

**LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1798-1914**  
**Paper-III**  
**Section A & B**

**M.A. English (Previous)**

**Directorate of Distance Education**  
**Maharshi Dayanand University**  
**ROHTAK – 124 001**

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**M.A. (Previous)**  
**LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1798-1914**

**Paper-3****Max. Marks : 100****Time : 3 Hours**

*Note: Students will be required to attempt five questions in all. Question 1 will be compulsory. This question shall be framed to test students' comprehension of the texts prescribed for **Close Study**. There will be one question on each of the Units in all the four Sections. The students will be required to attempt four questions (in about 200 words each) one from each section.*

*The other four questions will be based on the texts for **Close Study** with internal choice i.e. one question with internal choice on each of the five units. The students will be required to attempt **One** question from each of the two sections.*

**Section A**

**Unit 1**      **William Wordsworth**  
Intimations of Immortality  
Tintern Abbey  
**Keats**  
Ode to a Nightingale  
Ode on a Grecian Urn  
The Eve of Saint Agnes

**Unit 2**      **Robert Browning**  
Rabbi Ben Ezra  
Fra Lippo Lippi  
A Grammarian's Funeral  
The Bishop Orders His Tomb  
The Last Ride Together

**Section B**

**Unit 3**      **Dickens**  
Bleak House

**Unit 4**      **Emily Bronte**  
Wuthering Heights

**Unit 5**      **Walter Pater**  
Appreciations: Style  
Wordsworth  
Rossetti  
Postscript

## **William Wordsworth & John Keats**

### **Age of Romantic Revival (1798-1832)**

The word 'romantic' has so many meanings that at times it appears to be an exercise in futility to distinguish one from another, but in its present usage it is a mere a chronological label which is used to describe the imaginative literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Actually a single characteristic, which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, is to be found in the importance they attached to the imagination and in a special view, which they held of it. In the eighteenth century, imagination was not the cardinal point in poetical theory as a poet is more of an interpreter than a creator. This faith in the imagination was a part of the contemporary belief in the individual self. The poets were conscious of a wonderful capacity to create imaginary worlds and they grew skeptical about the existing society. The Romantic emphasis on the imagination was strengthened by considerations, which are both religious and metaphysical. They were influenced by the revolutionary ideals and at the same time reacted against them. They entered into a new communion with nature as if to seek consolation after facing the world of man, which is harsh and repugnant. Besides, the world of nature does not need reforming: at first *natura naturata*, the lovely

texture of the visible world; then *natura naturata*, the informing principle within it, made Wordsworth feel

A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things—

This faith encouraged a view to study man in relation to his fellows as well as to the natural universe of which he is a part and it gave birth a new kind of subjectivism. Briefly, those who feel that men are most themselves when in solitude or in the company of nature will naturally turn to the poetry of the romantic age. Geoffrey H. Crump commented in his book, Poets of the Romantic Revival that

“It is possible to divide the history of literature into so-called movements, and it is true to say that these movements do alternate between two extremes... The points between which the pendulum swings we may call classicism and romanticism, and it is fairly true that any period of literature during the last three hundred years may be said to be definitely either classical or romantic, though both elements are present at the same time in literature of all ages.”

Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, in his interesting book Romanticism argues that there is no true antithesis between romanticism and classicism, the former being an element of poetry, an attitude of mind, and the latter a style, a manner of poetic expression. In other words, if the classicism stands for insistence on simplicity, adherence to rules, reverence for tradition, and a high standard of technique, with romanticism comes the attempt to give voice to the cult of individualism, to embellish, to accentuate, to beautify

and to compare the deeply felt ideas and experiences.

The first half of the eighteenth century records the triumph of Romanticism in literature. When we speak of the Romantic Revival, we mean not only a change in the style of the work of certain poets, but also a change of thought, which came slowly over man's minds during the later half of the eighteenth century, and lasts predominantly till about 1830. The Romantic revival was maturing in embryo from about 1770 till 1778 and the year 1778 saw its birth in publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge. It actively lasted till the death of Byron in 1824 and after that, though Wordsworth and Scott were still alive, no romantic poetry of considerable importance was written.

Though the romantic idea grew so slowly, almost imperceptibly, that it is extremely difficult to trace its origin. There were political and social ideas, which steered the movement of democracy in many nations like America, the French Revolution, that frightful uprising, which proclaimed the natural rights of man and the abolition of class distinctions, the economic conditions, which had made England "the workshop of the world." It is intensely interesting to note how England, having gained enormously in prestige abroad, began her mighty work of reform. The total environment was charged with a new creative spirit, which shows itself in the poetry of the age of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats and in the prose of Scott, Jane Austen, Lamb and De Quincey. The age itself generated such a romantic enthusiasm that it reminds one of the Elizabethan age and becomes the second creative period of English literature. Its sense of independent, spontaneous and unaffected response to the common life of man and nature made Wordsworth say:

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

The age turned to be emphatically an age of poetry where, as in Elizabethan Age, “the young enthusiasts turned naturally to poetry as a happy man to singing” to use the expression of William J. Long.

Among the names applied to the literature of this period two in particular are noteworthy—the ‘Romantic Revolt’ and the ‘Romantic Revival’. To understand these terms fairly one must understand what it was a revolt *from* and what it was revival *of* and it would give insight into the origins and growth of the movement. First, the Romantic Revolt was a revolt from the purely intellectual view of man’s nature. The literary writers like Pope and Dr. Johnson were no doubt men of uncompromising honesty and integrity but poetry had become at their hands almost entirely a thing of the brain and not of heart. It was now the vehicle of religious, political and social satire, moral treatise and formal address. In form it was moulded as closely as possible on the classical models, but its sympathies for man and his common life was limited and it had no imagination. There were various causes that are responsible for the rebirth of romantic literature; for instance, the works of many Continental writers, of Rousseau in particular, did much to arouse men from the grooves of petty issues and earthly ambitions, and the French Revolution, which shook the accepted standards, and unnatural formalism of Pope-Johnson school. It was during this period that in poetry the imagination, romantic impulse first began to be felt in things natural as well as supernatural. It is these two things, either or both of them that underlie the poetry of all romantic writers. This period has been called the Romantic Revival because in it we find the revival of the romantic spirit that was dominating element in the poetry of Elizabethans, but since the beginning of the seventeenth century had grown weaker and weaker until it disappeared altogether. For the Elizabethan poets themselves, no less than the poets of the Romantic Revival (Keats especially in his narrative poetry), owe much



of their inspiration and the romantic element in their poetry to Chaucer, the first English Romantic poet. Chaucer's poetry was not rooted in classical models, but in French and Italian romance poetry from which he got language, and also rime, meter, and even stanza- form, which were only beginning to be used in England.

Another significant characteristic of the poetry of this age is to discover the marvellous beauties in the literatures of other races, both living and dead and of the undreamt of possibilities in their own language which awoke the poets of the Elizabethan era to an ardour and delight hardly ever experienced by the English poetry earlier. As a result,

“Their poetry resounds with acclamation of the wonder of life and enthusiasm for its loveliness: its essence of the finest romantic impulses, because they employed all the beauty that they could find in nature, art, and antiquity to enrich their song, and earned for their age the fully deserved name of the Golden Age of Poetry.”

The poets of the age of Romantic Revival followed their footsteps and created the most inspiring poetry exploring the treasures of the past. Their poetry was English in feelings but in form it was founded on the classical models and preserved the classical simplicity, which makes it uniquely beautiful. Their poems spring straight from the heart, from the deep emotions and are shaped by the brain unlike the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth century which originated in the brain and was a means for interpretation and speculation rather than ‘wonder’ as is true in the case of the romantic poetry which has a charm of its own being noble in thought and nearly always delicate and musical. Briefly, the qualities, which marked the Elizabethan poetry, are re-achieved by the poets of this age. Consequently,

the lyric that grows out of the imaginative and romantic impulse is the natural and true form of romantic poetry and it attained dignity, simplicity and profound significance in the Romantic Age. The most important names among the immediate forerunners of the Romantic Revival are those of Robert Burns and William Blake. If the former had an unerring, authentic poetic inspiration, and the genius for idealizing the common things, which is the essence of the romantic poetry, the latter was a mystic who tried to explain the mysteries of the world. Thus, the romantics describe the world of imagination and the movement called Romantic Revival brings into its literature the characteristic qualities which dominated the Elizabethan Age like the appreciation of the spirit of man and his sense of subjective experiences, his concern for the cause of the common man and his love for the immense beauties of nature and the aesthetic values of the past. These trends dominate the Romantic poets of both the generation--- first of Wordsworth and Coleridge and second of Shelley, Byron and Keats. Melvin Rader made a very significant observation when he remarked:

“Whatever we may think of Wordsworth’s poetry, we can not deny his vital role in the history of ideas. As a major figure in the Romantic Movement he contributed a new keen sense of the values of childhood and rural life; of the importance of memory, of time, growth, and continuity; of the necessity to explore one’s own past and to establish a personal sense of identity; of the need to probe the mysteries of life and the unconscious depths of the human soul.”

## Part I

### William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

#### CHRONOLOGY OF WORDSWORTH

- 1770 — William Wordsworth, the second son of John Wordsworth (1741-83) and his wife Anne (1748-78), born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, April 7.
- 1775 — Attends Anne Birkett's infant school at Penrith, Westmorland, while staying with his mother's parents at their mercers' shop there.
- 1776 — Dayboy at Cockermouth Grammar School at least until October and may have attended intermittently for two full years. (Much of this time certainly spent with Coakson grandparents at Penrith.)
- 1778-87 — At Hawkshead Grammar School, 1778;
- 1787-91 — At St. John's College, Cambridge.
- 1790 — First visit to France: Paris (November), Orleans, Blois, Paris (October).
- 1793 — An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches published. Walking tour by Salisbury, Stonehenge, Bristol, and

Tintern Abbey to Wales.

- 1795. — Settles with his sister Dorothy at Racedown, Dorset. Meets Coleridge.
- 1797 — Visits Coleridge at Nether Stowey, Somerset; leaves Racedown and settle at Affoxden, near Nether Stowey.
- 1798 — Lyrical Ballads (September). Visit to Germany (September) 1798-April 1799).
- 1799 — Settles at Dove Cottage, Townend, Grasmere (his home till 1808).
- 1802 — Visit to Calais (August). Marries Mary Hutchinson at Brompton, near Scarborough, October 4.
- 1803 — First tour in Scotland. Meets Walter Scott.
- 1805 — His sailor brother John drowned at sea.
- 1806 — Lives at Coleorton, Leicestershire, from October 1806 to the summer of 1807.
- 1807 — Poems in Two Volumes.
- 1808 — Moves from Dove Cottage to Allan Bank, Grasmere (his home till 1811).
- 1809 — The Convention to Cintra.
- 1811 — Moves from Allan Bank to the Rectory, Grasmere) his home till 1813).

- 1812 — Death of two of his children.
- 1813 — Settles at Rydal Mount, his home for the rest of his life.  
Appointed Stamp Distributor for Westmorland.
1814. — Second tour in Scotland. The Excursion.
- 1815 — Poems, two vols. (first collected edition). The White Doe  
of Rylstone (begun 1807).
- 1816 — A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns. Thanksgiving Ode.
- 1818 — Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland.
- 1819 — Peter Bell (Written 1798). The Wagoner (Written 1805).
- 1820 — The River Duddon, a Series of Sonnets. Miscellaneous  
Poems, four volumes (second collected edition, revised).  
The Excursion (second edition, revised). Fifth visit to the  
Continent: Switzerland, the Italian Lakes, Paris (July-  
November).
1822. — Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820. Ecclesiastical  
Sketches) called Sonnets in 1837).
- 1823 — Sixth visit to the Continent: tour in the Netherlands.
- 1827 — Poetical Works, five volumes (third collected edition,  
revised).
- 1828 — Seventh visit to the Continent: tour up the Rhine.
- 1829 — Tour in Ireland.

- 1830 — Rides from Lancaster to Cambridge, ‘a solitary equestrian’.
- 1831 — Third tour in Scotland: visits Scott at Abbotsford.
- 1832 — Poetical Works, four volumes (fourth collected edition, revised).
- 1835 — Yarrow Revisited, and other Poems. A Guide through the District of the lakes in the North of England.
- 1836-37 — Poetical Works, six volumes (fifth collected edition, revised).
- 1838 — The Sonnets of William Wordsworth, collected in one volume.
- 1841 — Revisits Alfoxden and Tintern.
- 1842 — Poems, chiefly of Early and Late Years (called ‘Volume VII’). Resigns post of Stamp-Distributor for Westmorland; receives a pension of & 300 from the Civil List.
- 1843 — Appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Southey. Dictates notes on his poems to Miss Fenwick.
- 1844 — Kendal and Windermere Railway: Two Letters reprinted from the Morning Post.
- 1845 — Poems, one volume (sixth collected edition, revised).
- 1847 — Ode, performed in the Senate-House, Cambridge.
- 1849-50 — Poetical Works six volumes, giving his final revision of the

text.

- 1850 — Dies at Rydal Mount (April, 23). *The Prelude* (begun 1799 completed 1805, revised 1839, published posthumously).

## **Life and Works of Wordsworth**

A prolific writer, William Wordsworth, was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, on April 4, 1770. He was the second son of John Wordsworth,

attorney -at-law. Outwardly his long and uneventful life divides itself into four periods:

(I) His childhood and youth in Cumberland Hills from 1770 to 1787: His mother confirmed that he was very moody, impulsive and even violent boy. His violent temper is reflected in many episodes of his life. She once remarked that “ the only one of her five children about whose future she was anxious was William: and he would be remarkable either for good or for evil.” His mother died in 1778 when he was only eight years old but she exerted an influence on him, which lasted all his life. In that very year he was sent to the ancient grammar school of Hawkshead in the beautiful Lake District where he stayed in the village at a cottage, which is still known as “Wordsworth Cottage.” He records the experiences of his stay here in *The Prelude*, which are the happy memories of childhood in the lap of nature. Wordsworth lost his father five years later. The children were placed under the guardianship of two uncles. Beyond the claims which he had against the Lowther family, his father had left small provision for his children – an amount over 4000 pounds. However, at Hawkshead he learned more eagerly from nature- flowers, hills and stars – than from his books. There emerge three important things, which consolidate his experiences there: first, Wordsworth never felt lonely with nature; second, in the woods and fields, he felt the presence of a living spirit in nature though unseen and “companionable though silent.” He says later on:

I heard among the solitary hills  
 Low breathings coming after me, and sounds  
 Of undistinguishable motion.

Such joyful experiences recorded so precisely invariably remind the reader of his own childhood; third, Wordsworth’s impressions of nature are



delightful and familiar. He reveals through them his own abounding joy of life.

(ii) The second period of his life begins with his university course at Cambridge in 1787: It reveals many stormy, stressful and even trivial engagements of life, his travels abroad and Revolutionary experiences. Perhaps the most interesting event in his life at Cambridge was his friendship with the young political enthusiasts, whose spirit is expressed in his remarkable poem on the French revolution. He has already acquired two things by now, first, the habit of verse and second, the temperament of poetry. The third book of *The Prelude* gives a dispassionate account of his student life including its pleasures and general aimlessness. Wordsworth made two trips to France, in 1790 and 1791. It was with his Cambridge friends specially Robert Jones that he took the walking tour in France and Switzerland which is commemorated in his *Descriptive Sketches*. In January he took his B.A. degree. Wordsworth developed a keen sympathy with the ideology of the French Revolution and this faith was deepened by his intimate friendship with Michel de Beaupuy, a captain in the Republican Army. As book IX of *The Prelude* bears witness, his friendship with Beaupuy profoundly influenced his political thought. Wordsworth's poems, written during this period, are full of hope and ambitions that stirred the whole of Europe then. Wordsworth remained in France till the end of 1792, for the most part in Orleans and Blois. In Orleans he had a passionate love-affair with Marie-Anne Vallon, a girl of a royalist family by whom he had a daughter, Anne-Caroline who was baptized on December 15, 1792.

During this period, Wordsworth wrote the greater part of *Descriptive Sketches*. In isolated passages he expressed his sympathies with the Revolution, his deep moral dejection and even a mood of religious unbelief. Wordsworth was to take religious orders in the approaching winter or spring

but he strongly wished to “deter the moment.” It confirms that his faith in the religious and moral conviction was deeply shaken by two things rapidly especially the execution of Louis XVI and the second was the rise of Napoleon, and the slavish admiration showered upon this dangerous man by France . His coolness soon grew into disgust and opposition as he reveals in his poems but other Romantic poets like Shelley and Byron criticized him for it.

In February 1793, Wordsworth published both *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*. Wordsworth’s chief interest as a poet was in resolving the conflict between style and substance, which later on becomes the integral part of his theory of poetry. In the same month England declared war upon France, which shook his moral nature earnestly. As expected he was on the side of France. Not only that the publication of Godwin’s *Political Justice* also influenced him. Earlier Wordsworth was influenced by Rousseau’s concept of deifying “Nature” but now he began to deify the individual reason as opposed to the collective reason which is another name for “the general will”, that is, for tyranny. In the autumn of 1793, he started writing *Guilt and Sorrow*, his first considerable poem that was finished in 1794. In 1795 - 1796 he wrote *The Borderers, A Tragedy* in which he seems to be struggling out of Godwin’s influence. For two years after returning from France Wordsworth led a life of obscurity but in 1795 his friend Raisley Calvert died and left him with a legacy of nine hundred pounds. This financial assistance gave him the independence to settle with his sister Dorothy at Racedon, Crewkerne where that *The Borderers* was finished and *Margaret or The Ruined Cottage* was begun.

It was one of the decisive periods of Wordsworth’s life when he started living with Dorothy and Coleridge at Alfoxden. Wordsworth acknowledges in *The Prelude* that he felt the signs of the recovery of the moral and ethical

health to the influence of first of his sister and then of Coleridge. When these “three persons and one soul” were living close together in Somerset, the *Lyrical Ballads* was conceived and written. Wordsworth decided to give himself to poetry as Uptill now he had produced nothing that showed much originality of treatment. Though in this period Wordsworth wrote comparatively little but the idea of a new poetry was simmering in his mind --poetry that was to be a complete revolt from the accepted standards in both matter and manner. When in 1797 he met Coleridge, and put his theories into words, he found a sympathetic supporter of his ideas.

(iii) The third period of his life, that is, between 1797 and 1807: This period is commonly known as The Great Decade. It was short but significant phase of his life. In the autumn of 1798 the volume of *Lyrical Ballads* was published which marks the climax of the Romantic Revolt, not because it was the zenith of the revival of romance but because of its importance as a gesture of revolt. Here two important things should be kept in mind: (a) In writing of the *Lyrical Ballads*, a spiritual division of labour between Wordsworth and Coleridge has been recorded by both of them. (b) It is the famous passage in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* that announces the opening of the two new roads in English poetry:

“ ... our conversation turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by modifying colours of imagination. In this idea originated the plan of *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a

human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment that constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object to give charm of novelty to the things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonder of the world before us."

However, *The Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads* is concerned only with Wordsworth and says in the opening sentence: "It is the honourable characteristic of poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest human mind" and that the poems were an experiment to discover "how far the language of conversation.. is adopted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." Wordsworth's contribution to the volume consisted chiefly of lyrical ballads properly so called; but to these he added four delightful lyrics—"It is the Mild Day of March," "I Heard a Thousand Blended Notes," "Expostulation and Reply," "The Table Turned," and a long poem "The Lines Written above Tintern Abbey" the medium of which is neither ballad nor lyric, but an elevated blank verse. It is of course not possible to divide the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* into two neat groups – ballads and lyrics; the very title of the collection proves this. Basically a ballad is a simple poem with a story told in a popular fashion, whereas a lyric is a short poem of personal feeling. None of the poems is mere list of events, and none of them is an outpouring of vague, highly-colored feeling. The language of Wordsworth's poems included in the *Lyrical Ballads* is simple, not poetic, artificial or grandiose.

After the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and his sister set sail for Germany and stayed there for six months. It proved to be an agreeable holiday perhaps because it served to throw the poet more exclusively upon his imaginative memories. Certainly the poems he wrote during this time such as “Lucy Gray” and “Ruth” are especially happy in their simplicity and charm. In the poems written during this period there are certain qualities which were to become more common characteristics of Wordsworth’s later poetry. As Margaret Drabble pointed out in her book, Wordsworth,

“The most noticeable of these qualities is a new tone of tender personal emotion, at its best pure and strong, and at its worst dangerously near sentimentality. It is quite different emotion from the sense of social, human sympathy with the general lot of men .... With this new tone comes a whole new set of images and references, dealing with flowers, birds, stars and the smaller and prettier details of nature.”

The *Lucy* poems are not ‘nature poems’ as some of his later poems are but they do point the way towards later works like “The Daisy,” “The Celandine,” “The Cuckoo,” and “The Daffodils.”

On his return from Germany, he and his sister went to live in Grasmere in the Lake District, where he had spent his childhood. Here he spent rest of his life except for occasional tours in Scotland and on the Continent. A new edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* was brought out in 1800, and this edition was enriched by his famous ‘Preface’ and by a second volume of poems, among them are some of his best and the most original pieces. A third edition appeared in 1802 with an appendix on ‘Poetic Diction’ and fourth in 1805.

In 1802, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson of Penrith. It was not a remarkable event in his imaginative life, though it was a successful wedding in its own way. She was a good wife and an interesting companion but could not be a literary influence like Dorothy or Coleridge. In the year when the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared, he had already begun working upon *The Prelude*. When the fourth edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared he had already finished the latter, which according to A.C. Bradley, "is the greatest long poem after *Paradise Lost*". *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's spiritual autobiography that shows "The Growth of a Poet's mind from the earlier childhood down to the date, i.e., 1797 and is a significant document of the romantic revival because it constitutes a handbook of imaginative life unique in subtlety and power. It was intended to be a preparation for "a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society," of which *The Excursion* was a part. Of the same poem, another part is the impressive fragment of *The Recluse*, written in 1800 but published later on. As a form of poem, *The Prelude* is a class by itself

In 1802-1803, Wordsworth's political interest revived, as the sonnets of that year affirm. Besides, the conditions in France created by the personal despotism of Napoleon who was made Consul for Life earlier and the war on England disillusioned him and broke his faith in political idealism. The stagnant worldliness that he felt in England of that time made it all the more difficult for him to preserve his faith in the revolutionary mission of France. It has become customary to reproach Wordsworth with forsaking his faith but it is unjust. What is deplorable is the fact that he forsook also so many ideals that he should have saved against historical disappointment. In 1807 Wordsworth published the *Poems in Two Volumes* this collection contains besides the sonnets on "National Independence and Liberty", and

“Memorials of a Tour in Scotland,” such masterpieces as “Resolution and Independence,” “Ode to Duty,” and the immortal “Ode on Intimation of Immortality” to mention a few. If the volumes of 1800 and 1807 established him as one of the great inventors of poetical forms, other works like *The Prelude*, *The Recluse* fragment, *Margaret or The Ruined Cottage* etc. constitute a body of poetical works which because of their compass and originality, place him among the greatest English poets.

There is a group of poems, written while he was still at the height of his powers, which seem to forecast his approaching decline and which are full of evidence that he knew what was happening to him as a poet. They are the poems written not with joy, nor about joy, but about the loss of joy. Precisely, they are the poems about the problem of living without joy. The most important poems in this group are “Resolution and Independence,” (written 1802, published 1807), “Ode to Duty,” (written 1804, published 1807), “Immortality Ode” (written over a few years, published 1802-4) and “Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle in a Storm,” (written 1805, published 1807). These poems, different as they are, share a certain stiff determination to make the best of things, to carry on without complaining, and they all lament the loss of the easy spontaneous joys and passions of early youth. The last of this group of poems about resignation is different from others as it was written not about a vague sense of growing old and loss, but about a specific tragedy. It was written in 1805, as an elegy for Wordsworth’s brother John who died that year when his ship was lost at sea. There is in the last line of the poem, something like a note of Christian hope. From this time on, Wordsworth, who had never been an orthodox Christian, was to become a church-goer. This poem gives the final hints of his final total conversion and commitment.

(IV)The last period after 1807: Wordsworth's poetic powers declined and the critics attribute different reasons to it. If the psychoanalysts feel that the decline was due to repressed passion for Annette that troubled his mind, others find that it is not passion but the remembered terrors. Herbert Grierson & J.C.Smith believe that the proximate cause of the withering of his genius was overwork as they stated in the book, *A Critical History of English Poetry*. Graham Hough tries to discover the cause of this decline stating:

“ What has happened to bring about this change? Failure of impulse, or the abnegation of the deepest-rooted convictions in favour of a conventionally conservative middle age, are the common explanations. Probably Wordsworth has explained it best himself – in the *Immortality Ode* and, more clearly, in the *Ode to Duty*. This dates from 1805; but it already contains within it the germs of Wordsworth's middle age... when this happy self-trust begins to fail, the power of duty must be called in to supply its place. The sense of something lost is as clear as in the *Immortality Ode* (or for that matter, in *Tintern Abbey*).... He did achieve a serenity and control in his middle years that was not achieved by any other romantic poet, and morally this is admirable: but unhappily what has been lost was what produced the poetry.”

The total output of this period of decline was, of course, *The Excursion*, which was a part of the plan that occupied Wordsworth's mind for a great part of his life, but the poem was not all composed at one time. Apart from Book I (which is a revised version of “The Ruined Cottage”) and Book II



(written in the summer of 1806), most of the poems were composed between 1809 and 1813. It was published in 1814. If a critic named Cox Jeffery did not accept the attempt and said, "This will never do", and Keats thought it "One of the three things to rejoice at in this age." At the end of 1814 Wordsworth wrote two remarkable poems- "Laodamia" and "Dion" in a new style, a classic style, suggested by his re-reading of Virgil but a general decline in his poetic powers is undeniable. He still wrote more poems and in 1815 was published the first collected edition of Wordsworth's works. In the same year appeared the "White Doe of Rylstone" a beautiful but neglected poem in which Wordsworth attempt a sustained romantic narrative. In 1819, "Peter Bell" and "The Wagoner"; in 1820, "The River Duddon" and "Miscellaneous Poems." Though the decline in his poetic powers was visible and he himself was aware of it, it was not totally extinguished till long after. Though a further decline of the poetic powers could be witnessed in the poems written in 1822 such as "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" and "Memorials of a Tour on the Continent," there are the moments when the old poetic power asserted itself as in the poem "Composed on an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty." His great voice is heard for the last time in the "Effusion on the Death of James Hogg":

Like clouds that rake the mountain summits,  
Or waves that own no curbing hands,  
How fast has brother followed brother  
From sunshine to the sunless land.

Though many of his best sonnets came from the late period also, for instance, from *Evening Voluntaries* (1835) when the old greatness flashes out, but after 1835 he published nothing new. Graham Hough has summed up Wordsworth's poetic career thus:

“Beyond *The Excursion* we need hardly follow him. At this point his ideas were formed and settled. His best poetry had been a product of their development: now that the development is complete the poetry almost stops. Wordsworth wrote great many verses after 1815, and was to live for forty years more, a serene and well-organized existence: but apart from some repetition of earlier lyric themes, and occasional fine sonnets, there is nothing in the remainder of his works that we could not well spare.”

The change, however, does not influence our admiration for Wordsworth a great poet, who has given us beautiful poetry out of the familiar experiences of the common world. It is not an exaggeration to state, “We have no poet so entirely original.” Lowell rightly calls him “the historian of Wordsworthshire.”

### **Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry**

If the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* marks the climax of the Romantic Revolt, it is because of its importance as a gesture of revolt against the existing poetic practices. In his Preface to the second edition Wordsworth explained in detail what his theories about new poetry were and what was to be looked for in his own poems. The immediate purpose of the Preface was to defend his poems against “the charges of lowness and unpoeticalness that had been made against both their subjects and their diction” to use the words of Graham Hough. The overall intention of Wordsworth was two-fold, that is, to relate poetry as closely as possible to common life, by removing it in

the first place from the realm of fantasy, and in the second by changing it from the polite or over-sophisticated amusement to a serious art. . According to him, poetry should be “ the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” not mere satisfaction of a taste for imagery and ornament. Wordsworth’s aim in all this is to show that the poet is a man appealing to the normal interests of mankind, not as a peculiar being appealing to a specialized taste. He says:

“ He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighted to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.”

In his Preface Wordsworth made four claims: first, “to choose incidents and situations from common life”; second, “to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men”; third, “to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect”; and, last, “above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature.” The greater part of the Preface is devoted to justification of the first two claims, and this has caused too much stress to be laid on

them while the fact remains that it is on the last two claims that the greatness of his poetry rests.

The poetic language of the eighteenth century was unreal, and its substance was far from being an interpretation of the universal spirit of man. Wordsworth did inestimable service in insisting on a new and true orientation. But he went too far; he said that rustic life and language were the simplest and purest being elementary, in close touch with nature, and unspoiled by social vanity. The fact remains that the rustic has little originality, few ideas, and makes almost no attempt to correlate them. It is also true that Wordsworth proposed to prune it of peculiarities but, as Coleridge observed, this would render it the same as the language of any other section of the community similarly treated. Wordsworth also asserted that the language of poetry differs in no way from that of prose, with the single exception of metre. This is the controversy that still rages and Wordsworth's finest poetry does not show any influence of this idea. Geoffrey H. Crump has stated categorically that "In his greatest poems he forgot his theories, or the poems are great enough to dwarf the theories into insignificance, and in his later works he intentionally discarded them."

Wordsworth was a complete innovator who saw things in a new way. Those who approach his poetry for the first time notice two peculiarities – its austerity and its appearance of triviality. It is so in the case of those who fail to see the quality of really human sympathy. Besides, Wordsworth himself is responsible for inviting this sort of response, as he had no relish for the present. Shelley said about him that "he was hardly a man, but a wandering spirit with strange adventures and no end to them." The triviality of manner is the manner through which he could convey the profoundest truths. While reading Wordsworth's poems, it is impossible not to be struck by two things: (a) "the magical strength of truth" to borrow the words of De Quincey,

because “the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time” to quote Wordsworth himself, and (b) the number of fine phrases that have become the common coin of everyday speech. John F. Danby observed in his book: *The Simple Wordsworth* that “Words exist not on the page but between people: only people can *mean* anything.” In Wordsworth’s poetry it is due partly to his simple people who use simple diction which, though often ineffective, is the most perfect form of utterance when used to express ideas that are imagined with passion. For instance, take such lines as

For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago

He received the vivid impression, but the delight came with “ emotions recollected in tranquility.” The impressions as he records them seem at first sight insignificant, but if we ponder over them they catch something of a wonder and delight He felt that as a poet he had a special responsibility being a human spokesman and his “Poems alter persons.” De Quincey quotes the instance of his saying of a cataract seen two miles off that it was “frozen by distance.” His effort to convey by the simplest means the impression of intensity does not depend only on the use of ordinary words. As Cazamian pointed out,

“ one thing more is necessary, namely, the deep-felt tone which reveals their hidden tension, and brings into play their power of virtual suggestion. Music is possessed of adequate means by which the proper tone may be indicated; Wordsworth makes up for them to a certain extent, thanks to the help of auxiliary devices: the presumption created by the choice of verse as a medium, the prestige of poetry, the rhythm, and the

effect of pieces which shed light on one another... He has also to allow for certain turns and expressions of a revealing nature, which imply by their very irregularity a superior degree of emotional tension, and the effect of which is to throw the whole tenor of style on the plane of full-meant intention and subdued eloquence.”

Wordsworth believed that the intrinsic relations are those, which the words of the poem entertain between themselves. “ Every good poem has a natural cohesiveness; all its parts have dealing with each other and reinforce each other,” as Danby stated. ” Thus, Wordsworth’s poetic style, which is not strictly according to the norms he laid down in his theory of poetry, achieves its artistic success by combining in it the psychological intensity, childlike spontaneousness, depth of feeling and delicate simplicity. T.S.Eliot has rightly summed up that,

“It is “Wordsworth’s social interest that inspires his own novelty of form in verse. and backs up his explicit remarks upon poetic diction; and it is really this social interest which (consciously or not) the fuss was all about, It was not so much from lack of thought, as from warmth of feeling that Wordsworth originally wrote the words ‘the language of conversation in middle and lower class society.’ It was not from any recantation of political principles, but from having had it brought to his attention that, as a general literary principle, this would never do, that he altered them. Where he wrote ‘my purpose was to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt, the very language of men,’ he was saying that no serious critic could disapprove.

In other words, “A new standard of actuality in poetry is insisted upon, a new conception of what poets should be, a new understanding of how their words actually work upon their audience. The poet is responsible in a new way to his world, to himself, and to his readers” as Danby stated with precision.

### **Wordsworth As a Nature Poet**

Wordsworth’s passion for Nature is deep and well known. DeQuincey said, “Wordsworth had his passion for Nature fixed in his blood. It was a necessity of his being, like that of a mulberry leaf to the silk-worm, and through his commerce with Nature did he live and breathe.” He loved all objects of Nature less with the sensuous manifestations that delight most of the poets of nature and more with the spiritual that underlying these manifestations. This *divinization* of Nature, which began during the Renaissance in English Literature, culminates in Wordsworth. As Compton-Rickett pointed out in *A History of English Literature*: “It was Wordsworth’s aim as a poet to seek beauty in meadow, woodland, and the mountain top, and to interpret this beauty in spiritual terms.” Wordsworth as a Nature poet is different from other Romantic poets who were influenced by the vast phenomena of nature in different ways. If Coleridge was attracted toward its sensuous appeal, Byron and Keats felt a pagan joy in landscape, waterscape and cloudscape. Shelley came very close to Wordsworth in his attitude to Nature. They are not only the poets of Nature but also the prophets of Nature. But there is a difference: Shelly in perceiving Nature enjoyed those aspects which appealed to his sensuous self like the brilliance of the evening star or mighty harmonies of the winds, and thus defined Nature as an ‘impulse’ while Wordsworth had an eye for the homely and the commonplace, for a flower half hidden by a mossy stone,

and Nature is for him ‘both law and impulse,’ Wordsworth’s love for Nature grew in different stages and attained various dimensions as his poems like “Tintern Abbey” and “The Prelude” affirm. “Tintern Abbey” is of course, the star of the 1798 volume, is important in giving one of the most succinct of Wordsworth’s accounts of the development of his attitude to nature—moving from the animal pleasure of childhood through adolescent passion for the wild and gloomy to adult awareness of the relation of our perception of the natural world to our sense of the human and moral world—but its poetic interest lies in its brilliant combination of the lyric and the meditative, the exaltation of reminiscence into poetry through the proper handling of “relationship and love” ,to use Wordsworth’s own phrase. The poem shows how his childhood days were spent in the midst of rich surroundings of Nature. The sights and sounds of Nature were for him a source of playful, animal pleasure like skating, riding, fishing and walking. Therefore, it can be stated that Wordsworth’s first love for nature was “a healthy boy’s delight in outdoor life.” In “Tintern Abbey” he refers to these “glad animal movements” of his childhood. Similarly, he says in “The Prelude”:

But secondary to my own pursuits  
And animal activities, and all  
Their trivial pleasures

were significant to him at this stage of his love for nature. In the development of his love for Nature, the second stage shows that he grew out of his “coarser pleasures,” which lost their charm for him, and he started enjoying Nature for her sensuous beauty. He refers to the boyish pleasures of this period when he viewed Nature with a purely physical passion. For example, take the following lines from “Tintern Abbey”:

I cannot paint  
What then I was. The sounding cataract



Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite: a feeling and a love,  
 That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 By thought supplied, nor any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye.

These “aching joys and dizzy raptures” faded away when he experienced the intensities of human sufferings in France. The French revolution made him realize afresh the dignity of the common man. The poet now “considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each to each other; He wishes to serve through this relationship between nature and human life his own fellows and to participate in the joys and sorrows of man. In other words, his love for nature got linked with the love of man and he could hear in Nature

The still, sad music of humanity,  
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue.

His poems like “Michael”, “Resolution and Independence”, “Solitary Reapers” are based on human “emotions recollected in tranquility” which becomes his central thought of his poetic process. Referring to this stage of human-heartedness, Wordsworth writes in “Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” which is his most complete account of “the balance sheet of maturity as he saw it; it is a poem whose very fabric is remembered perception giving way to reflection.” David Daiches says: “The poet is only born when the child’s bliss gives way to the man’s more sober but more profound sensibility, which works through

“relationship and love” rather than through mere animal sensation. The poem is thus one of Wordsworth’s most central and illuminating works.” He says:

I love the Brooks, which down their channels fret  
 Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;  
 The innocent brightness of a new-born Day  
 Is lovely yet;  
 The Clouds that gather round the setting sun  
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
 That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality;  
 Another race hath been, and other palms are won.

Here Wordsworth enters into the forth stage of his relationship with Nature when he interprets Nature spiritually. In his poem, “Nutting”, he describes the circumstances under which he experienced a great change in his approach to Nature. Something mysterious touched him and he felt that, “there is a spirit in the woods.” In other words, he felt that a divine principle reigns in the heart of Nature. To quote the statement of Warwick James, “At this stage the foundation of Wordsworth’s entire existence was his mode of seeing God in nature and Nature in God.” This is known as the stage of Pantheism. The poet believes that the Eternal spirit pervades all the objects of Nature as he expresses in “Tintern Abbey” where he says:

And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky and in the mind of man:

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.

Wordsworth's poetry is rich in the description of various aspects of nature and as a 'nature poet' a rough scale of his nature poetry can be constructed. The first level is that of 'nature notes', the counting the streaks of the tulip, observations like 'black as the ash-buds in the front of March' where he pays full attention to details. The second level is that at which the observer sees not only single details but also is interested in drawing the whole scene. He paints like an artist the scenery or a picture- a quality that Wordsworth never gives way to in his poetry. The third level has to do with Ruskin's 'pathetic fallacy' as now the scene is made the vehicle for feelings, originating in the beholder. The fourth is the attitude which he himself described as 'wise passiveness' that should not be mistaken for Keatsian 'indolence' but is "a strenuous discipline of mind" "a condition of calm and attentiveness, a state of receptiveness that is also vividly alert."

Wordsworth has written longer works as well as shorter poems, which make him the greatest poet of Nature that English literature has produced. There are four distinctive characteristics that mark his nature poetry. (i) He handles various moods of and sensuous delights in nature delicately because he is sensitive as a barometer to every subtle change in the world about him. In "The Prelude" in which he could most fully and adequately exploit his gift for the "egotistical sublime" is the long autobiographical account of his own development. He rightly compares himself to an Aeolian harp, which responds harmoniously to every touch of the wind and there is hardly a sight or a sound, from a violet to a mountain, from a bird's note to the thunder of the cataract that is not reflected in his poetry. (ii) Among the poets of Nature there is none to be compared with him in the truthfulness of his

representation in the description and representation of Nature. A close study of Wordsworth's poetry of Nature-description shows that he was exceptionally sharp 'seer' and sensitive listener but when it comes to capturing "the symbolism of sound, Wordsworth is supreme." For instance, consider the following lines:

It was as April morning; fresh and clear.  
The rivulet, delighting in its strength,  
Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice  
Of waters which the river had supplied  
Was softened down into a vernal tone.  
The spirit of enjoyment and desire,  
And hopes and wishes, from all living things  
Went circling, like a multitude of sounds.

Wordsworth has vividly described all the little graces and charms of the month of June in a couplet:

Flaunting Summer when he throws  
His soul into the briar rose.

Only he would have written the following lines:

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In springtime from the cockoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Wordsworth's senses of touch, taste and smell are also noted in some of the passages, but they were not so acute as that of sight and sound. That makes his world austere and even bleak. Wordsworth is peerless for his truthful representation of Nature. William J. Long makes a very perceptive remark that "Wordsworth gives you the bird and the flower, the wind and the tree and the river, just as they are, and is content to let them speak their own

language.” (iii) No other English poet ever found such abundant beauty in the common world. He has not only sight but insight that enables him to describe accurately the sense as well as the soul of Nature as well as those who live close to nature for example take “The Idiot Boy” who at the end of his adventure can tell of what happened to him “all this long night” in the following lines:

The cocks did crow to-whoo, to whoo,  
And the sun did shine so cold.

Even he could feel the moods of nature and could relate himself to it for communicating his own experiences.

(iv) What distinguishes him from other Nature poets is that for him Nature is a living entity. The indwelling spirit in Nature imparts its own consciousness to all objects of Nature. Hence there is love and joy, spiritual unity and mystical and moral note in all of Wordsworth’s nature poems. Nature directly teaches and Wordsworth “thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ.”

To every natural form, rock, fruit and flower,  
Even to loose stones that cover the highway  
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel.

