critiques were common themes, reflecting the prevailing Victorian ethos.

## Keywords

Romanticism, Victorian era, Prose, Fiction, Love, Nature, Social hierarchy, Gothic elements

## Discussion

Poetry dominated the romantic era. However, there were outstanding examples of prose writings. With the advent of more periodicals, the essay form received new impetus to develop and grow. A notable thing was the rise of reviews and magazines. *The Edinburgh Review* was founded in 1802 by Francis Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, and Henry Brougham as a quarterly publication. Sir Walter Scott, William Hazlitt, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the educator Thomas Arnold were some of the contributors for the review. *The Quarterly Review* was established in 1809. The first editor of the review was William Gifford. Later he was succeeded by John Lockhart who was Walter Scott's son in law. Blackwood's Magazine, originally known as *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, was founded by William Blackwood. *The London Magazine*, or *The Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* was founded in 1732. The magazine published poems by William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Clare and John Keats. Thomas De Quincey's *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* first appeared in this magazine. All these journals had specific political affiliations too. Many periodicals also appeared during this time. The number of essayists increased because of this. These reviews and periodicals also provided a fresh arena for criticism for contemporary writings.

### ► Prose writings

The romantic essays, like the romantic poems, were of a personal, subjective nature. Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Thomas De Quincey all wrote essays which



► Personal writings

were candidly autobiographical, intensely personal and wholly self-analytical.

### 1.4.1 Charles Lamb

Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834) was an essayist and critic. He began his career as a poet with contributions to a collection titled *Poems on Various Subjects* by Coleridge (1796). *A Tale of Rosamund Gray*, a prose romance, appeared in 1798. *John Woodvil*, a poetic tragedy, came out in 1802. *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), which he co-authored with his sister, is a retelling of Shakespearean plays for children.

► Retelling of Shakespearean plays

In 1809 they published *Mrs. Leicester's School*, a collection of stories supposedly told by pupils of a school in Hertfordshire. In 1808 Charles published a children's version of the *Odyssey*, called *The Adventures of Ulysses*. His acclaimed critical work is *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare*. It is an appreciation of Elizabethan dramatists. His most well-known works are his essays which he wrote under the name Elia and that appeared in *London Magazine*. A collection of these essays was published as *The Essays of Elia* (1823) and a second under the title *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833). The essays deal with a wide range of subjects and they express personal opinions and recollections. His letters to Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey and Hazlitt are also of great literary merit.

► Essays of Elia

### 1.4.2 Thomas De Quincey

Another important essayist of the romantic era was Thomas De Quincey (1785 – 1859). De Quincey was educated at Oxford and while there, he started writing essays in history, biography, psychology and German metaphysics. While at college he had started taking opium in order to alleviate the pain of facial neuralgia and remained an opium addict all throughout his life.

► Opium addict

Though he wrote much, the book that earned him fame was *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* which appeared in *The London Magazine*. The work is a series of visions which melt away as dreams. His intention was to make the readers aware of the dangers of opium. The book begins with an autobiographical account of the author's addiction, describes in detail the euphoric and highly symbolic reveries that he experienced under the



► Autobiographical account

drug's influence, and recounts the horrible nightmares that continued use of the drug eventually produced. This book contains numerous compelling and exquisite passages, which elevate it to the status of a masterpiece within the realm of English literature.

### 1.4.3 William Hazlitt

William Hazlitt (1778 – 1830) is a well-known essayist during the Romantic era. Hazlitt began his writing career as a reporter for *Morning Chronicle* and established himself as a journalist, essayist and critic. *A View of the English Stage* (1818) is a work of dramatic criticism. Hazlitt has also contributed many essays to the journal *Examiner* by Leigh Hunt. Together Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt published a collection of essays, *The Round Table*, 2 vol. (1817). *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, (1817) received much critical acclaim. Other significant works of Hazlitt were *The English Poets* (1818), *The English Comic Writers* (1819) and *The Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820). His best essay collections are *The Round Table* (1817), *Table Talk; or Original Essays on Men and Manners* (1821-22). *The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits* (1825) is regarded as his most important work.

► Essayist of the Romantic era

### 1.4.4 John G Lockhart

Lockhart (1794 – 1854) was a Scottish critic, novelist and biographer. Lockhart at first started writing essays for *Blackwood's Magazine*. Later on he became the editor of *The Quarterly Review*. And while there he produced significant critical works on the writers William Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Lord Byron. Among his novels the most important are *Valerius* (1821) and *Adam Blair* (1822). His masterpiece is *Memoirs on the Life of Sir Walter Scott*. (1837-38). It has been considered one of the best biographies of English language.

► Biographer

### 1.4.5 Leigh Hunt

Leigh Hunt (1784 – 1859) is an English essayist, critic, journalist and poet. His first collection of poems is *Juvenilia* (1801). *The Story of Rimini* (1816), is written in couplet verse renewed from the 18th century. His best works of poems are *Foliage* (1818), *Hero and Leander*, and *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1819). In 1808 Hunt along with his brother started his journal *The Examiner*. They raised many controversial issues through the journal like





► Social issues

abolition of the slave trade, Catholic emancipation, and reform of Parliament and the criminal law. Through the journal he also supported the new romantic poets who were then attacked by *The Blackwood's Magazine*. He also wrote many works of criticism of theatre and fine arts. *Imagination and Fancy* (1844), his most successful critical work, makes comparison between painting and poetry.

### 1.4.6 Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* is a prose work by Samuel Taylor Coleridge dealing with literary criticism, and published in two volumes in 1817. Another edition of the work, to which Coleridge's daughter Sara added notes and supplementary biographical material, was published in 1847. The works trace the development of his literary career. It also consists of autobiographical anecdotes of Coleridge and it deals with "Transcendental Philosophy." In the first chapters, he describes his early life and then continues to describe the comments made in the "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge discusses the poetic talent of Wordsworth. He comments about Wordsworth's poetic theory. It is also in this work that Coleridge discusses his theories of fancy and imagination. The last chapter of the book gives ample exposition of the theory of romanticism. Coleridge's importance as a critic also lies in his *Lectures on Shakespeare*. However, they were only lectures and were not properly collected by Coleridge. When the book was published, it was in an unfinished form. His views on the works of Shakespeare enables the readers to have a keener perception of the dramatist's work. It also establishes him as the greatest critic of the Romantic era.

► Literary criticism

Being true to romantic ideals, Coleridge denounces the Augustan poetry. According to him, the aim of poetry is not to instruct, but to provide pleasure - "pleasure through the medium of poetry". He also wrote *Aid to Reflection* (1825) and *Table Talk* (1835). Coleridge had also started a periodical, *The Watchman*. Though it began ambitiously, it ran only to ten numbers. To this journal he contributed a few essays. Later he also started another periodical *The Friend* which was also short-lived like the earlier one.

► Poetry for imparting pleasure

### 1.4.7 Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797) was an English writer and a women's rights activist. Her most important



► Radical change

contribution to society is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). It is a pioneering work of feminism. She argues in the work that the current educational system makes women only incapable. Wollstonecraft also put forward the idea that the position of women in society can be made better only by bringing in radical changes in the education system. *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) is a biography of her, written by her husband William Godwin. Wollstonecraft's views greatly influenced the twentieth century feminists.

### 1.4.8 Sir Walter Scott and the Historical Novel

► Genre of historical novel

Sir Walter Scott (1771 – 1832) was a Scottish novelist, poet, historian and biographer who is regarded as having invented the genre of historical novel. From an early age, he listened to the tales of the Scottish borders from the elders of his family. He also started reading poetry, history, drama, fairy tales and romances. Slowly a love for nature and an admiration for Scottish warriors developed in him and this later influenced him greatly in his writings.

► Archaic style

Scott's early works were translations from German. A notable one was *Lenore* (1796). *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, was published in three volumes from 1802 to 1803. The work was a compilation of ancient poems to which Scott added a number of his own poems written in an archaic style. The next published work was *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). The poem written in Christabel meter is about an aged poet who seeks shelter in the castle of Newark. The poem became a successful one and acquired praise for the way Scott has depicted the Scottish regions and also for the love of nature expressed through it. *Marmion*, which is generally regarded as Scott's masterpiece, followed in 1808. It deals with the Battle of Flodden that was fought at Flodden field between the Kingdoms of Scotland and England. *The Lady of the Lake*, set in the Trossachs region of Scotland, also became a great success. *Rokeby* (1813), and *The Lord of the Isles* (1815) were other successful poems written by Walter Scott.

Scott's fame chiefly lies in his novels. His first novel *Waverley* was published anonymously in 1814. It tells the story of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. A number of historical novels followed *Waverley*. They are *Guy*



► Waverley novels

*Mannerling* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *The Black Dwarf* (1816), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1818), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), and *A Legend of Montrose* (1819). These novels were collectively known as the “Waverley novels.”

► Scottish and English history

After writing these novels on Scottish history, Scott turned to English history. He wrote *Ivanhoe* (1820) which is set in Plantagenet England. *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* followed in 1820, and *The Pirate* and *The Fortunes of Nigel* appeared in 1822. Two more masterpieces were *Kenilworth* (1821), set in Elizabethan England, and the highly successful *Quentin Durward* (1823), set in 15th-century France. The best of his later novels are *Redgauntlet* (1824) and *The Talisman* (1825), the latter being set in Palestine during the Crusades.

► Domestic novella

Scott's contributions to the historical novel form have been great. He totally renovated the form and gave it a new life. He also played a significant role in the development of domestic novella through his works such as *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*. He added freshness to both these genres. Scott's prodigious talent has often encouraged the writers to regard him as the Shakespeare among prose writers.

### 1.4.9 Jane Austen

Jane Austen (1775–1817) was born to Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Austen of the Leigh family. She was their seventh child and second daughter to the couple. Her first serious work was *Love and Friendship* which she wrote in 1789. She wrote her first play *Sir Charles Grandison or the Happy Man* within four years. It is a six-act comedy based on the book of Samuel Richardson she had read in school. However, she did not complete it and later started writing *Susan*, a novel in epistolary form. The first draft of *Pride and Prejudice* titled *First Impressions* was completed in the year 1797, but the publisher to whom it was sent rejected it. Later it was published in 1813. Her first work to get published was *Sense and Sensibility*, which was regarded as a classic. The work offers a brilliant description of 19th-century middle-class life as it follows the romantic relationships of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. *Mansfield Park* published in three volumes in 1814 is the most serious of Austen's novels in terms of tone and treatment of religion and religious duty. *Emma*



► Nineteenth century middle-class

(1815) ushered in a new type of fiction with an innovative form and technique. The narrative, an experimental one, focuses on the heroine Emma who fancies herself to be an excellent matchmaker. *Persuasion* (1817) published posthumously is considered a mature work of Austen. It is a satire and is often viewed as a comedy of character and manners. *Northanger Abbey* was also published posthumously in 1817. It is a parody of the then popular gothic genre. Though her novels had a limited range, she presented an authentic portrayal of rural society during nineteenth century England.

#### 1.4.10 Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley (1797 – 1851) is the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. She married the poet P B Shelley in 1816. Mary Shelley is best known for her masterpiece *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). The novel is philosophical and has gothic elements in it. It has also been considered an early work of science fiction. In the novel, Victor Frankenstein, a Swiss student of natural science creates an artificial man from pieces of corpses and gives life to this creature. Though it initially seeks affection, the monster inspires loathing in everyone who meets it. Lonely and miserable, the monster turns upon its creator, who eventually loses his life. The novel has been adapted into movies many times. Her other novels are *Valperga* (1823), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), *Falkner* (1837), and *The Last Man* (1826).

► Science fiction

#### 1.4.11 Horace Walpole

Horace Walpole (1717 – 1797) has become famous as the writer of the novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the first Gothic novel in the English language. His other works are *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), a tragedy with the theme of incest; amateur historical speculations such as *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* (1768); and a work on art history, *Anecdotes of Painting in England, in four volumes* (1762–71).

► Victorian Prose

#### 1.4.12 Thomas Carlyle

Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881) was a historian and essayist, whose major works include *The French Revolution*, in three volumes (1837), *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), and *The History*



- Historical narratives

of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great, in six volumes (1858–65). He is chiefly remembered for his work *Sartor Resartus*. It is a humorous essay on the influence of clothes.

### 1.4.13 Mathew Arnold

- Cultural critic

Mathew Arnold (1822 – 1888) is a renowned poet, literary and cultural critic of the Victorian Era. He is chiefly remembered as the champion of 'culture' because of his upholding of cultural values, and criticism of contemporary people and their tastes mainly through his work *Culture and Anarchy*. His father was the headmaster at the famous Rugby school. Arnold was educated at Rugby and Oxford.

Arnold was a talented youth and he won the prestigious Newdigate prize for poetry for his poem "Cromwell" (1843). His significant poetic works are *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* (1852), *Poems* (1853), and *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems* (1849) which appeared under the pseudonym 'A'. A remarkable poem from these collections is "The Scholar Gypsy". His prose works are abundant. His essays are the most notable among them. *Essays in Criticism* (First Series, 1865; Second Series, 1888) contains some of his best critical works. The first essay in the 1888 volume of "The Study of Poetry" contains many ideas which are still inspiring and relevant. He finds poetry an alternative to religion. He emphasises further that more and more we will "turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." Therefore, we must know how to distinguish the best poetry from the inferior, the genuine from the counterfeit; and to do this we must steep ourselves in the work of the acknowledged masters, using as "touchstones," passages exemplifying their "high seriousness," and their superiority of diction and movement. These ideas are still evaluated by critics. Other essays deal with the criticism of the works of writers like Milton, Gray, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley. *Culture and Anarchy* is his masterpiece in many aspects.

- Touchstone passages

### 1.4.14 Arthur Hugh Clough

- A friend of Arnold

Clough was a friend of Arnold's who studied with him at Oxford. Most of his poems remained unpublished. *The Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich* (1848) and *Amours de Voyage* (1858) are his important works.





### 1.4.15 Walter Pater

Born in London Walter Pater (1839 – 1894) was educated at Oxford. He is foremost among the critics of the Victorian Era. He is chiefly remembered for advocating the idea “art for art’s sake” which became the motto of the Aesthetic movement. His first book of essays *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), includes essays on painters like Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, Pico della Mirandola, Michelangelo.

- Art for art’s sake

*Marius the Epicurean* (1885) is his most substantial work. *Imaginary Portraits* (1887) is a critique of artists and *Appreciations* (1889) is on literary themes. *Plato and Platonism* was published in 1893, which presents an extremely literary view of Plato, neglecting the logical and dialectical side of his philosophy.

- A literary view of Plato

As a true spokesman of the school of Aestheticism, Walter Pater focused on the form of a work of art rather than on the subject matter. He was more interested in the innate qualities of a work rather than its moral purposes. He saw criticism as a critic’s attempt to put himself in a sympathetic relationship with the artist in order to derive maximum pleasure from a work of art. Pater’s support of art for art’s sake brought him in contact with the Pre-Raphaelites. He also exerted a great influence on writers like Oscar Wilde.

- Derive maximum pleasure

### 1.4.16 Leslie Stephen

Leslie Stephen (1832–1904) belonged to an intellectual family and was educated at the University of Cambridge. He started his literary career as a contributor to periodicals. His greatest work was the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876). The next one was a philosophical study *The English Utilitarians* (1900). His other major works were *Science of Ethics* (1882), and *An Agnostic’s Apology* (1893). His most important work is the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which he edited from 1882 to 1891; he edited the first 26 volumes and contributed 378 biographies. It is a reference work on notable figures in English history.

- Philosophical works

### 1.4.17 Thomas Henry Huxley

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 – 1895) was an ardent supporter of Charles Darwin. He was a surgeon in the Navy. His best-known works are *Man’s Place in Nature*



- Supporter of Charles Darwin

(1863), *Lay Sermons, Addresses and Reviews* (1870), and *American Addresses* (1877).

In the rich tapestry of literary history, the Victorian era stands as a hallmark of exquisite prose, capturing the essence of a bygone era with its meticulous attention to detail and social nuances. From the works of Charles Dickens to the Brontë sisters, Victorian literature has transported readers to a world where propriety and restraint reigned supreme. Yet, as time marches forward, the boundaries of storytelling expand, and the realms of imagination beckon us to explore new horizons. Let us embark on a literary journey, where we traverse the delicate corridors of the Victorian era and venture into the uncharted territories of fiction, where dreams take flight and reality becomes malleable.

- Imaginary realms

### 1.4.18 Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) was one of the most famous and successful writers in nineteenth century England. Dickens' first work was *Sketches by Boz* (1836). His first novel was *The Pickwick Papers*, the full title of which was *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. This too was first published serially from 1836 to 1837 under the pseudonym Boz. The work is a kind of picaresque novel which centres on a sporting club. *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39) *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) followed *Oliver Twist*. Dickens' fame increased after *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *Dombey and Son* (1846). *David Copperfield* (1849) which has many autobiographical elements is considered his masterpiece by many critics. *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1860–61) followed *David Copperfield*. His novels such as *Hard Times*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations* were written during his last phase of his life, when his focus was on darker themes.

- Most successful writer of the nineteenth century

Dickens was a novelist who believed that novels could be an instrument of social reform. Through his novels he exposed many of the evils of his time. He presented it in such a way that people felt encouraged to abandon bad deeds and embrace the good. *Oliver Twist* realistically depicts the seedy side of London and Dickens seems to express a viewpoint in the novel that poverty often leads to crime. Through the novel Dickens also criticised the Poor



- Instrument of social reform

Law of 1834. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, he handled the issue of boarding schools, the new manufacturing system in *Hard Times* and the court of chancery in the *Bleak House*. The critics have however found that too much focus on social problems impact the artistic beauty of the works.

#### 1.4.19 William Makepeace Thackeray

Next to Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863) is another noteworthy novelist of the Victorian Era. He was born in Calcutta, where his father Richmond Thackeray was an administrator in the East India Company. His father died in 1815, and in 1816 following the re-marriage of his mother, Thackeray was sent home to England. He studied at several grammar schools and finally in 1822 reached Charterhouse, the London public school. From 1828 to 1830 he studied at Trinity College, Cambridge. After experimenting with a number of professions, Thackeray finally turned to professional journalism. The novel *Vanity Fair* which was serialised from 1847 to 48, brought Thackeray both fame and prosperity, and made him a recognised author on the English scene.

- Born in Calcutta

Some of his major literary contributions are *Vanity Fair* (1848), *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), *The Newcomes: Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family* (1854) and *The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century* (1857–59). *Vanity Fair* is a novel that offers a true description of the English society of the time. The novel focuses on the intertwined fortunes of two different women, Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp. The most prominent feature of the novel is the character, Becky Sharp, who has been chosen by E M Forster as a perfect example for a 'round character'. She is one of the most memorable characters in English Literature. It was the effortless and flexible style that made Thackeray an outstanding novelist of the Victorian era.

- Round character

#### 1.4.20 George Eliot

George Eliot (1819 – 1880) was born as Mary Ann Evans in Warwickshire, England as the daughter of a land agent. With her appointment in 1851 as the editor of *The Westminster Review*, she became a member of the literary circle. Her major works include *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middelmarch* (1871–72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

- Mary Ann Evans



► Moral concerns

*Adam Bede*, when published, George Eliot was introduced as a novelist of high calibre. The novel has beautiful descriptions of English country life. *The Mill on the Floss* is a partly autobiographical novel, which focuses on the characters Tom and Maggie Tulliver. Through the character of Maggie, Eliot gives an excellent study of human personality. *Silas Marner: the Weaver of Raveloe* (1861) is a short novel which also gives a fine picture of village life. In *Romola* (1863) the ethical and moral concerns of the novelist become more evident. Her other work *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1872) deals with a complex picture of the life of a small town. Her final novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876) also details moral concerns. Her novels mainly deal with the serious aspects of human lives mostly in a tragic way. All her characters are drawn from lower classes of the society. Her novels are distinctive for their meticulous analysis of ordinary people's lives. Eliot was the first English novelist to carry out thorough psychological analysis of her characters. She thus opened up a new path for the future writers to follow.

#### 1.4.21 The Brontës

► Daughters of a clergyman

Charlotte Brontë (1816 – 1855), Emily Brontë (1818 – 1848) and Anne Brontë (1820 – 1849) were the daughters of a clergyman and lived in Yorkshire. Charlotte's first novel *The Professor* was rejected by publishers after she completed writing it. It was published only after her death in 1857. *Jane Eyre* (1847) is her masterpiece. At the time of its publication the novel was regarded as a classic as it gave a new dimension to the Victorian novel with its realistic portrayal of a woman's inner life, highlighting her struggles with her natural desires and social situation. The character of the heroine Jane is presented with such truthfulness that was noticeable in English fiction for the first time. *Shirley* (1849) is different from *Jane Eyre* and is a social novel. The novel, which is set in 1812, deals with two major themes that were still pertinent in 1848, viz., working-class uprisings and the condition of women. *Villette* (1853) is also considered an excellent work by Charlotte, and the character of the protagonist Lucy Snowe is based on the author herself.

Emily Brontë is considered the greatest among the three sisters. Though she has written only one novel it



occupies a unique position in English Literature. The novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) was published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. It is different from the other novels of the period in its poetic presentation and uncommon structure. The story is narrated by Lockwood and within his narrative there are sequences of retrospective short anecdotes by Ellen Dean, the housekeeper. The emphasis of the whole narrative is on the impact of the orphan Heathcliff on the two families of Earnshaw and Linton in a remote Yorkshire district at the end of the 18th century. Heathcliff becomes enraged by the marriage of Catherine Earnshaw, whom he loves, to the kind and rich Edgar Linton. Heathcliff then plans a revenge on both families which lasts till the second generation. Cathy's death in childbirth does not free him from his obsession with her, until his death. The marriage of the surviving heirs of Earnshaw and Linton, restores peace later. The novel reflects the true spirit of the English moors where it is set, with a stark unflinching realism, and a powerful poetic quality.

► Pseudonym Ellis Bell

Anne Brontë is the lesser known of the three sisters. Her two novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* (1848) do not have the literary merit of the works of her sisters. The Brontë sisters have an exceptional place in English literature. Their novels marked a shift or transition in the realm of English novels. Rather than giving detached observations about human lives, the Brontës focused on exposing the raw aspects of the human soul. One notable feature of their novel was their portrayal of the women characters as having vital strength and passion.

► Raw aspects of the human soul

### 1.4.22 Gothic Novel

The gothic novel is a literary subgenre that first appeared in the late 18th century and rose to prominence in the 19th century. It is characterised by a gloomy, scary atmosphere, complicated, suspenseful narratives, and frequently incorporates supernatural aspects. Gothic tales frequently feature haunted castles, abandoned homes, and dark surroundings that act as metaphors for the protagonist's inner anguish. The genre frequently explores the deepest recesses of the human psyche as it examines themes of terror, lunacy, the supernatural, and the macabre. Popular examples of Gothic literature include *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *Dracula* by Bram





► Gothic novelist

Stoker, and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. These novels continue to hold readers' attention with their vivid locales, nuanced characters, and examination of the human condition in its most enigmatic and unsettling manifestations.

### 1.4.23 R. L. Stevenson

Stevenson (1850 – 1894) began his career as an essayist. His first works are *An Inland Voyage* (1878), *Travels with A Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879), and *Virginibus Puerisque* (1881). *The New Arabian Nights* (1882) is a collection of short stories. *Treasure Island* (1883) an adventure novel on pirates and buccaneers became very successful. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is a novella. It is of a terror mystery genre which focuses on the alter egos of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the two alter egos of the main character. The same person has displayed different appearances and behaviours in the private space and the public sphere. The novel has been considered an example for the divided self and the conflictual character of the Victorians.

► Terror mystery genre

### 1.4.24 George Meredith

George Meredith (1828 – 1909) was another notable Victorian poet and novelist. His novels focus more on the psychological features of characters. A remarkable feature of his work was that he portrayed women as having equal status with men. His first work was *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856). But his first significant work is *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859). His masterpiece is *The Egoist*. *The Egoist*, subtitled as *A Comedy in Narrative*, is a comic novel which was published in three volumes in 1879.

► Women as having equal status with men

### 1.4.25 Thomas Hardy and the Wessex Novels

Thomas Hardy was more renowned as a novelist than a poet during his lifetime. Hardy's first published work is *Desperate Remedies* (1871). His next work was a humorous idyllic novel *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). The book deals with a simple marriage plot. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1874) was the first of his major novels. It is based on Hardy's courtship of Emma Gavia Gifford who later became his wife. His next work *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) is the first novel set in Wessex.



### ► Wessex Novels

Wessex is a fictional countryside which formed the backdrop for many novels of Hardy. In reality, Wessex was the name of one of the old Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. It is believed that Wessex was the name chosen by Hardy to describe places in and around the present day Dorset in England.

In *The Return of the Native* (1878), the story takes place on Egdon Heath, a barren moor in Wessex. The characters in the novel, Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye are considered to be the best among his characters. Another novel set in the Wessex region is *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). The novel deals with a recurring theme in Hardy's novels like the influence of fate on human lives. *The Woodlanders* (1887) is thought to be Hardy's greatest Wessex novel. The novel which is looked upon as an idyll or pastoral is a pessimistic attack on a society that values high status and socially sanctioned behaviour over good character and honest emotions. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) is yet another novel by Hardy which is again set in Wessex. Nature and locale are like important characters in the novel. *Jude, the Obscure* (1895) shares the same location. Of all the Wessex novels of Hardy, *Jude, the Obscure* stands out as a special one. Both *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude, the Obscure* shocked the Victorian readers because of the 'immoral' treatment of religion, sex and marriage. Through his Wessex novels, Hardy documented a way of life which also serves as a historical account of life in southern England at the end of the 1800s.

### ► Immoral themes in the novels

## Summarised Overview

Romantic prose and fiction emerged in the late 18th to early 19th century as a response to the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment era. It emphasised individualism, intense emotions, and a connection to nature. Romantic writers, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Mary Shelley, explored themes of love, passion, and the sublime through their works. Their prose often featured imaginative and lyrical language, with an emphasis on introspection and the supernatural. On the other hand, Victorian prose and fiction dominated the 19th century, reflecting the values and concerns of the Victorian era. Victorian writers, including Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and the Brontë sisters, delved into social and moral issues, portraying the



complexities of human relationships, class divisions, and gender roles. Their works showcased a realistic depiction of society, often highlighting the hardships of the working class and advocating for social reform. Victorian prose and fiction displayed a sophisticated narrative style, characterised by detailed descriptions, intricate plots, and moral lessons. Both Romantic and Victorian prose and fiction left a lasting impact on literature, shaping the development of the novel and exploring the depths of human experience in different ways.

## Assignments

1. How did the Romantic period influence the development of prose and fiction, and what were some key characteristics of literary works during this time?
2. Analyse the themes of individualism and imagination in Romantic prose and fiction, providing specific examples from works by notable authors of the period.
3. Discuss the role of nature and the sublime in Romantic prose and fiction, exploring how these elements were used to convey emotions and evoke a sense of awe and wonder.
4. Compare and contrast the representation of love and passion in Romantic prose and fiction, examining the ways in which authors depicted romantic relationships and explored the intensity of human emotions during this period.
5. Discuss the role of social class and morality in Victorian prose and fiction, using specific examples from popular works of the era.
6. Analyse the depiction of gender roles and expectations in Victorian prose and fiction, considering how they reflect and challenge societal norms of the time.
7. Explore the theme of industrialisation and its impact on society as portrayed in Victorian prose and fiction, examining the ways in which authors addressed issues of progress, urbanisation, and technological advancements.



## Suggested Readings

1. Chrisp, Peter. *The Victorian Age*. Balley Publishing Associates. 2005.
2. Chaudon, Francis. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Romanticism*. Chartwell Books, 1980.
3. Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. Gramedia, 2017.
4. Gaull, Marilyn. *English Romanticism: The Human Context*. W.W. Norton. 1988.
5. Honour, Hugh. *Romanticism*. Harper and Row, 1979.

## References

1. Clewis, Robert R., edited. *The Sublime Reader*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
2. Fay, Elizabeth. *Romantic Medievalism. History and the Romantic Literary Ideal*. Palgrave, 2002.
3. Gordon, Jan B. *The Alice Books and the Metaphors of Victorian Childhood*. Worldview, 2018.
4. Grewe, Cordula. *Painting the Sacred in the Age of German Romanticism*. Ashgate, 2009.
5. Tekiner, Deniz. *Modern Art and the Romantic Vision*. University Press of America, 2000.
6. Tong, Q. S. *Reconstructing Romanticism: Organic Theory Revisited*. Salzburg, 1997.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*





# Poetry and Drama

## BLOCK-02

### Block Content

- Unit 1 Poetry (detailed)
- Unit 2 The Importance of Being Earnest (detailed)
- Unit 3 Poetry (non detailed)
- Unit 4 Drama (non detailed)

# Unit 1

## Poetry

### - Detailed Study

## Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ examine the characteristics of Romantic poetry, such as the celebration of nature, imagination, and the expression of intense emotions.
- ▶ analyse the themes and motifs prevalent in Victorian poetry, including social critique, and industrialization
- ▶ acquire an understanding of literary techniques employed in Victorian and Romantic poetry
- ▶ evaluate the historical and cultural contexts that influenced Victorian and Romantic poetry, exploring the impact of societal changes and political ideologies on poetic expression.

## Background

William Wordsworth is one of the pioneers of the Romantic Movement in English Poetry. His *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is called the “manifesto of Romantic Movement in English.” A prolific writer, his poetry is representative of the ideals of romanticism in literature.

First published in 1807, the full title of the poem is “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”. The poem was written in two parts, the first part consisting of four stanzas was written in 1802 and the rest of the seven stanzas were added in 1804. Initially titled “Ode,” the poem attained its present form in 1815. Coleridge responded to the first part of this ode with “Dejection: An Ode” in 1802. Wordsworth published the Ode with the epigraph “paulo maiora canamus” which is Latin for “let us sing a somewhat loftier song”.

## Keywords

Immortality, Nature, Childhood, Transcendence



# “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” - William Wordsworth

## Discussion

### Section 1

- Innocence and Experience

Wordsworth explores the moral development of human beings and the irreconcilable conflicts between innocence and experience. He presents childhood not merely as a stage in one's life but rather as a state of mind through which one can attain spiritual awareness and clarity of thought.

#### 2.1.1 Summary

- Dream-like nature

In the opening stanza, the speaker says that there was a time when all of nature (meadow, grove, stream, the earth and every common sight) seemed to him dreamlike, adorned with heavenly beauty. But the poet laments that time is past and “the things which I have seen I now can see no more.”

- Childhood sight has been lost

In the second stanza, even though he can still see the rainbow, the rose, the moon, and the sun, and even though they are still beautiful, something is different and something has been lost. He is unable to see the sights of nature as he used to see as a child.

- Child of joy

The third stanza describes that in the midst of joyous scenes (birds' singing, young lambs bound), the poet is stricken with grief. But the sounds of waterfall, the echoes of the mountains and the gusting of the winds relieved him from the wistful thoughts and he is determined not to mar the pleasantness of the season with his grief. He now finds jollity everywhere. He exhorts a shepherd boy whom he calls the “child of joy” to shout and play around him so that he can also be a part of his festive mood.

In the fourth stanza, the poet addresses all the blessed, happy creatures and says that he sees heaven laugh in their merriment. His head wears a coronal (garland worn by Romans to cover their heads during festivals). He feels the same happiness that all the other creatures around him experience. He acknowledges that it would be wrong to feel desolate or sad on such a sweet May morning, where everyone is happy – children pick fresh flowers; the sun shines and is warm; the baby in the mother's arm leaps. He hears all these sounds with



- Where has the visionary gleam gone?

joy. But amidst all these, he still feels missing joys. He sees a tree and a single field and both of them speak of something that is gone. The tree and the field used to give to him pure joy, but no longer now. And a pansy (flower) at his feet does the same. He asks: where has the visionary gleam gone and “where is it now, the glory and the dream?” The celestial light that he used to see in every object seems to have vanished.

- Birth is a sleep and forgetting

In the fifth stanza, Wordsworth proclaims that “our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.” He goes on to say that as infants we have some memory of heaven, but as we grow we lose that connection: “Heaven lies about us in our infancy!” As children this connection with heaven causes us to experience nature's glory more clearly. Once we are grown, the connection is lost. The divine light fades and becomes part of the common light of the day.

- Forget the place we came from

In the sixth stanza, the speaker says that as soon as we get to earth, everything conspires to help us forget the place we came from. She (the earth) has noble aims and fills her lap with pleasures and yearnings to make her foster-child (man) forget the glories of that imperial palace called heaven.

- Child imitates the grown-ups

In the seventh stanza, the speaker sees (or imagines) a six-year-old boy, and foresees the rest of his life. The child plays while his mother interrupts him with kisses and his father affectionately watches him play. He sees the boy playing with some imitated fragment of adult life, some little plan or chart, imitating “a wedding or a festival, a mourning or a funeral.” He will move from one thing to another and as he grows, he will talk about business, love, or strife. He says that the child will learn from his experiences, but that he will spend most of his effort on imitation, that is, he imitates the activities of the grown-up. Thus the little actor's (child's) whole life will essentially be an endless imitation.

- Child as a philosopher

In the eighth stanza, the poet addresses the child by calling him a philosopher. Though his outside appearance is small, his soul is deep. He says, in the child rests all the truths that the grown-ups toil all their lives to find out. He cannot understand why the child, who is so close to heaven in his youth, would rush to grow into an adult. The poet hints that the child will completely lose access to the heavenly light and soon his soul will have the burden of living.



► Celebration of the past memories

In the ninth stanza, the poet thinks of his lost past and is happy at the thought that through his memories of childhood, he will always be able to connect with the lost world of innocence. Thus the mood of the poet shifts again from despondence to joy. He celebrates the recollections of the past. The poet says that he expresses his gratitude (songs of thanks and praise) not for the delight or liberty – the simple creed of childhood, but for the persistent questions raised by the child about the reality of outward objects. It is for the intuitive awareness, primal instincts or first affections, and shadowy recollections (memories of our existence in heaven before our birth) that he expresses his gratitude. The vague memories are the fountain of light or guiding spirit that helps us to see celestial glory in everything. It is only through the memories that our upcoming age is made to seem beautiful. Once we have perceived eternity in childhood, its truth will wake us and never leave us. Thus, in peaceful moments (season of calm weather), we can have the vision of the immortal sea that brought our souls here. We can travel there and watch children playing on the shore and hear the roaring of waves.

► Find joy from what remains

In the tenth stanza, the poet asks the same creatures (birds, lambs) to sing and leap in joy, whose sounds earlier made him sad. He says that he will not grieve for what is lost but finds joy in what remains. Though he has lost some part of the glory of nature, he will take solace in primal sympathy (memory) and soothing thoughts that arise from human suffering. Death is not the end of life but the beginning or dawn of immortality. Also, he finds strength in the wisdom of old age. Finally, the poet addresses the fountains, meadows, hills and groves and asks them not to stop loving each other. He can feel their power in his heart (deep in his heart). He says that he still loves the brooks, the fresh sunshine is still beautiful, and the sober colouring of clouds at sunset is even more profound by giving him the message of mortality or death. The visionary gleam (celestial light) of his childhood may have been lost but it has been replaced by more deep thoughts. The poem concludes with the speaker's gratitude to his heart – its tenderness, its joys, and fears, and says that now even an ordinary (meanest) flower that moves in the wind leads him to profound thoughts that are "too deep for tears."



