TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF ARTS

ENGLISH

CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

MEG 201: BRITISH POETRY II: NEO-CLASSICAL TO VICTORIAN

BLOCK II

CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)

TEZPUR, ASSAM -784028

INDIA

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MEG 201: British Poetry II: Neo-Classical To Victorian

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MEG 201: British Poetry II: Neo-Classical To Victorian

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BLOCK II

MODULE III: ROMANTICS II	**UNIT 7: P. B. SHELLEY: *"ODE TO THE WEST WIND", "TO A SKYLARK"***
	UNIT 8: JOHN KEATS: *"ODE ON A GRECIAN URN", "THE EVE OF ST. AGNES" (SELECTIONS)*
	UNIT 9: LORD BYRON: *"SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY", "PROMETHEUS"*
MODULE IV: EARLY VICTORIANS	**UNIT 10: ALFRED TENNYSON: *"THE LADY OF SHALLOT", "ULYSSES"***
	UNIT 11: ROBERT BROWNING: *"FRA LIPPO LIPPI", "TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA"*

TABLE OF CONTENT

MODULE IV: EARLY VICTORIANS

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INTRODUCTION

BLOCK II

Block II of MEG 201: British Poetry II: Neoclassical to Victorian will deal with the second generation Romantics and a cluster of Victorian poets of repute. Block II comprises of three Modules, named Romantics II, Early Victorians and Late Victorians accordingly.

Module III entitled **Romantics II** encompasses prominent later romantic poets like Shelly, Keats and Byron. ***Unit 7: P. B. Shelley: "Ode to the West Wind", "To a Skylark"*** will help you to learn one of the trend setting romantics P.B. Shelly. Shelly's poetry always sought freedom from the tyranny of political despotism and dogmatism and is inspired and charged with the spirit of revolution. In this unit we will not only learn about Shelly as a poet, but also explore his poetic imagination through the reading of select poems. ***Unit 8: John Keats: "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "The Eve of St. Agnes" (Selections)*** will introduce you to another prominent poet of the time, John Keats. Considered to be the most musical of the English poets, Keats' poetry, the Odes, are unique examples of sensuousness and melancholy bearing at many times the poet's own personal sorrows, agony and disappointments. Along with discussing few representative poems by the poet, we will also discuss their thematic concerns and the philosophy of the poet as revealed in the poems. ***Unit 9: Lord Byron: "She Walks*** in ***Beauty", "Prometheus"*** will read Byron's select poetry, perhaps the first poet to gain a reputation across the European continent. The poet of *Childe Harold* that gave a new impetus to romantic poetry and took the whole of Europe by storm, Byron showed profoundly interest in himself and that interest manifested in his poetry.

Module IV: Early Victorians includes few select and well known poets of the period. Reading of this will make us aware that Victorian poetry is strikingly different from the previous trends in poetry. Instead of poet's imagination, the poetry of this period showed their concern in the doubt and uncertainties of the time through poetry. **Unit 10** will discuss Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot", and "Ulysses". **Unit 11** includes Robert Browning's "Two in the Campagna" and "Fra Lippo Lippi", a poem based on the life of fifteenth century Italian painter

Fra Lippo de Tommaso Lippi. The poem raises various questions on the role of art and artist, attitude and philosophy of Medieval and Renaissance artists on art etc.

We have prepared these units in the best possible way to make them useful for the learners. Each unit has additional components like 'Check you Progress', 'Let Us Stop and Think', and 'Assessment questions' through which learner will be able to equip themselves well with the provided information in each unit. Along with this we expect the learners to access further information by using the sources given in the 'Recommended Readings' section.

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MODULE III: ROMANTICS II

UNIT 7: P.B. SHELLEY: "ODE TO THE WEST WIND" & "TO A SKYLARK"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Belonging to the second generation of Romantic Poets, Shelley stands alone as one with a forlorn hope for mankind. His poetry is inspired and charged with the spirit of revolution. Freedom from the tyranny of political despotism and dogmatism lies at the heart of his literary pursuits. Shelley's definition of poetry as, "Poetry turns all things to loveliness: it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed"—is clearly indicative of his romantic spirit. The chief feature of romantic poetry is found in its kinship with nature. Shelley's poetry, like that of Wordsworth, worships and attributes nature with ethereal beauty and glory. More than any other romantic poets, it is Shelley, who succeeded in turning the objects of nature into abstract and airy entities. For instance, Shelley's poetic imagination turns the little bird skylark into a 'blithe spirit', and an

'unbodied joy'. Lyricism is found triumphant in some of his illustrious poems, such as "To a Skylark", "Ode to the West Wind", "The Cloud", "Stanzas Written in Dejection" and so on. In the succeeding sections, the characteristics of Shelley's poetry; his life and career; analyses of the prescribed poems are presented in details.

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to introduce you to the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley—the romantic poet whose imagination is fired with the zeal of reform through revolution. After reading this unit you would be able to-

- get a general idea of the works of Shelley and locate his poetry within the gamut of the Romantic Movement in England.
- read the prescribed poems and develop a critical assessment of the various thematic and poetic concerns of Shelley.
- identify Shelley's lyrical impulse and idealism as expressed in the poems.

7.2 SHELLEY'S LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER

Percy Bysshe Shelley is a revolutionary and one of the most radical of the romantic poets that English literature has seen. Born to an upper class family, in Sussex in 1792, Shelley showed an inclination towards unconventionality, radicalism and a liking for the classics from an early age. To Shelley, his first public school was a combination of hell and prison where a strong headed master would discipline with brutal floggings. At Eton, where people called him "mad Shelley", Shelley grew dissatisfied with all existing forms of authority; his revolutionary zeal filled him with a passion for reforming the world. One could perceive this mood especially in the longer poems like *Queen Mab*, *Witch of Atlas*, *Hellas*, and *Revolt of Islam*.

After Eton, Shelley's next academic experience occurred in the University of Oxford where his life took a decisive turn. Shelley's explosive essay, "The Necessity of Atheism" which he audaciously sent to all the bishops and heads of colleges, led to his expulsion from Oxford on 25 March 1811. Later, in 1818, he was forced to leave England as the then conservative society found his ideas audacious and untenable. Following Locke, he argues, "the senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind". For his atheistic conclusion, Shelley relies on the philosopher David Hume. Shelley argues that the proposition 'God exists' fails demonstration by sensible experience, by reason reflecting on experience, and, even by that weakest of all demonstrations, third-party testimony to experience. Therefore, the "mind cannot believe the existence of a God" ('The Necessity of Atheism', 6-9). Shelley recycled his atheism pamphlet as a long footnote to his poem *"Queen Mab"*, noting that the "argument applied only to a theistic creator, not to the hypothesis of a pervading Spirit co-eternal with the universe" (*Romanticism: An Oxford Guide* 109). The iconoclast of the twentieth century, Gerorge Bernard Shaw believed Queen Mab to be Shelley's greatest poem. Alan Gregory says in his essay "Philosophy and Religion" (included in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*), "For Shelley, atheism demanded that we redirect rather than suppress our religious motivation: awe, sacrifice, hope, and love must invest in immanent not transcendent reality. In his dramatic poem *"Prometheus Unbound"*, Shelley presents a reworking of the Christian virtues 'faith, hope, and love'. Of the three, faith is the most ambiguous term: all tyrannous religion demanded sacrifice of thought under this name. Shelley almost abandons it, subsuming 'faith' into 'hope'. 'Love' for him, is the insatiable desire for good and 'hope' is constant before 'Destruction's strength'. These two are the energies of renewal and the only means to overcome oppressive violence" (*Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, 108-109). Inspired by Aeschylus, "Prometheus Unbound" is a mythological rendering of human history, where Shelley draws upon imagery of biblical hope and Christian salvation to create his humane, atheist vision.

Shelley's elopement and marriage with Harriet Westbrook severed his ties with his family leading to his father's disowning of the poet. In course of time they were separated and Shelley met William Godwin in 1812, which brought him into close association with Mary Godwin (better known as Mary Shelley) who was later to become his wife. In 1816, the couple travelled to Europe where they met Lord Byron and with whom Shelley developed a longstanding friendship. On their return to England, Shelley came into contact with Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt and John Keats. This period also saw the composition of one of his long poems, "*The Revolt of Islam*". As mentioned in the preceeding paragraph, Shelley had to leave England in 1818. He went to Italy and settled in Pisa where his best poems were written.

Poems like *"Queen Mab," "Alaster," "The Revolt of Islam," "Prometheus Unbound," "Epipsychidian," "The Truimph of Life"* are some of his longer poems. Apart from the ones prescribed for you, his other odes include *"Ode to Heaven," "Ode to Liberty," "The Cloud," "Adonias"* is an eloquent elegy mourning the death of his fellow-poet, John Keats; "Hellas" is inspired by the Greek Revolution and *The Cenci* is a tragedy in five acts. Shelley's lyrics and sonnets include "*Stanzas written in Dejection Near Naples*", "*Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici*", "*Ozymandias of Egypt*", "*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*", "*Mont Blanc*", among others. "*The Truimph of Life*" written in June 1822 was Shelley's last major effort at writing poetry and most of it was left in an unfinished rough-draft manuscript. Later, in the same year Shelley met his watery grave while sailing in a small boat off the coast of Italy.

7.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF SHELLEY'S POETRY

In Shelley's poetry, the poet is not simply an entertainer or a moralist but a prophetic hero. Both the poems prescribed in your syllabus contain a message for mankind. Through his poetry Shelley attempts to reach out to the multitude, heralding his ideas of revolutions and change which he believes could lift mankind from all woes. To achieve this end, he takes inspiration

from nature and her hidden powers. This aspect of his poetry will be evident to you as you read the poems. The intimate association with the world of nature gives way to realization of cosmic truths through which the poet reflects upon the condition of humanity. In both the poems Shelley appeals to nature to help him in his distress. The skylark's song or the west wind's tempestuous spirit is invoked to revive him from his maladies.

In his "*Defence of Poetry*", Shelley gives a passionate reply to the charges made against poetry by Thomas Love Peacock in "*The Four Ages of Poetry*". The latter, after failing as a poet dissuaded intelligent men from writing poetry and urged them to study science, economics and political theory which he believed could benefit the world. This infuriated Shelley and in this essay, he claims a special place for the poets in society. Poets according to him are the 'unacknowledged legislators' of mankind. He writes, "Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought…" ("*A Defence of Poetry*"). Such a role is seen to be performed by Shelley himself in "Ode to the West Wind" where he invokes the wind to aid him in spreading his ideas of liberty and equality among mankind:

> Be thou, Spirit fierce,
> My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!...
> Scatter… my words among mankind!
> Be through my lips to unawakened earth
> The trumpet of a prophecy!
>
> ("Ode to the West Wind", 61-69).

For Shelley, poetry is a source of pleasure that combines delight as well as wisdom. Like the other Romantic poets, Shelley exhibits a deep love and respect for the power of Nature. Shelley at one time believed in the presence of a divine and unifying spirit running through everything in the universe. He finds this unifying natural force in "the spirit of beauty" in

"Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", in the song of the skylark in "To a Skylark" in the spirit of the Wind in "*Ode to the Westwind*". This force is the source of poetic creation and can inspire people to change the world to a better place. Whereas Wordsworth spiritualises Nature, Shelley intellectualises it.

A revolution to Shelley was much more than a political upheaval; it was a spiritual regeneration, a new awakening, a new life. On the other hand, Love for Shelley was a transcendental force kindling all things into beauty and no poet felt more deeply the dynamic influence of love in giving shape to human destiny. Shelley has been both acclaimed and criticised for his revolutionary ideas. Matthew Arnold thought of him as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings".

In his Charles Norton Eliot lecture delivered at Harvard in 1931, T.S. Eliot declared that although during his youth he had been influenced by Shelley, he could no longer read him with pleasure. Major writers as William Butler Yeats, George Barnard Shaw, George Santayana defended Shelley, but in contradictory ways. For instance, Yeats rejected Shelley as a revolutionary thinker. For him, Shelley exhibited a great mythopoetic imagination and metrical genius who drew his poetic imagery from the deepest wells of the racial memory to reveal mystical truths. For Shaw, a Fabian socialist, Shelley's greatness lay in his clear sighted understanding of the social and political workings of British society, atheism, women's rights, and other causes dear to Shaw himself. Shaw held "*Queen Mab*" to be Shelley's greatest poem.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are some of the chief characteristics of Shelley's poetry?

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2. What is a lyric? Name some of the major lyrics by Shelley.

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3. Name the longer poems written by Shelley.

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4. Why was Shelley expelled from Oxford?

