

**MAEN203CCT**

# **English Poetry**

**M.A. English**  
**(Second Semester)**

**Centre for Distance and Online Education**  
**Maulana Azad National Urdu University**  
**Hyderabad-32, Telangana- India**

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## English Poetry

For

M.A. English

2<sup>nd</sup> Semester

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*Message*

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## Message

Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) was established in 1998 by an Act of the Parliament. It is a central university with NAAC accreditation and the mandate of the university is: (1) promotion of Urdu language, (2) accessibility and availability of professional and technical education in Urdu medium, (3) providing education through traditional and distance learning mode, and (4) a specific focus on women's education. These are the points that distinguish this central university from all other central universities and give it a unique feature. It has been emphasized even in the National Education Policy 2020 to achieve education in mother tongues and regional languages.

The very objective of promotion of knowledge through Urdu is meant to facilitate the accessibility of contemporary knowledge and disciplines to Urdu knowing community. For a long time, there has been a dearth of course material in Urdu. The non-availability of books in Urdu is a matter of concern and Urdu University considers it a privilege to be part of the national process of providing course material in mother tongue/home language as per the vision of NEP 2020. Further, the Urdu speaking community is at a disadvantage in gaining updated knowledge and information in emerging areas or newer knowledge in existing fields due to non-availability of reading material in Urdu. The unavailability of content related to the above domains of knowledge has created an atmosphere of apathy towards attaining knowledge that could significantly affect the intellectual abilities of the Urdu knowing community. These are the challenges that Urdu University is confronted with. The scenario of Self Learning Materials (SLM) is also not very different. The unavailability of course books in Urdu at school/college level comes under discussion at the commencement of every academic year. Since the medium of instruction of Urdu University is only Urdu and it offers almost all the courses of important disciplines, the preparation of books of all these subjects in Urdu is the most important responsibility of the University. To achieve these objectives, MANUU makes available course material in the form of Self Learning Material (SLM) to the students of Distance Learning. The same is also available for sale to anyone interested in gaining knowledge through Urdu. To further provide access to learning, eSLM in Urdu is available for free download from the University website.

I am immensely pleased that due to the hard work of the concerned faculty and full cooperation of the writers, the process of publications of books has begun on a massive scale. To facilitate the students of Distance Learning, the process of preparing and publication of Self Learning Material (SLM) is of paramount importance to the University. I believe that we will be able to meet the requirements of a large Urdu knowing community through our Self Learning Material and will fulfill the mandate of this University and justify our presence in this country.

With best wishes,

**Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan**  
*Vice Chancellor*  
MANUU, Hyderabad

## Message

In the present era, distance education is recognized as a very effective and useful mode of education all over the world and a large number of people are benefiting from this mode of education. Maulana Azad National Urdu University also introduced the distance learning mode since its establishment in view of the educational needs of the Urdu speaking population. Maulana Azad National Urdu University started in 1998 with the Directorate of Distance Education and the regular programmes commenced from 2004, and subsequently various departments have been established.

The UGC has played a vital role in efficiently regulating the education system in the country. Various programs running under Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode at CDOE are approved by UGC-DEB. The UGC-DEB has emphasized on synchronizing the syllabi of distance and regular mode to enhance the level of distance learning students. Since Maulana Azad National Urdu University is a dual mode university catering to both distance and traditional mode of learning, to achieve its goal in line with the UGC-DEB guidelines, Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) was introduced and Self Learning Materials are being prepared afresh for UG and PG programmes containing 6 blocks with 24 units and 4 blocks with 16 units respectively.

The Centre for Distance and Online Education offers a total of seventeen (17) programmes comprising of UG, PG, B.Ed., Diploma, and Certificate programmes. Along with this, programmes based on technical skills are also being started. A huge network of nine Regional Centers (Bengaluru, Bhopal, Darbhanga, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar) and six Sub-Regional Centers (Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jammu, Nooh, Varanasi, and Amravati) was established to facilitate the students. Apart from this, an extension center has also been established in Vijayawada. More than one hundred and sixty Learner Support Centres (LSCs) and twenty Programme Centres are run simultaneously under these Regional and Sub-Regional Centers to provide educational and administrative support to the students. The Centre for Distance and Online Education makes full use of ICT in its educational and administrative activities, and offers admission to all its programs through online mode only.

The soft copies of Self Learning Material (SLM) for students are made available on the website of the Centre for Distance and Online Education and the links of audio and video recordings are also made available on the website. In addition, facilities of E-mail and WhatsApp groups are being provided to the students through which the learners are informed about various aspects of the program such as course registration, assignments, counselling, examinations, etc. In addition to regular counseling, additional remedial online counseling is being provided from the last two years to improve the academic standards of the students.

It is expected that the Centre for Distance and Online Education will play a vital role to bring educationally and economically backward population into the mainstream of contemporary education. In near future, changes will be made in various programmes under the New Education Policy (NEP-2020) in view of the educational needs and it is hoped that this will help in making the Open and Distance Learning system more efficient and effective.

**Prof. Mohd Razaullah Khan**

***Director, Centre for Distance and Online Education***

MANUU, Hyderabad

## Introduction to the Course

The M.A. English programme is designed to give a sound knowledge of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory so as to empower the prospective students for higher studies and employment, apart from helping them prepare for competitive exams. It is spread over two years (four semesters) minimum duration. The objectives of the programme are as follows:

- a. to provide a sound base in the English Language
- b. to provide insights into the development of English and the phonological, morphological, syntactical and stylistic aspects of language
- c. to provide knowledge in the teaching of English
- d. to explore the various literatures in English
- e. to provide exposure to the different genres, movements and periods of English literature
- f. to facilitate critical and analytical abilities
- g. to introduce literary theory and criticism
- h. to build confidence among learners with language skills in English
- i. to enable the working target group to enhance their qualifications and
- j. to facilitate higher education in the open distance learning mode.

At the end of the two-year post graduate programme in M.A. English, the learner would have mastered the theoretical knowledge of the English language and literature. The learners would be able to appreciate literatures in English, take up critical analysis, understand the different movements, periods and concepts in the study of English language and literature. The two-year programme will prepare the learner for competitive examinations, for employment and for research by developing their skills, apart from leading to refinement.

The course “English Poetry” aims to enable the Learners to understand the different types of poetry, the movements in poetry across different ages, and the literary techniques. and poetic devices employed in poetry representing different time and geographic zones. It also introduces them to the elements and forms of poetry, and prosody in English poetry. Some of the poems prescribed for your study are *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, *The Prelude*, *The Road not Taken*, *Lady Lazarus*, *Siren Song*, *Mrs Sunshine*, etc. The course is divided into four Blocks, each Block has four Units.

This SLM is supplemented by audio-video lessons. You may visit IMC MANUU YouTube channel <http://youtube.com/u/imcmanuu> for the complete list of AV lessons in English.

With you in your journey through the fields of English language and literature!

**Prof. Gulfishaan Habeeb**  
Programme Coordinator



# **English Poetry**



## **Unit – 1: Elements of Poetry**

### **Structure**

- 1.0 Introduction**
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### **1.0 Introduction**

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Poetry is a complex form of literary narration that includes rhyme, rhythm, sound devices, and figurative language to evoke depth of meanings. The language used in poetry is not often simple and straightforward as we have in other literary forms. Though, poetic diction binds a reader till conclusion, it never exposes its detail explicitly. It is the beauty of poetry to engage and captivate the attention of the readers despite its complex nature. Another difficulty is that the language of poetry is often indirect but at the same time it is the projection of human experiences, feelings, and actions. Poets often use emotional and rhetorical language and romantic subject matter that touch the emotions of the readers and they show interest despite all the complexities poetry has. Poets often use highly figurative and descriptive language to give insights to what

they have witnessed. As poetry is different from other forms of literary writing and there are diverse forms of poetry so, elements of poetry are also different.

The use of poetic devices on one hand enhances the depth, meanings, and literary importance, and on the other hand catches the attention of emotions of the readers. To be precise, poetry is a reflection of human thoughts, emotions, and feelings through the narration of what human beings think, feel, and act. The poets often play with words and sounds to touch the aesthetic feelings and emotions of the readers. Poetry has a significant value in human life as it is a powerful tool to express emotions and to serve as an outlet to express suppressed feelings and emotions. It is an expression of human experiences, thoughts, and inner voice. Alexander (2013) stressed upon the need of poetry in these words, “Poetry’s task is to reconcile us to the world – not to accept it at face value or to assent to things that are wrong, but to reconcile one in a larger sense, to return us in love, the province of the imagination, to the scope of our mortal lives.”

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## 1.1 Objectives

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This Unit is meant to introduce you to the concept of poetry and its elements. After going through the Unit, the students will be able to:

- be familiar with the concept of poetry and its chief elements.
- bring to light the difference between poetry and other forms of literary writing.
- know about different structural, sound, and thematic elements of poetry.
- draw a distinction between poet and narrator in any poem.
- explore the diverse metrical, structural as well as sound patterns in poetry.
- know the difference between mood and tone as well as between rhyme and rhythm.

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## 1.2 Elements of Poetry

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Being a distinctive form of narration, poetry comprises various elements which have been summarized as follows:

### **1.2.1 Structure:**

As poetry consists various forms and types, so there is a specific form and structure each type of poetry has. For example, in blank verse there is a metrical regularity but it is absent in free verse form of poetry. Similarly, the structure of sonnet is different from that of odes. Stanza, verse, and canto are the structural elements of poetry. Stanza is comprised of group or set of lines which are separated through the use of indentation or blank line. Different forms of stanza have different structure. Couplet consisted of two lines, triplet comprised of three lines, quatrain has four lines, quintain has five lines, sestet has six lines, and septet has seven lines while octave has eight lines structure.

Verse is a form of stanza but has no set rule for the number of lines. It comprises on the basis of sense. Canto is a form of stanza that was frequent in medieval poetry as well as long poem of modern age. Different forms of poetry have different structural formation. A sonnet is a 14 line poem whose structure consists of quatrain, couplet, sestet, and octave depending on what kind of sonnet it is. A villanella is a poem of 19 lines and it has five tercets and a quatrain at the closing. A limerick is a form of humorous poetry and it has a structure of five lines with uniformed rhyme.

### **1.2.2 Form:**

You will read more about forms of poetry in the next Unit. Apart from structure that distinguishes between diverse forms of poetry, form is also a key element of poetry. A poem which may or may not have a specific number of lines, rhythm, and meter, yet it can be labeled in terms of its style and form. There are three major types of poems in terms of form and style. First of them is a lyric poem. In this type of poem a speaker who may or may not be the poet, expresses strong feelings, thoughts or emotions. Mostly modern poetry is in form of lyric. In addition, it is considered as a personal piece of poetry which can be short and melodic. The second major type of poem in terms of form is narrative poem which narrates a story, event or an experience. Its structure is akin to that of a story or plot comprised of introduction, conflict, character, rising action, climax, and denouement.

Last but not the least is the descriptive poem that describes the environment in and around the poet. Mostly this type of poem has elaborate imagery and decorative adjectives. Unlike the lyric, it is mostly focused on outward reality. Then we have poetry that can be marked in terms of its style. Ode is one of such poem that has serious subject matter and is of moderate length. But the most striking thing about an ode is its elevated style. A ballad is a form of

narrative poetry which is marked by its musical rhythmic style. An epic is the most elevated form of poetry that is marked by its lofty and elevated style.

### 1.2.3 Sound and Rhythm:

Sound patterns and rhythmic style are also key elements of poetry. Rhythm is a pattern that is formulated with the assistance of sounds in poetry. In poetry, rhythm refers to the metrical arrangement of syllables. Sound patterns of poetry consist of rhyme scheme, meter, and word sound. The most important use of word sound is alliteration, consonance, assonance, repetition, onomatopoeia, and parallel. Alliteration comprises of repetition of initial sound in a line or stanza. For example “Big bad Bob bounced bravely.” Consonance is the repetition of consonant sound in a line or stanza. For example “all the air a solemn stillness holds.” Assonance refers to the repetition of vowel sounds in a line or stanza. For example, “Tilting at windmills.” Repetition indicates the repetition of words, phrases or ideas to lay emphasis in any piece of poetry. Parallel structure is the repetition of verb or noun but most importantly it involves repetition of sentence structure. For example, “I came, I saw, I conquered”.

### 1.2.4 Rhyme

Rhyme is a pattern of repetition of sound in poetry. It is used either to reinforce patterns or to emphasize on rhyme scheme. There are some types of poetry in which rhyme scheme is a significant element and such poetry included ballad, sonnet as well as couplet. In addition, there are diverse forms of rhyme scheme that is used in poetry. The most common among them is the end rhyme. It consists of culminating words of two or more lines on a similar pattern or rhyme. Imperfect rhyme is another type of rhyme which consists of rhyme that takes place in words that do not have similar sounds. For example:

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.”

(Lines 13-16, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”)

The rhyme scheme in these lines is aaaa. Then we have internal form of rhyme that takes place in the middle of line in any poetic piece. Below is an example of internal rhyme.

"In mist or **cloud**, on mast or **shroud**"  
"Whiles all the **night** through fog-smoke **white**"

Masculine rhyme is another form of rhyme which occurs between stressed syllables at the culminating point of verse or poetic lines. Lastly, there is a feminine rhyme that takes place between unstressed syllables at the culminating point of poetic lines. It is worthy to mention that most of the modern poetry as well as poems don't have rhyme.

### **1.2.5 Meter:**

Meter refers to a pattern that is known as definitive pattern in poetry. It is another key element that is found in poetry. Meter is usually identified through foot or feet which are defined as "the traditional line of metered poetry contains a number of rhythmical units." Foot in a poetic line is identified through syllables, either two or three. There are diverse layers of metrical feet that are used in poetry. Iamb is one of them which consist of one unstressed and one stressed syllable. For example, des-**pair**, re-**peat**, and ex-**clude**. Trochee is another form of foot found in poetry which comprises of one stressed and one unstressed syllable. **sis**-ter, **flow**-er, **spl**-in-ter, etc. are examples of Trochee form of poetic meter. Dactyl is third form of foot that consists of one stressed and two unstressed syllables. For example, in the word 'si-mi-lar' dactyl foot is used. Anapest is a form of poetic meter which has two unstressed and one stressed syllable as is found in com-pre-**hend**.

Spondee is a form of meter which has two stressed syllables as in the word "drum beat". Pyrrhic meter has two unstressed syllables as "to a" and "in a" are used in the line 'To a **green thought** in a **green shade**'. Metrical feet are used in poetry to form a pattern which is termed as metrical scheme or metrical pattern in poetry. Iambic pentameter is the one which has five iambs in a poem. The sonnets written by William Shakespeare are typical example of Iambic pentameter. Iambic tetrameter is another key metrical patterns and it occurs when a poetic piece has four iambs. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost is a typical example of this type of metrical scheme. Trochaic tetrameter is a metrical pattern that has "four trochees" per line. Longfellow has used this metrical scheme in "The Song of Hiawatha". Trochaic octameter takes place when each line in a verse has eight trochees. "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe is composed in trochaic octameter.

### **1.2.6 Subject:**

Subject matter or content in poetic works is one of the most essential elements of poetry. Subject is a key element as it is what is poem is all about. It is for which poetic piece is composed for. For example, the subject or content of sonnets center on the theme of love and admiration for beloved, loneliness, heartache, separation, etc. On the other hand divine sonnets

are about commitment and devotion towards God. These are also related with salvation and enlightenment. Elegies are written in memorization of those who are no more in this world and hence their subject matters are mostly sad and gloomy. Dead persons or dead feelings are the subject matters of such poetry. Epic poems are written to glorify and honor the great and heroic deeds of super human beings usually involving historical subject matters. Lyric and ballad usually revolve around the subject matters of love and personal affairs.

### **1.2.7 Speaker or Narrator:**

A speaker is one who narrates to the listeners or readers. Usually, it is considered that the poet himself or herself is the speaker but it is not always the case. The speaker or narrator can be other than the poet. That is why concept of first person or 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator is being introduced. If the speaker and the poet are the same person then we have 1<sup>st</sup> person narration, otherwise there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration in a poem. In case of 3<sup>rd</sup> person speaker, the poet assumes or imagines a character and narrates the poem through him or her. However, the perspective presented by the speaker and the poet is often the same so he is called the representative or mouthpiece of the poet. Another way of narration is also there in between 1<sup>st</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person speaker and that is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person narration and it occurs when poet directly communicates with the readers. The view, theme, subject matter or contents communicated through either of these narrative form is called point of view in literary or poetic diction. It is essential to comprehend the speaker in order to pick up the right tone and mood of any poetic piece or verse.

### **1.2.8 Theme:**

Theme is yet another key element of any poetic work or form of poetry. It is the recurring idea or thought provoking idea that is presented through poetry. Different poetic works have different themes. These range from ordinary and common life theme to personal themes. It may be from elevated themes of heroic deeds and historical events to most subjective themes related with love and emotions of one or more people. The common themes such as theme of love, beauty, nature, etc. are used in poetry. In addition, there are complex themes as well expressed through poetic piece like death, salvation, morality, and spirituality. Theme is a central clue that assists the readers to grasp the core idea and message that poet wants to convey. Actually, theme gives access to the very purpose of the poet for which a poem is composed of. In order to understand the concept more aptly, here is an example from Robert Burns' poem "A Red, Red Rose" which has summed up the entire message presented in the poem under view:

“O my Luve is like a red, red rose



That's newly sprung in June;  
O my Luve is like the melody  
That's sweetly played in tune."

It shows that the poem is composed with the purpose to admire the beloved of the poet. Hence, it can be concluded that the major theme of the poem centers on love, admiration, and beauty of the beloved.

### **1.2.9 Tone and Mood:**

Diction is another significant element of poetry. It refers towards the utilization of language, form, and sound in a poetic work. Tone is related with the attitude of the poet or the speaker in the poem while mood is referred towards the mood of the entire text or poetic version which is part of poetic diction in a broader prospective. Mood is something that is related with the impact the readers attain from any piece of poetic writing. In order to grasp the tone and the mood of the speaker as well as the poem, the readers have to keep in mind the choice of diction, utilization of figurative language and the devices related to sound that are consumed in that poetic piece of writing. For example, in "Ode to Nightingale", John Keats, through speaker, has described the song of nightingale in an elevated and dignified fashion. The language of the song is awe creating and has intoxicating persona on the listeners and the readers. Hence, the tone of the speaker is emotional, pleasant, and elevated. The mood presented in the song is happy, pleasant as well as positive.

### **1.2.10 Syntax:**

Syntax is another key feature or element of poetry. Syntax is a linguistic pattern which involves the arrangement of words to form a meaningful structure. The poets often manipulate and modify the syntactic patterns of words instead of using the conventional mode or pattern of structure. The use of such syntactic order or pattern is meant to achieve certain key purposes which have artistic impacts. These include attaining mood, tone, and specific artistic impact. For example, in "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass", the poetess Dickinson shows her utter surprise as well as amusement at the sight of snake. For that purpose she has used a diction having specific syntax:

"A narrow fellow in the grass  
Occasionally rides-  
You may have met him? Did you not  
His notice sudden is-"

### **1.2.11 Figurative Language:**

Poets often use figurative language in order to interpret diverse layers of meaning in any piece of poetry. In addition, it is also meant to evoke those ideas through words which are not associated with those words in any way. Sound devices are utilized to create musical effects in poetry. Likewise, poetic devices are used to connect a relationship among images which are not taken into consideration previously. There are diverse poetic devices or figures of speech that have been employed by the poets in poetry. Simile is one of such devices which is used to show comparison between two unlike things or objects. Incorporation of words “like”, “so”, and “as” are indication of simile used in any poetic line. For example, “My love is like a red, red rose.” Likewise, metaphor is also a poetic device that is used to show implicit comparison among different ideas and things. But the difference is that in metaphor there is no usage of “like”, “so”, and “as.” For example, “All flesh is grass.”

Repetition is another key figurative device that is meant to refer towards the usage of words, phrases or ideas several times in a single piece of poetry. Enjambment is another key poetic device which is referred towards the cut of poetic line before its culminating point. Irony is often used to project a different outcome from what is being expected. In other words, appearance vs. reality is called irony. It can be irony of words, situation or character. Personification is another significant figurative device which is meant to lend human qualities to inhuman things. Onomatopoeia is a sound-cum-poetic device when a sound imitates or copy a natural sound. Hyperbole is also a key figure of speech that is meant to refer when a statement is elevated to a certain degree just to enhance poetic effect.

### **1.2.12 Density:**

Poets have the ability to express their view point in a possible less use of words and this quality of poets is referred to as density. Poets use limited words, but use them appropriately to create an image of something in the mind of the readers and they are able to relate with it. It is a natural and gifted quality of poets as one cannot force a person to be dense otherwise all the meanings and sense in his or her words will be lost. In addition, it is also advisable to refrain from being dense or using figurative devices if these are not suitable for flow of writing. Bridging a relation and connection is a key aspect in density rather than mere describing a tale or event. Density as well as each and every other sound, poetic or figurative device is used purposefully either to attain a structural, semantic, musical or thematic purpose. This quality of poetry makes it difficult and complex. However, wise and appropriateness of words, sounds,

structure, and other devices makes poetry unique and distinctive from other literary and narrative form.

### **1.2.13 Let Us Sum Up:**

Poetry is one of the strongest medium to express feelings and emotions related to key aspects of human life that includes love, admiration, beauty, loneliness, happiness, and nature. Likewise, there are diverse forms of poetry and each one has its own distinctive elements. However, key elements of poetry consist of structure, syntax, form, meter, rhyme, theme, subject, tone, mood, figurative language, diction, speaker, and sound devices. Poetic diction is different from other forms of narration or literary forms. It refers towards the use of language, form, and sound in a poetic work. Tone is related with the attitude of the poet or the speaker in the poem while mood is referred towards the impact or impression the readers attain from any piece of poetic writing. Theme is a central clue that assists the readers to grasp the core idea and message that poet wants to convey in that piece of poetry. Sound means how the poem evokes the attention of the readers in their mind. Rhythm is a pattern that is formulated with the assistance of sounds in poetry. Speaker is the one who narrates poetry to the listeners or readers. Subject is a key element as it is what the poem is all about.

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## **1.3 Learning Outcomes**

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After going through the Unit, you should be able to:

- have an understanding of the concept of poetry and its chief elements.
- differentiate structural, sound, and thematic elements of poetry.
- comprehend diverse metrical, structural as well as sound patterns in poetry.
- know the difference between mood and tone as well as between rhyme and rhythm and figurative language used in a poem.

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## **1.4 Glossary**

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**Intricate:** Complex

**Explicitly:** Openly

**Rhetorical:** Of, relating to, or concerned with the art of speaking or writing formally and effectively especially as a way to persuade or influence people

**Enhance:** Improve

**Precise:** Accurate

**Aesthetic:** Concerning or characterized by an appreciation of beauty or good taste

**Outlet:** Opening

**Distinctive:** Typical

**Denouement:** Final outcome of a literary work

**Culminate:** Conclude

**Dignified:** Distinguished

**Emotive:** Sensitive

**Semantic:** Study of meaning

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## 1.5 Sample Questions

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### 1.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Why are the sound devices and figurative language used in poetry?
  - (a) To evoke depth
  - (b) Derive array of meanings
  - (c) To evoke depth and array of meanings.
  - (d) None of these
2. How many lines does a sonnet contain?
  - (a) 14 lines
  - (b) 16 lines
  - (c) 12 lines
  - (d) 4 lines
3. Poets often use highly figurative and descriptive language to give insights to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) What they thought
  - (b) What they perceive
  - (c) What they have witnessed.
  - (d) None of these

4. Ballad is a form of narrative poetry which is marked by its \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Musical rhythmic style
  - (b) Sound pattern
  - (c) Syntactic features
  - (d) Metrical feet
5. What is the most common rhyme scheme among diverse types of rhyme schemes?
- (a) Imperfect rhyme
  - (b) End rhyme
  - (c) Masculine rhyme
  - (d) Feminine rhyme
6. If the speaker and the poet are the same person in a poem then we have \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) 2<sup>nd</sup> person narration
  - (b) 1<sup>st</sup> person narration
  - (c) 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration
  - (d) All of these
7. Language in poetry has a distinctive syntax which is different as compare to others forms of literature like \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Artistic form
  - (b) Fiction form
  - (c) Prose form
  - (d) All of these
8. Mood is something that is related with the impact or impression the readers attain \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) From fiction
  - (b) From novel
  - (c) From drama
  - (d) From poetry
9. What is the syllable structure used in Iamb?
- (a) Stressed followed by unstressed
  - (b) Unstressed followed by stressed
  - (c) Two unstressed
  - (d) None of these
10. The sonnets written by William Shakespeare are typical example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Iambic pentameter
- (b) Trochaic tetrameter
- (c) Trochaic octameter
- (d) Iambic tetrameter

### **1.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What do you understand by rhyme as the chief element of poetry?
2. What is 1<sup>st</sup> person narration in a literary text?
3. Define the term 'tone' implied in a poem.
4. What do you mean by rhyme scheme in a poem?
5. Discuss briefly the various sound devices as elements of poetry.

### **1.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. What is the difference between speaker and the poet in a poem? How many types of speakers or narrators are mentioned in the Unit?
2. What do you understand by the concept of figurative language? Discuss briefly the chief figurative devices.
3. What is meant by meter? What are the chief metrical feet being highlighted in the unit?

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## **1.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Cengage India Private Limited, 2015.
2. Cook, Judy. *Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide*. Wisconsin, United States: Progeny Press, 2007.
3. Stedman, Edmund. *The Nature and Elements of Poetry*. New Delhi: Kessinger Publishing Co, 2004.

## Unit – 2: Forms of Poetry

### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Forms of Poetry
  - 2.2.1 The Lyric
  - 2.2.2 The Sonnet
  - 2.2.3 The Ode
  - 2.2.4 The Elegy
  - 2.2.5 The Epic
  - 2.2.6 The Ballad
  - 2.2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.3 Learning Outcomes
- 2.4 Glossary
- 2.5 Sample Questions
- 2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 2.0 Introduction

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The history of English poetry starts from the mid of 7<sup>th</sup> century. Old and conventional poetry written in England was in old English language. The result is that modern English language readers of current time are sometimes unable to read or comprehend it. In addition, there were also poetic tradition in Latin and Greek which was classical in nature. Today, the English society has become multicultural and there are numerous poems being written with wide range of array. As England expanded its imperial regime in different regions of the world, it resulted in spread of the English language at a massive scale. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century only a small number of native English speakers live in England and the majority consists of non-native speakers of English across the globe. In 1922, Irish poetry was taken into consideration as a distinctive area of study. English poetry has been diversified into various periods. The earliest period of English poetry is known as the old or early English period. This period was followed by Anglo-Norman and then came the middle Ages period of English poetry. Then with the advent of Renaissance age emerged Renaissance poetry. It was followed by Elizabethan poetry

and songs. Then there was courtly poetry and Elizabethan verse drama. Then there were classical, Jacobean and Caroline poetry. Then there was rise of metaphysical, Cavalier and Spenserian poets. Then we have Romantic and Victorian poetry prior to modern poetry.

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## 2.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to make you:

- familiar with the term, idea, and concept of poetry and verse.
  - aware about different forms of poetry that is consumed by various poets.
  - comprehend different poetic terms used in poetry and verse form.
  - differentiate among diverse forms of poetry and verse.
  - draw a distinction between poetic devices used in different forms of poetry.
  - feel at home while drawing a distinction between lyric and sonnet, epic and elegy.
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## 2.2 Forms of Poetry

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Poetry can be broadly divided into several different forms and types. Here, only the major forms of poetry are elaborated.

### 2.2.1 The Lyric:

The word lyric has been coined from a word “lyre” which is the name used for a musical instrument. It is a form of poetry which is short at one hand and melodious on the other. It deals mostly with the most powerful emotions and feelings of human being such as love, hate, sadness, loneliness, happiness, envy, revenge and patriotism. It is a form of poetic version that is purely subjective in nature and written in stanza form. However, it is kept in mind by the poets that only one emotion can be projected in a single poem instead of multiple emotions. However, sonnet which is also a form of lyrical verse is an exception in this regard which is written in its own form and has clear distinction from lyrical verse. The most imperative feature of lyrical poetry is its melody. The utilization of rhyme can also be noticed in lyrical poetry. But modern trend of lyrical poetry don't deem it essential to have rhyme any more. In this form of poetry musical element is a key feature of the verse.



Lyric is a form of poetry which is based on the mood, feelings and emotions of the poets so it can be called the personal form of verse. As it is a personal form of poetic expression hence at times it takes the form of confessional form of poetry as well. These poetic verses are highly personal and emotive in which poet expresses true version of his feelings in a musical language that he or she comes across anywhere. It is up to the poet how much he is skillful in making his personal feelings and emotions worth appealing and in an effort to make them universal and human. As regard the chief traits of this form of poetry it is characterized by its shortness. Though some lyrics are long but mostly it is short in length. Simplicity of diction is yet another key feature of lyrical verse so that a common reader can comprehend it. It is also characterized by subjective, internal projection, and emotions. Literary devices are employed to generate music in lyric which is a key feature of lyrical verse. Lyrical poetry is also marked by intensity of feelings and spontaneous expression of flow on the part of poet. That is why lyrical poetry is also called as personal form of poetry.

### **2.2.2 The Sonnet:**

The word sonnet has been derived from an Italian word “sonetto” which means “little song” or a “small lyric”. In each line of sonnet there are 10 syllables with a peculiar rhyme scheme. It is a form of verse which consists of 14 lines and is written in an iambic pentameter. It is also written in lyrical form and mostly deals with the theme of love. The key feature of the sonnet is its uniformity. Sonnets are broadly divided into two sub-types. One is known as Italian or Petrarchan and it is named after Petrarch who first used this form of sonnet in 14<sup>th</sup> century in Italy. It has two sections. First eight lines of this form of sonnet are termed as Octave rests of six lines are termed as sestet. These two sections are marked as divided through the utilization of punctuation marks such as colon, semi colon or full stop at the end of eighth line. Rhyme scheme that is used in first eight lines is “abba, abba” while rhyme scheme that is used in sestet is “cde, dce”. Major thought is projected in Octave while this is culminated in sestet. There is a sequence or consequence in sestet.

The second form of sonnet is known as English or Shakespearean form of sonnet. This sonnet is introduced by Surry and it was made famous by William Shakespeare. This form of sonnet has a couplet and three quatrains. A quatrain is a stanza consists of four lines. While two lines rhyming with each other of iambic pentameter is termed as couplet. The rhyme scheme that is used in this form of sonnet is “abab, cdcd, efef, and gg” while Spenser used “abba, bcba, cdcd, and ee” in his sonnet. The major difference between Italian and Shakespearean sonnet is that

Italian sonnet has five while Shakespearean sonnet has seven rhymes. Sonnet has been introduced by the Earl of Surrey and Wyatt into English. This form of verse has been used by English poets except Augustans and 18<sup>th</sup> century writers. Love was the theme in sonnet in the beginning but later other themes of war and nature have also become in fashion.

Apart from the two major or illustrious forms of sonnet discussed above, it can be broadly divided into Italian, Shakespearean, Spenserian, Miltonic, Terza Rima, and Curtal types of sonnet. Italian and Shakespearean sonnets have been discussed in detail while Spenser was the first poet who modified the Italian or classical form of sonnet and he was the first poet who introduced a new rhyme scheme in sonnet. Spenser's sonnets have "abab-bcbc-cdcd-ee" rhyme scheme and such types of sonnets are termed as Spenserian sonnet. Sonnet form becomes famous among poets because of its adaptability and to serve various purposes. It is an illustrious form of narrating ones feelings and emotions despite its short form. It is written in iambic pentameter and has peculiar rhyme scheme. It provides the poet a perfect style who wants to express strong emotions through verse as it is short in form so easy for both poets and readers to manage.

### **2.2.3 The Ode:**

It is another very significant form of verse which is lyrical in nature. Ode is usually short in length and it contains appreciation and praise for person, place, thing, scene or an abstract object. The word ode has been coined from a Greek word "aeidein" which is meant to sing or chant. As far as its theme and tone is concerned it is sober and serious. Ode often has an elaborative form of stanza and in a formal tone of narration. Ode has its unique metrical feet which is uniform. As regard the function of ode is concerned, the poet uses it as a powerful tool to express his or her lofty and noble emotions and sentiments in a serious manner and tone. For that a peculiar meter and rhyme scheme is followed. Though tone of the ode is serious but at times it is satirical. As ode has lofty themes and subject matter hence its appeal is universal. Keeping in view the tone and subject matter, poet of an ode consumes elevated style. Though sometime ode may be humorous in nature but mostly it is thought provoking meant to explore human relations, emotions, and senses.

It is written as an elaborate form to express feelings of enthusiasm and exaltation. It is usually written either to praise or address someone or something. Odes are of two types. One is called Pindaric ode and the second is termed as Horetian ode. Pindaric ode derives its name and origin from ancient Greek poet whose name was Pindar. His odes were overflowing with emotions and because of the intensity of emotions they were irregular as far as pattern of the

odes is concerned. Pindaric ode is also best known as Dorian ode. Such type of ode is choric in nature and recited in an accomplishment of a dance. In addition, Pindaric ode consists of three imperative parts which are known as the ‘Strophe’, the ‘Antistrophe’, and the ‘Epode’.” Horatian ode, on the other hand takes its name from classical Italian poet whose name was Horace.

As far as the difference between the two types of odes is concerned, Horatian ode is more regular and balance as compare to Pindaric ode. Horatian ode is also termed as Lesbian ode. The language of this form of ode is simple and it usually consists of small stanzas. The stanzas are mostly identical and uniform as far as the arrangement and length are concerned. It is significant to note that both Pindaric and Horatian odes are restricted to English language only but on the other hand genuine English odes are not limited or bound to conventional norms. English ode has its own theme, pattern, arrangement and above all style. As far as stanza pattern is concerned it can be either regular or irregular. John Keats, Shelly, and William Wordsworth are highly regular and they have stanzas of similar length. Their best known odes have exalted themes, patterns and are directed, linked or addressed to someone or something.

#### **2.2.4 The Elegy:**

An elegy is a type of verse or poem written in the form of a song to honour someone who is deceased. It is written in elegiac couplet, a peculiar type for such form of verse. It is typical form of verse in which the death of an individual is mourned or lamented. The word elegy is derived from a Greek word “elegus” which is meant to project a song of “bereavement” presented with the help of a flute. The form of elegy that we have today has its historical context back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the richest forms of verse which has the power to influence the emotions of the people deeply and for a longer period of time. It heavily relies on the memories of an individual who is deceased and this is the most powerful tool to move the emotions of the people. Famous elegists were fully aware of human nature that they forget deceased soon so they try to create an impactful environ to memorize deceased. Sorrow, grief, sadness, mourning, lamentation and memories are the essential tools used by elegists in composing their elegies.

In ancient Greek or Roman literature elegy was a form of poem that was written in a special meter which is known as elegiac meter. But in England, up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this type of poem was mostly associated with solemn meditation. But now it refers to a poem that is composed merely to lament some event or the death of a person. But it is not merely limited to lament some sad happening rather sometimes it is consumed for mere meditative purpose and the

chief example of this type of composition is “Gray’s Elegy” which is written in a churchyard. Pastoral type of elegy is a type of poem that is associated with both the mourner and for whom he or she mourns. Some of the most renowned pastoral elegies are Milton’s ‘Lycidas’, Shelley’s ‘Adonais’ and Matthew Arnold’s ‘Thyrsis’. Hence, pastoral elegists have conventions right from Roman and Greek time till present day. There are certain key conventions that are essential for elegy (special reference to “Lycidas”) and these are as under:

- Speaker usually rather conventionally begins with evoking the muses and during the narration he makes use of several mythological references.
- Nature is shown joining the mourning or lamentation on the death of shepherd.
- The mourner charges nymphs and other guardians with negligence of their duties with regard to the death of shepherd.
- There is a procession which is shown of appropriate mourners who are involved in mourning or lamentation on the death of shepherd.
- The poet in an elegy raises question about the system of justice with regard to divine nature or system of justice.
- Elegies inscribed in Post-Renaissance period usually included an elaborative passage in which flowers are shown which are used to embellish the audience.
- Usually elegy culminates at a consolation note.
- In Christian elegy, in the mist of woe, sadness and mourning, sport joy when it is made known that death in this world is a journey towards higher rank.

### **2.2.5 The Epic:**

An epic is a long narrative poem or verse that is to deal about great and serious subject matter. In order to meet the greatness of the theme a grand and exalted style of narration is maintained in epic. It mostly centers on a heroic figure that is also an elevated figure. His heroic deeds are depicted in an epic and it is he whose actions decide the fate of his tribe and nation. In classical epic such figures are always kings and princes. Because this poem deals with heroic deeds of a heroic figure hence this form of verse is also termed as heroic poem. Conventional epics were composed by poets about the legendary figures based on historical and oral narrations of the war deeds such mythological and legendary figures have involved in due course of time. Such epics are also known as folk epics. Some famous folk or conventional epics are *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Beowulf*. Literary and secondary form of epic which developed after classical form of epic is actually an imitation and modification of that traditional or conventional form of epic.

Virgil's *The Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are an imperative example of literary type of epic. Epic is highly dignified form of poetry and Aristotle deemed it second to tragedy which means he ranks tragedy as the upper most form of poetry and after that come epic form of poetry. Renaissance scholars are the ones who consider epic the highest genre of poetry. Epic requires a lot of knowledge, skills, style, narration techniques, variety, and grandeur on the part of the poet in composing such a dignified form of poetry. Mostly, in epic poem some hero, warrior, God or goddess is the heroic figure who either represents their tribe, race, nation or entire human race. The setting and scale of the poem is larger. It can take place either on earth or on heaven and hell. The deeds that are represented in such poem are super human. Most of such epics depict war scenes while in *Paradise Lost*; war scene is depicted in hell and heaven where Satan is shown as heroic figure.

As everything about this form of poetry is dignified hence, gods and other supernatural elements also take an active part during the action of the poem. As it is a dignified form of poetry and depiction hence ceremonial action is performed in a ceremonial style which has a distinction from ordinary speeches and acts. Epic was the earliest form of poetry as well as form of entertainment. Initially, epic was written to elevate the adventurous tales and deeds of kings and warriors. The main function of epic poetry at that time was to glorify the deeds of heroes and to inspire common people to be ready to perform heroic deeds. Mostly the tales of epic poetry revolve around ancestors and legendary figures. In this way, it was also a form of historical narration of the events that took place in past. As the very word epic is derived from a Greek adjective "epikos" which means poetic story so it is a narration of a narrative tale of heroes and heroic deeds.

### **2.2.6 The Ballad:**

It is a popular form of poetry which is also known as folk ballad. It usually tells a story in the form of a song that is orally related. It is assumed that the very first ballad may be written by a singer author but he is unknown to the world. As the ballad is an illustrious form of verse hence it has various variations as far as form and tone are concerned. The narrator usually initiates the ballad on climatic happening, and then he moves towards the actual tale and narrates it in a terse and compact manner. He narrates his tale in the form of dialogue and action but he abstains himself from articulating his personal attitude, feelings or emotions. The most significant and influential form of the ballad is written in quatrain stanza form. It is about a narrative verse

written by a poet who is well learned and who has a full command and grip in imitating a popular ballad.

Romantic age is the most famous period in which ballad form of poetry was in full swing and most renowned ballads were composed in that time. Coleridge wrote “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Scott composed “Proud Maisie” and Keats’s most renowned ballad “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” was also written during that period which are not only representative of that age but as a classic as far as ballad as a form of poetry is concerned. Ballad is a type of poetry that is often set to music. It has a history of its own and it is found in numerous cultures. It begins as a folk song which is popular as music now. Mostly love songs are written in ballad form. Ballad is written mostly in quatrain stanza form, often in a peculiar meter often iambic. Ballad is written in a narrative form hence it tells a tale. Because of its metrical and music it has a rhyme scheme ABAB. Romantic era is the most famous period of ballad form and some poets like William Wordsworth wrote his poetry in ballad form.

### **2.2.7 Let Us Sum Up:**

This Unit presented the concept of English poetry and how English poetry went through various phases and periods to reach its present form has been discussed. It was followed by a comprehensive study about the forms of English poetry. Six major forms such as lyric, sonnet, ballad, elegy, epic, and ode have been discussed in length. Their chief features along with the major poets of that form have been depicted in detail. In addition, different poetic devices being used in those forms of poetry have also been explained. Last but not the least, general poetic devices such as stanza, meter and rhyme scheme which are distinctive feature of each form of poetry has also been elaborated.

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## **2.3 Learning Outcomes**

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After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- have a comprehensive idea about the forms of poetry
- comprehend and use different poetic devices used by poets in their diverse forms of poetry.
- make distinction among different forms of poetry.
- draw difference between epic and elegy.
- make distinction between lyric, ode, and ballad.

- understand couplet, stanza, rhyme, and meter.

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## 2.4 Glossary

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**Distinction:** Difference, merit

**Array:** Display, collection

**Imperial:** Of a country having control or sovereignty over other countries or colonies

**Regime:** Government, rule

**Renaissance age:** An age in European civilization immediately following the Middle Ages and conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in Classical scholarship and values

**Elizabethan age:** It is the time period associated with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and is often considered to be a golden age in English history.

**Classical:** Of or relating to the ancient Greek and Roman world and especially to its literature, art, architecture, or ideals.

**Jacobean:** Relating to the reign of James I of England

**Caroline:** Relating to the reigns of Charles I and II of England

**Metaphysical:** Of or characteristic of the metaphysical poets

**Cavalier:** A supporter of King Charles I in the English Civil War

**Victorian:** Relating to the reign of Queen Victoria

**Confessional poetry:** It is a style of poetry that is personal, often making use of a first-person narrator.

**Iambic pentameter:** A line of verse with five metrical feet, each consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable

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## 2.5 Sample Questions

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### 2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Lyre, based on which the word lyric is derived is a \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Medical device

- (b) Musical instrument
  - (c) Teaching aid
  - (d) Dancing step
2. Lyric is a form of poetry that is written in \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Free verse
  - (b) Stanza form
  - (c) Couplet
  - (d) Prose form
3. English or Shakespearean sonnet consists of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) 1 quatrain and 3 sestets
  - (b) 3 quatrains and 1 couplet
  - (c) 1 octave and 1 sestet
  - (d) 3 couplets and 1 quatrain
4. English or Shakespearean sonnet is written in \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Ten lines
  - (b) Twelve lines
  - (c) Fourteen lines
  - (d) Eight lines
5. Pindaric Ode is derived from an ancient Greek poet. His name was \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Horace
  - (b) Pindar
  - (c) Shelly
  - (d) Surry
6. Elegy is a form of poetry that is written to \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Make merry
  - (b) Express joy
  - (c) Lament or mourn
  - (d) Celebrate an event
7. Which period of English literature was more fertile for ballad?
- (a) Renaissance
  - (b) Modern
  - (c) Romantic



(d) Ancient Greek

8. Who wrote poetry in ballad form?

(a) Horace

(b) Wordsworth

(c) Spenser

(d) Shakespeare

9. Sonnet is written in \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Elegiac meter

(b) Iambic pentameter

(c) Hexameter

(d) Tetrameter

10. Epic form of poetry is written in which form?

(a) Descriptive

(b) Narrative

(c) Elaborate

(d) Captivated

### **2.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is the distinction between classical form and literary form of epic?
2. Discuss Spenser contribution and modification towards Spenserian form of sonnet.
3. What are the other forms of sonnets other than Italian and English sonnet?
4. Why lyrical poetry is also called as personal form of poetry?
5. How may phases English poetry have progressed over the time to reach its present form?

### **2.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Lyrical poetry is marked by spontaneity, music, and emotive expression. How?
2. Discuss the role of Shakespeare in the development of English sonnet?
3. What are the key features of epic poetry? Why is it called dignified form of poetry?

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## 2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Abbs, Peter. *The Forms of Poetry: A Practical Study Guide for English*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
2. Abrams, M.H, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2015.
3. Johnson, Charles F. *Forms of English Poetry*. New Delhi: Forgotten Books, 2018.

## **Unit – 3: Prosody in English Poetry**

### **Structure**

- 3.0** Introduction
- 3.1** Objectives
- 3.2** Prosody in English Poetry
  - 3.2.1** Versification: The Grammar of Poetry
  - 3.2.2** Types of Meters
  - 3.2.3** Rhyme and Rhythm in Poetry
  - 3.2.4** Rhyme and Rhyme Schemes
  - 3.2.5** Stanza
- 3.3** Learning Outcomes
- 3.4** Glossary
- 3.5** Sample Questions
- 3.6.** Suggested Learning Resources

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### **3.0 Introduction**

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The prosody of a poem is a basic foundation of the literary appreciation which helps in the systematic analysis of language. We will study in detail the meter, syllable, rhyme and rhythm, the entire sound effects of a poem.

This Unit has to be studied and practiced regularly. Whenever you come across a poem if you start scanning it you will start learning and enjoying it.

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### **3.1 Objectives**

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- study the systematic versification of meter, rhyme and stanza in a poem
- understand the sound effects in poetry
- focus on various aspects of prosody

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### **3.2 Prosody in English Poetry**

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### 3.2.1 Versification: The Grammar of Poetry

The word “prosody” comes from the Latin term “*prosodia*,” and means accent of a syllable. It is the study of and the use of meter, rhyme, and other types of accents and sounds in poetry. The study of “versification” was first used in the 15th century in English. This corresponds with the use of well-established patterns, such as the use of iambic pentameter in poetry. There are several different types of prosody. In general, ‘prosody’ can be defined as a systematic study of sound of language like, alliteration, assonance and so on. Each of these sounds of language is discussed below.

**Alliteration:** It is the recurrence of speech sound in a sequence of nearby words. This term is usually applied only to consonants. The recurrent sound of a consonant occurs in a conspicuous position either at the start of a word or of a stressed syllable within a word. For instance, in Old English poems, each verse is separated with pause called *Caesura*, and at least one, and usually both, of the two stressed words in the first half-line alliterates with the first stressed word of the second half-line. In this versification vowel was considered to alliterate with any other vowel. However, a number of Middle English poems, such as “Piers Plowman” and *Gawain and the Green Knight*, continued to use and play variations upon the old alliterative meter. For example, in the opening lines of “Piers Plowman,” all four of the stressed words alliterate<sup>1</sup>:

In a *somer seson*, whan *soft* was the *sonne*...

During Elizabethan and Jacobean age, alliteration was used only for special stylistic effects like, to reinforce the meaning, to link related words or tone colour. The repetition of the *s*, *th*, and *w* sounds can be seen, in Shakespeare’s Sonnet XXX,<sup>2</sup>:

“When to the *sessions* of *sweet silent* thought  
I *summon* up remembrance of *things* past,  
I *sight* the lack of many a *thing* I sought  
And *with* old *woes* new *wail* my dear time’s *waste*”

There is another identical terminology used i.e., *Consonance*. It is the repetition of the consonants in some sequential order, by interchanging the stressed vowels: live-love, lean- alone,

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<sup>1</sup>A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H.Abrams, Macmillan Publication,1970, P. 7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p. 7

pitter-patter. W.H. Auden's " 'O where are you going?' said reader to rider," makes prominent use of this device; the last stanza reads<sup>3</sup>:

"Out of this house" – said *rider* to *reader*,  
"Yours never will" - said *farer* to *fearer*,  
"They're looking for you" – said *hearer* to *horror*,  
As he felt them there, as he left them there.

**Assonance:** It is the reappearance of same vowel sounds— especially in stressed syllables – in a sequence of nearby words. Observe the use of long *i* in the starting lines of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"<sup>4</sup>:

"Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou foster child of silence and slow time."

The assonantal effect the starting of William Collins' "Ode to Evening" depends on the arrangement of both identical and of matching vowels<sup>5</sup>:

"If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song,  
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy pensive ear"

**Euphony and Cacophony:** Euphony is language of appreciation which seems polished, attractive, and melodic, as in Keats's<sup>6</sup>

"And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;  
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred  
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,  
From silken Samarc and to cedared Lebanon."

Scrutiny of the above passage will show, that it strikes us as a mainly aural friendliness; which is the result of sense of the lexicon, and to the comfort of articulating the sound combinations, and then to the inherent melodiousness of the speech sounds as such. Similarly, Cacophony may be an unintentional element, because of a gap in the writer's thought, reflection or ability, as in the unfortunate line of Arnold's "Dover Beach": "Lay like the folds of a bright

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid p.7

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.7-8

<sup>5</sup>A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H.Abrams, Macmillan Publication,1970, P. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 56

girdle furl'd." Cacophony can also be intentional and practical: for humour, as in Browning's "Pied Piper,"<sup>7</sup>

"Rats!  
They fought the dogs and killed the rats...  
Split open the kegs of salted sparts,  
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats;"

**Onomatopoeia:** called as "echoism," is used both in general and in a specific sense:

In a narrow, and more common, sense "onomatopoeia" is applied to a word, or a grouping of words. The sound signifies "hiss," "buzz," "rattle," "bang." Lines from Tennyson's "Come Down, O Maid" are often cited as a skilful example of onomatopoeia:<sup>8</sup>

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

John Crowe Ransom has mentioned that if we modify the consonants of the last line, it will affect on the meaning, in a way leads to the change of echoic effect of the line: "And murdering of innumerable beeves."