### 2.1.2 Analysis

#### ► Nature and human

William Wordsworth, a prominent figure of the Romantic movement in English literature, is widely celebrated for his profound exploration of nature, human emotions, and the transcendental connection between the two. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" is a complex and introspective work, reflecting Wordsworth's contemplations on the loss of childhood innocence and the fading connection with the divine.

#### ► Loss of childhood innocence

At the core of "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" lies the theme of the loss of childhood innocence and its impact on adult life. Wordsworth mourns the gradual departure of the transcendent joy and harmony experienced during childhood, asserting that the human soul is endowed with a divine connection at birth, which fades as one grows older. He believes that children possess an innate ability to perceive the divine essence of the world, an intuition lost in the process of maturation. Wordsworth's poem becomes an exploration of the yearning to regain that lost connection, as well as a reflection on the transient nature of human life.

#### ► Irregularity in rhyme scheme and stanza

The structure of the ode is characterised by a series of nine irregularly rhymed stanzas, emphasising the organic and spontaneous nature of the poet's thoughts. Each stanza contributes to the overall philosophical and spiritual contemplation, building upon the previous ones. Wordsworth employs a mix of iambic and anapestic meters, creating a rhythmic and lyrical flow that mirrors the natural cadences of speech. The irregularity in rhyme scheme and stanza length echoes the fluctuating emotions and shifting thoughts of the poet, capturing the essence of his introspection.

#### ► Sensory details

Wordsworth's masterful use of imagery is particularly notable in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality". Through vivid and evocative descriptions of natural elements, such as the rainbow, the moon, and the stars, he creates a sublime atmosphere that transcends the physical world. These images serve as symbols of the divine and act as a bridge between the mortal and immortal realms. Wordsworth's language is imbued with sensory details and figurative language, enabling readers to experience the beauty and wonder of nature alongside the poet.



► Literary devices

Moreover, Wordsworth employs several literary devices to convey his philosophical ideas. One such device is the use of paradox, where he juxtaposes opposing concepts to highlight the complexities of human existence. For instance, he states, “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,” emphasising the paradoxical nature of life as a cycle of forgetting and remembering. The poet also utilises repetition to reinforce his key messages, such as the recurring phrase “trailing clouds of glory” to emphasise the connection between the divine and the human.

## Assignments

1. How does Wordsworth explore the concept of immortality in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”?
2. Discuss the role of childhood in shaping the speaker’s understanding of immortality in the poem.
3. Analyse the use of nature imagery in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and its connection to the theme of immortality.
4. What is the significance of the “celestial light” mentioned in the poem and how does it relate to the idea of immortality?
5. Explore the contrast between the speaker’s perception of immortality in childhood versus adulthood in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.”
6. Discuss the role of memory and nostalgia in the poem and their influence on the speaker’s contemplation of immortality.

## Suggested Readings

1. Davies, Hunter. *William Wordsworth: A Biography*. Frances Lincoln, 2009.
2. Hartman, Geoffrey. *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787–1814*. Yale UP, 1987.
3. Mason, Emma. *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth*. Cambridge UP, 2010.
4. Moorman, Mary. *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Later Years, 1803–1850*. Oxford UP, 1965.
5. Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems*. Longman, 1800.



## References

1. Barker, Juliet. *Wordsworth: A Life*. HarperCollins, 2000.
2. Bennett, Andrew. *William Wordsworth in Context*. Cambridge UP, 2015.
3. Davies, Hunter. *William Wordsworth: A Biography*. Frances Lincoln, 2009.
4. Moorman, Mary. *William Wordsworth, A Biography: The Early Years, 1770–1803*. Oxford UP Press, 1957.
5. Robinson, Daniel. *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, Oxford UP, 2015.

## “Dejection: An Ode” - Samuel Coleridge

### Background

The poem was first published in London's *Morning Post* newspaper in 1802. Later, it was included in the collection *Sibylline Leaves* (1817). The poem was an enjoiner to Wordsworth's “Resolution and Independence.” It explores the idea of despair and imagination. It draws an episode from his personal life, his marriage and divorce with Sara Fricker and eventual love towards Sara Hutchinson (sister of Wordsworth's wife Mary) which she rejected. The poem is written for Sara whom he addresses as Lady in the poem. The poem is structured in eight irregular stanzas alluding to the theme and language of Wordsworth's “Intimations of Immortality.”

### Keywords

Dejection, Ode, Melancholy, Nature, Inspiration

## Section 2

### 2.1.3 Summary

#### ► Epigraph

The epigraph of the poem consists of lines taken from a 13th century Scottish ballad – “Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence”. It is a warning given by the sailor regarding the arrival of a deadly storm that may endanger the expedition. The poem is divided into eight parts.

The first part of the poem begins with the speaker's comment that if the author of the grand old ballad of



► Skill to forecast

Sir Patrick Spence had the skill to forecast the weather (weather-wise), then a storm will blow this night also because the moon looks the same as it was described in the ballad. The new moon is wintry bright and is covered by a floating ghostly light. The poet sees the old moon in the lap of the new and it foretells the arrival of storm and rain. He hopes that this stormy night and the sounds of rain will help him to restore his imagination though they terrified him and made his mind wander. He hopes that this may startle his dull pain and may cure it.

► Nature of his grief

The second part describes the nature of his grief – “a grief without a pang, void, dark and drear, / a stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief.” It doesn’t pierce and is sleepy and doesn’t cause any sensation. It finds no natural outlet or relief in word, sigh, or in tears. The poet addresses his beloved and says that in his sickly mood, he hears the song of the throstle (a bird). The song calls him to think of other things in the long evening that are so pleasant and calm. But he admits that he gazes at the yellow-green tinted western sky with a blank eye. The poet sees the thin moving clouds, the sparkling stars behind or between them, and the crescent moon in the cloudless, starless sky. But he merely sees all these things but feels them not – I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!”

► Passion within

In the third part, the speaker admits that what we see in nature is nothing but a projection of our own interior thoughts. These outward forms will never raise his spirits as they cannot generate any feelings since the fountains of passion and life are within oneself.

► Beauty a reflection of the self

The fourth stanza opens with the speaker’s address to the lady that “we receive but what we give.” He says that the soul itself may provide light to see nature’s true beauty, which is nothing but a reflection of our own joyous self. It cannot be seen by a lifeless cold world. The source of light and glory is happiness in man’s heart.

► Pure joy

The speaker calls the lady as “O pure of heart” in the fifth stanza and says that she already knows about the light and music of the soul which is nothing else but pure joy. It gives us a new Earth and a new Heaven. All the sweet voices and sights that charm the ears and the eyes come out of pure joy that lies within one’s heart and “all colours a suffusion from that light.”

- Use fancy to weave vision of happiness

In the sixth stanza, the speaker looks back at his life and admits that he had enjoyed that pure joy and even when life's path got rough with time, he was able to rely on the joy within him to fight off the distress. He used fancy to weave his visions of happiness. It was at that time hope grew around him like climbing-vine around a tree. The pleasures derived from hope were like the fruits and leaves of vine that attached to the tree. They give an impression that they belong to the tree though it is not. Similarly, he got happiness even from hopes though they are merely a product of fancy. But now the sorrows of life crushed him ("afflictions bow me down to earth"). But he doesn't care about these misfortunes that robbed his mirth. But what saddens him is that each dejection suspends his inborn abilities, his creative spirit. He continues by saying that what he can do now is to remain silent and patient in hope of capturing some parts of his former sense – "to steal from my own nature." It is his only plan to restore his entire self ("part infects the whole") and that it is almost grown as a habit of his soul, a reflection.

- Turn away from the viper thoughts

In the seventh stanza, the speaker declares that he wants to turn away from the viper thoughts that coil around his mind and he wishes to listen to the sound of the wind whose roars were unnoticed for a long time. He compares thoughts to a viper and thereby implies that they are as dangerous and poisonous like a snake. For the speaker, the wind is a mad lutenist who makes a feast for the devil even in the spring (month of showers) whose rage is much worse than in winter (though no raging wind is expected during spring). The inner darkness and mind's deterioration are reflected through the images of dark brown gardens and weak (timorous) leaves which are in stark contrast to the scenes of springtime. He calls the wind as an actor who is "perfect in all tragic sounds" and as a truly inspired poet. To him, the sound of the wind suggests an army in retreat where the soldiers groan with pain and shudder. The speaker compares it to the writings of Thomas Otway (poet and dramatist who lived during the Restoration period and died in destitution). He says that it is a tale of a little child who was lost in the wild. Though not so far from her home, she lost her way and at first moans low in grief and fear and now screams loud in hope that her mother will hear.





In the concluding stanza, the speaker says that though it is midnight he plans not to sleep (small thoughts I have of sleep). But he wishes gentle sleep to his friend lady and he never wants her to be awake (vigil's keep). May the stars sparkle silently above her, similar to the way they watch over the earth when it sleeps. May she wake up with a light heart with happy dreams and cheerful eyes. He further wishes joy to lift her spirits and make her voice attune with it. He hopes the whole world from pole to pole will be vibrant and full of life for her and let her life join with the world's life so the two of them flow together like a stream. The poem ends with the speaker's wish for his lady who is a "friend devoutest" of his choice that may make her feel joy forever.

- Sleepless mid-night

### 2.1.4 Analysis

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Dejection: An Ode" is a profound exploration of the poet's emotional turmoil and his struggle to find solace in nature. Written in 1802 during a period of personal and artistic crisis, the poem delves into themes of melancholy, imagination, and the redemptive power of the natural world.

- Find solace in nature

"Dejection: An Ode" is composed of five stanzas, each containing varying numbers of lines. Coleridge employs a loose and irregular structure that reflects the poet's own fragmented state of mind. The poem opens with a sense of despair and gradually builds towards a moment of spiritual rejuvenation. This progression is mirrored in the language used, as the initial gloomy tone gives way to vivid imagery and lyrical expression.

- Irregular structure

The poem's language is rich in metaphors and allusions, contributing to its emotional depth and complexity. Coleridge employs contrasting imagery to highlight the duality of his emotions, such as the "stormy blast" of his internal turmoil juxtaposed with the "calm so deep!" of the external world. Through these contrasting images, the poet emphasises the stark contrast between his inner desolation and the tranquil beauty of nature.

- Contrasting imagery

One of the central themes in "Dejection: An Ode" is the exploration of melancholy and its impact on the creative process. Coleridge grapples with the loss of his creative inspiration, attributing it to a sense of dejection that has overtaken him. The poem serves as a meditation on the

- Melancholy and creativity

relationship between a poet's emotional state and their ability to produce meaningful art.

The poem also delves into the concept of the Romantic imagination. Coleridge portrays the imagination as a powerful force capable of both tormenting and redeeming the poet. He suggests that the imagination, when in a state of depression, can transform the world into a bleak and desolate place. However, when the imagination is awakened, it has the potential to restore the poet's connection with nature and offer a path towards spiritual renewal.

- Romantic imagination

"Dejection: An Ode" highlights the transformative power of nature. Coleridge presents nature as a source of solace and inspiration, capable of lifting the poet out of his despondency. The depiction of the moon's influence on the speaker's mood reflects the Romantic notion of the sublime and the ability of nature to evoke deep emotions. The poem's concluding lines, with their description of the moon's beauty and the speaker's sense of wonder, convey a profound sense of hope and renewal.

- Transformative power of nature

## Summarised Overview

"Dejection: An Ode" is a poetic lament written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this deeply personal and introspective work, Coleridge explores the themes of melancholy, creative despair, and the restorative power of nature. The poem begins with the speaker expressing his despondency and a sense of disconnection from the world, while reflecting on his fading inspiration and inability to find solace in the usual sources of joy. However, as the poem progresses, the speaker finds solace and renewal in the beauty of the natural world, which inspires a glimmer of hope and a rekindling of his creative spirit. Through rich imagery and introspective musings, Coleridge delves into the profound emotional states of the human psyche, offering a moving exploration of the relationship between the individual, nature, and artistic expression.

## Assignments

1. Explore the role of nature in "Dejection: An Ode" and how it reflects the speaker's emotional state.



2. Analyse the use of imagery in “Dejection: An Ode” and its impact on the overall theme of the poem.
3. Examine the use of poetic devices such as meter, rhyme, and repetition in “Dejection: An Ode” and their contribution to the poem’s structure and meaning.
4. Compare and contrast the speaker’s feelings of dejection and longing in “Dejection: An Ode” with another Romantic poem of your choice.
5. Investigate the influence of Coleridge’s personal experiences on the themes and emotions conveyed in “Dejection: An Ode.”
6. Discuss the role of imagination and creativity in “Dejection: An Ode” and how they relate to the speaker’s feelings of dejection and despair.

## Suggested Readings

1. Barth, J. Robert. *The Symbolic Imagination*. Fordham, 2001.
2. Bloom, Harold. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, Doubleday & Company, 1961.
3. Engell, James. *The Creative Imagination*. Cambridge, 1981.
4. Holmes, Richard. *Coleridge*. Oxford UP, 1982.
5. Woodring, Carl. *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

## References

1. Barfield, Owen. *What Coleridge Thought*. Wesleyan UP, 1971.
2. Bate, Walter Jackson. *Coleridge*. The Macmillan Company, 1968.
3. Radley, Virginia L. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Twayne Publishers, 1966.
4. Cheyne, Peter. *Coleridge’s Contemplative Philosophy*. Oxford UP, 2020.

## “Ode: To a Skylark”- Percy Bysshe Shelley

### Background

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote “Ode to a Skylark” in 1820, during a time when he was living in Italy with his wife Mary Shelley and their friend Lord Byron. It was inspired by a walk that Shelley took in the Tuscan countryside, where he heard the song of a skylark and was struck by its beauty and power. The poem is a celebration of the skylark’s song and a meditation on the nature of creativity, beauty, and spirituality.

Shelley was a major figure in the Romantic movement, which emphasised the importance of emotions and individual experience and celebrated the power of nature and the imagination. “Ode to a Skylark” is considered one of Shelley’s greatest works and a masterpiece of Romantic poetry. Its language is rich and evocative, filled with vivid imagery and lyrical beauty, and it continues to inspire and captivate readers today.

### Keywords

Romantic poetry, Conversational poetry, Ode, Pantheism

### Discussion

#### Section 3

“Ode to a Skylark” by Percy Bysshe Shelley is a romantic ode to the beauty and power of the skylark’s song, as well as a meditation on the nature of creativity and the role of the poet. The poem is divided into 21 stanzas, each with six lines, and has a regular ABABCB rhyme scheme. The poem begins with an invocation to the skylark as a “blithe spirit” that pours forth its heart in “profuse strains of unpremeditated art.” Shelley marvels at the bird’s ability to express its pure joy through song, and notes that its music seems to come from a divine source. Shelley goes on to describe the skylark’s flight, as it rises higher and higher towards the heavens, singing all the while. He compares the bird to a “cloud of fire” and notes that even as it soars, its song continues to fill the air.

► Romantic ode



### 2.1.5 Summary

In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker calls out to the skylark as a blithe spirit, suggesting that the bird embodies pure joy and happiness. He goes on to say that the skylark is not just any ordinary bird, but rather a celestial creature that comes from Heaven or somewhere close to it. This comparison to a heavenly being elevates the skylark to a higher level of importance and adds to the mystical quality of the poem.

- Blithe spirit

As the skylark continues to sing and ascend into the sky, the speaker describes it as a cloud of fire, emphasising the bird's beauty and radiance. The image of the skylark as a cloud of fire also suggests its intense passion and energy as it soars higher and higher. The bird seems to embody the very essence of the sun, as it moves through the sky, singing and shining with an almost ethereal quality. As the sun begins to set and the sky takes on a golden hue, the skylark seems to take on a life of its own, flying like an "unbodied joy" through the sky. This phrase suggests that the skylark is not just a bird, but a source of pure happiness and delight that transcends physical form. The skylark's song fills the sky, adding to the magical quality of the moment and creating a sense of wonder and awe in the speaker.

- Skylark transcends physical form

In the second stanza, the speaker notes that as the skylark continues to rise higher, it becomes more difficult to see. However, the bird's song remains as clear and piercing as ever, like the sharp beams of moonlight in the early morning. This comparison to moonlight adds a romantic quality to the poem, suggesting that the skylark's song is just as enchanting and captivating as the moon's light. The skylark's song fills both the earth and the sky, creating an almost overwhelming sense of beauty and wonder. The speaker compares this to heaven overflowing with the rays of the moon, suggesting that the skylark's song is like a heavenly chorus that can be heard by all. The image of a solitary cloud adds to the sense of mystery and magic in the poem, as if the skylark is a solitary and precious creature that has been given to the world to bring joy and happiness to all who hear its song.

- Skylark's song a heavenly chorus

In the third stanza of the poem, the speaker reflects on the true nature of the skylark and how difficult it is to



► Beyond comparison

find a worthy comparison for it. He wonders what is most like the skylark and concludes that there is nothing in the natural world that can compare to its melodious shower. Even the rainbow clouds, which are known for their vibrant and colourful appearance, do not rain as brightly as the skylark's song. This comparison emphasises the beauty and power of the skylark's music. The speaker then compares the skylark to a poet hidden in the light of thought, suggesting that the bird's song is like a poem that is written in the mind. Just as a poet writes until humanity is made to sympathise with their hopes and fears, the skylark's song touches the heart and stirs the soul. This comparison highlights the emotional power of the skylark's song and suggests that it has the ability to inspire and move listeners.

► Like a beacon of light

In the fourth stanza, the speaker compares the skylark to a lonely maiden in a palace tower who sings to soothe her soul. This image adds a sense of romance and longing to the poem, as if the skylark's song is a source of comfort and solace in a world that can often be harsh and unforgiving. The skylark's song is like a balm for the soul, offering a sense of peace and serenity to all who hear it. The speaker then compares the skylark to a golden glow-worm in a dew-covered valley. This image suggests that the skylark's song is like a beacon of light in the darkness, illuminating the world with its beauty and radiance. The glow-worm's light is scattered among the flowers and grass, just as the skylark's song is scattered among the clouds and sky.

► Power of the skylark's song

In the fifth stanza, the speaker continues to extol the beauty and power of the skylark's song. He suggests that the skylark's song is more beautiful than the spring rain falling on the twinkling grass or the flowers awakened by the rain. This comparison emphasises the skylark's ability to uplift and refresh the spirit, bringing joy and delight to all who hear its song. The speaker then goes on to assert that the skylark's song surpasses all other sources of joy and beauty in the world. It is more joyous, clear, and fresh than anything that has ever been experienced before. This suggests that the skylark's song is a truly unique and extraordinary phenomenon, one that cannot be fully understood or explained by human language.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker asks the skylark to



- Evoke powerful emotions

teach him the “sweet thoughts” that he has never heard before. He marvels at the skylark’s ability to evoke such powerful emotions in listeners, describing its song as a divine “flood of human rapture.” This image suggests that the skylark’s song has a transcendent quality, one that can lift the spirit and elevate the soul. The speaker then compares the skylark’s song to other forms of music, suggesting that nothing can compare to its beauty and power. Even wedding hymns or victory songs seem insignificant in comparison to the skylark’s song. This comparison highlights the skylark’s ability to evoke a sense of awe and wonder in listeners, as well as its unique and singular beauty.

### 2.1.6 Analysis

- Brilliant poetic composition

Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to a Skylark” is a brilliant poetic composition that captures the essence of the skylark’s song and explores profound themes of inspiration, imagination, and the fleeting nature of beauty. Through vivid imagery, evocative language, and skillful use of poetic devices, Shelley crafts a piece that not only celebrates the skylark’s song but also serves as an allegory for the power of art and its ability to elevate the human spirit.

- Vivid imagery

Shelley’s masterful use of vivid imagery is one of the notable strengths of “Ode to a Skylark.” From the opening lines, the skylark is portrayed as a symbol of pure joy and inspiration. Shelley describes the bird as a “blithe spirit” that “pourest thy full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art”. Through these evocative images, the skylark’s song becomes a transcendent force that transports the reader to a realm of heightened emotion and beauty. The poem’s imagery effectively captures the essence of the skylark’s song and its impact on the human soul.

- Allegory of the power of art

Shelley’s ode is not merely a celebration of the skylark’s song but also an allegory for the power of art itself. The skylark becomes a representative of the poet and his creative spirit. Shelley emphasises the idea that art has the ability to transcend the limitations of the physical world and elevate the human spirit to higher realms. He writes, “Like a cloud of fire... Like a star of heaven / In the broad daylight.” These metaphors and similes evoke a sense of awe and wonder, emphasising



the transformative power of art in its ability to ignite the imagination and stir the depths of the human soul.

Another significant aspect of “Ode to a Skylark” is its exploration of the themes of beauty and transience. Shelley contemplates the ephemeral nature of beauty and the fleeting moments of inspiration that both the skylark and the poet embody. He writes, “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.” Here, Shelley suggests that true beauty arises from the recognition of life’s transitory nature. The poem implores the reader to seize the fleeting moments of inspiration and appreciate the beauty in the world, even in its impermanence. Shelley’s contemplation of these themes adds depth and complexity to the ode, elevating it beyond a simple celebration of a bird’s song.

- Themes of beauty and transience

Shelley’s “Ode to a Skylark” possesses a musical quality, thanks to the poet’s skillful use of rhythm and sound devices. The poem’s structure, with its stanzas of uniform length and regular rhyme scheme, creates a harmonious flow. Shelley employs alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia to enhance the musicality of the verses. For example, “Hail to thee, blithe spirit!” and “For singing till his heaven fills” demonstrate the delightful interplay of sounds within the poem. The musicality of the ode adds to its lyrical quality and heightens the reader’s engagement with the poem’s themes and emotions.

- Musicality of the ode

## Summarised Overview

“Ode to a Skylark” by Percy Bysshe Shelley is a romantic poem that praises the beauty and power of the skylark’s song while meditating on the nature of creativity and the role of the poet. The poem is divided into 21 stanzas, each with six lines and a regular ABABCB rhyme scheme. The speaker elevates the skylark to a celestial creature that embodies pure joy and happiness, and its song seems to come from a divine source. As the skylark ascends into the sky, the speaker describes it as a cloud of fire and compares it to an “unbodied joy,” a pure expression of the spirit that is unencumbered by the constraints of the physical world. The remaining stanzas of the poem continue to praise the skylark’s song and meditate on the nature of creativity and inspiration, suggesting that the poet must tap into a similar source of inspiration in order to create great art.



## Assignments

1. What is the central theme of “Ode: To a Skylark” by Percy Bysshe Shelley?
2. How does Shelley use vivid imagery to convey the beauty and power of the skylark in the poem?
3. Analyse the use of symbolism in “Ode: To a Skylark” and its impact on the overall meaning of the poem.
4. Discuss the role of nature and its relationship with the human experience in Shelley’s “Ode: To a Skylark.”
5. Explore the use of poetic devices such as alliteration, rhyme, and meter in “Ode: To a Skylark” and their contribution to the poem’s musicality.
6. Compare and contrast the skylark’s freedom and joy with the constraints of human existence as depicted in Shelley’s poem.
7. How does Shelley employ romantic ideals of imagination and transcendence in “Ode: To a Skylark”?

## Suggested Readings

1. Blunden, Edmund. *Shelley: A Life Story*, Viking Press, 1947.
2. Hall, Jean. *The Transforming Image: A Study of Shelley’s Major Poetry*. University of Illinois Press, 1980.
3. Hamilton, Paul. *Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Liverpool UP, 2000.
4. Harold, Bloom. *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Modern Critical Views*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1985.
5. Hay, Daisy. *Young Romantics: the Shelleys, Byron, and Other Tangled Lives*, Bloomsbury, 2010.



## References

1. Bieri, James. *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2008.
2. Everest K, Matthews, G. et al (eds). *The Poems of Shelley, 1804–1821*. Longman, 1989.
3. Holmes, Richard. *Shelley: The Pursuit*. E.P. Dutton, 1975.
4. St Clair, William. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Cambridge UP, 2005.

## “Ode on a Grecian Urn” - John Keats

### Background

The poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” was written by John Keats, one of the stalwarts of Romantic poetry, in 1819. The speaker looks at the images in a decorated Grecian urn and meditates upon the philosophy of life. The British Museum opened only a century ago while Keats wrote this poem and he probably would have been inspired by the popular activity of looking at the objects of other cultures and contemplating them. The poem consists of five stanzas with ten lines each and is written in iambic pentameter.

### Keywords

Ode, Grecian Urn, Beauty, Art, Eternity

### Discussion

#### Section 4

- Beauty and permanence of art

John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is a poem that reflects on the beauty and permanence of art and its ability to transcend time and convey timeless messages. The speaker in the poem contemplates the scenes depicted on the urn, specifically a group of figures engaged in a sacrificial procession, a lover pursuing his beloved, and a musician playing his pipe. The speaker marvels at the beauty of the urn and the fact that the scenes depicted on it will remain forever unchanged.





### 2.1.7 Summary

The poem begins with the speaker's direct address to a Grecian urn whom he calls as "unravished bride of quietness," "foster-child of silence and slow-time," and "Sylvian historian." It stands there for a long time in silence and tell stories through its carvings that depict rural scenes. He wonders about the shapes seen on the sides of the urn and asks what tales they depict – whether they are mortals, or gods or both. He looks at the figures of the men and reluctant-looking women and thinks about whether the scene depicts a chase or an attempt to escape. He doubts what "wild ecstasy" is shown through the musical instruments.

- Address to a Grecian urn

In the second stanza, the speaker looks at another picture of a young man playing a pipe lying with his lover beneath the tree. Though his music cannot be heard, it is sweeter than the heard melodies. He calls the "fair youth" a "bold lover" and says that though he is nearly kissing his beloved, their lips can never meet and the leaves of the trees will never shed. They will love one another forever and the beauty of the lady will never fade. They are all frozen in time.

- Young man and his beloved

The third stanza continues with the same idea explored in the earlier stanza regarding the preservation of a bygone time through the artworks on the urn. The speaker calls the branches of the tree "happy boughs" because they will never shed their leaves and nor ever say farewell to spring. The "happy melodist" will play new songs untiringly for the coming ages and the poet says that the immortalised images on the urn will always be happy since human passions cause weariness to both heart and body of mortal beings ("high-sorrowful and cloy'd, a burning forehead, and a parching tongue") will never touch them.

- Happy boughs

In the fourth stanza, the speaker turns his attention to another scene, a ceremonial progression, depicted on the urn. It shows a mysterious priest leading a cow (heifer) to be sacrificed. It is dressed with silks and flowers. He doubts where they came – whether it is from town by the river, coast or mountain. He says to the "little town" that its street will "forevermore" be silent, for those who have left it are frozen on the urn and will never return.

- Priest leading a cow

In the final stanza, the speaker addresses the urn again and calls it “O attic,” “fair attitude” and “cold pastoral” (indicates it is inhuman), whose “silent form,” like an eternity, will offer a temporary respite from thought. He hopes that when his generation is long dead, the urn will remain and become an object of contemplation. Keats concludes his poem with a deep philosophical note that implies the power of art to communicate the greater truths of human nature – beauty and truth are one (“beauty is truth, truth beauty”) which is what the urn makes us know on the earth and it is what we actually need to understand.

► Beauty is truth

### 2.1.8 Analysis

John Keats, one of the prominent figures of the Romantic era, crafted “Ode on a Grecian Urn”. This poem stands as a testament to Keats’ ability to intertwine vivid imagery, philosophical contemplation, and intricate symbolism. It examines Keats’ exploration of the tension between permanence and transience, art and life, and the limitations of the human experience.

► Permanence and transience

Keats sets the stage by presenting an ancient Grecian urn as the focal point of his meditation. The urn, frozen in time and immune to the ravages of age, becomes a symbol of permanence. The poem begins with a series of questions, pondering the identity of the figures depicted on the urn. This exploration of the urn’s artistry leads Keats to confront the tension between immortality and the fleeting nature of life. The beauty of the urn’s frozen scenes, such as “marbled men and maidens,” highlights the paradox of permanence—they are trapped in an eternal stasis, incapable of experiencing life’s joys and sorrows. Keats poignantly muses, “What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?”

► Symbol of permanence

Keats further explores the relationship between art and life, weaving a tapestry of paradoxes. The urn’s artistic depiction freezes moments in time, preserving their beauty and innocence. The poet celebrates the urn as a “sylvan historian” that captures the essence of life. However, Keats acknowledges that while art can immortalise beauty, it cannot truly replicate life’s lived experiences. The urn’s figures are forever locked in their roles, devoid of the vitality that comes with the passage of time. The poem subtly suggests that art may offer solace



► Sylvan historian

from the ephemeral nature of existence, yet it can never replace the richness and complexity of lived reality.

Keats grapples with the limitations of the human experience through his exploration of desire and passion depicted on the urn. The figures on the urn engage in an eternal chase, forever frozen in the pursuit of their desires. Keats observes their yearning with a mix of fascination and melancholy. He recognizes the beauty of their unfulfilled longing, for they are spared the bitter taste of disappointment that often accompanies the fulfillment of desires. This contemplation prompts Keats to muse on the limitations of human existence, where the pursuit of desires can be both exhilarating and devastating. The urn becomes a mirror through which the poet confronts his own mortality and the inherent limitations of the human condition.

► Human mortality

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” stands as a testament to Keats’ ability to encapsulate profound philosophical contemplations within the confines of exquisite poetic imagery. Through the exploration of the urn’s frozen scenes, Keats delves into themes of permanence and transience, the paradoxical relationship between art and life, and the limitations of the human experience. The poem invites readers to question the nature of existence and the boundaries of artistic representation. Keats leaves us with a sense of both wonder and yearning, urging us to reflect on the delicate dance between the immortal realm of art and the ephemeral world of human life.

► Paradox of art and life

## Summarised Overview

The poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats explores the theme of the beauty of art and its ability to capture fleeting moments of life and hold them forever. The urn serves as a metaphor for art, symbolising its timeless and immortal nature. The poem highlights the way art can transcend time and convey timeless messages and emotions. Through the depiction of scenes of love, music, and religious procession on the urn, Keats contemplates human desire, the limitations of art, and the paradoxes of life. The poem reflects on the power and beauty of art, while also acknowledging its limitations and the complexities of human experience. Ultimately, it invites readers to contemplate the mysteries of existence and the power of the imagination.

## Assignments

1. How does Keats explore the theme of immortality in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”?
2. Discuss the significance of the visual imagery used in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and its impact on the poem’s meaning.
3. How does Keats convey the idea of permanence through the urn in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”?
4. Explore the concept of beauty in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and its relationship with the transient nature of human existence.
5. Discuss the use of paradox and ambiguity in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and how they contribute to the poem’s overall meaning.
6. How does Keats explore the tension between art and reality in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”?
7. Analyse the different interpretations of love presented in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and discuss their significance in the poem.

## Suggested Readings

1. Dickstein, Morris. *Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development*. University of Chicago Press, 1971.
2. Wolfson, Susan J. *Reading John Keats*, Cambridge UP, 2015.
3. Hofmann, Klaus. “Keats’s Ode to a Grecian Urn.” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2006, pp. 251–284. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25602046>
4. Patterson, Charles I. “Passion and Permanence in Keats’s Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *ELH*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1954, pp. 208–20. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871963>



## References

1. Bate, Walter Jackson. *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats*. New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2012.
2. Parson, Donald. *Portraits of Keats*. World Publishing, 1954.
3. Plumly, Stanley. *Posthumous Keats*, Norton & Co., 2008.
4. Richardson, Joanna. *The Everlasting Spell. A Study of Keats and His Friends*. Cape, 1963.

## “The Lotus-Eaters” - Alfred Lord Tennyson

### Background

The poem “The Lotus-Eaters” was published by Alfred Lord Tennyson, a representative poet of the Victorian age, in his 1832 poetic collection titled *Poems*. The concept of the poem is taken from Greek mythology and the context was inspired by his trip to Spain with his close friend and poet Arthur Hallam, where they visited the Pyrenees Mountains. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the lotus tree is described as a plant whose fruits when eaten induce drowsiness in the eater. It is said to be the only food of an island people called the Lotophagi or Lotus-eaters. The poem describes a group of mariners who, upon eating the lotus, are put into a dreamy state and isolated from the outside world. The first part of the poem (prelude) is written in a Spenserian stanza in an “ababbcbcc” rhyme scheme and the second part (choric song) is irregular in form. The prelude consists of five stanzas and the choric song has eight stanzas. The poem is melancholic in tone and the language conveys the surreal ambience in which the poem is set.

### Keywords

Greek mythology, Lethargy, Escapism, Temptation, Nostalgia



## Discussion

### Section 5

- Melancholic lotus eaters

The poem begins with the sailors who land on a distant island which they later understand as the land of wild-eyed melancholic lotus eaters. The descriptions of the serene beauty of the landscape implies the general air of doziness it carries. The fruit of the land induces drowsiness in the sailors and as the poem concludes they say that they will no longer return to their homeland.

#### 2.1.9 Summary

**Prelude:** In the prelude to the poem, Ulysses (a Greek hero, who is also known as Odysseus), the speaker, speaks to the sailors on his ship, pointing to an island on the horizon. He says that they have come to an island of Lotus-eaters where it seems always afternoon and has a languid air. The full moon shines above the valley and along the cliff flows a slender stream like a downward smoke. He calls it a land of streams as there are many other streams that flow throughout this land. Three snow-capped peaks shine in the sunset, covered with pine trees topped with dew. As the sun sets, they see a valley (dale) and meadow far inland. In this land “all things always seemed the same.” At that time, the dark faces that pale against the rosy flame – the inhabitants of the island – “the mild-eyed melancholy Lotus-Eaters” arrived. They carry branches of the enchanted stem of the lotus tree that are laden with flowers and fruit and give them to the sailors. When the men taste these flowers and fruits they hear a rushing of waves, and if their companion speaks, their voice sounds far away, as if from the grave. Similarly, though awake, they seem deeply asleep, charmed by the music of their own heartbeats. The men sit on the sand “between the sun and moon” and dream about their homeland and their families but they are tired of sailing. Someone from the group says to Ulysses that they will “return no more” and everyone sing together – “Our island home / Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam.”

- Island of Lotus-eaters

- Visions in the island

**Choric Song:** The next eight stanza dwells upon the languorous effect of the lotus fruit on the sailors and describes the visions in the enchanting island and shows their reluctance to return.





- Sweet music in the island

**Stanza 1:** There is sweet music in this island that is softer than petals dropping or night dew resting on walls of granite. It is gentler on the spirit than tired eyelids upon eyes. This music brings sweet sleep. There are also cool mosses, and through the moss creeps up ivy vines and in the streams float long-leaved flowers. Poppy (opium, a drug, is extracted from poppy plants) hangs from the rugged ledge.