He himself reiterates in “The Tables Turned”:

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man  
Of moral evil and of good  
Than all the sages can.

Wordsworth has a strong faith in the inner life of nature. There are many incidents of his own life when he felt Nature actively responding to him. Once he saved a bird from the trap of some boys and heard a voice among

the solitary hills. Similarly when he stole a boat to explore the silent lake in the evening, he felt as if the huge peak raised its head:

And growing still in stature the grim shape  
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
For so it seems, with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me.

As Stopford Brooke puts it:

“ He conceived, as poet, that Nature was alive. It had, he imagined, one living soul which, entering into flower, stream, or mountain, gave them each a soul of their own.” In other words, it is the *life* of nature, which is everywhere recognized; not mere growth and the cell charges, but sentient, personal life. It makes Nature as a reflection of the living God and this Spirit “roles through all things.”

Once such a philosophy charges his Nature poetry, it is natural to find a joy in nature The sight of ‘cheerful flowers’ as in “ To the Daisy” and jocund daffodils that outdo the sparkling waves in joy as in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud. In “Three Years She grew in Sun and Shower” Nature imparts to Lucy its own “vital feelings of delight.” Even in the birds and the budding twigs there is also enjoyment as he states in the poem, “Lines Written in Early Spring.” Thus Nature is a blessed power that fills all the things with a sense of joy. Moreover, Wordsworth believes that there is in Nature the universal presence of love, for example, take his poem “To My sister,” in which the poet asks his sister to put on her woodland dress on the first mild day of March and come out with him for a walk; they will together drink in

the love which is in the air, and so prepare their spirits for the coming whole year.

Love, now a universal birth,  
 From heart to heart is stealing,  
 From earth to man, from man to earth:  
 --it is the hour of feeling.  
 One moment now may give us more  
 Than years of toiling reason:  
 Our minds shall drink at every pore  
 The spirit of the season.

.....

And from the blessed power rolls  
 About, below, above,  
 We'll frame the measure of our souls  
 They shall be turned to love.

Wordsworth had a firm conviction that it is Nature's law that good and evil exist together in a spiritual unity. The universal life force imparts a pulse of good to each particle. Since every object impresses itself on others and each reflects its neighbours, the vice of ever 'dividing' falsifies reality.

For all things in this little world of ours  
 Are in one bosom of close neighbourhood.

In poem after poem, he projects this idea that all objects are sharing this spiritual unity despite the apparent disconnection. He believes in a mysterious bond that draws things together into a natural community:

Of unknown modes of being which on earth,  
 Or in the heavens, or in the heavens and earth  
 Exist by mighty combinations, bound

Together by a link, and with a soul  
Which makes all one.

Wordsworth's approach to Nature is moral, didactic and even mystical because according to him the poems remold experience. Though the critics have different opinions about it and they have gone to the extent of saying that "Wordsworth must know that what he writes Valuable is not to be found in Nature". However the fact is that he remains to be a poet of "the mighty world of eye and ear" and his mysticism is actually rooted in the senses. His Nature mysticism is clearly evident in "Tintern Abbey":

Nor less, I trust,  
To them I may have owned another gift,  
Of one aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this intelligible world,  
Is lighted: that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on, --  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

Spurgeon has rightly observed:

" Wordsworth was not only a poet, he was also a seer and a mystic and a practical psychologist with an amazingly subtle mind and an unusual capacity for feeling. it was not the beauty of Nature, which brought



him joy and peace, but the life in Nature. He himself had caught a vision of that life. He knew it and felt it, and it transformed the whole existence for him. He believed that every man could attain this vision which he so fully possessed and his whole life's work took a form of minute and careful analysis of the process of feeling in his own nature."

As he believed that there is a pre-existing harmony between the mind of man and Nature, the human being is taken up into the life of Nature and incorporated with it. For instance, take the cases of Lucy, Michael, the Leech-gatherer or the Solitary Reaper. Nature is always the feminine principle and the mind is always the masculine principle. Herbert read points out in his book, *Wordsworth* about these principles that

"They are geared together and in unison complete the motive principle of the universe... the exquisite functioning of this interlocked universe of Mind and Nature is for Wordsworth the highest theme of poetry; in poetry the process actually receives its final consummation."

Nature, according to Wordsworth, has the potential to solace the distressed humanity. It might appear to be only an abstract idea for some and an outdated doctrine for others but for Wordsworth it was a fact of experience, and the rapture of that experience that glows through "Tintern Abbey" and in much of his best poetry. Nature employs many means to educate and instruct mankind, to inculcate discipline as Nature teaches to man a 'Norm of Conduct' so that man could cultivate to the utmost the capacities given to him by nature. Nature's teachings are meant to 'kindle and delight.' Though Wordsworth

keeps referring to Nature frequently even in the later poems but it appears that his heart has gone out of his poetry of Nature. He no longer calls himself, as in “Tintern Abbey” “a worshipper of Nature.” There seems to be a kind of change in his faith from Nature to a theology as critics like Joseph Warren beach liked to assess in his book, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth – Century English Poetry*.

However, Wordsworth’s view of nature has been severely criticized by some well –known critics like Basil Willey who finds his idea of communion with Nature only a sort of self-glorification. Aldous Huxley attacks his Nature-religion as the product of “the cozy sublimities of Westmoreland” and William Empson states that Wordsworth “frankly had no inspiration.” All such opinions may not have a grain of truth and hence may not be acceptable to us but one thing is absolutely clear that Wordsworth’s attitude to nature was one-sided. He enjoyed the tone of complacent optimism amidst the loveliness of Nature and utterly rejected the negative side of the vast phenomena which is ‘red in tooth and claw’ to use the phrase from Tennyson. What is still unique about Wordsworth is not that he is a poet of Nature but because he gave the most impressive account of man’s relation to Nature,; because he thought of interconnectedness of all created things – animate or inanimate – as a part of the great design of one great whole.

### **Wordsworth’s Poetry of Man and Mysticism**

In his book *The Simple Wordsworth* Danby opens one of his chapters thus:

“Wordsworth as he has appeared so far has been the poet of Fortitude rather than Nature, and perturbed compassion rather than joy. His concern has been with a wounded society and with the wound in himself as the representative of all men of good will.

There is a division between the nature that unites energy and peace, impulse and law, and the other natures man finds in his individual self and in society of which he forms a part. And even these two are riven asunder.

Wordsworth aspired to project himself as a philosophical poet and the ultimate theme of his poetry was not just Nature but Man, the heart of man and his relationship with Nature and his fellow beings. It is a natural instinct that man's primary emotion is his love for Homo Sapiens and then he develops a relationship with his surroundings including the world of nature. But, in the case of Wordsworth the course of love runs differently. It is his love for Nature, which influences his love for man and becomes the integral part of the mindscape. In the early poems man remains still secondary to Nature who is

a passion, she,  
A rapture often, and immediate love  
Ever at hand; he, only a delight  
Occasional, an accidental grace,  
His hour being not yet come.

He sees the Cumberland shepherd like one 'in his own domain,' among the rocks and says:

Thus was man  
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,  
And thus my heart was early introduced  
To an unconscious love and reverence  
Of human nature:

With this sort of sudden awareness of the presence of man struggling to make some place for himself against all odds fills his heart with sympathy and respect. He feels for the “Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms.” Earlier than the French revolution, it was the English democratic revolution that had influenced all the Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake and its ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity were the determining factor in humanizing his soul, which made him a poet of man. He recognized the primary qualities of humanity and felt that every human being was intrinsically great and capable of infinite development. He developed a sympathetic attitude toward the simple humanity and in way indulged in the generous sentiment of hero-worship. Wordsworth never gave up hope for man and tried to test human nature in its elements, as he stated in *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, “By stripping our own hearts naked, by looking out of ourselves towards men who lead the simplest lives, and those most according to Nature, men who have never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, effeminate ways of thinking and feeling.” He could soon realize that the simple souls, which are utterly neglected by all, have great strength and energy. And he bends in reverence to them:

To Nature and the power of human minds,

To men as they are men within themselves.

Wordsworth’s philosophy of human life is based on four fundamental principles, which grow out of his basal concept that man is not apart from nature, but is the very ‘life of her life.’

(i) Wordsworth is a poet of childhood because he believes that in childhood man is sensitive to the influences of nature and is embodiment of beauty and joy because he comes straight from the Creator of the Universe as he says in the exquisite ode “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting  
 And cometh from afar:  
 Not in entire forgetfulness  
 And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home.

Wordsworth thus sums up his philosophy of childhood, which shows the influence of the metaphysical poet, Henri Vaughan. It is the kinship with nature as well as God that glorifies our childhood and he recommends that it ought to extend through a man's whole life and ennoble it. In "Tintern Abbey" also the poet offers the same insight that the best part of our life is the result of natural influences. He was convinced that that urban society and the unnatural, crowded life of the cities tend to damage and even pervert humanity. To save mankind from being miserable and wretched a return to nature and simple living is the only remedy.

(2) Wordsworth followed a doctrinaire opinion about the true standard of a man's happiness in life, which according to him are inherent in following the natural instincts and pleasures of childhood. Preoccupied with the worldly pursuits, man neglects the natural pleasures and chooses to indulge in artificial pleasures of which he soon goes tired. He adheres to this notion to find a permanent and increasing joy. His poems like "Tintern Abbey," "Rainbow," "Ode to Duty," and "Intimations of Immortality," offer this plain message.

(3) Wordsworth as a poet of humanity attempts to discover the *truth* of humanity in the common life, which passes through and faces the general heritage of love and labour, smiles and tears. Romantic interest in common life is of permanent literary interest and Wordsworth continued it in

“Michael,” “The Solitary Reaper,” “To a Highland Girl,” and “Stepping Westward,” to name a few poems, in which joys and sorrow, not of the chosen people but “in commonalty spread” are his major themes. The implied purpose of many of his poems is to assert how the keynote of all life is happiness – happiness not as an “occasional episode” achieved by chance or circumstance as Hardy believed it but as a state of living won by other intrinsic virtues like hard work, endurance, patience and tenderness in the face of desertion, poverty, the certainty of loneliness and death. Such essential qualities of humble, rustic and pastoral life find the imaginative sympathy in Wordsworth’s poetry as in the following lines:

It was the first  
Of those domestic tales that spake to me  
Of shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men  
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills  
Where was their occupation abode.

In the Preface of 1809 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth gives a clear reason for depicting the rustic life. He says, “Humble and rustic was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find better soil in which they can attain their maturity...” Hence, at this stage the tale of the humble people had a special importance in Wordsworth’s life and he was led on from the pure passion for nature to feel passion for man that were earlier not his own

And think  
(At random and imperfectly indeed)  
On man, the heart of man, and human life.

Arthur Symons makes a very insightful observation in *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, when he states that “Wordsworth conveys this part of truth to us as no other poet has ever done, no other poet having had in

him so much of the reflective peasant.” Wordsworth distrusts whatever dazzles and is not a part of ordinary human nature .He tells us that he found his trade in

The vulgar forms of present things,  
The actual world of our familiar days.

Wordsworth loved the “The common growth of mother –earth, /her humblest mirth and tears” as he put it in the prologue to “Peter Bell.” He never wished to escape the commonplace and viewed them with a calmness and courage.

The central themes of Wordsworth’s poetry of human life are the common incidents whether associated with work or love where even duty is the ultimate form of love. He says in anticipation of one such experience:

Serene will be our days and bright,  
And happy will our natures be,  
When love is an unerring light,  
And joy its own security.

Wordsworth’s sympathy for his fellow men and the desire for their welfare is the keynote of all his poetry. Matthew Arnold wrote of Wordsworth that his greatest strength was in his power of making us feel “simple primary human affections and duties”. It is noticeable that Wordsworth’s poems of rural life generally deal with the simplest and most primary of all—the bonds between parents and children. He rarely writes about love between man and woman, and when he does it is often about broken and unhappy love. Many of his poems hardly describe affections and passions: they are the records of chance encounters, unimportant in themselves, yet transfigured by some sudden moment of illumination, for example, consider “The Leech Gatherer.” In Wordsworth’s poetry there are many instances when he closely watched the

clouds of human destiny though Arnold emphasized that he “put by” these clouds. He heard patiently as he described in his famous lines:

The still sad music of humanity.

.....

the fierce confederate storm  
Of sorrow, barricaded evermore  
Within the walls of cities.

Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,  
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,  
The internal pangs, are ready: the dread strife  
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will  
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

The world remained for him in the end an “unintelligible” place. As A.C.Bradley put it:

“He sang of pleasure, joy, glee, blitheness, love, wherever in nature or in humanity they assert their indisputable power; and turning to pain and wrong, and gazing at them steadfastly, and setting himself to present the fact with a quiet but unsparing truthfulness, he yet endeavoured to show what he had seen, that sometimes pain and wrong are the conditions of a happiness and good which without them could not have been, that no limit can be set to the power of the soul to transmute them into its own substance, and that even in suffering and even in misery, there may still be such a strength as fills us with awe or with glory.”



To discover the truth of life he relies on the immediate experience, as he believes that the immediate experience rather than any intellectualizing power is the great agent of education. And in a state of contemplative calm the meaning of the experience gradually emerges:

The eye, it cannot choose but see;  
 We cannot bid the ear be still;  
 Our bodies feel, where'er they be,  
 Against or with our will.  
 Nor less I deem that there are powers  
 Which of themselves our minds impress;  
 That we can feed this mind of ours  
 In wise passiveness.

(4) To this natural philosophy of “wise passiveness” which leads to “pensive wisdom” Wordsworth added a mystic element, which is the result of his own belief that in every natural object there is reflection of the living God. If Nature is everywhere transfused and illumined by Spirit, man also is a reflection of the divine spirit. In “Tintern Abbey” the spiritual appeal of nature is expressed in almost every line: but the mystic conception of man is seen more clearly in “Intimations of Immortality,” which Emerson calls “the high-watermark of poetry in the nineteenth century.” In this splendid ode Wordsworth adds to his spiritual interpretation of nature and man the alluring doctrine of pre-existence, which makes human life a continuous, immortal thing, without beginning or end. His aim as a poet is to steer through the conditions and the key word for it is ‘activity’. So many times he tried to explain his mind that is always connected with this ‘interchange’ between man and his surroundings. Danby rightly remarked, “What Wordsworth was trying to describe was something organic. It had to do with the traffic between the inner and the outer. It was like assimilation or like the translation.” In his

early childhood, Wordsworth had memorably felt the peculiar coincidence of inner and outer as he says in *The Prelude* ,II:

How shall I trace the history, where seek  
The origin of what I then have felt?  
Oft in these moments such a holy calm  
Did overspread my soul, that I forgot  
That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw  
Appear'd like something in myself, a dream,  
A prospect in my mind.

The discipline of the “wise passiveness” extends its control to Wordsworth’s use of words and his philosophical poetry becomes the greatest since Milton as Coleridge said and Dr. Leavis agreed to. His poetry is genuinely ruminant and the language itself acts like the mind of the poet where the natural scene is assimilated into something other. It may be called a ‘mental landscape’ when the mind and the object interact with each other and create “a haunting inwardness.” The alternation is that of Wordsworth’s own two natures, “joy the one, the other melancholy,” as he himself accepts in *The Prelude* Bk. X. The inner mind and the outer landscape prepare for the further development with the fluid meaning rather than with fixed symbols. The images of the lake, river, mountain, cloud, birds, flower and stars act as if in a concert with full submission to law and at the same time with “unfettered freedom,” Such experiences caused him to be considered a ‘mystic’ but with a difference as Danby pointed out:

“ Wordsworth’s ‘mysticism’ is similar to the kind of experiences Shakespeare tries to define. Only, Wordsworth has the experience not with persons but with things, especially with landscapes, wherein river, road, wood, mountain, sky and

cloud muster their language for a summatory utterance.”

It has been rightly said that Wordsworth’s central achievement is “a curious composedness *in himself*. He was curiously *comfortable*” when left “alone”. His poems emanate from the Wordsworthian center in which both, ‘nature’ and ‘humanity’ are thought as one.

### **Moral and Philosophical Note in Wordsworth’s poetry**

Wordsworth had a distinct desire to draw moral lessons from the experiences of life because he believed that “Every great poet is a teacher: I wish either to be considered as a teacher or nothing.” He wrote in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, “There is scarcely one of my poems which does not aim to direct the attention of some moral sentiment, or some general principle or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution. Each of them has a purpose.” If one wishes to discover the purpose, its centre lies in its emotional qualities, which are a sign of the culture it recommends, and which reveal the spectacle of the great facts in human existence and the universal passions in the world of nature and men. When Leslie Stephen paid a tribute to him he emphasized that Wordsworth has invited enormous critical response for the purely poetical side of his genius but the fact is that his poetry and philosophy spring from the same root.

It is easier to point out his limitations or defects of his poetry, that it is commonplace, dull, homely, prosaic and humourless and that its projection of the world of nature is purely sentimental and always moralizing. These charges may carry some weight but what makes Wordsworth the great poet is the seriousness of his point of view, his philosophical notions. Leslie Stephen categorically states that, “ His poetry has a lasting value because it has solid substance. He is a prophet and a moralist, as well as a mere singer.

His ethical system is as distinctive and capable of systematic exposition as that of Bishop Butler.”

Wordsworth stresses the significance of the domestic, which gives the truest happiness, affection as the most noble force in character building in direct language. His poems guide the reader as to how the pain and sorrow may be transformed into new forces. It may even give a lofty purpose to otherwise an ordinary existence and thus may become a source of strength. His poems like “Michael,” “The Brothers,” “The Affliction of Margaret” render with unqualified power, the love of father for son, of brother for brother, of mother for child.”

Wordsworth believed that there is a divine order in the universe and conformity to this order reveals the beauty as embodied in the external world and regulates our character by promoting the condition of virtue, for example, take the opening stanza of “Ode to Duty,” which is a frankly moral and didactic poem, that guides human beings along the right path and teaches them to distinguish between right and wrong:

“Stern Daughter of the voice of God!  
O duty! If that name thou love  
Who art a light to guide, a rod  
To check the erring, and reprove;  
Thou, who art victory and law  
When empty terrors overawe;  
From vain temptations dost set free;  
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

It is his faith in the moral virtues and strong speculative ideas, which form the texture of his best poetry. Carlos Baker in his “Introduction” to Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* says: “ All three conspire to fruity his belief in the motherhood of Nature, the brotherhood of man, the fatherhood of God,

and—it may be added, the neighbourhood of pain.” Briefly, he fixed his thought upon the inherent and indestructible powers of nature and human nature and then focused on the moral message for humanity. Thus, it was a practical necessity for him to be a teacher. From the time he wrote “Tintern Abbey” to the end of his life, there is an ethical element in his poetry. In *Unity of Wordsworth’s Poetry* Bernard Groom says, “We turn to other poets for amusement, for intellectual stimulus, for the culture of emotion; we turn to Wordsworth for moral and spiritual consolation.”

Wordsworth’s strong moral and philosophical tendency clearly comes out in poems like “Intimation of Immortality” that represents perfect combination of profound thought and deep emotion. In this poem Wordsworth expresses his faith in immortality and his view about the unreality of the world of the senses. As he believes when the child comes into this world of the senses he is vaguely aware of the pre-natal existence and is enwrapped in the heavenly glory. In the fifth stanza of the poem, he philosophizes this idea thus:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
                                   Upon the growing Boy,  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
                                   He sees it in his joy;  
 The youth , who daily farther from the east  
                                   Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,  
                                   And by the vision splendid  
                                   Is on his way attended;  
 At length the Man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of the common day.

Wordsworth holds the Platonic view that the material world is only illusion. The last two stanzas of the poem are deeply reflective and meditative and the last four lines are full of moral submission and instruction:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joy, and fears,  
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Many poems like “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” “Michael,” “The Brothers,” “The Resolution and Independence,” etc. reveal Wordsworth’s deep moral sense. His teachings whether through the classical values or the living presence of Nature acquire a new meaning and relevance in the contemporary age. Though the critics like De Selincourt object that the message however significant should not be given so explicitly, but there is no reason to put a restriction of this kind when the sense conveyed is unique in experience, carries the general truth of psychology and communication in such magical words. Wordsworth is surely a great poet who has secured a place among the constellation of the superb poets because of his original response to the world of nature and human society and because of his lofty message of collective and happy living which his moral sense promotes.

### **Critical Appreciation of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and “Ode on Intimations of Immortality”**

#### **(a) “Tintern Abbey”**

This poem, which was composed on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1798, appeared in the *Lyrical Ballads* the same year. The occasion of this great reflective poem was a visit to the Wye after the lapse of five years. The second visit gave rise to those significant philosophical

thoughts that the landscape generated in him in the interval. The memory of the beautiful scene, the steep and lofty cliffs, the dark sycamore, the plots of cottage ground, the orchard with its unripe fruits, the hedge-rows, the pastoral farms, the columns of smoke rising from among the trees with a distant glimpse of the gipsy tents in the woods or of some hermit's cave inspired the poem. Wordsworth first restates his moral doctrine though he does not explain it directly. He owes it to these recollections, to an experience that carries its own guarantee of authenticity. Wordsworth writes that,

“No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days, with my sister. Not a line was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol.”

The title of the poem is not quite accurate. If it was written as the poet says, “upon leaving Tintern” on July 13, the scene of its composition must not have been not “above” Tintern Abbey, but below it. In fact, it must have been written largely on board the ‘small vessel’ which took them back to Bristol. It is possible that the poem began on the first day of their arrival there and was completed on 13<sup>th</sup>. Mary Moorman makes the following observation in her book: *William Wordsworth – A Biography – The Early years 1770 - 1803*, that Wordsworth nowhere in the poem does mention Tintern Abbey itself...though he does notice ‘a soft, inland murmur’ the change from tidal to non-tidal waters not far above Tintern.”

The poem may be regarded as an essay in verse, and one of the finest achievements of a “feeling intellect.” It expounds some of the leading views of Nature which Wordsworth had developed with Coleridge and which were to form the basis of his most important work. Nature, for Wordsworth, was a living personality. He believed that there is a divine spirit pervading all objects of Nature and this belief finds a complete expression in “Tintern Abbey” where he tells us that he has felt the presence of a sublime spirit in the setting sun, the round ocean, the living air, the blue sky, the mind of man. Precisely, it rolls through all things as Wordsworth says:

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

This belief in the divine spirit pervading through all the objects of Nature is called Pantheism.

The central theme of the poem is the poet’s relationship with Nature and his indebtedness to her. Margaret Drabble in her book entitled *Wordsworth* says that

“It is ‘Tintern Abbey’ that shows for the first time his romantic passion for nature, and in which he gives us highly emotional descriptions of the effects of the outer world upon his own inner self; this is the first poem in which he used, with deep feeling, phrases like ‘a worshipper of nature,’ and speaks of ‘the deeper zeal of holier love’ that he feels for nature.”

In this poem Wordsworth presents two important aspects of his attitude to Nature: First, as a boy whose love for nature was purely sensuous and



physical. The objects of nature were then an appetite, and they haunted him like a passion; second, as a man whose love for nature is spiritual and mystical because he has discovered in nature the presence of a Divine Spirit that is for him a source of peace and tranquility. So Wordsworth who began as a Nature poet becomes a Nature mystic. Transcendental note is struck when Wordsworth describes how contemplation of Nature brought him a blessed mood in which he developed an inner vision, mystical insight that transcends sense experience:

..... we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul:  
 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy  
 We see into the life of things.

The poet believes that these mystical states may be due to the ‘beauteous forms of Nature’ – a notion that has always been “a tenet of Platonism and neo-Platonism as well as of mystics that sensibility to natural beauty leads onwards to the beauty and truth that is beyond sense” to borrow an expression of Melvin Radar from his book, *Wordsworth – A Philosophical Approach*.

In “Tintern Abbey” the claims of poetry and philosophy have been harmonized. Wordsworth believes that nature is not only a source of joy but also a deep moral influence and shapes human character. Reflecting on the spiritual bond between man and nature, he says that he is

.....well pleased to recognize  
 In nature and the language of the sense  
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
 Of all my moral being.

As he told his sister Dorothy, “Nature never betrays the heart that loved her” and she is the greatest teacher. The structure of “Tintern Abbey” is three fold: The first stage is the description of the scene (lines 1-22) which shows that Wordsworth’s attitude to nature is marked by a simple delight in freedom and in the midst of nature “glad animal movements” which gave him “a coarse pleasure.” The second stage is development of the poet’s view of Nature (lines 23-113), when nature appealed chiefly to his senses and the colours and shapes of nature haunted him like a passion. The third stage is in which he addresses to his sister Dorothy (lines 114 –159) having heard “the still, sad music of humanity” in Nature. The poem becomes autobiographical being a poem of self-discourse. In other words, the poem is important biographically because it is the poet’s own testimony to the change in his feelings and outlook about that landscape which he revisited after five years. In this context F.W.Bateson observes: “In terms of Wordsworth’s mental evolution the importance of ‘Tintern Abbey’ is that it records his discovery that ‘the mighty world of eye and ear’ is half created in the process of perception. The discovery had implications that have not always been realized.”

In “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth has employed sublime language with double exposure technique; it is the collocation of two separate ‘spots of time’ which dramatize for him the degree and the kind of growth in the intervening period. Precisely, it is the technique of this double exposure which gives dramatic life to this philosophical lyric. It is through the use of majestic blank verse that Wordsworth becomes the spokesman of ‘a new spirit of poetry.’

**(b) “Ode on Intimation of Immortality”**

The ode is the high water-mark of English poetry of the Romantic age and one of the most famous philosophical poems of Wordsworth. Though written in form of an irregular ode, originally the poem did not bear any title, being simply designated as *Ode*. Noting its ambiguity some of the critics suggested to Wordsworth that there should be a descriptive title for the work ‘to guide the reader to a perception and direction.’ The poet then deliberately chose the title, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early childhood” which emphasizes its essential meaning. Wordsworth started writing this poem in the spring of 1802 and by the summer the first four stanzas seem to have been completed and its main design was finalized. It was finished two to four years later sometimes in 1806. It is built on such a well-defined and majestic plan that the delay has not disrupted its unity.

Referring to the sources of the ode in his personal life, Wordsworth observes,

“This was composed during my residence at Town-End, Grasmere. Two years at least passed between the writing of the first four stanzas and the remaining part to the attentive and competent reader the whole sufficiently explains itself; but there may be no harm in adverting here to particular feelings or experiences of my own mind on which the structure of the poem partly rests. Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere:

‘A simple child  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death!’

But it was not so much from the source of animal  
vivacity that my difficulty came, as from a sense of  
the indomitableness of the spirit within me.

Besides, the poet seems to have been influenced by Pythagoras and Plato, the Greek philosophers, and Henri Vaughan, the seventeenth century metaphysical poet. The belief in life before death, which is the basis of the poem, was first mentioned in the west by Pythagoras. The poet’s doubts and questionings about the reality of the world of senses in stanza 1X specially have their origin in the philosophy of Plato who said that this world is merely an imitation of the world beyond. Wordsworth’s idealization of the childhood may be traced back to Vaughan as in his poem “The Retreat.” The Ode has several themes which are connected with its central vision. First of all, it depicts the visionary experiences of the childhood; they are based on the theory of Reminiscences according to which the memories of our childhood inform us of the life before birth and therefore of the immortality of soul. The doctrine can not be scientifically verified but can be instinctively believed as it has sufficient foundation about it in humanity. Another important related theme is the fading of youthful vision with the advancement of age but the natural emotion of piety that binds our days together gives us the philosophical compensations of maturity. It also encourages the idea of pre-existence and the hope of immortality – not as an illusion but as ‘a master light.’ On this concept the poet establishes his central theme of the immortal nature of the human spirit. Wordsworth believes that in childhood it is intuitively experienced but as one grows old it

is partly forgotten. However through the intense experiences of the head and heart, our instincts of immortality is revived to some extent as Helen Darbishire stated in her book, *The Poet Wordsworth*.

A serious study of the poem confirms that it can be structurally divided into three parts: (i) the first four stanzas which high light the fact that “there hath passed a glory from the earth.” And the last two line of these stanzas question:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Stanzas V - V11 constitute the second part which gives the explanation in the form of the doctrine of reminiscence. Stanzas 1X – X1 is the third part which tries to vindicate the value of life from which the vision is fled. Though these three parts of the poem are not blended together, as the second part of the poem being a kind of interpolation has no link to the opening and closing Sections but the poem has a unity. As Maurice Bowra put it: “ The three parts of the Ode deal in turn with a crisis, an explanation, and a consolation, and in all the three Wordsworth speaks of what is most important and most original in his poetry.” John Heath –Stubbs has aptly remarked that “The Immortality Ode is essentially a free Pindaric poem of the type established by Cowley and perfected by Dryden...Wordsworth owed much to Dryden’s practice.: At the hands of Wordsworth it becomes a suitable vehicle for the shifting moods of the subjective emotions.”

In this Ode Wordsworth projects a double vision of childhood – the childhood that is busily lived through by children and the childhood which we carry within us like a memory. Alec King calls them “visible childhood and invisible childhood” for the purpose of convenience. The poet distinguished these two childhoods, not only by what he says of each but by different languages the visible childhood of the ‘six years’ lives for us in the

factual language of the seventh stanza who is vividly described as ‘an imitator,’ ‘an actor as he performs all parts and copies all action and gestures that he sees and the invisible child is referred as “a mighty prophet,” “seer blest” and “best philosopher” etc. Coleridge criticized the poem on this ground as the idealization of childhood, though full of sincerity and feeling, has no reality about it.

The Ode is a piece of spiritual biography of Wordsworth. It is a reminiscent of his past when he lived in ‘glory and the freshness’ of his senses, the senses finally fed on the ‘principle of joy.’ The poem confirms two important things: (a) Wordsworth’s lamentation about the loss of ‘visionary gleam’ or ‘the glory and the dream and (b) His belief in the compensating discovery of new and sober power, springing out of the harsh realities of life, inhumanity and cruelty of man towards man. The poem is difficult because it tends to focus on ‘immortality’ which means “negation of death” and celebration of the victories of life. G. Wilson Knight has made a beautiful remark in his book, *The Starlit Dome*, that “It is rather a vision of essential, all-conquering life. The symbols which carry this over to us are flowers, springtime joy, bird music, all young life, and pre-eminently, the child.”

Wordsworth lived not only with, in amidst nature. The ode clearly brings out his love for nature as a child and his love for nature as a man. For example, take stanza XI. if in his earlier mood he could say:

And O, yet Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,  
Forebode not any severing of our loves!

As a man he could add:

The innocent brightness of a new-born Day  
Is lovely yet;  
The clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober colouring from an eye

That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

Another race hath been, and other palms are won.

The language, specially the diction, is moulded to the poet's purpose. It achieves rhetorical heightening and touches at the same time ascetic discipline though the "simplicity remains the groundwork of his poetic style as Helen Darishire put it."

Precisely, the Ode contains all that Wordsworth's poetry stands for and above all it is a deep and sincere personal emotion which gives it a lyrical character. No one can remain untouched by the reflective and calm mood of the poet at the end of the poem when he says:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,  
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

In short, the blending of thoughts and emotions, meditation and melody, sincerity and simplicity created this splendid poem.

## **Assignments**

Note: Attempt the following questions

1. Discuss the characteristic qualities of the age of Romantic Revival.
2. What are the major influences on Wordsworth as a poet?
3. Give an account of Wordsworth's theory of poetry.
4. Discuss briefly Wordsworth's philosophy of nature.
5. What are the main qualities of Wordsworth's Poetic diction?
6. Evaluate Wordsworth's role as "a teacher" in the contemporary age.
7. Write an essay on Wordsworth as a poet of common man.

8. Give a critical appreciation of “Ode on intimation of Immortality.”
9. “Wordsworth was the rare phenomenon in English literature—a poet with a programme.” Discuss Wordsworth’s programme as a poet.”
10. Give an analysis of the development of thought in “Tintern Abbey” commenting on the value of the central idea.

Note: Answer the following questions in about *two hundred words*

1. Comment on the early life of Wordsworth.
2. What is the first stage of Wordsworth’s love of nature?
3. Write a note on the influence of French Revolution on Wordsworth.
4. Discuss any two features of Wordsworth’s Theory of poetry.
5. Write a note on Wordsworth as a poet of joy in nature.
6. What do you understand by the phrase that poetry is “emotion recollected in tranquility?”
7. Indicate the limitations of Wordsworth as a poet.
8. Write a note on the healing power of Wordsworth’s poetry.
9. What innovations in poetry do you ascribe to Wordsworth?
10. Give any three illustrations of Wordsworth as a lyric poet.

## **Books Useful for the Students**

### **Works**

**Poetry:** The poetical works of William wordsworth in five volumes, with textual and critical notes by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, Oxford, 1940-9.

The Cornell Wordsworth, Ithaca, N.Y. and Hassocks, Sussex: The Salisbury Plain poems (1975).



## Letters

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford, 1967  
(and later volumes).

## Critical Studies

W. Raleigh, Wordsworth. London, 1903.

G.W. Meyer, Wordsworth's Formative Years, Ann Arbor and London, 1943.

Valuable in the main, though outdated at some points.

J.C. Smith, A Study of Wordsworth, Edinburgh, 1944.

Helen Darbishire, The Poet Wordsworth, Oxford, 1950.

Enid Welford, Salisbury Plain, A Study in the Development of  
Wordsworth's Mind and Art, Oxford, 1966.

S.M. Parrish, The Art of the Lyrical Ballads, Cambridge, Mass., 1973.

Development within an excellent survey of the critical relations  
between Wordsworth and Coleridge.

## More Specialized Studies

W.H. White. An Examination of the Charge of Apostasy against  
Wordsworth, London, 1898.

Elsie Smith, An Estimate of Wordsworth, Oxford, 1932. Contemporary  
views and reviews from 1773 to 1822.

Edith C. Batho, The Later Wordsworth, Cambridge, 1933.

B.R. Schneider, Wordsworth's Cambridge Education, Cambridge, 1957.

R.M. Todd, Politics and the Poet, A Study of Wordsworth, London, 1957.

H. Lindenberger, On Wordsworth's 'Prelude', Princeton, 1963.

Melvyn Rader, Wordsworth A Philosophical Approach, Oxford, 1967.

Jonathan Wordsworth, The Music of Humanity, London, 1969. On 'The  
Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar'.

- M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, New York and London, 1971. Wordsworth is the principal subject, with parallels from English and German literature and philosophy to denote 'the spirit of the age' after the failure of the French Revolution.
- Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads*, Oxford, 1976.
- Joseph Warren Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry* (Macmillan, 1936). Like Beatty's book, an important discussion of Wordsworth's eighteenth century dimension.
- H.W. Garrod, *Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays*, and ed. (Oxford, 1927). Less valuable now, than it was in its time, for its contribution to knowledge about the composition of *The Prelude*, and Wordsworth's Godwinist phase. But it remains important as a work of rare sympathy.
- Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (Nelson, 1969). This study of 'The Ruined Cottage' is inevitably a study of *The Prelude's* origins. It sees Wordsworth as a tragic artist, with deep insight into 'emotions not his won'.
- F.M. Todd, *Politics and the Poet* (Methuen, 1957). An important study of a vital area of Wordsworth's intellectual life. Todd documents Wordsworth's so-called 'apostasy's and argues that much of the charge was made under the tutelage of his poetic faith.
- Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Clarendon Press, 1957-65; O.U.P. Paperback, 1968). The writing of *The prelude* is naturally a part of Wordsworth's biography, and Mrs Moorman's books are massively illuminating, both in data and commentary-and a beautiful biography.

## CHAPTERS AND ESSAYS

Newton P. Stallknecht, 'Wordsworth and the Quality of Man'.

Josephine Miles, 'Wordsworth and the Mind's Excursive Power'. Both in *Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal*, ed. C.D. Thorpe, C. Baker and B. Weaver (Carbondale, Ill., 1957).

Stallknecht discusses Wordsworth as a source of democratic feeling, linking his influence with Haldane, Bergson, Pascal, Santayana, Schweitzer, Whitehead, Alexander and Sartre. Josephine Miles writes of the philosophical suppleness of Wordsworth's blank verse and diction.

Colin Clarke, 'Landscape in the Poetry of Wordsworth', *Durham University Journal*, n.s., XI (Mar 1950).

John F. Danby, 'The "Nature" of Wordsworth', *Cambridge Journal*, VII (Apr 1954). Both of these pursue the way Wordsworth took 'nature poetry' into new dimensions, after Akenside. Professor Danby's essay, which appears also in his influential book *The Simple Wordsworth* (Routledge, 1960), contains excellent readings of 'there was a boy' and 'Simplon Pass'.

Edwin Morgan, 'A Prelude to The Prelude', *Essays in Criticism*, v (Oct. 1955). Notable readings of the 'dedication' in book IV and the love of shepherds passage in book VIII.

F.R. Leavis, 'Wordsworth', *Revaluation* (Chatto & Windus, 1936).

H.Lindenberger, 'The Reception of The Prelude', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LXIV (Apr. 1960).

Zera S. Fink, 'Wordsworth and the English Republican Tradition', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XLVII (1948). Explains Wordsworth's attraction to the Girondin cause by his, and their, attraction to Milton, Sydney, Harrington.

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Wordsworth and the Locke Tradition', in *The Seventeenth Century background* (Chatto & Windus, 1934), and ' "Nature" in Wordsworth', in *The Eighteenth Century Background* (Chatto & Windus, 1940) – both in peregrine Books; and 'A note on Stoicism' and Windus, 1964; Methuen, 1965).

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S.G. Dunn, 'A Note on Wordsworth's Metaphysical System', *English Association, Essays and Studies*, XVIII (1932). Studies Wordsworth's faith in 'the life of things' from its Lyrical Ballads origins, through *The Prelude* to *The Excursion*, and constructs with great authority the unwritten argument of the entire Recluse.

M.H. Abrams, 'The prelude as a Portrait of the Artist', and Jonathan Wordsworth, 'The Climbing of Snowdon', in the latter's *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell U.P., 1970). Abrams discusses, with reference to Rous, Augustine, Mill and others, the originality of Wordsworth's form, and 'the power of his evangel'. Jonathan Wordsworth continues brilliantly the debate begun by Hartman's essay on the *via naturaliter negativa*.

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A.C. Bradley, 'Wordsworth' in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, London, 1909.

Aldous Huxley, 'Wordsworth in the Tropics' in *Do What You Will*, London, 1929.

Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (XII) and *The Eighteenth Century Background* (XI, XII), London, 1934 and 1940.

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Two publications of particular interest appeared as the first impression of this Casebook went to Press.

M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (O.U.P., 1971) makes *The Prelude* the centre of a major study of Romanticism's secularisation of belief.

J.C. Maxwell (ed.), *The Prelude: A Parallel Text* (Penguin, 1971) is a handy reading text which incorporates a number of corrections of the still standard 1959 edition.

**Part II**  
**(John Keats: 1795-1821)**  
**CHRONOLOGY OF JOHN KEATS**

1795 John Keats born at the 'Swan and Hoop', Finsbury Pavement, either 31 October or in the previous June.

His brothers George and Tom born in 1797 and 1799; his sister Frances Mary (Fanny) in 1803.

1803-II At the Rev. John Clarke's school in Enfield.

1804 Death of his father.

His mother marries again and Keats goes to live with his grandmother Mrs. Jennings in Edmonton.

1811 Apprenticed to Thomas Hammond, surgeon, at Edmonton.

1815 Enters Guy's Hospital as a student.

1816 His First published poem, a sonnet, appears in Leigh Hunt's Examiner.

Qualifies as an apothecary, 25 July.

Meets Leigh Hunt and Haydon.

Writes the sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and sleep and Poetry.

1817 First volume of Poems published (March).

Endymion written (April-November).

Stays in Isle of Wight (April) and Margate (May); visits Benjamin Bailey at Oxford in September; they go to Stratford.

Meets Charles Wentworth Dilke, Charles Armitage Brown, and Joseph Severn.

1818 Living at Hampstead.

Endymion published in April.

Writes Isabella and begins Hyperion.

Visits Teignmouth with his brothers, March.

George and Georgiana Keats leave for America. June.

Walking tour to the Lakes and Scotland with Brown, June-August.

First signs of consumption, September.

Meeting with Fanny Brawne, September.

Tom Keats dies, 1 December.

Moves to Wentworth Place to live with Brown.

1819 Writes *The Eve of St. Agnes*, January; *Odes and La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, April-May; *Hyperion abandoned*, *Lamia* and *To Autumn* written, Autumn.

Stays at Chichester with Brown in January; at Winchester with him, August-October.

Becomes engaged to Fanny Brawne.

Severe sore throat, December.

1820 *La Belle Dame sans Merci* published in *The Indicator*, 10 May; *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *the Eve of St. Agnes* and *Other Poems* published in July; writes final version of the 'Bright star .....

sonnet, September. Commencement of fatal illness, February.