The sounds seemingly imitated by onomatopoeic words need not be pleasing ones. Browning liked soft and squishy effects, example "Meeting at Night":<sup>9</sup>

"As I gained the cove with pushing prow,  
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

A tap the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
And blue spurt of a lighted match..."

In the board sense, "onomatopoeia" is application of sounds or noise of word that it describes in size, movement, or force as well as sound. Alexander Pope recommends such extended verbal mimicry in his *Essay on Criticism*. He said "the sound should seem an echo of the sense," and he goes on to illustrate by mimicking two different kinds of motion by the words and metrical movement of his lines<sup>10</sup>:

"When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,  
The line too labours, and the words move slow;

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 56

<sup>8</sup>A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H.Abrams, Macmillan Publication,1970, P. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid 118

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 118

Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main."

### 3.2.2 Types of Meters:

The word metre is a derivative of Greek word called *metron*, meaning 'measure'. It is a literary tool working as a structural element in poetry measuring the rhythm of a verse. Conventionally, metre refers to the uniform, repetition of feet. Essentially, it is the periodic construction of a line within a poem or poetic effort. Meter refers to the measured beat established by pattern of stressed and unstressed syllable making the poem rhythmic.

**Metrics:** Metrics is the study of meter, We scan a line in order to find out where the accent falls . Meter might be defined as a methodical understanding of phonological aspects for the culmination of aesthetic properties.

**Scansion:** The metrical scanning of the poem is termed as scansion. The marking of symbols as stressed and unstressed are called 'Scansion'. In a verse - a foot, a line or a stanza can be scanned through symbols. We make use of a few symbols in order to scan a passage in verse sometimes in the case of prose.

**Syllable:** When we pronounce a word in English it is divided into syllables. That is in one word we may have one vowel sound or more and the consonant sound also may work as vowel. It is an unique application of the voice on one word, or on syllable, so as to distinguish from (an)other(s)'

**Ex.** Home – one syllable

Chicken – chic-ken two syllable

Beautiful – beau-ti-ful three syllable

University – u- ni -ver- sit -y five syllable

The syllables are divided into two

1. Stressed - or accented syllable. Stressed syllable will be longer, louder and little bit harder The symbol is '/'
2. Unstressed – or unaccented syllable. Unstressed syllable will be Softer, quieter and lower The symbol is 'U'

There are some symbols used to scan the foot, line or a stanza of the poem. When they are scanned, the resultant can be seen as well as heard. The symbols are as:

Symbol	Name of the symbol	Purpose
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/	the acute accent	Metrically stressed syllable
U	the brave	metrically weak syllable
	a single line	division between feet
	a double line	Caesura or pause in the line
^	a rest	a syllable metrically expected but not actually present

**Ex.** Delight – delight – de is pounced softly where as light is pronounced louder.

Delight – delight      U /

Purple - purple      / U

Open – open      U /

Believe – believe      U /

- Each verse of the poem can further be divided into ‘feet’. These are called the individual units of a poetry. Every foot has a set number of syllabic count and has a particular pattern of emphasis. The kinds of foot depend on the number of syllables, the type of syllables and the placement of stress

The number of feet defines the type of meter in the line

/ U

Ex: word - appear - a ppear .

U /

Word – depend – de pend

Meter can be measured as for one foot it is called as monometer, two as dimeter upto ten feet as decametre.

Foot: A foot usually contains one stressed syllable and one or more than one unstressed syllable(s).

Feet is again divided into six categories

1. “Iambic - pattern is – unstressed , stressed ( U, /)
2. Trochaic - ,, stressed, unstressed ( /, U)
3. Anapestic - ,, unstressed, unstressed, stressed  
(U,U, /)
4. Dactylic - ,, stressed, unstressed, unstressed



5. (/, U,U)
6. Spondaic - ,, stressed, stressed (//)
7. Pyrrhic - ,, unstressed, unstressed (UU)”

**For ex:**

**Iambic:** It has two syllables where the first syllable being unstressed and the second stressed.

**Ex:** “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”

(*Sonnet No. 18* by William Shakespeare)

Iambic: The curfew tolls the knell of parting day

U / U / U / U / U /

The cur | few tolls | the knell | of par | ting day |

Here one unstressed and one stressed, U+ / = one foot, in this line we have five feet . This line is called as Iambic pentameter. The straight line is to indicate one foot.

**Trochaic:** It is a fundamental unit of a foot consists of two syllables; one with stressed followed with the unstressed syllable.

**Ex:** There they are my fifty men and women

/ U / U / U / U

There they | are my | fifty | men and | women|

Here, the pattern is stressed followed with unstressed, /+U= one foot, in this line we have five feet. This will be called as Trochaic pentameter. The straight line dividing the line is to show the foot.

**Dactylic and Anapestic:** It is a long syllable with two short syllable called syllable weight. The instances can be observed in great epics of Greek poet Homer, the Iliad and the Odyssey. In English poem, it follows the pattern of two unstressed syllables and stressed syllable. Here two unstressed and one stressed, UU+/= one foot. We have four feet. This will be called as ‘Anapestic Tetra meter’. The straight line in between indicates foot in a line

**Dactylic Ex:** Eve, with her basket was

Deep in the bells and grass

/ U U / U U

Eve, with her | bas ket was |

/ U U / U U

Deep in the | bells and grass |

Here one stressed and two unstressed, /+UU= one foot. We have two feet. This will be called as ‘Dactylic diameter’

Anapestic ex: The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold

U U / U U / U U / U U /

The As syr | ian came down | like a wolf | on the fold |

Spondaic meter has only stressed ( // ) syllable whereas Pyrrhic meter has only unstressed (UU) syllable. This technique is used to make the poem rhythmic so that it can eliminate the mechanical and boring method of writing a poem.

### **Poetic length:**

U /

A monometer is simply a line with one foot. ex: upon – up on is monometer i.e., one foot

U / U /

\* a line with two feet is dimeter ex: up on | those boughs. This is a dimeter i.e., two feet

1 2

U / U / U / U / U /

Up on | those boughs | which shake | a gainst | the cold

1 2 3 4 5

This is in Trochaic meter where stressed is followed by unstressed syllable. There are four feet in each of these lines making them tetrameter. When we combine the meter with line length to get the metric of the description i.e., Trochaic tetrameter.

This is how we have to scan a poem. These are the tools to understand poetry or rhythmic pieces of literature.

### **3.2.3 Rhyme and Rhythm in Poetry:**

In poem, the use of stressed and unstressed syllables is basically termed as rhythm. For example let us consider the word - poetry. The first syllable is stressed, and the last two are unstressed, as in PO-e-try. A rhyme is a recurrence of same sound words at the end of each line of a poem or a song.

**Ex.**

“The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more”

So here, the ending is with the same sound, *bore* and *more*. This is called as rhyme

**Ex: Tyger ( by Willam Blake)**

“Tyger! Tyger! **burning** bright  
In the **forests** of the night,”

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### **Function of Rhythm:**

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The role of rhythm in poem is similar to the musical note of a song. It is used to express the need of certain words stronger than others. They might be stressed for a longer duration. Hence, the use of such rhythmical nature or pattern of sounds makes the mind and soul balanced.

### **3.2.4 Rhyme and Rhyme Schemes**

**Rhyme scheme** is important within poetry. It not only gives the work meter but also flow. The capital letters are used to denote rhyme scheme like ‘A’. ‘B’ and so on. For example, a four-line poem in which the first line rhymes with the third line, and the second line rhymes with the fourth line has the rhyme scheme ABAB, ...

Some rhyme schemes follow a simple pattern like AA and BB. For example:

“The sky is very sunny. (A)  
The children are funny (A)  
Under the tree we sit, ( B)  
But just for a bit (B)”

In the past several years, poets used different rhyme schemes. A few were very particular with the norm of the rhyme scheme like, the Keats ode, whereas others broke the traditional rules of rhyme scheme and created their own. Let’s explore some common rhyme scheme examples.

**Alternate Rhyme:** They are one of the simplest types of rhyme scheme, also called as interlocking rhyme. This rhyme scheme includes ABAB pattern demonstrated in four lines of a stanza. An example is “Neither Out Far In Deep”

“The people along the sand (A)  
All turn and look one way. (B)  
They turn their back on the land (A)

They look at the sea all day. (B)”

### **Ballad:**

A ballad is narrative in nature. This tells a story. Ballads get more complex when it comes to rhyme scheme. A ballade has 28 lines, including three 8 line stanza with the rhyming pattern ABABBCBC. The end will include a 4-line and the rhyme scheme BCBC. For example Hilaire Belloc’s “Ballade of Modest Confession.”

### **Coupled Rhyme:**

The coupled rhyme creates fun element and does not create any complex procedure. They will be a pleasure reading especially for the kids. It follows a simple format in two lines stanza as AA, BB, CC, etc rhyme scheme. Great poets from Shakespeare to Chaucer used rhyming couples. For example, look in Dr. Seus’s “Green Eggs and Ham”.

### **3.2.5 Stanza:**

In poetry we see a group of lines , it can be of two lines, three lines, four, five or six lines or even ten lines. These groups of lines are called as stanzas. So stanzas are of different types in which the structure will be different, length will be different.

**Forms of stanzas:** there are different types of stanzas in English literature like: Chaucerian stanza, Spenserian stanza, Ottava rima , Terza rima and Heroic Couplet. Now let’s discuss about them

**Chaucerian stanza:** This is called as Chaucerian stanza because it was first used by Jeffery Chaucer. He took this idea or style from France . This is also called as Rhyme royal because first time King James-I of Scotland used it in his poem “Kings Square”. In this the structure will be written in Iambic pentameter with seven lines. Its rhyme scheme will be ab ab bcc. Here last two lines cc are same so, it is called as couplet

### **Ex:**

“Ful wel arrayed, both meste, mene, and leste,

Ye, both for the seson and the feste”

It is mostly used to write long narrative poems. Chaucer himself has used it in his Canterbury tales. To narrate too many stories he used this type of stanzas. William Shakespeare also used it in his poem “The Rape of Lucracy”. In the Victorian age, William Morris used this style in his poem “The Earthly Paradise”. So it is used for long narratives with seven lines rhyme scheme and at the end with a couplet.

**Ottava Rima:** This was first used in England by Sir Thomas Wyatt. As he had connections with Italy for his diplomatic missions so he brought this form from Italy to England. The structure of this style is First it is like Chaucerian stanza used for long narratives works. This was used by P B Shelly and Lord Byron in their poems.

**Spenserian Stanza:** It is a famous stanza. This was first used by Edmund Spenser in his Romantic Epic poem “Faerie Queene”. The structure of this style is, it has nine lines out of which eight lines are written in Iambic pentameter, and the last line is a bit longer than the eight lines i.e., it is written in hexameter. Its rhyme scheme will be ababbcbcc.

**Terza rima:** This was used by the Italian poets. For the first time, it was used by the Italian poet Dante in his epic *Divine Comedy*. Terza rima was made famous in England by PB Shelly in his poem *Ode to the West Wind*. Robert Browning also used this style. Its structure is ABA BCB CDC. It has three lines. Its rhyme scheme is connected from one stanza to the other.

“O wild west wind, thou breath of Autum’s being,     A  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead     B  
Are driven, the ghosts from an enchanter fleeing     A

Yellow and black, and pale, and hectic red,     B  
Pestilence-sticken multitudes: Othou,     C  
Who chariotest to their dark winty bed     B”

**Quatrain stanza:** It is a very flexible stanza, it has four lines. It is flexible because it can be used in ballads and also in sonnets like the three quatrains and one couplet as Shakespeare used in his sonnets. Meter can also be anything like pentameter, tetrameter. The rhyme scheme can also be of any pattern like ABAB, AABB. In English literature it is mostly used in writing ballads. For example, Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*.

**Heroic Couplet:** It has two lines in iambic pentameter. A heroic couplet contains complete meaning and is self-sufficient. The use of pause indicated by a comma is called caesura. Christopher Marlowe used it in the poem *Hero and Leander* and in the Restoration period, Dryden and Alexander Pope used it extensively. They used for their satirical works like *Mac Flecknoe* and *Rape of the Lock* respectively.

“The time is out of joint, O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right!”

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### 3.3 Learning Outcomes

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At the end of the Unit, should be able to understand that prosody is the study of meter, rhyme, and the sound and pattern of words used in prose but far more commonly in poetry. You should also know the steps to scan a poem:

- Read the poem aloud
- Spot the strong and weak syllable
- Mark the syllables with symbols ( to indicate stressed and unstressed)
- Identify the pattern of syllables
- Divide the syllables into feet
- Count the number of feet
- Identify the meter

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### 3.4 Glossary

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**Grammar:** The rule of a language

**Accent:** a particular way of pronouncing words that is connected with the country, area or social class that you can form

**Corresponds:** To be the same as or equal to something to match

**Pentameter:** a line or verse consisting of five metrical feet, or ( in Greek & Latin verse) of two halves each of two feet and a long syllable

**Consonants:** Any of the letters of English alphabet except a,e,i,o,u

**Conspicuous:** easily seen or noticed

**Derivative:** a form of something (especially a word) that has developed from the original form.

**Conventionally:** in a way that is traditional and ordinary

**Phonology:** relating to the system of contrastive relationship's among the speech sounds that constitute the fundamental components of a language

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## 3.5 Sample Questions

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### 3.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The word “prosody” comes from the \_\_\_\_\_ language.  
(a) Latin                      (b) Germany  
(c) Italian                      (d) French
2. Prosody is the study of and the use of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) meter, rhyme, and rhythm  
(b) length, beauty & period  
(c) prose, speech & language  
(d) poet, time & length
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is the repetition of speech sounds in a chain of nearby words; the term is usually applied only to consonants.  
(a) Cacophony              (b) Alliteration  
(c) Trochaic                  (d) Quantitative
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is the recurrences of a sequence of consonants, but with a change in the intervening stressed vowels.  
(a) Vowels                      (b) Rhyme  
(c) Stress                      (d) Consonance
5. Onomatopoeia is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Echoism                      (b) Assonance  
(c) Versification              (d) Dactylic
6. The word metre is derived from the Greek word ‘*metron*’ which means \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Length                      (b) Measure  
(c) Poem                      (d) Rhythm
7. Meter can be measured as for one foot it is called \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Decametre                  (b) Dimeter  
(c) Monometer                  (d) Octameter
8. Ottava Rima was first used in England by \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Sir Thomas Wyatt              (b) Jeffery Chaucer  
(c) Dante                      (d) P.B.Shelly

9. Heroic Couplet has a complete meaning. If you see a comma in between, it is a pause. This pause is called \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Caesura                      (b) Rima  
(c) Stop                          (d) Start

10. In poetry, \_\_\_\_\_ is expressed through stressed and unstressed syllables.

- (a) Rhythm                      (b) Meter  
(c) Expression                (d) Length

### **3.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Explain Rhyme and Rhythm in a poem.
2. What is a Stanza and its forms?
3. Define Heroic Couplet
4. What is a Chaucerian stanza
5. Symbols are used in order to scan a passage in verse. Write the symbols, name of the symbols and its purpose.

### **3.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. What is versification of a poem? Explain in detail.
2. Discuss meter and explain its forms.
3. Explain prosody in detail giving examples.

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## **3.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Prasad, Birjadish. *A Background to the Study of English Literature*. Rev. Ed. New Delhi, Trinity Press, Laxmi Publications Pvt.Ltd, 2021.
2. N.C., Sinha. *Rhetorics & Prosody*. New Delhi, Prabath Prakashan, 2017.
3. Cuddon, J.A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2015.



## **Unit – 4: Development of English Poetry from Chaucer to Milton**

### **Structure**

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Development of English Poetry from Chaucer to Milton
  - 4.2.1 About the Poets
  - 4.2.2 Important Text from Chaucer to Milton
  - 4.2.3 Poetic Forms, Style and Devices of the Age
  - 4.2.4 Contemporary Poets
  - 4.2.5 Poetry Groups of the Age
- 4.3 Learning Outcomes
- 4.4 Glossary
- 4.5 Sample Questions
- 4.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### **4.0 Introduction**

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The history of English literature has been divided into many periods. Every age has certain characteristics of subject-matter, thought, tone and style. There have been many great writers belonging to every age with their specific qualities. Though their qualities were different from each other, certain qualities of the age connected them. The age of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton occupies prominent places in the history of English literature because of the greatness of writers and their creativity. The ages to which these writers belong are also known by their names.

Chaucer belonged to the fourteenth century (1350-1400), the age which has witnessed two great movements in England both in political and social context. The political change occurred in the reign of Edward III; growth of the English national spirits after the victory of England during the Hundred years war. It led to the decline of French influence on England as it was politically segregated from France as well as from the Roman bondage giving rise to extreme patriotism in the country. This increasing patriotism led to the decline of the French language and the popularity of the English language making it the language of court, parliament and masses. Social change also occurred in the fourteenth century during the reign of Richard II.

The difference between the high class and the peasant class led to the discontent in the society. It is due to the fact that the wealthy classes were living in luxuries and the peasants were overtaxed making them miserable. This led to the violent rebellion of Tyler. Besides these two movements, the age had also witnessed other developments.

There have been many great writers in the fourteenth century like Langland, Wyclif, Gower, Mandeville and Chaucer. These writers have distinct qualities. Langland voiced discontent in his writing, he preached the equality of men and dignity of labour in his work. Wycliff is regarded as the greatest of English religious reformers because he imparted the Gospel to the people in their native language. Gower, considered a scholar and literary man, criticized the vigorous life and its consequences and Mandeville, the traveller who is famous for writing travelogues. And the most famous of all is Chaucer who was a scholar, traveller, courtier and businessman. He is considered the first real national English poet.

After Chaucer, the next age in English literature is of vital importance as it is the Elizabethan age (1550-1620). The accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne led to the development of England in all spheres. Under her administration, the lives of the English people progressed rapidly, opening new horizons and in the field of English literature it has brought revolution. There are many characteristics which define the age and the most important feature of the age was the establishment of complete tolerance between Catholic and Protestants which was due to the efforts of the Queen. There was comparative social contentment due to the rise of economic growth giving employment to maximum people. The increase in trade due to various reasons made England a wealthy nation. This was an age which was an age of dreams, adventure and enthusiasm as many sailors found the sea routes to many lands and further made the base for future English colonization. To sum up, we can say that the Elizabethan age was an age of intellectual liberty, growing intelligence, growth of wealth, increasing patriotism among masses, rise of the middle class and establishment of peace in England. The famous writers of the age are; Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare.

The next age in English literature is the Puritan Age (1620-1660). The Puritan age, which was basically the Puritan movement, is considered as the second and greater Renaissance in England. The aim of the movement was to make men honest and free. Hence it has two objects; personal righteousness and the second is civil and religious liberty. The spirit of the movement was highly religious but it was not narrow-minded and it also included all shades of belief. There were political upheavals in the age owing to the struggle between the King and the Parliament.

The religious ferment of the age led to the foundation of Restoration and the decline of the ideal of the national church. The age which was witnessing confusion due to the breaking of old ideals and the establishment of the new ideals was the same as the situation of literature of the period; Medievalism was dying and the new forms like “metaphysical” was growing. Donne and Herbert ignited the age with their new poetic forms and the rise of Milton, who became the embodiment of the Puritan noblest spirit.

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## 4.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- study the development of poetry from Chaucer to Milton
- understand Middle and Early Modern English poetry
- examine the socio-cultural dynamics and English poetry from Chaucer to Milton
- demonstrate style, structure and content of the some famous poems from Chaucer to Milton
- understand the historical context of poets from Chaucer to Milton
- know the contemporaries of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Milton

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## 4.2 Development of English Poetry from Chaucer to Milton

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### 4.2.1 About the Poets:

The age from Chaucer to Milton has witnessed many great poets but among them the most famous poets are Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Milton. In this Unit, we will discuss all these great poets, their contemporaries, their important literary creations and other relevant aspects.

Chaucer (1340-25 Oct 1400) is an English poet who is famous for his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*. He is regarded as the “father of English literature” or the “father of English poetry”. He is considered the first real national English poet as he broke the dominance of other languages in England like French and Latin and legitimized the literary use of Middle English. He is credited with attesting almost two thousand English words to his manuscript. His other famous works includes; *The Book of Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *The Legend of Good Women*

and *Troilus and Criseyde*. He was born in the reign of Edward III, lived his life in the reign of Richard II and died in the reign of Henry IV.

In the Elizabethan age, we have two great poets, Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. Spenser, the English poet famous for his fantastical allegorical poem, *Faerie Queene*, is considered as one of the greatest poets of the English language. His year of birth is a matter of discussion among scholars as some consider it as 1552 while other 1553. In 1590, he published the first three books of his masterpiece epic poem, *The Faerie Queene* which celebrate the Tudor dynasty and Elizabeth I. In 1596, he published the second set of the books. In 1594, he married his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle, much younger in age and celebrated the marriage in his poem, *Epithalamion*. He also addressed her in his famous sonnet, *Amoretti*. His other famous poems include *The Shepherd's Calendar* and other shorter poems like *Complaints* and *Prothalamion*.

William Shakespeare (26 April 1564 - 23 April 1616) is considered one of the greatest writers of all times in world literature and the greatest dramatist in the English language. He is regarded as the national poet of England and scholars regard him as the “Bard of Avon.” Throughout his life he has written 39 plays, 154 sonnets, three long narrative poems and a few verses. His plays are translated, performed and studied all over the world. He began his career as an actor, writer and part-owner of a theatre company named “Lord Chamberlain’s Men” between 1585 and 1592. In 1613 at the age of 49 he retired to Stratford, the place where he died after three years. His writing career can be divided into three parts but he produced most of his work between 1589 and 1613. In his early days, he wrote comedies and histories but later he wrote tragedies. But in the last stage of his life he wrote tragicomedies which are basically romances.

After the Elizabethan age, the next age witnessed two great writers, John Donne and John Milton with their different styles. John Donne (22 January 1572 - 31 March 1631) is an English poet with a scholarly outlook. By profession, he was a soldier and secretary who received royal patronage. He is the chief representative poet of metaphysical poetry. His poetry is known for unique style i.e., metaphorical and sensual which is present in all his creations including, sonnets, love & religious poems, elegies, song and his prose works like satires, epigrams and Latin translations. The sermons which he wrote also became very famous. Though he possessed great poetic talent and education, he lived in poverty throughout his life. His works include *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), *The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World* (1611), *The Second Anniversary: Of the Progress of the Soul* (1612), *Devotions upon Emergent*

*Occasions* (1624), *Poems* (1633), *Juvenilia: or Certain Paradoxes and Problems* (1633), *LXXX Sermons* (1640), *Fifty Sermons* (1649), *Essays in Divinity* (1651), *Letters to several persons of honour* (1651) and *XXVI Sermons* (1661).

The last poet in this Unit is John Milton (1608 - 1674) who is an English poet and intellectual. Though he wrote many poems and prose pieces on religious and political themes, he is famous for his masterpiece epic, *Paradise Lost* (1667). The epic, *Paradise Lost* which is written in blank verse is regarded as one of the greatest works of literature of all times. His fame rose in his lifetime as his writing in English, Latin and Italian became famous worldwide. He read and travelled a lot which formed the basis of his liberal thinking. Milton's experience during his student life in the 1620s to the English Civil War also helped him in his writing. He died in 1674, but till then he was famous all over England for his intellectual, liberal and religious writings. Some of his famous poems are *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (1629), *On Shakespeare* (1630), *On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-Three* (1631), *L'Allegro* (1632), *Il Penseroso* (1632), *Lycidas* (1637), *On His Blindness* (1652), *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671)

#### **4.2.2 Important Text from Chaucer to Milton:**

##### **Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales***

*The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* is one of the greatest works in English literature. Chaucer's fame rests mostly on it. The prologue of the poem opens with the description of Spring by the narrator. It is the month of April and the narrator is describing nature as he talks about the April rains, blossoming flowers and leaves, chirping of the birds and other things. This time is appropriate for going on a pilgrimage as the weather is neither hot nor cold. They all decide to go to the pilgrimage of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury to thank him for helping them in time of crisis.

The Prologue to the Canterbury tales give a description of twenty-nine travellers who are going on a pilgrimage to Canterbury to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. Chaucer also joins them as a pilgrim and they all meet at the Tabard Inn. There are different characters in the poem each with their own skills and talents. The narrator lists them as per their rank and status. They are: Narrator, Knight, Wife of Bath, Pardoner, Miller, Prioress, Monk, Friar, Summoner, Host, Parson, Squire, Clerk, Man of Law, Manciple, Merchant, Shipman, Physician, Franklin, Reeve, Plowman, Guildmen, Cook, Yeoman, The Second Nun and The Nun Priest.

It was decided that each pilgrim would tell two tales on their way. So there are many interesting stories told by different characters describing them. At the same time, it reveals the narrator's point of view as well. As the poem progresses, we see lots of chaos and clashes among different people which are resolved by the host. Through this, we also come to know about their personality. The first tale was told by the Knight and the Monk was supposed to tell the second tale but the drunken Miller wishes to tell the second tale.

### **Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene***

Edmund Spenser wrote the English epic poem, *Faerie Queene* Book I-V which made him famous all over the world. He published *Faerie Queene* Books I-III in 1590 and Books IV-V which is considered as one of the longest English language poems. It is an allegory celebrating the dynasty of Queen Elizabeth I. Spenser is credited with inventing the verse form which was named the Spenserian stanza; *Faerie Queene* is based on it. The poem gave him royal patronage which he received throughout his life. This was also one of the reasons *Faerie Queene* gained success immediately. The book is divided into five parts: *Faerie Queene* Book I-V. Each part focuses on a different aspect.

Book I tells the story of the Knight, his virtues of holiness and the tale of his lady, Una and their fight against the monsters like Error, Duessa, Orgoglio. There is a misunderstanding created between them but they overcome it and finally are betrothed after beating Archimago. Book II is about the story of Sir Guyon and the virtue of Temperance embedded in him. Archimago persuades him to attack the Knight. He joins Arthur and fights with the witch Acrasia and saves many people from her. Book III deals with the story of a lady knight, Britomart and her virtue of Chastity. The heroes of Book I & II, Guyon and Arthur, are also part of it as they meet Britomart in it. In this tale, Britomart rescues the Knight and tells him about her wish to marry Sir Artegall. Redcrosse Knight joined her in her campaign. They fight with the evils and later Britomart rescues Amoret from the wizard Busirane. There are differences in the ending of this book in version 1590 and version 1596. (The earlier version has a happy ending which is the reunion of the lovers but the new version doesn't have.

Book IV is the continuation of the events of Book III though the title of the book is "The Legend of Cambell and Telamond or Of Friendship". But the book doesn't centre around them or their friendship and they partly occur in it. In this poem, we see the stories of Scudamore, Britomart and Amoret. We see the struggle between Britomart and Arthegal supported by Scudamore. Arthegal falls in love with her and confesses his feelings to her but he has to go on a

quest. Britomart and Scudamore embark together to find Amoret, who was abducted by a savage man who imprisoned her in his cave. She was saved by the squire Timias and Belphoebe and meets Arthur, who helps as a knight. On their way, they meet Scudamore and Britomart. In this book, the lovers are reunited. So it has a different plotline than Book III. We also witnessed the story of Marinel and Florimel. In Book V, we see the tale of Sir Artegall and the virtue of Justice embodied in it and Book VI tells the story of Sir Calidore and the virtue of Courtesy embodied in it.

### **Shakespearean Sonnets**

Shakespeare is famous worldwide as a dramatist but he is also a writer of sonnets and has published 154 sonnets. He wrote them between the early 1590s and about 1605s and revised them again and again. He published the Versions of Sonnets 128 and 144 which were published in the poetry collection, *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. Later, they were published in his quarto in 1609 with a dedication to a mysterious Mr. W.H. which became the matter of speculation for critics and scholars as to who is Mr. W.H. No matter different scholars have proposed their speculation regarding it but there has been no conclusive identification in this regard.

His sonnets have been widely read since ages because of their expressive ideas and thoughts possessing multiple meanings. Shakespeare has employed various themes in the sonnets like passage of time, mortality, love, beauty, infidelity and jealousy. If we classify them we find that the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a young man and the last 28 sonnets addressed to a mysterious woman, 'dark lady'. These sonnet's main concern is 'love' but they depict various aspects like time, change, ageing, lust, absence, infidelity and the difference between ideal and reality in respect to the person whom we love. Though so many centuries have passed, still there's curiosity regarding Shakespearean sonnets because of their unresolved questions.

The first 126 sonnets which are addressed to a 'Fair Youth' have a classification in terms of themes as the first 17 sonnets encourage the fair youth to marry and have children. After these sonnets, they have different themes which have continued till 126 sonnets. The sonnets from 127 to 152 which have been addressed to the 'dark lady' have some aspects as it explores a woman who is elusive or maybe tyrannous and it seems to have caused great pain and shame to the narrator of the poems. The word 'dark lady' seems to be a paradox of the complexion of a fair lady and the last two sonnets, 153 and 154 focus on Greek God Cupid. The themes of these sonnets are desire and longing.

The common aspects of his sonnets are that they are written in fourteen lines and in iambic pentameter. They are divided into three quatrains with the final concluding couplet. The final couplet is supposed to provide either a decisive, epigrammatic conclusion to the narrative proposed in earlier sonnets. The rhyme scheme of most of the sonnets are *abab cdcd efef gg*. This sonnet form and the rhyme scheme is called the 'English sonnet'. After Shakespeare, many poets have followed this pattern in their poems.

### **John Donne's Love Poems**

John Donne is a representative metaphysical poet and is considered as one of the great poets in English literature. He is considered as an intense poet both in terms of love poems and religious poems. In his poems, we find paradoxes of faith, human and pure love as well as mysticism. He is credited with using conceits, in other words extended metaphors for giving multifarious ideas. This has led to ambiguity which is a famous trait of his poems.

It is believed that Donne wrote love poems 400 years back but these poems are so lively as if they speak to readers directly. In the poem, *Elegy V*, we see a lover who is ready to board a ship for a long journey but before that he returns to his lady love to share the last moment of love or farewell intimacy. *The Good Morrow* is a poem in which two lovers have turned their back on the world because they want to celebrate the world which they have found in each other. They are clandestine lovers who are struggling against the disapproving world. In the poem, *The Perfume*, we see a jealous husband and a profound suspicious father.

In the love poems of John Donne, we witness multifarious experiences which are unique and different from each other, sometimes even juxtaposed. The poem, *The Anniversary* is a dramatic lyric in which the poet is celebrating the anniversary of his love which has completed one year as the title signifies. His beloved is present as a listener. In the poem, the poet is explaining the immortality of true love which is beyond death. The poem has both the theme; love as well as mysticism because the poet has explored the contradiction of immortality and death in it. His *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* is the best example of a metaphysical poem. At the same time, it talks about true love which is pure and beyond this world. The poem is subjective in nature because Donne has expressed his own feeling as he wrote it when he was going for a long journey leaving his wife. He explained to her that true love doesn't need physical presence because the souls of the two lovers are united always whether they are close or apart.



In the poem, *The Flea*, the poet is asking his beloved to look at the tiny creature “flea” who has witnessed their love. Since it has sucked the blood of them which has mingled in her body so she is also a participant in their love. *The Good Morrow* has several concepts thematically but basically it centers on evolving love. It transforms from physical love to spiritual love. The two lovers believe in each other which makes them brave and they pursue their dreams. *The Canonization* is one of Donne’s most romantic poems exemplifying his wit and irony.

### **John Milton’s *Paradise Lost***

*Paradise Lost* is a masterpiece epic poem written in blank. It is considered as one of the greatest works in English literature. Milton’s fame heavily depended on it, making him one of the great poets in English literature. He published the first version in 1667 in ten books and when he published the second version in 1667 he published twelve books. Scholars believed that he was influenced by Virgil’s *Aeneid*. It is a religious epic as it is based on the biblical allusion, the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man from Heaven. It is a fine example of epic tradition, beginning with the invocation to the Heavenly Muse and starting with *medias res*.

Milton has depicted the story of Satan also as he was one of the angels first but when he disobeyed God he became the fallen angel; Lucifer. Satan believed that instead of serving God in Heaven it is better to rule in Hell so he revolted against God and was defeated. He and other fallen angels were banished from Heaven. The other fallen angels like Mammon, Beelzebub, Belian and Moloch also supported him in his endeavour. Milton has depicted the fight between good and evil in the form of faithful angels and Satan’s army. This is in fact an Angelic war over Heaven in which Satan is defeated in the three days war. So in the end, it was the divine forces of the Son of God who won the battle. This led to the creation of the world and human beings in the form of Adam and Eve.

When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them the Garden of Eden to live where they had all kinds of freedom but they had to follow certain instructions. He asked them not to eat the fruit of the wisdom tree. Being angry and conspiring to take revenge against God, Satan tried to seduce Eve to go against the command of God and was successful in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. At his encouragement, Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree and Adam, in order to protect her, had to support her even in her mistake also so he followed her in her act of disobedience. This act is considered as the first disobedience of mankind leading to the

beginning of sufferings for humanity. But not only Adam and Eve were punished but God has punished Satan and his followers also for enticing Eve.

Many people have written this biblical story in different genres and languages but Milton's version is the most popular one as its popularity has not changed after so many centuries.

#### **4.2.3 Poetic Forms, Style and Devices of the Age:**

The great poets like Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Milton have used distinct styles in their poetry. Chaucer is credited with inventing the rhyme royal and also the first English poet to use the five-stress line which is related to iambic pentameter in his work. Being an admirer of classical poetry, he has written his works in continental accentual-syllabic metre. In his poem, *The Legend of Good Women*, he used the arrangement of five-stress lines into rhyming couplets. This he has used in his later works also making the base to make it popular standard poetic forms in English. In *The Reeve's Tale*, he has used a funny accent of a regional dialect to make it humorous and satirical. He is one of the poets of the era who standardized the London dialect of the Middle English language, combining it with Kentish and Midlands dialects. One of the distinct qualities of Chaucer's poetry is that he has used irregular spellings, but the modern readers can recognize it easily. *The Oxford English Dictionary* recorded Chaucer as the first poet who has used many common English words in his writings.

In his poems, Shakespeare has used blank verse or in other words, a metrical pattern consisting of unrhymed iambic pentameter. Mostly his plays are composed in blank verse or in simple prose. Almost all the sonnets of Shakespeare are written in iambic pentameter except Sonnet 145 which is written in iambic tetrameter. In terms of poetry, he is the writer of sonnets as he wrote 154 sonnets in his lifetime.

In his poems, whether it is love or religious poetry, Donne has started abruptly using myriad paradoxes, ironies and dislocations. One of the features for which he is famous is frequent use of dramatic use of everyday speech rhythms. His poems are juxtaposed with Elizabethan poetry and in it we find tense syntax and tough eloquence. With intellectual profundity, they seem to be an adaptation of English aristocratic or sophisticated elite language. Though he faced huge criticism, he wrote poetry reflecting the mannerisms of English society. One of the important aspects of Donne's poetry is the idea of true religion for which he has given his entire life theorizing the concept. He wrote both mystical as well as erotic poems which

reflect the contradictory nature of his writings. But above all, he is highly respected for his mastery of metaphysical conceits.

Milton, famous for monumental work, *Paradise Lost* which he wrote in blank verse. Being a free spirited human being believed in extreme freedom so he introduced this desire in his writings in the form of blank verse and the other as the prose work, *Areopagitica*. He contributed to the English language by introducing new words which were coined from Latin and Ancient Greek. He invented grandiloquence of voice and vision with peculiar diction and phraseology.

#### **4.2.4 Contemporary Poets:**

All ages from Chaucer to Milton have witnessed other writers of significance owing to each age who have contributed to the development of literature of each age. There are four prominent writers who were Chaucer Contemporaries; William Langland, John Wycliff, Gower and John Mandeville. William Langland is famous for his poem, *Piers Plowman*. He was a seer who voiced his prophecy in the poem *Piers Plowman* which became very successful. Being inspired by this success in 1399, he wrote another poem, *Richard* which was basically a protest against Richard II. But the poem is incomplete and after the assassination of the king, Langland disappeared and there was no trace of him, not even about his death. The second writer, John Wycliff was one of the most influential personalities of fourteen century England. A University man, a profound scholar and a close ally of Langland, Wycliff took interest in common people rather than the wealthy class. He was given the title of “father of English prose” because of his translation of the Bible. He translated the Bible from Latin Vulgate which was copied all over England.

The third writer of repute is John Gower, famous for his critically acclaimed work, *Confessio Amantis* which he completed in 1390 at the age of sixty. The poem is based on the Greek myth with the presence of Genius, the priest of Venus. Actually it is the confession of a lover to Genius leading to the seven deadly sins. Scholars believed that Gower was influenced by Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* as he has used the same narrative style to tell a series of tales. The poem explores the common nature of each sin committed by the lover with their particular forms. The last contemporary of Chaucer, John Mandeville, is famous for his travel writing. In 1356, he published *Voyage and Travail of Sir John Mandeville* which was an extraordinary book written in excellent style in the Midland dialect although he wrote the original work in French. The book was translated into Latin, English and other languages very soon because of its popularity. The book is basically the account of his travels during thirty years. The distinct quality of the book is

that it is also the first prose work in English with a different itinerary style making Mandeville famous for the ages.

Some minor poets who were Spenser and Shakespeare's Contemporaries are Thomas Sackville, Philip Sydney, George Chapman and Michael Drayton. Sir Thomas Sackville is one of the predecessors of the Elizabethan age. Being influenced by Dante's *Inferno*, he wrote his great poem, *The Mirror for Magistrate*. The idea behind this poem was that each character should tell their own story. He also wrote the first tragedy in English, *Ferrex and Porrex*, better known as *Gorboduc*, leading to the rise of drama. The next poet, Sir Philip Sydney, is considered an interesting human in his approach towards life. His life is regarded as more interesting than his books and students are advised to read his biography. He was so unfortunate that his three great works were published posthumously. This is because he didn't pay much attention to his writing though he encouraged his contemporary, Spenser. His poem *Arcadia* is a pastoral romance in which the shepherds and shepherdesses are celebrating their rural lives. The second work, *Apologie of Poetrie* better known as *Defense of Poesie* which was an answer to Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse*. His third great work, *Astrophel and Stella* is a collection of songs and sonnets which he has addressed to the lady once he was betrothed, Lady Penelope.

The third contemporary, George Chapman, wrote mostly for the stage. Basically the plays he wrote were more poems in dialogues. He is mainly known for his metrical translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He was also the finisher of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. The last contemporary, Michael Drayton, is regarded as the most interesting figure among minor poets of the age. He was considered more scholarly than his predecessor. His most significant work, *Polyolbion* which is a longer poem and composed of a thousand couplets describing the landscape of Britain and the legend associated with it. His other two important works are, *Barons' War* and the *Heroic Epistle of England* and some minor poems like *Ballad of Agincourt* based on the heroic deeds of noble ancestors.

Donne and Milton who belonged to the Puritan age had contemporaries like George Herbert, Thomas Carew, Suckling and Lovelace. George Herbert represents the true spirit of the Puritan age. He is believed to be the first poet in English literature who has spoken face to face with God in his poetry. During his lifetime, his reputation was greater than Milton but his poems were published posthumously. His most significant work is *The Temple* which consists of one hundred and fifty short poems based on religious themes.

#### **4.2.5 Poetry Groups of the Age:**

There have been many poetry groups from the age of Chaucer to the age of Milton like The Spenserian Poets, The Metaphysical Poets and Cavalier Poets.

##### **The Spenserian Poets**

The first group which falls in this category are “The Spenserian Poets”. Spenser, being one of the greatest poets, had a great influence on the poets of his age and even after his demise. The two followers of Spenser, Giles Fletcher and George Wither, were known as Spenserian poets. Though there are many other poets termed as Spenserian poets, these two are the most prominent ones. Giles Fletcher was an admirer of Milton’s noble simplicity and majestic lines and Milton in his early days was a follower of Spenser. His most famous work, *Christ Victory and Triumph* published in 1610 is an allegory in Spenser style. After *Piers Plowman* it was regarded as one of the greatest religious poems published in England.

George Wither is a prolific poet of English literature, a satirist and a composer of hymns. He lived in both the period; Elizabethan and Restoration period. He also worked enormously covering literature in both the ages. In 1612, he wrote an elegy on the death of the Prince of Wales, Henry Federick and in 1613, he published a volume of poems on the wedding of the princess Elizabeth. And in 1623, he published *Hymns and Songs of the Church*. He was basically a lyric poet of original nature.

##### **The Metaphysical Poets**

Metaphysical is the term given by Dr. Johnson to the fantastic form used by Donne in his poetry and by a group of minor poets who write in the same form. The group belonged to the seventeenth century, among whom Donne stands as a central figure. The other poets of this group includes; George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, John Cleveland, Abraham Cowley and Richard Crashaw. These poets have one thing in common and that is intellectual quality. Their writings consist of synthesis of emotion and intellectual ability, marked by conceit or “wit”

Metaphysical poetry is regarded as poems which analyse more and are less concerned with expressing feelings which means poets are more interested in traversing the mental break-up of their consciousness. Their poems are full of ironies and paradoxes. Their languages are composed of dramatic directness and the rhythm consists of living speech. The poets belonging to metaphysical poetry had distinct qualities. George Herbert is considered as one of the foremost British devotional lyricists. Henry Vaughan, a Welsh metaphysical poet, author and

translator known for his religious writings. Andrew Marvell is a poet, satirist and politician. He wrote on themes like love, aristocratic country house and garden as well as personal and political satires. John Cleveland is an English poet who is famous for writing political satires. Abraham Cowley adapted the Pindaric ode to English poems. Richard Crashaw was a poet and teacher, cleric and Roman Catholic convert. He wrote religious poetry with a definite mysticism and reflecting an ardent Christian faith.

### **The Cavalier Poets**

The Cavalier school of Poets belonged to the seventeenth century. They were gallant and trivial Cavaliers, regarded as openly rebellious. This school of poets include Thomas Carew, Robert Herrick, Suckling and Lovelace. Their poems were quite different from the poems of the Puritan poets. While the poets of the Puritan age composed serious poems, they composed trivial, lively, full of joy and on a lighter note. They were closely related to the Royalists as they were supporters of King Charles I.

Thomas Carew may be considered the inventor of Cavalier love poetry. His poems were a synthesis of sensual and religious form which is a unique quality. Being influenced by Spenser, he wrote Spenserian pastoral verses with a pure, direct and vigorous voice. Robert Herrick is regarded as a true Cavalier because of his jovial nature and light spirit. In his poems he has depicted the countryside surroundings in which he has lived. He has written on multifarious themes ranging from lighter love songs, pagan in spirit to highly religious ones.

Sir John Suckling possessed the quality of “wit” profoundly and was regarded as one of the most brilliant wits in Charles I court. He reflected his experience of his wild life in his poems. His life and poetry were parallel to Richard Lovelace. They are often classed together because of their allegiance to Charles I. But Lovelace’s poems are deeper in meaning. He fought on behalf of the King during the English civil war. He believed in spiritual freedom which he has reflected in his first volume of poetry, *Lucasta*.

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## **4.3 Learning Outcomes**

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At the end of this Unit, you are expected to:

- know about poetry from Chaucer to Milton
- understand Middle and Early Modern English poetry

- familiarize with the socio-cultural dynamics and English poetry from Chaucer to Milton
- demonstrate knowledge of style, structure and content of the some famous poems from Chaucer to Milton
- Know the contemporaries of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Milton

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## 4.4 Glossary

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<b>Justification:</b>	Giving reason
<b>Segregated:</b>	Differentiated
<b>Imparted:</b>	Bestow
<b>Discontent:</b>	Dissatisfied
<b>Endeavour:</b>	Attempt
<b>Contentment:</b>	Satisfied
<b>Invocation:</b>	To call for inspiration or witness
<b>Exemplifying:</b>	Clarify by giving an example
<b>Pastoral:</b>	A literary work portraying ideal village life
<b>Multifarious:</b>	Diverse, various types
<b>Upheavals:</b>	A violent or sudden change
<b>Paradoxes:</b>	Nonsense or contradictory statement
<b>Patronage:</b>	The support given by a patron
<b>Vigorous:</b>	Strong and full of energy
<b>Synthesis:</b>	Mixture or combination
<b>Sensual:</b>	Carnal or fleshy

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## 4.5 Sample Questions

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### 4.5.1 Objective Questions:

#### Fill in the blanks

- Chaucer belonged to \_\_\_\_\_ century
- Spenser is famous for his \_\_\_\_\_ poem.
- The name of the theatre company owned by Shakespeare was \_\_\_\_\_.

- iv) The Puritan Age is called the second \_\_\_\_\_ in England.
- v) Milton was the embodiment of the \_\_\_\_\_ noblest spirit.

**True or False**

- i) Chaucer lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- ii) The accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne led to the development of England in all spheres.
- iii) Shakespeare is known as the “Bard of Avon”.
- iv) The ideal of the National Church declined in the Puritan age,
- v) Donne lived in luxury throughout his life.

**4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Give a brief account of Chaucer’s contemporaries.
2. Describe Shakespearean sonnets.
3. Write about John Donne’s love poems.
4. Describe Metaphysical poetry.
5. What do you mean by the term, Cavalier Poets?

**4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Write in detail about Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*.
2. Describe Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* in detail.
3. Describe John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

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**4.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Greenblatt, Stephen, et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Major Authors*. Volume 1, 10th ed. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2019.
2. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Secker and Warburg Ltd, 1961.  
Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read a Poem*. Blackwell, 2007.
5. Gardner, Helen, editor. *Metaphysical Poets*. Penguin, 1957.
6. Kreutzer, James. *Elements of Poetry*. Macmillan, 1971.
7. Rickett, Compton Arthur. *A History of English Literature: From Earliest Times to 1916*. Dodge Publishing Comp, 1916.



## Unit – 5: The Development of English Poetry from Milton to Eliot

### Structure

#### 5.0 Introduction

#### 5.1 Objectives

#### 5.2 The Development of English Poetry From Milton to Eliot

##### 5.2.1 Milton and Puritan Poetry, Metaphysical Poetry, and Cavalier Poetry

##### 5.2.2 Neoclassical Poetry or Augustan Poetry

##### 5.2.3 Transitional Poetry to Romantic Poetry

##### 5.2.4 Victorian Poetry

##### 5.2.5 Modern Poetry to T.S. Eliot

##### 5.2.6 Let Us Sum Up

#### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 5.4 Glossary

#### 5.5 Sample Questions

#### 5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 5.0 Introduction

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English poetry is the earliest form of writing in English literature. A *Hymn* composed by the Christian monk named Caedmon (composed between 658-680 AD) in Old English is considered the first recorded piece of poetry. The earliest known epic in English is the *Beowulf* written in Old English around the 8<sup>th</sup> century. During the Renaissance and the Age of Shakespeare, poetry was the dominant form of literature. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* written from about 1387 to 1400, Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion* (1594), William Shakespeare's sonnets composed between the early 1590s to about 1605 add a richness to the study of English literature. Early English drama was also written in verse form. Long before the novel appeared on the literary scene, poetry was well-established and patronized by the royalty and the aristocracy. In this unit we will look at the development of poetry from John Milton to T.S. Eliot.

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## 5.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit include:

- an overview of English poetry from John Milton to T.S. Eliot.
- a familiarization with the major poets, poetic forms, poems, and the literary merit of poetry across the span of several centuries.
- to serve as a literary background to the study of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton in Unit 6, “The Prelude” by William Wordsworth in Unit 7, and “The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock” by T.S. Elliot in Unit 8.

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## 5.2 The Development of English Poetry From Milton to Eliot

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The Elizabethan Age (1558-1603) was a period in which poetry flourished and reached great heights of excellence, with William Shakespeare’s sonnets as the undisputedly magnificent compositions of the time. In the next period, generally referred to as the Age of Milton or the Puritan Age (1625-1650), John Milton is regarded as a major poet. This period also includes the Metaphysical and Cavalier poets. In the following period of neoclassical poetry, poets such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope were more famous for their contribution to English poetry. In the Age of Transition between the Neoclassical Period (1660-1785) of Dryden and Pope and the Romantic Age (1785-1832), poets like Thomas Gray popularized the Pindaric ode. The Romantic Age proposed imagination to be superior to reason and gave a new fervour to English poetry. Poets of this time such as William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley, Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, Anna Barbauld, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson contributed immensely to the lyric form and brought poetry into the domain of the common people. In contrast, the Victorian Age (1832-1901) which followed gave importance to realism and reason in poetry and was didactic in nature. In the first semester, you had read about the contributions of Victorian poets like Alfred Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning. The dramatic monologue reached its perfection in this age. The Pre-Raphaelite movement (1848-1860) was closely followed by the Decadents (1880-1901), the Edwardians (1901-1914) and the Georgians (1910-1936). With W.B. Yeats, poetry again reached new heights and by the time we come to Eliot,

poetry once again peaks in English literature. Imagism and free verse were introduced. You will now read about the development of the English poetry in stages.