**Stanza 2:** They (sailors) say that they face many hardships of life and asks why they want to consume distress; everything in this world have rest and asks why they have to toil alone and plunge into sorrow when they are the first of things –

“While all things else have rest from weariness?  
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,  
We only toil, who are the first of things,  
And make perpetual moan,  
Still from one sorrow to another thrown.”

- Hardship and rest

They go from one sorrow to another and wander ceaselessly, without listening to their inner spirit that tells them, – “There is no joy but calm!”

- Ripen and fall

**Stanza 3:** In the middle of the wood a folded leaf grows broad from a bud by the wind; it grows green in the sun and is moistened by the night dew and finally turns yellow and falls to the ground. The apple and the flower ripen and fall with no toil.

- Dreamful ease

**Stanza 4:** For them, the dark-blue sky that vaulted over the dark-blue sea is hateful. They ask – since death is the end of life, why should life consist only of labour? As nothing lasts forever, they find no meaning in fighting or sailing. So, they want to be left alone to take rest since at the end all things ripen and reach the graveyard in silence. Therefore, they plead to give long rest or death or dreamful ease.

All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave

In silence; ripen, fall and cease:

Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

**Stanza 5:** The sailors think that it is sweet to dream with eyes half-shut hearing the sound of the stream and

- Sweet dream with eyes half-shut

listening to other's whispered speech. They watch the rippling sea and lend their hearts and spirits wholly immersed in the state of drowsiness induced by the lotus fruits. They wish "to muse and brood and live again in memory" and the faces of their past are shut in an urn of brass (oriental culture).

- Pessimism of sailors

**Stanza 6:** The memories of their marriage and the last hugs and tears of their wives are dear to them. But by now changes may have happened. Their household hearths will surely be cold (loss of love and warmth) and their sons may have taken their places (children may have shouldered the family responsibility). They would seem like strangers if they returned. Others may have taken their possessions. Minstrels sing about their ten years war in Troy and their great deeds as "half-forgotten things." The sailors pessimistically say that it is hard to reconcile and settle order again and it is better to continue on the island – "let what is broken so remain." The confusion whether to return or not is worse than death and their hearts are worn out by many wars and eyes have "grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars" (indicates long ship voyages).

- Drowsy landscape

**Stanza 7:** But in this drowsy landscape, they can lie on the beds of amaranth and molly (magic herbs; "amaranth," in ancient Greece, is considered as a flower with healing powers and "molly" is described in Homer's *Odyssey* as a herb that Hermes gave to Odysseus to protect him from Circe's poison) with the sweet warm air blows lowly on them. They hear the sound of a slowly moving river and hear dewy echoes from cave to cave through lush vegetation. They wish only to hear and see the distant sea.

**Stanza 8:** The Lotus blooms everywhere on the island and they want to recline on the hills like Gods "careless of mankind." Gods smile secretly looking over the wasted lands which is filled with,

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

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

They listen and smile hearing the "doleful song" of humans who work and suffer and die – a song which is



- Slumber is sweet than toil

nothing but “a tale of little meaning tho’ the words are strong.” Some perish in hell when they die or some may dwell in Elysian valleys (in heaven). The poem concludes with the words of a sailor to his fellowmen that slumber is “more sweet than toil” and “we will not wander more.

### 2.1.10 Analysis

- Desire for escape

The main themes explored in “The Lotus-Eaters” are the lure of temptation, the desire for escape, and the power of nature. These themes are developed throughout the poem by Tennyson’s use of vivid imagery, symbolism, and sensory language.

- Desire for rest

Tennyson uses vivid sensory language to describe the sailors’ exhaustion and their desire for rest. He writes, “All day the wind breathes low with mellow tone/ Thro’ every hollow cave and alley lone/ Round the dark rocks that frown above the sea”. The use of words like “low” and “mellow tone” create a sense of weariness, while the description of the “dark rocks” and the “sea” suggest a harsh and unforgiving environment. This creates a sense of contrast when the sailors encounter the lush and inviting land of the lotus-eaters.

- Symbol of temptation

The lotus flower itself is a powerful symbol of temptation and escape. In Greek mythology, the lotus-eaters were a race of people who ate the lotus fruit and became trapped in a state of forgetfulness and pleasure. This symbolises the allure of addiction and the dangers of indulging in pleasure without regard for the consequences. Tennyson uses sensory language to describe the lotus flower’s intoxicating effect on the sailors. He writes, “They came to the Lotus land/ Who are these coming to the sacrifice?/ To what green altar, O mysterious priest/ Lead’st thou that heifer lowing at the skies/ And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?/ What little town by river or sea-shore/ Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel/ Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?” The description of the “green altar” and the “silken flanks” create an image of luxury and indulgence, while the question of “Who are these coming to the sacrifice?” suggests a sense of danger and sacrifice.

Throughout the poem, the sailors express their desire to escape the pressures and responsibilities of their daily lives. In stanza two, they describe their longing to

► Peaceful island of the lotus-eaters

leave the world behind and remain in the peaceful land of the lotus-eaters. The phrase “weary seamen” suggests that they are tired of their journey and the hardships they have faced. The idea of escape is further emphasised in stanza three, where the sailors describe the lotus flower’s ability to induce forgetfulness and the desire to remain in a state of blissful ignorance.

The landscape of the lotus-eaters’ island is depicted as a paradise, with “the land of streams” and “many a winding vale.” The language used to describe the island is rich and evocative, painting a picture of a lush and captivating landscape that is almost too perfect to be real. This description emphasises the idea that nature has the power to seduce and mesmerise, creating a sense of otherworldly enchantment that is difficult to resist. The sailors themselves are also influenced by the natural surroundings of the lotus-eaters. They feel a deep sense of peace and contentment in the presence of the lotus flowers, and are lulled into a state of forgetfulness and indifference by the gentle lapping of the waves. This demonstrates the powerful effect that nature can have on the human psyche, soothing and calming even the most troubled mind.

► Island of Lotus-eaters as a paradise

The sailors are described as having “forgotten their heritage” and being “weary of ocean-billows.” The lotus-eaters offer them a respite from their difficult journey, a chance to rest and forget their troubles. This portrayal of nature as a source of comfort and solace is further emphasised in the description of the lotus-eaters’ lifestyle, which is marked by ease and contentment. For instance, the lotus-eaters are described as “careless” and “languid,” suggesting that they are not burdened by the stresses and responsibilities of the outside world. This carefree existence is a stark contrast to the harsh reality of the sailors’ lives, and the temptation to abandon their duties and remain in this idyllic world is strong. This dichotomy between the natural world and the demands of society is a recurring theme in Tennyson’s work and is particularly relevant in “The Lotus-Eaters.”

► Carefree existence in idyllic world



## Summarised Overview

“The Lotus-Eaters” is a captivating episode from Homer’s epic, *The Odyssey*, recounting the encounters of the Greek hero Odysseus and his crew on their treacherous journey back home from the Trojan War. In this episode, the crew lands on the island of the Lotus-Eaters, a tranquil paradise where the inhabitants consume a mysterious plant called the lotus, inducing a state of blissful forgetfulness. Tempted by the allure of the lotus, Odysseus’ men partake in its consumption, becoming entranced and losing all desire to return home. To save his crew, Odysseus must employ his cunning and leadership to rescue them from the clutches of the Lotus-Eaters and continue their perilous voyage.

## Assignments

1. How does Tennyson depict the theme of escapism in “The Lotus-Eaters”?
2. Analyse the role of nature and its influence on the characters in Tennyson’s “The Lotus-Eaters.”
3. Discuss the portrayal of temptation and its consequences in “The Lotus-Eaters” by Tennyson.
4. Examine the use of sensory imagery in Tennyson’s “The Lotus-Eaters” and its impact on the reader’s perception.
5. Explore the significance of the lotus flower as a symbol in Tennyson’s poem “The Lotus-Eaters.”
6. Critically analyse the portrayal of apathy and indifference in Tennyson’s “The Lotus-Eaters.”
7. Compare and contrast the attitudes towards duty and responsibility in “The Lotus-Eaters” by Tennyson.
8. Investigate the narrative structure and its effect on the overall meaning of Tennyson’s “The Lotus-Eaters.”

## Suggested Readings

1. Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. Routledge, 1993.
2. Martin, Robert B. *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart*. Faber and Oxford UP, 1980.
3. Pearsall, Cornelia. *Tennyson's Rapture: Transformations in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue*. Oxford UP, 2008.
4. Sinfield, Alan. *Alfred Tennyson*. Oxford Blackwell, 1986.

## References

1. Baker, John Haydn. *Browning and Wordsworth*. Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004.
2. Grendon, Felix. "The Influence of Keats upon the Early Poetry of Tennyson". *The Sewanee Review*. 15 (3): 285–296.
3. Pattison, Robert. *Tennyson and Tradition*. Harvard UP, 1979.

### **"My Last Duchess" - Robert Browning**

## Background

Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" is a famous dramatic monologue that was published in 1842. The poem is widely studied in high school and college literature courses because it explores a range of themes, including jealousy, power, and art. The poem is written in the voice of a wealthy Duke who is showing a portrait of his late wife, the Duchess, to an emissary who has come to arrange his next marriage.

The poem's popularity can be attributed to its unique form and the psychological depth of the speaker. Browning's use of the dramatic monologue form allows readers to enter into the mind of the Duke and gain insight into his character. The Duke's personality is revealed through his comments on the portrait, as well as his reactions to the emissary's questions. The poem also offers a critique of the societal norms and expectations of the time, as the Duke's actions and attitudes towards women are shown to be oppressive and controlling. Overall, "My Last Duchess" is a thought-provoking and engaging poem that continues to be widely read and studied today.





## Keywords

Duke, Monologue, Jealousy, Power, Art, Appearance vs. Reality

## Discussion

### Section 6

- Dramatic monologue

The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue where the speaker, who is a duke, speaks to a silent listener whom we come to know as the servant of the duke's fiancé's father. He reminisces about his earlier wife, the last duchess. The comments of the Duke direct us to probe into his inner psyche. The poem also hints at the idea of Victorian morality and fusion of art and life. The poem also shows how a piece of painting becomes a symbol of power and objectification.

#### 2.1.11 Summary

The poem opens with the scene where the Duke points to a painting on the wall, to a guest and says that it is his former wife, the last duchess. The Duke praises the painting by saying that it looks alive and tells about the hard-work of its painter Fra Pandolf to make it a piece of wonder. The duke asks the guest to sit and look at the work. He says that he purposefully mentioned the painter's name because the strangers who see the portrait may want to ask about the depth and passion in the Duchess' face. Though they dare not to ask it directly to him, the duke believes that they have had this thought in their minds certainly. He reiterates that the guest isn't the first person to ask this question. The duke addresses the listener as "Sir" and informs more about the facial expression of the Duchess in the painting. He describes the reason behind her blush which wasn't just her husband's presence (though he wanted it to be the only thing why she blushes) but may be also because of Pandolf. He may have told her that her shawl covered her wrist too much or he might have complimented her which made her blush. The duke comments that "she had a heart" that "too soon made glad, too easily impressed."

- Painting on the wall

Further he says that she likes everything she sees, and she sees everything. This line indirectly indicates



- Duchess likes everything

the idea of sensuousness, infidelity or flirtatiousness which the duke thinks that the duchess possessed. He says that everything irrespective of status was alike to her; whether it is the duke's gift that she wore, sunset, the bough of cherries given by some fool officials or even the white mule she rode. The duke complains that she does not know why but the duchess ranks "my gift of nine hundred years old name with anybody's gift." This is an implication to the duke's long family heritage and social position. The duke rhetorically asks who would bother to have an argument with duchess for such a behaviour. He lists the difficulties that prevented him from telling his disinterestedness in her certain behaviour. These include his claim that he doesn't have a skill in speech (though the lines of the poem show his skilful rhetoric). He refuses to lower himself to the duchess.

- Smiles at everyone indiscriminately

He also complains she smiles at everyone indiscriminately. As her smiles grew more, he gave orders and "then all smiles stopped together." Now one can see her only in the painting where she looks as if alive. The duke then asks the guest to get up and go with him downstairs to meet the rest of the guests. As the poem comes to an end, the readers understand the listener is the servant of a Count whose daughter he woos. Duke finally says that his "object of desire" is the daughter of the Count and not the dowry and also says that he knows about the wealth and generosity (munificence) of the Count. Here, the duke implicitly says that his main motive is money. He objectifies the bride to be, where she becomes merely his object. The poem ends with the duke's final threat through an art that depicted Roman God Neptune taming a sea-horse which is a final indication on the Duke's attitude towards taming his wife to fit his tastes.

### 2.1.12 Analysis

- Duke's soliloquy

Robert Browning's dramatic monologue, "My Last Duchess," is a captivating and enigmatic poem that delves into the psyche of an unnamed duke as he recounts the story of his deceased wife, the Duchess. This poem explores themes of power, control, jealousy, and art through the Duke's soliloquy, inviting readers to question the underlying motivations and morality of the speaker. By employing various literary techniques, Browning skillfully presents a character who is both



fascinating and disturbing, ultimately challenging the reader's perceptions of love and art.

► Duchess a possession

From the very beginning, the Duke establishes his position of authority and dominance. Through his conversation with the envoy, the Duke reveals his controlling nature, transforming the Duchess from a living, breathing woman into a mere object of possession. He refers to her as “my last Duchess,” emphasising his ownership and reducing her to a lifeless entity, reflecting the patriarchal society of the time. The Duke's obsession with maintaining control is evident as he proudly declares, “I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together.” This chilling revelation hints at the Duke's potential involvement in the Duchess's demise and exposes the sinister extent of his desire for power.

► Duke's jealousy

The Duke's jealousy is a recurring motif throughout the poem, highlighting his obsession with maintaining an image of perfection and the perceived threat posed by the Duchess's nature. He complains that “she had a heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,” implying that her ability to find joy in simple pleasures was a source of discontent for him. The Duke's need for absolute control over his wife's emotions is further illustrated by his claim that her smiles were reserved only for him. This possessive attitude reveals his deep-seated insecurity and exposes the unhealthy dynamics of their relationship.

► Art as a means of power

Browning's exploration of art is a central element in “My Last Duchess.” The Duke's admiration for a painting of the Duchess, skillfully executed by Fra Pandolf, highlights his desire for art to serve as a medium of control. He views the portrait as a substitute for the living Duchess, able to preserve her beauty and keep her under his gaze indefinitely. The Duke proudly asserts his authority over the artwork, going as far as to draw the curtain to reveal it only to those he deems worthy. This reveals the Duke's perception of art as a means of asserting his power and elevating his own status.

One of the remarkable aspects of Browning's poem is its ambiguity, leaving room for interpretation and analysis. The Duke's unreliable narration raises questions about his reliability as a narrator and the truthfulness of his account. Is the Duchess truly as promiscuous and disobedient as the Duke suggests,

- Ambiguity of the poem

or is this merely a manifestation of his possessive and controlling nature? Browning purposefully leaves these questions unanswered, allowing readers to grapple with the complex nature of human relationships and the unreliability of individual perspectives.

## Summarised Overview

“My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning is a dramatic monologue in which a wealthy Duke shows a portrait of his late wife, the Duchess, to a messenger who is arranging his next marriage. The Duke’s personality is revealed through his comments on the portrait, as well as his reactions to the emissary’s questions. The poem explores themes such as power and control, as the Duke uses his position of wealth and status to exert dominance over the Duchess. It also offers a critique of societal norms and expectations of the time, as the Duke’s actions and attitudes towards women are shown to be oppressive and controlling.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the use of dramatic monologue in “My Last Duchess”
2. Explore the theme of power and control in “My Last Duchess” by examining the Duke’s character and his relationship with the Duchess.
3. Discuss the significance of the portrait in “My Last Duchess” and its role in conveying the Duke’s possessive nature and his attitude towards women.
4. Examine the use of imagery and symbolism in “My Last Duchess” and how they contribute to the themes of the poem.
5. Evaluate the role of dialogue in “My Last Duchess” and its impact on the reader’s understanding of the characters
6. Discuss the role of societal expectations and gender norms in “My Last Duchess”



## Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold, ed. *Robert Browning*. Chelsea House, 1985.
2. Drew, Philip. *The Poetry of Robert Browning: A Critical Introduction*. 1970.
3. Garrett, Martin. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning*. British Library, 2001
4. Pipes, B. N. "The Portrait of 'My Last Duchess.'" *Victorian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1960, pp. 381–86. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3825344>.

## References

1. Dowden, Edward. *Robert Browning*. J.M. Dent & Company, 1904.
2. Drew, Philip. *The Poetry of Robert Browning: A Critical Introduction*. Methuen, 1970.
3. Litzinger, Boyd and Smalley, Donald (eds.) *Robert Browning: the Critical Heritage*. Routledge, 1995.

### **"Dover Beach" - Matthew Arnold**

## Background

Matthew Arnold, a prominent Victorian poet and cultural critic, was born in 1822 and grew up in an intellectual family. His father was a renowned headmaster and scholar, and his mother was a well-known writer. Arnold attended Oxford University and pursued a career in education, serving as a school inspector for over 35 years. He was a scholar of literature, philosophy, and religion and believed in the importance of cultural criticism in shaping society. Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is a notable example of his cultural criticism, expressing his disillusionment with the state of Victorian society and the decline of religious faith.

"Dover Beach" was first published in 1867 and reflects Arnold's concerns about the moral and spiritual crisis of his time. The poem was inspired by his honeymoon trip to the English coast with his wife, where they stood on the Dover Beach and witnessed the moonlit landscape. The poem is characterised by its melancholic tone and explores themes of love, faith, and loss. Arnold uses the natural imagery of the beach to convey his sense of despair and



to contrast the beauty of the natural world with the bleakness of the human condition. The poem has become one of Arnold's most famous works and continues to be studied and analysed by literary scholars today.

## Keywords

Dover Beach, Victorian era, Religion, Melancholy, Sea, Loss of faith

## Discussion

### Section 7

► Human misery

The speaker of "Dover Beach" looks at the sea at night and describes it as the reminder of the ebb and flow of human misery amidst the sweetness of the night air. The central idea of the poem is human discontentment and anguish born out of the new age advancement that caused inner conflict and turmoil and erased religious faith with new science. The poem's melancholic mood reflects the air of despair that pervaded the Victorian society.

#### 2.1.13 Summary

► Calm sea

As the poem opens, the speaker stands on the cliffs of Dover beach and looks out upon a calm sea. He observes that the tide is high and the reflection of the moon on the water. The speaker sees the lights of the French coast fade away, while the cliffs of the English coast stand bright and tall, and the bay seems calm. Suddenly, he calls the unnamed listener, his companion, to come near the window and to enjoy the "sweet night air." He continues describing the spray where the water meets the moonlit land and asks the other person to listen to the "grating roar" of the pebbles made by the waves' movement. The speaker notes this slow repeating action, and tells that it "brings the eternal note of sadness in."

► Sophocles at the Aegean Sea

In the second stanza, the speaker remembers Sophocles (an ancient Greek playwright and philosopher) and imagines Sophocles hearing the same sadness in the Aegean Sea as the speaker hears now on the English coast. He says that "we" (humanity in general) finds the





same thought in the sounds of the sea. This is nothing but the “ebb and flow of human misery.”

► Retreating of the sea

In the third stanza he calls the human faith as sea (“sea of faith”) and tells that it which was once too full and covered the earth like a girdle now slowly vanished. The people who were once together and united under a common faith in God slowly parted their ways with the new science and resulting uncertainty and conflict of opinions. Now the speaker hears only the melancholic roaring and retreating of the sea that leaves the world naked.

► Pessimism

As the fourth and final stanza begins the speaker suddenly addresses the companion as “love.” He states desperately that “let us be true to one another” in this land of dreams which appears to be full of diverse, beautiful, new things but actually offers “neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain”. The poem concludes with a dark image of pessimism where the confused, ignorant armies (human beings) clash on the darkling plain (earth).

### 2.1.14 Analysis

► Uncertainty

“Dover Beach” is a poem that explores various themes such as the loss of faith in religion, the decline of culture, and the need for love and human connection. The poem starts with a serene description of the beach, but it quickly moves into a darker mood as the speaker reflects on the state of the world and the uncertainty of the future.

► Decline of religion

Arnold was a man of faith, but he saw the decline of religion in his time. The speaker in the poem looks out at the sea and imagines the ancient Greek poet Sophocles hearing the sound of the waves. He thinks of Sophocles as a symbol of the ancient world’s faith in the gods. However, the speaker cannot share this faith as he sees only “ignorant armies” fighting in the world. Arnold sees the decline of religion as a major cause of the spiritual malaise of his time. The speaker feels that the “Sea of Faith” is retreating and leaving humanity on a “darkling plain” with no guiding light. Arnold is not rejecting religion altogether, but he sees it as something that is changing and needs to be reinterpreted for a modern world.

► Decline of culture

Arnold was deeply concerned about the decline of culture in his time. The speaker in the poem looks out at the sea and sees the white cliffs of Dover as a symbol of England's proud history and culture. However, he is also aware of the fact that this culture is fading away. The speaker describes the world as a place of "confused alarms" and "ignorant armies" where people are losing their sense of purpose and direction. The poem suggests that this loss of culture is a major cause of the speaker's sense of despair. The speaker feels that the world is becoming a place of chaos and confusion.

► Love is the only hope

Arnold suggests that the only way to combat the darkness and confusion of the world is through love. The speaker looks out at the sea and sees the "eternal note of sadness" in the sound of the waves. However, he is comforted by the presence of his beloved, who is lying beside him. Arnold believes that love is the only thing that can give meaning and purpose to life. The speaker sees the world as a place of "ignorant armies" where people are losing their sense of connection with one another. He suggests that the only way to combat this is through love and human connection.

## Summarised Overview

"Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold is a four-stanza poem that explores the theme of uncertainty in a world that has lost its faith in God and religion. The speaker reflects on the state of the world, describing it as a place of chaos and confusion, with no guiding light. He sees the decline of religion and culture as major causes of the spiritual malaise of his time. However, he finds comfort in the presence of his beloved and suggests that the only way to combat the darkness and confusion of the world is through love and human connection. Overall, "Dover Beach" is a powerful reminder of the importance of love and human connection in a world that has lost its faith and direction. Arnold's poem highlights the need to address these themes if we are to find meaning and purpose in life.

## Assignments

1. How does Arnold use the sea as a metaphor to convey the poem's central theme of uncertainty and loss of faith?
2. Analyse the role of the beloved in the poem.
3. Compare and contrast the speaker's view of the world with that of the ancient Greeks, as portrayed in the poem.
4. Explore the poem's use of imagery and sound devices to convey its themes. How does Arnold's use of repetition, alliteration, and other literary techniques help to create a particular mood and tone in the poem?
5. Consider the poem's historical context and how it reflects the cultural and social issues of Arnold's time.
6. Evaluate the poem's relevance to contemporary readers. What themes and issues does the poem address that are still relevant today?

## Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold ed. *Matthew Arnold: Bloom's Modern Critical Views*. Chelsea House, 1987.
2. Holland, Norman N. "Psychological Depths and 'Dover Beach.'" *Victorian Studies*, vol. 9, 1965, pp. 5–28. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3825594>.
3. Rowe, M. W., and M. W. Rose. "Arnold and the Metaphysics of Science: A Note on 'Dover Beach.'" *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1989, pp. 213–17. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40002346>.

## References

1. Lowry, Howard F. (editor). *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough*. Oxford UP, 1932.
2. Allott, Miriam and Robert H. Super (editors), *The Oxford Authors: Matthew Arnold*. Oxford UP, 1986.
3. Super, Robert H. (editor), *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*. The University of Michigan Press, 1960.
4. Collini, Stefan (editor), *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Cambridge UP, 1993.



## “Pied Beauty” - Gerald Manley Hopkins

### Background

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a British poet who lived from 1844 to 1889. He was born in Stratford, England, and grew up in a devout Anglican family. Hopkins studied classics at Oxford University, where he converted to Catholicism, a decision that deeply influenced his poetry. His interest in language and music led him to develop his own style of poetry, which he called “sprung rhythm.”

The poem “Pied Beauty” is a curtal sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins. It was written in 1877, but not published until 1918. It was included as part of the collection *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. The poem follows the basic pattern of Petrarchan sonnet with an octave and a sestet along with an extra line added to it (that makes it a curtal sonnet). The key to understanding Hopkins’s poetry is his belief in the immanence of God, the idea that God is manifested in the material world.

### Keywords

Nature, Beauty, Dappled things, God’s creation, Appreciation

### Discussion

#### Section 8

- Diversity and beauty of nature

- Dappled things

#### 2.1.15 Summary

“Pied Beauty” is a sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins that celebrates the diversity and beauty of nature. The poem is divided into two stanzas, the first consisting of six lines and the second consisting of seven lines.

In the first stanza, the speaker begins by praising God for the variety and uniqueness of the natural world. He describes “dappled things” such as “brinded cows” and “speckled trout,” and notes that all of these things have “counter, original, spare, strange” qualities that make them interesting and beautiful. The speaker uses alliteration to emphasise the diversity of nature, such as “couple-colour,” “rose-moles,” and “finches’ wings.”



► Harmonious whole

In the second stanza, the speaker expands his praise of nature to include a wider range of things. He notes that the natural world includes not just things that are beautiful or pleasing to the senses, but also things that are “fickle, freckled (who knows how?)” and “swift, slow; sweet, sour.” The speaker goes on to praise the way that all of these different elements come together to create a beautiful and harmonious whole. He describes the natural world as being “praise[ful]” of God and calls on the reader to join in this praise.

### 2.1.16 Analysis

► Uniqueness of everything

Hopkins believes that everything in nature has a unique and beautiful aspect that should be appreciated and celebrated. The poem is structured in two stanzas, the first consisting of six lines and the second of seven lines, and it follows a unique rhyme scheme of its own. In the first stanza, Hopkins introduces the idea of “pied” beauty, which means beauty that is composed of different colours, patterns, or forms. He lists a range of natural objects, from skies and landscapes to animals and birds, that embody this type of beauty. Hopkins believes that everything in nature has its own unique and beautiful aspect, which should be appreciated and celebrated. He describes the beauty of the sky as “dappled”, suggesting that the clouds in the sky have a pattern and a colour that make them beautiful. Hopkins also describes the landscape as “brinded”, implying that the earth has its own unique patterns and colours. The phrase “rose-moles” refers to the spots on the skin of a trout, and “fresh-firecoal” refers to the warm, bright colours of the sunrise. The phrase “finches’ wings” highlights the unique patterns and colours of a bird’s wings.

► Divine creation

In the second stanza, Hopkins suggests that the beauty of nature is not just limited to its physical appearance but is also evident in its divine creation. He refers to God as the “Father” and “King” of nature, who created everything in its unique and beautiful form. Hopkins expresses his gratitude and praises the divine creator for all the beautiful things in nature. He says that everything that is “counter, original, spare, strange” has its own unique beauty and is worthy of celebration. He concludes by stating that the beauty of nature is not just limited to its physical appearance but is also evident in the diverse forms of human behavior.

► Religious devotion

The poem is a celebration of diversity and uniqueness in nature, and it reflects Hopkins' deep religious beliefs. Hopkins uses vivid and striking imagery to bring the beauty of nature to life. The use of alliteration and internal rhyme gives the poem a musical quality that is reminiscent of Hopkins' religious devotion. The use of the word "dappled" and "brinded" suggests that Hopkins sees beauty not only in uniformity but also in variety and diversity. The phrase "swift, slow; sweet, sour" suggests that everything in nature has a unique quality that should be celebrated.

### 2.1.17 Relevant parts of the poem

"All things counter, original, spare, strange" - The use of alliteration in this line emphasises the uniqueness of each element of nature.

"Pied Beauty" - The title of the poem itself is an example of the type of dappled, multi-coloured beauty that the speaker is celebrating.

"With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim" - The use of contrasting words in this line emphasises the wide range of elements in nature that the speaker is praising.

"He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change" - This final line of the poem emphasises the idea that God is the ultimate creator of all the beauty in the natural world.

## Summarised Overview

"Pied Beauty" by Gerard Manley Hopkins is a celebrated Victorian poem that exudes a deep appreciation for the beauty and diversity found in nature. The poem is characterised by its unique use of language and striking imagery. Hopkins expresses gratitude for the variegated and imperfect aspects of the natural world, emphasising the intricate patterns and contrasting colours that exist. He celebrates the magnificence of creation, recognising that even in the seemingly flawed or irregular, there is a divine presence and purpose. Through his poetic exploration of nature, Hopkins encourages readers to embrace the diversity and complexity of the world around them and find beauty in the unconventional.





## Assignments

1. What is the central theme of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Pied Beauty" and how does the poet express it through his use of language and imagery?
2. Examine the role of religious elements and references in "Pied Beauty" and how they contribute to the overall message of the poem.
3. Explore the structure and form of "Pied Beauty" and explain how it enhances the theme of the poem.
4. Analyse the various examples of contrasting elements in the poem, such as light and dark, regularity and irregularity, and explain how they contribute to overall aesthetic appeal of the poem.
5. Discuss the impact of Hopkins' use of alliteration and other sound devices in "Pied Beauty" and how they enhance the musicality and rhythm of the poem.
6. Explore the concept of "dappled things" as presented in the poem and analyse how Hopkins celebrates the uniqueness and imperfections of the natural world.

## Suggested Readings

1. Bridges, Robert. *Preface to Notes to the Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by W. H. Gardner, Oxford UP, 1948.
2. Lowenstein, Amy. "Seeing 'Pied Beauty': A Key to Theme and Structure." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1976, pp. 64–66. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40001861>
3. Westover, Daniel and Thomas Alan Holmes. *The Fire that Breaks: Gerard Manley Hopkins's Poetic Legacies*. Clemson University Press, 2020.

## References

1. Abbott, Claude Collier, ed. *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Oxford University Press, 1955.
2. Martin, Robert Bernard. *Gerard Manley Hopkins – A Very Private Life*. HarperCollins, 1992.
3. White, Norman. *Hopkins – A literary Biography*. Oxford UP, 1992.



## Unit 2

# The Importance of Being Earnest

- Detailed Study

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ gain a deep understanding of Oscar Wilde's witty commentary on Victorian society.
- ▶ analyse the play's themes, characters, and dramatic techniques.
- ▶ appreciate Wilde's masterful use of language, irony, and comedic timing.
- ▶ explore the social and cultural context of the Victorian era through the lens of historical and cultural awareness.

### Background

For a sensible understanding of Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it is necessary to have a basic notion of Victorian society and its values. The play is set in the late 19th century and satirises the upper-class English society of that time. Familiarity with the social conventions, expectations, and etiquette of the Victorian era allows readers or viewers to grasp the subtleties and humour embedded within the play's dialogue and plot.

Additionally, prior exposure to Wilde's wit and style can enhance the enjoyment of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde was known for his clever wordplay, puns, and social satire, which are prominent elements in this particular work. Being familiar with Wilde's other works, such as his essays, plays, and novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, can provide insight into his distinctive writing style and comedic sensibilities, allowing readers or viewers to better appreciate the nuances and comedic timing of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

### Keywords

Satire, Comedy, Parody, French Theatre, Melodrama, Social drama and Farce



## Discussion

This play had four Acts when originally published and later the acts two and three were merged into one and two characters were omitted.

### 2.2.1 Summary

**Act One:** The first act opens in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. His servant Lane is there, preparing the tea table. Algernon enters the room after the sound of a piano falls silent. Lane had ordered cucumber sandwiches for Lady Bracknell, from which Algernon takes some and flops down. Lane leaves the room after completing his work and having some talks with Algernon on married life and drinking.

► Algernon's flat

Lane informs the arrival of Mr. Ernest Worthing. Between their talk, when enquires to Ernest where he was, he seems confused and tries to change the topic. When Algernon says that Gwendolen and Aunt Augusta are coming for tea, Ernest says that he loves Gwendolen and has come to propose to her. Algernon comments that Ernest would never marry her and he would also never give consent because she is his first cousin.

► Arrival of Mr. Ernest Worthing

Algernon takes out an inscription in which it was written, "From little Cecily with her fondest love to her dear uncle Jack." At last Ernest reveals that his real name is Jack, not Ernest. He lives with the name Jack in the country and Ernst in town. Jack's adopted guardian made Jack the guardian of little Cecily. She is the granddaughter of Mr. Thomas Cardew who has adopted Jack. Algernon was curious to know about Cecily.

► Ernest's real name is Jack

Gwendolen and Bracknell enter. They all spend time together. Jack expresses his love for Gwendolen. She accepts. Gwendolen's fantasy of having a man named Ernest is revealed here. Lady Bracknell creates a scene of fury that she is not interested in Jack marrying Gwendolen. Then she kept a condition that if Jack could answer her questions and satisfy her, she would agree. She starts her questions regarding his habits, age, earnings, political party and his father. She was satisfied with many answers, but she was not happy to hear that Jack is an orphan. Lady Bracknell asks for his address.



► Disagreement of Lady Bracknell

Jack gives the address and leaves the place. There was a person who was happy to get Jack's address. None other than Algernon, who had a feeling to meet Cecily.

► Jack's country estate

**Act Two:** The setting of this act is a garden in the Manor House-Jack's country estate. Miss Prism and Cecily are in the scene. Miss Prism asks her to stop watering plants and study German. From Miss Prism, we get the image of Jack in the country as someone who holds duty and responsibility. Cecily's interest towards Jack's fictional brother Ernest is clear in their conversation. They share their writing habits. They are then informed by Merriman, the butler, about the arrival of Mr. Ernest Worthing. Mr. Ernest was Algernon who was crazy about meeting Cecily. In the course of time, Jack too arrives with a mourning dress to show that his brother Ernest is dead. But Jack was totally confused to hear the news from Cecily that his brother Ernest had arrived there. Jack could not talk against Algernon.

► Cecily fall in love

Algernon/Ernest and Cecily fall in love with each other. Cecily informs him about the fantasy she had in the name Ernest. They both share their love. Not so later, Gwendolen also arrives there. She finds it problematic when she sees Cecily in the house and finds that Ernest is her guardian. Things become more complex when Cecily says that she is going to marry Ernest Worthing. She was perplexed that Ernest had said nothing about Cecily.

► Confusion over 'Ernest'

There arises an argument on and for 'Ernest'. Jack arrives in between and Gwendolen goes to him and asks if he is going to make Cecily his wife. When Jack kisses Gwendolen, Cecily says that he is not Ernest, he is Jack. To add more intensity to the complications, Algernon also arrives. When Cecily addresses him as Ernest, Gwendolen clears up that he is not Ernest, his name is Algernon. Jack has to untie the secret of his fictional brother 'Ernest'. The act ends with the faces of sad Cecily and Gwendolen and the two 'Ernest' putting their heads down with shame.

**Act Three:** The setting is the Manor house. This act opens with Cecily and Gwendolen looking at the two men. This act can be called as that of reconciliation, solution and forgiveness. Both the ladies question the 'Ernest' why have they pretended so with fake names.



► Act of reconciliation

They both get satisfying answers that it was for their love. Then Lady Bracknell enters the scene with her arrogant behaviour. At first, she did not feel good to see Cecily. But after knowing about the wealth she inherited from her grandfather, she was happy with her. But Algernon and Lady Bracknell did not give consent for the marriage of Jack and Gwendolen. Jack warns them that if he does not get their consent, then he will also not give consent to Algernon to marry Cecily. He added that Cecily cannot enjoy the inherited wealth as her own unless she is thirty-five.