7.4 P.B. SHELLEY'S "ODE TO THE WEST WIND" & "TO A SKYLARK"

7.4.1 *Reading "To a Skylark"*

Written in 1820, Shelley's "To a Skylark" begins on a note of rapture. The poem is a superb example of Shelley's lyrical gift. The skylark, to Shelley, is not a mere bird but a spirit who pours forth melodious strains

spontaneously after soaring high in the sky, "That from heaven or near it/ Pourest thy full heart/In profuse strains of unpremeditated art" (3-5).The bird climbs up into the blue sky like a cloud of fire and soars and sings simultaneously. The lark's upward flight begins with sunrise, dispelling the darkness of the night. As it soars, it becomes invisible, like a star shining during the day. It is only the notes of music cascading down that makes us aware of its presence in the sky. Just as the moon remains invisible throughout the day but "…,we feel that it is there" (line 25), the skylark also indicates its presence in the heavens by flooding the atmosphere with its music. The invisibility of the bird adds to its mystique and through a series of abstract similes ("like a cloud of fire"; "like an unbodied joy"; "like a star of heaven"), Shelley suggests the sweetness of the bird's music. He likens the skylark to a poet who soars to the region of lofty thought (stanza 8); to an aristocratic maiden pouring out her heart from a high tower of a palace (stanza 9); to a golden glowworm which is hidden from view by the flowers and grass but whose light suggests its presence (stanza 10); then, the bird is equated with a rose which is ruined by the wind at the moment of its full bloom and which fills the air with its sweet scent (stanza 11). The bird is further compared to the sweet sound of spring showers falling on the grass, bringing to life new flowers. Its music transcends all other expressions of joy and ecstasy (stanza 12).

LET US STOP AND THINK

The contrast between the birds in **Wordsworth's "Skylark"** and Shelley's "To a Skylark" could be an interesting issue to pursue. Wordsworth's bird is rooted in the real world and achieves coalescence between its spiritual quest in the skies and its earthly responsibilities. But Shelley's bird is wholly ethereal. The long list of similes shows that Shelley is unable to find a fitting analysis of the skylark. The bird is full of enigma and mystery and its music, a healing potion for the 'mortals'.

The poet does not know what inspires the bird's glorious song. No song of love or enjoyment ("praise of love or wine"; line 64), no marriage song ("chorus hymeneal"; line 66) nor the triumphant victory chants ("triumphal chaunt"; line 67) can match the magical quality of the skylark's melody. The poet wonders what aspect of nature might have nurtured such euphoric strains in the skylark's life:

> What objects are the fountain
> Of thy happy strain?
> What fields, or waves, or mountains?
> What shapes of sky or plain?
> What love of thine own kind? What ignorance of pain? (lines 71-75).

There is no trace of languor, no irritation darkening its joy. The bird seems to be oblivious of the sad satiety of love or of human suffering. It seems to have acquired a deeper knowledge of the mysteries of death (Thou of death must deem/Things more true and deep; lines 82-83) and its music flows on ceaselessly like a crystal clear stream. The unrestrained ease which is characteristic of the skylark's song overwhelms the poet with wonder.

The concluding four stanzas of the poem become intensely personal as the poet contrasts the human situation to the skylark's rapturous song. Human beings are doomed to live with unfulfilled yearnings:

> We look before and after,
> And pine for what is not (lines 86-87)

There is always a trace of sorrow even in our merriest moods and the sweetest songs are also the most poignant and sad, "Our sincerest laughter/With some pain is fraught/ Our sweetest songs are those that tell of the saddest thought" (lines 88-90). Even if human beings were free from hatred, pride and fear, they would have never been able to reach the ecstatic mood of joy with which the skylark is blessed. The skylark's song transcends all human conceptions, possibly because what sustains the bird is the Truth which human beings can

only hope for but never realize, "I know not how thy joy we ever should come near".

If the poet were to experience even half of this joy, so natural to the bird, he could then write poems that would enrapture the world and hold them in thrall just as the bird's song holds the poet spellbound now—" The world should listen then as I am listening now!" (line 105). The poet's awareness of the tragedy of human life persuades him to experience the blissful state of the skylark.

The music of the skylark stands for the ideal conception of Art. In the poem, Shelley elevates the skylark to a spirit and its music grows in profundity and beauty as the bird soars higher and higher in the sky. The poem is remarkable for its vivid imagery and pictorial quality. Shelley uses a series of images to describe the effect of the skylark's song on the senses of hearing ("sound of vernal showers"); sight (from rainbow clouds there flow not/Drops so bright to see); touch, smell and taste (till the scent it gives/ makes faint with too much sweet these heavy winged thieves). The similes Shelley uses are unsurpassed for their romantic charm and impact. The lark is free from all worries—no reviewers, slanderers or creditors plague it—all men are compelled to heed its song. Given an opportunity, the poet would happily change places with the skylark as he obliquely emphasizes the troubles of human life in general and his own in particular. This ode is probably the most famous of Shelley's poems and one of the happiest of escape poems where Shelley transfuses with beauty a neutral and commonplace object.

Mary Shelley writes about this ode in 1820, "It was a beautiful summer evening, while wandering among the lanes, whose myrtle hedges were the bowers of butterflies, that we heard, the caroling of the skylark, which inspired one the most beautiful of his poems". She believed that the two odes "To a Skylark" and "The Cloud," "bear a purer poetical stamp than any other of his productions. They were written as his mind prompted, listening to the caroling of the bird, aloft in the azure skies of Italy…." There is a note of

exultant acceptance of life in the poems. In To a Skylark, the joy which is untouched by pain or death, rises to the height of a mystical experience. It is in such poetry as this that we see Shelley translating his own spiritual vision into enduring art.

7.4.2 *Reading "Ode to the Westwind"*

Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" has a distinct structure. The seventy (70) lines of the poem are arranged into five terza rima sonnets. The first three of these give a graphic and picturesque description of the effect of autumn on the foliage of the land, the sky, and the sea. The fourth stanza contrasts the situation of the poet with these elements of nature. The final stanza lays down an earnest entreaty to the West wind to support the zealous mission of the poet by spreading his views throughout the world and thus helping him effect a political and moral revolution. This ode was composed in 1819 under circumstances described by Shelley as: "This poem was conceived as chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions".

Shelley hails the West Wind as a source of primal energy ("O wild West Wind"; line 1) and a crucial agency of rejuvenation that drives away lifeless things ("leaves dead"; line 2) from the face of the earth and prepares the stage for fresh presences. By the sheer force of its unseen presence, the West wind clears away the withered leaves of the passing year so that new seeds could germinate and renew the earth. Thus the West wind has a paradoxical role of both a destroyer—the driver of the dead leaves; and a preserver—the charioteer of the new seeds. It scatters the leaves, and it also happens to implant the seeds.

In the second stanza, the poet gives a graphic description of the blowing of the west wind on the sky. The effect of the tempestuous wind makes the clouds spread from one end of the horizon to the other. The loose clouds are scattered all over the sky signaling the approaching storm:

> Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
> The locks of the approaching storm… (lines 22-23)

Here, the sound of the west wind is compared to a 'dirge' of the dying year. Like the charioteer of new seeds in the first stanza, the west wind heralds the beginning of a new year with new hope.

In the third stanza, the wind is referred to as a mighty power that shakes the tranquil and peaceful surface of the Mediterranean Sea. The latter rises to life, being touched by the west wind, thus ending its peaceful summer slumber. The Mediterranean is so quiet in summer that the mansions and towers standing on its shore are clearly reflected on its surface. But these images are disturbed as the West wind blows with full force over it creating a whirlpool.

The fourth stanza marks a distinct shift to a reflection on the poet's individual condition where he is in need of courage, energy and strength. He hails the west wind, "O uncontrollable!", and entreats it to engender in him its power. He wishes to be a leaf, a cloud or a wave and to be swept along with the force of the west wind. Lamenting on his own state, the poet says that he is worn out with the trials and sufferings of life and seeks the insurmountable power of the west wind to revive him:

> O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
>
> I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed! (lines 53-54)
> A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
> One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.
> (lines 55-56)

In the fifth stanza, the poet wishes to be the voice of the west wind so that he can spread his message and thoughts over the universe:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:

What if my leaves are falling like its own! (line 58)

The poet then passionately appeals to the West wind to identify its spirit with his own and to stimulate him so that through the magic spell of his poetry he may sing to mankind the inspiring song of a new era:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth….
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips, to the unawakened Earth
The trumpet of a prophecy (lines 63-70)

Like a visionary, the poet at the end of the poem makes an utterance that shows his rebellious spirit desirous of change and progress for mankind. The old world must go and pave the way for a new world to emerge just as winter paves the way for spring to come with new promises for suffering humanity:

…O wind!
If winter comes, can spring be far behind? (69-70).

Shelley is not a mere worshipper of nature but turns to her awe inspiring aspects. In the present poem Shelley explores the sheer power of nature in one of its wild and tumultuous manifestations—the blowing of the West wind. He is so awe struck with the force of the wind that he seeks its energy and spirit to bring about a change in the world. As a revolutionary and a visionary, Shelley in this poem anticipates a bright future after the bleak present.

7.5 SUMMING UP

The prescribed poems of Shelley showcase his revolutionary ideals and confirm his status as a prophet of humanity. Nature is culled into his

works to give the poet the much needed inspiration and strength so that he could change society for the better through poetry. The skylark and its song stand for what is ideal in art; while, the power of the Westwind symbolizes the need for positive change in society. Shelley's idealism in *Westwind*, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind" depicts his hope of resurrection of mankind and society. After reading this unit, you must have come to know how Shelley stands apart from the other romantic poets in his beliefs and ideologies. To many readers and critics, Shelley's genius is primarily lyrical. A lyric expresses the poet's emotional outburst vis-à-vis a particular sight, sound, idea etc. Consequently, emotions run through them; Shelley was impelled from within by his own thoughts, feelings and ideals. The root of Shelley's lyrical quality lies in this impulsiveness.

7.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Based on your reading of either "To a Skylark" or "Ode to the West Wind" examine Shelley as a poet.

2. What kind of role does the imagination play in Shelley's poetry?

3. Write an essay on Shelley's use of imagery in the poems prescribed for you with special reference to their concrete-abstract dualism.

3. How does Shelley discover the true nature of perfect poetry in the 'unpremeditated' outpourings of the skylark?

4. How, according to Shelley does the west wind embody the spirit of revolution and change? Give a reasoned answer.

5. How does Shelley define poetry? What are the similarities and contrasts between Shelley's idea of poetry and that of other Romantic poets?

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UNIT 8: JOHN KEATS: "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN" & "THE EVE OF ST. AGNES"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.0 INTRODUCTION

John Keats (1795-1821) is one of the more popular English poets. The essence of Keats' originality lies in a number of factors. Keats is a worshipper of beauty. The yearning passion for that which is 'beautiful' runs through all of his poems; as he asserts, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever". The sensuousness with which he portrays nature is always appealing. Keats' subjectivity underscores his poems and at the same time, like Shelley, bears a melancholic strain. His personal sorrows, agony and disappointments are echoed in his odes in particular. Keats is considered one of the most musical of the English poets. In the sections that follow, the life and career of Keats, features of his poetry and analyses of the poems are done in detail.

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to read the prescribed poems of John Keats and critically analyse the same in light of his romantic sensibility.

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- locate John Keats as one of the most important poets of the Romantic period in English literature.
- obtain a general idea of the works of John Keats.
- appreciate Keats' philosophy of poetry.
- interpret the prescribed poems in terms of themes, imagery and style.

8.2 LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER OF JOHN KEATS

John Keats was the youngest of the romantic poets who had a short life and a brief poetic career. Nevertheless he was able to carve a niche for his poetic talents and ensure a permanent place for himself in the English poetic tradition. Keats was born in London in 1795 in a lower-middle class family to Thomas Keats and Frances Jennings. Because of his humble background, Keats could not afford to have classical education but he had recourse to classical literature from his reading of John Lempiere's classical dictionary. Unlike the other two poets included in this Unit—Shelley and Byron— who were born into rich aristocratic families, life was not very comfortable for Keats. Most of his short life span was stricken with penury. Keats had three brothers—George, Thomas and Edward, and a sister named Fanny. Keats' letters to his siblings show their role in his development as a poet for he shared his poetic ideas and views freely with them. Speaking of George, Keats once said that he was "more than a brother" to him and his "greatest friend". Keats studied science, Latin and French in Clarke's School, Enfield. After the death of his mother Frances Jennings, Keats left Clarke's School to join as an apprentice under Thomas Hammond, who was a surgeon and apothecary. However, unfortunately his medical training did not fetch him financial security. It also left him with little time for writing poetry. Finally Keats abandoned the medical vocation and turned to poetry.