***Check your progress:***

1. Name three ages in the history of English literature.

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2. Name two poets of the Romantic Age.

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3. What is the Age of Milton also referred to as?

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**5.2.1 Milton and Puritan Poetry, Metaphysical Poetry and Cavalier Poetry:**

John Milton (1608-1674) is regarded as the greatest of English poets after Shakespeare. His poetry is characterized by the use of religious and classical themes, allusions, and diction. Milton is regarded as a Puritan in his concern with moral truth and justice, on his reliance on direct, simple language, and on Biblical allusions as evident in his works. He is recognised for his high literary merit and a preference for religious ideals, evident through his sonnets like “On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three,” “On His Blindness,” the pastoral elegy “Lycidas” and “Samson Agonistes.” Despite a conservative outlook, moral preaching, and the Hebraic references in his poetry, we clearly see Milton’s love for the Hellenic and the classics. In “Lycidas” (1637), Milton laments the untimely death of his friend Edward King using the pastoral elegy. “On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three” (1632) and “On His Blindness” (1655) are Petrarchan sonnets.

Milton’s renown rests more firmly, however, on the epics *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671), written in the epic form. *Paradise Lost* is widely hailed as Milton’s masterpiece. You will study it in detail in the next unit. Now we will introduce you to the Metaphysical poets.

The Metaphysical poets were inspired by John Donne (1572-1631). He wrote both love poems and religious poems. His poetry is characterized by the use of colloquial style, scholastic imagery, use of conceit, abrupt openings, and a vivid juxtaposition of ideas. *Songs and Sonnets* (first published as a collection in 1635), “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” (1611) and “A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy’s Day” are his well-known poems. It was Dryden who first referred to Donne using the term “metaphysics.” Thereafter, the term metaphysical was used to refer to

poets in the Age of Milton such as George Herbert (1593-1633) whose *The Temple* (1633) is written in support of the Church of England, Richard Crashaw (1613-1649) who wrote religious poems like *Steps to the Temple* (1646), Henry Vaughan (1622-95) who wrote both love poems and religious poems, Thomas Carew (1594-1639), Abraham Cowley (1618-67) and Andrew Marvell (1621-78) who is most well-known for “To his Coy Mistress” and “The Garden.” Metaphysical poetry is marked by wit, concentration, complexity, and a dramatic directness of language.

The Cavalier poets, so called for their allegiance to Charles I, wrote lyrical poems on the themes of love and war and followed Ben Jonson’s style of sophisticated and intellectual rationality. Robert Herrick (1591-1674) wrote short poems on profane love and religious themes; Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) is famous for his volume of short poems titled *Lucasta* (1649) and Sir John Suckling (1609-42) is another carefree gallant of the Cavalier school of poets.

Throughout the Age of Milton, the lyric remains dominant though in decline when compared to the preceding age. The epic arrives in English literature and the blank verse reaches its perfection with Milton. The heroic couplet begins its appearance, but it reaches perfection only in the next age. You will read more about the Neoclassical Age in the next sub-section.

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***Check your progress:***

1. How did the term “metaphysical” come to be applied to Donne?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Mention two features of Donne’s poetry.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The Cavalier poems are lyrical poems on the theme of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

4. What is Lovelace famous for?

\_\_\_\_\_

**5.2.2 Neoclassical Poetry or Augustan Poetry:**

The collapse of the Puritan Age and the rift between the Protestants and the Catholics contributed to a shift in literature from romanticism to classicism. The restoration of Charles II to the throne of England in 1660 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 too had an important influence on the poetry on the Neoclassical Age, also called the Augustan Age. The Neoclassical poets believed in the imitation of both ancient classical Roman and Greek writers, and of French writers. Their poetry is characterized by correctness in form, style, and diction. They adapted the

heroic style of the classical epic for trivial subjects in the “mock epic” as a satirical weapon to point out the unheroic character of contemporary times. The Neoclassical poets are also called the Augustans, for their admiration of the golden era of Roman writing under Emperor Augustus. Dr Johnson wrote that Dryden found English literature “of brick and left it in marble” just like Emperor Augustus found Rome in bricks and left it in marble. Hence the term Augustan is applied to this age.

John Dryden (1631-1700) wrote extensively during this period. He celebrated the return of Charles II in “*Astrae Redux*” (1660). “*Absalom and Achitophel*” (1691) was a satire on political events and written in support of the monarchy. “*Mac Flecknoe*” (published in 1682) is a biting satire famous for its antithesis and use of heroic couplets. Dryden’s lyrics such as “*A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day*” (1687) and “*Alexander’s Feast, or the Power of Music*” (1697) were popular poems of the age. Samuel Butler (1612-1680) is famous for his mock-heroic satire of the Puritans in his *Hudibras* (published in three parts from 1663 to 1678).

By 1700, power was sharply divided between members of two opposing political factions or parties, the Tories and the Whigs. The reaction against Puritanism waned and a period of tolerance set in. Prose writings became predominant, but poetry as written by Alexander Pope retained its position. The lyric and the ode forms almost disappeared. Satire was popular and the narrative form was extensively used. The pastoral form also remained in vogue. In fact, Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) was composed in heroic couplets influenced by classical writers and *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) written to bring truce between Lord Petre and Arabella Fermor is regarded as a brilliant mock-epic in heroic couplet. A perceptible change began to set in though, and you will read more about this shift from the Neoclassical to the Romantic in the following sub-section.

***Check your progress:***

1. Charles II was restored to the throne of England in \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The neoclassical poets are also called \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What is neoclassical poetry characterized by?

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**5.2.3 Transitional Poetry to Romantic Poetry:**

Before the Augustan Age came to an end, there was a gradual reaction to Neoclassicism and a shift was perceptible in the revival of the romanticism of the Elizabethan Age. There was a dwindling of interest in political themes and poets became more interested in nature for their

inspiration. A regard for Shakespeare rekindled as ballads and lyrics became popular poetic forms.

The transition to writing about nature is seen in the four-part descriptive poem set in blank verse, “The Seasons” by James Thomson (1700-1748). Oliver Goldsmith’s pastoral elegy, “The Deserted Village”(1770) is an account of the displacement of agrarian villagers, with descriptions of nature and a rural way of life. Thomas Gray (1716-1771) is an important poet of the transition period who achieved fame and recognition with his “Elegy written in a Country Churchyard”(1751). William Collins (1721-59) and William Cowper (1731-1800) also belong to the Age of Transition. The Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759-1796) is credited with being a precursor to the Romantics and his first collection titled *Poems* (1786) is composed of lyrics in simple diction, employing the imagery of nature and leaning toward realism. One of his most famous lines is: “My love’s like a red, red rose.”

William Blake (1757-1827), a lyric poet comes closest to the Romantics with his preoccupation with imagination and emotions. He is regarded as a true romantic in spirit, upholding the freedom of the individual, a love of nature and of medieval literature in his poems. Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* (1789) consists of short, joyful, lyrical poems dealing with childhood, innocence and happiness. “The Lamb” is a good example. His *Songs of Experience* (1794) depict the conflict between what is gentle and cruel, beautiful and ugly, good and evil. A good example of the duality of God and duality in nature is the poem “The Tyger.” The work of these writers is said to have prepared the ground for Romantic poetry. You will read about Wordsworth and other romantic poets now.

William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, P.B. Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron are the more famous names from the Romantic Age in British Literature. The period between 1798 (the date of publication of *Lyrical Ballads*) to 1832 (the year Walter Scott died and the year of the Reform Bill) is often considered as the dateline for this Age. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) jointly wrote the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth devoted himself to common incidents while Coleridge took up supernatural aspects in *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” is the most famous poem in this volume. Wordsworth went on to write several lyrics in the years to follow. “The Solitary Reaper” and “I wandered lonely as a cloud” are poems that you may have read earlier. “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” and “Ode to Duty” are among his widely anthologized odes. You will read his autobiographical poem in blank verse, *The Prelude*, in Unit 7.

Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" published in the *Lyrical Ballads* is among his more famous poems. This ballad laid the ground for the use of the supernatural in Romantic literature. "Christabel" (1816) is an unfinished long narrative poem also dealing with the supernatural; the octosyllabic meter used by Coleridge in this poem influenced several poets. Another poem which remained incomplete is "Kubla Khan"(1798). Composed after the poet experienced a dream, it is a highly imaginative poem that uses exquisite imagery to describe the palace that Kubla Khan built in Xanadu. "Frost at Midnight"(1798) and "Dejection: An Ode" are two other famous poems of Coleridge.

Among the more famous work of George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) are *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), a descriptive poem based on his travels. The protagonist of this poem came to be known as an archetypal Byronic hero—a variation of the brooding Romantic rebel who rejects traditional heroic virtues and is marked with a greater degree of emotional and psychological complexity. *Don Juan* (1819-1824) was a satirical poem which was unacceptable to his society because it was considered evil and immoral. In his satire, Byron is closer to the Augustans than to the Romantics.

The poet-hero, as an ideal and an illusion, also figures in the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) along with nature, melancholy, lyricism and the supernatural among other elements. His more famous works include "The Revolt of Islam" (1818), a poem in twelve cantos, "Ode to the West Wind"(1819) that introduced a new stanzaic form composed of five sonnets, "Prometheus Unbound"(1820) which is a four-act lyrical drama and "To a Skylark"(1820) as an ode to the "blithe" spirit of a singing skylark. It is Shelley who famously remarked that poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" in his critical essay, "A Defence of Poetry" (1821; published, 1840).

John Keats (1795-1821) lived a very short life but wrote extensively and is perhaps the most renowned. "On first looking into Chapman's Homer" (1817) is a sonnet, "The Eve of St. Agnes"(1819) is a narrative poem, and his famous odes composed around 1819 include "To a Nightingale," "On a Grecian Urn," "To Autumn."

Romantic poetry is said to be characterized by the use of simple diction, nature imagery, an elevation of imagination over reason, the individual over society, an influence of the Elizabethan Age and the French Revolution especially its slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity. Rural settings, the speech of ordinary persons, a sense of revolt, an awe of the rebel, non-conformity to social or political norms, descriptions of the landscape are some of the

features of Romantic poetry. There is a highly subjective element and most often, the poet is himself the subject of the poem.

The Romantic Age paved the way for the Victorian Age. In the first semester, you studied about the Victorian Age. Let us now look at Victorian poetry.

***Check your progress:***

1. Oliver Goldsmith wrote \_\_\_\_\_.
2. James Thomson wrote \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The poems “The Lamb” and “The Tyger” are written by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. “Tintern Abbey” and “The Solitary Reaper” are poems by \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Name two poems by P.B. Shelley.  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Given any two characteristics of Romantic poetry.  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**5.2.4 Victorian Poetry:**

The reign of Queen Victoria and the industrial revolution marks poetry written during the Victorian Age (1832-1901). Alfred Lord Tennyson, Mathew Arnold, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Gerald Manley Hopkins are some of its more famous poets.

Alfred Lord Tennyson’s popular works include “Ulysses” (published in 1842) and “In Memoriam A.H.A.” (1850) both of which represent a Victorian spirit and times. “In Memoriam” was written in the memory of his beloved friend Arthur Hallam and is an expression of the poet’s grief on an untimely death. Like most Victorian literature, “In Memoriam” (1850) too deals with the conflict between religion and science and seeks a reconciliation. The despair of the poet at a personal level extends to a despair over the sudden loss of faith witnessed in society due to the then current ideas about the theory of evolution, particularly influenced by the work of Charles Darwin. “Ulysses” is a dramatic monologue in blank verse which displays a Victorian spirit for travel, discovery, adventure, and a thirst for knowledge. You will read more about dramatic monologues when we study Robert Browning.

Mathew Arnold wrote “Dover Beach” (published 1867), a deeply philosophical dramatic monologue that addresses a silent audience on questions of the rift in society between religion and science. The poem reflects on the doubts unleashed in Victorian society as a result of work on evolution, including through work such as Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species by Means of*



*Natural Selection* (1859). The prevailing uncertainty, pessimism and loss of faith are characteristic features of the poem.

The Victorian Age also witnessed the emergence of the Pre-Raphaelite school of poetry, influenced by medieval art and literature from before the time of the Italian painter Raphael. Christina Rossetti and her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti were important Pre-Raphaelite poets. Christina Rossetti wrote extensively and found fame in her lifetime. *Goblin Market* (1862) is among her more famous poetry collections and is concerned, like most of her work, not with reform in society but with the salvation of the individual. In Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem "The Blessed Damozel" (1850) which was also later a painting by the same name, we find the presence of the omniscient narrator as in most Victorian literature. It also features two other narrators: the beloved who has died and yearns to be reunited with her lover, and the lover himself who feels her presence on earth with him. The poem is full of exquisite imagery and is a painting in words.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) and Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) are often compared to each other. Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" (published 1843) examines the problem of child labour in the Victorian Age and the squalid conditions that children lived and worked in. Barrett Browning condemned child labour, wrote against slavery, and in favour of the unification of Italy in her poems.

Robert Browning (1812-1889), her husband, is famous for the use of dramatic monologue. We mentioned the dramatic monologue when we discussed Tennyson and Arnold. A dramatic monologue is characterized by the use of single persona as the speaker. Through this speaker, we become aware of the presence of other characters with whom the speaker is interacting. The style is colloquial as the speaker of the poem addresses the reader directly. It has an abrupt opening, and through the monologue, the speaker presents the scene and the setting, and reveals the character of the speaker too. The dramatic monologues of Browning include "Porphyria's Lover" (1836), "My Last Duchess" (1842), "Andrea del Sarto" (1855) and "Fra Lippo Lippi" (1855).

Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) introduced "sprung rhythm" in Victorian poetry, which was so radical that his poems were not accepted for publication, and he remained unrecognized in his own times. Religion and nature are the major themes in his poetry. Like Christina Rossetti, Hopkins also believed that religion was superior to art. In "The Wreck of the Deutschland" modeled on the Pindaric ode (1875), Hopkins begins with a general invocation to God and an autobiographical account of his own religious experience. The poem goes on to talk

about a tragic shipwreck based on news reports and compares the faith and final agony of an individual passenger to the Passion of Jesus Christ before ending with a direct address to God. The poem was not accepted for publication because of its use of sprung rhythm, as well as its trust in religion over science.

***Check your progress:***

1. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are Victorian poets.
2. “In Memoriam” was written in the memory of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is a recurrent theme in the poetry of \_\_\_\_\_.

**5.2.5 Modern Poetry to T.S. Eliot:**

Pre-Raphaelite poetry paved the way for Decadent poetry which was a shift from the didacticism of the Victorian poetry in appealing to “art for art’s sake.” However, it was short-lived. This was followed by Georgian poetry written during the reign of King George V. The whole of Georgian poetry appeared in anthologies by the same name between 1911-1922. Robert Brooke, Walter de la Mare and John Drinkwater are poets from this time. However, even before it could establish itself, Imagism in English poetry became popular and with it the Modern Age set in in English poetry. The Imagists wrote under the influence of T.E. Hulme who advocated the “vers libre” and influenced both British and American writers. It was the American poet Ezra Pound who coined the term Imagism. You must remember Ezra Pound is also remembered for editing T.S. Eliot’s draft of “The Waste Land.”

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), unlike the Victorian poets before him, believed in imagination over reason. He forms the link between the Victorians and the Moderns. His poetry as seen in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1893) presents the spiritual barrenness of his times which leads him to seek a philosophy to replace the materialistic philosophy introduced by science in the Victorian Age. “The Second Coming”(1919) reiterates his faith in religion. Yeats brought a new vigour to English Poetry in the post-World War I years. Though the novel continued to be the most popular form of literature, the contribution of poets like Yeats made poetry more popular than drama in the period between the two World Wars. “Easter 1916”(1916), “The Second Coming” as well as the “Byzantium” poems (1928-1930) proved Yeats’ greatness as a symbolist. The symbols used in his poetry include the gyre, the sea, the bird and so on. The gyre serves as an important recurring symbol representing the cycle of history. Fragmentation, disillusionment and shifts from a rural to an urban landscape in Yeats’ poetry go on to form the characteristic features of Modern poetry. This increasing position of Modernism finds

culmination in poetry written by T.S. Eliot who is considered the greatest Modernist poet. You will read about Eliot and his contribution in the following paragraph.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) created a niche for himself not only in English poetry in particular but in English literature in general. You will read his poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917) in Unit 8. With “The Waste Land” (1922), Eliot became immortal as a poet. The poem is divided into five sections: The Burial of the Dead; The Game of Chess; The Fire Sermon; Death by Water and What the Thunder Said. His other famous poem “Ash Wednesday” (1930) is divided into six parts, each of which represents a mental state. The poem introduces the break from Imagism to Modernism in English poetry. The disjointed stanzas, the sense of despondency, fragmentation, disillusionment, isolation, excessive use of allusions, mystic element, obscure imagery and symbols are the main features of Eliot’s poetry. All these elements often make “Ash Wednesday” and “The Waste Land” difficult poems to understand. In “Ash Wednesday,” we notice a shift towards religion and the beginning of hope for the Modern man ravaged by the War. Poetry in the post-war period reflected the despair and sense of disillusionment mentioned earlier. There was also an increased influence of symbolism in poetry.

***Check your progress:***

1. \_\_\_\_\_ advocated the verse \_\_\_\_\_.
2. “Imagists” wrote under the influence of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ edited the manuscript of “The Waste Land.”
4. \_\_\_\_\_ was a symbolist.
5. Name two symbols used in the poetry of W.B. Yeats.  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is the greatest Modernist poet.
7. List any two features of the T.S. Eliot’s poetry.  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. “Ash Wednesday” is divided into \_\_\_\_\_ parts.

**5.2.6 Let Us Sum Up:**

In this Unit, we surveyed English poetry from John Milton to T.S. Eliot. Our discussion closed with the year 1932, when Eliot’s “Ash Wednesday” was published. Several shifts are noticed in English poetry from the Puritan Age in which Milton wrote to the twentieth century in which Eliot wrote. Epic in English reached its perfection. Lyric became a popular poetic form. Innovations are seen in metaphysical poetry, in Imagism and in Symbolism. The Neoclassical

tradition brought the mock-epic and the satire into English poetry. The Romantics brought back the power of imagination. Objective poetry gave way to the subjective. With the Victorian Age, realism began to take centre-stage. Dramatic monologue, sprung rhythm, Imagism, were among the new elements introduced. The conflicts of the different ages left their influence on the English poetry and helped keep it in a dynamic mode. While the contribution of the poets is too vast to be covered in one Unit, we hope you gained some understanding that will help you to follow the prescribed poems in the following Units in this Block.

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### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

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After reading this Unit, you should have an understanding of the trends in English Poetry from Milton to Eliot. You should be familiar with some of the major poets, poetic forms and poems. You should also know the importance of the study of poetry. This Unit should prepare you for a textual analysis of select poems in the units to follow.

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### 5.4 Glossary

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- Age of Milton:** Is another name for the Puritan Age, as explained above.
- Age of Transition:** Is the period between the Neoclassical Age and the Romantic Age when writers like Thomson, Gray and Blake paved the way to a revival of Romanticism
- Ballad:** Is a narrative poem using dialogue and repetitive lines or refrain to reveal a story.
- Blank Verse:** Is the use of iambic pentameter without end-rhyme. First introduced in Italy, it was used by literary giants like Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton, Yeats.
- Conceit:** Is a jarring comparison between two seemingly dissimilar objects, popular in Metaphysical poetry.
- Dramatic Monologue:** Is a form of poetry in which there is single narrator but the presence of other characters, the setting and scene are revealed through the single speech which is uttered in a moment of crisis.
- Elegy:** A sad narrative poem often dealing with the theme of loss and death.

**Elizabethan Age:** Is the period in the history of English literature when Queen Elizabeth ruled over England, i.e., 1558-1603. Also referred to as the Age of Renaissance, it was the age of Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe among others.

**Epic:** A long narrative poem dealing with the exploits of a superhero using an elevated style and diction.

**Hebraic:** An element in Milton's poetry that refers to the use of biblical and religious themes and allusions.

**Hellenic:** An element in Milton's poetry that refers to the use of classical themes and allusions.

**Heroic couplet:** A form of couplet extensively used by the Augustans for satiric purposes to imply the exact opposite through antithetical statement.

**Horatian Ode:** Also known as regular ode is a direct address to a familiar person and is written in smaller stanzas of equal length on common subjects.

**Imagism:** Was introduced by T.E. Hulme and was well-received in the Modern Age by writers such as Ezra Pound and James Joyce. It is the use of images for precise expression.

**Lyric:** A form of poetry initially meant to be sung to the accompaniment of the lyre. It is an expression of the thoughts and feelings of the poet.

**Mock-epic:** A form which employs the elevated form and style of the epic while its subject and the treatment of the subject remain trivial.

**Modern Age:** In British literature is twentieth century English literature from about 1900 to 1960. It is characterized by a reaction against the Victorian Age and is deeply influenced by the two World Wars. The major poetic devices of this time include free verse, imagism, and symbolism.

**Modernism:** A period from around the turn or the beginning of the twentieth century to the early 1940s; it is marked by a rejection of tradition and a representation of the contemporary.

**Neoclassical Age:** Preceded the Romantic Age in English literature. It is the period between 1660-1798 which witnessed the influence of the classical Roman and Greek writers. Correctness, method, reason are its defining features.

**Pastoral elegy:** An elegy is an expression of grief and sorrow often on the theme of death; a pastoral elegy is imaginatively set in a rural idyllic surrounding with shepherds mourning the death of a fellow shepherd.

**Petrarchan sonnet:** A poem of fourteen lines divided into an octave and a sestet with abbaabba rhyme scheme in the octave. It is also called Italian sonnet as it originated in Italy.

**Pindaric Ode:** A form of ceremonial poetry which is written to celebrate an event or a person and is accompanied by music. It is divided into a strophe, an anti-strophe and an epode.

**Pre-Raphaelite poetry:** Poetry inspired by art from the period before the Italian painter Raphael and hence medievalism is the dominant influence.

**Puritan Age:** The period from 1600-1660 in the history of English literature when liberty of the individual was upheld over monarchy, when drama was banned as immoral and when religious orthodoxy prevailed.

**Romantic Age:** The period of English literature between 1798 to 1832 when Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and others were writing to give importance to imagination, individual and simplicity.

**Satire:** A literary device for ridicule and censure using irony, humour or exaggeration.

**Sprung Rhythm:** A poetic device invented by Gerald Manley Hopkins in which a stressed syllable is followed by unstressed syllables of unspecified number.

**Symbolism:** A movement that started in France and was a popular medium of expression in the Modern Age. Yeats and Eliot made extensive use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.

**The Augustans:** A term applied to writers of the Neoclassical Age, from Dr Samuel Johnson's use of the term for Dryden.

**The Victorian Age:** 1830 to 1900 is the Victorian Age in British Literature when Queen Victoria reigned over the British Empire (1837-1901).

**Vers libre:** Meaning free verse is a form of poetic device where rules of prosody do not apply. It was popular among the Modern poets who wanted freedom from rhyme and rhythm.

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## 5.5 Sample Questions

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### 5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *The Canterbury Tales* is written by \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Name a sonnet written by John Milton.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ wrote “To his Coy Mistress.”
4. “Absalom and Achitophel” is a \_\_\_\_\_ on political events.
5. Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock” was written to bring truce between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Who wrote the *Songs of Innocence*?
7. \_\_\_\_\_ meter is used in “Christabel.”
8. “Dover Beach” is written in the form of a \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ wrote “The Wreck of the Deutschland.”
10. The poetry of Yeats presents the \_\_\_\_\_ barrenness of his times.

### 5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Give three differences between Neoclassical and Romantic poetry.
2. Mention the aspects of Puritanism found in Milton.
3. Write a short note on Transitional Poetry.
4. Discuss the contribution of Yeats in brief.
5. Mention the five sections in “The Waste Land.”

### 5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Attempt a survey of English poetry from John Milton to T.S Eliot.
2. Elucidate on the greatness of Milton and Eliot as poets.
3. Critically evaluate the impact of socio-political events on English poetry.

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## 5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1923.
2. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. London: Martin and Warburg, 1960.
3. <https://youtu.be/eiSDMO23pH4> in-house audio-video lesson on Paradise Lost as an epic
4. <https://youtu.be/hQojSIWB2p8> in-house audio-video lesson on Romantic Poetry Part 1.
5. <https://youtu.be/ICyBkqah0lg> in-house audio-video lesson on Romantic Poetry Part 2.
6. <https://youtu.be/3hR8nBZZ0Sc> in-house audio-video lesson on Romantic Poetry Part 3.
7. <https://youtu.be/eUO-ICj6PHQ> Yale lecture on Modern Poetry.
8. <https://youtu.be/CqvhMeZ2PIY> A reading of The Waste Land by Eliot.

## Unit - 6: Paradise Lost Book IX

### Structure

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### 6.0 Introduction

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In Unit 5, we presented to you the development of the English poetry from Milton to Eliot. In this Unit we attempt an analysis of Book IX of *Paradise Lost* which details the climax of the Biblical account of the Fall of Man. Lines 1-100 are prescribed for your study. *Paradise Lost* (1667), divided into 12 books, is written in the form of a classical epic but the subject matter is biblical. Therefore, we find in it a blend of the Hebraic and the Hellenic elements. The fall of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate and the return of Charles II to England are contemporary political events readers also encounter in *Paradise Lost*. Consequently, critics have argued that Milton had a political motive in writing an epic and that Satan serves as a mouthpiece on issues that were close to him. However, it must be remembered that Milton was a staunch Puritan with strong religious convictions and his purpose as he himself states was “to justify the ways of God to men.”



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## 6.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are:

- to familiarize you with Book IX of John Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost* (1667).
- to help you understand the features of an epic, the use of poetic devices like epic similes, Hebraic and Hellenic allusions in *Paradise Lost*.
- to introduce you to Milton's stylistic use of the inversion of word order, the perfection of blank verse, the theme of *Paradise Lost* and Milton's Grand Style.

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## 6.2 *Paradise Lost*

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John Milton's stated purpose in writing the *Paradise Lost* was to "justify the ways of God to men" and he chose the lofty theme of the Fall of Man from the Book of Genesis in the Bible for his ambitious epic. Structurally, *Paradise Lost* was written initially in 10 books but was later expanded to 12 books. Milton was already famous when he began his epic. Moreover, his eyesight was failing and led to eventual blindness but this did not deter him from composing the epic. A Protestant in his religious beliefs and a Parliamentarian in his political beliefs, Milton opposed the monarchy and suffered when Charles II was restored to the throne of England. His belief in individualism stems from his Puritanical faith. Milton's religious dogma and his faith in the individual are reflected in *Paradise Lost*. Margarita Stocker notes in her *Introduction to the Variety of Criticism: Paradise Lost* (1998) that "[as] a Christian poem in classical epic form, *Paradise Lost* seems to reflect the humanist fusion of Christian with classical learning. Its assertion of man's free will can be regarded as humanist...Similarly, the poem's stress upon reason as man's inner guide to the proper use of his freedom reflects the idea that reason was God's imprint upon the human mind, an intellectual conscience" (p. 16). Much criticism revolves round Milton's depiction of Satan. William Blake is famously known for having said this about Milton: "He was of the devil's party without knowing it." Satan gets the loftiest speeches in *Paradise Lost*. Among his many famous lines is: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Whatever be the critical reception across the ages, *Paradise Lost* remains a canonical work of art and an epic par excellence in English till date. You will now read *Paradise Lost* as an epic.

**Check your progress:**

4. What was Milton's stated purpose in writing *Paradise Lost*.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How many books does *Paradise Lost* have?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Milton was a \_\_\_\_\_ in his religious beliefs.

7. What are the two kinds of allusions referred to in *Paradise Lost*.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. In which Book does of *Paradise Lost* does the climax occur?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What is the Age of Milton also referred to as?

\_\_\_\_\_

**6.2.1 Paradise Lost as an Epic:**

Milton chose the classical form of the epic for *Paradise Lost*. An epic, as you read in the previous unit, is a **long narrative poem** dealing with the exploits of a **hero** who is a superhuman, a demi-god or a god. It begins *in medias res*, that is, in the middle of action. Book I opens with Satan and the fallen angels lying in Hell after being thrown out of Heaven. An epic opens with an **invocation**, a prayer to the muses. Milton opens *Paradise Lost* with an invocation but being a staunch Puritan, his invocation is not to any one of the classical Muses but to "the Heavenly Muse." "Instruct me," prays Milton to the "Spirit." His invocation is: "What in me is dark/ Illumine," so that he may "justify the ways of God to men."

The **hero** in an epic is a being of great stature and Milton's hero is Adam, the first man to be created. Adam is not represented as an individual, but the archetypal man. Critics later on considered Satan to be the hero; yet others considered God himself to be the hero of *Paradise Lost*. The main theme of this epic is the Fall of Man. The **setting** of an epic is vast. The setting of *Paradise Lost* spreads across Heaven, Earth, Hell and encompasses the entire universe. The four main regions that Milton presents are Hell, Heaven, Chaos and the new Earth. Thus, it is a cosmic setting.

The **action** in an epic is on a grand scale. Wars involving gods, voyages to distant lands, elaborate meetings are an integral part of the action. In Milton's epic, there is action in the form of War between the good and the bad angels, Satan's temptation of Eve and Adam, the throwing out of Adam and Eve onto earth and the throwing of the fallen angels into Hell. In the beginning

of the epic, Satan resolves “to wage by force or guile eternal war.” The first meeting in the form of Satan’s address to the fallen angels is in the fiery river in Hell. The fall from Heaven into Hell; and from Heaven on Earth, Satan’s voyage to Earth, the new world in Book II are the voyages in *Paradise Lost*. A good example of the epic meeting is in the Pandemonium where Satan addresses the fallen angels. God is also presented as holding a meeting in Heaven.

The presence of the **supernatural element** is another feature of an epic. The use of a **deus ex machina** brought the gods on the stage to resolve the conflict between good and evil. In Milton’s epic, God, angels, Satan and the fallen angels form the supernatural element. There is a presentation of the **catalogue** of warriors in the battle. Milton also presents a catalogue of the fallen angels in Book I. Lengthy and **lofty speeches** as in the epic are found in *Paradise Lost*. Satan’s opening speech and his subsequent speeches are among the loftiest speeches in English literature. The first speech begins thus: “If thou beest he – but O how fallen!” and then Satan goes on inspire his followers thus: “What though the field be lost?/All is not lost.” Digressions are also an integral part of the epic. Milton’s erudite and scholarly nature are put to full use in the form of digressions. However, they do not serve an ornamental purpose only. They also add layers of meaning to the epic.

**Homeric epithets, epic similes, allusions** are features of an epic that are abundantly found in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. You will learn more about these in the following sub-sections.

***Check your progress:***

1. Do you know of any other epics? If yes, name any two of them.

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2. Mention any three features of an epic.

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3. Can you tell who are the characters in *Paradise Lost*?

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4. Who tempted Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*?

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**6.2.2 Poetic Devices:**

Milton was well-read in the classics, including the works of Greek poet Homer and the Roman poet Virgil, and had abundant knowledge of the Bible. There is an archetypal representation of Man, the good and the bad angels. The use of symbols include three major ones: the scales of justice which stand for God’s power of divine justice, the tree of knowledge which

symbolizes the temptation of the forbidden, and Adam's wreath for Eve that symbolizes true love. You will read more about Milton's Grand Style later in this Unit. Now we will study the major poetic devices used by Milton in *Paradise Lost*.

### 6.2.2.1 Epic Similes:

An epic simile, also known as the Homeric simile, is an extended comparison between two dissimilar things where the object of comparison is treated at great length and runs into several lines. It was used by Homer in his epics, *The Iliad* (around 700-750 BCE) and *The Odyssey* (around 725-675 BCE). Epic similes were also used by Virgil in *The Aeneid* (around 30-19 BCE) and Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queen* (1590).

Milton's use of the epic simile, both Hebraic and Hellenic, serves more than an aesthetic purpose. They are functional and add to the grandeur and stature of the theme and character. He uses a maximum number of epic similes in Book I, followed by Book IV and Book IX.

In Book I, Milton compares the fallen angels lying in the river of fire to leaves in Vallombrosa valley in autumn season; the use of an epic simile here runs into 13 lines. "His legions, Angel forms, who may entranced/ Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks/ In Vallombrosa, ....So thick bestrewn, / Abject and lost, lay these, covering the flood, / Under amazement of their hideous change." In the comparison of fallen angels to leaves lying strewn in autumn, Milton simultaneously evokes the image of rot and decay, as well as multitudinous numbers. The image is meant to indicate how, despite the huge number of angels on his side, Satan still lost the battle to God and the good angels. Similarly, Milton uses an epic simile to compare Satan's physical stature to the sea monster Leviathan, his shield to the moon as seen through Galileo's telescope and his spear to the tallest pine tree.

...the broad circumference  
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb  
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views  
...  
His spear – to equal which the tallest pine  
Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast  
Of some great admiral, were but a wand – [Lines 286-294]

The epic similes serve not only to depict the gigantic proportions of Satan but also demonstrate Milton's own vast learning and exposure through travel. Satan's depraved status, his deceptive and vile nature, is further presented through the comparison to the Leviathan whom

sailors would mistake to be an island and anchor off, only to be shaken into the sea and devoured. Thus, this simile evokes Satan not just as a huge, powerful being but also an evil, deceptive and ferocious beast.

Milton presents Satan's temptation of Eve in the climactic scene in Book IX too through an epic simile. As Satan looks around Eden, he is fascinated by the idyllic surroundings just as a person living in a city would be fascinated on entering the countryside. This again is an epic simile. Hellenic similes that span multiple lines are used to describe Eve, through a comparison with a list of classical goddesses who came to an evil end.

***Check your progress:***

1. What is an epic simile also known as?

---

2. Name two epics by Homer.

---

3. Who wrote *The Aeneid*?

---

4. What sea animal is Satan compared to in *Paradise Lost*?

---

**6.2.2.2 Allusions:**

*Paradise Lost* abounds in classical and biblical allusions. An allusion is a figure of speech; a hint and a play on words in which a brief reference is drawn to a person, place or event. The reference is generally indirect and the writer leaves it to the reader to make the connection to the person, thing, place or event alluded to. As we told you earlier, the form of the epic is classical but Milton uses it with a Christian subject. Hence, there is a blend of the Hebraic and the Hellenic elements in *Paradise Lost* as you learnt in the previous unit.

In the preceding section we mentioned the Leviathan. In using an epic simile here, Milton is also employing another figure of speech, an allusion. The Leviathan is an allusion to the Bible where the sea monster is mentioned in the chapters on Isaiah and Job. The allusion to Busiris in Book I is also a historical reference to the pharaoh of Egypt, Ramses II. The allusions of the goddesses when comparing Eve in Book IX are Hellenic allusions. The Vallombrosa valley mentioned in the previous section alludes to the actual place in Italy that Milton had visited.

On the whole, there are biblical allusions drawn from the chapters on Peter, Solomon, Romans, Timothy, Samson and Delilah. You must remember that the whole of *Paradise Lost* is

based on the Book of Genesis, so there are several references to Genesis throughout the epic. The classical allusions are drawn from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (about 8 BCE), Horace's *Odes* (23-13BCE), the myths of Medusa, Hercules, Tiresias, Tantalus, Dryad, Diana, Pomona, Ceres, and many more. The allusions to historical personages and geographical places are reflected in Galileo, the Egyptian King Ramses II, the Arctic Ocean, the Black Sea, etc. We also find allusions to Dante's *Inferno* (1320), Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591) Spencer's *Faerie Queen* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603),

**Check your progress:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is an allusion to King Ramses II.
2. Who wrote *The Faerie Queen*?

- 
3. Name two chapters from where Biblical allusions are drawn in *Paradise Lost*.
- 

**6.2.2.3 Inversion of Word Order:**

It is interesting to note that the opening sentence of *Paradise Lost* in Book I runs into 16 lines; it does not begin with the subject which occurs in line 6 and is placed after the verb. It begins with a prepositional phrase: "Of man's first disobedience," the main verb is "sing" and the subject is "Heavenly muse." The normal word order would be subject + verb: Heavenly muse, sing of man's first disobedience. Thus, the opening lines are:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,  
Sing Heavenly muse, ...

The inversion of word order in Milton's poetry is also referred to as the Miltonic sentence. His use of the blank verse not only facilitated the inversion of the word order but also demanded it. The sentences may seem convoluted at times but serve as a poetic device. The text abounds in this technique of inversion of word order.

**Check your progress:**

1. Into how many lines does the opening verse of *Paradise Lost* run?

- 
2. The inversion of word order is also known as the \_\_\_\_\_ .

#### **6.2.2.4 Blank Verse:**

Blank verse is the use of unrhymed iambic pentameter. Each line contains 5 feet. Each foot has an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. An important part of blank verse is the Caesura or the pause in every line. There is no end rhyme. Blank verse is best suited to an epic because of its sheer length. Thomas Wyatt first introduced it into English. Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare both used the blank verse before Milton, but with him it is said to have reached the highest level. Milton himself explained his use of the blank verse in *Paradise Lost* as “An example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.” Here, Milton refuses the bondage of rhyme while composing his epic and upholds poetic liberty and freedom in his choice of verse. The limitations of rhyme in English would have greatly impeded his epic. In this, Milton is the forerunner to the Romantics.

#### ***Check your progress:***

1. What is blank verse?

- 
2. What is iambic pentameter?
- 

#### **6.2.3 *Paradise Lost*, Book IX : A Textual Analysis (up to line 100)**

Let us first look at a brief summary of *Paradise Lost*. In Book I, we find Satan and the fallen angels lying in the river of fire. As we told you, the poem opens in the middle of the action or *in medias res* as per epic convention. There is an invocation of the “Heavenly muse.” The theme is clearly stated: the Fall of Man and to “justify the ways of God to men.” Book II presents Satan's journey to the new world, earth, and the fallen angels discuss whether to wage war against God. Book III is set in Heaven where God observes the journey of Satan to earth and foretells the Fall of Man. The son of God offers himself as ransom for man's disobedience. Book IV is set in the Garden of Eden where Satan watches Adam and Eve, tries to tempt Eve in her dream and is thrown out by the good angels. In Book V, Eve narrates her dream to Adam. The Archangel Raphael forewarns Adam, as they discuss various matters. Book VI is a visualization of the battle between good and evil angels with Satan's forces on one side and Abdeil's on the other as the battle commences. In Book VII Raphael tells Adam about God's decision to create

earth. Book VIII presents a divine explanation of scientific theories when Raphael tells Adam about the planetary and solar systems. Adam narrates his own creation, his discussion with God and how God had enjoined on him not to eat the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. Book IX presents the temptation of Eve by Satan and is the climax of *Paradise Lost*. Satan re-enters the Garden of Eden as a serpent. Eve and Adam both eat the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of good and evil and are thrown out of the Garden of Eden to earth as punishment. In Book X, there is resolution as God sends his Son to earth to fulfil the promise of Redemption and let Adam and Eve know about the consequences of their disobedience. Eve and all women are condemned to experience pain at childbirth. Adam and all men are condemned to toil on earth for livelihood. All snakes are condemned to forever crawl on the ground. Sin and Death also enter earth as part of divine punishment. In Book XI, God forgives Adam and Eve and promises their redemption through the Son. Raphael escorts Adam and Eve out of Paradise. They are promised the whole earth. Adam is shown the future of mankind. Finally in Book XII, the future of Man on earth is presented in continuation from Book XI. The stories of Abraham and Moses are presented. At the end, Adam and Eve leave paradise, holding hands and in tears.

We will now attempt an analysis of Book IX, lines 1-100. Like each Book, this also starts with a prologue. Titled “The Argument,” it presents the gist of the Book in prose and prepares the readers for what is to follow. We are informed that Satan returned to the Garden of Eden in the night after having journeyed across the earth. He enters into a serpent to beguile Eve. In the meantime, on Eve’s suggestion, Adam and Eve take different paths. Satan tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. She fallen into temptation, eats of the fruit and offers it to Adam. Adam is shocked but decides to eat the fruit. There is an immediate effect on both of them. E.M.W. Tillyard (1966) considered the prologue to Book IX as “the finest of all the prologues” and said it presents a “double change of atmosphere”: the “blackness of the storm clouds” are contrasted with the earlier “dazzling sky” and the action shifts “from the Garden of Eden to its final scene, the mind of Man” (*Milton*, 1966).

**Lines 1- 5:** Milton opens Book IX declaring that he will no longer talk of the discourse between Man and God or between Man and Angel, referring to the previous Books. He will not discuss any more the idyllic talk between them or their “venial discourse.” [the pronoun “him” in the text refers to Adam. In the earlier Books God and the Angels were shown as sitting with Adam and talking to him indulgently in good humour with pardonable discourse.]



**Lines 5 – 10:** Milton forebodes the tragic circumstances leading to the Fall of Man, stating that he must now shift to a “tragic” tone. Man’s disobedience, his revolt against the command of God to not eat the forbidden fruit, his evil “distrust” and the “breach” of loyalty to God will be discussed. Heaven representing God is “alienated” from Man. God has distanced himself, and His anger and “just rebuke” are seen in his judgement against Man. [Milton’s poetical tone in the text will now change to a tragic one, to suggest the breach of trust and the disloyalty of Man towards God. Man is estranged from God, is distanced from Him and experiences God’s wrath.]

**Lines 11 – 13:** Man’s disobedience brought sin, death and misery into this world. Sin, Death and Misery are personified here. Evoking the opening lines of Book I (“...all our woe”), Milton says the act of disobedience brought Man into a “world of woe.” Book IX thus opens to lead us back to Book I. [The judgement of God is passed against Man. It exposes Man to woe, misery, sin and death.]

**Lines 14 – 19:** It is a “sad task” to discuss the theme of disobedience and the fall but nonetheless is more “heroic” than what is found in the classical tradition. In Homer’s epic *Iliad*, Hector the mighty warrior and prince of Troy is chased three times around the city of Troy by Achilles, the Greek warrior of superhuman strength before Hector is caught and killed. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Lavinia’s favourite suitor and legendary warrior Turnus is enraged when her father gives her hand in marriage to the Trojan warrior Aeneas. Milton makes these allusions to Achilles, Turnus and Lavinia, Poseidon, Juno and Cytherea’s son from Greek mythology to suggest that Book IX is no less heroic than these classical epics. God’s anger against Man for his disobedience is far greater than Poseidon’s anger against Odysseus on killing his son, Juno’s ire against Venus or Cytherea, mother of Aeneas.

**Lines 20 – 47:** The invocation begins now with a prayer to his “Celestial Patroness” who visits him every night, uninvited. Milton is suggesting here that he does not have to put in effort to write his epic. She dictates to him while he sleeps, meaning his imagination is fertile. She inspires him to write “unpremeditated verse.” Milton is putting forth a theory of poetry that was to be the foundation of the coming age, the Romantic Age. (Wordsworth would later define poetry as “spontaneous overflow of emotions recollected in tranquillity.”) Milton then goes to tell how the subject of the epic had been chosen several years ago but that he began working on it late in his life. In the past epic poetry was written on heroic themes of wars, depicting the tales of kings and their conflicts, their voyages with details of their war horses, shields, and other

paraphernalia. Knights and their armour, their tournaments and such things had preoccupied the heroic poets. But Milton is unlike them and aims something truly lofty, “a higher argument” even though he modestly considers himself neither “skilled nor studious” like his predecessors. Milton hopes to fulfil his aim of writing an epic on an exalted theme, unlike any that was written before. His only fear is that old age may dampen his spirit and prevent him soaring high in writing an epic. With this, the invocation ends and a new stanza begins.

**Lines 48 – 69:** Milton without any further diversion takes his reader straight to the scene of action. We are once again made aware of the presence of Satan. In the previous Book, Satan had tried to tempt Eve in her dream but he was discovered by Gabriel and driven out of Paradise. Now Satan returns stealthily by night after circling the earth and journeying for seven nights without a break. This time Satan is more fraudulent and malicious. He is “bent on man's destruction” and fearlessly returns to the Garden of Eden despite Gabriel's threats.

**Lines 70 – 86:** A number of allusions follow from the geographical world. Before entering Paradise, Satan had travelled relentlessly in search of a creature that he would use as a disguise to enter Paradise. He traversed the seas, the lands, and the depths of oceans in his search. The Tigris, the Pontus, the Ganges and the Indus rivers were all inspected. Satan did not give up until he found “The serpent the subtlest beast of all the field.”

**Lines 87 – 100:** Satan did not select the serpent immediately on the spur of the moment but deliberated first. After a “long debate” he resolved that the serpent was a “fit vessel” because it is the “fittest imp of fraud” in whom he could hide his “dark suggestions.” To fulfil his sinister game, Satan felt that the serpent was the best form he could take because nobody would suspect his diabolic intentions in the wily snake. So Satan made him up mind resolutely that he would enter into a serpent to gain entry into the Garden of Eden and tempt Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. But before he enters, he bursts out in grief at the thought of Earth being as good as Heaven.

***Check your progress:***

1. Name two personifications in lines 11-13 of *Paradise Lost*.

---

2. Satan tried to tempt \_\_\_\_\_ in a dream.

---

3. What is the “fittest imp of fraud”?

---

#### 6.2.4 Theme:

As we told you, Milton's stated aim in writing *The Paradise Lost* was to "justify the ways of God to men." Hence the main theme of the epic is the Fall of Man based on the Book of Genesis in the Bible. The theme is purely Christian. The complete subject matter of the epic draws heavily from biblical tradition. Most of the characters and all the major characters in the epic are from Christian traditions. In the allusions and in the epic similes we find pagan or Hellenic references. Satan, the fallen angels, the good angels, the Son of God, Adam, Eve, Raphael, Gabriel, God are all drawn from the Book of Genesis. The exalted form of the poem necessitated an exalted and elevated theme and style and vice versa.

Milton was a staunch Puritan and a Protestant, a defender of the Christian faith. His religious fervour and zeal are seen in his smaller poems too. In the sonnet "On His Blindness" (1673), Milton reiterates his faith in God. In "Lycidas" (1638) he had reconciled himself to the death of Edward King in keeping with his religious tradition. In *Paradise Lost*, the canvas is so vast that it covers several things: the creation of Man, the creation of Earth, the temptation of Eve by Satan in the Garden of Eden, the disobedience of Man, the revolt of Satan and his followers, Satan's journeys, the battle between good and evil angels, the meetings of Satan and the fallen angels, God's meetings in Heaven, the role of the Son of God in these meetings and so on. From the beginning of creation to the Fall, the theme of *Paradise Lost* is the loss of Paradise and Man's fall.

#### ***Check your progress:***

1. What is the theme of *Paradise Lost*?

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2. What are the allusions and epic similes in *Paradise Lost* drawn from?

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3. What does Milton reconcile himself to in "Lycidas"?

#### 6.2.5 Milton's Grand Style:

By now you may have come to an understanding of Milton's Grand Style. Milton perfected the blank verse in his epic *Paradise Lost*. This was not the first time that the blank verse had been used in English: Spenser, Shakespeare and others before Milton had already introduced the blank verse in English. Nonetheless, it is said to have reached perfection in the hands of Milton. The metre is iambic pentameter without an end-rhyme, which makes it more suitable for longer poetic works and comes closest to natural English speech.

The diction used by Milton is lofty and elevated. It is a reflection of his learning in the classics and the vast body of literature in English. Milton's political and religious affiliations also impacted his writings. As we told you, he was in favour of the Parliament and against monarchy in his political beliefs. His religious affiliation was with Protestantism and against the Roman Catholic church. The puritanical strain is evident in Milton's writings. David Daiches (1984) observes that "The diction of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a deliberately elevated poem intended to convey in a grand, symbolic manner some of the profoundest truths about man and his place in the universe, is very properly more stylized than the diction of a modern satiric poet commenting daily on some defects in contemporary civilization" (*Critical Approaches to Literature*, p. 189). The use of literary devices like imagery, figures of speech, and the now famous inversion of word-order characterize Milton's Grand style.

***Check your progress:***

1. The diction used by Milton is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Milton was on the side of the \_\_\_\_\_ in political beliefs.
3. Name two poets who used blank verse before Milton.

- 
4. Who tempted Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*?
- 

**6.2.6 Let Us Sum Up:**

In this Unit we attempted a textual analysis of the first 100 lines of Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, apart from looking at its form as an epic, the use of epic similes, allusions, blank verse and inversion of word order. We also studied Milton's Grand Style and the theme of *Paradise Lost*.

Let us quickly sum up the features of an epic:

- opens *in medias res*
- opens with an invocation
- the protagonist is a heroic figure
- employs Homeric epithets and epic similes
- presents a catalogue of heroes
- uses a *deus ex machina* and supernatural elements
- has lofty speeches
- employs lengthy and frequent digressions
- features a journey and long distance travel

- describes characters at length
- ends tragically

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### 6.3 Learning Outcomes

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After reading this Unit you should be in a position to understand the features of an epic, the contribution of Milton to epic in English literature, the greatness of Milton as a poet, the background of *Paradise Lost* and the text of Book IX. You should also be able to place the prescribed text in the context of English literature and assess its literary merit in the canon.

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### 6.4 Glossary

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**Busiris:** An Egyptian king killed by the hero Heracles in Greek mythology.