► Real Ernest

The story reaches its twist when Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell happen to see each other in the midst of the incidents. Lady Bracknell enquires about a baby to Miss Prism, that she had left somewhere twenty-eight years ago. Miss Prism confesses that she accidentally happened to put the baby in a handbag and lost it. Jack suddenly runs and brings a hand-bag which Miss Prism identifies as hers. Lady Bracknell is left shocked that Jack is her brother's son. When everyone was immersed in the stunning news, Gwendolen wanted to know Jack's real name. They discover from a book of Army list which included the details of his real father and family that his name was Ernest. Gwendolen was extremely happy. Jack too.

### 2.2.2 Analysis

Oscar Wilde has presented Victorian society satirically through the play, with the topics of marriage, love and the obsessions towards certain things. The irony of the play starts with the name 'Ernest'. The dialogues between the characters are mostly ironic and hyperbolic. Wilde made use of puns, epigrams, situational irony and dramatic irony. The fictional 'Ernest' and the obsession with the name 'Ernest' symbolise the trivialities of the era. The settings in the 'country' and 'urban' can be indicative of the kind of people over there. The last two Acts were set in the countryside where the real faces of people come out. Things become clearer and more open in the country. Whereas the setting of the first act is in the town. The urban setting provides a hypocritical face in all the incidents. The lack of honest or 'earnest' relation is conveyed through the title itself.

► Use of Irony

It is a satirical comedy of manners that sharply critiques Victorian society's hypocrisies and superficiality. Set in

► Satirical comedy of manners

the late 19th century, the play revolves around two friends, Jack and Algernon, who create fictitious identities to escape their social obligations and responsibilities. Wilde uses witty dialogue, absurd situations, and exaggerated characters to mock the Victorian aristocracy's obsession with social status, appearance, and reputation. The play's humour and satire are not only entertaining but also thought-provoking, exposing the flaws and limitations of Victorian society's values and beliefs.

► Dual identity

One of the central themes of the play is the idea of dual identity or double life. Both Jack and Algernon lead double lives, with Jack pretending to be his own brother, Ernest, and Algernon creating the fictional character of Bunbury. Through these identities, they are able to escape from the constraints of their social obligations and responsibilities. Wilde uses this theme to critique Victorian society's obsession with appearance and reputation, suggesting that people are not who they seem to be and that appearances can be deceiving. For example, Jack's dual identity allows him to be perceived as a respectable and upstanding citizen, even though he has a questionable past.

► Marriage as a social contract

Another theme of the play is the idea of marriage as a social contract rather than a result of love or affection. Wilde portrays marriage as a business transaction, with characters using marriage as a means to advance their social status and wealth rather than for love. For example, Lady Bracknell, the epitome of Victorian social snobbery, disapproves of Jack as a potential husband for her daughter, Gwendolen, because he has no family connections or wealth. This satirical portrayal of marriage highlights the hypocrisy of the Victorian society's values, which placed an emphasis on superficial qualities rather than genuine emotions.

► Identity and deception

In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, identity and deception are significant themes that drive the plot forward. The characters in the play constantly deceive each other to maintain their social standing and reputation. The play's premise is centered on the two main characters, Algernon Moncrieff and Jack Worthing, who lead double lives to escape their social obligations. Algernon pretends to have a friend named Bunbury, whom he visits whenever he wants to avoid social gatherings, while Jack creates a fictitious brother called



Ernest, whom he uses as an excuse to visit the city and lead a double life.

The theme of identity is highlighted in the play through the use of mistaken identity, where characters are mistaken for others or pretend to be someone else entirely. For instance, Gwendolen believes that Jack is Ernest, and Jack pretends to be Ernest to win her affection. Similarly, Algernon poses as Jack's brother Ernest to visit Jack's ward Cecily. The play also explores the theme of social class and its influence on identity. For instance, Lady Bracknell's insistence on finding a suitable match for her daughter based on social status and wealth highlights the pressure on individuals to conform to societal expectations.

► Social status

Deception is used as a tool to comment on societal expectations and norms. Wilde uses the characters' deception to show how the upper-class society values appearances over reality. The characters prioritise maintaining their reputation over the truth, which ultimately leads to comedic situations and misunderstandings. For example, the revelation that Jack's real name is Ernest leads to a humorous misunderstanding between the characters. Additionally, the play explores the idea of the Victorian Era's hypocritical moral values, which prioritise appearances over substance.

► Appearances over reality

Marriage is a significant theme in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Wilde uses it to satirise the societal expectations and conventions surrounding marriage during the Victorian era. In the play, marriage is often depicted as a business transaction, and love is seen as a secondary consideration. This is evident in Lady Bracknell's insistence that marriage should only take place between individuals of similar social status, and the emphasis on the monetary aspects of marriage throughout the play. For instance, when Lady Bracknell interviews Jack to determine if he is a suitable match for her daughter, she is more concerned about his wealth and social connections than his character or feelings for Gwendolen.

► Marriage and society

Wilde also challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes associated with marriage through his characters. For example, the character of Jack, who is the male protagonist of the play, is not depicted as the

► Gender roles

dominant or patriarchal figure. Instead, he is portrayed as a man who is trying to escape from the constraints of his social class and create a new identity for himself. Similarly, the character of Gwendolen is not depicted as a passive or submissive woman, but as a confident and assertive individual who knows what she wants. This is evident in her pursuit of Jack and her determination to marry him, even though her mother disapproves of the match.

► Individual freedom

Moreover, the characters in the play often use marriage as a means of achieving personal freedom or social mobility. For instance, Algernon is depicted as a character who is skeptical of marriage and its conventional trappings. He views marriage as a trap that will limit his freedom and prevent him from pursuing his pleasures. On the other hand, Cecily, who is a younger character in the play, views marriage as a means of escape from her oppressive guardian, Miss Prism. She believes that marriage will give her the freedom to live life on her own terms.

► Critique the Victorian society

Class and social hierarchy is a significant theme in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Wilde uses it to critique the Victorian society's values and conventions. The play reflects the strict class system of Victorian England, where social status was everything, and one's position in society dictated their behaviour, beliefs, and aspirations. Wilde challenges these conventions through his characters and their interactions with each other.

► Upper class and the lower class

The characters in the play are divided into two distinct classes - the upper class and the lower class. The upper-class characters, such as Lady Bracknell, are portrayed as snobbish, materialistic, and obsessed with social status. Lady Bracknell is a perfect example of this, as she is more interested in her daughter's potential suitor's wealth and social status than his character or personality. Wilde satirises the upper class's obsession with materialism and social status through Lady Bracknell's character and her absurd demands for her daughter's marriage.

On the other hand, the lower-class characters, such as Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble, are portrayed as kind-hearted and good-natured, but with limited social mobility. Miss Prism, for instance, is a governess and has little hope of rising above her social status. Wilde uses



- Lack of social mobility

these characters to highlight the rigid social structure of Victorian society and the lack of social mobility for those in the lower classes.

- Society and ethics

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde questions the morality and ethics of the Victorian era by satirising the society's strict moral codes and hypocritical behaviour. The characters in the play engage in various forms of deception and trickery, and their actions challenge the conventional notions of right and wrong. For instance, Jack and Algernon both create false identities to escape the constraints of their social obligations, and Gwendolen and Cecily are willing to overlook their fiancés' lies and deceit.

- Challenge moral codes

Through the actions of these characters, Wilde challenges the rigid moral codes and values of Victorian society. He suggests that these codes are superficial and hypocritical, and people are more concerned with maintaining a respectable facade rather than living a virtuous life. For example, Lady Bracknell's emphasis on social status and wealth as criteria for marriage shows how the Victorian society valued materialistic values over moral values.

- Nuanced view of morality

Wilde offers a more nuanced view of morality and ethics by suggesting that one's intentions and actions should be judged in context rather than based on rigid moral codes. For instance, Jack's deception of his own identity is not necessarily immoral or unethical if it is done for the right reasons, such as to escape a stifling social environment. Wilde implies that morality and ethics should not be governed by strict codes and conventions but should be shaped by individual contexts and circumstances.

## Summarised Overview

In Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the themes of identity and deception, marriage and society, and class and social hierarchy are satirically explored. The play is a commentary on the Victorian era's hypocritical social norms and expectations. The characters in the play deceive each other to maintain their social standing and reputation, and marriage is portrayed as a business transaction based on social status and wealth. The play also critiques the strict social hierarchy of Victorian England, where social

status is everything, and individuals are judged by their family background and wealth. The play's humour and satire are thought-provoking and expose the flaws and limitations of the Victorian society's values and beliefs.

## Assignments

1. What is the significance of identity and deception in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?
2. How does Oscar Wilde use marriage to satirise Victorian society in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?
3. What are some of the ways in which Oscar Wilde challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?
4. How does *The Importance of Being Earnest* critique the values and conventions of Victorian society regarding class and social hierarchy?
5. How does the theme of appearance versus reality contribute to the satirical tone of *The Importance of Being Earnest*?
6. What does *The Importance of Being Earnest* suggest about the limitations of Victorian society's values and beliefs, as presented through the characters and their actions?

## Suggested Readings

1. Beckson, Karl E. *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia*. AMS Press, 1998.
2. Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.
3. Hyde, H. Montgomery. *Famous Trials: Oscar Wilde*. MD: Penguin Books, 1963.
4. Igoe, Vivien. *A Literary Guide to Dublin: Writers in Dublin, Literary Associations and Anecdotes*. Methuen, 1994.

## References

1. Holland, Merlin, ed. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Harper Collins, 2003.
2. Hyde, H. Montgomery. *Oscar Wilde: The Aftermath*. Farrar Straus, Methuen, 1994.
3. Sturgis, Matthew. *Oscar: A Life*. Head of Zeus, 2018.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

## Unit 3

## Poetry

### - Non Detailed

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse the themes of beauty, grace, and darkness in Lord Byron's "She Walks in Beauty"
- ▶ examine the exploration of spirituality and courage in Emily Bronte's "No Coward Soul is Mine"
- ▶ interpret the symbolism and religious undertones in D.G. Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel"
- ▶ explore the themes of love, vulnerability, and self-expression in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets

### "She Walks in Beauty" - Lord Byron

### Background

One of the leading poets of the Romantic age, George Gordon Byron was very influential. He wrote widely against the oppression faced by people, and about the need for freedom in life. He always fought against all kinds of suppression faced by common man. He believed in the individual power and skill of man. His character Byronic hero is a melancholic, strong, passionate, rebellious and socially outcast man who defies the rules of society.

The poem "She Walks in Beauty" is said to be an inspiration from Byron's personal life. Byron happened to meet a lady named Anne Beatrix Wilmot, the wife of Byron's cousin Sir Robert Wilmot. Amazed by her beauty, he wrote this poem in 1814. It is a short lyrical poem in iambic tetrameter

### Keywords

Beauty, Walks, Night, Stars, Tenderness, Grace





# Discussion

## Section 1

- Woman walking with grace

- Flawless beauty

- Purity and innocence

- Inner beauty

- Romantic ideals of beauty

### 2.3.1 Summary

The first stanza describes the beauty of a woman who walks with grace and poise, like the clear night sky filled with stars. The speaker notes that the woman's appearance combines both light and dark qualities, creating a unique and captivating aura. Her gentle and tender appearance is contrasted with the bright and showy aspects of the day.

The second stanza suggests that even a slight change in the woman's appearance could detract from her beauty. The speaker notes that the delicate balance of light and dark in her hair and face is perfect and that even a slight alteration could damage her flawless beauty. The woman's serene expression and pure thoughts are also highlighted, indicating that her beauty goes beyond just her physical appearance.

The final stanza speaks to the woman's inner beauty, as well as her outward appearance. The speaker notes the softness and calmness of her features, yet they still convey a sense of eloquence and depth. Her smile and glowing complexion suggest a kind and loving heart, which is at peace with the world around her. The final line reinforces this idea, emphasising the purity and innocence of the woman's love.

The poem celebrates the beauty of a woman both inside and out. It portrays her as a source of light and grace in a world that can be both dark and bright. The poem also suggests that true beauty is more than just physical appearance and is reflected in a person's inner qualities, such as purity, goodness, and peace.

### 2.3.2 Analysis

Lord Byron, a prominent figure of the Romantic movement, is known for his evocative and passionate poetry. One of his most celebrated works, "She Walks in Beauty," explores the ethereal beauty of a woman. Written in 1814, this poem encapsulates the Romantic ideals of beauty, contrasting light and darkness, and the power of aesthetic harmony.



► Lyrical quality

The poem consists of three stanzas, each containing six lines. Byron adheres to an ABABAB rhyme scheme, creating a musicality that enhances the poem's lyrical quality. The consistent iambic tetrameter maintains a rhythmic flow and adds elegance to the verse. The structure, while seemingly simple, reflects the poem's focus on balance and harmony.

► Harmony of opposing forces

Byron masterfully employs vivid and evocative imagery to portray the woman's beauty. The opening line, "She walks in beauty, like the night," sets the tone for the poem, juxtaposing light and darkness. This contrast runs throughout the poem, as the woman's physical attributes are described in terms of both light and dark elements. The lines, "And all that's best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes," underscore the harmony of opposing forces. This interplay of light and dark creates a visual feast that adds depth to the portrayal of beauty.

► Symbol of aesthetic perfection

Beyond its surface depiction of physical beauty, "She Walks in Beauty" explores profound themes. The woman becomes a symbol of aesthetic perfection and the embodiment of divine harmony. Byron captures the transcendental quality of her beauty, suggesting an otherworldly presence. He refers to her as "the starry skies" and "tender light" while emphasising her inner qualities of innocence and serenity. The poem's central theme is the reconciliation of contrasting elements, emphasising the Romantic belief in the unity of seemingly opposing forces.

► Melancholic undertone

Byron subtly conveys a range of emotions within the poem, evoking a sense of awe and longing. The lines, "One shade the more, one ray the less," hint at a melancholic undertone, suggesting a loss or absence within the woman's beauty. This ambiguity adds complexity to the poem, inviting readers to interpret their own emotions and experiences. Byron's ability to evoke a multitude of feelings with economy of words is a testament to his skill as a poet.

While "She Walks in Beauty" is undeniably a remarkable poem, it can be argued that Byron's depiction of beauty is limited to external appearances. The woman's beauty is described solely in terms of physical attributes, neglecting the depth of her character. This focus on



► Physical beauty

surface-level aesthetics may limit the poem's scope and fail to fully explore the woman's inner world.

## Summarised Overview

The poem "She walks in Beauty" by Lord Byron is a romantic poem that praises the beauty of a woman both in terms of physical appearance and inner qualities. The poet uses a metaphor to compare the woman's beauty to "cloudless climes and starry skies," emphasising that her beauty is not superficial but rather subtle and nuanced. The poet also emphasises the importance of balance in the woman's appearance, suggesting that even a slight change could detract from her beauty.

In addition to her physical beauty, the poem also emphasises the woman's inner beauty. Her thoughts are described as "serenely sweet" and her heart is filled with innocent love, suggesting that she is not only physically beautiful but also has a kind and gentle nature. The final stanza focuses on the woman's character and personality, emphasising her peaceful mind and loving heart.

## Assignments

1. What is the poem "She Walks in Beauty" about?
2. What literary devices does the poet use to convey the woman's beauty?
3. What is the significance of the balance of light and dark in the woman's appearance?
4. What does the poem suggest about the relationship between physical beauty and inner beauty?
5. Why is "She Walks in Beauty" a timeless classic?

## Suggested Readings

1. Brand, Emily. *The Fall of the House of Byron: Scandal and Seduction in Georgian England*. John Murray Press, 2020.



2. Calder, Angus. *Byron and Scotland*. Cencrastus, 1984.
3. Calder, Angus (ed.). *Byron and Scotland: Radical or Dandy?*, Edinburgh University Press, 1989.

## References

1. Garrett, Martin. *George Gordon, Lord Byron*. British Library, 2000.
2. Garrett, Martin. *Palgrave Literary Dictionary of Byron*. Palgrave, 2010.
3. Grosskurth, Phyllis. *Byron: The Flawed Angel*. Hodder, 1997.

## “No Coward Soul is Mine” - Emily Bronte

## Background

Emily Bronte is one of the most famous female English writers and wrote under the pen name Ellis Bell. Born on 30 July 1818, she is famous for her work *Wuthering Heights*. Though she is best known as a novelist, Bronte has written many poems, some of which are “A Daydream”, “Hope”, “Long Neglect has Worn Away” and “Remembrance.” She has a figurative style of writing and deals mostly with themes like nature, solitude, romanticism, loss, death, religion, revenge and class.

## Keywords

Poetry, Spirituality, Identity, Courage, Transcendence, Immortality

## Discussion

### Section 2

#### 2.3.3 Summary

The poem “No Coward Soul is Mine” is religious in nature. The speaker says that she is not afraid of anything



- Religious content

because she has faith in God. This faith helps her to not be afraid of death. She talks about others who are not as faithful as her, and she regards them as low people. She says that their life is in vain. The poetic persona also adds that any temptation which comes to destroy her faith is useless, as her faith is so strong.

- Unlimited love of God

The speaker says that God's love is unlimited. Nothing wrong can happen to her or the world as God, the saviour, is there. She once again feels pride in her faith, and proclaims that even death is low in front of God.

The speaker is meditating on all the endless things that move men's hearts. Individuals are often moved by creeds that are unutterably vain. The poet here is speaking of all the human wants that drive men and women forward – from money to a love that is not for God. She condemns these kinds of people. She feels utter contempt for how they live their lives and towards their faith, if they have any, in God. The speaker refers to those who are not strong like her as “vain.” These people might give in to the temptations of the world, which is something she is sure not to do. The speaker is saying that she is so steadfast in her morality and faith that any doubt that might be present is “Worthless as withered weeds” in the “boundless” and endlessly powerful ocean. If at all present, they are unable to influence her just as idle froth in the ocean has no impact on the currents.

- Human drive

### 2.3.4 Analysis

One of the most striking aspects of Brontë's “No Coward Soul is Mine,” is its exploration of religious faith and spirituality. The opening lines, “No coward soul is mine, / No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere,” establish a strong sense of conviction and courage. Brontë's depiction of the soul as fearless and unyielding suggests a defiance against societal constraints and a steadfast belief in a higher power. The poem can be seen as a rejection of conventional religious dogma and an assertion of a personal, intimate relationship with the divine.

- Religious faith

“No Coward Soul is Mine” can be read as a response to the turbulent political and social climate of Brontë's time. Brontë's contemporaries lived in a period of great upheaval, marked by political revolutions and social unrest. In this context, the emphasis of the poem is on



► Political upheavals

the indomitable nature of the soul takes on a broader significance. It can be interpreted as a call to resist oppressive systems and to remain true to one's inner convictions, even in the face of overwhelming challenges.

► Interconnectedness of all living beings

Brontë's use of vivid imagery and evocative language enhances the impact of the poem. The lines, "The midnight call of birth / Goeth up to God," for example, capture the awe-inspiring nature of creation and the interconnectedness of all living beings. The imagery throughout the poem creates a sense of cosmic vastness and eternal transcendence. It serves to elevate the themes of faith and spirituality, inviting readers to contemplate the mysteries of existence and the divine order of the universe.

► Resilience of the soul

However, despite its many strengths, "No Coward Soul is Mine" does have some limitations. One aspect that can be critiqued is its rather idealistic portrayal of the human spirit. While the poem exalts the soul's courage and resilience, it does not fully acknowledge the complexities and vulnerabilities of human nature. By presenting the soul as an invincible entity, Brontë may overlook the nuances of human emotions and the struggles inherent in navigating the world.

► Lack of tangible connection

Another point of criticism is the poem's lack of concrete context or narrative structure. Brontë's lyrical style, while beautiful, can sometimes obscure the underlying message and make the poem feel detached from tangible experiences. The absence of specific references or allusions to real-world events can limit the poem's accessibility and potentially alienate readers seeking a more tangible connection.

## Summarised Overview

"No Coward Soul is Mine" is a poem by Emily Bronte, the renowned English author and poet. It serves as a profound expression of Bronte's spirituality and her contemplation of life and death. The poem reflects her belief in the eternal nature of the soul and its resilience in the face of adversity. Bronte celebrates the courage and strength of the human spirit, asserting that it cannot be weakened or diminished by fear or mortality. Through vivid imagery and emotive language, she explores themes of faith, transcendence, and the indomitable nature of the soul, creating a thought-provoking and inspiring work of poetry.





## Assignments

1. Analyse the religious imagery and themes present in “No Coward Soul is Mine” by Emily Bronte.
2. Discuss the significance of the title and its connection to the overall message of the poem.
3. Explore the use of metaphysical language and its impact on the reader’s understanding of the poem.
4. Examine the role of nature and the natural world as a source of solace and strength in Bronte’s poem.
5. Compare and contrast “No Coward Soul is Mine” with other works by Emily Bronte, such as *Wuthering Heights*, focusing on their themes and stylistic choices.
6. Write a personal response to the poem, discussing its emotional resonance and how it relates to your own experiences or beliefs.

## Suggested Readings

1. Austin, Linda. “Emily Brontë’s Homesickness”. *Victorian Studies*. 44 (4): 2002. p.p 573–596.
2. Barker, Juliet R. V. *The Brontës*. Phoenix House, 1995.
3. Gérin, Winifred. *Emily Brontë*. Clarendon Press, 1971.

## References

1. Miller, Lucasta. *The Bronte Myth*. Vintage, 2013.
2. Robinson, F. Mary A. *Emily Brontë*. Boston. Roberts Brothers, 1883.
3. Vine, Steven. *Emily Brontë*. Twayne Publishers, 1998.



## “The Blessed Damozel” - D. G. Rossetti

### Background

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the author of “The Blessed Damozel,” was a leading figure in the Pre-Raphaelite movement of the mid-19th century. Rossetti was born in London in 1828 to an Italian father and an English mother. He showed a talent for drawing from a young age, and at the age of 14, he enrolled in the Royal Academy Schools.

In addition to his formal training, Rossetti was also heavily influenced by the poetry of his contemporaries, including John Keats and Alfred Lord Tennyson. He was particularly interested in medieval literature and the art of the Italian Renaissance, which inspired the Pre-Raphaelite movement. “The Blessed Damozel” is a perfect example of this style, which sought to reject the artificiality of contemporary art in favour of a return to the naturalistic style of the early Renaissance. Rossetti’s poem draws on the themes of death, love, and spiritual longing, and it is widely regarded as one of his most important works.

### Keywords

Blessed Damozel, Love, Heaven, Death, Beauty, Devotion, Transcendence

### Discussion

#### Section 3

“The Blessed Damozel” by D. G. Rossetti is a poetic meditation on the themes of love, death, and the afterlife. The poem is divided into eleven stanzas, each of which explores a different aspect of Damozel’s experience in heaven and her longing for her earthly lover.

#### 2.3.5 Summary

The first stanza sets the scene, describing the Damozel as “bent above the spinning world” and looking down upon her lover from the heights of heaven. She longs to be reunited with him, but is held back by the distance between their worlds. The second stanza describes Damozel’s appearance: she is dressed in “amazing gold” and surrounded by angels. She is a vision of



- Looking from the heaven

beauty and purity, but she is also lonely and longing for companionship. In the third stanza, Damozel speaks directly to her lover, telling him that she is happy in heaven but also aware of the distance between them. She asks him to remember her and to think of her when he looks up at the stars. The fourth stanza describes Damozel's experience of time in heaven. Time passes more slowly there than on earth, and she feels as though she has been waiting for her lover for a thousand years.

- Longing for the physical world

In the fifth stanza, the Damozel looks down upon the earth and sees its beauty and its sorrow. She longs to be reunited with her lover, but she also understands that his life on earth is full of hardship and pain. The sixth stanza describes Damozel's relationship with the angels. They are her companions in heaven, but she longs for the human connection she had with her lover on earth. The seventh stanza describes Damozel's longing for the physical world. She remembers the taste of fruit and the smell of flowers, and she longs to experience these sensations again. In the eighth stanza, Damozel remembers her lover's face and voice. She longs to hear his voice and to see his face again.

- Waiting for lover

The ninth stanza describes Damozel's relationship with God. She sees God as a loving and merciful father, but she also longs for him to bring her closer to her lover. The tenth stanza describes Damozel's understanding of the nature of heaven. She sees it as a place of love and joy, but also as a place of waiting and longing. The final stanza brings the poem to a close. Damozel speaks directly to her lover, telling him that she will continue to wait for him in heaven. She urges him to live a good life on earth so that they may be reunited in the afterlife.

- Theme of love

### 2.3.6 Analysis

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" is a poignant and evocative poem that explores the themes of love, death, and spiritual longing. The poem depicts a young woman, the "blessed damozel," who is in heaven and longing for her lover who remains on earth. Through vivid and imaginative descriptions, Rossetti creates a mystical world that is both beautiful and haunting.

The poem is divided into five stanzas, each with eight lines. The first stanza sets the scene in heaven, where the damozel is depicted as gazing down at the earth, waiting

for her lover. The second stanza describes the beauty of the celestial world, with its “sea of glass” and “sapphire blaze” that illuminate the scene. The third stanza introduces the theme of spiritual longing, as the damozel calls out to her lover and expresses her yearning for him. The fourth stanza is particularly striking, as it describes the damozel’s perception of time. She tells her lover that “a year’s long vigil seems but a night,” highlighting the different ways that time is experienced in heaven and on earth. The final stanza returns to the theme of spiritual longing, as the damozel expresses her desire to be reunited with her lover in heaven.

► Five stanzas

One of the most interesting aspects of “The Blessed Damozel” is the way that Rossetti uses language to create a sense of otherworldliness. The poem is filled with rich and vivid descriptions that conjure up images of a mystical realm. The use of colour, in particular, is striking. The “sapphire blaze” and “sea of glass” create a sense of wonder and awe, while the “pale gold hair” of the damozel suggests her ethereal beauty. The repeated use of the word “blessed” also adds to the sense of otherworldliness, emphasising the damozel’s spiritual status.

► Sense of other-worldliness

Another important aspect of the poem is its exploration of the relationship between the damozel and her lover. Rossetti presents a complex and nuanced portrayal of love, one that is characterised by both passion and pain. The damozel’s yearning for her lover is palpable, and the imagery of the “red-gold” clouds and the “blood-red” sunset creates a sense of intense emotion. At the same time, the poem also acknowledges the sorrow and anguish that come with separation. Damozel is described as being “lost in love’s most inward thought,” suggesting that her longing is all-consuming and overwhelming.

► Nuanced portrayal of love

It is worth considering the religious undertones of the poem. Rossetti was deeply interested in spiritual and theological questions, and “The Blessed Damozel” can be read as an exploration of the relationship between the human and the divine. The damozel is depicted as being in heaven, but she is also presented as a deeply human figure, with all the longings and desires that come with being mortal. The poem raises questions about the nature of the afterlife and the relationship between heaven and earth.

► Religious undertone



## Summarised Overview

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" is a spiritual poem that meditates on the themes of love, death, and the afterlife. Divided into 11 stanzas, each explores a different aspect of the Damozel's experience in heaven and her longing for her earthly lover. Through vivid imagery and lyrical language, the poem offers a glimpse into the world of the Damozel and her longing for her lover, expressing the power of love to transcend the boundaries of life and death. The poem is filled with rich and vivid descriptions that create a sense of otherworldliness. The use of colour and the repeated use of the word "blessed" adds to the sense of the Damozel's spiritual status. The poem also explores the complex and nuanced portrayal of love, characterised by both passion and pain. The religious undertones of the poem also suggest that Rossetti was deeply interested in spiritual and theological questions, making the poem a beautiful meditation on the power of love to transcend even the boundaries of life and death.

## Assignments

1. What are the main themes explored in "The Blessed Damozel" by D. G. Rossetti?
2. What is the significance of the damozel's appearance and surroundings in the poem?
3. How does the damozel experience time in heaven, and what does this suggest about the afterlife?
4. What is the role of love in the poem, and how is it portrayed?
5. How does Rossetti use language and imagery to create a sense of otherworldliness in the poem?
6. In what ways does "The Blessed Damozel" address spiritual and theological questions?

## Suggested Readings

1. Boos, Florence S. *The Poetry of Dante G. Rossetti*. Mouton, 1973.
2. Doughty, Oswald. *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Frederick Muller, 1949.
3. Hilton, Timothy. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Thames and Hudson, 1970.



## References

1. Marsh, Jan. *The Pre-Raphaelites: Their Lives in Letters and Diaries*. Collins & Brown, 1996.
2. Roe, Dinah. *The Rossettis in Wonderland. A Victorian Family History*. Haus Publishing, 2011.
3. Simons, J. *Rossetti's Wombat: Pre-Raphaelites and Australian animals in Victorian London*. Middlesex University Press, 2008.

### **“Sonnet 14” and “Sonnet 22” *Sonnets from the Portuguese*- Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

## Background

This unit on *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning is an opportunity to explore the themes of love, self-discovery, and transformation. Browning's sonnets are among the most famous love poems in the English language, and they offer a unique perspective on the experience of falling in love and being loved. The poems are deeply personal, and they offer a glimpse into Browning's own life, particularly her courtship with fellow poet Robert Browning.

In addition to exploring the themes of love and transformation, the unit can also help students develop their understanding of the sonnet form. Browning's sonnets follow the traditional Italian sonnet structure, with fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme of ABBAABBA CDCDCD. However, Browning also includes variations on this structure, such as in Sonnet 43, where she uses an alternate rhyme scheme (ABBAABBA CDDCEE) and divides the poem into two stanzas. Through studying these variations, students can gain a deeper appreciation for the flexibility and versatility of poetic form. Out of the sonnets by Browning, this unit discusses the Sonnet 14 and 22.

## Section 4

### 2.3.7 Summary

#### 2.3.7.1 “Sonnet 14”

In “Sonnet 14,” Elizabeth Barrett Browning contemplates the depth and intensity of her love for her beloved. The sonnet begins with the speaker acknowledging her inability to express the true extent of her love through conventional means, such as comparing it to





► Boundless love

any earthly or divine examples. She describes her love as vast and boundless, surpassing the limits of human comprehension. The speaker expresses her desire to use metaphors or symbols to capture the intensity of her emotions, but finds them inadequate to encapsulate the depth of her affection.

► Transcends the realm of the ordinary

Browning further emphasises her passionate love by contrasting it with the traditional and ordinary expressions of love that can be found in literature or among ordinary people. She suggests that her love transcends the realm of ordinary existence and reaches extraordinary heights. The speaker admits that her love cannot be measured or fully comprehended by others, as it is deeply personal and unique to her and her beloved.

► A flame that burns

In the concluding lines of the sonnet, Browning portrays her love as a flame that burns intensely within her, illuminating her entire being. She claims that her love is capable of bringing her closer to her beloved even when they are physically apart. The sonnet portrays the speaker's profound and incomparable love, which defies conventional descriptions and goes beyond the boundaries of human understanding.

### 2.3.7.2 "Sonnet 22"

► Transience of physical beauty

"Sonnet 22" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning focuses on the theme of love's enduring power. The sonnet begins with the speaker contemplating the fleeting nature of life and the transience of physical beauty. The speaker acknowledges that time passes quickly, and beauty fades with age, but love remains constant and eternal. Browning suggests that the true essence of love resides beyond the physical realm.

► Resilient love

The speaker then reflects on the possibility of their love being tested or weakened by the challenges of life. Browning expresses a fear that love might waver in the face of adversity, such as separation or the passage of time. However, she quickly dismisses this fear, proclaiming that their love is resilient and unshakeable. The speaker believes that love possesses the power to withstand any trials and tribulations.

As the sonnet progresses, Browning emphasises the enduring nature of their love by contrasting it with the fleeting nature of other worldly things. The speaker uses

- Imagery of fading flowers

imagery of fading flowers, dying embers, and passing melodies to illustrate the temporary and transient aspects of life. In contrast, their love is depicted as a constant force, transcending the limitations of time and mortality.

- Unwavering love

In the closing lines, Browning asserts that their love is not bound by earthly constraints and will continue to exist even after death. She suggests that their love will flourish in the realm of eternity. The sonnet portrays a love that is unwavering and eternal, surpassing the limitations of the physical world and embodying the enduring power of true affection.

- Depth of love

Both “Sonnet 14” and “Sonnet 22” from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* explore the profound depth of love, its indescribable nature, and its ability to transcend the limitations of time and mortality.

### 2.3.8 Analysis

- Love sonnets

Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is a collection of 44 love sonnets that were inspired by the poet’s own relationship with her future husband, Robert Browning. Sonnet 14 and 22, both explore the nature of love and the importance of loving for love’s sake alone.

- Selfless love

“Sonnet 14” is a plea for true, unconditional love, free from any ulterior motives or conditions. The speaker implores her beloved not to love her for her physical attributes, such as her smile or her way of speaking, as these things can change over time. Instead, she urges him to love her purely and selflessly, without any expectation of reward or repayment. The speaker warns that love that is based on superficial qualities or pity may fade or disappear altogether. She argues that true love should be eternal, existing beyond the boundaries of time and space. The poem is structured in the form of a sonnet, a 14-line poem with a strict rhyme scheme and meter. The first four lines set the tone and establish the theme, while the following eight lines develop and elaborate on that theme. The final two lines provide a resolution or conclusion. The poem’s tone is reflective and introspective, with the speaker urging her beloved to consider the nature of their relationship and the true meaning of love.



► Power of love

“Sonnet 22” is a meditation on the power of love and its ability to transcend the boundaries of time and space. The speaker imagines a moment when two souls come together in perfect union, with nothing else in the world mattering but their love for each other. She argues that in this state, nothing on earth can harm them, and even the angels would be inspired to bring them gifts of beauty and harmony. The poem is also structured in the form of a sonnet, with the same rhyme scheme and meter as “Sonnet 14”. The first four lines establish the theme, while the next eight lines develop it. The final two lines provide a resolution or conclusion. The poem’s tone is contemplative and philosophical, with the speaker reflecting on the nature of love and its place in the world.

► Many facets of love

In both sonnets, Browning is exploring the nature of love and its relationship to the physical world. In “Sonnet 14”, the speaker urges her beloved to love her for her inner qualities rather than her outer ones, while in “Sonnet 22”, she imagines a state of being where love transcends all earthly concerns. Both poems are also concerned with the idea of eternity and the possibility of love lasting beyond death. Overall, these two sonnets offer a complex and nuanced exploration of love and its many facets. Through her use of language and imagery, Browning conveys a sense of the depth and complexity of human emotion, while also suggesting the possibility of transcendence and eternal love. In both poems, the speaker is grappling with the question of what it means to truly love someone, and how that love can endure in the face of life’s many challenges. By exploring these themes in such a powerful and thought-provoking way, Browning has created two of the most memorable love poems in the English language.