In the literary circle, Keats had a close association with Leigh Hunt and this also brought him into contact with other poets like Shelley. In 1817,

Keats first volume of poetry, Poems, appeared. It failed to make any memorable impact. In 1818, his second volume, Endymion was published, which underwent scathing criticism in the Tory circles. Though Endymion is not counted among Keats' best works it definitely paved the way for his genius to emerge. The year 1819 was the most significant period of his life in terms of poetic output. During April-May of the year, Keats wrote "La Belle Dame sans Merci", "Ode to Psyche", "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn". As C.M. Bowra says, "In these poems he found his true voice and the perfection which he had been seeking" (Bowra 126). For Keats, these odes were a new attempt at shaping his creative genius; he says of the "Ode to Psyche", "This I have done leisurely—I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit". "The Eve of St. Agnes" was also composed in the same year.

Keats received a heavy jolt when in June 1818 his brother George and his wife emigrated to America. In December, his other brother Thomas, whom he loved dearly, died of tuberculosis. Keats, who himself had been suffering from tuberculosis reached the final stage of the fatal disease in the beginning of 1821. Shelley learned of John Keats' serious consumptive illness from Leigh Hunt. Late in July 1820, Shelley wrote, inviting Keats to visit him in Italy. Keats accepted the invitation and sailed for Naples with Joseph Severn in mid September 1820. On 15 November, they arrived in Rome where they lodged at Piazza di Spagna. There Keats succumbed to his ailment on 23 February 1821, and was buried in a Protestant Cemetery in Rome. Shelley did not learn of this event until April 1821, in a letter from Horace Smith and Smith and immediately began writing "Adonais", his elegy on Keats.

8.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF KEATS' POETRY

John Keats is one of the most remarkable members of the group of second-generation Romantic poets who accomplished a lot in his short life. He has won more laurels than Shelley possibly because, in spite of the indulgent

luxuriance of his imagery, he cultivated a kind of self-discipline in both emotions and craftsmanship, a quality which Shelley could hardly profess to have attained. Keats is a Romantic in his ability to appeal to the senses, his harking back to the Middle Ages, his love of Hellenism (markedly different from Shelley's) and his conception of the role of the poet. Keats in his own way is found to weave together all these aspects giving rise to his own style of writing.

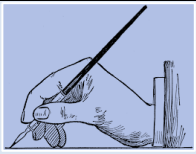
Among the formative influences on all of Keats' work, Spenser stands first in the sheer love and pursuit of Beauty; Chaucer and Milton influenced his poetic style and vocabulary; lesser poets like Chapman and Leigh Hunt affected him in his choice of words and in his search for colour. But the finest part of Keats' work owes nothing to a derivative source. Perhaps his most notable divergence as a poet from his contemporary Shelley, is that he chooses, as a rule, to deal with sensations rather than with ideas, with concrete form rather than with abstract imagining. When he deals with ideas, he chooses such human themes as life, love, beauty, joy and sorrow, and presents them in concrete shape.

Intellectually, Keats was strongly in sympathy with Shelley and Byron. In 'religious' philosophy he was more extreme, more wholeheartedly pagan than either. Byron, for all his cynicism, never freed himself entirely from the hold of Christianity, and Shelley's transcendental fervor impresses more than his so-called atheism. Whatever his political sympathies be, Keats never coloured his poetry with them. In all of his works, he fled from the workaday world to an enchanted realm that remained closed to the intrusion of ordinary human affairs. Unlike Shelley, Keats' idealism is not coloured by any revolutionary ardour. He took from Medievalism and Hellenism material for fashioning his sequestered land of beauty, and whatever he found he used for sensuous delight, not ethical inspiration.

The influence of medieval Italy and its rich store of legend, the pastoral sweetness and sensuous beauty of Spenser overpowered his

sensibility. But, it was ancient Greece that haunted Keats' imagination most. He knew it mainly through the Classical Dictionary, the Elgin Marbles and Chapman's Homer, yet his instinctive understanding enabled him to use these secondary sources and to mould them into a form of art entirely his own. The influence of the Greek or Hellenic element in Keats' poetry is seen to a great extent in poems like "Endymion", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion". Italian medievalism finds its effects in "The Pot of Basil", "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "Lamia". The atmosphere of all these poems is that of the Middle Ages, but a symbolic Middle age where art, ritual, superstition, revelry and luxury combine to form a magnificent backdrop.

"O for a life of sensation rather than of thought!" wrote Keats, for he believed in the importance of sensation and its pleasures. For him, sensation includes the dovetailing of all the five senses, so that in all his responses to the physical world there is an impression of testing things by the palate and by the scent, of feeling their texture as well as the usual reactions to sight and sound. Sensation for Keats was cognitive; it was a path to the knowledge of reality and the poet's duty was therefore to seek it and render it persuasively in words.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name the famous odes of John Keats.

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2. Who were among the literary predecessors had an influence on John Keats?

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2. What do you mean by sensuousness? Is Keats' poetry sensuous?

The sensuous quality of Keats' verse belongs to an order entirely his own. Where Wordsworth spiritualizes and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is more than content to express her through the senses. The colour, the fragrance, the touch, the taste, the music—these pulsating elements move him to the depth of his being. All of Keats' poetry is characterized by the fact that it is a vision of Beauty and Truth, steadily growing richer as well as purer and more intense. He was, like Shakespeare, a strongly 'physical' poet rejoicing in sounds, colours, odours and textures; his physical ardour gives to his poems an extraordinary richness. All through his poetry what is most discernable and characteristic is the fact that Keats' vision is never distorted by mere theorizing—in this sense, he is a pure poet.

LET US STOP AND THINK

Negative Capability

A term coined by John Keats in a letter written on 21 December, 1817. According to Keats, a true poet to be able to accept intuitive insights will have to possess the capability to negate his own personality. In this way he could to perceive reality. Keats means by Negative Capability, a quality in a poet which enables him to be in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". Keats cites Coleridge as lacking this ability and Shakespeare as one possessing it in a great measure. The poets need to display impersonality and objectivity about the subject- matter and "get outside of themselves".

8.4 KEATS' "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN" & "THE EVE OF ST. AGNES"

8.4.1 *Reading "Ode on a Grecian Urn"*

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" was written in 1819 when Keats' life was in turmoil, when he was nearly a bankrupt, with dwindling health, an incompatible life partner, and his family dispersed or dead. Art and death are both seen as modes of escape from mutability and change, and the relation between art, death and life is the true theme of the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The poem considers the arresting of life by art as both profit and loss. It represents an escape from change and decay into eternity, but at the expense of eternal unfulfilment. Beauty and permanence remain in the figures on the urn, but they are after all only an "Attic shape", an "attitude", a "cold pastoral". Conversely, if a moment of life arrested by art lacks the promise of completion, it is certainly compensated by being untouched and not knowing decay, which is the inevitable conclusion to every completed action in this transitory world. Another form of compensation is in the avoidance of disappointment of satiety which is the end of all realized anticipations.

This ode presents a world of beauty and human passions made eternal by art. On the literal level, it describes a marble urn which has existed for many centuries in this physical world where everything decays. In the first line, the urn is addressed as a 'bride' and in the next as a 'foster-child' of silence and slow time. The emphasis upon silence in these lines is heavy and unmistakable. Within two lines, three words convey this idea—'still', 'quietness' and 'silence'. Later in the 'Ode' it becomes clear that time and natural processes of change are anything but kind to human beings. But they have been gentle to art, symbolized by the urn in the poem, keeping it preserved in its pristine state—'still unravished'. After the first two lines, with their insistence upon the urn's silence, the title 'sylvan historian', by which the urn is addressed in line 3, becomes paradoxical. Being a historian, the urn "can…express/A…tale". Though silent, it communicates, it speaks volumes

about life preserved through art. This fact of communication despite being silent is the paradox that governs the 'ode'. In the rest of the stanza, the poet expresses his confusion through a series of questions. These lines play upon contrasts and possibilities for paradox. The poet asks whether the figures on the urn are 'deities' or 'mortals', 'men or gods'. He also asks whether the scenes on the urn refer to the place called Tempe—a valley in Greece, created according to myth by the God Neptune, or Arcady—a district, also located in Greece. He does not know whether these Grecian representations are associated with a life of perfect contentment. The last line of the stanza highlights a revel of sound and activity. The music of the pipes and timbrels presents a paradox by suggesting almost a din on the face of the urn whose very essence had seemed to be of 'silence'. The closing phrase 'what wild ecstasy?', might be considered another attempt to balance opposites—the pursuit of the lovers and the escape of his beloved seem almost resolved in a moment of shared bliss.

The second stanza opens with one of the few direct, declarative utterances in the entire 'Ode', "Heard melodies are sweet/Those unheard are sweeter". Taken literally, this makes no sense, for there are no unheard melodies. The poet, however, is articulating the kind of paradox that was only implied in Stanza 1. Unheard melodies are sweeter than heard melodies in the same sense that the urn, wedded indissolubly to silence, "can…express/a flowery…rhyme". In the subsequent lines, Keats makes clear what he has in his mind. The pipes on the urn play 'not to the sensual ear' but 'to the spirit'. Though it is a material object, the urn leads us beyond its material medium to a spiritual vision. What is particularly ironic here is that the wild scene of men in pursuit of maidens that decorates the urn could justly be called 'sensual'.

After the general assertion of unheard melodies in lines 11 and 12, and the commands in line 12-14 to the 'soft pipes' to 'play on…to the spirit', the poet begins a series of invocations, not to the urn itself now but to the figures upon it. The movement of meaning within this passage is two-fold. On one hand, the poet, speaking to the figures on the urn, stresses their limitations.

The key words here are ‘cannot’ and ‘never’. The youth who plays his pipe ‘can….not leave’ his music nor can the trees above him ever be bare. The lover can never kiss his beloved but neither can her beauty ever fade away.

The third stanza echoes the same sentiment but the negatives ‘cannot’ and ‘never’ give way to a strongly affirmative pair of epithets—‘happy’ and ‘forever’. He begins by addressing the ‘happy, happy boughs!’; then, he calls on the ‘happy melodist’. The trees are destined happily to remain green without ever bidding farewell to spring. The youthful musician is “forever piping songs forever new”. Love is appraised as “forever warm…forever panting and forever young”. This love is immune to time and is immortalized through art: “more happy love!/ More happy, happy love”. Keats articulates the idea that the lovers on the urn “whatever the limitations of their own love/ Have surmounted human limitations”, that the love portrayed here is “far above…all breathing human passion”.The mere mention of the word human is enough to snap him back to reality; his involvement with the figures on the urn gives way to a reflection on the shortcoming of human love. As Keats speaks of it in the last two lines of Stanza 3, the love of the figures on the urn is still unsatisfied, “still to be enjoyed”, but human love leaves the heart “high sorrowful and cloy’d”. Their love was panting with anticipation; this leaves a ‘parching tongue’. Their love is far above the human condition; the only height to which human love reaches is that of sorrow. Keats presents a number of contrasts which create the paradoxical condition of the life presented on the urn.

In Stanza 4, the poet refocuses his attention towards another scene on the urn. At first the poet questions the individual figures. Who are the people coming to sacrifice a heifer? To what outdoor altar is the priest leading them? And which is the town they have just left? The town itself is not pictured on the urn, for the poet guesses where it might be located—on a river, a sea-shore, or a mountain. Again, the poet reverts to the urn’s limitations through the now familiar words ‘never’ and ‘cannot’:

“Not a soul…can e’er return.”

This stanza traces the same wave of feelings as the earlier ones. It describes a setting with a green altar, a garlanded heifer, and a crowd of people, who are possibly on a religious procession. The poet is so captivated by the pictures that he begins to speculate on the town wherefrom these people might have come. The silence of this little town is the silence of desolation, not the urn's silence of aesthetic repose.

In stanza 5 the men and maidens are 'overwrought' in the sense that they are overwhelmed by their passion. But the poet maintains a kind of detachment, as the stanza proceeds, to the extent that he can even reflect upon his own reactions to the urn, chiding it, "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity". 'Thought', the mind's everyday method of dealing with reality through concepts and abstractions, does not work when it comes to the paradoxes of the urn. It seems as if the poet has been tricked into imagining a world that could not exist, a world where trees always keep their springtime freshness and love is always on the brink of fulfillment. The "cold pastoral" is insulated from the ravages of time and human history. Like the myth of the pastoral world of Tempe and Arcady, the urn speaks from the timeless realm to men in every period of history, even though its "marble men and maidens" never had a real existence.

To whom the urn is speaking and what it says comprise the subject of the last five lines of the ode. As 'friend to man', the urn speaks to the whole human race, but since man lives in time and history, it speaks more particularly to each generation as it comes along. Keats' phrase 'this generation' is vague but effectively so. 'This' can refer to Keats' generation, to ours, or to any successive generation of readers and the phrase is richer for the ambiguity. In contrast to all generations, the urn 'shalt remain', whereas they will succumb to the ravages of 'old age' and 'other woe'.

Towards the end of the poem, the urn delivers its long awaited message in the two closing lines. Like many oracular statements, the message is cryptic and difficult to decipher. What is clear, however, is that the poet has at last received an answer from the object he has been so urgently questioning.