Parts from Brown, May.

Stays at Kentish Town with Hunt, June-July.

Returns to Wentworth Place to be nursed by Fanny Brawne and her mother, August.

Sails from Gravesend for Italy with Severn, September.

Writes last letter from Rome, November.

1821 Dies at Rome late at night, 23 February.

Buried in the English cemetery near the tomb of Caius Cestius, 26 February.

## **Life and Works of John Keats**

Among the second generation of the Romantic poets, Keats was the last to be born and the first to die. He was born 31 October 1795 in London in a lower middle class family. His father Thomas Keats, who came to London from the West County, was the ostler or chief groom of the 'Swan and Hoop' livery stables, Finsbury Pavement. It was a flourishing establishment providing horses for hire in the city of London. In 1794 he reached a higher stage of



prosperity when he married the daughter of the proprietor, Frances Jennings. John was the first-born child of the marriage. There followed two brothers, George and Tom, and a sister, Frances Mary. Brothers and sister retained a close attachment and loyalty into adult life; some of Keats's most intimate self-revelations are in the long letters he wrote to George and his wife in America.

Their father was killed in a riding accident in 1804 and their mother married again almost immediately and the children were put under the guardianship of Mr. Richard Abbey. The few stories that have come down about Frances Keats suggest that she was a warm, impulsive woman, and she may have given her generous, spirited nature to her son. The affection between mother and son was strong. It is not out of place to surmise that Keats owed to her that serene acceptance of the natural world which was always there to steady him, even when another side of his complex nature was inclined to breed doubts and questionings. Most of the poets of this period have been strongly influenced and helped by either their ancestry or their environment, but Keats was born of uninspired parents in drab surroundings and there is no more remarkable instance of automatic poetic growth. As a small boy he showed little poetic promise. However, the children were brought up by their grandmother, Mrs. Jennings at Edmonton, then a village to the north of London. It was a comfortable middle-class upbringing. He went to school at Enfield, was happy there and had a reputation 'in all active exercises'. He was a fighter. He found a friend in Charles Cowden Clarke, an assistant master and the son of the headmaster who introduced him to English poetry. He aroused his literary talents and in 1813 gave him Spenser's poetry, which so fired his imagination that poetry became immediately and permanently the one great interest in his life. Besides, it was an enlightened policy in a school at that time to submit its pupils to good modern literature as well as the

classics. Spenser was Keats's first love: "What an images is that-- *sea-shouldering* whales," he said to Clarke. Spenser made him regard great poetry for some time as the projection of a state of exquisite and luxurious dreaminess, but even in this early phase of his appreciation there was lurking a sense of the sheer active power of poetic imagery.

As the grandmother of Keats children placed them under the authority of two trustees, their main dealings were with Mr. Richard Abbey, a tea broker, who was a cold, distrustful man and was cautious to the point of stinginess in paying out money from the estate. He took John Keats out from the school at Enfield, and bound him as an apprentice to a surgeon at Edmonton. For five years he served his apprenticeship, and for two years more he was a surgeon's helper in the hospitals; though skillful enough to win the approval, he disliked his work and his thoughts were on other things. He told his friend: "The other day, during a lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in a ray; and I was off with them to Oberon and fairyland." A copy of Spenser's *Faery Queene*, which had been given to him Charles Cowden Clarke, was the prime cause of his abstraction. Keats abandoned his profession in 1817 for the wild bohemian career of poetry and this must have appeared to his guardian as a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of things. Keats told the bewildered Abbey that he did not intend to practice as a surgeon: "I mean to rely upon my abilities as a poet." Though Keats had a single-minded devotion to poetry, he did not find it necessary to retire into an ivory tower in order to cultivate his ideal. He was passionately, amusedly, indignantly interested in all that went on around him. He lived a bustling life in London, going to theatre frequently, and talking far into the night with a wide circle of friends, who included cultivated young lawyers, artists, schoolmasters, and other professional men.

John Keats published in 1817 itself his first volume of *Poems*. This collection has little of merit, except the fine sonnets, “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer,” “I Stood Tiptoe Upon a Hill,” and “Sleep and Poetry.” The last piece stands out prominently. No doubt, the poem is immature but it contains a number of perfect lines and provides an effective exposition of Keats’s view of poetry. The first volume was modest in spirit and hardly went beyond the circle of Keats’s circle of friends. It was also true of his second volume, *Endymion*, which was brought in 1818. It is a long narrative poem in four volumes dealing with the Greek myth of the love of the Moon goddess, Cynthia, for a young, Greek shepherd, Endymian. The poem begins with the striking lines:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever;  
 Its loveliness increases; it will never  
 Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
 A bower quiet for us; and a sleep  
 Full of sweet dreams, health, and quiet breathing,

They illustrate the spirit of Keats’s later work with its magnetic appeal, melody and perfect finish. It has many quotable lines and its “Hymn to Pan” carries the theme, which echoes Wordsworth’s famous sonnet “The World is too much with us.” The poem gives splendid promise but on the whole it is rather chaotic with gaudy and overdone ornamentation. Keats felt this defect strongly as it is evident from his modest preface, where he speaks of *Endymion*, not as a deed accomplished, but only as an unsuccessful attempt to reveal the underlying beauty of the Greek mythology.

Keats’s third and the last volume was published in 1820. It contains the poems like “Lamia,” “Isabella,” “The Eve of St. Agnes”, and , besides the poems mentioned in the title, the odes, “Hyperion” and several others. Their poems.” There is also a considerable body of miscellaneous poetry, collected after

Keats's death, which includes "The Eve of Saint Mark," "La belle Dame sans Merci," and some of his finest sonnets. The volume has only two subjects, Greek Mythology and medieval romance. "Hyperion" is a magnificent fragment, suggesting the first arch of the cathedral that was never finished. Its theme is the overthrow of the Titans by the young sun-god Apollo. Keats himself realized that the knowledge required for this sort of colossal task is somehow lacking, so he laid aside this work, and only at the insistence of his publisher agreed to print the fragment with his completed poems. Through his last volume, especially in "Hyperion", the influence of Milton is apparent while the second volume, *Endymion*, suggests frequently the influence of Spenser. Of the longer poems in the volume, "Lamia" is the most appealing. It is the story of a beautiful enchantress, who turns from a serpent into a glorious woman and fills every human heart with delight. It was the mindless philosophy of old Apollonius that she vanishes away from her lover's sight forever. "Eves of St. Agnes," the most fascinating of Keats's medieval poems, is a vivid painting of the romantic mood. Like all the works of the Romantic poets like Shelly and Keats, it has an element of unreality for example consider the last lines of the poem;

And they are gone; aye, ages long ago

These lovers fled away into the storm,

It is the only possible way to all of Keats's Greek and medieval fancies though dreams do effect us because we are never the same before or afterwards. Keats himself stated: "The imagination may be likened to Adam's dream; he awoke and found it true." Keats's short poems like his great odes are exquisite and carry four major qualities of his poetry: a love of sensuous beauty, a touch of pessimism, a purely pagan delight in nature and a strong individualism. However, the qualities of his great poetry did not prevent the brutal attack by the critics of the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* and they

treated this circle contemptuously and jeered at “the cockney school of poetry.” They made a kind of social distinction probably because Keats was often pressed for money, when Abbey denied him funds for months at a times; he had to borrow from friends, and himself lent money to others when he could ill afford it. In time there came other, graver difficulties like the sickness and death of his beloved brother Tom from consumption, and the first signs of his own surrender to the same disease. ; quarrels with his friends and the attacks of literary journalists. It is often alleged that the poet’s spirit and ambition were broken by these attacks, but Keats was a strong character, and instead of quarreling with his reviewers, or being crushed by the criticism, he went quietly to work with the idea of writing poetry that should live forever. As Matthew Arnold acknowledge, “Keats had flint and iron in him.” At this time Keats had been extending the range of his reading and of his artistic interests generally. To his knowledge of Spenser, Chapman, and the Elizabethans, he now added Wordsworth and a closer study of Shakespeare. By submitting himself to the universal truth of Shakespeare’s range of situations and characters he learned to discount in poetry what was merely superficial or egoistic or didactic. He said: “ We hate poetry that has a palpable design on us.” This means a gradual revision of his estimate of life and poetry. Ever widening circle of his friends included Leigh Hunt who was in touch with greater men, the poets Shelley and Byron and the critic William Hazlitt. Through Hunt he made a number of friends. One was another young poet, John Hamilton Reynolds, another painter, Joseph Sevens; Benjamin Robert Haydon, another more celebrated painter, recognized Keats’s genius and gave him every encouragement. Haydon was a man of fine taste who persuaded the Government to buy the Elgin Marbles, the sculptures taken from the Parthenon frieze, for the nation. Keats also met Shelley, whose his ethereal temperament and social status intimidated him. Shelley, however,

wrote the most generous letter when Keats was dying, asking him to be his guest in Pisa and praised "Endymion" for "the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion." Other friends whom he met in 1817 were Benjamin Bailey who later became the Archdeacon of Colombo and to whom he wrote frequently unburdening himself most freely of his views on "the burden of the mystery." Charles Wentworth Dilke, a civil servant and amateur literary man and James Rice, a solicitor, a charming friend who, Keats said, "makes you laugh and think." If Keats wrote and felt like Hunt for a time it was because it was necessary for him to go through a phase of being a connoisseur before he could become truly creative. Keats's genius was yet unproved.

At the personal level his life was full of money worries, declining health and bitterness. The matters were made worse by his hopeless consuming passion for Fanny Brawne. He had become acquainted with this frivolous young lady during his stay at Hampstead with his friend Charles Brown. She encouraged him in the beginning but later on rejected him on the flimsy ground of being short statured, barely more than five feet in height. It was a tumultuous disturbance for him. As his letters to her indicate she certainly brought him pain as well ecstasy, jealous agony and constant anxiety caused by wondering how they might marry without an assured income. About his personality it is stated that "His hair was brown and fell in ringlets, his eyes were dark hazel. His upper lip was thick and his mouth rather wide, but his face, on the whole, had a peculiar sweetness of expression, with a character of mature thought and an almost painful sense of suffering. His voice was deep and grave."

As his experience grew he felt that the highest literary achievement demanded that a man should resolve contradictions and be capable of 'being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact&

reason.” He also increased his acquaintance with painting and sculpture. He spent days at the national gallery and among the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum; there were a number of Roman statuary, cameos and vases to which he had access. However, the setting in which he recreated Greek gods and heroes in *Endymion* owed more to the descriptions in Elizabethan poetry and to his direct observation of nature than to the inspiration of the ancient art. In 1818 Keats stayed at Teignmouth from March to May. His brother Tom was receiving treatment there for consumption but his condition deteriorated. In June George and Georgiana left to make their fortunes in America and Keats went to see them off from Liverpool. He then went on a walking tour with Charles Brown, first through the Lake District, visiting Rydal and Grasmere and climbing Skiddaw. Entering Scott by coach, they went to Dumfries and other places associated with the life and death of Burns. Keats was deeply moved, as Wordsworth had been on a similar tour. These thoughts lead him to write, “On Visiting the Tomb of Burns.” Then they continued on a truly walking tour which may not have had a good effect on Keats’s health. After a brief excursion to Northern Ireland he arrived back in Hampstead with an ominously bad sore throat.

Back in London he nursed Tom devotedly during his last illness and stayed by him till his death in December 1818. he was soon himself to experience the first symptoms of consumption from which he too was to die.

Though Keats was surrounded by all kinds of worries he had always aspired by intense self-discipline to attain a state

Where I may find the agonies, the strife

Of human hearts

It made Matthew say that “Keats had flint and iron in him, that he had character; that he was, as his brother George says, ‘as much like the Holy

Ghost as Johnny Keats' – as that imagined sensuous weakling, as the delight of literary circles of Hampstead.”

Now he was himself to come to grips with the problems of mortality. All the major poems of 1819 approach in different ways the contradiction between transient human joy and its inevitable interruption by sorrow or death.

In January 1819 he visited Bedhampton and Chichester for a few days with Brown. The Gothic carving of the cathedral and the old stone buildings in the town provided food for his imagination; this Gothic atmosphere is evoked in “The Eve of St. Agnes” and “The Eve of Saint Mark”; it is an instance of how in all his journeys Keats was taking in impressions to be selected and blended by the discipline of art. His travel impressions always retain a remarkable savour of the thing itself: his own personality does not come between the scene and us. Professor Roger Sharrock has observed in this connection:

“Whatever he is evoking, his vision is alive with appreciative energy, but this is disinterested: sometimes it is the sense of place, the ‘rich antiquity’ and ‘saintly imageries’ recalled in “The Eve of St. Mark;” sometimes it is natural description, the lushness of Devon in a shower, or the stubble fields near Winchester; or sometimes an individual human person, like the old woman ‘with a pipe in her mouth’ ....”

Keats wrote “The Eve of St. Agnes” at Chichester. There seems no reason to doubt that its atmosphere of rapturously romantic love is to be associated with Fanny Brawne. Keats’ one ambition was to write a successful play. However, he left two unsuccessful plays behind: (i) a tragedy. *Otho, the Great* and the unfinished *King Stephen*. He hoped to be free from the financial worries and turn over other plans



After a spring and early summer spent in Hampstead there was another visit to the Isle of Wight from June to August. In the middle of August he went with Brown to Winchester and remained there about a month; here he completed “Lamia” and wrote the “Ode to Autumn” after the walking in the fields in September. After his return to London his health declined rapidly. He had a severe haemorrhage in Feb. 1820 and was in bed over a month. Spending his time with many of his friends he decided to return to Hampstead and Wentworth Place, to the care of Fanny Brawne and her mother. The doctors decided that going to Italy could save him. Mr. Abbey had turned totally against him and he could not put his hands on what remained of his portion of the estate; His friends Taylor and Hessey raised funds for him, The faithful Joseph Severn, offered to go as his companion and on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1820 they sailed from Gravesend in the brig *Maria Crowther* They arrived in Rome in November and he died soon late at night on 23 February 1821 with Steven watching by him. He was buried in the Protestant cemetery near the pyramid tomb of Caius Cestius. The first biographer of Keats epitomized his life as “Three small volumes of verse, some earnest friendships, one passion and premature death”. Geoffery H. Crump rightly added to his comment:

“To his friendships we owe, besides occasional poems, his letters. No real understanding of Keats and his poetry is possible without a study of these letters, and they are better than any criticism or commentary of others. ... His heart was not broken, but it was starved (in the case of Fanny Brawne) His life was a turmoil of growing conflict between thought and sense and agonized passion, but in spite of it all his devotion to his chosen ideal and his chosen art was constant; very few poets

have set before them so clear an aim, or have pursued it so steadfastly.”

Keats is an artist in language who thought deeply and freshly about life and its problems. What he wrote in a letter in October 1818 is a prophecy come true that “I think I shall be among the English Poets after my Death.” Matthew has added, “He is: he is with Shakespeare.”

### **Keats’s Ideas On Poetry**

In the history of English Romanticism Keats is different from other romantic poets in more than one way. He had an unusually short span of life and whole of the poetic history of Keats is contained in the four years between the end of 1815 and the beginning of his fatal illness in February 1820 after which he wrote no poetry. While the political and social movements like the French Revolution profoundly influenced other romantic poets, Keats remained aloof and unaffected by them. S. A. Brooke says that, “It is not that are consciously laid aside, it is as they had never existed in the world.” He was acquainted with “the weariness, the fever, and the fret” of life, but instead of mourning about it, he tried to find some solace in the imaginary world of beauty. None-the less, Keats studied the great English writers in depth and thought a great deal about the nature of poetry but did not bring his personal point of view in form of a theory of poetry. His letters are the richest source to know his ideas about poetry, which became a more or less definite creed, but this creed was the logical outcome of his dominating love of beauty. “A poet,” he wrote, “is the most unpoetical thing in existence, because he has no identity; he is continually in for and filling some other body.” In other words, the poet has made up his mind to have no identity so that he could enter so completely into the identity of other people and things. In a memorable letter to Bailey he wrote on 22 November 1817: “if a sparrow were before my window, I take part in its existence, and pick about the gravel.” A whole letter to Woodhouse

written on 27 October 1818 deals with this point of the “unpoetical character”. In that valuable piece he says; “ it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing – it has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in a gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the philosopher delights the camelion Poet.” That is the attitude of the artist and because it was always Keats’s attitude he was, temperamentally, the perfect poet; and through the humility of his relations with his great subject he has come nearer than most other poets to a final expression of whatever he has chosen to express. He said: “ I can scarcely possess what I but dimly perceive – and yet I think I perceive it. ”Keats understood very well what poetry was; he knew that “if comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.” But he also knew that poetry does come always on anything but rarely, in its perfect form, and so he rewrote his poems again and again in order to achieve this perfect form.

In a letter written to George and Tom Keats on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1817 Keats clarifies two important ideas: firstly, the need for a art to be so vivid that we experience it as directly as we do living reality; secondly, that it should reveal that essential beauty of even a repulsive subject. It appears that for Keats these two ideas are really one: that to bring out the true reality of something is to show its beauty and vice versa. He consistently held the view that the function of art was to reveal the beauty and truth in all things and as a statement about art it is worthy of the most serious consideration.

In a letter to his publisher, Taylor, (27February, 1818), Keats formulated two axioms of poetry: (i) “Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity.”(ii) poetry should express in a heightened way what the reader can at once perceive as true. This does not mean that the poet should merely express elegantly what everyone already knows but that the poet should write

in such a way that we can instantly accept it as synchronizing with our experiences however out of the way the subject may be. For instance, take a grotesque subject of caring for Lorenzo's head in "Isabella" Secondly, "Its touches of beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the sun come natural to him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight"; probably no words could better express what Keats wishes to say here and probably no poem exemplifies it better than "To Autumn", over which the sun itself does rise, progress and set, leaving the reader in the "Luxury of twilight".

Keats being a craftsman knew fully well that when he wants poetry to come "naturally", it in no way means without a great deal of efforts if one wants to achieve the desired result. For example, consider his poem "The Eve of St. Agnes." which is a heavily corrected poem. In Keats's case, most of the corrections belong to the first draft of the poems and are the part of the initial creative process. Once the poems were completed, Keats did not engage himself in extensive tinkering. Also, when he speaks of poetry coming "naturally" this is not the same thing as "fluently". By using the term "naturally" he means to say that it should grow out of the experiences of the poet; it should be reflection of his feelings, his very identity at the time of the writing. The poems like "The Eve of St. Agnes" and the Odes clearly exemplify it.

In one respect at least Keats knew his own experience of poetry to differ markedly from such great poets as Milton and Wordsworth and to resemble that of Shakespeare. In a letter to his friend Reynolds he wrote on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1818: "We hate poetry which has a palpable design upon us" which means poetry that seems to force the reader to hold a particular opinion rather than allowing him to experience something in all its variety and contradictions.

Shakespearean, on the other hand, permits his reader to discover his own meanings interpreting the facts through his own reasoning power.

These ideas of Keats have added to his own poetry an intense vividness, a sense of living reality, both in characters and in the details, for example take the imagery in "Ode to Nightingale." We also find an absence of dogmatism and a revelation of life's contraries: in "The Eve of St. Agnes" warmth and cold are juxtaposed without being driven to seek or draw any conclusions about them. ; the melodramatic climax of "Lamia" stands free of comment and no moral is drawn as such. As W.J.Long has lucidly stated:

“ ‘ None but the master shall praise us; and none but the master shall blame’ might well be written on the fly leaf of every volume of Keats’s poetry; for never was there a poet more devoted to his ideal, entirely independent of success or failure... Keats lived for poetry alone, and as Lowell pointed out, a virtue went out of him into everything he wrote. In all his work we have the impression of this loyalty to his art; we have the impression also of a profound dissatisfaction that the deed falls so far short of the splendid dream.”

Thus, a marvelous faculty of discerning the real spirit behind the things and the thoughts carries out Keats’s high ideals of poetry. Among other factors, it is his new theory of poetic diction that was to supersede both the artificiality of Pope and the pedantry of Wordsworth. He really enjoyed the joy of his poetic ideals with liberty and delight as if following the aim set by Spenser, which is the keynote of his 1817 volume:

What more felicity can fall to creature  
Than to enjoy delight with liberty?

## **Keats as a Writer of Odes**

The Odes of John Keats represent the consummation of his poetic talent. They are “above criticism, pure gold of poetry--virgin gold” to borrow the expression of S.A. Brooke. As De Selincourt aptly observes, “In the Odes Keats has no master; and their indefinable beauty is so direct and so distinctive an effluence of his soul that he has no disciple.” Keats deliberately chose this medium. Like the lyric, ode is of Greek origin. It is a Greek word, which means a song usually of some length. The main features are an elaborate stanza – structure, a marked formality and stateliness in tone and style, and lofty sentiments and thoughts. In short, an ode is rather a grand poem, which is of two basic kinds: the public and the private. The public is used for ceremonial occasions, like funerals, birthdays, state events; the private often celebrates rather intense, personal and subjective occasions. It is inclined to be meditative and reflective. Tennyson’s “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” is an example of the former; Keats’s “Ode to Nightingale” is an example of the latter. Pindaric Odes are named after the Greek, poet Pindar while Horacian Odes are written after the model provided by the Latin poet Horace. In England Ben Jonson was the first to write in Pindaric tradition. Later Andrew Marvell wrote his Horacian Ode and Abraham Cowley introduced the “English Irregular Odes.”

When a reference is made to Keats’s odes it is usually to the five Odes of April and May 1819: it includes “To Psyche,” “On Indolence,” “To a Nightingale,” “On a Grecian Urn,” and “On Melancholy,” and the poem “To Autumn” written later in the year. These Odes mark the epitome of Keats’s poetic achievement, combining an intense and imaginative response to beauty with technical innovation and a peculiar felicity of expression. On the one hand, they are the happy poems but on the other there is too much of awareness of suffering and of the transience of beauty in them. They look at

the experience of joy and sorrow, at the decay of beauty and pleasure and consider how humanity can come to terms with life's contradictions. "To Autumn" was written in a more tranquil mood than the others but it brings to perfection Keats's command of form and richly meaningful use of language.

(a) **The Form of the Odes:** The stanzaic form of the great Odes seems so natural and inevitable that it is hard to realize how much of the innovation it was. Keats had long practiced the sonnet but had become disinterested and even dissatisfied with both its Petrarchan and its Shakespearean forms. The ten-line stanza of the Odes, which is Spenserian stanza, has a firmness and clarity of structure without inflexibility or obtrusiveness of rhyme: a quatrain (abab) gives an anchor to the verse and is followed by a variable sestet (generally cdecde) which allows the verse room to expand. The "Ode to Nightingale" features a highly effective short eight line and "To Autumn" replaces the sestet by a septet which gives the stanza an appropriate fuller quality.

(b) **Style:** The Odes display a fine descriptive power and a concentrated richness of expression. The word pictures are the integral part of the poem and a wealth of details is concentrated into a few words which are often boldly used. Nothing is redundant and so nothing can be spared. The epithets like 'cool-rooted' and 'fragrant -eyed' in "Ode to Psyche" compresses many images into a very few words; "To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees" in "Ode to Autumn" conjures up a vivid picture of a cottage garden with long-established trees laden with fruit and the phrase "cottage trees" to mean 'trees in a cottage garden' is a highly original use of language; "the coming musk-rose, in full dewy wine" in "Ode to a Nightingale" contains ideas of freshness conveyed by the words 'coming' and 'dewy' and yet maturity by the use of the word 'full' and heady intoxication by the words 'musk' and 'wine'. Metaphor, more concentrated than simile, provides some of the most notable

images: For example, consider the metaphor “Joy’s grape” in stanza three of “Ode to Melancholy,” which gives a strongly sensuous quality to the abstract word ‘joy’; less direct and forceful but highly ingenious is the ‘branched thoughts’ and ‘wreathed trellis of a working brain’ in “Ode to Psyche.” This conveys both the scenery that is conjured up in the imagination, and the anatomical appearance of the brain and the nature of the thought process in which ideas branch off from one another and interweave.

The figure of personification is also rather prominent and this lends vitality to inanimate objects or abstractions. The terms ‘bride’ and ‘foster-child’ of the Urn are rather metaphors than personifications but the phrase ‘Sylvan historian’ clearly attributes a human characteristic which emerges most clearly in the Urn’s speaking in the last stanza. Melancholy is very obviously personified as a veiled female figure. Autumn is given a more subtle personification, ‘conspiring’ with the sun or ‘sitting carelessly on a granary floor.’ In each case we are made to feel a direct relationship with the Ode. Besides, Keats’s use of alliteration adds the musicality to the Odes; their sheer beauty as sound sequences depends a good deal on these figures of alliteration and assonance as they reinforce in sound the sense, which the words express. We may notice, for example, the ‘*i*’ sound in the opening lines of “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as in the words: bride, quietness, child, silence, and time or the ‘*ee*’ sound in stanza four: these, green, priest, lead’st, sea, peaceful, streets and be. The sounds of the insects are clearly present in the nasal ‘*m*’ end ‘*n*’ and in the ‘*s*’ sound of “murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.” in “Ode to Nightingale.” As is the effervescence of wine in the explosive ‘*b*’ of “beaded bubbles winking at the brim,” the bark of the trees with the weight of the fruit and crispness of apples may all perhaps be felt in enunciating ‘moss’d cottage-trees” in “Ode to Autumn.” In this manner Keats exploited the angularities of the English language rather than seeking smoothness not natural to it and



doing so he gave his verse a vigour, which quickly counteracts any tendencies to sentimentality or morbidity.

The odes of Keats can be studied and properly appreciated as “A Choral Whole” to use the expression of Blackstone if we focus on a useful analogy of music which meant so much to Keats who told his friend Bailey that “had he studied music, he had some notions of the combinations of sounds, by which he thought he could have done something as original as his poetry.” As Keats was naturally inclined towards *a musical structure*, the Odes, like the “To Psyche”, “To a Nightingale,” “On a Grecian Urn” have a chorus of themes of love, ambition and art. No doubt, the musical analogy holds good in close analysis of the Odes, it is essential to study them from the point of view of still deeper analogy of growth in relationship. “Ode to Psyche” presents Keats’s most acutely realized vision of human love in its relation to nature as there the cosmic nuptials of Eros and Psyche consummated in the lap of nature, in “Endymion” there is a participation mystique between the fruition of human passion and fruitfulness of nature’s store. Stuart M. Sperry has given a very fascinating analysis of this ode in the book *Keats the Poet*, and says:

“As patroness of “shadowy thought,” the goddess will at least be forever welcome to the poet, and there is even the hope that the early love of Cupid and Psyche can actually be reborn within the poet’s consciousness. The casement of the mind stands fully open “To let the warm Love in,” suggesting as Bloom has noted, the continual accessibility of the poetic imagination.”

In “Ode on Indolence” the urn focuses on the details of a flower-strewn lawn. Keats as forcibly extricated himself from the world in which youth grows pale

and spectre-thin and dies, and entered into the relaxed and day-dreaming state, a creative indolence. Here the three figures representing Love, Ambition and Poetry are rejected in turn by the poet who is content with his deeper, less highly conscious imaginings. Keats alluded to this ode itself in a letter of June 9, 1819 and says: “You will judge of my 1819 temper when I tell you that the thing I have most enjoyed this year has been writing an “Ode to Indolence” which is indeed “a fresh poetical adventure”

All the ode shares a mood of tension between the world and the spirit with other odes. “Ode to Nightingale” has the theme of frustration and its expression too has traces of uneasiness. Bernard Blackstone has made a insightful observation:

“ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ treats the theme of ambition ... in no restricted sense: there is an ambition of love, of friendship, as well as of fame. But the thought of fame underlies it all: the ode is a meditation on immortality, in which the deathless song of the bird is set over against all human accomplishment.”

For a while the song of the bird achieves the status of a great of poetry, that is meant “To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.” The journey backward to the habitual self is painful after the supreme vision of being with the bird but “Keats manages his transition with exquisite tact; and the return in a ‘waking dream’ to the initial note of ‘drowsy numbness’ gives the poem a circular structure he so much loved” as Blackstone beautifully sums up.

Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” comes nearest to a formal expression of his philosophy of ‘Beauty and Truth’, which is the centre of power; because of its wisdom it is a “centre of healing” and offers the moving image of eternity. The dramatic action of the symbols and the cluster of images reveal Keats’s

reverence for tradition, for ‘sacred customs,’ for a religion that connects the three worlds. It was inevitable that the urn, the all-inclusive symbol, should present this facet of life side by side with the passion of the lovers and the ecstasy of the musician. ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ equation remains mysterious partly through the lack of definition as there can be statistical truth or there can be living truth. Similarly, there can be the intellectual beauty or the beauty of form. But two things are absolutely clear that the essence of the both has to be captured by the imagination and secondly, Keats always moves through impermanence to permanence. Hence we can not reach them without a degree of imagination and detachment. Keats’s “Ode to Autumn” is his “own bid for detachment.” There are three qualities which make it unique as Blackstone sums up: (i) It is the only major poem that is completely unisexual.(ii) All other Odes, to a greater or lesser degree, protest and exclaim only *To Autumn* simply accepts.(iii) Here all is ripeness, tumescence, fruition. Hence, Keats seems to be enjoying here the artistic fruition also in the golden sunshine of the season. In his valuable book The Consecrated Urn Bernard Blackstone has give a wonderful insight into the thought structure of all the Odes stating:

“ Much of the turbulence, the anguish, the questioning of these narrative explorations of ‘the sexual strife’ spills over into the intrinsically calmer lake of the great Odes. There is little relaxation of tension in *To a Nightingale* and *On Melancholy*. Pain is an undercurrent in the *Grecian Urn*, and lingers as regret in the placid wheelings of *To Autumn*. But there is a difference. Tensions remain, but are integrated in a broader pattern. It is as though what had existed in *Isabella*, *St. Mark* and *Lamia* as pure suffering,

loneliness, waste—as pain seen and felt in isolation—is here transmuted through *relationship*. The Odes form a unity, as the narratives did not. Keats is feeling his way towards an inclusive vision.”

Summing up the analysis of the great odes of Keats, Sperry makes a very perceptive observation that they are a “magnificent achievement judged by any standard.” He further adds:

“Taken together, the great odes of spring reveal an extraordinary development in self-awareness... They represent the purest expression of *Negative Capability* in Keats verse. Yet they also demonstrate the way in which that negative precept, when adopted as a cardinal tenet of poetic composition, culminates in a pervasive irony.”

### **Keats as a Romantic Poet**

Keats subscribes to the Romantic conviction that poetry overrides every other value. He says, “ I find that I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry.” Consequently, it leads to the supreme value of imagination and in “Ode to Nightingale” he enters the world of the bird “ on the viewless wings of poesy.” It means this belief is not only a theoretical idea but a force to apprehend the truth. He wrote in one of his letters that, “ I think poetry should surprise us by a fine excess...This poem (Endymion) will be a test, a trial of my powers of imagination.” A lover of “fine phrases,” Keats shares all the characteristic qualities of other Romantic poets of his generation but still he is unique in many ways in his approach, ideas and substance of poetry. He was an over-sensitive spirit whose poetic powers matured rapidly. His poetry and

the letters are “a living and breathing picture of man” to use Roger Sharrock’s words. His imagination is fired by all kinds of beauty, which can be realized through the senses. Even the beauty of the unknown regions or hidden from the mortal eye could fill him with intensity of emotions. When he studied Chapman’s Homer this is what happened to him:

Then felt I some watcher of the skies,  
 When a new planet swims into his ken;  
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes,  
 He stared at the Pacific, and all his men,  
 Looked at each other with a wild surmise.

The pursuit of the unknown, the invisible, and the infinite has inspired the romantic poetry of the world.

The romantic poets are dissatisfied with the present order of things and so they prefer to escape from the present into the past and even in the ancient world of Hellas. Shelley being a futurist believed that the Spring or the Golden age is yet to come, while Keats found it in the past. As a result, Greek myths, Greek literature and Greek art made a special appeal to him. Two characteristics –Love for nature and fascination for the supernatural—attract the romantic poets for different reasons. It may be the delight in the sensuous beauties in nature or its spiritual presence both makes them communicate with these charms. Like the romantic poets he loved nature for its remarkable beauties but there is a difference as Compton Rickett pointed out:

“Where Wordsworth spiritualizes and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express it through the senses. The colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsing music, these are the things that stir him to the depths; there is not a mood of Earth

he does not love, not a season that will not cheer  
and inspire him.”

Poetry for Keats is a spontaneous outpouring of the heart, for example take his “Ode to Nightingale,” which he composed within a few hours with all the music and melody that the song of the bird has. Keats’s poetry has the melancholy note which enriches the poetry of all the romantic poets, but Keats brings to his poetry the fact of human suffering, transient nature of human existence and experiences more effectively. Focusing on the morbid state of mind first, he enters into the deeper and tragic mystery of existence measuring even the pain of joy as in “Ode to Melancholy.” It is pertinent to note that the romantic quality of indirection and suggestiveness reaches an acme in the poetry of Keats when he lingers lovingly over each word and fills it with a wealth of meaning as in “Ode to Autumn.” Keats’s poetry unites, unlike other romantic poets, in the form and the content of his poems the romantic as well as classical traits. The rare union adds perfection to his art. The imagination and restraint move in harness, emotion and self-control achieve a perfect felicity of mood and expression. The romantic spirit with unlimited range of sensations and emotions is given a perfect balance in form and thus the two—the content and the form—are kept in perfect harmony. However, The following characteristics are the hallmarks of Keats’s poetry:

(i) **Sensation and Sensuousness**

Keats believed that “Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses” as he wrote to Reynolds on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1818. It means that we should not only read them but also feel them first as a source of delight, and then as symbols of the life of mind and emotions. Keats was keenly alive to all perceptions as it was a temperamental quality of his poetic genius. As Wordsworth pointed out, a poet possesses extraordinary “organic

sensibility,” his sense impressions are more acute and hence there is in him the desire for the greater gratification of the physical senses, which is called “sensuousness.” Keats is “enchantingly and abundantly sensuous” as Arnold remarked, because he is keen to satisfy, unlike other poets, all the five senses. Poetry for Keats finds its origin in what he means by ‘sensation’ and at the same time, poetry exists to express and to communicate sensation. Clarence Thrope writes in his study of the poet’s mind that by ‘sensation’ Keats meant “feelings or intuitions, the pure activity of the imagination.” Much more recently, Walter Jackson Bate, has noted in his book, *John Keats* that “Hazlitt’s constant use of the word ‘sensations’ in the traditional empirical sense—virtually equivalent to concrete experience—added a new term to Keats’s own habitual vocabulary.” The first asserts the primacy of the mind and its own intuitions. The second stresses the evidence of the senses and the contact they provide with material phenomena. Nevertheless, the whole fabric of his thinking is charged by the notion of ‘sensation’ and determines the course of his poetic career. More frequently Keats uses the word ‘sensation’ as a synonym for feeling or emotion. And his unique potential to communicate them in language made him a poet par excellence.

Poetry, according to Milton’s famous saying, should be “simple, sensuous and impassioned” and no one can question the eminency of the quality of sensuous in Keats’s poetry. As Matthew Arnold admits in his essay on Keats that

“Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous; the question with some people will be, whether he is anything else? Many things can be brought forward which seem to show him as under the fascination and sole dominion of sense, and desiring nothing better.”

There is the exclamation in one of his letters: “ O for a life of sensation rather than of thoughts!” while in other he says, “ that with a great Poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.” In isolation it implies an emasculated longing for indulgence in sensual experience to the exclusion of a more mature understanding or as Arnold put it a lack of “Character and self-control.” But, taken in its difficult context it acquires quite different connotations as Keats himself stated in a letter to Bailey dated 22 November 1817:

“ I am certain of nothing but of 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... I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning—and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections?”

It might seem very odd to doubt that logical processes of thought can reach the truth, yet Keats is right in thinking that logical thought proceeds nowhere without some intuitive leap or acceptance of what is unproven. For Keats, the intuitive grasp of truth is the main method of reaching it; beauty is the criterion of a truth so attained Thus direct experience i.e. sensation, is not inferior to abstract reasoning but is an essential means to a true understanding of life.

There are admirers of John Keats who worship him because of the sensuous strain in his poetry as the poet of

“Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair,  
Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast.”



Sensation, whether real or imagined, was to him the finest experience that life brought because it is senses that are made creative by exaltation. In Keats's poetry a moment of exaltation occurs when more than one sense participates in the same experience at the same moment, for example, consider the following lines of "Ode to Psyche":

'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,  
Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,  
They lay calm –breathing on the bedded grass;  
Their arms embraced their pinion too;

The sense of touch, smell, and sight combined with other shades of coloured emotions, create these lines. His acute awareness of taste is reflected in passages like the following from "The Eve of St. Agnes":

While he from forth the closet brought a heap  
Of candied apple, quince, and plum and gourd,  
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon,  
Manna and dates, an argosy transferr'd  
From fez, and spiced dainties every one  
From silken Samarcand to Cedar'd Lebenon."

Or consider some lines from "Ode to Nightingale":

"O for a draught of vintage that hath been  
Cooled a long age in the deep—delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance and Provencal song and sun-burnt mirth."

The following lines From "Ode to Nightingale" are a wonderful example of his sense of smell:

"Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs  
But in embalmed darkness guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket, and fruit- tree wild.

Similarly, Keats flutters from one sensuous delight to another in “Ode to Autumn” where a spirit of generosity and prodigal luxuriance is prevails everywhere. The sun conspires with the earth:

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,  
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
 And still more, later flowers for the bees'  
 For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

Through the use of the operative verbs, the poet shows the functioning of active spirit of nature expanding the landscape. In the last stanza, Keats enjoys the manifold note of music of nature. “Ode to Nightingale” is the most sensuous of all of his Odes as it thrives in the rich delight of all the senses. The very opening lines shows the effect of the rapturous song on the poet: “My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains /My senses.” For a moment he catches the glimpse of the bird in an exalted, celestial setting when:

.. happily the Queen-Moon is on her throne;  
 Clustered around by all her starry fays,

To realize the quality of Keats's total sensuousness consider the following passage from the same poem:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feel,  
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet,  
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild;  
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
 Fast fading violets covered up in leaves;  
 And mid May's eldest child.

Keats is a gifted word-picture painter. In a poem like “Ode to Nightingale” his sensuous enjoyment of the song of the bird gives some glimpses into eternity and he finds the bird immortal. Middleton Murry says in this context: “With a magnificent sweep of imagination, he sees the song and the bird as one. The bird becomes pure song, and inherits the eternity of beauty.” Actually the whole of his poetry is charged by the luxuriant delight generated by his subtle sensitivity. His indulgence in the sensation makes some of the critics think that he is an escapist who wishes to ignore the hard realities of life or even to think about them. It is not true of all of his poetry and his later poetry makes it abundantly clear that “there is in him something more than sensuousness ... signs of character and virtue,” “flint and iron” as Matthew Arnold put it. Nonetheless, the sensation to him was all-important, because only through sensation could he come into communion with the principle of beauty.

### **(ii) Keats’s Philosophy of Beauty and Truth**

Keats categorically admits that “With a great poet, the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration.” Then he chooses a goal for himself that “I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful.” No wonder, love of beauty is the dominant note in his poetry from the early “Endymion” to his last poem “Hyperion.”

Keats is an artist who wrote to Shelley that “An artist must serve Mammon,” that is, his own art rather than humanity and his letter perhaps marks the beginning in England of the doctrine that was later to develop into “Art for Art’s sake.” And almost hundred years later, W.B. Yeats wrote of him, “His art is happy, but who knows his mind?” in *Ego Dominus Tuus*. His art was happy because its enthusiasm and inspiration lay in the central principle of

beauty though out of his suffering was born the noblest poetry. As Geoffrey Crump says:

“The central fact of Keats’s life was the existence of the spiritual essence called beauty; and instead of his enthusiasm for beauty leading him to philosophical speculation, as it led Shelley, he interested himself in revealing this beauty to human senses, and proclaiming its universal importance, choosing poetry as his medium.”

Keats admitted as Clarence Dewitt Thorpe quotes in his book, *The Mind of John Keats*:

“In the presence of the natural objects of unusual beauty or significance, the poet becomes oblivious of the present world. He loses himself in contemplation, becomes detached from his surroundings, as ‘fainter-gleamings’ shoot over his fancy, and visions of human form appear, until presently his imagination takes wing, and poetic creation is accomplished.”

Keats whose sensibility was so much grounded in the senses could experience how this imaginative process of understanding and comprehending beauty gradually evolves. In his letter to Bailey in which he compares the imagination to Adam’s dream he asserts that “I have the same idea of all our Passions as of Love; they are all in their *sublime*, creative of *essential* Beauty.” He repeatedly says, “an ideal beauty is refined and released from such common ingredients by imagination which, through its energies, bestows a kind of ‘finer tone’ on what it perceives.”