**Ceres:** The Roman goddess of agriculture; her Greek counterpart is Demeter.

**Climax:** That part of a plot when the story reaches its peak. It is the turning point in the story.

**Deus ex machina:** Literally, it means god from a machine. In classical literature, a “God” would be lowered on the stage from a contraption to resolve the conflict. It refers to the use of supernatural elements.

**Diana:** The Roman goddess of hunting; identified with the Greek goddess, Artemis.

**Dryad:** A tree nymph.

**Gabriel:** One of the archangels in Heaven.

**Hercules:** The Roman equivalent of the Greek god Heracles. Famous for his adventures and his strength, he was believed to be so strong as to carry the earth on his shoulder.

**Homeric epithet:** Is the repeated use of an epithet to describe a person, place or object.

**Leviathan:** Believed to be a huge sea animal that sailors would mistake for an island, anchor off and then be killed by the monster.

**Medusa:** A divine figure in Greek mythology and one of the Gorgons. She had a head of snakes for hair and anyone who looked at her would turn into stone.

**Pomona:** The Roman goddess of fruit trees, gardens and orchards.

**Raphael:** One of the archangels in Heaven who it is believed will blow the trumpet on the Day of Judgement.

**Tantalus:** The son of Zeus and the nymph Pluto. According to Greek mythology he was punished variously for his different crimes against the Gods.

**Tiresias:** In Greek mythology, a clairvoyant. He could foretell the future though he himself was blind.

**Vallombrosa valley:** An actual place in Italy. Milton had visited it in his younger days.

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## 6.5 Sample Questions

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### 6.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *Paradise Lost* is written in \_\_\_\_\_ books.
2. Milton was a staunch \_\_\_\_\_.
3. *Paradise Lost* opens in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. An epic simile is also called \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Milton's stated aim in writing *Paradise Lost* was to "justify \_\_\_\_\_."
6. Satan appears before Eve in the form of a \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Satan is compared to the sea animal \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The meeting of Satan and his followers was held in \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Milton mentions the two Indian rivers \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in *Paradise Lost*.
10. *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are epics by \_\_\_\_\_.

### 6.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What is an epic simile? Give one example.
2. Write a note on allusions in *Paradise Lost*.
3. Explain inversions of word order.
4. Discuss the opening of Book I of *Paradise Lost*.
5. How does Satan tempt Eve?

### 6.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Critically examine the epic conventions in *Paradise Lost*.
2. Discuss the use of poetic devices in *Paradise Lost* with specific reference to Book IX.
3. Evaluate Milton's contribution to English poetry.

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## 6.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Barber, Charles. *Poetry in English: An Introduction*. London: Macmillan, 1983.
2. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Allied, 1979.
3. <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/Home/ViewSubject?catid=9RA537jM1m7VD3VCoav4IQ==> ePG Pathashala Module on Milton's poems.
4. <https://youtu.be/eiSDMO23pH4> in-house AV lesson on Paradise Lost as an epic
5. Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Edited by Scott Elledge. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993.
6. Reid, David. *The Humanism of Milton's Paradise Lost*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993.
7. Tillyard, E. M. W. *Milton*. London: Chatto-Windus, 1966.

## UNIT - 7: William Wordsworth - The Prelude

### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 *The Prelude*
  - 7.2.1 An Autobiographical Poem
  - 7.2.2 Poetic Devices
    - 7.2.2.1 Imagery
    - 7.2.2.2 Diction
    - 7.2.2.3 Metre
    - 7.2.2.4 Figures of Speech
  - 7.2.3 Textual Analysis (1-130)
  - 7.2.4 Features of Romantic Poetry
  - 7.2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.3 Learning Outcomes
- 7.4 Glossary
- 7.5 Sample Questions
- 7.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 7.0 Introduction

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William Wordsworth (1770-1850) lived during a time that came to be called the Romantic Age in British literature. He is considered to be one of the greatest poets not only of his age but also in the whole body of English literature. In fact, the publication date of Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge's jointly authored *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) is said to inaugurate this period. Through "The Preface" written to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) and much of Wordsworth's poetry, we learn about the characteristic features of the Romantic Age. You will read about this, later in the Unit.

*The Prelude* was published posthumously in 1850 and its full title is *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*. Wordsworth started working intermittently on this poem in 1798 as a prelude to a longer work "The Recluse" and continued working on it for the next several decades. "The Recluse" itself remained unwritten, while "The Prelude" underwent four distinct manuscript versions during Wordsworth's lifetime.



Written in 14 books using blank verse, the main theme of *The Prelude* is the development of the speaker as a poet. It presents his journey from childhood up to the age of thirty, his poetic crisis and its resolution, and the influences on his imagination during his period. The impact of Romanticism is clearly seen here. Wordsworth was influenced by John Milton and aimed to write an epic poem though his epic is not a heroic poem. It deals with the life of poet and the growth of his mind. However, inspired by Milton, he does use blank verse to write *The Prelude*.

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## 7.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- provide a textual analysis of the first 130 lines of *The Prelude*
  - place it in the context of the Romantic Age
  - explain Wordsworth's theory of poetry
  - understand the autobiographical element and the poetic devices in the poem
  - understand some key features of Romantic poetry in British literature.
- 

## 7.2 *The Prelude*

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*The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind* can be said to be an extension of "Tintern Abbey," widely considered to be the best poem in *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's love for nature, his belief in the individual, his insistence of imagination over reason, his yearning to bring poetry to the common man by depicting everyday emotions, the period of dullness when he was away from nature, his rekindling of imaginative expression—all of these are reflected in *The Prelude*. Let us now look at the autobiographical element in *The Prelude*.

**Check your progress:**

1. The poem *The Prelude* falls under the \_\_\_\_\_ Age.
2. What is the subtitle of *The Prelude*?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the poem Wordsworth intended to write but could not?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. *The Prelude* was written in \_\_\_\_\_ verse.

5. Which poem is considered to be the best in *Lyrical Ballads*?

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6. What is reflected in *The Prelude*?

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7. Wordsworth chose to write *The Prelude* in blank verse to emulate \_\_\_\_\_.

### 7.2.1 An Autobiographical Poem:

You may recollect that the Romantic Age laid emphasis on the individual rather than society. The French revolution (1789) with its famous slogan of “liberty, equality and fraternity” and the idea that all men and women are born and remain free and equal in rights greatly influenced the literary writings of the time. Freedom and individualism were upheld and the subjective became more important in literature as well. In “The Prelude” too, we find the poet himself is the subject. He is the narrator and presents the growth of his own mind. It is not just a physical development from childhood to becoming a man but also the intellectual influences working on the poet through his journey that are important.

Book I begins with “Childhood and School-time,” which is its title too. However, we must remember that the poem does not move in a chronological order. Instances from Wordsworth’s life are interwoven throughout the *The Prelude*. While presenting his life, Wordsworth was presenting his philosophy of life and poetry. Thus, the poem is more philosophical than autobiographical. But Wordsworth does present the shaping influences on his life. Wordsworth’s humanism, his concern for the common man, his belief in simple diction, his love for imagination over reason, his inspiration from nature, his love for the countryside, are some of the shaping influences on his poetry. Specific incidents too are presented which throw light on his development into manhood. The influence of the French Revolution, his later disillusionment with it, his travels to France, his friendship with Coleridge, his growing popularity and the periods of lack of poetic production shaped Wordsworth’s poetry and his imagination. These thoughts are reflected in *The Prelude* and enable reading it as an autobiographical poem.

*The Prelude* also represents Wordsworth’s practice of a theory of poetry. In the “Preface” to the second edition of *The Lyrical Ballads* published in 1800, Wordsworth discusses his theory of poetry that also came to be identified as the major features of Romantic poetry. Wordsworth

talks about the creation of a poem, about the influence of the poem on the poet and the reader and about the use of vocabulary in poetry. His central ideas are about the need for reforming poetic diction and a recasting of the role of a poet, which he felt had become too marginal.

Wordsworth also felt that the troubles of society had become too rooted in the “dreary intercourse of daily life” in urban societies, and mankind had lost its organic relationship with nature, which he saw as an embodiment of God. The codes of polite society and public opinion inhibited a free expression of human instincts and impulses, whereas rustic and humble living allowed for an uninhibited expression of fundamental human passions. All that Wordsworth has laid down in the Preface is found in the actual writing of *The Prelude*. So, the poem may be considered as a practice of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry. Wordsworth famously says in the Preface that poetry is “a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” These feelings are recollected by the poet when in “tranquility.”

Wordsworth and Coleridge believed that poetry should present “incidents and situations of humble life.” In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth presents ordinary incidents from his life. He proposed that the language of poetry must be the “real language of men” since the poet is essentially one man talking to other men and such language is easy for an ordinary reader to understand. The Romantics were not writing for elite society. Their readers were common people. So *The Prelude* uses simple diction. The poet occupies a high place in Romantic philosophy. He is “a man speaking to men.” Similarly, in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth is talking to the readers through his poem. In short, because *The Prelude* is a poem about the poet himself, it is an autobiographical poem.

**Check your progress:**

1. Is *The Prelude* more philosophical than autobiographical?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Illustrate two influences on Wordsworth’s poetry.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The poem begins with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

4. *The Prelude* uses \_\_\_\_\_ diction.

**7.2.2 Poetic Devices:**

The scope of Wordsworth’s intended epic poem, *The Prelude* was very vast. Hence he chose to write in blank verse like John Milton before him. The length of *The Prelude* running into fourteen books made it possible for Wordsworth to use several poetic devices. The poem is

composed in iambic pentameter without end rhymes that is most suitable for blank verse. It abounds in figures of speech, in imagery drawn from nature and uses simple diction. Let us now look at the imagery.

**Check your progress:**

1. Is *The Prelude* an epic poem?

---

2. What is the length of *The Prelude*?

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3. Wordsworth chose to write *The Prelude* in blank verse to emulate \_\_\_\_\_.

**7.2.2.1 Imagery:**

The poem abounds in imagery taken from nature. Like all Romantics, Wordsworth relies on nature for inspiration. He draws heavily from nature and his imagery is a reflection of his experiences in the midst of nature. Wordsworth believed that the poet's mind and the external world are one. Mountains, brooks, the flora and fauna, the wind and the clouds, any natural object turns into a vivid image in the hands of Wordsworth. His short poem titled "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (1807) begins with the line "I wandered lonely as a cloud." Wordsworth uses the simile to compare himself to a cloud and the word "lonely" further points to his state of mind. He is alone not just because he has no company but because the Romantics enjoyed spending time alone in the company of nature. The word "wandering" makes the image of a cloud more evocative. The poet is rambling without any specific purpose, and he is by himself, drifting like a cloud which is free and uncontrolled. He strolls around aimlessly, allowing himself to be enchanted by the world around him. When he comes across a field of daffodils, the poet writes "Ten thousand saw I at a glance,/ Tossing their heads in sprightly dance." The sudden sighting of the daffodils fills the solitary poet with joy. The image of the breeze brushing past the daffodils and making their movement seem like a happy dance is beautifully presented by Wordsworth.

Nature as elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry is personified in *The Prelude*. A personification is the treatment of an inanimate object as though it is animate, or alive. There are several descriptions of the landscape in this poem. The breeze, wind, water, trees, birds, valleys, mountains, seas, brooks are all presented as they occur. The poem is suffused with the beauty of the Cumberland landscape, which for the most part is soothing and benevolent, characterized by the "blessing" of the "gentle breeze" that Wordsworth describes in the poem's opening lines. It

begins with a detailed description of the landscape, keeping it literal. Very soon, the figurative meaning becomes more dominant. Even “some floating thing/ Upon the river” becomes a guide to the poet. Mountains, wind and water are recurrent images. You must remember that for Wordsworth, nature is his friend, philosopher, and guide. All these roles of nature are presented through “The Prelude.” It serves a symbolic purpose. The image of a bird flying is a symbol of freedom. The image of the wandering cloud is the symbol of the poet ambling without any particular aim in life. Reality and imagination blend into one another. Thus, *The Prelude* is also rich in imagery from nature throughout the poem.

***Check your progress:***

1. Wordsworth relies on \_\_\_\_\_ for inspiration.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is personification?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Mention two recurrent images in *The Prelude*.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

**7.2.2.2 Diction:**

The Romantic Age aims to bring literature out of elite society to the layperson and ordinary people. Therefore, there was conscious shift in diction. The choice of words was no longer high, elevated or exalted. Simple words describing simple incidents and situations in life were used in literary writings. The French Revolution made the individual the center of society. Imagination and feelings were given importance. Humanism—a philosophy that upholds the dignity of all human beings as free, independent, and creative individuals—was endorsed. Thus, in Wordsworth’s poetry we find simple diction. Moreover, he argued that the “language of men” is refined when the “humble and rustic” elements are used as a setting in the poem. A “plainer and more emphatic language” is more comprehensive and easy to communicate in “because the manners of rural life germinate from ... elementary feelings.” Wordsworth further felt that the language arising from “regular” and “repeated experiences” is more philosophical and permanent.

Hence, Wordsworth preferred to use common, everyday words used in daily expressions. The poem begins with a feeling of joy which is described in very simple terms drawing from immediate natural surroundings. The innocence of boyhood is reflected in the innocent joys of the speaker, the poet, as he narrates life-shaping events. The narrative shifts to meditative and

reflective depending on the mood of the speaker. However, the tone and choice of words continue to remain simple and commonplace.

***Check your progress:***

1. To which Age does William Wordsworth belong to?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you find in Wordsworth's poetry?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The tone and choice of words in *The Prelude* are \_\_\_\_\_.

**7.2.2.3 Metre:**

Wordsworth was in awe of John Milton, the poet who lived in the Puritan Age and is famous for *Paradise Lost* (1667) an epic poem written to “justify the ways of God to man.” Wordsworth's attempt at a justification of his poetic vocation is regarded as a bold attempt to make the epic personal, giving the genre a new psychological focus.

Milton used blank verse in *Paradise Lost*, a verse form written in iambic pentameter without end rhyme. An iamb is a foot of two syllables, with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable and a pentameter is a verse of five feet. So iambic pentameter is a verse line of five feet, each foot containing an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Milton is said to have perfected the blank verse in English literature. You must remember that the blank verse gave a poetic freedom to the poets and the Romantics gave a lot of importance to freedom. Hence, blank verse was popular among the Romantics after Milton. Wordsworth too used iambic pentameter without end rhymes in *The Prelude* though critics argue that he does not reach the same level of expertise as Milton in the crafting of blank verse.

**7.2.2.4 Figures of Speech:**

A figure of speech is a word, or a phrase used in a non-literal way to create a particular effect, to achieve something poetic. It uses language to convey a meaning or idea that is different from what the word or phrase states on the literal level. Thus, figures of speech function as literary devices that add richness to language. They are often used by poets to connote rather than to denote. Simile, personification, metaphor, alliteration, assonance, repetition are some examples of figures of speech. Wordsworth's poetry uses figures of speech of different types. You read some lines from the poem “I wandered lonely as a cloud” earlier in this Unit. Look at them again: “...lonely as a cloud” is an example of simile, while “Tossing their heads in sprightly dance” is a personification.

In *The Prelude* we find different figures of speech. Wordsworth uses personification for breeze and liberty. The bird is a metaphor for freedom and is a symbol of the poet's yearning to be free. The drifting cloud is metaphorically compared to the wandering poet. Other metaphors include "my life became a floating island," "every word they uttered was a dart," "My business was upon the barren sea," "the horizon of my mind enlarged," and so on. Alliteration is used for sound effect. Examples of alliteration include phrases such as "the self-sufficing power of solitude," "dereliction and dismay," "solemn and sublime" and many more. Assonance is used for rhythmic effect "I look about and should the chosen guide...." Repetition is used, as in "O welcome messenger! O welcome friend" in line 5, to reinforce the welcoming of nature into the poet's life. Thus, the poem abounds in figures of speech.

### 7.2.3 Textual Analysis:

You will now read the explanation of the first 130 lines from *The Prelude* prescribed for your study.

**Lines 1- 32:** In the opening stanza, Wordsworth expresses his joy at being one with Nature once again. After spending sometime in the city, cut-off from natural surroundings, the poet finds his rural sojourn refreshing. He feels the gentle breeze against his cheek and experiences joy. The breeze is personified and is termed a "visitant." It visits the poet in the night and rejuvenates his life. In the city, Wordsworth was a "discontented sojourner" because he was not in the company of Nature. Now, in the presence of Nature, he is free as a bird. Metaphorically, Wordsworth compares his boyhood to the stage of freedom. He lived a carefree life and soared to great heights in imagination. Just as a bird flies high, unhindered, the boy also soars in his imagination. The poet is free to decide where to live. He wonders which valley or which grove will extend a welcome retreat to him. The whole expanse of the earth is before the poet. The child is filled with happiness at his freedom: there is no fear. Even a passing cloud could be his guide. Being in the company of Nature is like being able to breathe once again. He was suffocated in city life. Nature gives him rebirth. "The heavy weight of ... weary days" is now lifted from his heart. He is confident of finding a peaceful life now.

Unlike the normal opening of an epic poem, Wordsworth does not use an invocation or begin *in medias res*. He opens the poem with a celebration of joy in the present, in the company of Nature. He has escaped from the city and he is happy with his present state of freedom. In Milton's epic, Adam and Eve leave Paradise for earth after the Fall. But in Wordsworth, the earth is the best place where the poet finds peace and happiness in his boyhood.

**Lines 33-54:** In the next stanza, Wordsworth shows how he finds inspiration within himself and how he finds heaven around him. Liberty is personified and Wordsworth addresses it directly. The “sweet breath of heaven” he feels blowing on him and awakens a “corresponding mild creative breeze.” Internally, he feels inspired and the gift of Liberty that he found in Nature makes him joyful. He finds renewed energy which refreshes him. However, as the gentle breeze quickly turns into a powerful “tempest” the poet reflects on his past experiences. The warm breeze removes the harshness of the city life. He now sees everything in a different light. The poet had lived a phase marked by a lack of creativity. Winter had set in his life. There was a frost which affected his clarity of thought and vision. When the breeze turns into a tempest, it helps the poet break free from the frost. The poet is filled with hope that Nature will rekindle his spirit.

**Lines 55-67:** The third stanza begins with a direct address to Coleridge, as the poet tells him how overjoyed he is on a recollection of poetic emotions while looking at a field. This stanza also reiterates Wordsworth’s theory of poetry. As he puts it, “poetic numbers” come “spontaneously” to “clothe” his feelings. The strong emotions that Wordsworth had felt on his visit to the village of Grasmere in 1799 are recorded as poetry. Moved by “fancies,” he is reminded of days when he wanted to be in religious service and “cheered” by an “Internal echo of the imperfect sound.” The poet’s work is also a religious duty. Wordsworth converts his personal experience of joy into a poetic form. The poet finds language insufficient to express his feelings.

**Lines 68-94:** In this stanza, Wordsworth tells us it was a pleasant morning in Autumn when he came to rest under a “green shady place,” a tree. It was “the perfect stillness” of a “calm and placid day” that “balanced” his thoughts. Suddenly, in his mind’s eye Wordsworth sees the cottage where he had stayed as a schoolboy. He feels a sense of “assurance of some work,” even “glory” to be “performed.” He decides to spend his life in the valley of Grasmere. The memories of this “sweet vale” are fresh in his mind. Thus, cheered by “the genial pillow of the earth,” the earlier feeling of freedom and lack of purpose lead to an impending period of optimism and creativity which settles into a “gentler happiness.”

**Lines 95-115:** His thoughts occupied, Wordsworth lingers until the sun had almost touched the horizon, meaning it was sunset. His mind is now content to bid farewell to the city left he has left behind. The chance “equipment of that hour”—nightfall—nonwithstanding, Wordsworth journeys on.

His soul is restored “afresh” such that “she” did not “...want/ Eolian visitations ...”—Wordsworth is using the metaphor of a wind instrument, the Aeolian harp named after the Greek



god of wind, Aeolus that was supposedly meant to be played by the God himself and not by human hands. The writers and artists of the Romantic Age used the Eolian/Aeolian harp as a metaphor for the human mind, as an object that transformed the breeze or the wind itself into truth. The wind also is a metaphor for change among the Romantics, and here stands as a vehicle for Wordsworth's complex subjective musings in his life, on his vocation as a poet and that earlier period of poetic dullness and inactivity. But refreshed by his recollections in tranquility, Wordsworth does not see the "want" of "visitations" by an Eolian harp—an analogy for creativity. The memory of a "splendid evening" spent in Grasmere would make any other thoughts "an injury" and Wordsworth continues his "pleasant loitering journey" towards his "hermitage" in Grasmere.

**Lines 116-133:** Wordsworth continues to speak to his friend, Coleridge, of the thoughts that hovered in his mind after his arrival at the cottage: a "love" of a life of the "common" and the "endless store of things" made every day "complete," with a composure of "happiness entire." Nonetheless, there soon rises in the poet a "longing" to write, to fix on "some determined aim." He thinks aloud that reading or thinking may, through "timely interference," help in this process and rescue from the "decay" within him. The feelings in his heart have remained "oppressed" for too long and Wordsworth hopes to write and "fix in a visible home" some thoughts ("those phantoms of conceit") that had been "floating loose."

#### **7.2.4 Features of Romantic Poetry:**

The discussions of the poetic devices and the textual analysis in the previous sections would have given you an idea of some key features of Romantic poetry, particularly with regard to Wordsworth. Nonetheless, we will revisit some of these features in this section once again.

As we told you in the beginning of the Unit, critics consider the period from 1798 to 1832 as the Romantic Age in English literature. Coleridge and Wordsworth published *The Lyrical Ballads* in the year 1798. It introduced a new form of poetry distinct from the poetry of the Neoclassical age. Hence the year 1798 is said to usher in the Romantic Age. In the year 1832, the Reform Bill was passed; it gave the middle class the right to vote though most men and all women remained without the vote. It also marked a shift from agricultural to industrial economy that over time ushered in the Victorian Age. The Romantic Age was also influenced by two revolutions outside England: the American Revolution (1775-1783) and the French Revolution (1789).

The Romantic Age is a reaction to the Neoclassical Age. In the preceding age, the writers were proud to represent their age. The Romantic writers did the opposite: they represented themselves, not society in general. For the Romantic writer, the individual is at the center of the universe. So, literature was considered to be an expression of the individual's thoughts and personal feelings. The source of poetry was not the general but the particular, the unique experience of the poet. In fact, a poet was marked by the intensity of his feelings, taking the workings of his own mind as his basic subject matter to convey Truth. Another important feature was the shift from Neoclassicism's emphasis on mimetic or imitative writing to a stress on imagination. Coleridge saw the imagination as a supreme poetic quality, a quasi-divine creative energy. Therefore, the poets of this period placed great emphasis on the workings of the unconscious mind, on dreams and reveries, and on the supernatural. A childlike or primitive view of the world was regarded as valuable because its clarity and intensity had not been overlaid by the restrictions of civilized "reason." Advising younger poets, Wordsworth wrote "You feel strongly; trust to those feelings, and your poem will take its shape and proportions as a tree does from the vital principle that actuates it." He meant that instead of adhering to a classical notion of "genres," poetry must take shape organically and be fashioned according to the dictates of a creative imagination.

After reading *The Prelude* you may now be able to identify the essential features of Romantic poetry. Let us look at some of them below:

- use of everyday simple language
- common everyday incidents
- imagery drawn from Nature
- Nature as Guide, friend and philosopher
- importance to the individual
- importance to freedom of Man
- importance to imagination over reason
- Nature is the source of inspiration
- spontaneity of thought and expression
- importance of the Sublime. It is the use of language that excites thoughts beyond the ordinary.
- product of emotion rather than reason
- reaction against form and rules

- influenced by medievalism instead of classicism
- belief in the supernatural
- subjective rather than objective
- lyrics, ballads and folk poetry was popular

### 7.2.5 Let Us Sum Up:

In this Unit, we attempted to study *The Prelude* as a Romantic poem by placing it in the context of Wordsworth's writings. You read of the autobiographical element in “The Prelude” and the theory of poetry as propounded by Wordsworth. You learned to apply it to his poetry as we closely examined the first four stanzas of *The Prelude*. The textual analysis helped you to understand the poem and the poetic devices used by Wordsworth. The unit also helped you identify some key features of Romantic poetry.

## 7.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the Unit on Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, you must be able to place it in the tradition of Romantic poetry. You should have an idea about Wordsworth’s philosophy of life and his theory of poetry. You should also be able to appreciate the use of poetic devices, themes, and diction in *The Prelude*.

## 7.4 Glossary

<b>Aeolian harp</b>	: a musical instrument that was kept in homes, allowing wind to blow against it and create music.
<b>Alliteration</b>	: the use of words with same initial sounds.
<b>Assonance</b>	: the close repetition of vowel sounds.
<b>Matin and vespers</b>	: morning and evening prayers.
<b>Metaphor</b>	: a comparison between two dissimilar things as though they are same.
<b>Simile</b>	: a comparison between two dissimilar things using words like such as, like.
<b>Vale</b>	: a reference to Grasmere where Wordsworth lived between 1799 and 1808.

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## 7.5 Sample Questions

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### 7.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The full title of *The Prelude* is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The poem “Tintern Abbey” was published in the volume titled \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Book I of *The Prelude* is titled \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The bird is a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Define personification. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Wordsworth addresses his friend \_\_\_\_\_ in the poem “The Prelude.”
7. Wordsworth uses \_\_\_\_\_ imagery in his poems.
8. *The Prelude* is written in \_\_\_\_\_ verse.
9. *The Prelude* was written as a prelude to the poem \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Liberty is \_\_\_\_\_ by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*.

### 7.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a short paragraph on the diction in *The Prelude*.
2. Examine the imagery in *The Prelude*.
3. What are the poetic devices used in *The Prelude*?
4. How does *The Prelude* begin?
5. Discuss the use of metre in *The Prelude*.

### 7.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Critically examine *The Prelude* as a Romantic poem?
2. Discuss the features of Romantic poetry.
3. Evaluate the greatness of Wordsworth as a poet with reference to this poetry.

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## 7.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude: Authoritative Texts, Recent Critical Essays, Context and Reception*. Eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill. New York: Norton, 1980.
2. Harvey, W.J. and Gravil, Richard. Eds. *Casebook on Wordsworth's "The Prelude."* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1972.

## Unit - 8: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock"

### Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
  - 8.2.1 Introduction to the Poet
  - 8.2.2 Introduction to the Poem
  - 8.2.3 A Brief Summary of the Poem
  - 8.2.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem
- 8.3 Learning Outcomes
- 8.4 Glossary
- 8.5 Sample Questions
- 8.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 8.0 Introduction

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During the twentieth century, many changes occurred in cultural, religious, political and scientific fields. The period witnessed the massive destruction caused by the two world wars which devastated Europe and impacted the rest of the world. The rise of different schools of philosophical thought such as Marxism, socialism, feminism, humanism, modernism and psychology changed the social, cultural and moral fabric of society. The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1859 loosened the hold of religion in the western world. Industrialization, urbanization, scientific and technological advancements, mechanization, the rise and fall of fascism in Europe, the decline of colonialism, the rise of nationalism and the emergence of democratic governments all over the rest of the world made the 20<sup>th</sup> century an unprecedented period in the history of the world. "Modernism," a philosophical and arts movement influenced the arts, architecture, literature, culture, etc. The poets of the time experimented with the form of poetry, making liberal use of free verse, allusions, unconventional images, alliteration and assonance. T.S. Eliot is widely regarded as synonymous with modernism, and his poetry in terms of content as well as poetic style is held to use some of the famous elements of modernism.

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## 8.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- introduce you to some key features of modernism, modern poetry and its representation of the predicament of the modern man
- familiarize you with T.S. Elliot's poem "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917)
- help you understand and appreciate the poem, its structure, literary devices, images, symbols and its depiction of the emotional crisis of a run-of-the-mill type of modern man.

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## 8.2 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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The abrupt changes in Europe, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, led to radical shifts in literature and art as well. Literature and art broke away from the earlier conventions and traditions of coherent, structured and well-ordered styles. The writers and artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century believed that conventional, linear, ordered and coherent modes of writing were no longer adequate and appropriate to express the complex realities of the times. M. H. Abrams states that "the term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts and styles of literature and the other arts" in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It involves a deliberate and radical break from the traditional bases of western culture and thought. The main characteristics of modernist literature include a focus on individual experiences and identities, experimentation in form and style, highlighting the absurdity and meaninglessness of life, symbolic representations of thoughts and ideas, attention to cityscapes and urban realities, and psychoanalysis.

Modern poetry too broke away from the traditional poetic style and themes. The poetry of the period violated traditional syntax, coherence and unity of expressions making it fragmented and prosaic in an effort to represent the nature of modern life. T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" also deliberately broke sequence of events, disrupted flow of thought, coherence and unity of construction, and rejected conventional images, traditional and outmoded similes, metaphors and poetic diction. Let us read a little about the poet in the next sub-section.

### 8.2.1 Introduction to the Poet:

Thomas Stearns Eliot (T. S. Eliot) is regarded as one of the major writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a distinguished poet, dramatist, critic, editor and publisher. He was regarded as the harbinger of modernism in English literature. He introduced radical innovations in poetic techniques that were inherited from Romantic and Victorian traditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and revolutionized poetry in the twentieth century. His critical essays too shattered established theories and concepts about art and literature from the Romantic and the Victorian periods.

Eliot was born in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, as the seventh and last child of Henry Ware and Charlotte C. Eliot on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1888. He received his early education at Smith Academy and Milton Academy, followed by graduation and post graduation in English literature at Harvard University. He later went to Oxford University in London where he met the British poet Ezra Pound, who became a profound influence in his literary career. The friendship with Ezra Pound led him to acquire British citizenship. In his lifetime, he was widely acclaimed as a scholar, poet, dramatist, critic and editor. Harvard University conferred on him an honorary degree in 1947. He was the recipient of the Order of Merit, the highest civil decoration in 1948. In the same year, he was awarded Nobel Prize for literature. He died on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1965.

Eliot began his poetic career with the publication of the poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in 1915. It was later held to mark the beginning of modernist poetry in English literature. Articulation of distinctly modern themes using innovative poetic techniques and style continued in the poems that followed. He later wrote “Gerontion” (1920), “The Waste Land”(1922), “Ash Wednesday”(1930), “*Four Quartets*” (1943), considered to be his masterpiece. “Four Quartets” was a series of four poems titled “*Burnt Norton*” (1941), “*East Coker*” (1940), “*The Dry Salvages*” (1941), and “*Little Gidding*” (1942) published individually and later in book form.

The publication of “The Waste Land” in 1922 was an epoch-making event in the history of modern literature and won Eliot international acclaim. It captures the disenchantment, disillusionment, and disgust of the period after the first World War. The poem is written in a highly complex, erudite, and allusive style which demanded a high level of scholarship for the reader to understand and appreciate the poem. The poet provided notes and references to explain the work’s many quotations and allusions.

Eliot’s career as a dramatist began with *Sweeney Agonistes* (1926) and ended with *The Elder Statesman* (1959). Eliot wrote plays in blank verse that he modified and brought poetic

drama back to the popular stage. He revived medieval miracle plays, Elizabethan verse dramas in blank verse and Greek plays with chorus. All his plays except *Murder in the Cathedral* were regarded as inferior to lyrical and meditative poetry.

As a literary critic, Eliot is renowned for his theories of the “impersonality of art” in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” his notions of the “dissociation of sensibility and unification of sensibility” in the essay “Metaphysical Poets,” and the literary concept of “objective correlative” in the essay “Hamlet and His Problems.”

T.S. Eliot inaugurated a new literary phase with his pathbreaking literary style, techniques and theories of literature such that modernist writings were definitively shaped by his writings and theories.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Mention the title of the T. S. Eliot’s first published poem.

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2. What are the important characteristics of T. S. Eliot’s poems?

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3. Which essay introduced the concept of objective correlative?

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**8.2.2 Introduction to the Poem:**

“The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock” was written in the initial period of Eliot’s literary career. He wrote the poem in 1910 or 1911, but it was not published until June 1915 by Harriet Monroe in the magazine *Poetry*. It was later included in Eliot’s first book, *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917. Eliot wrote the poem when he was a postgraduate student at Harvard University. The symbolist poetry of the French poet Charles Baudelaire and a Franco-Uruguayan poet Jules Laforgue impacted his poetic style. The prolific use of unconventional images and symbols in his early poems is the outcome of the influence of symbolist poetry.

The name Prufrock is an uncommon one in the U.S.A. The origin of the name could be from Prufrock-Littan Company, furniture dealers at Fourth and St. Charles Streets in St. Louis, Eliot’s birth place. Records stated that the company existed at the time of composition and publication of the poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” When asked about it, Eliot himself was not sure whether he had borrowed the name from the name of the furniture dealers though it might have registered in the unconscious and he failed to recollect it when he asked



about it. Nonetheless, the rather whimsical “Prufrock” can be read as undermining any romantic associations of a conventional “love song.”

The title suggests that it is a love song meant to be sung or recited to a lover. The age of J. Alfred Prufrock is not mentioned but other lines in the poem suggest that he is a middle-aged man. He is an upper class, educated, indecisive middle aged man: “I grow old ... I grow old....” and unsure of his ability to woo a woman and marry her. The whole poem is about his mutterings and the thoughts of an indecisive and fractured mind.

The poem is a dramatic monologue, where the speaker speaks at length in a specific situation or a crucial moment, addressing and interacting with one or more people. The presence of the listener/s is understood only from the clues in the monologue of the speaker. The monologue thus reveals to the reader the speaker’s temperament and character.

According to Eliot, the only way to express emotion vividly “is by finding an ‘objective correlative’, in other words, a set of objects, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.” He employs the concept of objective correlative to express the emotions of the speaker in this poem.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Name the magazine in which “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock was published?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the central idea of the poem?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the main purpose of objective correlative?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**8.2.3 A Brief Summary of the Poem:**

The Latin epigraph of the poem is a quote from Dante’s *Inferno* (1308-1321), canto 27, lines 61-66. Dante faces the spirit of a hell bound false advisor named Guido da Montefeltro with whom a question about return to earth is raised. The lines convey the meaning that none have ever come out of hell to return to earth. The speaker of the poem, J. Alfred Prufrock, addresses the readers and divulges his inner conflict, similar to Guido in Dante’s *Inferno* who addresses the visitor in Hell. Prufrock too feels himself getting trapped in a hellish situation from which he is unable to escape.

The poem begins with a dramatic line: “Let us go then,…” says Prufrock as the poet compares the evening to a patient anesthetized upon a table. Prufrock prepares his mind to propose to a woman whose name is never mentioned in the poem; we only get to know her as a lady with a shawl, attending a tea party. He wishes to invite her for a walk, and yet is painfully aware that the streets are half-deserted and lined with cheap restaurants that let out rooms for one-night stands. The struggle to control his longing to consummate his love and his fear of expressing the desire to the lady are played out throughout the poem.

In the evening, fog and smoke hover the house in a polluted city. The poet personifies the fog and smoke through his use of the phrases “rubs its back upon the window-panes” and “rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,” as if it is a yellow cat. Prufrock worries about his state of indecision, yet he thinks that there is still time for him to express his love for the woman. He hesitates to face the women in a high-society drawing room, people who are at ease talking of Michelangelo. He withdraws into his own cocoon and alienates himself from the world outside him. As echoing the Book of Ecclesiastes, Prufrock consoles himself that “...there will be time” for everything in the world, including for preparing “a face to meet the faces that you meet.”

“There will be time, there will be time” mutters Prufrock, as he decides on the appointed time for proposal. Yet, he fails to muster courage to go ahead. He repeats the question “Do I dare?” twice, unable to make his mind to move further. Gripped in anxiety and fear, he desperately thinks of retreating, rather than moving ahead with his plan. Like Dante in *Inferno*, he wants to grope his way down the stairs, instead of facing the woman in the room upstairs.

He catalogues his rather ordinary body, defending himself from the critical gaze of the readers. The description of his thin hair, the bald spot on his head, his morning coat tightly buttoned up to his chin, a simple pin that punctuates a “rich and modest” necktie—all these details present an atypical picture of a romantic hero. The self-knowledge of Prufrock compels him to deny his urge to seek love and express love—“Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?” The need to retreat from his decision to propose to her presses on him. As decisions and revisions of decisions can be made in a minute, Prufrock ponders on the possibility of revising his decision to talk to the woman about his feelings for her.

Prufrock has measured the odds in his life. The unfriendly gaze, scorn and laughter of the people around him are not unfamiliar to him. He is cognizant of the critical remarks of both men and women about his physique and age. He knows the way people estimate him and look down upon him like an insignificant creature. He feels the scrutiny of watchful eyes that fix him “in a

formulated phrase” setting the limits of his goals and aspirations. So, he says, how should he presume to talk to the lady? Floundering and flailing under all these eyes, Prufrock agonizes how he may “spit out” the “butt-ends” of his days and his life. He does not know how he has to strike up a conversation with the woman.

Prufrock wonders whether he ought to begin by sharing the memories in his mundane life. He is acquainted with women whose arms, “braceleted and white and bare,” are “downed” by light brown hair under lamplight, as they “lie” along a table or “wrap” around a shawl. He knows their responses to him and wonders whether it is the smell of perfume from a dress that disturbs his train of thought.

Prufrock feels confused about how he may start a conversation with these women as feels he is only a mediocre man. He thinks about sharing his routine of walking through the narrow streets, watching lonely men leaning out of windows, smoking in their undershirts. Torn by indecision and a lack of confidence, he thinks that he should have been reduced to a crab-like creature, a “pair of ragged claws,” moving hastily on the floor of the “silent seas.” A crab moves sideways, and thus does not appear to have the responsibility of moving forward with choices and decisions. Had he been a crab, Prufrock too could lead a life following his instincts. The metaphor suggests Prufrock’s desire to escape from unpleasant realities and responsibilities.

On a peaceful evening, he tries to muster courage to face the critical moment of revealing his love for the woman. He has thought about the decisive moment many times, and has even anticipated the consequences of his venture. He imagines the head of John the Baptist on a platter, who was beheaded for reproaching King Herod. He is aware that he is neither a prophet nor does he bear great message like John, the Baptist. His heydays are over as he can visualize his death, dressed as the eternal Footman who holds his coat with a “snicker.” Prufrock can only admit that gripped in an indescribable fear, he is unable to step forward and carry out his decision.

Prufrock muses whether broaching the topic “among some talk of you and me,” surrounded by the chatter and clatter of cups of tea would have been worthwhile. He wants to shed his inhibitions and speak boldly about the desire of his heart, to tell “all,” like a Lazarus risen from the dead in the Bible. His doubts about the fruitfulness of his endeavour make him anticipate the reply of the woman— “That is not it at all,/ That is not what I meant, at all.” Prufrock considers whether he should have more confidence and sit down, “settling a pillow or

throwing off a shawl” by the woman as he tells her in an unconcerned tone—“It is impossible to say just what I mean!”

Prufrock suddenly proclaims that he is no prince Hamlet, but rather meant to be an attendant who could only serve to add to a scene or increase the numbers in a crowd. He could advice a prince, much like Polonius in *Hamlet*, or be a subservient instrument, by turns eloquent, cautious, shrewd, meticulous, obtuse, and ridiculous perhaps like the Fool. Anxiously, he realizes that he is growing old and his grooming style is drab and obsolete: “the bottoms of ... trousers rolled.” The fact that he is growing old and is physically unappealing for courtship weakens his spirit. He wants to make himself more impressive among his lady friends and acquaintances. He worries whether he should part his hair behind, eat a peach, wear white flannel trousers and walk casually and fashionably on the beach. The parting one’s hair behind was a bohemian style of those times and perhaps would also serve to cover the bald spot on Prufrock’s head.

Rather whimsically, Prufrock claims he has seen mermaids singing to each other and riding towards the sea on the “white hair” or foamy waves of the sea. Nonetheless, he knows the mermaids will not sing to him. Still, in his dreams, Prufrock imagines the “We” that mermaids wreath (garland) with red and brown seaweed. Sadly, human voices wake them both and they “drown”: brought back to the reality of life on earth and away from the land of dreamy fantasies.

***Check your Progress:***

1. How does the epigraph connect to the poem?

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2. Why does Prufrock want to identify himself with Lazarus?

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3. What is the reason of Prufrock’s mental conflict?

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**8.2.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem:**

The title of the poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” may give rise to romantic thoughts in the mind of a reader. However, the poem itself works against conventional notions of a charming of a love song. In fact, Prufrock’s love song lacks the drama and the sophisticated wit of the love poems of Metaphysical poets, such as Andrew Marvel’s poem “To His Coy Mistress.”

Eliot's poem is a dramatic monologue and yet differs from the dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson in one of its characteristics. There is a lack of explicit reference to the presence of a silent listener in the poem, which gives room for doubt about the form of the poem. Critics have stated that it is not clear whether it is a monologue or a soliloquy. The identification of "you" with the lady Prufrock is wooing helps readers infer that he is speaking to her. However, the inference that he is rehearsing his proposal in his own head is more convincing. The reader gets a clear picture of the temperament and character of Prufrock from his self-revelations as he speaks about himself at critical moments of dilemma and indecision, characterized by a diffidence and frustration.

"You and I" in the first line of the poem have also been variously interpreted. "You and I" have been primarily interpreted as the speaker, J. Alfred Prufrock, and the woman whom he loves and wishes to propose. Another interpretation conveys the thought that they are the outer and inner selves of Alfred Prufrock. Brooks and Warren interpret that "you" is a generalized reader and suggests that there is really no one in the poem.

Eliot also disrupts the flow of thought and unity of expression in the poem, making it fractured and fragmented. The poem seems to lack a sequence of events. However, it has a coherence because of the consistency of feelings expressed by the speaker. The lines "In the room the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo" are fragmentary, but these lines seem to represent digression in the monologue of the speaker. The fragmented lines repeatedly remind Prufrock of his inability to impress the snobbish women in the room. The poet satirically comments on the affectations of city-bred women who pose as connoisseurs while talking about the paintings of Michelangelo. The poem uses a monotonous tone to convey an unglamorous hero's emotional crises and dull routines.

The poet presents J. Alfred Prufrock as a protagonist with characteristics more of an anti-hero rather than that of a hero. Prufrock is regarded by scholars as a modern anti-hero. He is an educated, sophisticated, middle-aged, city-bred man with a tortured self. He lacks the usual charms of a romantic hero. Yet, the need and longing to be loved and love has not disappeared from this human heart. The poem is thus about a conflict arising from the need for love and a failure to satisfy this need. It therefore appeals to modern readers due to its realistic portrayal of a modern man's angst, isolated and adrift in the modern world.

Eliot has deliberately chosen the urban, polluted city as the setting for his speaker and his tortured existence. The images—"cheap hotels," "sawdust restaurants," "yellow fog," "yellow

smoke,” “pools that stand in drains,” “soot that falls from chimneys”—vividly describe a colourless, squalid, monotonous, urban landscape ill-suited for conventional romantic songs. Eliot also makes use of an objective correlative to describe Alfred J. Prufrock and his inner turmoil: the comparison of evening to a patient anesthetized upon a table. It offers two contrasting thoughts—the serene beauty of evening and its diseased state through the body of a patient, which also foreshadows the tortured self of J. Alfred Prufrock. As the emotional crisis of the speaker develops, the poet brings allusions to the characters of Hamlet, Polonius and the Fool from Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* to describe Prufrock. The references to these characters serve as objective correlative to express the emotional crises of Prufrock. The allusions to John the Baptist, Lazarus and Hamlet become figures to contrast Prufrock with and express his self-contempt and self-pity. The self-mockery of Prufrock further heightens his feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, alienation and despair.

Apart from the use of objective correlatives and allusions, Eliot makes use of personification, similes, alliteration and irony to elaborate on the dilemmas and emotional conflicts of Prufrock. The poet animates fog, smoke and evening to describe the locale and time. Similarly, similes are used to describe the evening and the street, which in turn mirror the mind of Prufrock. Prufrock metaphorically relates himself to Polonius, Fool and Lazarus to give a vivid self-image. Allusions to John the Baptist and Hamlet are ironically employed to bring out the contrast between them and Prufrock.

The poem revolves around the theme of a sense of emptiness and depression, which spring from a lack of love, loss of self-esteem and confidence. Prufrock is shown as a lonely man, incapable of getting along with the shallow and snobbish people around him as he is also quite aware of his own and everyone else’s shortcomings. Brookes and Warren point out that “Prufrock suffers from modern damnation, loss of faith in the meaning of life, loss of creativity of all kinds, a feeble purpose, of neurotic self-absorption.” Prufrock feels alienated in the modern world which appears shorn of purpose and meaningless to him. Being uncertain about his ability to impress women, he is hesitant about approaching them and talking to them without inhibitions. Like any man, he desires to win the heart of a beloved and be with her. But when he consider himself and weighs the odds, he withdraws into himself. Afraid that he will be rejected, he pulls back from the world. Indeed, it is he who rejects the world, not necessarily the world that rejects him. Fretful and feeling futile, he is aware of the meaninglessness of the world and feels that life is measured with endless coffee spoons. Prufrock feels a self-annihilation that comes from a real

or imagined loss of love. He pities himself and tries to control his desires to achieve an emotional stability in his life. He mocks himself and the world of which he is also a part of. Nevertheless, it is too late for him to change himself or the world.

The inner turmoil of Prufrock arises from the fear of reprisal, if not rejection, by the lady he loves and the fear that his desire to be loved is unbecoming of him. Prufrock yearns to be loved but he is unable to express his need for love. He avoids love's impulses and is afraid of self-assertion. He fears that his desires will overwhelm him. When his desires surface in his conscious mind, he rejects them. His anxiety and fear force him to deny the impulses of love. He does not dare to express his sexual urge which seems to be an "overwhelming question." He tries to dismiss the thought by saying "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?/ Let us go and make our visit.'" Prufrock continually fears rejection by the woman and thinks that she will reject his proposal of love. He anticipates this rebuff by framing a claim "that is not what I meant at all, that is not, at all." He loses his nerve to divulge his feelings to the woman and retreats to defend himself from the pain of rejection. He presents a body image, ridiculing himself in an attempt to convince himself that he does not deserve romantic love. He tries to avoid the pain of rejection through a rather brutal honesty and self ridicule. In other words, he wants to insulate himself from pain by never making an attempt to woo the lady.

***Check your Progress:***

1. What do you understand by the statement that Prufrock is a modern anti-hero?

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2. What is the main theme of the poem?

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3. What are the literary devices employed in the poem?

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### **8.3 Learning Outcomes**

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After reading Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" prescribed for study and about the poem itself, you should be able to understand and appreciate the poem, its structure, its literary devices, images, symbols and the emotional crises of its protagonist, Prufrock. You should also be able to talk about the salient features of modern poetry and the dilemmas of modern man, as evidenced in the literary writings of the period and exemplified in "Prufrock."

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## 8.4 Glossary

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- Etherised** : anesthetized
- Sawdust restaurants** : dirty and unappealing, the kind of restaurants that have sawdust on the floor to clear up all the liquor that people spill as they start to get drunk.
- Yellow fog** : a symbol commonly found in French symbolist poets to describe the sordidness of the city.
- Muzzle** : nose and mouth of an animal
- Stair** : Dante's figure of stair from Purgatory to Heaven  
(*Purgatoria*, XXVI)
- A dying fall** : from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (Act I, Scene 1, line 4)  
That strain again! It had a dying fall.  
The love-sick Duke Orsino is ironically compared and contrasted with Prufrock.
- Butt-ends** : butts are ends of smoked cigarettes.
- I should ... silent seas** : cf. *Hamlet* (Act II, scene ii, lines 205-206). It would have been better if he had been a crab that leads an instinctive life. Then he would have been freed from making moral choices and decisions.
- John, the Baptist** : a prophet, preacher and forerunner of Jesus Christ who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. He was beheaded by Herod Antipas after John rebuked him for divorcing his wife and unlawfully marrying his brother's wife, Herodias.
- Lazarus** : brother of Martha and Mary in Bethany. Jesus Christ resurrects him from the tomb four days after his death. Prufrock wants to identify himself with Lazarus of Bethany who was raised from the grave, but his paralysed will makes resurrection impossible.
- Attendant lord** : Polonius in the play *Hamlet*.
- Full of high sentence** : eloquence of Polonius



- Fool** : The court fool called Yorick in *Hamlet*.
- I shall ... rolled** : A reference to the new fashion of trousers with cuffs  
or turn-ups.
- Shall I ... behind?** : A daringly bohemian hair style.
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## 8.5 Sample Questions

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### 8.5.1 Objective Questions:

- The epigraph of the poem is taken from \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Seneca's *Hercules Furens*      (b) Petronius Arbiter's *Satyricon*  
(c) Dante's *Inferno*      (d) Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*
- Who is the speaker in the poem?  
(a) the poet      (b) J. Alfred Prufrock  
(c) Prufrock's lover      (d) alter ego of Prufrock
- What type of a poem is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"?  
(a) dramatic lyric      (b) experimental poem  
(c) sonnet      (d) dramatic monologue
- J. Alfred Prufrock is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) middle aged      (b) young  
(c) old      (d) none of these
- What do "yellow fog" and "yellow smoke" symbolize?  
(a) beauty of the city      (b) weather  
(c) pollution      (d) squalid urban landscape
- Why does the poet bring the allusion to John the Baptist?  
(a) to bring out similarity      (b) to bring out contrast  
(c) to bring out humour      (d) none of these
- Prufrock is regarded by scholars as a modern anti-hero because-----  
(a) he is cruel      (b) he is uneducated  
(c) he is a simpleton      (d) he is a middle- aged man with tortured  
self
- Does Prufrock propose to his lover?  
(a) yes      (b) no

(c) can't say (d) perhaps

9. What is/are the reasons of mental conflict of Prufrock?

- (a) fear of reprisal by the lady he loves
- (b) fears that his desire to be loved is unbecoming
- (c) fears that his desires will overwhelm him
- (d) all of these

10. Why does Prufrock ridicule himself?

- (a) He does not have confidence to propose to the lady he loves.
  - (b) He is afraid of rejection of his proposal.
  - (c) He is not physically attractive.
  - (d) He thinks that he does not deserve romantic love.
- (i) only (a) (ii) (b) and (c) (iii) only (d) (iv) all of these

#### **8.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is the purpose of the epigraph in the poem?
2. Why does Prufrock hesitate to approach his lover?
3. Analyze the use of objective correlative in the poem.
4. What is the purpose of the mockheroic couplet— “In the room women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo”
5. Why does Prufrock say – “I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.”

