Directorate of Distance Education

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU

JAMMU

STUDY MATERIAL

FOR

M.A. ENGLISH

Course Code : ENG 412	**Modern Poetry-III**	**Lesson No. 1-19**
Semester - IV		**Unit - I to VI**

Course Coordinator :
PROF. ANUPAMA VOHRA

Teacher Incharge :
DR. JASLEEN KAUR

http:/www.distanceeducationju.in

Printed and Published on behalf of the Directorate of Distance Education, University of Jammu, Jammu by the Director, DDE, University of Jammu, Jammu.

MODERN POETRY - III

LESSON WRITER :

- **DR. GARIMA GUPTA**
- **DR. JASLEEN KAUR**

EDITING & PROOF READING :

- **DR. JASLEEN KAUR**

DTP Print-o-Pack/19/1000

Course Code : ENG 412 **Duration of Examination : 3 hrs.**

Title of the Course : Modern Poetry - III **Total Marks : 100**

(Credits : 5) **(a) Semester Examination : 80**

(b) Sessional Assessment : 20

Detailed syllabus for the examination to be held in May 2020, 2021, 2022.

Objective :

The objective of this course will be to acquaint the students with 20th Century British Poetry and the stylistic, structural, thematic and other technical innovations exercised by the modern and contemporary English Poets, especially in the interregnum of the two Global wars and later on, under the impact of Modernism as a literary phenomenon.

Unit - I

Intellectual background and literary trends of **twentieth century** British Poetry

Unit - II

W.B. Yeats : (a) The Second Coming

(b) Sailing to Byzantium

(c) Easter 1916

(d) Nineteen Hundered and Nineteen

(e) Leda and the Swan

(f) Lapis Lazuli

Unit - III

T.S. Eliot : The Waste Land

Unit - IV

W.H. Auden : (a) Shield of Achilles

(b) In Memory of W.B. Yeats

(c) Journey to Iceland

(d) First September 1947

(e) The Unkown Citizen

Unit-V

Ted Hughes	:	(a) The Hawk Roosting
		(b) The Jaguar
		(c) The Thought Fox
		(d) Wind
		(e) An Otter
		(f) Thrushes

Unit- VI

Seamus Heaney	:	(a) At a Potato Digging
		(b) The Forge
		(c) Casualty
		(d) Punishment

Mode of Examination

The Paper will be divided into sections A, B & C **M.M. = 80**

Section: A **Multiple Choice Questions**

Q.No. 1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted.

Each objective will be for one mark. **(10 x 1 = 10)**

Section - B **Short Answer Questions**

Q.No. 2 comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks **(5 x 2 = 10)**

Section - C **LongAnswer Questions**

Q.No.3 comprises long answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Six questions, one from each unit, will be set and the candidates will be required to attempt all any five questions in about 300-350 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks. **(5x 12 = 60)**

Suggested Readings:

F. R. Leavis	*New Bearings in English Poetry.*
F. R. Leavis	*Revaluations.*
G. S. Fraser	*The Modem Writer and His World.*
Boris Ford	*The Pelican Guide to English Literature.*
	Vol. VII, The Modern Age and Vol. VIII, The Present.
David Daiches	*Poetry and the Modern World.*
John Lucas	*Modem English Poetry from Hardy to Hughes.*
Grahain Martin and EH. Furbank.	*The Twentieth Century Poetry : Critical Essays and Documents.*
P. Waugh	*The Harvest of 60s.*
Ian Gregson	*Contemporary Poetry and Post Modern.*
Edward Larrisa	*Reading Twentieth Century Poetry.*
Ronald Tamplin	*Seamus Heaney (OUP, 1989).*
Ayaz Ahmed	*The Location of Culture.*
Harish Trivedi	*Colonial Translations.*
Edward Said	*Orientlism Culture and Imperialism.*
Ngugi Wo Thiongo	*Homecoming : Decolonising The Mind.*


~~~~
~~~~

Section - C **LongAnswer Questions**

Q.No.3 comprises long answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Six questions, one from each unit, will be set and the candidates will be required to attempt all any five questions in about 300-350 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks. **(5x 12 = 60)**

Suggested Readings:

F. R. Leavis	*New Bearings in English Poetry.*
F. R. Leavis	*Revaluations.*
G. S. Fraser	*The Modem Writer and His World.*
Boris Ford	*The Pelican Guide to English Literature.*
	Vol. VII, The Modern Age and Vol. VIII, The Present.
David Daiches	*Poetry and the Modern World.*
John Lucas	*Modem English Poetry from Hardy to Hughes.*
Grahain Martin and EH. Furbank.	*The Twentieth Century Poetry : Critical Essays and Documents.*
P. Waugh	*The Harvest of 60s.*
Ian Gregson	*Contemporary Poetry and Post Modern.*
Edward Larrisa	*Reading Twentieth Century Poetry.*
Ronald Tamplin	*Seamus Heaney (OUP, 1989).*
Ayaz Ahmed	*The Location of Culture.*
Harish Trivedi	*Colonial Translations.*
Edward Said	*Orientlism Culture and Imperialism.*
Ngugi Wo Thiongo	*Homecoming : Decolonising The Mind.*


~~~~
~~~~

WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Distance Learners,

I welcome you to the final semester of your post-graduate programme. By now, you must be well-versed with the prolific works of twentieth century British poetry. The purpose of this paper is to allow you to be acquainted with the modern British poets. Including some of the finest poems of our times, these literary writings have ushered new techniques and themes within literary circles around the world and have been at the vanguard of social and political prophecies and change in the modern world. With this view, the self-learning material has been compiled to appraise the distance learners of the churning in the twentieth century poetic world.

Although the S.L.M provided is thorough with regard to the topic, it is by no means all-inclusive and therefore, learners are encouraged to make use of the Directorate library for references and original text of the poems and authors.

All distance learners are further advised to follow the deadlines for the submission of the internal assessment assignments. Also, please keep in mind that the assignments must be in your own handwriting, failing which, you will not be marked for the answer.

With this, I wish you all the best for your future endeavours.

Best of Luck!

Dr. Jasleen Kaur
Assistant Professor
P.G English
D.D.E, University of Jammu

LIST OF CONTENTS

M.A. ENGLISH
(SEMESTER-IV)

Course Code : ENG 412 **MODERN POETRY - III**

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 1**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-I**

MODERN BRITISH POETRY UPTO THE THIRTIES

UNIT STRUCTURE:

1.1 Introduction

The early twentieth century, between about 1900 and the First World War saw the beginning of radical new experiments in poetry. Early writers were especially concerned to delineate clear images and to rid poetry of its Romantic and Victorian era superfluities (its emotion, its didacticism, its exposition).

Many Modernist poets looked to seventeenth century metaphysical poets for technical inspiration. So the Modernists were not entirely anti-tradition, and many, like T. S. Eliot argued that Modern poets must have an extensive knowledge of tradition. The metaphysical poets-of whom John Donne was the best example-worked with simile and analogy to present the reader with startling new comparisons. T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* contains a good example in its opening lines: *"Let us go then you and I when the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon a table".* The comparison of the evening to an etherized patient is both surprising-a comparison we have likely never heard before-but it also reflects the perspective of the poet's speaker that is, we learn about him by how he views the world. T. S. Eliot was also important in the way that his work presented allusions to, and direct quotations from, many other works, as though a "new" kind of poetry could in fact be built from fragments of the old.

Many poets of the late 1930s and 1940s (especially post-Second World War) embraced a more direct, impassioned, and human tone, perhaps responding to the inhumanity of the war. But with the 1950s came a movement back towards the linguistic precision of the early Modernists (i.e., away from the emotive extravagance of the 1940s). While returning to a more precise language, however, poets of the mid-century were not so concerned to return to a style heavy with allusion and intellectualism. They were just as concerned to produce a poetry that was well-crafted and concise but that communicated the details of everyday life.

Over the last half of the twentieth century (and continuing today) the English poetic landscape became more and more diverse. This is thanks in part to the diverse "English" voices that are now part of the literary tradition but that emerged from colonial and post-colonial experiences in India, Africa, and the Caribbean, for example. Writers from these "mixed" heritages are especially well equipped to speak to the modern sense that many people feel (regardless of their heritage) in a world that often seems a mixture of positive and negative and the product of a fractured past. Poets like St. Lucian speak directly to a divided sensibility: a love for an English literary tradition but a deep scorn for a history of imperial mistreatment. This mixed-ness is becoming more obviously a benefit and not a problem of "impurity"

as for so long it was deemed to be by cultures who sought to protect a "pure" racial identity by denigrating anything that was different.

1.2 Objectives

Our aim in this lesson is to provide a map of the twentieth century British poetry. Starting with the end of the nineteenth century it tries to give you some idea of the intellectual background and literary trends and figures making brief references to American poetry. The larger perspective will help you understand an individual poet or a particular tendency in terms of literary tradition and historical change.

1.3 The End of the Nineteenth Century

The Modern period, beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, has its roots in the late Victorian transition from widespread belief in art as a vehicle for pleasure and instruction towards a belief in "art for art's sake." The sense of alienation-i.e., the distance between the serious artist and a general public-that marked the early twentieth century grew out of this sense of art for art's sake; or, put another way, a sense of art was no longer beholden to some general, public purpose.

Mass literacy became a reality towards the end of 1800s, in large part owing to passage of the Education Act of 1870 that mandated compulsory elementary schooling. Universal education, even if just in basic reading and writing, produced a general reading public that in turn generated demand for popular fiction. A widening gulf emerged between so-called serious (or highbrow) art and popular (or lowbrow) art. Seemingly, the more generic and "mass-produced" popular literature became the more experimental, challenging, and avant garde some modern artists became, as though reacting against a literature that tried to appeal to a lowest common denominator.

Already by the last decades of the Victorian period (the 1880s and 1890s) authors were turning away from the optimism and triumphalism that had marked the early- and mid-Victorian periods. Many authors were satirizing, even attacking,

middle-class Victorian values and were reflecting a greater degree of skepticism in their work, especially of the long-held Victorian belief in national exceptionalism i.e., that England was special in history and thus had a duty to spread its version of civilization across the globe.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, many people (artists included) had lost their faith in institutional, cultural, or social foundations that could provide stability in the world. W. B. Yeats would express this sense of dissolution and instability most definitively in his 1919 poem, *The Second Coming": "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"*.

The development of psychoanalysis and of comparative mythology in the early twentieth century also had a profound impact on artists of the time. Psychoanalysis challenged traditional ways of understanding human beings as fundamentally rational, decision-making individuals. Comparative mythology sought basic connections between the world's various belief systems, which ultimately destabilized faith in Christianity as a singularly privileged (or "correct") belief system.

Fundamental changes in the intellectual sphere were matched by equally fundamental changes of a more mundane variety: the use of electricity, for example, or the proliferation of radio and film, was changing the world in basic but profound ways. Even basic beliefs in the universal laws of mathematics were challenged by new theories of relativity and quantum mechanics, each in its way offering a radically new view of the world than what Newton had provided centuries before. Mass production, a logical outgrowth of the industrial revolution, became the norm for all manner of goods, from cars, to clothes, to works of art.

The American ex-patriot writer Ezra Pound provided British Modernism with its paradigmatic motto: "make it new." At this time, women were finally gaining some measure of equality: the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 allowed women to own their own property, and women won the right to vote thanks to parliamentary acts in 1918 and 1928.

1.4 Georgian Poetry, Imagism and War Poetry

The period we are talking about mixes three literary movements we are going to describe briefly: Georgian Poetry, Imagism and War poetry.

Georgian Poetry was the title of a series of anthologies showcasing the work of a school of English poetry that established itself during the early years of the reign of King George V of the United Kingdom. Edward Marsh was the general editor of the series and the centre of the circle of Georgian poets (which included Rupert Brook). The period of publication was sandwiched between the Victorian era, with its strict classicism, and Modernism, with its strident rejection of pure aestheticism. The common features of the poems in these publications were romanticism, sentimentality and hedonism. The Georgians were born from the general conservative climate that prevailed in the first decade of the twentieth century resulted in patriotic and nationalistic issues often being addressed in the poetry of the period. They shared the desire for reintroducing the individual and depicting a personal response in their poetry. To do this, they commonly evoked the rural landscape rather than looking towards the city for inspiration because their beliefs were firmly entrenched in the traditional Romantic concept that individual subject is inextricably linked with the natural world.

'Georgian', which 'had been applied proudly by Marsh in 1912 to mean "new", "modern", "energetic" had, by 1922, come to connote only "old-fashioned", "outworn", or worse.

The Georgian movement was a reaction against the poetic establishment, quite informal, and not homogeneous. Besides, there are two phases in Georgian Poetry:

-Georgian phase proper: 1912-1915 volumes.

-Neo-Georgian phase.

Phase 1 is the real Georgian Poetry. In 1912, Georgian Poetry was hailed as symbolizing "the new rebellion in English poetry". Poets have in common to

challenge the establishment, the current trends in poetry: (i) Denial of individualism.(ii) Virtues of national identity and moral responsibilities and (iii) "Poetic diction", pompous poetry.

By contrast, the aims of Georgian Poetry in Phase 2 were to give a subjective personal response to personal concern to return to Wordsworth and to use a straightforward and casual language.

The Georgian general recommendation was the giving up of complex forms so that more people could read poetry. Georgian Poetry was to be English but not aggressively imperialistic, pantheistic rather than atheistic, and as simple as a child's reading book. The result was that, finally, Georgian Poets were mainly blamed for their traditionalism, for being escapists and for cultivating false simplicity.

In America in 1912, the most common and popular poetry was called genteel because it was very well-behaved. Since they were "genteel", these poems avoided controversial and realistic subject matter like sex or industrialization. Instead, genteel poetry tended to consist of short, inoffensive, traditional verse about inward feelings, written in a deliberately purified, rather vague, "poetic" language.

Around 1912 in London, some British and American poets led by Ezra Pound started a poetic movement called Imagism. These poets reacted against genteel poetry, which they saw as sentimental, soft-edged, and emotionally dishonest. They also rejected the sentiment and discursiveness typical of much Romantic and Victorian poetry. Somewhat unusually for the time, the Imagists featured a number of women writers among their major figures.

At the time Imagism emerged, Longfellow and Tennyson were considered the paragons of poetry, and the public valued the sometimes moralizing tone of their writings. In contrast, Imagism called for a return to what were seen as more Classical values, such a directness of presentation and economy of language, as well as a willingness to experiment with non-traditional verse forms.

In the preface to the anthology, "Some Imagist Poets" (1916), there is set down a brief list of tenets to which the poets contributing to it mutually agreed:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word.

   The language of common speech means a diction which carefully excludes inversions, and the clichés of the old poetic jargon. Common speech does not exclude imaginative language or metaphor but it must be original and natural to the poet himself, not culled from older books of verse.

   The exact word means the exact word which conveys the writer's impression to the reader (critics conceive a thing to be so and so and no other way; to the poet, the thing is as it appears in relation to the whole); it is the exact word to describe the effect. In short, the exactness is determined by the content.

2. To create new rhythms -as the expression of new moods- and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.

   This refers to the modern practice of writing largely in the free forms. It is true that modern subjects, modern habits of mind, seem to find more satisfactory expression in vers libre and "polyphonic prose" than in metrical verse. It is also true that "a new cadence means a new idea." Not, as has been stated by hostile critics, that the cadence engenders the idea; quite the contrary, it means that the idea clothes itself naturally in an appropriate novelty of rhythm. The Imagist poets "do not insist upon free-verse as the only method of writing poetry."

3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly of airplanes and automobiles, nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor as old-

fashioned as an airplane of the year 1911. It means that old, new, actual, literary, anything which excites the creative faculty in the individual poet is permissible.

4. To present an image. We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

"Imagist" refers more to the manner of presentation than to the thing presented. It is a kind of technique rather than a choice of subject. "Imagism" simply means a clear presentation of whatever the author wishes to convey. Imagism is presentation, not representation.

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.

It must be kept in mind that this does not refer to subject but to the rendering of subject. Ornament may be employed, so long as it follows the structural bases of the poem; but poetical jig-saw work is summarily condemned. That is why, although so much Imagist poetry is metaphorical, similes are sparingly used. Imagists fear the blurred effect of a too constant change of picture in the same poet.

6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

To remain concentrated on the subject, and to know when to stop, are two cardinal rules in the writing of poetry.

Perhaps because Pound began to see imagism as a "stylistic movement, a movement of criticism rather than creation", he soon moved beyond imagism to a new poetic movement he called vorticism. While the rules and "dont's" of imagism were designed to improve poetic writing but not necessarily to produce complete poems, vorticism was designed as a movement whose principles would apply to all the arts and be capable of producing complete works of art. Pound also wanted to add to the image further movement, dynamism, and intensity.

War poetry is not a school of poetry in itself although it played a tremendous part since it inspired a new birth of inspiration. War had already been a subject for poetry but never with such feelings. However, the term 'war poetry' has strong internal tensions that often go unnoticed: it seems hard to imagine two human activities more unlike each other than experiencing a war and writing a poem. But we have to bear in mind that the best war poets always know that they involve themselves in a monstrous negotiation between artistic pleasure and human suffering. War poetry is attracted to pain, and makes artistic capital out of it. A war poem represents the partial victory of unholy joy over shame. The war poem pays homage only to the impulse which produced it; although a war poem may seek to justify itself as a warning, or a bearing witness, or an act of compassion or catharsis or redress, its primary motivation is to celebrate its own achievement.

The trauma of the First World War was first expressed by poets in the trenches challenging patriotic and military humbug; it then colored the sensibility of an entire age. The later war poets like Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen increasingly saw the War as organized and motivated insanity: their poetry bore witness to the ugly truth seen through the eyes of the common soldier. In Sassoon, the war encouraged a direct, colloquial vigor to reinforce the gruesome imagery, anger and ridicule. Both Sassoon and Owen used realism in order to shock readers out of their complacency and expose the naked reality of dehumanized violence. After the war, Sassoon's poetry acquired an ironic quality through an unsettled juxtaposition of viewpoints. Owen, despite his unparalleled mastery of realistic detail, achieved a truly complex, sometimes visionary detachment and distancing. Isaac Rosenberg also attempted this imaginative distancing and often used a rapid succession of images. Thus we can see that war poetry prepared the ground for the Modernist poetry of the 1920s.

1.5 Yeats and Irish Poetry

After the literatures of Greek and Latin, literature in Irish is the oldest literature in Europe, dating from the 4th or 5th century CE. The presence of a "dual tradition" in Irish writing has been important in shaping and inflecting the material written in English, the language of Ireland's colonizers. Irish writing is, despite its unique national and linguistic characteristics, inevitably intertwined with English literature, and this

relationship has led frequently to the absorption of Irish writers and texts into the canon of English literature. Many of the best-known Irish authors lived and worked for long periods in exile, often in England, and this too has contributed to a sense of instability in the development of a canon defined as uniquely Irish. Key Irish writers, from Edmund Burke and Jonathan Swift to Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth, Oscar Wilde, and George Bernard Shaw, were traditionally considered English (or British) authors. But during the 20th century-particularly after the partition and partial independence of Ireland in 1920-22-scholars reclaimed these writers and their works for Ireland. This shift can be seen in the changing use of the term Anglo-Irish literature, which at one time referred to the whole body of Irish writing in English but is now used to describe literature produced by, and usually about, members of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy of the 18th century.

Ireland's history of conquest and colonization, of famine and mass emigration, and of resistance, rebellion, and civil war etched its literature with a series of ruptures and revivals. Since the 17th century, Irish society has also simultaneously been a colonial one and an independent, national one. That hybridity has been the source of endless cultural tension in Irish writing, which has repeatedly coalesced around four issues: land, religion, nationality, and language.

The defeat of Hugh O'Neill, 2nd earl of Tyrone, at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 marked the start of the gradual, century-long collapse of Gaelic civilization as the dominant mode of Irish existence. It also marked the acceleration of a long process of Protestant British colonization that would dramatically transform the land, the language, and the religion of Ireland. Out of the profound cultural trauma engendered by this process, "Anglo-Irish" writing emerged.

As the 20th century drew near in Ireland, a new nationalist cultural revival stirred. It would come to be known as the Irish literary renaissance and would change modern Irish history, but first it had to make sense of the Irish past. In 1878 Standish James O'Grady, considered by his contemporaries the "father" of this revival, published History of Ireland: The Heroic Period. More a fantasia than a history, it nonetheless introduced a new generation of nationalists to the myths and

legends of early Irish history. This Gaelic past would ballast the rising nationalist movement, providing it with subject matter and inspiration. In 1893 Douglas Hyde founded the Gaelic League to preserve the Irish language and to revive it where it had ceased to be spoken. Hyde became a central figure in the revival, and his translations of poetry from the Irish inflected new poetry being written in English at the turn of the 20th century. In 1892 he gave the lecture "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland," a call to embrace things authentically Irish. Hyde's call gave rise to multiple organizations that pushed a nationalist agenda in the 1890s and early 1900s and, by 1905, had culminated in the foundation of the Sinn Féin movement. In literary terms, this period saw a renaissance in Irish drama and poetry in particular and a move away from realism.

Yeats

The preeminent writer-and the architect-of the Irish literary renaissance was William Butler Yeats, whose remarkable career encompassed both this revival and the development of European literary Modernism in the 1920s and '30s. In both movements Yeats was a key participant. While the renaissance gave new life-and new texts-to Irish nationalism in the late 19th century, Yeats aimed to produce a new kind of modern Irish literature in the English language. Toward the end of his life, while he was writing some of his greatest poetry, Yeats wrote of this seeming paradox:

I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser, and to Blake…and to the English language in which I think, speak and write…; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate.

Yeats's career falls roughly into three phases. An early romantic period produced work saturated by folklore, occultism, and Celtic mythology, such as the collection The Wanderings of Oisín (1889) and the play The Countess Cathleen (1892, first performed 1899). The latter stirred particular religious controversy among Roman Catholics. Yeats's counterversion of that play was Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902), which became the central literary moment of the renaissance. In that play-set in 1798, the year of the Irish Rebellion-an old woman persuades a young man to forgo marriage and fight for his country instead; upon leaving the man at the end of the play, she is reported to have

been transformed into a young queen, thereby allegorizing the rejuvenation of Ireland by heroic male sacrifice. Near the end of his life, Yeats would write, in reference to the Easter Rising of 1916: "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?"

A mature middle period saw Yeats' continued preoccupation with the matter of Ireland, particularly during the revolutionary years 1916-23. In 1904 Yeats-with playwright and folklorist Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory-founded in Dublin the Abbey Theatre, one of Europe's earliest national theatres. For the Abbey, between 1915 and 1920, he wrote At the Hawk's Well, The Only Jealousy of Emer, The Dreaming of the Bones, and Calvary, published together in 1921 as Four Plays for Dancers. In the first two-and in On Baile's Strand (1904), The Green Helmet (1910), and The Death of Cuchulain (1939)-Yeats embodies his changing view of Ireland in Cuchulain (Cú Chulainn), the powerful but ultimately maimed hero of Ulster legend. Strongly influenced by the nonrealistic dance-based conventions of the Japanese Noh theatre, these plays radically challenged theatrical convention.

Yeats' vision grew increasingly apocalyptic as he aged. The executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising led to some of his most powerful work, notably the poem "Easter 1916" (1921), in which he marks the transformation of political activists into martyrs and the alteration in his own opinion of them, for all is "changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born." The late poems are to some extent his greatest. In "The Second Coming" (1921), "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (1928), "Leda and the Swan" (1928), "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), "Among School Children" (1928), and "Long-Legged Fly" (1939), among many others, Yeats created a body of work in which both the nation-changing events Ireland experienced in these years and his own journey toward old age and death were filtered through an elaborate personal belief system. Outlined in A Vision (1925; rev. ed. 1937), Yeats' philosophy is an obscure system of gyres and oppositions, with the poet aiming for what he called "unity of being." This notion of system is crucial to understanding Yeats, for it marked him as essentially Romantic, an heir to the English poet and visionary William Blake. It also differentiated him from many of the other great Modernist poets of the period, for whom disintegration or chaos

represented a more seductive aesthetic. In 1923, two years before Shaw, Yeats became the first Irish writer to receive a Nobel Prize for Literature.

Yeats' pursuit of a world of pure ideas, a Byzantine abstraction - monuments of unageing intellect- was anchored in the concrete vitality of the imagination. Thus his poetry dramatizes the fundamental dichotomy of the flesh and the spirit on different levels: as a result, a dispassionately cold style unleashes passionate intensity by virtue of a magisterial control. From The Tower (1928) onwards, Yeats' system of opposed personae or split selves is largely unburdened of its occult trappings: it is as though in his last poems Yeats rises above his system to the existential conflict between affirmation and renunciation, art and nature, passion and conquest, old age and the disturbing promptings of the flesh.

1.6 Modernism, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot

Critic, poet, impresario, and propagandist, Ezra Pound (1885-1972) was one of the shaping forces of modernism, with connections to the era's most influential writers of prose and poetry. In championing the liberatory effects of free verse and in skillfully practicing the techniques of collage and allusion, Pound placed a value on novelty and formal experimentation that helps define what we see as the avant-garde to this day.

Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho in 1885 and raised in Wyncote, Pennsylvania. He studied Greek and Latin languages at Cheltenham before enrolling at the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied languages for two years before finishing his studies at Hamilton College. He traveled throughout Europe in 1908, visiting Italy, Spain, and England. During this time, he became interested in Chinese and Japanese poetry, an interest that would last throughout his creative life and help marshal his disparate interests into a disciplined aesthetic. His 1909 collection of poems, Personae, showed his deep engagement with both traditional lyrical forms, like the dramatic monologue, and radically new forms of expression.

After his travels in Europe, Pound arrived in London, determined to transform the literary scene there. Pound's importance to the development of modernism lies

not only in his own work but in his influence on the other major writers of the period, whom he cultivated and promoted in American little magazines like Poetry (of which he was the London correspondent) and The Egoist (of which he was the poetry editor). He befriended William Butler Yeats, who was twenty years his senior, and encouraged Yeats' turn away from romantic and symbolist poetic diction and towards poetic precision and colloquial language. Later, Pound publicized T.S. Eliot's poetry and edited the manuscripts of The Waste Land (1922), which Eliot dedicated to him as the better or best craftsman. He also worked to promote James Joyce's writing, and, although Pound's poetry is less often read than that of Yeats or Eliot, he was arguably the most influential poet in establishing the canon of modern poetry and in articulating its aims.

Although relatively short-lived, Imagism played an important role in introducing modernist sensibilities to English-language poetry. The American Amy Lowell joined the Imagists, and eventually took over the movement, publishing three further Imagist anthologies during the First World War. Lowell's popularity and her attraction to more traditional verse forms alienated Pound, who felt that the movement had lost its experimental edge and become feminized; he rechristened it "Amygism."

Between 1913 and 1916, Pound and Yeats shared a stone cottage in Sussex, where they studied occult lore, Chinese poetry, and Japanese Noh drama. Pound served as Yeats' secretary, and Yeats praised the younger man for helping him to "eliminate the abstract" from his poetry, although Pound learned much from Yeats too about how to write modern poetry.

During the early years of his collaboration with Yeats, Pound was still actively promoting Imagism and Vorticism. Even while he remained the impresario of the English avant-garde, however, Pound was preparing to undertake a more far-reaching revision of the English poetic tradition. As in his Imagist manifesto, Pound maintained his emphasis on the need for poems to use the language and rhythms of speech, rather than artificial poetic conventions. Although he rejected conventional poetic diction and meter, Pound was steeped in literary tradition. Early in his career, he wrote that "No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for

to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and cliché, and not from life, yet a man feeling the divorce of life and his art may naturally try to resurrect a forgotten mode if he finds in that mode some leaven, or if he think he sees in it some element lacking in contemporary art which might unite that art again to its sustenance, life."

Like other modernists, Pound here uses the antique-the forgotten mode-as a corrective to the sham traditions of the recent past. His major poem of the war years, the *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1917), translates and adapts passages from the writings of a difficult poet of the early Roman Empire into a modern American voice.

Pound and Yeats between them made a number of literary "discoveries" of authors living in relative obscurity whom they helped to catapult to leading positions in the modernist movement. Before the war, Yeats had championed the poetry of the Indian nationalist and mystic Rabindrinath Tagore and had assisted him in translating his poems from Bengali to English; Pound published Tagore's work in *Poetry*. With the help of Yeats and Pound, Tagore rapidly developed a huge European following and won the Nobel Prize in 1913, leading Pound to react against this popularity and include him among the "Blasted" in the 1914 issue of BLAST. Pound also took up the cause of Robert Frost, eleven years older than himself, but Frost rebuffed his efforts. Pound more successfully befriended two writers who later, with his help, would earn reputations as the central figures of English-language modernism, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce.

In 1917, Pound became the London editor of *The Little Review,* largely determining the content of this most influential of modernist publications and securing a regular place of publication for Joyce, Eliot, and Lewis in its pages. In 1920, he moved away from London to Paris. In 1924, he moved yet again, this time to Italy, where he would live for the next twenty years. Living in London, Paris, and Italy, Pound wrote some of the most challenging, beautiful poetry of the era, including his at times ribald, at times doleful *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) and one of his true masterpieces, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920).

Pound's epic, *The Cantos,* begun during the First World War but still incomplete at his death in 1972, shares some of the features of *The Waste Land,* but it shores its fragments on a much greater scale. (Canto VIII begins with a reference to Eliot: "These fragments you have shored (shelved).") It makes use of quotation and allusion to other poets in a method that somewhat resembles cubist collage, but at epic length. Pound combines borrowings from Homer, the Provencal poet Arnaut Daniel, the history of the Italian Renaissance, President John Adams, Robert Browning, and Chinese poetry (as interpreted by the scholar Ernest Fenollosa) with offbeat economic and social theories to relate what he calls "the tale of the tribe," that is, the intellectual life of the human race, exemplified in certain key historical or literary moments. The result, though tainted by Pound's anti-semitism and adoration of Mussolini, is, like The Waste Land or Ulysses, a major expression of the modernist ambition to bring the whole of world history to bear on the understanding of modern life and the remaking of poetic tradition. Pound called it an epic, "a poem including history," and it is also a poem shaped by history.

Pound's contributions to modernism are varied, from his early advocacy of the publication of Joyce's prose to his extensive editing and paring of Eliot's *The Waste Land* to his own manifestos and aesthetic pronouncements. Perhaps his most impressive achievement, however, is *The Cantos,* the epic poem that he worked on for the last fifty years of his life. Partially modeling this great work on the prior creations of Dante and Browning, Pound explored the spiritual quest of the poet in modern, apparently debased times. It stands, along with its creator, as one of the great symbols of modernist achievement.

As the earliest Modernist, T. S. Eliot had a central role in determining certain broad dictates of the movement. With fellow Modernist poet Ezra Pound, for example, he decided that "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together". By this, he almost certainly meant that true poetry is not only a creative expression of a poet's worldview, but that such expression had to be scientifically derived-another of his beliefs. He contended that poetry was the highest form of science and the

one most necessary to the generation that came after science had destroyed so many cities.

With these ideas in mind, Eliot and many other Modernist poets, such as Pound, William Carlos Williams, Dylan Thomas, and William Butler Yeats attempted to describe the world they saw before them in poetry, rather than transport their readers to a false world. Though they saw themselves as harshly realistic, their work might also be interpreted as incoherent or unnecessarily dark. Eliot, like the others, attributed the former to the incoherence of the times and the latter to the misconceptions of his critics. He described his mission as follows:

"What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike their own, an unreal world in which poetry can be spoken. What I should hope might achieved, by a generation of dramatists having the benefit of our experience, is that the audience should find, at the moment of awareness that it is hearing poetry, that it is saying to itself: "I could talk in poetry too!" Then we should not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, out own sordid, dreary, daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured." *(Poetry and Drama, 1951)*

1.7 Let Us Sum Up

Modernist poetry in English started in the early years of the 20th century with the appearance of the Imagists. In common with many other modernists, these poets wrote in reaction to the perceived excesses of Victorian poetry, with its emphasis on traditional formalism and ornate diction. In many respects, their criticism echoes what William Wordsworth wrote in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* to instigate the Romantic Movement in British poetry over a century earlier, criticizing the gauche and pompous school which then pervaded, and seeking to bring poetry to the layman.

Modernists saw themselves as looking back to the best practices of poets in earlier periods and other cultures. Their models included ancient Greek literature,

Chinese and Japanese poetry, the troubadours, Dante and the medieval Italian philosophical poets and the English Metaphysical poets.

Much of early modernist poetry took the form of short, compact lyrics. As it developed, however, longer poems came to the foreground. These represent the modernist movement to the 20th-century English poetic canon.

1.8 Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is not regarded a Georgian Poet?

   A. Hopkins

   B. W. H. Davies

   C. Walter de la Mare

   D. John Masefield

2. Who wrote 'When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating human experience'?

   A. T. S. Eliot

   B. F. R. Leavis

   C. I. A. Richards

   D. None of these

3. Who said, 'The twentieth century is still the nineteenth, although it may in time acquire its own character'?

   A. G. B. Shaw

   B. T. S. Eliot

   C. Ezra Pound

   D. None of these

4. For most of his poetry Yeats depended on the source of?

   A. The Irish legend and folklore poetry

   B. The Indian legend, magic and theosophy

   C. Both A and B

   D. None of these

5. 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold/ Mere anarchy is loos'd upon the earth' In which of the following do we come across these lines?

   A. No second Troy

   B. The Second Coming

   C. Adam's Curse

   D. None of these

6. The apparition of these faces in the crowd petals on a wet, black bough. These lines of Ezra Pound are unique for their quality of:

   A. Imagism

   B. Expressionism

   C. Existentialism

   D. Allusive Quality

7. Which of the following is 'a classicist in literature, royalist in politics and anglo-catholic in religion'?

   A. T. S. Eliot

   B. Ezra Pound

   C. M. Arnold

   D. W. B. Yeats

8. T. S. Eliot compares the evening to 'a patient etherized upon a table' by using the device of a conceit. In which poem do we come across this?

A. The Waste Land

B. Four quartets

C. The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock

D. None of these

9. What characteristics of seventeenth-century Metaphysical poetry sparked the enthusiasm of modernist poets and critics?

A. its intellectual complexity

B. its union of thought and passion

C. its uncompromising engagement with politics

D. Both A and B

10. Which best describes the imagist movement, exemplified in the work of T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound?

A. a poetic aesthetic vainly concerned with the way words appear on the page

B. an effort to rid poetry of romantic fuzziness and facile emotionalism, replacing it with a precision and clarity of imagery

C. an attention to alternate states of consciousness and uncanny imagery

D. the resurrection of Romantic poetic sensibility

Answer key: - 1 (A), 2(A), 3(B), 4(C), 5(B), 6(A), 7(A), 8 (C), 9 (D), 10 (B)

1.9 Examination Oriented Questions

1. Write an essay on the three literary movements: Georgian Poetry, Imagism and War poetry.

2. Comment on the significance of Yeats and Irish poetry in English literature.

3. Write a note on Ezra Pound as one of the shaping forces of modernism.

4. As the earliest Modernist, T. S. Eliot had a central role in determining certain broad dictates of the movement. Discuss.

1.10 Suggested Readings

1. Bayley, John. The Romantic Survival (London, 1958)

2. Brooks, Cleanth. Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill, 1939)

3. Daiches, David. Poetry and the Modern World (Chicago, 1940)

4. Leavis, F. R. New Bearings in English Poetry (rev.ed. London 1950)

5. MacNiece, Louis. Modern Poetry (Oxford 1938)

6. Pinto, V. de Sola. Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940 (London 1951)

7. Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry ed. Ian Hamilton (Oxford, 1994)


~~~
~~~

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 2**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-I**

THE POETRY OF THE THIRTIES AND AFTER

UNIT STRUCTURE:

2.1 Introduction

With the publication of *The Waste Land,* modernist poetry appeared to have made a breakthrough into wider critical discourse and a broader readership. However, the economic collapse of the late 1920s and early 1930s had a serious negative

impact on the new writing. For American writers, living in Europe became more difficult as their incomes lost a great deal of their relative value. While Gertrude Stein, Barney and Joyce remained in the French city, much of the scene they had presided over scattered. Pound was in Italy, Eliot in London, H.D. moved between that city and Switzerland, and many of the other writers associated with the movement were now living in the States.

The economic depression, combined with the impact of the Spanish Civil War, also saw the emergence, in the Britain of the 1930s, of a more overtly political poetry, as represented by such writers as W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender. Although these poets were nominally admirers of Eliot, they tended towards a poetry of radical content but with formal conservativeness. For example, they rarely wrote free verse, preferring rhyme and regular stanza patterns in much of their work.

2.2 Objectives

Putting the high modernist mode of the 1930s in the center, this lesson examines its lasting influence up to the present day. At the same time, it considers the rival tendency to recover the native English tradition wary of the Franco-American element in Modernism. Each decade seems to react against the poetic idiom of the previous one. The Irish and Welsh situations are also analyzed but in relation to the main stream.

2.3 1930s Modernism

Modernism in English remained in the role of an *avant garde* movement, depending on little presses and magazines and a small but dedicated readership. The key group to emerge during this time was the Objectivist poets, consisting of Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting and Lorine Niedecker. The Objectivists were admirers of Stein, Pound and Williams and Pound actively promoted their work. Thanks to his influence, Zukofsky was asked to edit a special Objectivist issue of the Chicago-based journal

Poetry in 1931 to launch the group. The basic tenets of Objectivist poetics were to treat the poem as an object and to emphasize sincerity, intelligence, and the poet's ability to look clearly at the world, and in this they can be viewed as direct descendants of the Imagists. Continuing a tradition established in Paris, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and Oppen went on to form the Objectivist Press to publish books by themselves and by Williams. In his later work, Zukofsky developed his view of the poem as object to include experimenting with mathematical models for creating poems, producing effects similar to the creation of a Bach fugue or a piece of serial music.

In the 1930s, some changes from the Pound-Eliot era became noticeable at once, especially in the circle of W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNiece. These poets turned against their predecessors' absorption in poetry as an autotelic art and were influenced by the stark contrast between their privileged public school upbringing and the specter of economic depression and Fascism in Europe. Their fight against Fascism not only centered on the Spanish Civil War but extended to sympathy for Marxism and the achievements of the Russian revolution. As the focus shifted out of literary tradition or myth into social and political commitment, the poets of the Thirties rejected the discontinuous and disjointed style in favor of a less obscure or gnarled idiom closer to native English speech. The concern for contemporary events was reinforced by the need for intelligibility and wider readership and the poets reverted towards more traditional syntax, meters and forms like the sonnet, the heroic couplet, *terza rima* and so on. Apart from Marx, Freud was an important influence in the poetry of W.H. Auden, the outstanding poet of the generation. In The Destructive Element, Stephen Spender also believed in the fusion of Marx and Freud. From his earliest volume of verse, Auden struck a remarkably individual note but always within a traditional framework. Even as the heroic and the modern are brought together, the imagery is ingeniously drawn by Auden from guerrilla warfare, ruined industry, railheads and frontiers. Using light verse, parody and the popular song, he was often successful in making the banal a vehicle of serious meaning.

Many of the new poets came from regions remote from the centers of metropolitan culture, and tended to identify themselves with the culture of the region

from which they came. Evidence for the strength of cultural regionalism in the late thirties can be seen in the magazines like *Wales*. The poets grew up in a period of uncertain (or sometimes all too certain and crude) critical values, and under the shadow of writers of the virtuosity of Auden or Dylan Thomas, who seemed to have cornered the contemporary scene. Before they had had time to develop their individualities, the war brought the world of the thirties to a dramatic end, and, in its turn, brought new and pressing demands. Almost as dramatically as it closed the thirties, the war itself ended to reveal in Britain an emerging welfare state' in a period of austerity under the menace of the atom bomb.

2.4 The Poetry of the Forties

When the 1940s arrived United Kingdom was at war, and a new generation of war poets appeared in response. These included Keith Douglas, Alun Lewis, Henry Reed and F. T. Prince. Many of these war poets owed something to the 1930s poets, but their work grew out of the particular circumstances in which they found themselves living and fighting.

The main movement in post-war 1940s poetry was the New Romantic group that included Dylan Thomas, George Barker, W. S. Graham, Kathleen Raine, Henry Treece and J. F. Hendry. These writers saw themselves as in revolt against the classicism of the New Country poets. They turned to such models as James Joyce, and helped their own poetry to emerge as a recognizable force.

Other significant poets to emerge in the 1940s include Lawrence Durrell, Bernard Spencer, Roy Fuller, Norman Nicholson, Vernon Watkins, R. S. Thomas and Norman McCaig. These last four poets represent a trend towards regionalism and poets writing about their native areas; Watkins and Thomas in Wales, Nicholson in Cumberland and MacCaig in Scotland.

The Apocalyptic Movement

The New Apocalyptics were a group of poets in the UK in the 1940s, taking their name from the anthology *The New Apocalypse* (1939), which was edited by

J. F. Hendry and Henry Treece. Their reaction against the political realism of much Thirties poetry drew for support upon D. H. Lawrence, surrealism, myth, and expressionism.

The Apocalyptic Movement or New Apocalypse were a group of poets in which were included writers such as J. F. Hendry and Henry Treece, which ones we could consider the fathers of the movement. But, we have to mention that Dylan Thomas was really in charge of the poetry of the movement. Some of the authors that rejected strict adherence to the movement were W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and C. Day Lewis.

James Findlay Hendry and Henry Treece were Scottish and British poets and writers that wrote together some poetry anthologies such as *The New Apocalypse* (1939); followed by the further anthologies *The White Horseman* (1941) and Crown and Sickle (1944). Henry Treece wrote also some critical studies, for example, one of Dylan Thomas, after which edition they both fell out because Thomas refused to sign up as a New Apocalyptic.