As a votary of beauty, Keats believes in two things: (a) it is imagination that generates beauty even in the common things and (b) it evolves toward sublimity. Keats has written in another letter to Benjamin Bailey on 22 November, 1817: “I am certain of nothing but of 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.” Keats suggests that Beauty cannot be perceived through cold logic or reasoning. Only sensation can lead to beauty. For him sensations include two type of experiences—“the Heart’s affections,” which refers to instinctive impulses and, “Imagination” which means intuition. Thus ‘impulses’ and ‘intuition’ are the two means to perceive beauty. Keats attains the perception of beauty through love as in “Endymion” and firmly believes that “sublimated passion, like love, leads to essential beauty.”

Beauty in Keats’s poetry in the beginning was an entirely sensuous experience. Every common object, which might leave others unmoved and unaffected, thrilled him and filled him aesthetic delight. His friend Haydon bears testimony to his love of beauty when he states; “the humming of a bee, the sight of a flower, the glitter of the sun, seemed to make his nature tremble; then his eyes flashed, his cheeks glowed, and his mouth quivered.” The song of the nightingale could cause numbness and transport him to the fairyland into the realm of the delight of the song. Autumn, a season of decay, could fill him with a new charm of the golden mists and its own sweet music. His sensuousness is universal and his love for the sensuous beauty of all kinds includes the female beauty as well as it is conveyed in the oft-quoted couplet of “soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy neck.” As Middleton Murry remarks, “Beauty in all things—this was Keats’s great poetic intuition, and the revelation of this Beauty, the great human purpose to which he dedicated himself and for which he was prepared to die.” In

“Endymion” his yearning passion for the beautiful becomes the quintessence of his poetry and hence a source of perpetual bliss:

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever;  
Its loveliness increases: it will never,  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”

The idea of beauty gradually became an overwhelming passion for Keats as he wrote in one of his letters, “ I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness for the beautiful, even if my night’s labours should be burned every morning.” Keats knew that sensuous enjoyment, however intense it maybe, cannot attain permanence as many of his Odes confirm. Therefore he attempts to relate beauty to intellectual and spiritual planes. In other words, it still includes sensuousness but does not stop there. He believes that “What imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth” Thrope explains this idea further stating: “ A sense of spiritual reality which the mind apprehends imaginatively – or immediately rather than indirectly—is Beauty; this is also Truth.” In this sense beauty does not refer to physical sensuous objects, but to “abiding universal truth.”

Keats is convinced that truth can not be achieved through muddling intellect. In a letter to Bailey he says: “I am zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning.” Reason fails to discover it while intuition discovers it automatically. Hence, beauty is nothing but intuitively discovered truth. As he again reiterated it in a letter of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1819, “ I can never feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its beauty.” Middle Murry corroborates the idea thus: “He (Keats) is unable to recognize truth except

by the sign of beauty” while Thorpe sums up Keats’s concept of beauty stating that “a direct and intuitive perception of truth is Beauty.’ Arnold confirms it when he says: “To see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth, and Keats knew it.” In “Ode to Grecian Urn” Keats had identified that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.”

However, beauty ceases to be an abstract idea; it is not a cloistered beauty of the dream world but has been closely linked to a realistic world of humanity and social or individual suffering. Keats’s concept of beauty gradually evolves from being only sensuous, aesthetic and intellectual to its spiritual basis as his imagination mellowed with experience and sobered with intimate contact with humanity that matured his thought and sense of judgment. In other words, with a knowledge of human suffering – the severe illness and death of his brother Tom – and personal sorrows, came the fullness and profundity to know the mystery of existence. He could realize that even beauty must die as he says in “Ode to Melancholy”:

“She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;  
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu;

If the principle of Beauty and Truth prevail eternally, death too is the certainty, which dominates human life. The reality has left tone of melancholy and sadness. Keats, who is oppressed by the idea of death, pessimistically reflects in the “Ode to the Nightingale”:

“Darkling I listen; and for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful death.”

.....

“To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,”

On seeing the Elgin marbles Keats was moved; he says: “Of God-like hardships tell me, I must die.” In his beautiful sonnet, “Why did I Laugh To-Night” he admits:

Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,  
But death intenser, Death is life’s high weed.”

Keats is capable of viewing life as a whole and not life and death as separate parts. With this comes a profound acceptance of life as it is, passing beyond all rebellion, “into a condition of soul, to which the sum of things- foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor,” become necessary and true and beautiful. If earlier he believed that beauty resides only in the bright side of human life now he realizes that “the principle of beauty” resides “in all things” good and bad alike. Thus, Keats achieved a high poetic ideal when he could seek beauty in “the agonies, the strife, /Of human heart” beyond the “ realms of Flora and Old Pan.” Keats’s ideal vision of beauty in “The Grecian Urn” of “ Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty” went a step further in the evolution of his concept of beauty in “Hyperion.” He correlates beauty with power. According to him, the prettiest is the mightiest. Apollo is more beautiful than the Titans. Therefore he is also more powerful and overthrows Hyperion and other gods of the earlier order.

For its eternal law  
That first in Beauty should be first in might.

S.A.Brook’s comment on these lines is noteworthy,” Where there is highest Beauty, there is of necessity the greatest power. It is the instinct of all spirits to bow unquestioning to beauty, if they have the heart to see it.” The poetic height of John Keats can be measured by his aesthetics of Beauty and his dedication to it. He says: “ If I should die I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory; but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made



myself remembered.” Matthew Arnold aptly sums up stating: “It is no small thing to have so loved the principle of Beauty as to perceive the necessary relation of beauty with truth, and of both with joy. ”And this is the supreme value of Keats’s poetry

### **(iii) Keats’s Hellenism and Medievalism**

Shelley said, “Keats was a Greek” and rightly admired him as “a Greek of Greeks” because Greek literature and culture absorbed and fascinated him so deeply. Keats’s poetry is steeped in Hellenistic spirit. Hellenism implies admiration and attachment for Greek culture, outlook, literature and art. It is derived from the word ‘Hellene,’ that is, Greek. In one of the letters to his friends Severn, Keats expressed his undiminished wonder at “ all that incarnate delight” of the Hellas. He has himself admitted, “ I feel more and more everyday as my imaginations strengthens that I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me... I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches or with Theocritus, in the vales of Sicily.” Keats could have a temperamental affinity with the Greeks and hence he could grasp the secrets of Hellenism in a way never attained by other poets.

If one attempts to discover the sources of his knowledge of Greek, it is self-evident that like Shakespeare, Keats knew little Latin and less Greek but he came under its spell through three significant sources;

(a) Keats had read the translations of the Greek classics through the Elizabethans. It was George Chapman’s translation of Homer, *which* inspired his mind and stimulated his interest in Greek mythology and literature. After reading it he composed his famous sonnet, “On Looking Into Chapman’s Homer” which reveals his intense joy: “ Then felt I like some watcher of the skies, When a new planet swims into his ken.”

(b) It is believed that he learnt by heart Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, which made him well-versed in classical mythology.

(c) He devoted himself seriously to the works of those Renaissance poets and dramatists who had used classical mythology in their works profusely. He read Spenser, Lyly, Milton, and Flecher. Through them he could catch the spirit of the ancients.

(d) Besides, Greek sculpture also wielded significant influence on Keats and his poetry. According to many critics Hellenism came to Keats more through Greek sculpture than through Greek literature. The famous *Elgin Marbles*, which were brought from Greece by Lord Elgin and placed in the British Museum in 1816, also fired his imagination and he recorded his appreciation in his sonnet, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." De Selincourt has emphasized that Keats had an essential kinship with the thought of Greece. Two aspects of the Greek spirit attracted Keats most: its cult of Beauty and Sense of Joy, which is the integral part of Greek way of life. However, his presentation of the Greek or Hellas is romantic and not realistic because he had entered the world of Greek culture and art imaginatively.

Keats visualized the beauty of Greek mythology and literature and out of sheer love chose Greek stories and legends as the themes for his poetry. "Endymion," "Hyperion," "Lamia," "Grecian Urn," and "Ode to Psyche" all have themes borrowed from the Greeks. He captures their spirit using the Greek form, that is, the 'Ode.' His "Ode On Grecian Urn" is the remarkable feat of the poet's imagination, which shows his power of entering into the world of Hellenic Beauty, love, festivity, ritual and celebration. Briefly, the Greek spirit permeates through out the poem and transports the reader into that entirely different world of "eternal whispering" to borrow a phrase from his sonnet "On the Sea."

To convey the intensity of experience and recognition of the diverse strands of sensation Keats adopts two devices: one of cataloguing of different items, which mysteriously coalesce to yield the desired goal and other of using Greek allusions. For example take an early sonnet, “After Dark Vapours”:

The calmest thoughts come round us—as of leaves  
 Budding—fruit ripening in stillness—autumn suns  
 Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves, --  
 Sweet Sappho’s cheek, --a smiling infant’s breath,  
 The gradual sand that through an hour glass runs, --  
 A woodland rivulet—a Poet’s death.

In the landscape of nature, the presence of the Greek goddess of wisdom “Sappho,” the mystery of the ever-advancing time and the death of a poet shows that Keats works out on a thought only by analogy. Obviously Keats had a “philosophic” mind and he was occupied with the idea of making the highest use of poetry. He frequently refers to Muses, Apollo, Pan, Endymion, Diana, Narcissus and a number of other Greek gods and goddesses. In “Ode to Nightingale,” an ode not based on a classical subject, he refers to the Greek deities, Dryads, nymphs, the goddess Flora, Bacchus and his pards etc. instinctively. W.M.Rossetti has found in the “Nightingale” “a surfeit of mythological allusions” which are, to quote the words of Douglas Bush, “are so harmonious that one may forget they are there.” In this context De Selincourt observes that

“He realized instinctively the spirit in which the legends had taken their rise, and by the same artistic sense which led the Greek to incarnate in human form the spirit recognized by his religion in the beauty and the power about him, Keats made it his own.”

Keats uses such allusions not as merely conventional personifications but for their charm as they are the “vital embodiment of ideas” to use a phrase of William Michael Rossetti. Like the Greeks, the poet, who takes innocent delight in the physical side of life, masters the realm of Flora and Pan.

However, there are two major areas in which the Greek influence manifests itself rather strongly: (a) His poetic style and (b) his attitude to nature. Keats, unlike the romantic poets, observes strictly the rules of proportion and symmetry and form. His poems specially the Odes are the finest example of his mastery over form. He has a Hellenic feeling for style, that is, about the selection of the right word and phrase. Commenting on his polished and chiseled style W.J.Long comments “ he seems to have studied words more carefully than did his contemporaries, and so his poetic expression, or the harmony of word and thought , is generally more perfect than theirs.” Arnold admired him stating that, “in rounded perfection and felicity of phrase, he is like Shakespeare.” Keats’s poetry has a style which is marked by Hellenic lucidity and directness, for example, consider the following lines from “Ode to Melancholy”:

“And joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu; and aching pleasure nigh,  
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.”

The whole picture emerges with a classical clarity and directness. Though he indulges in the romantic excesses in poetic style but he combines it with classical restraint if the content demands. For example take the following lines of the “Ode to Nightingale”:

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell  
To toll me back to my sole self.

Or the lines

Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Precise and at the same time concrete picture carries the effect of Grecian style which is marked by a “calm grandeur, majesty, simplicity and austerity.” Keats celebrates both the aspects of the Greek life: Dionysian and Apollonian-- the former represents the emotional life and love pursuits and the latter ecstatic excitement and luminous order and his “Ode on Grecian Urn” epitomizes the culture of the Hellenes. In his famous book, *The Starlit Dome* Wilson Knight has pointed out that Keats derives the significant portion of his imagery from the ancient Pagan rituals and ceremonies. For example consider that stanza of “Ode on Grecian Urn” where a ‘heifer’ is being taken for the sacrifice or the lines from “Ode to Psyche” where the poet wants to build a temple “in the untrodden region of my mind” to worship the goddess Psyche. Another feature of his poetic style that directly has the influence of the Greek poetry is the pictorial quality, for illustration, in the opening stanza

“The Eve of St. Agnes” which presents a vivid picture of the January chill:

“Ah bitter chill it was!

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;

The hare limp’d through the frozen grass.”

Likewise, “Ode to Autumn” impersonates the season through its manifold activities as a reaper, gleaner and cider-presser. She is personified as

“Sitting careless on a granary-floor.

Her Hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or

On a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,

Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while her hook

Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers.

Keats's attitude to Nature is marked by the typical characteristics of Greek temper that is three-fold in its feelings:- (a) worship, (b) joy and (c) wonder and thrill. According to Stopford A. Brooke, "the temper of the soul with which he looked on nature had all the simplicity, and the same feeling of joy and worship together, which a young Athenian might have had." Similarly, Courthope affirms "he indeed resembles the Greeks in his vivid sense of the joyous and multitudinous life of nature." Keats's child-like wonder at the beauties of nature led him to impersonate them and mythologize them as most of his poems including the Odes reveal. Being a true artist, Keats combines in his poetry the classical traits with the romantic zeal in an ideal balance.

Keats enjoyed Greek art with a passion of a lover. Like them he was a devotee of beauty and asserted; "With a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration." Hence it is the ultimate object of all art. Like the Greeks he uses Beauty as an all-inclusive term, which has a large scale to cover from the physical to spiritual where it is identified with Truth, for instance, in "Ode to Grecian Urn." Weekes observes "for him as for them (Greeks), beauty is not exclusively material, nor spiritual, nor intellectual, but finds its expression in the fullest development of all that goes to make up human perfection."

Keats talks about Greek polytheism as a "religion of joy." If there is the intoxicating delight in the momentary experience of the song of the bird, ideal embodiment of the moment in art, in song, or in marble as in "Ode to Nightingale" or "Ode on a Grecian Urn," it is an imperishable source of joy. In his book, *On Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer*, Arnold praises Keats for being Greek, "as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus... composed with the eye on the object, a radiancy and light

clearness being added.” Commenting on “Ode to Maia” Douglas Bush has said something so very true that it can be suitably applied to all his poetry that

“ the concrete details are suffused with a rich nostalgia. The hard edges of the classical Greek writing are softened by the enveloping emotion and suggestion. In his classical moments Keats is a sculptor whose marble becomes flesh.”

If the classicism emphasizes the concrete and the sensuous Medievalism, that is the revival of interest in the middle ages, stresses the abstract and the spiritual. The romantics were dissatisfied with the present and the sordid reality of their immediate surroundings. Therefore they looked to the past or the future. If Shelley found relief by imagining the future to be the golden age of perfect happiness, Keats, like many other poets, escaped into the past and was fascinated by the colour and pageantry, tales of love and adventure of the middle ages. For illustration, consider his poems like “The Eve of St. Agnes,” “Isabella” and “La Belle Dame Sans Merci.” The middle ages were the ages of Feudalism where the mentions of the feudal lords were the centre of life. In “The Eve of St. Agnes” Keats depicts such a feudal mansion with a vivid account of medieval pomp, colour and pageantry:

A casement high and triple-arched there was  
 All garlanded with carven imageries  
 Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass.  
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes.

The medieval life was characterized by the beliefs I a host of superstitions Keats strikes a medieval note when he refers to one such superstition:

They told her how, upon St Agnes Eve,

Young virgins might have visions of delight,  
 And soft adorings from their lovers receive,  
 Upon the honeyed middle of the night,  
 If ceremonies due they did aright.

The poem closes on a note of supernatural terrors:

The lovers fled away into the storm,  
 That night the Baron dreamed of many woe,  
 And all his warrior guests, with shade and form,  
 Of witch, and demon and large coffin-worm,  
 Were long be- nightmared.

The weird and uncanny atmosphere of the Middle Ages is often evoked by the use of suggestive words and images. Thus, in the “Ode to the Nightingale”, the mystery and magic of those bygone times are artistically suggested by the following lines:

The same that oft-times hath,  
 Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam,  
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Another aspect of the Middle Ages that fascinated Keats is its spirit of knight-errantry and chivalry. For instance, take the following lines of “La Belle Dame Sans Mercy,” a ballad steeped in medieval atmosphere where the ballad metre and ballad manner is used effectively:

I saw pale kings and warriors too,  
 Pale warriors, death pale were they all;  
 They cried- La Belle Dame Sans Merci  
 Hath thee in thrall.

The revival of the old metre forms is an essential part of the medievalism and Keats with his historical imagination could recreate the romantic charm of the remote and even the unknown ages.



**(iv) Keats's Idea of 'Negative Capability':**

On 21st December 1817, Keats wrote a letter to his brothers George and Tom in which he used the term '*Negative Capability*' while enumerating the qualities of a man of letters. He says:

“ ... what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability* that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact or reason ....”

If one examines the statement of Keats dispassionately, one realizes that for him a necessary condition of poetry is submission to things as they are, without trying to intellectualize them into something else, submission to people as they are without trying to indoctrinate or improve them. Keats found this quality in Shakespeare at its fullest.

Walter Jackson Bate analyses Keats's idea of “Negative Capability” in his article of the same name very thoughtfully. He says that there is a three-fold idea at the heart of his concept of “Negative Capability”: First, the problem of form or style in art; second, the ideal toward which he is groping is contrasted more strongly with the egoistic assertion of one's own identity. Third, the door is further opened to the perception—of the sympathetic potentialities of the imagination.

The occasion, which provoked this idea, was when he went to see an exhibition of the American painter, Benjamin West, specially his picture “Death on the Pale Horse”. Keats found it “flat” He writes in the letter:

“The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate,

from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine 'King Lear', and you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness...."

Keats makes it almost compulsory that in art all that is irrelevant and discordant must "evaporate." Hence "Truth" and "Beauty" spring simultaneously into being. The harmony of these two would excite the "depth of speculation" of human insight. Keats quotes the example of *King Lear*. As it is believed Hazlitt's essay "On Gusto," which suggests the word 'briskness' for "an imaginative intensity" also influenced Keats's thinking about the poetic style.

The second part of his idea of "Negative Capability" is direct and even "transparent" as his friend Bailey pointed out. It involves negating one's own ego. It hints at two significant things: first is 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' etc. which means merging one's identity completely with the object contemplated. He should have no self at all and "should be capable of picking with the sparrow on the gravel" as Keats wrote in his letter to Woodhouse. Further he added, "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity, he is continually in, and filling, some other body." The second is the use of the pejorative word, "irritable" that refers to deliberate and frustrated efforts to justify the one's egoistic assertion.

The third extension of this thought is to "explore the potentialities of the imagination so that one could attain what Wordsworth calls "wise passiveness" or "ripeness" with a view to making humanity "a grand democracy of Forest Trees" to borrow a phrase of Keats himself. To achieve

this goal, the ideal of “disinterestedness” is directly helpful for realizing the “sympathetic potentialities of imagination” because it “was not a mere escape hatch from the prison of egocentricity, but something thoroughgoing, something indigenous and inseparable from all the activities of the mind” as Hazlitt stated in *Principles of Human Action*. In this respect, Shakespeare was to be “The least of an egoist..... he was nothing in himself : but he was all that others were, or that they could become.... He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it” as Hazlitt stated in his lecture on “Shakespeare and Milton.” Thus, the “Negative Capability” adds to the power of imagination and “ a great degree hieroglyphic visioning” to use the expression of Walter Jackson Bate. Sidney Colvin identified Keats’s “Negative capability” with sympathetic imagination and writes, “ the very essence of his genius was the predominance, namely of the sympathetic imagination over other faculties.” Hence his work was not inspired by his own personality but by the things outside himself, be it a Nightingale or an Urn , a season or a book.. What Maurice Bowra has said about the Romantic poet in general can be truly applied to Keats with a view to appreciating him properly. He says:

“The Romantic poet appeals to us because he does something which we can not but respect. He believes that in exercising his imagination he creates life and adds to the sum of living experience.... We may not accept all his assumptions and conclusions, but we must admire the spirit in which he approaches his task., and admit that the problems which he seeks to solve must not be shirked by anyone who wishes to understand the universe in which we live.”

Critical Appreciation of Keats's "Ode to Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Eve of St. Agnes"

(a) "Ode to Nightingale"

Keats's "Ode to Nightingale" is one of his finest Odes and it embodies the poet's spontaneous reaction to the rapturous song of the bird. The poem was written in April 1819 when Keats was staying at Wentforth Place, Hampstead with Charles Brown. Mr. Brown himself has given a first hand account of the extempore and spontaneous composition of this ode.

"In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song, and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grassy plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house I perceived that he had some scrapes of paper in his hand, and these ....contained his poetic feelings on the song of our nightingale."

In spite of the swiftness of the composition, the poem is marked by a complex thematic structure and artistic excellence. The perfect art of music of the bird, Poetry, Metaphysics and Dreams form one layer of the themes while the contrast between the existential conditions in the world of the bird and the world of man form the other and they are cemented together by the subtle poetic devices. The poet's primary poetic concern is for the synthesis, that is, for the creation of bird as evolving symbol while the dramatic thematic development of the poem shows that "frustration is the theme, not the expression. Yet the expression too has the traces of uneasiness. The dull pain of the first strophe is more real than the triumphant escape from it" as Blackstone has beautifully summed up the thought.

The ode has eight stanzas and they are held together by an organic unity and logical development. The first stanza introduces the reader to the effect of the song of the bird on the poet. The contrast between the benumbed lethargy of the poet and the ecstatic song of the bird is implied. The first stanza vividly depicts the sensation of “drowsy numbness” that is akin to the mood of indolence, that is celebrated in the “Ode to Indolence.” The second stanza shows the craving for “a draught of vintage, ” for a beaker

..... full of the warm South,  
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
 And purple-stained mouth;

The contrast between what is and what ought to be in the second strophe shows that the poet’s primary concern is for synthesis and for the creation of the bird as an evolving symbol. When the poet directly confronts the problem of creative process he seeks the help through the imagery of wine. The movement of the poem is a vertical one—up and down. First four lines of the first strophe plunge downward while the last sextet soars upward to the “melodious plot/ Of beechan green.” But with the first line of the second strophe we are underground again in “the deep-delved earth.” The poet makes it clear that earth has its value and can be enjoyed immensely in the “realm of Flora and Old Pan,” that is, sensuous beauty. As a result of the luxuriant richness of experiences and train of associations the poet escapes from personal frustration into a community of happy human beings. The phrases like “sun-burnt mirth,” “warm South,” “blushful Hippocrene” “beaded bubbles” and “purple-stained mouth” present vivid world pictures. He craves for “a beaker full of warm South” and as Wasserman rightly points out in his book, *The Finer Tone*,

“wine was at one time or another explicitly linked with poetry, with imagination, with happiness, with “heaven” in short with all that the nightingale represents. Moreover, in the second stanza, wine resembles the nightingale in being associated with summer, happiness and song....Like the “immortal Bird” the wine comes from a “long age,” and reiteration of the word “full” the fullness of the beaker , suggests a desire for an intense , gluttonous experiencing similar to the poet’s deep reaction to the song of the nightingale.”

He soon realizes that wine is an aid not to community but to forgetfulness, the forgetfulness of the world in its sinister aspects of “The weariness, the fever and the fever.” Thus, in the third stanza Keats presents what he has actually known while the Provencal song and other delights he has only imagined. The stanza opposes to the gaiety of the second stanza and with its stark realization of the misery of life and personal griefs caused by the death of his brother Tom becomes autobiographical. This for Keats is the real world , the world of impotence and frustrations. Here the Ode also shares other themes like the ambition of love, of friendship, as well as of fame. But, the fame underlies it all.

As Blackstone assesses with the same human feeling which Keats deeply felt that “Life is pain; and there can be no anodyne, Keats rejects the aid of wine in the forth stanza and relies on “the viewless wings of Poesy” to enter the world of the bird though his trust in himself is partially justified.”

The stanza is a superb expression of Keats’s impulse of the imaginative escape in the face of the knowledge of the tragic human limitations but the poet still wishes to escape from the ugly facts of life and says, “Away!

away! for I will fly to thee.” From the “disagreeables” of the third stanza, which deal with sickness, sorrow and death, the poet experiences “the solace of romance.” He notices that discordant associations have evaporated and for a moment he catches the glimpse of the bird in an exalted, celestial setting of the moon and stars in that “tender night.” The illumination is fleeting and yet effective. It has the power to order and tranquilize the poet’s anguished thoughts; it brings harmony. In this psychological state of mind there is a willful exclusion of the tragic knowledge of life.

The fifth stanza carries the illusions of recovering the primal garden of eternal spring. The tranquility prevails and the central vision brings acceptance. “The song-haunted darkness stimulates the imagination” to borrow an expression of David Perkins from his article “The Ode to Nightingale” and he tries to “guess each sweet.” Through the eye of imagination the poet can see more than the sensory eye can ever see. He says he cannot ‘see’ but he can ‘guess’ and he is content to guess. The acceptance is in line with his doctrine of ‘negative capability,’ of patience with half-truths. He returns to himself and in returning to himself he attains for the first time to what existed around him. The initial self-centered disquiet is replaced by a self-surrender to the spirit of here and now. Precisely, the poet realizes the limitations of the urge to imaginative escape and so returns to the reality by listening to “The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.” The stanza satisfies four out of five senses. And thus provides what Masson calls “The universality of his sensuousness” which makes Symon describe Keats as “a purely sensuous poet.”

Through out the poem darkness has been gathering about the poet as he moves into the world of nightingale. He repeatedly says, ‘there is no light’ ; “I can not see”. The sixth stanza opens with the line, “Darkling I listen” and he returns to the thought of death. This darkness is no longer terrible and

bears within itself the possibility of transmutation because it is as Blackstone stated “an integral part of the total process, the unending three-fold rhythm of birth, growth and death” which Keats recognized in life and in the dialectic of poetry itself. Keats believes that the presence of death might lead to the prolongation of ecstatic moment and might reconcile it with other value—love, beauty, and happiness which the bird symbolizes.

As David Perkins has shown, the bird, taken as poetic image is no longer natural bird, becomes an essential and primary spirit of art, a symbol, a value that exists independent of the world of man. Keats says:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;

The poet attempt to unite the earthly and the eternal but the seventh stanza once again shows the gap between them. Keats achieves a universal vision which includes an ever-widening circle of human experience and feels that the song of the bird might served mankind for ages. The poet’s wish to identify with the bird is slowly dissipated. He feels that the voice he hears ‘was’ heard by generations of men, kings and clown alike and even by the biblical characters like Ruth, and it might have consoled the wounded heart of the love-sick princess. Under the spell of the song of the bird, the poet had forgotten himself for a while but he realizes that the faery lands are “forlorn” because man is not born to live there. The journey homeward to the habitual self painfully begins. The song of the nightingale ceases to be a happy song and becomes the high requiem and slowly declines into a “plaintive anthem.” In other words, the illusion of the mythic oneness is dissolved in the awareness of change and human history. The poet awakens from the trance and bids farewell to his vision. He says:

Adieu! The fancy can not cheat so well  
As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.



It is pertinent to note that it is not the bird that first fades away, it is the song. It so happens when the poet comes to his “sole self.” The point of the whole experience is driven home by the closing lines and the question they pose:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music: -- Do I wake or sleep?

The question arises when the poem has ended. As David Perkins aptly suggests, “The question is one that has haunted poetry ever since the romantic age, and poets, writing their own versions of Keats’s great ode, have often used virtually an identical symbol....” In his fascinating and lucid analysis of the odes of Keats, he sums up “Ode to Nightingale” in a very convincing, familiar and common sense logic stating:

“We are not left on the heights; for Keats knew well that in the courses of this world such transfigurations are not permitted. There must be a descent from the Mount. Keats manages his transition, it seems to me, with exquisite tact; and the return, in “a waking dream” to the initial note of “drowsy numbness” gives the poem that circular structure he so much loved.”

Keats finishes his poem with his feet on the ground, precisely from the point where he began.

(b) “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

The “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” which invites special attention among Keats’s Odes, was written in May 1819. The pattern on the urn does not exactly correspond to any surviving Greek vase. Keats’s imagination may have fused together memories of scenes from two or more different Greco-Roman vases in the Louvre, Paris. C.M. Bowra has enumerated some of these artistic

pieces from which Keats evolved his imaginary Urn in his book *The Romantic Imagination*. They are:

- (a) A marble vase constructed by the sculptor, Sosibios.
- (b) Another marble vase depicting a revelry-scene in Louvre.
- (c) Famous Elgin marbles which Keats saw in the British Museum
- (d) A marble Urn that belonged to Lord Holland and is kept at Holland House, Kensington, might have partly inspired this Ode.

The ode makes the final selection from this material and organizes various themes into a single poem.

A major contrast between “Nightingale” and “Grecian Urn” is indicated by the different nature of the central images – the difference between the living creature and artifact. Nightingale moves from mortality toward essence, from time to eternity; in the Grecian Urn Keats begins from the world of myth, and seeks to elucidate its mystery within the terms of human life and history, make it speak of the impatient needs and questions of his human situation. Both share ‘the great aim’ of poetry, that is, “To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.” One can but agree with Bate’s judgment that “Urn is in every way a more considered poem than the “Nightingale.” Bernard Blackstone aptly says, “ ‘On a Grecian Urn’ is the *Hamlet* among Keats’s Odes in more than one sense.” It is the most familiar, the richest in texture and the most obscure. Of all the Odes, it comes nearest to a formal expression of Keats’s ‘philosophy.’

The Urn, which is an artifact, gathers to itself the resonances of all other urns, vases, pots and jars that stud Keats’s poetry. The poem opens with the images of exceptional compression:

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

The urn is a bride and yet still maiden, “unravished”; it is the foster child of silence and still most vocal. Such paradoxical collocations of contraries affirm that “the ode is a symbolic action in term of the urn, its intrinsic theme is the region where earth and the ethereal, light and darkness, time and no-time become one; and what the symbolic drama ultimately discovers is the way in which art (the urn) relates man to that region.”

The urn depicts two scenes in four stanzas: The first scene, which is a love-scene of “mad pursuit” is depicted in the first three stanzas; here in the “wild ecstasy” of love a youth plays pipes under a tree for the “sensual ear” and another fair youth chases a pretty girl to kiss her. These human emotions are “For ever panting, and for ever young;” unlike our world. Still the urn, which is endowed with a voice, reconciles the dead with the living, past and present by projecting the similar emotions and needs and thus provides a vehicle of continuity. The second scene pertains to a sacrificial procession in which a priest leads a garlanded heifer to a ‘green altar’ and is followed by a company of pious worshippers. They present two sides of Greek genius – *Dionysian* which stands for ecstatic excitement and *Apollonian* which represents luminous order. These two scenes depict two different moods of man’s life – first of passionate celebration that presents personal desire and emotion and second of calm, serene Pagan ritual which is a community activity.

Keats has said in the first stanza that the urn is a “Sylvan historian”: it is the chronicle of our brief lives and their mystery without mentioning the facts, dates and names, as a historian would do. It is an artistic method and gives us the knowledge of life attained through “imaginative engagement and disengagement that defines the circular shape of both of the urn and the ode” to use the expression of Stuart M. Sperry. It is after the mysterious significance of the religious ritual that the urn enters the context necessary

for such a conversion that the urn eternally withholds. The ode's famous concluding apothegm:

“ ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ - that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

has assumed crucial importance and remains the major challenge in any attempt to reinterpret the poem. T.S.Eliot in his well-known judgment went to the extent of calling these lines “a serious blemish on a beautiful poem.” Cleanth Brooks in his brilliant essay “Keats's Sylvan Historian” says that the poem is ‘beautiful’ and ‘true.’ What the urn presents is beautiful and is based on the imaginative experience of “essentials of human life and nature” and nature” by a “good historian.” The phrase, ‘Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty’ in which the second part is the mirror image of the first part, if thus isolated by this punctuation, carries a curious suggestion of a motto or a proverb spoken by the Urn itself. But the whole statement of these two lines is the message of the Urn to those who contemplate it (hence the change to the second person plural – “that is all Ye know on earth”). The message is only incidentally an assertion of the permanence of art; it declares that the imagination can achieve states of intense illumination or ecstasy, transcending the actual moment of experience, and that the imagination speaks through art; imaginative knowledge can satisfy us when the activity of the discursive thought never can: in Keats's language, a sense of the beauty of life and the world comes nearer to truth, to understanding the meaning of existence, than the activity of thought or reason. In his letters also he expressed this conviction. To Benjamin Bailey he wrote on 22 November 1817 he says, “ I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination – what imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not.”

Thus, the urn asserts that beauty and truth are identical. Beauty of art can attain permanence and it leads to truth which is ‘of lasting value’ to use a phrase from Graham Hugh. In the words of Bowra, the message of the urn is that “Imaginatively perceived reality is both Truth and beauty.” Philosophically speaking the Urn teaches us to visualize the beauty of life “upon our pulses” and truth in every fact of life including the pain and ugliness as Middleton Murry concluded. Briefly the lines convey Keats’s philosophy of art and the ethics of human life.

(c) Eve of St. Agnes

The Eve of St. Agnes was composed in Jan. & Feb. 1819. It marks Keats’s momentary abandonment of Milton for Spenser, of the spirit of heroic endeavor for imaginative escape, of epic for a return to romance. “Eve of St. Agnes” is a romance of a sort totally different from any he had yet attempted. The poem was written in the early day of Keats’s love for Fanny Brawne, before the rapture of his passion had given way to doubts and anxieties. The story of this poem is derived from a romance of the Italian writer Boccaccio. The two lovers Porphyro and Madeline belong to the two families which are at daggers drawn with each other. Such love is fraught with danger & tragic possibilities. But the poet brings about a happy ending. The lovers escape on a stormy night. It is happy love story.

St. Agnes was a Christian martyr of the fourth century. The Eve of St. Agnes falls on 20<sup>th</sup> Jan. “St. Agnes was Roman virgin who suffered martyrdom in the reign of Diocletian. A few days after her parents are said to have a vision of her surrounded by angels and attended by a white lamb which afterwards became sacred to her. In the Roman Cathartic Church formerly the nuns used to bring a couple of lambs to her altar during Mass. The superstition is that by taking certain measures of divination, damsels may get a sight to

their future husbands in a dream. The ordinary process seems to begin by fasting. This note was added to the poem when it was published by Leigh Hunt in 1835, long after Keats's death.

The poem is written in Spenserian Stanzas, a form invented by Edmund Spenser for his *Faerie Queene*. The rhymes link all the lines together in an unbroken series. The most distinctive feature is the lengthened last line of six feet technically called Alexandrine. It is not just that the poem reveals a new, breath-taking advance in technical mastery. More important, the apparent simplicity of Keats's late conceals a new Sophistication, an extraordinary awareness of the devices of romance, and a fascination with both their possibilities and limitations. St. Agnes grants a greater sensuous & emotional intensity to a world of dreams and makes –belief, and thus makes them seriously intellectual & dramatic.

For Keats's contemporaries and the Victorians who in one way or another came under its spell the meaning of the poem was absolutely clear. It was for them the essence of romance, a gorgeous bit of tapestry, full of color, tenderness passion, and high feelings. So the commonest response to "The Eve of St. Agnes" has been the celebration of its 'heady and perfumed loveliness'. The poem has been called "a monody of dreamy richness", "one long sensuous utterance", "an expression of lyrical emotion," "a great affirmation of love", "a great choral hymn", an expression of "unquestioning rapture", and many things else. Even Leigh Hunt thought it to be the most delightful & complete specimen of Keats's genius. These remarks confirm that this poem is 'a romantic tapestry of unique richness & color'. One is moved less by the experience of characters & more by incidental innumerable beauties of descriptive phrase & rhythm; to use the expression of Jack Stillinger.

The poem is above all dramatic as Keats's himself saw it a step toward a chief ambition "the writing of a few fine plays". The poem opens on a note of "bitter chill" & progresses through images of cold & death before the action gets under way. When young Porphyro comes from across the moors to claim his bride, he enters a hostile castle, where Madeline's kinsmen will murder even upon holy days; and in the face of this danger he proceeds to Madeline's bed-chamber. Madeline is sober and demure, "St. Agnes Charmed Maid", rising beneath her solitary candles gleams to pious observances. Yet the rites she must observe like 'going supperless to bed, nor look behind nor side ways,' while rooted in folk superstition suggest a little child put to bed early with the vision of sugar plums. Porphyro in soft-voiced and trembling, yearning for his lady in the darkness still disliked to interrupt her slumbers. However, with the sexual consummation of their love, storm comes up; they must escape the castle passed "sleeping dragons" porter, porter, and bloodhound into night. The ending is reverse to the opening notes of "bitter chill & death"; Madeline's kinsmen are be nightmared, & old Beadsman & Madeline's nurse Angela are grotesquely dispatched into the next world. It is pertinent note that the warmth & security of Madeline's chamber are contrasted with the coldness and hostility of the rest of the castle.

However, St. Agnes is not primarily a glorification of sexual experience or even, for all the condensed richness of its imagery, of human senses. It is, rather, an exceptionally subtle study of the psychology of imagination & its processes building the relationship between this world and the next. More than anything else the element most central to the poem is its concern with for wish-fulfillment, a fundamental aspect of romance that had fascinated Keats from time of his earliest verse. To describe "The Eve of St. Agnes" as a romance of wish fulfillment is to regard its activities as artless & even

simple-minded while the fact remains that the reality and activity it shows is not simple but complex & continually shifting.

Stuart M. Sperry rightly points out that,

“ ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’ is a supreme example of art as wish-fulfillment.... of an exceptionally practiced and self-conscious kind that gives the work its essential character. The poem, that is, achieves its magic, but only in such a way as to dramatize the particular tensions that oppose it and the kinds of device it must employ in overcoming them - repression, anxiety, disguise, censorship, sublimation. The very artistry that brings the dream swelling into reality draws our attention to itself in such a way as subtly to qualify, even to unsettle, its own effects. Once we go beneath the surface melodrama we discover a mixture of the naïve and sophisticated, the sentimental and the disenchanting, fantasy and psychological realism.”

Though Madeline or Porphyro are not directly introduced, it is in the portrayal of Madeline and her dream that Keats's treatment becomes more subtle. The shifting use it makes of different conventions and attitudes continually affirm that this narrative romance is full of the masterpieces of Keats's technique. For example take his brilliant use of images. The most significant use is that of sculptural imagery, which reflects the harsh repression of human warmth and feeling, the note from which the poem commences and ascends. At the most critical moment of the poem, the moment of Madeline's apparent withdrawal from her dream and her awakening, Porphyro kneels as if frozen by her bedside, “pale as smooth



sculptured stone.” Keats uses the imagery of sculpture to express the way feeling is arrested or repressed, then liberated and fulfilled in a new onrush of emotion.

There is a similar logic at work in the poet’s use of musical themes and images which indicates another range of experiences in the single moment.

When Beadsman passes through the little door, “Music’s golden tongue/Flatter’d to tears this aged man and poor.” Similarly, the image of tear defines a particular moment central to the poem’s harmony. The image occurs twice at important turning point in the poem – once when Porphyro first learns of Madeline’s hope for St. Agnes’s night and again when Madeline weeps on awakening from her dream to observe her lover kneeling By her bedside - and thus perpetuates and extends, almost like a theme in music, the power of a single mood.

There is much in the poem, which reminds the reader of the trappings of “old romance.” As R.H. Fogle has justly observed, the effects of the poem are “complex and even self-contradictory.” It is certainly “not the poetry of a simple romancer.” Though the poem carries the world of romance, the characters nevertheless lay claim at various times to different levels of existence or reality that continually play off against , challenge , or modify each other.

It is worth noticing that Porphyro is “no rude *infidel*” and called her twice his bride. Sperry sums up the poem thus:

The poem, in fact, seems virtually on the point of ending on a note of domesticity, with the storm, for all its icy gusts, marking a return to the world of the natural elements and breathing humanity. Such homely expectations, however, are quickly lost amid the onset of some final magic. “Hark ‘tis

an elfin storm from faery land,” Porphyro exclaims. The lovers are not destined for a return into the mortal world but for some nebulous transcendence of their own..”

There is something sad about the way they flee away as “phantoms” unfelt, unheard and unseen by all. We remain charmed but also perplexed by the poem and its blend of domesticity, elvishness, Gothicism, realism, courtly romance, riddle, fairy tale and legend, a combination that remains to the last deliberately anachronistic and refuses to relate itself to what is commonly known as ‘reality’ that can be readily defined.

### **Assignments**

Note :Attempt the following question.