The answer tells us nothing about the objects curved on the body of the urn; but, it does tell us what the urn is:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth and, all ye need to know"

The urn is an object of beauty, the reality or truth of which the poet himself has experienced; it is enough that he knows this. The final message that comes from the urn sums up the meaning of its existence and completes the poem. Views on these lines have been various.T.S. Eliot thinks that this is "a serious blemish on a beautiful poem; and the reason must be either that I fail to understand it, or that it is a statement which is untrue". For Robert Bridges, the lines redeem an otherwise not very distinguished work and for Quiller-Couch they are "an uneducated conclusion". In his 1944 essay, "Keats's Sylvan Historian", Cleanth Brooks is of the opinion that this culminating message is a bit too sententious and that "this bit of wisdom sums up the whole of mortal knowledge" (p. 132). Brooks vindicates it by saying that this is a speech in character like the ones made by characters in a drama, and as such can be construed only in the full context of the poem and the character of the urn. Garrod paraphrases it as, "there is nothing real but the beautiful and nothing beautiful but the real". He opines that Keats uses "truth", as others do, to mean "reality". C.M. Bowra in The Romantic Imagination defends Keats saying that this is not a complete philosophy of life, nor did Keats intend it to be. It is a theory of art, a doctrine intended to explain his own creative experience. The belief that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is true for the artist while he is concerned with his art. It is no less true that, while he is at work, this is all that he knows for certain and all that he needs to know for the proper pursuit of his special task. Unless he believes this, he is in danger of ruining his art. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" tells what great art means to those who create it, while they create it, and, so long as this doctrine is not applied beyond its proper confines, it is not only clear but true.

LET US STOP AND THINK

The following passages extracted from Keats' letters show to what extent Keats was obsessed to find out the relation between truth and beauty. It is worth mentioning here that all the ensuing extracts were written before "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and show how Keats developed his own doctrine about the relation between beauty and truth.

> "I am certain if nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not." (Letter to Benjamin Bailey on 22 November, 1817).
>
> "The excellence of all every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from their being in closer relationship with Beauty and Truth." (Letter to George and Thomas Keats on 21 December, 1817).
>
> "I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty" (Letter to George and Georgiana Keats on December 1818).

8.4.2 Reading "The Eve of St. Agnes" (Stanzas 30 to 42)

John Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes" is an attempt to move beyond the lyric to epic and narrative. His mastery of dramatic and verbal effect gets reflected in this poem. "The Eve of St. Agnes" is a narrative poem consisting of forty-two Spenserian stanzas. The tale's setting is a night of revelry and dancing in a medieval mansion on a freezing wintry evening in the distant past. Madeline gets to know that on this particular night, which is St. Agnes' Eve, a virgin may be granted a vision of her lover, and she prepares to leave the ball and retire to bed. Unknown to her, Porphyro, her lover, a son of her family's bitter foe, has crept into the castle unseen and unnoticed by the guards. Porphyro speaks about the longings of his heart and his desire to meet Madeline to an old 'beldame' Angela who is sympathetic to the young lover.

He persuades her to hide him in a chamber in Madeline's apartments from where he can observe her undressing for sleep, and to prepare an exotic supper for the two. Enticed by his soft lute playing, Madeline emerges from her dreams to find him by her bedside. They slip through the sleeping halls silently and 'away into the storm' leaving old Angela to die 'palsy-twitched' and the Baron to his dreams of 'many a woe'.

Leigh Hunt is of the opinion that "The Eve of St. Agnes" is the most delightful and complete specimen of Keats' genius. Keats' poem is a Romantic montage of popular legend, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, motifs from Chaucer and Boccaccio, and the atmospherics of Gothic romance. The narrative is fast moving, at times even dramatic.One of the most striking aspects, however, is the richness and radiant sensuousness of the imagery, particularly in the central bed chamber. The reading of 'The Eve of St. Agnes' has been done here with specific reference from stanza 30 to stanza 42.

Hidden in a closet, Porphyro silently watches Madeline as she prepares for bed and goes off to sleep. Then as the ritual demands, Porphyro emerges from his hiding place and prepares a rich supper for his lover. Here the senses pertaining to sight and palate are roused. The description is rich in colour, odour and texture:

……..

In blanched linen, smooth, and lavendered

While he forth from the closet brought a heap

Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd

With jellies soother than the creamy curd

And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;

Manna and dates……

On golden dishes and baskets bright.

(Stanza 30-31)

Comparisons like "jellies soother than the creamy curd" are intended to appeal to sight and touch. The reference to manna elevates the scene as it is divine nourishment supplied by God. Consequently the position of Porphyro as a lover is also elevated. Andrew Bennet in his analysis of the poem opines that "while Porphyro requires a visual embodiment of his desires and a physical consummation of those desires, Madeline requires a vision of her desires and a visionary dream of a consummation" (Bennet 96). Although critics like Bennet have tended to see the poem as 'a vulgar adolescent fantasy of voyeurism' and questioned Porphyro's honourable intentions (not to look with ruffian passion in her face), Keats tries to present his characters on a higher pedestal. For instance, Angela serves as the agent to scrutinize Porphyro's intentions:

> A cruel man and impious thou art
> Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
> Alone with her good angels, far apart
> From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem
> Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem (Stanza 16).

Madeline, Keats tells us earlier in stanza 25, is "so pure a thing" that she is "free from mortal taint". Madeline is repeatedly likened to "a splendid angel", "charmed maid" to hint that her intentions are far above mortal passion and infatuations. In his very first address to Madeline, Porphyro calls her a 'seraph':

> And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!/Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite: (Stanza 31)

These lines could be seen to function as a recompense to redeem Porphyro from his honourable albeit questionable intentions. Assuming the role of a hermit, Porphyro pledges dedication to his "heaven" for a single look of grace, failing to obtain which would cause him to "drowse beside thee, so

my soul doth ache" (Stanza 31). In stanza 34, Porphyro is shown to be almost praying to the sleeping lady (his heaven), to win her favour: "Porphyro…/…knelt with joined hands and piteous eye". When Madeline wakes up (Stanza 34), she withholds beside her, the real vision of the man who was shown in her dreams. Prophyro's rising up (in stanza 36) from an apprehensive kneeling position ("Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculpted stone", stanza 33) after Madeline's love laden words is symbolic. Not only he rises physically, but also in stature and Keats makes an attempt to bring him closest to Madeline in terms of intentions. He too like Madeline is likened to an "ethereal" being, "a throbbing star" that could be found only in the heavens:

…,he arose

Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star

Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose; (Stanza 36).

In the remaining stanzas, Porphyro maintains this stance consistently without facing further interrogations about his intentions. In Stanza 38, he wants to be Madeline's "beauty's shield"; she is his "silver shrine" where after long hours of "toil and quest", he, like a "famish'd pilgrim" would take some rest. He assures her that he is "no rude infidel" and "will not rob thy nest".

In Stanza 36, we see that the oneness or merging of their individual dreams is conveyed through the sensuous imagery of a rose that "blendeth its odour with the violet" to producing a "solution sweet". The harmony prevailing in the lovers' world is contrasted to the chaos outside:

……..meantime the frost-wind blows

Like love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet

Against the window-panes…." (Stanza 36).

In Stanza 40, where Madeline elopes with Porphyro, the inmates of the castle are metaphorically seen as "sleeping dragons". The development in the lovers' world is set against the total silence of the palace with "no human sound". The

only things in motion are the curtains (arras) with printed "horsemen, hawk and hound" set fluttering by the uproarious wind. The absence of 'human sound' is to be taken as a good omen by the lovers. They are careful enough as well, not to produce any 'human sound'. It is interesting to note in the following stanza (Stanza 41) that Madeline and Porphyro along with their movements are not presented as humans. They, rather, "glide, like phantoms" through the "wide hall", "the iron porch" and finally undo the bolts, the chains and the door.

The dramatic effect of the narrative leaves the reader enchanted. The graphic descriptions and intensely sensuous rendering of imagery, makes the reader a participant (one who watches silently but intently) in the escapade. In the final stanza, Keats manages to leave his readers in enchantment and uncertainty by giving a grim finish to the poem. Both Angela and the Beadsman are dead while no news is heard of the lovers after they step out into that "elfin storm".

8.5 SUMMING UP

The life of John Keats, the celebrated romantic poet, was beset with hardships, penury and personal tragedies. His poetic engagements led to the emergence of a distinctive style infused with the sensuous and the musical. Of all poems in his oeuvre, it is his odes that are celebrated the most. While Wordsworth and Shelley invest nature with a philosophic and prophetic vision, Keats paints nature in various colours, investing it with sights, sounds, music and different hues. As a poet of beauty, Keats immortalizes beauty in its ever appealing and never perishing effect. In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats confers upon beauty, an ethical element. He assimilates truth and beauty not as two separate elements but as one and the same thing. His odes depict the importance of sense impressions on his poetic style. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" shows Keats as a worshipper of beauty and his speculations on time, permanence, temporality, art and the creative process. The selections from the

other poem, "The Eve of St. Agnes" testify to his narrative and dramatic prowess in writing poetry.

8.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that Keats' concept of Negative Capability could be applied to his poetry? Give a reasoned answer with special reference to 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

2. How does Keats deal with the theme of time and permanence in the Ode on a Grecian Urn?

3. Write an essay on Keats' sensuousness with reference to 'The Eve of St. Agnes'.

4. Comment on Keats' narrative art in the poem 'The Eve of St. Agnes'.

5. "'The Eve of St. Agnes' is an unresolved poem". Give your opinion on this statement

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UNIT 9: LORD BYRON: "SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY" & "PROMETHEUS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.0 INTRODUCTION

Byron is a poet of vigour and energy. Of the romantic poets, he was the first to gain a reputation across Europe. His poems earned the admiration of German philosophers like Goethe. In his hands, English poetry became European for the first time. Byron's poetical production is not very bulky and also not of an even standard. Some of his popular and remarkable works include "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", "The Vision of Judgement", and "Don Juan". It was "Childe Harold" that took the whole of Europe by storm and gave a new impetus to romantic poetry. It needs to be mentioned that, everywhere in his writings, Byron is profoundly interested in himself. His character and personal traits get reflected in his poetry. Byron, the man, was fond of posing and pretension and often remained vain and pompous. At the same time, he was a champion of liberty and democracy and had a strong dislike for hypocrisy. These contrasting qualities of Byron, the man have an affect on his poetry that mark it both with poetic excellence and deficiency.

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit is to:

-introduce you to the life and works of George Gordon, Lord Byron.

-aquaint you with the characteristic features of Byron's poetry and his poetic style.

-enable you to analyse the prescribed poems with reference to their respective themes and techniques.

9.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF LORD BYRON

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) was born to Catherine Gordon and Captain Byron (also popular as Mad Jack). Byron's early childhood was spent with his mother at her home in Aberdeenshire while his father, a profligate and squanderer, had to flee from his creditors to France and died three years after the birth of Byron.Catherine Gordon was a rich Scottish heiress descendedfrom James I of Scotland and this enabled Byron to have a comfortable childhood and proper education, notwithstanding his father's economic condition. Byron was educated at home and then at Aberdeen Grammar School. In 1805 he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became infamous for his profligate behaviour that foreshadowed much of his achievements. In 1807, he published a small volume of verse Fugitive Pieces and Hours of Idleness. In 1809 he came up with English Bards and Scotch Reviewers which attacked Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Scott. In June 1809 he journeyed through the Mediterranean and in 1811 published Hints from Horace. Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" which was published in 1812 after his return to England, made him a popular figure in the then English society. Byron's subsequent publications include The Curse of Minerva (1812), The Bride of Abydos (1813), The Corsair (1814), Hebrew Melodies (1815), The Seige of Corinth and Parisina (1816). After separation from his wife Anabella Milbanke (who bore him a daughter), Byron left England for Switzerland on 25 April 1816, never to return.

In spring 1816, in Switzerland, Shelley met Lord Byron for the first time. David B. Pirie observes,"the two poets rented houses within walking distance of each other beside Lake Geneva and spent much of the summer together. They shared the costs of a boat, and, on their most protracted voyage around the lake, called at the grim Chateau de Chillon, exploring its dungeons and torture-chambers….A specific disagreement between the two poets was provoked by Shelley's ardent hostility to all organized religion. Byron shared Shelley's disgust at the hypocrisies of the Anglican Church in England which was then fervently preaching support for the Tory government. Nevertheless, he was on the whole, far more tolerant of Christianity, and would later have his daughter brought up as a Roman Catholic" (27-28).

In 1816, Byron composed the third canto of "Childe Harold" and "The Prisoner of Chillion". After a brief liaison with Mary Shelley's step sister Claire Clairmont, Byron went to Venice. A lot of Byron's creations belong to this period during his sojourn in Venice. The Lament of Tasso (1817), Manfred (1817), the fourth canto of Childe Harold (1818), Beppo (1818), Mazeppa (1819), and the first canto of Don Juan.