#### **8.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Examine “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” as a modernist poem.
  1. How does Eliot describe modern man's despair in the poem?
  2. Justify the title “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

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## 8.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage India Pvt. Ltd., 2015, (11<sup>th</sup> edition).
2. Blum, Margaret Morton. "The Fool in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Modern Language Notes* 72.6 (1957): 424-426. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3043369>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.
3. Moody, A. David. *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
4. Walcutt, Charles Child. "Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.'" *College English* 19.2 (1957): 71-72. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/372706>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.
5. Waldoff, Leon. "Prufrock's Defences and Our Response", *American Imago* 26.2 (1969): 182-193. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26302802>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

## **Unit – 9: Development of American Poetry**

### **Structure**

- 9.0** Introduction
- 9.1** Objectives
- 9.2** Development of American Poetry
  - 9.2.1** Colonial Period
  - 9.2.2** Postcolonial Period
  - 9.2.3** Period of American Idiom
  - 9.2.4** Period of Modernism
  - 9.2.5** Period of World War II & After
  - 9.2.6** Present American Poetry
  - 9.2.7** Let Us Sum Up
- 9.3** Learning Outcomes
- 9.4** Glossary
- 9.5** Sample Questions
- 9.6** Suggested Learning Resources

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### **9.0 Introduction**

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Poetry began to mark its way in America in the colonial period. Most of the poetic work written during that period was under the influence of British form of verse in terms of the diction, theme, and form. Later on during 19<sup>th</sup> century American poetry began to mark its own footsteps on the poetic as well as on the literary horizon. During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Walt Whitman was getting bloom among audiences as well as readers. It is followed by a period when American poets have attained a considerable amount of attention and fame in English poetry. That fame and reputation is being kept by American poets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It gains even much more richness during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Ezra Pound and TS Eliot were counted among the leading English language poets after and in and around World War I. In the 1960s it was the period when young and inspiring British poets looked at American poets and poetry for inspirational models for their poetry.

At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry was much more influential mode of literature as compare to others on American literary horizon. The major feature of the time was that it had

moved from the conventional traditions of poetic vision to environment and ecological harmonized world. It was experimental in both its diction as well as theme. There was no doubt that the landscapes of America were so enriched and diversified that these enhanced the imaginative vision of the poet as in the words of Walt Whitman, “The United States themselves are great poem”. But it were the settlers especially British in American colonies who started writing poetry in English language. The colonizers in America were against the colonial regime and they wanted to assert their identities and poetry became a medium for their voice for identity. As America came into being after revolutionary war hence war was a major theme in American poetic vision.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the fame as well as form of American Poetry has been diversified all over the globe. It was a period when scholars as well as literary critics had given a great impetus as well as emphasis on the women poets, Hispanics, Afro-American and Chicano poets. In addition, not only poetry rather all forms of creative arts became popularized and gained much consideration due to the fact that creative writing programs were launched all around the country.

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## 9.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- be familiar with the term, idea, and concept of American poetry and verse.
- be aware of the different periods of American poetry
- comprehend different poetic terms, trends and forms of American Poetry and verse.
- differentiate among diverse periods of American Poetry and verse.
- draw a distinction between different periods of poetic Idiom in American poetry.

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## 9.2 Development of American Poetry

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The development of American Poetry through different phases can be broadly categorized into the following:

### **9.2.1 Colonial Period:**

First and the foremost poet during colonial period was Anne Bradstreet who was also deemed as the first women poetess of English language. But her poetry was limited to her home, family, and her love for her husband. Hence, the scale of her poetry was limited. Edward Taylor wrote poetry under the influence of Puritan in a metaphysical style and it was the typical style of poetic version during colonial period. Narrow spectrum of Puritan ethic was the key feature of the poets who wrote poetry during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Phillis Wheatley was another important poetic voice of America during colonial period. By origin he was a slave and his poetic books with the name *Various Subjects* and *Religious and Moral* got published in 1773. She was not only considered the best poetess of her time but also one of the most influential poets during colonial period. Her poetry centered on typical English poetic spirit of that time around religion and classical subject matters.

This diversity and modification of theme can be seen from the poetry of Philip Freneau. He was the one who showed great human and sympathetic attitude towards Native Americans which was uncharacteristic of that time. But it is essential to note that despite the renovation of subject matter in this sort of poetry during late colonial period, technically it was still old fashioned on typical lines. However, it let hands in developing the ways and means of Pope and Gray in the period of Burns and Blake. The initial phase of American Poetry was meant to honour the integrity of the puritans' ideals and ethics. But as soon as the confidence grew among colonists their poetry began to reflect the urge for independence and liberty. This was a great shift in the themes of the poets and hence conservative style of narration was not deemed fit for it. So, this opened as an era for change in style, tone, and form along with the subject matters in American Poetry.

### **9.2.2 Postcolonial Period:**

William Cullen Bryant was the first important poet of postcolonial period of America. His prime contribution was to write poetry on the grandness of forests and prairies. The early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed numerous notable poets in American literature. Among them Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Edgar Allan Poe, and Sidney Lanier were important. The major objective that these poets kept in mind was to make a distinction of their work from their British counterpart in term of theme, tone, and form. In addition, it was meant to honor the American voice. They tried to explore the landscape, natural scenes, and great traditions of their native land

America in their verse. *The Song of Hiawatha* by Longfellow is a significant instance of this type of tendency in postcolonial American Poetry. In this poem the poet had made use of the narrative tales as were collected by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, who was in charge of the Indian affair during 1836 to 1841.

In order to avoid the British model Longfellow imitated the meter of Finnish epic in the above mentioned poem. However, it didn't act as a model for American poet for future. The other significant factor that distinguished these American poets and their poetry from British poets and poetry was the influence of transcendentalism. Transcendentalism was an American strain of English period termed as Romantic which was initiated and perfected by William Wordsworth and ST Coleridge. Emerson who was the founder of transcendentalism visited England twice to meet these two poets. After Romanticism mellowed down into Victorianism in England, it got energetic and more forceful in America from Civil War of 1840s and onward. Edgar Allan Poe was perhaps the most influential American poet who was outside America at that time. There were numerous writers of Sweden, Russia, and France who were under his influence to a great deal. His renowned poem "The Raven" swept all over Europe and it was translated into many languages. Carlos William who was also an American poet was of the view that it was through Edgar Allan Poe that provided the solid ground for American Poetry to be anchored.

### **9.2.3 Period of American Idiom:**

Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman were the chief poets who set the tone of true American essence of English language poetry in America. On the surface these two poets were not much alike. Walt Whitman used long lines which were derived from the metric of the Bible of King James version. In addition, his democratic inclusiveness was greatly in contrast to Emily Dickinson's short lines and concentrated phrases which Emily Dickinson utilized. Emily Dickinson's short lines, stanzas, and phrases were mostly derived from Protestant hymnals. What made them in connection was their attachment to Emerson and their daring originality of vision. These two important names of American Poetry had set two different American poetic Idioms. These were free meter and direct expression of emotions. Emotional temperature of Walt Whitman and obscure and ironic expression of Emily Dickinson were the key features that set the foundations of 20<sup>th</sup> century American poetry. Later on enhancement of these poetic Idioms of America can be seen in modernized form in the forms of Robert Frost, Edwin Arlington

Robinson, Stephen Crane, and Carl Sandburg and that resulted in a new poetic tradition and voice of American Poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **9.2.4 Period of Modernism:**

American poetic idiom along with the influence of French poets and poetry has set the tone for the 20<sup>th</sup> century modern American poetic expression. Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot were the most leading and renewed names of the modern American Poetry but there were other poets as well who had contributed significantly in this period of American English poetry. William Carlos, Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, Adelaide Crapsey, Hart Crane, and E. E. Cummings were few of the chief contributors of modern American Poetry. William Carlos was the most unique among others as he was the one who introduced free verse rhymes in American Poetry. It is important to note that though these poets were associated with high Modernism but there were other poets and they were connected with the movement termed as New Criticism. Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren were few illustrious names of New Criticism or school of thought.

Apart from these two groups of poets during modern period there was another school of thought who though practiced modern techniques and tools of American Poetry yet they had more inclination towards traditional or classical mode and tone of poetry. Archibald MacLeish was the most renowned name of this school of thought. Modernist torch was lighted in 1930s by a group of poets who were famous and well known as Objectivists. Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Carl Rakosi, Lorine Niedecker, and Charles Reznikoff were the chief propagators of modern torch. Madeline Gleason and Kenneth Rexroth were the ones who introduced yet another dynamic in this modern period of American Poetry and it was termed as “San Francisco Renaissance”. Most of the Objectivists came from urban areas and from immigrants’ class hence this new blood had enriched the vision of modern period of American poetry or idiom. Another major contribution in this modern idiom was that of Afro-American poets such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes.

#### **9.2.5 Period of World War II & After:**

John Gillespie Magee is deemed to be the “poet of war” among American poets. World War II had given birth to a new generation and tone of poets and poetry in America. Most of the poets and poetry of this era was under the dominance of Wallace Stevens. During this period there were poets who wrote poetry which was based on their active service during war. The notable among such poets were Randall Jarrell, Karl Shapiro, and Richard Eberhart. Along with



such poets were those poets in that war period who still stuck to classical and conventional mood and tone of poetry and these included Delmore Schwartz, Elizabeth Bishop, and Theodore Roethke. Once the war was over another poetic movement sprang in America. This new movement was termed as “confessional movement” and the leading poets of this school of thought were Robert Lowell and John Berryman. These poets had great influence on the poets who came later such as Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath.

Both of these poets Lowell and Berryman were closely linked with modernists yet they had great admiration towards their personal experiences as subject matter of their poetry. They had “cooked” (in the view of Lowell), created and well managed style of writing. There were Beat poets as well who were in contrast to these poets and among Beat were Joanne Kyger, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Denise Levertov. They had pushed the horizon of American Idiom towards what was called as demotic speech. Side by side these poets there were another school of poets known as “Black Mountain poets” and the chief among them was Charles Olson. They were advocators of open form of narration but in more pragmatic manner than the Beat and cooked. Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Paul Blackburn, Ed Dorn, Hilda Morley, Larry Eigner, and John Wieners were some of the renowned names of “Black Mountain poets”.

Some poets who belonged to Beat trend as well as “Black Mountain poets” were considered to be the forerunner of the movement known as Sans Francisco Renaissance. However, it is important to mention that Sans Francisco Renaissance was a center of experimental poetry. Gleason and Rexroth initiated this school of poets in the 1930s and other poets who joined this club included Jack Spicer and Charles Bukowski. They tested with the current poetic Idiom with the traditional Idiom of English poetry. Jerome Rothenberg was the one who introduced another school of poets during war period which was termed as “deep image”. This school of poetic Idiom was greatly influenced by symbolist theory. The works of Diane Wakoski, Robert Kelly, and Clayton Eshleman were in line with the theory of deep image Idiom of American Poetry. “The Small Press” or mimeograph was another major trend during war and after period in America and it was originated in 1950s and it is still working in one or the other way. Stephen Morse, John Bennett, Hugh Fox, Gene Fowler, Paul Foreman, A.D. Winans, and Judy L. Brekke were the chief figures of mimeograph trend of poetic Idiom.

Another trend that emerged after war period in American poetic Idiom was New York school of poets. Their poetry was greatly infused with the depiction of everyday life in a diction

that was of every day so that it could attain the caption of common people. Poetry of this period was marked with elegance and urban wit. James Schuyler, Frank O'Hara, Bernadette Mayer, Richard Howard, and Anne Waldman were the key poets of this Idiom of American Poetry. John Cage and Jackson Mac Low wrote poetry that was based on chance and technique of aleatory. They were inspired by indeterminacy, a scientific theory, in order to prove influence "U.S *avant-garde*" in 1970s. James Merrill who was a great American poet and wrote an epic *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1982), distanced himself from all these schools of poetic Idiom. Wallace Stevens' influence and musical touch of French and German poetry was very much evident in James Merrill's poetry.

### **9.2.6 Present American Poetry:**

The poetry written after 1970s belonged to numerous trends and school of poets who emerged during the period till present day. In 1970s emerged interest in surrealism on the part of the poets. The chief among such poets were Maxine Chernoff, Andrei Codrescu, and Russell Edson. In addition, diverse trends of poetic Idiom also emerged during this period. Performance poetry also emerged during this period under the influence of Beat poetry. Trend of talk-poems initiated by David Antin, ritual events based poetry by Rothenberg were the chief poetic trends that gave birth to serious poetic version at one hand and enhanced the concept of multiculturalism among poets. This period was also marked by the growing interest of Afro-American poets into American poetic idiom. Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, and Ishmael Reed were the chief Afro-American poets who significantly contributed in the poetic Idiom that emerged during 1970s period.

This period can also be marked by the group of poets who belonged to "Language Poet" which was the most controversial group of American poetic idiom. The poetry of this group of poets was highly language centered and theoretical. They considered speech or language as the basis component of poetry. They also carried dominance of sentence structure as a part of syntax. They were of the view that language had both connotative as well as denotative meanings that took meaning close to source language. It is what provides insights and depth to text which otherwise may not be possible to create or note. Language trend and poets took poetry to logical conclusion. Sense and context were also associated by this school of thought as a key in poetic idiom. This movement or trend was also marked by the inclusion of women poets on poetic horizon of American Poetry.

In addition, the inclusion of Afro-American women poets also marked this era other than Language Poets. The important Afro-American women poets were Amy Gerstler and Adrienne Rich. One of the key features of Language Poets was that it included numerous Academics which mean poetry made its way to the institutional campuses. Trend of poetry became famous among general public. It was due to the fact that creative writing programs were initiated on a mass scale. It enhanced the taste of teaching and learning poetry as a tool for expression. This was marked by a true spirit of professionalism. In 1980s yet another group of poets emerged on poetic idiom of America and it was named as New Formalists. Poets of this school of thought wrote their poetry on traditional lines, they returned to the conventional rhyme and fixed meter.

The well-known poets of New Formalists were Brad Leithauser, Dana Gioia, Molly Peacock, and Marilyn Hacker. Outlaw Poets, Small Press Poets or Many Poets were the propagators of yet another tone of American poetic idiom and they linked traditionalism and experimental poetry in their poetry. In 1984 yet another trend of American Poetry emerged and it was termed as slam poetry which was devised by Smith. This was a competitive performance based poetry which opened new horizons for the poets as well as poetry. It opened a new vista for spoken based performance in poetic idiom. Slam poetry witnessed poets like Saul Williams, Alix Olson, and Taylor Mali.

### **9.2.7 Let Us Sum Up:**

This Unit presented the general concept of American poetry, how and when it emerged and through which phases it has progressed to reach its present form. In addition, it deals with the key poetic movements that emerged during World War II and after war period in American poetic idiom. Then six major periods of American poetry have been discussed at length. During the study, it is found that there are even numerous trends and school of poets within the same period. The major poets of each period and each trend within a same period have been elaborated. Various traits carried by each school of poets have assisted in differentiating their trend from that of other schools of poets. All these in one way or the other have significantly contributed in developing modern American poetic idiom.

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## **9.3 Learning Outcomes**

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After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- have a comprehensive idea about American poetry and verse.
- comprehend and use different poetic terms, trends, and forms of American Poetry and verse.
- make distinction among diverse periods of American Poetry and verse.
- draw difference between war poetry and after and before war poetry.
- make distinction between diverse poetic trends within a same period of American poetic idiom.

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## 9.4 Glossary

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**Impetus:** Motivation, force

**Culminate:** Conclude

**Prairie:** Grassland

**Counterpart:** Equivalent

**Transcendentalism:** Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement that developed in the late 1820s and 1830s in New England

**Mellowed:** Developed

**Hymnal:** A book of hymns

**Classical:** Relating to ancient Greek or Latin literature, art, or culture

**Propagator:** Advocate

**Beat Movement:** Beat movement, also called Beat Generation, was an American social and literary movement originating in the 1950s

**Demotic:** Of, relating to, or written in a simplified form of the ancient Egyptian hieratic writing

**Sans Francisco Renaissance:** The “*San Francisco Renaissance*” is the name given to the emergence of writers and artists in the Bay Area at the end of World War II

**Mimeograph:** A duplicating machine which produces copies from a stencil, now superseded by the photocopier

**Elegance:** Grace

**Aleatory:** Relating to music or other forms of art that involve elements of chance in their creation or performance

**Avant-garde:** It refers to innovative or experimental concepts or works, or the group of people producing them

**Surrealism:** It is movement in visual art and literature, flourishing in Europe between World Wars I and II

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## 9.5 Sample Questions

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### 9.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Who is known to be the first poet of war among American poetic idiom?
  - (a) Kenneth Rexroth
  - (b) Allen Tate
  - (c) John Gillespie Magee
  - (d) Archibald Macleish
2. After war period, which of this poetic movement became famous in American poetic version?
  - (a) Beat poetry
  - (b) Language poets
  - (c) Black Mountain
  - (d) Confessional movement
3. Sylvia Plath was greatly influenced by which poetic movement of America?
  - (a) Beat poetry
  - (b) Language poets
  - (c) Black Mountain
  - (d) Confessional movement
4. Black Mountain poets operated under the leadership of which of these poets?
  - (a) Charles Olson
  - (b) Amiri Baraka
  - (c) Robert Creeley
  - (d) Gary Snyder
5. Deep image poetic idiom was greatly inspired by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) Modernist movement
  - (b) Symbolist theory

- (c) Beat poetry
  - (d) Colonial poetry
6. Who wrote *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1982), an epic poem?
- (a) James Merrill
  - (b) James Schuyler
  - (c) John Ashbery
  - (d) Sylvia Plath
7. Which trend of American poetry has been compared with the political trend of Regan era by critics?
- (a) Colonial poetry
  - (b) New Criticism
  - (c) New Formalists
  - (d) Confessional movement
8. Who was the first known woman English poetess?
- (a) Sylvia Plath
  - (b) Adrienne Rich
  - (c) Anne Bradstreet
  - (d) Amy Gerstler
9. Who wrote *The Song of Hiawatha* in which Native Americans tales were used?
- (a) Sidney Lanier
  - (b) James Russell Lowell
  - (c) John Greenleaf Whittier
  - (d) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
10. Modernist torch of American poetic idiom was carried out in 1930s by a group of poets known as \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Language poets
  - (b) Postcolonial poets
  - (c) Objectivists poets
  - (d) Confessional movement

### 9.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Why is the Language Poets movement deemed to be the most controversial movement of American poetic tradition?

2. Discuss the role of women poets and Afro-American poets in the development of American poetic idiom?
3. Who are the representation poets of San Francisco Renaissance, Black Mountain poets and Deep image poetry?
4. Discuss the role of many poets and slam poetry in the development of current trends of American poetic image?
5. Write a short note on the traditionalism of New Formalists.

### **9.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. How will you distinguish World War II period of American Poetry from other periods? Draw the differences.
2. Discuss how American poetry developed into its present form? Discuss the periods of development of American Poetry in detail.
3. What are the chief attributes of American poetry written in different periods of its development from colonial to the present day?

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## **9.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Aldridge, Alfred Owen. *Early American Literature: A Comparatist Approach*. New Delhi: Princeton University, 1982.
2. Beach, Christopher. *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
3. Lehman, David and John Brehm. *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.
5. Matthews, Brander. *An Introduction to the Study of American Literature*. New Delhi: Palala Press, 2016.
6. Rice, Eliphalet L. *Introduction to American Literature, or the Origin and Development of the English Language, with Gems of Poetry*. London: Forgotten Books, 2019.

## **Unit - 10: Robert Frost ‘Birches’ and ‘The Road Not Taken’**

### **Structure**

#### **10.0 Introduction**

#### **10.1 Objectives**

#### **10.2 ‘Birches’ and ‘The Road Not Taken’**

##### **10.2.1 About the Poet Robert Frost**

##### **10.2.2 About the Poem ‘Birches’**

##### **10.2.3 Themes in the Poem ‘Birches’**

##### **10.2.4 Critical Study of the Poem ‘Birches’**

##### **10.2.5 About the Poem ‘The Road Not Taken’**

##### **10.2.6 Themes in the Poem ‘The Road Not Taken’**

##### **10.2.7 Critical Study of the Poem ‘The Road Not Taken’**

##### **10.2.8 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **10.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **10.4 Glossary**

#### **10.5 Sample Questions**

#### **10.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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### **10.0 Introduction**

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The poem “Birches” is written by Robert Frost. It is among the most famous pieces of Frost’s poetic verse written in blank verse. Mostly the poem is composed in an iambic pentameter. The readers of the poem are not sure about the actual cause of breaking of the branches of the tree either due to natural cause or due to the swinging of the boys on them. Robert Frost in this poem tries to test the readers time and again with the view that poetry “plays perilously between truth and make-believe.” The poem also contains metaphoric meaning as birches represent the creativity of life while fragility projects the support every human needs in life.

“The Road Not Taken” is an ambiguous poem which is about the choices that human have in their life. Life is considered as a journey and this poem highlights those critical times when a decision is needed to be taken about which way to go? Actually, Robert Frost has written this poem to highlight and make fun of his friend Edward Thomas who was also a poet. His



friend during his walk with Frost in England always regret in not taking a different route. At the end of the poem, readers are left with their own mind to use whether the decision to travel by road which is less traveled a positive one or not.

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## 10.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this unit are to:

- be familiar with the life events of Robert Frost such as his autobiography, poetic work and artistic stature.
  - be aware about different forms of poems written by Robert Frost.
  - comprehend different themes as depicted in the poems ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.
  - differentiate the literary devices used by Robert Frost in ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.
  - understand the general summary of both the poems ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.
  - learn about the literary and critical devices used in ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.
  - be aware of use of figurative language such as imagery, metaphor, symbolism and irony as made use of Robert Frost in ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.
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## 10.2 ‘Birches’ and ‘The Road Not Taken’

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### 10.2.1 About the Poet Robert Frost:

Robert Frost, an iconic poet of American poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was born in 1874. His father died when he was only 11 years of age. He got interested in both reading and writing when he was in high school. After leaving school he worked as a cobbler, teacher as well as editor of Sentinel. “My Butterfly” was his first published poem which got published in 1894. He married in 1895 and moved to England with his wife in 1912. During his stay in England he developed friendship with Ezra Pound. In 1915 he returned to America. His major work includes “A Boy’s Will” 1913, “North of Boston” 1914, “Mountain Interval” 1916 “New Hampshire” 1923, “A

Further Range” 1936, “Steeple Bush” 1947, and “In the Clearing” 1962. Due to his literary and poetic services he was awarded Pulitzer Prizes four times.

In addition, he worked as a Consultant of poetry to Library of Congress from 1958 to 1958. He was awarded with Congressional Gold Medal in 1962. Daniel Hoffman who was a poet and reviewer while writing review on the poetic vision and poetic voice of Robert Frost came up with the view as, “the Puritan ethic turned astonishingly lyrical and enabled to say out loud the sources of its own delight in the world” and “American Bard.” President John F. Kennedy on whose inauguration Robert Frost wrote a poem, acknowledged Robert Frost in these words, “He saw poetry as the means of saving power from itself. When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.” The poet died in 1963.

### **10.2.2 About the Poem ‘Birches’:**

Robert Frost published *Mountain Interval* in 1916 and it contains numerous well-known poems. ‘Birches,’ is the longest poem in that collection which has revealed to the readers and critics the developing persona of Robert Frost’s imagination. In human life with ever changing persona human beings have to live in between reality and imagination. With the intermingling of internet and web based resources life is totally reshaped between physical and online spaces. Though, Robert Frost couldn’t make use of the alternate realities represented by internet yet the poem presents the alternate or imaginative reality of day dreaming on the part of the speaker who is in pursue of an escape. Another key feature is the question arises by him about why human beings are in search of alternate realities rather than actual reality.

The speaker is shown walking in the woods. The trees are swaying in the wind and the speaker begins to think about the trees. He imagines the scene when ice cracked and then the trees bend themselves. Then he thinks about the much interconnected idea how ice and wind bend heavy trees as the ice is heavy and the trees are thin. This gives the speaker an imaginative idea about the boy who is climbing atop of the tree and he bends himself down until he lands safely on the ground. This yet again takes the speaker towards his own childhood memories and his wishes as a kid when he is entrapped by adult fellows. It gives the speaker the idea that life is a trap as his youth and his youthful imagination can be taken away any time.

### **10.2.3 Themes in the Poem ‘Birches’:**

In most of Robert Frost’s poems, youth is a recurring idea and like death it is always presented as a backdrop in most of his poems. In ‘Birches’ he can only imagine a young boy who is climbing atop of the tree and that boy is the imaginative version of the speakers. The second theme is relation of man with natural world. In the ‘Birches’, nature presents challenge as well as blissful opportunity in man life. There are two aspects of nature in Frost’s view one is Romantic as projected in above line and the other is the Transcendentalist which represents the scary and fearful nature of Nature as here nature acts as a religion.

This idea leads towards exploration and adventure that is a key as far as Americans are concerned and they are destined to explore. Spiritual ideas are also inculcated as far as the themes of the Birches are concerned though Robert Frost is not a kind of poet who inculcates religious imagery into his poems. Christian’s allusions are not very frequent but as he talks about life and death so spirituality is bound to come. In ‘Birches’ Robert Frost mentions “heaven” two times which is clearly a spiritual hint. But he has used it with “h” instead of “H” which is suggestive of sky instead of paradise. Last but not the least is the theme of isolation and loneliness that is central to ‘Birches’. Winter and an imaginative boy are the clear cut hint of being alone and isolated on the part of the speaker. It seems that not only in boyhood rather still the speaker is isolated from others. His current isolation and loneliness is associated with the concerns and apprehensions that are brought to him by being an adult.

### **10.2.4 Critical Study of the Poem ‘Birches’:**

The first thing that the readers notice with regard to the critical study of the poem is the philosophical and literary references of Emily Dickinson and that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the line 13. Secondly, there is a depiction of appearance vs. reality. In the poem the speaker imagines a boy who is climbing atop of the tree which is actually the wishes of the speaker when he was a boy himself but the reality that he faced at that time was different. Then the poet has utilized the image of “cracks and crazes.” In lines 10 and 11 there is a comparison that has been drawn between ice and crystal shells which has enhanced the impact of descriptive language. Then there is a vivid imagery “shattering and avalanching”. In line 12 of the poem there is a metaphor of cracking ice.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> lines of the poem, the poet has utilized simile when broken trees are compared with a girl who is drying her hair in the sun. Thus, the simile has a powerful impact of carrying away not only the speakers but also the readers. The concept of truth is ironically being

consumed by the poet as there is a wide gulf between the intended truth and actual truth. The concept of truth is usually an imagined concept and reality is the other way round. In line number 44, life has been compared with an overgrown tree. The image of the boy in the poem is a highly imaginative representation. The boy is also the metaphoric depiction of rugged Americans in the poem. The poem is written in a Blank Verse form in an unrhymed iambic pentameter. There is a formal and conversational tone in the poem, unlike Robert Frost's way of narration.

Another critical idea is the contrasting views of young and old age through the depiction of a boy and imagining being the same person on the part of the speaker. Most of Robert Frost's poems represent old age which, is indicative of two things. One, his liking for old traditions and two for his own age, as most of his own pictures we have today are taken in his old age. The poem has a complex narrative prospective and, in order to understand it, the readers, like the speaker, have to flee towards an imaginative version. In addition, the figurative language such as imagery, images, metaphor, irony and similes, are the trickier tools that have been made use of in the poem. As far the image of the speaker is concerned, he appears to be an old man. The idea of other considerations is indicative of the typical life style and expression of old age, which is also linked with the poet as well.

The setting of the poem is not indicated explicitly, so the readers have the liberty to utilize their full swing of imagination. The poem is set on a cold icy morning in England and the readers can extend the setting to the level of their fertile imagination. The ice is so intense that the branches of the trees are bending and the leaves are falling. Though the sun has melted the top layer of the ice, the trees bend down and hold the weight only for seconds before weighing down. Due to intensive cold and ice, there is no sound of the animals that can be heard, only the cracking sound of the ice and falling trees can be heard. The title of the poem is simple, but it holds deeper meanings. It is a tale of a speaker who dwindles between imagination and reality and in between there are deeper images of life and its perspectives. The poem begins at a simple note but culminates at the conclusion about life.

#### **10.2.5 About the Poem 'The Road Not Taken':**

It is one of the most notable poems written by one of the leading American poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Robert Frost. It was published for the first time in 1916 in Frost's collection of poems *Mountain Interval*. Despite having been written a century ago, it has been one of the most taught poems in American schools till date. It is a reflection of the implied meaning that decisions and choices in life are not simple. The choices are hard to make as they have a life-

changing impact. It also indicates that how life and choices of path might be when there was no assistance of technology and satellites to navigate. And whichever road or path a person opts for, there is yet another choice or path the person leaves in making use of other. So, the poem basically centers around these issues and hardships associated with making decisions and opting for a choice in everyday life.

To summarize, the readers comes across the speaker who is traveling in woods in fall season when the leaves of the trees are turning their colors. The speaker comes across a split way and he is in a dilemma which way or path to go. In his confusion he wishes to go on both ways, but he cannot. In his confusion, he looks at one path and chooses the other path to go, thinking that it might be a short one. But in reality, both the paths are of equal length and the leaves on both the paths are fresh. He is unsure about the path and decision by thinking that he might not come back after going this way. He wants to imply that such choices in life are worth changing the entire game of human life.

#### **10.2.6 Themes in the Poem ‘The Road Not Taken’:**

The first and the foremost theme that is projected through the poem is the theme of “choice”. The path on which the speaker is going on is a split in two different directions and it is the choice of the speaker to choose which way he wants to go. The path in the woods is the representation of the path of life. Just like the path of life, it is hard for the speaker to choose which way is right or better. Choice of path in life changes the entire complexion of life once it is taken irrespective of the reason behind that choice. Another major idea is dreams, plans and hopes that each one has an imperative part in life and that is closely associated with the choice one makes in his life. The speaker in the poem is sure about one thing and that is that his choice or decision will change his life altogether. But he is unsure about the future how it will be changed until that change takes place in his life. The speaker also considers the chances and opportunities he has lost or will lose after taking the decision.

Throughout the poem there is a relation that has been shown between nature and human life. Nature has been utilized by the poet in a metaphoric sense to represent the life of the speaker. The decision of the speaker which he took during his walk in the woods in fall has been contextualized. The metaphoric expression of the poem has helped the readers to comprehend the complexities that are involved while taking a decision or choosing a path in life as it has far reaching consequences. Another major theme in the poem is related to the sense of exploration on the part of the speaker, as he is in the forest but without a map or guide. That leads him to

confusion as he is unable to make choice out of splitting which one to walk or move on. But instead of going back or remaining indecisive, he chooses a path to continue his walk and it shows his will to face and encounter whatever challenges he has to come across in that unknown way and walk. The poem is suggestive of the fact that the element of exploration is what introduces us what is beyond the other side of the road.

### **10.2.7 Critical Study of the Poem ‘The Road Not Taken’:**

The first thing that the readers notice about the poem is that it has a swaying rhythm and rhyme. It feels as we are moving and walking along the speaker in the woods, such is the impact of rhyme in the poem. The lines of the poem are little shorter while the stanzas of the poem are a little longer when are put in comparison to a normal or average rhyming poem. It sounds that the tone the speaker uses is in line with his own perspective of being different from others by choosing a different path. The speaker is unsure and hence walking slowly and carefully instead of making a speedy movement. The hesitation of the poet with regard to his movement can be noticed in the last stanza when he repeats “I” and it seems that he has stopped moving and the birds too seem to be halted to see how the speaker will culminate the narration.

Secondly, the title of the poem is also a head word with regard to the influence and interpretation of the poem. ‘The Road Not Taken’ is indicative of the fact that the poet is talking about those opportunities which are not availed in life or which are lost in one way or the other. Though the speaker chooses the path which he deems to be less travelled, this interpretation with regard to the title or theme of the poem is mistaken. It is obvious when the speaker chooses a path that he has lost his chance or opportunity to pick the other way. This is what is implied by the poet in the poem. In a metaphoric sense, the speaker wants to imply that our choices and decisions that we make in life have far reaching consequences in our lives to come. Humans always have questions in their mind about what might have been the scenario if they had taken or opted the other way. What opportunities might be accessible to them if they have made a different path to go along?

Thirdly, the setting of the poem is in woods or forest, but it is not just like the woods which were “lovely, dark and deep” as is depicted in yet another famous poem by Robert Frost, “Stooping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”. Here, the woods are yellow and colorful. The speaker is not on a horse, he is on foot and he has no one to guide and make him conscious of impending danger, just like the “harness bells”. It is the fall season, trees are colorless and leaves are falling. The leaves are on both the paths and they are fresh. It is the time of morning unlike

the time of winter night in the other poem. Another major difference is that the speaker here is in confusion about which path to choose, and hence fails to relish the beauty of the woods and the scenery, but in the other poem the speaker enjoys the beauty of the woods and snow.

Fourthly, the speaker is a reserved person as he does not tell the readers much about himself, but the readers come across the dilemma he is in. His dilemma of choosing which way is representation of the dual nature of life and its hardships. Leaves are turning yellow and are falling, which is a metaphoric expression of the life of the speaker, which is further aggravated by his confusion in choosing the path. His inability to go back and change his decision is also an expression that he is too late in his life to make amend. The flux and crisis in which he is in the poem is the representation of the crisis of a common person in an everyday life. Another aspect of the speakers is also indicated as he is out in the woods along an unknown path without any aid, plan, map or guide. It is also a metaphoric expression of the dilemma of human life as there is no map of the future and uncertainty about the consequences of human acts, choices and decisions.

Lastly, the language of the poem is simple, easy, and straightforward. However, the meaning is deep and the readers have to name a choice out of multiple perspectives with regard to its implied meaning and title. Just like the speakers, it is up to the readers which narrative seems to them the most apt one? But the distinction is that the speaker has to choose one path but the readers can choose to opt for more than one. The setting of the speaker and the readers is also a different arena. The effect and meanings are left by the poet in the hand of readers which makes his poem fun reading as there are possible hints, suggestions, and guidance but not a direct meaning. The poem is in four stanzas of five lines each. Each quatrain has a rhyming scheme of ABAAB. Robert Frost has utilized a relatively trickier rhyme scheme in the poem. The use of figurative language such as imagery, symbolism and metaphor is also very frequent in the poem.

### **10.2.8 Let Us Sum Up:**

Both the poems have been taken from *Mountain Interval* which was written by Robert Frost in 1916. Both the poems are written in natural settings and the speakers in both the poems are walking in woods. In both the poems, the reality of life has been depicted by the poet. In ‘The Road Not Taken’, there is a depiction of inability and uncertainty about decisions and choices, while in ‘Birches’ we have a depiction of reality vs. alternate reality. Figurative language such as simile, metaphor, symbolism and imagery has been utilized by the poet in both the poems.

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## 10.3 Learning Outcomes

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After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- have a comprehensive idea about the life events of Robert Frost, an iconic American poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- comprehend different types of poems written by Robert Frost, especially in *Mountain Interval*.
- make a distinction between ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.
- understand the use of literary devices
- know the different key ideas and themes as are depicted in ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Birches’.

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## 10.4 Glossary

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**Iconic:** Recognizable

**Intermingling:** Combination

**Sway:** Oscillate, move from side to side

**Transcendentalist:** Transcendentalism is a philosophy started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that promotes intuitive, spiritual thinking instead of scientific thinking based on material things.

**Inculcate:** Instill

**Allusion:** Reference

**Crystal:** A highly transparent gem

**Avalanche:** A large mass or body of snow and ice sliding swiftly down a mountain side

**Simile:** A figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind

**Explicitly:** Openly, clearly

**Dwindle:** Decline, decrease

**Perspective:** Viewpoint, view

**Culminate:** Conclude

**Illustrious:** Famous



**Flux:** Change

**Metaphor:** A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn't literally true, but helps explain an idea or make a comparison.

**Deem:** Believe, consider

**Consequence:** Result

**Relish:** Enjoy

**Figurative:** Departing from a literal use of words; metaphorical

**Symbolism:** The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities

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## 10.5 Sample Questions

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### 10.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The Road Not Taken is written by which of these poets?
  - (a) William Shakespeare
  - (b) William Wordsworth
  - (c) Robert Frost
  - (d) John Keats
2. How many ways are there in the path in Road Not Taken?
  - (a) Multiple paths
  - (b) Two paths
  - (c) Three paths
  - (d) Single Path
3. Why are trees bending and the leaves are falling in the poem Birches?
  - (a) Intense Ice
  - (b) Intense heat
  - (c) Sun light
  - (d) Spring season
4. The collection of poems Mountain Interval was written by which of these poets?
  - (a) Robert Frost
  - (b) ST Coleridge
  - (c) William Shakespeare

- (d) William Wordsworth
5. Mountain Interval was written in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) 1912
  - (b) 1914
  - (c) 1916
  - (d) 1918
6. In which poem is the speaker in conflict with choosing a path?
- (a) Birches
  - (b) The Road Not Taken
  - (c) Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
  - (d) Daffodils
7. Robert Frost was an iconic poet of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) American Poetry
  - (b) British poetry
  - (c) Indian Poetry
  - (d) African Poetry
8. The imagined boy in Birches is a metaphoric representation of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) The poet
  - (b) The speaker
  - (c) Old man
  - (d) None of these
9. The Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to Frost in \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) 1960
  - (b) 1962
  - (c) 1964
  - (d) 1966
10. When was Robert Frost born?
- (a) 1870
  - (b) 1872
  - (c) 1874
  - (d) 1876

### 10.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Define the theme of spirituality in Robert Frost's poem *Birches*.
2. What are the well-known poems that are there in *Mountain Interval*, a collection of poems by Robert Frost?
3. Briefly discuss the major themes in *Birches* by Robert Frost.
4. Draw a distinction between *The Road Not Taken* and *Stooping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*.
5. Why does the speaker in *Birches* imagine the boy climbing up the trees? What does it represent metaphorically?

### 10.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the major ideas and themes presented in *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost?
2. What are the chief literary devices employed by Robert Frost in *Birches*?
3. Examine the greatness of Robert Frost with reference to the poems prescribed for your study.

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## 10.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Frost, Robert. *The Complete Works of Robert Frost*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964.
2. ---. *The Collected Poems*. New Delhi: Vintage Classics, 2013.
3. J Greiner, Donald. *Robert Frost: The Poet and his Critics*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1974.

## Unit - 11: Sylvia Plath: “Lady Lazarus”

### Structure

#### 11.0 Introduction

#### 11.1 Objectives

#### 11.2 Sylvia Plath: “Lady Lazarus”

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#### 11.5 Sample Questions

##### 11.5.1 Objective Questions

##### 11.5.2 Short Answer Questions

##### 11.5.3 Long Answer Questions

#### 11.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 11.0 Introduction

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Sylvia Plath, a remarkable American poet of the 20th century, is widely recognized for her confessional style and poignant exploration of personal struggles in her writing. Plath’s life, tragically cut short at the age of 30, continues to captivate readers and scholars alike, as her work reveals a deep introspection and raw emotional intensity. Plath’s poetry, renowned for its vivid imagery and confessional style, is most notably encapsulated in her seminal collection, *Ariel*, a work that has served as a cornerstone for subsequent generations of poets and readers. One of Plath’s most renowned and powerful poems is “Lady Lazarus”, which showcases her mastery of poetic expression and explores profound themes of death, rebirth, and personal identity.

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## 11.1 Objectives

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In this unit, our objectives are to:

- Identify the distinct characteristics of confessional poetry and its relevance to Plath's body of work.
- Analyze the prominent themes and motifs present in "Lady Lazarus,"
- Examine how gender dynamics and societal expectations impact the speaker's experiences and self-perception.
- Discuss the feminist undertones and social commentary present in the poem.
- Analyze the poetic devices employed by Plath, such as metaphor and symbolism.

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## 11.2 Sylvia Plath: "Lady Lazarus"

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### 11.2.1 Sylvia Plath: Life and Work

Sylvia Plath was born on October 27, 1932, in Boston, Massachusetts. Her literary talents emerged at a young age, and she went on to study English at Smith College, where she excelled academically. Plath's experiences at college, including a prestigious summer internship at *Mademoiselle* magazine, would later inform her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*.

Tragically, Plath battled depression and mental health issues throughout her life. These struggles, combined with her tumultuous marriage to poet Ted Hughes, deeply influenced her writing. Plath's poetry became a means for her to confront her innermost fears and anxieties, resulting in a body of work that is deeply personal and introspective.

Her first collection of poems, *The Colossus and Other Poems*, was published by Heinemann in 1960. Most of the poems in the collection had already appeared in major U.S. and British journals. Her semi-autobiographical work *The Bell Jar* remains the only published novel by the writer. It was published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas in 1963 and under her own name only in 1967. A month after the publication of the novel, she died by suicide. The novel, however, was not published in the U.S. until 1971.

While Sylvia Plath had already established her reputation as a poet by then, it was the posthumous release of her second collection of poems, *Ariel* in 1965, that cemented her enduring presence on the literary landscape. The American edition of the volume featured an introduction

by the poet Robert Lowell, whom Plath acknowledged in an BBC interview as a significant influence on her writing.

The two collected volumes, *Winter Trees* and *Crossing the Water*, published in 1971, included a notable addition of nine previously unpublished poems that were part of the original manuscript of *Ariel*. Published in 1981 and edited with an introduction by Ted Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, comprises Sylvia Plath's work from 1956 until her passing. Plath was posthumously honored with the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1982.

### **11.2.2 Analysis of “Lady Lazarus”:**

The poem, “Lady Lazarus”, is one of the most widely anthologized poems of Sylvia Plath and its enduring appeal can be attributed to its autobiographical elements and the vivid imagery that leaves a lasting impression on readers. “Lady Lazarus” was written in 1962 and published posthumously in her 1965 collection, *Ariel*. The poem explores themes of death, rebirth, and the struggle for control over one's own life and identity.

Task: Read the poem, “Lady Lazarus”. Look for the meanings of words you do not know and read the poem once again.

### **11.2.3 Brief Summary of the Poem:**

The poem is written in the first person, and the persona identifies herself as Lady Lazarus, a reference to the biblical figure Lazarus who was raised from the dead by Jesus. Throughout the poem, Lady Lazarus describes her multiple suicide attempts and her ability to repeatedly come back to life, much like Lazarus.

In “Lady Lazarus”, the persona shares a recurring pattern in her life, that is, approximately every decade she encounters death and, astonishingly, returns to life. Her experiences are marked by a stark blend of grim imagery and dramatic public displays.

After each resurrection, the speaker's appearance is unsettling and is likened to Holocaust lampshades and mummies, concealed behind a shroud. She challenges an unnamed adversary, urging them to reveal her face and asks whether her appearance terrifies them. While her revival initially carries the stench of decay, she assures that this odor will dissipate as her body regenerates, emphasizing the cyclic nature of death and birth.

The speaker's resurrections are depicted as grand spectacles, akin to a circus performance, with an enthralled audience. Her handlers strip away her burial cloth in a manner reminiscent of a strip-tease, adding a layer of theatricality to her renewal.

The speaker's deaths, both accidental and intentional, exemplify her complex relationship with mortality. She likens herself to a seashell, isolated from the world, and dependent on external intervention to return to life. She takes pride in her mastery of the art of dying, characterized by vivid and visceral experiences.

Furthermore, the speaker revels in the public's fascination with her, underlining the dramatic nature of her resurrections and the sense of wonder and admiration they elicit. She indicates the commercialization of her experiences, suggesting that people are willing to pay to partake in her extraordinary life.

In addressing "Herr Doktor" and "Herr Enemy", the speaker portrays herself as a prized possession, akin to a valuable figurine, subject to manipulation. She likens her moments of agony to melting gold, accentuating the intense pain and transformation she endures.

"Lady Lazarus" portrays the speaker's life as an intriguing blend of horror, spectacle, and an extraordinary ability to outwit death. She thrives on the public's fascination, weaving her recurrent acts of self-destruction and resurrection into a unique and captivating narrative.

Plath's poem is marked by its dark and intense imagery, with vivid descriptions of her own death and resurrection. She uses disturbing and violent metaphors to convey the pain and suffering she has endured. At the same time, there is a sense of defiance and empowerment in her words as she refuses to be defeated by death. She likens herself to a phoenix rising from the ashes, suggesting a cyclical pattern of self-destruction and renewal.

The poem reflects Plath's own struggles with mental illness and her complicated relationship with life and death. It is a complex and powerful exploration of the human condition, mortality, and the enduring will to survive and thrive in the face of adversity. "Lady Lazarus" remains a significant work in Plath's body of poetry and continues to be studied and analyzed for its emotional depth and literary merit.

"Lady Lazarus" is a powerful and emotionally charged poem. It consists of 28 tercets (three-line stanzas) and follows a confessional style, revealing the innermost thoughts and experiences of the speaker. The poem's content revolves around the speaker's encounters with death and her personal destruction, presented through vivid and disturbing imagery. The structure of the poem is characterized by its intense and fragmented narrative, reflecting the fragmented state of the speaker's psyche.

#### **11.2.4 Impact and Metaphorical Significance of the Poem:**

Among Plath's extensive repertoire, "Lady Lazarus" stands out as a remarkable and influential poem. Published posthumously, the poem showcases Plath's adeptness at weaving together vivid imagery, intense emotions, and complex symbolism. It has since become an iconic piece of literature that embodies the confessional poetry movement and solidifies Plath's reputation as a leading voice of her generation.

"Lady Lazarus" takes inspiration from the biblical story of Lazarus, who was resurrected by Jesus. In the poem, the speaker, like Lazarus, metaphorically undergoes multiple deaths and resurrections, defying the limitations of mortality. Plath's exploration of death in the poem is not merely a literal or physical demise but also a symbolic representation of personal struggles, emotional turmoil, and societal pressures that women, especially artists, go through.

The creation of a Lady Lazarus holds metaphorical significance within the poem, connecting to Plath's own struggles with mental illness. The reference to Lazarus suggests a cyclical pattern of death and resurrection. Through this metaphor, the speaker embodies her own experience of repeatedly facing death and being revived, both metaphorically and perhaps even literally. Lady Lazarus becomes a symbol of resilience and the enduring spirit in the face of personal suffering and societal pressures. While, the biblical story is marked by celebration, the speaker's tone is characterized by bitter irony and deep sorrow. She endures significant suffering within a patriarchal society that denies her agency and life choices.

#### **11.2.5 Tone and Imagery:**

The persona's emotions in "Lady Lazarus" are intense and complex, encompassing anger, resentment, and a desire for agency. The tone of the poem oscillates between defiance and vulnerability, reflecting the speaker's conflicted state of mind. Lines such as "Herr God, Herr Lucifer" and "A cake of soap, / A wedding ring" reveal the speaker's anger towards authority figures and her profound disillusionment with traditional societal expectations. The poem's tone is marked by a sense of defiance, as the speaker confronts her own mortality and seeks to assert her agency in the face of oppressive forces.

Plath employs vivid and unsettling imagery throughout the poem to convey the speaker's experiences of death and destruction. Images of fire, violence, and suffering are recurrent, evoking a sense of darkness and despair. For example, lines such as "Dying is an art, like everything else" and "Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair" portray the speaker's familiarity with death and her ability to rise from the ashes of her own destruction. The use of such imagery



intensifies the emotional impact of the poem, allowing readers insight into the speaker's inner turmoil.

### **11.2.6 Themes and Motifs:**

Themes and motifs in a poem are key elements that unlock deeper meanings and emotions concealed in it. These are recurring elements or ideas that link various parts of the poem together. By identifying these themes and motifs, readers can gain a more profound understanding of the poet's intended message, as they provide a framework for interpreting the poem's imagery, symbols, and metaphors. An analysis of themes and motifs help us in exploring the central ideas, emotions, and the poet's perspective. It helps the readers connect with the poem on a more meaningful and emotional level, ultimately enriching our appreciation and comprehension of the poem. This section examines the following themes and motifs, shedding light on their significance and impact on the overall meaning of the poem.