1. Discuss briefly the major events of the life of John Keats.
2. Give an account of the aims and methods of Keats’s poetry.
3. Keats said, “ O for a life of sensation rather than of thought.” How far is this preference revealed in his poetry.
4. Discuss the central ideas of Keats as Romantic poet.
5. Why did Shelley called Keats “a Greek?” Give reasoned answer and illustrate it.
6. Discuss Keats’s concept of “Beauty and Truth.”
7. Write an essay on Keats as a writer of odes.
8. In Keats’s poetry there is a synthesis of Romanticism and Classicism. Do you agree?
9. Give a critical appreciation of “Ode to a Nightingale.”

10. Analyse the significance of Keats's term 'Negative Capability' with reference to his poetry.

Note: Answer the following questions in about *two hundred words*.

1. Define any three characteristics of Romantic age.
2. Write a note on Keats's imagery.
3. Discuss any two personifications given in the poem "Eve of St. Agnes"
4. What is the significance of the last stanza of "Ode on a Grecian Urn?"
5. Discuss the importance of "imagination" in Keats's Theory of Poetry.
6. Write a note on Hellenism.
7. What, according to Keats, is "beauty as a poetic principle?"
8. Discuss any two features of "Eve of St. Agnes" as a medieval narrative poem.
9. Write a note on the stanzaic form in Keats's odes.
10. Discuss briefly Keats as a pessimistic poet.

### **Books Useful for Students**

#### **Edition**

The Poems of John Keats, ed. Jack Stillinger, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. Scrupulously assembled; complete textual notes.

The Poems of Keats, ed. Miriam Allott. London: Longman, 1970. Very useful notes, including sources and allusions, and generous references to relevant letters.

John Keats: The Complete Poems, ed. John Barnard. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973. Reliable texts, extensive notes, Keats's marginalia to Paradise Lost, his review of Edmund Kean's Richard III.

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# **ROBERT BROWNING**

**Rabbi Ben Ezra**

**Fra Lippo Lippi**

**A Grammarian's Funeral**

**The Bishop Orders His Tomb**

**The Last Ride Together**

## Unit-2

### Robert Browning: Chronology

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- 1812 Robert Browning born at Cumberwell in London.
- 1829 Attends University College, London, then first opened.
- 1832 Pauline composed, published in 1833, Death of Goethe and Scott.
- 1833 Travels to Russia and pays his first visit to Italy. Elizabeth Barrett publishes her translation of Prometheus Bound .
- 1835 Published Paracelsus .
- 1837 *Strafford* acted. Princess Victoria becomes Queen.
- 1840 Published *Sordello*.
- 1840 Published Pippa Passes .
- 1842 *King Victor and King Charles* appeared
- 1842 Brought out *Dramatic Lyrics*.
- 1843 Published *Return of the Druses*
- 1843 *A Blot in the Scutcheon*.
- 1843 *Colombe s Birthday*.
- 1845 *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*.
- 1846 Published *Luria* and *A Soul s Tragedy*. (The above books were published in eight numbers of *Bells and pomegranates*).
- 1846 Married to Elizabeth Barrett.
- 1847 The Browning settled in Florence at Casa Guidi.
- 1849 Death of Browning s mother. A son born to Browning-Robert Wiedemann Browning.
- 1850 Published Christmas Eve and Easter Day .
- 1855 Published *Men and Woman*.
- 1861 Death of Mrs. E.B. Browning.
- 1861 Leaves Italy and settles in London.
- 1864 Published *Dramatis Personae*.
- 1866 Death of Browning s father.
- 1867 Honorary M.A. of Oxford conferred upon Browning.
- 1868 Brought out *The Ring and the Book*.
- 1871 Published *Balaustion s Adventure*.
- 1871 Published *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwarzgau*.
- 1872 Published *Fifine at the Fair*
- 1873 Published *Red Cotton Nightcap Country*

- 1875 Published *Aristophanes Apology*.  
 1875 Published *The New Album*.  
 1876 Brought out *Pacchiarotto*.  
 1877 Published *Agamemnon of Aeschylus*.  
 1878 Published *La Saisiaz*.  
 1878 Published *The Two Poets of Croisic*.  
 1879-80 Brought out *Dramatic Lyrics*, two volumes.  
 1883 Published *Ferishta s Fancies* and *Jocoseria*  
 1889 Death of Browning at Venice.  
 1889 Buried in Westminster Abbey.

### Robert Browning (1812-1889)

**The Victorian Age (1837-1901)** In 1837 Victoria became the Queen of England and English literature entered into a new era, which is named after her. It seemed to be a lean period and held a bold contrast to the previous age that was marked by the unique literary achievements. For a while it appeared that there was none to replace the literary men, none to proclaim the literary glory of the new age. That is so because the Victorian age is a period of progress and unrest – the progress is in the fields of scientific studies, social philosophy, and empirical history, political thought and unrest is about the terrible industrial and unnatural competitive methods. The main tendency of the age was rationalistic and scientific but there was another movement equally strong – it was the Renaissance of Idealism. Amidst the multitude of social and political forces of this age there are certain things, which stand out clearly: first, it is the struggle for personal liberty that paved the way for democracy as the established order of the day. Secondly, being an age of democracy, it promoted the general, popular education and religious tolerance in the face of the marked social unrest. When the slaves had been freed in 1833, the English society realized that slaves are not necessarily Negroes but multitudes of men, women and children in the mines and factories who were also the victims of a more terrible industrial and social slavery. To free them from their ugly existential conditions has been the growing purpose of the Victorian Age. The English society was now more concerned with creating those conditions, which would promote the social equality, peace and justice. To achieve this end, the great Reform Bill was introduced which carried the ideals of the Liberals. Tennyson, the representative poet of the day recommended the gospel of peace.

The Victorian Age in the 1830s and early 1840s were a time of reaction against abstract theoretical solutions, or what Newman called ‘paper systems’. It is known for the remarkable and rapid progress in the arts and sciences and in mechanical inventions. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is pre-eminently the century of science. From the very beginning of the Victorian age, the spirit of science permeated every department of life and literature. The influence of science can be seen in men’s attitude towards life and the very idea of ‘the reign of law’ developed through science. The scientific theory like the theory of Evolution by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) that was further extended by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and was put forth in his doctrine of Synthetic Philosophy. Darwin’s great disciple, T.H.Huxley (1825-1895) became the greatest champion of freedom of thought, unfettered by tradition, dogma or prejudice. His thought is based on feeling and intuition; it can stand the test both of practice and moral health. He quickly became the master of modern faith, and along with Darwin and Herbert Spencer the greatest influence on Victorian art and literature, especially on philosophy, theology, history and literary criticism.

From 1830 onward the doctrine of utility became the effective philosophy of the Victorian society. It provided a central framework for the edifice of ideas that science was building. J.S Mill became the representative of the new scientific philosophy, which is known as the philosophy of intellectualism. In other words, as a moralist and social philosopher he upheld the Utilitarian Radicalism as the basis of a democratic society. Influenced by this

philosophy, he promoted rationalism and took upon himself the task of making history the mirror of a nation's moral and political faith. He was criticized for his bourgeois intellectualism, which was narrow-minded, but none can deny that it reflected the dominant spirit of the Victorian Age. The scientific spirit gave the most powerful challenge to religious belief. As the faith of many people was broken from their church, there was a deep spiritual uneasiness. When after 1860 absolute free-thinking appeared as a creed, it scandalized the people. Religious thinkers like Whately and Hampden tried to introduce greater elasticity in the belief in biblical inspiration, which brought about a reaction in the form of Oxford Movement. The influence of science and of liberal theology finally resulted in the Broad Church movement, which aimed to reconcile independence of thought with belief. To sum up the argument, it can be said that it was a period of complex and feverish activity in both thought and literature. Covering as it did three-quarters of the nineteenth century, it witnessed a host of movements in social, economic and political fields, which had their corresponding effect on the intellectual life and literature.

It is relevant to note that the major forces that had already affected the romantic period, still continued to be the well-head of all subsequent currents and cross-currents in life and thought. They were the French revolution and Industrial Revolution. The French Revolution had no doubt excited the Romantics like Shelley and Byron and inspired their dreams and visions about a perfect society which brought with the passage of time dismay and disenchantment to the early Victorians. Nevertheless, the political and social principles it stood for had an abiding impact. They ushered in an era of political democracy with the passing of the first Reform Bill in 1832. The growth of political and institutional systems was influenced not merely by the forces of democratic radicalism that were in ferment, but also by the effect of the industrial revolution which had already begun to make itself felt in the opening decades of the nineteenth century.

With the Victorian age opened up the era of railroads and steam-ships, which led to rapid industrialization of the country as large resources of coal, iron and machine-tool industry were discovered with the help of the new science. With the expansion of trade and empire, the country grew rich and prosperous; it led to the rise of the middle class, which had a thoroughly materialistic and rationalistic outlook. But it also resulted in inequality and squalor, breeding social and economic discontent all-round, and giving rise to many problems in the fields of commerce and industry.

The rise of the middle class is an important fact of the Victorian era. It determined the character of the age, of its thought and literature. Being mostly the middle class people, they reposed their faith in the doctrine of *laissez faire*, which is the key to all the movements and counter-movements of the age. As a matter of fact, the rise and growth, supremacy and decline of liberalism, which is another name for *laissez faire*, is coincident with the three phases of Victorian development, the early, the middle and the later phases. In the economic field it stressed competition, self-interest, free trade and free enterprise but in the political field it favoured social and political reform through constitutional methods.

Liberalism, in the ethical and cultural domains, laid stress on a strong family life, on a powerful social opinion, and treasured the habits of industriousness, self-help and tolerance. It being the attitude of the successful business middle class, morality was at best prudential, and consistent with the idea of respectability, which expected honesty and decency in individual behaviour, cleanliness of habits, irrespective of social position. While the domestic virtues were extolled, sex was tabooed.

If the advancements of scientific thought and researches gave sanction to the idea of progress which resulted in a sense of complacency and optimism on the one hand, the more sensitive minds, unable to reconcile the traditional beliefs with the claims of new science, gave way to pessimism. Carlyle, Tennyson, Ruskin, Arnold and Clough, in different ways express this sense of spiritual crisis in their works. Tennyson anyhow affects a compromise between the claims of religion and science, Arnold and Clough, more conscious of the loss of faith, keep doubting till the end. Browning, with his robust optimism, looks forward rather than backward and refutes the controversy.

The literature of the age shows the new spirit of scientific inquiry, especially in the literary criticism by Matthew Arnold who studied literature as a reflection of the national mind, and applied psychological tests to it. He

became the preacher of self-culture and evoked the spirit of calm self-possession that he found in the Greeks and in Goethe. The literature reflected in many ways the temper and mood of the rising middle class. With the enormous growth of population in the towns, the demand for cheap reading material increased. This led to the rise of periodicals, which published short article or long articles in a serial form. Much of this literature was hastily written lacking in form and quality. It was actually mediocre and incoherent in form. Lacking totally the sense of archetectonics, the writers of Victorian age catered first to the needs of the reading masses of an intensely self conscious society a society that was conscious of every change to quote the expression of Geoffrey Tillotson from his book, *A View of Victorian Literature*. Due to the social unrest and economic distress brought about by the growth of Industrialism, the writers were face to face with the condition of England Question, which gave him a sense of purpose. A good deal of early Victorian literature is therefore marked by moral; earnestness; it even has a touch of propaganda which was quite palatable to the middle class people who desired to be taught.

The materialistic preoccupations of the age with their roots in the philosophy of Utilitarianism did not favourably act upon the writers of the period. On the contrary it evoked an attitude of hostility. They were so badly alarmed at the growth of materialism in life, which seriously challenged the life of the spirit that they sought refuge in the Renaissance idealism. From the literary viewpoint the idealistic movement is more important than the scientific one. Victorian idealism was an offshoot of Romanticism. It was a vast association of emotional and imaginative tendencies, all inclined towards an intuitive philosophy. Carlyle represented the new idealistic spirit in philosophy and gave a call Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe. He vehemently censured drab materialism and middle class philistinism. Charles Dickens in his social novel generated in his readers a distrust of romantic dreaminess and sentimentalism and encouraged them to search for the realism in the subject matter. He criticized the contemporary society and represented in his work the spiritual suffering of the nation due to discontented sensibility. In the field of religion, Newman s Oxford Movement with its revival of medievalism, which later found support in the movement of pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, resisted rationalism and affirmed the place of emotion and ritual in theological matters. In arts, Ruskin and other Pre-Raphaelites attacked the vulgarity and materialism of the contemporary society and put before it the concept of Beauty. They revolted against the didacticism of the early Victorians and stressed the autonomy of art.

It is interesting to note how scientific achievements also contributed to the thought and technique of literary writings. For example, consider the invention photography, which led to a greater appreciation of the values of vivid detail, and gave rise to naturalism in fiction and inspired the Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetes in painting and poetry. The discoveries in biology brought into focus the influence of heredity and environment on human conduct, which was of immense value for the novelists. The sciences of psychology and anthropology shifted the focus of the writers from the outer to the inner world of man, not to man *sui generis* as to man the individual. This is precisely the reason why the age is primarily the age of fiction; even the major poets often wrote narratives in verse to project the growing complexity of life.

The literature of the age, which associated itself with the social life of the nation, freely and frankly depicted that life. It is the literature of compromise as the life of the middle classes with its strange adoration for both God and Mammon. The average businessman or merchant is God-fearing but also comfort loving. Material prosperity to him is not incompatible with piety. He values political freedom but within the bounds of reason; freedom that flows from the gradual constitutional reform not revolution. The state has only to guarantee the individual maximum freedom even though it may result in inequality. The most successful man in business has indeed the right to rule the masses. The down-trodden deserve help not because it is their right but because it ensures the rich to save their souls by giving charity.

The poetry of the Victorian age is woven out of main strands of feeling and thought. One group is led by Tennyson. It is the idealistic romantic

school of poetry and emphasizes emotion, imagination and sensibility. Romanticism is more disciplined and expresses itself in a controlled manner and in some sort of perfection of form. Tennyson is the representative

poet of this group. He constantly endeavoured to adapt his muse to the demands of the people and is the poet of compromise *par excellence*. The other group seeks to identify itself with the contemporary movement in intellectual and critical thought, which is influenced by science and new intellectualism. It aims to incorporate many-sided intellectual life of the nation. Browning represented this group. His chief interest was in human motive rather than human action. He was untouched by the political and spiritual controversies of the day, and equally disinterested in the social and economic problems of the people. Browning also had little interest in the advancement of science

and industry. His idea of progress is of a long triumphal march which he set forth in *Paracelsus*. He believes in the ancient religio-metaphysical notion of a great chain of being. Though he is anti-Victorian in his concept of love and optimism and even in his poetic style, he still stays within the orbit of Victorianism by virtue of his evangelicalism his spiritual individualism that totally ignores the claims of society or the state, and his moral earnestness as a poet.

### **Life & Works of Robert Browning**

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, Southampton Street, in the city of London on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1812. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England like his grandfather. The poet's mother was a Scotch and his bringing up was somewhat narrow. He went to no public school and to no University. Till the age of fourteen he remained at a school for young gentlemen after which he was placed under the care of a private tutor. When he was seventeen, he went for a term to a Greek class at University College, Gower Street. The systematic use of his father's well-equipped library of six thousand volumes was perhaps the most important in the early education of the poet. He took delight in reading poetry especially the great works of Elizabethans, Shelley and Byron. The poet was not less fortunate in his mother who had leanings towards music and art, which became a prime factor in his life and writings. She brought him the works of Shelley and Keats from London. It was again from his mother that he inherited feelings for spiritual realities that gave such an intense animation to the whole gamut of his writings.

The most unusual and striking fact in Browning's youth is the way in which at the age of seventeen or eighteen he took the decision to make poetry his career and profession. Influenced by Byron and Shelley, he made this deliberate choice, which had to be approved by his father who was a man of more than ordinary culture and originality of mind. Browning developed a wholesome all-rounded literary taste as he learnt Latin and French very well and was acquiring proficiency in Greek. Like Wordsworth he loved nature and roamed through Camberwell and Peckham where he had attended his first Private school. He kept pet animals of all kinds and had a hobby of making collections of one sort or another as his poems reveal. Browning had studied music and art also and these subjects form the background of his poetry. During the year 1832, at the age of twenty, wrote his first notable poem, *Pauline: a Fragment of Confession* which was published in January 1833. The poem shows the influence of Shelley but it is in no way a mere imitation. The poem is written in the blank verse which is rather stiff but the language is almost free from the oddities of structure which mark the later poems as Ryland put it. The poem invited a mixed response as either it was highly criticized or warmly praised. However, after publishing *Pauline* Browning travelled to Russia in company with the Russian Consul-General and stayed there for three months. It seems to have turned his thoughts to diplomacy. Browning applied for an appointment in a mission to Persia but somehow he did not succeed.

The very next year he published *Paracelsus*, a poem in dramatic form though it is not a drama in the real sense of the term, and *Strafford* that was Browning's first attempt in pure drama. Like so many of his poems, the former was a study of the development of character and the poem was reviewed favourably by John Forster, who was the biographer of Dickens.

In May 1837, *Strafford* was produced at Drury Lane and ran for a few nights. It has been customary to speak of this and other dramatic pieces written by Browning for the stage as conditional successes. *Strafford* is a



poetic drama, a tragedy in five Acts, dealing with the impeachment of Earl of Strafford, minister of Charles 1, who was later condemned and executed. In spite of the histrionic talents of Macready, who played the leading part, the tragedy failed owing to many external reasons. In this context Ryland stated, "There is no need, however, to try to explain away what is, on the face of it, perfectly evident, that Browning's plays are without the particular qualities, which make for success on the boards. The tragedy was withdrawn after five nights.

In the spring of 1838, Browning went to Venice and during the voyage wrote two poems of a more popular cast: (i) *How They Brought the Good News from the Ghent to Aix* and (ii) *Home Thoughts from Sea*. These poems along with a number of other dramatic and sub-dramatic poems were

published later in the series of poems called *Bells and Pomegranates* but the logical sequence of the development of Browning's works after Paracelsus is *Sordello* that was published in 1840. This poem of 6000 lines of heroic couplets has the reputation of being the most difficult poem among his works and presents the least estimable features of his style, for instance, his compact terseness, mode of breaking the line rhythms, his use of colloquial idioms, omission of particles, suggestion of a change or the development of an idea by a gap and a sudden resumption afterwards of the thread of narrative etc. It led to the obscurity of Browning's style, which the critics of half a century ago held up to ridicule. Their attitude towards the poet's early work may be inferred from Tennyson's humorous criticism of *Sordello*. It may be remembered that the first line of this obscure poem is "Who will may hear Sordello's story told" and the last line is, "Who would has heard Sordello's story told." Tennyson remarked that these were the only lines in the whole poem that he understood, and they were evidently both lies. Carlyle affirmed that Mrs. Carlyle had read it through without being able to tell whether Sordello were a man, a city, or a book. It is enough to say here that the hero Sordello was a thirteenth century troubadour and poet of north Italy and one of those characters who are referred to in Dante's *Purgatorio* and that to Dante himself Browning pays in this poem a fine tribute which is included in the present poem *Sordello*.

The next six years saw the publication of many works from time to time. In 1841 appeared *Pippa Passes*, which is a delightful work. In its main outlines it is just opposite of *Sordello* being clear and definite. The dramatic shape of the work is only related to its form; the plot is altogether wanting in unity and the stories it is composed of are left half told. However some of the characters are superbly drawn and capture in full the human interest. It was issued as number one of his series of the volumes of poetry to be called *Bells and Pomegranates*. In rapid succession appeared other poems of series. They are: *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) which included *Cavalier Tunes*, *My Last Duchess*, *Johannes Agricola*, *The Pied Piper*, *The Return of the Druses* (1843), *A Blot on the Scutcheon* (1843). It was a three act tragedy produced by Macready at Drury Lane. The poet and the manager quarrelled over it and Browning felt that not enough had been done to ensure its success. *Colombe's Birthday* (1844) was not put on the stage till April 1853 when it was produced at the Hay Market.

In autumn 1844 Browning paid his second visit to Italy. Next year he published the seventh number of *Bells and Pomegranates* – the admirable volume called *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). This like the *Dramatic Lyrics* of 1842 consisted of short poems like *The Italian in England*, *The Englishman in Italy*, and *The Tomb at St. Praxed's*, *The Lost Leader*, *Pictor Ignotus*, *Home Thoughts From Abroad*. Then he published *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy* in 1846. The works run in common series, to which Browning had given the title *Bells and Pomegranates*. Browning explain the title thus:

"It only meant by the phrase *Bells and Pomegranates* to indicate an endeavour towards something like an alternation or mixture of music with discoursing, sound with the sense, poetry with thought...."

The most of these books are either dramatic lyrics or sub-dramatic pieces and lyrics. Number three contained *Dramatic Romances* and number seven consisted of *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. These form two sets of

Browning's favourite form of poems in which the dramatic and lyrical elements are mingled together, each poem being what is called now a Dramatic Monologue.

It was in 1845 that Browning met his future wife, Elizabeth Moulton Barrett (1806-1861) who was herself a poet of high rank and had earned a reputation for herself for her works *The Seraphim* (1838) and *Poems* (1844). Despite the fact that her father was reluctant to allow her to get married because of her fragile health, the couple was secretly married at Marylebone Parish Church on September, 12, 1846. After a few days, they left England together for Italy where love and climate proved better than her Physicians. For fifteen years Browning and his wife lived happily in Pisa and in Florence. Here their only child, Robert Barrett Browning, who became a painter, was born. Robert Browning and his wife worked independently in their poetic fields. In 1850 Browning's poems of the spiritual vision appeared, for instance take his poems: *Christmas Eve* and *Easter Day* which deal with the Judgment and Resurrection and other Christian beliefs in unique and novel way. In 1855 Browning published *Men and Women*, a collection of short pieces of the same sort as the *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* which proved to be the great literary monument of the poet. It is the product of the happy married life and perhaps the highest level of sustained achievement of the poet. *Men and Women* is a wonderful gallery of soul-pictures pictures not of persons but of the souls of the artists, musicians, philosophers, statesman, lovers and the worldly men who unveil their characters unconsciously. They are matchless character studies.

Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861 and was buried among her favourite people in Florence. The loss was at first too much, almost unbearable. Browning left for England along with his son. For the remaining years of his life Browning lived alternately in London and in various parts of Italy. Wherever he went being very sociable he mingled with men and women, well dressed, courteous, loving crowds and won the popular applause, contrary to what his friend Tennyson received.

It was with his next volume *Dramatic Personae*, which was published in 1864, that Browning got the recognition as a popular poet. Among his admirers were some of the most illustrious men of his day though the general public still remained indifferent and thought that he was too eccentric and too obscure to be taken seriously. Like the poems in *Men and Women* every poem of this volume is a Monologue. Some of the poems have a rare wealth of beauty. The poems like *James Lee's Wife*, *A Death in the Desert*, *Caliban upon Setebos*, and *Rabi Ben Ezra* are included in it. Browning had reached the apex as a serious thinker and preacher of his age. For illustration, take his poem *Prospice* where he boldly faces the Arch-enemy, i.e., Death himself. In 1868 he brought out a new edition of his poems, and in 1872 came out a volume of selections of his poetry, which contributed greatly to his popularity. However, the University of Oxford conferred on Browning the degree of M.A. in June 1867 and he was elected Honorary Fellow of Bolliol College, Oxford in the October of the same year.

The following year, on the death of John Stuart Mill, he was offered a nomination to the Lord Rectorship of the University of St. Andrews. And Mrs. Orr, in the life of the poet speaks of the offer as virtually guaranteeing his election—a statement which is a proof of Browning's popularity among the university students and scholars.

Browning's fame as a poet was largely increased by the publication of *The Ring and The Book* in the years 1864–1869 which is his masterpiece. It is an intense poem, twice as long as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and longer by two thousand lines than the *Iliad*. *Athenaeum* welcomed it as the greatest poetic achievement of the time and the most profound spiritual treasure that England has produced since the days of Shakespeare. It consists of four volumes of blank verse, containing over 21000 lines in which the horrible story of Count Guido's murder of his beautiful young wife, Pompilia. Browning tells the reader in detail just when and how he found a book containing the record of the crime and the trial. There the story element ends and the symbolism of the book begins. The title of the poem is explained by the habit of the old Etruscan goldsmiths who, in making their elaborately made rings, would mix the pure gold with an alloy, in order to harden it. When the ring was finished, acid was poured upon it; and the acid ate out the alloy, leaving the beautiful design in pure gold. Browning proposes to follow the same method with his literary material, which consists simply of the evidence given at the

trial of Guido in Rome in 1698. Browning planned to mix a poet's fancy with the crude and even brutal facts of life and thereby create a beautiful and artistic work. The result of Browning's intention and effort is a series of monologues, in which the same story is told nine different times by the different actors in drama. The Count, the young wife, the suspected priest, the lawyers, the Pope who presides at the trial, each tells the story, and each unconsciously reveals the depth of his own nature in the recital. The story is told in twelve books and the manner in which it is told gives the poem a sort of epic dignity. Though it is the most original poem in English language, it is marked by the flaws like the sameness that causes monotony, and inordinate verbosity. The Count is tried and found guilty and Book 1 & XI are called respectively *The Ring and The Book* and *The Book and The Ring*, which serve as prologue and epilogue.

By now Browning's position as a poet was fully established, but whatever he wrote after this venture only kept pace with his reputation and respect without adding anything substantial to it. The volumes of 1876, 1879, 1880, 1883 and 1889 belonged to the same category as those of 1855 and 1864 because they were mainly the collections of short poems of dramatic self-revelation, mingled with lyrics. The last volume published on the day of his death in 1889 is entitled *Asolando: Fancies and Facts which is* a play on the name of the town of Asolo in Venetian territory, where the greater part of the volume was written. It contains some of the poems, which were written in his youth but remained unpublished for years while other poems were written in the old age.

Browning's later life was spent mostly in London with usually one or two trips to France and Italy. It was in 1882, while striking a deal for the purchase of a villa at Asolo, that he was taken ill and died at his son's home in Venice on December 12, 1889. He closed his eyes in death after learning the telegraphic news from England of the publication of *Asolando* in London. His countrymen insisted that his remains should be brought home to rest in his own native land, and he was buried in Westminster Abbey. But Italy also honoured him for on the wall of the Rezzonico Palace where he died, the Italian people placed a tablet upon which appear the lines from De Gustibus:

*“Open my heart and you will see  
Graved inside of it. Italy*

Browning announced and lived up to his triumphant creed – the creed of true fortitude – that he is

*“One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to awake.*

### **Browning's Theory of Poetry**

Any attempt to understand Browning as an artist invariably leads one to know his poetic aesthetics and it is not an easy proposition in his case for two reasons: (i) He has not followed any given norms and has evolved his own complex system of techniques. (ii) He has not left an account of his theory like Wordsworth did. Realizing the difficulty that the critics or the reader might face, in one of the letters Browning said:

*“ he is more than fair in praising one portion of my  
work at the expense of all the rest, unfair in saying  
I have never even tried to do what I have done,  
well or ill, in long poems. He is pleased not to call  
failures, but pass clean over; thus, I never  
describe... and so on. The fact is, there is more in  
my works than a new comer can take in at once,  
or by next month,.....*

Browning himself emphasized the necessity of reading his poems with close attention. In this connection A. Allen Brockington makes a very interesting remark: My own feeling is that there are not enough poetic intervals in Browning. His mind is so athletic and he speeds along at so great a pace that the reader is apt to suffer from mental, or even imaginative indigestion.

It means that to have a conception of the essential Browning is not an easy task and the only way out is to discover his poetic norms through and in his poems.

A remarkable feature of Browning's poetical career is the comparatively late blossoming of his genius. Other poets like Wordsworth and Tennyson generally came into their own in their youth, while Browning's true poetry is the poetry of maturity. He published his first poem in 1833, when only twenty, but attained his characteristic method twenty years later in *Men and Women* (1855) and had to struggle hard for another fifteen years to bring his method to perfection in *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69). The cause of this delay in Browning's poetic growth is that from the beginning he had his own ideas of poetry—ideas that are at once daring and original, and he required time not only to master them but also to conform his practice to them. To understand and appreciate the poetic achievement of an innovator and original poet like Browning it is, therefore, necessary to inquire what are ideas of poetry that inspired his practice?

In his first three poems Browning gives the broad outlines of his poetic theory which he later on put into practice. In *Pauline*, he gives his idea of poetry thus:

*And thou saidst a perfect bard was one  
Who chronicled the stages of all life.*

He suggests clearly his preference for the subject matter of poetry without hinting at its form and poetic manner. The primary concern of the poet is to be a truthful and faithful chronicler of life at all its stages. Browning brings out the full implications of this definition in some of the later poems. In *How it Strikes a Contemporary*, the poet is described as a recording chief inquisitor, the town's true master

*The general-in-chief,  
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and  
death.*

The emphasis on being realistic is also made in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. The artist should count it crime/to let a truth slip. but the implication that the poet can thus register life though the form of drama and that the highest poetic form is to be experienced in the works of Shakespeare is obvious from what he wrote about him in *Christmas Eve* :

*As I declare our Poet, him  
Whose insight makes all other dim:  
A thousand poets pried at life,  
And only one amid the strife  
Rose to be Shakespeare.*

Shakespeare exercised an abiding influence on Browning. From the very outset his ambition was to see life steadily and see it whole like Shakespeare. Hence his insistence that his poetry should be always dramatic in principle. Moreover, in his endeavour to present a wide galaxy of men and women and to express the whole gamut of their emotions and feelings—every passion sprung from man/Conceived by man, too seemed to have been inspired by Shakespeare.

In his next poem *Paracelsus*, Browning particularly refers to the social function of the poet. As an interpreter of truth of life, the poet will stand out as a champion of the common man, as sin's familiar friend :

*For common life, its wants  
And ways, would I set forth in beautiful hues:  
The lowest hind should not possess a hope,*

*A fear, but I'd be by him, saying better  
Than he his own heart's language.*

Browning believes that even hate is but a mask of love; he would strive to trace love's faint beginning in mankind and assist them in their faint aspirations, dim/Struggle for truth All with a touch of nobleness. This idea Browning develops further in his *Essay on Shelley* and in a short narrative poem, *The Glove* in which the poet, Ronsard, follows the lady when she goes out amid hooting and laughter. He asks:

*as a grace, what it all meant?  
If she wishes not the rash deed's recalment?  
For I so I spoke am a poet:  
Human nature, - believes that I know;*

The poet's function, Browning seems to emphasize through the words of Ronsard, is to probe human motive in order to remove popular misunderstanding regarding human action. The poet should have a profound understanding of human nature and should have special sympathy for the deprived and much maligned people in the society. That is why Browning is always preoccupied with the questionable characters and employs the method of special pleading or case making in his longer poems such as *Fifine at the Fair* or *The Ring and the Book*.

Browning strongly believes that a poet has social responsibility as, for example, in his spiritual autobiography, *Sordello*. Like Shelley he claims that the poet must be earth's king because thought is the soul of act and song is the fullest affluence of the finest mind. Hence the poet says in

*Paracelsus:*

*Don't each contrive,  
Despite the evil you abuse, to live?  
Keeping each losel, through a maze of lies,  
His own conceit of truth? To which he lies  
By obscure windings, tortuous, if you will,  
But to himself not inaccessible  
He sees the truth, and his lies for the crowd  
Who cannot see, some fancied right allowed  
His vilest wrong.*

In his own conscience, even the so-called evil man has his own concept of truth with which he justifies his actions. The aim of the poet is to probe his conscience and bring out his image of truth. It is possible only at the hands of the best of the poet:

*For the worst of us, to say they so have seen  
For the better, what it was they saw: the best  
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest.*

Browning makes a distinction among various kinds of poets. While the first and the weakest category of poets objectively record their observations, the better sort merely present their subjective reactions to the world of phenomena, but the best, combining the functions of both, impart their vision of truth to others. They are at once subjective and objective; they transcend the limits of their narrow self with their negative capability and see through the world of things about them. This ideal of a perfect fusion of the two faculties subjective and objective Browning was to postulate later on in his *Essay on Shelley*: Nor is there an reason why these modes may not issue hereafter from the same poet in successive works. It was in the pursuit of this ideal that Browning carries on in his excellent monologues. Browning offers some observations on the language of the poet in *Sordello*. He says that one in the whose work man's inmost life shall have yet freer play, should talk as brothers talk/In half-words, call things, call things by half names, without however discontinuing old aids. He should

*Leave the mere rude  
Explicit details; tis but brother s speech  
We need, speech where an accent s change gives each  
The other s soul.*

Browning recommends the use of the colloquial idiom, the language of day- to-day conversation, with all its characteristic turns of expression and liberty

in the use of grammar for the realistic presentation of life. Browning himself employed in his poetry such an idiom and style.

In some of his later poems, Browning expands his ideas on the poetic method. He is no doubt concerned with truth, but his method is not to preach directly. This idea is expressed in *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Transcendentalism*. To preach morality, *Fra Lippo Lippi* observes:

*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 it well.*

Browning criticizes those who philosophize instead of singing from the heart. He affirms, *Since song is our art , we must not speak these naked thoughts, for which we better speak prose as Carlyle recommended.* Browning believes that in poetry, it is not merely the thought but the technique also matters seriously. Poetry raises a distinct image of the person or action he intends to describe; but the images are always saturated with thought.

Browning verse is also subordinate to this intellectual theory of poetic art. It is uniformly inspired by the principle that sense should not be sacrificed to sound. With all his love for music, he is more susceptible to sense than sound. Southerland Orr has rightly assessed that

*“He values thought more than expression; matter more than form;.....He has never meant to be rugged, but he has become so, in the exercise of strength. He has never intended to be obscure, but he has become so from the condensation of style which was the excess of significance and of strength.*

Browning s determination never to sacrifice sense to the sound is the common secret of whatever repels or attracts in Browning s verse. The technical rules, by which Browning works, carry out his principles to the fullest extent. They are as follows:

1. He uses the smallest number of words, which his meaning allows and is particularly sparing in adjectives.
2. He uses the largest *relative* number of Saxon (therefore picturesque) words.
3. He uses monosyllabic words wherever this is possible.
4. He further condenses his style by abbreviations and omission, of which some are discarded, but all warranted by authority. Pronouns, Articles, conjunctions and prepositions are, on the same principle, occasionally left out.
5. He treats consonants as the backbone of the language, and hence, as the essential feature in a rhyme.
6. He seldom dilutes his emphasis by double rhymes.
7. He always uses the measure most appropriate to his subject, whether it is the ten-syllabled blank verse, which makes up *The Ring and the Book* or the separate dramatic monologues.

8. He takes no liberties with unusual measures.
9. he eschews many vulgarisms and inaccuracies which custom has sanctioned.
10. No prosaic turns or tricks of language are ever associated in his verse with a poetic mood.

Such poetic principles are the central facts of Browning's work and his work is himself to borrow the expression of Orr from his book *Handbook to Browning's Works*

### **Browning as a Poet of Love**

Browning is the greatest of love poets. It is with the publication of his *Dramatic Lyrics* in 1842, that Browning earned a reputation for himself as the writer of the truest and finest love poetry in the world. He began writing love poetry early in his career and continued to write it upto the very end. It proves that love is the central tenet of Browning's thought. It being the central theme provides him an opportunity to communicate his significant opinions about life and truth. Chesterton says that the best and most characteristic of his poems are love poems; they express almost to perfection the real wonderland of youth.

Browning believes that love has a surprising intensity to raise to the full the personality of man and is of immense value in the pursuit of knowledge and art, truth and beauty. Love for Browning has two significant aspects: physical as well as spiritual. Both aspects are of equal value. Not only that when they meet in his love poetry, each exists in its pre-eminence. When most of the Victorian poets would recoil from the flesh, Browning would celebrate even the kiss of a girl as according to him, momentariness is the very essence of the experience of love. It should not be overlooked that it is his realism which makes him not to disregard the claims of the body. Rather he believes that it is the body that becomes the means to spiritual development. In other words, Browning asserts that the perfect union between two individuals is a mystic relationship, which is definitely soul's upward progress and leads to spiritual regeneration. Here love becomes for Browning the basis for humanity, of virtue and goodness in life.

Browning deals with two kinds of love—divine love and human love. In most of his poems, love is primarily a relationship between man and woman. The earthly love is not an abstraction—a lofty unattainable idea but the divine love is not opposed to it. To him as to Shakespeare, it is both an ideal which inspires the lovers towards self-effacing activity in life and a reality rooted in the ordinary human experience of mutual relations. It is both infinite passion and the pain of the finite heart that yearn and a common bond which makes allowance for the human weakness. For Browning, a woman is not desirable because she holds an eternal charm and loveliness but because she is a woman, her imperfections only endear her the more as he says in a poem *Too Late* :

*And your mouth, — there was never, to my mind,  
Such a funny mouth, for it would not shut,  
And the dented chin too — what a chin;  
There were certain ways when you spoke, some words  
That you know you never could pronounce.*

For Browning love is a complete human experience in which the body, the mind and the soul have their equal share. He differs with the average Victorian in two significant ways: (i) The Victorian recoiled from the flesh and looked upon it as an obstacle in the development of the soul and (ii) Browning believes that it is something warm and human, of this earth earthy and yet something inspiring and lofty. He does not abhor romance and sensuousness in love. He regards love as a means to attain a higher end, that is perfect union leading to marriage and a happy home.

In *A Critical History of English Poetry* Herbert J.C. Grierson and J.C. Smith make very insightful observations about Browning that,

*“The love he writes of is love between man and woman, and that he knows in many phases, from the fierce animal passion of Ottima in *Pippa Passes* to the romantic love (“*Queen's Worship*”*

*he called it) so exquisitely rendered in The Last Ride Together and Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli But he knew a better way than that the love whose object is not an imagined goddess but a real woman, whom a man loves not because she is his ideal but because she is herself, all the causeless laughters, the little private jokes and common memories that are the stuff of intimacy. That is the real thing, and in that kind of love poetry Browning is a master. Too Late, A Lovers Quarrel, Love Among Ruins, By the Fireside such poems are among his best title to immortality.*

The natural end of such love is marriage, and Browning like Donne in an earlier age, is the chosen poet of wedded love.

Quite constant with this ideal of love is his conviction that in motherhood lies the perfection of womanhood. In Inn Album the heroine declares:

*Womanliness means only motherhood;  
All love begins and ends here, - roams enough,  
But having run the circle, rests at home.*

Similarly, Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book* is drawn with piercing and overpowering tenderness to borrow the expression of Swinburne. It is a masterpiece in Browning's gallery of woman-characters. In such love poems his own love-story and marriage enrich both imagination and emotion.

Browning as a love poet is more concerned with the psychology of love than with the passion of love. In one poem after another, his lovers analyse and dissect their passion. For example, in *The Last Ride Together* the lover thinks less of his beloved than of his own success and failure in love, and derives consolation from the fact that success is rare in life. Browning intellectualizes love as the emotion of love is always entwined with grave questions of life and conduct.

Browning's love poems can be broadly divided into two groups, the personal and the dramatic. The personal poems are far outnumbered by the dramatic poems but in them the flame of love is steadier and more serene, fed as it is by the pure lyricism of sincere emotion. They are the product of Browning's happy married life and testify to the power of love - the power to raise his imagination to the heights of lyrical rapture and even to awaken it to a sense of mystic realization. In other words, it is the power of love that lifts the lover to a higher and nobler level and gives him new strength. In *Men and Woman* the poems like *My Star*, *By the Fire Side*, *One Word More*, and in *Dramatis Personae* *Prospice* are some of the examples of the personal love poems. In *My Star* which is a poem of delicate fancy and is obviously to his wife he says:

*What matter to me if their star is a world?  
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.*

The idea of supreme significance of love reminds us of Donne because like him Browning also shows how love which began merely as a physical passion attains new depth of the divine.

Addressed to his wife as a dedicatory preface to *Men and Women*, in *One Word More* Browning lays his habitual dramatic guise aside and speaks this once in my true person. Although the poem falls into two parts - the first part of fourteen stanzas and the other of five only, both are thematically interlinked. The perfect correspondence between the poet and his wife, which is the central theme of *By the Fire Side*, is emphasized here as well.

In *Dramatis Personae* (1864) the only poem that has an unmistakable personal note is *Prospice*. It was written in the autumn following Mrs Browning's death. Here the poet refers to the loss of his beloved but unlike other poems of loss, such as Tennyson's *In Memoriam* or Arnold's *Thyrsis* this poem expresses an exalted mood without any sense of anguish. Indeed his faith in life after death is so strong that death becomes only a necessary prelude to the final reunion with his beloved. His manliness and courage makes him willing to pay glad life's arrears/Of pain darkness and cold. because soon the worst turns the best to the brave and as a peace out of pain emerges, he perceives a light that reunites him to the soul of my soul.