Dylan Thomas was a very important author in the 1940's, not because his writings developed towards or away from difficulty, but because it was liable to lean either way at any time, until it reached certain stability in his last poems. Thomas used to talk with hostility towards commcommon external opinions because he was a rebel and wanted to write as anyone had written before. This is one the characteristics he shares with Byron's poetry. But there are some more such as the non-answered questions that appear in his poems or problematic complexity in some bipolar tendencies and themes.

This post-Thomas manner, called New Apocalypse, was a 1930s phenomenon marginally attached at the end of the decade to a poetry which had been in production since 1933, in Thomas's hands, and a good deal earlier among the forces that influenced him.

This neo-romantic style in its extreme forms was unnecessarily involved and prolix, emphasizing the mysterious, mystical and subconscious. When it influenced a later generation of poets like Kathleen Raine and Edwin Muir it was fortunately divested of its violence. Much before the Fifties finally rejected such 'apocalyptic' fashions, the finest challenge to the excesses and defects of this style came perhaps from the poetry of Keith Douglas whose untimely death in the Second World War was a major loss to British poetry. Although his linguistic economy and compactness became an urgent vehicle of a controlled and unblurred vision of death and mutability, his poetry found true recognition in the Sixties.

2.5 The Poetry of the Fifties

The 1950s were dominated by three groups of poets, The Movement, The Group, and poets clarified by the term Extremist Art, which was first used by the poet A. Alvarez to describe the work of the American poet Sylvia Plath.

The Movement poets as a group came to public notice in Robert Conquest's 1955 anthology *New Lines*. The core of the group consisted of Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, D. J. Enright, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn and Donald Davie. They were identified with hostility to modernism and internationalism, and looked to Hardy as a model. However, both Davie and Gunn later moved away from this position.

As befits their name, the Group was much more formally a group of poets, meeting for weekly discussions under the chairmanship of Philip Hobsbaum and Edward Lucie-Smith. Other Group poets included Martin Bell, Peter Porter, Peter Redgrove, George MacBeth and David Wevill. Hobsbaum spent some time teaching in Belfast, where he was a formative influence on the emerging Northern Ireland poets including Seamus Heaney.

Other poets associated with Extremist Art included Plath's one-time husband Ted Hughes, Francis Berry and Jon Silkin. These poets are sometimes compared with the Expressionist German School. Hughes shattered the wry placidity of the

Movement with his very first volume of poems *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), reviving as it were, the Romantic concept of inspiration based in the instinctual and atavistic. His harsh, jagged and abrasive style rejected urban effects in favor of a turbulent energy and violence that at times go out of control.

A number of young poets working in what might be termed a modernist vein also started publishing during this decade. These included Charles Tomlinson, Gael Turnbull, Roy Fisher and Bob Cobbing. These poets can now be seen as forerunners of some of the major developments during the following two decades.

Despite the importance of Larkin as a poet, the Movement and its allies signaled a withdrawal into insular parochialism and elegance bordering upon triviality. The return to traditional modes and styles often concealed a decline in vigor, range, complexity and passion. As Kingsley Amis wrote in *Poets of the* 1950s (edited by D.J. Enright), 'Nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems'. In the same anthology, Philip Larkin, expressing his dislike of Mozart publicly, was more dismissive: he had no faith, he declared, in tradition or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets.

2.6 The Poetry of the Sixties

The sixties represented above all else a sense of freedom. Of course older poets continued to make valuable contributions. Auden produced his last significant collection, *Homage to Clio*,' Ted Hughes and Thom Gunn still had some years of great poetry ahead of them, Philip Larkin produced, in *The Whitsun Weddings,* his finest work, Betjeman continued to produce some excellent poems; and three poets who began publication in the fifties established themselves in the sixties. Nevertheless, it was a time characterized by freedom, experiment and an 'anything goes' attitude.

Geoffrey Hill, who started off writing some of the most full-blown romantic verse for many years, reinvented himself as a kind of English version of Rilke. His work became dense, taut, and almost inchoate in its obscurity. The quality of it is

beyond dispute, though his excessively obscure style has irritated many of his admirers.

Charles Tomlinson was influenced by both the French Symbolists and by William Carlos Williams. He, more than anyone else, brought Williams to the attention of British poets. Like Hill, his work is gifted, well-crafted but often seems rather insubstantial.

Jon Silkin, who began as a full-blooded romantic, turned to writing political poems. He too was talented but somehow managed to rarely hit the mark.

The sixties saw one of the last attempts to impose a poetic school in Britain, with the 'Group.' A much looser and less effective school than the Movement, the only significant poet to belong to it was Peter Redgrove, an archetypal neo-romantic who was also influenced by surrealism and Ted Hughes. He wrote some excellent lyrical poetry and was genuinely talented.

Sylvia Plath, a legatee of the 'confessional' tradition, settled in England after her marriage to Ted Hughes. Even as she wrote out of a strange kind of terror and despair she was able to approach, through her masterly control of language, the calm center of hysteria. Unlike Auden, she located her psychological crisis in a larger social and historical context, the equivocating anxieties of gender in a patriarchal society. From 1960 onwards, she was able to observe and analyze with unflinching honesty her imprisoned psyche, creating and exploring a surreal landscape specific to it. From her mingled response of fascinated terror of death she perilously extracted the heroic courage of liberation.

An equally dubious 'school' was so-called 'underground poetry,' which was a rag-bag description for almost any kind of poet who at least pretended to be anti-establishment. Most of them were neither particularly 'underground' nor modernist. The only poets who fitted reasonably well in that paradigm were Jeff Nuttall, Dave Cunliffe and Spike Hawkins. Hawkins is a fascinating and eccentric poet whose work deserves to be more widely known than it is; Cunliffe is a lyrical romantic

with a slight influence of surrealism; and Nuttall is a surrealist who was also influenced by Williams.

2.7 The Poetry of the Seventies

The 1970s was a time of major experiment in British poetry. Both in terms of the poetic 'establishment' and the 'fringe' the decade saw a big emphasis on new ways of writing, performing and presenting verse.

Bob Cobbing and various associates of his, particularly Eric Mottram, managed to take over the Poetry Society in the early 70s and turned its formerly rather traditional magazine, *Poetry Review*, into a flagship publication for modernist and experimental poets.

In opposition to the Cobbing/Mottram axis, which modestly described itself as the 'British Poetic Revival' - as if there had been no significant writing during the fifties and sixties - there arose two main foci of opposition. The first were a group of poets primarily orientated towards the Movement and the second were a much looser crowd who were primarily associated with the performance poetry movement of the period.

The late sixties also saw three poets from Northern Ireland emerging into prominence. The best known of them is Seamus Heaney. He is a fine 'formalist.' Derek Mahon was another poet much more of a lyricist than Heaney. Stewart Parker is a very raw talent who erupted on to the scene with his powerful poems. Sadly, he never fulfilled his early promise but the quality of his first collection is beyond dispute.

Performance poetry, though hardly invented in the seventies, exploded during that era. Some of the best and most interesting performers arose out of the Troubadour Coffee House in the Earl's Court region of West London. As well as the regular Monday night sessions, the Troubadour also hosted folk and jazz evenings and the Black Voices poetry group, of which the best poets were Mahmood Jamal,

Cecil Rajendra and Adel Hamadi. In spite of its name, two white poets were allowed to perform at Black Voices once, David Sheen and Michael FitzGerald.

As well as the Troubadour-orientated axis of poets, a more 'Movement' style group of poets frequented the Wednesday evening sessions at the Poetry Society, called *Poetry Round*. Their leading lights were Michael Brereton, who aspired to write like Ezra Pound but lacked the talent to do so successfully; Malcolm Peltu, a South African exile who wrote light verse and ended up working as a computer writer for the *New Scientist*; Roger Chinery, an archetypal post-Movement type of poet, very skilful at what he did; and James Sutherland Smith, perhaps the most gifted poet associated with the Round.

By the mid-seventies the *Troubadour/Poetry Round* axis had become dissatisfied with the present structure of poetry in Britain and set up a short-lived but briefly successful body called the *London Poetry Co-operative.* This managed to unite most of the non-establishment poetry groups within London and a few outside it and even to put on a festival showing off the talents of most of the poets involved. Then it broke up, perhaps because its ambitions had always been too unrealistic, and many of the individual groups involved folded as well.

2.8 Poetry since 1977

1977 marks the defeat of the 'avant-garde' and linguistically innovative grouping of poets at the Poetry Society (at that time the premier organization of poetry in the UK). In 1977 Eric Mottram left the editorship of the *Poetry Review* and Bob Cobbing was forced out of the Poetry Society under suspicion of financial impropriety and managerial incompetence. For most of the 1970s prior to that Eric Mottram and Bob Cobbing between them had done their utmost to support young poets, innovation and radical experimentation, in London and elsewhere, and their ethos and practice were marked both by the influence of American modernism (especially from the Black Mountain poets) as well as the European neo-avant garde. Peter Barry's new book The *Poetry Wars,* forthcoming from Salt, deals with this episode in British literary history in great detail.

1977 also represents the beginning (as far as poetry is concerned) of the post-1968 right-wing backlash, later leashed on a national scale in 1979 with 18 years of Thatcherite corporate-authoritarianism (immediately followed by the false dawn of Blairite corporate-authoritarianism). Thus began a long retrenchment for British poetry along market-lead, neo-con, publisher-driven lines stemming from the neo-Movement position adopted by the new Poetry Society management and the sudden purge of non-conformist poets and poetry from all public space (Roy Fisher and Lee Harwood stayed on a little later than the others, but not for long).

This was a return to form. The immediate post-war situation in British poetry was equally bleak, suffering from the long winter of the Movement (represented in particular by the likes of Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, D J Enright, John Wain and Elizabeth Jennings and beginning around 1950). After 1977, it was Larkin's spawn in the shape of Craig Raine and the Martian set, which includes the poet laureate Andrew Motion, who have ruled the roost with an iron (and distinctly Tory, conservative) fist. On both occasions this conservative retrenchment into the narrowest confines of tradition has been disastrous for poetry in Britain. Genuinely energetic, innovative and modernist poetry (such as that represented in Italy by I Novissimi in the 1960s, for example) was largely squeezed out of large-circulation magazines, publishing houses, and most other public spaces where it might otherwise have found an audience.

The obvious result has been that since 1977 there has been a huge reduction in the number of good poets being published, a dwindling number of opportunities for wider publication, a slowdown in the rate at which poets respond to other trends in the arts, and a general malaise and feeling of ennui that took root in the 1980s: a decade to survive rather than one to flourish in, at least as far as the UK is concerned (the idiom of Language poetry was busy generating new work in the USA, although by 1980, even there, the US equivalent of the neo-avant garde had seen its best days). Nevertheless, below the surface of Thatcherism, a new generation of young poets was making huge steps to reinvigorate British poetry, while the veterans of the wars in the 70s maintained their practice largely out of sight, waiting

for the tide to change once more in their favor. So, towards the end of the decade momentum was building up once again, to the point where it was possible for John Muckle (later Iain Sinclair) to edit a major series of works published by Paladin: Grafton Books, including the major anthology *The new British poetry* (1988) containing work by a host of younger writers, as well as important retrospective volumes of more established poets from the 1960s and 1970s whose careers had taken a downturn in the 1980s. These include Tom Raworth's *Tottering State* (1988), Lee Harwood's *Crossing* the *Frozen River* (1988) and the three-poet selection *Tempers of Hazard* (1993) featuring Barry MacSweeney, Chris Torrance and Thomas A Clark. This last came right at the end of this Paladin-led revival. Rupert Murdoch took over the press and his accountants advised him to pulp all non-profit making titles.

Since this false start at the beginning of the 1990s, however, a number of new features became conspicuous in what must still be considered the tradition of 'linguistically innovative' poetry, to use the descriptive term employed by Robert Sheppard in his book *Far Language* (1999), among others. Ulli Freer (who started working back at the end of the 1960s) continued to produce highly charged, condensed and vituperative anti-lyrics, a style that continued in another form with the Zukofsky-inspired work of Adrian Clarke, with its word-based line measure, and consequent syntactic breakdown. The freshest lyrical voice to come from the 1980s, and emerge fully mature in the 1990s, was Maggie O'Sullivan, whose ur-languages literally come into being on the page, individual words, syllables and sound-fragments verbalized and set in motion, making the poem the site of powerful transformations. Vigorous counter-currents were attested in London, Cambridge, and the North-East of England in particular, each with their own regional peculiarities.

Basil Bunting had already laid down a specifically North-Eastern modernism in Durham and Newcastle in the 1960s (he was one of the original modernists of the 1930s with close links to Pound, Zukofksy and Niedecker in particular). Throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s this modernist renaissance has been continued by colleagues, and now their students and disciples: of especial note is the late

Richard Caddell, but Colin Simms' poetry of the wilderness and its wildlife should also be noted here (with its suggestion of a radical pastoral poetry, that could only come from this far northern province of England), as well as Tom Pickard's.

Poetry from Cambridge has been marked, in particular, by the glittering surfaces of its language, its use of non-poetical discourse in the body of the poem (e.g. bureaucratic, financial or scientific languages and registers), its ability to mix high modernism with lyric and metrical formality, and ultimately its ability to use all these features in savage critiques of ideology, state power, and the language that is in their service.

There have been at least three generations of Cambridge poets since J. H. Prynne, Tim Longville, John Riley, and Michael Grant set the ball rolling. Of note since have been Andrew Crozier, Peter Riley, Denise Riley, John James, Wendy Mulford, David Chaloner, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, John Wilkinson, and now emerging in the 2000s are the exceptional poets Keston Sutherland, Andrea Brady, Marianne Morris, Stuart Calton and Jow Lindsay.

For several decades Bob Cobbing also presided over some of the most exciting poetry, publishing and performance work of the Twentieth century in Britain, making London (once again) the true hub of British poetry. His was a career marked by numerous, shifting, collaborations, producing strange and wonderful fruit: first with Jeff Nuttall, but then with a host of other artists, some famous, some less so, including the monumental sequence Domestic Ambient Noise (DAN) written with Lawrence Upton, who now maintains Cobbing's press Writers Forum, and the workshop associated with it. Upton is one of the very few still producing exciting and challenging new sound and concrete poetry, as well as remarkable lyric poetry. The latest generation of poets to have sat at the feet of Cobbing, the master, includes Jeff Hilson, Doug Jones, Chris Paul, Aodhán McCardle, Stephen Mooney, Piers Hugill and Sean Bonney, whose fiery political diatribes and caustic lyrics somehow summarize the achievements of the London poets with apocalyptic genius.

Miniature foci have also come into existence at some London universities.

Redell Olsen has been extremely influential in bringing ideas of performance in poetry, and mixed media approaches, to a wider audience, as well as doing a great deal of work to make younger female poets better known. Other key poets in the London orbit (although not all of them from London) are Robert Sheppard and Patricia Farrell, Harry Gilonis and Elizabeth James, Tim Atkins, Mike Weller and Peter Jaeger.

One of the youngest veterans of 1977 is Cris Cheek, who like Bergvall, has done more than anyone to expand the possibilities of what poetry can be as both a performative and technological art-form. Much of his early work was inspired by a combination of Cobbing's influence at his Writers Forum workshop and press, and visiting the USA in the mid 1970s when Language poetry was taking off. This cocktail has proven explosive and there are few poets with a more exuberant and fully thought-through perfomance style, or with a wider understanding of the possibilities of stretching a reader's resources. Other inspirations have been the talk poems of David Antin and Steve Benson. In the last few years Cris has worked with both Sianed Jones and Kirsten Lavers on a number of multi-media projects, most notoriously as TNWK (Things Not Worth Keeping), which mix writing, performance art, handicrafts, film and installation art in extravagant and luscious hybrids.

Having looked at the regional make-up of the contemporary poetry scene in the UK, it might also be worthwhile considering some aspects of genre and the current areas of interest that are exciting and motivating younger poets. The following are a list of some of the features that seem conspicuous in current poetry:

Techniques of fast cutting and montage inherited from an interest in cinema: This also relates to an interest in American modernism, both of the New York School type as well as the poets associated with the Black Mountain College. This is especially prevalent in the older generation of poets, who began writing in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Lee Harwood, Tom Raworth and Roy Fisher.

An interest in contemporary music: At least in London this has tended to mean

a close association with the free improvisation scene, as well as with Electronica to a lesser extent. Of most note in this respect are the Esemplastic Tuesday sessions organized by Out to Lunch (Ben Watson), a student of Prynne's at Cambridge, held at the Royal College of Art. These combine free drawing, free improvisation in music and radical poetry. OTL often plays back sessions on Resonance FM, London's only experimental radio station.

Despite a common ancestry in concrete poetry and text-sound scores among many on the London scene, there has been a tendency to combine the lessons learned from these earlier forms in either multi-media performance, or as elements within more textual or even lyrical writing. That said, a few years ago Andres Anwandter and Martin Gubbins, both from Santiago in Chile, brought a Latin American high modernism to London, that still employed sound and concrete in a very fresh and invigorating way, thus amounting to a mini-renaissance of these forms.

One interesting feature of the poets who are emerging in this first decade of the twenty-first century has been the playfulness with which they have adopted older registers and forms in poetry and made them new. Thus there appears to be a case for a radical pastoral poetry with Jeff Hilson's use of bird-lore and other 'folk' elements in his short lyrics (as with Tim Atkins' Folklore), a latter-day Romantic mysticism below the brooding urban surfaces of Doug Jones' powerful work, and a Blakean derangement and revolutionary political anguish in Bonney's sensational rantings. Hilson, for example edited an anthology of experimental and radical sonnets, a form, it appears, still widely used by many poets in Britain. There has always been an interest in Augustan poetics (the end of the 17th C and the first half of the 18th C, the key poets of which are Dryden and Pope) at Cambridge, stemming from the influence (benign or malign as taste dictates) of F R Leavis and later Donald Davie and C H Sisson, and this is no less the case now. Simon Jarvis produced a monumental 300 page lyric, *The Unconditional* (2005), which investigates form and tradition in a way rarely seen on such a scale, and which must prove devastating to the trivial whimsy of the New Formalist reaction.

Another distinctive feature of London poetry especially, has been an abiding interest in the city as place, and London as locus of attention, history, political and spiritual intrigue, and of paranoia. Charles Olson, especially his *Maximus Poems*, made a huge impact on poets in the UK. Later when Ed Dorn came to Britain he brought with him an even sharper, more politically realist geopoetics, as manifested in work such as *The North Atlantic Turbine*. Prynne was an early admirer of Olson and his The White Stones collection of 1969 is heavily indebted to both with its observations regarding huge-scale geological and historico-cultural phenomena, as witnessed in, for example, *The Glacial Question, Unsolved*

Throughout the 1970s Allen Fisher produced a major series of poems known collectively as Place (republished in its entirety in 2005): as with Olson and Gloucester, Massachusetts, Fisher focuses on London and its history, landscape, rivers, trade, agitation and unrest, and population changes, to demonstrate the relation between all these and the present state of things, with all that that implies politically. An analogous project was undertaken by Iain Sinclair with his works *Lud Heat* (1975) and *Suicide Bridge* (1979), with what Sean Bonney has called a sense of 'paranoid realism', mixing prose and poetry in a crazed and obsessive tale of his journeys round 'underground' London sites, in search of the hidden truth behind the city, always finding even stranger answers. These traditions have survived, and Sean Bonney has written some excoriating psycho geographical 'documents' about travelling round London, hounded by oppression, rage, war and despair. Stephen Mooney has begun what promised to be a major project tracking gay subculture round the London Underground's District Line, with a similarly paranoid snarling and rage just beneath the surface, and Chris Paul has produced some equally intoxicating accounts of life on the margins of the biggest city in Europe.

Another distinctive feature of the new poetry from the 1960s onwards has been the development of innovative performance styles and an increased awareness of the importance of the poet's voice as an instrument in its own right. In London especially, this has led to the development of very personal styles of performing. Of especial note are Ulli Freer's incantatory readings. He always begins with some brief spectacle; whether it be playing some 'house' music and dancing round the

room, or folding and unfolding a large sheet of metallic paper to the sound of tribal chants; either way, whatever he does breaks open a space in which the audience feels compelled to listen to him, as he reads his poems swaying backwards and forwards, his voice modulating rapidly as he scans across the short lines of his verse. Adrian Clarke has learned a lot from Freer's techniques and is just as likely to perform his ultra-modernist poems with an exaggeratedly emphatic rhythm, assisted by the fact the his poems tend to be written on the basis of the number of words rather than syllables to the line, creating a syncopated, bee-bop feel that he does nothing to discourage. The absolute master of performance, however, has got to be Brian Catling, who creates films, and performance installations, where he can maintain a performance for hours at a time, and for days in a row. As with Maggie O'Sullivan, also a stunning performer of poetry in her own right, Catling makes use of the poet's shamanic inheritance, introducing elements of fear, pain and haunting into his poetry and performances, which can be unnerving as well as hysterically funny at times. It is true to say now that any poet performing in London is going to have to at least deal with performance issues to get an audience interested in their work. The belief is still held by many that a poem only really exists once it has been voiced. Other younger poets have really taken the performance idiom seriously, and Cris Cheek, Caroline Bergvall, and performance groups like *London under Construction,* and the students of Redell Olsen, among others, have made performance itself a serious site of poetic creation in improvisation and live on-site manipulation of language.

Perhaps strangely, digital technology has also been implicated closely with new performance practices. If nothing else is entirely unique in contemporary British poetry, one thing that perhaps is the degree to which the performance of poetry has been hybridized with various new media and technologies. 'Performance Writing' as a concept in itself, implies technologies of writing and the way the very process of writing becomes performative through the mediation of new technology. The place of the poet, their body, their voice, and their relations to others are all investigated in the performance traditions emanating from Dartington and Royal Holloway. If it is clear that the use of new media became central to the poetic practices of many poets throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, it is natural that an extension of this

into the 1990s and 2000s is the employment of ever newer digital and electronic media; in particular the extraordinary capacity for the internet to process and store information, and the huge amounts of power now available in laptops, utilizable in live, improvised, and semi-improvised performance. Instant generativity and interactivity have opened up the possibilities for poets to extend their work in inter- and hybrid media, beginning perhaps in the early 1980s, and even to expand the social and collective participation in poetry both in performance, as well as in the forms of mass composition that hypertext and code make possible. John Cayley is the single most important British artist (actually a Canadian by birth) to work with digitial poetics, organized E-Poetry 2005 in London with the American poet Loss Pequeño Glazier, bringing the leading light of international digital poetry and demonstrating the peculiarities of the British focus on performance and performativity rather than programming code. Lawrence Upton, Bob Cobbing's erstwhile collaborator has also done very important work in this area.

It is probably too early to say whether the possibilities that have emerged with ever greater access to digital technologies will lead to fundamental changes in poetry, or whether, as with the typewriter, they will simply be absorbed and become just one more item in the writer's toolkit. We would suspect the latter, and already the concept of a specific genre of digital poetry seems to be weakening, as the use of new technologies, and even knowledge of advanced programming, becomes commonplace.

2.9 Let Us Sum Up

In this lesson you have learnt about the history of modern British poetry from the 1930s to the present age. You have seen how the search for precision and economy along with irony dominates the modernist movement. Political commitment or social reporting, neo-romanticism and assertion of Englishness are some of the other interwoven themes.

2.10 Multiple Choice Questions with Answers

1. Which of the following writers did not come from Ireland?

   A. W. B. Yeats

   B. James Joyce

   C. Seamus Heaney

   D. none of the above; all came from Ireland

2. Which poet could be described as part of "The Movement" of the 1950s?

   A. Thom Gunn

   B. Dylan Thomas

   C. Pablo Picasso

   D. Philip Larkin

3. In the 1930s, younger writers such as W. H. Auden were more _____ but less _____ than older modernists such as Eliot and Pound.

   A. popular; reverenced

   B. brash; confident

   C. radical; inventive

   D. anxious; haunting

4. Why did 'Poetry Quarterly' cease publication in 1953?

   A. Owner convicted of fraud

   B. Fall in Sales

   C. Rise in taxation on magazines

   D. Shortage of paper

5. When did 'The Cambridge school' emerge?

A. The 1900's

B. The 1960's

C. The 1920's

D. The 1930's

6. What kind of poetry did Sassoon and Brooke write?

A. Light verse

B. Romantic

C. Political satire

D. War poems

7. Which American poetess was Ted Hughes married to?

A. Carolyn Kizer

B. Mary Oliver

C. Sylvia Plath

D. Marianne Moore

8. How old was Rupert Brooke at the time of his death?

A. 24

B. 31

C. 21

D. 28

9. How did W. H. Auden describe poetry?

A. An awful way to earn a living

B. A game of knowledge

C. The soul exposed

D. An explosion of language

10. By which exhibition was the magazine 'Contemporary Poetry and Prose' inspired?

A. The Festival of Britain

B. The Surrealist Exhibition

C. People of the 20th Century

D. Drawing the 20th Century

Answers: 1. D, 2. D, 3.C, 4. A, 5. B, 6. D, 7. C, 8. D, 9. B, 10. B.

2.11 Examination Oriented Questions

1. Write short notes on:

(a)The poetry of social reporting

(b)Confessional poetry

(c)Neo-romanticism

(d)The rejection of modernism

(e)The Movement

(f)The Group

(g)The theme of energy and imagery of violence

2. What do you understand by Objectivist Poetics?

3. Show your acquaintance with the Apocalyptic Movement.

4. The sixties represented above all else a sense of freedom. Discuss.

5. Enumerate some of the features that seem conspicuous in current poetry in the UK.

6. What do you understand by Performance Writing?

2.12 Suggested Readings

Alvarez, A. The Shaping Spirit (London, 1958)

Brooks, Cleanth. Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel hill, 1939)

Daiches David. Poetry and the Modern World (Chicago, 1940)

Fraser, G. S. The Modern Writer and His World (London, 1953)

Leavis, F. R. New Bearings in English Poetry (rev. ed. London, 1950)

MacNiece, Louis. Modern Poetry (Oxford, 1938)

Contemporary Poets ed. James Vinson (London, 1975)

Great Writers of the English Language: Poets ed. James Vinson (London, 1979)

Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry ed. Ian Hamilton (Oxford, 1994)

~~~
~~~

W. B. YEATS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

3.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to provide a broad view of Yeats's early life and his poetic career. It also focuses on the main source of inspiration and influences both political and personal on his distinctive writing.

3.2 Yeats and the Irish Revolution

As an Irish poet W.B. Yeats was associated, directly and indirectly, with the Irish political and literary revolutions. In a way, both came up around the same time, in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Irish political leaders of the day abandoned their efforts to bring about reforms within the British Parliament. They decided instead to rouse the nationalist enthusiasm among the Irish people, which finally prepared the way for Home Rule. As early as 1830, Trinity College, Dublin, had become a centre of political and literary activities. The pioneering work of

arousing the nationalist fervour was carried out by the *Dublin University Magazine* (founded in 1833). The contributors to the Magazine formed a group called "Young Ireland," which had for part of its programme the stimulation of patriotism by rousing interest and pride in the national past, especially the Irish legend, lore and literature. As a result, antiquarians, philologists, and historians advanced to the forground of the national scheme, Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-1886), a Gaelic scholar, made known to the reading public the cycle of epic legends of deeds of Cuchulain and the lores of Deirdre. Then followed *Lays of the Western Gael* (1865), *Congal* (1872), and *Deirdre* (1880), all by Sir Ferguson, also an original poet, which restored to the general consciousness these monuments of the heroic past.

Another important contributor to the promotion of the Irish Renaissance was Douglas Hyde who lived to become President of the Irish Free State. He exercised great influence as a folklorist, editor, translator, and writer of original poetry in Gaelic. His *Literary History of Ireland* (1899) did a good deal to advance the cause of Irish literature to be judged independently of English literature. Around the same time appeared also an anthology of *Poems and Ballads* of Young Ireland (1888). The editor of this anthology was W.B Yeats (1865-1939), who was at that time in the early years of his career as poet. A child of Irish Protestantism and the son of an Irish painter, Yeats was born in Dublin, but his childhood was passed in London except for the vacations which he spent in the west of Ireland. The young poet's early attempts at poetic drama were in the nature of false start.

3.3 W. B. Yeats's Poetic Carrier

The first poem of W.B Yeats that still matters is *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), the volume with which the Irish Literary Revival attained full self-consciousness. Although littered with modern political ideas, the volume is marked by the other-wordly atmosphere, by the Gaelic theme of the pagan who relates at St. Patrik his adventures in fairyland, and is overlaid with stylistic ornament reminiscent of Spenser, Shelley and William Morris. The poem's design also owes something to Keats's *Endymion*. Although in succeeding years Yeats remained a member of the coterie of poets and aesthetes in London, he was rather impatient to find a fresh tradition and an individual style. His individual style is quite evident in the poetic

plays that followed, where there is very little that can be called derivative from English sources. These plays include *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894). Nor is there anything derivative in the lyrics and balled-pieces that accompanied the former. Typical of Yeats's early poetry are the qualities of delicate light rimes (frequently off-rimes and assonances), the insubstantial rhythms, and the vague outlines.

The aesthetic theory of the separation of art from life, which Yeats was later to repudiate, is implicit in his early poems. The characteristic feature that distinguishes the poetry of this phase is also the exploitation of the strange and the intense, the tone of spiritual weariness ("the soul with all its maladies"). In fact, these qualities are typical more of the milieu and the time than the poet.

Yeats's poems were collected in 1895, but for several years he was primarily occupied with prose. The contrast between the simple fairy-lore of *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) and the difficult occultism of *The Secret Rose* (1897) is a measure of his advance during these years. The studies which resulted in his edition of Blake's *Works* (1893) strengthened his interest in symbolism. At a later date, a meeting with Mallarme (a French poet) and association with Arthur Symons (the man who brought symbolism from France to England) confirmed Yeats's acceptance of the doctrine of the French Symbolists. The influence of the French school and of Maeterlinck (also a French symbolist) is apparent in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), a new collection of Yeats's poems. Some of the early symbols in Yeats's poetry, especially those drawn from the natural world, are simple enough. One of these symbols, the moon, stands for weariness (as often in Shelley), water for the fleetingness of beauty, and the rose, repeatedly, for the principle of Eternal Beauty. The life of ecstatic reverie, hidden from the world, is suggested by the image of the veil. A real treasury of symbolism was, however, to become available to Yeats in Irish mythology, which was hitherto unused in English poetry. The clues to these symbols are not always readily available, nor the precise significance of some of the figures. Fairyland itself - the country of the Sidhe, the Irish fairy-folk - is itself a symbol of the imagination. Set against the world of the imagination is the naturalistic, scientific world, sometimes symbolized by Yeats in hostile allusions to Huxley or Tydall.

In the middle phase of Yeats's career as poet takes place his drift towards actuality, the contemporary world of politics and industry. One can even notice an influence of Ibsen's problem plays. Also, not withstanding the poet's aloofness, there came the influence of Irish politics. He could not have escaped the influence of his environment, in which fierce nationalist struggle was going on - the less so because he fell in love with the fiery nationlist, Maud Gonne. In 1899, Yeats and Lady Gregory founded the Irish National Theatre Society, which was presently housed in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory (1859-1932) was a powerful influence upon the entire Irish movement. Her exploration of folklore and legend are recorded in various volumes. But his chief contribution was in the drama. She collaborated with Yeats in *The Unicorn from the Stars* (1908) and other plays. Of her own comedies, some are in one act, others full-length. *The Rising of the Moon* and The *Workhouse Ward* are perhaps her best, which show her deft craftsmanship and economy of means. Yeats's energetic activity during the formative, combative period of the Abbey Theatre had a profound effect upon him as a poet, although drama was not the appropriate medium for his imagination. His *Plays For an Irish Theatre* (1904) are far more study than the dramatic fairy fantasies of his youth. The best of these plays is *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (performed 1902), in which beneath the dramatization of a story of 1798 there lurks the lure of symbolic nationalism. In other plays, subjects are taken from the heroic sagas, as in the tragic *Deirde* (1907). Later, Yeats was occupied with obscure and difficult abstractions in which he made use of dancers, musicians, and masked actors. These pieces, for which he derived suggestions from the *Noh* plays of Japan, were collected as *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921).

For a time during the middle phase of his poetic career Yeats seemed to be less dependent upon symbolism. *In the Seven Woods* (1904) and *The Green Helmet* (1910), the latter a reworking of an earlier play in prose, are hard and dry in manner. Yet, concurrently with his substitution of lively and homely detail for the dreamy vagueness of background in his renderings of Irish myths, his studies became, during this middle period, increasingly esoteric. The symbolism, that he evolved, is extremely difficult. No doubt, at times Yeats drew upon traditional and hence, easily intelligible sources (such as Plato), but he enquired also into astrology, theosophy,

the phenomena of clairvoyance, oriental speculation, and various hermetic writings. At the time he was also engaged in writing *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (1915) and *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), which were afterwards combined into one text entitled *Autobiographies* (1926). In this prose book he came to use events from his own life as symbols (for his poetry) that are often private and obscure to the extent of incommunicability. As a result, he had to increasingly rely upon prose comments appended to the poems. In Yeats's later work, there are quite often multiple connotations, which are not effectively communicable. Some of these symbols, such as the cat-headed figures, are utterly uncouth.

3.4 Yeats and Mysticism

Yeats was profoundly interested in, and disturbed by, reports of mystic experience; but though he would have liked to be one, he never a genuine mystic. The theory of the "Arth Memory," which, he held in common with his friend A.E. (who, however, held it with sincere conviction) is in Yeats not more than a literary in *A Vision* (Privately printed in 1926), with its exposition of the Fool, and with its great show of screat gnosis, in this pseudo-mystic erudition, one detects something of shame. In fact, Yeats himself once admitted that the document was perhaps no more than metaphors for poetry, "a painted scene." There was, for sure, a core of rationalism in Yeats's nature. Nevertheless, though at bottom he remained unconvinced, these speculations provided for him the wonderful contrasts conveyed in his verse between the pagan world and the Catholic, between the natural and the supernatural, between the transient and the abiding. The sence of the conflict between soul and body, Being and Becoming, is suggested with greastest depth and splendour in Yeats's best-known poem, *Sailing to Byzantium.*

A reaction from what Yeats considered the sentiment of his early poetry was sometimes pushed to the extreme of sheer brutality. It took the form of substituting for the old suggestiveness the precise, hard-hitting world. He felt dissatisfied because formerly he separated his imagination from life; yet he was deeply dissatisfied with life itself- "this pragmatical pig of world." This is expressed with terrible and prophetic force in various poems, notably *The Second Coming* where some readers have detected a prediction of the world catastrophe which came about in the year of his death – 1939. The reference here is to World War II, which began in 1939

and ended in 1945, causing world-wide distinction and devastation, counting for several million deaths and many times more rendered homeless. Yeats seemed to abandon the effort to give, through his art, order to a chaotic world. From *The Tower* (1928) onward, humour, sarcasm, scorn, audacity, and a most unexpected sensuality mark his poetry of the final phase. He resisted and resented the on-coming of old age. In his latest poems, there is at once a passionate regret for the passing of the passionate experiences of youth and at the same time an indignant remoteness from the world. The gyre, the spiral, and the winding stair are constantly recurring symbols of the cyclic philosophy, which he had evolved from reading and from life.

As is clear from the development of Yeats as a poet, the affinities of temperament played an important part in shaping his ideas on life and art. These affinities exercised a secret magnetism on the rich fund of suggestions stored in the ancient spirit of Ireland. He extracted from it all that could be harmonized with the delicacy of a subtle art. More than the work of any other Irish writer, Yeats's poetry is thoroughly steeped in the imaginative mysticism which, as we gather, is the essential attribute of Celticism. The deepest roots of this mysticism are in the old traditions of Ireland. No doubt, its inspiration derives strong nourishment from the racy sap of the soil. But it equally draws on foreign and distant influences. India and (what the west characterizes) its pantheism come in for a growing share in it; and French symbolism has been more and more responsible for the general manner of its expression. Yeats's poetry in its later phase, however, became more and more intellectual, possessing, at the same time, precious gifts of nature. It showed the ability to raise with words the spell of a mysterious atmosphere, as to how to efface the outlines of material objects in a dreamy mistiness, and how to draw the most aerial and spare images upon this tin-grey background, in the style of a Japanese print. A laboured and occasionally obscure reflection, with intentions and studied effects, since the time of his first collections of verse, too often veiled those fugitive and charming glimpses. Yeats's own note, and the most striking, can be seen in the Ossian – like evocations, intensified by all the modern science of inexpressible (*The Wanderings of Oisin*), and in the ethereal grace of his early poems.

Yeats's dramas, too, derive their life from the same lyricism of his imagination. Their value does not lie in the action or the characters. Their beauty arises from a tragic or tender symbolism, through which are dimly seen the features of sentiment and of reverie, or those of heroism and suffering, which Single in the moral figure of Ireland. *The Land of Heart's Desire,* a minor masterpiece, in which the wistful aspiration for the beyond, the eternal restlessness of unsatisfied hearts, are crystallized in a pure allegory; *Cathleen in Hoolihan,* in which the symbol rises to the breadth and poignant force of a patriotic emotion, remains the highest achievements of this series of plays.

3.5 Yeats as a Poet

Remaining all along his life a conscious and truth-loving mind, Yeats proved a penetrating analyst in poetizing life-experience in his compositions. One can see how he tends to loose the complexes of temperaments and the complexities of values through the suppleness of his intuitions; how he disentangles and classifies their shades by means of his lucid intelligence. One can clearly see how he remains the poet in his judgments, and one whole side of his nature made him akin to the school of critics moulded by the influence of the Elizabethans. His varied work remains an example as a transitional work between the literary ideal of Romanticism and that of Modernism. Between these two ideals, showing traces of both, he maintained, as Eliot recognized in his funeral lecture on the death of Yeats, his unique sense of impersonality within the presence of an individual personality. No wonder he called himself one of the last Romantics, and yet the promoters of Modernism like F.R. Leavis included him among the leading poets of the Modernist movement.

The entire poetry of W.B. Yeats, as F.R. Leavis, in his *New Bearings in English Poetry,* remarks, is a sort of running commentary on the changing relation between him and Maud Gonne. Yeats's never-dying love for the firy nationalist (Maud Gonne) remained, no doubt, a one-sided affair. But it kept his poetic spirit ignited all along his career as a writer, enthusing it with new fuel at every turning of the winding-stair-like course of his life. Maud Gonne, too, was conscious of her contribution to the making of Yeats a great poet. As she once said, the world should

be grateful to her that she did not marry him, indicating that it was owing to her refusal to oblige him that he rose to become a great poet. Yeats, too, acknowledged the force that Maud Gonne became in motivating him to express his anguish in poetry. In fact, the love for Maud become for Yeats the same force that Beatrics was for Dante, or Laura was for Petrarch, or Fanny Brawne was for Keats. Like Beatrice, Maud moved Yeats from *Inferno,* through *Purgatory,* to *Paradiso*. The three phases of his poetry – the early, the middle and the later – can be compared, in terms of his spiritual development, to the three stages of Dante's spiritual journey described in his Christian epic, *Divine Commedia.* One can also see fulfilled in the poetry of Yeats the Aristotelian ideal of literature in which history and philosophy, or particular and universal, stand harmoniously blended.

THE POEMS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

4.1 Objectives

The six poems of W.B. Yeats meant for special study are all from his later phase. It is in this phase that he was at the peak of his poetic career, producing the most mature poems, which earned him the status of the major artist of the Modern Age. In this chapter three major poems by Yeats are discussed along with the text of the poem. The objective of two lesson is to provide the distance learner an idea of Yeats's poetic style.

4.2 The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" is a short poem that blisters with apocalyptic ominousness. Its first line, "turning and turning in the widening gyre," locates the whole poem inside an expanding gyre, or spiral, making it clear that something is moving and changing, and the world will never be the same.

The poem's second line zooms from that gigantic, unclear beginning straight into a very specific and symbolic image—the falcon, which has lost touch with its falconer. This line essentially implies that the "falcon," which likely represents humanity, has

become detached from its "falconer," some sort of controller or holder that once kept it in order. Now the falcon is roaming free.Lines three through six describe collapse and turmoil, a dissolution of order and a rising tide of violence and revolution without cause. Innocence and rituals celebrating purity have been destroyed, and a wave of violence is washing over the land, drowning everything in its path. In the seventh and eighth lines, Yeats mourns that the best people have become silent and resigned to their fate, while villains are the ones in power, speaking the loudest and caring the most about their causes.

In the second half of the poem, Yeats looks beyond the present into the future. He has taken stock of all that is going on, and he knows that certainly something large must be happening—all this chaos cannot be accidental; it must be part of an event of apocalyptic proportions. This must be a Second Coming, he thinks—this must be an apocalypse like the one predicted in the Bible's Book of Revelations.Something about the words "The Second Coming" sends the speaker spiralling into a sort of dream state. He falls out of his physical self and gains contact with the Spiritus Mundi, or the world-soul or collective consciousness, which Yeats believed each person has access to in some part of his mind. This collective consciousness is full of strange, ancient, mythological images, and a few mythological archetypes appear to Yeats in this surreal dream space. He sees a desert in his mind's eye, and observes a lion with a man's head, also known as a sphinx, moving slowly around the desert, while angry, fearful birds flutter around, casting shadows on the sand.

Then Yeats finds himself suddenly back in his own body and mind, out of this surreal, dreamlike scene. But he has seen something he cannot forget: something is happening now, something that will shake the world to its foundation. The world has been sleeping for two thousand years, he thinks, but something is brewing, something terrible, and it is on its way, slouching towards Bethlehem to be born.

"The Second Coming" is written in a very rough iambic pentameter, but the meter is so loose, and the exceptions so frequent, that it actually seems closer to free verse with frequent heavy stresses. The rhymes are likewise haphazard; apart from the two couplets with which the poem opens, there are only coincidental rhymes in the poem, such as "man" and "sun.