#### **11.2.6.1 Death and Resurrection:**

The recurrent theme of death and rebirth in "Lady Lazarus" offers insight into the speaker's intricate relationship with mortality. The persona grapples with the idea of taking control over her own life by repeatedly attempting suicide, as she reveals at the outset of the poem: "I have done it again./ One year in every ten,/ I manage it." These attempts occur once a decade, and the speaker portrays death as more alluring than life, over which she has no control.

The poem's title, with its allusion to the resurrection of Lazarus, is used ironically by the persona. The biblical resurrection of Lazarus was deemed a miraculous and celebratory event. However, the speaker resists being brought back to life and deems death superior to life. Her disdain for those who revive her is evident in her use of the German honorifics "Herr Doktor" and "Herr Enemy," by which she likens them to Nazis. She resents being resurrected, feeling powerless and vulnerable when restored to life. In her view, she lacks agency over her body, her life, and even her own death. She finds dying easier than the challenge of being resurrected

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.  
It's easy enough to do it and stay put.  
It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day  
To the same place, the same face, the same brute  
Amused shout:

'A miracle!'

That knocks me out.

Plath's attitude to death seems ambiguous. It is not that she does not want to be resurrected at all; she wants to have agency over it. Through stark holocaust imagery the persona illustrates, to her, life feels akin to what others experience as death. Evidently, the persona is not dead. She uses the metaphors of death and resurrection to suggest that life is unbearable to her. The speaker uses unsettling images to refer to death and life. She describes the skin of her resurrected body to "Nazi lampshade" and the resurrection itself as "flesh / the grave cave ate will be / at home on me." However, she uses imagery of comfort and calmness to describe death, such as "rocked shut/ As seashell" or "Dying/ Is an art", suggesting that death is better than the life she is living. The persona informs the reader that she must continue to attempt suicide, it is as if she has a calling for it. She tells the readers that this is her third attempt and describes it in detail.

As the poem unfolds, it becomes apparent that the speaker believes that it is only by taking charge of her own existence through the act of dying can she anticipate a true rebirth. Her desire isn't to be revived by external forces, instead, she aspires to emerge from death like a phoenix, a legendary bird renowned for its capacity to be born anew from its own ashes. She wants to get back to people who had made her life difficult as she asks them to beware and warns them that, "Out of the ash/ I rise with my red hair/ And I eat men like air".

#### **11.2.6.2 Suffering:**

In Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus", the haunting and vivid imagery drawn from the Holocaust serves as a potent metaphor for the speaker's personal suffering and resilience. Throughout the poem, these references to the Holocaust are laden with symbolic significance, adding layers of complexity to the theme of suffering.

The Holocaust imagery in "Lady Lazarus" is unmistakable, and it conjures images of mass extermination, persecution, and inhumanity. The repeated images such as "peeling off the napkin" and "My face a featureless, fine/ Jew linen" draws parallels with the dehumanization and brutality experienced by Holocaust victims. It is as though the speaker, in her own suffering, feels akin to those who endured the horrors of the Holocaust, suggesting that she, too, has faced profound dehumanization and violation of her identity.

The metaphor of "Nazi lampshade" in the poem is particularly striking. It is a chilling reference to the atrocities committed during the Holocaust, where human skin was used to make lampshades. This metaphor serves to underscore the commodification and objectification of the

speaker's own suffering, suggesting that her pain and despair have been exploited for others' voyeuristic pleasure, much like the Holocaust victims' suffering was exploited.

Plath's use of Holocaust imagery in "Lady Lazarus" serves as a stark reminder of the atrocities of history, and it highlights the notion that suffering, especially when placed in the public eye or media, can become a spectacle. The poem also underlines the idea that the speaker's suffering, like the Holocaust itself, is not easily forgotten or erased, and it leaves a permanent scar on her identity and her art. This use of imagery creates a powerful, if unsettling, connection between the speaker's own pain and the horrors of the past, challenging us to consider the impact of history and the weight of suffering on the individual and society as a whole.

#### **11.2.6.3 Patriarchy and Gender:**

An analysis of the poem reveals the ways in which gender influences the speaker's experiences and perceptions. Plath's exploration of female identity and the societal pressures women face is a prominent theme within the poem. The speaker's struggles are deeply rooted in her gendered existence, as she confronts the expectations, objectification, and marginalization imposed upon her by society.

The poem looks into the broader implications of gender and feminism, highlighting the ways in which women are often reduced to objects of spectacle and fascination. The speaker's embodiment of Lady Lazarus, a reference to the biblical figure of Lazarus and the biblical story of resurrection, challenges the traditional narratives of femininity and victimhood. Through her powerful and defiant words, the speaker reclaims her agency, questioning societal norms and demanding recognition for her authentic self.

In "Lady Lazarus", Sylvia Plath weaves together themes of death, rebirth, identity, self-expression, and gender to create a thought-provoking and impactful poem. The exploration of these themes and motifs allows readers to engage with the complex emotions, societal critiques, and personal empowerment expressed by the speaker. Through her masterful use of language and vivid imagery, Plath invites us to reflect on our own identities, societal expectations, and the transformative power of resilience and self-expression.

#### **11.2.7 Style and Techniques:**

Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" showcases her distinctive writing style and skillful employment of various literary techniques.

Plath's use of language in "Lady Lazarus" is striking and powerful, evoking intense emotions and vivid imagery. She employs a mix of precise and visceral words that create a sense of urgency and intensity throughout the poem. Through her careful selection of words, Plath conveys the raw emotions and inner turmoil experienced by the speaker.

The imagery in the poem is often disturbing and provocative, aiming to shock the reader into confronting the harsh realities of pain, suffering, and societal expectations. Plath utilizes graphic metaphors and descriptions to paint a vivid picture of the speaker's experiences. For example, phrases like "peanut-crunching crowd" and images such as "my skin/ Bright as a Nazi lampshade", "unwrap me hand and foot" and "I eat men like air" create unsettling visual imagery, emphasizing the poem's themes of death, rebirth, and personal struggle.

Sylvia Plath employs a carefully crafted structure in "Lady Lazarus" to enhance the poem's impact. The use of repetition is particularly notable, as it reinforces key ideas and emotions. Plath uses anaphora very effectively in the poem, for example, "I do it so it feels like hell./ I do it so it feels real./ I guess you could say I've a call." and "It's easy enough to do it in a cell./ It's easy enough to do it and stay put./ It's the theatrical...". It creates a sense of rhythm and emphasizes the speaker's resilience and defiance. This repetition serves to heighten the poem's intensity and drive home its central themes.

Symbolism is also an integral part of the poem's structure, adding layers of meaning to the narrative. The reference to Lady Lazarus, drawn from the biblical story of Lazarus' resurrection, symbolizes the speaker's ability to transcend death and emerge stronger. Additionally, allusions to the Holocaust and Nazi imagery further underscore the themes of suffering, oppression, and the dehumanization of the individual.

Plath's confessional style is a defining characteristic of her poetry, and "Lady Lazarus" exemplifies this deeply personal and introspective approach. The poem is imbued with a sense of authenticity and raw emotion, as Plath draws from her own experiences and emotions to craft a deeply introspective narrative.

This confessional style allows Plath to connect with her readers on a profound emotional level. The intense emotions expressed by the speaker resonate with readers, evoking empathy, discomfort, and a sense of shared vulnerability. Plath's ability to tap into the depths of human emotions and confront taboo subjects contributes to the poem's lasting impact and its ability to provoke strong reactions.

In “Lady Lazarus”, Sylvia Plath’s writing style and techniques combine to create a powerful and emotionally charged poem. Through her skillful use of language and imagery, she captivates the reader, immersing them in the speaker’s tumultuous world. The deliberate structure, repetition, and symbolism further enhance the poem’s impact, allowing for a deeper exploration of its themes. Plath’s confessional style invites readers to confront their own emotions and experiences, fostering a connection that resonates long after the poem is read.

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### 11.3 Learning Outcomes

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Upon completion of this unit the students will be able to:

- Recognize the relevance of confessional poetry to Sylvia Plath’s body of work, particularly in “Lady Lazarus.”
- Demonstrate an understanding of prominent themes and motifs found in the poem and how they contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the poem.
- Engage in critical discussions about the role of gender in Plath’s poetry and its reflection of societal norms and pressures.
- Exhibit an understanding of poetic devices used by Sylvia Plath and apply this knowledge to their analysis of other poems or literary works.

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### 11.4 Glossary

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**Lazarus:** A name and is most notably associated with the biblical figure. In the New Testament of the Christian Bible, Lazarus of Bethany is a man who is raised from the dead by Jesus, as recounted in the Gospel of John. This story is a significant and well-known miracle in Christian tradition, symbolizing the power of faith and resurrection.

**Resurrection:** Resurrection refers to the act of being brought back to life, often in a religious or spiritual context, or more broadly, a revival or reawakening after a period of decline or inactivity.

**Anxieties:** Anxiety is the feeling of unease or worry that can arise when you are nervous or concerned about something.

**Unsettling:** something that causes discomfort or anxiety, making people feel uneasy or disturbed.

**Reminiscent:** something that reminds you of a past experience or something familiar, often invoking nostalgia or recognition.

**Defying:** It means to resist or challenge a rule, authority, convention, or expectation by openly and boldly refusing to obey or conform. It implies a determined and often confrontational act of resistance.

**Metaphorical:** Metaphorical language or expressions involve using symbols or figurative comparisons to represent something other than the literal meaning, highlighting similarities or resemblances in order to convey a deeper or symbolic message.

**Oscillates:** The term is often used to describe something that alternates between two opposing or contrasting situations, such as emotions, opinions, or physical movements.

**Defiance:** a refusal to conform or yield reflecting a spirit of resistance or rebellion

**Vulnerability:** the condition of being exposed or open to potential harm or emotional distress.

**Disillusionment:** the feeling of disappointment or loss of belief and trust in something or someone, typically as a result of discovering that the reality doesn't meet the previously held ideal or expectation.

**Motif:** a recurring thematic element or pattern in a work of literature, art, or music.

**Allusion:** a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or event from literature, history, mythology, or culture, which the author assumes the reader will recognize.

**Holocaust:** It refers to the systematic genocide and mass murder of approximately six million European Jews, along with millions of other minority groups and perceived enemies of the Nazi regime, during World War II.

**Voyeuristic:** an adjective that describes the behavior of a voyeur, which is someone who gains pleasure or satisfaction from observing or spying on the private lives, actions, or intimate activities of others without their consent.

**Visceral:** an adjective that pertains to or affects the internal organs of the body, especially the gut. In a more figurative sense, it is used to describe a deep, intense, and emotional response or reaction that is instinctive, raw, and felt in one's gut, rather than being solely intellectual or rational.

**Imagery:** Descriptive language that appeals to the senses, creating vivid mental images for the reader.

**Anaphora:** Anaphora is a rhetorical and linguistic device that involves the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences, clauses, or phrases.

**Confessional Poetry:** A style of poetry that emphasizes the personal experiences, emotions, and struggles of the poet. Sylvia Plath is associated with the confessional poetry movement, and “Lady Lazarus” exemplifies this style through its raw and introspective exploration of the speaker’s inner world.

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## 11.5 Sample Questions

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### 11.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. In “Lady Lazarus”, death and resurrection are portrayed as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) Depressing and hopeless
  - (b) Liberating and empowering
  - (c) Confusing and chaotic
  - (d) Irrelevant and insignificant
2. In which collection was Sylvia Plath’s poem “Lady Lazarus” originally published?
  - (a) *Ariel*
  - (b) *The Bell Jar*
  - (c) *The Colossus*
  - (d) *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*
3. Sylvia Plath use Holocaust imagery in her poem Lady Lazarus \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) To celebrate the renewal of life and hope.
  - (b) To emphasize the beauty of life and rebirth.
  - (c) To draw parallels between personal suffering and historical trauma.
  - (d) To create a sense of detachment from the poem’s emotional core.
4. “Lady Lazarus” can be examined through a feminist lens to explore \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) The speaker’s fear of death.
  - (b) The poem’s religious undertones.
  - (c) The influence of gender on the speaker’s experiences.
  - (d) The class barriers in the society
5. Which literary technique is prominently used in the poem?
  - (a) Simile
  - (b) Metaphor

- (c) Personification
  - (d) Hyperbole
6. The poem's structure includes the use of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Repetition
  - (b) Alliteration
  - (c) Irony
  - (d) Foreshadowing
7. How does the poem "Lady Lazarus" exemplify the characteristics of confessional poetry?
- (a) By avoiding personal and emotional revelations.
  - (b) By adhering strictly to conventional poetic forms.
  - (c) By exploring the poet's personal experiences and emotions.
  - (d) By maintaining an objective and distant tone throughout.
8. What is the significance of the title "Lady Lazarus"?
- (a) It represents speaker's piety.
  - (b) It represents the speaker's desire for immortality.
  - (c) It reflects the speaker's struggle with mental illness.
  - (d) It symbolizes the theme of rebirth and resurrection.
9. The speaker's desire for control is evident through \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Her use of vivid and disturbing imagery.
  - (b) Her rejection of societal expectations.
  - (c) Her indifference towards her own suffering.
  - (d) Her willingness to embrace death.
10. The overall tone of the poem can be described as \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Lighthearted and whimsical
  - (b) Mysterious and enigmatic
  - (c) Defiant and confrontational
  - (d) Passive and indifferent

### 11.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. How does the speaker's struggle for personal identity manifest in "Lady Lazarus"? Provide specific examples from the poem to support your answer.
2. Discuss the role of language in shaping the speaker's sense of self in the poem. How does the speaker use language to express her emotions and assert her identity?



3. Examine the role of gender and societal expectations in “Lady Lazarus” and how they influence the speaker’s experiences and self-perception.
4. Explain the significance of the recurring theme of death and rebirth in the poem. How does it contribute to the overall meaning of “Lady Lazarus”?
5. How does Sylvia Plath use Holocaust imagery in “Lady Lazarus” to convey the poem’s themes and emotions?

### **11.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. How does Sylvia Plath’s choice of imagery contribute to the overall themes and emotions conveyed in the poem?
2. How does the choice of the title “Lady Lazarus” help set the tone and establish the thematic framework of the poem, and what does it reveal about the speaker’s identity and experiences?
3. How does Plath’s confessional style contribute to the raw intensity of the speaker’s emotions, and what effect does it have on the overall tone and meaning of the poem?

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## **11.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Bassnett, Susan. *Sylvia Plath*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
2. Demjen, Zsofia. *Sylvia Plath and the Language of Affective States*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
3. Gill, Jo. *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
4. Helle, Anita, et al. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Sylvia Plath*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.
5. Kendall, Tim. *Sylvia Plath*. Faber & Faber, 2001.
6. Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel: The Restored Edition*. Harper Collins, 2005.
7. ---. *The Bell Jar*. Harper Collins, 2014.
8. Stevenson, Anne. *Bitter Fame*. Mariner Books, 1998.
9. Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Sylvia Plath*. Routledge, 2013.
10. ---. *Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life, Second Edition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

## Unit - 12: 'Dedications' from An Atlas of the Difficult World

### Structure

12.0 Introduction

12.1 Objectives

12.2 'Dedications' from *An Atlas of the Difficult World*

12.2.1 *An Atlas of the Difficult World*

12.2.2 XIII (Dedication): A Brief Summary

12.2.3 XIII (Dedication): Critical Analysis

12.3 Learning Outcomes

12.4 Glossary

12.5 Sample Questions

12.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 12.0 Introduction

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Adrienne Rich is one of the towering figures in American poetry of the Post World War II era. Though known primarily as a poet, her essays constitute some of the major works in feminist and lesbian writings. In fact, to understand the personal and political elements of her poetry better, her prose works have to be read alongside her poems. Adrienne Rich was born to a Jewish physician father and a Protestant musician mother, Helen Elizabeth Jones. She was initiated into poetry by her father Arnold Rich who encouraged her to read and write poems from a very early age. It was under the influence of such a training that she wrote her early poems which were formal, metrical and rigid in style and structure. They were imitative of the poets she had read in her father's library. Even before she graduated from Radcliffe College in 1951, her first collection of poetry, *A Change of World* was chosen by W H Auden for the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Award.

In 1953 she married Alfred H Conrad, a Harvard University economist with whom she had three children. *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law. Poems 1954-1962* was published in 1963. After they moved to New York in 1966 Rich got involved in the women's movements and also the civil rights and anti-war movements. A few years later she got divorced from her husband who committed suicide the following year. Rich has since then written more than fifteen

collections of poems and also many essays. She has received many honours and awards for her works.

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## 12.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- enable you to understand and appreciate Adrienne Rich’s poetry
- achieve a grasp of the politics, geography of location and history that find diffused in her poetic expressions.
- understand how Rich’s life, works, politics and activism are tightly interconnected.
- see how Rich’s poetry is not a work of art for art’s sake, but is strongly inclined to communicate with the readers, offer a social critique and change society.

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## 12.2 ‘Dedications’ from *An Atlas of the Difficult World*

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*Diving into the Wreck. Poems 1971-1972, The Dream of a Common Language. Poems 1974-1977 and An Atlas of the Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991* are some of the other major poetry collections by Adrienne Rich. Her notable collection of essays and criticisms include *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (1986) and *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993). She lived with her partner Michelle Cliff, the Jamaican American author, till her death in 2012. Her last collection of poetry published during her lifetime was titled *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve. Poems 2007- 2010*.

Her early poems make references to the religious and cultural contradictions that she experienced because of her mixed parentage. In “Readings of History” published in the collection *Snapshots*, this split in her identity finds a reference. “Split at the root, neither Gentile nor Jew/ Yankee nor Rebel, born/ in the face of two ancient cults/ I am a good reader of histories.” One of her most commonly prescribed poems in schools and colleges is “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” from her first collection *A Change of World*. Here, as in most of her early poems, she follows a traditional and rigid style with uniform stanza lengths, metrical patterns and rhyme scheme. The poem has three stanzas of four lines each and follow a rhyme scheme

(aabbccddeeff). Even her early poems reflect her interest in issues related to women's equality and gender relations. Women's oppression in marriage is a theme that finds its way in this poem. Aunt Jennifer embroiders a tiger that prances freely in the green forest unafraid of anything. However, the power and beauty of her artwork is contrasted by her unsteady and shivering hand that has been weighed down by the wedding band that she is wearing. Even death cannot end her ordeal. Wives will continue to be "mastered by" their husbands.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie  
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.

The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

On tracing the course of her poetic career, one might notice that a significant change came about in her style and theme in the 1960s and 70s, as she started involving in issues related to gender, women's empowerment, sexuality, lesbianism, civil rights and war. She abandoned meter and rhyme and embraced free verse as her poetry became more politically engaging. One of her most important achievements during this phase is her poetry collection *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (1973) which won the National Book Award. She refused to accept the award individually, and shared it with the other nominees Alice Walker and Audre Lorde on behalf of the women community whose voices go unheard in a male dominated world. Written at a time when the second wave of feminism was at its peak, the book gives voice to Rich's radical feminism. In "Diving into the Wreck", one of the poems in this collection, the speaker ventures alone into the deep waters of the ocean to inspect a wrecked ship. Before she dives into the wreck, she reads the "book of myths/ in which/ our names do not appear." This book of myths could be a reference to mainstream history where the stories of women and the other marginalized communities are absent. Diving into the wreck is symbolic of Rich's exploration of the past in an attempt to rewrite history from women's perspective and to reclaim the lost stories of women's experience. Through the use of such images and symbols, she is in fact trying to define the feminist project of exploring the past and rewriting history.

I came to explore the wreck.

The words are purposes

The words are maps

I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.

Rich's prose complements her poetry, but is more direct and forthright in the expression of its politics. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), her first book of prose, that invited a lot of critical attention and praise, is a foundational text in the field of Women's Studies and Maternal Studies today. It is also in this book that she openly declares her lesbian sexuality for the first time: "The suppressed lesbian I had been carrying in me since adolescence began to stretch her limbs." Her research on the subject of motherhood and her personal experience as a mother have found their way into the ideas expressed in this book. She explains how motherhood is an institution and how patriarchy has its hold over motherhood. By examining motherhood, she is not just pondering over her personal experience, but is interrogating the notion as it prevails in society. She writes, "...the laws regulating contraception and abortion;...the denial that work done by women at home is part of 'production': the chaining of women in links of love and guilt; the solitary confinement of 'full time motherhood'; the token nature of fatherhood, which gives him rights and privileges over children toward whom he assumes minimal responsibility; the psychoanalytic castigation of the mother... that she is inadequate and ignorant... all these are connecting fibers of this invisible institution."

### **12.2.1 *An Atlas of the Difficult World:***

The title of most of her poetry collections mentions the period during which her poems were written. This tells us how important it is to know the social and historical contexts of their composition. In one of her interviews she speaks about the context in which she wrote the poem *An Atlas of the Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991* (1992): "...An Atlas of the Difficult World," which reflects on the condition of my country, which I wrote very consciously as a citizen poet, looking at the geography, the history, the peoples of my country. I started writing "An Atlas of the Difficult World" just before the Gulf War, so I was writing it during and after the Gulf War." This collection of poems written between 1988 and 1991, has two parts. The title poem which forms the first part of the book has thirteen sections. These sections are not given any titles, but are merely numbered using Roman numerals, with the exception of two sections- VII (The Dreamsite) and XIII (Dedications).

As suggested in the title, the poem aspires to function like an atlas, bringing together the experiences of people from different geographical locations of the continent on a single canvas of the poem. "Catch if you can your country's moment,..." For example, section I shows the life of immigrant plantation labourers in Salinas Valley, California, while section III tells us about

Rich's life with her husband in Vermont and section VII is set in the New York city. The poet establishes the epic dimensions of her work as she jumps from one location to another, capturing scenes and voices from the lives of people from different geographical locations with diverse economic, gender and social identities. Rich does, at different places in the poem, remind us of her grandiose intention to present an atlas of America. In the beginning of section II of the poem she says "Here is a map of our country", but towards the end she realizes that what she has shown is not a map, but a mural. "I promised to show you a map, you say, but this is a mural/ then yes let it be these are small distinctions/ where do we see it from is the question." (II) Although in the title she uses the word 'atlas' and later 'map', she later prefers to call her poetry a 'mural'. Perhaps the poet becomes conscious of the fact that maps always claim to be objective and scientific, whereas a mural is a work of art and is subjective. They also present the world from different perspectives.

The world she depicts is not a pleasant world, but "a difficult world" as the title says. The traumatic experiences and the difficult lives of the underprivileged people are the raw materials of her poetry. She says that these are not pleasant things to talk about, but these are her raw materials for poetry. "I don't want to know /wreckage, dreck and waste, but these are the materials."(I) The poem begins with the description of the life of an immigrant woman who works in the strawberry fields. She picks strawberries with her hands and has "strawberry blood on the wrist/ Malathion in the throat." (I) The speaker says that she is in close "communion" with not only the strawberries she picks with her hands, but also with the insecticide Malathion that is dusted on the strawberries. It gets inside her and causes the premature birth of her baby - "the hospital at the edge of the fields,/prematures slipping from unsafe wombs." (I) The irony is that this is happening in a place that is famously known as "THE SALAD BOWL OF THE WORLD". While the agribusiness empires expand and become richer, the labourers who work in their fields continue to remain poor and work and live in the same conditions. Not only does she give us a glimpse of the lives from different parts of the country, but she also takes us to different moments in time as she makes reference to many historical events of the past and the present. The speaker, through her omnipresence in time and space, casts herself into the role of a witness of the experiences of the 'difficult world.'

This poem makes better sense when read along with her essay "Notes Towards a Politics of Location" (1984) written just before the *Atlas*, as the poem echoes many of the thoughts and views expressed in this essay. In the essay, Rich emphasizes the importance of our geographical

location in determining our history, experience and identity. She quotes her own example and says “The body I was born into was not only female and white, but Jewish – enough for geographic location to have played, in those years, a determining part.” She was four years old when the Third Reich began. Had she been located in some other place than Baltimore, she might have been somebody else now or perhaps she might not even be alive. According to Rich, our primary location is our body, which determines our perspective of the world and also our privileges and limitations. Outside the body we are located in a place, a geographical location. This location determines our history and our identity. Therefore, it is important to understand how we are placed in relation to our country, for that constitutes our national identity. Rich understands that it is her responsibility to be conscious of our location and how we are related to our country. “As a woman I have a country.... I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which, as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create.”

### **12.2.2 XIII (Dedications): A Brief Summary**

Dedications is the thirteenth and last poem in the series “An Atlas of the Difficult World.” This section begins with the poet directly addressing her potential readers located at different places and in varied situations. All of these people are pictured as reading this very same poem by Adrienne Rich where she directly communicates with them. The first line of the poem, “I know you are reading this poem,” is the refrain that is repeated every time a new reader is introduced. The first reader is in her office, working very late. She is exhausted and reads this poem before leaving the office. The street lamp is throwing its bright yellowish light through the dark window. The streets are silent with no people outside as it is “long after rush-hour”. The second reader is reading the poem “standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean.” She is separated in time and space from the first reader. It is a “grey day of early spring, faint flakes driven/ across the plains’ enormous spaces around you.”

The next reader is “reading this poem in a room where too much has happened” for her to bear. Although the poet does not say it explicitly, it is suggested that the poet has been a victim of domestic violence and has been suffering for a long time without reacting or leaving. She lives in a small room “where the bedclothes lie in stagnant coils on the bed.” There is an open suitcase lying on the floor. Perhaps the speaker had thought of leaving the people and place responsible for her suffering. However, she “cannot leave yet.” Unlike this reader, the next one does not suffer in silence or surrender to social pressure. She reads the poem while travelling on the

underground train. As the train stops, she runs “up the stairs/ toward a new kind of love/ your life has never allowed.” Unlike the previous reader who wishes to leave, but cannot leave, this reader is going to the love she desires.

The next reader is a refugee or immigrant who is “reading this poem by the light of the television screen” while waiting for news “from the *intifada*.” The reader is far away from her homeland, which is caught in rebellion and civil unrest. Another reader, in the middle of a journey, is reading the poem in a waiting room full of strangers. Rich then imagines a young man or woman who has been “counted out” “at too early an age”, bored of this life, reading this poem. “Counted out” here could mean excluded from participating in the government (has been disenfranchised). It could also mean that the person cannot or does not want to fit in to the mainstream society and feels dejected and alienated. Perhaps he also realises that it does not make any sense to try to fit in. Most of the people Rich describes are those who are displaced or have been counted out by their own country, like this young man who is saturated with boredom. They are the eternal outsiders who are never made to feel at home and are always on the move, searching for a place.

The next reader, in spite of poor eyesight, reads the poem through the thick lens of her glasses. All of these readers, caught in varied and difficult circumstances, read on the poem “because even the alphabet is precious.” Language is precious and powerful as it has the potential to liberate people. A mother of an infant, reads the poem, as she warms milk for her crying child. She carries the baby on her shoulder while holding this book of poetry in her hand. She does a lot of things at the same time “because life is short and you too are thirsty.” Rich then imagines the experience of a person from another country (could also be an immigrant), for whom English is a foreign language, reading this poem. While the reader may have to guess at the meaning of some words, the words she knows would prompt her to keep on reading. Rich “wants to know which words they are.” Yet another reader is reading the poem “torn between bitterness and hope” continuing to live in the same world, going back “to the task you cannot refuse.” The last type of reader is the one who has nothing to lose. “...there where you have landed, stripped as you are.” In the situation that the reader is in now, there is nothing left to be done. For such a person, the only source of solace is poetry.

### **12.2.3 XIII (Dedications): Critical Analysis**

The section “Dedications” may not apparently seem to be linked with the earlier sections of the poem that sketch the histories and geographies of the nation through the lives of the



people who inhabit them. However, one cannot overlook the fact that here the art of poetry functions to offer solace to all the people trapped in the “difficult world” depicted in the earlier parts of the poem, and hence, forms the connecting link. The situations of some of the readers depicted here resonate with some lives depicted in the earlier sections. For example, the reader who is reading this poem “in a room where too much has happened” for her to bear but still does not leave, reminds us of the woman in section I, who is a victim of domestic violence, but still does not leave the man she is living with because she believes he still loves her and he would be devastated if she left him.

...he beat her after the earthquake,  
tore up her writing, threw the kerosene  
lantern into her face....  
...he tore the keys from her hands (I)

There are other examples of how the readers in this section remind us of some people we met in the earlier sections. The immigrant reader who does not get the meaning of all the words in the poem or the one who waits for news from her homeland are reminiscent of the immigrant in the first section who works in the strawberry plantations. These are the people who work in unsafe conditions to boost the country’s economy. Their labour, life and death translate to profits for the agribusiness empires. However, their immigrant status (especially if it is illegal) deprives them of all the basic rights and privileges that an ordinary citizen would enjoy. Here Rich is attempting to show how people are exploited in this country because of their geographic location and their relationship with the country. She examines a kind of social injustice where, in creating a better America, the interests of many oppressed communities remain undefended. As mentioned above, this poem mainly focuses on showing how different people are connected to the nation in different manners. As a poet, she considers it her responsibility to be conscious of the relationship of different people with their country, and to understand how their nation determines their identities and lives. As a poet of the United States, she is responsible for the lives of other people living in her country. It is her responsibility to criticize class divisions, racism, gender inequality, economic inequality, war and nationalism in America. This poem was written during the Gulf War. US’s involvement in this war had caused the economy of the country to dip and the working classes were greatly affected by this. The gap between the wealthy, middle and working classes increased. It is in such a context that she interrogates the government’s policies and practices through her poem. In section XI she says, “I am bent on

fathoming what it means to love my country.” According to Rich, patriotism is not merely singing praise of one’s country, but is more importantly registering, dissent against one’s government and being responsible to the oppressed and marginalised communities. “A patriot is not a weapon. A patriot is one who wrestles for the/ soul of her country/ as she wrestles for her own being” (XI). Adrienne Rich is here not a feminist poet, but a citizen poet or a national poet, trying to understand what it means to belong to a nation. In a 1994 interview she says that in *Atlas*, “I was trying to talk about my location, the privileges, the complexity of loving my country and hating the ways our national interest is being defined for us.”

This part of “Dedications,” which is dedicated to her readers across America (and also outside), is primarily concerned with the relationship between the poet and the reader, and also the acts of writing and reading poetry. It also makes us think of the function of poetry in our everyday world. Rich strongly believes that poetry can change society and the lives of people primarily by connecting with them and communicating with them. This is what Rich mainly strives to achieve through this work. She addresses around twelve readers from different places and varied backgrounds. She addresses them as “you” and herself as “I” which makes the communication more direct. Her readers, whom she has brought together in her “atlas” live in a “difficult world” ridden with poverty, violence, prolonged misery, helplessness, anger and despair. She expects to connect them all through a single thread of her poetry. They are mapped and brought together as a community of readers whose only solace, consolation and means of survival is poetry. Poetry gives people the energy to carry on in this difficult world. Adrienne Rich expects her poetry to create a community of people who understand each other. But interestingly, Rich (as a poet) is also a part of this community, as her sustenance also depends on this act of communicating with her readers and helping them survive in this difficult world through poetry. The community of readers supplies the poet with all the necessary energy to write her poems. In one of her interviews, she explains what this reading community means: “There is a community of those whose work and whose lives you respect and love and cherish, a community that gives you the strength to create, to push boundaries, to take risks, a community that perhaps challenges you to do all that. There is an audience of those unknown to you but whom your words are going to reach. You can’t know them in advance, but you can hope for them, desire them.” In the same interview she sheds some light on the origin and composition of “Dedications”: “‘Dedications’ came to me as a way of creating a personal dialogue with many

different kinds of readers who might have read this whole poem and connected with it here or there. But I wanted ‘Dedications’ to be there at the end, waiting for the reader.”

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## 12.3 Learning Outcomes

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Following are the learning outcomes of this Unit:

- Students are introduced to the wide range of themes and issues dealt with in the works of Adrienne Rich.
- Students learn to place her poem within the socio-political context of the times.
- Students can understand how Adrienne Rich’s work fits into the broader feminist literary tradition. They can explore how her poetry contributes to the evolution of feminist literature and the ways in which she engages with and challenges the traditions of poetry.
- The diverse themes and issues that intersect her poetry explain why she calls herself a ‘citizen poet’.

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## 12.4 Glossary

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**Malathion:** Malathion is an insecticide that is dusted on the strawberries.

**Third Reich:** The term ‘Third Reich’ refers to Nazi Germany under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.

**Intifada:** The word ‘Intifada’ is Arabic and means ‘uprising’. Here the reference is to a place of civil unrest.

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## 12.5 Sample Questions

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### 12.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which work by Adrienne Rich is mainly about feminists’ attempts at rewriting history from a women’s perspective?

(a) *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve. Poems 2007- 2010.*

(b) *An Atlas of The Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991.*

- (c) *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–1972*  
 (d) “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”
2. Which of Adrienne Rich’s prose works is based on her research on motherhood and her personal experience as a mother?
- (a) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*  
 (b) *Blood, Bread and Poetry*  
 (c) *What Is Found There. Notebooks on Poetry and Politics.*  
 (d) None of the above
3. Adrienne Rich’s poetry collection \_\_\_\_\_ won the National Book Award which she insisted on sharing with the other nominees, Alice Walker and Audre Lorde.
- (a) *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve. Poems 2007- 2010.*  
 (b) *An Atlas of The Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991.*  
 (c) *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–1972*  
 (d) *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*
4. *Atlas of the Difficult World* is written in \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) free verse  
 (b) iambic pentameter  
 (c) Following a rhyme scheme  
 (d) conventional form and style
5. The second wave of feminism in America was at its peak in
- (a) the 1960s and 70s  
 (b) the 1930s and 40s  
 (c) the 1990s  
 (d) 2010
6. “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” is a well-known poem from her first collection of poems \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve. Poems 2007- 2010.*  
 (b) *An Atlas of The Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991.*  
 (c) *A Change of World*  
 (d) *Diving into the wreck: Poems 1971–1972*
7. *An Atlas of the Difficult World* is a series of \_\_\_\_\_ number of poems.
- (a) Twelve

- (b) Thirteen
  - (c) Fourteen
  - (d) Fifteen
8. The thirteenth section of the poem “An Atlas of the Difficult World” is titled \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) The Dream-site
  - (b) The Histories
  - (c) Atlas
  - (d) Dedications
9. The section ‘Dedications’ mainly deals with the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) The reader and the poet
  - (b) Two poets
  - (c) A citizen and an immigrant
  - (d) None of the above
10. “I know you are reading this poem”- here “you” refers to\_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) A poet
  - (b) Rich’s father
  - (c) A reader
  - (d) None of the above

**12.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Justify the suitability of the title “Dedications” to the poem.
2. What is Adrienne Rich’s concept of “community” of readers?
3. Comment on the depiction of the “difficult world(s)” in which the readers of Dedications are trapped.
4. Explain Adrienne Rich’s definition and notion of patriotism.
5. Discuss Adrienne Rich’s feminist poetics and politics with reference to any one of her works.

**12.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Although Adrienne Rich is primarily known as a feminist poet, in *Atlas* she is a “citizen poet” trying to understand what it means to belong to a nation. Discuss.
2. “I happen to think poetry makes a big difference”. Discuss this statement by Adrienne Rich with reference to “Dedications.”
3. Write an essay tracing the evolution and development of Adrienne Rich’s poetic career.

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## 12.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Gwiazda, Piotr. “‘Nothing Else Left to Read.’ Poetry and Audience in Adrienne Rich’s *An Atlas of the Difficult World*.”
2. Moyers, Bill. *The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets*. Interview. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
3. Rich, Adrienne. “Adrienne Rich. I Happen to Think Poetry Makes a Big Difference.” Interview by Matthew Rothschild. *The Progressive* 58.1 (January 1994).
4. \_\_\_\_\_. *An Atlas of the Difficult World. Poems 1988-1991* New York: W.W. Norton, 1991.
5. Riley, Jeanette E. *Understanding Adrienne Rich*. South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 2016.
6. Stein, Karen F. *Adrienne Rich. Challenging Authors*. The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2017.
7. Templeton, Alice. *The Dream and the Dialogue. Adrienne Rich’s Feminist Poetics*. Lexington: U of Tennessee P, 1994.

## **Unit – 13: Development of Commonwealth Poetry**

### **Structure**

#### **13.0 Introduction**

#### **13.1 Objectives**

#### **13.2 Development of Commonwealth Poetry**

##### **13.2.1 Development of Australian Poetry**

##### **13.2.2 Development of New Zealand Poetry**

##### **13.2.3 Development of African Poetry**

##### **13.2.4 Development of Canadian Poetry**

##### **13.2.5 Development of Caribbean Poetry**

##### **13.2.6 Development of Indian Poetry**

##### **13.2.7 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **13.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **13.4 Glossary**

#### **13.5 Sample Questions**

#### **13.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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### **13.0 Introduction**

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Commonwealth literature refers to the literature written in all those countries which were once colonized by Britain, namely commonwealth countries. It is experimental on one hand and symbolizes the new form of English literature on the other hand. It is something that ranges from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Africa, and Asian writing in English. Indian writing in the English language is also included under this umbrella of Commonwealth literature since India was a British colony. Many scholars and critics criticize the term “commonwealth” as it signifies imperialism and its legacy, so they prefer to call it “New Literatures in English”, “Third World Literature” or “Post-Colonial Literatures in English” instead of “Commonwealth Literature.” As there are diverse terms associated with this trend of literature, so are the features of Commonwealth literature. It is meant to portray the socio-cultural system of these countries and the impact of colonialism on it.

The artists, writers, and poets of this trend are in search of identity, modernity, and unity in their writing, poetry, and artistic value. It is a form of literature that is rich as far as poetry and fiction is concerned, but it is not as good in terms of drama, prose, and criticism. The major

objective of Commonwealth literature was to create a reconciliation between their own or native culture along with foreign or invading culture. Narasimhaiah (1990) has summed up the Commonwealth literature very precisely as, it “offers the best means of pooling the resources of many cultures as suggested by Achebe’s vivid phrase humanity’s heirloom and of breaking the national barriers so as to make them available to all of us in the hope of supplementing each other’s deficiencies and correcting the warps.”

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## 13.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- make you familiar with the terms, ideas, and concepts of Commonwealth poetry and verse.
- make you aware of different countries of the Commonwealth and their poetry comprehensively in the process of development of Commonwealth poetry.
- comprehend different poetic trends and forms of Commonwealth poetry and verse.
- differentiate among diverse regions and countries of Commonwealth poetry and verse.
- draw a distinction between different traditions of poetic voice in Commonwealth countries.

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## 13.2 Development of Commonwealth Poetry

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Poetry which comes under this umbrella term Commonwealth poetry is principally a phenomenon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The initial phase of poetry in countries like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa was written by settlers who belonged to Europe, especially Britain, so English literature became widespread because of it. Scholars have divided the poetry of these countries into two categories. The first is “the ballad, which was written in a narrative style referring to the hardship of life incidents and adventure. The second includes, “poetry being sentimental and nostalgic in nature”. It refers to the tales of homesick immigrants. As this type of poetry was sentimental ,hence, it consisted of music and rhythm which captured the attention of the youth and they used it as a source of inspiration. During this period, there had been numerous genuine poets whose poetry had taken its place among the readers to a great deal.



Another key feature of the Commonwealth poets is that they follow either the individual, national or cosmic voice in their poetry. But above all, it is the national voice which gives height and prominence to their poetic voice and vision. Hence, we see a patriotic flavour or love for the motherland in their poetry.

A poet who gives voice to his/her country's landscape, culture, and tradition has a great influence on forming his or her own identity. For example, African poets are fully aware of their national and cultural identity and they try to voice their narratives in their poetry. Some of the key figures who have projected the image of Africa in their poetry are: Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Dennis Brutus, David Nicholl, David Rubadiri, Michael De Anang, Christopher Okigbo, and Roy Campbell. The entire image and persona of Australia has been transformed since William Charles Wentworth wrote his poem "Australasia." Life of people and the landscapes of the country have attained the imagination of poets to a significant degree. A. D. Hope's poem, "Australia" is also a fine example of love for the motherland. James McAuley, Mary Gilmore, Douglas Stewart and Judith Wright are some of the illustrious names of the Australian school of thought. There are two features which are common to all the poets of the Commonwealth nations, and that are "native idiom" and "native land".

Like the poetry of other poets of the Commonwealth countries, poets of Canada are also fully involved in the landscapes and geographical norms of their countries. In Canada, poetry has two mediums, one is English and the other is French. It has also drawn its features from American and British poetic idioms. However, it seeks its roots within the Canadian context. The names of the prominent Canadian poets of the Commonwealth umbrella are Margaret Avison, E. J. Pratt, A. M. Klien, Margaret Atwood, Duncan Campbell Scott, P. K. Page, Anne Wilkinson, Robert Finch, Dorothy Livesey, and A. J. M. Smith. As far as the Commonwealth poetic traditions are concerned Indian poetry has its own significant contribution and it is marked due to its authentic and original nature. The Indian subcontinent which has a rich and wealthy culture has enriched the impactful literary as well as poetic traditions of the Commonwealth. In the modern era, the Indian poets are also in the quest of identity like other poets of not only Commonwealth category but of all the trends.

Indian poets have also used the English language as a tool to project their glorious past heritage, to depict the impact of the colonial regime under which they lived for many decades and to evolve the future prospects of their culture and identity. A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar, Kamala Das, and Jayanta Mahapatra are some of the few

illustrious Indian poets belonging to Commonwealth traditions. As regards the poets and poetry of New Zealand, is concerned, they have isolated phenomenon, individual self, and land landscapes as the key features which they share with other poets of the Commonwealth countries. Metaphysical themes and love are also the subject matters of poets belonging to New Zealand. James Baxter, Edward Tregear, William Pember Reeves, A. R. D. Fairburn, Allen Curnow, and Gordon Chellis are some significant poets of New Zealand. Caribbean poets have an inclination towards the past. However, there are poets like Edward Brathwaite, Evan Jones, and Derek Walcott who represent a new idiom in Caribbean poetry. Apart from these poets, there are other poets who have written poetry under the Commonwealth umbrella, which includes poets from Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Sri Lanka.

### **13.2.1 Development of Australian Poetry:**

Since Australia was colonized in 1788 and the distinctive poems in Australia were written at the end of the 19th century. Hence, we can divide the development of Australian poetry into three major periods. The first period began with the advent of colonialism which stretched till the end of the 19th century. The second period started in the 1890s and it was extended till World War I. The third period was initiated in the 1920s and has spread till the present day. Initially, poetry in Australia was written by settlers about hardship, tragedies, and adventures. Those poems were mostly written by intellectuals, professors, journalists, and administrative people. The form of their poetry was ballad or bush ballad and their poems centered on the themes of patriotism, nostalgic ideas, and sentimental. The description of motherland was also very frequent among Australian poets. Though their subjects and themes were Australian, their tone and model was that of British because they were of British origin. The period between 1850 and 1860 was the prime time as far as the development of Australian poetry was concerned.

Adam Lindsay Gordon was the one who introduced the Australian form of verse from bush ballad. From 1890, there were some prominent Australian poets who wrote great lyrical, reflective and philosophical poetry. A Bush ballad form of poem was also composed during that period. The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the best female poet in Australia and her name was Judith Wright. Her poetry was replete with social situations, descriptions of landscapes and geographical depictions. A. D. Hope, who won the “Commonwealth Poetry Prize” in 1958, made a great contribution towards the development of Australian poetry. Poets like Shaw Neilson, George Essex Evans, Mary Gilmore, Roderic Quinn, Christopher Brennan, and Victor

Daley wrote reflective and philosophical poems. Paterson, Henry Lawson, C. J. Dennis, and Andrew Barton had composed bush ballads. While major poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were Judith Wright, James McAuley, Robert D. Fitz Gerald, Douglas Stewart, Kenneth Slessor, and Rosemary Dobson.

### **13.2.2 Development of New Zealand Poetry:**

New Zealand, a country made up of two islands, was colonized by Europeans in 1840. It had a great literary horizon and tradition which had contributed a great deal towards new insights to poetry. Just like the poets of Australia and Canada, the poets from New Zealand are also from the educated and intellectual classes. Most of the poets are teachers, professors, journalists, and administrative people. Most of these poets are born, brought up, and educated in Britain. There is yet another group of poets who had no literary training and they wrote poems of home in the form of narrative ballads depicting adventures, hardships, and sufferings of their lives. The year 1890 was a period when the poetry of New Zealand took another turn. It gave rise to nationalist poetry with an emphasis on giving way to patriotic spirit and description of landscapes. Jessie Mackay and William Pember Reeves were the representative poets of this trend of poetry.

Nationalist spirit was in full swing in the poetry of William Pember Reeves. Besides that, there was a group of women poets in New Zealand who introduced the religious flair in their poetry and the women poets of this group included Eileen Duggan, Ursula Bethell, and Robin Hyde. Eileen Duggan, who was one of the best lyrical poets of New Zealand, inculcated traditional forms and native themes in her poetry. The period of the 1930s, which is the period of the Great Depression, gave rise to a trend of poets and poetry who had experimented with new forms, and their themes shifted towards frustration, disillusionment, loss of faith in religion, bitterness, and irony. The poetic voice of Charles Brasch and Allen Curnow projected mountains and sea as symbolic gestures for shelter and protection. They shaped the myth of the islands as they were inspired by natural and pictorial depictions of the landscapes. However, there were numerous gifted poets and writers who went unnoticed and the chief among those was Katherine Mansfield.

### **13.2.3 Development of African Poetry:**

The African region or continent was the first or the earliest to come under the direct effect of colonialism as British colonizers landed on this land in 1820. Francis Carey Slater was perhaps the first native South African and the best among South Africans who wrote poetry. Roy Campbell and William Plomer were two notable Poets of South Africa who wrote poetry about

the poverty and climate of suffering of South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thomas Pringle depicted nature, land, and animals in his poetry. Then we have poets from South Africa like Michael Dei-Anang and Dr Armattoo, who wrote English poetry vividly but in African style and tone. The emergence of numerous sovereign states in Africa gave rise to the idea of national consciousness as far as the literary horizon of Africa was concerned. This new trend was deeply embedded in the conversational mode of poetry in folk songs, proverbs, funeral dirges, drums, legends, and tales.

Nobel Prize winner Nigerian poet Wole Soyinka made a significant contribution to African literature in general and poetry in particular. He, along with other African poets, tried to reinforce the sense of freedom through their poetic voice. The image and idiom of Africa was a predominant idea behind their thinking process and there was a quest for identity with regard to their poetry. African people had utilized and adopted English from the British as they were their colonizers and while talking about the future of English, famous Nigerian author Chinua Achebe remarked, “The African writer should aim to use English that brings out his message without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out English, which is at once unusual and able to carry his peculiar experience.” For African poets, poetry has been a major tool of making people aware of their destiny through and projecting their present and future on the part of African poets and poetry.

In the African countries, poetry has played a key role as a source for inspiration for native people in the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras. Dennis Brutus, who was tortured during the empirical regime, wrote poetry that was full of images of love as well as images of death. The rich oral literary traditions, native experiences, and imported poetic traditions made African poetic idiom a major success locally as well as abroad. Srinivas Iyengar, an Indian critic, summed up the role of African poets in the development of Caribbean poetry as “Poetry became a powerful medium through which they conveyed to the world audience, not only their despair and hopes, the enthusiasm and empathy, the thrill of joy and the stab of pain... but also about the nation’s history as it moved from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence and from independence to tasks of reconstruction which further involve situations of failure and disillusion.”

#### **13.2.4 Development of Canadian Poetry:**

We see that poetry in Canada came to its ripe form after so many struggles and difficulties. The forms and trends it adopted were the same as were followed by Australian and New Zealand poets. Poets of Canadian origin were mostly well educated who were taught mostly in Britain. Their poetry was mostly retrospective and self-evaluative in nature and form. There was a notable form of poem which was termed as “survey poem” by R. E. Rashley. During the colonial period of poetic voice, Canada witnessed numerous poets, which included Susannah Moodie, Joseph Howe, Alexander McLachlan, Charles Sangster, and Charles Heavyside. The year 1867 was a significant year in terms of the “Dominion of Canada.” As a result, the four provinces merged into a Federal Govt. This was an event that had an impact as far as literature in general and poetry in particular was concerned. There were yet again settlers in this region of the world that set the tone of writing, especially, poetry like other Commonwealth literary and poetic spheres. Their imagination set the tone for exploration of their land and landscapes on the part of settlers, political figures, explorers, and poets who opened the door of “Canadianism”.