## Summarised Overview

The two sonnets from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* that are explored are 14 and 22. Sonnet 14 is about the plea for true, unconditional love, free from any ulterior motives or conditions. The speaker implores her beloved not to love her for her physical attributes, such as her smile or her way of speaking, as these things can change over time. Instead, she urges him to love her purely and selflessly, without any expectation of reward or repayment. Sonnet 22 is about the power of love and its ability to transcend the boundaries of time and space. The speaker imagines a moment when two souls come together in perfect union, with nothing else in the world mattering but their love for each other. The poem explores the nature of love and its relationship to the physical world.

## Assignments

1. What is the theme of Sonnet 14 in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*?
2. What is the speaker's main message in Sonnet 14?
3. How does the speaker warn against conditional love in Sonnet 14?
4. What is the structure of Sonnet 14, and how does it contribute to the poem's meaning?
5. How does Sonnet 14 relate to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's personal life?
6. What is the significance of the final couplet in Sonnet 14?
7. What is the main theme of Sonnet 22 in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*?
8. How does the speaker view the union of two souls in Sonnet 22?
9. What is the speaker's view of the earthly realm in Sonnet 22?
10. What is the structure of Sonnet 22, and how does it contribute to the poem's meaning?
11. How does Sonnet 22 relate to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's personal life?
12. What is the significance of the final couplet in Sonnet 22?



## Suggested Readings

1. Everett, Glenn. *Life of Elizabeth Browning*. The Victorian Web, 2002.
2. Forster, Margaret. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. Vintage Classics, 2004.
3. Kaplan, Cora. *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems*. The Women's Press Limited, 1978.
4. Lewis, Linda. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress*. Missouri UP, 1997.

## References

1. Sampson, Fiona. *Two Way Mirror: The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. Profile Books, 2021.
2. Taplin, Gardner B. *The Life of Elizabeth Browning*. Yale University Press, 1957.
3. Thomas, Dwight and David K. Jackson. *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe*. G. K. Hall & Co., 1987.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





## Unit 4

# The Cenci - Percy Bysshe Shelley

- Non Detailed

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse the themes of power, justice, and morality in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci*.
- ▶ evaluate the use of dramatic techniques and poetic devices employed by Shelley in *The Cenci*.
- ▶ examine the historical and social context of *The Cenci* and its impact on the play's interpretation.
- ▶ critically assess the portrayal of characters and their motivations in Shelley's *The Cenci*.

### Background

Percy Bysshe Shelley's play *The Cenci* is a fascinating exploration of the human psyche and the dark depths to which it can descend. Shelley was inspired to write this play by the true story of the Cenci family, a noble Italian family that lived during the Renaissance. The patriarch of the family, Francesco Cenci, was notorious for his cruelty and debauchery, and his daughter Beatrice was rumoured to have killed him in order to escape his abuse. Shelley's play delves into the psychological motivations behind the Cenci family's actions, exploring themes of revenge, justice, and the corrupting influence of power.

Shelley was heavily influenced by the Romantic literary movement, which emphasised emotion, individualism, and the power of the imagination. "The Cenci" is a prime example of Shelley's literary style, as it incorporates elements of horror, tragedy, and psychological suspense. The play was also deeply political, as Shelley was a staunch advocate for social justice and human rights. Through the character of Beatrice, Shelley highlights the plight of women in patriarchal societies, and he uses the play as a platform to critique the corruption and abuses of power within the ruling classes.



## Keywords

Tragedy, Romanticism, Italian Renaissance, Familial conflict, Rebellion, Justice, Morality

## Discussion

### 2.4.1 Summary

**Act 1:** The play begins with Cardinal Camillo's discussion with Count Cenci regarding a murder in which Cenci is involved. Camillo agrees to hide the crime only if he donates a third of his possessions to the Church. He sends his two sons, Rocco and Christafano, to Salamaca, Spain, in the hope that they will die of starvation. Meanwhile, Cenci's daughter Beatrice and her lover Orsino plan to file a petition against Cenci. However, Orsino withholds the petition and shows his lustful side. Later, Cenci conducts a banquet in celebration of his sons who died at Salamaca. Beatrice asks the guests to protect her and her family from Cenci but they heed it not in fear of Cenci.

► Murder case

**Act 2:** Cenci torments Beatrice and his wife Lucretia and plans to imprison them. A servant returns the unopened petition of Beatrice. Thus, her last hope of salvation failed. Orsino comes and proposes a plan to murder Cenci. He also encourages Giacomo (Cenci's son) who is upset over the loan he took from his father by pledging his wife's dowry which he is unable to recover from Cenci. Together, they plot against Cenci.

► Plot of Cenci's murder

**Act 3:** Beatrice reveals the unpardonable cruelties her father did to her which corrupted her both physically and spiritually. This indicates the rape attempted by Cenci on Beatrice. They, along with Orsino, plan to kill Cenci but the first attempt fails because of his early arrival. Orsino conspires with Beatrice, Lucretia and Giacomo for the next attempt. Orsino proposes the idea that at the bridge on the way to the Apennines, he will station two killers – Marzio and Olimpio – the ill-treated servants of Cenci who are glad to murder him.

► Cenci's rape of Beatrice



- Cenci is strangled to death

**Act 4:** The assassins arrive at the castle and Lucretia says that she has put a sleeping potion in Cenci's drink. But the two of them seem hesitant to kill Cenci. Olimpio says that he cannot kill an old man in his sleep and Marzio thinks that he hears his own father's ghost speaking through the lips of sleeping Cenci. Beatrice shames the servants and snatches the dagger. Shamed into action, the assassins finally strangle Cenci to death and throw his body into the garden. Shortly thereafter Savella, a papal legate, arrives with a murder charge. He and his team find the dead body of Cenci and arrest them. But Orsino escapes in disguise and all the others are caught.

- Family members are to be executed

**Act 5:** They are taken for trial in Rome. Marzio is tortured and he finally confesses the murder implicating the role of Cenci's family in the murder. Giacomo, tricked by Orsino, was also caught by the police. Beatrice convinces Cardinal Camillo about her innocence and her father's cruelties but fails to convince the judge. Camillo's pleas to the Pope to save the family seem futile and when the play ends all the suspects wait execution.

### 2.4.2 Major Characters

**Count Francesco Cenci:** A sadist Roman nobleman. He kills his son and commits unpardonable crimes to his wife and daughter. He is killed at the end of the play.

**Lucretia:** Second wife of Cenci. She helps the assassins of Cenci by giving him a sleeping potion. She is finally executed.

**Beatrice:** Cenci's daughter; executed at the end of the play charged with the crime patricide (killing one's father).

**Rocco, Christophano, Giacomo and Bernardo:** Sons of Cenci

**Count Orsino:** A noble man turned priest. He betrays his lover Beatrice and her family. He escapes the punishment for his part in the killing of Cenci by fleeing in disguise.

**Olimpio and Marzio:** The assassins hired by Orsino to murder Cenci.

### 2.4.3 Structure of the Play

The play follows a five-act structure similar to a classical tragic play.

### Sub-genre

**Revenge Tragedy:** Follows the Senecan model. The major element of the drama is the protagonist's revenge. It involves complex intrigues, elements of madness, disguise, and depiction of violence and bloodshed.

**Verse drama:** Also known as poetic drama, it is a drama that combines both the qualities of poetry and drama.

#### 2.4.4 Analysis

Shelley's *The Cenci* is a powerful and disturbing play that explores themes of corruption, power, and justice. The play is based on the true story of the Cenci family, who were victims of the tyranny of Count Francesco Cenci. Shelley portrays the Cenci family as victims of a corrupt society that is complicit in the Count's crimes. The play is a critique of the power structures of society and the injustices that result from them.

- Critique of the power

One of the most striking aspects of the play is the character of Beatrice, who is presented as a tragic heroine. Beatrice is a victim of her father's abuse and is driven to commit murder in order to escape his tyranny. Shelley portrays Beatrice as a complex character who is both a victim and a murderer. On the one hand, Beatrice is a victim of her father's cruelty and the corrupt society that supports it. On the other hand, she is also a murderer who has committed a heinous crime. Shelley does not present Beatrice as a simple or one-dimensional character, but rather as a complex and nuanced individual.

- Complex character of the heroine

The play is also a critique of the justice system. The Cenci family is punished for their crimes, but Shelley suggests that this punishment is unjust. The Cenci family is punished for taking justice into their own hands, but Shelley suggests that the justice system is corrupt and cannot be relied upon to deliver justice. Shelley portrays the justice system as being controlled by the powerful, who are able to use it to protect their own interests. The play suggests that justice is not always served by the law, and that sometimes the only way to achieve justice is through vigilante action.

- Critique of the justice system

Shelley's portrayal of the Cenci family is sympathetic and nuanced. While the Cenci family is guilty of heinous



#### ► Corrupt society

crimes, Shelley suggests that they are also victims of a corrupt society. The play suggests that the Cenci family is not inherently evil, but rather has been driven to evil acts by the circumstances of their lives. Shelley portrays the Cenci family as complex and nuanced individuals, rather than simple villains. The play challenges the idea of good and evil as absolutes, suggesting that these concepts are more complex than they appear.

*The Cenci* is a powerful and tragic play that explores the complexities of human nature and the injustices of society. Shelley's portrayal of the Cenci family is sympathetic and nuanced, and his exploration of the themes of justice and power make the play a timeless work of literature. The play is a critique of the power structures of society and the injustices that result from them. Shelley suggests that justice is not always served by the law, and that sometimes the only way to achieve justice is through vigilante action. *The Cenci* is a disturbing and thought-provoking play that continues to be relevant today.

## Summarised Overview

*The Cenci* is a play written by Percy Bysshe Shelley, based on the true story of the Cenci family in the 16th century. The play portrays the horrific events that took place within the family, including the murder of Count Francesco Cenci by his own children. Shelley's play highlights the corrupt power structures of society, explores the idea of whether or not it is justified to take the law into one's own hands in the face of extreme injustice, and challenges the idea of good and evil as absolutes. Shelley portrays the Cenci family as victims of a corrupt society that is complicit in the Count's crimes. The play is a critique of the power structures of society and the injustices that result from them. The play is also a critique of the justice system. The Cenci family is punished for their crimes, but Shelley suggests that this punishment is unjust. The play suggests that the Cenci family is not inherently evil but rather has been driven to evil acts by the circumstances of their lives.

## Assignments

1. What is the main theme of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci*?
2. How does Shelley explore the concept of family relationships in *The Cenci*?

3. Discuss the role of power and corruption in *The Cenci* by Percy Bysshe Shelley.
4. Analyse the character of Beatrice in *The Cenci* and her significance in the play.
5. Explore the use of imagery and symbolism in *The Cenci* by Percy Bysshe Shelley.
6. Discuss the social and political context of "*The Cenci*" and its impact on the themes of the play.
7. Examine the portrayal of justice and morality in *The Cenci* by Shelley.
8. What is the significance of the tragic elements in *The Cenci* and how do they contribute to the overall impact of the play?
9. Compare and contrast *The Cenci* with other works by Percy Bysshe Shelley in terms of themes, style, and literary techniques employed.

## Suggested Readings

1. Cameron, Kenneth N., and Horst Frenz. "The Stage History of Shelley's *The Cenci*." *PMLA*, vol. 60, no. 4, 1945, pp. 1080–105. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/459292>.
2. Finn, Mary E. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Shelley's '*The Cenci*.'" *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1996, pp. 177–97. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25601165>.
3. Goodall, Jane. "Artaud's Revision of Shelley's '*The Cenci*': The Text and Its Double." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1987, pp. 115–26. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41153273>.

## References

1. Adams, Charles L. "The Structure of *The Cenci*." *Drama Survey*, 4, 2 Summer, 1965, pp. 139–48.
2. Curran, Stuart. *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970.
3. Finn, Mary, E. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Shelley's *The Cenci*," *SIR*, 35, Summer, 1996, pp. 177–97.
4. Gladden, Samuel Lyndon. *Shelley's Textual Seductions: Plotting Utopia in the Erotic and Political Works*. Routledge, 2002.





## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

# Prose and Fiction

## BLOCK-03

### Block Content

Unit 1: Prose - Detailed

Unit 2 : Sweetness and Light - Matthew Arnold (Non-Detailed)

Unit 3 : “Preface” from Studies in the History of the Renaissance

-Walter H. Pater (Non-Detailed)

Unit 4: Fiction (Non-Detailed)



## Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ gain an understanding of the depiction of Oxford as a tranquil and idyllic setting in Charles Lamb's "Oxford in the Vacation."
- ▶ analyse William Hazlitt's exploration of the importance and characteristics of familiar style in his essay "On Familiar Style."
- ▶ develop insights into John Ruskin's views on the significance of books and reading in shaping individual and societal values in "On Books and Reading."
- ▶ explore the connections between nature, art, and morality as presented in John Ruskin's essay "On Books and Reading."

## Section - 1

### Oxford in the Vacation - Charles Lamb

## Background

Charles Lamb was a prominent literary figure of the Romantic era, which spanned the late 18th century to the mid-19th century. The Romantic era was marked by a focus on emotion, imagination, and individualism, and was characterised by a reaction against the rationalism and materialism of the Enlightenment.

Lamb's literary career began in the early 19th century, at a time when Romantic literature was in full-swing. He was part of a circle of writers that included William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Hazlitt, who were all part of the Romantic movement. Lamb's writing style was distinct, however, as he blended humor, wit, and personal reflection into his essays and other works. Lamb's most significant contribution to literature was his essays, which were published in *The London Magazine* and other publications. His essays were marked by a conversational tone, and often touched on topics such as friendship, love, and human nature. Lamb's essays were highly influential, and helped to shape the style of English essay writing for generations to come.

Lamb's collaboration with his sister Mary on the children's book *Tales from Shakespeare* was also a significant contribution to literature. The book, which

retold Shakespeare's plays in a simplified form for children, became a classic and is still widely read today. In addition to his literary works, Lamb was also an important figure in the literary scene of his time. He was a close friend of many writers and intellectuals, and was part of the group that founded *The London Magazine*. His contributions to English literature and his impact on the literary world make him an important figure in the Romantic era and in the history of English literature as a whole.

"Oxford in the Vacation" is an essay written by Charles Lamb, a renowned English essayist and literary critic, originally published in *The London Magazine* in August 1820. In the essay, Lamb describes his experiences wandering the streets of Oxford, visiting its libraries and colleges, and interacting with its inhabitants. He captures the essence of the city and its academic culture, while also reflecting on his own life and experiences.

The essay is also notable for its historical significance, as it provides a glimpse into the Oxford of Lamb's time. Lamb lived during a period of great change in England, as the country underwent industrialisation and urbanisation. In "Oxford in the Vacation," he contrasts the intellectual pursuits of the university with the materialism of the outside world, highlighting the tension between tradition and progress that defined the era. "Oxford in the Vacation" is a compelling essay that showcases Charles Lamb's literary talent and his ability to capture the spirit of a time and place. It remains a valuable piece of English literature and is often studied by students and scholars of the Romantic era.

## Keywords

Oxford, Vacation, Charles Lamb, Travelogue

## Discussion

Charles Lamb was born in London in 1775 and is considered one of the most important literary figures of the Romantic era. He is best known for his essays, which were published in *The London Magazine* and *The Edinburgh Review*, as well as for his collaboration with his sister Mary on the children's book *Tales from Shakespeare*. Lamb's essays are notable for their wit, humor, and personal voice, which make them engaging and entertaining to read. "Oxford in the Vacation" is a prime example of Lamb's writing style, as he imbues the essay with his unique voice and perspective.



► Clerical and literary works

Lamb explains that the pseudonym “Elia” refers to himself. He informs the reader that at one time he was a clerk at the South-Sea House, a description of which, with brief sketches of some of his colleagues of those days, he has given in an earlier essay “The South-Sea House”. He used to treat his working hours in the office as a sort of relaxation preparatory to his literary labours which he used to commence after going home from the office. In changing over from his clerical work in the office to his literary work in the evenings, he used to have the feeling that he had been promoted to a higher position.

► Abolition of holidays

Lamb deplores the abolition of certain holidays which were formerly observed on certain days connected with the memories of saints. There was a time when certain days were observed as holidays in commemoration of saints like Paul, Stephen, Barnabas, Andrew, John and Simon. But those holidays have now been dispensed with. Those “red-letter days” have now become “dead-letter days.” In those days Lamb used to have a list of festivals and holidays on the tips of his fingers. It is a pity that the civil authorities have abolished most of the holidays connected with religious and spiritual matters.

► Visit to the university of Oxford

Lamb then describes a visit to the university of Oxford during the vacation. He never actually had a university education. But a visit to the university of Oxford during the vacation makes him imagine what he might have been, had he actually been admitted to the university as a student. He imagines himself as a Sizar or a Servitor or a Gentleman Commoner. He even imagines himself as a Master of Arts. In the cathedral of Christ Church, Lamb imagines himself as a Doctor of Divinity. He sees the tall trees of Christ Church and the groves of Magdalen College. He passes through the deserted halls and takes a peep into the butteries, sculleries and kitchens. The meanest cook of the university rises in his imagination to the dignity of the Manciple whom Chaucer describes in the Prologue to his *Canterbury Tales*.

► Travels back to the antiquity

Lamb’s mind next travels back to the days of antiquity. The times, which are referred to as antiquity, had their own, a more remote, antiquity. There was a time when antiquity itself was not antiquity but the “present.” It is a tendency of people to go back in retrospect to bygone times, and not to project themselves into the future. Even in the bygone “dark ages,” the sun used to shine as brightly as it does now.



► Souls of the past writers

To stand in the Bodley library of the university of Oxford is a most satisfying and pleasing experience for Lamb. It seems as though all the souls of all the past writers are resting on the shelves of the library. Lamb would not like to disturb those souls by handling the various volumes. He feels as if he is inhaling learning. The odour of the most eaten volumes is as fragrant to him as was that of the apple tree in the Garden of Eden to Adam. Nor would he like to disturb the repose of the different manuscripts that lie in the Bodley library. He is not one of those research workers who try to explore the past. He is no Herculean explorer.

► Exploring manuscripts

The labour of exploring manuscripts should be left to a man like George Dyer, says Lamb; George Dyer pores over books so diligently that he himself has grown almost into a book. George Dyer is assiduous in his visits to the seats of learning like the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Much of his fortune has been spent in his journeys from his dwelling to these two universities and back. Dyer has been investigating the dispute as to which of the two universities was founded first. The enthusiasm with which he has been pursuing this investigation has not been shared by heads of colleges and other administrators at the two universities. George Dyer is a very absent-minded man. He looks startled even when accosted by a person of long acquaintance. He is so absent-minded that one day he made a second call at a house where he had already called and been told that the occupants of the house were away to the country and were not expected for a week at least. Most of the time George Dyer is preoccupied with his meditations and with his imaginative flights.

► Author without much commercial success

After a course of hard study at Cambridge, Dyer worked as an usher to a knavish fanatic schoolmaster at a meagre salary. Subsequently he became an author but without much commercial success. His poems do not sell because he is too absorbed in ancient literature to understand the demands of modern taste. He is a writer of excellent prose.

► Feeling home at Oxford and Cambridge

Lamb concludes the essay by observing that Dyer is delightful anywhere but that he is at his best at such places as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The rivers of Oxford and Cambridge universities are more to him than all the waters of Damascus. He feels most at home at these seats of learning.





### 3.1.1 Analysis

This is a reflective or meditative type of essay. We find Lamb here in a ruminative mood. After disclosing to us the identity of Elia, he informs us that his real vacation is not auditing and accounting which he does in the office, but the writing of poems, epigrams, and essays which he undertakes after office hours. He follows up this piece of information by an expression of regret at the abolition of a large number of holidays connected with the memory of various Christian saints. Holidays being welcome to everybody, this part of the essay will have a wide appeal because no one wants a reduction in the number of holidays for any consideration whatsoever. However, Lamb expresses his helplessness in the matter as, "being plain Elia," he has no voice in determining or fixing the number of holidays.

► Ruminative mood

We are then given a fanciful account of what might have been! Lamb imagines that, if he had been able to join a university, he might have been a Sizar or a Servitor or a Gentleman Commoner, or even a Master of Arts. He visualizes the tall trees of Christ Church and the groves of Magdalen College.

► Imaginary account

He takes an imaginative peep into the butteries, sculleries and the kitchen. Then follows a wonderful apostrophe to antiquity: "Antiquity! thou wondrous charm, what art thou? that, being nothing, art everything! When thou wert, thou wert not antiquity-then thou wert nothing, but hadst at remoter antiquity, as thou called'st it, to look back to with blind veneration; thou thyself being to thyself flat, jejune, modern! What mystery lurks in this retroversion?" In these lines, Lamb reveals the truth about antiquity. What we call antiquity was not antiquity at the time. Man has a tendency to look backwards to the past rather than to look forward to the future. Such is the psychology of mankind.

► Truth about antiquity

Lamb's description of himself in the midst of books and manuscripts in the Bodleian library is a truthful expression of his feelings. It seems to him that the souls of all the writers are reposing on the shelves. He would not like to touch any volume for fear of disturbing one of the souls. Nor does he feel a desire to handle any of the manuscripts because exploration into matters pertaining to old manuscripts does not interest him.

► Souls of the writers on the shelves



This is a highly personal and autobiographical essay. Lamb lays bare his mind before us. Not only does he tell us something about his work in the South-Sea House, but also something about his literary activities in which he was more interested than in his office work. He speaks of his love of holidays also and expresses his regret at the reduction in the number of holidays as compared with days gone by. There is a touch of pathos in his telling us that he could not reap the benefits of a university education. How wistfully he imagines himself as a Sizar or a Servitor, or a Gentleman Commoner, or a Master of Arts. Even without a university education we find Lamb to be a learned man. How much more learned he might have been with a university education, one can only imagine.

► South-Sea House

Almost half of the essay has been devoted to a delineation of the character of George Dyer. We are given a striking portrayal of the man, his literary scholarship, his proclivities towards research, his love of creative writing, his absent-mindedness etc. This portion of the essay reads almost like a story. We have here a combination of Lamb's narrative quality with his gift for character-portrayal.

► Character of George Dyer

The essay is written in a scholarly style. Not only do we have a number of Latin expressions, but we also have a number of learned allusions. A number of Christian saints are mentioned. A number of priests and scholars are named, and there is the portrait of the great scholar, George Dyer. The style of the essay suits the subject-matter and the mood of the writer. It is not a simple style. The vocabulary employed is not easy for the average reader. The following sentences may be quoted as an example of a highly verbose manner of writing: "The enfranchised quill, that has plodded all the morning among the cart rucks of figures and cyphers, frisks and curvets so at its ease over the flowery carpet-ground of a midnight dissertation. It feels its promotion. So that you see, upon the whole, the literary dignity of Elia is very little, if at all, compromised in the condescension". The meditations over antiquity are couched in language that suits the sentiments expressed.

► Learned allusions

Lamb's style is highly figurative. For instance, George Dyer living among attorneys and vermin of the law is compared to a dove sitting on the asp's nest. The fangs of the law pierce him not, we are told. The following sentences are not only written in a richly figurative style but also



► Descriptions of George Dyer

provide an example of Lamb's biting irony: "Your caputs and heads of colleges, care less than anybody else about these questions. Contented to suck the milky fountains of their Alma Maters, without enquiring into the venerable gentlewomen's years, they rather hold such curiosities to be impertinent and irreverent. They have their good glebe lands *in manu*, and care not much to rake into the title-deeds". In these sentences, the author ridicules the attitude of the dons and fellows who are interested only in drawing salaries from their universities and are not concerned with the controversy into which George Dyer has been investigating.

## Summarised Overview

"Oxford in the Vacation" is an essay written by Charles Lamb that provides a nostalgic and vivid account of his experiences and memories of the university town during the summer break. Lamb's essay captures the unique atmosphere and character of Oxford, portraying it as a tranquil and idyllic place that transforms when students leave for vacation. He describes the empty streets, deserted colleges, and the sense of calm that envelops the city during this time. Lamb reflects on his own experiences as a student, reminiscing about the friendships formed and the intellectual pursuits pursued within the university's hallowed walls. Through his rich and evocative language, Lamb paints a charming portrait of Oxford in the absence of its bustling student population, highlighting the beauty and serenity that exist beyond the scholarly fervor of term time.

## Assignments

1. How does Charles Lamb depict the atmosphere and activities in Oxford during the vacation in his essay?
2. What are the key themes explored by Charles Lamb in "Oxford in the Vacation," and how do they contribute to the overall message of the essay?
3. Analyse the role of nostalgia and memory in Charles Lamb's "Oxford in the Vacation" and discuss how they shape the narrator's perception of the city.



4. Examine the use of descriptive language and imagery in Charles Lamb's "Oxford in the Vacation" and evaluate their effectiveness in creating a vivid portrayal of the setting.
5. Discuss the significance of the university's absence of students in "Oxford in the Vacation" and its impact on the narrator's experience of the city.
6. Explore the role of humor and satire in Charles Lamb's "Oxford in the Vacation" and how they contribute to the overall tone of the essay.
7. Analyse the narrator's attitude towards tradition and change in "Oxford in the Vacation" and discuss how it reflects broader societal shifts during Lamb's time.

## Suggested Readings

1. Barnett, George L. *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*. Indiana UP, 1964.
2. Cecil, David. *A Portrait of Charles Lamb*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983.
3. Lamb, Charles. *Collection of Ancient and Modern British Writers*. Baudry's European Library 1835.
4. Lamb, Charles. *The Last Essays of Elia*. Little, Brown, and Company, 1892.

## References

1. Black, Jeremy. *Culture in Eighteenth-Century England: A Subject for Taste*. Continuum, 2007.
2. Hazlitt, William. "Elia, and Geoffrey Crayon", *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 11, P.P. Howe, ed. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1932, pp. 178–79.
3. James, Felicity. *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.



## Section - 2

### “On Familiar Style” – William Hazlitt

#### Background

“On Familiar Style” is an essay written by William Hazlitt, an English essayist, literary critic, and philosopher, originally published in *The London Magazine* in 1821. The essay is a reflection on the nature of style in writing. William Hazlitt was born in Maidstone, England in 1778 and was a contemporary of Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, among other literary figures of the Romantic era. He was known for his literary criticism, essays, and philosophical writings, and was one of the most influential writers of his time.

Hazlitt also touches on the importance of clarity and simplicity in writing, arguing that overly complex or ornate language can obscure the meaning of the text. He notes that writers should strive for a balance between familiarity and elegance in their writing, in order to create a style that is both accessible and effective. “On Familiar Style” is an important essay in the history of English literature, as it reflects Hazlitt’s views on the nature of style in writing and its importance in communicating with readers. It remains a valuable text for students and scholars of English literature, and is often studied as an example of Hazlitt’s literary criticism and philosophy.

#### Keywords

Familiarity, Writing style, William Hazlitt, Personal voice, Informal prose

#### Discussion

##### ► Importance of style

“On Familiar Style” is an important essay in Hazlitt’s oeuvre, as it reflects his views on the importance of style in writing. Hazlitt argues that a conversational, familiar style is the most effective way to communicate with readers, as it allows the writer to connect with the reader on a personal level. He notes that this style of writing is often associated with speech, rather than writing, but argues that it can be just as effective in written form.

In “On Familiar Style”, Hazlitt points out how an author should convey his ideas in a manner that is comprehensive

► Ordinary language

to the reader in clear terms. For him, the familiar style must use the common style of language and reject both meaningless and pompous words. For instance, an author wants to explain a situation like 'a man falls down'. This is the most familiar style. But we can make it unfamiliar by changing the language in a sententious style by saying that 'the man changes his position from perpendicular to horizontal'. William Hazlitt is of the view that the subject has to be explained in simple, clear and dignified words.

► New coinages as a crime

Hazlitt expresses his observation on the style of Dr Johnson also in his essay. The writer of a plain style must give up the slang. Words must not be given new meanings. New coinage of words should be avoided. Hazlitt considers new word coinages as a serious crime. Hazlitt adopted new techniques like descriptive imagery, parallel structure and antithesis to simplify his essays. While writing, an author must select words very carefully to prove that familiar style is not just dropping words. Hazlitt introduces two words 'vulgar' and 'clownish' to describe what an author should ignore to attain a familiar style. The readers will get annoyed by the implication of these words. William Hazlitt differentiates a familiar style and a gaudy style. The gaudy style always has an empty meaning. Hazlitt concludes his essay On Familiar Style by criticising the writers of gaudy style that they are careless of the standard of the essay and give much importance to pompous words and they cannot touch the heart of the readers.

### 3.1.2 Analysis

► Balance between familiarity and elegance

"On Familiar Style" by William Hazlitt is a seminal piece of writing in the history of English literature, and remains a valuable text for students and scholars of literary criticism and philosophy. In this essay, Hazlitt argues that a conversational, familiar style is the most effective way to communicate with readers, and that writers should strive for a balance between familiarity and elegance in their writing. One of the key strengths of Hazlitt's argument is his emphasis on the importance of clarity and simplicity in writing. He notes that overly complex or ornate language can obscure the meaning of the text, and argues that writers should strive for a style that is both accessible and effective. This emphasis on clarity and simplicity is particularly relevant in today's world, where there is a growing demand for clear, concise communication across a wide range of fields.





- A sense of intimacy

Hazlitt's argument for a conversational, familiar style is also compelling, as it reflects the growing importance of informal communication in the modern world. With the rise of social media and other informal communication channels, there is an increasing demand for writers who can connect with readers on a personal level, and who can create a sense of intimacy and familiarity through their writing. Hazlitt's emphasis on the importance of a familiar style is therefore highly relevant in today's world, and reflects a growing trend towards more informal, personal forms of communication.

- Overly prescriptive

One potential weakness of Hazlitt's argument is that it may be seen as overly prescriptive, particularly in its emphasis on a specific style of writing. While Hazlitt's argument for a conversational, familiar style is compelling, it is important to remember that there are many different styles of writing that can be effective in different contexts. Writers should therefore be careful not to rely too heavily on any one style, and should instead strive to develop a flexible, adaptable approach to writing that can be tailored to the needs of different audiences and contexts. William Hazlitt's essay "On Familiar Style" is a valuable contribution to the field of literary criticism and philosophy, and remains an important text for students and scholars of English literature. Hazlitt's emphasis on clarity, simplicity, and familiarity in writing reflects a growing trend towards more informal, personal forms of communication, and his insights remain highly relevant in today's world.

## Summarised Overview

Hazlitt explains in "On Familiar Style" how a writer should present his ideas to the reader in a way that is comprehensive and in simple words. For him, the familiar style must employ everyday language and shun both pompous and meaningless terms. According to Hazlitt, a word's universal appeal comes from how it is used, not from the word itself. The familiar style must be honest with no use of slang. It should be employed with ease, force, and clarity, much like sermons. Employing a familiar style requires simplicity and propriety. The common language must avoid obsolete and misleading terms.

## Assignments

1. Analyse Hazlitt's use of rhetorical devices in "On Familiar Style" and discuss their impact on the reader's engagement with the text.
2. Compare and contrast Hazlitt's concept of familiar style with other theories of writing, highlighting its unique characteristics and contributions.
3. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Hazlitt's argument in "On Familiar Style" and present a well-supported critique.
4. Discuss the significance of Hazlitt's ideas on familiar style in relation to his broader literary philosophy and analyse their manifestation in his other works.
5. Explore the role of personal experience and subjective expression in Hazlitt's "On Familiar Style" and assess their impact on the reader's interpretation of the text.
6. Investigate the implications of Hazlitt's advocacy for a more conversational writing style in "On Familiar Style" and its influence on subsequent literary movements.

## Suggested Readings

1. Park, Roy. *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory*. Clarendon P, 1971.
2. Sampson, George, ed. *Hazlitt: Selected Essays*. Cambridge UP, 1958.
3. Wardle, Ralph M. *Hazlitt*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1971.
4. Whelan, Maurice. *In the Company of William Hazlitt: Thoughts for the Twenty-first Century*. Merlin P, 2005.
5. Wu, Duncan. *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*. Oxford UP, 2008.



## References

1. Albrecht, W. P. *Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination*. Lawrence: The U of Kansas P, 1965.
2. Baker, Herschel. *William Hazlitt*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard U P, 1962.
3. Bromwich, David. *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1983.
4. Gilmartin, Kevin. *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist*. Oxford UP, 2015.
5. Hazlitt, William. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*. J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930.
6. Howe, P. P. *The Life of William Hazlitt*. Hamish Hamilton, 1947.

## Section - 3

### “On Books and Reading”- John Ruskin

## Background

“On Books and Reading” is an essay written by John Ruskin, an English art critic, social thinker, and philanthropist, originally published in 1907 as part of his collection of essays titled *On Reading in Relation to Literature*. The essay is a reflection on the value of books and reading, and argues that reading should be a form of active engagement with the world around us, rather than a passive form of entertainment. John Ruskin was born in London, England in 1819 and was a leading figure in the Victorian art world, known for his criticism of the industrialisation of society and his advocacy for social reform. He was also a prolific writer, producing a wide range of works on art, architecture, literature, and social and political issues.

“On Books and Reading” is an important essay in Ruskin’s oeuvre, as it reflects his views on the importance of reading. Ruskin also touches on the importance of the physical book itself, arguing that books should be treated with respect and care, and that the act of reading should be seen as a form of reverence for the knowledge and wisdom contained within the pages. He notes that the physicality of the book - its weight, its texture, its smell - is an important part of the reading experience, and that readers should take the time to appreciate these qualities. “On Books and Reading” is an important essay in the history of English literature, as it reflects Ruskin’s views on the importance of reading as a means of engaging with the world around us. It remains a valuable text for students and scholars of English literature, and is often studied as an example of Ruskin’s literary criticism and social philosophy.



## Keywords

Reading, Intellectual growth, Knowledge, Imagination, Wisdom

## Discussion

- Coinage of “pathetic fallacy”

John Ruskin is a famous Victorian essayist, social reformer and art critic. Ruskin's works inspired many political leaders including Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji was influenced by Ruskin's book *Unto the Last*. Ruskin is popular for his coinage of ‘pathetic fallacy’ which means attributing human feelings to natural phenomena. His art criticism reached its heights by the publication of *Mountain Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*.

- Spend valuable time in reading books

Ruskin, through his essay “On Books and Reading” discusses the advantages of reading. The author is of the view that people should use their valuable time in reading good books. Ruskin goes to the extent of saying that parents must focus on giving quality education to their children through reading. The beautiful and worthwhile thoughts of a writer are given expression in a book. Hence Ruskin opines that we should value a book for the efforts of its author. Good reading must have concentration to each and every word written in the text. Reading should be effective only if the reader refers to the book in minute details. Therefore, reading a book with proper focus is much better than reading a large number of books. A nation cannot be able to survive by avoiding literature, arts and science. According to Ruskin an individual's personality is shaped by reading books.

### 3.1.3 Analysis

John Ruskin's essay “On Books and Reading” is a thoughtful reflection on the value of reading and the role that books play in our lives. In this essay, Ruskin argues that reading should be an active process, in which the reader engages critically with the text and seeks to understand its meaning in the context of their own life and experiences. One of the key strengths of Ruskin's argument is his emphasis on the importance of reading as a form of engagement with the world around us. Ruskin



- Reading as an engagement with the world

notes that reading can provide us with new perspectives and insights, and can help us to better understand ourselves and our place in the world. He argues that this form of reading requires active engagement and critical thinking, and that readers should strive to understand the context and meaning of the text in relation to their own lives and experiences.