Yeats spent years crafting an elaborate, mystical theory of the universe that he described in his book A Vision. This theory issued in part from Yeats's lifelong fascination with the occult and mystical, and in part from the sense of responsibility Yeats felt to order his experience within a structured belief system. The system is extremely complicated and not of any lasting importance—except for the effect that it had on his poetry, which is of extraordinary lasting importance. The theory of history Yeats articulated in *A Vision* centers on a diagram made of two conical spirals, one inside the other, so that the widest part of one of the spirals rings around the narrowest part of the other spiral, and vice versa. Yeats believed that this image (he called the spirals "gyres") captured the contrary motions inherent within the historical process, and he divided each gyre into specific regions that represented particular kinds of historical periods (and could also represent the psychological phases of an individual's development).

"The Second Coming" was intended by Yeats to describe the current historical moment (the poem appeared in 1921) in terms of these gyres. Yeats believed that the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic revelation, as history reached the end of the outer gyre (to speak roughly) and began moving along the inner gyre. In his definitive edition of Yeats's poems, Richard J. Finneran quotes Yeats's own notes:

"The end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to its place of greatest contraction... The revelation [that] approaches will... take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre..."

In other words, the world's trajectory along the gyre of science, democracy, and heterogeneity is now coming apart, like the frantically widening flight-path of the falcon that has lost contact with the falconer; the next age will take its character not from the gyre of science, democracy, and speed, but from the contrary inner gyre—which, presumably, opposes mysticism, primal power, and slowness to the science and democracy of the outer gyre. The "rough beast" slouching toward Bethlehem is the symbol of this new age; the speaker's vision of the rising sphinx is his vision of the character of the new world.

Many Yeats scholars believe that this poem is specifically about the Russian Revolution of 1917, also known as the Bolshevik Revolution, which resulted in a bloody seven-year war that paved the way for the rise of the Communist party in Russia; it also certainly has echoes of World War I, which rocked the world to its core. But perhaps Yeats could see even further. Perhaps he could somehow sense the coming of further wars and violences—World War II, the atomic bomb, technologies that would reshape the world from the ground up. He knew the world would never be the same after the 20th century, and it certainly is not.

Yeats gives a name to this whole series of events, placing them under the umbrella of a "Second Coming." But instead of a second appearance of Christ, this event will be a birth of a creature as significant as Christ, who will completely alter the state of the world just as Christ did—but who will operate in a completely different way than the world has been operating since Christ arrived and civilization began to form.The second half of the poem finds Yeats delving into mythological imagery through occult methods.

Yeats believed that all humans share a common, vast memory, populated by universal archetypes and myths. This collective consciousness or Spiritus Mundi, also described as the Oversoul by Carl Jung, is the source of the bizarre, apocalyptic imagery that leads the poem to its conclusion. The speaker descends into a bizarre vision, observing a sphinx staring cruelly at him in a desert, moving its thighs slowly and almost sexually, perhaps offering him the clues to understanding what is happening around him while also embodying primal, ancient ways of being and creative, fertile energies that represent a potential union and rebirth.When he re-emerges from the vision, the speaker re-enters reality, having totally departed from it temporarily. The poem ends where it began: in a haze of ominous foreshadowing, the spectre of a looming monster of the future rapidly approaching, the universe spinning and growing into something different than it was. Whether that future is an evil mess of pure chaos, or whether it will offer some sort of freedom and possibility, remains undecided.

Symbols, Allegory and Motifs

The widening gyre (symbol)

"Gyre" is actually a scientific term used to refer to a vortex located over the air or sea, and it usually refers to systems of circulating ocean currents. In Yeats's "The Second Coming," "gyre" is used to represent the swirling, turning landscape of life itself.Gyres appear in many of Yeats's poems. He uses it to represent the systems that make up life, the push-pulls between freedom and control that spin together to create existence.

The falcon (symbol) : The falcon, separated from the falconer, is lost: without reason, without ruler, without larger cause. It is a symbol for a lost humanity, at the mercy of uncontrollable forces. The falcon, in short, is all of us, wandering around the earth, trying to find meaning.

The falconer (symbol) : The falconer is a symbol that may represent God, or a wider standard of ethics or morality.

The blood-dimmed tide (symbol) : The blood-dimmed tide, loosed upon the world, is a symbol that represents overwhelming violence and uncontrollable chaos.

The sphinx (symbol) : The sphinx, perhaps, represents the bearer of the riddle-like prophecies that the narrator is trying to unwind, the creature in between the narrator and the answers he is looking for. He is mystified by what has been happening around him, but he believes that it is not all accidental, and he is trying to find clues in the seemingly inexplicable events that have been occurring around him. In mythology, sphinxes often delivered riddles and would sometimes kill those who could not answer the riddle. Perhaps this sphinx is asking what the poem is asking—what rough beast is emerging? What is this nebulous world called the future going to look like?

Themes

Violence : "The Second Coming" is a response to a world wracked by violence. Yeats wrote the poem 1919, right after the end of World War I, in which 16 million people were killed in a horrifying display of the power of modern technological warfare and of the continuing conflicts that wracked the supposedly modern, civilized world. The poem voices a sense of shock, dismay, and pessimism about the future that many felt after the war. Lines like "blood-dimmed tide" and "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" both eloquently describe the horrific chaos of war and violence.

Many people felt as if there could never be another war after World War I; it was even called "The War to End All Wars," because people believed that it was so horrible and destructive that people would never allow something like it to happen again. But Yeats foresaw a darker future, which of course came to pass—World War II began a mere 14 years later, and Yeats's second coming took the form of a modernity that endowed humans with increasingly destructive weapons like the atomic bomb, and continued to force people to question how far into the violence the world could descend. This violent history continues, with unimaginable violence continuing on in the Middle East and around the world today.

Prophecy : "The Second Coming" is a deeply ominous poem, full of foreshadowing. Like mythical Greek oracles of old, delivering prophecies in the form of fragmented predictions of the future, it is full of grandiose, dramatic premonitions that do not necessarily make the future much clearer: all it is sure of is that something is going to happen, and the world will never be the same.

Cyclicality : Circles and cycles reoccur persistently throughout the poem. The first line describes all of existence as a "widening gyre," or an expanding spiral. Later, "indignant birds" "reel" or circle through the sky.

Yeats wrote "The Second Coming" during a chaotic time in world history. World War I had just ended, bringing unprecedented violence and chaos to the world. Also, Yeats had just witnessed the bloody Irish War of Independence, which split Ireland

into two parts, as well as the Bolshevik Revolution that tore Russia apart. Traditional borders were collapsing, and precarious new ones were being drawn. Yeats believed, as many historians do, that history operates in cycles, with nothing lasting forever and with events always repeating themselves. He also believed that beginnings always lead back to where they began—to endings, to the absence of whatever constituted the circle.This poem modifies the Christian idea of the "Second Coming" to imply that the world is returning back to how it was before Christianity: without religious morality to guide it, and without an ethical compass to lead it into the future.

Christianity : The poem's overt Christian themes are written into its very title. Yeats himself was not a Christian; he had abandoned the faith in exchange for an interest in occult spirituality, which involved delving into the esoteric mysteries of the universe. His own father, who had grown up as part of the Established Church of Ireland, rejected Christianity at an early age, and Yeats followed suit. But unlike his father, Yeats was deeply invested in spirituality, constantly seeking a philosophy of life, which eventually led him towards occultism and a sort of religious faith in the power of words.In this poem, Yeats uses Christianity as a stand-in for all order, ethics, and tradition. He borrows this poem's title from the Book of Revelations, which describes Christ's return to earth after the end times as a "second coming" (the first, of course, having been Christ's return after his crucifixion).Crucially, in the Bible, Christ's return always occurs after a death—of himself, or of the world, in the case of the Book of Revelations. The world is spinning towards a kind of death, Yeats predicts in this poem, but what rises out of the ashes will not be Christ—it will be a mysterious "rough beast."

Meaninglessness : "The Second Coming" is about loss, about change, and about traditional meanings and values coming apart at the seams.The line "the center cannot hold" basically predicted (and can be used to summarize) modernism and postmodernism, two gigantic literary genres that defined the twentieth century, and both of which—especially postmodernism—fixated on the idea that much of life is meaningless, hollow, without defined order and certainly without the comforting linearity and order that religion and tradition provide. The center cannot hold—there is no more core meaning or logic to be found, and only time will tell what will rise out of the ashes.

4.3 Sailing to Byzantium

Sailing to Byzantium (text)

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

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

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,

And be the singing masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

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

Sailing to Byzantium" is a poem by William Butler Yeats, first published in the 1928 collection *The Tower*. It comprises four stanzas in ottava rima, each made up of eight ten-syllable lines. It uses a journey to Byzantium (Constantinople) as a metaphor for a spiritual journey. Yeats explores his thoughts and musings on how immortality, art, and the human spirit may converge. Through the use of various poetic techniques, Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" describes the metaphorical journey of a man pursuing his own vision of eternal life as well as his conception of paradise.

The country that the speaker is in does not suit the old. It is full of bounty, with fish in the water and birds in the trees. The young and reproductive are caught in the earthly cycle of life and death. They do not heed ageless intelligence. An old man can be mere pathos. To escape this fate and to get away from his too-vital country, the aged speaker has sailed to Byzantium. Once arrived, he calls out to the elders who

are part of God's retinue. He asks them to move in a gyre and take him away to death. He has a living heart fastened to a dead body, and as such cannot live.Once the speaker has died, his body will no longer be organic, but fashioned of metal, like the statues that preserve dying emperor, or perhaps instead molded into a mechanical bird, which will sing to the lords and ladies of Byzantium.

This is Yeats' most famous poem about aging—a theme that preoccupies him throughout The Tower. The poem traces the speaker's movement from youth to age, and the corresponding geographical move from Ireland, a country just being born as Yeats wrote, to Byzantium. Yeats felt that he no longer belonged in Ireland, as the young or the young in brutality, were caught up in what he calls "sensual music." This is the allure of murder in the name of republicanism, which disgusted Yeats.

Byzantium was an ancient Greek city, which Yeats draws on for its decadent associations. The Byzantine Empire was centered on Constantinople, later renamed Istanbul. The speaker thinks that by escaping to Byzantium, he can escape the conflict between burning desire and a wasted body. Once there, he pleads to God's "sages" to take away his life, meaning his body. This stanza is suggestive of Yeats' religious beliefs, as he wrote this collection after a turn to theosophy. The idea of elders waiting upon God is not familiar from any Western religion, but would be acceptable under theosophy, which holds that all spiritualities hold some measure of truth. Yeats imagines this process as being consumed by a healing fire that will allow his body to take on any form he wishes when it is finished. His first wish, to become a statue, seems too static. His second, to become a mechanical bird, alludes to the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus. Theophilus, according to legend, had just such mechanical birds. It is thus the poet's wish to be granted a body immune to death and to sing forever.

Written in 1926 (when Yeats was 60 or 61), "Sailing to Byzantium" is Yeats' definitive statement about the agony of old age and the imaginative and spiritual work required to remain a vital individual even when the heart is "fastened to a dying animal" (the body). Yeats's solution is to leave the country of the young and travel to Byzantium, where the sages in the city's famous gold mosaics could become the "singing-masters" of his soul. He hopes the sages will appear in fire and take him away from his body into an existence outside time, where, like a great work of art, he could exist in

"the artifice of eternity." In the final stanza of the poem, he declares that once he is out of his body he will never again appear in the form of a natural thing; rather, he will become a golden bird, sitting on a golden tree, singing of the past ("what is past"), the present (that which is "passing"), and the future (that which is "to come").

Yeats wrote in a draft script for a 1931 BBC broadcast: "I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts about that subject I have put into a poem called 'Sailing to Byzantium'. When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells, and making the jeweled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city."

John Crowe Ransom comments: "The prayer is addressed to holy sages who dwell I know not where; it does not seem to matter where, for they seem qualified to receive the prayer, and it is a qualified and dignified prayer."

Epifanio San Juan writes that the action of the poem "occurs in the tension between memory and desire, knowledge and intuition, nature and history, subsumed within a vision of eternal order".

Cleanth Brooks asks whether, in this poem, Yeats chooses idealism or materialism and answers his own question, "Yeats chooses both and neither. One cannot know the world of being save through the world of becoming (though one must remember that the world of becoming is a meaningless flux aside from the world of being which it implies)".

In this poem, the old poet, electing the boy for his next incarnation, choses to inhabit an artificial Byzantine bird that will sing. In that shape he will not have to feel his living body decay as he does now, and will not have to pray to be delivered of it. The prayer is addressed to holy sages who dwell one does not know where; it does not matter where, for they appear qualified to receive the prayer, and it is a correct and elevated prayer. Here, an old man faces the problem of old age, of death and of regeneration and gives his decision. Old age, he tells us, excludes a man from the sensual joys of youth.

The world appears to belong completely to the young. It is no place for the old. Indeed, an old man is scarcely a man at all, he is an empty artifice; an effigy merely, of a man; he is "a tattered coat upon a stick". This would be very bad except that the young also are excluded from something. Rapt in their sensuality, they are ignorant utterly of the world of the spirit. Hence if old age frees a man from sensual passion, he may rejoice in the liberation of the soul; he is admitted into the realm of the spirit; and heis rejoicing will increase accordingly as he realises the magnificence of the soul. But the soul can best earn its own greatness from the great works of art; hence he turns to those great works, but in turning to them he finds that these are by no means mere effigies or monuments but things which have souls also; these live in the noblest element of God's free, free from all corruption.He prays for death, for release from his mortal body; and since the monuments exhibit the possibility of soul's existence in some other matter than flesh, he wishes reincarnation, not now in a mortal body but in the immortal and changeless embodiment of art.

4.4 Easter 1916

Easter 1916 is a reflection on the events surrounding the Easter Rising, an armed insurrection which began in Dublin, Ireland on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916. A small number of labour leaders and political revolutionaries occupied government buildings and factories, proclaiming a new independent Irish Republic. At this time in history, Ireland was under British rule. After the Rising, the leaders were executed by firing squad. William Butler Yeats wrote about their deaths in the poem "Sixteen Dead Men."

The poem opens with Yeats remembering the rebels as he passed them on the street. Before the Rising, they were just ordinary people who worked in shops and offices. He remembers his childhood friend Constance Markievicz, who is "that woman"; the Irish language teacher Padraic Pearse, who "kept a school" called St. Enda's; the poet Thomas MacDonagh "helper and friend" to Pearse; and even Yeats's own rival in love John MacBride, "a drunken, vainglorious lout." After reflecting on the rebels' constancy of purpose, as if their hearts were "enchanted to a stone," the poet wonders whether the rebellion was worth it. The poem ends on a note of ambivalence and futility, reflecting Yeats's own reluctance to engage in political debate.

The poem is divided into four stanzas, symbolizing the month of April, the fourth month. It is known for its famous refrain, "All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born." The text of the poem is as follows :

Easter 1916 (text)

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

The first stanza describes Dublin, where the revolutionaries lived and worked. Dublin is known for its "eighteenth-century houses," rows of connected and identical four story brick homes, each doorway made distinctive by "fan light" windows. Yeats himself lived in one such house, at 82 Merrion Square.In this stanza not much happens other than remembering how he and the rebels exchanged pleasantries on the street or talked at the "club." The club was a traditional gentleman's social meeting place open to

members only. It was part of a fashionable English upper-class tradition and the revolutionaries were not members. Yeats admits that he belittled the earnest rebels to his companions at the club.One should also take note of the language Yeats chose to use in these lines. His writing is commonly associated with flowery language, and very traditionally poetic sounding verses. This is not the case here. The lines are simplified, just as his speech is to these revolutionaries. There are certain phrases, such as "mocking tale or a gibe" which also speak to the poet's tone towards the subjects. These words in particular are intentionally strange and are meant to make a reader questions why they are being used. It is clear Yeats, or at least his speaker, has a difficult and complicated relationship with the Rising and those who participated.

Toward the end of the stanza, Yeats introduces the subtle, but powerful, metaphor of "motley." To wear motley is to wear different colors combined. The people of Dublin could be said to be a "motley" group in 1916: they were Catholic and Protestant, Irish in spirit but English in terms of citizenship, poor and rich. Here Yeats is making use of metonymy, or the creation of a relationship between an object and something closely related to it. In this case Yeats beliefs about the clothes and their silly, multicoloured designs, are transferred to the lives of those wearing them.The River Liffey divides Dublin; many of the rebels worked on the poorer north side of the city. Court jesters also traditionally wore motley, and Yeats is likely also referring to the tradition of the "stage Irishman," a comic figure in English plays, usually portrayed as being drunk. The poet thought the rebels were like these ridiculous jesters and once mocked their dreams. This one word encapsulates the social, political, and cultural situation of Dublin in 1916.

The stanza ends with the refrain that will mark all the stanzas of the poem, the oxymoron: "a terrible beauty is born." Terrible and beauty are opposite sentiments and speak to the concept of the "sublime" in which horror and beauty can exist simultaneously. It is usually experienced from afar. This could be said for Yeats' perspective on the Rising. The Easter Rising was terrible because of its violence and loss of life, but the beauty was in the dream of independence, a "wingèd horse" of romantic imagination.

That woman's days were spent

In ignorant good-will,

Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode our wingèd horse;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vainglorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

In the second stanza, Yeats begins to name the rebels by their social roles. Their names will be listed directly in the fourth and final stanza of the poem. The people

Yeats mentions in the text are actual historical figures. He remembers that Constance Markievicz, one of the leaders of the Easter Uprising. She is known to have designed the Citizen Army uniform. He states that she was sweeter before arguing for Irish independence. This is seen through a second instance of metonymy in which her "shrill" voice is compared to her femininity. She used to ride horses and hunt rabbits, but then she got involved via her husband, in the Rising.

Yeats also speaks on Padraic Pearse, a poet and another leader of the Uprising. He mentions this man as riding "our winged horse." This is a reference to the Pegasus, which represented poets in Greek mythology. The "other" who Yeats mentions next is Thomas MacDonagh. He was also a poet but was executed before he could write anything lasting. Yeats hoped this young man would become a great name in literature.Next Yeats moves on to John MacBride. He is described as a "drunken vainglorious lout," or hick. MacBride was married to Maud Gonne, a woman Yeats was deeply in love with throughout his life. John MacBride was accused of physically abusing her. Although Yeats clearly hates this person, he states that he must add him into the narrative as he too died fighting.The "causal comedy" may refer to the idea of Dublin being a stage, as in the famous line from As You Like It by William Shakespeare, "all the world's a stage; and all the men and women merely players." In the 19th century, domestic comedies were plays about ordinary middle-class life and family concerns. Yeats and MacBride had been fighting for the love of the beautiful actress and revolutionary Maud Gonne, whom Yeats adored, but who MacBride married.

Hearts with one purpose alone

Through summer and winter seem

Enchanted to a stone

To trouble the living stream.

The horse that comes from the road,

The rider, the birds that range

From cloud to tumbling cloud,

Minute by minute they change;

A shadow of cloud on the stream

Changes minute by minute;

A horse-hoof slides on the brim,

And a horse plashes within it;

The long-legged moor-hens dive,

And hens to moor-cocks call;

Minute by minute they live:

The stone's in the midst of all.

The third stanza of the poem introduces an extended pastoral metaphor. The rebels have hardened their hearts against the English, and have focused on "one purpose"—armed rebellion. The hearts of these rebels are compared to a stone that "troubles" a stream of history. Not only are the hearts representative of the entire person, they are referred to as stones. They are immovable, dedicated to one purpose. It is at this point that Yeats is changes his tone towards the rebels. They are garnering a respect they didn't have before.In order to emphasize the unchanging nature of the rebels Yeats goes through a variety of images. He speaks on the rating briefs and the tumbling clouds. These are things which do change. They contrast the rebels' hearts.

Too long a sacrifice

Can make a stone of the heart.

O when may it suffice?

That is Heaven's part, our part

To murmur name upon name,

As a mother names her child

When sleep at last has come

On limbs that had run wild.

What is it but nightfall?

No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse—
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

In the final stanza of the poem, Yeats asks the significant question about the Rising and the subsequent executions: "Was it needless death after all?" Was it all worth it? Did the rebels feel so much love for their country that they were willing to sacrifice their lives? And what good is Ireland if the dreamers are dead? The immediate political issue that arises is that England was on the verge of granting Ireland status as an independent—or "free"—state, which would allow it to have its own parliament. The granting of independence had been set aside during World War I because the English required Irish support of the war. In the second stanza, Yeats introduced the idea "the song." In stanza four he developed the idea more fully. In Irish political ballad tradition, naming the names of martyrs was important. Yeats follows the tradition by listing Padraic Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, and John MacBride. He also includes

James Connolly at this point, the labor leader.Green is the traditional color associated with Ireland, the Emerald Isle. It is also the color of the original Irish flag. At the end of the poem, Yeats reconciles himself to the fact that "wherever green is worn," people will remember the sacrifices of the rebels of 1916.

Form

The stanzas of Easter 1916 intentionally have an irregular line length and meter. Stanzas 1 and 3 are divided into 16 lines, representing both the year 1916 and the 16 men who were executed after the Easter Rising. These stanzas also are scenic in character, invoking the landscape of Dublin city and the surrounding Irish countryside. Stanzas 2 and 4 are about specific people involved in the Rising. There are 24 lines in Stanzas 2 and 4, symbolizing the fateful day of the month on which the Rising began : April 24, 1916.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 5**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-II**

W. B. YEATS

THE POEMS CONTINUED

UNIT STRUCTURE:

5.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the reader with the diverse subjects and themes in Yeats's prolific oeuvre. While the first poem deals with the Irish revolution and itsifluence on Yeats, the next two poems Greek mythology and the theme of societal regeneration respectively.

5.2 Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen

William Butler Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," from the 1928 collection The Tower, is not the most accessible of his poems, but it encompasses many of the themes, motifs, and techniques of his mature poetry. It is probably best understood and best enjoyed in the greater context of his work. Written in six parts of unequal length, the poem uses, as its focal point, the bloody retribution of British soldiers against the Irish citizenry during the time of the Sinn Féin rebellion (1919-1921). Although rooted in the Irish Home Rule struggle, it is more than a political

poem, examining the fluctuating relationship between time and understanding, reality and illusion, and nature and artifice. What seems clear at one point in time can easily be thrown into flux by the events of a later time, perpetuating an ascending series—a metaphysical "tower"—of transformation and reappraisal. Woven together with the poet's private pantheon of symbols are allusions to contemporary, historical, and classical events, challenging the reader to follow the byways of Yeats's visionary landscape.

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN (text)

I.

MANY ingenious lovely things are gone
That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
protected from the circle of the moon
That pitches common things about. There stood
Amid the ornamental bronze and stone
An ancient image made of olive wood —
And gone are Phidias' famous ivories
And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

We too had many pretty toys when young:
A law indifferent to blame or praise,
To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;
Public opinion ripening for so long
We thought it would outlive all future days.
O what fine thought we had because we thought
That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.

All teeth were drawn, all ancient tricks unlearned,
And a great army but a showy thing;
What matter that no cannon had been turned
Into a ploughshare? Parliament and king
Thought that unless a little powder burned
The trumpeters might burst with trumpeting
And yet it lack all glory; and perchance
The guardsmen's drowsy chargers would not prance.

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
On master-work of intellect or hand,
No honour leave its mighty monument,

Has but one comfort left: all triumph would
But break upon his ghostly solitude.

But is there any comfort to be found?
Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
What more is there to say? That country round
None dared admit, if Such a thought were his,
Incendiary or bigot could be found
To burn that stump on the Acropolis,
Or break in bits the famous ivories
Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.

II.

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
It seemed that a dragon of air
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
Or hurried them off on its own furious path;
So the platonic Year
Whirls out new right and wrong,
Whirls in the old instead;
All men are dancers and their tread
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

III

Some moralist or mythological poet

Compares the solitary soul to a swan;
I am satisfied with that,
Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it,
Before that brief gleam of its life be gone,
An image of its state;
The wings half spread for flight,
The breast thrust out in pride
Whether to play, or to ride
Those winds that clamour of approaching night.

A man in his own secret meditation
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made
In art or politics;
Some Platonist affirms that in the station
Where we should cast off body and trade
The ancient habit sticks,
And that if our works could
But vanish with our breath
That were a lucky death,
For triumph can but mar our solitude.

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
To end all things, to end

What my laborious life imagined, even
The half-imagined, the half-written page;
O but we dreamed to mend
Whatever mischief seemed
To afflict mankind, but now
That winds of winter blow
Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.

IV.

We, who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

V.

Come let us mock at the great
That had such burdens on the mind
And toiled so hard and late
To leave some monument behind,
Nor thought of the levelling wind.

Come let us mock at the wise;
With all those calendars whereon
They fixed old aching eyes,

They never saw how seasons run,
And now but gape at the sun.

Come let us mock at the good
That fancied goodness might be gay,
And sick of solitude
Might proclaim a holiday:
Wind shrieked — and where are they?

Mock mockers after that
That would not lift a hand maybe
To help good, wise or great
To bar that foul storm out, for we
Traffic in mockery.

VI.

Violence upon the roads: violence of horses;
Some few have handsome riders, are garlanded
On delicate sensitive ear or tossing mane,
But wearied running round and round in their courses
All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:
Herodias' daughters have returned again,
A sudden blast of dusty wind and after
Thunder of feet, tumult of images,

Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind;

And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter

All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,

According to the wind, for all are blind.

But now wind drops, dust settles; thereupon

There lurches past, his great eyes without thought

Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,

That insolent fiend Robert Artisson

To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought

Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks.

Yeats opens with a scene from the fallen Acropolis at Athens, where "Many ingenious lovely things are gone." This is a reminder of what the Greeks began to believe about their hegemony and cultural achievement: that they had achieved some kind of immortality. Greece would always stand to bestow its cultural blessings to the earth. Nevertheless, in the fall of Greek civilization, much was lost, including "Phidias' famous ivories / And all the golden grasshoppers and bees." The poet immediately ties this hubris and loss to the WWI generation when he recounts,

"That the worst rogues and rascals had died out".

This is of course a kind of vain faith, the kind we see at the turn of the century when Europe prophesied the end of war. Darwin promised creatures progressed inevitably to better and higher species; laws and policy devoted themselves to social engineering more than merely establishing justice and concord; the rulers of Europe were all related through Queen Victoria; the once fractured German states now united together to achieve technological and military excellence; clergy preached post-millennial eschatology from the pulpit. Old sins and evils would soon to be long gone. The Enlightenment worked: the nation-state and man's reasonableness helped erase "old wrong" and "the worst rogues and rascals." "All teeth were drawn, all ancient tricks unlearned, / And a great army but a showy thing." So the West told itself.

Of course, few had the foresight of Otto von Bismarck, who expected disaster for the Concert of Europe to come from "some damn thing in the Balkans." A plethora of factors combined to unleash the storm of widespread war: nationalism, imperial powergrabs, amassed military power, jealousies, and—most important of all—human choices. Now Yeats paints the perennial memory of the post-1914 imagination, mourning,

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
>
> Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
>
> Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
>
> To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free.

The reference to the dead mother points toward Yeats's dual-object investigation: the Irish poet is musing on both the Great War (in this line, the rape of Belgium) and his own land's civil war. Indeed, war haunted the world's mind as well as the poet's doorstep. The happy Victorian imagination morphed into the spoiled Edwardian consciousness; both thought more highly of man than he deserved. The totalizing nature of modern technological warfare dragged both soldiers and civilians into the category of combatant. Those who didn't fight manufactured and aided. Indiscriminate attack became the norm especially in Ireland. Yeats concluded that modern men "are but weasels fighting in a hole."

How can one find stability and meaning in this chaos? After all, "Man is in love and loves what vanishes." The cyclic run of time (Yeats refers to a pagan understanding of chronology) "whirls" out old evils, not simply new goods and new evils. Man, whose only condition is supposed to be mutability in the progress towards the next epoch, is threatened by sameness. "All men are dancers and their tread / Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong," Yeats complains. The Great War was but an unsuspected reiteration of persistent evil.

Yeats's answer to all this is, for lack of a better word, introspection or reflection. The "solitary soul" functions like a swan, ready "to play, or to ride / Those winds that

clamour of approaching night." A sort of human greatness—such as that found in what Carlyle called "great men"—generally produces a height of civilization, even when others suspect a coming downfall. Contemplative souls especially, according to Yeats, are these swanlike beings who understand the meaning of the passing present, untroubled by the excesses of "triumph" that "can but mar our solitude." For some reason, this zeitgeist has "leaped into the desolate heaven," leaving behind frustrated men to destroy the perishable joys it produced. To destroy for destruction's sake: that nihilistic terror cannot help but strike true, especially if one has ever read Graham Greene's "Destroyers." Not only has mankind ceased to produce beauty; they have gone out of their way to eliminate what was left to them by their fathers.

The hubristic skepticism pushed more savage and frightful insights about God and wickedness to the margins. The "calculators, economists, and sophisters" only saw purer and purer golden ages to come. The return of true war ripped away the veil:

> O but we dreamed to mend
> Whatever mischief seemed
> To afflict mankind, but now
> That winds of winter blow
> Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.

In a sickening revelry, modern men delight to destroy goodness, proclaiming,

> We, who seven years ago
> Talked of honour and of truth,
> Shriek with pleasure if we show
> The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

Now, cynics mock the great, the wise, and the good. They even mock the mockers; they are weasels fighting weasels. Humans threaten to destroy themselves.

Yeats concludes darkly by pointing to ancient evils snuffing out the promises of a brighter day. For example, the reference to Herodias' daughters reminds us of the beheading of John the Baptist. As the last prophet, he heralded the coming of the Light of the World. Pulling from his Irish roots, Yeats mentions Lady Kyteler bringing coxcombs and peacock feathers to Robert Artisson. According to legend, Kyteler was the first woman in Ireland to be condemned for witchcraft; many believed that she laid with an incubus named Robin (or Robert) Artisson. Throughout Northern mythology, the cock heralds the coming of a new age with his crowing. Having pluck feathers and harvested combs from presumably dead fowl matches with the John the Baptist reference. The heralds of any brighter days lie slaughtered.

How Yeats handled this perspective can be seen, in his poem "The Stolen Child." The "world more full of weeping" we have seen all too clearly. Yeats argues for a kind of escapism to this lost faerie realm. His conception of the "solitary soul" comes to mind—a human in touch with the fey. This world—this insight—has been lost to all but children, who in their innocence can escape but for a while from the modern world's darkness.

This then is Yeats's response as distanced poet to the Promethean sins of modernity. Tinkering with nature merely gave evil yet greater abilities to terrify humankind. The poet, who sees both beauty and ugliness in their fullness, seeks escape from the bonds. Nevertheless, he finds taint on his own soul. He uses "we"—Yeats, who himself took part in human common life, sees himself as guilty along with the generals, soldiers, and politicians. He envisages the world as wretched and without hope of turning back, or rather, turning over. He thus deems impossible a cosmological understanding as found in the medieval and ancient. It is inaccessible, but can be glimpsed in his art. He takes the basic founding principles of the post-Enlightenment world for granted. Postmodernism is but modernism with regrets.

5.3 Leda and the Swan

"Leda and the Swan" was written in 1923, a year of success for W.B.Yeats, who was awarded the Nobel prize for Literature. The poem is a Petrarchan sonnet, a form usually associated with love and romance, yet here used controversially by Yeats.

The story of Leda and the Swan comes from ancient Greek mythology. Zeus, the Father of the Olympian Gods, took the form of a swan in order to seduce Leda, daughter of King Thestius. She later the same night lay with her human husband Tyndareus, and so produced eggs out of which hatched four individuals - Castor and Pollux the twins and the half-sisters Helen and Clytemnestra.Yeats took the central theme of this story - the seduction, the rape - and turned it into a metaphor for the British involvement in Ireland, which lasted centuries, eventually coming to a conclusion in 1922. At least, this is one interpretation of Leda and the Swan. Others see it as a disguised narrative of the progress of western civilisation. A single violent event sets off a cycle of barbarism and deceit, initiating the modern era and despite the pessimism and outrage, positive and beautiful things can emerge.But as Yeats himself said ' Bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it.'

William Butler Yeats is acknowledged as one of the great poets of the English language, but his poetical techniques and mode changed quite radically over the years. After meeting with and listening to Ezra Pound, the young American poet and editor, Yeats became more aware of his poetic language and developed a more concise way of saying things. But he never lost his interest in folklore and mythology and went on using them as vehicles for more contemporary ideas - Leda and the Swan proves that.

Leda and the Swan is a Petrarchan sonnet with a rhyme scheme of ababcdcdefgefg and has 14 lines (one of which is split, so officially it has 15 lines) and is mostly iambic pentameter in rhythm. That is, it has five stresses in each line, a steady rhythm which does occasionally alter to reflect the violent action.All the end rhymes are full, for example : still/bill, push/rush except for the slant rhyme of up/drop.Yeats chose the sonnet form, traditionally associated with romance and love, to highlight the irony - this is a full blown rape, a controversial subject for the tightly knit framework of a sonnet.

After eight lines comes the volta or turn, where the previous lines are answered or a conclusion is drawn. Look out for the unusual way in which the poet ends the sonnet.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Leda and the Swan is based on the well-known ancient Greek myth in which Zeus takes the form of a swan in order to make love to Leda, wife of Tyndareus, King of Sparta, who also happens to lay with her that very night. The result? She becomes pregnant and the following births of Helen, Clytemnestra, Castor and Pollux all have profound effects on the history of Greece and subsequently, western civilization. Yeats

used this theme of seduction, rape and resultant offspring as a metaphor for the relationship between Britain and Ireland. Britain being the swan (the mighty Zeus) and Ireland Leda (the helpless victim).

Perhaps this is why the poet uses such dramatic language in the first eight lines of the poem. From the opening three words the reader is instantly caught up in this act, this shocking scenario of violent passion. A sudden blow....as the swan catches the girl with its beating wings and she staggers back. It is nothing short of a rude assault. The diction is worth focusing on: blow/beating/staggering/dark/caught/holds/ helpless/terrified/push/loosening/rush/strange/beating/shudder/broken/burning/ mastered/power/indifferent/drop.

There is a natural tension set up as the poem progresses; it is basically a masculine versus feminine struggle.In Greek mythology the gods looked down on the human world and treated them as playthings. Humans were pawns in a game. Every so often the gods would enter the human world and stir things up.In this poem it is the brutal physical act that sets off a chain of events, divinely inspired it could be said, leading to all sorts of disruption and violence in human society.

Lines 1 – 4 Set right in the here and now, this sonnet opens with an astonishing scene of violence, passion and trauma. This is no ordinary sonnet on the theme of sweet romance and eternal love. The reader is right there in the front row, staring at what is a blatant sexual assault on a girl, the wife of a king no less.The first line has five stresses, iambic and spondaic, to reflect the impact of the swan as it impregnates Leda, who is in shock, staggers back, and is helpless to resist.Note the use of enjambment - where one line flows into another without punctuation and with the sense maintained - and caesura, the pause in the middle of the line as the physical act takes place. Rhythm is all important, as is the tension between the stresses and the content. Alliteration is strong in the fourth line: He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

The swan has the girl by the nape, the back of the neck, whilst her breast rests on his. This is a vivid description, with rich yet direct language. There is nothing in the

least romantic about this coupling but the image is so strong - little wonder artists throughout the centuries have been keen to depict this scene.So the reader can have no doubts after this first quatrain. A barbaric act has been perpetrated by this beautiful if sinister bird, a god in disguise, the god of gods in the guise of a pure white swan.

Lines 5 – 8The descriptive language continues and intensifies in the form of two mostly iambic questions, focusing on Leda's predicament as the swan advances. This is serious stuff. Zeus is all powerful and intent on impregnating the helpless female, who seems unable to ward him off.Feminists raise the alarm at this point, for here we have the blatant rape of an innocent girl, which they see as symbolic of the exploitation of females by the males, by patriarchal society.The speaker relays the awful details to the reader in language that is anatomical - vague fingers/loosening thighs/body/heart beating - it is lustful and earthy and real.Note that white rush is an ambiguous term which could refer to the advancing feathers of the swan, the soft down of the loins.

Lines 9 – 15A shudder...echo of the opening line A sudden...and how poignant for this is the moment of conception as the swan consummates the meeting. The orgasm occurs and with it the engendering of a future war - the seige of Troy, occurring in the Trojan War, a 10 year conflict between the kingdoms of Troy and Greece.So Leda is responsible indirectly for all that follows because she gave birth to Helen, who caused the Trojan War when abducted from her husband Menelaus by Paris. It's all quite complicated but what the poem is trying to say is that the consequences of one act can have devastating repercussions.Agamemnon was the husband of Clytemnestra (born to Leda), but she ended up killing him when he returned from the war a hero.Note the unusual two lines, the eleventh and twelfth. The eleventh brings closure to the whole sordid business of the rape and subsequent births. The full stop (period, end stop) is a definite end of clause.Line twelve begins the conclusion, ambiguous to say the least because of that verb put on and asks the question - Despite Leda being so overwhelmed by the whole violent episode she still knew who it was who was raping her, she was aware that Zeus was omnipotent. Or did she gain his knowledge and power as a natural consequence of the seduction?

5.4 Lapis Lazuli

I have heard that hysterical women say
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow,
Of poets that are always gay,
For everybody knows or else should know
That if nothing drastic is done
Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
Until the town lie beaten flat.

All perform their tragic play,
There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
Yet they, should the last scene be there,
The great stage curtain about to drop,
If worthy their prominent part in the play,
Do not break up their lines to weep.
They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.
All men have aimed at, found and lost;
Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop scenes drop at once

Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,
Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,
Old civilisations put to the sword.
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus
Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
All things fall and are built again
And those that build them again are gay.

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,
Over them flies a long-legged bird
A symbol of longevity;
The third, doubtless a serving-man,
Carries a musical instrument.
Every discolouration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,

Or lofty slope where it still snows
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.

Lapis Lazuli is a deep blue mineral. Here it refers to the medallion of this Chinaware presented to the poet. The poet has listened to the cries of hysterical women (of the nineteen thirties) who are panicky and scared of the preparations for the Second World War. They are sick of the painter's palette and the musical instrument of the singer and the poet's compositions because all of them are happy and gay.

The women express their anxiety and suspense and want everybody to known that unless something drastic is done, airplanes and bombs will level flat the town just as King Billy-King of Orange hurled bombs in the battle of Boyne. Everything will be reduced to dust.The Arts have a fruitful role to play in a world overwhelmed by war-hysteria. Look at the tragic characters in a play. There walks Hamlet on the stage and there is Lear. There is Ophelia and there is Cordelia. They do not break down in tears or collapse even when the last scene is being enacted and the curtain is about to drop. They play their roles efficiently. They do not interrupt their words with weeping. They know that Hamlet and Lear and happy. Their joy in acting transforms their fear and tragedy. They know that human life is basically tragic.

Their acceptance of fate leads to their inner illumination and tragedy enlarges their understanding of life. Though Hamlet raves and Lear falls into fits and even if all that drops seems to occur at once on a thousand stages, world-wide destruction of human lot cannot be worse or more tragic than what it really is. Pilling of horror on horror cannot add further to the tragedy of life.

Civilizations have come and gone; why should we feel sorry if our civilization is destroyed. Conquers came with armies, some on foot, some on ship, camel-back, horse-back, ass-back and mule-back. They destroyed the old civilization and their wisdom, to, came to an end. Callimachus, the Athenian sculptor created wonderful things of marble as if it were bronze. Yet none of his sculptures exist today. He with his running drill made dress of human beings in marble as if they would move with a gust of wind. He made the bronze lamp in the form of a stern and of slender palm leaf. Nothing of this exists today. All things are destroyed and are built up again. So, all those who build again can be happy again.The poet gives an account of the carved China-ware which supplies the title to the poem. Before me lies this Chinese gift of semi-precious blue stone called Lapis Lazuli. Here are three human beings-two Chinamen-an ascetic and his disciple and the third one who follows them carries a musical instrument and is their servant. Above the three flies a long-legged bird whose presence indicates that these three men will have a long life.

On this China were, every discoloration of the stone or crack or dent indicates a water-course (stream) or an avalanche or some lofty slope covered with snow. The plum and cherry branches are found near the half-way house towards which those China-men climb. The poet feels happy with the thought that the China-men are seated in that house. From the mountain, they view the tragic scene all around. One of them desires that some mournful song be sung and the expert artiste begins to play on the instrument. The eyes of the two Chinese listeners shine brightly in their faces full of wrinkles. They appear to be quite happy, in spite of the tragic scene around. Poets and artists can view with balance and equanimity the world tragedy, as well as the rise and fall of civilizations.

This poem represents the almost constant pressure on human society to renew and regenerate that what has been lost. With the new generation coming into its own

as the turn of the century passes we as artist have a responsibility to the following generations to provide what will be needed in the future. In conclusion, the poem should be read aloud in a voice as emotional and resounding as possible so that the full effect of the words and alliteration can be felt through the body, mind and even soul if it is read just right. What will follow is a mystical experience that cannot be described, but is ineffable. Wondering what it means to understand a poem to this degree is like experiencing racism to the ninth degree with a stadium of people watching.

W. B. YEATS

YEATS AS A SYMBOLIST POET

UNIT STRUCTURE:

6.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to brief the Distance Learner about Symbolist Movement and how it effected Yeats's poetry.

6.2 Yeats as a Symbolist Poet

W.B. Yeats, along with T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Paul Valery, Gertrude Stein, and Marcel Proust, represents the culmination of a self-conscious and very important movement of European Symbolist poetry. Edgar Allen Poe's critical writings, translated by Baudelaire in 1852, played an important part in providing the first scriptures of the Symbolist Movement. Poe corrected the Romantic looseness and lopped away the Romantic extravagance. However, it did not, at the same time, aimed at Naturalistic effects. Rather, it aimed at ultra-Romantic effects by making a special use of language. This new movement in European poetry is known for its use of medley of images; the deliberately mixed metaphors; the combination of passion and wit - of the grade and the prosaic manners; the bold amalgamation of material

with spiritual.