Byron's affair with Countess Guiccioli which began in Venice in April 1819, influenced his "The Prophecy of Dante", showing the poet's interest in Italian nationalism. Later, in 1821, Byron wrote a dramatic poem on a Venetian subject "Marino Foliero". His Sardanapalus dedicated to Goethe, appeared in the same year along with "The Two Foscari" and "Cain". Goethe who had started correspondence with Byron after reading his Manfred, honoured him in the second part of Faust where the younger poet appears as Euphorion—the child of Faust and Helen. Byron's life gives us an interesting account of a man who embraced different causes in his life. For a while, he was associated with the Carbonari—a militant nationalist movement dedicated to Italian aspirations to independence from Austrian overlords. After the movement fizzled out in 1821, Byron embraced the cause of Greek liberation from Turkish oppression. On 24 July 1823, he set sail on a brig "Hercules",

for 10 days to reach Cephalonia from Leghorn. Byron exerted a strong influence over the Greek cause; he planned to attack the Turkish stronghold at Lepanto in association with Alexander Mavrocordato. But in April, he caught a severe chill after getting drenched in an open boat. Thereafter, Byron caught a fatal rheumatic fever and on 19 April 1824, he breathed his last. Byron was refused burial in England's Westminster Abbey. He was thereafter buried in the family vault in the church of Hucknall Torkard in Nottinghamshire.

9.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF BYRON'S POETRY

While Shelley is a poet of revolution and a prophet of humanity, Keats a lover of beauty and the sensuous, their contemporary Byron is a poet of vigour and derision. Among the poets of his generation, Byron received enormous popularity in his lifetime and was able to draw the attention of entire Europe towards his poetry. His poems were read, appreciated and applauded across the continent. One of the most striking features of Byron's poetry is the identification of the poet with his subject. His personality had many divergent aspects to it and all these are found to be reflected in the heroes that he creates. Jerome Mc Gann says, "The Byronic hero, fashioned between 1812 and 1815 is a hero with a thousand faces" (Byron and Romanticism, 158).

Paul Douglass observes that Byronic portraiture like "Childe Harold, Selim, Lara, Conrad, Manfred, Cain, and Don Juan have inspired scores of writers". Byron once wrote to his friend at Cambridge, Francis Hodgson, "the hero of …a tragic poem must be guilty to excite terror and pity. Who is the hero of Paradise Lost? Why Satan" (BLJ, viii, 115). The Byronic hero, therefore, is popularly described as a libertine with depraved morals, at times melancholic, and often unprincipled. Stopford A. Brooke observes that, "the position of Byron as a poet is a very curious one". He is partly of the past and partly of the present. There is something of the school of Pope strongly present in him. Nevertheless, there is a departure from old standards and conventions to make his poetry unique, not imitative. As mentioned in section

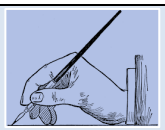
9.2, Byron's oeuvre is not very bulky but it contains masterpieces like Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, A Vision of Judgement, and Don Juan. Byron's poetry is characterized by his vigour of description. His graphic verbal art showcases a dynamic mind and impulsive imagination. Another very significant feature in Byron's art is found in his use of satire. With his characteristic vigour, enlivened with wit and humour, Byron is found to satirize his own country and its habits and characters. Byron's "The Vision of Judgement", (occasioned by the death of King George III and more immediately on account of an acerbic academic squabble with the then poet laureate—Southey), depicts the irony of kingship and the idea of royal stature, when the person with whom these things are associated is "an old man with an old soul, both extremely blind" (The Vision of Judgement, XXIII).

LET US STOP AND THINK

After George III's death in 1820, Robert Southey, the poet laureate wrote a "Vision of Judgment", describing the deceased King's glorious entry into heaven. In his preface, Southey launched an attack on Byron labelling him as a 'Satanic' poet, a corrupter of morals, and a danger to the spiritual health of the nation. In reply, Byron wrote "The Vision of Judgment" slandering Southey and published it in the journal The Liberal of which he and John Hunt were editors.
Byron's scathing ridicule of Southey in this poem is only a part of the poem's aim. In posing the question whether George III is fit to enter heaven, Byron brings to close scrutiny, the conduct of not only the King, but of the entire nation. Byron's poem goes far beyond that of Southey in scope and seriousness, for the course of contemporary history and England's role in it is questioned and ridiculed.

Byron's power as a verse satirist finds ample expression in his unfinished epic satire "Don Juan" (1819-1824). Through the experiences of the central character, the poem offers a wide ranging ironic comment on human passions, whims and shortcomings and more specifically on contemporary English society, politics, and literature. The central character here is not the libertine Byronic hero, but an innocent young lad who is educated into maturity by his experiences abroad. Byron's most celebrated work "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" written in Spensarian stanzas is the result

of the poet's extensive travels in Europe in the company of his friend, Hobhouse. Byron's imagination is found impelled by his visits and experiences and all this is reflected in his poetry. It describes the exploits of a young man who is disillusioned with his pleasure seeking existence and looks for a new kind of life in foreign parts. The central character, Childe—Byron's hero is closely related to the poet himself. The poet's identification with his hero is intimate and intense and a strong subjective note is perceived. As Paul Douglass observes, "Byron was strongly identified with the hero of [t]his work and the poem made him an object of personal fascination" (*The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, 8). The immediate popularity of "Childe Harold" made the melancholic 'Byronic hero' one of the most recognizable figures of Romantic literature. This success made the poet say that he, "woke one morning and found myself famous". Byron's poetic excellences—his descriptive vigour, narrative power, character portraits, satiric zeal and self-portraiture—are all found here in an abundant measure.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What kind of a life did Byron lead?

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2. What do you understand by the term "Byronic Hero"?

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3. Name some of the important works of Byron.

9.4.1 Reading She Walks in Beauty

"She Walks in Beauty" is one of the short poems composed by Lord Byron in 1814 and published in 1815 in a volume called Hebrew Melodies. It is a lyric consisting of three stanzas written in iambic tetrameter. As the name suggests, the poem is about a pretty woman whose beauty the poet admires. In the poem, the physical beauty of the woman is expressed on a higher plane by equating her face with a dwelling place which is 'pure' and houses 'serene' thoughts and 'sweet' expressions. Her 'cheeks' and 'brow' are 'soft' and 'calm', yet 'eloquent'.They speak a lot about the lady's virtues. Her 'smile' and the 'glow' on her face convey to an onlooker her days spent in 'goodness'. Her 'mind' is at 'peace' and she possesses a heart which is the source of innocent love.

An attempt is made to bring out the affinities between the lady and nature in the opening simile. More importantly, the poet succeeds in bringing out the balanced beauty of the woman by playing on the contrast between light and dark. The poem that starts at the level of the physical – in its description of the physical loveliness of the woman, even the very act of walking, concludes with the beauty of the woman's mind. The movement of the woman is likened to the beauty of a cloudless and starry night which attracts an onlooker. A star-studded sky on a cloudless nightis enchanting and attractive. The brightness and radiance that the lady exudes while walking dazzles a bystander:

She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies (lines 1-2)

To give an idea of the lady's beauty, the poem plays with shades of light and darkness. Here, the darkness of the night and the brightness of the stars are contrasted to present the lady in all her elegance and grace. Further, in line 3, "all that's best of dark and bright" seem to merge in her eyes to enhance her

radiance. Her quiet radiance is further contrasted to a 'gaudy day' suggesting the perfection of her beauty. This perfection is further accentuated by the opening lines of the second stanza:

> One shade the more, one ray the less
> Half impaired the nameless grace
> Which waves in every raven tress (lines 7-9).

The second stanza focuses on the lady's dark hair (raven tresses) and her face where darkness and light meet to create a perfect blend. The balance of light and darkness is very delicate which the slightest change could upset. This play of light and darkness also enhances the flawlessness and purity of her countenance which sweetly expresses serene thoughts:

> Or softly lightens o'er her face
> Where thoughts serenely sweet express
> How pure, how dear there dwelling place (lines 10-12).

The 'eloquence' of her 'calm' brow, though seems paradoxical shows that the poet Byron is finally more intent on expressing her intellectual beauty eschewing the physical aspects:

> And on that cheek, and o'er that brow
> So soft, so calm, yet eloquent (lines 13-14)

Her smile is not enticing yet wins hearts and tells us of her noble upbringing. The days spent in 'goodness' have bestowed upon her a 'mind' which is 'at peace' and a 'heart whose love is innocent'.

Critics have suggested that the poem was inspired by the beauty of a lady, Annie Beatrix Wilmont, wife of Byron's first cousin, Sir Robert Wilmont. Byron met her at a party and her elegance and grace moved him to pen down this poem. "She Walks in Beauty" is an exceptional poem coming from Byron's oeuvre, given the poet's notoriety for lust and decadence.

9.4.2 Reading "Prometheus"

Byron composed "Prometheus" in 1816 when he had settled in Switzerland near Lake Geneva and started a friendship with Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley. The mutual influence of the poets over each other (as already mentioned in section 7.3) could be perceived with all the three poets' interest in the mythical character of Prometheus. It might be useful to mention here Shelley's poem "Prometheus Unbound" and Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus.

Byron's "Prometheus" is structured in three stanzas and starts with an apostrophe, "Titan!" and immediately the gods' convict becomes Byron's hero. Prometheus is the Greek mythological figure who stole fire from the gods and gave it to man illumining his life with knowledge, reason, intelligence, and independence. Byron's Prometheus is an individualized figure, who stands towering above his sufferings. He is presented in heroic grandeur symbolizing resistance against the ultimate tyranny (that of the gods) in particular, and all kinds of oppression in general. As a silent yet proud sufferer, Prometheus is heroic in his suffering:

> All that the proud can feel of pain,
> The agony they do not show,
> The suffocating sense of woe,
> Which speaks in its loneliness (lines 8-11)

Prometheus is so convinced about himself that he will not "sigh/Until its voice is echoless". Although a titan and immortal, he is made to suffer like a mortal.

Prometheus' defiance of Zeus and his attempt to mitigate the "sufferings of mortality" arouses Byron's interest in him; he asks, "What was thy pity's recompense?" Later in the third stanza, Byron draws a parallel between the condition of humans and that of Prometheus. He shows how humans have proudly accepted their fate like the titan who too is a silent sufferer.

Apparently, Prometheus is defenseless and powerless against God; but his integrity as an individual in the teeth of perilous circumstances surpasses the doings of all despotic powers.

The second stanza begins with the same address, "Titan!" and Byron goes on to show how the "deaf tyranny of Fate" refused him "even the boon to die"; instead, it conferred upon him "the wretched gift [of] Eternity". Here, more than anywhere else in the poem, Prometheus and Zeus are presented in stark contrast to each other. Zeus with all his powers of Thunder and Lightning is drawn as a despotic monarch who is content to inflict torture with the rock, the vulture, and the chain. Prometheus who is at the receiving end, silently endures "the torments of thy rack":

> And in thy Silence was his Sentence
> And in his Soul a vain repentance
> And evil dread so ill dissembled
> That in his hand the lightnings trembled.
> (lines 31-34)

The lines quoted above show how Byron turns the tables upon Zeus by exposing his powerlessness beneath his arrogant might. Prometheus' strength lies in his silent endurance and refusal to "show/The suffocating sense of woe". Pitted against the inner strength of Prometheus, Zeus cuts a poor figure whose vainglorious attitude ultimately boils down to nothing.

In the third stanza, Byron shifts the focus of the poem to talk about humanity's lot. While Prometheus is distanced from the gods in the earlier stanzas ("to whose immortal eyes/The sufferings of mortality/Seen in their sad reality/Were not as things that gods despise"; Stanza 1); he is brought closer to the humans in this particular stanza. Byron says paradoxically that what is 'Godlike' in Prometheus is his 'crime'. This is paradoxical because the very 'crime' which makes him godlike was committed against God.

In the subsequent lines of stanza 3, Byron brings the heroic potential of Prometheus to a magnificent height. Lines 40-46, one could argue, are the most eloquent lines that express the solemn grandeur of the titan:

Still in thy patient energy
In the endurance and repulse
Of thine impenetrable Spirit
Which Earth and Heaven could not convulse
A mighty lesson we inherit
Thou art a symbol and a sign
To Mortals of their fate and force
(lines 40-46)

Prometheus here becomes a symbol of courage and strength ('force') to men to withstand their destiny ('fate'). In line 46, Byron raises men on a higher pedestal by referring to mortals with a capital 'M'. This is seen again in lines 47 and 49:

Like thee Man is in part divine
A troubled stream from a pure source
And Man in portions can foresee
His own funereal destiny
(lines 47-50)

Byron attempts to redeem the status of Man from his fallen state by showing that he too, like Prometheus, is in "part divine". Like Prometheus who could anticipate his fate, men too could foresee his own "wretchedness, and his resistance/ And his unallied existence/ To which his spirit may oppose". Yet, humans are shown as unyielding, powerful and insurmountable. Even death cannot defeat them as death is turned into a kind of victory. Another parallel found between Man and Prometheus is in their defiance of God. The fate of both results from their refusal to follow the dictates of God.