- Everybody should create a library

This essay begins with the positive aspects of reading. He observes that human life being very short need not be wasted with reading valueless books. He advises that in a civilized country, books should be in the reach of everyone, printed in excellent form. Everybody should create a library for themselves with good books. Ruskin writes that parents often ask him about the books which their children should prefer in order to succeed in life. He instructs them that getting an honest education itself through reading good books is enough to succeed in life.

- Books should be treated with respect

Ruskin's emphasis on the physicality of the book is also noteworthy, as it highlights the importance of the book as an object of value and importance. Ruskin argues that books should be treated with respect and care, and that the act of reading should be seen as a form of reverence for the knowledge and wisdom contained within the pages. This perspective is particularly relevant in today's world, where digital media has become increasingly prevalent and the physical book is sometimes seen as an outdated relic.

- Overly prescriptive

However, one potential weakness of Ruskin's argument is that it may be seen as overly prescriptive or elitist, particularly in his emphasis on the importance of reading certain types of literature. Ruskin notes that some books are more valuable than others, and that readers should focus on works that are morally and intellectually enriching. While this perspective is certainly valid, it is important to remember that different readers have different tastes and interests, and that what is valuable or enriching for one person may not be for another.

This essay is a valuable contribution to the field of literary criticism, and remains an important text for students and scholars of English literature. Ruskin's emphasis on the importance of active engagement with texts, as well as his emphasis on the physicality of the book itself, provide valuable insights into the role that

- Contribution to the field of literary criticism

literature plays in our lives. While his views on the value of certain types of literature may be controversial, his overall perspective on the importance of reading and the value of the book remains highly relevant in today's world.

- Education through reading

A book is a permanent record of a writer's most valuable and beautiful thoughts. A writer's thoughts are like precious gold which cannot be imbibed directly. Like gold, which is hidden under deep mines, the author's best thoughts must be extracted through reading. Ruskin concludes his essay by a criticism that a nation which is interested only in money-making and ignores the value of arts, literature and science would definitely never last long.

## Summarised Overview

In "On Books and Reading," John Ruskin emphasises the importance of cultivating a deep and meaningful relationship with books. He highlights the transformative power of literature, urging readers to engage with books as sources of wisdom, inspiration, and moral guidance. Ruskin argues that reading should not be a mere passive activity but an active process of observation and reflection. He encourages readers to choose their books carefully, seeking those that offer genuine insight and intellectual stimulation. Ruskin also emphasises the role of books in shaping character and fostering empathy, emphasizing the importance of reading widely to broaden one's perspectives. Ultimately, he champions the value of books as treasures that have the potential to enrich and enlighten our lives.

## Assignments

1. Write an essay discussing Ruskin's views on the value of reading books as a means of developing one's intellect and moral character.
2. Prepare a write-up analysing Ruskin's argument that the quality of books we read significantly influences our thoughts, actions, and overall well-being.
3. Craft a critical review of Ruskin's essay, highlighting his ideas on the importance of selecting books that are morally uplifting and intellectually stimulating.





4. Create a comparative analysis exploring Ruskin's perspective on the benefits of reading books versus other forms of entertainment or media consumption.
5. Develop an essay examining Ruskin's belief that books should be chosen based on their capacity to foster empathy and understanding of diverse human experiences.
6. Compose a reflective essay discussing the impact of Ruskin's ideas on your personal reading habits and the role of literature in your intellectual and emotional growth.
7. Provide an outline, presenting arguments both for and against Ruskin's assertion that reading books of different genres and subjects contributes to a well-rounded education.

## Suggested Readings

1. Cate, George Allen, ed. *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin*. Stanford UP, 1982.
2. Hewison, Robert. *John Ruskin*. Oxford UP, 2007.
3. J. L. Bradley, edited. *Ruskin: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge, 1984.
4. Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years*. Yale UP, 2000.

## References

1. Derrick Leon. *Ruskin: The Great Victorian*. Routledge, 1949.
2. Jackson, Kevin. *The Worlds of John Ruskin*. Pallas Athene, 2010.
3. Rosenberg, J. G. *The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin's Genius*. Columbia UP, 1961.
4. Waldstein, C. "The Work of John Ruskin: Its Influence Upon Modern Thought and Life", *Harper's Magazine*, vol. 78, no. 465, pp. 382–418, Feb. 1889.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*



## Unit 2

# Sweetness and Light

- Matthew Arnold

Non- Detailed

## Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ gain an understanding of the importance of balancing intellectual pursuits with the pursuit of beauty and harmony in life.
- ▶ develop an appreciation for the transformative power of culture and art in promoting social harmony and individual well-being.
- ▶ recognise the significance of cultivating moral and ethical values in order to create a more enlightened and harmonious society.
- ▶ consider and recognise literature as storehouses of culture.

## Background

Matthew Arnold was a prominent Victorian intellectual, known for his work as a poet, critic, and cultural commentator. He was particularly interested in the role of culture in society, and was a leading figure in the “culture wars” of the Victorian era - a debate about the nature and value of culture that was central to the intellectual life of the period.

“Sweetness and Light” is the first chapter of Matthew Arnold’s book *Culture and Anarchy*, which was first published in 1869. The chapter is a reflection on the idea of “culture” and its relationship to society and politics, and argues that culture has an important role to play in shaping the values and ideals of society.

In “Sweetness and Light,” Arnold argues that culture has the power to elevate and refine society, and that it can help to create a more enlightened and harmonious world. He notes that the pursuit of culture involves a focus on intellectual and aesthetic pursuits, as well as a commitment to moral and social values, and that it requires a deep engagement with the world around us.

Arnold’s emphasis on the importance of culture as a force for social and political change is particularly noteworthy, as it reflects the broader cultural and intellectual context of the Victorian era. During this period, there was a growing awareness of the need for social and political reform, and many intellectuals saw culture as a way to achieve this goal. Arnold’s perspective on culture was influenced by his own experiences as a poet and critic, as well as by the broader intellectual currents of the period.



“Sweetness and Light” is thus an important chapter in the history of English literature and cultural commentary. It reflects the intellectual and cultural context of the Victorian era, and provides valuable insights into the role that culture can play in shaping society and politics. The chapter remains a valuable text for students and scholars of English literature, and is often studied as an example of Arnold’s literary criticism and cultural philosophy.

## Keywords

Victorian literature, Cultural criticism, Intellectualism, Moral values, Harmony and balance

## Discussion

“Sweetness and Light” is the first chapter of Matthew Arnold’s book *Culture and Anarchy*, which was published in 1869. In this chapter, Arnold argues that culture is essential for creating a more enlightened and harmonious society. He defines culture as the pursuit of intellectual and aesthetic engagements, as well as a commitment to moral and social values. Arnold believes that culture has the power to refine and elevate society, and that it should be pursued by all members of society, not just the elite. He argues that a lack of culture can lead to ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and social conflict. Arnold’s ideas on culture reflect the broader intellectual and cultural context of the Victorian era, which saw a growing awareness of the need for social and political reform. Overall, “Sweetness and Light” remains a significant work in English literature and cultural criticism, and is often studied as an example of Arnold’s views on culture and society.

- Culture creates an enlightened society

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold used the phrase “Sweetness and Light” as the title of the first essay to convey that culture is free from all kinds of narrowness and stands against all the mischiefs men who believed in machinery. The title “Sweetness and Light” is first used by Jonathan Swift in his *The Battle of Books*. In this work, he wrote of beauty and intelligence as the “two noblest of things, sweetness and light.”

- Culture is free from all kinds of narrowness



- Culture is never completed

The opening chapter is where Arnold lays down the foundation of his definition of culture. He says that culture is a society's inexorable movement toward the idea. In seeking perfection, there are two requirements. They are eagerness to learn based on seeing things as they really are and the effort to ensure that the rest of society is constructed upon this knowledge and recognition. As a result, the irony is that culture is never completed because perfection cannot be attained: culture is always flux and adaptable.

- Literatures are storehouses of culture

Matthew Arnold points out that religion is the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself. He says, "Religion that voice of the deepest human experience does not only enjoin and sanction...the aim of setting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is...but also, in determining generally in what human perfection consists". According to Arnold, all great literature of time and space are storehouses of culture. Arnold finds a sincere connection between culture and the idea of sweetness and light. His ideal man of culture is a Greek man named Euphuasis. The character of the man is moulded by religion and poetry. The aim of religion is to make man perfect ethically, whereas poetry possesses the idea of beauty and of human nature perfect on all its sides.

### 3.2.1 Analysis

*Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* is a series of essays written by the Victorian writer Matthew Arnold. It appeared in the Cornhill Magazine. It is very important to Arnold's theory of culture that perfection is not just partial perfection or perfection on one side of human nature. Arnold argues that there must be three aspects to the perfection pursued by culture. It must be harmonious perfection, general perfection and perfection in action. Culture has the power to prevail peace and satisfaction by killing our bestiality and drawing nearer to the world of spirituality with perfection. He gives instances from the puritanism that is based on the impulse of man towards moral development and self-conquest. The great men of culture broaden the basis of life and intelligence and work powerfully to expand sweetness and light to make reason and the will of God to prevail. A man of culture



- Three modes of perfections

seeks knowledge from all departments and shares it to all. He is not narrow-minded because such knowledge brings perfection. Hence his pursuit of knowledge is sweet and light.

- Culture as a force for social and political change

In this essay Arnold offers a vision of culture that emphasises its importance for creating a more enlightened and harmonious society. He defines culture as the pursuit of intellectual and aesthetic pursuits, as well as a commitment to moral and social values. Arnold argues that culture has the power to refine and elevate society, and that it should be pursued by all members of society, not just the elite. He notes that a lack of culture can lead to ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and social conflict. Arnold's emphasis on the importance of culture as a force for social and political change is particularly noteworthy, as it reflects the broader cultural and intellectual context of the Victorian era.

- Criticism against the narrow definition of culture

Arnold's ideas on culture have been widely debated, with some critics arguing that his definition of culture is too narrow and elitist. Others have noted that his emphasis on the importance of culture for social and political change reflects the broader cultural and intellectual context of the Victorian era. Some have also criticised Arnold's tendency to view culture as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. Despite these criticisms, "Sweetness and Light" remains a significant work in English literature and cultural criticism. It offers valuable insights into the role that culture can play in shaping society and politics, and continues to be studied as an example of Arnold's views on culture and society.

## Summarised Overview

"Sweetness and Light" is an influential essay written by Matthew Arnold, a 19th-century British poet and cultural critic. In this work, Arnold explores the concept of sweetness as a metaphor for beauty, refinement, and harmony, while light represents intellectual and moral enlightenment. He argues that the pursuit of sweetness and light should be the aim of individuals and society, emphasizing the importance of culture, education, and a balanced development of the mind and spirit. Arnold criticizes the excessive materialism, utilitarianism, and narrow-mindedness of his time, calling for a broader, more holistic approach to life that embraces both intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. Through his eloquent prose, Arnold advocates for a harmonious fusion of intellectual and artistic endeavors, as well as the cultivation of moral values, in order to achieve a higher, more enlightened state of being.





## Assignments

1. Analyse the concept of “Sweetness and Light” in Matthew Arnold’s essay, examining its significance in promoting social harmony and intellectual enlightenment.
2. Compare and contrast Arnold’s notion of “Sweetness and Light” with other philosophical ideas of moral and intellectual improvement.
3. Evaluate the role of education in achieving “Sweetness and Light” as presented by Arnold, and discuss its implications for modern educational practices.
4. Explore the relationship between culture and “Sweetness and Light” in Arnold’s essay, assessing how cultural pursuits contribute to personal and societal development.
5. Investigate the influence of historical and societal contexts on Arnold’s concept of “Sweetness and Light”, analysing how cultural and intellectual movements shaped his ideas.
6. Discuss the role of art and literature in embodying the ideals of “Sweetness and Light” proposed by Arnold, exploring how creative expressions contribute to social progress.
7. Reflect on the contemporary relevance of Arnold’s ideas on “Sweetness and Light,” considering their applicability in addressing modern societal challenges and fostering a more enlightened world.

## Suggested Readings

1. Collini, Stefan, edited. *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Cambridge UP, 1993.
2. Honan, Park. *Matthew Arnold: A Life*. McGraw-Hill, 1981.
3. Super, Robert H. edited. *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*. The University of Michigan, 1960.
4. Trilling, Lionel. *Matthew Arnold*. Norton, 1939.
5. Young, Robert J.C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Culture, Theory and Race*. Routledge, 1995.



## References

1. Carroll, Joseph. *The Cultural Theory of Matthew Arnold*. University of California, 1981.
2. Connell, W. F. *The Educational Thought and Influence of Matthew Arnold*. Routledge, 1950.
3. Eliot, T. S. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. Harvard UP, 1933.
4. Frye, Northrop. "The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism". *Daedalus*, 99, 2, pp. 268–342, Spring 1970.
5. Pratt, Linda Ray. *Matthew Arnold Revisited*. Twayne Publishers, 2000.
6. Watson, George. *The Literary Critics: A Study of English Descriptive Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1962.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

## Unit 3

# “Preface” from *Studies in the History of The Renaissance*

- Walter H. Pater

Non-detailed

## Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ understand the historical context of the Renaissance and its significance in shaping Western culture.
- ▶ recognise the central themes and ideas explored in Walter Pater’s “Preface” and their relevance to the study of art and aesthetics.
- ▶ analyse Pater’s writing style and its impact on the interpretation and appreciation of Renaissance art and literature.
- ▶ evaluate the influence of Pater’s “Preface” on subsequent scholarship and criticism of the period.

## Background

Walter H. Pater’s “Preface” from *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* is a significant piece of literary criticism that was first published in 1873. Pater, an influential figure in the Aesthetic movement of the late 19th century, presents a radical and highly subjective perspective on art and its appreciation. In this preface, Pater lays the foundation for his overall thesis, which centers on the concept of “art for art’s sake.” He argues that the value of art lies in its ability to offer unique and intense experiences, capturing the fleeting moments of beauty and pleasure in life. Pater challenges traditional notions of morality and utility, emphasising the individual’s right to pursue aesthetic pleasure as a means of self-realization and personal growth. His emphasis on the sensual and immediate aspects of art, rather than its historical or moral significance, marked a departure from prevailing Victorian ideals and had a profound influence on later writers and artists.

Pater’s “Preface” reflects the broader intellectual and cultural milieu of the late 19th century. It emerged during a time of social and intellectual upheaval, where artists and thinkers were questioning established norms and seeking new forms of expression. Pater’s writing exhibits a rich and evocative style, characterised by its poetic language and vivid descriptions. He draws upon a wide range of sources, including classical mythology, literature, and philosophy, to illustrate his ideas on the aesthetic experience. Pater’s “Preface”



has remained a seminal work in the field of art criticism, inspiring subsequent generations of aesthetes and contributing to the development of modernist sensibilities in the arts.

## Keywords

Renaissance, History, Art, Aestheticism, Criticism

## Discussion

- ▶ Study on Renaissance art and culture

Walter Pater's "Preface" to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* was published in 1873. It is considered one of the most influential works of art and literary criticism of the Victorian era. Pater was a scholar of classics and history at Oxford University, and his work on Renaissance art and culture was a major departure from the traditional approach to scholarship of his time.

- ▶ Individual appreciation of art

Pater's "Preface" lays out his philosophy of art and criticism, emphasising the importance of subjective experience and individual interpretation in the appreciation of art. He argues that art should be approached not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself, with its own intrinsic value and beauty.

- ▶ Profound influence on modern art

Pater's emphasis on the subjective experience of art and his rejection of traditional notions of morality and objectivity made his work controversial in its time. However, his ideas on the importance of individual interpretation and subjective experience have had a profound influence on modern art and literary criticism.

- ▶ Important work in the history of art

*Studies in the History of the Renaissance* itself is a collection of essays on the art and culture of the Italian Renaissance, and includes Pater's famous essay "Mona Lisa", which explores the enigmatic smile of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting. The book is notable for its vivid and evocative prose, as well as its innovative approach to art and literary criticism. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* and Pater's "Preface" remain important works in the history of art and literary criticism, and continue to be studied and debated by scholars today.

### 3.3.1 Analysis

- Seminal piece of art criticism

Walter H. Pater's "Preface" from *Studies in the History of The Renaissance* is a seminal piece of art criticism that has had a significant influence on subsequent generations of scholars and aesthetes. Pater's work explores the notion of aestheticism and its implications for understanding and appreciating art.

- Art for art's sake

One of the central ideas put forth in the "Preface" is Pater's advocacy for the "art for art's sake" philosophy. He argues that the purpose of art is not to convey moral or didactic messages but rather to provide an intense and pleasurable sensory experience. Pater posits that the aesthetic moment, the fleeting sensation of beauty and pleasure that arises from encountering a work of art, is the ultimate goal of artistic creation. This emphasis on the immediate sensory experience of art represents a departure from the prevailing moralistic and utilitarian approaches to art that were dominant in Pater's time.

- Cult of personality

Furthermore, Pater's "Preface" also delves into the concept of the "cult of personality." He suggests that the artist's personality and individuality play a crucial role in the creation and reception of art. According to Pater, it is through the expression of the artist's unique sensibilities and subjective experiences that art achieves its true power. This focus on the artist as an individual allows for a more nuanced and subjective interpretation of art, breaking away from traditional notions of objective artistic standards.

- Emphasis on subjectivity

However, despite its influence and profound insights, Pater's "Preface" is not without its criticisms. Some argue that his emphasis on subjectivity and the individual artist may undermine the potential for broader social and political critiques in art. Pater's narrow focus on aesthetic pleasure and the artist's personality neglects the capacity of art to engage with and comment on the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it is produced.

- Excessive aestheticism

Moreover, Pater's prose style, characterised by its elaborate and sometimes excessively ornate language, has been criticised as self-indulgent. The excessive aestheticism in his writing can sometimes overshadow the substance of his ideas, making it difficult for readers to grasp the underlying arguments.





In conclusion, Walter H. Pater's "Preface" from *Studies in the History of The Renaissance* is a groundbreaking exploration of aestheticism and its implications for understanding art. While his emphasis on the immediate sensory experience of art and the artist's individuality offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of his approach, particularly in its neglect of broader social and political contexts. Additionally, Pater's prose style, while stylistically rich, can be overly indulgent, making his arguments less accessible to some readers. Nonetheless, Pater's work remains a significant contribution to the field of art criticism and continues to inspire discussions on the nature and purpose of art.

- Neglect of broader contexts

## Summarised Overview

Walter H. Pater's "Preface" in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* explores the concept of aesthetic appreciation and the pursuit of beauty in art and life. Pater argues that art should be approached as a means to experience intense and pleasurable sensations, as it enables individuals to fully engage with the present moment and attain a heightened state of being. He emphasises the importance of subjective interpretation and personal response to art, advocating for the liberation of the individual from traditional moral and societal constraints. Pater suggests that the Renaissance period, with its celebration of individualism and the pursuit of pleasure, offers valuable lessons for contemporary society, urging readers to cultivate their own aesthetic sensibilities and live authentically.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the influence of Renaissance art and literature on the aesthetic sensibilities of the Victorian era as elucidated in Walter H. Pater's "Preface."
2. Compare and contrast Pater's concept of "art for art's sake" with the prevailing Victorian ideals of morality and utility.
3. Examine Pater's use of evocative language and vivid imagery to convey the sensory experience of art appreciation.
4. Evaluate the role of individualism and self-expression in Pater's understanding of the Renaissance as a transformative period in human history.



5. Critically analyse Pater's arguments regarding the significance of the Renaissance as a catalyst for intellectual and cultural renewal, considering its impact on subsequent artistic movements and societal attitudes towards art.

## Suggested Readings

1. Benson, A. C. *Walter Pater*. Macmillan, 1906.
2. Hough, Graham. *The Last Romantics*. Duckworth, 1949.
3. Shuter, William F. *Rereading Walter Pater. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*. Cambridge, 1997.
4. Thomas, Edward. *Walter Pater: A Critical Study*. Martin Secker, 1913.

## References

1. Cecil, David. *Walter Pater the Scholar Artist*. Rede Lecture, 1955.
2. Donoghue, Denis. *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls*. Knopf, 1995.
3. Levey, Michael. *The Case of Walter Pater*. Thames & Hudson, 1978.
4. Ward, Anthony. *Walter Pater: The Idea in Nature*. MacGibbon & Kee, 1966.
5. Wright, S. *A Bibliography of the Writings of Walter H. Pater*. Garland Publishing, 1975.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

## Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse and interpret the major themes and literary techniques employed in Victorian literature.
- ▶ detail on the themes of independence and self-discovery in Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*.
- ▶ evaluate the impact of social class and ambition on the characters' lives in Dickens' *Great Expectation*.
- ▶ investigate the consequences of moral choices and the concept of fate in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

## Section -1

### *Jane Eyre* - Charlotte Bronte

## Background

Charlotte Bronte was a prominent figure in English literature during the 19th century. Her most famous work, *Jane Eyre*, is considered a classic of English literature and has had a significant impact on the literary world. Charlotte Bronte was born in Thornton, England, in 1816. She was the third of six children and grew up in a family of modest means. Her father was a clergyman and her mother died when Charlotte was just five years old. Charlotte, along with her sisters Emily and Anne, published a book of poetry under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Charlotte's first novel, *The Professor*, was rejected by publishers, but her second novel, *Jane Eyre*, was a huge success and made her famous.

Bronte was known for her unique voice and her ability to depict complex characters with psychological depth. She was part of a literary movement known as the Bronte sisters, which included her sisters Emily and Anne. Together, they created a body of work that dealt with themes of love, loss, and the human condition. Bronte's writing was characterised by her use of vivid imagery, emotive language, and a keen sense of observation. She was interested in exploring the experiences of women in Victorian England, and her work challenged the social norms and expectations of the time.

*Jane Eyre* is a work of Gothic fiction that has become a classic of English literature. The novel tells the story of Jane Eyre, an orphaned governess who falls in love with her employer, the brooding Mr. Rochester, and navigates the complex social and moral issues of Victorian England. *Jane Eyre* was revolutionary for its time, as it depicted a strong-willed, independent female protagonist who defied social conventions and sought to live life on her own terms. The novel deals with themes of gender, class, and morality, and it has been praised for its psychological depth and vivid characterisation. *Jane Eyre* has had a significant impact on literature and popular culture. It has been adapted into numerous films, television shows, and stage productions, and it continues to be widely read and studied today. The novel's enduring popularity is a testament to its enduring relevance and its ability to speak to contemporary audiences.

## Keywords

Bildungsroman, Orphan, Love, Social class, Gothic, Redemption

## Discussion

The novel begins with Jane living with her aunt, Mrs. Reed. Mrs. Reed and her children are very cruel towards Jane and one night Mrs. Reed locks Jane in the Red Room, a supposedly haunted room in the family home. The opening scene is Jane reading alone in the breakfast room, hoping she can find peace away from the Reed family. However, this doesn't last, as Master John Reeds arrives, wanting to torment Jane. He taunts Jane by calling her a 'rat', claiming she is poor, ungrateful and as she depends on his mother's wealth. Jane retaliates and a fight breaks out. Mrs. Reed sends Jane to Lowood School where the headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, is also cruel towards Jane. Conditions are very poor at the school and Jane's best friend, Helen Burns, dies of consumption. Jane later becomes a teacher at Lowood. Jane applies for a governess position at Thornfield Hall and gets the post. She becomes governess for Adele.

► John Reeds  
torments Jane

Jane begins to fall in love with her employer, Mr. Rochester. A fire breaks out at Thornfield, nearly killing Rochester as he sleeps. Jane saves him. Rochester

claims it was Grace Poole - a servant - who started the fire, however Jane doesn't think it was Grace Poole. Jane is shocked when Rochester confesses his love and desire to marry her. She thought he wanted to marry Blanche Ingram. On the day of their wedding, a man turns up at the church to declare that Rochester cannot marry as he is already married. Rochester reveals all about his marriage, claiming his wife Bertha is mad and he still wants to be with Jane. Jane cannot be with Rochester when he is still married so she runs away, becoming homeless and then sick. The Rivers family take her in and nurse her back to health. Jane inherits her uncle's wealth and estate. She finds out that the family that took her in are actually her cousins. St. John Rivers asks Jane to join him in his missionary work abroad and be his wife. She nearly accepts but when she hears Rochester calling her in a dream, she decides she cannot marry someone she doesn't love. Jane returns to Thornfield. When she arrives, she discovers it has burnt down and Rochester is now living at Ferndean, his usual retreat, and is blind. Jane rushes to him and they marry. The novel concludes with Jane and Rochester married with children. Rochester also regains his sight in one eye.

- ▶ Jane falls in love with Mr. Rochester

### 3.4.1 Analysis

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte is a novel that has been widely praised for its vivid characterisation and its exploration of themes such as gender, class, and morality. However, there are several other aspects of the novel that are worth analysing. One of the most striking elements of the novel is its depiction of Gothic tropes and elements. The novel features a haunted house, a madwoman locked in the attic, and other supernatural and eerie elements. Bronte's use of these Gothic elements adds a layer of mystery and intrigue to the story, and helps to heighten the sense of tension and danger that pervades the narrative.

- ▶ Madwoman locked in the attic

Another aspect of the novel that is worth examining is the complex relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester. The novel depicts a romantic relationship between the two characters, but it is not a straightforward love story. Instead, the relationship is marked by power dynamics, hidden secrets, and a sense of danger. Mr. Rochester is not a typical romantic hero, and his character is shaped by his own flaws and weaknesses. Jane, meanwhile, is a strong and independent character who is not afraid to challenge Mr. Rochester when he acts unfairly or unjustly.

- ▶ Romantic relationship





- Outspoken young girl

From the beginning of the novel, Brontë describes Jane as a strong-willed, passionate and outspoken young girl. Jane regularly speaks out against the cruel treatment of her cousin, John and her aunt, Mrs. Reed. This results in Jane becoming isolated and alienated in the house, as she endures her punishments alone. When Jane moves to Lowood School, her life appears to be similar, as she has to endure horrible taunts and punishments from Mr. Brocklehurst. However, it is at Lowood Jane finds true friendship and love. Here, Jane is very loyal and kind towards Helen Burns, her best friend. When Helen dies, she is heartbroken and lost.

- Rochester confesses his love for Jane

As the novel progresses, the reader sees Jane blossoming into adulthood. Jane is always described to be plain and doesn't see herself as a beauty. Nonetheless, she manages to fall in love with Rochester, and eventually Rochester confesses his love for Jane. They plan to marry but their plans are thwarted when it is revealed Rochester already has a wife. Jane suffers more heartbreak and vows to leave Thornfield, as she cannot sacrifice her integrity and principles to live with a man, she loves but cannot marry. She leaves, sacrificing her chance of happiness. Jane becomes homeless and finds refuge at the Rivers' home. When it is revealed they are Jane's cousins, she offers them a portion of her newly inherited fortune, thus ensuring their happiness. The novel ends with Jane finding happiness, as she marries Rochester as a confident, independent, young woman.

- Rochester is a wild and outspoken character

Edward Rochester is the master of Thornfield Hall and as a consequence, has a large fortune. Brontë describes Rochester as aloof, intelligent, rugged and witty. The reader first meets him when he falls off his horse, accusing Jane of bewitching it. From the beginning, we get the impression that Rochester is aloof, wild and outspoken. Rochester demands that Jane spends time with him, and they spend their evenings arguing and discussing topical issues. His rugged appearance makes him appear wilder, echoing his personality. Jane begins to fall in love with him.

The novel also deals with issues of social justice and morality. Jane's experiences as an orphan and a governess, as well as her encounters with characters such as Bertha Mason and St. John Rivers, highlight the inequalities and injustices of Victorian society. The novel suggests that

- Issues of social justice and morality

- Autobiographical details

- A multi-layered novel

social change and progress can only be achieved by challenging the status quo and fighting for justice and equality.

There are elements of *Jane Eyre* that echo Charlotte Brontë's own life. She and her sisters went to a school run by a headmaster as severe as Mr. Brocklehurst. Two of Charlotte's sisters died there from tuberculosis (just like Jane's only friend, Helen Burns). Charlotte Brontë was also a governess for some years before turning to writing.

Thus, *Jane Eyre* is a complex and multi-layered novel that has stood the test of time. Its exploration of themes such as love, power, morality, and social justice continue to resonate with contemporary readers, and its vivid characterisation and Gothic elements make it a compelling and engaging read.

## Summarised Overview

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë is a captivating novel that follows the life of Jane, an orphaned and mistreated young woman who overcomes various hardships to find love and fulfillment. The story unfolds as Jane endures a difficult childhood at the hands of her cruel aunt and attends a harsh boarding school before becoming a governess at Thornfield Hall. There, she develops a deep connection with her brooding employer, Mr. Rochester, leading to a complex romance. However, Jane's path to happiness is hindered by dark secrets and obstacles that test her resilience and integrity. Through themes of independence, social class, and gender roles, Brontë paints a vivid picture of Jane's journey towards self-discovery, highlighting her strength, moral compass, and unwavering determination to forge her own path.

## Assignments

1. How does the theme of social class influence the development of Jane Eyre's character and her relationships with other characters in the novel?
2. Analyse the role of the "madwoman in the attic," Bertha Mason, and discuss the significance of her character in the context of Victorian society and gender roles.
3. Explore the theme of independence and rebellion against societal expectations in *Jane Eyre*, focusing on Jane's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment.



4. Discuss the significance of the settings in *Jane Eyre*, particularly Thornfield Hall and Moor House, and their impact on the development of the plot and characters.
5. Examine the role of religion and spirituality in *Jane Eyre*, considering Jane's experiences with different religious figures and her own personal beliefs.
6. Compare and contrast the characters of *Jane Eyre* and her cousin St. John Rivers, highlighting their differing approaches to love, morality, and personal fulfillment.
7. Investigate the use of symbolism in *Jane Eyre*, specifically focusing on the symbolism of fire and ice and their representation of passion and restraint within the novel.

## Suggested Readings

1. Burt, Daniel S. *The Literature 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Novelists, Playwrights, and Poets of All Time*. Infobase Publishing, 2008.
2. Gilbert, Sandra; Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale UP, 1979.
3. Martin, Robert B. *Charlotte Brontë's Novels: The Accents of Persuasion*. Norton, 1966.

## References

1. Alexander, Christine, and Sara L. Pearson. *Celebrating Charlotte Brontë: Transforming Life into Literature in Jane Eyre*. Brontë Society, 2016.
2. Atherton, Carol. *The Figure of Bertha Mason* British Library, 2014.
3. Martin, Robert B. *Charlotte Brontë's Novels: The Accents of Persuasion*. NY: Norton, 1966.
4. Meyer, Susan (1990). "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of Jane Eyre". *Victorian Studies*. 33 (2): 247–268. JSTOR 3828358.
5. Shuttleworth, Sally. "Jane Eyre and the 19th Century Woman." The British Library, 2014.

## Section-2

# Great Expectations - Charles Dickens

### Background

Dickens is one of the most prominent writers of the Victorian era, and *Great Expectations* is considered one of his greatest works. It is a novel by Charles Dickens that was first published in serial form from 1860 to 1861. The novel is set in the early 19th century and tells the story of Pip, a young orphan boy who dreams of becoming a gentleman. The novel explores a range of themes, including social class, identity, ambition, and love. One of the key influences on the novel was Dickens' own experiences growing up in poverty. Like Pip, Dickens had a difficult childhood and struggled to make his way in the world. The novel can be seen as a reflection of Dickens' own struggles and aspirations, as well as a critique of the social and economic conditions of his time.

Another motif of the novel was Dickens' interest in the concept of the "gentleman." In the novel, Pip's desire to become a gentleman reflects the social aspirations of many people in Victorian England. However, the novel also critiques the idea of the gentleman as a privileged and entitled class, and suggests that true worth and value can be found in other qualities, such as kindness and honesty.

The novel also reflects Dickens' interest in social reform and his concern for the plight of the poor and disadvantaged. Throughout the novel, Dickens portrays the harsh realities of life for those who are born into poverty, and suggests that social change is necessary to address these inequalities. Thus, the novel is a rich and complex work that reflects the social, economic, and cultural context of Victorian England, as well as Dickens' own experiences and beliefs. Its exploration of themes such as social class, identity, and ambition continues to resonate with readers today, and it remains one of the most beloved works of English literature.

### Keywords

Social class, Pip, London, Redemption, Identity, Love, Ambition, Guilt



## Discussion

- Story of an orphan boy

*Great Expectations* is a novel by Charles Dickens that tells the story of Pip, an orphan boy who dreams of becoming a gentleman. The novel is set in the early 19th century and explores themes such as social class, identity, ambition, and love. Pip is raised by his harsh and abusive sister and her kind-hearted husband, the blacksmith Joe. When Pip is called to the home of the wealthy and eccentric Miss. Havisham to play with her adopted daughter, Estella, he becomes infatuated with the idea of becoming a gentleman in order to win Estella's affections.

- Transformation into a gentleman

Through a series of twists and turns, Pip receives a mysterious benefactor who finances his transformation into a gentleman and sets him on a path to social and financial success. However, as he climbs the social ladder, he realises that his ambition and desire for Estella have led him astray, and he must confront the truth about his past and his identity. The novel explores the harsh realities of life for those born into poverty and the corrosive effects of social ambition and greed. It also critiques the idea of the gentleman as a privileged and entitled class and suggests that true worth and value can be found in other qualities, such as kindness and honesty.

### 3.4.2 Analysis

- Bildungsroman novel

*Great Expectations* is a bildungsroman which appeared serially in the magazine *All the Year Round* between 1860 and 1861. The theme of self-knowledge explored in the novel expresses in part Dickens' own search for a sense of self. Many critics and readers suggested that Pip has some autobiographical elements of Dickens. The novel is divided into three stages representing stages of Pip's expectations. As the novel is a bildungsroman, it portrays the growth of Pip from a child to young adult. It shows the acceptance of Pip's self in the society. Thomas Carlyle, the famous Victorian essayist and philosopher called the novel 'Pip nonsense'.

*Great Expectations* works on a number of levels: as a critique of Victorian society and as an exploration of memory and writing. However, it is perhaps more importantly a search for true identity. During the

- Search for true identity

course of the novel, Pip comes to realise that his “great expectations”—social standing and wealth—are less important than loyalty and compassion. *Great Expectations* is also noted for its blend of humour, mystery, and tragedy. In the original ending of the work, Pip and Estella were not reunited, but Dickens was persuaded to write a happier conclusion.

- Symbol of transformation

One of the most notable elements of the novel is its use of symbols and imagery. For example, the character of Miss Havisham, who lives in a decaying mansion and wears a wedding dress despite being jilted on her wedding day, is a powerful symbol of the destructive effects of heartbreak and bitterness. Similarly, the motif of fire, which appears throughout the novel, can be interpreted as a symbol of transformation and renewal, as well as a warning of the dangers of unchecked passion.