If critics do not ordinarily think of Yeats as primarily a Symbolist poet, it is because, in taking Symbolism to Ireland, he fed it with his poetry from the point of view of its relation to the test of the European literature. Yeats seems to be conscious from the beginning of an antagonism between the actual world of industry, politics and science, on the one hand, and the imaginative poetic life, on the other. He tells us, in his autobiography, that a vital issue seemed to be raised for him, in his boyhood, by then popular and novel realism of Bastien-Lepage and Carolus Durand as against the mysticism of the Pre-Rephaelite painters. Bastien-Lepage's "clownish peasant staring with vacant eyes at her great boots" represented already to the young Yeats that Naturalistic, scientific vision which contradicted and warred with his own. And he takes up from the very beginning, in his criticism, a definite and explicit position in regard to Naturalism: he will stand apart from the democratic, the scientific, modern world - his poetic life shall be independent of it; his art shall owe nothing to its methods. His principles in literature are those of the Symbolists, but he formulates them more clearly and defends them with more vigour than anyone else has yet done in English.

In his early essay on Shelley's symbolism, Yeats asserts that "there is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture, that is that image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images and ... this one image, if he would but brood over it his whole life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world into that far household, where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp." All great literature, says Yeats, is created out of symbols: observation and statistics mean nothing; works of art which depend upon them can have no enduring value. " There is something, he says, of an old wives'tale in fine literature. The makers of it are like an old peasant telling stories of the great famine or the hangings of '98 or from his own memories. He has felt something deep in his mind and he wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses as possible. He will use the most extravagant words or illustrations if they will suit his purpose. He will invent a wild parable, and the more

his mind is on fire or the more creative it is, the less will he look at the other world or value it for its own sake. It gives him metaphors and examples, and that is not all. He is even a little scornful of it, for it seems to him while the fit is on that the fire has gone out of it and left it but white ashes. I cannot explain it, but I am certain that every high thing was invented in this way, between sleeping and waking, as it were, and that peering and peeping persons are but hawkers of stolen goods. How else could their roses have grown so ravenous or their eyes so sharp ?"

As playwright and journalist, during the middle period of his poetic career, Yeats was leading a reaction against Naturalism. Symbolism did not play yet in the theatre the role that it was playing in poetry. Yet its seeds had already sprouted here and there. August Stindberg wrote the Symbolistic *To Demascus* and *Dream Play,* the prototypes of the German Expressionistic drama; and Maeterlinck, with vague, pale and sauve images, had created quite a little theatre of Symbolism. In his own dramatic works, Yeats, too, produced a theatre somewhat similar to Maeterlinck's. The productions of a greater poet, equipped with a richer and more solid mythology, Yeats's plays do, however, take place in the same sort of twilit world as Maeterlinck's - a world in which the characters are less often dramatic personalities than disembodied broodings and longings. These plays have little dramatic importance because Yeats himself had little sense of drama, and we think of them primarily as a department of his poetry, with the same sort of interest and beauty as the rest.

Although during the middle phase of his career, the years of the Abbey Theatre, he was both active and effective in a public sense, his philosophy never ceased to insist upon the irreconcilable oppositions between the life of self-assertion in the practical world and the life consecrated to the recovery and contemplation of the precious symbol, which "if he would but brood over it his whole life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world," into the presence of the gods. Yeats' interest in things and ideas of esoteric nature is another aspect of his art and personality that led him to the language of symbolism in poetry. As a young man, he frequented clairvoyants and students of Astrology and Magic; Madame Blavatsky, the necromantic Theosophist, seems to have made upon him a considerable impression. In 1901, all these interests

led him to formulate, in an essay on magic, the following set of beliefs, to which he adhered for a long time :

"(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy."

"(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself."

"(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols."

What Yeats was really approaching here was such systematic study of the symbolism of myths, trances, dreams and other human visions as psychoanalysis and anthropology were attempting from a different direction. And despite the obvious charlatanism or naivete of most of his instructors and fellow investigators, Yeats's account of his researches is interesting. For it is not merely that Yeats loves the marvelous: he is also intent upon discovering symbols which may stand for the elements of his own nature or which shall seem to possess some universal significance. In Yeats, the romantic amateur of Magic is always accompanied and restrained by the rationalistic modern man. "He and I often quarreled," Yeats writes of himself and A.E., "because I wanted him to examine and question his visions, and write them out as they occurred; and still more because I thought symbolic what he thought real like the men and women that had passed him on the road." And Yeats attributes to a sort of supernatural being designated as "Anima Muudi" precisely such universal symbols as are studied by such psychologists as Jung. What is most curious is that Yeats should at last have constructed out of these symbols an elaborate mystical-metaphysical system.

This system was set forth in *A Vision,* a work which occupied Yeats for many years and which he published privately in 1926. The work presented an elaborate theory of the variations of human personality, of the vicissitudes of human history and of the transformations of the soul in this world and the next. The theory was worked out with geometrical diagrams and set forth interns of such unfamiliar conceptions as *diamons, tinctures, cones, gyres, husks* and *passionate bodies. Yeats* asserts in *A Vision* that human personality follows the pattern of a "Great

Wheel." That is, the types of personality possible constitute a kind of closed circle - they are regular stages in a circular journey to and fro between complete objectivity at one pole and complete subjectivity at the other; and this journey may be represented by the orbit of the moon, to which it corresponds. Let the moon symbolically represent subjectivity and the sun, objectivity: then the dark of the moon, when it is closest to the sun, is the phase of complete subjectivity. At these two opposite poles of the circle, human life is impossible: there exist only antipodal types of supernatural beings. But along the circumference of the circle, between these two ultra-human poles, there occur twenty-six phases which cover all possible types of human personality. The theory is extremely complicated, which we need not elaborate here. But we do need to talk about some of the important symbols used in Yeats's poetry.

Besides the sun and the moon, their various phases, Yeats uses the symbols of the Mask, the Hunchback, the Fool, etc., which create just the right impression of significance in mystery for Symbolistic poetry. And, what is perhaps the most eloquent passage in *A Vision,* Yeats returns to a certain type of beautiful uncontemplative women who haunted his poetry : "Here are born those women who are most touching in their beauty. Helen was of this phase; and she comes before the mind's eye elaborating a delicate personal discipline as though she would make her whole life an image of a unified *antithetical* (that is, subjective) energy..... Is it not because she desires so little and gives so little that men will die and murder in her service ?" and there is a strange imaginative power in the conception behind the final sequence of the Hunchback, the Saint and the Fool. Yeats's own comment on *A Vision* explains its significance : "Some will ask if I believe all that this book contains, and I will not know how to answer. Does the word belief, used as they will use it, belong to our age, can I think of the world as there and I here judging it?" And he intimates that, after all, his system may be only a set of symbols like another - a set of symbols, we recognize, like the Irish myths with which he began.

As Yeats approached his later (after the early and the middle) phase, he has passed into a sort of third phase in which he is closer to common world than at any

previous period. With the Dantesque mask, he has lost something of intensity and something of sharpness of outline. In *The Tower* (1928), certain words such as "bitter," "wild," and fierce," which he was earlier able to use with such thrilling effect, cease to have the same force. In this later volume of poems, he writes more loosely, and seems to write more easily. We find him now more plainspoken, more humorous - his mind seems to run more frankly on his ordinary human satisfactions and cahrins: he is sometimes harsh, sometimes sensual, sometimes careless, sometimes coarse. Consequently, his symbolism becomes as relaxed and natural as earlier it was self-conscious and obtrusive.

Although Yeats inhabits in his last phase, like Michael Roberts, a lonely tower (symbolic of artist's alienation as also of the old from the youthful world) on the outermost Irish coast, he had spent six years in the Irish Senate, presiding at official receptions in a silk hat, inspecting the plumbing of the government schools and conscientiously sitting through the movies which it was one of his official duties to censor. He is much occupied with the wisdom of the lifetime experience, he is passionate even in old age. And he writes poems which charge now with the emotion of a great lyric poet that profound and subtle criticism of life which informs his later poetry. We may take as an example of Yeats's later style of poetry, of his mature symbolism, one of the finest poems in *The Tower,* "Among School Children." The poet, now "a sixty year old smiling public man," pays an official visit to a girls' school kept by nuns. As he gazes at the children there, he remembers how the woman he had loved (Maud Gonne) had told him once of some "harsh reproof or trivial event" of her girlhood which had changed "some childish day to tragedy." For a moment, the thought that she may once have looked like one of the children before him revives the excitement of his old love. He remembers the woman in all her young beauty - and thinks of himself with his present sixty years - "a comfortable kind of old scarecrow."

What is use of philosophy now?, the poet thinks. Is not all beauty bound up with the body and doomed to decay with it ? Is not even the divine beauty itself which is worshiped there by the nuns inseparable from the images of it they adore ?

"Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor body born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole ?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance ?"

Here, the actual scene in the convent, the personal emotion it awakens and the general speculations which these emotions suggest – have been interwoven and made to play upon each other at the same time that they are kept separate and distinct. A complex subject has been treated in the most concentrated form and yet without confusion. Perceptions, fancies, feelings, and thoughts have all their place in the poet's record. It is a moment of human life, masterfully seized and made permanent, in all its nobility and lameness, its mystery and actuality, its direct personal contact and abstraction.

In Yeats's later poetry, of which the poem under discussion is the finest example, the symbolic mode comes closest to the naturalist; the symbolic and the actual become inseparable, just as the dance from the dancer, or the bloosom from the tree. Thus, Yeats as a poet travels a long journey on the path of poetic maturity, beginning with the Aesthetes' mode of day-dreaming symbolism, moving into the more concrete mode of nationalist public poetry, using mythology as a source of symbolism, finally ending with the metaphysical mode in which idea and emotion, fact and fancy, object and symbol merge into one whole, presenting a picture of life like the multi-dimensional prism cut to life size.

6.3 Suggested Reading

1. Richard Ellman, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London, 1949).
2. Norman A. Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet,* ed. (London, 1962).
3. ....., *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Folkstone, 1984).

4. Norman A. Jeffares and C.G.W. Cross (eds.), *In Excited Reverie : Centenary Tribute to W.B. Yeats* (London, 1965).

5. Alasdair D.F. Macroe, *W.B. Yeasts : A Literary Life* (London, 1995).

6. Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, i : The Apprentice image 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1997).

7. B. Rajan, *W.B. Yeats* (Delhi: Doaba House, 2004).

6.4 Sample Questions

1. Discuss W.B. Yeats as the "Last Romantic" - his own description.
2. In what ways is Yeats a "modern" poet ?
3. Write a note on Yeats as a symbolist poet.
4. Discuss Leavis's statement that Yeats's poetry is a running commentary on his changing relationship with Maud Gonne.
5. What is Irish about the poetry of W.B. Yeats ?
6. Trace the development of Yeats as a poet from his early Aestheticism to later Modernism.
7. Critically examine the 'subject' and 'form' of "The Tower" or "Sailing to Byzantium," including tone and imagery.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 7**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-III**

T. S. ELIOT

UNIT STRUCTURE:

7.1 Objectives

Without having an understanding of the social milieu in which the poet matured and created his poetry, it is very difficult to grasp the essence of the poetry. Same is very true about T. S. Eliot too, as he himself commented once, "a great poet in writing of himself writes his age." So here in this chapter, we try to consider his social background and the main literary trends which influenced him and determined the tone of his poetry.

7.2 The Literary and Social Background of T.S.Eliot

The last decade of the 19th century ushered in an era of social change. There was a complete break-down of agrarian way of life and economy. During this period rural England collapsed and urbanization led to problems like over-crowding, lack of accommodation, increase in criminal activities, loosening of sex taboos, fall in the standards of sexual morality, for public opinion does not operate as a check in an over-populated city. The evil effect of industrialization is one of the main concerns of early 20th century society. However, this change proves beneficial to

bring about a more healthy pattern in social relations. The new age has seen the emergence of the concept of the welfare state: the society or the state is now held responsible for education, health and well-being of the individual.

This age was an age of scientific temperament and reasoning. Everything traditional and conventional was put to question, whether it was religious belief or social custom. This led to agnosticism and uncertainty. By the end of the 19th and 20th century, the very basis of existing social, economic, and moral system were criticized by the writers like Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy. As R.A. Scott James puts it, "the 20th century has, for it's characteristic, to put everything, in every sphere of life, to the question and secondly , in the light of this skepticism, to reform, to reconstruct to accept the new age as new, and attempt to mould it by conscious, purposeful effort."

With the theories given by Freud, emphasis is laid on the power of the unconscious to affect conduct. Freud pointed out that the behaviour of human beings is not guided or controlled by the conscious but by the sub-conscious. According to Freudian psychology, the normal human beings are also abnormal and neurotic to some extent. This kind of thinking had a profound influence on the 20th century moral attitudes, especially in the matters of sex. In Freudian point of view, repressed sex instincts are the root cause of neurosis and other signs of abnormality. Literature of the times also delves deep into the sub-conscious and conscious mind to have a true and real understanding of human nature.

The old authoritarian pattern in family relationships is completely shattered man-woman relationship, is undergoing a drastic change. Women are trying to find their identity and place in society. The war of generators, of the old and young, has resulted in re-orientation of parent child relationship. The greater mobility resulting from the automobile and the railway train has also weekend the authority of the old over the young and increased the rootlessness of man. This very rootlessness is the main concern of Eliot in *The Wasteland*.

Twentieth century poetry is a curious blend of the traditional and experimental, of the old and the new. It is complex and many-sided. Modern poetry is poetry of revolt against tradition and as such there is much in it that is experimental, ephemeral

and puerile. There is much eccentricity and whimsicality but there are definitely some poems, which contain universal element.

Poetry of the time revolts against the decadent romantic tradition and this revolt can be noticed both in the poem and content of poetry. Realism in subject matter has led the modern poet to reject the highly ornate and artificial poetic style of the romantics in favour of a language, which resembles closely to the language of everyday life. Colloquial diction, speech rhythms and prosaic words are the main characteristics of modern poetry. This realism in diction and versification is the marked feature of Eliot's poetry.

Humanitarianism and a deep concern for the miserable and pitiable condition of the poor and downtrodden are a leading concern of modern poetry. The spread of democracy has made the poet more and more conscious of the dignity of man, and he perceives, "in the daily struggle of the poor the same potentialities of a spiritual conflict that the older poets found in those of exalted rank". Davidson, Masefield are the prominent poets, who glorified the heroism of the mean, obscure and squalid existence of the have-nots.

All illusions and dreams have been shattered because of the grim realities of life. It has led to pessimism and bitterness. The modern poet is concerned with stark realities and finds wages of man nothing but 'dust'. Eliot regards man as 'hollow' and 'stuffed' and for W.B. Yeats, "human sorrow becomes an elemental passion, profound, eternal and burning like a flame." T. S. Eliot's *The wasteland* is an appropriate example of the tragic gloom and despair of the postwar world. However, this does not mean that 20th century poetry is poetry of despair. Even in the works of the most pessimistic of poets, there is an element of wit, satire, humour, and jests.

The modern poets, with all their earthiness and realism, have romantic longing for a more perfect world. Love is still a dominant theme in the poems of Robert Bridges and W. B. Yeats. In France, the French symbolists Laforgue, Verlaine and Mellarne strike this note of romance. Yeats and Eliot have also made an extensive use of symbolism to communicate their vision and sensations, which are too complex and intricate to be conveyed in any other way. Other liberal techniques of verse

form are being used; the bonds of metre have been loosened. There are no rules of rhyme, stresses vary according to emotion and verse-rhythm is replaced by sense-rhythm.

Impressionism seeks to convey the vague, fleeting sensations passing through the mind by the use of a novel imagery and metaphor. The new innovations like Imagism and Sur-realism are also in use in the 20th century poetry. T. S. Eliot is highly impressed by these innovations and are reflected in his poetry in various ways.

7.3 Life and Work of T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot was born on 26th September, 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri (U.S.A.). His first American ancestor, Andrew Eliot was a Calvinist, who came from England. The name of Eliot's father was H.W. Eliot and his mother Charlotte Champe Stearns also came from a celebrated New England family. Eliot's family background played a vital role in the formation of his sensibility. He later asserted that 'the primary channel of transmission of culture is the family, no man wholly espcapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree of culture, which he acquired from his early environment.'

His mother exercised a deep, complex and life-long influence on her son. She wrote a memoir of her father-in-law, which she dedicated to her children,' lest they forget'. She also wrote poems, which are didactic and full of religious fervour. In some respects they anticipate Eliot's preoccupation with spiritual drought, martyrdom and faith. Eliot was later to transform the tranditonal religious themes and images of his mother's poems.

St. Louis, the city in which Eliot grew up, also played an important role in the formation of his literary imagination. When Eliot's grandfather moved to st. Louis, this city was prosperous and rapidly developing. However by the turn of the century, it had become notorious for it's urban decay. The area in which Eliot grew up 'had become shabby to a degree approaching slumminess.' The experience of living in such an environment was the source of the urban imagery in early poems. St. Louis also brought Eliot in contact with elemental forces and the prehistoric past.

Eliot appears to have been training himself to be a poet from the time when, at the age of ten, he brought out eight issues of his own magazine 'fire side'. Eliot's wit, his sense of the absurd, and his fascination with the exotic landscapes are already evident in some of these early pieces. In his last year at smith academy, where he studied from 1898 to 1905, Eliot contributed short stories and poems for the smith academy record.

The poet was at Harvard from 1906-1910, where he pursued a wide-ranging course studies in language and literature : the classics, the German, the French and English literatures. Two teachers who exercised a deep influence on Eliot were Irving Babbitt, Whose course on literary criticism in France, he took in 1909-1910 and George Santayana, whose course on the history of modern philosophy, he took in 1907-1908, and on the philosophy of history in 1901-1910. Eliot acknowledged that Babbitt's influence was one of the forces that sent him to paris in 1910-1911 and it was probably on Babbitt's advice that he began to study Sanskrit, Pali and Indian philosophy. Some of the central concepts Babbitt's though continued to be Eliot's major preoccupations - the importance of tradition ; the necessity of the poet and critic of mediating between the past and the present; the unification of thought and feeling; the opposition between classicism and romanticism.

The American poetry of his generation represented for Eliot 'a complete blank'. He drew inspiration from late nineteenth century English poets such as *John Davidson* and *Ernest Dowson* and the slightly earlier poet *James Thomson* (1834–1882). Thomson's poem, *The City of Dreadful Night* is an exprecession of the dreariness and inhumanity of the modern city. Thomson uses Dante to place his city within the context of Dante's vision of hell. It is possible that Thomson's poetry shaped Eliot's reading of Dante and enabled him to see the relevance of *Dante's Inferno* to contemporary city life. Davidson, too, is a poet of the City. Eliot declared that the 'personage' that Davidson created in his poem *Thirty Bob a Week* haunted him all his life. His poems, like those of Eliot, reveal the violence beneath the quotidian surface of city life.

Eliot received his B.A. in 1909 and his M.A. in 1910 from Harvard. In October 1910, he left for Paris to read French Literature and Philosophy for a year. Eliot returend to Harvard in September 1911 and enrolled as a graduate student in philosophy

with intention of taking up philosophy as an academic career. While at Harvard, he studied Sanskrit, Pali and Indian philosophy. He studied classical texts including Bhagavad Gita and some sacred books of Buddhism. At one place, Eliot admists that he almost became a Buddhist at the time when he was writing *The Waste Land*. He acknowledged that his poetry showed the influence of Indian thought and Sensibility.

In 1913, Eliot was elected the president of Harvard Philosphical Club. However, the very next year he undertook another trip to Germany to continue his philosophical studies there. With the outbreak of the first world war, Eliot had to leave Germany. He came to England and continued his studies at oxford till 1915. In 1916 he submitted his disseration on the philosophy of F.H.Bradley (1846-1924) from England, but never returned to Harvard to take that degree.

In 1915, he married Vivien Heigh-Wood, daughter of a painter. She was herself interested in painting, ballet and writing. Much has been written about their marriage. It appears to have caused intense suffering to both of them because of their contrasting temperaments, recurrent financial problems and Vivien's Chronic illness. She was neurotic, impulsive, childish and hysterical, yet fiercely loyal to her husband.

In 1916, he started teaching in Highgate School. Very soon, he got fed up with his job and in 1917, he joined Lloyds Bank where he remained till 1925. During this period, he wrote vigorously, *Prufrock and other observations* (1917), his first volume of poetry, was published in London. He worked as the assistant editor of *The Egoist* from 1917-1919, contributed frequently to *the Athenaeum*, and in 1923, became the editor of *The Criterion* which he continued to edit till the out-break of the second world war. In 1925, he joined the new publishing firm, *Flaber and Faber*, of which he soon became the director, and worked in the capacity till the end of his days.

During this period, he had also been writing poetry and his reputation as a poet was constantly growing. In 1919, his second collection of poems and in 1920, *Ara Vos Prec*, his third collection of twelve poems, were published. In 1922, *The Waste Land*, a great classic of English Literature, was published. It's pulication earned wide acclaim and exercised great influence upon the coming generations.

In 1927, Eliot joined the Anglican church of England. Impact of this event can be clearly noticed in the poems like *The Journey of the Magi, Ash Wednesday*. The poet searches for a right way, a right solution to the human dilemma, and he does so through

the traditional material and Christian imagery. His reputation continued to grow and he paid a short visit to Harvrd as a visiting professor in 1933. At this time, Eliot developed practical interest in drama. As a result great masterpieces of poetic drama were created. *The Family Reunion* (1939), The Cocktail Party (1950), etc. His poetry after 1935, continued to be religious, but not so obviously Christian as that of the earlier period. His last major poetic work is *The Four Quarters*.

Eliot's success both as a poet and in a wordly sense was remarkable. He visited the U.S.A. several times and contiuned to publish his critical pronouncements in the form of articles and essays, in numerous periodicals and journals of the day. They have been collected in the form of books as: The use of *Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *The idea of the Christian Society (1939)*, *Notes Towards a Defintion of Culture* (1948), *Selected essays, Third Edition* (1951), *On Poetry and Poets* (1957) and *To Criticize the Critic* (1965). The value of Eliot's criticism arises from the fact that he speaks with authority and conviction, and his prose style is as precises and memorable as his peotry.

World recognition of his genius came with the award of the *Order of Merit* and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948. After the death of his first wife in 1947, who had been ailing since 1930, he married his private secretary, miss Valerie Fletcher in 1957. This lady was the companion of his last days and nursed him tenderly when he was ill in 1964. He died on 4th january 1965 in London leaving a void in the literary world, which may never be filled.

World recognition of his genius same with the award of the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948. After the death of his first wife in 1947, who had been ailing since 1930, he married his private secretary, missed her tenderly when he was ill in 1964. He died on 4th january 1965, in London leaving a void in the literary world, which may never be filled.

THE WASTE LAND

UNIT STRUCTURE:

8.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the mythical and biblical background of *The Waste Land.*

8.2 An Introduction to The Waste Land

Eliot's immediate waste land is the world, as he saw it, after the First World War. The 'Waste' is not, however of the war's deviation and bloodshed, but the emotional and spiritual sterility of western man, the 'Waste' of our civilization. Eliot does not regard this as a single moment in history, particular to the West in the twentieth century, and the poem is organized to present an inclusive, comparative vision, a prespective of history in which (by succinct alusions and references)

twentieth century forms of belief and disbelief of culture and of life are kept in a continuous and critical relationship with those of the past.

The Waste Land was written during the autumn of 1921, in Lausanne, Switzerland, when Eliot was preoccupied partly with the ruin of post-war Europe, partly with his own health and the conditions of his servitude to a bank in London. The poem was first published in a serial form in *The Criterion* in October and November, 1922, However, before publishing it the poet sent a rough draft of it to Ezra Pound, who suggested far-reaching modifications. It had for epigraph a phrase from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* ("The Horror! The Horror!) In Paris that winter, Ezra Pound has recalled, *"The Waste Land* was placed before me as a series of poems. I advised him what to leave out," Pound dissuaded Eliot from installing *Gerontion* as a prelude to the sequence, forbade him to delete "phlebas the Phoenician," and nagged about the Conrad epigraph until a better one was discovered in Petronius.

The Waste Land is a five-parted work of four hundred and thirty-four lines, with sudden wrenching juxtapositions, thematic links between section and section, fragments quoted from several languages with no one present to whose mind they can occur. It has a very dense textual untiy. There are diverse opinions about *The Waste Land.* Louis Untermayer calls it a "set of separate poems..... a piece of literary carpentry, scholars joiner's work.... a pompous parade in erudition." While there are critics like F.R.Leavis, Mathiessen and Cleanth Brooks whose interpretatins have proved *The Waste Land* as a highly compressed epic of modern age.

8.3 The Mythical Background

The theme of the poem is the salvation of the Waste Land, not as a certainty but a possibility: of emotional, spiritual and intellecutal vitality to be regained. Eliot develops this theme drawing upon related patterns in nature, myth and religion: the cycle of the seasons; the ancient fertility myths of Egypt, India and Greece, in which the god must die to be re-born, to bring fertility to the soil and potency to the people; a pattern present in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

In his notes to the poem, Eliot refers us to From *Ritual to Romance* (1920) by Jessie Weston. This book provided Eliot with a coherent shape for the mass of intricate material that enters into his poem. It gave to his mind the very fillip, which it needed to crystallize. What he learned especially from it was the recurring pattern in various myths, the basic resemblance, for example, between the vegetation myths of the rebirth of the year, the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the Christian story of Resurrection, and the Grail legend of purification.

Eliot made particular use of Jessie Weston's account of the *Fisher King,* a figure which recurs in a number of fertility myths, and whose story is one of obvious relevance to this poem. His land is under a curse and lay waste. The Fisher King is impotent, by illness or maiming, and his people are likewise infertile. The curse can only lifted by the arrival of a stranger who must put or answer certain ritual questions.

Eliot relates this myth to the *legend of the Grail*. The Grail was the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper and in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the blood from the wound made in Christ's side at crucifixion and brought it to the Glastonbury in the West of Englnad. The Grail was there force regarded as a supremely holy Christian relic. It was lost and the search for the Grail became a power narrative image of man's search of spritiual truth, an image used by many medieval writers. The searcher of teh Grail is a knight, whose quest takes him to the chapel perilous where he must (like the stranger in the Fisher King myth) put certain questions about the Grail and another holy relic, the Lance that pierced Christ's side. When this is done, the plight of the land and the people is eased.

8.4 The Vegetation and Fertility Myths

Eliot also refers to his other major anthropological source. *The Golden Bough* (12 volumes, 1890-1915) by Sir James Frazer, an encyclopedic study of primitive myth, presenting a possible line of continuity from these origins, through organized religion to modern scientific thought. In his notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot referred to it as a work 'Which has influenced our generation profoundly'.

Frazer's researches showed that the myth underlying primitive fertility cults in different cultures and historical epochs was that of the dying and resurrected god. The main lines of the myth are invariable. The God is young and beautiful, the lover of a great Goddess and the victim of a tragic and untimely death. After his death, the god passes to the land of the dead, which is usually underground. His death is bitterly mourned because it brings loss and misfortune upon the world. Then for the salvation of the land, the god is either rescued or resurrected into the land of the living by his beloved, or else an agreement is made that he will spend half his time in each of the two realms. According to Frazer, the god was a vegetaion deity and his death and resurrection enacted the annual cycle of the change of seasons. Eliot drew particularly on Frazer's account of the vegetaiton ceremonies in part IV, the two volumes treating the deities Adonis, Attis, Osiris: these ceremonies were ritulas of sacrifice to conciliate the powers of nature and ensure the continuing cycle of the season, with the life of the new year to be born again out of the old.

This vegetation cremony has been referred to in the opening lines of *The Burial of the Dead.* Symbolically, this recurrent pattern of birth and death stood for spiritual death as a result of sin and sexual pervision, and spritiual regeneration, the result of suffering and penance. This recurrent pattern has been taken over in the Christian myth, in the birth of Christ, his crucifixion, and his resurrection.

8.5 Mythical Background of Tiresias and his significance in *The Waste Land*

Eliot gives a note on Tiresias, which offers to supply the poem with a nameable point of view:

"Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character", is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants melts into the Phoenician sailor, and the later is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem."

The significance of Tiresias is complex and varied. Historically, he is connected with the story of king Oedipus of Thebes, which is clearly and demonstrably the classical legend of a wasteland, with striking resemblnces to the drought infested sin-ridden kingdom of the medieval Fisher King.

Eliot refers to the prophetic powers and bi-sexuality of Tiresias, quoting the Latin text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which tells this legend: Tiresias came across two snakes copulating in a forest. He hit them with his staff and was turned into a woman. Seven years later he saw the same two snakes and hit them again. As he had hoped, he was turned back into a man. On account of Tiresias's male and female experience, Jove called him as an expert witness to settle a quarrel with his wife Juno. Jove was arguing that in love the woman enjoys the greater pleasure; Juno argued that it was the other way round. Tiresias supported Jove. Out of spite Juno blinded him. To make up for this, Jove gave him the power of prophecy, and long life. In the myth, Tiresias was successfully male and female. In *The waste Land* he is specifically hermaphroditic.

In this representation of Tiresias Eliot is also aware of other legends associated with him. One legend attributes Tiresias's blindness and prophetic powers to Athena, whom he saw bathing. Being a friend of his mother, Athena, instead of killing, made him blind and prophetic, there by pre-empting anyone believing that he had seen her nude. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus is sent to Hades to consult Tiresias as to the manner of his returning home to Ithaca. Tiresias 'walked among the lowest of the dead' and evaded prediciting Odysseus 'homecoming, and Odysseus was somehow satisfied with it, and did get home, for a while. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* by Sophocles, Tiresias is the blind, withered prophet who knows that Thebes has ben cursed because of Oedipus's particide and subsequent incestuous marriage to his mother, despite the fact of his ignorance of the identity of both paretns. As a result, Thebes has been turned into a wasteland the people and the land are infertile. *Dante* placed Tiresias in hell with augurs and diviners who, because they wished to peer into the secrets of the future, have their faces turned so that they can only go backwards, because looking forward was denied to them.

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

Tiresias is the fittest symbol of human consciousness itself, the accumulated experience and knowledge of the race acquired during its long and devious passage through the immense stretch of time. He is the enlightned ghost of the age, watching the depressing spectacle of modern humantiy, which has fallen from the ancient heights and forgotten old values and sanctities. He is at once a relic of the past and as inhabitant of the present, at once a prophet and detached spectator of the agonizing drama of contemporary history and a participator and fellow sufferer, with a superior insight into the meaning of the ghostly masquerade, miscalled human life. Psychologically speaking, he is the conscience of humanity, banished and disowned by thoughless men and women, but still strong enough to prick the bubbles of their illusions, joys, hopes and fears.

Tireasias provides unity to *The Waste Land*. He is a connecting link between all the sections. But for his presence throughout, the poem would have become a phantasmagoria, a nightmare, a medley of scenes and meaningless snatches of talk 'almost overwhelming in it's confused impression. Tiresias mixes the past with the present and through symbols, the distance of time and space is destroyed.

8.6 The Biblical Wasteland

After discussing two wastelands, the wasteland of King Fisher and the wasteland of king Oedipus of Thebes, the third Biblical Wasteland or evil land of *Emmaus*, needs to be discussed in detail. The Biblical Wasteland is metnioned in *Ecclesiastes* and *Ezekiel* parts of the old testament. The prophet Ezekiel warns his followers to member god and give up worshipping of idols. Their sins have laid the country waste and regeneration will come only when they return to god.

These three wastelands form the mythical backgorund to the contemporary wasteland. In this way, Eliot has linked up the past with present, and universalized the tropical. These mtyhs have been used as "objective correlatives' to depersonalize his emotions and they have provided impersonality to the poem.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 9**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-III**

THE WASTE LAND

SECTION-WISE CRITICAL ANALYSIS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

9.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to explain the Section wise summary of The Waste Land discussing first three part of the poem.

9.2 The Title of the Poem

Eliot probably took this title from *Morted' Arthur* by Thomas Malory, where the words have a significant context within the story of Galahad (Book 17, Ch 3, in Caxton's text: 'And so befell great pestilence and great harm to both Realms for since then increased neither corn, no grass, nor well no fruit, in the water was a fish,

wherefore men called hit the lands of the two marches the wasteland for that dolorous stroke.'

It could be a double allusion, since 'a wasteland' closes Book II of the Confessions of St. Augustine, to which Eliot refers in his notes to lines 307 and 300: 'I wandered, O my God, two much astray from Three my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to my self a wasteland' Beyond these literary sourced, there could also have been a much more immediate suggestion in the back numbers of *Poetry* in which, 'Prufrock' was first published in June 1915. Two years earlier, in the issue for January 1913, there had appeared a 'Wasteland' by Madison Cawein, a poem, whose desolate landscape, like Eliot's, communicates spiritual desolation, and whose imagery and themes are also similar.

9.3 The Epigraph

The Epigraph of the poem has been taken from the *Satyricon*, a satire by the Roman Writer Petronius (1st Century AD). The poem narrates the story of the Sibyl of Comae. In Greek mythology the Sibly were women of prophetic powers, that of Cumae the most famous. She was granted long life by Apollo, at her own wish, as many years as she held grains in her hand; but carelessly she forgot to ask for eternal youth. Hence, she aged and her prophetic authority declined. Now she longed for death.

Translated into English, the Epigraph means: 'For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a case, and when the boys said to her, "Sibyl, what do you want ?" she answered "I want to die ." Trimalchio in the Satyricon speaks these words. The speaker is drunkenly boasting, trying to surpass his drunken companions in their tales of wonder.

The Epigraph introduces the theme of death-in-life. In her role as prophetess and in her position as tapped spectator the Sibyl is associated with Tiresias in the poem. In the decline of her prophetic powers the Sibyl is associated with Madame Sosostris in the poem.

9.4 The Burial of the Dead

The opening section of the Waste Land is titled 'The Burial of the Dead.' It refers to (a) The Burial of the dead fertilty God (b) the burial service for the dead performed by the Christian church. 'The Order of the Burial of the Dead' is full title of the Burial service in the Church of England. In both the cases death is believed to be followed by rebirth. But the inhabitants of the contemporary waste land are spiritually dead and this stirring of the life and return of fertility is as painful to the waste landers, for it reminds them of their spiritual death and need for spiritual regeneration."They dislike to be roused from their death-in-life" (Cleanth Brooks). Their values are all topsy-turvy. April is the cruelest month for modern waste landers. The account of April is a contrast to the general prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer (1343-1400) which is conventionally energetic and cheerful in accordance with the traditional treatment of 'Spring'. Thus the coming of April with its refreshing rain is resented.

Up out of the incantation beaks a woman's voice, giving tongue to the ethnological confusions of the new Europe. There is a light chat between two inhabitants of the Waste Land, perhaps overheard and remembered by Tiresias, or perhaps he himself is one of the speakers. One of the two is a German princess Marie. She is a globetrotter representing regressive thrills and objectless travels, symbolizing the rootlessness of the modern man. She is separated not only from the life of a nation, but also from that other natural unit, the family, for her memories involove neither father nor mother, only a holiday at a cousin's. In winter they go south in search of pleasure and physical comforts. The shower of rain surprises her, she seeks shelter from it, as she is unaware of its purifying and fertilizing significance. "In the mountains there, you feel free,"speaks of the spiritual bankruptcy, deracinated ardour, and an illusion of liberty, which is no more than impatience with human society and relief at a temporary change.

Tiresias is surveying the panorama of modern civilization and finds it spiritually barren and dead. The entire passage is closely reminiscent of the parts titled *Ezekiel* and Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. God shows his prophet *Ezekiel* a vision of desolation and addresses him, 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak

unto thee." Ezekiel is told of his mission, to preach the coming of the Messiah to the rebellious, unbelieving people. The "son of man" is moving tirelessly eastward, when the speaker accosts him with a sinister "Come in under the shadow of this red rock" and offers to show him not merely horror and desolation but something order and deeper fear. Red rock symbolizes the Christian church. The shadow of the rock is immortal and eternal and it is different form the shadow of man, which is his death. In the morning, solubilizing youth, it is behind and in the evening, symbolizing old age, it stands in the front, ready to face him. Dust is the symbolic reminder to man of his bodily mortality, his beginning and end in matter and "The fear' is partly the fear of death, but still more a nameless, ultimate fear, a horror of the completely negative." (F.R. Leavis). The 'fearful' associations, raised in Eliot's line, are biblical. In this way, the modern Waste Land is linked up with the Biblical Waste Land.

Two episodes of guilty love are introduced, which are Eliot's comments on the sexual perversion of the modern waste Landers. Eliot's note refers us to the libretto of *Tristan and Soiled*, the opera by Richard Wagoner (1813-83). A sailor is singing about the sweetheart he has left behind him: 'The wind blows fresh to the homeland. My Irish girl, where are you lingering?' Act I of Wagoner's Tristan ends with a scene of mystical love-recognition. Eliot again refers to Wagner's opera, when Tristan is dying, waiting for Soiled his beloved, but the look-out reports that there is no sign of her ship: 'Desolate and empty the sea.'

These two extracts from the German Opera enclose within them another episode of guilty love, and so equally devoid of satisfaction. It presents the picture of a youthful, romantic love. 'The Hyacinth girl', young and beautiful lady, has now been forgotten by her lover, but a year ago when they came back together from the Hyacinth garden, the lover had a moment of intense emotional ecstasy. Hyacinths are the flowers that symbolize the resurrected God of the fertility rites also. In Greek myth, Hyacinth was killed in an accident and a flower grew out of his blood. In this passage, Hyacinth girl speaks with hurt simplicity. Her words are child-like words, self-pitying, spoken perhaps in memory, perhaps by a ghost, perhaps by a wistful woman now out of her mind. The response exposes many contradictory layers of feeling : "..... I knew nothing, Looking into the heart of light, the silence."

The context is erotic, the language that of mystical experience-plaintly a tainted mysticism. The words " I was neither living nor dead" signify a moment of ecstasy, and "In the heart of light, a silence" echo a similar passage of *Dante's Inferno*, and bring out the fertility of sex outside marriage.

In the next passage, a clairvoyant named Madame Sosostris is shown as telling fortune with Tarot packs. Madam Sosostris is a fake fortuneteller in the novel *Come Yellow* (1921) by Aldous Huxley. The Tarot pack of 78 cards, referred to in the passage was used in the ancient Egypt to forecast the rise and fall of the river Nile, the source of life and fertility. But in the Contemporary world the function of the pack has degenerated and it is used for the forbidden fortune telling. This dengeration is symbolized by the fact that Madam Sosostris suffers from bad cold and lives in constant fear of the Police: "One must be so careful these days," she says to the woman who has been consulting her as regards her fortune, and adds that she would bring the horoscope of Mrs. Equitone herself. The various cards in the Tarot pack represent the different personages who are : (a) the drowned Phaenician Sailor, a type of fertility God, whose image was thrown into the sea each year to symbolize the death of the summer. Drowning is a process of transformation and so his eyes have been transfigured into pearls. The line, 'Those are pearls, that were his eyes, 'is reminiscent of Aerial's song in *The Tempest* (b) Belladonna: literally, in Italian, beautiful lady, also the popular name for a flower from which is obtained a dangerous drug, used by women to enlarge the pupil of the eye; also the name for one of the three Fates of classical lengends. Bellandonna is the lady of situations in the Waste Land, for she is adept in manipulating sex intrigues. Her name is reminiscent of a title of painting of Virgin Mary by Leonardo, titled: Madonna of the rock. (c) The man with three staves is the King Fisher himself, symbol of degenerate humanity, requiring a three-fold remedy to give, to sympathize, and to control. (d) The wheel, it symbolizes the efforts of degenerate humanity to control and guide their own destiny, without caring for divine guidance. It may also symbolize the flux of life and the cycle of seasons. (e) the one-eyed merchant is the Smyrna merchant who in the past brought both religion and sexuality to Euroipe. Now he has only one eye, i.e., represents only sexuality and has lost

his religious function. (f) The Hanged Man stands for the dead fertility God or Christ crucified, but such spiritual values are not found in the modern Waste Land. He is 'hooded' and the fortune teller cannot recognize him (g) the crowds of people, 'Walking in a ring,' are the London crowds going through their daily round of existence which is dull and boring.

The protagonists then surveys 'The Unreal City'. This unreal city is Eliot's London, Baudelaire's Paris and Dante's Limbo. Eliot is presenting a vision of contemporary life but all ages and all centuries are contained in it. This unreal city is given an additional haunting dimension as a realm of death-in-life by being linked with Dante's *Limbo*, the region of those dead, who, while on earth, had 'lived without praise or blame,' ' who had not been strong enough in will to do either good or evil,' and so were condemned forever to wander aimlessly, in feverish, useless motion. And as this throng moves through the murky streets of wintry London, the poet encounters one with whom he has shared experience and now shares memories of war. Eliot considers all wars to be one war Stetson represents humanity at all-times. The 'corpse' symbolizes Stetson's spiritual failure and 'the Dog' symbolizes spiritual awareness or conscience, which tries to awaken man and this awakening is not linked by Stetson or other Waste Landers. This section ends with a line from Baudelaire's prefatory poem 'Au Lecture' (To the Reader) "O hypocrite reader, my fellow-man, my brother."They share the sin of ennui, boredom heightened to a profound spiritual dissatisfaction, expressed in the modern term *anomie*.

9.5 A Game of Chess

A Game of Chess revolves around perverted nature, denied or murdered offspring. Title is taken from Middleton's play, *Women Beware Women*, in which Bianca, in the background, is being seduced by the duke, while in the foreground Livia, the duke's accomplice, plays a game of chess with Bianca's mother-in-law in order to hold her attention. Every move in the game corresponds to the forcible seduction of Bianca. The effect of the title is to suggest that the relationships of the men and women depicted in this section are akin to a game of chess, with it's moves and counter-moves, and attempts of the adversaries to out maneuver each other. It symbolizes perversion of sexual values in the contemporary world of

desolation. Sex has become a matter of intrigue and seduction, and so the cause of spiritual death and dissolution.