This trend has continued till today as we see some major poets belonging to the tradition of Canadianism. They are Frederick George Scott, Bliss Carman, Tom MacInnes, Charles Mair, William Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, and Marjorie Pickthall. Though it was in line with conventional trends of English or British poetry, its tone and subject matters were typically Canadian. The best lyrics written in this period are about landscape description and geographical portrayal, which is a common feature of Commonwealth Poetry. Duncan Campbell Scott’s poetry was a typical portrayal of forests, lakes, and rivers. His poetry was about depiction of country and savage life and about civilization. His poems became popular in Britain. In the 1930s, E. J. Pratt brought a modern Canadian poetic voice to Canada. His poem “Towards the Last Spike” attained the status of national epic. After World War II, personal poetry emerged in Canada. Moreover, many women poets emerged and greatly enriched Canadian literature, more than any other Commonwealth country. Jay Macpherson, Leonard Cohen, James Reaney, and Daryl Hine are the representative poets of personal trends of poetry. Anne Wilkinson, P. K. Page, Margaret Atwood, and Margaret Avison are some of the lustrous Canadian women poets.

#### **13.2.5 Development of Caribbean poetry:**

The Caribbean poets and writers gained international recognition during a short span of time. Before the beginning of the 20th century, there was a complete absence of West Indies

poetry or any other kind of literary contribution. It was just a fragment of the British empire and hence remained its colony as well. Native poets belonging to this region wrote poetry based on nature. The first anthology of Jamaican poetry was published in 1929 with the title “*Voices from Summerland*.” It was full of cool, pleasant, and colorful depictions and portrayals of the West Indies’ nature and landscapes. In the initial part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a famous West Indies poet, Claude McKay, gained worldwide recognition. The focus of his poetry and writing is the sufferings and agonies suffered by Negroes in the United State of America.

Derek Walcott is a major poet from St. Lucia, a Caribbean island. He is also a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was a poet who belonged to the British West Indies. The focus of his poetry is on the depiction of poverty, racial and social discrimination and other such problems which were between the British and the native people during the colonial period and even continued in the aftermath. He was the one who drew his poetic inspiration from the “Creole dialect of St. Lucia” while composing poetry in English language. Derek Walcott and George Lamming were the representatives of West Indies poetry who had strong devotional as well as religious tone in their poetry. As stated above, English literature in the West Indies is very new yet perhaps the most dynamic, and there have been numerous great literary figures that wrote during this short span and gained worldwide fame. Some of these figures included George Campbell, Claude McKay, M. G. Smith, John Figuerosa, and Derek Walcott.

### **13.2.6 Development of Indian Poetry:**

The power and empire of the British began to impact India in 1757, which led to the imperative spread of the English language. It became the official language of India in 1835. After World War I, there was a growing trend of imaginative literature that began to flourish in India. After World War II, Indian English poetry was at its peak as Indian English poets adopted models which were frequent among British Romantics and Victorian poets. Henry Derozio is deemed to be the one who laid the foundation of Indian poetry written in English. Due to the fact that he was the forerunner of Indian English Poetry, he was called the father of Indian English Poetry. His poems “My Native Land”, “To India”, “To the Pupils of the Hindu College”, etc. projected love for the motherland. As regard to the development of Indian English Poetry, it is divided into three major phases. One is called the imitative phase in which themes and style of poetry were coined from British poets, yet themes of nationalism and love for the motherland were at the apex during that phase. Henry Derozio and Toru Dutt are the representative poets of the imitative phase of Indian English Poetry.

The Assimilative phase is the second phase of Indian English Poetry which was less romantic and was more practical and real as compared to the imitative phase. Nationalism, patriotism, mysticism, and spirituality were the frequent subject matters of the Assimilative phase of Indian English Poetry. Aurobindo Ghose, Harindranth Chattopadhyaya Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu are the representative poets of the Assimilative phase of Indian poetry. Post-colonial or post-independence is the third major phase of Indian English Poetry, which was distinctive from the first two phases. Ideas with regard to urbanization, industrialization, mobility, social change and refined mode of communication have been the subject matters of the third phase of Indian English Poetry. Arvind Mehrotra, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarthy, Dilip Chitre, Gieve Patel, Dom Moraes, K. N. Daruwalla, A. K. Ramanujan, Vikram Seth, Shiv Kuma, Santan Rodrigues, Manohar Shetty, Nissim Ezekiel, Meena Alexander, Agha Shahid Ali and Eunice De Souza are the most illustrious poets of this phase of Indian English Poetry.

### **13.2.7 Let Us Sum Up:**

To conclude, we can say that the poetic vision of Commonwealth poets and poetry is full of depiction of landscapes, creative abilities, and poetic magic as well as full of inspiration and hopes. Poetry, though written in diverse regions and has different dynamics, portrayal of landscapes and nature is common. In addition, it talks about diverse cultures, religions, races, and nationalities, but all of these remained under the dominance of the British regime. Most of the poets of African and Caribbean Commonwealth poetic versions talk about their life problems and sufferings in spite of blindly following the poetic tradition of English or European poetry. African had utilized English in their literacy writing but in African style. As in the view of Raja Rao that Commonwealth poets have tried to “convey in a language that is not one’s own, the spirit that is one’s own.” On the other hand poets from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have followed the trail set by their masters and they are not very much experimental in their poetic vision. In addition, the terms like “Canadianism”, “New Zealandian” and “African image” have also been elaborated in detail. The Unit also focuses on the fact that the accomplishments of Caribbean poets in a short span of 25 years is incredible and admirable.

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## **13.3 Learning Outcomes**

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At the end of this Unit, you are expected to:

- have a comprehensive know how about Commonwealth poetry and verse.

- comprehend the use of different poetic trends and forms of Commonwealth Poetry and verse.
- make distinction among diverse regional conventions of Commonwealth Poetry and verse.
- draw common poetic conventions that are followed in all the regions of Commonwealth countries and poetry.
- make distinction between diverse poetic trends within the same region of Commonwealth poetic image.
- understand the diverse poetic voices of Commonwealth poetry

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## 13.4 Glossary

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**Commonwealth literature:** Literature produced by the writers of the countries which were British colonies

**Precisely:** Exactly

**Heirloom:** Inheritance

**Warp:** Damage

**Replete:** full

**Imperativeness:** Importance

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## 13.5 Sample Questions

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### 13.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which form of literature is referred to as “New Literatures in English?”

- (a) American
- (b) British
- (c) Commonwealth
- (d) English

2. Early Commonwealth poetry is written by \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) British poets
- (b) Settlers
- (c) Native English poets



- (d) American poets
3. Commonwealth poetry is basically a phenomenon of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) 17<sup>th</sup> century
  - (b) 18<sup>th</sup> century
  - (c) 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - (d) 20<sup>th</sup> century
4. Bush ballad is a form of poetic expression found in the poetry of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) American poets
  - (b) Australian poets
  - (c) African poets
  - (d) Asian poets
5. Which was the beginning era of modern Canadian Commonwealth poetry?
- (a) 1910s
  - (b) 1920s
  - (c) 1930s
  - (d) 1940s
6. *Towards the Last Spike* is a national epic of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Australia
  - (b) New Zealand
  - (c) Canada
  - (d) Africa
7. To which country does did Allen Curnow belong?
- (a) New Zealand
  - (b) England
  - (c) Australia
  - (d) Canada
8. Which of these African poets won Nobel Prize for Literature?
- (a) Christopher Okigbo
  - (b) Wole Soyinka
  - (c) Thomas Pringle
  - (d) Francis Carey Slater
9. A renowned writer and novelist, Chinua Achebe, belonged to \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Canada
- (b) New Zealand
- (c) Caribbean
- (d) Nigerian African

10. Which of these was the first collection of Jamaican poetry written in 1929?

- (a) “*I Thank God*”
- (b) “*Voices from Summerland*”
- (c) “*At Gull Lake*”
- (d) “*Towards the Last Spike*”

### 13.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What are the three periods of Australian poetry with regard to the Commonwealth poetic version?
2. Discuss the role of modern Canadian poetry in the development of the Canadian form of Commonwealth poetry.
3. What are the chief attributes and themes of women poets of New Zealand?
4. What are the common sources of inspiration for Commonwealth poets despite their different regions?
5. What are the conversational forms of African poetry that get embedded in New English poetry under the Commonwealth umbrella?

### 13.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the chief features and attributes of Commonwealth poets who shared with each other despite their different regional context?
2. Discuss the origin and development of Commonwealth poetry in diverse Commonwealth countries.
3. What are the six major regions where Commonwealth poetry is in full bloom? Highlight the illustrious Commonwealth poets from each of these six regions?

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## 13.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Ashcroft B, Griffiths G and Tiffin H. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post Colonial Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
2. Lazarus, N. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
3. Narasimhaiah, C.D. *An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry*. Madras: Macmillan India, 1990.
4. Walsh, William. *Commonwealth Literature*. London: O.U.P., 1973.

**Unit - 14: (a) Ee Tiang Hong: “The Common Man”  
(b) Margaret Atwood: “Siren Song”  
(c) Gabriel Okara: “Once Upon a Time”**

**Structure**

**14.0** Introduction

**14.1** Objectives

**14.2** *The Common Man, Siren Song and Once Upon a Time*

**14.2.1** About the Poets

**14.2.2** Summary

**14.2.3** Critical Study

**14.2.4** Themes

**14.2.5** Structure of the Poem

**14.2.6** Literary/Poetic Devices

**14.3** Learning Outcomes

**14.4** Glossary

**14.5** Sample Questions

**14.6** Suggested Learning Resources

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**14.0 Introduction**

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The area of English literature is very vast because the British, being the most powerful imperial power, have spread their literature in almost all their colonies. The outcome is that English literature has spread far and wide in all the countries which the British once occupied and now, with the passage of time, it has developed in all the colonized countries. Now English literature has become very rich, comprising literature from many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This has led to the rise of some terms implied for the literature of these colonized countries, like Commonwealth Literature, Post-colonial literature and New Literature. Commonwealth literature, Post-colonial literature or New Literature, whatever term it is called, but it is gaining popularity and international importance because of the success of writers belonging to these countries. For example, Salman Rushdie (India), V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad & Tobago), Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lanka), Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Gabriel Okara (Nigeria), Nadine Godimer (South Africa), J. M. Coetzee (South Africa),

Margaret Atwood (Canada) and Ee Tiang Hong (Malaysia) to name a few. Many writers belonging to Commonwealth countries have won the Booker prize and Nobel Prize.

But many scholars around the world disagree with the term, “Commonwealth Literature” as it denotes the allegiance to imperial connections and some other issues. So it is better to call it New Literature. The famous Indian-born Man Booker prize winner, Salman Rushdie suggested that, “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist.” His claim has been supported by many writers and literary critics.

Maes Jelinek, in his lecture at Free University of Brussels, stated that writers often believe the term “Commonwealth Literature” is limited as it denotes various kinds of literature and also associate this literature as outside the British mainstream. Many scholars use “Post-colonial Literature” instead of “Commonwealth Literature”. Though there are some critics who don’t support the term, most of the critics agree that the term ‘postcolonial’ is an umbrella term for English literature covering the literature of some Asian countries, African countries, South-Pacific island countries, Latin American countries Australia,, New Zealand and Canada. The very fact is that not many people are familiar with the term “Commonwealth Literature”. Hence, it is better to call it “New Literatures" which, everybody agrees with. There are many poets belonging to this category who are internationally acclaimed and among them we are discussing three poems by three eminent poets of contemporary times; Ee Tiang Hong’s *The Common Man*, Margaret Atwood’s *Siren Song* and Gabriel Okara’s *Once Upon a Time*.

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## 14.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this unit are to:

- know about New Literatures
- examine the literature of Malaysia, Canada and Nigeria
- understand the writings of some contemporary writers
- understand the themes in the contemporary poetry
- understand some poetic devices

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## 14.2 *The Common Man, Siren Song and Once Upon a Time*

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### 14.2.1 About the Poets:

There are three poets from three different countries, Ee Tiang Hong from Malaysia, Margaret Atwood from Canada and Gabriel Okara from Nigeria. These poets not only belong to three countries, but three different continents: Asia, Africa and North America.

Ee Tiang Hong is a famous Malaysian English poet with Chinese roots who was born in 1933 in Malacca, Malaysia in the British colonial era. He published his first poetry collection of English poems in 1960. He is considered as one of the outstanding English writers of the first generation in Malaysia. He did his schooling in Malacca and then studied in Singapore and the UK. He started his career as a school teacher in Malacca High School but later joined the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. Circumstances forced him to emigrate to Perth, Australia in 1975. There he started his career as a Lecturer in Education at Western Australian College of Advanced Education in Nedlands, Western Australia.

He has published many poems and literary articles in magazines and journals, mainly in Malaysia, Singapore and the UK. When Malaysia got independence, there was chaos regarding political developments, making Ee Tiang Hong so depressed that he left his birth place in 1975. He has reflected all these happenings in his poems. His poem, *The Common Man* is about the hardships and suffering of a common man who is caught up in the political chaos of his country and wants to change it by arousing his countrymen.

The next writer in the series of New Literatures is Margaret Atwood. Margaret Eleanor Atwood, the Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, teacher, environmental activist and inventor, was born on 18th November 1939. She began writing in 1961 and has published 66 books in genres like poetry, novels, non-fiction, short fiction, children's books, graphic novels and a number of small press editions of both poetry and fiction. She is a critically acclaimed international writer, credited with winning many prestigious awards and honours, like two Booker Prizes, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the Governor General's Award, the Franz Kafka Prize, Princess of Asturias Awards, and the National Book Critics and PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Her popularity has led to adaptation of her works into film and television. She has included myriad themes in her works, like gender and identity, religion and myths, the power of language, climate and power politics. From an early age, she was interested in myths and fairy

tales, which inspired her to write many poems. She has a position in the academic and literary world as she is the founder of the ‘Griffin Poetry’ and the ‘Writers’ Trust of Canada’. With other academic merits, she is also a Senior fellow of Massey College, Toronto. She is a genius as she has also invented the LongPen device and associated technologies that help writers in robotic writing of documents.

Atwood published her book of poems, *You Are Happy*, in 1974. The collection has the famous poem, Siren Song. The poem is a fine example of Hellenism as it is based on the story of the ancient Greek myth of Siren. The theme of the poem is deception and isolation. It is quite similar to Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* as in the poem, *Siren* also employs tricks to seduce sailors and ultimately lure them to death.

The third poet in the Unit is Gabriel Okara, a Nigerian poet, novelist and playwright. Gabriel Imomotimi Okara was born on 24th March 1921 in Bumondi, Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State of Nigeria. He is a poet and novelist who is famous for his experimental novel, *The Voice*, published in 1964. He is also famous for his award-winning poetry which he published in *The Fisherman's Invocation* in 1978 and, the other remarkable poetry collection is *The Dreamer, His Vision which*, he published in 2005. He is considered the first Modernist poet of Anglophone Africa. The themes which he used in his writings are based on African thought, religion, folklore and imagery. He is popular as a poet of “the Nigerian Negritude”.

In 1945, when he was 24 years old, he started working as a printer and bookbinder for colonial Nigeria's government-owned publishing company. Being inspired by the surroundings, he started writing and translated poems from the South Nigerian language, Ljaw, to English. He also wrote some scripts for Nigerian government radio. He befriended Chinua Achebe and worked with him as a roving ambassador to Biafra's cause in 1969. He also served as Director of River State Publishing House from 1972 to 1980. He also started writing poems and plays and one of his poems, “The Call of the River Nun” won the Nigerian Festival of Arts in 1953. He started composing more poems and publishing them in magazines, which led to his popularity worldwide. His fame rose to heights and his poems were translated into many languages. Some of Okara's famous poems are “Piano and Drums” and “You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed” which are very much appreciated in the literary world. In 1964, he published his first novel, *The Voice*. Not only poetry and fiction, but he published some plays and features for broadcasting.

During his life, he has received many prestigious awards and honours and died on 25th March 2019. He was respected so much that a festival was organized in his name, the “Gabriel Okara Literary Festival” in April 2017 at the University of Port Harcourt. “Once Upon a Time” is a famous poem by Gabriel Okara which focuses on his famous theme i.e. concerning consequences of the problem faced by Ancient African culture against the growing Modern Western culture.

#### **14.2.2 Summary:**

##### **Ee Tiang Hong’s *The Common Man***

Ee Tiang Hong’s poem *The Common Man* is part of his poetry collection, *Myths for a Wilderness*. It is about the qualities, hardships and sufferings of a common man who is caught up in political chaos. The theme of the poem is about a common man who is upset regarding the political situation in his country and wants to change it. Since the poet was disturbed by the political condition of Malaysia and so he wrote it thinking that he could invoke revolutionary spirit among his countrymen.

The poet is addressing his countrymen, his fellow people to write about the conditions and they themselves can put upside down the adverse conditions in which they are living due to politicians. In the first stanza, he seems to say that not the collective people with their collective strength and fury, but a strong man who has some vocal champion who can rouse his countrymen by doing rally with a common cause for their country. A strong man who can sacrifice everything and has nothing to lose. A person who can console people for a stable future without any political chaos. He is a person who is as useful as the salt of the earth and is really an inheritor of heaven because of his service to his countrymen.

The poet begins the second stanza, by repeating the word, “The common man”. He says that the common man struggles alone with no patron to support him in making his speech rhetorical. And the person who doesn’t have courage and the cunningness of a master which makes the orator a man of action otherwise he will speak only to himself and he will never have any audience to hear his speech.

In the third stanza, the poet is discussing the voters who are helpless voters who don’t have any option but to keep voting the wrong person and participate in their hopeless cause. In the end, he says that the common man is everywhere perceived as weak and fragile and hence he is always forgotten like history.



## Margaret Atwood's *Siren Song*

*Siren Song* is a poem which is taken from her poetry collection, *You Are Happy*, published in 1974. It is a fine example of Hellenism as it is based on the story of the ancient Greek myth of Siren. The theme of the poem is deception and isolation. It is quite similar to Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* because the way, as in the poem, the beautiful lady seduces Princes and Knights in the same way, Siren also employs tricks to seduce sailors and ultimately lure them to death. It is believed that she has borrowed the story from Homer's masterpiece epic, *The Odyssey* but, the fact is that she has employed the events of Odysseus who passes through the rocky shores of Sirens.

In the poem, the poet is actually talking about a Greek creature, Siren: half woman, half bird. They were famous for their irresistible songs which nobody could resist. This was their way to trick sailors or anybody on their island so that they may kill them. Most of the critics believed that there were three Sirens —named Parthenope, Ligea, and Leucosi. The title of the poem, “Siren Song” is confusing as it refers to the horn of an ambulance or other vehicle. The poem begins abruptly:

This is the one song everyone  
would like to learn: the song  
that is irresistible:

But at the end of the third line in the first stanza, it becomes clear that the Speaker is declaring that Siren's songs are so mesmerizing that nobody can resist them and everyone wishes to learn them.

In the second stanza, the poet continued describing the song sung by the Sirens. The speaker talks about the power of Siren's song which used to mesmerize sailors with its melody to such an extent that even if they saw the death threat in the form of “the beached skulls” of previous human victims still, they did not care about their fate. In the third stanza, the poet also says that nobody knows the song sung by the Siren because people who have heard it either are dead or have forgotten it, such is the magic of the song.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker reveals the fact that he is one of the Sirens. But she is not happy with her situation and wants to escape from her helpless state. She justifies her position—to get out of her “bird suit.” She is willing to reveal the secret of the song, no matter if it will be a betrayal to other Sirens as the disclosure of the secret will make them powerless.

In the fifth and sixth stanzas, the Siren tells her unhappy state and the reasons behind it. People think that she has a happy life on the island as it appears “picturesque and mythical” but in reality it is not. In fact, she lives in an adverse state as she describes her two cohorts as “feathery maniacs”, which clearly reflects that she is not happy with it. She says that she doesn’t enjoy singing the irresistible song but she has to do it since she is living on the island with other Sirens. In an emotional frenzy, she is revealing her miserable state to readers and in this way she is alienating herself from her other Sirens. In these lines she shows herself a victim for the readers to sympathize with her instead of considering her as an evil creature. As the lines indicate:

with these two feathery maniacs,  
I don’t enjoy singing  
this trio, fatal and valuable.

In the seventh and eighth stanzas, she is still addressing the readers personally, trying to explain that she needs friends to understand her and her song, which is believed to be enticing, but it is rather a cry for help. She believes that people who come closer to her can understand her misery. The word “come closer” can be interpreted in two ways: either it refers to physical closeness or it may be emotional closeness as a friend. But in both the cases, she means to tell the secret because she believes only a true friend can understand her feelings.

In the last stanza, readers can understand the true nature of Siren. As it is revealed that she is trying to emotionally blackmail the readers by depicting herself as a victim. But it is revealed that she is shrewd and cunning with no conscience. In these lines she confesses that though the Siren’s song is boring, it has always helped her in gaining sympathy. So the song makes her task easy and she is able to win in her game. This also reflects that people can be easily fooled by emotions.

### **Gabriel Okara’s *Once Upon a Time***

*Once Upon a Time* is a poem by Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara. In the poem, the speaker, a man, is addressing his son, and tells him about the changing attitudes of people in the current times. He is speaking in a nostalgic way about the olden times. In the first stanza, he says that in the olden days, people used to laugh with honesty in a realistic manner, but now people have changed and now they laugh in a false manner posing

themselves to be sophisticated. This means that earlier people were genuine with no false pretense, but with the changing times, their attitude and behaviour changed.

In the second stanza, the poet laments that in olden days, people used to greet each other warmly, showing their genuine love for others irrespective of social status. He is telling his son that those days have become past history as now people shake hands without any warmth of heart and their concern is about the social status of the person or how much bank balance a person has:

Now they shake hands without hearts:

while their left hands search  
my empty pockets.

In the third stanza, the poet is discussing the false invitation given by people to come to their home and consider it as their own. But in reality, it is just a formality, because if he goes to their house twice and tries to be comfortable there, then they never call him for the third time. If he ever goes to their house, they never open for him.

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, he tells his son how he has changed his attitude and behaviour with the changing times. He has now learned to behave in a hypocritical way, changing his nature and attitudes as per the situations. He can now change his facial expressions in every situation like that of changing dresses. For example, he behaves differently at home, at the office, or on the street. He behaves differently as a host, during cocktails, smiling at everyone, posing that he is happy with each and every individual around him at all places. Next, he tells his son that he has learned to laugh in a false manner and shake hands without his heart. He has learned all the fake behaviours from people. He has started to speak falsely or ironically. He learned to say 'Goodbye' when he means 'Good-riddance'. Now he says 'Glad to meet you', though he is not happy to meet the person. He says 'nice talking to you' though he does not feel comfortable talking to the person. These two stanzas are like confession.

In the sixth stanza, he is lamenting the fact that he has changed and he tells his son that he doesn't like his changed attitude and wants to be the same as he used to be earlier at, the same age as his son. He says that he doesn't like these fake things and wants to leave them and be his natural and real self as he was. He wants to laugh whole-heartedly because he himself is not happy with his fake laugh which he compares with a snake's bare fangs when he sees himself smiling in the mirror.

In the last stanza, he asks his son to guide him to becoming innocent and humble as he was in his early days. He wants to laugh and smile in a genuine way without any false pretense as his natural self as he was at his son's age.

### **14.2.3 Critical Study:**

#### **Ee Tiang Hong's *The Common Man***

Ee Tiang Hong's poem, *The Common Man* is about the hardships and suffering of a common man who is caught up in the political chaos of his country and wants to change it by arousing his countrymen. Through this poem, the poet is trying to awaken the spirit of the common man to change the political condition of their unstable country. Perhaps through the poem, the poet seems to awaken the spirit and responsibilities of his countrymen towards their country. He took the theme of a common man who has a revolutionary spark in his heart and wants to change the political scenario of his country. He believed that even a common man has the ability to be a part of the political cause of his country.

The poet has discussed the hardships of the common man and says that he doesn't have anybody to help him. He thinks that only a strong man who has nothing to lose can bring revolution because he can sacrifice everything to bring change in the country. He believed that he had to be a good speaker, otherwise nobody would hear him. He says that voters are helpless as they support corrupt politicians who are useless to the country and its people. In this way, they help them in their hopeless cause of ruining the lives of their countrymen because nobody cares about the common man and they are left alone. Through this poem, the poet is trying to invoke his country's people to write against the corrupt politicians. He himself is an example of it as he left his country when he was not happy with the political situation of his country.

#### **Margaret Atwood's *Siren Song***

*Siren Song* is a poem by Margaret Atwood, the famous feminist writer of Canada. The poem is written in 9 stanzas with 3 lines in each of it. There are 27 lines written by the poet in free verse. Readers are often confused by the title because the title seems to be associated with vehicles, but at the end of the first stanza readers come to know that the poem is a Greek myth of the Siren: the half bird and half woman who lured sailors with their songs and later killed them. The poem seems to be inspired by Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, as in the poem, the beautiful lady seduces Princes and Knights in the same way, Siren also employs tricks to seduce sailors and ultimately lure them to death.

Through this poem, Atwood has given a different perspective to Siren. She has made Siren as the speaker of the poem and gives an insight into her character. The poem has an abrupt start when the speaker is talking about an irresistible old song sung by the Siren which everyone likes. In the beginning, the poet talks about their inhuman behaviour of luring people by their irresistible song and killing them, but as the poem proceeds and when the Siren is speaking, she presents herself as a victim of circumstances who is forced to do such an act. But at the end, we become aware of her cunningness. There is a dramatic element in the poem which heightens the tension between male and female. The poet has shown males as victims in the poem from the beginning till the end. But at the same time, she has also depicted a female Siren as a sufferer.

Atwood is famous around the world as a feminist writer and in this poem also we can see the glimpse of it as she has portrayed as powerful in respect to male counterparts. This might be a counterattack against male dominance around the world. She has reflected her opinion about males as they see women as an object of lust. Perhaps, there are speculations that if the Sirens were women then would the males be attracted towards them or not.

By using the myth of Siren, Atwood has put it in the category of Hellenism. Other examples are the use of phrases like “others can’t remember” which, seems to refer to Odysseus, who resisted the Sirens by having his crew tie him to his ship’s mast, or the Argonauts, who were protected from the Sirens by Orpheus.

The poet has used enjambment in every stanza, which means readers have to pay attention at every pause in the poem. The tone of the poem is intimate, confessional and ironic. We see that the Siren calls her rescuer to get closer to her. She confesses about her personal feelings and situation with the readers. We see Siren saying different things at first and in the end.

### **Gabriel Okara’s *Once Upon a Time***

Gabriel Okara is one of the first modern Nigerian/African poets. He has a unique style of writing that uses African folklore, myth and various issues dealt with in African societies in order to get insight into tradition and transition. The poem, *Once Upon a Time* is included in his book, *The Fisherman’s Invocation published*, in 1978. The poem comprises 7 stanzas with 47 lines stanzas. The first four stanzas have 6 lines, the fifth stanza has 8 lines, sixth stanza has 7 lines and the last stanza has 4 lines. The poem is written in free verse, which is a common characteristic of modern poetry.

The poem is a conversation between father and son in which the father tells his son about the changing attitudes of people towards friends, neighbours and acquaintances.

Through this, Okara seems to focus on the impact of Western culture on African society as it is the common topic of his writing. The African society which was earlier naive, humble and simple is transforming into a sophisticated Anglicized society where people wore fake smiles all the time on their faces.

In the first stanza, he is discussing the way people laugh in the current time with no originality. In the second stanza, he is talking about the way people greet these days without warmth in their heart. The third stanza speaks about the false invitations given by people while inviting friends at their home. In the fourth and fifth stanzas he is explaining about his transformed behaviour to his son and he is also telling that he is not happy with it. In the sixth stanza, he is lamenting his transformation from a genuine person to a fake person and wants to be back to his natural self. In the seventh stanza, which is the last stanza, he is asking his son to become his mentor and to make him as he was earlier in his age.

Basically, in this poem, the poet wishes to change his African society, which has changed drastically from simple and humble into a sophisticated one where everything is fake; laughter, smiles and greetings. He also wants to change his own self, which has transformed from an innocent individual to a fake personality. He wished to be back as a childlike, honest and simple man full of real love and affection for all.

There are many metaphors used by the poet in the poem, “ice-block-cold eyes”, “empty pockets”, “door shut”, “many faces”, “fixed portrait smile” and “snake’s bare fangs”.

#### **14.2.4 Themes:**

##### **a. Hardship of Common Man Caught in Political Chaos in *The Common Man***

Ee Tiang Hong, through his poem, *The Common Man*, has raised a question of vital importance and that is the accountability of a common man towards his country. He himself tried to change the society he belonged to and when he was not able to do so, he became so depressed that he left the country he was born in. As an accountability of a writer towards his country and his countrymen, he wrote this poem so that he could arouse revolutionary spirit among his people and they could fight against the corrupt politicians who are using their votes and gaining power. In the poem, he is trying to discuss the hardships of a common man. As he says in the following words:

The common man

Is he who sinks alone,  
No prophet to lead him  
Framing his speech.

#### **b. Love and Passion in *Siren Song***

One of the themes of the poem, *Siren Song* is “love and passion. Sirens are being depicted by the poet as objects who have extreme qualities of seducing sailors or passersby. They possessed such feminine qualities that men became passionate about them and were not able to control their desires. They consider them as their “love objects” but they are fools as Sirens lure them to death. The most important which Sirens possess are their passionate songs which are irresistible. Nobody can surpass the spell of the song sung by Sirens, hence it is called an irresistible song.

There are different interpretations of the Greek myths of Sirens and their songs. As Robert Fitzgerald in his translations of Illiad’s *Odyssey* suggested, songs of the Sirens appealed to the sailors and passersby on three levels: firstly, the songs sung by the Sirens are irresistible, nobody can resist the charm it possesses. Nobody remembers it as either they die or they forget. Secondly, they have enough wisdom which can be similar to the song of Troy. Thirdly, the Sirens can see beyond the transcendental world which nobody on Earth can see. Homer has depicted Sirens possessing mesmerizing voices whose songs had a beautiful message, but Margaret Atwood had completely reversed it. She has projected Sirens as shrewd, cunning people who are luring people with feminine viles. Men considered them as objects of lust and were eager to meet at the cost of their lives. We can also consider them as objects of love and passion because their charm led to the death of many individuals.

The Siren in the poem considers herself as a helpless creature who is forced to do the cruel act of luring and killing men. We can see the passion in her pleading when she is asking for help from a friend. So we can see that helplessness is also a theme, but the men who are victims of their charms, are more helpless than Sirens because they are not able to resist their songs and to meet them, they jump into the sea and ultimately die.

#### **c. Greek Myth in *Siren Song***

*Siren Song* is believed to have borrowed the story from Homer’s masterpiece epic, *The Odyssey* but, there are different opinions from the critics regarding it. Some scholars have suggested that she has employed the myth of Odysseus, the event when Odysseus passes the rocky shores inhabited by Sirens in a reversal. The reason why scholars say so might be because

in the poem, *Siren Song*, Atwood has characterized them in a different way which is unique. In the beginning of the poem she has depicted their nature of singing irresistible songs, luring the sailors and killing them. But as the poem proceeds, we see that she has made Siren as the speaker who is crying for help and is presenting herself as a victim of circumstances who is bound to do the cunning act against her wishes. But in the end, she has shown her real nature of fooling people by emotions. So, in this way the readers are able to comprehend the actual nature of Siren. At the same time, it also gives a dramatic element to the poem.

There are many interpretations to the myth of the Siren. In *The Odyssey*, Book VII, we find that when Odysseus was sailing to the rocky island inhabited by Sirens, he requested his men to fasten him to the ship so that he could hear the mesmerizing song of the three Sirens, Leucosia, Ligeia and Parthenope as he was very curious to listen it but doesn't jump into the sea to meet them. In the Homeric version, we find that Odysseus, in order to save his men from listening to the irresistible song sung by the Sirens, plugs their ears because the consequences were very bad. As the song drives men crazy and they feel lust for Sirens, who are half bird and half woman. When the Sirens were not able to be successful in their mission of luring Odysseus and his sailors to death, then in depression, the three Sirens (Leucosia, Ligeia and Parthenope) jumped into the sea.

There are other mythological interpretations of these stories, as some believe that these Sirens lost to the Muses, the inspirational Goddesses of literature, science and arts. The story is that Hera, the Greek queen of gods, organized a singing competition between Sirens and the Muses. When the Muses won the competition, as per the rules, they plucked out all the feathers which Sirens possessed and made their crowns out of them. In the humiliation and anguish of losing the competitions and their feathers, they transformed into white and fell into the sea. In the Greek epic, *Argonautica*, the story says that Chiron warned Jason about Orpheus on their journey. Orpheus, who was a renowned poet, on hearing the song, started playing the lyre. The music which Orpheus played beat the songs of the Sirens, But Butes, the sharp-eared hero and one of the crew members on hearing the songs of the sirens was not able to resist himself and jumped into the sea to meet them. The goddess Aphrodite caught him and saved him from the sea.

#### **d. Transformation of Society in *Once Upon a Time***

The poem, *Once Upon a Time* by Gabriel Okara has raised many issues of vital importance in the contemporary scenario; transformation of society, cultural shifts, rising capitalism and the erosion of values. Okara believed that nowadays people have changed, as now



they have become materialistic, posing false pretenses all the time. They only like meeting wealthy people or people who are powerful and successful. People who are poor are not respected in society and they are not welcomed in the neighbourhood. In olden days, things were different as there was love and warmth in the behaviour and manners. They were genuine, used to laugh whole-heartedly and greeted people with their heart. Now they smile with their teeth, not with their heart.

The poet confesses that he himself has been transformed from his earlier self and now he too has become a fake person who can adjust to all situations, whether it is office, street or party. He behaved as per needed in the situation. So, now he has put on a different face which is not his real and natural self. Now he has started saying meaningless things which are the need of the hour. But he laments that he has changed. He feels nostalgic and wishes to become innocent as he was in his childhood. He is not satisfied with his transformation in personality, but he is not able to change himself, so he asks his son to become his mentor and make him like he was at his age. He thinks that his son is innocent and genuine, so he can change him back to what he was earlier. He wants to get back to his natural self and in this effort, his son can only help him in getting rid of his false self.

In the poem though the poet seems to be nostalgic, he has shown an ironic tone because he seems to know that things cannot be changed, whether it is society or his own personality. He wished to change society as it was earlier; genuine, honest and natural. He feels that all these changes occurred due to the advent of Western culture. One of the important themes which Okara has highlighted in his writing is the impact of Western culture on African society. He thinks that African culture is great and it doesn't need to change.

#### **e. Rise of Capitalism in *Once Upon a Time***

The other major theme in the poem is also very relevant and that is the rise of capitalism. The rise of capitalism has badly affected the social system in every country and Africa is not apart from it. African countries have suffered many centuries because of colonization by Western powers and when they left, African countries were caught in the grip of capitalism, which is the extended form of Western imperialism. Capitalism has completely destroyed the culture of Africa and now African society has been completely transformed. The simplicity and humbleness has been lost from society and now people have become cold-hearted. He feels very disheartened seeing all these things happening around him and has expressed his concern in the following lines:

Once upon a time, son,  
they used to laugh with their hearts  
and laugh with their eyes:  
but now they only laugh with their teeth,  
while their ice-block-cold eyes  
search behind my shadow.

#### **14.2.5 Structure of the Poem:**

##### ***The Common Man***

Ee Tiang Hong's *The Common Man* is a 27 line-poem in 3 stanzas. The first stanza consists of 12 lines, the second stanza has 10 lines and the third has 5 lines. Some words like "collective," "common," "man," "strong" and "common man" have been repeated twice to emphasize the motive of the poem to inspire people about their duties towards their nation and the power of the common man. The language of the poem is simple, lucid and plain because it is written by a common man for common people so that they can understand it in a better way and so that it creates a fuel in their revolutionary spirits.

The poem is written in free verse, though some words are rhyming. The poet has written it in an irregular way because it is meant to be read and understood. The poet does not care much about the music & rhythm, but rather about the content of the poem and the message behind it. The poet is addressing his countrymen, his fellow people to write about the conditions in which they live.

##### ***Siren Song***

Margaret Atwood's *Siren Song* is a poem of 27 lines with 3 lines each in nine stanzas. So there are nine tercets or in other words stanzas of three lines. Being written in free verse with no rhyme scheme and no regular meter. As it displays no rhyme scheme, it is more in a conversational style. In the poem, she emphasized more stanzas and enjambment. For example, in the seventh stanza, the enjambment occurs in the last words, "This song" to the next stanza "is a cry for help". This technique arouses interest in readers, which means the aim of the poet has been successful.

In the poem, the poet talks about the songs of the Sirens; the half-bird, half-woman mythical Greek creature. The words in the songs seem to be lies, but they are rhetorical as whoever hears it believes it. Atwood has highlighted one of the desires of human beings in the form of Sirens and that is the belief of being unique or different from others. This, most of the

time, leads him/her to the path of lies and ultimately to destruction. Since this quality gives rise to individualism, which makes a person vulnerable, then he/she is even liable to deceive himself and becomes lesser in responding to others, hence, creating a barrier between their individual self and others.

### ***Once Upon a Time***

Gabriel Okara's *The Common Man* is a poem consisting of 43 lines which are divided into seven stanzas each but with different numbers of lines. The first four stanzas have 6 lines, the fifth stanza has 8 lines, the sixth has 7 lines and the last stanza has 4 lines. These lines have been divided as per their subject matter. The narrator in the poem is the first-person speaker and the poem is written from that point of view, making it a lyric. It is a free verse poem as there is no rhyme scheme. It seems to rhyme to some extent, but that is not regular. The poem is mostly written in iambic meter but with some metrical variations.

#### **14.2.6 Literary/Poetic Devices:**

Literary devices are the tools which are used by writers to make their writing more interesting. It is a medium to express emotions, ideas and themes in a more appealing way to the reading world. It takes writing to a different level which is beyond straightforwardness, giving it a literal meaning. Poetic devices are those literary devices which are used only in the poem.

### ***The Common Man***

Ee Tiang Hong has used some literary/poetic devices in his poem, *The Common Man*.

- a) **FreeVerse:** The poem is written in free verse, though some words are rhyming but they are not in regular form. For example:

Not the collective man  
With his collective strength  
And fury,  
Who has his strong man

- b) **Repetition:** Some words like “collective”, “common”, “man”, “strong” and “common man” have been repeated twice to emphasize the motive of the poem to inspire people about their duties towards their nation and the power of a common man.
- c) **Metaphor:** Hong has used some metaphors in the poem like, “salt of the earth” and “prophet”.

- d) **Stanza:** Ee Tiang Hong has written the poem, *TheCommonMan* in 27 lines. The poem has 3 stanzas; the first stanza consists of 12 lines, the second stanza has 10 lines and the third has 5 lines.

### ***Siren Song***

Margaret Atwood has used different literary devices in different works. In *Siren Song*, she has used some literary devices to enhance its literary merits and make it more interesting as well as giving the writer a chance to do textual study of it. Some literary/poetic devices which she has used in the poem are as follows:

- a. **Assonance:** Assonance is a literary device where the repetition of similar vowel sounds takes place within a line of a poem or a prose work. Most often, it refers to the repetition of internal vowel sounds in words that do not end the same. For example, the sound of /ee/ in “even though they see the beached skulls”. The repetition of the vowel “e” creates a sense of rhythm and offers a lyrical effect of words and sound.
- b. **Consonance:** Consonance means the repetition of the same consonant sounds in a line of text. In the use of consonance, the focus is on the sound made by consonants and not mostly the letters. They are frequently used as a poetic device which gives readers a chance to use words interestingly which makes language artistic and becomes appealing to the readers. For example, the sound of /l/ in “I will tell the secret to you”.
- c. **Enjambment:** Enjambment is defined as the continuation of a sentence or a thought to the next line without punctuation. It is also called the opposite of the end-stop. For example:

“the song nobody knows  
because anyone who has heard it  
is dead, and the others can’t remember.”

- d. **Imagery:** Imagery means the use of figurative sentences to evoke the five sense organs. It can be referred to as creating a picture for the readers by the use of words. It gives readers visual, psychological, physical & internal sensations and emotions. For example, “even though they see the beached skulls”, “with these two feathery maniacs” and “to leap overboard in squadrons.”
- e. **Metaphor:** A Metaphor is a figure of speech in which words or phrases are used to compare two different kinds of objects or actions. It is also called an implied comparison between two two totally different objects. *Siren Song* is the best example, as we see the

complete poem is an extended metaphor pertaining to a supernatural theme, luring sailors with their songs and leading to their death. The second metaphor in the poem is the deceptive physical attraction which is the cause of suffering of humanity in all ages.

- f. **Allusion:** Allusion is a statement that refers to something without mentioning it directly. It is a belief and indirect reference to a place, thing or an idea of a historical, cultural, political or literary significance. The poem refers to the Greek myth of the Siren, a half-bird and half-woman creature famous for seducing sailors.
- g. **Rhetorical Questions:** Rhetorical questions do not basically mean questions, but it means creating a dramatic effect or to explain something clearly by making a point. For example:

“Shall I tell you the secret  
And if I do, will you get me  
Out of this bird suit?”

- h. **Stanza:** A stanza is a poetic form of lines and verses. There are nine three-line stanzas in the poem.
- i. **Free Verse:** Free verse means those poems which do not have any patterns of rhyme or meter.
- j. **Tercet:** Tercet is believed to be borrowed from Hebrew poetry, which is basically three-lined stanzas. In Siren Song, each stanza is tercet.
- k. **Alliteration:** Alliteration means the use of the same alphabets or sounds twice, thrice or more times in the same line, “even though they see the beached skulls”.
- l. **Quotation:** Quotation means a group of words taken from any text or from a famous speech and is repeated by somebody else and not the original writer or speaker. For example, the lines below can be used as quotations by anyone:

“Is a cry for help: Help me!  
Only you, only you can,  
you are unique.”

### ***Once Upon a Time***

Gabriel Okara has used some literary devices in *Once Upon a Time* like:

- a. **Enjambment:** It occurs at many places in the poem. For example,  
“ they use to laugh with their hearts”/ and laugh with their eyes”
- b. **Repetition:** The word “laugh” in the first stanza is repeated, stressing the importance of the word. In a similar way, the word “shake hands” is also repeated

- c. **Metaphor:** In the poem, Okara has used some metaphors like “ice-block-cold eyes”, “homeface” and “officeface” etc.
- d. **Simile:** Simile is a phrase which describes some objects or someone by comparing it with others by using the words viz, “like” and “as”. In the poem, Okara has used similes in the lines, “with all their conforming smiles/like a fixed portrait”, and “show only my teeth like a snake bare fangs?”
- e. **Imagery:** In the poem, there are many images like “shaking hands” and facial expressions in different situations.
- f. **Alliteration:** In the poem there are some examples of alliteration like, “So show me, son”, “But believe me”.
- g. **Free Verse:** The poem is written in free verse as the poem doesn’t contain any rhyme scheme.
- h. **Stanza:** The poem consists of seven stanzas containing 43 lines
- i. **Iambic Meter:** In any poem, if any line is composed of two-syllable units that flow from an unaccented beat to an accented beat, the rhyming pattern is said to be iambic meter.

For example:

Once upon a time, son,  
they used to laugh with their hearts

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### 14.3 Learning Outcomes

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At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- know Commonwealth/New Literatures
- understand poets like Ee Tiang Hong, Margaret Atwood and Gabriel Okara
- analyze and appreciate their literary works
- understand various poetic devices

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### 14.4 Glossary

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**Vehemently:** in a passionate or intense manner

**Post-colonial:** the period aftermath of Western colonialism

**Contemporary:** belonging or occurring at the same time

**Emigrate:** to leave your native country and settle in another country

**Perceptions:** the way in which something is regarded, understood or interpreted

**Adaptation:** when a poem, novel, drama or any literary genre is made into a new genre like movie, series or musical

**Hellenism:** related with the ancient culture or character of Greece

**Seduce:** attract powerfully

**Folklore:** the traditional beliefs, customs and stories passed from one generation to another orally

**Irresistible:** too powerful or convincing to be resisted

**Mesmerized:** to capture the complete attention or to hypnotize

**Alienating:** to make someone feel alone or estranged

**Nostalgic:** an emotional longing to go back to the past

**Lament:** a passionate expression of grief or sorrow

**Counterpart:** a person that corresponds with the same function as another person in a different place or situation

**Ironically:** an act or event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expect

**Invocation:** the action of calling someone or something

**Comprehend:** to grasp mentally or to understand

**Vulnerable:** exposed to the possibility of being harmed either emotionally or physically.

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## 14.5 Sample Questions

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### 14.5.1 Objective Questions:

#### Fill in the blanks

- (a) Ee Tiang Hong was born in \_\_\_\_\_, Malaysia in 1933.
- (b) Hong left Australia in \_\_\_\_\_.
- (c) Margaret Atwood published her book of poems \_\_\_\_\_ in 1974.
- (d) Gabriel Okara was born in the country \_\_\_\_\_.
- (e) Okara is famous for his experimental novel \_\_\_\_\_.

#### True or False

- (a) Ee Tiang Hong's *The Common Man* is a part of his anthology, *Myths for a Wilderness*.

- (b) Atwood's full name is Margaret Eleanor Atwood.
- (c) Atwood's *Siren Song* is a fine example of Biblical allusion.
- (d) Gabriel Okara was born in West Africa.
- (e) Okara published his award -winning poetry collection, *The Voice* in 1964.

**14.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is the definition of Commonwealth Literature?
2. What is Ee Tiang Hong's message in *The Common Man*?
3. Discuss *Siren Song* from a feminist perspective.
4. Explain the dilemma of the Siren in *Siren Song*.
5. Discuss the reason behind the transformation of society as discussed by Gabriel Okara in *Once Upon a Time*.

**14.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss the theme of Ee Tiang Hong's *The Common Man*.
2. Discuss Greek myths in Margaret Atwood's *Siren Song*.
3. Examine the changing attitude of people as discussed by Gabriel Okara in *Once Upon a Time*.



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## 14.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Atwood, Margaret. *In Other Worlds : SF and the Human Imagination* (1st Anchor Books ed.). New York: Anchor Books, 2012.
2. Brenda Marie Osbey, Introduction, *Gabriel Okara: Collected Poems*, University of Nebraska Press, 2016.
3. Echeruo, Michael J.C."Gabriel Okara: a Poet and His Seasons."*World Literature Today*, 1992.
4. Ee Tiang Hong. *I of the Many Faces*. Malacca: Wah Seong Press, 1960.
5. \_\_. "Literature and Liberation: The Price of Freedom ." *Literature and Liberation: Five Essays from Southeast Asia*. Ed. Edwin Thumboo. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1988. 11-41.
6. Gabriel Okara, "Once Upon a Time", in *Collected Poems*, University of Nebraska Press, 2016.
7. Gabriel Okara," in Hans M. Zell, Carol Bundy, Virginia Coulon, *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.
8. *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms*. VanSpanckeren, Kathryn; Castro, Jan Garden. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1988.
9. *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms*. VanSpanckeren, Kathryn; Castro, Jan Garden. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1988.
10. William Walsh, (1973) Introduction, *Readings in Commonwealth Literature*, ed., William Walsh (London: Oxford University Press,) xvi.

## Unit - 15: Development of Indian English Poetry

### Structure

15.0 Introduction

15.1 Objectives

15.2 Development of Indian English Poetry

15.2.1 Imitative Phase of Indian English Poetry

15.2.2 Assimilative Phase of Indian English Poetry

15.2.3 Post Colonial Phase of Indian English Poetry

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15.2.5 Let Us Sum Up

15.3 Learning Outcomes

15.4 Glossary

15.5 Sample Questions

15.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 15.0 Introduction

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Indian English poetry is among those “New Literatures” emerged in the initial part of the 19th century. Once World War II was over, it was the culminating period of the British regime in India when Indian English poetry touched its peak. The models which were adopted by Indian English poets were that of the British Romantics and their successors, the Victorian poets. Long narrative poems were composed by Byron and Walter Scott, while short forms of poems were taken from the poets of 19<sup>th</sup> century English conventions. The earliest Indian poet who laid the basic foundation of Indian English poetry was Henry Derozio. His mother was English while his father was Indo-Portuguese. It was due to his early contribution that he was called the “father of Indian English Poetry.” His poetic work is “*The Fakeer of Jungheera, A Metrical Tale and Other Poems*” which was published in 1827. His poetry is full of patriotic spirit and he is considered the true son of his soil.

His poems “My Native Land”, “To India”, “To the Pupils of the Hindu College”, etc. were typical voices of his ardent love for his motherland. Though his poetic span was short, it revealed his authentic and true poetic talent and mostly his poems involved myth and legendary figures. Though the initial source of inspiration for Indian English poets was British poets, the

advent of Toru Dutt on the poetic horizon made it real and less imitative. She was the first Indian English female poet who wrote about Indian myths and legends. Chaudhari had summed up her poetic talent and stature as “In her poetry we confront for the first time a language that is crafted out of the vicissitudes of an individual life and a sensibility that belongs to modern India.” She wrote one of the best poems that belonged to Indian English poetry and it was “Our Casuarina Tree” which was an excellent instance of “romantic melancholy and nostalgia” in the words of Naik.

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## 15.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- be familiar with the terms, ideas, and concepts of Indian English poetry and verse.
- be aware of different periods and phases of Indian English poetry it went through in the process of development.
- comprehend different poetic terms, trends, and forms of Indian English poetry and verse.
- differentiate among diverse periods of Indian English Poetry and verse.
- draw a distinction between different periods of poetic vision in India with regard to English poetry.
- feel at home in drawing a distinction between pre-independence poetry and post-independence poetry.
- be aware of the terms with regard to Indian English poetic vision, such as imitative, assimilative, modern, postmodern, neo-Romantic, and post-independence poetry.