The figure of Byron's Prometheus turns into a kind of model for humans to bear his fate with a 'firm will', which could make "Death a Victory".

9.5 SUMMING UP

Shelley, Keats and Byron are among the major poets of the romantic age who have contributed immensely to the realm of English poetry. Byron's poetry, however, suffers from some limitations. Even in his serious poems, he fails to treat his themes with lofty idealism and penetrative visions. As such he fails to attain the position of his great contemporaries, viz. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. Notwithstanding his libertine ideals, Byron's poem, "She Walks in Beauty" brings out the poet's admiration for a kind of ideal beauty which is intensified with metaphors drawn from the world of nature. "Prometheus" on the other hand becomes a symbol for the Romantic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. This module gives you a glimpse of the variety that one could find in Romantic poetry. It also shows how the Romantic poets excelled in all genres of poetry—lyric, ode, narrative and the dramatic.

9.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Assess Byron as a romantic poet with special reference to the poems prescribed for you.

2. What role does Nature play in the poem 'She Walks in Beauty'?

3. Give an assessment of Byron as a lyric poet from your reading of the poem 'She Walks in Beauty'.

4. "Byron's Prometheus is a hero spun out of the ideals of Romanticism". Express your views on this statement.

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MODULE IV: EARLY VICTORIANS

UNIT 10: ALFRED TENNYSON: 'THE LADY OF SHALLOT', 'ULYSSES'

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Tennyson, like the other Victorian poets, was concerned about the social problems resulting from the industrial revolution, like the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the pursuit of material goods at the cost of spiritual commitment. Tennyson's poems were filled with a strain of melancholy as well as elemental vigour.

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

So far in the course you have read about the Neo-classical and Romantic poets. In this unit which is divided into two subsections you will be introduced to two major Victorian poets, namely, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. To this end, the unit will:

- acquaint you with a general overview of the socio-political conditions of the Victorian age

- familiarize you with the life and works of Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning
- enable you to read and understand the select poems of the poets
- help you to understand the major thematic and stylistic features of their poetry
- have an idea of the poets' perception of socio-political reality

10.2 ALFRED TENNYSON: LIFE AND WORKS

His range of poems span from the sentimental Idylls to the verse In Memoriam to the rustic vigour of The Northern Farmer, The Cobbler and Rizpah. Carlyle had described him as one who was always single and sad and dwelling in an "element of gloom, carrying a bit of Chaos about him".

Born on August 06, 1809 at Somersby Rectory, Lincolnshire, England, Tennyson was brought up in the countryside and the spirit of the landscape invaded some of his happiest scenic descriptions. His father, George Clayton Tennyson (1778–1831), was the rector of Somersby (1807–1831). Alfred Tennyson's mother was Elizabeth Fytche (1781–1865). Tennyson had two elder brothers who too wrote poetry which were published locally. Tennyson studied at Louth Grammar School for four years (1816–1820)and then in the year 1827 entered Trinity College, Cambridge, along with his brother Charles. It was at Cambridge that Tennyson met Arthur Henry Hallam, who went on to become his closest and dearest friend. His first publication was a collection entitled Poems by Two Brothers published in 1827. At the age of just twenty Tennyson was the recipient of the Chancellor's Gold Medal at Cambridge for one of his earliest pieces titled 'Timbuctoo.' His friendship with Arthur Hallam was one of the most precious things that happened to him.

Tennyson's first collection of poems called Poems Chiefly Lyrical was published in 1830. This was followed by the publication of his second book of poetry in 1833 which included his well-known poem, 'The Lady of Shalott.' The untimely death of Hallam resulted in his In Memorium. The poem which

initially began as an elegy became a long philosophic poem about life, death and the afterlife. In 1842 Tennyson's two slight volumes of Poems were published. , in 1850, Tennyson finally published his masterpiece, which was dedicated to Hallam, titled "In Memoriam" A.H.H., which voiced conflicting questions about religion and science that were beginning to preoccupy the poets of his generation.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. When was the poem Ulysses published?

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2. In which year did Tennyson publish his first solo collection of poems, Poems *Chiefly Lyrical*?

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2. What was the name of the poem dedicated to his friend Arthur Hallam? When was it published?

10.3 READING TENNYSON'S POEMS

The poem "The Lady of Shalott" was an early work of Tennyson which was first published this poem in 1833 and then again in a1842 version.

Tennyson wrote about the legends of King Arthur in some of his poems and this poem is one of them. The poem presents an idealized version of the Victorian woman running her home. The ideal Victorian woman was refined in manners and etiquette and restricted herself to domesticity and caring for others.

10.3.1 Analyzing "The Lady of Shalott"

Lines 1-18

PART I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd

The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."

The opening passage offers a description of the landscape bordering the river. The fields are rich with crops like barley and rye and through them a road winds its way to Camelot which looks down upon the island of Shallot. The branches of the willow and aspen trees move in the breeze in tandem with the movement of the river waters. The island of Shallot in the river, consists of a walled structure which houses the lady of Shallot. The river barges glide down under the sweeping willow branches. There is much activity on the road to Camelot but nobody notices the lady of Shallot languishing on a light boat as it coasts along the river.

Only the reapers working amongst the barley hear a song floating over the water towards the towers of Camelot. They continue with their harvesting till at the end of their day's labour, they pause to suggest in the moonlight that it is the lady of Shallot singing.

Part II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights

A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

It is said that the lady of Shallot keeps moving as someone had said that if she stops to look on Camelot a curse would fall on her. She weaves a colourful web without turning to look towards the activity on Camelot. All she sees are reflections on the mirror in front of her and throughout the year she continues to look at the reflections of the village people—colourfully dressed young men and girls apart from the odd man of religion, or a shepherd or page—as they move towards the town. The different sights disturb her to the extent of making her sad or frustrated. The lady weaves all the sights into her web and appears to enjoy doing what she does till she decides that she has had enough of shadows.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily

As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;

"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Someone in armour comes riding through the fields by the Lady of Shallot's house as if in answer to a bow shot from her window. The bright sunlight flashes on his armour and the knight is identified as none other than Sir Lancelot from King Arthur's circle. Sir Lancelot's shield in the true fashion of chivalry bears a picture of a red-cross knight kneeling before a lady, the red cross connecting him with St George, the patron saint of England. It adds to the portrait of a gallant protector offering his services at the lady's (Lady of Shallot's) feet.

The description continues with a comparison of Lancelot's gem-studded bridle flashing in the sun to a constellation of stars. There is also an emblazoned belt with bells worn across his shoulders (called a baldric), and suspended from it is a silver bugle for use in battle or in some celebration. As Lancelot rides towards Camelot, the ringing of the bells and the jangling of metal adds to the larger than life impression created by his handsome figure. Interestingly, his striking dress and accessories including his flashy helmet, stand out against the deep blue sky. In the poet's words Lancelot "Burned like one burning flame together" against the bright morning on his way to Camelot. Apart from his dress and manner, Lancelot was richly endowed with natural gifts which would anyway have shown him as a very handsome person. In fact the poet suggests that the passage of Lancelot towards Camelot had the effect of a meteor lighting up the night sky over Shallot and the neighbouring areas.

As he passed by the island of Shallot, Lancelot's image flashed on the mirror in the Lady's bedroom. As he also sang loudly, it made her forget the curse and turn to the window to catch a glimpse of him. The web she had been spinning floated out and the mirror cracked to remind the Lady of the curse and her doom.

PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seër in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,

Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

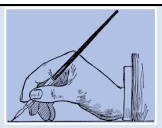
Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."

The weather changed and the woods looked pale as the Lady of Shallot left her abode and came to the water's edge where a boat was tied beneath a willow tree. She looked long and deep towards Camelot, as if she could read

her fate in the distance. Then she wrote the Lady of Shallot on the boat's prow and as the daylight faded, she sat on the boat and undid the chain to launch her herself down the river. As the boat drifted down the river, the passersby could hear her song. The cheering was replaced by apprehension when the boat reached the palace grounds at Camelot and the stillness of the figure in white struck the observers. Only Lancelot amongst the knights looked down upon her dead face and commented on her beauty. The final irony is that the Lady abandoned her bower to look for Lancelot but he can only make an impersonal remark suggesting his lack of interest or regret over her unnecessary death.

LET US STOP AND THINK

The final version of this poem appeared only 1842 though it was first written in 1832. Though the poem resembles the story of the Maid of Astolat in Malory's Morte d'Arthur Tennyson claimed to have based it on an old Italian romance.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the poem about?

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2. Who is the Lady of Shallot? What curse is she under?

---

3. Who is Lancelot?

---

4. Why does the poet use the background of Arthurian times?

10.3.2 Reading the poem "Ulysses"

"Ulysses" is a poem about the mythical Greek hero Odysseus of Homer's celebrated epics The Iliad and The Odyssey. It presents the courageous seafaring nature of the ageing hero and his group of mariners as they decide to take off once more for the unknown.

Textual analysis of Ulysses:

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,

Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,

Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Lines 1-10: the speaker feels that it is useless to rule over a disinterested people who are content to go through the motions of living. He has issues with the barren landscape as well as his aged wife. He says that he is restless and eager to resume his travels through which he has experienced good times and bad times, alone as well as in company, over land as well as on sea when the

stars beckoned or confused them. The speaker here is the aged Ulysses, the famous Greek hero, known for his exploits in the Trojan war and after. He is no longer young, yet still wishes to live life to the last drop by setting out on another journey by sea.

Lines 11-17: He says that he has become famous for his travels and for his exploits. He had experienced joy and trouble and won much honour from people. He had also enjoyed the challenges of the battlefield with his peers at Troy.

Lines 18-23: He absorbs all that he comes across but his experiences act as the arch or door to the world still to be discovered.

Lines 24-32: He affirms that life is for living not for storing, or resting upon hoarded riches. Every hour, he believes, would bring new things to discover or know. It would therefore be a waste to sit on past achievements when his gray hairs still yearn for more knowledge through fresh discoveries.

Lines 33-43: He hands over power and responsibility of the island and the people to his son Telemachus who he feels would be able to both control and guide the people towards a less 'rugged' life. He will be able to lead the people to a life of goodness and usefulness at the same time. Moreover, Telemachus can be relied upon to look after their personal assets as well as obligations, proving a worthy substitute while his father took up his knowledge quest again.

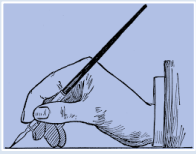
Lines 44-53: His fellow sailors awaited him at the port with their ship. Ulysses describes them as men who took the good and the bad in their stride. These men like him are no longer young but Ulysses is sure of them and their shared feelings. He declares that death lies at the end of each man's life but before life closes for them, they would like to do something worthy of note. Surely, that is not too much for men who strove with the gods!

Lines 54-70: He declares that it is "not too late to seek a newer world and that their motto was "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."Ulysses hopes to sail beyond the sunset into the empyrean realm where they might meet the late Achilles. Though they are past their prime and have lost their physical

strength, their hearts still beat with one purpose as they take on what might turn out to be their last act of daring. He expects their heroic hearts though weak in limb, to remain undaunted as they set off on another journey of discovery.

LET US STOP AND THINK

After the death of his friend Arthur Hallam, Tennyson was deeply troubled and he began writing poems to overcome this state of mind. Yet a strong spirit and mental fortitude did not abandon him and this finds expression in the poems written by him during this period. The poems exalt the virtues of optimism and discuss the importance of facing life bravely. Not to "rust" but to continue to persevere as Ulysses says is the central theme of both "In Memoriam" and "Ulysses".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How does Ulysses refer to his people who inhabit the kingdom of Ithaca?

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2. Who was Ulysses' wife? What two words does the speaker use to describe his wife?

---

3. Despite his old age, why does Ulysses want to travel once again leaving behind the comforts of his hearth?

---

4. Who is the speaker in the poem? How does he present his case?

10.4 MAJOR THEMES

Art and Life

The poem 'The Lady of Shallot' juxtaposes the conflict between art and life. The Lady can be taken to represent a symbol art and the contemplative artist who is detached from the bustle and activity of daily life. The world of art is opposed to the real world. The artist meets with a curse that snatches away her life when she gazes upon the real world. The poem on another level may also express a more personal predicament for Tennyson. To the reapers who are robust and lively, engaged in activity throughout the day the Lady proves her existence by her singing. She is elusive and enigmatic to the outside world of passers by. Even though, her activity is limited as opposed to the peasants she does not fail to keep herself connected with the world outside through her mirror and the shadows that fall on it.