A large number of Browning's love poems are dramatic and impersonal. They often deal with a rich variety of critical love situations and reveal the poet's remarkable insight into the multitudinous complexities of emotion of love. Broadly speaking, they fall into two categories: poems dealing with romantic and idealized love with all moods, vagaries, certainties, failures and conquests, and poems, - the bigger, the more varied and more characteristic group - that treats the little ironies and differences, joys and sorrows enlivened with common memories in the life of the lovers whether married or not. In Browning's love poems the situations are curiously dramatic. Despite the fact that his own love ran so unhesitatingly smooth, he explored so often the eddies and backwaters and torrents in the current of love as T.S. Yong put it. He seems almost the first to realize that these moments are not necessarily those of rapture of possession and enjoyment, or of fierce bitterness of rejection, but may be any one of the scores of episodes in the long chronicle. Hence the novelty of situations is the main feature of his love poetry. Browning stands apart from other love poets because even the positive emotion of love does not come singly to him. His curiously examining intellect traces it back to the origins and at the same time assesses its future. Browning has a deep psychological interest in the poems of romantic love. In *Two in Compagna* love is an insatiable longing:

*Infinite passion, and the pain  
Of finite hearts that yearn.*

In the poems about romantic love that lover confesses that it is not under our control/To love or not to love. Besides dealing with the romantic love, Browning also depicts various aspects of grossly realistic love, which has nothing squeamish about it - something that sets Browning apart from rest of his contemporaries. The episode of Ottima and Sebald in *Pippa Passes* is a dramatization of illicit love in its fierce animality where as Respectability offers another aspect of the same, which defies social order.

Browning also portrays failure in love as in *Crestina* Or *The Last Ride Together* and a host of other poems. Failure in love is not an occasion for wild outburst of grief or violence, but rather for a manliness of character and temper which gathers strength out of defeat, and is imbued a new thought to resolve other ventures. T.S. Young says, Tragedies of love are for Browning's women, rather than for his men. The tragic love poems deal with both marital and premarital relations between lovers. The cruelty and jealousy in love are invariably presented as in *The Laboratory* and *My Last Duchess*. Other studies of estrangement in married life are offered in *Any Wife to Any Husband* or *The Worst of It*. The first gives the woman's point of view while the second represents the male partner's case. The greatest poem of marital tragedy, however, *Andrea del Sarto* where the Faultless painter realizes at last that his failure in love is largely responsible for his failure as an artist.

Browning does not hesitate to represent even the abnormal love as, for example, in *Porphyria's Lover* where the abnormal lover strangulates the girl with her own silky, golden hair and then sits calmly with her head on her head on his shoulder. In this way he has made her his own for ever. In *Evelyne Hope* middle aged man of forty-eight loves a young girl of eighteen. He never reveals his love for her in her lifetime but when she dies he speaks of it. He places a geranium petal in her hand as an emblem of their love, hoping that she will wake up, remember, and understand. In such poems Browning affirms that love overrides death - that unfulfilled love in this life will be fulfilled in the next. In other words, here love is frustrated by death but the lover is not dejected. In many poems love is thwarted by circumstances by different forces but Browning never approves of the idea of sighing and pining for love as it has no meaning and yields nothing to either party. However there are two things, which Browning openly rejects and treats as a sin, that is, infirmity of purpose and moral cowardice. For illustration take *The Statue and the Bust* and *Youth and Art*. If in the former poem the lovers agree to fly together but the flight once postponed never comes to pass, while in the latter poem lovers, both artists, despite their material success remain incomplete without love:

*Each life unfulfilled you see;  
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy  
We have not sighted deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired, -been happy*

In a couple of poems Browning presents the case of the rejected lovers as, for example, in *The Last Mistress* and *The Last Ride Together*. In the former poem, he is content to be mere friends with her, in the latter, the frustrated lover accepts the defeat with philosophic calm for he knows that in this world all men strive but who succeed. He is well satisfied with the lady's concession to have the last ride with her for he at least has instant which could be made eternity. So, he is grateful to her —

*My whole heart rises up to bless  
Your name in pride and thankfulness!*

Browning's rejected lovers are indeed splendid fellows because they have faith in love and its ultimate triumph. For Browning love is the central principle of the universe, the highest attribute both of God and man and God has created love to reward the love. Browning's love poems show the countless phases and varieties of love in all the classes of society, which makes him one of the greatest love poets in English literature after John Donne. Precisely, love for Browning is a spiritual experience which abides, for love is the best as he says in his well-known poem, *Love Among the Ruins*.

### **Browning's Optimism**

A singular feature of Browning's outlook, which is an essential part of his philosophy of life, is his optimism. It is not a theoretical notion or the result of any superficial idea; it is not a blind opinion or cheap optimism which is generated by ignoring the realities of life. In an introduction to a volume of selections from Browning published a century ago in 1903, Mrs. Alice Meynell wrote: 'The most inspired and inspiring of the qualities of his genius is his singular and splendid courage. Browning's singular and splendid courage arises from his optimism which runs through the whole of his poetry from *Pauline* to *Asolando*. And it is particularly striking in the case of a poet who belonged to an age of spiritual doubt and disillusionment when almost every thinker was overpowered by growing pessimism.

Browning's optimism was not shallow as it did not blink at life's ugly realities and it was not smug or facile, having no roots in thought. It was neither a variant of escapism as some of the modern critics would like to believe, nor a brand of Victorian meliorism. Misreading of the well-known lines in *Pippa's song*:

*God's in his heaven —  
All's right with the world.*

leads to the opinion that Browning's optimism has failed in the face of shattering cataclysm of the Great War. But none can deny that Browning's optimism is consonant with a close enquiry into the actual incidental, and accidental human nature in action concerning the range of customary life.

Browning knew fully well that there is in man sordid, selfish, impure, corrupt, brutish traits but in spite of every disappointment and every wound, he still finds a spiritual power in him which restores assurance and faith in man and his singularly noble character.

Browning's optimism was partly the result of his own abundant good health and capacity for enjoyment, but it is also the outcome of an enthusiast's view of life. He believed that life as it is constituted, the events of life as they happen, are best for carrying on. He was lucky not merely in having the most congenial and favourable domestic environment ever since his birth and a healthy constitution but in his love affair. It was his indomitable zest for life which wrought the miracle of reviving a dying woman to live with him in perfect happiness for fifteen years. His optimism added other qualities like serviceableness to his character, which convinced him that so-called difficulties of life are the necessary part of it.

Browning's optimism is not wise passiveness. A man may indeed sigh for rest at the end of his life, may even regard the body as a prison-house and look forward to deliverance from it but Browning's normal gospel is:

*As the bird wings and sings,  
Let us cry All good things*

*Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than  
flesh helps soul.*

He believes that while we are in flesh our duty is to strive with all our energies and single-minded devotion in pursuit of our objective, our life's set prize. Briefly, he bent all his energies that way stating "You must be ready to burn your way through the world if you want to see God."

It would be, however, an error to suppose that Browning was blissfully ignorant of evil or failure in life of their manifold manifestations, of misery and suffering, sorrow and despair. A close study of his first poem, "Pauline" is enough to show that he too like any other young thinker had a period of storm and stress. He was quite aware of his prevalent squalor and evil in life as it is also borne out by his other poems also. In "The Patriot" Browning deals with a failure. The Patriot recognizes that the disrespect of the world leading to an ignoble death is safer than a worldly triumph. He has had experience of both. He is now on the way to execution. He has been serving the people but they have changed that is all. He says:

*Thus I entered, and thus I go!  
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.  
Paid by the world, what dost thou owe  
Me? God might question; now instead,  
Tis God shall reply: I am safer so.*

It is the faith in a just God that makes him an optimist. The poet's own life is mainly contemplative and so he arrives at the peace of faith. Browning's aim as a poet is to act in a truly religious spirit as sin's familiar friend, to be "the lowest hind." That is why he assigns two monologues to Guido, the villain in *The Ring and the Book* while every other character has only one. Moreover, optimism is the natural sequel of Browning's poetic method, which probes the complex human motive to bring out the soul of goodness in things evil. It has a firm philosophical basis and it grows out of his conception of life and its purpose. This world is a dreadful machinery of sin and sorrow, which shapes human character as he says in *Sordello*, iii:

*Evil's the scheme by which tho' ignorance  
Good labours to exist.*

Browning is also confident that good will ultimately triumph, and that evil too will be transformed into good as he says in "Abt Vogler":

*There shall never be one lost good! What was shall live  
as before  
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;  
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;  
On the earth the broken arcs; in heaven, a perfect round.*

Browning's optimism is thus rooted in his faith in future existence of which the present life is just probation, a training ground. There is no doubt that Browning believed in a life after death, and believed also that the life after death is better than this one as he does in "Prospice," that is what is called a personal immortality. In his personal Epilogue to his last volume, *Asolando*, he says that fools think we are imprisoned by death. On the contrary, we are set free - we sleep to wake. It is life after death that gives meaning to this life. The old scholar of "A Grammarian's Funeral" is said by his disciples to await a life in which he can put to the proof all he has learned in his earthly life. Rabbi Ben Ezra said

*Look thou not down but up  
To uses of a cup,*

Browning, in his many religious poems, like "The Christmas Eve," "Easter Day," or in the poems based on Greek stories like "Ixion," refutes the doctrine of eternal punishment. Though he himself seemed to have denied that he was a Christian, but many Christians claim him as a Christian poet par excellence. His poem like "A

Death in the Desert , which has been described as the best commentary on St. John s Gospel, is a defence of Christianity in the face of questionings and denials. Browning s optimism has acquired a graver and strictly religious undertone but he feels no reason to be unhappy. The basis of his optimism now is the wisdom he has cumulatively acquired in life. It is the philosophic mind that teaches him to rationalize and justify failure as in The Last Ride Together or the faith that The best is yet to be. Moreover, when Fra Lippo Lippi says:

*This world s no blot for us,  
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good;  
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.*

He expresses rather crudely Browning s principle of joyous acceptance of life as it is. The faith in mere joy of living in his view is the only positive and pragmatic approach to life, for wisdom lies in making a virtue of necessity. In Browning when belief is impossible, hope comes forward to assist us to uphold our conduct. Browning dares to face the facts and after scrutinizing them he brings to us an assurance of hope to borrow an expression of Westcott. Precisely, Browning s optimism is, however, the lure and the sustaining force as A.Allen Brockington emphatically put it in his book, *Browning And The Twentieth Century*.

### **Browning s Dramatic Monologues**

Dramatic Monologue is a term used in a number of senses, with the basic meaning that in it a single person speaks alone with or without an audience, Most prayers, much lyric verse and all laments are monologues, but apart from these four main kinds can be distinguished;(a) Monodrama as in Strindberg s *The Stronger*; (b) Soliloquy, for instance the Moor s self-revelation in *Othello*; Soliloquy addresses to an audience in a play, for instance, Iago s explanation s to the audience in *Othello*; (d) dramatic monologues a poem in which there is an imaginary speaker addressing an imaginary audience, as in Browning s The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed s Church or Fra Lippo Lippi.

Robert Browning s genius was essentially dramatic which reveals itself in two aspects of drama: (i) Art of characterization and (ii) Unfolding of strong dramatic situations. From the very beginning of his career as a poet Browning was attracted towards drama and had been constantly fascinated by Shakespeare s mighty achievement as a dramatist. His own ambition, though unfulfilled, was to be a chronicler of all forms of life. He had also felt the necessity to take up the cause of the maligned and misunderstood people in order to play his role as a leader of men ;It was in pursuit of these ideas that Browning continually made experiments until he was able to express himself fully through his dramatic monologues. Browning began by concentrating his attention on the incidents in the development of a soul and could depict the phenomena of the mind without being hampered by the limitations of the stage. Browning made this form entirely his own because it suited his genius. His highest achievement as a poet lies in his technique of dramatic monologue, which makes him the most original force in the nineteenth century poetry and the first of the moderns.

Browning considered drama to be the highest form of expression and therefore took to writing plays for the stage. He produced several plays in a period of eight years but, unfortunately, his plays were hopeless failures for three specific reasons: (a) the plays were deficient in action; (b) they lacked a sustained plot and (c) the action in them is entirely internal. His real interest lay in soul study, in psychological analysis and in introspection. Browning s interest in men and women was in what is called the soul . In this context he wrote to J. Milsand of Dijon, a letter saying: My stress lay on the incidents in the development of the soul: little else is worth study. Even Hardy thought that it was the essence of Browning. His dramatic skill as well as his skill in painting, interior landscape exercise special influence on the Dramatic Monologue of which he became the supreme exponent in an age steeped in the romantic poetry. Browning added a new dimension to it and yoked it to a new purpose. As Hugh Walker pointed out, Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue. But he made it specially his own, and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it.

The Dramatic Monologue is dramatic because it is an utterance of an imaginary characters and not of the poet himself and the character is developed not through the description on the part of the poet, but through the conflict

in the mind of the character, the opposite thoughts and emotions of the character himself. It is a monologue because here a single individual converses with himself. This form is also referred as Monodrama. T.S. Young defines the dramatic monologue stating:

*“This kind of comprehensive soliloquy, absorbing into its substance by the speaker’s keenly observant glance, the surrounding scenery and audience, bringing all that is pertinent to the chosen moment by the channels of memory, argument, curiosity and association; adding through the deep graven lines which habit has incised upon character much which the soul would fain conceal, and enriching the current of self-revealing speech with the product of any other emotion which may have been powerful enough to share in the fashioning of this critical moment.*

The dramatic monologue differs widely from drama in its purpose and method. In drama the action is external; in monologue the action is entirely internal. The thoughts and emotions of the individual character are the actors, and his soul is the stage. The monologue develops character not through outward action and conflict as in the drama, but through the clash of motives in the soul of the speaker, and with end in view the a moment of crisis is built when the personality of the actor is most active. Therefore, Walter Pater calls Browning’s poetry as the poetry of situations. In almost all the monologues, the speaker is placed in a critical situation, his reaction to it are analysed and dissected and so the real worth of the actor is brought out. For example, take *The Last Ride Together* where the crucial situation is the rejection of a lover by the lady. It is the lover’s reaction to this situation, which forms the substance of the poem. Unlike the drama, here the attention is focused not on the action but on the crisis and the past is unfolded only retrospectively. There is no chronological sequence of events; as the speaker’s mind moves backwards and forwards at will and the past and the future are both telescoped in the present in the process of self-analysis. There are incidents but they are the incidents of the soul, and the unity between them is not logical but emotional. It is aptly summed up by a critic that the view of life’s reality in drama is panoramic, in the monologue it is kaleidoscopic.

If the soliloquy is the a dialogue of the mind with itself, the dramatic monologue implies the presence of some other character or characters to whom it is addressed and who listen to it without taking part in it. This imparts to the monologue a conversational tone. A. Allen Brockington says in his book, *Browning and the Twentieth Century*,

*“Some of the dramatic monologues are in form of soliloquy, but the majority are conversational that is to say there are listeners and the presence of listeners affects the talk. Often, the remarks of the listener are indicated by the speaker’s answers.*

Thus the character not only of the speaker but also of the listener is also revealed. For illustration in *My Last Duchess* the listener is a messenger who has come to negotiate with the Duke a second marriage on behalf of his master’s daughter; in *Andrea del Sarto* the listener is the painter’s beautiful wife, Lucrezia. This use of the conversational method is important feature of the technique of Browning. W.L. Phelps makes a very perceptive observation that in his book, *Browning How to Know Him* that Browning’s dramatic monologue is a series of remarks, usually confessional, addressed either orally or in an epistolary form to a group of listeners. These other figures, though they do not speak are necessary to the understanding of the monologue: we often see them and see their faces change in expression as the monologue proceeds. The dramatic monologue also differs from the aside although both are addressed to an audience. The aside has a strictly dramatic function and it glimpses into the character in a fleeting moment, whereas the monologue is lengthier and more extensive in its range of both thought and emotion. Briefly, Browning’s monologue is essentially a study of character, of mental states, of moral crises emerging from within. It is predominantly psychological, analytical, meditative and argumentative. It ranges from brief and subtle self-delineation as in *My Last Duchess* to prolonged exploration of spiritual depths and moral complexities as in *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*.

If one tries to study the evolution of Browning’s monologue there are many sources, which have contributed significantly. In his effort to find his natural voice, Browning was originally inspired by Shakespeare, but he had

other sources of help and encouragement. All the critics have a common consensus that an original poet like Browning is hardly influenced by anybody though he may have his favourites. However, the suggestions for his method Browning had already derived from Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* (1824-29) Browning had his personal contact with Landor to whom he owed much of his interest in Greek Art. Landor's work is based upon the doctrine of the 'psychological moment' derived presumably from Lessing's *Laocoon* - a fairly known work in those days. Browning likewise believes that the poet must deal with the crest of life only, and in practice follows what he believes. His special technique of the dramatic monologue is indeed an extensive application of the 'psychological moment' in poetry. He treated this form of monologue with a psychological intention and employed the language of ordinary conversation both in rhythm and syntax.

The characteristic use of the conversational method has been described by Brockington thus:

*“ The phrase conversational method perhaps conveys to the plain reader an image of a kind of placid fire-side talk. Two or three persons are sitting together, and with intervals of silence, they drop out casual remarks about nothing in particular. But suppose these two or three persons are friends who have many recollections in common, but have not met for a long time. One of them meanwhile, has been for a voyage, which has proved to be a critical experience. The companions of the voyage are known to the friends with whom he is conversing. He talks about the voyage. The others hardly say a word. But he answers their unspoken thoughts. The talk becomes a monologue. The speaker may use the homeliest words and images, or at heightened moments may rise to a vivid and exalted eloquence. The situation comes to the listeners as it came to the speaker; they live in the scene and also in him.*

By giving the monologue the semblance of a conversation, Browning intended to provide the speaker with the widest possible range to express himself. The silent reactions of the listener, as indicated by the speaker himself during the speech draw out the speaker's mind, much like the remarks of the interlocutor in a dialogue. They help the projection of the conflict of ideas and feelings which rages in his mind and also contributes to the dramatic effect of the monologue, although they often break the flow of the narrative of the argument, posing a challenge to the reader's intelligence at times.

Since the monologue deals with the most momentous event in the life of the speaker, it plunges headlong into the crisis at the very outset. As such it has an abrupt and very arresting beginning, suggesting that the present situation is a continuation of something that has gone before. For example take *Fra Lippo Lippi* in which the central character says:

*I am brother Lippo, by your leave;  
You need not clap your torches to my face.*

It indicates that Lippo while returning to his cell is stealthily caught by fellow friars who flash their torch-light on his face to identify him. Having thus begun in a dramatic manner, Browning then makes the speaker speak out his mind on the critical situation in which he is placed. He studies the various postures of his mind towards the situation. The speaker's attitude varies, through a series of moods, varying in accordance with his fleeting intellectual and emotional aptitudes. As regards language and style, it is what Browning calls 'brother's speech', the language of informal talk between friends, which takes liberty both with grammar and syntax, often omitting the necessary connectives such as 'that', 'which', and 'who' and even verbs, and using plenty of dashes and parentheses.

In these monologues Browning has presented a vast galaxy of men and women, each having his/her own individual character, physical and mental-make-up, aspirations and problems and his/her own peculiar situation in life. They include poets, painters, musicians, theologians, kings, lovers, beggars - mostly scoundrels and indifferent people, saints being generally women like Pippa, Pompillia and Balaustion - placed in surroundings commensurate with their character and temper. These figures not merely stand out as distinct personalities, but also represent the crises in theology, art or political and social life of their times. In most of these monologues Browning has

distilled the essence of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In his monologues Browning's power and technique evolved slowly but steadily till perfection was achieved. Though Browning was not the first to employ as other poets like Tennyson and Rossetti had already used it but Browning made it the most significant form of poetic expression. Though the hints and traces of this form are to be seen even in such early poems as *Pauline* and *Paracelsus* but the form comes to full flowering in *The Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842 and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845. In the latter volume there are two more important dramatic monologues, *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church* and *The Laboratory*. The former is his first monologue in blank verse which is known for its concentrated truth about human nature and biting imaginative realism, while the latter is the picturesque but terrible piece of work known for Browning's unique power of compressing and concentrating intense emotion into a few poignant words that move our souls to a perfect passion of terror and pity and sympathy. It is in his next volume, *Men and Women* (1855) that Browning's special instrument—the dramatic monologue—is brought to perfection. Almost every poem, in the volume down to the smallest lyric, is essentially dramatic monologue. Perhaps the most striking instances of the form and method are the five blank verse pieces, *Andrea Del Sarto*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Cleon*

*Karshish* and *Bishop Blougram*.

A larger part of Browning's next volume of poems, *Dramatis Personae*

(1864) also consists of dramatic monologues which are extended and elaborate. Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) is the culmination of this dramatic method. In the earlier monologues Browning is specially concerned with character delineation, but in the later monologues he is more occupied with the case-making. In them there is tendency towards argument and casuistry often neglecting the emotional and lyrical effect. Sometimes the monologue becomes much too intricate in argument, leading to obscurity and unpoetic didacticism. However, such monologue turns out to be a kind of special pleading, which the speaker makes in his own defence, often for a dubious action. It has been sometimes said that Browning's monologues are satires upon their respective speakers. But this is far from the truth. No doubt, the speakers expose their follies and their weaknesses, but as Chesterton points out—the monologues are not satires upon their subjects; they are not even harsh or unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences. *The Last Ride Together* is a defence of the lover, and *Andrea del Sarto* offers an excuse for the painter's maltreatment of his parents:

*My father and my mother died of want.  
Well; had I riches of my own? You see  
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot,  
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died.*

Most of Browning's monologues are dramatic and hence objective studies of character and times of the imagined speakers, and as such testify to his astonishing power to realize a situation or a character imaginatively but quite often they betray the personal point of view of their creator. The element of subjectivity is to some extent inevitable in a method which requires the poet to lend his own mind to his characters to enable them to defend themselves the best. In the process of special pleading he naturally and unavoidably gives his own thoughts on life, God and immortality to them. It will not be an exaggeration to say that we can deduce the poet's own philosophy of life and art from the study of these monologues.

Browning's dramatic monologue is certainly a major step towards the characteristic inwardness of the modern drama. In his passion for psychoanalysis, Browning anticipated, to a very great extent, the modern stream of consciousness technique. For instance, consider the Bishop's incoherent fumbblings over the problem of his own burial in the concluding part of *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*. Moreover, like the modern impressionists, Browning ranges at will over the vast stretches of time focusing the past and the future in the present. His aim is to render the soul or psyche of the protagonists and so he follows the same technique as the modern impressionists adopt. Hugh Walker rightly sums up that,

*“ These collections of Monologues form together one of the most precious and profoundly original contributions to the poetic literature of the nineteenth century. The defects, which prevented his complete success in the regular drama, are not apparent in this cognate form. He takes just what interests him, and consequently he is nearly always inspired, nearly always at his best.*

### **Browning and His Art: Language And Versification**

Most of the critics of Browning are keen to discover message or the central meaning of his poetry but the best way to arrive at it to focus on the characteristic use of the language. Browning has been generally regarded as a philosophical poet and a great writer of dramatic monologues but they hesitate to acclaim him as a literary artist but it is by the virtue of his use of language that he is considered to be a highly original genius and one of the great innovators in verse like Donne, Dryden and Wordsworth. It is, to quote Chesterton, gross and complete slander upon Browning to consider him as a philosopher and logician but not a poet simply because his poems are so perplexing and baffling. Browning does not use the so-called poetic language either of neo-classic or romantic tradition. Neither does he care for decorum or decency in his choice of words nor does he employ them for cumulative emotional effects. His language is neither sophisticated nor evocative; it is functional and it serves the purpose it is meant for, that is, to delineate its characters and situations as precisely as possible. To achieve its end he uses all kinds of words, whether learned, poetic, archaic, unfamiliar, colloquial or slang as in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. His poetry also lacked the use of modifiers and other words which decorate or fill out rhythmic patterns just as Tennyson or Swinburne often do. Still, he sought to establish the poem as a unified expression and for his use of words he may be regarded as a precursor of the poetic idiom of the Twentieth century.

Browning has the reputation that he did not care for the poetic form of his poetry but the fact remains that he was always weaving, inventing and modelling new forms. As a result, among his hundreds of poems, there are half as many different verse forms as there are different poems. Being an originator of poetic forms, he believed that an idea always invents its own organic, novel and artistic form to express it. Browning was not indifferent to the technical aspects of form or beauty of form and for it he depended on three important things:

- (a) ***An attempt to make a poem a harmonious composition, varied but having a unity, a form:*** Referring to this aspect of Browning's poetry, Arthur Symonds in his famous book, *Introduction to Browning's Poetry* says that his poems are invariably works of art. There is no characteristic of his work more admirable or more rare than unity, the compactness and completeness, the skill and care in construction and definiteness in the impression of each poem. It makes Browning a conscious artist. For example, take his poems from the volume entitled *Men and Women*, which are designed, constructed and finished with the skill of an architect. Though there seems to be much which is broken up and over-crowded lacking selection and order but these details and digressions are perfected appropriate in their place and contribute to the total thought structure and complexity of the central idea of the poem. They are the outcome of the richness of mental process and not of the faulty craftsmanship. T.S. Young is apt in his remark that Browning was never formless: There is a marvelous sense of proportion in the importance assigned to various features in his dramatic monologues; every element plays a significant but not over-emphasised part: hence the unity of atmosphere and effect.
- (b) ***To promote the beauty of form in poetry through style and diction:*** Browning's primary purpose is to present character in the act of self-communication for which he constantly adjusts his language and method to this purpose. Browning was a highly original genius and his style is entirely individual and so it can be called *Browningesque*. The structure of his sentence in a poem is governed by the relative importance, which the speaker attributes to its elements. He uses words under the pressure of a mood, which coaxes him to omit certain necessary connectives and take certain liberties with grammar and syntax. Making his style cryptic and elliptical at times. It means that the unity of verse form is not logical but emotive or



associative; it is imaginative rather than grammatical. Sometimes when he employs words as symbols to communicate experiences in their pre-conscious state of mind as in *Bishop orders His Tomb*, he foreshadows the stream of consciousness technique.

The characteristic features of Browning's style are listed by the critics including Mrs. Orr as follows:

1. He is economical in the use of words and is contented to use only two words where would normally use ten as if to refute the charge of verbosity leveled against him in the beginning of his career. The result was the compression and condensation that made him a difficult and even an obscure poet.
2. Browning uses adjectives only sparingly.
3. Whenever possible he uses mono-syllabic words.
4. He further condenses his style by abbreviations and omissions. For example, *in*, *on*, and *of* become *i*, *o*, etc. in his poetry. Pronouns, articles, conjunctions and prepositions are frequently left out.
5. Browning uses inverted constructions. It is often the tail first with him. It gives an impression that when other poets put the right word in the right place, Browning continually puts his words in the wrong places. It adds many bad and ugly lines to his works.
6. Perhaps due to his whim or caprice, he leaves his sentences half-finished and his meaning half expressed.
7. His style is overloaded with parentheses, which create further difficulties for his readers
8. Browning's style is over crowded with Latin expressions and allusions and references to little known sources.

These features often make his style rugged, grotesque and fantastic. According to Chesterton, Browning's artistic originality lies in the serious use of the grotesque and it seems to add strength and energy to his style.

However, as a rule Browning takes care to see that his language suits the mood and the temper of his speaker. For example, take the language of *Fra Lippo Lippi* which is vigorous and concrete, perceptive and sensory; many words contain explosive consonants, for instance, *snap*, *whipped*, *bite*, *peep*, *splashed* and great many words express action phonetically: *twinkle*, *snap*, *munching*, *prodded* and *scuttle*.

Browning uses various structural devices to dramatize the sense of conflict in character. The colloquial and technical, slang and unfamiliar, archaic and rugged, learned and grotesque words are yoked together. Sometimes, words from most varied registers are used within the compass of a single poem as in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. Here two things can be rightly pointed out that the use of language is functional and that the language is determined by the mood and temper of the speaker as R.J.King pointed out in *The Bow and the Lyre*.

As regards the basic nature of his language, it can be stated that colloquialism is less a matter of diction than of sentence-structure. Browning was a great metrical artist and throughout his career he experimented with a variety of stanza-forms, rhyme schemes and other metrical devices. Arthur Symonds considers Browning to be 'The greatest master of our language.' He further adds that,

*"Browning is indeed far from paying no attention, or little, to metre and versification. Except in some of his late blank verse, and in a few other cases, his very errors are just as often the result of hazardous experiments as of carelessness and inattention. In one very important matter, that of rhythm, he is perhaps the greatest master in our language; in single or double, in simple and grotesque alike, he succeeds in fitting rhyme with a perfection which I have never found in any other poet of any age."*

If his lyrical poems have tremendous varieties of form, his blank verse, at its best, is of a higher quality than any of other modern poet. D.C. Somerwell rightly assesses that 'As a matter of fact, a few writers have

ever had a greater flexibility of style than Browning. In *Grammarians Funeral*, as the disciples of the dead Grammarian limb the mountain, the lines of the poem seem actually to move to the steady climbing rhythm of their feet.

Browning employs many literary devices like irony, paradox, pun and a group of associated words to further the meaning. Irony and paradox carry the burden of Andrea's situation, which suggests his masculine strength as well as the bareness of his soul to use Roma J. King's words. Browning's poetry is very rich in the use of figures of speech like metaphors, similes and symbols but they are mostly organic and functional. For example, take the following line from *Pauline* for its use of simile. He talks of the blackthorn boughs which

*Were white with coming buds,  
Like the bright side of sorrow.*

His similes in the later poems are more distinct and deep-cut. In *By the Fireside*, for instance, he describes the November colour on the creeper leaf:

*Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,  
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss.*

As a rule Browning's wealth of metaphoric expression is richer and more effective and also more organically conceived. In *Rabi Ben Ezra*, his equation of God with the potter, of the world with the wheel, of the human soul with the pitcher or the cup and of its quality of work with wine, is very apt and significant. Similarly, in *Andrea del Sarto* the phrase *serpentine beauty* suggests the destructive nature of Lucrezia's seductive charm as well as her deceptive nature.

Browning makes an excellent use of certain images from nature. He is particularly fond of the moon and the stars. If the star image is suggestive of an ideal of purity, nobility and peace, for instance, in his love poem, *My Star*, in *One Word More* he expresses the uniqueness of his love by referring to the astronomical idea of the other unknown side of the moon. The same figure is used in *Andrea del Sarto*, but the reference is to the commonplace side of the moon: *My face, my moon, my everybody's moon*. Browning's use of the image of house is exquisite as, for instance, in two poems *Life in a Love* and *Love in a Life* where it represents a perfect union of two souls, rooted in the creed that only love is best and it results in abiding peace and happiness. Briefly, Browning's use of images and other figures of speech is effective, functional and artistic.

(c) ***To Create Clear, Sweet Melody of Thought and Language in Verse:*** Browning used an amazing variety of verse-patterns and rhythms. If in *Pippa Passes* the lyric verse creates music like her songs where Browning has succeeded in capturing the exquisite melody of her songs, in *Saul* he captures the choral symphony of nature. Likewise in *One Way of Love*, he has used the simplest of lyric measures with great skill. He is a brilliant rhymist and could adjust both rhythm and rhyme to carry the meaning of a poem. In the use of metre Browning's determination to sacrifice the sound to the sense is the secret which either attracts or repels the reader. Mrs. Orr makes a very perceptive remark that *In Browning's poetry wherever sense keeps company with sound, we have a music far deeper than can arise from mere sound*. Pointing out some distinctive features of his verse as a metrist she says that Browning's skill and originality is unique for the following reasons:

- (a) For Browning consonants are the backbone of English language and hence the essential feature of his rhymes.
- (b) He uses double and triple rhymes to create the humorous or satirical effects as in the *Flight of the Duchess*.
- (c) He uses measures most appropriate to his subject, whether in blank verse or in heroic rhymed verse or the smaller lyrics.

- (d) He takes no liberties with the unusual measures, though he may take all liberties with the usual ones to impart variety to them and increase their effect.

Browning, who had inherited from his mother his love for music, had a trained ear for music and melody but he cared more for sense than for sound as a part of his poetic theory. S.A. Brooke says:

*“ He injured the melody of his verse by casting into the middle of it, like stones into clear water, rough parenthetic sounds to suit his parenthetic phrases. Sometimes, he broke his melody into two by introducing violent clanging words, and discordant sounds. By his interest in quaint oddities of sound, in jarring tricks of metre, in fantastic and difficult arrangements of rhyme, in scientific displays of double rhymes, he, only too often, immolates melody on the altar of his own cleverness.*

In these and many other distinctive features lies Browning's real greatness as a poet.

### **Browning's Philosophical Thought**

Though Browning had no formal message, no church, no philosophy in the technical sense of the term, he had certain definite opinions and firm view about human life, human nature and spirituality and God. Those opinions are very striking and very solid. Hence Browning is called a philosophic poet to borrow an expression of Frederick Ryland. In his poetry, he constantly explores the relation of man to the universe and God and exhibits his philosophy through imaginary characters and situations. Despite the multiplicity of his characters and the complexity of their disposition, there are certain common chords among them and they share certain ideas with their creator as well. Many of these ideas, which recur in Browning's dramatic poems, have found expression in the personal and private records of the poet's dealings with other men in his letters, memoirs and biographical accounts. Leaving apart a few characters, most of them express those views on religion, philosophy and morality with a certain degree of consistency which inevitably leads us to infer how their creator looked at life. This is particularly true of his later poems where the dramatic guise is extremely thin.

Browning may not have been a profound thinker, but he is very consistent. He certainly does not challenge the existing theological and metaphysical dogmas and even accepts the conventional view of God, the immortality of soul and the Christian belief in the Incarnation. Still he is original in his attitude to life and optimism which hold a sharp contrast to institutional Christianity and growing pessimism of the age. It is rightly assessed that He is one of those who rolled back, as far as England is concerned, the morbid pessimism, the sickly disdain of active life, which has infected so much of European literature during the present century.

Browning's philosophy is based on two great theories of the universe, which as G.K. Chesterton pointed out in his book, *Robert Browning*. He says that these two great theories can be expressed in two comparatively parallel phrases. The first was what may be called the hope which lies in the imperfection of man. For instance take his poem *Old Pictures in Florence* which expresses very amusingly the idea that some hope may always be based on deficiency itself. The poem suggests that a sense of incompleteness may be a great advance upon the sense of completeness. Browning draws a definite hope for immortality and the larger scale of life from the very fact of mortality where the dance of death everywhere is a promise for the eternal existence. And Browning was right in saying that in a cosmos where incompleteness implies completeness, life implies immortality. So, the first doctrine is that the hope lies in the imperfection of man. The second of the great doctrines of Browning can only be properly stated as his hope that lies in the imperfection of God.

*“That is to say, that Browning held sorrow and self-denial, if they were the burden of man, were also his privileges. He held that these stubborn sorrows and obscure valours might, to use a yet more strange expression, have provoked the envy of the Almighty. If man has self-sacrifice and God has none, then man has in the Universe a secret and blasphemous superiority. And this tremendous story of a Divine jealousy Browning reads into the story of the Crucifixion.*

*If the Creator had not been crucified He would not have been as great as thousands of wretched fanatics among His own creatures.*

Thus Browning has definite views on man and God, which he expresses through his poetry. He says:

*Art may tell truth  
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought.*

These are indeed the flashes of insight, which a character has in a moment of crisis in his life. Browning's approach to life is essentially religious and individualistic. He conceives of humanity not as an aggregate, but as a collection of units. Neither does he like the romantic poets concern himself with man as a species, nor does he, like the Augustan poets, consider man in relation to society. His chief concern is with individual men and women each having his or her distinct personality, purpose and mode of life. A thorough-bred Evangelical as he was, he believes: the world is made for each of us, and

*Each of the Many helps to recruit  
The life of the race by a general plan;  
Each living his own, to boot.*

Browning believes that every individual has his own goal of life to pursue and his own problems to solve. His or her life is not cooperative enterprise, undertaken for a common purpose. The ultimate end of each individual is complete self-development through the experiences of life and perfect self-expression. Man has to strive relentlessly to achieve this goal. He has to struggle hard because the path is dogged by all sorts of evils and troubles in their multifarious forms. But, Browning is not daunted by evil and does not think that evil is a philosophical counter-part of good, rather he regards evil as a practical instrument of human advancement it is in a sense essential for the attainment of good; rather it is another form of good itself as he says in *Abt Vogler* :

*Evil the scheme by which thro ignorance  
Good labours to exist.*

Hence,

*The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound  
What was good shall be good, with for evil so much good more.*

Browning lays stress on practical experience, and tests every theory on this touchstone. Compton Rickett sums up Browning's concept of his pragmatic approach to experiences of life thus:

*“Whatever enriches the experience, favours aspiration, gives strength to the heart and mind, is good and is to be used by us whether conventionally sanctioned or not. That which enervates, paralyses deadens is bad and must be put aside. Browning believes that it is through experiences that we wring knowledge from ignorance. According to him evil by contrast, gives meaning to good and defines its qualities. Man has the freedom of will, so that “liberty to do evil, gives grace to good. Doing evil involves suffering but without suffering true knowledge, which is the basis of good, cannot be attained: “When pain ends, gain ends too.*

Browning is a passionate adherent to the theory of evolution and his optimism is logically justified by this theory. For the progress in the moral and spiritual direction, persistent struggle is necessary as perfection is only an ideal and it can not be wholly achieved. But this failure to achieve it is man's initial step to success:

*And what is our failure here but a triumph's  
evidence  
For fullness of the days? How we withered or  
agonized.*

Thus evil is thus a condition of man's moral progress. Similarly doubt is also necessary for the existence of faith as he says in *Easter Day* :

*You must mix some uncertainty  
With faith if you would have faith be.*

Browning values doubt because it diversifies a life of faith. Doubt also acts as a trial of faith as he says in Bishop Blougram's Apology :

*With me faith means perpetual unbelief  
Kept quiet like a snake neath Michael's foot  
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.*

In the dynamic process of life, what is really important is continuous striving towards perfection, not perfection itself because what's come to perfection perishes and imperfection means perfection hid. It is so because perfection spells stagnation and he says most progress is most failure. Browning believes in eternal aspiration as the basis of all human progress as in Andrea Del Sarto .

Rabbi Ben Ezra is Browning's most explicit statement of his philosophy of life. It looks on life from the standpoint of age and recommends that lofty aim and continuous striving are the only key to success in life and they require courage and hope on the part of man:

*Be our joys three part pain  
Strive and hold cheap the strain.*

Browning believes that justification of man's present existence - the motive force of all his striving on this earth is the faith in the next life or the life after death. It is not accomplishment but intention, not the outward gain but the inner aim, that is the real test of human worth. This life is a preparation for the life to come, and evil, suffering and failure are to be welcomed for that ensure that man can enjoy the pleasures of Heaven. In La Saisiaz he says :

*Certain am I - from this life I pass into a better,  
Where that lady lives of whom enamoured was my  
soul  
Where this  
Other lady, my companion dear and true she also  
is?*

The lines point out two significant aspects of his philosophy: Browning's faith in the life after death and in the immortality of soul. The body may die but the soul lives infinitely as it is a part of the Infinite. For example take Evelyn Hope where the lover is sure that the time will come for taking you. Hence man's aspirations and goals are to be based on this principle that Man has Forever and Now, is for dogs and apes. It is expressed in different words by Andrea del Sarto:

*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's heaven for?*

Browning believes that the final judgment is passed not on accomplishment but upon the intention and nobility of soul, which prompts the attempt. This however does not minimize the value of the flesh in the development of the soul as he says:

*The soul is not the body; the breath is not the flute  
Both together make the music, either marred and all is mute.*

Thus for self-realisation it is necessary that

*In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it  
Bears fruit*

as David in *Saul* affirms. In this light one can conclude that death is not the herald of extinction but a Gateway to heaven. Death in Browning's poetry is: A groom/That brings a taper to the outward room. For example, consider his poem *Prospice* where the trial of facing death ends successfully, where the pain of death shall become first peace/ Then a light, Then thy breast, . . .And with God be the rest.

In Browning's view of life, the only weakness that can never be excused is to delay and to reshuffle. To act decisively is better than to hang back, even though the action is not suitable because the strength of purpose may convert it to be good. In the case of the person who lacks will-power nothing can ever be expected.

Browning believes that earthly love is a prelude to divine love. It is a means to a higher end self-realisation or attainment of godhead. Man is lower than God and higher than beasts: God is, they are? Man partly is, and wholly hopes to be. The soul is continually growing from the finite to infinity. Rabbi Ben Ezra says: Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure. Browning has full faith in the potential of love because it is love that kindles and exalts both knowledge and power, and is common to both God and Man. It is through love that Man touches the Infinite. He says: God, Thou art Love I built my faith on that and further adds:

*O, world as God has made it, all is beauty:  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.*

It is Christ in God who represents the love that tops the might. Though there is no real conflict between power and love. They are indeed one, for the All-Great were the All-Loving too. And in his upward progress towards God-head, he can rise through love because God is love. The poems like *Paracelsus*, *Cristina*, and *Death in the Desert* illustrate Browning's belief that Love is the meaning of life.