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## 15.2 Development of Indian English Poetry

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Indian English poetry began even before the independence of India during the British regime. The major credit of introducing English as a language to Indians went to Lord Macaulay. Later, Indian culture assimilated with English language and culture. Indians befriended the English language as they took it as a tool for intellectual and emotional narration, especially, in poetry. This rise of interest in the English language gave impetus to the pre-independence Indian

poetic image through Aurobindo, Dutt family, and Tagore. The themes of pre-independence poets were nationalism, Indian culture, love, and nature. Though most of the poets of that period were imitative in nature and tone, there were some who were genuine and artistic. Their poetry depicted their individualized persona even in the imitative era. Post-Independence Indian English Poetry also brought to light the issue of identity and disillusionment. On one hand were the promises of a bright future and on the other hand there was the bitterness of partition that made the lives of Indians even more miserable. Cultural, lingual, and social issues, in addition, changed the tone and themes of the poetry written in English by Indian poets after independence. This gave rise to new trends in Indian English poetry, such as the modern and post-modernist movement. These sorts of poetic visions had depictions of societal life of that time.

Indians have a long tradition of literary taste, though the poetic tradition of English was a phenomenon that began in the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the colonial period and it reached its apex after World War II, which was the culminating years of the British regime in India. Colonialism gave Indians yet another tone to experiment with as far as literature and poetry in particular was concerned. This diversity of Indian poets which developed over one and half centuries can be broadly divided into three phases. The initial phase was called the imitative phase, the second phase was the assimilative phase and the last was termed as experimental phase. The first phase which lasted from 1850 to 1900 was the phase which was imitative as the Indian poets imitated the Romantic poetic tradition of English poets and it was termed as “Matthew Arnold in a saree” and “Shakuntala in a mini-skirt” by George Bottomley. Their main source of Romanticism was British Romantic poets such as Keats, Shelley, Scott, Wordsworth, and Byron. Then came the assimilative phase of Indian English poetry which was extended from 1900 to 1947. Indian English poetry was still Romantic in nature. But it was a new sort of Romanticism that became entangled between political changes and a nationalist spirit which culminated in the freedom of Indians in 1947.

### **15.2.1 Imitative Phase of Indian English Poetry:**

It was the initial phase of Indian English poetry as it was a period of the Indian Renaissance. Though most of the poetry written during that period was imitative, especially of the Romantic and Victorian poets, there was a spirit of patriotism and sentiment for the motherland on the part of the poets. Henry L. Derozio, known as the “son of soil” and “father of Indian English poetry”, also belonged to this phase. In spite of the country being under the subjugation of the British regime at that time, his poetry instilled the spirit of patriotism and love

for the soil. His poems “My Native Land”, “To India”, “To the Pupils of the Hindu College”, etc. were the typical voice of his ardent love for his motherland.

Derozio’s poems, and poems of other such poets as Kashiprasad Ghosh’s *The Shair*, Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s “The Captive Ladie”, Manmohan Ghose’s *Love-Songs and Elegies* were testimony of their Indian Renaissance spirit and creative height as Indian English poets. Though Toru Dutt was less imitative as far as the tone and subject of her poetry were concerned, she belonged to this very phase of Indian English poetry. She was the first who brought innovation to Indian English poetry and brought about Indian myths and legends in her poetry. She brought about a large heritage of Indian culture and traditions in the form of Indian legend. She had also used the tree as a destructive symbol in her poem “Our Casuarina Tree” derived from her childhood memories or nostalgic regret.

### **15.2.2 Assimilative Phase of Indian English Poetry:**

The second phase, which was known as the assimilative phase of Indian English poetry was less romantic, more real and practical. Here, romanticism is embedded with the spirit of nationalism, patriotism, and the urge for freedom. The elements of mysticism and spirituality were also very frequent among the poets of this phase. Poets of this phase such as Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore, Harindranth Chattopadhyaya, and Sarojini Naidu were romantic but their romantic spirit was totally different from British poets of romantic nature. Aurbindo was in quest of the divine in human beings while Tagore was in pursuit of beauty in man and nature. Both Tagore and Aurbindo were philosophical types of poets. Sarojini Naidu’s romantic vision was to depict the grandeur and charm of Indian traditions and to unearth the Indian charming scenes. She had a fine verbal taste of melody and she was interested not merely in English but also in Urdu and Persian poetry. She attained perfection in lyricism and, hence, it can be called the nightingale of Indian English Poetry.

Poetry written by Indian English poets during the colonial period was embedded with patriotism and an urge for freedom. At times there was an outburst of emotions in their poetry that were embedded with national, cultural, spiritual, mystical, and philosophical emotions and sentiments. It was surely meant to capture the attention of the readers in their effort to struggle for freedom movement which ultimately resulted in the liberation in 1947. Though Sarojini Naidu, Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo belonged to the less romantic phase of Indian English Poetry, it could never be rated as Romantic as there was an ethos of life and age that was vividly depicted in their poems. Their poetry was a true expression of the contemporary Indian spirit and

description of reality. The sense of crisis and the quest for identity was very much frequent in the poetry of these poets, which were the burning issue of the people of India at that time. Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt both acted as a watershed between the first two phases i.e. imitative and assimilative phase of Indian English Poetry.

### **15.2.3 Post-Colonial Phase of Indian English Poetry:**

This post-colonial or post-independence phase of Indian English poetry is fundamentally different when compared to other two phases. Once slavery was over, political, cultural, and lingual freedom was bestowed on Indians, they were relaxed. There was hope and inspiration in the hearts and minds of the Indians and this was something that could be seen in the poetry written after independence. As the quest for identity was resolved, so Indian writers and poets were free to be critical about other aspects and dynamics of life. This gave boost to Indian English poets to be enthralled and they were seen in line with modern British and American poets. So, yet again, there was an imitative poetic vision, just like the imitative phase when they imitated the Romantic and Victorian poets, but in this phase, Indian English poets borrowed poetic idioms from modern English poets like Auden, Eliot, Pound, and Yeats. It was amazing that the word romantic attained a position of veritable red tag among postcolonial poets.

Adil Jussawalla commented about *Savitri* of Sri Aurobindo's as "unwinding like an interminable sari". While Parthasarthy remarked about it as "*Savitri* fails as a poem because Ghose's talent and resourcefulness in the use of English was limited." Likewise, Parthasarthy had articulated about Toru Dutt as "Toru Dutt's poems mean little to us because our idea of poetry has changed since her day." It is imperative to highlight that no true and genuine poet can escape traditions, rather they hold them dear. The past, especially, the glorious past is always kept by the poets close to their hearts, as in the words of the psychologist, Jung, "the blocked off radical unconscious". Similarly, a poet cannot escape from the present, so what is ideal in the process of becoming, is to keep the past in mind in order to shape the present, which will have shaping force for the future. The later period of Indian English poetry is that of the modern or we can say postmodern phase. This was a new phase or a changed phase as far as the subject matters were concerned. It was more modernized based on the ideas of industrialization, urbanization, social change, mobility, and enhanced mode of communication.

There was a modernization as far as TV, films, newspapers and mass education were concerned. Out of these factors emerged a new sort of independent culture within India. Hence, subsequent factors contributed to the development or enhancement of the modern, new, and

experimental phase of Indian English Poetry. Economic advancement made by India after independence along with democratic and social reform policies by the government. The second imperative factor was the social advancement by means of mass education, as both social and economic progress had resulted in widening the vision of the middle class in society and it gave rise to modern literary and poetic taste and horizon. Another significant feature that contributed in this regard was the scientific and technological advancement that gave rise to intellectual thought in the country in general and literary and poetic horizon in particular. All these progress in diverse fields of human activity led to a broadening of vision, thought, and poetic taste of both the readers as well as the poets in modern post-colonial India.

This modern trend of Indian English Poetry dealt with concrete things and they laid the concrete foundations of free verse. Conventional devices of rhyme, meter, and stanza forms were left out just like the initial phase of poetic form and subject matters. Some of the major and key poets that belonged to the post-colonial or post-independence phase of Indian English Poetry were Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarthy, Arvind Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, Dom Moraes, K. N. Daruwalla, A. K. Ramanujan, Saleem Peerdina, Dilip Chitre, Adil Jussawalla, Vikram Seth, Manohar Shetty, Pritish Nandy, Silgado, Shiv Kumar, Meena Alexander, Santan Rodrigues, Agha Shahid Ali, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, and Eunice De Souza. This modern trend of Indian English Poetry was neither purely English nor exclusively an Indian idiom, rather a composition of numerous cultures such as Asian, African, American, and British. Modern Indian English poets got their inspiration in this phase of poetry mainly from Dylan Thomas, Yeats, Auden, Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath, Ginsberg, Pound, and Eliot and from devotional saints like Tukaram. Modern poets were characterized by the idea that there was a comprehensive rejection of the past in their poetry. They also disdained idealism and romanticism in their poetry.

Instead of flight and escape, there was acceptance and an unsentimental attitude towards realities and actualities of life among modern Indian English poets. However, they had deep faith in mysticism. They turned away from religion and wrote about the development of human relations. They utilized irony in order to represent love or hate relationships within human beings. Apart from Romantic poets in Indian English Poetry we have also poets who belonged to neo-Romantics. Though only two poets, Pritish Nandy and P. Lal belonged to this trend, other poets also shared the conventions and these included Meena Alexander and Moraes. These poets were highly diversified in their styles and modes. P. Lal is considered witty in his gestures, Moraes is experimental in themes but conservative in form, Nandy's style is expressionist, Mahapatra is

sentimental and emotional, and Alexander is a poet who is considered as academic as well as dreamy. Postmodern trend of Indian Poetry written in English had come up with new poetic devices such as inter-textuality, pastiche, parody, and literal cannibalism. The subject matters were usually involved around poetic problems, exploitation of authenticity, Indian context, and dissimilarities within Indian people.

Indian English poetry of the post-colonial or post-independence period or phase is an articulation of various attitudes and beliefs of certain segments of the post-independence Indian society. Poets are realistic and artistic in their intellectual caliber with critical thinking to individualize their personal experiences. Precision is a key feature of this phase of poetry. Their poems are thought provoking and depict psychological problems of society. Their poems are based on psychological states and not based on themes or subject matter anymore. There is a lot of experimentation on the part of modern Indian English poets. There is a rise of free verse poetry instead of conventional forms and norms of poetry. Use of alliteration and assonance expressions is frequent among them. The intellectual tone of the poets is ironic as well as sarcastic. Objectivity is another key feature among those modern poets. Symbolism, stream of consciousness and free expressions of ideas are characteristics of modern Indian English poetry. The social, cultural, historical, and geographical depiction of India among modern poets is natural and in abundance.

#### **15.2.4 Contribution of Women Poets in the Development of Indian English Poetry:**

The contribution of women poets, especially in the modern trend of the post-independence phase, is very significant as far as the development of Indian English poetry is concerned. Women poets are equally good in diverse layers at their poetic vision such as their subject matters, language, tools, and their artistic craftsmanship. Monika Verma, Lila Ray, Gauri Pant, Meena Alexander, Rosen Alkazi, Sunita Namjoshi, Eunice de Souza, Lakshmi Kannan, Gauri Deshpande, Margaret Chatterjee, Ira de, Tapti Mukherjee, Malti Rao, Mamta Kalia, Tillotama Rajan, Vimla Rao, Kamala Das, Silgado, and Sunita Jain are some of the most illustrious women poets of Indian English Poetry. Their poetry is a voice against the conventional role of women in a conventional society which has been merely restricted to their role as mother and daughter and within household affairs. Yet another wave within the women poets of the postmodern phase of Indian English poetry was the feminist trend.

Though the feminist movement was in full swing in Australia, America, Canada and Europe, it had also empowered women of India from their typical role to move ahead with men



in all walks of life. And poets and poetry written by women Indian poets cannot be deemed unmoved from such moves. The women of India have tried to raise their voice against subjugation in which they were living for centuries and poetry has become an effective medium in this regard. On one hand, women poets of India raise their voices as a resistance force and on the other hand, they are loaded with self-assertion and confidence. Though it is yet another borrowing and imitation from English and European norms on the part of female Indian English poets, it brings about a significant role in both awakening the women of India and for the development of a feminist trend of poetic vision in Indian English poetry in modern and postmodern phase. It is important to indicate that the poems of Kamala Das center around the theme of love, sex, marriage, and her childhood memories.

Das has introduced a linguistic pattern which is purely Indian in order to make the readers comprehend what she is trying to articulate and project. Silgado and Eunice de Souza who are the youngest poets of this phase have also followed the footsteps of Das and have collaborative colloquial and direct speech patterns. Other female poets have written about other women's plight and suffering through their own experiences. The role and persona of these women poets is very imperative for the development of Indian English poetry. They not only expand but also refine the domains and dynamics of Indian Poetry written in English. They have brought poetry within the actual sphere such as family life, human psychology, relationship issues, human emotions, sentiments and hence the poetry of Indian poets in English in general, and women's poetry in particular begins to come into the limelight as far as radio, TV, newspaper, and film screen are concerned. Women themselves are symbols of richness, beauty, and freshness, hence, poetry written by women poets of India in English language has also brought about freshness and alluring flair in Indian poetic tradition as well in the societal sphere.

#### **15.2.5 Let Us Sum Up:**

After going through the diverse phases and trends of Indian Poetry written in English, it becomes evident that Indian poets have utilized English as a medium very effectively in their poetic vision. Though it was in infancy during imitative and assimilative phases but with the passage of time it has reached at apex. The growing numbers of poets in English poetry affirmed the fact that it is gaining high projection in Indian society. In addition, the variety and trends that are inculcated with the time also confirm the social and lingual acceptance of this phenomenon. There are diverse experiments that have been done by Indian English poets such as inculcation of free verse, alternation in tone, form and, above all the subject matter that have assured the

readers and critics about the bright future of Indian English Poetry in the time to come with new height and dynamics. The unit also focuses on the role of women poets in the development of English Indian poetry. In addition, it highlights prominent Indian English poets and their chief traits as poets during the pre and post-independence periods. Last but not the least, it talks about what is meant by Indian feminist trend in Indian English Poetry and why Sarojini Naidu is called ‘the nightingale of India.’

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### 15.3 Learning Outcomes

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After going through this Unit about the development of Indian English poetry, you should be able to:

- have a comprehensive knowledge of Indian English poetry and verse.
- comprehend and use different poetic terms, trends and forms of Indian English poetry and verse.
- make distinction between diverse periods of Indian English poetry and verse.
- draw difference between the pre and post-independence period of Indian English Poetry.
- understand the development of diverse periods and trends

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### 15.4 Glossary

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**Culminate:** Conclude

**Regime:** Rule

**Vicissitude:** Transformation, shift

**Nostalgia:** Reminiscence

**Impetus:** Impulsion

**Colonialism:** The policy of a country seeking to extend or retain its authority over other people or territories, generally with the aim of economic dominance

**Subjugation:** Suppression

**Veritable:** Genuine, absolute

**Pastiche:** Imitation, blend

**Parody:** A humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece of literature or writing

**Precision:** Accuracy

**Stream of consciousness:** It is a technique of writing that tries to capture the natural flow of a character's extended thought process

**Colloquial:** It refers to words or expressions used in ordinary language by common people

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## 15.5 Sample Questions

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### 15.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Who gave Indians a new language for the expression of their poetic expression?
  - (a) American poets
  - (b) British colonizers
  - (c) Australia intellectuals
  - (d) Native Indian
2. Who said “Matthew Arnold in a saree, Shakuntala in a mini-skirt”?
  - (a) Michael Madhusudan Dutt
  - (b) Kasiprasad Ghose
  - (c) George Bottomley
  - (d) Aurobindo Ghose
3. The Imitative Phase of Indian English Poetry extended from \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - (a) 1800 to 1850
  - (b) 1850 to 1990
  - (c) 1860 to 1910
  - (d) 1870 to 1920
4. Who wrote the poem “Our Casuarina Tree”?
  - (a) Sarojini Naidu
  - (b) Tagore
  - (c) Sri Aurobindo
  - (d) Toru Dutt
5. Which of these Indian English poets is termed as ‘nightingale of India’?

- (a) Toru Dutt
  - (b) Sarojini Naidu
  - (c) Sri Aurobindo
  - (d) Tagore
6. The models of modern Indian English poetry consisted of \_\_\_\_\_>
- (a) Indian norms
  - (b) British conventions
  - (c) Cosmopolitan
  - (d) Cultural consciousness
7. Who laid the foundation of Indian English Poetry, being the earliest Indian English poet?
- (a) Henry L. Derozio
  - (b) Toru Dutt
  - (c) Rabindranath Tagore
  - (d) Nissim Ezekiel
8. Who was the first Indian English poet who wrote about Indian myth and legend?
- (a) Nissim Ezekiel
  - (b) Rabindranath Tagore
  - (c) Toru Dutt
  - (d) Henry Derozio
9. Who termed “Our Casuarina Tree” as “romantic melancholy and nostalgia”?
- (a) Henry Derozio
  - (b) Naik
  - (c) Sarojini Naidu
  - (d) Nissim Ezekiel
10. Indian English poetry since emergence till now, has been categorized into how many broader phases?
- (a) One phase
  - (b) Two phases
  - (c) Three phases
  - (d) Four phases

### 15.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Which are the various facets of love highlighted in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry?

2. Why did M.K. Naik terms “Our Casuarina Tree” as “romantic melancholy and nostalgia”?
3. Who are the key representative poets of Indian English poetry of the imitative phase?
4. What are the chief attributes of the assimilative phase of Indian English Poetry?
5. How will you bring a distinction between modern and postmodern trends of Indian English poetry?

#### **15.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss the pre and post-independence phases of Indian English poetry in detail?
2. What are the chief traits and innovations of Indian poets in Indian English poetry?
3. What were the chief pre and post-independence themes in Indian English poetry?

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## **15.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2014.
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**Unit - 16: (a) A.K.Ramanujan: “Obituary”  
(b) Vikram Seth: “The Frog and the Nightingale”  
(c) Meena Kandaswamy: “Mrs. Sunshine”**

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**16.0 Introduction**

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In this Unit, you will read about three English poems, namely, “*Obituary*”, “*The Frog and the Nightingale*” and “*Mrs. Sunshine*” by celebrated poets A. K. Ramanujan and versatile writers like Vikram Seth and Meena Kandaswamy.

“*Obituary*” by A. K. Ramanujan is an elaborate poem on Indian traditions and customs, especially represented from a son’s point of view who, has no idea of the weight that was moved to his shoulder as the eldest son of the family after his father’s death. The poem, instead, offers an ironic picture of the scenario of pre-cremation and post-cremation in the family, from a rigidly ritualistic view. “*The Frog and the Nightingale*” by Vikram Seth, on the other hand, is a fable where animals are presented with a typical humanized characteristics, especially shading light on the human weaknesses and vulnerabilities such as cunningness, meanness and the ability to take the disadvantage of other’s vulnerability and innocence. It is a timeless and stark description of human society. Meena Kandaswamy discusses the strong voice of an aware and courageous

married woman who ceases to sacrifice her identity for her traditional and rigid husband in “Mrs. Sunshine”. Instead, she chooses to leave him behind with her shadow (here, traditionally bound physical body) and denies any traditional obedience to him, but later comes back to him. However, this return of the wife was of a more aware, courageous and self-conscious woman who chooses to live with her traditional husband as a part of following the societal customs. This is a revolutionary poem written by a Dalit feminist Indian English poet, Meena Kandaswamy.

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## 16.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- familiarise you with Indian English Poetry
- enable you to understand and comprehend different forms of poetry
- critically appreciate the genre of English poetry in general and Indian English poetry in particular
- master a deeper understanding of English poetry, the prominent literary figures and their contribution in the development of varied genres, here, English poetry
- understand and appreciate the contributions of Indian English poets, namely A. K. Ramanujan, Vikram Seth and Meena Kandaswamy by critically reading their celebrated poems, i.e. *Obituary*, *The Frog and the Nightingale* and *Mrs. Sunshine*

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## 16.2 Indian English Poetry

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Indian English poetry has been celebrated as the oldest form of Indian English literature. It has accomplished a place of its own as a literary form over the period during different developmental phases in the post-independence era. However, it was a group of modern English poets in India who began to use English as a language in an organically inward manner where it lost the mechanical trait and became more relevant, filled with varied humane experiences. Modern poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, K. N. Daruwalla, R. Parthasarthy, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra have played a key role in shaping Indian English poetry. In addition, versatile writers like Vikram Seth and Meena Kandaswamy have also tried their hands at poetry. These poets believed in experimenting and preferred originality in their works. They

have been writing about multiple commonly-relatable themes, such as Indian traditions, customs, and history, to mention a few. Irony has been used extensively in modern Indian English poetry, and is also found in the poems, “*Obituary*”, “*The Frog and the Nightingale*” and “*Mrs. Sunshine*.” Satire and a strong feminist voice in these poems is reflective of the modern Indian English poets.

### **16.2.1 *Obituary* by A. K. Ramanujan:**

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929 – 1993) was an Indian poet. He has donned multiple hats as a versatile scholar and academic who has also been celebrated as a scholar, linguist, essayist, philologist, folklorist, playwright and translator. He has written extensively across various genres, but he is best remembered as a poet. He is known as a poet whose literary oeuvre reflects Indian ethos, humanitarian values and relevance to life. His works are rooted in Indian culture and tradition. The common theme that can be traced across his poetic works is his relationship with family life and personal relationships.

The word ‘obituary’ points to the information or notice published in the newspaper on account of someone’s demise, which also includes a short biography of the deceased soul. The ‘*Obituary*’ poem is taken from Ramanujan’s poetry collection entitled “*Relationships*” (1971). The poem “*Obituary*” by A. K. Ramanujan is a detailed description of the aftermath of a parent’s demise. The poem is written in a first person narrative style, and is described from a son’s perspective. It is written in eight stanzas.

The poem begins with the descriptions of the objects left behind by the deceased father, which the son, the narrator, is analysing. There were so many tangible and intangible objects that he left behind when he died. For instance, the poem begins by describing meaningless tangible things such as dust, a stack of old papers, debt (monetary and of the unmarried daughters) and a grandson that are left behind by the late father, which are of no use to the family. However, certain intangible things such as traditions, rituals and memories are the ones that will last long and shall pass along from one generation to the other. The narration slowly moves toward the ritual of cremation in the Hindu traditional household. The narrative further describes an obituary that was published in a local newspaper, something that can be considered something important by the father. A tradition that has now been handed over to the son with the expectation that he will pass it on to future generations. The poem offers a direct reference to the patriarchal family lineage where a man is considered responsible as a breadwinner and a leading figure in the family. The son carries this tradition forward in the case of the demise of the father.



The narrator continues the enlisting of the things he is expected to take care of as he says “A house that leaned slowly through our growing years on a bent coconut tree in the yard” that elaborates that the family has also inherited an old family house in a dilapidated condition and in a need of repair like a ‘bent coconut tree’. The late father is also described as a typical bad-tempered man who had never developed a close rapport with the family. He is depicted as “the burning type” (Ramanujan) who has mostly been a dissatisfied and struggling man in his life with the least urge to live life. Thus, was the reason that his mortal body was “burned properly at the cremation” (Ramanujan). The following stanza continues the elaborate description of the cremation. His body was burnt easily from “both the sides” (Ramanujan). Ultimately, only ashes and eyeballs are left for the family at the end of the cremation. However, the poet says that his “eye coins didn’t look one bit different” (Ramanujan). In addition, the son, here the narrator, was suggested to gather ashes, eyeballs and even certain scattered spinal discs to continue the following ritual.

The next stanza continues the description of the earlier one where the priest is instructing the son to perform a ritual where the gathered ashes and other remains of the late father will be thrown by “facing east where three rivers meet near the railway station”(Ramanujan). The narrator furthers the description by saying that “no long standing headstone with his full name and two dates” (Ramanujan) will be established for others to remember him for things that he himself had not done, like “his cesarean birth in a Brahmin ghetto and his death by a heart attack in the fruit market”(Ramanujan). However, someone did inform the son that his father did get “two lines in an inside column of a Madras newspaper” (Ramanujan) that was “sold by the kilo, exactly four weeks later to street hawkers” (Ramanujan). Further, the narrator continues rather ironically that these are the newspapers that are further sold to the “small groceries” who pack “salt, coriander, and jaggery” (Ramanujan) in it. The narrator used to read these wrappers “for fun and lately in hope of finding these obituary lines” (Ramanujan). The poem concludes on an interesting note as the narrator notes that the late father, above all, has “left us a changed mother and more than one annual ritual”.

Therefore, the poem begins with the information about the demise of the father family’s reaction to the death and slowly concludes by describing the importance of the family rituals that passed on from one generation to the other, a responsibility that was fulfilled by the father and now shouldered over to the son.

***Check your Progress:***

1. What is the name of the poetry collection that this poem is taken from?
2. Discuss the central idea of the poem.
3. Who is the narrator in the poem?

### 16.2.2 Critical Appreciation:

“*Obituary*” is written in the first-person narrative style. The narrator is believed to be the poet himself. Family and personal relationships is a common theme that can be traced in most of A. K. Ramanujan’s literary works. Hence, certain autobiographical traits can be found in the narration. Hence, certain autobiographical traces can be found in the poem. It is written from a son’s point of view, where immediately after the father’s demise, he had to take on all the responsibilities of his deceased father. At this moment, he begins to analyse his father’s achievements and failures throughout his life, from now onwards he will be the responsible one to shoulder those left behind responsibilities and weight to carry it forward to hand it all over to the next generation.

Further, an obituary is generally a tribute mentioning all the good aspects and best achievements of the deceased person, which is certainly not the case here. The poem, on the other hand, ironically describes detailed emotional effects and reactions after the father’s demise in a household through a son as a narrator. However, the tone is more of mockery than serious and sincere. It also portrays the emotional upheaval a son feels while seeing all the things left behind at the physical and emotional levels by the father, but the description reads shallow and unemotional. The poem offers a mere record of a full-length description of a family’s reactions to the responsibilities the father successfully fulfilled for the family during his lifetime and the list of what is left behind, in terms of the tangible things, rituals and societal responsibilities to be carried forward by the son. Therefore, the description has apparent satirical and ironic sketches with the mention of a “cesarean tree” that may signify the rich culture and tradition of India that should be carried forward in the family. However, amid the mocking, ironical and burdening circumstances, the poem ends with a stark mention of a “changed mother” that might be considered a positive change that may be introduced into the family by the mother, who must have been a silent follower during the lifetime of her husband. But she is now the eldest responsible person in the family, hence, may bring some changes. On the other hand, there is also a mention of how the narrator used the newspaper to get groceries and other stuff and read it for fun. But now the poet has developed a novel interest in reading the obituary section, probably in the hope of finding some achievement or praise of his late father to get inspired by. The poem

ends with the quest of a son to find out reasons to take on the monotonous responsibilities left behind by the deceased father, on a positive note that he will probably be able to make some difference when he leaves the earth and leaves behind his son to carry forward what he started off of.

Therefore, “*Obituary*” in particular and other literary works by A. K.Ramanujan generally sheds light on the humane values, brings traditional India alive and the relatedness with life, where the readers can also feel connected and find it relatable to the core. Such poetic works also give us an opportunity to take an objective look towards the life, actions, practices and manners of leading our lives as a commoner in the traditional societal set-up.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Who is the narrator in the poem “Obituary”?
2. What moral does the poem give, if any?
3. What purpose does it serve?

**16.2.3 The Frog and the Nightingale by Vikram Seth:**

Vikram Seth (born 1952) has been considered as one of the Indian English writers who have put Indian writing in English on the world map. Vikram Seth (born 1952) is a novelist, travel writer and a poet. He is best known as an Indian English writer and poet. Among many of his literary works, he is best known for his verse novels, *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *A Suitable Boy* (1993). He has received the Sahitya Academy award for his novel, *The Golden Gate* (1986) written in verse style. He has also published novels, a travelogue, a libretto, an autobiography, a translation book and four books of poems. His *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is a Commonwealth Writers Prize winner novel which has been adapted into a series and film. It also boasts to be one of the longest novels published in one volume. His poem “The Frog and the Nightingale” holds the distinction of being included in the school syllabus by the Ministry of Education. It is taken from his poetry collection titled, *Beastly Tales From Here and There* (1992). It was written in 1994 and was originally published by Evergreen Publication House. This poetry collection is a “group of ten animal fables written in rhyme couplet”. Fables from the “*Beastly Tales from Here and There*” share similarities with the renowned Indian classic *Panchatantra*, which is known as an incomparable work by Vishnu Sharma and it has lasted the test of time for the past 2000 years. The similar traits can also be traced in T. S. Eliot’s *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* (1939). The literary works of Vishnu Sharma, T. S. Eliot and Vikram Seth share similarities in a manner that animals have been humanized. They share love, hatred, compassion, cunningness, wit,

cowardice and courage. Despite not receiving much attention to his poetry, Vikram Seth's poetry has played a vital role in making Indian English poetry famous at an international level.

The poem "The Frog and the Nightingale" (1994) is a fable of a frog and a nightingale living in a jungle once known as the Bingle Bog. The frog, a passionate singer singing in its harsh voice, had been living for a long time in the jungle, Bingle Bog. It used to croak from dusk to dawn. Every bird and animal living in the jungle was loath to listen to its insufferable croak but had no choice but to bear with the croak –croak, "other creatures loathed his voice, but, alas, they had no choice" (Seth). The frog, the determined frog, would not budge since "neither stones nor prayers nor sticks, insults or complaints or bricks stilled the frog's determination" (Seth). He became an insufferable headache for the jungle.

Then on one moon night, a beautiful little nightingale entered the jungle, settled on a "sumac tree" and began to sing in a melodious voice. Everyone immediately fell in love with its melodious and soothing voice. Thus, she received a lot of admiration from every creature in the jungle. However, the frog lost its audience with the nightingale's entry. He also grew jealous of the fame and respect that was given to the nightingale. But the frog, being a cunning creature, reached out to the naïve nightingale and introduced itself as the owner of the tree, trained singer and a professional critic: "I'm the frog who owns this tree. . . I've long been known for my splendid baritone . . . I wielded my pen for Bog Trumpet now and then" (Seth). The frog then offered some praise to the nightingale with more criticism. The innocent bird fell into the frog's shrewd scheme and believed in its shallow and devious criticism. The frog offered her a scheme to get training from him, if she wanted to become an established singer in the Bog. As soon as the poor nightingale agreed to his scheme, he began to organize her singing sessions where audiences were charged to listen to the nightingale. The frog used to keep all the money alone and would still criticize the nightingale. The poor bird began to practice beyond her limits and still felt lagging behind her so-called trainer and critic. She was forced to sing in a louder voice on a rainy morning with a frog and she sang continuously "for six hours, till she was shivering and her voice was hoarse and quivering" (Seth). Despite practicing beyond her capacity, the frog continued to compel her with negative criticism "everyday the frog who'd sold her songs for silver, tried to scold her: "you must practice even longer till your voice, like mine grows stronger" (Seth). However, in the meantime, the frog was earning money for himself and simultaneously emotionally manipulating the naïve bird even deeper. This began to affect the nightingale deeper and "day by day the nightingale grew more sorrowful and pale" (Seth). The

poor bird was reaching her limits yet kept pushing herself even harder. However, on one such evening, the sleep deprived, exhausted and anxious bird couldn't sing well but, the frog's anger made her compelled to go on. Unfortunately, the poor bird crossed her limits, "trembling, terrified to fail, blind with tears . . . tried, puffed up, burst a vein and died" (Seth). Even after such a terrible end of the beautiful and innocent nightingale, the cunning, mean and opportunist frog declared "I tried to teach her, but she was a stupid creature – far too nervous, far too tense. Far too prone to influence" (Seth).

Therefore, this fable of a frog and a nightingale sheds light on the types of humans living together in our society. Vikram Seth aptly establishes a point for commoners who get easily influenced by people around them without even knowing them better. This cautious tale is a strong reminder for all around us to never lose self-confidence and faith in one's own self. Otherwise, the blind followers always reach a bad end.

***Check your Progress:***

1. What was the fable about?
2. What is the name of the jungle?
3. Throw some light on the moral of the fable?

**16.2.4 Critical Appreciation:**

"*The Frog and the Nightingale*" is a striking and intriguing fable. It is as relevant today as it was when published for the first time. This fable and the book "*Beastly Tales from Here and There*" have rightly been compared with the timeless *Panchtantra* stories. The rhyming scheme of this poem is AABBCDD.

The poem has a satirical tone with a sharp warning. It satirically mocks the mindless rat-race that is prevailing in society today. The poem hints at those who fail to develop a healthy sports spirit in their attitude and aptitude, that may lead to extremely distressing consequences at times. It is a poignant reminder to all those who consider themselves part of a competition but fail to believe in themselves and appreciate their fellow counterpart's skills in a spirit of a healthy competition.

The key theme discussed in the poem is the sad consequence of being driven by flattery and fear while not believing in yourself and your abilities. The nightingale loses its life despite receiving appreciation from a wider audience because it did not believe in itself. The innocent bird began to doubt its abilities under the influence of the cunning frog. The poem, hence, elaborates the binary feelings of self-confidence and selfishness using allegory. This allegorical

poetry sheds light on the brutally practical aspect of life, where one should maintain belief in one's skills set and abilities. It also showcases the gloomy consequences as a cautionary tale about choices and their results and the outcomes of blindly following others' advice. There are people in the world who love to manipulate individual vulnerabilities for their own benefit, as was done by the cunning and jealous frog that led to the nightingale's death. The ironical part is the end, when the frog declares the nightingale as "a stupid creature – far too nervous, far too tense. Far too prone to influence (Seth)." The frog claimed to have a skill and offered his professional services to polish the nightingale's singing but, it actually turned out to be a disastrous decision on the nightingale's part. The nightingale respected him and followed his instruction as a blind and sincere disciple to the extent that she compared him with the renowned musician Mozart "this is a fairy tale and you are a Mozart in disguise (Seth)." This comparison sheds light on how immaculately innocent the nightingale was that she considered the frog a bliss in disguise by comparing him with the great classical composer Mozart. This is an instance that reflects her virtuousness.

The frog was a capitalist who was only interested in earning money, by manipulating and playing with the vulnerabilities of the innocent bird. The animal world has well been represented by humanitarian virtues and vices. The frog and the nightingale represent the human society that is filled with different types and kinds of people, where one has to maintain belief in oneself to survive as an individual because the world is full of shallow, assertive, egoistic, opportunist and ruthless practical people. It is easy to get lost among such a multitude of people but challenging to survive and maintain your identity. Hence, it is the frog that gives the last yet significant advice for the readers that the nightingale lost her life for nothing. No one cares whether you live or die. But she could have managed the situation if she had believed in her abilities, as the frog says, "she should have known that your song must be your own" (Seth).

***Check your Progress:***

1. Why are fables written?
2. Can fables be considered timeless?
3. How does it give a message to the readers to take their vulnerable selves as normal?

**16.2.5 Mrs. *Sunshine* by Meena Kandaswamy:**

Ilvenil Meena Kandaswamy (born 1984) is an Indian poet, translator, Dalit feminist writer, and social activist. She has published two poetry collections, namely *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010). She has also edited the famous bi-monthly English magazine, *The Dalit*

(2001 – 2002). She often writes columns for online platforms such as *The Outlook India* and *The Hindu*.

Her writing is generally focused on social issues. She is the spokesperson who gives voice to the voiceless traditional women who are stuck in the vicious circle of societal rituals, customs and traditions for ages. In fact, she voices the women who have been living a married life not because of love for their spouses but dragging themselves through domestic violence, abusive marital relationships as a part of their duty as a wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and so on. She believes that poetry can be used as a potent tool to shed light on the prevailing discrimination, especially gender discrimination at multiple levels in society. Thus, she states “poetry is not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain set of practices while you present your ideas in the way that academic language is”.

“Mrs. Sunshine” is one such poem that represents her ironical stance towards a woman, who is stuck in a paradoxical space between a woman and a wife. The poem signifies a strong voice that grows from a housewife’s newly regained consciousness, when she finally decides to leave her husband with her shadow “without warning”. The typical patriarchal husband used to speak more with fiery hands and less in a verbal manner since “his fire”, as “his fist . . . blistering fingers. . . were always in heat” (Kandaswamy). It was becoming unbearable for her to stay as a whole with him with her mind, body and soul. Thus, she finally leaves him “with her shadow as acting spouse, for keeping house” (Kandaswamy). Their marriage did not have affection, love and concern left for each other. It was just a societal and traditional compromise that the wife had been doing by following the tradition she had been taught and brought up in.

The initial stanza simply puts the fact straight that a wife ultimately decided to take control of her life, which is more than her only role as wife that she has been playing for a long time. However, traditional society does not allow a wife, a woman, to have the reign of her life in her hands. She is nurtured to be a follower of her parents and then her husband and his parents. But this wife, when eventually decided to leave her husband with her moral physical body, empty of emotions, hence, least or no reactions towards any kind of treatment given to her, “he went wild.” Meena Kandaswamy skilfully depicts what happens when a wife stops reacting to all her husband’s pains and troubles. She writes, he becomes,

lovesick, he lost his fiery temper,  
his high temperature his feverish fondness  
for flames and furnaces and he became a man

of moderation. Running behind a woman on the run, he became a master of masquerade. (Kandaswamy)

The man could not accept the fact that his wife, his follower, his docile woman, had decided to take control of her own life. The fact hit him as a deep shock that he began to find ways to bring her back, either by hook or by crook, as she was, since he had known her for a long time. He was on the run behind his woman, who was beginning to taste the unforgettable taste of emancipation. This newly found empowering trait of his wife was enough to turn him into a masquerade. Ironically, he was ready to pursue her for as long as it might take, but would not let her go, not because he loved her, but because he cannot let his wife make an independent decision. He could have accepted death but not the idea of his wife becoming an independent decision maker. However, before he was ready to leave almost everything and go to extreme lengths, the wife decided to come back “for old times sake” (Kandaswamy). But she plainly added that she will help him maintain his so-called societal image like a hallucination, where she will maintain his “halos” and “holiness” (Kandaswamy) as the tradition goes.

Thus, the poetry ends on a note where the husband is not aware of his wife’s newly discovered conscious decision of staying with him only because she has to, as a physical mortal body since her soul is long emancipated from these sticking points that have been keeping her from mobility for a long time.

#### **16.2.6 Critical Appreciation:**

Meena Kandaswamy reflects her revolutionary stance as an aware feminist in this poem “Mrs. Sunshine”. The wife in the poem ironically has finally turned into a sunshine that can also be felt, not touched. The poem is a strong voice that ironically represents our shallow and rigid society where a woman owns limited identity, only with reference to her family members, as a daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law and so on. She is also dependent, both emotionally and financially. She was nurtured to become a dependable person, first by her father before the marriage and later on her husband after the marriage. Therefore, she was never taught to own an independent identity as a decision maker of her life.

“Mrs. Sunshine” sheds light on a burning yet overlooked issue of a married woman’s struggle to find her identity, lost self and freedom, more as an individual than as a wife. The poem begins on a striking note where it is directly declared that the wife has suddenly left her husband without giving him any prior notice as she was tired of being beaten by him. Therefore, he startles and tries every trick possible to get his wife back. However, the wife has now finally



realised that she can stay with him and still leave him, by leaving her physical body under his control and taking full control over her mind and soul. But her physical shadow was not enough for a typical Indian man to live with. He wanted a woman who would cry of pain and suffering after being beaten.

“*Mrs. Sunshine*” is one of Kandaswamy’s poems where she has been expressing her dissent of being considered a “Second Sex” as the celebrated feminist Simone de Beauvoir writes. Kandaswamy has extensively written on gender discrimination issues as an ardent feminist writer. Her poem “*Mrs. Sunshine*” explicates the common perplexing notions of desolation and anguish in women’s lives. The most common themes that can be traced in her literary oeuvre are the issues of caste discrimination, gender discrimination, sexuality, issues of gender identity and oppression, to mention a few. A striking characteristic of her works is that it encourages the reader to get inspired and take apt action rather than living like a silent spectator. Hence, the thorough description found in her “*Mrs. Sunshine*” of the startled yet disconcerted husband and an emancipated courageous woman who eventually manages to speak for herself is a noteworthy and deeply courageous writing for an Indian Dalit feminist woman writer. The poem shares the deep values that Kandaswamy has been living with and trying to spread out and around by extensively weaving them in her writings. As an Indian poet writing in English, Meena Kandaswamy has become a strong feminist, Dalit and revolutionary voice today. Her writings have been turned out as an articulation of the beliefs and values that she has believed in.

***Check your Progress:***

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. What is the name of the poetess?
3. Can this poem be considered an important voice that is raised by an Indian feminist Woman English poet?

**16.2.7 Conclusion:**

The chapter elucidates three distinct yet important poems written by the Indian English poets, namely, “*Obituary*”, “*The Frog and the Nightingale*” and “*Mrs. Sunshine*” by celebrated poets A. K. Ramanujan and versatile writers Vikram Seth and Meena Kandaswamy. They have created a mark for themselves with their writings that stood the test of time. The most common themes that they used in their writings are the Indian traditions, values, relationships, ethos, human vices and virtues, issues of gender, sexuality, rigid societal traditions and customs and so on. The most common figure of speech that can be traced in all the three poems is irony. Irony

has been used as a tool by these poets to share their beliefs with the wider readership. Irony, indeed, makes their writings more relevant and pertinent.

For instance, “Obituary” by A. K. Ramanujan is an elaborate verse on Indian traditions and customs, that is depicted from a son’s point of view who, is struggling to take on the weight of the left behind responsibilities that he will have to fulfil as the eldest son of the family after his father’s demise. Interestingly, the narrative offers a detailed description of the tangible objects and intangible feelings of the son at length. However, the serious issue of a son’s dilemma and struggle is treated in an ironical manner through the poem. The next poem “The Frog and the Nightingale” by Vikram Seth is a fable that is often compared with *Panchtantra* where animals represent typical humanized characteristic, exclusively human frailties and weaknesses such as cunningness, unkindness and the aptitude of taking the disadvantage of other’s susceptibility and incorruptibility. Thus, it can rightly be considered a timeless and stark description of human society. The last poem in the chapter discusses Meena Kandaswamy’s poem “Mrs. Sunshine”. It discusses the strong voice of an aware and courageous married woman who ceases to sacrifice her identity for her traditional and rigid husband. Instead, ironically, despite living together under the same roof, she chooses to leave him behind with her shadow (here, traditionally bound physical body) and denies any traditional obedience to him when the shocked husband tries to woo her with every possible trick he knows to get her old self back. However, she does return but this return of the wife was of a more aware, courageous and self-conscious decisive woman who chooses to live with her traditional husband to fulfil the societal obligations. This radical poem written by a Dalit feminist Indian English poet, Meena Kandaswamy, does leave a mark on the reader’s mind and inspires them to act rather than remain a silent spectator.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Which figure of speech is used in all the poems?
2. How can these poems leave a lasting impact on the reader’s mind?
3. Why are these poems more relevant and relatable?

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### **16.3 Learning Outcomes**

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At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- be familiar with Indian English poetry
- understand and comprehend English poetry written by Indian English poets
- critically appreciate the genre of English poetry in general and Indian English poetry in particular
- master a deeper understanding of English poetry, the prominent literary figures and their contribution in the development of English poetry
- understand and appreciate the contributions of Indian English poets, namely A. K. Ramanujan, Vikram Seth and Meena Kandaswamy

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## 16.4 Glossary

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**Indian English Poetry:** poetry that is written by Indian poets writing in English

**Obituary:** memorial written in the newspaper after someone's demise

**Caesarean:** here, a reference to the traditional family hierarchy where traditions, rituals and responsibilities are passed onto the next generations

**Bog:** an area of land that is very wet and muddy

**Mozart:** Here, a reference to the well-known classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

**Hoarse:** rough and unclear

**Quivering:** Shaking, trembling

**Baritone:** a male singing voice

**Serenaded:** sang beautifully

**Loath:** Hate

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## 16.5 Sample Questions

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### 16.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. What was the reaction of the denizens of the Bingle Bog jungle on the frog's song?
2. How did they react to the nightingale's song?

3. How did the frog assert his importance to the nightingale?
4. Do you think the nightingale deserved such a devastating and cruel end?
5. How did the frog manage to get rid of his talented competitor?
6. What is the meaning of the word obituary?
7. What tangible objects are left behind by the late father in the poem “Obituary”?
8. Who is the narrator in the poem “Obituary”?
9. What is the full name of Meena Kandaswamy?
10. What are some of the common themes that she writes on in her works?

#### **16.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Is the title of the poem “*Obituary*” suitable? Why?
2. What is irony? Give examples from the poem “Obituary.”
3. What key issue does the poem “Mrs. Sunshine” discuss?
4. Comment on the line “She left him with her shadow” by taking suitable examples from the poem.
5. How does the poem “Mrs. Sunshine” end?

#### **16.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Write a detailed answer on the frog’s ironic statement by using apt examples from the fable “your song must be your own” from the poem “*The Frog and the Nightingale*.”
2. “*Obituary*” can be considered a poem where a son is looking for a ray of inspiration from his deceased father to carry forward his tradition in the patriarchal society by reading obituaries in different newspapers. Discuss
3. Discuss “Mrs. Sunshine” as a revolutionary poem from the feminist perspective.

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## 16.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. M. K. Naik, *History of Indian English Literature*, (1982), New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.
2. Mohanty, S. (2007). *A Critical Analysis of Vikram Seth's Poetry and Fiction*. Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
3. Shekhawat, A. (2012). Resonant Symbolism in AK Ramanujan's Poems. *IUP Journal of English Studies*, 7(3), 54.
4. Singh, K. D. (2008). *Contemporary Indian English poetry: Comparing male and female voices*. Atlantic Publishers & Dist.

# Maulana Azad National Urdu University

Programme: M.A. English

II Semester Examination, April/May-2024

Paper: MAEN203CCT, Paper Title: English Poetry

Time: 3 Hours

Total Marks: 70

**Note:** This question paper consists of three parts: Part – A, Part-B and Part-C. Number of words to answer each question is only indicative. Attempt all parts.

**Part–A** contains 10 compulsory questions of multiple choice/fill in the blank/very short answer type question. Answer all questions. Each question carries 1 mark. **(10x1=10-marks)**

**Part-B** contains 08 questions of which students are supposed to answer 05 questions. Answer each question in approximately 200 words. Each question carries 06 marks. **(5x6=30 marks)**

**Part-C** contains 05 questions of which students are supposed to answer 03 questions. Answer each question in approximately 500 words. Each question carries 10 marks. **(3x10=30 marks)**

## Part- A

Q1.

- I. Write the title of the poem by Ee Tiang Hong prescribed in your syllabus.
- II. ‘Have you read any Hemingway’? is an example of \_\_\_\_\_. (Synecdoche/ Metonymy)
- III. \_\_\_\_\_ is a form of poetry that has no set stanzas or line length. (Blank verse/ ballad/epic/ode)
- IV. \_\_\_\_\_ is a poem which is autobiographical in nature. (Lady Lazarus/ Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock)
- V. ‘The Road not Taken’ is a poem written by \_\_\_\_\_.
- VI. “She left him without warning.” Identify the poem.
- VII. ‘This song is a cry for help...’ Name the song.
- VIII. \_\_\_\_\_ was a poem written by Gabriel Okara.
- IX. ‘Dedications’ was written by \_\_\_\_\_.
- X. Identify the poem: ‘What dwelling shall receive me/In what vale shall be my harbour’.

## Part- B

2. Explain the following with appropriate examples: alliteration, assonance, simile and metaphor.
3. Write short notes on sonnet, elegy and ode.
4. Do you think the nightingale was responsible for her own downfall? Why? Why not?
5. Margaret Atwood’s ‘Siren Song’ offers a fresh and subversive perspective on the seductive power of manipulation. Do you agree? Give reasons.
6. Comment on the personality and character of J. Alfred Prufrock.
7. ‘Dedications’ is a poem that confronts the impact of oppression on personal and collective identities. Critically elucidate the statement.

8. Milton reinforces Satan's degeneration with visual images. Discuss the visual imagery with reference to the poetic art of Milton.

9. 'Mrs Sunshine' is a profound exploration of the inner strength and resilience of a woman trapped within societal constraints. Discuss critically.

### **Part- C**

10. Discuss critically how the poem 'The Common Man' brings into light the inequalities in society against the backdrop of everyday myriad struggles a common man faces.

11. Childishness is a great virtue. Elucidate this point with special reference to 'Once Upon a Time' highlighting some of the African values.

12. Discuss some customs and traditions of Indian society and particularly of Brahmins depicted in the poem 'Obituary'.

13. Throughout 'Lady Lazarus' the speaker uses extended metaphors of death and resurrection to express her own personal suffering. Discuss critically.

14. Critically comment on the role and impact of Nature upon the psyche and character of man with reference to the 'The Prelude'.