- Psychological narratives

Dickens is known for his vivid descriptions and colorful characters, and *Great Expectations* is no exception. However, the novel also contains moments of subtlety and nuance, particularly in its exploration of the psychological states of its characters. For example, the complex emotions that Pip experiences throughout the novel are conveyed through a mix of internal monologues and external actions, creating a rich and layered portrait of a young man grappling with identity and desire.

- Critique the institutions of Victorian society

Finally, the novel can also be read as a critique of the institutions and structures of Victorian society. Throughout the novel, Dickens portrays the corrupting influence of wealth and social status, as well as the harsh treatment of those who are considered “lower” on the social ladder. However, he also suggests that redemption and forgiveness are possible, even in a society that seems stacked against the disadvantaged. *Great Expectations* is a complex and multi-layered work that rewards careful analysis and interpretation. Its use of symbols and imagery, language and style, and social critique make it a rich and enduring contribution to the canon of English literature. *Great Expectations* is a rich and complex novel that explores timeless themes and continues to resonate with readers today. It remains one of the most beloved works of English literature.





## Summarised Overview

*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens is a classic novel set in 19th-century England. The story follows the life of Pip, an orphan boy raised by his abusive sister and her husband, the blacksmith. Through a twist of fate, Pip encounters the mysterious Miss. Havisham, an eccentric wealthy woman, and falls in love with her adopted daughter, Estella. Pip's life takes a dramatic turn when he receives a large inheritance from an unknown benefactor and moves to London to pursue a life of wealth and social status. However, as Pip navigates the complexities of Victorian society, he learns valuable lessons about the true nature of wealth, love, and human connection. The novel explores themes of social class, ambition, identity, and redemption, creating a compelling narrative that captures the essence of Dickens' masterful storytelling.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the character development of Pip throughout the novel and its influence on his journey from innocence to experience.
2. Explore the themes of social class and its impact on the characters' lives in *Great Expectations*.
3. Discuss the role of Miss. Havisham as a symbol of decay and the effects of her influence on Pip and Estella.
4. Examine the use of imagery and symbolism in the novel and how they contribute to the overall themes and motifs.
5. Investigate the portrayal of justice and the legal system in *Great Expectations*, focusing on the character of Jaggers and the concept of moral responsibility.
6. Evaluate the significance of the minor characters in the novel, such as Joe Gargery and Herbert Pocket, in relation to Pip's development and the broader themes of the story.
7. Explore the motif of guilt and its effects on Pip's conscience, examining the instances of guilt throughout the narrative.
8. Discuss the ending of *Great Expectations* and its implications for the characters' fates, considering the themes of redemption and self-discovery.



## Suggested Readings

1. Cordell, Michael ed. *Critical Essays on Great Expectations*. G. K, 1990.
2. Richard Lettis and William Morris, ed. *Assessing Great Expectations*. San Francisco, 1960.
3. Tredell, Nicholas. *Charles Dickens: Great Expectations*. Icon Books, 1998.
4. Worth, George J. *Great Expectations: An Annotated Bibliography*. Garland, 1986.

## References

1. Mary Edminson. "The Date of the Action in Great Expectations," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 13 (1):22–35, doi:10.2307/3044100, JSTOR 3044100.
2. Moynahan, Julian. *Essays in Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 1960.
3. Sadrin, Anny. *Great Expectations*, Unwin Hyman, 1988.
4. Walsh, Susan . "Bodies of Capital: Great Expectations and The Climacteric Economy", *Victorian Studies*, Indiana University Press, 37 (1), Autumn 1993, pp.73–98, JSTOR 3829059.

## Section - 3

### The Mayor of Casterbridge

Thomas Hardy

## Background

Thomas Hardy is considered a significant literary figure for his exploration of complex human emotions and relationships, as well as his vivid depictions of rural life and the natural world. His writing style is characterised by detailed descriptions of the landscape and environment, realistic and often flawed characters, and a focus on the struggles and tragedies of everyday life.

One of Hardy's most notable contributions to literature is his criticism of Victorian social norms and class structures. He often portrayed characters from the lower classes and challenged the traditional roles assigned to women in society. This can be seen in novels such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, which were controversial for their frank treatment of sexuality and societal constraints.



Hardy was also a pioneer in the development of the modern novel. He experimented with narrative techniques and structures, often employing flashbacks, multiple narrators, and unconventional plot devices to create complex and layered stories. His works have been influential in shaping the modern literary landscape, particularly in the areas of psychological realism and social commentary. Hardy's literary contributions have had a significant impact on the development of English literature, influencing generations of writers and critics with his unique vision and voice.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a novel written by Thomas Hardy, first published in 1886. The novel is set in the fictional town of Casterbridge in Wessex, England, in the mid-19th century. The novel explores the tragic story of Michael Henchard, a man who rises from poverty to become the mayor of Casterbridge, but who is ultimately brought down by his own character flaws and the forces of fate. Hardy's novel was influenced by his own experiences growing up in rural England and his observations of the changing social and economic landscape of the Victorian era. The novel reflects Hardy's preoccupation with the complexities of human relationships, the struggle between fate and free will, and the impact of social class on individual lives.

The novel was also shaped by Hardy's own personal experiences. Hardy trained as an architect before turning to writing, and this is reflected in his detailed descriptions of the town of Casterbridge and its buildings. The character of Henchard is also believed to be partly inspired by Hardy's own father, who struggled with alcoholism and financial insecurity.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* was a critical success upon its publication and remains one of Hardy's most popular and enduring works. The novel has been adapted into various forms of media, including film, television, and stage productions, and continues to be widely read and studied today for its exploration of human nature and society in the Victorian era.

## Keywords

Fate, Redemption, Regret, Character flaws, Rural England, Tragedy

## Discussion

*The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character* (1886) is a novel by Thomas Hardy, an English novelist and poet. Taking place in a fictional rural England in the 1840s, the story follows the exploits

- Rich characterisation

of a young hay trucker Michael Henchard as he traverses English social life and struggles to improve his standing. The novel is known for its rich characterisation of the pursuit of social and economic mobility in the mid-nineteenth century and its portrait of how personal vices can damage one's fate.

- Tragic sale

The novel begins at a country fair in Wessex, a fictional English county. Drunk on rum, twenty-one-year-old Michael Henchard, feuding with his wife, Susan, impulsively auctions her and their baby daughter off for five guineas. The buyer is Richard Newson, a sailor passing through town. Regaining his sobriety the next day, he can no longer retract the sale because they have all departed. He vows to not drink again for the next twenty-one years.

- Successful merchant

The novel shifts to eighteen years after the tragic sale. Henchard, now a successful merchant of grain, as well as the Mayor of Casterbridge, is well known for his adamant about the virtues of sobriety. Despite this reputation, he has never revealed the event of losing his wife and child; people conclude that he must be a widower.

- Infatuation of Lucetta

One day, feeling sick on a business trip to Jersey, Henchard meets Lucetta Le Sueur who gives him medical aid. He falls in love with her, but still never reveals the circumstances of his past marriage, deciding, instead, to claim that Susan had run away and is probably dead. Though Lucetta is wary, she is too infatuated to reject him. He goes back to Casterbridge, leaving Lucetta behind, for the time being, anxious about his past marriage and the fact that he is already technically married.

- Susan reappears with their daughter

Lucetta, aware that she should marry Henchard to get back into polite society, is concerned that people will look down on them for negating his existing marriage. Henchard commits to send for Lucetta and ask for her hand in marriage, but Susan suddenly reappears with their daughter, Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard learns that her owner, Newson, became lost at sea, forcing Susan to search for him to regain a livelihood.

Susan, adamant that her marriage to Newson is still valid, questions the legitimacy of her marriage to Henchard, but is willing to pretend that it is valid as well. Also arriving in the town is a Scottish man, Donald



► Complex relationship

Farfrae, who works in agricultural science. He becomes Henchard's friend and later is hired by him. Henchard puts up Susan in a different house, pretending to have just met her so that their marriage seems new and organic. He doesn't tell Susan about Lucetta, and he informs Lucetta by post that their marriage is cancelled.

► Bad financial decisions

Farfrae becomes a very popular individual in the town, stirring the jealousy of Henchard. They have a falling out, mostly the fault of Henchard, the less honest and composed of the two. He makes several bad financial decisions that result in the loss of much of his former status. He speaks out in opposition to the news that Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane are engaged. After Susan dies, Henchard learns from her sealed letter that he is not Elizabeth-Jane's biological father. His daughter died while an infant, and she named her second daughter after her. Henchard no longer resists the marriage. However, he grows cruel to Elizabeth-Jane, never revealing that he is not her father.

► Lucetta strikes a new relationship

Having inherited a large sum of money from a relative, Lucetta appears in Jersey and buys a house in Casterbridge. She tries to get back with Henchard but he resists because it is improper to remarry so soon. She takes in Elizabeth-Jane, hoping to compel Henchard to visit. Meanwhile, Farfrae meets Lucetta and falls in love with her, oblivious to the fact that she is in town to court Henchard. Lucetta reciprocates his love, and questions Henchard's integrity when news breaks that he sold his first wife. Henchard finally resolves to marry Lucetta to improve his credit. Because she is now in love with Farfrae, she stalls, frustrating Henchard. She goes out of town to marry Farfrae in secret. Henchard's credit plummets, forcing him to sell off his possessions. In an attempt to help him, Farfrae buys the old businesses, only later being informed that Henchard is malicious towards him.

Lucetta's prior relationship with Henchard is exposed by town gossip. Lucetta, pregnant at the time, suffers an epileptic seizure from the stress and dies. At the novel's end, Newson returns from the sea. Henchard tells him that Susan is dead. At the same time, his twenty-one-year period of sobriety comes to a close. At the novel's end, Elizabeth-Jane searches for him, finding that he has died and writes a will that asks simply to have no funeral. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* thus suggests that human vices



- Repetition of errors

are pervasive and cyclical, requiring constant emotional investment to suppress. Henchard's repetition of his vices is symbolised in his failure to ever connect with his daughters, whether biological or not, harbouring dysphoria and resentment about the world.

### 3.4.3 Analysis

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a novel by Thomas Hardy that explores themes of redemption, guilt, and fate. The novel centers around Michael Henchard, a man who sells his wife and daughter in a moment of drunkenness and later becomes a successful and respected mayor of the town of Casterbridge. However, his past catches up with him and he is forced to confront the consequences of his actions. One of the key themes in the novel is the idea of fate and the role it plays in shaping our lives. Henchard is constantly haunted by his past and struggles to escape the consequences of his earlier actions. This creates a sense of inevitability in the novel, with the characters feeling as though they are trapped in a predetermined path.

- Themes of redemption, guilt and fate

Another important aspect of the novel is the exploration of social class and the rigid hierarchies of Victorian society. Henchard is initially seen as an outsider in the town, but through hard work and determination, he is able to climb the social ladder and becomes a respected figure. However, his past actions continue to haunt him and ultimately lead to his downfall. The novel also explores the complexities of human relationships, particularly in the context of family and parenthood. Henchard's relationship with his daughter Elizabeth-Jane is particularly poignant, as he struggles to connect with her and make amends for his past mistakes.

- Rigid hierarchies of Victorian society

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a powerful exploration of the human condition, with its vivid descriptions of rural life and its portrayal of flawed and complex characters. Through its exploration of themes such as fate, social class, and family, the novel offers a compelling critique of Victorian society and its values.

- Critique of Victorian values





## Summarised Overview

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy is a captivating novel set in the fictional town of Casterbridge. It tells the story of Michael Henchard, a deeply flawed but ambitious man who, in a fit of drunkenness, sells his wife and daughter at a fair. Years later, Henchard becomes a prosperous and respected figure in Casterbridge, eventually rising to the position of mayor. However, his past misdeeds come back to haunt him, leading to a series of dramatic events and moral dilemmas. Through themes of fate, redemption, and the consequences of one's actions, Hardy explores the complexities of human nature and the destructive power of pride.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the character of Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Caster bridge*. How does his personality evolve throughout the novel, and what factors contribute to his downfall?
2. Explore the theme of fate versus personal responsibility in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. How does Hardy depict the role of fate in shaping the lives of the characters, particularly Michael Henchard?
3. Discuss the significance of the setting in *The Mayor of Caster bridge*. How does the town of Casterbridge influence the events and characters in the novel?
4. Examine the theme of social class in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. How does Hardy portray the divide between different social classes and its impact on the characters' lives?
5. Discuss the symbolism of the character Donald Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. What does he represent, and how does his presence affect the dynamics between the other characters?
6. Explore the concept of redemption in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Which characters seek redemption, and how do they go about achieving it? Is redemption ultimately possible in Hardy's world?



## Suggested Readings

1. Avery, Simon *Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge*, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
2. Lerner, Lawrence. *Thomas Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge: Tragedy or Social History?* Sussex University P, 1975.
3. Menefee, Samuel P. *Wives for Sale: An Ethnographic Study of British Popular Divorce*. Eastbourne, 1981.
4. Taft, Michael. "Hardy's Manipulation of Folklore and Literary Imagination: The Case of the Wife-Sale in the Mayor of Caster bridge." *Studies in the Novel*. 13 (4), 1981, 399–407.

## References

1. Halliday, F. E. *Thomas Hardy: His Life and Work*. Adams & Dart, 1972.
2. Hardy, Evelyn. *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography*. Hogarth Press, 1954.
3. Hardy, Florence Emily. *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*. Macmillan, 1928.
4. Harvey, Geoffrey. *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy*. Routledge, 2003.
5. Holland, Clive. *Thomas Hardy O.M.: The Man, His Works and the Land of Wessex*. Herbert Jenkins, 1933.
6. Johnson, Lionel Pigot. *The Art of Thomas Hardy*. E. Mathews, 1894.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

# Critical Responses

## BLOCK-04

### Block Content

Unit 1 Romantic Poetry in English Literature

Unit 2 Aspects of Victorian Poetic Imagination

Unit 3 Victorian Novels in English Literature



## Unit 1

# Romantic Poetry in English Literature

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ detail the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shaped Romantic poetry
- ▶ analyse and interpret the key themes and motifs in Romantic poetry
- ▶ evaluate the influence of Romantic poets on the development of English literature
- ▶ compare and contrast the styles and techniques employed by different Romantic poets

### Background

The Romantic era witnessed a significant shift in literary sensibilities and artistic expression. Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats, rejected the rationality and restraint of the preceding Neoclassical period and embraced a heightened emotional and imaginative approach to writing. This shift in focus led to the exploration of themes like nature, individualism, love, and the sublime, as well as a renewed interest in the supernatural and the spiritual. The critical study of Romantic Poetry seeks to analyse and interpret the complex ideas, themes, and techniques employed by these poets, exploring their contributions to the development of English literature and their lasting impact on subsequent generations of poets. One prominent aspect of Romantic Poetry is its celebration of nature as a source of inspiration and spiritual solace. Romantic poets sought to capture the sublime beauty of the natural world, often using vivid and detailed descriptions to evoke a sense of awe and wonder. Romantic poets placed a strong emphasis on individualism and the subjective experience, exploring the depths of human emotions and the power of the human imagination. They sought to convey the intensity of personal feelings and experiences, expressing a longing for freedom, passion, and transcendence.



## Keywords

Romantic poetry, English literature, Nature, Imagination, Individualism, Sublime, Love and emotion

## Discussion

Romantic poetry in English literature emerged as a reaction against the rationalism and industrialisation of the 18th century. The Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Lord Byron, believed in the power of imagination, individualism, and emotion. They emphasised the beauty of nature, the importance of the individual, and the subjective experience of the poet.

### ► Romantic poetry

One of the most significant contributions of the Romantic poets was their emphasis on the individual's subjective experience. They believed that the poet should express his or her own feelings and emotions, rather than merely imitate classical models or adhere to social conventions. This focus on the subjective experience of the individual helped to create a new language of poetry that was both more personal and more accessible to a wider audience.

### ► Subjective experience

Another important aspect of Romantic poetry was its emphasis on the beauty of nature. The Romantics believed that nature was a source of inspiration and spiritual renewal, and they sought to capture its beauty and power in their poetry. Many Romantic poets wrote about the natural world in a way that was both descriptive and mystical, conveying a sense of awe and wonder at the majesty of the universe.

### ► Emphasis on the beauty of nature

Despite its many strengths, Romantic poetry has also been subject to criticism over the years. One common criticism is that Romantic poets tended to be self-indulgent and narcissistic, focusing too much on their own feelings and emotions rather than engaging with broader social or political issues. This criticism is often leveled at poets such as Wordsworth and Keats, who were accused of being overly sentimental and lacking in political engagement.

### ► Self-indulgent and narcissistic





- Overly idealistic

Another criticism of Romantic poetry is that it can be overly idealistic, emphasising the beauty and power of nature at the expense of more complex and difficult realities. This criticism is often directed at poets such as Shelley and Byron, who were accused of being too focused on idealised visions of love and heroism rather than engaging with the messy complexities of human experience.

- Emotionally resonant language

Despite these criticisms, however, Romantic poetry remains a powerful and enduring tradition in English literature. Its emphasis on the individual, the natural world, and the power of imagination continues to inspire poets and readers alike. The Romantics created a language of poetry that was deeply personal and emotionally resonant, and their legacy continues to influence the way that we think about and experience the world around us.

#### 4.1.1 Themes of Loss, Memory, and Timelessness in Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"

- Meditation on childhood and adulthood

William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" is a complex and multifaceted poem that explores themes of loss, memory, and the passing of time. At its core, the poem is a meditation on the relationship between childhood and adulthood, and the ways in which the memories of our youth can shape our understanding of the world around us.

- Loss of innocence

One contemporary reading of the poem is that it can be seen as a reflection on the decline of the natural world and the loss of innocence that comes with growing older. Wordsworth contrasts the beauty and purity of nature with the corruption and decay of human society, suggesting that our connection to the natural world can help to preserve a sense of purity and goodness in our lives.

- A sense of timelessness

The poem could also be seen as a commentary on the role of memory in shaping our understanding of the world. Wordsworth suggests that our memories of childhood can provide us with a sense of continuity and stability, even as the world around us changes and evolves. By reflecting on the memories of his youth, Wordsworth is able to connect with a sense of timelessness and permanence that transcends the fleeting nature of human experience.

- Importance of memory

In terms of relevance, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” remains a powerful and resonant poem that speaks about many themes and concerns that we face in the modern world. The poem’s emphasis on the importance of nature, memory, and the passage of time are all still relevant today, and the poem continues to be read and appreciated by readers and scholars alike.

- Themes of hope and renewal

The poem deals with the themes of hope and renewal in the face of loss and decay which remain as relevant today as it was when Wordsworth first wrote it. In a world that often seems chaotic and uncertain, the idea that we can find solace and meaning in our memories of childhood and our connection to the natural world is a powerful one, and Wordsworth’s ode continues to inspire and resonate with readers today.

#### 4.1.2 Creativity, Nature, and Despair in Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode”

- Introspective poem

Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode” is a highly personal and introspective poem that explores the themes of melancholy, despair, and creative inspiration. Written in 1802, the poem is considered one of Coleridge’s most powerful works, and it offers a window into the mind of one of the most important poets of the Romantic era.

- Meditation on the nature of creativity

At its core, “Dejection: An Ode” is a meditation on the nature of creativity and the role of the poet in society. Coleridge begins the poem by describing his own sense of despair and isolation, which he attributes to the loss of his creative inspiration. He laments the fact that he can no longer connect with the natural world in the same way that he once did, and he expresses a sense of deep sadness at the fact that his poetic powers have waned.

- Inspiration lies in the world around

As the poem progresses, however, Coleridge begins to reflect on the nature of creativity itself. He suggests that the poet’s ability to create is intimately tied to his or her relationship with the natural world, and he argues that the true source of inspiration lies not within the poet himself, but in the world around him. By connecting with the beauty and majesty of nature, the poet is able to tap into a wellspring of creative energy that can transform even the most mundane experiences into something magical and transcendent.



- Employs a rich and evocative language

One of the most striking aspects of “Dejection: An Ode” is its use of language and imagery. Coleridge employs a rich and evocative language that is at once lyrical and complex, and he creates a series of vivid and memorable images that help to bring the poem to life. The use of first-person narration also helps to create a sense of intimacy and immediacy, drawing the reader into the world of the poem and allowing us to share in Coleridge’s sense of despair and longing.

- Connection between the natural world and imagination

In terms of relevance, “Dejection: An Ode” continues to be a powerful and resonant work of literature that speaks to many of the same themes and concerns that the reader faces in the modern world. The emphasis of the poem on the importance of creativity and the connection between the natural world and the creative imagination is still relevant today, and it remains a source of inspiration and guidance for writers and artists of all kinds.

- Themes of hope and redemption

The poetic message of hope and redemption in the face of despair and disillusionment is also highly relevant in the modern world. In a time of political turmoil, social upheaval, and environmental crisis, the idea that we can find meaning and purpose in our relationship with the natural world is a powerful one, and Coleridge’s ode continues to inspire and resonate with readers today.

### 4.1.3 Transcendence and the Power of the Imagination in P.B Shelley’s “Ode to a Skylark”

- Power of the imagination

Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to a Skylark” is considered one of the finest works of Romantic poetry. It was written in 1819, during a time of great social, political, and economic upheaval in England. The poem reflects Shelley’s fascination with nature and his belief in the power of the imagination. The poem begins with a description of the skylark’s ascent into the sky, as Shelley marvels at its ability to soar above the earth and sing its joyful song. He then compares the skylark to a “high-born maiden” and a “rose empowered in its own green leaves,” emphasising its beauty and purity. Through these comparisons, Shelley suggests that the skylark embodies the ideal of innocence and joy, which is often lost in the harsh realities of the world.

Shelley goes on to express his desire to be like the skylark, to escape from the troubles of the world and

- Escape from the troubles of the world

achieve a higher state of being. He asks the skylark to teach him its secrets, so that he too can “be as happy as thou art.” This desire for transcendence is a central theme in Shelley’s poetry, reflecting his belief in the power of the imagination to overcome the limitations of the physical world.

- Musings on the nature of existence

The poem then shifts to a more philosophical tone, as Shelley muses on the nature of existence and the role of the imagination in shaping our perception of reality. He suggests that the skylark’s song is not just a beautiful sound, but a manifestation of the “unpremeditated art” of nature itself. This idea reflects Shelley’s belief in the Romantic concept of the sublime, which holds that the natural world is a source of awe and wonder that can inspire us to transcend our own limitations.

- Idea of the interconnectedness of all things

Shelley also touches on the idea of the interconnectedness of all things, as he suggests that the skylark’s song is a part of a larger harmony that encompasses all of nature. He writes, “We look before and after, / And pine for what is not; / Our sincerest laughter / With some pain is fraught; / Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.” This passage suggests that our experience of the world is shaped by our perception of it, and that our desire for something more is always tempered by the knowledge that it is out of reach.

- Look beyond the limitations of our physical existence

“Ode to a Skylark” is a masterpiece of Romantic poetry that continues to resonate with readers today. Its themes of transcendence, beauty, and the power of the imagination are as relevant now as they were in Shelley’s time. In a world that is often harsh and unforgiving, the skylark’s joyful song reminds us of the possibility of transcendence and the beauty that exists in the natural world. Shelley’s poetry encourages us to look beyond the limitations of our physical existence and embrace the power of the imagination to shape our perception of reality.

#### 4.1.4 The Beauty of Art and the Power of Imagination in John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is considered a masterpiece of Romantic poetry, written in 1819 during a time of social and political upheaval in England. The



- Fascination with Greek art

poem reflects Keats' fascination with Greek art and his belief in the power of imagination. The poem begins with a description of an ancient Greek urn, which Keats admires for its beauty and the stories it tells. He emphasises the timeless nature of the urn, suggesting that it has outlasted the people who created it and the events it depicts. Through this imagery, Keats explores the idea of beauty as something that transcends time and endures beyond the physical world.

- Figures in the scenes

Keats then focuses on the images depicted on the urn, describing them in detail and imagining the stories they might tell. He draws attention to the figures in the scenes, suggesting that they are frozen in time and cannot change or grow old. This idea reflects Keats' fascination with the idea of permanence, which he sees as a source of beauty and transcendence.

- More philosophical tone

The poem then shifts to a more philosophical tone, as Keats reflects on the nature of human experience and the role of art in shaping our understanding of the world. He suggests that the stories depicted on the urn are more beautiful than reality, because they are free from the limitations of time and change. Keats writes, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know". This famous passage reflects Keats' belief in the power of art to reveal deeper truths about the world, and to capture the essence of beauty in a way that transcends our physical experience.

- Fascination with the idea of transcendence

The poem concludes with Keats imagining himself in the world depicted on the urn, experiencing the beauty and wonder of the scene. He imagines himself joining a procession of people on their way to a sacrifice, suggesting that he is willing to embrace the unknown and explore the mysteries of the world. This final image reflects Keats' fascination with the idea of transcendence, and his belief that the imagination can help us to reach beyond the limitations of our physical existence.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a masterful work of Romantic poetry that continues to resonate with readers today. Its themes of beauty, permanence, and the power of the imagination are as relevant now as they were in Keats' time. In a world that is often characterised by change and transience, the urn's timeless beauty reminds us of the enduring power of art to reveal deeper truths about



- Enduring power of art

the world. Keats' poetry encourages us to embrace the mysteries of the world and to explore the depths of our own imagination in order to discover the true meaning of beauty and transcendence.

#### 4.1.5 "She Walks in Beauty": A Celebration of Female Empowerment and a Critique of Patriarchal Values

- A tribute to a woman's beauty

Lord Byron's poem "She Walks in Beauty" is a masterful work of Romantic poetry, written in 1814. The poem is a tribute to a woman's beauty, describing her as a source of light and radiance in a dark and troubled world.

- A description of the woman's physical appearance

The poem begins with a description of the woman's physical appearance, emphasising her beauty and grace. Byron compares her to the night, suggesting that she embodies both darkness and light. He writes, "She walks in beauty, like the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies." This metaphor reflects the Romantic fascination with the natural world, and suggests that the woman's beauty is an expression of the sublime.

- Beauty is a reflection of her goodness

Byron then focuses on the woman's inner qualities, suggesting that her beauty is a reflection of her goodness and purity. He writes, "And all that's best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes." This suggests that the woman is a source of balance and harmony in the world, embodying both the darkness and the light.

- Beauty is a source of inspiration

The poem concludes with Byron reflecting on the woman's impact on him, suggesting that her beauty has given him hope and comfort in a troubled world. He writes, "One shade the more, one ray the less, / Had half impaired the nameless grace / Which waves in every raven tress, / Or softly lightens o'er her face." This final image suggests that the woman's beauty is a source of strength and inspiration, helping Byron to find meaning and purpose in life.

- Woman's inner qualities

In contemporary readings, "She Walks in Beauty" can be seen as a celebration of female empowerment and agency. The poem's focus on the woman's inner qualities suggests that beauty is not just a matter of physical appearance, but also reflects a person's character and values. This can be seen as a rejection of the traditional view of women as mere objects of male desire, and





an affirmation of women's ability to shape their own identities and influence the world around them.

The poem can also be seen as a critique of the patriarchal values of Byron's time. The image of the woman as a source of balance and harmony suggests that women have a vital role to play in creating a more just and equitable society. By highlighting the woman's goodness and purity, Byron challenges the prevailing view of women as morally inferior to men, and suggests that women have the potential to be agents of change and transformation.

► Critique of the patriarchal values

## Summarised Overview

Romantic poetry in English literature emerged as a reaction against the rationalism and industrialisation of the 18th century. The Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Lord Byron, believed in the power of imagination, individualism, and emotion. They emphasised the beauty of nature, the importance of the individual, and the subjective experience of the poet. The Romantics created a language of poetry that was deeply personal and emotionally resonant, and their legacy continues to influence the way we think about and experience the world around us.

Each of the highlighted poems—Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark," and Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—explore different themes and aspects of Romantic poetry. They delve into topics such as loss, memory, timelessness, creativity, nature, despair, the power of imagination, the beauty of art, and female empowerment. These poems demonstrate the enduring relevance and impact of Romantic poetry, inviting readers to reflect on the human experience, find solace in nature and art, and embrace the power of the imagination.

## Assignments

1. Discuss the concept of individualism and its significance in Romantic poetry.
2. Analyse the portrayal of nature in the poems "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" and "Ode to a Skylark."



3. Write on how the poems “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” explore the theme of imagination.
4. Examine how the poems “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” delve into the concept of time and its relationship to human existence and the beauty of art.
5. How does Coleridge’s portrayal of the female figure in the poem “Dejection: An Ode” contribute to the Romantic perspective on gender and power?
6. Analyse how the poems “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and “Ode to a Skylark” examine the role of memory and its impact on the human condition.

## Suggested Readings

1. Chaudon, Francis. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Romanticism*. Chartwell Books, 1980.
2. Cox, Jeffrey N. *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle*. Cambridge UP, 2004.
3. Dahlhaus, Carl. *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*. Cambridge UP, 1985.
4. Wulf, Andrea. *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*. Knopf, 2022.

## References

1. Gaull, Marilyn. *English Romanticism: The Human Context*. Norton, 1988.
2. Hesmyr, Atle. *From Enlightenment to Romanticism in 18th Century Europe*. Independent, 2018.
3. Honour, Hugh. *Romanticism*. Harper and Row, 1979.
4. Rosen, Charles. *The Romantic Generation*. Cambridge. Harvard UP, 1995.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

## Unit 2

# Aspects of Victorian Poetic Imagination

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ Examine the influence of societal norms and values on Victorian poetry
- ▶ Identify and discuss the prominent poets and their contributions to Victorian poetry
- ▶ Understand the key themes and characteristics of Victorian poetry
- ▶ Evaluate the influence of Victorian poets on the literary landscape

### Background

The Victorian period witnessed a remarkable shift in poetic expression, moving away from the romantic ideals of the previous era towards a more nuanced exploration of social, political, and cultural themes. Victorian poets responded to the rapidly changing world around them, grappling with urbanisation, scientific advancements, and shifting gender roles. Their works reflect a complex interplay between tradition and innovation, as they navigated between the demands of the past and the aspirations of the future.

Victorian Poetry encompasses a wide range of styles and voices, from the introspective musings of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, to the sharp social critiques of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Poets like Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins brought a renewed emphasis on spirituality and religious fervour, while others, such as Matthew Arnold, sought to capture the spirit of the age through their introspective and melancholic verses. Through careful analysis, we can gain insight into the Victorian mindset, exploring the tensions and anxieties of a society caught between tradition and progress, and ultimately deepening our understanding of the profound literary contributions of this transformative period.



## Keywords

Victorian poetry, cultural perspectives, aesthetics, social change, nostalgia, Pre-Raphaelites, social critique

## Discussion

### 4.2.1 Elegance and Complexity of Victorian Poetry

Victorian poetry, a remarkable literary movement that flourished during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), captivates readers with its unique characteristics and profound exploration of human experiences. This era witnessed an extraordinary surge of poetic creativity, embracing a wide range of themes, forms, and styles. Victorian poets, such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Christina Rossetti, broke new grounds by infusing their works with a rich tapestry of emotions, social commentary, and deep introspection.

- Profound exploration of human experiences

One of the central features of Victorian poetry is its acute engagement with contemporary society and the moral dilemmas of the time. Poets of this era expressed concerns about industrialisation, urbanisation, social inequality, and the changing moral landscape. Through their verse, they contemplated the consequences of progress, questioned the rigid social structures, and explored the tension between tradition and modernity.

- Engagement with contemporary society

Victorian poets delved deeply into the complexities of human emotions, often exploring themes of love, loss, longing, and personal identity. They sought to capture the intricacies of the human psyche, delving into the depths of individual experiences and often grappling with existential questions. Their poems acted as a conduit for introspection, enabling readers to connect with the profound emotional journeys of the poets themselves.

- Complexities of human emotions

While the Victorian era is often associated with progress and modernisation, many poets of the time demonstrated a strong sense of nostalgia and drew inspiration from the Romantic tradition of the preceding



- Strong sense of nostalgia

- Adopted both traditional and innovative forms

- A vehicle for social critique and political discourse

- Aesthetic approach

- A life of idleness and apathy

era. They longed for a simpler past and expressed a yearning for the beauty and purity found in nature, rural life, and idealised notions of love. This blend of Romanticism and Victorian sensibilities created a unique poetic landscape.

Victorian poets exhibited remarkable versatility in their choice of poetic forms and structures. They embraced both traditional and innovative forms, such as sonnets, ballads, dramatic monologues, and even experimental free verse. This flexibility allowed them to adapt their poetry to suit various themes and narrative techniques, enriching the diversity of Victorian verse.

Victorian poetry served as a vehicle for social critique and political discourse. Poets engaged with issues such as women's rights, class disparities, religious skepticism, and the impact of imperialism. They challenged prevailing ideologies, scrutinised power structures, and advocated for social change through their poetic expressions.

Victorian poetry often embraced a highly aesthetic approach, where the beauty of language and the sensory experience of the reader were paramount. Poets employed vivid imagery, intricate symbolism, and ornate language to create a rich sensory tapestry within their verses. This emphasis on aesthetic pleasure enhanced the emotional impact of the poetry and heightened the reader's engagement.

#### 4.2.2 “The Lotus-Eaters” : The Perils of Escapism and the Call to Purpose

“The Lotus-Eaters” is a renowned poem written by Alfred Lord Tennyson, one of the most celebrated Victorian poets. Published in 1832 as part of Tennyson's collection *Poems*, the poem explores themes of escapism, the allure of pleasure, and the consequences of surrendering to a life of idleness and apathy. The title “The Lotus-Eaters” references the characters in Homer's *Odyssey*, who encounter a group of people called the Lotus-Eaters, who live in a state of perpetual bliss induced by consuming the lotus flower. Tennyson draws inspiration from this mythological episode but expands it to convey a broader message about the human condition.





- Dreamlike atmosphere

The poem opens with a vivid description of “The Lotus-Eaters” land, characterised by a dreamlike atmosphere, where the air is heavy with the scent of the lotus flower, and the inhabitants seem languid and indifferent. Tennyson’s skillful employment of sensory imagery creates a sense of lethargy and seduction, immersing the reader into the setting of the poem.

- The world of the lotus-eaters and mariners

Tennyson establishes a stark contrast between the world of “The Lotus-Eaters” and the realm of the speaker and his fellow mariners. The mariners, weary from their journey, stumble upon this alluring land. Initially, they are tempted to stay and partake in the lotus-eating lifestyle, which promises a release from the toils and hardships of their seafaring existence.

- Form of self-destruction

However, as the poem progresses, Tennyson begins to question the desirability and consequences of surrendering to the Lotus-Eaters’ way of life. He raises the fundamental question of whether the pursuit of pleasure and comfort, at the expense of ambition and purpose, is a meaningful existence. The speaker, who serves as the voice of reason and resistance, emphasises the dangers of indulging in the lotus flower’s effects. He acknowledges the allure of forgetting their responsibilities and escaping into a life of blissful ignorance but ultimately recognises it as a form of self-destruction. The mariners, influenced by the Lotus-Eaters, start losing their motivation, willpower, and sense of duty.