Browning is not a mystic in the common sense of the term but his poetry often expresses itself through gleams of a vision of the all-embracing Spirit of the cosmos attained through personal spiritual experiences. For instance consider his poems like *Christmas Eve*, *Easter Day*, *Saul* .

Browning's optimistic philosophy of life further experienced in the thought shows that there is the passion of joy at the very core of Nature. This joy in Nature is derived from the form Creative joy of God Unlike Wordsworth he sees God not only in every bush and tree but in every human face, every situation and every form of life. One of the primary avenues of mystical experience to him is art specially music:

*Which is earnest of heaven  
Seeing we know emotions strange by it  
Not else to be revealed.*

That is why music has the power to conjure up that state of trance, that equanimity of the mind, when truth comes upon man and he requires no harp more, no song more.

Hugh Walker has made a very perceptive observation in *Literature of Victorian Era* that no one has sung more fervently than he of the delight of life. David in *Saul*, Pippa in *Pippa Passes*, Fra Lippo Lippi in the poem of the same title and a host of other characters are keenly alive to the pleasure of living. Rabbi Ben Ezra condemns the ascetic negation of the flesh, and asserts the necessity and moral value of both the flesh and the soul:

*As the bird wings and sings,  
Let us cry, "All good things,  
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more now, then flesh  
helps soul.*

Thus through his poetry Browning speaks of invincible faith in life and God, in moral courage and optimism. William Long has aptly summarized the thought that Of all English poets, no other poet is so completely, so consciously, so magnificently a teacher of man . . .Browning has spoken the strongest words of faith in an age of doubt.

## Browning's Obscurity and Its Causes

Though many critics have disapproved of Browning as too unintelligible and difficult, many critics have given a spirited and sympathetic response and defended him against this charge. Despite all the defence, it is hard to absolve Browning fully of this charge of obscurity.

Any attempt to explain this obscurity, which in his own days puzzled even Tennyson or Mrs. Carlyle makes it explicit that it has many sources or causes. In the Victorian Age the chief difficulty was attributed to his style. Among other episodes related to the obscurity of *Sardello* there goes an interesting story that Douglas Jerrold just recovering from his illness, read the poem, and as he could not understand even two lines of it, exclaimed in great panic, My God! I am an idiot. My health is restored but my mind is gone. Such stories, whether true or not, undoubtedly, comment on the difficult nature of the poem and the difficulty of Browning's poetry increased with the passing of time though for different reasons. For his contemporaries, the difficulty lay in his style, for the present day reader it lies more in his subject-matter. On the whole, his obscurity is partly fact, but largely fiction.

Browning being a difficult poet is called the Carlyle of poetry. Two things should be properly understood before one attempt to enumerate the causes of obscurity: First, as Chesterton pointed out that Browning's life and career shows that he was never vain and that the poet was not unintelligible because he was proud and full of contempt for his readers. Second, in Browning's time the Victorian critics had a typical middle class attitude to literature. As a matter of fact their idea of originality was based on the principle of recognition, according to which an original work was one which presented in a new form what was already known to them. Besides Browning, unlike Tennyson, never cared to offer what the people wanted. He wrote to his friend W.G.Kingsland in the late sixties:

*"I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed.... On the other hand I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes to an idle man.*

It means Browning had a very high concept of poetry. He did not care to cater to the taste of the masses. He thought that a poet should try to put, the infinite within the finite and so should suggest much more than he should describes. In his letter to Ruskin he explained his position stating: Do you think poetry was ever generally understood or can be. A poet's affair is with God, to whom he is accountable and of whom is his reward. Thus Browning obviously spurned the idea of stooping to the level of people's understanding. His poetry is not meant to be read merely to while away a leisure hour.

Browning was a highly learned and original genius. His extraordinary interest in history, particularly of the remote past of the remote lands is one of the causes responsible for the so-called unintelligibility of his poetry. He makes extensive use of multiple and unknown historical details in such poems as *Sardello* and *The Ring and the Book* without providing explanatory notes and necessary references, the result naturally is a certain amount of difficulty in following him. Browning's schooling was mostly private so his learning was more profound than of those who attended schools. Besides his encyclopedic knowledge of history and geography not of one but of many countries, his thorough study of the stupendous *Dictionary of Dr. Johnson*, his choice of fantastic subjects the use of strange and queer names and other details, and the adoption of a satirical, jaunty or sportive manner present difficulties to the uninitiated reader.

Browning was interested in the strangest of human beings and tried to probe the odd and abnormal in human psychology. He sought the sinners whom even the sinners had cast out and tries to show that even they can be generous and humane. The subjects of his dramatic monologues probe into the unconscious mind of all sorts of imaginary characters. He explores the depths of the human heart without proper setting or background, without introductory remarks or any kind of break in the conversation to interpolate certain elucidatory observations on the situation in question. At a given moment in his life, all the past, the present and the future are made to converge, without any regard for chronology; all this results in extraordinary concentration of experience. He

paints the interior landscape with minimum reference to the objective correlative - a difficult task - that he enjoyed immensely. In his monologues he explores uncharted seas of human psychology, which a man with inadequate intellectual equipment can hardly comprehend. Browning's monologues are soul-studies; they study the shifting moods and changing thoughts of a developing soul. He is led from one thing to another by his own mental associations and forgets that the reader's associations may be of an entirely different kind.

Most of the critics have a common consensus that Browning's thought is often obscure or else so extremely subtle that language expresses it imperfectly as he himself admits in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, \_

*Thought hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped.*

But the supreme difficulty for his contemporaries, not so much for the moderns, was presented by his style which administered a shock to those who were habitually nourished on the elegant and polished styles of the eighteenth century poets, or the romantics or Tennyson. Browning's colloquial manner, which turns a soliloquy into a conversation, presents several difficulties. It, no doubt, contributes to the dramatic realism of poetry but without any intermediary explanatory notes, causes an excessive strain to the imagination and attention of the reader. Moreover, the abrupt beginnings, the jerky breaks in the narrative to refer to the reaction of the speaker's audience, the use of the colloquial idiom, omitting the necessary connectives like the particles *\_to, which, and that* and lengthening out the sentence unusually with plenty of dashes and parentheses - all these devices present difficulties to the average reader. Browning's style was the outcome of what he had declared in *Sardello* :

*Leave the mere rude  
Explicit details! 't is but brother's speech  
We need, speech where an accent's change gives each  
The other's soul.*

This concept has the resemblance with Wordsworth's theory of poetry that he himself could not practice so thoroughly. It can also be considered that Browning is careless in his English, and he frequently clips his speech, giving a series of ejaculations and a reader must stop between the ejaculations to trace out the connections. He even attempted to be unconventional in his use of syntax to communicate dramatically the total experience of the speaker.

Some of Browning's later poems are obscure in meaning also because of their bad grammar. One of his critics observed about his fine poem *A Grammarian's Funeral* that he had not only buried the grammarian but grammar also. It is no doubt true that Browning is often provocative in style and something too much of a verbal acrobat. Difficulties in some cases consist in the use of the bewildering details, obscure references, unfamiliar allusions, Latin expressions and quotations and using mythological and historical sources, of Medieval and Renaissance art, and culture of Europe. The very titles of some of the poems are forbidding, for example, *Sibrandus* or *Schafnaburgensis*. Briefly, Browning sought his subjects in many lands and his allusions are drawn from many little known sources and they have added to the difficulties in Browning's poems. The use of far-fetched metaphors and images, similes and illustrations as in *Two in the Campagna* is another characteristic feature which make the poems obscure. Besides, Browning wrote too much and revised too little. William Long rightly assesses that,

*"The time which he should have given to making one thought clear was used in expressing other thoughts that flitted through his head like a flock of swallows. His field was the individual soul, never exactly alike in any two men, and he sought to express the hidden motives and principles which govern individual action. In this field he is like a miner delving underground, sending up masses of mingled earth and ore; and the reader must sift all this material to separate the gold from the dross.*



It is said that Browning made use of two words where ten words were needed. Such compression and concentration, obviously, confused the sense.

However, the obscurity of Browning's poetry must not be exaggerated, as his shorter poems are perfectly lucid and simple. For that matter even the obscure and difficult poems have passage of great originality and eloquence, of spontaneous comprehension and classical charm.

### **Critical Appreciation of Browning's Poems**

(a) **Fra Lippo Lippi.** (*Men and Women*, 1855; Rome, 1853-54)

Fra Lippo Lippi (1412-69), the painter, was the son of a butcher in Florence. His mother died while he was a baby, and his father two years later than his mother. His aunt, Monna Lapaccia, took him to her home, but in 1420, when the boy was but eight years old, placed him in the community of the Carmelites of the Carmine in Florence. He stayed at the monastery till 1432, and there became a painter. He seems to have ultimately received a more or less complete dispensation from his religious vows. In 1452 he was appointed chaplain to the convent of S. Giovannino in Florence, and in 1457 he was made rector of S. Quirico at Legnaia. At this time he made a large income; but ever and again fell into poverty, probably on account of the numerous love affairs in which he was constantly indulging. Lippi died at Spoleto on or about Oct. 8th, 1469. Vasari, in his *Lives of the Painters*, tells the whole romantic story of his life.

#### **About the Poem:**

Brother Lippo the painter, working for the munificent House of the Medici, has been mewed up in the Palace, painting saints for Cosimo dei Medici. Unable to tolerate the restraint any longer (for he was a dissolute friar, with no vocation for the religious life), he has tied his sheets and counterpane together and let himself out of the window for a night's frolic with the girls whom he heard singing and skipping in the street below. He has been arrested by the watchmen of the city, who noticed his monastic garb, and did not consider it in accord with his present occupation. He is making his defence and bribing them to let him go. He tells them his history: how he was a baby when his mother and father died, and he was left starving in the street, picking up fig skins and melon parings, refuse and rubbish as his only food. One day he was taken to the monastery, and while munching his first bread that month was induced to renounce the pomps and varieties of this wicked world, and so became a monk when eight years old. They tried him with books, and taught him some Latin; as his hard life had given him abundant opportunity for reading people's faces, he found he could draw them in his copybooks, and so began to make pictures everywhere. The Prior noticed this, and thought he detected genius, and would not hear of turning the boy out: he might become a great painter and do our church up fine, he said. So the lad prospered; he began to draw the monks the fat, the lean, the black, the white; then the folks at church. But he was too realistic in his work: his faces, arms and legs were too true to nature, and the Prior shook his head

*“And stopped all that in no time.*

He told him his business was to paint men's souls and forget there was such a thing as flesh:

*“Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!*

And so they made him rub all out. The painter asks if this was sense:

*“A fine way to paint soul, by painting body*

*So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further*

*And can't fare worse!*

He maintained that if we get beauty we get the best thing God invents. But he rubs out his picture and paints what they like, clenching his teeth with rage the while; but sometimes, when a warm evening finds him painting saints, the revolt is complete, and he plays the fooleries they have caught him at. He knows he is a beast, but he can appreciate the beauty, the wonder and the power in the shapes of things, which God has made to make us thankful for them. They are not to be passed over and despised, but dwelt upon and wondered at, and painted

too, for we must count it crime to let a truth slip. We are so made that we love things first when we see them painted, though we have passed them over unnoticed a hundred times before:

*“And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
Art was given for that.*

The world is no blot for us, nor blank; it means intensely, and means good. Ah, but, says the Prior, your work does not make people pray! But a skull and cross-bones are sufficient for that; you don't need art at all. .... And then the poor monk begs the guard not to report him: he will make amends for the offence done to the Church; give him six months' time, he will paint such a picture for a convent! It will please the nuns. So six months hence. Good-bye! No lights: I know my way back. !

Thus Fra Lippo Lippi has a very dramatic beginning. This abrupt beginning is followed by self-introspection on the part of the speaker, and the whole gamut of his moods, emotions, reflections and meditations is given. The listeners are the members of the watch who have arrested Lippo while he was engaged in a nocturnal adventure. The speaker's thoughts range freely over the past and the future, and so there is no logical and chronological development. The past and the future are focused in the present, and the unity is emotional rather than logical.

The opening of this most successful poem is a good example of the way Browning sets the scene and give us the information to use Mark Roberts' words. If Lippo is by any standards an unusual monk, the poem is the most delightful poem Browning ever wrote. The frank sensuality of the painter-monk, his ribaldry, his impudence, his description at the end of the poem of the mischievous painting he is going to do (a religious painting with himself in it) all these things give to the central idea the flesh and blood that Lippo, and Browning himself, were so keen on. The result is a richly human portrait which at the same time tells us much that is of the greatest importance for the understanding of Browning's view on art. Leaving aside a few references to the art and artists of Italy, the style of the poem is free from the usual weakness of Browning's style. In short,

*“The poem is admirable for its undercurrent of humour, its impressionistic descriptions, its imaginative insight into the complex character of the friar-artist, and for certain lines that have the unescapable ring of great poetry, like the following, which sums up in the noble words the theme of the poem.*

He says:

*The beauty and the wonder and the power  
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises, and God made them all!*

- (b) **Grammarians Funeral:** (*Men and Women*, 1855; *Romances*, 1863; *Dramatic Romances*, 1868). Robert Browning often describes a man as a typical product of his age and environment, and invests him with its characteristics, making him figure as an historical personage. He has done so in this case, and we seem to know the grammarian in all his pedantry and exclusive devotion to a minute branch of human knowledge. The revival of learning, after the apparent death-blow which it received when the hordes of Northern barbarism overran Southern Europe and destroyed the civilisation of the Roman empire, began in the tenth century—that century which, as Hallam says (*Lit. Europe*, i. 10), used to be reckoned by mediaeval historians the darkest part of this intellectual night. In the twelfth century much greater improvement was made. The attention of Europe was drawn to literature in this century, says Hallam, by, 1<sup>st</sup>, the institution of universities; 2<sup>nd</sup>, the cultivation of the modern languages, followed by the multiplication of books and the extension of the art of writing; 3<sup>rd</sup>, the investigation of the Roman law; and lastly, the return to the study of the Latin language in its ancient models of purity. All these factors were at work and progressing gradually down to the fifteenth century. A company of the grammarian's disciples is bearing his coffin for burial on a tall mountain, the appropriate lofty place of sepulture for an elevated man. As they carry the body, one of them tells his story, and dilates on the praises of the departed scholar. They cannot fitly bury their master in the plain with the common herd. Nor will a lower peak suffice: he shall rest on a peak whose soaring excels

the rest. This high-seeking man is for the morning land, and as they bear him up the rocky heights they step together to a tune with heads erect, proud of their noble burden. He was endowed with graces of face and form; but youth had been given to learning till he had become cramped and withered. This man would eat up the feast of learning even to its crumbs. He would live a great life when he had learned all that books had to teach; meanwhile he despised what other men termed life. Before living he would learn how to live:

*“Leave Now for dogs and apes!  
Man has Forever.*

Deeper he bent over his books, racked by the stone (*calculus*): bronchitis (*tussis*) attacked him; but still he refused to rest. He had a sacred thirst. He magnified the mind, and let the body decay uncared for. That he long lived nameless, that he even failed, was nothing to him. He wanted no payment by installment; he could afford to wait, and thus even in the death-struggle he ground at grammar. And so where the

*“Lighnings are loosened,  
Stars come and go!*

this lofty man was left loftily lying.

In this poem Browning has captured the very spirit of Renaissance and it is the very epitome of his philosophy because it brings out Browning's faith in God, his faith in immortality of human soul, and his belief that failure in this life means success in the life to come. Precisely speaking, it is a psalm of life, the mighty optimistic song of a life lived in the life of eternity, rather than within the limits of time. This dramatic monologue is of 145 lines and has a symbolic significance. The difficulties that the disciples face in climbing the mountain symbolize the hardships, which beset the path of learning. It has been aptly stated, at every step the poem admits of allegorical interpretation.

Some of the critics find this poem as a satire on those scholars who waste their life in such pursuits at the cost of life itself. Such persons are actually cut off from the real and actual experiences and only know more and more about less and less. However, Chesterton is very convincing and decisive when he says that Browning's monologues are never satirical, rather they are defences or extended apologies for their respective subjects. T.S. Young makes a very apt observation that here the grammarian is not ridiculed; rather, his energy and sincerity are held up for our admiration.

The poem is written in a smooth, flowing Iambic measure varied here and there by other metrical structures. Whenever the monologue adopts irregular rhythm and strange rhymes, they suggest the roughness of the grammarians' rugged journey through life as well as track up the hill which the disciples climb.

- (c) **The Last Ride Together:** (*Men and Women*, 1855; *Romances*, 1863; *Dramatic Romances*, 1868). This poem is considered by many critics to be the noblest of all Browning's love poems; for dramatic intensity, for power, for its exhibition of what Mr. Raleigh has aptly termed Browning's tremendous concentration of his power in excluding the object world and its relations, the poem is certainly unequalled. It is a poem of unrequited love in which there is nothing but the noblest resignation: a compliance with the decrees of fate, but with neither a shadow of disloyalty to the ideal, nor despair of the result of the dismissal to the lover's own soul development. The woman may reject him, there is no wounded pride; she does not love him, he is not angry with her, nor annoyed that she fails to estimate him as highly as he estimates himself. He has the ideal in his heart; it shall be cherished as the occupant of his heart's throne for ever of the ideal he at least can never be deprived. This ideal shall be used to elevate and sublimate his desires to expand his soul to the fruition of his boundless aspiration for human love, used till it transfigures the human in the man till it almost becomes Divine. And so as he knows his fate since all his life seemed meant for, fails his whole heart rises up to bless the woman, to whom he gives back the hope she gave; he asks only its memory and her leave for one more last ride with him. It is granted:

*“Who knows but the world may end to-night?*

a line which no poet but Browning ever could have written. The force of the hour, the value of the quintessential moment as factors in the development of the soul, have never been set forth, even by Browning, with such starting power. She lay for a moment on his breast and then the ride began. He will not question how he might have succeeded better had he said this or that, done this or the other. She might not only have loved him, she might have hated. He reflects that all men strive, but few succeed. He contrasts the petty done with the vast undone.

*“What hand and brain went ever paired?  
What heart alike conceived and dared?  
What act proved all its thought had been?  
What will but felt the fleshly screen?”*

Only Browning's lover could understand the meaning of it all, the reason of the struggle, the outcome of the effort. The poet alone can tell: he *says* what we *feel*. But, poet, he asks, are you nearer your own sublime than we rhymeless ones? You sculptor, you man of music, have you attained your aims? Then he consoles himself that if here we had perfect bliss, still there is the life beyond, and it is better to have a bliss to die with dim-described

*“Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?”*

What if for ever he rode on with her as now, The instant made eternity. ?

This monologue which happens to be one of the finest love-poems of Browning a dramatic monologue which is also called a dramatic lyric because it is not an expression of his personal emotions but that of an imagined character, a rejected lover. The poem lays bare before us the soul of the lover as he muses over the past failure of his love, his bliss in the present and his hope for the future. He is a heroic soul and is not discouraged by his failure in love. He seems to be sharing the optimism of the poet who believes that God creates the love to reward the love.

Many critics have praised the poem and considered it as the greatest love-poem which has its passion as of a rarer and more difficult kind than that of Evelyn Hope to borrow the expression of C.H.Herbert. John T. Nettleship says in his book, *Robert Browning: Essays and Thoughts* that it deals with love as an aspiration which was not to be realized here at all, but must have its completion in the other life. According to Raleigh, while in other poems Browning is preoccupied with the glory of failure, the present poem flushes with the human glory of possession though the possession is brief and fleeting. S.A.Brooke is the only critic who points out the inherent defect in the poem that the lover is totally possessed by his own thoughts and hardly thinks of the woman by his side who must have been somewhat wearied by so silent a companion. Intellectual analysis and argumentation come in the way of emotional intensity.

- (d) **The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church** (Rome, 15 . *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics Bells and Pomegranates* No. VII., 1845). First published in *Hood's Magazine*, 1845, and the same year in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*; in 1863 it appeared under *Men and Women*: St. Praxed or Praxedes is an old *title* or parish church in Rome which bears the name of this saint. It was mentioned in the life of Pope Symmachus (A.D. 498-514). It was repaired by Adrian. I, and Paschal I., and lastly by St. Charles Borromeo, who took from it his title of cardinal. He died 1584; there is a small monument to his memory now in the church. St. Praxedes, Virgin, was the daughter of Paden, a Roman senator, and sister of St. Pudentiana. She lived in the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Pius. She employed all her riches in relieving the poor and the necessities of the Church. The poem is a monologue of a bishop, of the art-loving, luxurious, and licentious Renaissance, who lies dying, and, instead of preparing his soul for death, is engaged in giving directions about a grand tomb he wishes his relatives to erect in his church. He has secured his niche, the position is good, and he desires the monument shall be worthy of it. Ruskin, in *Modern Painters*, vol. iv.

says of this poem : Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages always vital, right, and profound; so that in the matter of art, with which we are specially concerned, there is hardly a principle connected with the mediaeval temper that he has not struck upon in these seemingly careless and too rugged lines of his (here the writer quotes from the poem, As here I lie, In this state chamber dying by degrees, to Ulpian serves his need ! ). I know no other piece of modern English prose or poetry in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I have said of the central Renaissance, in thirty pages of the *Stones of Venice*, put into as many lines, Browning's also being the antecedent work. It was inevitable that the great period of the Renaissance should produce men of the type of the Bishop of St. Praxed's; it would be grossly unfair to set him down as the type of the churchmen of his time. As a matter of fact, the Catholic church was undergoing its Renaissance also. The Council of Trent is better known by some historians for its condemnation of heresies than for the great work it did in reforming the morals of Catholic nations. The regulations, which it established for this end, were fruitful in raising up in different countries some of the noblest and most beautiful characters in the history of Christianity. St. Charles Borromeo, archbishop of Milan, whose connection with St. Praxed's Church is noticed already, was the founder of Sunday-schools, the great restorer of ecclesiastical discipline and the model of charity. St. Theresa rendered the splendour of the monastic life conspicuous, leading a life wholly angelical, and reviving the fervour of a great number of religious communities. There were bishops of St. Praxed's such as the poet has so inimitably sketched for us; but had there been no others of a more Christian type, religion in southern Europe would have died out instead of starting up as a giant refreshed to win, as it did, the world for Christ. The worldly bishop of the poem is an art for art's sake ecclesiastic, who is not at all anxious to leave a life that he has found very satisfactory for a future state about which he has neither anxiety nor concern. What he is concerned for is his tomb. His old rival Gandolf has deprived him of the position in the church which he longed for as a resting-place, but he hopes to make up for the loss by a more tasteful and costly monument, with a more classical inscription than his. The old fellow is as much Pagan as Christian, and his ornaments have as much to do with the gods and goddesses of old Rome as with the Church of which he is a minister. In all this Browning finely satirises the Renaissance spirit, which, though it did good service to humanity in a thousand ways, was much more concerned with flesh than spirit.

In this dramatic monologue the speaker is a dying Bishop and his sons and nephews constitute the group of listeners. He calls them around his bed to tell them of his last wish. He begins by moralizing about the vanity of human wishes and then he comes to the question of a suitable tomb for himself, a question which is uppermost in his mind at the time. He believes that if his sons construct for him the grand tomb he desires, then he would lie in his grave peacefully for the centuries to come. The poem is a marvelous and penetrating study of the psychology of the dying Bishop. Two emotions welter in the mind of the Bishop: first, the life-long envy of his ancient rival Gandolf and second his consuming desire for a monument, splendid in design and rich in ornament. Even at the moment of death, his jealousy and hatred for his rival Bishop Gandolf. In short, every line reveals that Bishop is greedy, petty-minded and worldly. In all this Browning satirises the Renaissance spirit.

- (e) **Rabbi Ben Ezra** (*Dramatis Personae*, 1864) It is a didactic poem of thirty two stanzas of six lines each which was published three years after the death of his wife. The poet was in a contemplative mood and the mystery of life and death had preoccupied his mind more than ever. Besides, the publication of *The Rubaiyats* of Omar Khayyam translated by Edward Fitzgerald into English also stirred his imagination and prompted him to thinking about the Epicurean philosophy of eat, drink and be merry. Browning's philosophical beliefs were not reconcilable with the philosophy of Khayyam as the poem Rabbi Ben Ezra shows.

Rabbi is a historical character which in Hebrew language means one who is a learned man in theology and religious philosophy. Ben is a distortion of the Arabic word Ibn means son. The Encyclopaedia Britannica gives the name as Abenezra. However, Ezra was one of the most eminent of the Jewish literati of the Middle Ages. He was born at Toledo in Spain in 1092, and left for Rome in 1140. After residing in various countries including England, he died in Rome probably in 1167. He was distinguished as a philosopher, astronomer, physician and the poet. The works by which he is known especially are a series of *Commentaries* on the books of the Old Testament. His commentaries are acknowledged to be of very great value.

Rabbi Ben Ezra is an expression of the religious philosophy, which from one point of view, has much in common with Browning's own and only an Evangelist might have spoken. But, there are critics like I.A. Campbell who are of the opinion that the poem is indeed the philosophy of Rabbi Ben Ezra. It is possible that Browning was acquainted with the works of this Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages. It is also possible that both of them were well-read in the Bible and the work was a common source of their inspiration. However, the Christian doctrine of the one poem brings into strong relief the pure Theism of the other; and the religious imagination in Rabbi Ben Ezra is strongly touched with the gorgeous and solemn realism which distinguishes the Old Testament from the New. At times it appears that Rabbi is the mouthpiece of Browning

The most striking feature of Rabbi Ben Ezra's philosophy is his estimate of old age. The speaker surveys life in a calm and contemplative mood from the vantage point of old age and expresses triumphantly his faith in the value and significance of human life. According to him the soul is eternal, but it completes the first stage of its experience in the earthly life; and the climax of the earthly life is attained, not in the middle of it, but at its close. Age is, therefore, a period, not only of rest, but of fruition.

Browning's philosophy has four important aspects (1) faith in the organic wholeness of life which means the youth finds its fulfillment in the old age; (2) the value of the struggle which alone leads to achievement and spiritual development; (3) faith that death opens up the gate for the eternal life and thus is a consummation of life in this world; (4) faith in God and in the immortality of soul in the ever-changing conditions of life. Rabbi Ben Ezra logically presents all the four phases of his philosophy.

The monologue opens abruptly in a conversational style. Regret for lost youth and the fear of approaching old age are the stock ideas in human thought but the invitation to look forward to old age as the best time of life is unexpectedly new. It is true for those who live an inward rather than physical life. Sufferings and conflicts are the part of life in youth as per the design of the divine machinery so that true progress could be attained by overcoming the obstacles. The life of flesh is good as it provides sensual pleasures and mental stimulants but they too are meant for the spiritual development of man. In the seventh stanza comes a bold and cheerful thought that the failures are equally rewarding: What I aspired to be, /And

was not, comforts me; It shows that what he could gain was far superior to what remained unachieved. Up to stanza twenty fifth, Browning frequently returns to this idea and keeps emphasizing that if the world fails to appreciate the finer achievements of life and counts only things done and not things attempted it is because the ways of the world are rude and coarse. From the twenty-sixth stanza to the end, Browning takes up the figure of the Potter, the wheel and the clay. Unlike Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam* where much is made of this metaphor as the blind destiny, Browning explicitly rejects and scorns this teaching, which he believed is propounded by fools for the benefit of other fools. In Browning's poem the Potter is God; the wheel is the whirling course of life's experiences; the clay is man. The potter engraves lovely shapes on man; though the base of the cup of life is adorned with the laughing loves, the skull like images and signs of death constitute its rims. In xxx stanza, he finally says:

*Look not thou down but up!  
To uses of a cup,  
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,*

*The new wine s foaming flow,  
The Master s lips a-glow!  
Thou, heaven s consummate cup, what need st  
thou with  
Earth s wheel?*

Thus, Browning has crystallized his religious philosophy into a shape of abiding beauty to use the expression of Arthur Symonds. Having an unshakable faith in God and the immortality of soul, Browning gives us a message that failure in this life means success in the life to come. Hence the message is optimistic as the best is yet to be. The worst sin, according to him, is passive acceptance of things or sheer indifference to them. He gives us an assurance:

*All I could never be,  
All men ignore in me,  
This, I was worth to god, whose wheel the pitcher  
shaped.*

Man, who is more akin to God than to dogs and apes is an immortal and hence is not intimidated by the skull things. Hugh Walker has beautifully stated No more confident and triumphant poem was ever written, it has the magnificent faith of certain of the Psalms.

No doubt, the style of the poem presents certain difficulties due to the inverted constructions and omissions which some stanzas like 9th, 12<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and many others rather difficult to follow, but there are no problems of obscurity or eccentricities which mar the meaning of the poem. Its images and symbols and the use of Iambic with subtle variations in different lines create the desired effect of serenity and repose. Its rhythm scheme is aabccb adds a soothing musical note this celebrated philosophical ideas of the poem proving what Carlyle said that, if you think deep, you think musically. Rabbi who cherished the spiritual heritage and never lost the sight of his divine has passed on the treasure of his thoughts to the generations of mankind.

### **Assignments**

Note: Attempt the following questions:

1. What are the characteristic qualities which make the nineteenth century after 1837 truly Victorian?
2. Give an account of the formative influences on Robert Browning.
3. Discuss Browning as a poet of love.
4. Write an essay on Browning as philosophical poet.
5. What is a dramatic monologue? Discuss it with special reference to Browning s dramatic monologues.
6. Browning is essentially an optimist. Do you agree? Give illustrations to support your answer.
7. Evaluate Browning s contribution to the Victorian poetry
8. Give an account of the major themes in Browning s poetry.
9. What are the main qualities of Browning as a literary artist?
10. Write an essay on Browning s achievement as a poet.
11. Discuss Browning s theory of poetry. Give a reasoned answer.
12. Two major aspects of Browning s poetry are soul s dissection and interior landscape . What does he wish to convey through these themes?
13. Browning is certainly a difficult and obscure poet. What are its causes?
14. Give a critical appreciation of Rabbi Ben Ezra.
15. Give a comprehensive account of Fra Lippo Lippi showing how it truly represents Browning s poetry.

Note: Answer the following questions in about *two hundred words*.

1. Define dramatic monologue and give two illustrations to support your answer.
2. Write a note on Browning's originality.
3. Do you agree that Browning's poetry shows unity in variety?
4. Browning's optimism is not a cheap but cheerful optimism. Discuss.
5. Write a note on Browning's use of grotesque.
6. What are the chief features of Browning's diction?
7. Discuss briefly Browning as a great metrical artist. Illustrate your answer.
8. Give any three examples of Browning's Imagery showing how they are functional.
9. What is the moral message in Browning's poetry?
10. Point out any three significant qualities of Browning's poetic theory.
11. Discuss any two critical situations from the poems prescribed in the course showing how they represent intense psychological moments.
12. Define any two qualities in Browning's poetry, which make him a Victorian Poet.
13. What are the reasons of Browning's delayed popularity?
14. Write a note on Browning as a lyricist.
15. Give a short note on the character of Rabbi Ben Ezra.

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**M.A (Previous) English**  
**English Literature from 1798 TO 1914**  
**UNIT 3 Charles Dickens: *Bleak House***

***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Charles Dickens, the most outstanding novelist in English literature, was also the most popular and influential writer of his times and his works have continued to be read with great admiration by a wide reading public till today. He shares this distinction of being a very great and popular writer with Shakespeare. Before we come to a discussion of the valuable contribution made by Dickens to English novel it may be useful to have a brief look at some facts and events of his life which are relevant to our understanding of his works including *Bleak House*.

Charles Dickens was born at Landport, Portsmouth in 1812. His father, John Dickens, was a clerk in the pay department in the Navy office there. As a clerk his salary was not very high, but he was rather free-handed and careless in spending money. This frequently created financial problems for the family. When Charles was two year old, the family moved to London and then to Chatham where they lived for some years. Charles was second in a large family of eight children. As a child he showed an extraordinary memory and lively talent for mimicry. His father, on account of an innocent pride in the gifts of his exceptional child, would often encourage him to display his talent before friends who visited their house. At Chatham, Charles Dickens had a happy life and his school teachers were impressed by his keen enthusiasm for learning and his exceptional abilities as an impressionable child. In fact, as a child, Charles Dickens showed himself to be a prodigy and something of this quality remained with him throughout his life. The creative energy he poured into his novels, as we shall discuss later, is simply prodigious. From the large fund of energy and vitality he carried within him, a substantial part was devoted to activities of social reform he sponsored in his grown-up life. He carried fund-raising campaigns in his later life for setting up homes for destitute women and children: he also found time and energy for organizing a group of amateur actors who gave performances in London and other nearby towns. His active interest in the social environment around him and in the problems which came up before the public from time to time, made it necessary for him to edit magazines like *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* where such issues and problems were discussed with a lot of imaginative energy and intellectual force.

When Charles Dickens was about ten years old, the family moved to London again. His father's salary having been cut down, the family had to live in the dingy areas of London. This gave an opportunity to Charles Dickens to know from within

the shabby genteel life of the lower middle class sections of London population which forms a large part of the world of Dickens's novels. In fact, the most notable feature of Dickens as a novelist is that the locale and happenings in his works belong primarily to urban life and most of the characters, too, are born and brought up in the city. In *Bleak House* we have a character like Phiz who has had no contact whatsoever with the countryside and does not even know exactly what marshes are, his personality structure being entirely that of a product of the city. If Dickens is virtually the first novelist of the city; it should cause no surprise to us. He spent the formative period of his childhood and early youth in the dingy streets of London and gathered his impressions of human life from what was happening around him in that city. Apart from this personal factor, there were, of course, some larger factors related to the changes taking place in society which brought about this important shift in the location of English novel and made it city-centred.

A very significant development in the early life of Charles Dickens which played a decisive role in shaping his interests, perspective and attitude towards contemporary society as a creative writer is related to the brief period of seven or eight months he had to spend as a child labourer in a Blacking Warehouse after being taken away from school. His father, John Dickens, because of his failure to pay of his debts to his creditors, was put in the Debtors' prison, Marshalsea and in the difficult situation created for the family on this account. Charles Dickens, at the tender age of eleven or twelve years, was required to earn his own living by working in a Boot Polish factory. In this situation where he had to fend for himself away from his family in the big city of London, he felt that he had been abandoned by his parents. This was a traumatic experience which left deep scars on his psyche. The whole experience became such a sensitive issue that he never talked about it in his later life even to his wife or children. He wanted to erase the painful memory of this experience, although it was the most vital single experience whose compulsive pressure we can feel in all his writings. He wrote a brief autobiographical sketch spelling out how he felt at that time and handed it over to his friend John Forster who incorporated it in his definitive biography of the writer. This painful experience is also recorded in a slightly disguised form in *David Copperfield* which is an autobiographical novel where Dickens tries to come to terms with all those experiences which pained and shocked him but also shaped and moulded his vision as a creative writer. The importance of this experience for understanding Dickens's novels was first highlighted by Edmund Wilson in 1939 through his essay "The Two Scrooges" and since then almost all the critics writing on Dickens have invoked the seminal hints thrown by Wilson in this essay in their interpretation of Dickens's works.

Two or three main points relating to the significance of this experience can be briefly mentioned here. The first point to be emphasized is that Dickens had a

painful feeling of having been abandoned by those who loved him. The acute sense of loneliness and abandonment experienced by him would explain the frequency with which he brings into his novels figures of children who are hunted and oppressed or totally neglected by the grown up people who control the levers of power in the society. If Dickens is able to strip the halo of respectability and normalcy which surrounds the grown up people either as parents or as men in authority, this experience of shock and desertion Dickens went through as a child is certainly at the root of his vision. Dickens is able to expose the arbitrary ways and rigid postures of the grown-up people which they themselves cannot perceive because they are so completely controlled by them and have lived under their pressure for such a long time that they have become a second nature with them and acquired a kind of naturalness on this account. The abandoned and frightened child can see with full clarity and intensity the callousness which remains hidden from the ordinary, work-a-day point of view because of the film of familiarity which covers it.

The whole urban scene, where the child wanders oppressed by a sense of perplexity and pain, comes out before us, in Dickens's novels, very sharply and clearly, in its puzzling haphazardness and miscellaniety. If Dickens is credited with bringing out with full intensity the seemingly purposeless and directionless movement of crowds in a city and the stunningly fragmented picture presented by the entire social scene, it is largely because his traumatic experience as a child provided an opening to him to see the metropolis of a modern industrial society as a nightmarish "unreal city" similar to that in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. The element of exaggeration in Dickens's descriptions of the cruel and oppressive character of the city environment does not look false to us precisely because it is actually a natural magnification which takes place in the appearance of a buried reality in the nightmarish vision of a frightened child. Since Dickens as a child did not allow himself in those days to be overpowered by his fear and tried to come to grips with his new experiences he was able to gain control over the situation by recognizing the elements of absurdity and ridiculousness which formed an integral part of his nightmarish vision. His presentation of the abnormal and misshapened characters, therefore, remains vivid and unblurred and it carries conviction as an authentic revelation of something which actually exists in the objective world of the city.

Another aspect which is significant for the purpose of his art, is that it is not just pain and fear which constituted the whole of this experience, but it also carried a strong element of resentment and anger against a social order which allowed this kind of outrage to take place. The voice of Dickens as a novelist is, therefore, that of strong protest. The radical dissatisfaction experienced by Dickens as a child could not be assuaged through mere adjustment. The ignominy and shame he

experienced in being pushed into a situation where he became an ordinary labouring hand and the anguish he felt over the crushing of all his hopes of developing his personality through a proper education and occupying the respectable position of a gentleman in society provided a strong basis to him to adopt in his novels the stance of a rebel against the existing social order and created an urge in him to visualize a society where such outrages did not take place. In almost all his novels of the later period, he mounts a savage attack on the society for its failure to provide adequate facilities of health and education to its members and to ensure justice and decent living to them.

A closer look at the structure of the traumatic experience, reveals a contradiction and ambivalence in Dickens's attitude towards society. On the one hand, he experiences resentment and anger against the society for giving him an unmerited harsh treatment; on the other hand he does not feel identified with the other boys placed in the same situation and feels ashamed of their company. He behaves as a "little gentleman" who deserves a special treatment. His anger, therefore, demands a selective rectification of the wrongs done to the victims of the society. That is why we find in Dickens a simultaneous presence of an acute awareness of the wrongs perpetrated by the structure of the existing social system and a rectification of these wrongs by a selective transfer of the "deserving" victims to the ranks of gentility within the existing system itself. Also, insightful diagnosis and woefully inadequate solutions co-exist and collide with each other in many of Dickens's novels on account this ambivalent quarrel with the system. There are some other ambivalences in this traumatic experience whose impact on Dickens's writing will be taken up later in our detailed discussion of *Bleak House*.

John Dickens was released from the prison when after spending some months of imprisonment, he inherited a legacy with the help of which he could clear his debts. On one of his walks through the streets of London, John Dickens's eyes fell on his son working in the Blacking Warehouse. He felt deeply ashamed of it and immediately took his son away to his home. Thus ended the painful experience of Charles Dickens which had deeply seared his soul. He was again put in a school where he continued his education for about four more years. However, when he was taken away from his job in the Blacking warehouse his mother remonstrated against it and wanted him to continue. This gave a shock to Dickens on account of which he could never forgive his mother. The large number of women characters in Dickens's novels who as mothers are very slovenly and insensitive to the emotional needs of their children is an index of this sense of hurt Dickens felt at the position taken by his mother at that critical juncture.

At the age of fifteen Charles Dickens left school and started working as a clerk in a lawyer's office. This was a valuable training which helped him in understanding not only the eccentricity produced in the personalities of the lawyers

by the very nature of their profession, but also gave him an insight into the operations of the legal system as an institution of the dominant power groups. During this period of his apprenticeship with a lawyer, Dickens had also started learning short-hand which enabled him to work as a reporter first of the proceedings of the legal courts like Doctors Commons and the Chancery Court and then of the speeches delivered by the member of Parliament inside the house. Dickens recognized that law provides the ideology and rationale for the interests which dominate the entire social system. His understanding of the idiom in which law-makers and practitioners of law in the courts spoke enabled him to dramatize the actual form in which oppression was perpetrated by the dominant groups on the common people in the existing social system. *Bleak House* provides a good example of the insights. Dickens gained into the functioning of the social system of his times through his practice as a journalist specializing in the reporting of law cases and the working of the legal institutions.