The opening of the section is a mosaic of quotations, phrases and allusions from various authors woven into a pattern. They are a fine example of Eliot's poetic shorthand. The luxurious surrounding of the lady in the beginning of this section, brings out the artificiality of her life. "The chair she sat in," reminds one of Coleoptera in her barge, and the connection is reinforced by the mention of carved Dolphins a few lines later. The description of the lady's accumulation of scene in *Pope's* the 'Rape of the Lock', where Belinda's toilet is described. But the relationship between the sexes here is not the harmless play of the 'Raoe of the Lock'. Nor is it the passionate belief of Cleopatra in the integrity of personal love, to which she is willing to sacrifice power and empire. When one of the characters here says, "We shall play a game of chess,' this is a euphemistic statement of their intention to turn again to the over-familiar routine of their physical relationship.

Over the fireplace is carved the picture of Philomela. Eliot's note refers us to *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid (43B.C.-A.D.18). Ovid's version of the Greek myth tells how Philomela was raped by King Tereus of Thrace (the husband of her sister Procne), how he cut out her tongue, and how she was eventually transformed into a nightingale and so escaped his murderous rage. Her song filled the wasted Land with antiquity with melody and it echoes still. But to the dirty ears of modern man it is a meaningless "Jug-Jug". In Elizabethan poetry this was a conventional way of representing bird-song; it was also, in contrast, a crude joking reference to sexual intercourse. The waste landers fail to understand the real significance of Phyllome's story-purification and transformation through suffering. Similarly, other figures carved on the wall seem to them mere decoration, useless relics of the past, without any spiritual significance. They are mere "Withered stumps of time" devoid of all significance.

Their journey is once again a purposeless wandering, devoid of meaning, this preludes withdrawal to pleasure. This union of the sexes is not in any degree actuated by a desire for children - The comment of the Cockney woman at the close of the section is relevant to the situation here as well as to her own friend's:

You are a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get-married for if you don't want children ?

There are two couples that desire to avoid propagation, to escape parentage. There is a distortion of the sexual relationship and the reason for the distortion is that these are the children of lost parents., Various allusions make this quite clear. The Sylvan scene of line 98 is that of *Paradise Lost*, IV, where Satan is described as a Cormorant sitting on the tree of life, awaiting Adam and Eve. This summons to our minds the idea of original Sing, and the fall of Adam and Eve, so many times re-enacted in the Waste Land.

There is the suggestion of the Satan who denied god and so lost his spiritual father. The quotation from *The Tempest*, 'Those are pearls that were his eyes', is from song by Ariel that reminds Ferdinand of his drowned father. The father of the speaker in the Waste Land is similarly lost. At the end of the section Ophelia's words.

'Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.' recall that both Ophelia and Hamlet have lost their fathers and from this stems the tragedy that overtakes them. In the dialogue between the man and the woman:

"Speak to me. Why do you never speak, speak.....

You know nothing ? Do you see nothing ? Do you remember nothing ?"

There are allusions to the dialogue between Lear and Cordial at the beginning of the play, *King Lear*, when Cordially too answers 'Nothing', and through this loses her father and begins the tragedy.

Towards the end of the section, a picture of lower strata of society has been painted. Lil, a lower class woman, is being given suggestions about the maintenance of her physical self. Other wise, her husband Albert might turn to other woman for physical satisfaction. Thus, the results of perverted sex are highlighted in both the couples. The technique of 'Compare and Contrast' has been used elaborately in this section. In the apparent likeness of past and present lies the deeper contrast of meaning.

9.6 The Fire Sermon

The title of this section is taken from the famous sermon of Lord Budda in which he preaches against the fires of lust, anger, envy and the other pasions that consume men. Buddha enunciates it thus :

The eye, O Bikkhus, is burning : visible things are burning .....

With what fire is it burning ?

I declare untoi you that it is burning with the fire of lust .....

The title also reminds one of the Confessions of St. Augustine, wherein the represents lust as a burning cauldron. This section, the most explicit of the five sections, surveys with grave denunciatory candor a world of automatic lust.

In the opening, Tiresias surveys the condition of river the Themes in the autumn. He finds 'river's tent' is broken; the immediate, visual image is of shelter provided in summer by the leafy boughs of the trees overhanging the river, a shelter now broken by the loss of the leaves at the close of the year. But the rhetorical ring of the first half line suggests more solemn overtones of meaning : perhaps the loss is of some sacred or mystic quality. In the Old Testament 'tent' can mean tabernacle or holy place, arising from the use of a tent as a portable tabernacle by the wandering tribes of Israekl in the wilderness. In Isaiah, the 'river' ins linked with tent' as an image of the power and security that god offers to his chosen people."The nymphs are departed" both because summer is past, and because the world of Spenser's *Prothalamion* (when nymphs scattered flowers_on the water) is gone. From the 'brown land', amorists have fled indoors, but the river is not restored to a sixteenth-century purity because the debris of which it is now freed was not a sixteenth-century stewing of petals but discarding of twentieth century impedimenta. The nymphs, who have this year departed, are not the same nymphs who departed in autumns known to Spenser; their friends are "the loitering heirs of city directors" who, unwillingly to assume responsibility for any untoward pregnancies,

Departed, have left no addresses.

The journey is again one without aim, and one that can yield no hope. The person who fishes'in the dull canal' is Ferdinand Prince of Naples. The ceremony of fishing is connected with fertility ritual. In the Mahayana scriptures Buddha is referred to as the Fisherman who draws fish from the ocean, and is so represented in figures and pictures. The allusion here is international, for it is Buddha's Fire Sermon that combines with the reference to Augustine to close the section. Eliot is saying that the fishing is in the wrong hands, as the wheel in section IV is also in the wrong hands. The situation is presented again at the close of the poem where we are told that the question,

'Shall I at least set lands in order ?'

must be decided. Presumably, that is the affairs of each individual's life must be regulated before salvation can be expected.

Spring will return and bring sweeney to Mrs. Porter; Mrs. Porter introduced by the sound of horns and caressed by the moonlight while she laves her feet, is a latter-day Diana bathing; her daughter perhaps, or any of the vanished nymphs, latter-day Philomela

'So rudely forced.

Tereu.

Reference to "sound of horns and hunting" in day's *The Parliament of Bees* brings to mind Actaeon, a huntsman in the Greek legend, who surprised Diana (goddess of chastity) bathing with her nymphs. As a punishment he was turned into a stag and hunted to death. The chastity of Diana is contrasted with the promiscuity of Mrs. Porter.

Immediately after this, the reference to Mrs. Porter and her daughter who ... Wash their feet in soda water, is associated with the singing of the children, which accompanies the ceremony of feet-washing in the Grail legend. This precedes the restoration of the Fisher King to health. Inevitably, too, it suggests the Christian ceremony of baptism. An echo from the previous section of the bird song and the account of the Philomela's betrayal rounds off the meaning of the passage.

Next, Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant, is introduced. He is unshaven, unclean, his pockets are full of currants (symbolizing his merchandise) and documents showing that he is authorized to bring his goods carriage and insurance free. The degeneration of his function is further brought out by his inviting Tiresias to hotels, which were the hot beds of corruption and homosexuality during the war, and the years, which followed.

And next the typist expects a visitor to her flat. The mating of the typist with the young man, 'Carbuncular' is my mechanical symbolizing animal-like sexual relationship of modern man. The typist passage is the great 'tour de force' of the poem; in gentle lyric melancholy, it's repeatedly disrupted rhythms, the automatism of it's cadencies, in alternate lines as piring and falling nervelessly-

The time is now propitious, as the guesses,

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,

Endeavors to engage her in caresses which still are unreporoved, if undesired-constitute Eliot's most perfect liaison between the self-sustaining gesture of the verse and the presented fact. The upturned eyes and back-nothing else, no torso-recalls a Picasso distortion, the "human engine" throws pathos down into mechanism.

The seduction of the typist introduces Tiresias, representative of both sexes, who sees the consummation of the clerk's desires. The eighteenth- century attitude to 'lovely woman's folly, even if only conventional, was better than the indifference with which this couple regards its action. The line, "When lovely Woman stoops to folly", is from the song in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* in which the lovely woman who has stooped to folly commits suicide. But here the woman, the typist, indifferently turns on the gramophone. Thus the juxtaposition of the past and the present brings out the contrast, and in this way heightens Eliot's satire on the Contemporary perversion of values. Tiresias looks on a scene that typifies all the sexual relationships in the poem, and so what he sees is 'the substance of the poem.' All the more so because the music that he hears repeats one of the leading themes-that of the lost father:

Sitting upon a bank

Weeping again the King my father's wreck,

This music crept by me upon the waters,

And the father here, not only the leader of the family, is also the leader of a country, being once again Ferdinand's father, the King. As before, at the conclusion of the glimpse of the Waste Land's mechanical pleasure, it is impressed upon us that what these people lack is guidance from without.

The music leads the poem's action to one of the few manifestations of virility in the Waste Land, in lower Thames Street, abode of the fish man, those who continue to give allegiance to the source of life. They live by the river and by the church. This manifestation of virility is transitory, however, and with the song of the three Thames daughters who, like Wagner's Rhine daughters, have been violated, comes the treatment of the river as it appears now, dirty and sordid. That the following lines, switching to the scene on the Thames as Elizabeth travels in magnificent procession, are partially a contrast to the contemporary squalor is indubitable. Fundamentally, Elizabeth is the same as the childless lovers of all the earlier sections. She toys with the idea of marriage and remains childless-Eliot refers to this specifically in his note on the passage. The exact parallel to Elizabeth in the modern scene is the woman in the first part of 'A Game of Chess', also surrounded by luxury.

Each of the Thames daughters speaks in turn to recount the circumstances of her seduction. The broken quotations from St. Augustine and the Fire Sermon summarize the lesson of the section-that the sin of the actors is in the sterile burning of their lust. So it has been in all ages. Human beings have at all times been open to, and have succumbed to, the same temptations. The burning of lust, the sterility of love, the physical and spiritual drought, can be quenched only by the coming of the life-giving water, though this may mean, paradoxically, as it does in the fourth section, physical death by water. That is, a death that can lead to renewed spiritual life.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 403 **LESSON NO. 10**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-III**

THE WASTE LAND

SECTION WISE CRITICAL ANALYSIS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

10.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the distance learnerwith a critical understanding of *The Waste Land,* discussing the last two parts along with symbolism and poetic technique used in the whole poem by T. S. Eliot.

10.2 Death by Water

According to Jessie Weston, each year at Alexandria an effigy of the head of the god was thrown into the sea as a symbol of the death of the powers of nature. The head was carried by the current to Byblos. It was then retrieved and worshipped as a symbol of the god reborn. Another powerful tradition of a life-bringing death-by-water is contained in the Christian sacrament of Baptism.

This section is a close adaptation of the seven lines of a French poem by Eliot, 'Danle Restaurant', written May-June 1918. The Phoenician sailor, Phlabas was young, tall and handsome, but he was drowned because his life was a sordid round of business activity and pleasure without any spiritual motivation. There is re-birth for the vegetation God drowning but for the Phlabas and the modern man there is no re-birth as they lack spiritual guidance.

10.3 What the Thunder Said

Eliot wrote to Bertrand Russell (1923) that he was glad Russell liked the Waste Land, 'and especially Part V, which in my opinion is not the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all.'

Eliot notes that in the first part lines 322-94, three themes are employed. First, the story told in Luke XXIV, of the two disciples traveling on the road to Emmaus (a village some distance from Jerusalem) on the day of Christ's resurrection. He joins them but remains unrecognized until he blesses their evening meal. Meanwhile, the disciples talk over the recent events-the trial, the crucifixion and so on.

The section begins with the events of Christ's betrayal and arrest, after the night of agonized prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, until the moment of his death. At the death of Chirst the earth shook. However, the poet believes that his crucification was not his real death, for Chirst lived on through his religion in the hearts of his disciples. But the modern man is dying a living-death because of his lack of spirituality and pessimism.

The second theme specified by Eliot is the approach to Chapel Perilous. This is the final stage of the Grail quest. Medieval versions of the Grail legend tell of the horrors with which the Chapel Perilous was filled to test the Knight's Courage and of the nightmare visions, including bats with baby faces that assail him on his approach. The knight is tested by the illusion of nothingness. This theme is interwoven with the Emmaus story from lines 331-94. Both these journeys have ended with success despite all kinds of trails and doubts, because they had definite purpose. But the journey of modern humanity is merely aimless wandering, without any purpose or goal.

This becomes the third theme, the decay of Eastern Europe in the modern world. The vivid description of uprooted humanity has been taken from Hermann Hesse's *The Brink of Chaos*. The vast expanse of barrenness can be witnessed. The old values are losing their hold with the falling towers. Civilization itself seems to be coming to an end. Eastern Europe seems to have gone mad. She is represented as woman fiddling music on her own black hair. Humanity has grown godless, and spiritually dead. This is symbolized by 'empty Cisterns' and 'exhausted Wells'.

Eliot recommends the wisdom of India for the spiritual salvation of modern humanity. He refers us to the source of the Indian legend of the Thunder in the sacred book *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad.* There is famine and drought and three groups-gods, demons, men-approach the creator Parajapati and each in turn asks him to speak. To each group he answers 'DA'. Each group interprets this reply differently. According to the fable, 'This is what the divine voice, the Thunder, repeats when he says DA, DA, DA: "Control Yourselves; give alms,; be compassionate." The title of this section has also been derived from this fable.

First 'DA' means 'to give'. Giving over to some noble cause is possible only in moments of great emotional excitement and such step cannot be retraced back by prudential considerations. Martyrs of such noble cause are not remembered in obituaries or in the wills of the rich. But they are the ones who bring spiritual regeneration.

Second 'DA' means 'Dayadhvam' i.e. 'to sympathize'. Modern man is imprisoned in his own isolated self. It is only in the night during sleep, when our conscious self is asleep, that we hear for a moment 'ethereal whispers'. Modern man is liked to 'coriolanus,' the proud and self-centered Roman leader, but he can be redeemed through 'Sympathy' and harmony with others.

Third, DA means 'Damyata' i.e. 'Self-Control'. Unlike the rider, who may dominate his horse, the sailor survives and moves by co-operation with a nature that cannot be forced; and this directing, sensitive hand, feeling on the sheet the pulsation of the wind and on the rudder the momentary thrust of waves, become the imagined instrument of comparably sensitive human relationship. If dominance compels response, control invites it; and the response comes 'gaily'.

In the last passage, the poet strikes a personal note and tells the spiritually dead humanity how he hopes to achieve spiritual and social disintegration in the Waste Land. The poet turns his back on the dead land and sits fishing on the shore of the river i.e. he makes efforts at his spiritual re-generation. He remembers some lines from Dante's *Purgatoria* and some from another Latin poem, *Pervigilium Veneris*, which teach him that suffering results in self-purification and beauty is born when the heart is purified. He has also learnt that absolute detachment is necessary for spiritual salvation. These are the principles he 'collected' and he hopes to save himself by following them in life. Just as the mad Heironymo in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* is ready to fit the actors with a suitable play. So Eliot has also fitted or provided humanity with the necessary advice and guidance. In the end, he reminds humanity of the teachings of the Upanishads. It is in this way alone that absolute peace - 'the peace which passes understanding' - can be achieved.

10.4 Symbolism in The Waste Land

Symbolism is essentially an oblique or indirect mood of expression, which suggests much more than is actually described or asserted. It deals with the Infinite and the Absolute and expresses the spiritual and the abstract through the physical and the concrete. Symbolism as a conscious movement originated in France as a reaction against naturalism and the precision and exactitude of the 'naturalist' school represented by Zola. The French symbolists like Laforgue and others headed by Mellarme, condemned more 'exteriority' and laid great emphasis on the treatment of the sensations', or the representation of eye. There are two kind of symbols (1) Traditional and (2) Personal. Traditional symbols are stock symbols; their use increases the evocative pleasure of poetry without introducing any element of complexity or obscurity. Personal symbols are devised to express the vague fleeting impressions passing through mind, or to convey a sense of mystery in life.

Eliot was greatly influenced by French symbolists. He uses symbolistic technique to express, not personal sensations, but a complex and decadent civilization with all its soul killing monotony and meaningless routine. Eliot's symbols are predominantly traditional, drawn from the literatures and mythologies of the past. In The Waste Land 'dry bones' signify spiritual decay and desolation, and 'rats' the ugliness and

horror of modern civilization. In the same way, 'dry grass;, 'rocks' 'winds singing dryly' are all symbols of spiritual sterility, from which results the desolation of the Contemporary Waste Land as well as the Waste Lands of the past. 'Spring' stands for re-birth, 'winter' for death, 'rain' for spiritual fertility, and 'draught' for spiritual dryness. Fishing symbolizes spiritual re-birth and rejuvenation by using traditional symbols, Eliot retains the essential suggestive quality of all symbolism, while limiting the suggestiveness to a clearly defined range in this way, he intensifies the feeling, the content of the poem, retains the suggestiveness which distinguishes poetry from prose, and yet assures that the suggestiveness will be confined to the demands of the poem's purpose. In this way, he eliminates the blurring of the object, or excessive vagueness, and achieves what matchlessness calls, "precision in vagueness".

Some symbols are used ambivalently. 'Water' is a symbol of regeneration, of purification of life as well as of death. In 'The Fire Sermon', fire stands for the destroyer, for the sterile lusts of the city; it is in the closing lines of the final section that fire represents the purifier, the purgatorial flame. The subtly different connotations of the chief symbols within the Course of 'The Waste Land' itself are one of the strongest means by which the poet conveys the complexity of the existence that confronts him. There are some examples of personal symbols in the Waste Land e.g. 'The Dog' symbolizes human conscience, the 'Red Rock', the Wrath of God or a place of refuge, and 'Broken Coriolanus', the pride and ego which isolate the human soul and lead to its fall. Urban imagery and the symbols of city life are also used frequently i.e. a 'taxi' throbbing waiting' symbolizes the eagerness of the typist to return home, 'Silk hat on the head of a Badford Millionaire' sybolizes the awkwardness of the young man Carbuncular, the 'broken finger nails' symbolize the emptiness and insignificance of the life of the three Thames Daughters. The rivers, "sweating oil and tar," stands for the squalor and dirt of modern life. "A heap of broken images", "Withered stumps of time" signify loss of faith in old values. Philomel and her song are symbols of spiritual rejuvenation through suffering, her song being mere "jug-jug" to modern humanity symbolizes the indifference of modern humanity of spirituality and purification. Tiresias himself is a complex symbol, a symbol of human conscience, and the spokesman of humanity. Biblical symbols have also been

sued in abundance. "The cricket which gives no relief', the address, "Son of man", "the fear in a handful of dust", "the rock", "the dead tree", "the dry bones" are all derived from Bible.

10.5 The Use of Poetic Shorthand

In *the Waste Land* alone there are allusions and references to at least twenty-five different writers, and there are passages from at least six different languages. The close of "The burial of the Dead" is a mosaic of quotations and allusions that I-A. Richards referred to his style as, "Poetic Shorthand". This device links the Contemporary waste Land with places and scenes in history, myth and legend, by the use of phrases, fragments of quotations, allusions etc., from poets and authors of different ages and countries. His use of the phrase 'unreal city', in the following passage, links up London with Paris, the city of Baudelaire, and with Dante's Limbo.

Unreal city

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many

I had not thought death undone so many.

In this way topical is universalized and the poem acquires the impersonality of great art. By relating the past to Contemporary life, the poet not only charges his poetry with an added significance, but also emphasizes the Continued virility of the past. The past is glorified and the sordidness and squalor of the present is accentuated by contrast. Eliot merely suggests "the sameness at the heart of Contrast", "resembling Contrasts" -that the human life has basically been the same despite superficial differences. For example, though in a famous passage in "The Fire Sermon" the mention of, "Elizabeth and Leicester brings an illusion of glamour, close thought reveals that the stale pretence of their relationship left it essentially as empty as that between the typist and the clerk" - (Matthiessen). But the poet does not say so explicitly : he juxtaposes the past and the present. The contrast is obvious, but the sameness is implicit.

The technical device of mythical method and use of abundant allusions and quotations in poetic shorthand is for compression. According to I. A. Richards "The Waste Land is the equivalent in content to an epic. Without this device twelve books would have been needed." Often a sense of ironic contrast is also produced by the device of 'Poetic Shorthand". The quotation 'When lovely woman stoops to folly' signifies the value attached to chastity in the past and its ironically contrasted with the typist's indifference to it. The 'Sound of Horns' makes reference to the legend of Diana and Actaeon but at the same time purity of Diana is ironically contrasted with Mrs. Porter's Washing her feet,'in soda water', to improve her complexion. Eliot has compressed into a single moment this memory and the sameness of other moments; He has enclosed 'vast immensities' within little space. In order to concentrate within his poem varied range and volume of awareness, Eliot eliminated all connectives, everything that was not entirely essential, and in his way increased the energy and lyric intensity of the poem. He thus created a work of art, a triumph of intellectual organization and conscious effort.

10.6 Suggested Readings

1. The Art of T. S. Eliot by Helen Gardner
2. The Poetry of T. S. Eliot by D. E. S. Maxwell
3. T. S. Eliot, His mind snd art by A. G. George
4. T. S. Eliot, A Collection of Critical Essays by Hugh Kenner

10.7 Sample Questions

1. Bring out the salient features of T. S. Eliot's poetry.
2. Discuss T. S. Eliot as a modern poet.
3. Bring out the chief allusions in the third movement of 'The Waste Land' and their significance.
4. What does Eliot owe to oriental thought in 'The Waste Land'.

5. Tiresias provides unity to the poem'. How far is this statement correct ?

6. In 'The Waste Land' Eliot mourns the death of Europe comment

---

W. H. AUDEN

UNIT STRUCTURE:

11.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to explore the political and social milieu of W. H. Auden and to see how it had effected Auden's poetic ability and how this further inspired a whole lot of younger genration to follow him.

11.2 Auden's Political and Social Milien

Auden is known as the poet of the 1930's. As the Wall Street crash of 1929 caused a general economic depression in America and Western Europe, the decade of the 1930's came to be called the decade of depression. Also, since there was no depression at the same time in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, many American and British writers got attracted towards Marxism, considering the political philosophy of Marx as the only remedy for the ills of Western civilization. Since the poets of the decade - Auden, Spender, Lewis, McNeice - were writing to advance the interests of Marxist ideology, the poetry of the 30's also came to be called the Poetry of Commitment. Auden, being the

leading poet of the time, came to be accepted as the leader of the group. It is for this very reason that the poet of the 30's are known as the Auden Group.

Auden was a source of inspiration for the younger poets of the 1930's. C.Day Lewis found him a poet full of vitality : a vitality so abundant that, over-flowing into certain poses and follies and wildly unrealistic notions, it gave these an air of authority, an illusion of rightness which enticed some of Auden's contemporaries into taking them over-seriously. Stephen Spender, too, made a similar praise, admiring Auden's deep insight into human nature. Auden's leadership of the group remained undisputed. Since he was conscious of his position, he spoke with the aplomb of authority uncommon among poets. Just as Ezra Pound enjoyed the position of a law-giver among poets of the 1920's, Auden remained a guide and governor of the literary realm of the 1930's. As the decade headed towards its close, and the World War Two started, Auden left his home country, England, and migrated to the safe haven of the time, America. He settled in New York.

Auden's migration to America became rather controversial among the fellow poets as well as the critics. It was not just the change of nationality that Auden had made, he had also converted to Christianity. That added fuel to the fire. From Marxism to Christianity, from fight to escape, both sounded anticlimactic to Auden's friends and admirers. For a time, they did not quite know how to take it. But as the stock-taking started, one started seeing the genesis of the change in Auden's equally strong commitment to Freud right from his early fascination for Marx. They, the critics and friends, then started viewing Auden's Marxism as a case of infatuation, or flirtation, not a case of lasting commitment. On the contrary, Auden's interest in Freud was found to have been lasting. Some of the reactions to Auden's conversion are interesting. Philips Larkin, a poet of 1950's, found 1940 as a unbridgeable gap in Audens's work. Before 1940, Auden was believed to be a socialist poet, but thereafter he became too verbose and erudite. The humanists thought that Auden's poetry disintegrated on his turning an orthodox Christian. Joseph Warren Beach denounced him as a lost leader. Randall Jarrell also attacked him for his shifting positions from rebellion to religion. But there

were also the ones, the rabid Christians, who lavished praise on the later Auden.

Those not extremely committed to left or right saw Auden more sympathetically; they viewed him as a quester, as someone in search of values. Richard Hoggart, for instance, finds Auden questing for order, for a pattern and meaning in life. Hoggart cites Auden's favorite images to be those of a wanderer, a quester. For John Blair, ''Auden is, from first to last, a moralist who wants his poems to arouse his audience into critical self-awareness and to incite them to reform. Yet he rejected all attempts, including some of his own early sermonizing, to tell the reader exactly what the moral truth is.'' Auden himself seems to endorse such a position. In his view, writing poetry is always a complex process, which no theory can encompass. Since writing comes first, and theory only later, the two cannot ever square with each other. In other words, creating a poem and theorizing about creating poetry are two very different processes which can never quite agree with each other. No wonder that whoever has theorized about the creative process — Pope, Shelley, Eliot - have ended up giving only a personal account of their own creative activities, seldom relevant to the creation of other poets.

In his theory of poetry, Auden disfavours the direct rendering of moral truth. Direct preaching in poetry, he thinks, is an exercise in futility. Like Eliot, he favours indirect communication of whatever the poet is anxious to say to the reader. He does agree that in times like the 30's, when the entire western world is facing a crisis, or at any other time of great social crisis, the poet cannot turn his back on the scene and take to fiddling. In his considered opinion, in such a time of crisis, the poet as an aware intellectual owes it to the world, to the society of which he is the member, to offer his reading or analysis of the situation, thereby to enlarge awareness of his readers as to the enormity of the situation faced by them. As he puts it in his elegy on the death of W.B.Yeats, ''Poetry makes nothing happen.'' What he means is that poetry cannot promote practical programmes of any political or social or religious group. Since poetry is committed to the service of truth, it has to place before the reader the whole case, concealing or distorting nothing.

Right from the beginning, therefore, Auden advocated objectivity in the poet's handling of his subject, be it war or politics, or economic depression. In one of his early poems, published in 1929, entitled ''Consider'', Auden begins with the following :

Consider this and in out time
As hawk sees it or the helmeted airman

Thus, what he recommends is a clinical view of the subject. From the detached position of the hawk or the helmeted airman, the poet is to view the social or political reality, and like the surgeon in his clinic, has to analyze the symptoms he notices in the body politic, or the social structure. And this is precisely what Auden did in his early poetry. Using the analytic tools of Marxist economic philosophy and Freudian clinical psychology, he analyzed dispassionately the ills of the 30's at the level of the individual. He tried to seek relationship between the ills of the individual and those of the society. For in his view, the individual being a part and product of society cannot be very different from the milieu that has made him. The entire body of his early poetic career is solely devoted to this task of operating upon the diseased body of the individual as well as of the society.

While examining the implications of Freud's theory of the human psyche, Auden comes to the conclusion that, like philosophy, the art has for its purpose to make people conscious of their environment so as to enable them to make their choices in a better way : "The task of psychology, or art for that matter, is not to tell people how to behave, but by drawing their attention to what the impersonal unconscious is trying to tell them, and by increasing their knowledge of good and evil, to render them better able to choose, to become increasingly morally responsible for their destiny."

It can be seen from this statement that the label of the "poetry of commitment," generally appended to the poetry of the 30s, is not quite appropriate. The label, as we know, is meant to point out the political commitment of the poet of the 1930s. And the ideology of politics to which they are alleged to be committed

is said to be Marxist. Auden makes it quite clear that his commitment, like that of any other poet proper, is only to the moral sense of good and evil, not to any brands of politics, including the Marxist. And, as he further clarifies it, in the statement just quoted, even the moral sense to be imparted to the reader, is not to be in the form of any preaching; rather, it is to be in the form of an added knowledge, making the reader see the situation, a story, an experience, a person or persons, and their relationship in a moral way, from the viewpoint of what is good and what is evil or bad. Auden goes on to describe the kind of poetry that can accomplish the desired function : "You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences, from which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions". Here, one may not quite agree with Auden, for if each reader is free to draw his onw conclusions, it is not necessary that every conclusion would be morally sensitive. It needs to be emphasized here that the stories the poet narrate or depict or dramatize, are not that open, having no accent of their own. The story, we may stress, is always told from the viewpoint of the moral or the human, and that in moral or in human, conclusions are not possible to be drawn any way you like. If there can be such a possibility, then either the literary text or the critical interpretation is perverse, and as such would not merit the name either of literary work or of literary criticism, whichever be the case.

Auden's view of poetry, like that of Eliot, is anti-romantic. He decries Shelley's grand statement that poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world". In his view, Shelley's statement describes the "secret police, not the poets". This reveals the general modernist prejudice against the romantics. Understood in the sense in which Shelley implies the phrase one can see that he means something very different from what Auden makes it out to be. Shelley only means that poets legislate the larger issues of life, and as such go to make an impact on the moral fiber of the people at large. Both Eliot and Auden only brandish their smartness to twist a phrase and render it ridiculous. For one thing, the modernists—Prund, Eliot, Auden and company—were a smartest, who bullied people by their smart phraseology and cant, dismissing their predecessors (taken

as adversaries) as naive and immature. Auden's insistence is that art is not a guide to life, as the Romantics conceived of it. In his view, art is not about this or that kind of life, but it has a life of its own, drawn decidedly from human experience, but transmuted, just as a tree transmutes water and sunlight into tree-hood, into its own unique being. In the reader's individual encounter with art, a poem does not give information, but a revelation of itself, which is simultaneously a revelation of ourselves.

Auden, as earlier stated, firmly believes that "poetry makes nothing happen". As he puts it elsewhere, "The frivolity of art is that it cannot have much effect in changing people. No matter how utterly convincing, didactic art cannot succeed in changing society... the best definition of man is the ungrateful biped". If that were the case, one would like to ask Auden, why do poets write (and publish), and why do people read compositions in any language, and why all societies begin the child's education with verses. If art were useless, or frivolous, it would not have enjoyed all along the course of civilization the status it has had. Related to the function of art is the question of 'catharsis', to which Auden has recorded his response. In his view, "Catharsis is properly effected, not by works of art, but by religious rites; it is also effected usually improperly, by bullfights, professional football matches, bad movies, military bands and monster rallies at which ten thousand girl guides form themselves into a model of the national flag." Once again, the attempt is to show a certain smartness to give Aristotle's concept a certain twist, only to render it ridiculous. Properly understood, we know that Aristotle's concept makes a sound sense. He only underlines the impersonal order of art, which excites, not a personal or national emotion, but balances the opposing emotions that arise from the textual experience.

Many of the statements made by Auden on poets and poetry, in fact, belong to his later phase as poet—after he had migrated to America in 1939. In that phase, he goes on retreating from his radical position of the 1930's farther and farther away into the conservative cave of Eliot's conception. The developmental graph of Auden as a poet shows how he tried to erase his radical past, cover it up with a certain form of spiritualism, for which one can

only shed tears. He, like Wordsworth, could be branded as another lost leader. His very departure to America was a signal towards his change of position. Thereafter, he abandoned Marx and his ideology, all his social concerns, and confined himself to personal and private individual life, speaking of Homer Lane the modern healer of spiritual sickness of the Wastelanders. Thus, Auden completely converted to the orthodoxy of Eliot, totally abandoning the socialist path. His later poetry is markedly different from his early poetry. Whereas his early poetry is social and political, showing poetic activism, his later poetry is private and personal, showing poetic escapism.

It will be interesting to observe the nature of change that comes about in Auden as he moves away from the Europe of the 1930's. Before his immigration to America, Auden in 1936 could say that he preferred to describe poetry as "the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of the common people", making his poems "simple, clear and gay". But later, like Eliot, poetry became an instrument of Christianity. He could now declare that a poem was a rite and the poet was guided by his personal encounters in his imagination. His poetry therefore shifts from the social to the personal, from the larger to the individual subject : I look for originality; in this sense, that if I read a volume of poems by somebody, I want to feel that this person has a unique perspective on the universe, that it is from his point of view and not from somebody else's. Secondly, I look for a real love and reverence for the medium itself—that is to say, for language.

Hammering his firm conviction over and over again, that "poetry makes nothing happen," Auden, as late as 1972, remarked :

> *Over the centuries Europe has had poets such as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton. I don't think the course of events there would have been much different without them. Yet they make Europe interesting. I think of Dr Johnson's words, "Poetry helps us a little bit to enjoy life, a little bit to endure it". Without communication life would be difficult and uninteresting. However, poet's don't change the course of history. It wrote*

about Hitler in the thirties but that didn't save one Jew from going to the gas chamber, or postpone the war even five seconds.

No one ever said, not even Shelley, that art changes the course of history. But it has always been believed that art does change the course of individual lives. Like most modernist statements, Auden's sounds cynical, implying a rejection of humanism and Renaissance values. The excuse for this rejection, even condemnation, of humanism, was the war in Europe. Well, when was world ever free from the wars? An event of history does not disprove a system of values that makes possible a civilized way of life. Majority of people would vouch for humanism, for love and peace; one Hitler or Mussolini may not. If poetry makes nothing happen historically, it does make something happen humanly, morally, spiritually. Johnson's words are precious, which Auden also endorses; Poetry does make life enjoyable and bearable. And that is no small significance attached to poetry.

When Auden paid posthumous tribute to his fellow poet Louis MacMeice, he remarked on the poet's pleasure in "language, in country landscapes, in city streets and parks, in birds, beats and flowers, in nice clothes, good conversation, good food, good drink, and in what he called 'the tangles'". These transient, temporal pleasures, tangled and all, are rejected in Auden's own verse. Auden himself was, of course, a far more affirmative poet, even in his later phase, than a mere admirer of landscapes and drinks. The nature of his affirmation did, however, shift as he gradually moved, in charted stages, from a Marxist alignment to a Christian one. Like Wordsworth, he extensively revised his earlier verses, pruning what he considered the excesses of utterance, particularly the political.

11.3 Sample Questions

1. Write a note on the environment of the 1930s.
2. What do we mean by the 'Poetry of Commitment'? Did Auden write that brand of poetry?
3. Write a note on the relation between poetry and politics.

4. Is Auden a political poet? Discuss.
5. Compare and contrast the early and later poetry of Auden.

11.4 Further Reading

1. C.D. Abbot (ed.), *Poet at work* (New York; Harcourt Brace, 1948).
2. A. Alvarez, *The Shaping spirit; Studies in Modern English and American Poets* (London; Chalto and Windus, 1961).
3. J.W. Beach, *The Making of the Auden Canon* (London; Oxford University Press, 1957).
4. John Blair, *The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden* (Princeton, New Jeresy; Princeton University Press, 1965).
5. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1971).

W. H. AUDEN

TWO MAJOR POEMS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

12.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to discuss two major poems i.e. *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* and *The Shield of Actilles* by W. H. Auden.

12.2 The Shield of Achilles

She looked over his shoulder

For vines and olive trees,

Marble, well-governed cities

And ships upon untamed seas

But there on the shining metal

His hands had put instead

And artificial wilderness

And a sky like lead.

And plain without a feature, bare and brown,

No blade of grass, no sign of neighbourhood,

Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,

Yet, congregated on the blankness stood

An unintelligible multitude.

A million eyes, a million boots in line

Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air, without a face

Proved by statistics that some cause was just

In tones as dry and level as the place:

No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;

Column by column in a cloud of dust

They marched away enduring a belief

Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief (19-21).

She looked over his shoulder for ritual pieties

White flower garlanded heifers, libation and sacrifice,

But there on the shining metal

Where the altar should have been,

She saw by his flickering forge-light

Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot

Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
And sentries sweated for the day was hot:
A crowd of ordinary decent folk
Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
As three plae figures were led forth and bound
To three posts driven upright in the ground.
The mess and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weighs the same
Lay in the hands of others ; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came
What their foes liked to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.
She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music, but there on the shining shield
His hands had set no dancing floor
But a weed-choked field.
A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about the vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,

Were axioms to him, who'd never heard

Of any world where promises were kept,

Or one could weep because another wept (56-59).

The thin lipped armourer,

Hephaestos hobbled away,

Thetis of the shining breasts

Cried out in dismay

At what the god had wrought

To please her son, the strong

Iron hearted man slaying achilles

Who would not live long.

In this poem, Thetis looks at the images on the shield that Hephaestos has been making for Achilles during the Trojan War. She expected to see olive trees and vines and marble cities and ships on windy seas, but Hephaestos has forged "an artificial wilderness" under a leaden sky. The plain is bare and brown, but a great multitude of boots stand ready for war. A faceless voice dryly explains with statistics why war is required for justice, so they march forth.Thetis also expected scenes of religious piety, but that is not what Hephaestos has been making. Barbed wire encloses a military camp in "an arbitrary spot," and civilians observe from a distance while the camp punishes three pale prisoners by binding them to upright posts. No hope comes from outside. The prisoners and the citizens are too "small," and the prisoners (perhaps also the other characters) "lost their pride / And died as men before their bodies died."

Thetis has looked a third time over the shoulder of Hephaestos while he works. She looks for athletes and dancers enjoying games and music, but on the shield there was a "weed-choked field" instead of a dancing floor. One poor child wanders about alone, throwing a stone at a bird that flies away to escape. To him rape and murder

seem normal. The child has never heard of a place with kept promises or even human sympathy. Hephaestos limps away, revealing the whole shield to Thetis, who cries out in horror at its imagery. This is what the armorer decided to put on the shield of Achilles, son of Thetis, Achilles the man-slayer doomed to soon die.

Critical Analysis

"The Shield of Achilles" provides a chilling confrontation between love and war. Written in 1952, it was included in his volume of poetry of the same name, which was published in 1955. The volume won the National Book Award in 1956. It is written in alternating seven-line stanzas of rime royal (ABABBCC) and eight-line stanzas in a ballad format (ABCBDEFE).

The contents of the poem derive from Homer's *Iliad*, an ancient epic poem concerning a key part of the Trojan War. A lot has happened by this point. In book 18, the goddess Thetis, the mother of Achilles, asks the god Hephaestos (Latinized as Hephaestus) to create a shield for son so he can triumph in the war against Troy. Achilles's earlier shield was taken by Hector after he killed Achilles' close friend Patroclus, who had taken the armor into battle thinking that seeing this armor would scare the Trojans (Achilles had stayed out of the fight over a dispute with Agamemnon about a woman). Homer goes into great detail describing the shield that Hephaestos makes; it contains a veritable history of the world in its scenes of pastoral calm, marriage, war, the cosmos, art, and nature.

The poem begins Thetis looking over the armorer's shoulder with disappointment. In each of her three stanzas, employing the repetition "She looked over his shoulder" in the first line, she is hoping to see images of civilization, joy, piety, and peaceful employment of athletic and musical arts. She loves her son and is thinking ahead to what he should be fighting for. But instead she sees images of irrationality, war, wilderness, immorality, injustice, and punishment. The contrast between what Thetis expects and what Hephaestos delivers, what Thetis desires and what the armorer thinks appropriate for Achilles, is stark.The pattern of hope and disappointment occurs all three times, followed by the concluding stanza wrapping up the point: after all, Achilles is doomed to live a short but heroic warrior's life. Achilles, like people in

general, can try to live average but boring lives instead, but Achilles has chosen heroism, and his mother is dismayed.

Critic Scott Horton argues that the poem has contemporary resonance for Auden and his audience, reflecting a warning about the Cold War and the authoritarian warmongering of the 1950s: "Auden is not portraying the tragedies of the last war as such. He is warning of a world to come in which totalitarian societies dominate and the worth and dignity of the individual human being are lost. He warns those who stand by, decent though they may seemingly be, and say nothing." This perspective is supported by anachronistic images on the shield. Thetis sees a scene that seems more like one from the Second World War: barbed wire around a military base. Modern war engages "millions" and spreads propaganda through "statistics."

Another allusion on the military base concerns the three people punished. A crowd watches from a distance as three figures are brought forth and bound to three posts in the ground. This scene alludes to the Crucifixion of Jesus between two others, as though the three posts are crosses, and it makes the horrors of war seem more universal. Horton writes, "the anonymous image also displaces the greater spiritual significance of the Christian sacrifice, suggesting that in the modern world such sacrifice has lost its ultimate meaning and that the victims, Christ in particular, have become nameless and insignificant." Poet Anthony Hecht has noted that the executed men were not martyrs, just victims. One also might see in this image an allusion to the Jews and others killed in Nazi concentration camps.

When Hephaestos hobbles away (in myth he is lame) without comment, the shield is his only statement. He put a mirror up to reality and reproduced it on the "shining metal." In contrast, Thetis' "shining breasts" reflect her motherly love, less with reality than with hope. Auden once said, "A society which was really like a good poem, embodying the virtues of beauty, order, economy, and subordination of detail to the whole, would be a horror." As much as we might strive for the virtues, reality—whether presented by Hephaestos, Homer, or Auden—shows us a different, more distressing world.

W. H. Auden was a mercurial poet, frustrating and fascinating for his vibrant juxtaposition of the banal and poignant in his challenging poetry. His influences were

legion, stemming from specific political issues such as warfare and class to more personal concepts such as Auden's constantly changing relationship with Christianity and his own homosexuality. One of the most powerful of the thematic strains that runs throughout Auden's work is the theme of warfare, especially in its relation to Auden's moral ambiguity and sometimes irreconcilable views on whether one should or should not engage in conflict. Perhaps the most interesting and relevant of the poems arising from Auden's interest and horror at the wages of war is "The Shield of Achilles," a work that paints a hideous portrait of modern life characterized by inevitability and martial horror and set amidst the classical lyricism and vitality of the Iliad of Homer. First published in 1953 and later included in the eponymous anthology The Shield of Achilles in 1955, the poem is constructed with alternating stanzas depicting the construction of Achilles' shield and a cruel, nameless war waged in modern times, with both strands of the poem ending in tragic fashion. As the poem develops, Hephaestus creates a shield adorned with unexpectedly banal and barren images, and the war continues on for the hapless inhabitants of the modern world. In "The Shield of Achilles," Auden juxtaposes the classical imagery of Hephaestus's construction of the eponymous shield with brutal modern imagery to illustrate the anxious meaninglessness of modern life, the warfare engendered by it, and the cruel social realities that lie behind both.