10.5 TENNYSON'S POETIC STYLE

The poem 'The Lady of Shalott' is divided into four parts long stanzas. The first two parts contain four stanzas each, while the last two parts contain five. The four parts concludes with a speech, firstly by the reaper, then by the Lady herself and finally by the knight Lancelot. Each stanza contains nine lines with the rhyme scheme *aaaabcccb*. The poem is rich in imagery and Tennyson paints a very vibrant picture of the countryside. The lyrical intensity of the lines is heightened by the poignant image of the Lady weaving at her

loom which has inspired many a painter. The poet makes use of rich and potent words to depict the knight who brings about the end of the Lady. The rhyming words add to the rhythm of the poem which ebbs and flows with the thoughts and emotions of the Lady.

10.6 SUMMING UP

Through these two poems Tennyson adds a different dimension to Victorian poetry. Unlike some of his contemporaries, the use of myth and ancient history helps to raise the poems above the quotidian reality of Victorian society as it struggled between materialism and poverty in the wake of the industrial revolution. Tennyson strives for spiritual comfort through artful fictions or by reviving the mythic and historical past. If social problems like class conflict, the tension between religion and science, as well as issues of women's rights loomed large on the horizon, poetry could at least reignite a sense of aesthetics and spiritualism through a pleasurable quest for knowledge, morality and pursuit of art.

10.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. How does Lord Tennyson reveal character in "The Lady of Shalott"?

2. What are some themes in the poem? How do they relate to the development of the poem and characters?

3. What do you make of Ulysses' character from the poem by the same name/

4. Write a critical analysis of Tennyson's Ulysses.

5. Critically examine Tennyson as a poet.

10.8 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

1. Woolf, Virginia (1996). Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar, eds., ed. "The Professions of Women" in Norton Anthology of Literature by Women (2 ed.). W. W. Norton & Company. p. 1346.

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UNIT 11: *ROBERT BROWNING: "FRA LIPPO LIPPI", "TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA"*

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.0 INTRODUCTION

Although Victorian poetics came to distance itself from Romantic poetics, the first generation of Victorian poets initially saw themselves as writing in a Romantic tradition. In their imagination, use of imagery and dwelling in the world of myth and mysticism, early Victorian poets can be identified with that of the Romantics.

This unit will try to give a precise idea of one of the greatest poets of the age, Robert Browning who refined himself in a genre of poetry called Dramatic Monologues.

Browning is regarded as a major poet of the Victorian period. His dramatic monologues and the historical epic The Ring and the Book (1868-1869) have helped him to carve a niche in the history of English poetry. Browning developed the dramatic monologue in poetry. His philosophy of life was essentially a pragmatic one. He was interested in the psychology of his characters rather than in social reform. Morality is not an issue with

Browning. Whether he deals with love, or patriotism, artistic passion or religious aspiration it is directed at the inner workings of the characters.

Apart from that Browning's poetry is famous for the use of masks—whether a Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea del Sarto or Sordello—which allow the poet to explore distant moments in time as well as the social milieus. As these early European painters—Lippo or Andrea—the poet examines the restrictions on art imposed by Christianity and society.

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to learn

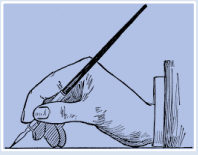
- the life and works of Robert Browning
- indepth reading of the prescribed poems
- major themes, style etc. of Browning

11.2 ROBERT BROWNING: LIFE AND WORKS

Born on 07 May 1812 in Camberwell, a middle-class suburb of London, he was the only son of Robert Browning, a clerk in the Bank of England and a German-Scotch mother, Sarah Anna Wiedemann Browning. He also had a sister, Sarianna. Both his parents had a profound influence on him. Mrs. Browning with her piety and love of music and Mr. Browning's scholarly interests helped shaped his literary career. The son of a wealthy banker, Robert Browning the elder had been sent in his youth to make his fortune in the West Indies, but he found the slave economy there so distasteful that he returned, hoping for a career in art and scholarship. Browning's father had a personal library of some six thousand volumes, many of them collections of arcane lore and historical anecdotes which became the source of his many poems.

Browning's development may be divided into four periods. Firstly, the period from 1832-1846 which is the experimental phase in which he tries out various forms and finds the dramatic lyric the most satisfying. The Dramatic Lyrics

(1836-46) covering a period of ten years. Secondly, the period from 1846-1869 is the period of his best and varied work. The Ring and the Book was written in this period. Thirdly, the period from 1869-1876 shows Browning's thinking and reasoning prowess rather than the artist. Fourthly, the period from 1876-1889 where the artist Browning can be seen but a softer and mellower one. In 1833 was published his first major published work titledPauline though anonymously and in 1840 Sordello was published. In 1849 Collected Poems and Men and Women was published in 1855. Among his other works was Dramatis Personae (1863) and The Ring and the Book (1868). Asolando published in 1889 was his last.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. In which part of his career was the *Dramatic Lyrics* written?

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2. What kind of poetry did Browning write and how was it different from that of his contemporaries?

11.3 READING BROWNING'S POEMS

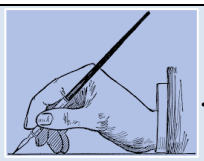
Fra Lippo Lippi was published in the two-volume collection *Men and Women* in 1855. The subject is loosely based on the life of Florentine painter Filippo Lippi (c. 1406–69) as described in Giorgio Vasari's 16th-century

Lives of the Painters. The poem relates that Lippi's impoverished aunt had placed him in a monastery because she could not afford to raise him. Later Lippi was granted freedom by his patron Cosimo de' Medici when he managed to escape through a window after being locked due to drunkenness .

11.3.1 Reading Fra Lippo Lippi

In this monologue, Browning is using historical knowledge to recreate a particular moment in history and a particular individual within that moment. On a spring night in the Florence of the 1440s, the painter-monk Fra Lippo Lippi has been caught by the police near a brothel. He could not learn the Latin language, the official language of the church (108–9). He often finds the religious subjects dull and repetitive to paint (48–9). He is not on good terms with his present patron, Cosimo the Elder, who keeps him locked up in a room to keep him at this work (47–8). The church while arguing that art should represented not merely the flesh but something "higher" denies the essential humanity people who are the creation of God. Similarly the church demands celibacy from its clergy and looks disapprovingly at any lustful activity. According to Lippo, the church wishes to "rub out" all earthly pleasures and desires of the flesh. In this monologue, Lippo argues that his life in cloister has been unnatural and restraining. Lippo speaks out against the mandatory celibacy imposed on them and voices his concern when he says that, "You should not take a fellow eight years old/ And make him swear to never kiss the girls" (224-25). He seems to see this celibacy as a terrible waste of youth and life. Art is used as a metaphor in the poem to depict the restraints felt by Lippo: "Rub all out!' Well, well, there's my life in short." (221). If art, like sexual desire, cannot be expressed, then it would seem that religion is somehow a lie, that there is always something lurking under the surface. The narrator points out not only the hypocrisy of these celibacy rules, but the inherent flaws that exist within them, namely, that humans are creatures of the flesh.*Fra Lippo Lippi* extends this idea of the necessarily worldly nature of art. It defends a sensuous, particular, and social art against an art that is purist

or idealized. Art must engage with ‘the shapes of things,/Theircolours, lights and shades’ (284), and also, implicitly, with God given sexuality: ‘the value and significance of flesh’ (268).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

. 1. Who does Lippi depict as Salome?

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2. How does the painter feel in the presence of the heavenly host?

Fra Lippo Lippi

[Florentine painter, 1412-69]

1. I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
2. You need not clap your torches to my face.
3. Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
4. What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
5. And here you catch me at an alley's end
6. Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
7. The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
8. Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
9. Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
10. And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
11. *Weke, weke*, that's crept to keep him company!
12. Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take
13. Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
14. And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
15. Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
16. Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?

17. Master—a ...Cosimo of the Medici,
18. I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
19. Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
20. How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!

Fra Lippo Lippi, a monk who liked to paint, is caught on the streets late at night by the police and when they see his face and dress in the torchlight, they are uncertain of their quarry. Taking advantage of the confusion, Fra Lippo tries to convince them that they have caught him in the neighbourhood of prostitutes only because he was on his way back from attending to some business away from his cloister. He asks them to release their hold around his neck and informs them that he is staying with the Cosimo of Medici, just around the corner. At the mention of the Cosimo the men look awkward and Lippo takes the chance to tell thm that they would be punished for insulting him and rough handling him.

21. But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
22. Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
23. Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
24. And count fair price what comes into their net?
25. He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
26. Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
27. Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hang-dogs go
28. Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
29. Of the munificent House that harbours me
30. (And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
31. And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
32. His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
33. With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
34. John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
35. With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
36. And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
37. It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
38. A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
39. Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.

Fra Lippo is unhappy with the treatment meted out to him and asks why they should grab whoever or whatever they can off the streets like pilchards in a fishing net. He offers them money so that they could drink to the health of his host, the Cosimo. He further tells the policemen that he would like to capture the shifting expressions on their faces but without a piece of chalk or charcoal, he would have to forego his dearest wish to draw.

40. What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,

41. You know them and they take you? like enough!
42. I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
43. 'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
44. Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
45. Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
46. To roam the town and sing out carnival,
47. And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
48. A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
49. And saints again. I could not paint all night—
50. Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
51. There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
52. A sweep of lute strings, laughs, and whifts of song, —
53. *Flower o' the broom,*
54. *Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!*
55. *Flower o' the quince,*
56. *I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?*
57. *Flower o' the thyme*—and so on. Round they went.
58. Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
59. Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim shapes,
60. And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
61. That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
62. Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
63. All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
64. There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
65. Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
66. And after them. I came up with the fun
67. Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
68. *Flower o' the rose,*
69. *If I've been merry, what matter who knows?*
70. And so as I was stealing back again
71. To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
72. Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
73. On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
74. With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
75. You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
76. Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
77. Mine's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting 's in that!

Fra Lippo settles down to explain the situation to a friendly looking officer. He says that after remaining cooped up for several days painting saints for his client, the great man, when he looked out of the window for some fresh air. He heard the voices singing and the patter of feet on the street and that was enough for him to decide that he needed to leave his room for a while. Making a ladder out of the curtains and bed clothes, he lets himself down the window to join the revellers. Having enjoyed the night time activity he was on his way back to bed so that he could resume his painting in the morning when they

caught him. At their shaking heads, Fra Lippo says even if he is a monk, he has not shut his eyes and ears to the happy sounds of life.

78. If Master Cosimo announced himself,
79. Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
80. Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
81. I was a baby when my mother died
82. And father died and left me in the street.
83. I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
84. On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
85. Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
86. My stomach being empty as your hat,
87. The wind doubled me up and down I went.
88. Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
89. (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
90. And so along the wall, over the bridge,
91. By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
92. While I stood munching my first bread that month:
93. "So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father
94. Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—
95. "To quit this very miserable world?
96. Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;
97. By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
98. I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
99. Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking-house,
100. Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
101. Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.

He asks them not to tell his master Cosimo about his escapade but justifies it with the assurance that surely a monk can look forward to something. He then goes on to tell the story of how he became a monk. Apparently he was orphaned early and when hunger drove him over the edge, his aunt took him to the convent where he was fed and asked if he was prepared to give up the world. To an eight-year old hungry boy, nothing looked safer than the guarantee of food and so he agreed and has been a monk ever since. In fact he reiterates that he gave up all the things that rich and powerful men give their lives for, when he was a small child.

102. Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
103. 'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,

The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside!
"Let's see what the urchin's fit for"—that came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:
Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove.
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
"Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d'ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!"
And hereupon he bade me daub away.

The monks tried to teach the child Latin but that was something he could not learn. He recounts that his experiences in the street had made him wise to the human temper: he knew which person would show kindness and which would get him beaten up. In order to survive on the streets, he had become a shrewd

observer of faces and expressions. In the monastery he used up his spare time in drawing things in his copy books as well as the walls, the door and the bench. The monks reacted with shock and anger till the Prior decided that his talents could be used to decorate the church.

143. Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
144. Never was such prompt disemburdening.
145. First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
146. I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
147. From good old gossips waiting to confess
148. Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
149. To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
150. Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
151. With the little children round him in a row
152. Of admiration, half for his beard and half
153. For that white anger of his victim's son
154. Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
155. Signing himself with the other because of Christ
156. (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
157. After the passion of a thousand years)
158. Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
159. (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
160. On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
161. Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
162. (The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
163. I painted all, then cried "'Tis ask and have;
164. Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
165. And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
166. The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
167. Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
168. Being simple bodies,—"That's the very man!
169. Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
170. That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
171. To care about his asthma: it's the life!"
172. But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funked;
173. Their betters took their turn to see and say:
174. The Prior and the learned pulled a face
175. And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
176. Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
177. Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
178. As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
179. Your business is not to catch men with show,
180. With homage to the perishable clay,
181. But lift them over it, ignore it all,

182. Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.