- A life of idleness and apathy

“The Lotus-Eaters” serves as a powerful cautionary tale, highlighting the potential dangers of complacency and apathy. The existence of the Lotus-Eaters is portrayed as a surrender to passivity, where the pursuit of pleasure takes precedence over pain and ambition. The inhabitants of this land are depicted as perpetually indulging in the lotus flower, which brings about a state of blissful ignorance and a detachment from the challenges and responsibilities of the outside world. Through this portrayal, Tennyson questions the true fulfillment and purpose of a life devoid of striving and ambition. He challenges the notion that a perpetual state of pleasure is the ultimate goal, suggesting instead that it hinders human growth and progress. By emphasising the absence of pain and ambition in the Lotus-Eaters’ existence, Tennyson implies that these elements are essential for personal and societal development.

- A life centered around pleasure

The poet raises the crucial question of whether a life centered solely around pleasure and devoid of purpose can provide true contentment. While the Lotus-Eaters' lifestyle may appear enticing, Tennyson suggests that it leads to stagnation and a lack of fulfillment. The poem serves as a reminder that the pursuit of higher goals, the willingness to face challenges, and the acceptance of responsibility are vital for personal growth and the advancement of society.

- Reclaim their sense of duty and purpose

In the closing stanzas, the speaker takes on the role of a moral compass, urging his fellow mariners to resist the allure of the lotus flower and to reclaim their sense of duty and purpose. The speaker reminds them of their responsibilities, emphasising the importance of continuing their arduous but meaningful journey. This plea serves as a rallying cry against succumbing to the seductive power of escapism and highlights the necessity of perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges. Through these closing stanzas, Tennyson emphasises the transformative power of purpose and the potential for personal and collective progress. The poem stands as a reminder that while the pursuit of pleasure and comfort may temporarily provide respite, it is the pursuit of higher goals and the willingness to face adversity that ultimately leads to a more meaningful and fulfilling existence.

- Concerns over hedonistic lifestyles

The poem can also be interpreted metaphorically, reflecting the prevalent social attitudes of Tennyson's time. The Victorian era was marked by concerns over social degeneration and the seductive appeal of hedonistic lifestyles. Tennyson critiques the prevailing culture of complacency and challenges the notion that indulging in pleasure without purpose or responsibility is a desirable way of life.

- Theme of escapism

"The Lotus-Eaters" is a thought-provoking poem that explores themes of escapism, the allure of pleasure, and the consequences of surrendering to a life of idleness and apathy. Through vivid imagery and powerful symbolism, the poem raises questions about the nature of human existence and challenges the notion that a life devoid of ambition and purpose is truly fulfilling. It serves as a timeless cautionary tale, reminding us of the dangers of surrendering to the seductive allure of comfort and pleasure at the expense of personal growth.



### 4.2.3 Possession, Control, and Objectification in “My Last Duchess”

The poem “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning, first published in 1842 as part of his collection *Dramatic Lyrics*, delves into the psyche of a powerful and controlling Duke as he reveals the story behind a portrait of his deceased wife, the Duchess. Through intricate language, vivid imagery, and the Duke’s unsettling narrative, Browning explores themes of power, possessiveness, jealousy, and the objectification of women.

- Objectification of women

The poem opens with the Duke presenting a portrait of his late wife to a visitor, who serves as the silent listener throughout the monologue. The Duke’s monologue provides insight into his thoughts, feelings, and the circumstances that led to the demise of his marriage. As the poem unfolds, it becomes evident that the Duke is a possessive and dominating individual who views his wife as an object to be controlled and admired.

- Monologue provides insight into thoughts and feelings

Browning skillfully portrays the Duke’s character through his language and tone. The Duke’s voice exudes a sense of arrogance and entitlement, as he narrates with an air of superiority. His use of the possessive pronoun “my” throughout the poem emphasises his view of the Duchess as a possession, rather than an equal partner. The repeated phrase “my last Duchess” reinforces this possessiveness and hints at a history of multiple wives, suggesting a pattern of controlling behavior.

- Duchess as a possession

The Duke’s jealousy and need for control become apparent as he describes the Duchess’ behaviour. He reveals that she treated everyone with equal warmth and affection, which infuriated him. The Duke’s possessive nature is evident when he states, “She had a heart... too soon made glad, too easily impressed.” He resented her ability to find joy in the small things and her friendly demeanour towards others, as he believed her attention should be solely devoted to him. The Duke’s jealousy and desire for total control lead him to orchestrate the Duchess’ demise, hinting at her untimely death.

- Desire for control

The portrait of the Duchess becomes a symbol of her subjugation to the Duke’s control. He explains that he keeps the painting behind a curtain, revealing it selectively to visitors. By concealing her image, he



- The portrait becomes a symbol of her subjugation

exercises authority over her, choosing who can see and admire her. The way he describes the portrait, mentioning “the depth and passion” in her expression, suggests that he may have been intimidated by her emotional depth and her ability to connect with others on a genuine level.

- Critiques the societal norms

The Duke’s inability to understand or appreciate the Duchess’ spirit and individuality reflects a broader theme of objectification of women prevalent in Victorian society. The Duchess is reduced to a mere object, a possession to be admired, controlled, and ultimately discarded. Browning critiques the societal norms that allowed such objectification to occur, highlighting the need for equality and autonomy within relationships.

- Reliability of the Duke’s narrative

“My Last Duchess” also invites the reader to question the reliability of the Duke’s narrative. As the monologue progresses, it becomes clear that the Duke is an unreliable narrator, offering a skewed perspective on the events and his relationship with the Duchess. He dismisses her qualities that he found displeasing, failing to acknowledge his own role in the breakdown of their marriage. The reader must piece together the story through the Duke’s fragmented revelations and read between the lines to understand the complexities of their relationship.

#### 4.2.4 Faith and Existential Uncertainty in “Dover Beach”

- Themes of existentialism

“Dover Beach” is a renowned poem by Matthew Arnold, a prominent Victorian poet and critic. First published in 1867, the poem explores themes of existentialism, the erosion of faith, and the fleeting nature of human happiness. Through vivid imagery, rich symbolism, and a melancholic tone, Arnold crafts a profound meditation on the complexities of the human condition and the search for meaning in a changing world.

The poem opens with a description of the tranquil Dover Beach at twilight, where the speaker and his companion stand overlooking the English Channel. The serene scene initially conveys a sense of peace and beauty, symbolising the stability and comfort traditionally associated with faith and love. However, as the poem progresses, Arnold introduces a stark contrast between the calmness of the natural world and the restlessness and uncertainty within

- Contrast between the calmness and the restlessness

the human realm. He employs powerful sensory imagery, describing the “grating roar” of the pebbles on the shore and the “eternal note of sadness” in the sound of the waves. This juxtaposition suggests a growing sense of disillusionment and uneasiness, symbolising the erosion of traditional beliefs and the existential crisis faced by individuals in a rapidly changing world.

- Decline of the faith in modern society

Arnold explores the theme of faith and its decline in modern society. He presents the speaker's lament over the loss of religious conviction, suggesting a sense of longing for the comforting certainty of a higher power. The metaphorical image of the retreating sea of faith, once abundant like the tides, but now “withdrawing” and leaving the world desolate, underscores the speaker's feelings of isolation and spiritual disarray. The poem also touches upon the transitory nature of human happiness and the fragility of human relationships. Arnold reflects on the fleeting moments of joy and love, contrasting them with the overwhelming vastness and indifference of the world. He presents the image of a “darkling plain” devoid of purpose or guidance, evoking a sense of loneliness and insignificance.

- Sea acting as a metaphor for faith

The use of symbolism throughout the poem enhances its thematic depth. The sea becomes a symbol of the eternal and the unknowable, reflecting the uncertainties and complexities of existence. The image of the sea acting as a metaphor for faith, with its ebb and flow, reinforces the theme of its decline and withdrawal from the human realm.

- Support amidst the uncertainties of life

In the final stanza, Arnold turns to his companion, expressing a desire for solace and connection in the face of the existential uncertainties presented throughout the poem. He emphasises the importance of love and human companionship as a means of finding temporary refuge and support amidst the uncertainties of life.

#### 4.2.5 Celebration of Diversity in G. M. Hopkins “Pied Beauty”

“Pied Beauty” is a celebrated sonnet written by Gerard Manley Hopkins, a renowned Victorian poet known for his innovative use of language and exploration of nature and spirituality. Published in 1918, the poem exudes a profound appreciation for the diverse beauty



- The diverse beauty found in the natural world

found in the natural world, while also reflecting on the relationship between humanity and the divine. Through its unique language, vivid imagery, and striking structure, Hopkins invites the readers to embrace the beauty of the imperfect and find joy in the manifold hues and forms of creation.

- Countless shades that make up the natural world

The title itself, “Pied Beauty,” sets the tone for the poem and encapsulates its central theme. The term “pied” refers to something multi-coloured or variegated, suggesting a celebration of diversity and the fusion of contrasting elements. Hopkins directs our attention to the countless shades and patterns that make up the natural world, encouraging us to embrace and cherish the manifold aspects of existence.

- A burst of exultation

The poem begins with a burst of exultation, as Hopkins expresses gratitude for the numerous manifestations of beauty present in nature. Through vivid sensory imagery, he celebrates the vibrant colors, textures, and patterns that adorn various aspects of creation. He uses examples such as “dappled things,” “rose-moles,” and “finches’ wings” to illustrate the intricate and diverse tapestry of the world.

- Use of sprung rhythm

One of the distinctive features of “Pied Beauty” is Hopkins’ use of sprung rhythm, a metrical pattern characterised by irregular stressed syllables. This rhythm, coupled with the frequent use of alliteration and internal rhymes, imbues the poem with a lively and musical quality. The irregularity of the rhythm mirrors the unpredictability and abundance of nature, echoing its organic and dynamic essence. The poem also embraces paradoxical expressions and unexpected pairings of words, creating tension and surprise. For instance, Hopkins refers to the sky as “couple-color,” highlighting the simultaneous presence of opposing colors and suggesting harmony in their coexistence. This technique, known as “paradoxical juxtaposition,” reinforces the notion that beauty can be found in contrasting elements.

While celebrating the diversity of nature, “Pied Beauty” also hints at a deeper spiritual message. Hopkins presents the idea that the natural world is a reflection of the divine, and each unique element of creation bears the imprint of God’s creative power. The poem subtly reminds readers of the presence of a higher power in





- Deeper spiritual message

- Joy in the irregular

- Themes of faith and resilience

- No cowardice can be found

- Soul is like an ocean

- Faith serves as a source of inner strength

the intricate designs and varied forms found in nature. It encourages us to recognise and appreciate the divine beauty inherent in the world around us.

“Pied Beauty” invites us to embrace imperfection and find joy in the irregular and unconventional. Rather than seeking a standardised and homogenous notion of beauty, Hopkins encourages us to celebrate the uniqueness and individuality of each created thing. In doing so, he challenges conventional notions of beauty and expands our understanding of what is truly captivating and praiseworthy.

#### 4.2.6 Power of Faith and Resilience in Emily Bronte’s “No Coward Soul is Mine”

“No Coward Soul is Mine” is a deeply introspective and spiritually evocative poem written by Emily Bronte, a renowned English poet and novelist. Published posthumously in 1850, the poem explores themes of faith, resilience, and the indomitable nature of the human spirit. Through its powerful language, vivid imagery, and passionate tone, Bronte presents a profound reflection on the eternal nature of the soul and the unwavering strength that comes from a steadfast belief.

The poem opens with a bold assertion, declaring that no cowardice can be found within the speaker’s soul. Bronte immediately establishes a tone of strength and conviction, signaling her defiance against any forces that may try to diminish or extinguish her spirit. This initial declaration sets the stage for the poem’s exploration of faith and resilience in the face of adversity.

Bronte utilises vivid and evocative imagery to convey her spiritual and emotional depth. She describes the soul as “like the ocean, vast and wide,” emphasising its boundless and expansive nature. Through this imagery, Bronte suggests that the soul is connected to something greater than the physical world, hinting at its divine origins and infinite capacity for growth and endurance.

The poem also explores the idea of faith and the speaker’s unwavering belief in a higher power. Bronte expresses her trust in a benevolent and compassionate God, describing the divine as a “rock of strength” and a source of solace and guidance. The speaker’s faith serves as a source of inner strength, allowing her to navigate the challenges of life with courage and resilience.



- Eternal nature of the soul

Bronte emphasises the eternal nature of the soul and its ability to transcend earthly limitations. She rejects the notion of death as a finality, asserting that the soul remains unconquered and unafraid even in the face of mortality. The line “Still steadfast, still unchangeable” underscores the enduring nature of the soul and its resistance to the transitory nature of the physical world.

- Unwavering commitment to her faith

The poem’s passionate and emotive tone reflects the depth of the speaker’s conviction and belief. Bronte’s use of exclamatory phrases, such as “My spirit, walk not with the souls of the dead!” and “With storms to wrestle, not to rest in thee,” conveys a sense of urgency and determination. The poem becomes a fervent declaration of the speaker’s unwavering commitment to her faith and her refusal to be swayed or diminished by fear or doubt.

- Resilience in the face of personal hardships

“No Coward Soul is Mine” can be seen as a reflection of Bronte’s own inner strength and resilience in the face of personal hardships and societal expectations. It embodies her steadfast belief in the power of the human spirit to withstand adversity and find solace in faith.

#### 4.2.7 Love and Longing in D.G. Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel”

- Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

“The Blessed Damozel” is a celebrated poem written by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a prominent figure of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. First published in 1850, the poem depicts a scene of longing and divine love, exploring themes of spirituality, beauty, and the longing for an idealised union. Through its rich imagery, intricate symbolism, and lyrical language, Rossetti presents a profound meditation on love, death, and the yearning for transcendence.

- It centers around a damozel

The poem centers around a damozel (a medieval term for a young woman) who is in heaven, longing for her earthly lover. The damozel gazes down from the heavens, depicted as a place of purity and transcendence, while her lover remains on earth, separated from her by the boundaries of life and death. Rossetti creates a powerful contrast between the realms of earthly existence and the divine, highlighting the damozel’s desire to bridge the gap and reunite with her beloved.

One of the notable aspects of “The Blessed Damozel” is its vivid and sensual imagery. Rossetti employs lush



- Lush descriptions to evoke other-worldly beauty

descriptions to evoke a sense of otherworldly beauty and divine radiance. He describes the damozel as being surrounded by a “sweet and saintly light” and adorned with a crown of “lilies and roses.” Through these descriptions, Rossetti elevates the damozel to a celestial level, emphasising her ethereal and transcendent qualities.

- Allegory for the soul’s yearning for divine union

Symbolism plays a crucial role in the poem, enriching its themes and adding layers of meaning. The damozel symbolises both idealised love and spiritual purity. Her longing for her lover represents the human desire for connection and transcendence, while also serving as an allegory for the soul’s yearning for divine union. The heaven she inhabits symbolises the realm of eternal bliss and spiritual fulfillment.

- Ephemeral nature of human existence

Rossetti explores the theme of time and its effect on love and longing. The damozel’s perception of time differs from that of her earthly lover, as time is depicted as flowing differently in heaven. This contrast highlights the ephemeral nature of human existence and the eternal nature of spiritual love. The damozel’s yearning becomes an eternal longing, transcending the boundaries of time and mortality.

- Musical and rhythmic language

The language and structure of the poem contribute to its evocative and lyrical quality. Rossetti employs musical and rhythmic language, employing repetition, alliteration, and assonance to create a melodic flow. The use of refrains, such as “One shade the more, one puff the less,” enhances the poem’s musicality and adds to its emotional impact. The poem is divided into stanzas, each containing a quatrain followed by a tercet, creating a balanced and harmonious structure. The poem explores the human longing for love, beauty, and transcendence. The poem invites readers to contemplate the complexities of earthly existence and the yearning for a higher state of being. It speaks to the universal human desire for connection and the search for meaning beyond the confines of mortal life.

#### 4.2.8 Vulnerability and Redemption in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnets 14 and 22

Sonnet 14 and Sonnet 22 are part of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s renowned collection, *Sonnets from*

- Delves into the depths of romantic love

*the Portuguese*. These sonnets, written during her courtship with Robert Browning, explore themes of love, vulnerability, and the transformative power of affection. Through their introspective and passionate language, Browning delves into the depths of romantic love and the emotional complexities that accompany it.

- Desire for unconditional acceptance

Sonnet 14 begins with the speaker acknowledging her own limitations and fears. She expresses a sense of unworthiness, questioning whether her love can truly be reciprocated. The use of the phrase “thine am I” reflects the speaker’s surrender to the intensity of her emotions and her willingness to devote herself entirely to her beloved. The sonnet unfolds as an exploration of vulnerability, with the speaker admitting her insecurities and fears while expressing a desire for unconditional acceptance from her lover.

- Transformative power of love

Browning employs vivid imagery to convey the transformative power of love in Sonnet 14. She compares her love to a “beacon hand,” a guiding light in the darkness of her own self-doubt. The image of a lighthouse represents the potential for love to guide and bring clarity to the complexities of life. Additionally, the imagery of being “wrecked upon the shoals of guilt” suggests that the speaker’s love has the power to heal past pain and restore her sense of worthiness.

- Metaphoric conceit

Sonnet 22 further explores the profound impact of love on the speaker’s life. Browning employs a metaphorical conceit, comparing her heart to a garden that was once barren but is now flourishing. The imagery of “wide walks” and “shady bowers” symbolises the growth and abundance of love within her heart. The sonnet showcases the transformative nature of love, highlighting how it has blossomed and enriched the speaker’s life.

In both sonnets, Browning demonstrates a deep understanding of the complexities of romantic love. She delves into the vulnerability and insecurities that often accompany profound affection, highlighting the transformative power of love to heal wounds and bring joy. Browning’s language is passionate and introspective, reflecting the depth of emotion and the intensity of her personal experience. Both sonnets also showcase Browning’s mastery of form and rhyme. The sonnets follow the traditional Petrarchan sonnet structure, with



- Insecurities accompany profound affection

fourteen lines and a rhyming scheme of ABBA ABBA CDC DCD. Browning's skillful use of language and rhyme adds to the musicality of the poems, enhancing the emotional impact of the words.

## Summarised Overview

Victorian poetry, which thrived during Queen Victoria's reign, is characterised by its elegance and complexity. It encompasses a wide range of themes, forms, and styles, with poets like Tennyson, Browning, and Rossetti pushing the boundaries of poetic expression. Victorian poets delved deeply into human emotions and introspection, exploring themes of love, loss, and personal identity. They also exhibited a blend of Romanticism and Victorian sensibilities, longing for a simpler past while embracing the modern era. Victorian poetry showcased narrative versatility and served as a vehicle for social critique and political discourse, challenging prevailing ideologies. The poets emphasised aestheticism, employing vivid imagery and symbolism to create a sensory tapestry that heightened the emotional impact of their works.

One prominent example of Victorian poetry is Lord Alfred Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters." The poem explores the perils of escapism and the call to purpose. Tennyson draws inspiration from Homer's "Odyssey" and expands upon it to convey a broader message about the human condition. The poem follows a group of mariners who stumble upon the land of the Lotus-Eaters, where the inhabitants indulge in a life of blissful ignorance. While initially tempted to join them, the speaker recognizes the dangers of surrendering to a life devoid of ambition and purpose. The poem serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the importance of perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges. It questions the true fulfillment and purpose of a life centered solely around pleasure and emphasises the transformative power of purpose and the potential for personal and collective progress.

## Assignments

1. How does Victorian poetry reflect and engage with the social and moral dilemmas of the era?
2. Discuss the role of introspection and emotional depth in Victorian poetry?
3. Explore the blending of Romanticism and Victorian sensibilities in Victorian poetry, and how it contributes to its unique character.



4. Analyse the narrative versatility of Victorian poetry, considering the various forms and structures employed by poets of the era.
5. How did Victorian poets use their poetry as a vehicle for social commentary and political discourse? Provide examples of poems that reflect these themes.

## Suggested Readings

1. Chesterton, G. K. *Robert Browning*. Macmillan, 1903.
2. Flint, Kate, ed. *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2014.
3. H, Tennyson. *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*. MacMillan, 1897.
4. Herbert W. Paul, *Mathew Arnold*. Macmillan, 1902.

## References

1. DeVane, William Clyde. *A Browning Handbook*. Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955.
2. Felluga, Dino Franco, et al. *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.
3. Flint, Kate, ed. *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2014.
4. G. W. E. Russell. *Matthew Arnold*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904.





## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

## Unit 3

# Victorian Novels in English Literature

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ Evaluate the social and cultural contexts portrayed in Victorian novels
- ▶ Examine the representation of gender roles in Victorian novels
- ▶ Assess the moral and ethical dilemmas presented in Victorian novels
- ▶ Interpret the complex and intricate narrative structures employed in Victorian novels

### Background

The Victorian period witnessed a remarkable transformation in society, politics, and technology, and Victorian novels reflect the complexities and contradictions of this era. A critical inquiry in the field unravels the themes such as social class, gender roles, industrialisation, colonialism, and morality. It can shed light into the intricate narratives, character development, and stylistic choices employed by authors like Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy.

The critical study of Victorian novels can unravel the moral and social issues of the period. The Victorian era was marked by a heightened awareness of social problems, and novelists used their works as a platform to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and the plight of women. Through close reading and analysis, the intricate layers of meaning, symbolism, and social critique can be understood.

### Keywords

Society, Morality, Gender, Class, Hypocrisy, Realism



## Discussion

### 4.3.1 Society's Transformations and Moral Dilemmas in Victorian Novels

- Multitude of social and political transformations

Victorian novels hold a prominent position in English literature, representing a significant era in literary history. Spanning from the early to late 19th century, the Victorian period witnessed a multitude of social, political, and cultural transformations, which greatly influenced the themes, styles, and concerns of the novels produced during this time. This deep analysis aims to explore the key characteristics of Victorian novels, their cultural and historical contexts, and their enduring legacy in English literature.

- Characterised by industrialisation and colonial expansion

One of the defining features of Victorian novels is their reflection of the rapidly changing society of the time. The Victorian era was characterised by industrialisation, urbanisation, and colonial expansion, which brought about new challenges and complexities. Victorian novelists, such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, captured these social changes and examined their impact on individuals and communities. The novels often depicted the stark contrasts between the rich and the poor, explored the effects of industrialisation on the working class, and critiqued the prevailing social injustices of the time.

- Moral and ethical dilemmas

Victorian novels delved into moral and ethical dilemmas, frequently presenting their characters with difficult choices and examining the consequences of their actions. These novels often embodied a strong sense of morality, emphasising the importance of virtue, self-discipline, and social responsibility. Authors like Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* and William Makepeace Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* tackled issues of class, gender, and morality, and offered nuanced portrayals of their characters' struggles to navigate societal expectations.

Another significant aspect of Victorian novels was their exploration of gender roles and the evolving status of women in society. The period witnessed the emergence of the women's suffrage movement and discussions around women's rights. Female authors like Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and George



- Exploration of gender roles

Eliot played a crucial role in depicting the experiences and challenges faced by women in Victorian society. Novels such as Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* provided complex female protagonists who defied societal norms and challenged conventional expectations.

- Duality of human nature

Victorian novels often reflected the era's fascination with science, progress, and the exploration of human psychology. The Industrial Revolution and advancements in science and technology influenced the narrative techniques and thematic concerns of Victorian authors. For instance, in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the duality of human nature is explored, reflecting the era's interest in psychology and the evolving understanding of the human mind.

- In-depth psychological portraits

In terms of style, Victorian novels tended to be expansive and detailed, with extensive descriptions of settings, characters, and social contexts. The novels often featured intricate plots, weaving together various subplots and storylines. Authors paid meticulous attention to character development, providing readers with in-depth psychological portraits and complex motivations. This attention to detail and realism aimed to capture the complexities of human experience and society's intricacies.

- Legacy of Victorian novels in English

The legacy of Victorian novels in English literature is undeniable. Their exploration of social issues, focus on morality, and nuanced character portrayals have left a lasting impact on subsequent literary movements. Victorian novels paved the way for the modern realist novel, influencing authors such as Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence. The themes and concerns raised in Victorian novels continue to resonate with contemporary readers, as many of the social and moral dilemmas they addressed remain relevant in today's world. The following sections are the analytical critiques of the novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy.

### 4.3.2 Independence and Challenging Conventions in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë is a timeless classic that has captivated readers for generations with its



- Nuanced critique of societal norms

compelling narrative, complex characters, and thought-provoking themes. Brontë's novel not only explores the social and psychological constraints of Victorian society but also challenges prevailing notions of gender, love, and morality. Through the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and resilience, *Jane Eyre* offers a nuanced critique of societal norms while emphasising the importance of personal integrity and independence.

- Unwavering sense of self-worth

One of the notable aspects of *Jane Eyre* is the powerful and independent character of Jane herself. Brontë presents Jane as a spirited and intelligent young woman who refuses to conform to societal expectations. From her tumultuous childhood to her struggles as a governess and her love affair with Mr. Rochester, Jane's journey is marked by a fierce determination to assert her individuality and seek emotional fulfillment. Her unwavering moral compass and unwavering sense of self-worth make her a compelling and relatable protagonist, inspiring readers to question societal norms and strive for personal agency.

- Women's autonomy and equality

Brontë skillfully tackles the theme of gender and its limitations in Victorian society. Through Jane's experiences, the novel exposes the inequalities faced by women and the limited opportunities available to them. Despite the societal constraints imposed on her, Jane challenges traditional gender roles and refuses to be defined solely by her gender. Her refusal to compromise her integrity, even in the face of social pressure, highlights Brontë's feminist stance and underscores the importance of women's autonomy and equality.

- Unconventional love story

The complex and unconventional love story between Jane and Mr. Rochester adds further depth to the novel. Brontë challenges the notion of idealised romance by presenting a flawed hero and an unconventional love interest. Mr. Rochester's brooding nature and hidden secrets add layers of mystery and tension to the narrative, while Jane's unwavering love and loyalty challenge societal expectations of a woman's role in a relationship. This exploration of love as a transformative and sometimes tumultuous force reflects Brontë's rejection of shallow societal conventions and her belief in the power of authentic emotional connections.

► Moral ambiguity

*Jane Eyre* delves into moral and ethical dilemmas, often blurring the lines between right and wrong. The novel grapples with themes of justice, forgiveness, and redemption, as exemplified through the character of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's first wife. Brontë raises questions about societal treatment of the mentally ill and the consequences of past actions, forcing readers to confront the complexities of morality and empathy. This moral ambiguity adds depth to the novel and challenges readers to question their own preconceived notions of right and wrong.

► Introspective narration

Brontë's prose is marked by its vivid descriptions, evocative imagery, and emotional intensity. Her meticulous attention to detail brings the settings and characters to life, immersing readers in the atmospheric world of Thornfield Hall and Lowood School. Through her eloquent and introspective narration, Brontë masterfully captures Jane's inner thoughts and emotions, allowing readers to intimately connect with the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

### 4.3.3 Ambition, Identity, and Redemption in *Great Expectations*

► Redemptive power of love

*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens is a masterpiece that explores themes of social class, identity, and personal transformation. Through the captivating story of Pip's journey from a humble blacksmith's apprentice to a young gentleman with "great expectations," Dickens delves into the complexities of human nature, the corrosive effects of ambition, and the redemptive power of love and self-realisation. With its richly drawn characters, evocative settings, and astute social commentary, *Great Expectations* stands as a profound and enduring work in English literature.

One of the remarkable aspects of *Great Expectations* is Dickens' portrayal of the social stratification of Victorian society and its impact on individuals. Pip's encounters with characters from various social classes, such as the convict Magwitch, the eccentric Miss Havisham, and the snobbish Estella, highlight the stark divides between the rich and the poor, and the influence of social standing on one's opportunities and self-perception. Dickens exposes the class biases and prejudices prevalent in society, challenging the notion of inherent worth based





- Class biases in the society

on social rank and emphasising the importance of true character and virtue.

*Great Expectations* is a profound exploration of identity and self-discovery. Pip's journey from his humble origins to his exposure to wealth and privilege causes a profound shift in his perception of self and his aspirations. However, as Pip becomes consumed by his "great expectations," he loses touch with his true self and becomes entangled in a web of deception and disillusionment. Dickens skillfully exposes the dangers of pursuing material success at the expense of one's authenticity and personal values. Pip's eventual realisation of the emptiness of his aspirations and his ultimate quest for self-redemption and reconciliation form the heart of the novel's powerful narrative.

- Entangled in a web of deception

The characterisations in *Great Expectations* are exceptionally vivid and multi-dimensional. Pip, as the protagonist and narrator, undergoes a complex transformation that evokes both sympathy and reflection. His flaws and mistakes make him a relatable and flawed human being, and his growth and self-awareness offer a compelling portrayal of personal development. The supporting cast, such as the eccentric Miss Havisham, the mysterious lawyer Jaggers, and the kind-hearted Joe Gargery, contribute to the richness and depth of the narrative, each representing different facets of human nature and society.

- Representing different facets of the society

Dickens' masterful use of language and imagery further enhances the impact of *Great Expectations*. His vivid descriptions bring to life the atmospheric settings, from the decaying grandeur of Satis House to the haunting marshlands of Pip's childhood. These settings serve as symbolic landscapes that mirror the emotional and psychological states of the characters, adding depth and resonance to the themes explored in the novel.

- Symbolic landscapes

Dickens' social commentary in the novel is incisive and thought-provoking. He exposes the moral decay and hypocrisy of the Victorian upper class, the dehumanising effects of industrialisation, and the devastating consequences of social ambition and misplaced priorities. Through his sharp wit and satirical tone, Dickens challenges the prevailing social norms and highlights the need for compassion, empathy,

and personal growth in the face of a society driven by materialism and superficiality.

#### 4.3.4 Fate, Redemption, and the Grip of the Past in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy is a powerful and compelling novel that delved into the themes of fate, personal responsibility, and the destructive consequences of past actions. Set against the backdrop of a small rural town, Hardy weaves a tragic tale of the rise and fall of Michael Henchard, a flawed and complex protagonist whose choices and character flaws shape his destiny. Through his masterful storytelling, Hardy explores the depths of human nature, the complexities of human relationships, and the inescapable grip of one's past.

- Inescapable grip of one's past

One of the remarkable aspects of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is Hardy's exploration of the theme of fate and the notion that individuals are bound by their past actions. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader witnesses Henchard's impulsive decision to sell his wife and daughter in a fit of drunkenness, an act that sets in motion a chain of events that haunt him throughout his life. Despite Henchard's sincere efforts to change and redeem himself, his past actions continue to cast a shadow over his present and determine his future. Hardy skillfully portrays the relentless and inescapable nature of fate, highlighting the tragic consequences of one's actions and the limitations of personal agency.

- Chain of events that haunt him throughout his life

The novel delves into the complexities of human relationships and the consequences of pride and stubbornness. Henchard's strained relationship with his daughter Elizabeth-Jane, whom he initially rejects, serves as a poignant exploration of the damaging effects of pride and the missed opportunities for connection and happiness. Hardy presents a nuanced portrayal of the complexities of familial bonds, emphasising the importance of forgiveness, understanding, and communication in fostering meaningful relationships.

- Strained relationship with daughter

Hardy's depiction of the town of Casterbridge itself is another compelling aspect of the novel. Casterbridge serves as a microcosm of society, a place where social norms and conventions exert their influence on



- A microcosm of society

individuals' lives. The intricate social hierarchy and the gossip-driven nature of the town create an oppressive atmosphere that adds to the sense of entrapment experienced by the characters. Through his vivid descriptions and atmospheric portrayal of the town, Hardy creates a palpable sense of the stifling and judgmental environment in which the characters exist.

- Scathing critique of societal hypocrisy

The novel also offers a scathing critique of societal hypocrisy and the harsh moral judgments that individuals face. Henchard, as a public figure and the mayor of the town, becomes the subject of scrutiny and condemnation, highlighting the unforgiving nature of social expectations and the relentless punishment of past transgressions. Hardy's portrayal of the hypocrisy of society serves as a commentary on the limitations of moral judgments and the complexities of human nature.

## Summarised Overview

Victorian novels provide a rich tapestry of societal transformations and moral dilemmas. Authors of this era, such as Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, captured the changing dynamics of Victorian society through their novels. These works explored themes of social injustice, gender roles, morality, and the consequences of one's actions. The novels depicted the stark contrasts between different social classes, challenged societal norms and expectations, and delved into the complexities of human nature.

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë challenges conventions and highlights the importance of personal integrity and independence. The novel explores themes of gender, love, and morality, presenting a strong and independent protagonist who defies societal expectations. *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens examined social class, identity, and personal transformation, emphasising the dangers of ambition and the redemptive power of self-realisation and love. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy explores the consequences of past actions, the grip of fate, and the complexities of human relationships, critiquing societal hypocrisy and moral judgments.

## Assignments

1. How do Victorian novels, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*, navigate the moral dilemmas posed by societal expectations and individual autonomy?
2. Discuss the portrayal of women in *Jane Eyre*.
3. Explore how the theme of redemption is portrayed in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*?
4. How do Victorian novels examine the interplay between fate and personal agency? Discuss with examples.
5. Analyse the moral ambiguity and ethical dilemmas presented in Victorian novels, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*.

## Suggested Readings

1. Allott, Miriam. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge, 1995.
2. Higonnet, Margaret R., ed. *Feminist Essays on Hardy: The Janus Face of Gender*. University of Illinois Press, 1992.
3. Leavis, F. R. *The Great Tradition*, New York UP, 1963.
4. Moers, Ellen. *Literary Women: The Great Writers*. The Women's Press, 1978.

## References

1. Dawson, Carl. *Victorian High Noon: English Literature in 1850*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1979.
2. Horsman, Alan. *The Victorian Novel*. Oxford, 1991.
3. Hroncek, Susan. *Strange Compositions: Chemistry and its Occult History in Victorian Speculative Fiction*. Laurier, 2016.
4. Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*. Springer, 1998.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

*Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.*

## സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം  
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം  
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണം

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ  
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം  
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം  
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം  
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ  
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണം

കുരിപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

# SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

## Regional Centres

### Kozhikode

Govt. Arts and Science College  
Meenchantha, Kozhikode,  
Kerala, Pin: 673002  
Ph: 04952920228  
email: rckdirector@sgou.ac.in

### Thalassery

Govt. Brennen College  
Dharmadam, Thalassery,  
Kannur, Pin: 670106  
Ph: 04902990494  
email: rctdirector@sgou.ac.in

### Tripunithura

Govt. College  
Tripunithura, Ernakulam,  
Kerala, Pin: 682301  
Ph: 04842927436  
email: rcedirector@sgou.ac.in

### Pattambi

Sree Neelakanta Govt. Sanskrit College  
Pattambi, Palakkad,  
Kerala, Pin: 679303  
Ph: 04662912009  
email: rcpdirector@sgou.ac.in



# Romantics and Victorians

COURSE CODE: M21EG05DC



**Sreenarayanaguru Open University**

Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: [info@sgou.ac.in](mailto:info@sgou.ac.in), [www.sgou.ac.in](http://www.sgou.ac.in) Ph: +91 474 2966841

ISBN 978-81-963914-7-8



9 788196 391478