Auden's poem is replete with images of the absence of hope and meaning in modern life, and these images are made all the more poignant for their juxtaposition with the vibrance of the classical imagery of the Iliad. The world Auden describes in "The Shield of Achilles" is a horrific one, one bereft of inner meaning and whose only catalyst is the posturing of figures of authority. The environment is, as Auden describes, a "plain without a feature, bare and brown, / No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood, / Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down" (9-11). A featureless expanse physically and metaphorically, it is an environment in which the individual is a pointless being without any singular meaning. In essence, it is a world in which the individual has been crushed under the weight and enormity of life itself. The narrative of the poem describes a modern variation of the human race that can no longer be reduced to single individuals; it is, rather, an "unintelligible multitude" that is, at best, less a body of human beings than a statistical anomaly (Auden, 13). Their world is one defined by

the absence of personal meaning, and they have become so degraded that they have taken to silently occupying their space as a "million eyes, a million boots in line, / [w]ithout expression, waiting for a sign," seeking not for personal revelations but for any sign of authority (14-15).

It is a form of life far removed from the vibrance and singular personal experience that defines the classical imagery of *The Iliad*, which Auden references in his description of Hephaestus's creation of Achilles' shield. The world that Thetis inhabits is one that stands in sharp contrast to Auden's modern environment, being defined in Auden's verse by the sheer brilliance of its construction, one in which "vines and olive trees" and "[m]arble well-governed cities" are prominent features (2-3). As Thetis watches Hephaestus fashion her son's shield, she imagines futilely that the imagery he crafts upon it will reflect her world's magnificence, its "ritual pieties, / [w]hite flower-garlanded heifers," and "[l]ibation and sacrifice" - for her, unlike the masses of modern life, there is no question as to life's hope and inherent worth (Auden, 24-26). Thetis's world is the antithesis of the cruel, impersonal world that Auden describes. Robert Pack explores this in his article "The Idea in the Mirror: Reflections on the Consciousness of Consciousness," stating that Auden uses the Homeric, mythical vision of life to provide a sharp contrast with the mundane, scientific reality that modern people live in, one in which the individual cannot appeal to personal or social meaning (61). Rendered against the fantastic imagery of Homer, the meaninglessness of that modern life is made all the more stark and unmerciful.

Such as in Homer's epic, Auden's poem also alludes to brutal fits of warfare and mindless slaughter resulting from the stagnant torpor of modern life, which he equates with his version of the shield of Achilles. In the modern world Auden depicts in the poem, the masses march blindly to conflict, being roused by ethereal voices of authority to take up any number of meaningless, supposedly just causes. In the words of Auden,

> No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
>
> Column by column in a cloud of dust

They marched away enduring a belief

Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief (19-21).

They do not question the bizarre situation that compels them to fight, and thus they willfully partake in militaristic actions against whatever other masses they are exhorted to destroy. As such, their world is propagated with horrifying events resulting from their acts and those of their enemies, such as the binding of "three pale figures … [t]o three posts driven upright in the ground," an event that Auden describes in rather Biblical imagery (36-37). These occurrences do not trouble the masses, however; rather, they are simply taken as reality. This mindless acceptance is hardly surprising, given the futility and hopelessness of the world they exist in. Humanity in Auden's modern world has actually ceased to be, as life has left them stunted; as the poem mentions, they "lost their pride / And died as [individuals] before their bodies died" (43-44).

The stagnation of their life has destroyed them, and it is that stagnation that Auden so potently equates with the shield Hephaestus fashions for Achilles. As the article "Hephaestus' World: The Shield" by Eva Brann notes, the desolation of Hephaestus's shield is thoroughly modern in its imagery (42). Unlike the shield constructed in the Iliad, which is defined by its beauty and wonder, the eponymous shield of the poem is adorned with cruel, unbroken expanses of nothingness, featuring only an "artificial wilderness / [a]nd a sky like lead" (Auden 7-8). The base monotony of the shield is unrelieved by expanses of Thetis's lush greenery and seas; indeed, its only truly distinguishing feature is the harsh horizon between land and sky, a line which is, according to the article "The Poet and the Postwar City," largely meaningless in the "irrational wildernesses of metallic artifice" (Pearsall). Like modern life, the shield is stagnant, deadened, and featureless; it is cruel in its ambiguity and lack of meaning, and that absence of hope is the very essence that drives the people of Auden's poem to commit acts of horror in the hope of pleasing ethereal authorities.

At the heart of Auden's poem is a critique of the social realities that generate people willing to engage in such bloodshed, and Auden makes magnificent use of Thetis's harsh realization to illustrate the unanticipated consequences arising from false and immoral values. The unbridled cruelty and horror of the modern world Auden

describes is best detailed in a passage from the poem about an unnamed boy's perception of reality:

> That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
> Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
> Of any world where promises were kept,
> Or one could weep because another wept (56-59).

The boy, like most others of his world, lives in an atmosphere that is beyond hellish; it is illogical and viciously arbitrary. Auden's modern world has not only anesthetized its inhabitants on an individualistic and creative scale, but it has also destroyed any moral sensation that might have stayed their hand from committing acts of atrocity. Without the barest perception of a world that might abhor strife and violence, humanity has become simply unable to conceive of a reason not to propagate both. When the masses of Auden's world seek to please ethereal voices of authority, they do so likely hoping that they will find some sense of meaning. Because of their conditioning, however, although they do not aspire to become murderers, they become so nonetheless.

Their harsh epiphany is echoed by Thetis, who finds that the shield she has so desperately sought in order to protect her son is adorned not with images of beauty but of meaningless monotony. Like the inhabitants of Auden's modern world, Thetis is a product of her environment, which, although quite different from that of the harsh, impersonal modern masses, is just as misleading and deadening. Her world is that of classical Homeric virtue and beauty - great cities of wonders, religious rites that pervade life and grant it meaning, and an individualistic need for glory. That glistening fantasy obscures hard social realities, however; it does not show the privations of the poor or the dying wounded of the battlefield, choosing instead to celebrate pleasant imagery such as "athletes at their games" and "[m]en and women in a dance" (Auden 46-47). That world shapes her entire being, and as John Lucas comments in his essay "Auden's politics: power, authority, and the individual," what Thetis truly wishes is that Hephaestus will honor her distorted, "heroic" view of reality (162). What she finds in his shield, however, is a symbol of the futility of her son's life, of the hopeless future of "[i]ron-hearted man-slaying Achilles / [w]ho would not live long" (Auden, 66-67). The shield's

barren visage reminds her of that stark truth, which is, in its inevitability and hopelessness, quite akin to the desolation of the hideous world Auden describes. Her perception, like that of the anesthetized masses, is ultimately proven misguided, and it leads to consequences that will define not only her life but that of her son's.

Such realizations lie at the center of "The Shield of Achilles," Auden's harsh juxtaposition of classical vitality and wonder and the hopelessness, warfare, and cruel social realities of modern life. In Hephaestus's shield, Auden depicts lives irreparably damaged by an absence of meaning, and ultimately driven to violence in the vain hope of achieving it. The cruel logic that runs throughout the poem is that of modern life, of wars motivated by the thinnest of justifications and lives defined not by their expression but by their lack thereof. In many ways, the poem is the realization of Auden's hell and humanity's reality, and its relevance has only deepened as the very fabric of life becomes continually more absurd. By contrasting the quiet horror of existence and warfare with the splendor and beauty of Thetis's hopes for Hephaestus's creation, Auden makes a damning observation of the darker aspects of an impersonal, amoral modern world. For Auden, dispirited by World War II and the loss of any remaining innocence he might have had about the motivations of humanity, "The Shield of Achilles" was not only a magnificent artistic achievement, but the startling articulation of a hope dispelled. If Thetis is left in anguished realization at the end of the poem, so too is the reader.

12.3 In Memory of W. B. Yeats

I

He disappeared in the dead of winter:

The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,

And snow disfigured the public statues;

The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.

What instruments we have agree

The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness

The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,

The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays;

By mourning tongues

The death of the poet was kept from his poems.

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,

An afternoon of nurses and rumours;

The provinces of his body revolted,

The squares of his mind were empty,

Silence invaded the suburbs,

The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers.

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities

And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,

To find his happiness in another kind of wood

And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.

The words of a dead man

Are modified in the guts of the living.

But in the importance and noise of to-morrow

When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor of the Bourse,

And the poor have the sufferings to which they are fairly accustomed,

And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom,

A few thousand will think of this day

As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual.

What instruments we have agree

The day of his death was a dark cold day.

II

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:
The parish of rich women, physical decay,
Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.

III

Earth, receive an honoured guest:
William Yeats is laid to rest.
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry.
In the nightmare of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark,
And the living nations wait,
Each sequestered in its hate;
Intellectual disgrace
Stares from every human face,
And the seas of pity lie
Locked and frozen in each eye.

Follow, poet, follow right

To the bottom of the night,

With your unconstraining voice

Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a

Make a vineyard of the curse,

Sing of human unsuccess

In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart

Let the healing fountain start,

In the prison of his days

Teach the free man how to praise.

William Butler Yeats died in winter: the brooks were frozen, airports were all but empty, and statues were covered in snow. The thermometer and other instruments told us the day he died "was a dark cold day."While nature followed its course elsewhere, mourners kept his poems alive without letting the poet's death interfere. Yet, for Yeats himself, mind and body failed, leaving no one to appreciate his life but his admirers. He lives through his poetry, scattered among cities and unfamiliar readers and critics, who modify his life and poetry through their own understandings. While the rest of civilization moves on, "a few thousand" will remember the day of his death as special. In the second section of the poem, Yeats is called "silly like us." It was "Mad Ireland" that caused Yeats the suffering he turned into poetry. Poetry survives and gives voice to survival in a space of isolation.

In the third, final section of the poem, the poet asks the Earth to receive Yeats as "an honoured guest." The body, "emptied of its poetry," lies there. Meanwhile, "the dogs of Europe bark" and humans continue their "intellectual disgrace." But the poet is to "follow right / To the bottom of the night," despite the dark side of humanity somehow

persuading others to rejoice in existence. Despite "human unsuccess," the poet can sing out through the "curse" and "distress." Thus one's poetry is a "healing fountain" that, although life is a "prison," can "teach the free man how to praise" life anyway.

Analysis

Along with his piece on the death of Sigmund Freud, Auden's tribute to the poet William Butler Yeats is a most memorable elegy on the death of a public figure. Written in 1940, it commemorates the death of the poet in 1939, a critical year for Auden personally as well as for the world at large. This was the year he moved to New York and the year the world catapulted itself into the Second World War.

Yeats was born in Ireland 1856 and embraced poetry very early in his life. He never abandoned the traditional verse format of English poetry but embraced some of the tenets of modernism, especially the modernism practiced by Ezra Pound. He was politically active, mystical, and often deeply pessimistic, but his work also evinces intense lyrical beauty and fervent exaltation in Nature. He is easily considered one of the most important poets of the 20th century, and Auden recognized it at the time.

The poem is organized into three sections and is a commentary on the nature of a great poet's art and its role during a time of great calamity—as well as the ordinary time of life's struggles.The first, mournful section describes the coldness of death, repeating that "The day of his death was a dark cold day." The environment reflects the coldness of death: rivers are too frozen to run; hardly anyone travels by air; statues of public figures are desecrated by snow. These conditions symbolize the loss of activity and energy in Yeats' death.

At the same time, far away, wolves run and "the peasant river" flows outside of the rest of civilization ("untempted by the fashionable quays"), keeping the poetry alive. The implication is that the poems live even though the man may be dead. The difficulty with this situation, however, is that the man can no longer speak for himself; "he became his admirers." His poems, like ashes, are "scattered" everywhere and are misinterpreted ("unfamiliar affections" are brought into the poems). The ugly fact of bad digestion modifies the poems as "The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living."Furthermore, as in "Funeral Blues" and "Musée des Beaux Arts,"

the events of the average day go on—a trader yells on the floor, the poor suffer—for most people, the day goes unmarked. It takes a special soul to mark the importance of the day of the death of a great poet, and only "a few thousand" have such a soul. As scholar James Persoon writes, "These two elements—the poet's death as national and natural crisis and the poet's death as almost completely insignificant—describe a tension within which Auden explores the life of the work after the death of the author." Thus, in addition to the thermometer telling us so, the speaker of the poem tells us that it is a "dark cold day" with respect to the popular reception of Yeats' poetry.

In the second section the speaker briefly reflects on the generative power behind Yeats' poetry. It was "Mad Ireland" that "hurt" him and inspired his poetry as a form of survival. For Yeats, "silly" like other poets or, more broadly, like other Irishmen or humans, poetry was a "gift" that survived everything other than itself—even Yeats' own physical degeneration, the misinterpretations of "rich women," and Yeats' own failings. Poetry itself, from this perspective, survives in the midst of everything, not causing anything, but flowing out from isolated safety (perhaps the Freudian subconscious) and providing voice (metaphorically a "mouth") to that deep level of raw and unassailable humanity.The third and final part brings the reader back into more familiar territory, with six stanzas of AABB verse, every line in seven-syllable trochaic verse (three long-short feet followed by a seventh stressed syllable).

The body of Yeats ("the Irish vessel") rests in the ground, the warring nations fight (metaphorically, the "dogs of Europe bark"), people misinterpret his work ("intellectual disgraces"), yet somehow, his poetry retains a place somewhere. The true poet, like Yeats himself, will "follow right / To the bottom of the night" (to the primordial humanity expressed in Yeats' poetry), to that fundamental human freedom where an "unconstraining voice" can "persuade us to rejoice" in our existence. True enough, the human "curse" (evoking the Fall of Man in Genesis) remains; death awaits. This is all too true in a time of war. But the poet can turn the curse into a "vineyard" where sweet poetic drink can form. On the one hand there are "deserts of the heart" and human distress, yet on the other hand, with this wine a "healing fountain" can release a man from "the prison of his [mortal] days." A poet like Yeats, despite

everything, can "teach the free man how to praise" that fundamental spark of existence that survives in one's poetry.

The views of John Fuller on this elegy are interesting and worth quoting at length In Memory of W. B. Yeats contains two basic, related points: that a poet's work ultimately becomes independent of him, because he has no control over the interpretation which posterity give it and that, therefore, it is conditioned by society, and its role in society can be no more than a passive one. The rather sinister dramatization of Yeats's death in the first section is thus an essential part of the mystery of a poet's destiny, and the numb elegiacs reinforce the sense that the external world, in the grip of winter, is quite irrelevant to the internal world of poetry; the external "instruments" measure the fact of the weather and the fact of Yeats's death, but the internal 'guts' receive and modify his life's work. Similarly, the metaphor of revolution represents the purely material fate of the poet's body: the city is in revolt, but the country-side (the poetry) goes on as usual. The poems, by being still read, continue to live (By mourning tongues/ The death of the poet was kept from his poems) and the poet, in ceasing to be a physical being, takes on the effective value of his admirers (he became his admirers)."

12.4 Sample Questions

1. Write a note on "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" as an elegy.
2. What does Auden say about poetry and politics in the poem?
3. Discuss "The Shield of Achilles" as a war poem.
4. Write a note on the role of myth in "The Shield of Achilles."
5. Discuss Auden as a poet of war.
6. Can we call Auden a political poet?

12.5 Further Reading

1. D.E.S. Maxwell, *Poetry of the Thirties* (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

2. V.D.S. Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940* (New York : Hutchinson University Library, 1951).

3. Robin Skelton (ed.), *The Poetry of the Thirties* (London : Penguin Books, 1964).

4. M.K.Spears (ed.), *Twentieth Century Views : Auden* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1964).

5. M.K. Spears, *Poetry of W.H. Auden : The Disenchanted Island (*1963 ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1968).

W. H. AUDEN

MAJOR POEMS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

13.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to discuss in detail three poems poems by W. H. Auden and to familiarise the distance learner with multifarious themes in Auden's poetry.

13.2 Journey to Iceland

In 1936, a thirty-year-old poet from Britain travelled around Iceland. His name was Wystan Hugh Auden—you probably know him as W.H. Auden, one of the 20th century's most influential poets.Many perhaps thought that this great poet would want

to stay close to awe-inspiring waterfalls and graceful mountains. But Auden didn't show the slightest interest in such natural wonders. He said that he didn't enjoy hiking mountains or watching rivers fall off cliffs, experiences that could be similarly had in other countries. He was, however, very interested in getting to know the people inhabiting the isle. Upon doing so, he described them thusly:

As a race, I don't think the Icelanders are very ambitious. A few of the professional classes would like to get to Europe; most would prefer to stay where they are and make a certain amount of money. Compared with most countries, there is little unemployment in Iceland.

Auden often described the food he ate on his trip, but rarely with any enthusiasm (in Blönduós, for example, he was served "enormous hunks of meat that might have been carved with a chopper smeared with half-cold gravy"). In fact, Auden was an extremely picky eater, as his Icelandic guide Ragnar Jóhannesson recalled in a magazine article in 1960. Ragnar wrote that Auden seemed to subsist nearly exclusively on coffee and cigarettes, drinking an estimated 1500 cups of coffee over the three months he spent in Iceland. Furthermore, Ragnar claimed to have on more than one occasion observed the poet sitting up in the middle of the night to light a cigarette, seemingly still asleep.

Ragnar also recalled a dinner feast he and Auden were treated to on a farm, where the host served them a chunk of steaming-hot hangikjöt (smoked lamb) of the finest and fattest sort. While the Icelanders in Auden's entourage became excited and wolfed down this great delicacy, Auden himself only had a few bites. He did not like it. While certainly hungry after a long day on the road, the poet opted instead for a dinner consisting of a cigarette and five cups of coffee — later explaining to Ragnar that he felt he owed his good health to the principle of only ever eating food he liked.

The most famous product of Auden's trip to Iceland was his poem which is as follows :

And the traveller hopes: "Let me be far from any

Physician"; and the ports have names for the sea;

The citiless, the corroding, the sorrow;

And North means to all: "Reject".

And the great plains are for ever where cold creatures are hunted,
And everywhere; the light birds flicker and flaunt;
Under a scolding flag the lover
Of islands may see at last,

Faintly, his limited hope; as he nears the glitter
Of glaciers; the sterile immature mountains intense
In the abnormal day of this world, and a river's
Fan-like polyp of sand.
Then let the good citizen here find natural marvels:
The horse-shoe ravine, the issue of steam from a cleft
In the rock, and rocks, and waterfalls brushing the
Rocks, and among the rock birds.

And the student of prose and conduct, places to visit;
The site of a church where a bishop was put in a bag,
The bath of a great historian, the rock where
An outlaw dreaded the dark.

Remember the doomed man thrown by his horse and crying:
"Beautiful is the hillside, I will not go";
The old woman "He that I loved the
Best, to him I was worst,"

For Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore
Unreal. And the steadfast affections of its dead may be bought
By those whose dreams accuse them of being
Spitefully alive, and the pale

From too much passion of kissing feel pure in its deserts.
Can they? For the world is, and the present, and the lie.
And the narrow bridge over a torrent,
And the small farm under a crag
Are natural settings for the jealousies of a province;
And the weak vow of fidelity is formed by the cairn;
And within the indigenous figure on horseback
On the bridle-path down by the lake

The blood moves also by crooked and furtive inches,
Asks all our questions: "Where is the homage? When
Shall justice be done? Who is against me?
Why am I always alone?"

Present then the world to the world with its mendicant shadow;
Let the suits be flash, the Minister of Commerce insane;
Let jazz be bestowed on the huts, and the beauty's
Set cosmopolitan smile.

For our time has no favourite suburb; no local features
Are those of the young for whom all wish to care;
The promise is only a promise, the fabulous
Country impartially far.

Tears fall in all the rivers. Again some driver
Pulls on his gloves and in a blinding snowstorm starts
Upon his deadly journey; and again some writer
Runs howling to his art.

The poem 'Journey to Iceland' is taken from his book 'Letters from Iceland' which is made up of a series of letters and travel notes by Auden and MacNeice written during their trip to Iceland in 1936 compiling light-hearted private jokes and irreverent comments about their surrounding world.

Auden's "Letters from Iceland" is a diverse collage of works written during a three month voyage, featuring prose, poetry, newspaper clippings, photographs and other media. Following the book's opening poem, which is the first installment of a five-part poem written to the deceased Lord Byron, is the poem Journey to Iceland. The brief poem invites the reader into the poet's mind in a pre-journey state – Auden arrives on the page with a fresh and excited mind ready to absorb a new and foreign land, then approaching on the horizon. It is as though the poem was born amidst the sea, with the boat cutting through a thick fog, and the scene of Reykjavik's shore becoming visible in the distance. It is a suspended moment of travel, and the poet is filled with only abstract and vivid visions of the approaching land. Within the form of the poem, Auden displays eagerness for the approaching land by constantly beginning lines with "And," which happens four times in the first two stanzas and is the word that begins the poem. This constant conjunction, also defining the beginning of a new thought, creates a kind of psychological leaping, as though he is unable to remain focused in on one specific idea or image for too long, like a child first entering a blossoming park at the peak of spring.

The first line of the poem reads, "And the traveller hopes," (Auden, l. 1) a line which is perhaps the most instructive statement in understanding Auden's position in relation to the Island. His self-identity as a "traveller" and as the other is made explicit to the reader in this line. He does not refer to himself as an explorer or even a poet, but a traveller, a man in motion who will pass through a space and then be gone. It is a consistent theme in Letters for Auden to refer to himself with these terms of otherness. In a later work, Letter to R.H.S. Crossman, ESQ. Auden writes, "I walk among them taking photographs; The children stare and follow, think of questions to prove the stranger real."

In this instance, Auden refers to himself as a "stranger," a man unknowable to the native Icelanders. Unlike his life in England, in Iceland it is not his writing, his family name nor his reputation that defines him, rather it is the inquisitiveness of the innocent children who detect a stranger that "proves" or ushers him into reality. In this moment of self-reflection, Auden invites us to discover how the Icelanders view him, as opposed to how he views himself. One can imagine the children asking: Who are you? Where are you from? Auden does not concern the reader with the imagined answer of "I am W. H. Auden, a poet from England." For Auden, these answers are not critical. As a traveller, the vaporous existence he has on the Island is shaped by the questions that are presented before him – simple, unadorned questions that materialize his identity on the island as a traveller, as a stranger. Auden distinctly admits, the traveller is not able to walk with the children, but is instead only able to walk "among" them, not unlike a Whitehall might float among the swans, but never with them – never knowing the water as they know it.

Auden pushes this self-reflexivity in a photograph included as part of Letters from Iceland, called "The Student of Prose and Conduct" - a grainy, haphazardly framed image of the poet himself, almost completely obstructed by what appears to be someone's leg very close to the lens. In the image, Auden appears with sleep-filled eyes and holding a cigarette in his mouth. It is as if he is turning himself into the caricature of a poet, or at the very least presenting himself as an object in the frame of his own camera. In this photo, Auden becomes the object of the process of observation.

Despite making great efforts to be consciously aware of himself as a traveller in Iceland, he also makes many references to being not someone and not somewhere. In this first line of Journey to Iceland he tells what the traveller hopes for; "And the traveller hopes: Let me be far from any Physician," (l. 1-2) Auden is using the physician as a symbol for a modern, developed society. To be far from a physician is to remove oneself from a structured world, for physicians do not employ themselves in nature or untouched land. In these first two lines, Auden reveals that it is this distance from society at which he hopes to find himself.

On this journey, Iceland provides all the sensual surroundings to satisfy this dream of distance from the menacing modern world. Auden creates an idealized picture of a beautiful, primal and otherworldly experience of the country in Journey to Iceland:

> "And the great plains are for ever where the cold fish is hunted,
> And everywhere; the light birds flicker and flaunt,
> Under the scolding flag the lover
> Of islands may see at last,
> Faintly, his limited hope; and he nears the glitter
> Of glaciers, the sterile immature mountains intense
> In the abnormal day of his world, and a river's
> Fan-like polyp of sand." (l. 5-12)

Auden imbues his hope within the physical features of the island, declaring that his hope is something that can be seen, within the rocks and mountains of an abnormal world as the boat approaches Iceland's shore. The use of the word "sterile" suggests a land that has not been infected or become sick with the maturity of modernity. Auden being a man of the modern world and of England, who has undeniably suffered from the infection of modernity, views these mountains as an area of untainted life where he can cleanse his own stained perspective.

Later in the same poem, another statement provides great definition of Auden's perspective of Iceland: "For Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore unreal." (l.26-27) The nature of Iceland of being a land removed from Europe makes it a unique and surreal entity compared to what Auden understands of reality or the real world of Europe. It is this unreality which Auden seeks, and he is ready and willing to exile himself into "The rock, and rocks, and waterfalls brushing the rocks, and among the rocks birds." (l.15-16)

The wonder and escape that Auden experiences in the moments of approach in the Journey to Iceland is perhaps the beginning of what Paul Beekman Taylor calls in his article "Auden's Icelandic Myth of Exile" a "Life long artistic commitment to Iceland." (Taylor, 213) According to Taylor, this was an artistic perspective that Auden applied to his writing that allowed for him to create distance from the rest of the English writers and don what his contemporaries labelled as a "Nordic Mask." (Taylor, 220). As a child and through his years of adolescence in England, Auden's concept of Iceland existed purely within the imagination and through the reading of Nordic myths. He expressed this connection to Iceland later in his life when he stated in a speech, "The images of Nordic myths which my father planted in my imagination were protected like a treasure trove to be retrieved in good time" (Taylor, 227).

In Journey to Iceland, written during Auden's first of many trips to Iceland, a special "good time" had arrived for the poet – a spectacular and rare moment when the magical and intangible myths that were planted and grew within Auden's mind, within his dreams as a child, are meeting with excitement a tangible reality. The "rock where an outlaw dreaded the dark" (Auden, l. 19-20) of which Auden writes is for him no longer a line on the page or a flickering dream, but can be seen, felt, understood and lived before him. Taylor continues to describe the experience of Auden's time in Iceland as "a confirmation that the worlds of the poet's physical and imaginative visions can converge on one natural and mythological landscape." (Taylor 227) It is as if Auden's image of Iceland is double exposed: one being the true and physical space of the mountains and the fjords, the other a hazy Viking ship resting in the water outside of Gisli's fjord of hiding. It is through these two realities, the imaginative and the tangible, that the poet navigates Iceland.

Auden's physical and poetic journey is a liberation of the imagined. Auden writes:

"The pale,

From too much passion of kissing feel pure in its deserts." (l. 28-29)

Iceland is a place where the pureness of intimacy can be found and restored. It is a place where idealized notions of emotions have remained completely untouched. The emotions are found only within the experience of the landscape, within the endless expansive deserts of Iceland.

The sentiments Auden expresses of emotion often echo those made by the Romantic poets. Specifically, the emotional overflow that Auden is unable to contain mirrors the connection William Wordsworth expresses in his contemplative nature poetry in his trips to Tintern Abbey. From "Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the banks of Wye during a Tour July 13, 1798:"

> "And I have felt
>
> A presence that disturbs me with joy
>
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
>
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
>
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
>
> And the round ocean and the living air,
>
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
>
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
>
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
>
> And rolls through all things." (l. 93-103)

Wordsworth implants an unexplainable, sublime joy within the images of landscape, saying that an all-encompassing spiritual "motion" in fact "dwells" within the landscape of Tintern Abbey, a place that is silent of the industrial roar. For Wordsworth, this abstract connection with the natural space is an elevation of thought, for it maintains purity that can only be contained by nature. It seems Auden is also channeling this abstract "spontaneous

overflow of powerful things" (Wordsworth, 273) that Wordsworth claims lies at the heart of poetic experience. For Auden in Journey to Iceland, this powerful experience is one that forces him to the writing of poetry, as he states in the final line, "The writer runs howling to his art." (Auden, l. 52) In this extremely inspiring and foreign visual landscape, the only place to which Auden can turn to express it is to poetry, as if the mountains are drawing words out of him. This, again, reverberates in what Wordsworth describes poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," (Wordsworth, 273) a phenomenon that, for Auden, can only happen in places like Iceland where nature remains untouched and preserves a life and space alien to modernity.

In so many of the beautiful moments of nature poetry from Auden, it is difficult (if not impossible) to remove the reality that the poet will always be a traveler and an observer. In a brief passage in Birna Bjarnadóttir's A Book of Fragments, after remarking how people flocked to the Island to see a spectacle, she makes a reflection of those who come to Iceland to observe how the Icelanders are different: "One could observe the observers projecting their transparent need for a different kind of place here on earth." (Bjarnadóttir, 27) Is this not exactly what Auden himself is searching for in his trip to Iceland? Does Iceland not just satisfy Auden's need for a place to escape from the constricting world of English society and to realize his poetic visions? His reflections about Iceland as being "unreal" shows his belief in the Island not being just an escape from the constrictions of England but an outright removal from reality, an unreality that Auden needs to exist on earth. A moment of truth shows itself in Wordsworth's Lines as he writes:

> "I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides_
>
> Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,_
>
> Wherever nature led: more like a man
>
> Flying from something that he dreads, than one
>
> Who sought the thing he loved." (68-72)_

In these Romantic impressions of nature, there is a blurred line between truly connecting and admiring the land and the simple fleeing from the modern age. Wordsworth's distinction between fleeing from dread versus searching for love presents an interesting perspective of Auden's Icelandic works. One must wonder whether Auden is not simply

providing himself with what Bjarnadóttir calls a "luxury" (Bjarnadóttir, 27) that observers allow for themselves in places of great foreignness. Perhaps after inquiring about his garments, the children and the mountains too should ask the lover of islands this question: Well, Wystan Hugh Auden, is this love?

13.3 September 1, 1939

Among W.H. Auden's major poems, one of the more important one is "September 1, 1939." It is a political poem in which the poet makes almost a direct address to America, asking at times ironically, to join the Second World War to save the world from the huge destruction the dictators like Hitler of Germany and Musolini of Italy were out to unleash. The poem's title is the significant date when the World War II began with Germany's invasion and occupation of Poland. Note how the poem opens:

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade :
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odor of death
Offends the September night.

Here comes out so clearly the individual's response to the possibility, or near certainty, of a general doom. Sitting in one of the restaurant's on the Fifty-Second Street (in New York), uncertain and afraid, as the clever hopes of a low dishonest decade, the decade of the 1930's, the decade of depression, came to an end, the

poet as a sensitive individual makes a response to the larger issue of war. The point is that as the decade ends in 1939, so do the hopes it had aroused.

Auden as poet has always been an analyst, diagnosing the ailing society with the tools of Marxian economics and Freudian psychology. After making a statement about the situation of war as it obtained in 1939 on September 1, he soon goes into the reasons responsible for the political developments at the time :

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god :
I and the public know
What all school children learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Here is an analysis of the rise of German nationalism in the time of Hitler, whose roots Auden traces in the development of Western religio-philosophic thought from Martin Luther - the father of Reformation - down to Descartes. As for Auden's view of these developments, we can recall his "Preface" to *Poets of the English Language* (1950), especially the following :

The dualism inaugurated by Luther, Machiavelli and Descartes has brought us to the end of our tether and we know that either we must discover a unity which can repair the fissures that separate the individual from society, feeling from intellect, and conscience from both, or we

shall surely die by spiritual despair and physical annihilation.

One can also notice Auden's reiteration of Eliot's tirade against Reformation, implying a commitment to Roman Catholicism, the pre-Reformation medieval Christianity. In the case of Auden, it is a radical change from his earlier Marxism to his new-found Catholicism. It is another instance of modernist regression into the past – an inability to face and deal with the present. In the lines cited about from the poem under discussion, Linz is the place where Hitler spent his early life.

Auden, then, turns his eye to America, where he is now living as a citizen, leaving his native England behind. We know how in the early years of World War II America was trying to maintain neutrality, trying to remain outside the European War. Auden views this stance of neutrality as a case of self-deception. He uses his Freudian apparatus to diagnose the American stance, feeling rather let down in a moment of crisis. Note, how strongly the poet comes out against the neutral stance :

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse :
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Here, Auden points to the tall buildings on the sea bank in New York, where we now have the United Nations' Building. In 1939, we know, we had the League of Nations, a world body to deliberate international issues. Making an ironic reference to the American neutrality, Auden comes harshly an other nations also that try to evade the issue facing them. Rather than use the collective might symbolized by the "skyscrapers"

housing the international body, each of these nations takes recourse to "competitive excuses" for not facing the Imperialist threat.

As usual, after chiding at the nations, or society, Auden, then, takes on the individuals, who are equally guilty of seeking escape from the tiger at their doorstep. Auden's use of Freudian tools is apparent enough in the following lines :

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day :
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

Here is the case of the common man who, too, indulges in self- deception, trying to evade the crying situation, by seeking escape into everyday routine sources of pleasure, behaving as if all around him continues to be normal. Thus, both individual nations as well as individual persons behave the same way when faced with a situation of enormous gravity. Like the children afraid of night, they withdraw into their individual cells.

After showing the conduct of nations and citizens, Auden turns to the war mongers, the real villains of the piece in the international calamity staring in the face :

The windiest militant trash
Important persons shout
It is not so crude as our wish :
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone

Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

Once again, Auden takes recourse to Freudian psychology for analyzing individual behaviour in the face of a social tragedy. The reason he attributes to the individual's tendency to remain aloof from social events is self-love, which excludes universal love, "agape." Although Auden's anger is directed against the militant trash of the political war-lords, he finds the individual's self-love even cruder than the "militant trash" of the war-mongers. He uses, for example, the Russian ballet dancer, Nijinsky (1890-1950), who had written about the Russian ballet producer, Diaghilev (1872-1979), the following :

> Some politicians are hypocrites like Diaghilev, who does not want universal love, but to be loved alone. I want universal love.

As in his elegy on the death of W.B. Yeats, Auden expresses in disgust the inconsequential nature of art - "Poetry makes nothing happen" - reiterating :

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky :
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

The self-centred conduct of states as well as citizens comes under harsh criticism from Auden. We can see here the remnants of thought as he blames the lack of solidarity

among both states and citizens as the sole reason for the war lords going unchallenged. The message, clear and loud, is that ‘‘we must love one another or die,’’ for ‘‘hunger allows no choice.’’

Interestingly, or perhaps ironically, Auden closes his poem with an utterance cast in the mode of prayer :

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their massages :
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Opening the stanza with the description of an air raid, which shows flashes of ironic light, which sends waves of fear to the entire world, lying defenceless in a stunned state, Auden turns to the prayer mode, hoping for a change of heart in every individual, shunning the self-love, or self-centeredness, and taking to the affirmation of universal love, committing oneself to the solidarity of mankind.

13.4 The Unknown Citizen

(To JS/07 M 378

This Marble Monument

Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

One against whom there was no official complaint,

And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a
saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace: when there was war, he went.

He was married and added five children to the population,

Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.

And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

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

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

The poem begins with an ironic epigraph, "To JS/07 M 378 / This Marble Monument / Is Erected by the State."

The Bureau of Statistics and all other reports show that he will complied with his duties to "the Greater Community." He worked in a factory and paid his union dues. He had no odd views. The Social Psychology investigators found him to be normal, as did the Press: he was popular, "liked a drink," bought the daily paper, and had the "normal" reactions to advertisements. He was fully insured. The Health-card report shows he was in the hospital only once, and left cured.

The Producers Research and High-Grade Living investigators also showed he was normal and "had everything necessary to the Modern Man"—radio, car, etcetera. The Public Opinion researchers found "he held the proper opinions for the time of year," supporting peace in peacetime but serving when there was war. He was married and had the appropriate number of five children, according to the Eugenicist. He never interfered with the public schools.It is absurd to ask whether he was free or happy, for if anything had been wrong, "we should certainly have heard."

"The Unknown Citizen" (1940) is one of Auden's most famous poems. Often anthologized and read by students in high school and college, it is renowned for its wit and irony in complaining about the stultifying and anonymous qualities of bureaucratic, semi-socialist Western societies. Its structure is that of a satiric elegy, as though the boring, unknown citizen was so utterly unremarkable that the state honored him with a poetic monument about how little trouble he caused for anyone. It resembles the "Unknown Soldier" memorials that nations erect to honor the soldiers who fought and died for their

countries and whose names have been lost to posterity; Britain's is located in Westminster Abbey and the United States' is located in Arlington, Virginia. This one, in an unnamed location, lists the unknown man as simply "JS/07 M 378."

The rhyme scheme changes a few times throughout the poem. Most frequently the reader notices rhyming couplets. These sometimes use the same number of syllables, but they are not heroic couplets—no, they are not in iambic pentameter—they are often 11 or 13 syllables long, or of differing lengths. These patterns increase the dry humor of the poem.

Auden's "Unknown Citizen" is not anonymous like the Unknown Soldier, for the bureaucracy knows a great deal about him. The named agencies give the sense, as early as 1940, that a powerful Big Brother kind of bureaucracy watches over its citizens and collects data on them and keeps it throughout one's life. This feeling makes the poem eerie and prescient; one often thinks of the dystopian, totalitarian states found in the writings of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley or the data-driven surveillance state of today. In Auden's context, one might think of the state-focused governments of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini.

The Big Brother perspective begins from the very outset of the poem, with its evocation of a Bureau of Statistics. The man has had every aspect of his life catalogued. He served his community, he held a job, he paid union dues, he did not hold radical views, he reacted normally to advertisements, he had insurance, he possessed the right material goods, he had proper opinions about current events, and he married and had the right amount of children. It does not appear on paper that he did anything wrong or out of place. In fact, "he was a saint" from the state's perspective, having "served the Greater Community." The words used to describe him—"normal," "right," "sensible," "proper," "popular"—indicate that he is considered the ideal citizen. He is praised as "unknown" because there was nothing interesting to know. Consider, in comparison, the completely normalized protagonist Emmet in The Lego Movie.

At the end of the poem, the closing couplet asks, "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: / Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard." With these last lines comes the deeper meaning of the poem, the irony that despite all of the bureaucratic data gathering, some aspect of the individual might not have been captured. It becomes clear that the citizen is also "unknown" because in this statistical gathering of data, the man's individuality and identity are lost. This bureaucratic society, focused on its

official view of the common good, assesses a person using external, easily-catalogued characteristics rather than respect for one's uniqueness, one's particular thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, and goals.

Interestingly, and ironically, the speaker himself is also unknown. The professionals in the poem— "his employers," "our Social Psychology workers," "our researchers into Public Opinion," "our Eugenicist"— are just as anonymous and devoid of personality. While a person might be persuaded that he is free or happy, the evidence of his life shows that he is just one more cog in the faceless, nameless bureaucratic machine.

13.5 Sample Questions

1. Write a note on the political aspect of September 1,1939."
2. How does Auden use his knowledge of Freud in the poem, "September 1, 1939?"
3. Critically examine the poetics of "September 1, 1939."
4. Write a note on the title of "The Unknown Citizen."
5. Bring out the elements of satire in "The Unknown Citizen."
6. Discuss Auden as a representative poet of his age.

13.6 Further Reading

1. George Wright, *W.H. Auden* (New York : Twayne Publishers Inc. 1969).
2. Narsingh Srivastva, *W.H. Auden : A Poet of Ideas* (Delhi : S. Chand and Co., 1978).
3. Stephen Spender, "W.H. Auden and His Poetry," *The Atlantic Monthly 192* (July, 1953).
4. Stephen Spender, *World Within World : The Autobiography of Stephen Spender* (London : Hamilton, 1951).
5. Delmore Schwartz, "The Two Audens," *The Kenyon Review 1, No. 1* (Winter 1939).

---

i

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 14**

MODERN POETRY-III **UNIT-V**

TED HUGHES

UNIT STRUCTURE:

14.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to familiarise distance learners with the milieu in which Ted Hughes lived and the political and philosphical influences on his poetry.

14.2 Hughes Poetic Career

One of the giants of 20th century British poetry, Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, Yorkshire in 1930. After serving as in the Royal Air Force, Hughes attended Cambridge, where he studied archaeology and anthropology, taking a special interest in myths and legends. In 1956 he met and married the American poet Sylvia Plath, who encouraged him to submit his manuscript to a first book contest run by The Poetry Centre. Awarded first prize by judges Marianne Moore, W.H. Auden, and Stephen Spender, The Hawk in the Rain (1957) secured

Hughes's reputation as a poet of international stature. According to poet and critic Robert B. Shaw, "Hughes's poetry signalled a dramatic departure from the prevailing modes of the period. The stereotypical poem of the time was determined not to risk too much: politely domestic in its subject matter, understated and mildly ironic in style. By contrast, Hughes marshalled a language of nearly Shakespearean resonance to explore themes which were mythic and elemental." Hughes's long career included unprecedented best-selling volumes such as Lupercal (1960), Crow (1970), Selected Poems 1957-1981 (1982), and The Birthday Letters (1998), as well as many beloved children's books, including The Iron Man (1968). With Seamus Heaney, he edited the popular anthologies The Rattle Bag (1982) and The School Bag (1997). Named executor of Plath's literary estate, he edited several volumes of her work. Hughes also translated works from Classical authors, including Ovid and Aeschylus. An incredibly prolific poet, translator, editor, and children's book author, Hughes was appointed Poet Laureate in 1984, a post he held until his death. Among his many awards, he was appointed to the Order of Merit, one of Britain's highest honours.