He started drawing all the people that he had come across and the younger monks were full of admiration for his life like paintings. The artist was happy to receive such praise but it was not to last. The seniors, including the prior, advised him not to produce replicas from life. He was told that his purpose should not be artful creations but to deflect attention from the flesh.

183. Your business is to paint the souls of men—
184. Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
185. It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
186. (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
187. It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
188. Give us no more of body than shows soul!
189. Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
190. That sets us praising—why not stop with him?
191. Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
192. With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
193. Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
194. Rub all out, try at it a second time.
195. Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
196. She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
197. Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
198. Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
199. A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
200. So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
201. And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
202. When what you put for yellow's simply black,
203. And any sort of meaning looks intense
204. When all beside itself means and looks nought.
205. Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
206. Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
207. Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
208. Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
209. The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
210. You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
211. Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
212. Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
213. Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
214. And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?
215. Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
216. (I never saw it—put the case the same—)
217. If you get simple beauty and nought else,

You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
"Rub all out!" Well, well, there's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.

The artist was told to paint the souls of men and leave the body aside. He was asked to emulate Giotto in his depiction of saints. The Prior said: “Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!/Rub all out, try at it a second time.” Thus, nothing that was representative of the body was allowed. He is unhappy with such advise as he cannot image portraying the soul without the body. He notes that “And any sort of meaning looks intense/ When all beside itself means and looks nought.” As an artist he feels that his work is deprived of its essence. He wonders why there cannot be a balance between body and soul in painting. His contention is “Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,/And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?” He asks if there can’t be beauty without the soul. Here the essential question of art versus morality comes into play. Fra Lippo feels that one arrives at genuine beauty in the process of painting things and if the artist manages to paint things as God made them he will rediscover the soul in the process of thanking God. However, the elders were not convinced or satisfied with his explanations and he was ordered to erase his work. That, he says has been his fate. As an artist he is not allowed artistic freedom, let alone support.

I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds:
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front—
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—"It's art's decline, my son!
You're not of the true painters, great and old;
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find;

Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr ... manners, and I'll stick to mine!
I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don't;
For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
(*Flower o' the peach*
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
Settled for ever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

The adult Lippo looks back and tries to justify his predilections. He says that he was never allowed to make any choices in his life. He had been asked to conform to regulations laid down by others not only in life but in his art as well. It was as if something was waiting to give way. Now that he is an adult, he has decided to do things his way without appearing as a complete rebel. However, there are always the censuring voices looking over his shoulder and disapproving his work. Instead they praise the work of Fra Angelico and next

to him the work of Lorenzo. They call his work “art’s decline” and Fra Lippo has to quietly get on with his work by partially conforming and partially resisting their dictates. He claims that “The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,” and tries to tap its hidden essences from time to time. He affirms that he sees both the garden and God, the life of the senses as well as that of the spirit. More than that he understands the value of flesh—meaning that he does only draw his ideas from abstractions.

You understand me: I'm a beast, I know.
But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace.
I hope so—though I never live so long,
I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
—For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are here already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;

God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though! How much more,
If I drew higher things with the same truth!
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

Fra Lippo holds that once a person has seen “The beauty and the wonder and the power,/ The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,” it would be wrong to ask him to shut out the world. He mentions a young boy named Guidi, who watches him and is sure to follow him one day and paint what he sees. One does not have to be an expert in Latin to recognise artistic talent, and the young boy will one day capture the natural beauty of the river and the hills as well as the people in his work. Fra Lippo wonders why painting God’s works as they are is deemed a crime. He affirms that art makes clear what was not noticed before. The job of the artist is to interpret and help people to connect with God’s world. He regrets that in the name of God men do such harm to God’s world and His children. The senses are there for human beings to enjoy their perception of the world around them at different levels. There is no use denying or blotting out the world: it exists and is reached by the senses and all the worldly appetites.

"Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning's plain
It does not say to folk—remember matins,
Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:
"How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?"
I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns—

"Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
The pious people have so eased their own
With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

The Prior's judgement on his art is that it does inspire or push people to prayer. Fra Lippos reaction is why do we need something to encourage people to pray? However, he mentions one of his works at Prato which turned the tide of devotion and is seen as a success, in fact, so much that one of his fellow Brothers tells him that he will soon get another commission to paint. His painting had succeeded in moving the emotions of the crowd and drawn them closer to religion.

—That is—you'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
... There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!
They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—
Saint John' because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these

Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck—I'm the man!
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?

If a work manages to move the crowd, it is sure to be a success. Thinking of his past work Lippo decides to make amends for breaking the rules of the monastery by painting something wonderful consisting of angels, the Madonna and child, as well as God, which would take him about six months to execute. There will be space in the painting to include Job and the Saints John and Ambrose, as well as other devotees. All shall come unexpectedly upon his work and be surprised that it is his effort. Being a self-effacing person, he will try to fade into the background or else escape.

Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
—Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw—
His camel-hair make up a painting brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus! So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!

391. The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
392. Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

Then a sweet voice intervenes on his behalf to suggest that only Fra Lippo could have produced such work. So he offers to produce something again in six months as he shakes hands with the person/persons who had detained him. For the present he has to quietly return to his room in Cosimo's house and he has to do it under the cover of the dark.

11.3.2 Reading the poem 'Two in the Campagna'

In Two in the Campagna the speaker is the lover who speaks to his beloved who remains silent throughout the poem. The setting of the poem is the Roman Campagna, an area outside Rome, and it awakens in the narrator a desire to articulate thought about their love which proves elusive. The speaker is perturbed at the fleeting and transitory nature of love; he feels he can never achieve that sense of oneness with his beloved. Two in the Campagna, originally published in Men and Women in 1855, is a poem on the passing of time and the limitations of love. The poem's basic dilemma is that the speaker wants to unite with her not only to become one being with her but also to "adopt [her] will". He uses the figure of the cobweb to explain how like "turns of thread the spiders throw/Mocking across our path" a thought has troubled him for long and he is unable to frame it into words. The eyes of the lovers travel all over the Campagna tracing the turns of thread from the "yellowing fennel, run to seed "to getting entangled in the "brickwork's cleft". The beautiful imagery of the land is described in great details and the poet paints a vibrant picture of the Roman countryside on a May morning. The "grassy slope" is filled beetles on orange cups gathering honey. The speaker rejoices in the bounty of nature:

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting nature have her wa

And urges his beloved to be “unashamed of soul. The speaker ardently declares his love for his Lady and urges her to bare her soul to him. He does not want the beautiful moment to pass and wishes this feeling to be transformed into something permanent and eternal. But love is inconsistent in nature and the speaker realises that it is not in their control whether to love or not to love. The poem reflects the idea of a man’s inherent helplessness in his attempt to make the instant eternal. The speaker finds the answer to his query when he realizes that though human passion is really infinite, while the possibility of having fulfilment of all the desires is limited.

The poem also makes a subtle comment on the limitations of art. In the early stanzas, the speaker mentions he would like to immortalize his perfect moment through "rhymes," but even this possibility escapes him. As they sit in the Campagna amidst the bounty of nature

LET US STOP AND THINK

The Roman Campagna or just Campagna is a low-lying area surrounding Rome of central Italy. The pastoral beauty of the Campagna inspired the painters who flocked into Rome in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Textual analysis of

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

I

I wonder do you feel to-day
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw

Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

The male speaker searches for an elusive emotion that he could share with his beloved . Love seems elusive and the search continues.

III

Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles,—blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

The above lines suggest the speaker's dilemma as he tries to rediscover that missing emotion. He keeps saying "Hold it fast!" but there appears to be nothing to hold onto.

V

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air—
Rome's ghost since her decease.

The peaceful air about the place links it with Rome's distant past.

VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers!

VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,

Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

He wonders if they can bare their souls to each other to get hold of the missing emotion.

VIII

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more.
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

Despite wishing for a special love, the speaker knows that it is not possible. It is not as if there is no feeling among them but somehow that special spark is missing.

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs,—your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

All feelings of mutuality fail to provide that special feeling. Even placing themselves in each others positions does not help.

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes.

XI

Already how am I so far
Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
Onward, whenever light winds blow,

Fixed by no friendly star?

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

The speaker knows that there is strong feeling between them but each time he tries to reach out to that fleeting emotion, it disappears. Finite hearts have to learn to live with infinite yearnings.

11.4 MAJOR THEMES

Life and Art

The poem enthusiastically makes a case for freedom in art through Lippo's defence. When Lippo paints images which resemble that of men in and around the vicinity he is discouraged from distracting people and told to draw the "souls of men". The Church authorities object to Lippo's real life depiction of the people not because of any religious concern but because of its need to protect its own reputation. Lippo had depicted the Prior's niece as the seductive Salome. The poem raises questions about the purpose of art—whether to instruct or to delight. The point remains inconclusive as Browning does not provide any answers.

Lippo finds painting religious subjects uninspiring for he believes that art should imitate life. Lippo did not join the monastery by choice but rather by accident as he lost his parents early in life. He is caught between the celibate life of the monastery and the corrupt practices of his patron, one of the Medicis. According to Browning high art and morality cannot be seen together.

His dramatic monologues afforded vast scope for psycho- analysis and it afforded him the freedom to explore the individual consciousness of people.

Life and Love

The best of Browning's poems reflect his philosophy of life. Browning had always been optimistic and his work evoked joy, faith an immortality of the human soul. He looked at the brighter side of things. The best of his poems like 'The Last Ride Together", "A Grammarian's Funeral", "Fra Lippo Lippi" and "Porphyria's Lover" deal with his philosophical outlook. In the poems "Porphyria's Lover" and "Andrea Del Sarto", Browning put forth the view of eternity while in the poem "Two in a Campagna", the poet laments the loss of a moment which cannot be eternal.

11.5 POETIC STYLE

The poem "Fra Lippo Lippi" is written in blank verse- unrhymed lines, most of which fall roughly into iambic pentameter. The language used is colloquial and it very effectively captures the emotional outbursts of the monk Fra Lippo Lippi in his drunkenness.

"Two in the Campagna" symbolises the limitations of human beings to love, as is evident in the two final verses: "Infinite passion, and the pain; Of finite hearts that yearn".

11.6 BROWNING'S DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

In Browning's dramatic monologues there is a sole speaker and it begins in a dramatic situation with a silent listener. The poems are replete with images from nature and uneven and sometimes harsh diction. According to Abrams, a Dramatic Monologue is not a component in a play, but a type of lyric poem uttered by a single speaker "who is patently not the poet". The entire poem is set in a critical situation and there are other persons too whose presence is known from the hints in the discourse of the speaker only. His dramatic monologues offer him the freedom to express his reflections on art and life through the speaker and they are a blend of both dramatic and lyrical quality.

His dramatic monologues are, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Men and Women* (1855), *Dramatic Romances* (1858) and *Dramatis Personae* (1864) comprises of poems which display every aspect of Browning's brilliance. Browning set many of his poems in medieval and Renaissance Europe, most often in Italy. He drew on his extensive knowledge of art, architecture, and history to fictionalize actual events, including a seventeenth-century murder in The Ring and the Book, and to channel the voices of actual historical figures, including a biblical scholar in medieval Spain in "Rabbi Ben Ezra" (1864) and the Renaissance painter in "Andrea delSarto." The remoteness of the time period and location allowed Browning to critique and explore contemporary issues The poems deal with tenderness, subtlety, quaint kindness, humour, satire, philosophy and a keen observance of human life and art. According to Browning, art should reflect the warmth and vigour of life. The painters of the Renaissance wanted to look beyond the perfection and harmony of Greek art, and to Browning there lies the charm. Art is not an abstraction but throbbing with life. In each of the studies of artists, Browning points out what each of them lacks. PictorIgnotus needed human touch, Lippo needed life and experience to give life to his work, Andrea, some generous emotion.

Browning, like his contemporaries and predecessors was committed to the role of the artist as someone who would not allow himself to compromise with market values. As far as he was concerned the poet should not be directed by outside forces.

11.7 SUMMING UP

After going through the unit you must have realized the depth and range of Victorian poets like Tennyson and Browning. We hope that you would read other poems from these poets and enrich you knowledge of not only Victorian poetry but of the socio-cultural milieu that shaped their work.

11.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the relationship between morality and art in Browning's poetry.
2. What are some symbols used in the poem "The Lady of Shalott"?
3. Critically appreciate the poem "Two in the Campagna".
4. Explain the following lines:

   a.The old trick! Only I discern—/Infinite passion, and the pain/ Of finite hearts that yearn.

   b.Such life here, through such lengths of hours,/ Such miracles performed in play.

   c.For me, I touched a thought, I know,/Has tantalized me many times,/(Like turns of thread the spiders throw/Mocking across our path) for rhymes/To catch at and let go.
5. Discuss Browning's attitude to life as reflected in the poem "Two in the Campagna".

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