The rural landscape of Hughes's youth in Yorkshire exerted a lasting influence on his work. To read Hughes's poetry is to enter a world dominated by nature, especially by animals. This holds true for nearly all of his books, from The Hawk in the Rain to Wolfwatching (1989) and Moortown Diary (1989), two of his late collections. Hughes's love of animals was one of the catalysts in his decision to become a poet. According to London Times contributor Thomas Nye, Hughes once confessed "that he began writing poems in adolescence, when it dawned upon him that his earlier passion for hunting animals in his native Yorkshire ended either in the possession of a dead animal, or at best a trapped one. He wanted to capture not just live animals, but the aliveness of animals in their natural state: their wildness, their quiddity, the fox-ness of the fox and the crow-ness of the crow." However, Hughes's interest in animals was generally less naturalistic than symbolic. Using figures such as "Crow" to approximate a mythic everyman, Hughes's work speaks to his concern with poetry's vatic, even shamanic powers. Working in sequences and lists, Hughes frequently uncovered a kind of autochthonous, yet literary, English language. According to Peter Davison in the New York Times, "While inhabiting the bodies of creatures, mostly male, Hughes clambers back down the evolutionary chain. He searches deep into the riddles of language, too, those that precede any given tongue, language that reeks of the forest or even the jungle. Such poems often contain a touch—or more than a touch—of melodrama, of the brutal tragedies of Seneca that Hughes adapted for the modern stage."

Hughes's posthumous publications include Selected Poems 1957-1994 (2002), an updated and expanded version of the original 1982 edition, and Letters of Ted Hughes (2008), which were edited by Christopher Reid and showcase Hughes's voluminous correspondence. According to David Orr in the New York Times, Hughes's "letters are immediately interesting and accessible to third parties to whom they aren't addressed… Hughes can turn out a memorable description (biographies of Plath are 'a perpetual smouldering in the cellar for us. There's always one or two smoking away'), and his offhand observations about poetry can be startlingly perceptive." The publication of Hughes's Collected Poems (2003) provided new insights into Hughes's writing process. Sean O'Brien in the Guardian noted, "Hughes conducted more than one life as a poet." Publishing both single volumes with Faber, Hughes also released a huge amount of work through small presses and magazines. These poems were frequently not collected, and it seems Hughes thought of his small-press efforts as experiments to see if the poems deserved placement in collections. O'Brien continued: "Clearly [Hughes] needed to be writing all the time, and many of the hitherto uncollected poems have the provisional air of resting for a moment before being taken to completion—except that half the time completion didn't occur and wasn't even the issue… as far as the complete body of work went, Hughes seems to have been more interested in process than outcome."

Though Hughes is now unequivocally recognized as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, his reputation as a poet during his lifetime was perhaps unfairly framed by two events: the suicide of Plath in 1963, and, in 1969, the suicide of the woman he left Plath for, Assia Wevill, who also took the life of their young daughter, Shura. As Plath's executor, Hughes's decision to destroy her final diary and his refusal of publication rights to her poems irked many in the literary community. Plath was taken up by some as a symbol of suppressed female genius in the decade after her suicide, and in this scenario Hughes was often cast as the villain. His readings were disrupted by cries of "murderer!" and his surname, which appears on Plath's gravestone, was repeatedly defaced. Hughes's unpopular decisions regarding Plath's writings, over which he had total control after her death, were often in service of his definition of privacy; he also refused to discuss his marriage to Plath after her death. Thus it was with great surprise that, in 1998, the literary world received Hughes's quite intimate portrait of Plath in the form of Birthday Letters, a collection of prose poems covering every aspect of his relationship with his first wife. The collection received both critical praise and censure; Hughes's desire to break the silence around Plath's death was welcomed, even as the poems themselves were scrutinized.

Yet despite reservations, Katha Pollitt wrote in the New York Times Book Review that Hughes's tone, "emotional, direct, regretful, entranced—pervades the book's strongest poems, which are quiet and thoughtful and conversational. Plath is always 'you'—as though an old man were leafing through an album with a ghost."

Though marked by a period of pain and controversy in the 1960s, Hughes's later life was spent writing and farming. He married Carol Orchard in 1970, and the couple lived on a small farm in Devon until his death. His forays into translations, essays, and criticism were noted for their intelligence and range. Hughes continued writing and publishing poems until his death, from cancer, on October 28, 1998. A memorial to Hughes in the famed Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey was unveiled in 2011.

14.3 Ted Hughes as a poet of the "Will to Live"

Ted Hughes has been called the first English poet of the "Will to Live." Before Hughes, D.H. Lawrence wrote of animal joy, which is, perhaps, a more fanciful thing. Then, Robinson Jeffers occasionally picked up the subject, and wrote poems like a hawk on his wrist, but he was too eager, and too clumsy, to master the subject. It was only Ted Hughes who displayed a complete mastery of the subject, and at the same time got completely mastered by it. He owns the subject as he is owned by the subject.

The will to live might seem the first and healthiest of subjects; in fact, it is almost the last and most morbid. In a way, it is the last stop– waterless, exposed – before nothingness. Civilization blows off, love and utopia evaporate, the interest the human mind takes in its own creations washes out, and there, its incisors bared, stands life, daring you to praise it.

Quite curiously, in an interview with Egbert Faas in *The London Magazine* (January 1971), Hughes speaks in a manner as if he were not at the very end but instead at some new beginning. Other poets, he says, suffer the disintegration of Christianity; he, by constrast, celebrates demonic force. More, he calls for a new ritual, a new whirring of 'the elemental power circuit of the Universe.' Whatever Hughes might say, the readers look at him and shy away at the brutal light; their inevitable conclusion is that Hughes himself, above all, is beyond the help of ritual. It is felt that Hughes' hand is on the naked wire and he is held there helpless, a celebrant of a sort. One is automatically reminded of Schopenhauer, who, as Hughes acknowledged, was a great influence on him. As the German philosopher puts it, "The whole and every individual hears the stamp of a forced condition." It can be called

Hughes's distinction to be the poet of this truth. As a thinker, he would be called a hangman, not a priest.

Ted Hughes clearly admitted that Schopenhauer is the only philosopher he "ever really read." Someone has called it a case of bringing coals to Newcastle, for the town in known for coal alone, in other words, what Schopenhauer has to preach, Ted Hughes already seems to believe. Hughes, it can be seen, would have come round to the same sort of pessimism on his own (and perhaps did) as Schopenhauer was to impart. Hughes's school was the world of animals. As Alvarez has observed, Hughes gives the compression of a being congenitally indifferent to humanism, a mind on the outskirts of civilization, like a boy who skips school and spends the day, even the night, in the woods. That leaves the stars above, gleaming like the barrels of guns, and the animals below, jumping as if the sound of shots.

14.4 Ted Hughes interest in animals

To begin with, Hughes's interest in animals was a matter of love and curiosity. He felt attracted towards them, wanted to possess them; it was a sort of adventure for him. As he himself noted later, "My interest in animals began when I began. My memory goes back pretty clearly to my third year, and by then I had so many of the toy lead animals, you could buy in shops that they went right round out flat – topped fireplace fender, nose to tail…." Later, at threshing time, he would snatch mice from under the lifted sheaves till he had thirty or forty crawling inside the lining of his coat. Squiring life, indeed! Yet the animals – "the magpies and owls and rabbits and weasels and rats and curlews" his older brother shot – were just as exciting dead. "He could not shoot enough for me."

Here is an instance to note – how literature is rooted in the culture of the writer. Hughes's hunger for shorting birds, asking for more all the time, may be exciting for him and his people for whom he wrote. For certain other cultures, where killing of animals or birds is no enjoyment, Hughes may not receive any appreciation as a "great poet". Those who consider life sacred, even of animals and birds, would wonder what such a poetry is about. The case of Hughes becomes all the more intriguing when one finds him lavishing praise on the animals, and showing contempt for mankind. It would be quite incomprehensible for those who value life as to how a person can kill the same birds and animals he loves and admires.

In the poetry of Ted Hughes, animals emerge, not as playthings or toys, but as the lords of death and life. In his poetic imagination, they were gods, – or demons, no matter. Their superiority consisted in nothing so much as their lack of self-consciousness, of the sickness of the mind. No hesitation, no remorse, a mind all reflex, streamlined as a trigger – it began to look like the state before the fall. In discovering his own death – so it would seem – Hughes concluded that the one thing that mattered was life: he became a worshiper of the claw. An animal's organs represent purely, as Schopenhauer said, "the will to live in [its] particular circumstances." Quick eyes, the trap jaw, the noose of the tolon – these are forms of vital genius. The creature may be a poor thing of "forced condition," but it is also a wire that will destroy, if it can, the first mouth that chews it. "The universal desire for life" is a thing both driven and terrible. No poems so grim and airless, so remote from joy as Hughes's. But if this is life, so be it, he seems to say. Better to fight than die.

We can see from all this how our interest in Hughes's poetry gets limited: first, by the very fact that it is about animals, and not about human experience; second, by the fact that it offers a philosophic attitude more than an experience, and that too rather cynical, in that it glorifies hunting birds and animals, the killers of life. No doubt, Hughes displays a certain poetic talent. But the subject-matter of his poetry forbids us from sharing a common experience and destiny literature has always been known to offer. Also, one feels a little uneasy when one comes upon his repeated praise of animal vigor of animal appetite, and of animal instinct to kill. All that which is being praised in his poetry is unpalatable to many, especially those who love peace and sacrifice rather than violence and killing.

Signaling all that was to come, Hughes's first collected poems, under the title *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), place man, both literally and vitally, below the hawk :

> *I drown in the drumming ploughland, I drag up*
> *Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth's mouth,*
> *From clay that clutches my each step to the ankle*
> *With the habit of the dogged grave, but the hawk*
> *Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye…*

For Hughes, the hawk is "a diamond point of will," the speaker is turning to mind. So runs the refrain of Hughes's title poem as well as the rest that follow. All of these poems

are written in furtive or open contempt for the human as the paltriest instance of the will to live, hence also of "reality itself," as Schopenhauer would put it. We are all, concludes another poem, "held in utter mock by the cats."

As can be seen from different volumes of his poems, Hughes is primarily a poet of the will to live at the phenomenal level of the leaping blood – which is almost to say at the poetic rather than the philosophical level of his theme. Only very rarely has he descended with Schopenhauer into the darkness below. Once in the somewhat Yeatsian "Crow Hill" :

What humbles these hills has raised
The arrogance of blood and bone,
And thrown the hawk upon the wind,
And lit the fox in the dripping ground.

We can see here how Hughes invites a glimpse into the vast desire that, in Schopenhauer's words, "presses impetuously into existence under a million forms … eagerly grasping for itself every material of life." In another poem, "The Bull Moses," we find Hughes going down further still :

The brow like masonry, the deep-keeled neck :
Something come up there into the brink of the gulf,
Hadn't heard of the world, too deep in itself to be called to,
Stood in sleep…

Thus, Hughes embodies, again in Schopenhauer's words, "that which is no longer phenomenon, but thing in itself": the will as pure cause, in trance at the centre of the world.

14.5 Ted Hughes and Humans

One cannot fail to notice Hughes's scorn for human life, how ever secretly he might try to express it. One also cannot fail to see that his scorn in part is because this radical perspective lingers even in his daylight consciousness, like the black in a coal miner's skin. But he must live in the sun like everyone else; besides, his poet's senses pertinaciously buoy him up there; and there he feels forced to choose between the cat and the man. Unfortunately, I would say, to Hughes, the more terrible the bird or animal, the more admirable it is. The stabbing thrush, the slavering wolf, the meat-eating dragon-fly, the hawk, the pig, the jaguar, the rat, the tom,

the stoat, the carrion-eating skate – these are the heroes of his world, his fierace bulwark against nothingness as against these ferocious animals, to Hughes, the humans have nothing whatever to recommend themselves. In his view, it seems, to be human is to start out behind the animals, like a one-legged man in race. The human mind, he seems to say, is nothing but a kind of missing leg, an ache where the amputated part had been. Not even in Lawrence does the human intellect appear so repugnant as in Hughes's poem called "Wings," which is on Sartre, Kafka, and Einstein. His contempt for the human stands out.

To continue our understanding of Hughes's tirade against the human mind, the poet seems to suggest that it is the mind that takes the sting out of a man. Women too, incapacitate. In Hughes's view, women are formidable even though weak. He seems to fear and hate them. One can only say that he is not a representative of the class of normal men who would rather love than fear women, much less hate them. In Hughes's poetry, women are presented as stale, overpowering wombs; for example, in the poem called "Crow and Mama." Other poems making similar representations of women are "Revenge Fable" and "Song for a Phallus." In these poems, mamas are shown squalling on their little boys. Women as mothers are also shown as head swallowing vulvas:

And Crow retched again, before God could stop him.
And woman's Vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened.
The two struggled together on the grass.
God struggled to part them, cursed, wept…

As can be seen here, as well as elsewhere, nothing is shown to be more dangerous to man than a woman. At their safest, in Hughes, women are groveling whores, graved under the male heel. In the radio play *The Wound*, the licentious queen and her ladies have "faces like ear-wigs"; they are maggots. Writhing, squirming to split their seams – a "carnivorous pile of garbage." In truth, this notion of female vileness is itself vile; we can only draw satisfaction from the fact that Hughes's world is ordinarily reserved for beasts and men. Even among men, only two types survive his pitiless need for strength, the he-man and the artist. The first boasts what Norman O. Brown calls the "simple health that animals enjoy, but not men." The Vikings in "The Warriors of the North" thaw "at the red and black disgorging of abbeys/The bountiful, cleft casks,/The fluttered bowels of the

women of dead burghers", and Hughes cannot admire them enough. Then there is Dick Straightup – like a Western hero, too manly even to be sexual, despite his name:

Past eighty, but never in eighty years –
Eighty winters on the windy ridge
Of England – has he buttoned his shirt or his jacket…

For Hughes the man's shadow extends into the caves of sleep. To be able to curl up beyond all dangers, to snore fearlessly – this is to be like the bull Moses, heavy and dark, a stone sunk beneath the frantic waters of conscious life. "The unconscious part, the vegetative life with its ganglion system, into which in sleep the brain-consciousness disappears," note Schopenhauer, is the common life of all. Here, in this life, is safety, a red strength. Dick Straightup, a local legend, one

feel in the sleet, late,
Dammed the pouring gutter; and slept there; and, throughout
A night searched by shouts and lamps, froze,
Grew to the road with welts of ice. He had chipped out at dawn
Warm as a pie and snoring…

Other poems of Hughes sound implications. In one of his masterpieces, "November," Hughes writes of the sleeping tramp:

I thought what strongtrust
Slept in him

Death would not think to stoop so low as that rainy ditch – think to descend there into "the common life of all." Then there are Hughes's witches, demonic queens of night and the common life,

Nightlong under the blackmoor spraddled,
Back beside their spouse by dawn…

– women to whom the poet pays all the deference gentlemen once showed to ladies.

Hughes's notion of the artist claims that he possesses the steel of Nature's involuntary will, he drops on the word, the colour, as the hawk drops on the mouse. Like the thrush, he displays "bullet and automatic/Purpose:"

Mozart's brain had it, and the shark's mouth
That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own
Side .....

Thus, the artist is shown working in a fearless, instinctual region of attack where no one heeds "the minimum practical energy and illumination"–that curse of civilization.

Those sympathetic to Hughes defend him on the grounds it is not really violence Hughes celebrates but an energy too strong for death. To support their contention, they cite his poem, "Wilfred Owen's Photographs," in which Parliament is shown refusing to abolish the navy's cat-o-nine-tails until

A witty profound Irishman calls
For a "cat" into the House, and sits to watch
The gentry fingering its stained tails.

No doubt, the poem conveys contempt for the good men's queasiness. Yet its title, with its queer optimism, seems in earnest. The closest poem to "Wilfred Owen's Photographs" is "Crow's Account of the Battle," which, however, is cynical about peace :

This had happened too often before
And was going to happen too often in future
And happened too easily
Bones were too like lath and twigs
Blood was too like water...

Yet even in its regret over war the poem slings blood and anguish like a clown slinging pies. The truth, his defenders say, is that Hughes is not able to avoid violence because life to him is a violent conception. And he wants to be on the winning side. His weakness, they say, is not violence but the absolute egotism of survival. It is the victor he loves, not war. He thrills to strength with all the envy, the trembling, of a mortal man.

The defenders of Hughes do not seem to be on a strong wicket. Literature, we know, has always been valued for its power to morally sensitize the readers. Now, a poet who loves the victor, just because the victor is powerful, would be accused of moral bankruptcy. In the cynical vision of life that Hughes seems to demonstrate in his

poetry, there seems nothing to win or lose. He seems to be a total nihilist. To keep death from drawing a black line and adding every effort up to zero is, for him, the whole sum of life. It is all a struggle against debt; the credit side is a blank. Thus, Hughes can be called a nihilist on the scuffling, muscled side of nothingness, the opposite kind from, say, Philip Larkin, who is said to have become a wise ghost. Larkin observes life half wistfully, half coldly, as if from the farther side. Hughes is in the midst of the battle, relishing its proof of the will not to die – the correct name of the will to live. Where Larkin has taken "the grave's part," Hughes is terrified of "the earth's mouth." Hughes fights sigh of the border across which Larkin, glad to be reprieved from eating ash, has slipped almost greatfully.

As can be easily concluded, the logic lies with Larkin. Hughes's "wild rebellion" against nullity is, as Schopenhauer would put it, an "irrational tendency." It has "no sufficient reason in the external world." Driven out of the womb, it is our fate, according to Hughes's "Existential Song", to sun "for dear life" – but not because life is dear, the running itself prevents that. In a poem of Hughes called "The Contender," the hero nails himself to life

> *Though his body sweeling away like a torrent on a cliff*
> *Smoking towards dark gorges.*

Nothing can budge him. Even "through his atoms and decay" he grims into "the ringing nothing." What a hero! One wonders. What a fool. For of course his trial of strength is senseless. Several of Hughes's poems are full of grinning and black laughter. It is the sound of the will in the void.

Yet there is no telling life, certainly not in Hughes, that it has nothing to lose. Walking up to itself in the middle of the race, it means to "win." So Hughes prefers to side with the runners out front. Increasingly, though, he seems to have discovered himself among the losers. He finds himself to have fallen behind with the weak who eat the dust. Although he perches and gloats with the hawks, and runs with the eaters, not the eaten, even so he realizes that the cannot outrun himself. His human weakness nags like tearful child stumbling behind. Gradually, he seems to have given himself up to his human problems. Consequently, his poems about animals become fewer in the later volumes, such as *Wodwo*. His dependence on will, we find, is not altogether defeated, the theme of Hughes's later work is the dual horror of existence – that of the monstrous rage for life and that of being small, left out, emptily included. Thus, double-barrelled, it hits a wide target. A poet who had once seemed limited to being the laureate of

animals had suffered to develop a significant scope. Not that his mind ranges free: it is part boot, part worn. Yet at least, the brutal will to live, on the one hand, and the fear both life and death, on the other, have the virtue of being essential truths. They comprehend, they are respectively, the first impulse and the first hesitation, the sum and the vapour of being. And of this frightening portion of existence – the struggle to live and the nothingness of life – Hughes is a jolting and original poet.

14.6 Sample Questions

1. Discuss Ted Hughes as a poet laureate of animals.
2. In what sense is Ted Hughes a poet of the will to live?
3. Discuss the difference between the early and the later poetry of Ted Hughes.

14.6 Further Reading

1. Richard Gilbertson, *Animal Poems* (Credition, 1967).
2. Ted Hughes, *Select Poems 1957-1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).
3. Calvin Bedient, *Eight Contemporary Poets* (London: Oxfort University Press, 1974).
4. Ted Hughes, *The Burning of the Brothel* (London : Turret Books, 1966).
5. Ted Hughes, *Crow Wakes, Poet and Printer* (London, 1971).

TED HUGHES

THREE POEMS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

15.1 Objectives

"Hawk Roosting", "The Jaguar" and "The Thought Fox" are among the major poems of Ted Hughes who is known as the great animal poet of England. No one else in the English language, not even Walt Whitman, has so much glorified the animals as has been done by Hughes in his poetry. This lesson discuses three poems by Ted Hughes.

15.2 Hawk Roosting

Hawk Roosting is a poem that puts the reader into the imagined mind of a hawk about to rest up for the day. It's a monologue of a raptor given the powers of human thinking, thus personified.It is a typical Ted Hughes animal poem, being unsentimental and

unromantic. The poet concentrates on the dominance of the hawk as it sits in the wood reflecting on its raison d'etre, what it is and what it does.Being at the top of the food chain this bird's instinct is to hunt down quarry; it lives by the deaths of other creatures; it kills in order to survive. It has no enemies except perhaps for humans so it does not fear life as other creatures further down the chain fear it.Inspired by the rawness of the natural world, the speaker does not shy from explicit description. Some lines in the poem cause controversy because of their direct depiction of the hawk's instinctive behaviour.

Some commentators have remarked on the violence within. Ted Hughes had this to say:'The poem of mine usually cited for violence is Hawk Roosting, this drowsy hawk sitting in a wood and talking to itself. That bird is accused of being a fascist, the symbol of some horrible genocidal dictator. Actually what I had in mind was that in this hawk Nature was thinking. Simply Nature.' Therefore, there is this tension set up in the poem between what is instinctive, what can be observed in the natural world by anyone, and the mindset of the hawk itself, given human characteristics.

Ted Hughes first published Hawk Roosting in 1960 in the book Lupercal and it has been a popular poem since that time, appearing in many anthologies and on many school and college curricula. The poem runs as under :

Hawk Roosting

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.

Inaction, no falsifying dream

Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!

The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray

Are of advantage to me;

And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

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

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

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

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

Hawk Roosting is a poem that creates a special tension between the natural world and the human world, one that Ted Hughes explored a great deal in his animal poems.This particular work relies on personification - the bird is speaking to itself, like a human - describing violent scenes, claiming domination, which means that the reader has to wrestle with ideas that go beyond the animal kingdom and into the realm of the human and associated psychological and political issues.

Some critics see in the ruthless behaviour of the hawk for instance, a despot or dictator, a figure that cares only about power, a symbol of the fascist. Ted Hughes never

intended this to be the case but the way the poem is worded, detailing explicit violence and arrogant god-like thoughts, the reader can't help but entertain the idea.The hawk, roosting in the top of a tree in a wood, is given a voice that is human and the ensuing monologue is an attempt to get right into the soul of the raptor and understand just what hawk essence is.Using single sentences, lots of end stops (full stops), some enjambment and repetition, the stanzas are tightly controlled but given a sense of freedom by lack of rhyme and plodding beats.

Stanza 1

The first line is pure innocence. Here is the hawk settling down for a night's sleep at roosting time. The position he holds is secure - at the top of the wood, overseeing all. One thing for certain, this hawk has a mind of its own. It can think, like a human.The second line gets the reader thinking too. That long four syllable word falsifying has repercussions. At this early stage there is no context for this word, which means to mislead, but it points toward comparison with humans, who are prone to misleading one another. This bird is pure raptor, can't be anything else.Enjambment leads to line three and the repeated hooked just to emphasise that this hawk is physically impressive and sharp. And those hooked features might be called into action if the hawk falls asleep. Subconscious perfection of future hunts and kills.

Stanza 2

This hawk has it all worked out, from tree to earth, his physicality suits. Being high up means that there is an overview, a natural domination. The air's buoyancy (upward force) and warmth are there to be taken advantage of. Even the earth is facing the right way so close inspection comes as a given.

Stanza 3

Focus on the feet again as they close tight around the bark on the tree. Note the first lines of five of the stanzas are complete within themselves. End stopped. This means certainty and gives immediate control.The theme of mastery continues, this time introducing the idea of the whole of Creation being within the grasp of this extremely dominant figure.Lines 10 - 12 are a focal point in the poem for they suggest that Creation itself was involved in the making of this hawk and that now, the roles are reversed so to speak. It's

the hawk that is holding Creation, becoming the master of all.The question has to be asked: Is this the Creation of a Creator or the Creation of Evolution, where the fittest only survive?

Stanza 4

The perspective changes as the hawk continues its monologue, which is not a dream as we know it, but a live commentary.Now the hawk is flying, watching the earth revolve as it makes its way up and up in readiness for a kill. That all important four letter word that first popped up in the opening stanza is here again - kill - I kill - that act which is so common and normal in the predator's world yet is so shocking and hard to handle in the human world.This is killing with impunity. The hawk has to hunt, it knows no other way and in the poem this fact is expressed with a certain coldness. The language is spare yet full of arrogance and fierceness. Everything belongs to the hawk when it is up in the air and ready to kill; there is no deception, no going back. Heads are torn off. Simple.

Stanza 5

The hawk deals out appropriate deaths, that is the purpose of the unwavering path when it is about to strike 'through the bones', a rather terrifying yet effective phrase.There are no doubts or questions or debate or opinion one way or the other. Fact is fact; it's the whole thing. Nothing can get in the way of the hawk's instinctive actions. It kills without malice; the bird world's permissions are non-existent; environmental guidelines do not apply.

Stanza 6

All a hawk needs is the sun. Right now the sun is setting. In the mind of the hawk nothing has changed, nothing ever will change. As long as the hawk has an eye, the all-seeing eye, its will to remain the same shall persist.This last stanza sums up the hawk's attitude to life and death. In one sense it is a pure ego that is speaking - undiluted, pure, true to itself.Having given the hawk a human voice Ted Hughes brings the raptor into the world of homo sapiens, that most developed of animals, the most sophisticated, able to consciously decide between the moral and the immoral.In some ways the hawk becomes a mirror - reading this poem does make the reader think about life and death, power, morals, the relationship humans should have or want with, the natural world.What force

compels the hawk? Evolution? A Creator? How does the personification change the way we think about this raptor, master of its own world, top predator?

Hawk Roosting is a free verse poem of 6 stanzas, all quatrains. There is no set rhyme scheme and the metre (meter in American English) varies from line to line. On the page it appears formal, tight, restrained - perhaps reflecting the balanced control of the hawk.

Syntax

Syntax is the way clauses, punctuation, grammar and sentences are put together and in this poem it is quite orthodox. There are no strange eccentricities, no odd line breaks or grammatical quirks.It gets the business of building a poem done, just as the hawk gets the business of living done - through ruthless control and efficiency.Note the way many lines are end stopped, again reinforcing the idea of strictness and straightforward action.

Language/Diction

Repetition and particular use of vocabulary help underline this poem's powerful message. For example, in the first stanza the word hooked appears twice, so giving the feel of practicality and savage function. Raptors have incredibly sharp beaks (bills) and claws (talons) that absolutely get the job done.And in the fourth line the phrase perfect kills and eat give the reader further food for thought with regards to what this bird is all about. The verb to kill occurs again in stanza four.The idea that the hawk is invincible and made for one purpose gradually strengthens. Here is a bird in complete control, holding even Creation in its foot, pleasing itself as to whether to kill or not.

The build up of related words: hooked/locked/rough/kill/tearing off/death/bones which suggest physicality, and the contrasting abstract phrases: no falsifying dream/in sleep rehearse/no sophistry/through the bones/No arguments assert.This creates another set of tensions based upon the duality of the physical world the hawk inhabits and the mental construct imagined by the poet.The use of words such as falsifying and sophistry (deception) help sharpen the distinction between the purely animal and the human.

15.3 The Jaguar

This lesson discusses critically Ted Hughes poem "The Jaguar". It is written in four-line stanza form called the "quatrain," although neither the metre nor the rhyme shows any set pattern. The poem runs as under :

The apes yawn and adore their fleas in the sun.
The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut
Like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut.
Fatigued with indolence, tiger and lion

Lie still as the sun. the boa-constrictor's coil
Is a fossil. Cage after cage seems empty, or
Stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw.
It might be painted on a nursery wall.

But who runs like the rest past these arrives
At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,
As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged
Through prison darkness after the drill of his eyes.

On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom –
The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
By the bang of blood, in the brain deaf the ear –
He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him

More than to the visionary his cell:
His stride is wilderness of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come.

Here is a descriptive poem, making a survey of an animal zoo. We are shown animal after animal, confined into different cages. The poem's movement marks the viewer's glance – its pace revealing the viewer's attitude to each animal. The speaker, the poet, throws a quick glance at all other animals except the jaguar, considering them

all as dull and drab like the dead. The fact that the hero among animals, the jaguar, is introduced at the end creates a certain suspense in the reader's mind; it also makes the poem dramatic. Drama is also created by the contrast, the juxtaposition between the other animals, who lack vigour, and the Jaguar, who is full of life and vigour.

We are shown, to begin with, the yawning apes, who "adore their fleas, in the sun," making a meat of the flies that swarm upon them. The parrots, too, are shown dull and uninteresting, who "shriek as if they were on fire," or who "strut" like cheap tarts, to attract the stroller with the nut. As we know, "strut" is a sort of walk, "tart," a prostitute, and the stroller, the idle passerby. These comparisons show how the speaker does not have much liking for the parrots. "Cage after cage seems empty," we are told, stinking "of sleepers from the breathing straw." The whole thing sounds lifeless to the poet, no better than a painting "on a nursery wall." As it becomes clear from the first two stanzas of the poem, the poet's interest is elsewhere, away from these uninteresting animals, the lower species; he is obviously focused somewhere else. No wonder that while several animals are dismissed in just two stanzas, three stanzas are devoted to the single animal, Jaguar alone.

The turning point in the poem is marked by the use of "But" in the opening line of stanza 3 :

But who runs like the rest past these arrives

At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerizes,
As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged
Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes

Thus, Jaguar is presented as the hero among animals, a distinguished presence, attracting the attention of one and all, drawing crowd who stand and stare at the superior, the super-animal, in awe and wonder, just as a child does at a dream. The next stanza is devoted to describing the animal's vigour of body, his anger like Achilles' wrath, his heroic turning in the cage. For this huge, larger-than-life animal, the cage is no bar; it cannot confine the heroic presence within its bars. Jaguar may be living behind the bars of the cage, he moves freely as if the bars were not there. He contemptuously remains unmindful of the confining bars of the cage. To him, there is no cage "More than to the visionary his cell."

Ted Hughes goes into a sort of ecstasy over the power and vigour of Jaguar :

His stride is wilderness of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come.

Reading these lines one is reminded of the romantic moments of ecstasy in Keats and Wordsworth, where the poet is so charmed by the beauty of an object that he goes into a sort of trance, losing consciousness of time and place. But in Keats and Wordsworth, the poem seldom ends with the state of trance; it always goes beyond, bringing the poet back to earth, pulling him down to the harsh reality. Here, in Hughes's poem, that "going beyond" is missing, making the poem one-sided, praising the animal beyond proportion, raising him to the heroic status, making him larger than life. But can any amount of euphoria about the animal vigour of jaguar take away or obliterate the fact that the animal is in the cage, that he cannot break open his fetters and enjoy the freedom he might be dreaming of. The poem is decidedly impressionistic, lacking the normative perspective of reality of the animal existence.

15.4 The Thought Fox

Another poem of Ted Hughes for our detailed study is "The Thought Fox." Written in regular stanzas, with definite metrical or rhyme scheme, the poem shows a firm pattern of thought and imagery woven into its texture. The poem runs as under :

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Thought deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now

And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow,
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come.

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening, deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.

It is a beautiful poem, and yet dreadful in its own way. It is also a romantic poem in its delicate descriptions of sensitive responses of the lonely figure of the poet composing a poem, as also of the fox (both literal and symbolic) nosing its way through darkness. In colour and texture, the poem is a pure romance, but beneath that colour and texture lies the terror bomb of loneliness and anguish of nothingness. Thus, the poem is (or seems) romantic on the surface, but remains at its core a terrifying piece – the postmodern view of life and universe, in which man is condemned to cope with an alien universe offering no solace or consolation. The poem is a rendering of the poet's experience of loneliness; it is also symbolic of man's situation in the universe, his alien existence; it is at the same time a description of the act of creative composition, and it is a celebration of the fox's life of concentration.

Even though one of the most subjective poems of Ted Hughes, "The Thought Fox" is also like his most animal poems, in which the animals, mostly the hunting, are praised and admired with awe, made into a mystery of nature, so very different from the pathetic position of mankind that look before and after and pine for what is not, lacking the will to live, the will to act, and the will to power, so very well shown by

the hunting animals like the hawk, the fox, the jaguar, the crow, etc. These animals, in Hughes, appear as symbols of concentrated life, focused on a purpose, a point, and not frittered away in trivialities or indecisiveness, unbounded; it always overflows the horizons of the poem, its human boundaries. Here, in the present poem, as elsewhere, the stars are either not visible or are far away, suggesting that the earlier transcendental world is no longer there, or is far away from human reach, with its remoteness suggesting the position of unconcern with human destiny. In the post-Darwinian world of the western thought, the absurd defines the condition humane, leaving no scope for any solace or consolation for the surroundings.

15.5 Sample Questions

1. Discuss Ted Hughes as a poet of animals.
2. In what sense is Ted Hughes a poet of the "will to live"?
3. Write a note on the romantic elements in Hughes's poetry.
4. Is Ted Hughes a modern or postmodern poet?
5. Write a note on the imagery in Hughes's poetry.
6. Discuss the poetics of Ted Hughes as it comes out in the poems you have read.
7. Is Hughes a symbolist poet?
8. What is the contemporary relevance of Hughes's poetry?
9. Does Hughes write about women? If not, why not?
10. As a third-world reader, how would you respond to Hughes's glorification of the hunting animals, not very different from the colonizing forces of Europe?

15.6 Further Reading

1. Ted Hughes, *The Hawk in the Rain*, London: Faber and Faber, 1957.
2. Ted Hughes, *Selected Poems 1957-1967*, London Faber and Faber, 1972.
3. Calvin Bedient, *Eight Contemporary Poets*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

4. Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature,* London: Oxford University Press, 2000.
5. Bhim S. Dahiys, *A New History of English Literature,* Delhi: Doaba Publications, 2005.

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 16**

MODERN POETRY - III **UNIT-V**

TED HUGHES

POEMS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

16.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the distance learner with few more poem by Ted Hughes and to see how Ted Hughes percieved in nature the dual characteristics of calm and peaceful yet wrathful powers.

16.2 Ted Hughes and Nature

In an interview with Egbert Faos, published in the London Magazine in January 1971, Hughes said :

Any form of violence-any form of vehement activity-invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circut of the Universe. Once the contact has been made--it becomes difficult to control. Something from beyond ordinary human activity enters when the wise men know how to create rituals and dogma, have lost credit and

disintegrated, and no new ones have been formed, the energy cannot be contained, and so its effect is destructive-and that is the position with us.And that is why force of any kind frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook. In the old world God and divine power were involved at any cost-life seemed worthless. Without them we wouldn't know how to use them or stop them destreying us. We have settled for the minimum practical energy and illumination-anything bigger introduces problems, the demons get hold of it . That is the psyical stupidity, the ineptitude of the rigidly rationalist outlook-its a form of hubris and we' re paying the traditional price, if you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative ? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control-rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one.

The purpose of this quotation is to acquaint the student with the territory of Hughes's poetry and point out his preoccupations and to refer to some of the problems that occur when one attempts to explain in conceptual terms what has been concieved in the language of the imagination. The bigger 'energy' that humans have to struggle to contain and channelize within themselves is seen by the poet in nature and especially in the animals which instinctively know how to channelize it.

16.3 Wind

The "Wind" occurs in Hughes's second collection of poems, which was entitled *The Hawk in the Rain.* The major poems here deal with man in relation to the animals, the earth, the weather, time and mortality in a language greatly charged with relish for experience be it pleasant or unpleasant and capable of generating energies equal to the great primary energies of the world. According to Keith Sagar in *The Art of Ted Hughes*, " This is a language uniquely fitted to express a vital awareness of the Contineum, outside human life of the mystery takes many forms. There is no mistaking it when it takes the form of a gale". Here the 'gale that the critic is refering to is the theme of the poem "Wind". The text of the poem is as follows :

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,

Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet.

Till day rose ; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places and wind wield
Blade-light,luminous black and emerald,
Flexiing like the lens of mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house -side as far as
The coal - House door. I dared once to took up--
Through thebrunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,

At any second to bang and vanish with a flap.
The wind flung a magpie away and a black
Back gull bent like a Iron bar slowly the house

Rang like same fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great frue, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the windon tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizones.

In this poem Hughes seems to deal with "the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe" which here takes the form of a wind. It is " Something from beyond ordinary human activity" which is symbolized by the "house". A house is a place of refuge and sojourn, the centre of ordinary human activity where people go on about there lives oblivious of vitality of creation. The house is man's "impregnable castle" and he is sure of its roof above his head and its ground under his feet. Natures' forces of any kind frightens this security, threatens the "Civilized"

existence of man. This encounter between man and nature, the latter threatening the former is the theme of this poem.

The first stanza speaks of a 'house' as a ship which is tossing in the violence of the storm-scarred sea. In these lines the windy landscape is the storm scarred sea and "violence" of the wind is conveyed through phrases like crashing" woods, "booming hills, stampeding,"" Floundering" etc. The night is full of the fury to the wind and the " darkness" weighs upon it till the day breaks.

The day however, brings no respite and the 'Orange sky' renders the power of the wind more visible. The hills, so much more immovable than the house built of their stones, too, were unable to regist the power of the wind and seemed to have shifted implying that the entire landscape has transformed under the fury of the wind. Even the sunlight is 'black and emerald' and filtered through the winds seems to flicker like the "lens of a mad eye".

At noon, the poet- narrator, dared to leave the refuge that was shaking like a piece of paper under the power of the wind and came out to examine the effect of the wind. With all his might he looked up and tried to look through the raging wind and felt that even the hills were as flimsy as a flapping tent held by one 'sayrope'.

Everything seemed powerless against the wind. The fields are 'quivering, the skyline getting ready to 'vanish with a flap, the magpie is flung away and a gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The wind has the strength to dent eyeballs, to bend iron bars and shatter the house by sound alone like a delicate 'goblet'.

Confronted by the 'wandering elementals outside, the house is no more a source of comfort for the man. The force of the wind "frightens our rationalist, humanist style of outlook", We are no longer able to withdraw confortably in our cosy cushioned chairs in front of the fire. Any sort of civilzed activity like thinking, reading or conversation becomes an impossibilty. We can only grip our hearts and hold desperately onto our integrity which is under seige. We try to feel the firmness of the ground beneath, even though we know it is shifting. We wait with fear and apprehenion of the moment when the wind will come in and sweep the whole

charade of civilization away.

The 'window' in the last staza is the last line of defense ' trembling' but nonetheless keeping the wind out. The wind represents all those natural forces that human try to keep out of their lives-the black demons, dark anarchic forces which inhabit... the safely locked cellar of the unconscious".

The language of the poems has been critically claimed as the most lucid. The poet does not convey the violence through the play of sounds but through the play of images. We encounter metaphors after metaphors which emphasize upon the furiousness of the wind, the shifting landscape and the threatend civilization. In the poem one feels that the poet trusts the conceits to do their work, and they seem accordingly inevitable. The conceits are the result of "concentration on a small point, while.... letting your imagination work freely to collect everything that might concern that still point". The stillness-in-concentration can perhaps be most clearly seen here.

Black gull bent like an iron bar slowly, which is not merely a precise visual image but a record and recreation of a slow movement in the midst of violence and suddenness. The line typifies the sustained steediness of concerntration which is awed but not deflected by the violence of the elements, and is also represented in the people at the end of the poem who are severed from each other and their own thoughts "but sit on," the words suggesting a voluntary endurance of their subjection to a violence that threatens to engulf them.

16.4 An Otter

In poems such as "An Otter" "Relic" and "Crow Hill", Hughes is hinting towards an understanding of the necessity of the war between vitality and death' by placing the animal evidence of vitality sustained by death in the wider context of a creative-destructive universe. The poet defines the tensions in the natural world and the implication is that conscious awarencess and acceptance of the tensions at the heart of poems like "An Otter" are necessary if man is to achieve the sort of completness that comes from the commitment to those tensions. The text of the poem is as follows :

I

Underwater eyes, can an eel's
Oil of water body, neither fish nor beast is the others.
Four-legged yet water-gifted, to outfish fish;
With webbed feat and long ruddering tail
And a round heat like an old tomcar.

Brings the legend of himself
From before wars or burials in spite of hounds and Verminpoles;
Does not take root like the bodage. Wanders, caries;
Gallops along land he no longer belongs to ;
Re-enters the water by melting.

Of neither water nor land. Seeking
Some world lost when first he dived, that he cannot come at since,

Takes his charged body into the holes of lakes;
As if blind, cleaves the stream's push till he licks
The pebbles of the source ; from sea
The sea crosses in three nights
Like a King in hiding, Crying to the old shape of the Starlit Land,
Over sunken farms where the bats go round,
Without answer. Till light and birdsong come
Walloping up roads with the milk wagon.

II

The hunt's lost him, Pads on mud,
Among sedges, nostrils a surface bead,
The other remains, hours. The air,
Circling the globe, tainted and necessary,

Mingling tobacco-smoke, hounds & parsley,
Comes carefully to the sunk lungs.

So the self under the eye lies,
Attendant and withdrawn. The otter belongs

In double robbery and concealment --
From water that nourishes and drowns, and from land
That gave him his length and the mouth of the hound.
He keeps fat in the limpid integument

Reflections live on. The heart beats thick,
Big trout muscle out of the dead cold;
Blood is the belly of logic ; he will lick
The fishbone bare. And can take stolen hold

On a bitch otter in a field full
Of nervous horses, but linger no where.
Yanked above hounds, reverts to nothing at all,
To this long pelt over the back of a chair.

The poem is less a description of an otter than an invocation of the spirit of an otter the subject was suggested to Hughes by an Ouija board. The Ouija spirit like poetry (particularly Shakespeare) and one hot day wrote a poem about ‘a cool little spirit that wanted to live in the bottom of icebergs. Hughes wrote Part I with great labour over a long period and was not really satisfied with it. The second part virtually worte itself and seemed to Hughes to be the Ouija spirits revision of the first part-and very much better. This is how Keith Sagar decribes the genesis and evolution of part I and II of the poem.

In the Part I of the poem, the poet brings out the ambiguity in the nature of an otter who is “ neither fish nor beast and yet he is both “ Four legged yet water gifted”. He has “Feet” but they are webbed and her head is like that of “an old tomcat”. This is the duality, the contrariness and tension that an otter embodies and balances. He wanders in search of the long-lost world where he once ruled, where he knew himself and his kingdom. But now he roams around the territory “he no

longer belongs to". He is of amphibious nature or maybe not because he does not belong to both water and land, that is he is "of neither water nor land". He is in a perpetual quest as if seeking the lost territory and in his search he blindly swims against the current of the stream, tearing it apart to reach the source. He seems like a king in hiding' who yearns for the lost kingdom, for his lost paradise-the land that once was his and now he can hear bats screaming and going around, the bird songs and the noise of the milk wagons. Thus he is aware of both the night and the day rounds on the land. In the last stanza of Part I, the otter, crying without answer for his lost paradise, is surely, in part, an image of the duality of man, neither body nor sprit, neither beast nor angel, yearing for his Eden, his original home where death was not. It is not the charm of the otter that Hughes celebrates, but the creature's innate, inbuilt store of endless energy and his ingenuity of movement. The unrhymed five line stanza ripples with verbal understanding of this movement.

In Part II of the poem one notices an abrupt change in the form and tone of the poem. The first part gives to us the creature and its world. In the second part that world is intruded by man. In the last line of the first part & "milk wagon" already signals the advent of humans in the world of the otter. In the second part this intrusion is further explored. Thus, the loose stanza structure of the first part gives way to a more tightly knit quartrains of the second part.

The first two paragraphs vividly portray the hunted animal. It is the otter hunting season and man, with his regular sense of occassion, moves in for the kill. The hunted, the otter tries to remain hidden from the hunter in the water for hours. The air, much needed for breathing, is cantiously inhaled and with it cames the interusion of the human world in the form of "tabacco-smoke, hounds and parsley". Otter, the hunted, is both " attendant and withdrawn", cautious of the danger houering in the form of hunters with their hounds and trying to conceal his self from their predatory eyes. Thus, water of this time is both death and life to him. If does not surface to breathe the air, the water will drown him putting an end to his life. And yet the same water provides the place of concealement for him thus protecting his life. The land has also an amphibious significance for the otter. It provides him his form as well as the life giving air. Yet it also harbours the men and the hounds which bring death to him. The hunted is itself a hunter. The otter is being hunted

by the hounds but he, too is a hunter of the trout. However, for otter "Blood is the belly of logic". He kills to feed himself. He is the hunter in the ecological cycle of nature. The otter's killings are crimes of function. Man, however, destroys nature to reduce it to ornamentation. The dead otter will not feed any belly or satiate any functional need. It will merely serve as a decorative covering for the back of a chair in the drawing room.

Man always resorts to the predatory features of animals, nature's creatures, to justify his own hunts. However, here the poet forcefully brings out the fact that the violent aspect of nature is a functional necessity whereas the mindless violence of humans is unnatural and thus a crime-more than a crime, a sin.

In *Ted Huges : A Critical Study*, Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts say, "....the interect of the otter for Hughes lies in the difficulty of defining this animal. " Otter symbolizes for the poet all those forces of nature that elude definition, are ambiguous and need to be understood by man to reach at the metaphysical reality of human existence. The magical quality of the otter's "melting" into river suggests that he has been dispalced from the material world to curuive by some mysterious, supernatural force. The dualities of "tainted and necessary", "attendant and withdrawn", "robbery and concealment", and "nourishes and drowns" place the otter's mysterious spirit at the centre of the tensions in the elements. Moreover, the emphases on dualities indicates the development of a more clearly metaphysical preoccupation with language.

16.5 Thrushes

In Ted Hughes the imaginative process is triggered by the observation of something in 'external' nature, usually belonging to the animal kingdom and for him the animal is not merely an analogue or emblem of the inner self but a part, with that self, of an indivisible whole. Amongst other features the violence in animals is what attracts the poet the most in the last discussed poem "An Otter" he describes the predatory nature of the otter but attributes it to a natural trait in contarast to the unnatural violence of man . In "Thruses" he describes the violence of these seemingly delicate and beautiful birds but again attributes it to nature.

The polarity of fierce energy and indolent inactivity is a dominant note of "Thrushes". Hughes shocks and enlightens the reader of this poem by undermining

any sentimental sense one might have of kinship with the birds. The opening stanza is hinged on the double perception of the predatoriness of the thrushes and their delicacy brilliantly fused in the word "triggered'. The thrushes on the lawn look sleek and yet terrifying. They are alive but they seem to be rigid and devoid of life like steel their legs. The text of the poem is as follows :

Terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes on the lawn,
More Coiled steel than living-a poised
Dark deadly eye, those delicate legs
Triggered to stirrings beyond sense-with a start, a bounce,a stab

Overtake the instant and drag out some writhing thing.
No indolent procrastination and no yawning stares,
No sight or head scratchings. Nothing but bounce and stab
And a ravening second.

Is it their single-mind-sized skulls, or a trained
Body, or genius, or a nestful of brats
Gives their days this bullet and automatic
Purpose. Mozarts brain had it, and the shark's mouth
That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own
Side and devouring of itself ; efficiency which
Strikes too streamlined, for any doubt to pluck at it
Or obstruction deflect.

With a man it is otherwise. Heroisms on horseback,
Outstripping his desk-diary at a broad desk,
Carving at a tiny ivory ornament
For years; his act worships itself-while for him,
Though he bends to be blent in the prayer, how loud
and above what Furious spaces of fire do the distracting devils

Orgy and hosannah, under what wilderness of black silent waters weap.

Look delicate, but there is a dark and deadly expression in their eyes. The moment

they catch a glimpse of a prey in the grass, they act swiftly and pounce upon the insect. The movement is prompt, swift and schematic- a start, a bounce a stab". There is no moment of reluctance, of hesitation or of doubt. There is no deliberation on the hunt.

The thrushes are both "terrifying" and "sleek". The word "terrifying" broods over the whole stanza like a keynote. It not only conveys the idea that thrushes are expert killers but also represent a sort of predatory freedom which is the redeemed joy of life, The 'lawn' is slipped into the description as a customary setting for thrushes and as a concise suggestion of the limit of our relation to nature.

In the second stanza Hughes tries to uncover the reason, the force behind the promptness of thrushes, their hunt which is "bullet and automatic". The poet uses striking smiles to convey his point. The ferocity of the thrush is compared to that of a shark ; and the promptness and rapidity of the movements of the thrush, is compared to the quickness of the brain of the famous German composer, Mozart. The efficiency of the thrushes is too horribly automatic, like the shark's mouth which hungers for blood so much that it bites some flesh of its own tail. However, such violence such savagery is not mindless. It is directed by nature or may be by the thought of the youngones on, waiting in the nest. Thus, this hunt is directed by a necessity the necessity of survival. In this stanza it is the language itself, performing its subject, that takes the poet where he wants to go and to lead us, and the fulfilment brings a horrible recognitaion ; that this efficiency belongs not to the whole shark but to an eating mechanism with a separate existence.

This discovery would persuade most men to give up the quest of liberating the animal self. But Hughes reminds us of the necessity of pursuing it with a summary of normal human existence. What a man does neither defines nor deifies him; nor can man crash straight through doubts, obstructions, temptations sin, guilt and despair. Human beings do not possess that kind of decisiveness and swiftness of action which these thrushes have. A human being riding a horse may perform a heroic deed but he would think a long time before performing it. A human being spends years working on a piece of ivory in order to turn it into an artistic ornament. His worship is his torment. Beyond the little area lit by man's concious, there is a vast darkness. "The distracting devils" like sin, praise or despair are those suppressed

powers within any man which will not let him be staisfied with the heroisms he invents at his desk, or with any enclosed self worshipping activity. A man totally given over to those powers, genius, or hero, is a madman or automation. A man totally cut off from these powers denies or perverts the life that is in him, and drops out of the divine circuit from which alone come the energies to destroy or to create. According to lan Bold, the poem emphasizes the murderous functions of these birds By comparison with the thrushes, man comes off badly, and is reduced to a physically sterile life in his invory tower, “Carving at a tiny ivory ornament for years”.

.....

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG 412 **LESSON NO. 17**
MODERN POETRY III **UNIT-VI**

SEAMUS HEANEY

UNIT STRUCTURE:

17.1 Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to familiarise the distance learner with life and work of Seamus Heaney and to explore the different aspects which shaped Heaney as an important modern poet.

17.2 Life of Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney was born in April 1939, the eldest of family which would eventually contain nine children. His father owned and worked in a small farm of some fifty acres in Country Derry in Northern Ireland, but the father's real commitment was to cattle dealing. There was something very congenial to Patrick Heaney about the cattle 'dealer's way of life to which he was introduced by the uncles who had cared for him after the early death of his own parents. The poet's mother came from a family called McCann whose connection were more with the modern world than with the tradtional rural economy, her uncles and relations were employed in the local linen mill and an aunt had worked "in service" to the mill owners family. The poet has commented on the fact that his parentage thus contains both the Ireland of the cattle-herding Gaelic past and the Ulster of the Industrial Revolution; indeed, he considers this to have been a significant tension in his background, something which corresponds to another inner tension also inherited from his parents, namely that between speech and silence. His father was notably sparing of talk and his mother notably ready to speak out, a circumstance which Seamus Heaney believes to have been fundamental to the "quarrel with himself" out of which his poetry arises.

Heaney grew up as a country boy and attended the local primary school. As a very young child, he watched American soldiers on manoeuvers in the local fields, in preparation for the Normandy invasion of 1944. They were stationed at an aerodrome which had been built a mile or so from his home and once again Heaney has taken this image of himself as a consciousness poised between "history and ignorance" as representative of the nature of his poetic life and devlopment. Even though his family left the farm where he was reared (it was called Mossbawn) in 1953, and even though his life since then has been a series of moves farther and farther away from his birthplace, the departures have been more geographical than psychological : rural County Derry is the "country of the mind" where much of Heaney's poetry is still grounded.

When he was twelve years of age, Seamus Heaney won a scholarship to St. Columb's College, a Catholic boarding school situated in the city of Derry, forty miles away from the home farm, and this first departure from Mossbawn was the decisive one. It would be followed in years to come by a transfer to Belfast where he lived between 1957 and 1972, and by another move from Belfast to the Irish Republic where Heaney has made his home, and then, since 1982, by regular, annual periods of teaching in America. All of these subsequent shifts and developments were dependant, however, upon that original journey from Mossbawn which the poet has described as a removal from " the earth of farm labour to the heaven of education". It is not surprising then that this move has turned out to be a recurrent theme in his work, from "Digging", the first poem in his first book, through the much more orchestrated treatment of it in "Alphabets" (*The How Lantern*, 1987), to its most recent appearence in " A Sofa in the Forties" which was published in *The Sprit Level*.

At St. Columb's College, Heaney was taught Latin and Irish, and these languages, together with the Anglo-Saxon which he would study while a student of Queen's University, Belfast, were determinig factors in many of the developments and retrenchments which have marked his progress as a poet. The first verses he wrote when he was a young teacher in Belfast in the early 1960s and many of the best known poems in *North*, his important volume published in 1975, are linguistically tuned to the Anglo-Saxon note in English. His poetic line was much more resolutely stressed and packed during this period than it would be in the eighties and nineties when the "Mediterranean" elements in the literary and linguistic heritage of English became more pronounced. *station Island* (1984) reveals Dante, for example, as a crucial influence, and echoes of Virgil -as well as a translation from Book VI of *The Aeneid* -are to be found in *Seeing Things* (1991). Heaney's early study of Irish bore fruit in the translation of the Middle Irish story of Suibhne Gealt in *Sweeney Astray* (1982) and in several other translations and echoes and allusions, the Gaelic heritage has always has been part of his larger keyboard of reference and remains culturally and politically central to the poet and his work.

17.3 Seamus Heaney and Poetry

Heaney's poems first came to public attention in the mid-1960s when he was active as one of the group of poets, who were subsequently recognized as constituting something of a "Northern School" within Irish writing. Although Heaney is stylistically and temperamentally different from such writers as Michael Longly and Derek Mahon (his contemporaries), and Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian and Ciaran Carson (members if younger Northern Irish generation), he does share with all of them the fate of having been born into a society deeply divided along religious and political lines, one which was doomed moreover to suffer a quartercentury of violence, polarization and inner distrust. This had the effect not only of darkening the mood of Heaney's work in the 1970s, but also of giving him a deep preoccupation with the question of poetry's responsibilities and prerogatives in the world, since poetry is poised between a need for creative freedom within itself and a pressure to express the same of social obligation felt by the poet as citizen. *The essay in Heaney*'s three main prose collections, but especially those in *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) and *The Redress of Poetry* (1995), bear witness to the seriousness, which this question assumed for him as he was coming into his own as a writer.

These concerns also lie behind Heaney's involvement for a decade and a half with Field Day, a theatre company founded in 1980 by the playwright Brains Friel and the actor Stephen Real. Here, he was also associated with the poets Seamus Deane and Tom Paul in, and the singer David Hammond in a project which sought to bring the artistic and intellectual focus of its members into productive relation with the crisis that was ongoing in Irish political life. Through a series of plays and pamphlets (culminating in Heaney's case in his version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* which the company produced and toured in 1990 under the title, *The cure at Troy)*, Field Day contributed greatly to the vigour of the cultural debate which flourished throughout the 1980s and 1990s in Ireland.

Heaney's beginning as a poet coincided with his meeting the woman, whom he was to marry and who was to be the mother of his three children. Marie Devlin, like her husband, came from a large family, several of whom are themselves writers

and artists, including the poet's wife who has recently published an important collection of retellings of the classic Irish myths and legends *(Over Nine Waves*, 1994). Marie Heaney has been central to the poet's life, both professionally and imaginatively, appearing directly and indirectly in individual poems from all periods of his oeuvre right down to the most recent, and making it possible for him to travel annually to Harvard by staying on in Dublin as custodian of the growing family and the family home.

The Heaneys had spent a very liberating year abroad in 1970/71 when Seamus was a visiting lecturer at the Berkely campus of the University of California. It was the sense of self challenge and new scope which he experienced in the American context that encouraged him to resign his lectureship at Queen's University (1966-72) not long after he returned to Ireland, and to move to a cotage in County Wicklow in order to work full time as a poet and free-lance writer. A few years later, the family moved to Dublin and Seamus worked as a lecturer in Carysfort College, a teacher training college, where he functioned as Head of the English Department until 1982, when his present arrangement with Harvard University came into existence. This allows the poet to spend eight months at home without teaching in exchange for one semester's work at Harvard. In 1984, Heaney was named Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, one of the university's most prestigious offices. In 1989, he was elected for a five- year period to be Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, a post which requires the incumbent to deliver three public lectures every year but which does not require him to reside in Oxford.

In the course of his career, Seamus Heaney has always contributed to the promotion of artistic and educational causes, both in Ireland and abroad. While a young lecturer at Queen's University, he was active in the publication of pamphlets of poetry by the rising generation and took over the running of an influential poetry workshop which had been established there by the English poet, Philip Hobsbaum, when Hobsbaum left Belfast in 1966. He also served for five years on the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland (1973-1978) and over the years has acted as judge and lecturer for countless poetry competitions and literary conferences, establishing a special relationship with the annual W.B. Yeats International Summer

School in Sligo. In recent yeras, he has been the recipient of several honorary degrees ; he is a member of Aosdana, the Irish academy of artists and writers, and a Foreign Member of The American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1996, subsequent to his winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995, he was made a Commandeur de L'Ordre ds Arts et Letters by the French Ministry of Culture.

17.4 Seamus Heaney's Poetic Carrier

Seamus Heaney's first book, *Eleven Poems,* was published in November 1965 for The Queen's University Festival. In 1966, Faber published his first volume called *Death of a Naturalist.* This collection met with much critical acclaim and went on to win a host of awards. Also in 1966 he was appointed as a lecturer in Modern English Literature at Queen's University Belfast and his first son, Michael, was born. A second son, Christopher, was born in 1968. In 1968, with Michael Longley, Heaney took part in a reading tour called *Room to Rhyme,* which led to quite a lot of exposure for the poet's work. In 1969 *Door into the Dark* was published. In 1972 *Wintering Out* was published, and over the next few years Heaney began to give readings throughout Ireland, Britain and the United States. In 1975 Heaney published his fourth volume, *North.* His next volume, *Field Work,* was published in 1979.

Selected poems and preoccupations : Selected Prose was published in 1980. In 1983, along with Brain Friel and Stephen Rea he co-founded Field Day Publishing and in 1984 published *Station Island.* Another volume, *The Haw Lantern* was published in 1987. In 1988 a collection of critical essays entitled *The Government of the Tongue* was published.

In 1990 *The Cure At Troy,* a play based on Greek legend, was published to much acclaim. In 1991, *Seeing Things,* was published. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995 for what the Nobel committee described as "works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past". In 1996, his collection, *The Spirit Level* was published and won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award. He repeated that success with the release of *Beowulf : A New Translation.*

Heaney's work often deals with "the local" -- that is, his surrondings and everthing inclusive of them. Inevitably this means Ireland, and particularly Northern Ireland. Hints of sectarian violence, which began just as his writing career did, can be found in many of his poems, even works that on the surface appear to deal with something else. Despite his many travels much of his work appears to be set in rural Londonderry, the county of his childhood. Like the Troubles themselves, Heaney's work is deeply associated with the lessons of history, sometimes even prehistory. Many of his works concern his own family history and focus on characters in his own family : they can be read as elegies for those family members. He has acknowledged this trend.

The Anglo-Saxon influences in his work are also noteworthy, his university study of the language having had a profound effect on his work. It also led to a small revival of interest in the verse forms of Anglo-Saxon poetry amongst a number of poets influenced by Heaney. He has also written critically well-regarded essays and two plays. His essays, among other things, have been credited with beginning the critical re-examination of Thomas Hardy. His anthologies (edited with friend Ted Hughes), *The Rattle Bag* and *The School Bag,* are used extensively in schools in the UK and elsewhere.

In addition to original works, Heaney has published translations, including a version (with Stanislaw Baranczak) of Jan Kochanowski's *Laments* from the Renaissance Polish (1995), a highly-regarded verse translation of *Beowulf* from the Old English (1999), and a version of Sophocles'a *Antigone,* titled *The Burial at Thebes* (2004).

His influence on contemporary poetry is reckoned to be immense. Robert Lowell has called Heaney "the most important Irish poet since Yeats". A good many others have echoed the sentiment. His influence is not restricted to Ireland but is felt world-wide.

17.5 Seamus Heaney as a Poet

Seamus Heaney, the contemporay Irish poet, epitomizes the dilemma of the modern poet. Heaney embarks on a search for answers to some fundamental questions regarding the poet : How should a poet live and write? What is his relationship to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary

world? As far as literary tradition is concerned. Heaney admits that he has inherited a "two humped" tradition, the Gaelic tradition of Ireland and literary tradition of England. Among the most important precursors that Heaney has accommodated into his work are William Wordsworth, Patrick Kavanagh, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce.

Heaney's first collection of poems, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) invokes the atomsphere and experiences of his childhood at Mossbawn in County Derry in a language of Great sensuous richness and directness, which Heaney calls " a Keatsian wooly line". Digging potatoes and truf, picking blackberries, churning butter and ploughing are all rendered in poems which weave "a strong gauze of sound" around their occasions. The most obvious characteristics of this sound are its onomatopoeic and alliterative effect. The onomatopoeia - "the squelch and slap/ Of soggy peat" in Digging," "the plash and gurgle of the sour-breathed milk,/ the pat and slap of small spades on wet lumps" in "Churning Day"- has been termed by philip Hobsbaum as "Heaneyspeak... the snapand - crackle-and-pop of diction".

Some of the central poems in this collection maintain a certain allegiance to Wordsworth. "Death of Naturalist" itself, is such poems in which an enlargement of consciousness is enacted in some interchange between mind and nature. "Death of a Naturalist" evokes such passages as the boat-stealing scene in book I of *The Prelude*. It comes to an end with explicit statements of the new knowledge acquired during the incidents they describe. At the end of "Death of a Naturalist", after seeing the "angry frogs" which can develop out of jars of frogspawn, and hearing their bass chorus, (the child).

sickened, turned and ran. The great slime kings
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

The reaction is exactly like that of the child in *The Prelude* - *"* with termbling hands I turned",. and Heaney's " I Knew" is the terrified knowledge of the threat implicit in apparently benign natural forms. The guilty fantasy of the frogs' "vengeance" for his act of seizing frogspawn is prefigured by Wordsworth's fantasy of being hounded by the cliff.

Like Wordsworth, who devoted a whole poem to the development of his poetic self *(The Prelude)*, Heaney too addresses the poetic act in his poem "Digging". He finds many analogies in rural experience for the art of poetry. The poem which opens *Death of a Naturalist*, "Digging," not only memorializes the cycles of manual labor on his family's farm- digging up potatoes and cutting turf on the bog-but shows the poet discontinuing with that tradition as he replaces the spade with a pen, a tool he will try to "dig" with as he attempts to explore his inner self and his origins, tradition and history. The poet, watching his father turn the soil in the flower-beds, recalls his grandfather working on the bog. Though the memory of the feel of potatoes and the sound of the turf links the poet to that tradition, he acknowledges that he has "no spade to follow men like them." The poets sense of alienation from family tradition is counterbalanced by his decision to encompass that world within his poetry as he will "dig" not with a spade but with his pen; in other words, he can "dig" metaphorically, unearthing the details of the life of his family and community and honoring them by preserving them in his verse. Heaney conceives of art as labor, craft and production, precariously analogous to manual labor, a traffic with Nature mediated by verbal rather than material instruments.

Heaney, then, is in agreement with Sir Philiip Sidney's formulation that whereas nature's "world is brazen, the poets deliver a "golden" world. Both Sidney and Heaney posit a transformative power for poetry : the power to take the ready material of the everyday and to fashion it into something astounding. " Hercules and Anteus" epitomizes the dilemma of the Ulster writer, who looks toward the rational to control illiterate fidelities ; in so doing so he risks separation from the local and the familar, the very source that shapes and nurtures his writing. The conflict between Hercules and Antenus reveals what Heaney calls an advance-retire situation, in which the poetry moves toward the rational and then seeks to avoid it, thus, striking a precarious balance. The essential ingredients of Heaney's own poetic struggle shape the poem : the rational intelligence, which tends toward heavely abstractions, on the one hand, and the emotional instinct attracted to the natural world, on the other.

The natural world in Heaney is seen as feminine--a fecund pullulating maternal principle, an all-absorbing, threatening power. The male poet's attitude towards this role is "one of supplication," a mingled need and fear, erotic in its intensity. Unlike the child in "Death of a Naturalist", who flees when confronted with such fecundity, the adult's reaction is to outstare the darkness and then to attempt to come to terms with it and explore it. This exploration, this peering down into wells, digging, fishing, exhumation, rescuing from oblivion, probing of secrecy and inwardness, concern with the subaqueous and subterranean which is so typical of the poems in Heaney's first three books, is not carried out in a spirit of explication and explanation but of a communion with mystery.

Heaney attempts to ease the tension between the need to be true to the recognitions of the emerging self and the need to be faithful to a collective historical experience. At one point the need to address the political predicament of Ireland took priority, "From that moment on the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament," by finding "befitting emblems of adversity." Heaney found "befitting emblems" in P.V. Glob's *The Bog people* for the situation in Northern Ireland and in "the idea of the bog as the memory of a landscape or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in or near to it."

Heaney's work also testifies to the continuty of the pastoral tradition in poetry. This poetic form, whether it deals with "the potent dreaming of a Golden Age or the counter-cultural celebration of simpler life-styles or the nostalgic projection of the garden on childhood" still figures largely in Heaney's poetry. That Heaney's interest in the pastoral mode has not waned is evidenced by his revisitation to natural or rural experience, in his most recent collection of poems. Heaney is of the conviction--his poetry is evidence of this-that the pastoral is still a viable mode, even in the twentieth century, even in the most devastating conditions.

It is evident then, in conclusion, that Heaney, like every poet who suffers from "the anxiety of influence," who struggles under the burden of his poetic heritage, has successfully emerged from the shadow of his predecessors as a poet in his own

right. His assimilation and use of the various strands of both the English and Irish literary traditions, as well as his literary talent, has given Heaney a highly individualized poetic voice, in which he is able to articulate all the doubts, tensions and uncertainties of the modern poet and his predicament.

17.6 Preoccupation with Pastoral

Born in County Derry, Northern Ireland, Seamus Heaney's rural Catholic upbringing in Protestant Ulster has provided an important focus for his literary works. His pastoral style of poetry uses specific images of the rural simplicity of rural Ireland to suggest greater, universal situations and ideas. Though he spent a several years in the 1960s as an active sympathizer with the Catholic situation, writing political pamphlets and essays, as a poet, his work is less an ideological statement than an effort to create a "general historical awarness." His themes contain some ingredients of resistance and small acts of defiance, but do not make an active political statement. He is able to insinuate through his descriptions of the land, the use of mythology and history, and the all-pervading religious atomsphere the images of prejudice, violence, and intolerance.

Though pastoral literature is often used to decribe the idyllic rural home life, using smooth and picturesque vocabulary, pastorals often utilize ruder language to imply at greater matters. Heaney makes use of both poetic pharses and conversational language simultaneosly, as well as devices such as onomatopoeia and different styles of rhythm, to clarity and focus on his peculiar subjects. Some of his early works have an air of wandering and less focus than that of his later works. He received direction, however, with the beginning of the violence in Northern Ireland in 1969 between Catholics and Protestants. "[T]he problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to [Heaney's] predicament."

Heaney's pastoral use of the land, religion, and myth creates his unique poetic impact. Though his use of history and myths has been criticized for appearing to give the conflict in Northern Ireland a "fatalistic historical determinism," it is more of an attempt to connect to the past, and put it into a larger mythological perespective. He seeks to reestablish the timeless rituals in order to put an end to the violence.

As poet Tony Curtis says of Heaney's work, "For peace to return to Northern Ireland, people have to reestablish the rhythm of the natural world."

17.7 At a Potato Digging

I.

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.
Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;
Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch
A full creel to the pit and straighten, stand
Tall for a moment but soon stumble back
To fish a new load from the crumbled surf.
Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
Mother. Processional stooping through the turf
Recurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

II.

Flint-white, purple. They lie scattered
like inflated pebbles. Native

to the black hutch of clay
where the halved seed shot and clotted
these knobbed and slit-eyed tubers seem
the petrified hearts of drills. Split
by the spade, they show white as cream.
Good smells exude from crumbled earth.
The rough bark of humus erupts
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
whose solid feel, whose wet inside
promises taste of ground and root.
To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed.

III.

Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on
wild higgledy skeletons
scoured the land in 'forty-five,
wolfed the blighted root and died.
The new potato, sound as stone,
putrefied when it had lain
three days in the long clay pit.
Millions rotted along with it.
Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,
faces chilled to a plucked bird.
In a million wicker huts
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

A people hungering from birth,
grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,
were grafted with a great sorrow.
Hope rotted like a marrow.
Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
and where potato diggers are
you still smell the running sore.

IV.

Under a gay flotilla of gulls
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop
Down in the ditch and take their fill
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.

At a Potato Digging was published in 1966 and it was featured in *Death of a Naturalist,* Heaney's first major poetry collection. The poem consists of four sections that depict men's relationship with the land. During the 1960s, Ireland's farming relied mostly on manual labour and, like in the 19th century, farmers depended on a single crop. Thus, At a Potato Digging reflects Ireland's total reliance on the potato crop.The poem has four sections which vary in length and form. Particularly, section I has four quatrains with an ABAB CDCD rhyme scheme. Section II has a sonnet form, section III has five stanzas, and section IV has two quatrains. The poem explores the potato crop as an emblem of suffering, and how it evokes a moment of poverty and agony,

such as the famine of the 1840s. The different sections of the poem, with their different forms and tones, depict a complex portrait of Irish history and its roots. The main themes of the poem include nature, history, and suffering.

The first stanza depicts a 'present day' harvesting sequence. The lyrical voice describes how workers operate in a potato field. Notice that, from the very beginning, the harvesting process is described as mechanized and harsh ("A mechanical digger wrecks the drill"). The movements of the machine that works the field are described: "Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould". Nevertheless, the workers are depicted as being cooperative with the machine, as they "swarm in behind, stoop to fill/Wricker creels". In the description of the laborers, the harvesting process appears to be intense, manual, and traditional. The way in which the workers assist the machine relates them with the potato croppers of the past. Thus, the stanza presents a menacing atmosphere where "fingers go dead in the cold". Although dealing with the present, this last line suggests circumstances that are similar to those of the famine.

The second stanza furthers the descriptions of the workers. The potato diggers are compared to crows "attacking crow-black fields", reduced to the disorganized movements of birds ("A higgledy line from hedge to headland"). There is a great use of alliteration in these first lines in order to emphasize the way in which the men work next to the mechanical digger. This lack of organization continues to be described, accentuated by the use of military terms, "Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch/A full creel to the pit and straighten". The lyrical voice uses vivid descriptions so that the reader can visualize the situation clearly.

As in the previous lines, the third stanza extends the description of the workers in the potato field. The labor is ceaseless, as the potato diggers "soon tumble back/To fish a new load from the crumbled surf". Once again, the harvesting process is seen as harsh and intense for the workers, just as it was in the past. All of the laborers efforts are put towards the operation of the machine and the harvest acquires a religious tone as the potato diggers reverence "the black Mother" (the field). This activity is given the name of "Processional stooping" which conveys the idea of a procession with both a religious and a pagan connotation.

The final stanza furthers the idea of the "processional stooping". Notice that, throughout the poem, the stanzas are linked together as they continue and expand the idea of the previous one. This activity is presented as continued unquestionably and inevitably ("Recurs mindlessly as autumn"). The idea of autumn refers not only to the harvest season, but to the fall of leaves, and the history surrounding that particular moment of the year. The lyrical voice remembers the past and, especially, the famine: "Centuries/Of fear and homage to the famine god". The "Processional stooping" described as the potato harvesting, with its annual, endured, and religious form, refers to the dependence that this particular community has to the potato due to its previous history. There are more explicit religious references such as "famine god", "humbled", and "seasonal altar". This is because there is a need for these workers to worship the land and not take the harvest for granted ("Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees, Make a seasonal altar of the sod") , as they did at the moment of the famine.

17.8 The Forge

All I Know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting ;
Inside, the hannered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or biss when a new shoe toughers in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a aunicorn, at one end square,
Set there immovable : an attar
Where he expends himself in shape and music.
Sometimes, leather aproned, hairs in his nose,
He learn out on the yarb, recalls a clatter
of hoofs where traffic is flashing is rows ;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slan and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

"The Forge" is the first poem of his second collection, "Door into the Dark" (1969). Seamus Heaney opens this collection with The Forge', whose opening line provides his new title "All I know is a door into the dark." The word 'dark' echoes

throughout the second book seeming to be almost over-intended and programmatic. One can draw a contrast between the present poem 'The Forge' and 'The Barin'. In The Barin', the speaker is unwilling to enter into the darkness, afraid of what he might find there, whereas, the speaker in The Forge' seeks to go into the darkness, to see what lies beyond, or witin, the outside world. The use of word 'dark' in the present poem by the poet refers to artistic creation for its use signifies a point of departure on a fresh voyage of exploration.

When the speaker starts his adventurous journey into darkness, he finds 'Blacksmith' working on a new horseshoe and juxtaposes past with present recalling "a clatter /of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows". ' The Forge' deals with a dying trade threatened with extinction. It presents the figure of Blacksmith, for the creative intelligence, who although considered outmoded is nevertheless capable of producing from the ordinary, something extraordinary. Infact, the last line of the poem, "To beat real iron out, to work to bellows," sounds Heaney's rebellion tone against the English and suggests his action as voluntarily chosen to leave behind familar territory and set out himself on the road less travelled.

Seamus Heaney describes 'The Forge' as the bright flurry of sparks that never cool or blur, the twang of iron that reverberates forever. The poem signifies, speaker's artistic vitality that is sustained by moving for ward ; staying still, hesitating in any form before the door into the dark is to stagnate. And for a poet such as Heaney to half or to become stagnant is akin to retreating backwards.

17.9 Casualty

I

He would drink by himself
And raise a weathered thumb
Towards the high shelf,
Calling another rum
And blackcurrant, without
Having to raise his voice,
Or order a quick stout

By a lifting of the eyes
And a discreet dumb-show
Of pulling off the top;
At closing time would go
In waders and peaked up
Into the showery dark,
A dole-kept breadwinner
But a natural for work.
I loved his whole manner,
Sure-footed but too sly,
His deadpan sidling tact,
His fisherman's quick eye
And turned observant back.

Incomprehensible
To him, my other life.
Sometimes on the high stool,
Too busy with his knife
At a tobacco plug
And not meeting my eye,
In the pause after a slug
He mentioned poetry.
We would be on our own
And , always politic
And shy of condescension,
I would manage by some trick
To switch the talk to eels
Or lore of the horse and cart
Or the Provisionals.

But my tentative art
His turned back watches too:
He was blown to bits

Out drinking in a curfew
Others obeyed, three nights
After they shot dead
The thirteen men in Derry.
PARAS THIRTEEN, the walls said,
BOGSIDE NIL. That Wednesday
Everyone held
His breath and trembled.

II

It was a day of cold
Raw silence, wind-blown
Surplice and soutane :
Rained-on, flower-laden
Coffin after coffin
Seemed to float from the door
Of the packed cathedral
Like blossoms on slow water.
The common funeral
Unrolled its swaddling band,
Lapping, tightening
Til we were braced and bound
Like brothers in a ring.

But he would not be held
At home by his own crowd
Whatever threats were phoned,
Whatever black flags waved.
I see him as he turned
In that bombed offending place,
Remorse fused with terror
In his still knowable face,
His cornered outfaced stare

Blinding in the flash.

He had gone miles away
For he drank like a fish
Nightly, naturally
Swimming towards the lure
Of warm lit-up places,
The blurred mesh and murmur
Drifting among glasses
In the gregarious smoke.
How culpable was he
That last night when he broke
Our tribe's complicity ?
'Now, you're supposed to be
An educated man',
I hear him say. 'Puzzle me
The right answer to that one."

III

I missed his funeral',
Those quiet walkers
And sideways talkers
Shoaling out of his lane
To the respectable
Purring of the hearse...
They move in equal pace
With the habitual
Slow consolation
Of a dawdling engine,
The line lifted, hand
Over fist, cold sunshine
On the water, the land
Banked under fog : that morning

I was taken in his boat,
The screw purling, turning
Indolent fathoms white,
I tasted freedom with him.
To get out early, haul
Steadily off the bottom,
Dispraise the catch, and smile
As you find a rhythm
Working you, slow mile by mile,
Into your proper haunt
Somewhere, well out, beyond...

Dawn-sniffing revenant,
Plodder through midnight rain,
Question me again.

This poem is written in memory of a dear friend of Heaney, who was killed in the curfew in Ireland in the wake of Bloody Sunday. It is a poem that speaks of the fatility of the killings by the IRA of the civilions. The 'Casualty' in this poem is of Heaney's Catholic friend, who was killed by the provisional IRA for defying a curfew, and the poet asks 'how capable was he?" It is an elegy to his friend a fisherman. On this particular day, joint funeral was held for the thirteen men who were killed in riots. His friend, a fisherman, instead of staying at home, left his home to get a drink in the local public house. On his way there, he was shot by the IRA for defying the curfew. The poem explores the reason for his friend's death, lamenting the fact that he was innocent and had done nothing to deserve his fate. It is a moving poem, as Heaney portrays the cruelty of killing his innocent friend, whose only wish was to lead a simple, carefree life.

In this elegy he not only mourns the death of his friend but also describes him as, " a dole-kept bread winner" who "would drink by himself" like a fish. He would sit almost by himself in a pub, and at closing time, would go home "is waders and peaked cap." He was an ordinary, run-of-the-mill guy, and despite his "deadpan sidling tact", he was observant and sharp, aware of everything around him.

The fisherman wasn't an intellectual, and the poet's work was "incomprehensible" to him, yet, while carving tobacco, he would bring up the topic of poetry, which the poet would " Shy" away from.He would pay lip-service to the subject, and move on to more "politic" ground, Something both were comfortable with-floktore, fishing or the IRA.However, the friend observed his 'art' at changing the topic, as he also kept his touch with the 'art world.

His friend was killed these days after the killing of thirteen men is Derry. The day of his funeral was one of "Old raw silence", as it was the day of funerals. The Coffins "Seemed to float out from the door", as the mourners were "bound" into a ring, bound perhaps by feelings of outrage. Everyone had gone to attend the funeral, but the fisherman" would not be held at home", and he went "towards the lure" of a pub, a drink. When he saw so many casualties around him, he stared death in the face, "remorse fused with terror," in his "Cornered" state, he wished that he had stayed at home. Just before diying he saw a "blinding ...flash", that lit up his assassins faces, and "he had gone miles away".

The fisherman may have been an alcoholic, as he "drank like a fish, and felt "lured" towards "warm lit-up places". He was happiest "drifting' among glasses", spending his lonely nights at the public house. His only crime was breaking the "tribes complicity", wishing for a drink instead of going to the funeral, that is all he was "capable" of. Heaney feels he can hear him asking what he was guilty of as Heaney being "an educated man", could possibly "puzzle" him the right answer. The irony is even the "educated man", is himself puzzled.

In the last section we find that Heaney "missed his funeral", maybe he didn't want to confront the truth. The mourners "move in equal pace". They seemed to be moving from the fog to the "Cold Sunshine", yet there was a cold shadow over the mourners, the shadow of outrage and horror. The poet recalls going out in his boat that very morning with his friend, the Lazy waters foaning, as they "tasted freedom". They were fishing "early", and felt a sense of freedom, a spirit of exhilaration. He now exhorts his friend, the "dawn-sniffing revenant", to asks him questions, to talk to him again.

Casualty is a poem about a catholic friend killed by the Provisional IRA for defying a curfew, gives us another look at the tribal warfare in Northern Ireland. His questioning of his friend's responsibility for his own death makes us realise the muddling of right and wrong that grips Norhthern Ireland today. And what is of superme importance is not placing blame but recognising what remains for those who live, burdended with memories and sadness.

Allthough his poem is filled with images of death and dying, but it is also rooted firmly is this world. His elegy not only mourn great losses, but also celebrate those we have gone before us. However, the poignancy of the poem, and the death of the poet's friend, is sensed powerfully through the simple yet forceful language. The reader is left with a single, haunting though "how capable was he? And as the poet struggles in vain for "the right answer", he realises that it was the fisherman's love of freedom that led him to his death, and thus into contemlating the situation in which a man is not allowed his freedom, and has to give up his life for it.

17.10 Punishment

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling

that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin :

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adultress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and you
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webling
and all your numbered bones :

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

Poem "Punishment" is one of Seamus Heaney's later poems from the volume "North", dealing with the double standards involved in the treatment of men and women in general, and in Ireland in particular. This poem was sparked off at some modern instances of "Punishment" for adultery.

This poem presents the picture of a delicate, beautiful girl, who is treated brutally by her townsfolk and drowned in a bog. He describes the plight of a Windeby Girl ; whose two thousands year old preserved body was discovered in a peatbog. The poet uses the bog drowned body as a symbol for issues that are cloaked by society that the poet digs out and uncovers. He describes her persona in detail, imagining how she was before she was brutally killed.

Heaney can almost "feel the tug /of the halter at the nape," imagining her frail body, the "rigging of her ribs". He can see in his mind's eye her drowning, "the weighing stone" holding her down, the noose around her. The poet describes her body when it was dug out , tar covered, almost as if her skin was like bark. His shaved head looked like "a stubble of black corn", a blindfold around her eyes, and her noose "a ring", to commemorate her moments of stolen love.

The poet describes her as she was beautiful, "flaxen-haired", and she was made a "scapegoat", punished. The poet sympathises with her, and feels almost like a "Voyeur", watching whilst others punish her needlessly. Being a Catholic he feels that he might have, despite his sympathy for her, been unable to stand up for her. He codemns the people who exact "tribal, intimate revenge", however he too "would have cast... the stones of silence."

The issues dealt with in the poem, though at the surface only about a preserved body found in the bog, are Universal--dealing with topics like adultery, torture, punishment and barbarity. The plight of this particular girl stands out, enhanced by Heaney's reference to her "Flaxen hair", and "beautiful" tar face. He portrays her with poignant, delicate images, arising sympathy for her in the reader's mind. His language. canveys her frailty, her helplessness, the tragedy of her youthful death, as a barked sapling."

He analogies her with Irish girls who fall in love with British soldiers, "little adulteresses". The poet sympathises with the "little adulteresses" or what Irish people brand them as "betraying sisters", but he is the "artful voyeur", silently watching the lives of other people. Though poet sympathises with her, yet he also feels ashamed, because he knows that he would "have stood

dumb," and let the barbarity happens. He sympathises with the girl, yet he also understands the viewpoint of the provisionals, who feel a sense of "outrage" at their betrayal.

The poet deals with the double standards. On one hand he cannot condone this "teribal, intimate revenge", as it is against the principles of humanity, on the other hand, he understands the sentiments of the outraged, provisionals, as they punish the crime of getting involved with the energy. His deep emotions are clearly reflected in this poem, and it is conclusive proof against the assertion that he remains indifferent to the situation in his homeland.

Through this poem Heaney demonstrates how even people who are on the surface educated, rational and compassionate human beings, turn irrational and brutul when such sensitive issues are brought to the fore poet displays two faced approach, which is common amongst the people of today. Though they feel violence is uncalled for, when issues of race and nationality come up, such values are really tested. The poem gives us an insight into the psyche of the common man, the irrational attitude with which he attacks his fellow human being- who just a while ago was his friend and neighbour.

17.11 Sample questions

1. What specific poetic and stylistic devices does Seamus Heaney use to explore themes in "casualty" ?
2. Give example of imagery in the poem "At a Potato Digging" by Seamus Heaney.
3. What is the main theme of the poem "Punishment" ?
4. In social awareness an important concern to Seamus Heaney in his poetry ?
5. What are some distingushing features of Seamus Heaney's poetry ?

.....

.....