Dickens soon adopted journalism as a profession and became a regular reporter to the press. His work of reporting speeches of politicians and of other important events taking place in different towns took him away from London on hurried journeys and this experience was very valuable to him. It gave him an intimate feel of the journey by stage coaches and of the conditions prevailing in different inns and wayside eating places. This also kept him in the thick of important events of larger public interest. His keen powers of observation and his enthusiastic and energetic participation in every work he took in hand enabled him to gather a large fund of varied experiences and a rich knowledge of different types of individuals belonging to various professions he met during his work as journalist. The work of journalism also enabled Dickens to develop a style of writing that could be immediately grasped by the ordinary reader and captured his interest because of the vivid reproduction of what had happened through a proper emphasis on the essential and significant details. His work as a reporter also helped Dickens as a writer by developing in him a keen responsiveness to the popular concerns of the reading public. He could quickly know about the shifts and changes in their moods and tastes. If Dickens could combine popularity with his greatness as a novelist, his active contact with the reading public through his work as a journalist provided a sound base for this achievement. While working as reporter in town and country, he was able to store his memory, on account of his quick powers of observation, with scenes, incidents and oddities of life which he freely used later in his novels. He also developed in the course of his work as a reporter those habits of steady application and rapid execution which were to be of great use to him when he came to write the monthly instalments required for the serial publication of his novels.



While working for the *Morning Chronicle*, Dickens tried his hand at creative writing and sent his first story to *The Monthly Magazine* with some trepidation. He was overjoyed when it was published there in December 1833. Later, he sent some pieces to *The Evening Chronicle* as well. He published these early pieces of creative writing in 1836 under the title, *Sketches by Boz*. The energy of registration which made this early writing interesting was recognized immediately and Dickens was invited by Chapman and Hall to supply the descriptive material in support of illustrations by an artist of adventures of some sportsmen moving about in the countryside. Thus begin *The Pickwick Papers* which soon became a phenomenal success with readers, because of the keen power of observation for odd details of human behaviour, the zestful humour and ability to capture colourful types of characters in their own idiom that Dickens displayed here. The characters were realistic in their essence, but much more vivid and fantastic-looking in Dickens's novel than they could have been in real life had they been actual living figures. Even ordinary life can assume the colourfulness of a carnival if we look at it with a Dickensian gusto and keen power of observation. While this vivid and fantastic rendering of "ordinary characters in everyday life situations" was being published and had touched the peak of 40,000 copies of serial instalments being sold, Dickens started an altogether different kind of novel in *Oliver Twist* in 1837. Here although he invented a number of memorable characters like Bumble, Fagin, Sikes and Artful Dodger his main focus was on mounting a severe attack on the bureaucratic officialdom which oppressed young orphans under the authority derived from highly obtuse Poor Laws. He also uncovered in this novel the frightening presence in big cities of an underworld of crime, violence and grim poverty and lent it the compulsive power and vividness of a nightmare. With *Oliver Twist* began a series of novels where Dickens focused his attention on some specific social problem or the other and produced a work which revealed to his readers the ugly face of their own times while also reproducing before them the tremendous efforts made by some odd-looking characters to lead a zestful life in spite of the hurdles placed before them by a rigid framework of outdated and mechanically operating social institutions. *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838 – 39) *Old Curiosity Shop* (1840) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843 – 44) carried forward this series of novels devoted to exposure and critique of particular kinds of social ills and also creating a number of memorable characters including Mr. Squeers, Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Quilp and Mrs. Gamp. Apart from these rambling novels where the plot was more or less a mechanism to bring in as many characters and situations as possible to make his satirical portrayal of social life full and comprehensive, Dickens also wrote some Christmas books which strengthened and deepened his hold on the readers. *Christmas Coral* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844) and *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) all consolidated his influence with the readers in this manner.

With *Dombey and Son* (1846 – 47) Dickens enters a new phase of his career as a novelist. The earlier unchecked exuberance in character portrayal, the looseness of structure and the habit of targeting specific social problems and institutions for criticism disappear from these novels. He is now concerned with projecting a sombre vision of the society in its total structure being created through industrial capitalism in England. There is no attempt in *Dombey and Son* or the novels which come after it merely to amuse or entertain the readers. He ruthlessly exposes with focused attention and serious concentration the inhuman social order which tramples upon the aspirations and ambitions of all those who do not conform to its ruthless onward march and seriously distorts and perverts the personalities of those who became its instruments. The effort now is not so much to exuberantly record the flamboyant eccentricities of particular characters or make sharp but playfully witty comments on this or that specific social problem but to take on the social system as a whole and bring out its total structure which usually remained hidden to the victims of its operations. In all these novels which include *Dombey and Son* (1846 – 47), *David Copperfield* (1849 – 50), *Bleak House* (1852 – 53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855 – 57), *Great Expectations* (1860 – 61) and *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's mood is that of serious disturbance and he dramatizes with full intensity his vision of the social order being imposed on the common people in his times. His creative energy finds a disciplined and concentrated expression in these novels and this gives them the resonance, luminosity and haunting power of poetic creations.

Dickens had a passionate interest in theatre and he always felt a great need to establish an intimate rapport with audiences. To satisfy this need and to raise additional income, Dickens often gave public readings of his novels and went on long tours for this purpose. He loved to cast a hypnotic spell on his audience, but in the process he himself got emotionally charged and became highly tense during these reading sessions. When they were over, he felt exhausted and tired. This had an adverse effect on his health. This turned out to be particularly the case after the long tour to U.S.A Dickens undertook in 1868 – 69 for the sake of such reading sessions. This seems to have ruined his health and he died in 1870 before completing his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

### ***HOW DICKENS REMOULDED ENGLISH NOVEL FOR EXPRESSING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL EXPERIENCE***

English novel had emerged during the eighteenth century as a new form of narrative which gave expression to the interests and concerns of the middle classes which had gained ascendancy during that period and played a dominant role in shaping the thinking and value-system of the society as a whole. The key factors in

this outlook and value-system which determined the form as well as content of the novel were secularism or this-worldliness, individualism and belief in progress. The combined impact of these key factors produced a dialectics of individual and society which was projected as lived experience in the novel. In practice this projection of the experience of individuals in society took two distinctive forms. In one case, the tilt was in favour of the desires and aspirations of an individual's personality while in the other the primary focus remained on the requirements of the society and pressures it exerted on the individuals in implementation of its agenda of development and progress. Charles Dickens associated himself with the latter form of English Novel. In order to project the full panoramic picture of society and to show what kind of pressures were being exerted on different individuals and what sorts of adjustment they had to make in order to conform to the consensual wisdom of the society, this type of novel adopted a very loose and rambling structure where the plot became a mere machinery for introducing more and more characters and scenes. The crowded picture which emerged in such a novel was one that had been observed from a distance with a considerable amount of detachment. The vantage point where the particular interests of an individual and the over-all requirements of the society both in terms of its smooth functioning and the maintenance of its developmental trajectory could co-incide was generally located in an observer who remained outside the action and could, from the normative perspective thus available to him, discern the deviations and deficiencies which persisted in the behaviour of various characters. In other words, of the two types of realism Ian Watt talks about in his *The Rise of the Novel*, it is the "realism of assessment" which remains predominant in this type of novel. The most prominent practitioners of this realism during the eighteenth century were Fielding and Smollett.

By the time we come to the nineteenth century, this type of novel becomes unsustainable in its old form. A writer of the genius of Charles Dickens who had the additional advantage of an appropriate location in the emerging society was needed to transform this novel and make it a fit instrument for adequate expressions of the new social experience.

The normative perspective in the eighteenth century novel was evolved within the limits set by the ideology of the dominant social grouping that had emerged through the political settlement between the middle classes and the landed aristocracy generally known as the Golden Revolution of 1688. The rural gentry which shared upto a point the interest and concerns of both the contending social groups mentioned above became a connecting link between them and assumed the role of a pivotal component of the dominant social grouping which shaped the attitudes and values of the entire society during the eighteenth century. The lived experience of the rural gentry, therefore, became the terrain for the discovery of the

vantage point where optimum reconciliation between the highest mode of self fulfillment of an individual and the most viable form of social development permissible within the framework of the dominant ideology could be visualized. Since the normative perspective used in the novel was linked with the vantage point, even if such a novel seemed to present a panoramic picture of the entire social scene, the centre of gravity here remained identified with the rural gentry. This novel, therefore, had to be rural-centric in its over-all character. This rural centric form of novel becomes outdated when Dickens starts writing his novels during the period spanning the fourth to seventh decades of the nineteenth century.

Rapid changes taking place under the process of industrialization and urbanization created a crisis-situation on account of which reconciliation between rights of the individual and claims of the society which had been posited in the eighteenth century novel as a realizable possibility became unfeasible and the dialectic of individual and society got riddled with very severe tensions. Carlyle has forcefully registered in his writings the dislocations and distortions produced in the entire social fabric by the ruthless onward march of industrialism in England. Dickens's own experiences as a part of the urban lower middle class which along with the other working people was bearing the brunt of this whole process of change confirmed Carlyle's grim vision of a society under crisis. Dickens's novels, therefore, register the strain under which the established institutions and apparatuses of social management were working in his times and he shows how they failed to achieve the purposes they were supposed to serve. It may be the law-courts or schools, Poor Houses or factories, Parliament or the government administration all of them are shown functioning in his novels in an indifferent or callous manner. Their objective invariably seems not to help the individual or solve his problems but to tyrannise and victimize him. The contemporary situation, as Dickens perceived it, is marked by a shameless absence of facilities for health and housing and a total lack of proper job opportunities for the uprooted and dispossessed and the whole system operating with an appalling callousness and inefficiency.

Apart from registration of these symptoms of crisis in the society, Dickens's novels also show the crumbling of the social consensus which had been built up earlier under the combined influence of different components of the dominant social grouping which had shaped the thinking and value –system of the entire society during the eighteenth century. Growth of capitalism during the period had changed the internal composition of this social grouping in very significant ways. The landed aristocracy continued nominally to be an important component, but it had actually become dysfunctional and parasitical in its role and acted only as a drag on the institutions of governance where it still had a marked presence. The comparative weight of the middle classes became much greater in all matters of

social management, but the leading role here went into the hands of the industrial magnates, big merchant houses and the financial oligarchy.

The rural gentry lost its importance and no longer played the role of a key component. The urban lower middle class, although aligned with the dominant formation, did not play any role in determining the dominant ideology which was imposed on this class from above even if it occupied a marginal space within the dominant social grouping. The main option before the urban lower middle class was to become a willing agent for the legitimization of an oppressive ideology and provide manpower for operating the repressive machinery of social management. However, since the living conditions of this section of society were broadly similar to those of the other victims of oppression and subjugation the, lived experience of this class also provided a vantage point of resistance that would enable an imaginative writer to recognize the oppressive features of the dominant ideology thrust upon the people and expose the repressive character of various institutions being used for social management. This vantage point since it fell within the lived experience of the urban lower middle classes, could also enable the writer to see very clearly various forms of dehumanization the subservient sections of this class had to undergo on account of their role as tools and agents of the system and measure accurately the degree to which this dehumanization could reach in different cases. As the form of resistance emerging from within the lived experience of the lower middle classes had perforce to be individualistic, it usually remained at the level of perception and understanding and seldom took the form of active intervention. Another important aspect of this vantage point of resistance was that while it could recognize some of the worst consequences arising out of the functioning of the existing social system, being located within the framework of the dominant ideology, it could not clearly identify the agency that would take the society out of the crisis. It could only post the imperative need for such an intervention as something most devoutly to be wished. However, even though the resistance visualized in Dickens's novel manifests itself largely in the passive form of recognition of the inhumanities of the system, it carries within it tremendous amount of energy and strength because it had at its back the creative response of the entire popular mass of humanity which was subjected to oppression and placed in inhuman living conditions.

Dickens's rich and irrepressible humour is an index of this creative energy he shared with the common masses who could covertly assert in this way their independence of spirit even when they outwardly looked helpless. The humour flows from an unfazed awareness of the absurdities and weaknesses of the oppressors. Of course, since this creative response is something developing instinctively under the pressure of their living conditions, the form of resistance based on it usually contained within itself some elements of adjustment, regression

and bafflement as well. The sentimentalities present in many novels of Dickens are rooted in this adjustment aspect of the popular response. His use of symbols like fog and mud and introduction of mystery in his novels also betoken the sense of puzzlement he shared with the oppressed masses and could not completely get over even in his moments of creative insightfulness.

The eighteenth century novel with special emphasis on the realism of assessment was thus recast by Dickens in very important ways. The complicated plot machinery, the panoramic view of society and the crowded scene characteristic of that novel are present in a Dickensian novel also, but they no longer give the impression of a society leisurely moving forward without intolerable damage to the independent identity of the characters. The multiplicity and miscellaniety of scenes and characters gives the impression in Dickens not merely of a heterogeneous crowd but of a whole way of life characterized by haphazardness, discontinuity and restlessness. The interaction of characters and the functioning of social institutions here are both loaded with tension and show the symptoms of an impending breakdown. The array of characters in Dickens becomes even more colourful than what we find in the eighteenth century novel, but most of these characters have become badly twisted out of shape and are riddled with compulsive irrationalities. The humour in Dickens is sometimes genial and sometimes sardonic but it is never re-assuring and creates the vision of a world which usually haunts us like a bad dream and brings before us those disturbing realities of our life which we may want to forget but must be acknowledged if we want to retain our emotional health. More-over, there is greater profusion of details in a Dickens's novel than what we find in the novels of eighteenth century specializing in realism of assessment. In this respect, he incorporates within this form of the novel something of the strength of the other kind of eighteenth century novel which according to Ian Watt specialized in the "realism of presentation".

Thus the major change introduced by Dickens is that while the eighteenth century novel moved placidly along the smooth surface of day-to-day social life, Dickens surrealistically brings before us what we would generally avoid seeing in our waking life. The old digressions, parallel narratives and coincidences are retained by Dickens, but they are now knit together through major thematic motifs and symbols which run through all the parallel stories. We can sum up this change brought about by Dickens by saying that the novel now becomes city-centred and presents a society going through a crisis with its internal contradictions posing the threat of an impending collapse. Since the novel has become city-centered, the characters define their identities here through loud assertion rather than through dialogue and sustained interaction. We can quote here the comments made by Raymond Williams in his book *English Novels from Dickens to Lawrence* to

highlight some of these features of the novel which Dickens developed by transforming the novel of social realism inherited from the eighteenth century:

As we stand and look back at a Dickens novel, the general movement we remember – the decisive movement – is a hurrying seemingly random passing of men and women, each heard in some fixed phrase, seen in some fixed expression: a way of seeing men and women that belongs to the street. There is at first an absence of ordinary connection and development. These men and women do not so much relate as pass each other and then sometimes collide. Not often in the ordinary way do they speak to each other. They speak at and past each other, each intent above all on defining through his words his own identity and reality; in fixed self-description in voices raised emphatically to be heard through and past other similar voices. But then the action develops, unknown and unacknowledged relationships, profound and decisive connections, definite and committing recognitions and avowals are as it were forced into consciousness. These are the real and the inevitable relationships and connections, the necessary recognitions and avowals of any human society. But they are of a kind that are obscured, complicated, mystified, by the sheer rush and noise and miscellaneity of this new and complex social order.

The creation of consciousness – of recognitions and relationships – seems to me indeed to be the purpose of Dickens's developed fiction. The need for it is at the centre of his social and personal vision.

Dickens's special achievement as a writer of novels, thus, lies in his ability to capture the experience of loneliness and isolation which comes to most individuals living in a city, and to register the breakdown of continuous interaction with neighbours or the disintegration of community life, which again is a characteristic feature of city life. He could also present a picture of the gradual dehumanization and mechanization by industrial capitalism of all the institutions evolved for social management and the emergence of a new hard-headed and stone-hearted ethos of indifference toward the sufferings of those millions who had gone down in the race for survival and were forced to live a wretched life of poverty and ill health in the dingy slum areas which had proliferated in big cities and industrial towns.

### *THEMES AND TECHNIQUES*

In the initial phase of his career as a novelist, Dickens's aim seems to have been to present a lively and colourful report of ordinary social life as it was being lived by different people in different places. The main emphasis was on highlighting all that was striking in the personalities and behaviour of the ordinary

people so that his novels could have the arresting power of an exceptionally successful journalistic report. Dickens's sharp eye captured all the eccentricities and oddities of the character he introduced in the story and the plot became a loosely woven web of incidents in order to introduce a variety of characters and situations to make the report as comprehensive in range as possible. In order to make ordinary life look like an exciting and thrilling adventure, he lent to this report the freshness of the vision of a child who was fascinated by everything that was new and different from what he had seen before. The narrator, even if he is a grown up and well-experienced person, retains the childlike simplicity and wonder which makes even familiar things seem interesting by being viewed for the first time. This childlike simplicity of observation enables the narrator to take special note of those mannerisms and habitual gestures of the grown-up people which have become fixed and automatic without their being aware of it. The tricks and eccentricities of behaviour make all Dickens's characters not only interesting but also strikingly different from one another. Dickens's description of characters and situations is also marked by an extraordinary zest and gusto. Even the characters who have been twisted out of shape by the pressures of circumstance are filled with an irrepressible desire to affirm their freedom and display a keen appetite for living. This zestful registration of oddities and eccentricities of the characters produces an effect of genial humour in Dickens's novels of the earlier phase. His imaginative power enlarges and intensifies all the oddities and peculiarities he notes and makes them more vivid. The characters, therefore, look larger than life and, sometimes caricatures. Since the characters do not give the impression of undergoing change and present themselves in a fixed identity, and since with all their energy and liveliness they exist all on the surface, they are seen as "flat" characters. In the early phase of Dickens's career best represented by *Pickwick Papers*, there is no specific or particular theme other than that of showing the social reality in its interesting variety and fullness. The technique used consists of three main components – a loose and rambling story line, flat characters and a genial and rich humour. But even in this early phase Dickens introduces in novels like *Oliver Twist* *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* some specific social problems which are crying for reform or brings in some aspect of the dominant social ethos which needs to be exposed. *Oliver Twist*, besides being a lively picture gallery of memorable characters like Artful Dodger, Bumble, Claypole and Fagin, also draws our attention to the plight of the poor young children and the deplorable condition of the Poor Houses. It also reveals to us the powerful presence of the underworld of crime which can threaten the settled and comfortable life of the middle-class drawing-rooms. Here Dickens brings in through the character of Oliver Twist, the problem of orphaned children who are harassed and grossly mistreated by almost everyone with whom they come in contact. The characters



and scenes remain as memorable and vividly drawn as in *Pickwick Papers*, but Dickens's humour here has become more sardonic and insightful and has turned into a faculty for exposing the frightening realities which his contemporaries could ignore only at their peril. Dickens's novel has now become an instrument for arousing the social conscience of his contemporaries and his humour has assumed the character of quick and intuitive intelligence. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, too, the deplorable condition of schools in Victorian England is vividly brought before us and the cruelty shown to the young pupils by the tyrants who managed the schools is forcefully presented here. The humour here also becomes an instrument of social satire. Furthermore, in these early novels including *Old Curiosity Shop* and those mentioned earlier, Dickens has started showing how the eccentricities and deformities of the memorable characters are very intimately linked with their roles as tools in the hands of the social system or as carriers of its inhuman ethos. Mr. Bumble in *Oliver Twist*, Quilip in *Old Curiosity Shop* and Pecksniff and Jonas Chuzzlewit in *Martin Chuzzlewit* are an outcome of this kind of insight. Similarly characters like Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist* and Mrs Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit* show that Dickens is registering through them the impact on the personality of the ordinary human beings of the precarious conditions in which they have to live. Such victims of the system preserve their humanity by creating an interior zone of fantasy into which they can withdraw and live in partial abstraction from their harsh living conditions. But in all the novels of this earlier phase, Dickens's artistic concerns do not get concentrated into a serious and sustained effort to grapple with the over-all character of the social system of his times. His imagination and his humour seem to work in spurts and produce a desultory and uneven kind of creative writing.

With *Dombey and So*, this desultoriness disappears and Dickens enters a new phase in his career as a novelist. His humour, his ability to create a wide variety of memorable characters, his tendency to drag in a number of specific social problems apparently unconnected with one another and his use of a complicated plot machinery containing a generous amount of coincidences and arbitrarily provided linkages – all these old ingredients of his novels remain, but with a qualitative change in them. The exuberance of the humour gets toned down and it acquires a sharper edge. The characters do not co-exist in a loose assemblage, but get integrated into a total vision. A focus on a particular social problem simultaneously signals a serious attempt to understand through it the underlying logic which propels the social system as a whole. Even the mechanism of the plot with its zigzag movement comes to signify the arbitrary interlocking network of institutions imposed on the centrifugal forces the social system at once generates and tries to control. The pattern of images and symbols which runs through all the parallel or criss-cross flows of events gives the novel a deeper

thematic unity behind the welter of diverse material included in the work. These novels of the later period are, therefore, more sombre and neater than the earlier works, and acquire the concentration and density of meaning we find in the poetic drama of Shakespeare. This change in Dickens's art as a novelist does not merely indicate that he has gained greater mastery on narrative techniques, it in fact results from the writer's clearer understanding of the inner contradictions of his own self and a firmer grasp of his response to the larger social world of his times. Now whatever be the specific issues he takes up for direct treatment, he invariably links them up with the nature of the society which was being created in his times. It is the logic of this social system and its impact on the quality of life available to human beings living within it that becomes Dickens's primary concern. *Dombey and Son* is ostensibly about the devastating effect on human feelings like love between husband and wife and the ties of affection between parents and children that the pride of money and the imposition of terms of trade and business on family life can have, but this moral issue gets transformed in the novel and becomes a comprehensive form of social criticism in which, as Raymond Williams tells us, we have to see "people in their world and their society" and where society is not merely "a background against which the drama of personal virtues and vices is enacted" but becomes "the creator of virtues and vices, its active relationships and institutions at once generating and controlling or failing to control" what in the earlier methods of moral analysis, were seen "as faults of soul". Similarly in *David Copperfield*, the search for prosperity and domestic happiness by the hero actually becomes a social criticism where the real meanings of these ideals given by the social order as a whole is examined and probed. *Great Expectations* witnesses a similar enlargement of concern from a particular problem of attainment of gentlemanly respectability to a critique of the nature of Victorian society itself. In the case of *Little Dorrit* we can see a similar broadening of concern on account of which the novel is not merely about the impact of living conditions in Debtor's Prison on the inmates, but what the novel probes is the quality of life available in the society as a whole to those of its members who are not a part of the power-structure. The Debtor's prison becomes a potent symbol of the Victorian social order as such. In *The Bleak House*, which falls in this category of Dickens's novels, we find a similar enlargement of theme. As Edmund Wilson points out in his comments on this novel: "In *Bleak House*, the fog stands for Chancery and Chancery stands for the whole web of clotted antiquated institutions in which England stifles and decays."

Dickens's art in this phase of his career is not merely of an alert and competent reporter, but that of a poet who is not satisfied merely with detailed description of facts which are visible on the surface but gives his characters and

scene a density of meaning by turning them into metaphors and symbols and packs the language he is using with a rich density of meanings.

### *A CRITICAL SUMMARY OF BLEAK HOUSE COVERING DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE LARGER THEME OF THE NOVEL*

At first glance *Bleak House* looks like a novel where Dickens presents a broad spectacle which provides vivid glimpses of different layers and segments of society in separate narrative blocks without joining them together through a dramatic plot based on the logic which governs the functioning of the society as a whole and directs the process of formation of personalities of different characters. Furthermore, it may also appear that as in many of the earlier novels, the spectacle becomes interesting largely because, there are on display, in each separate narrative block, a number of characters with eccentricities and oddities which make them fantastic figures strikingly different from ordinary human beings we find in the day-to-day life around us. We may also take note of another apparent point of resemblance with the earlier novels of Dickens in his attempt to provide an additional source of attraction to the reader by including in the novel some specific social problems of his times such as the shockingly inefficient functioning of the law-courts resulting in inordinate delays and miscarriage of justice, the utter neglect of sanitary conditions in slum areas carrying the threat of sudden outbreak of epidemics like cholera and small-pox and the abstract philanthropic enthusiasm of some women who neglect their own children and put forward utterly non-viable schemes for the welfare of some remote and unknown beneficiaries or impose their lectures and pamphlets on the poor and destitute people at home without any genuine concern for the real problems and difficulties they have to face in their life. There is a good deal of evidence in the novel to support this kind of reading. First of all, we find here four distinct narrative blocks which run side by side and interlock with one another only at a few selected points when a character or a group of characters belonging to one narrative block strays into the space occupied by another narrative block and remains there for some duration of time. One of the narrative blocks is centered on the world of aristocratic privileges, power-games and fashionable goings-on represented by the scenes and happenings related to the personalities of Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. This narrative block brings before us the guests and "cousins" who come to Chesney Wold, the ancestral seat of Sir Leicester, provides us glimpses of the park surrounding the building and describes the rooms, halls and galleries of the house and the family portraits adorning its walls as well as the large retinue of servants and functionaries who run this establishment. A particular mention in this regard could be made of the striking personality of Mr Tulkinghorn, a lawyer who advises Sir Leicester in

all legal matters and keeps strict guard on the family secrets and of Mrs Rouncewall, the respectable housekeeper in charge of proper maintenance of the building and smooth functioning of the household. We also have here Rose, a young girl whom Lady Dedlock patronizes and with whom Watt, a grandson of Mrs Rouncewall has fallen in love and Hortense, a passionate and vengeful French woman, who was earlier attending on Lady Dedlock and has been dismissed by her. Important political figures like Mr Doodle, Mr Poodle, Mr Noodle, Mr Buffy, Mr Duffy and Mr Puffy are frequent visitors here. Affairs of state are discussed by them with Sir Leicester Dedlock who plays the role of an active advisor to them. The views of Miss Volumina and other cousins dependent on the hospitality of Sir Leicester on the current trends in society are placed before us with humorous exaggeration in order to show how much out of touch they are with the basic realities of social life in the nineteenth century England. Another set of incidents and happenings in this narrative block are shown in the house in the town where Lady Dedlock stays for some time whenever she comes away from Chesney World to receive the homage of the fashionable circles of the town. Here the buzz of scandal-gossip and flutter of rumours can be heard anytime and the spirit of “dandyism” through which all important matters are talked about by the fashionable world can be seen on display during Lady Dedlock’s visits.

The second narrative block which comes before us at the very beginning of the novel is related to the working of the judicial system and the investigative wing of the administrative apparatus pertaining to the enforcement of law and order. This is represented by the working of Chancery Court where the Lord Chancellor sits in the midst of thick fog. The inefficiency and purblindness which mark the working of the law courts and the inhumanity which permeates the whole judicial process are illustrated here by the well-known Jarndyce and Jarndyce case which has been going on for such a long time that many of the original litigants have since died and its costs have by now accumulated to the huge sum of sixty thousand pounds. The havoc caused by the judicial system is illustrated by the ruin of all hopes of an amiable young man like Richard Carston, one of the parties of the complicated case who gets sucked up in its proceedings. The spirit of cunning and guile which pervades the legal practitioners in this court comes out through the striking personalities of lawyers like Mr Tulkinghorn, Vholes. The empty verbiage and the obfuscation produced by the legal jargon and technicalities is illustrated by the lawyer Conversation Kenge and the style and manner of Mr Guppy, a clerk attached to the legal firm of Kenge and Carboy humorously exhibited in some sections of this narrative block. The atmosphere of seediness and decay and the anarchic conglomeration of old and used up things found in the bottles and rags shop of Mr Krook parodies the ultimate outcome of Chancery Court proceedings if timely reforms are not introduced by the society. The mistrust and cunning of Mr

Krook's personality and the prowling and preying activities of his cat with regard to the birds of Miss Flite, a lodger in Mr Krook's house draw our attention towards the preying and prying attitude of the lawyers towards their clients. The figure of half-crazed Miss Flite, with her absurd gentility and the pinched and denuded condition of her room indicates the ravages caused by the working of the judicial process in the life of those who get entangled into its proceedings. She is so much caught up in the web of the Court's functioning that she feels a compulsive urge to attend its proceedings daily in the hope that her case may be taken any day and she must not be found absent at that time. Another victim of the erratic functioning of the judicial system is Gridley, the man from Shropshire who, because of his anger and sense of outrage at the dilatory manner in which the law-courts deal with property disputes, gets arrested and put behind the bars a number of times for his offensive behaviour even though his case is yet to be taken up for active consideration. The Smallweed family of usurers, through their connection with Mr Tulkinghorn and Mr. Krook as also the legal cases in which they involve Mr George and his friend Bagnet represent an interesting extension of this narrative block.

The third narrative block in the novel seems to have been given a special significance because it covers a broad middle domain of society consisting of different strata of the middle classes including doctors, lawyers, religious functionaries, artists, teachers and ladies and gentlemen of modest income as well as those who own property and sources of income which allow them to lead a comfortable settled life. The special significance of this narrative block where people are trying to lead a life of respectability and concentrating their attention on attainment of their domestic happiness is indicated by the fact that it has a special narrator who is also a character in the novel, Miss Esther Summerson. She tells her own life-story and records her observations and impressions of the characters she meets at different points of time. The narrator is deliberately shown as a character of sober and subdued nature who is sensitive enough but who keeps her reactions in a low key. We get to know through her about Mrs. Barbary, her step-aunt, who made her feel in her early childhood the shame of being an illegitimate child abandoned by her parents immediately after her birth. She learns to keep all her feelings and reactions properly subdued and develops a keen sense of her duty towards others. This apparently makes her less interesting in her own person and more important as a level-headed and well-meaning observer who registers faithfully the idiosyncrasies and oddities of various characters who are trying to make a place for themselves inspite of the hardships and challenges they have to face in preserving their middle-class gentility and decencies. Apart from Mrs Barbary who has a harsh and cheerless sense of duty and subscribes to a form of Christianity which is very exacting in demands it makes on mankind, Esther's

story includes characters like Rachel, who was her governess and later appears on the scene as Mrs. Chadband and Mr. Jarndyce, her benefactor who first made arrangements for her education and later brought her into his own household with his wards, Ada and Richard Carstone. She also brings into the story Mrs. Jellyby who, because of her abstract philanthropic concern for the natives of Borrioboola – Gha in Africa neglects her own family and is particularly indifferent to the fate of her elder daughter, Caddy, whom she keeps busy in writing letters about her African projects. Apart from Mrs. Jellyby, another votary of “telescopic philanthropy”, Mrs. Pardiggle is also introduced. She is equally indifferent to her domestic responsibilities. We see her later in this narrative block visiting the families of poor bricklayers and inflicting on them sermons of abstract morality without showing any concern for their immediate poverty and suffering.

Esther Summerson introduces to us another odd character, Mr Skimpole, who is supposed to be endowed with artistic sensibility but is an extremely self-centred and parasitical individual who projects himself as a child as a rationalization of his total lack of a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Apart from those who also figure in the Court of Chancery narrative block, like Mr. Guppy, Mr. Vholes, the Smallweed family where even children look “like little old men and women”, Miss Flite and Mr. Krook, another set of characters whose conditions of living form a part of Esther Summerson’s narrative block are Mr. Bayham Badger and Mrs. Badger in whose medical establishment Richard Carstone gets attached to train himself for the medical profession. We also meet in this narrative Mr. Alan Woodcourt, another doctor working with Bayham Badger who is good-hearted and serious-minded in the pursuit of his profession and eventually marries Esther Summerson, George, an old soldier running a shooting gallery and his assistant Phiz Squod. Esther Summerson becomes friendly with Caddy, the harassed elder daughter of Mrs Jellyby and helps her with good advice in her plans to marry Mr. Prince Turveydrop who gives lessons to girls interested in dancing. Prince Turveydrop’s father old Mr. Turveydrop is an irresponsible parent who exploits the affection of his children as a parasite pretending to live for upholding the cause of proper deportment in the age of business and utilitarian interests.

Esther Summerson’s narrative touches at some points the life of characters who fall outside the middleclass and belong to the poor and deprived sections of society. When Mr. Neckett, the bailiff dies, he leaves three children behind him without anyone to take care of them. Charley, the eldest, works in the neighbours homes and very effectively takes care of the two young children. Later she works as a maid in the Smallweed household from where she is rescued by Mr. Jarndyce and employed as a maid for Esther. Esther takes good care of Charley and later she comes into contact with Jo, the crossing sweeper boy from whom she catches the

infection of small-pox when she brings him home to take care of him in his illness. She also meets Jenny, the bricklayer's wife when she visits the bricklayer's cluster of hovels along with Mrs. Pardiggle and is deeply touched on seeing their condition of desperate poverty and misery.

The fourth narrative block in the novel takes us to the slum areas and brings before us their hellish living conditions marked by filth, starvation and disease. Tom-all Alone's, is a festering sore where dilapidated houses are overcrowded by the poor and destitute people who live there like "maggots". There are many scenes in which our attention is focused on this slum area and the brick-layers colony not very far from the house of Mr. Jarndyce and Esther Summerson. We are made to experience by the omniscient narrator here the outrageous pressures under which these poorest of the poor have to live without any one recognizing their needs and aspirations as fellow human beings. Poor Jo, the crossing sweeper boy who admits he knows nothing and who is harassed by a number of people including Tulkinghorn and Inspector Bucket and other policemen whose only duty in respect of Jo seems to roughly and callously ask him to "move on".

An important feature of the working of the four narrative blocks identified under this reading may seem to be their interlocking with one another at different points in the novel. The most interesting point of interlocking, however, has not been mentioned so far. Three important characters in the novel, that is, Lady Dedlock, Nemo and Esther Summerson who belong to three different narrative blocks are intimately connected with one another. Esther Summerson is the daughter of Honoria and Captain Hawdon who figure in the separate narrative blocks – Honoria as Lady Dedlock in the Chesney Wold narrative and Captain Hawdon in the Chancery Court narrative as Nemo, the poor law-manuscript-writer who copied legal documents for Mr. Snagshy, the law-stationer and lived in shabby poverty as one of Mr. Krook's tenants. Esther Summerson had once or twice met her mother and during one of these meetings, Lady Dedlock had revealed to Esther her true identity as her mother. Similarly, with the help of Jo, Lady Dedlock had gone to all the places linked with Captain Hawdon as Nemo including the place of his burial in the pauper's graveyard, The most interesting interlocking point among the four narratives, however, is when Lady Dedlock is running away to escape the shame of exposure of her past at the hands of Tulkinghorn and puts on Jenny's dress to mislead those who are pursuing her. Esther travels with Inspector Bucket in search of her mother only to find her lying dead at the gate of the pauper's burial ground where her lover and Esther's father lay buried. All the four distinct narrative blocks get joined here to produce a spark of meaning which had been only vaguely felt earlier.

### *THE LARGER THEME*

This reading of the novel which takes note of wide coverage of the social scene and vivid presentation of significant details remains inadequate. It does not capture the real character of the poetic vision which makes *Bleak House* one of the most powerful and haunting works of fiction in English literature. In this novel, Dickens does not merely view Victorian society as a spectacle with a medley of interesting scenes and characters. Nor does he remain contented with offering piecemeal criticism of some specific social problems in isolation from the larger social context of which they form a part. He is concerned here with understanding through a strenuous and sustained imaginative effort the disturbing character of the society of his times in its totality. It is a novel where Dickens couldn't afford to let his imagination move lazily from one segment of society to another or to dwell now on the working of one particular institution and then shift the focus to another. He wants here to come to grips with their inter-relatedness and pinpoint the logic that binds all the segments of society into an integrated whole and works as a propelling force in all the institutions. Dickens makes a serious bid here to gauge the quality of life available to individuals and groups in this society. This includes an effort to make an accurate assessment of the extent to which their living conditions are responsible for the ravages caused to their humanity and to ascertain how far their own response to the over-all social situation becomes a contributory factor in its erosion or distortion.

In the accomplishment of this serious task, Dickens does not find it necessary to use the methods of subtle psychological and moral analysis we find in writers like Jane Austen, George Eliot or Henry James. This does not make his assessment any the less probing and insightful. His method is of vivid demonstration and sharp grading through comparison and contrast. A simple example of this grading by comparison and contrast is the use of two narrators. There is an omniscient narrator who has an overview of the whole society and though deeply involved in the lived experience being projected through his report, is not constrained by any particular role as a character in the novel. We also have the other narrator in the form of Esther Summerson, a character in the novel who has to survive under the harsh conditions of being an illegitimate child abandoned by her parents immediately after her birth and preserve her middle class gentility and moral decencies through exercise of caution and control. Both the narrators often view the same characters and situations, but their responses are different, and their perspectives are also quite different. The character of Esther Summerson is graded and assessed in this way by comparison and contrast with the omniscient narrator's perspective and response. From the first chapter itself, Dickens is concerned with defining the basic character of the society by an imaginative visualization of how it manifests itself in particular areas of social activity, like the



functioning of the law courts. And this act of visualization and definition includes an assessment of what is happening to human beings who are participating in the processes of law courts in various capacities.

The voice of the omniscient narrator used in the novel to project this probing imaginative exercise strikes us as that of a person who is shocked by what he registers but does not allow his intelligence and will to be overwhelmed by this shock. It remains sober and alert even when it is charged with a deeply felt emotion. Dickens was greatly disturbed by the inhuman and repressive power structure which came up under the collaboration of the landed aristocracy and the business and industrialist classes who had gained a dominant position in this ruling alliance on account of the tremendous expansion of the market forces in the society of his times. The values of liberal humanism which had emerged during the eighteenth century had raised expectations of the construction of a social order based on equity and justice that would provide adequate opportunities of self-fulfilment to different individuals and ensure for them a life of dignity and self-respect. However, the actual social order erected under the direction of the ruling partnership was shockingly different from what had been expected. The governing logic of this social order in all its spheres of public life was that of relentless pursuit of self-interest and ruthless competition which left no scope for co-operation and interdependence or any sense of fellow-feeling. Here might was right, a might based on property and privilege. The weak and vulnerable elements, who owned no property and held no influential position, particularly the orphaned children and the deprived masses were not recognized here as full-fledged human beings and were exploited and repressed. The role of the landed aristocracy in the ruling set-up being only of a junior partner, it could not materially affect the basic character of the governing logic in any major way. All it could do was to make the working of the institutions where it had a size-able presence somewhat more arbitrary and more indifferent towards the concerns and purposes of the ordinary people. Being a parasitic body clinging to its inherited privileges, it also inordinately slowed down the pace of change in the institutions under its control and made their functioning more irrational and out-dated than it might have been otherwise.

To identify the specific forms in which this logic operated in different areas of public life, a powerful imaginative effort was required. Dickens succeeded in bringing out these specific forms mainly in two ways; through images and metaphors and through a precise grading of the impact of the logic on the humanity of the characters involved in the working of this logic. This required not only intuitive perception but also an alert mind engaged with full seriousness in making accurate assessments. Dickens's assessment of the impact of the logic of the system on the personality of various characters led him to divide them into two

broad categories (a) those who were carriers of this logic as instruments and accomplices (b) those who bore its brunt as victims and showed varied degrees of resistance or surrender. In both these categories, finer discriminations had to be made with regard to the forms the erosion or distortion of humanity took and the extent to which this had been carried in particular cases. Dickens's success in the accomplishment of this task in *Bleak House* is visible from the first page to the last without any let-up in the rigour of his imaginative effort. A notable feature of Dickens's serious attempt in this novel to understand the logic which governed the working of the society of his times is that he does not limit himself to demonstrating its impact only in the public spheres of politics and administration but also brings to our view the distorting pressures it exerts in the private world of parent-child relationships within the family and in the subjective worlds of love, religion and humanitarian concerns.

### *TREATMENT OF THEME THROUGH WORKING OF LAW COURTS*

Since the absence of justice and equity can most directly and vividly be seen in the functioning of the judicial machinery, Dickens begins the novel by focusing his attention on the Chancery Court and continues to give till the end vivid glimpses of how the logic of the social system operates in this area of public life. This is how Dickens begins the novel:

London, Michaelmas's Term lately over and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from Chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun..... Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper and losing their foothold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud---

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows along green airs and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city.....

This is a vivid description which brings the physical location of Chancery Court and the prevailing weather conditions sharply before our minds. Dickens's intention, however, is not to describe a landscape but to use its physical details for a metaphorical purpose. He is actually making an imaginative effort to capture

through this description, the spirit which pervades, not only the the process of the Chancery Court but the atmosphere of the entire city and, by extension, the general tenor of life of the whole society. Through the salient features of this description. we get a feel of the working of the social system as a whole in easily comprehensible terms of sensory perception. We find an entry into the lived experience which this system permits. The clipped sentences at the beginning where verbs are left out or converted into the hanging state of present participles give the impression of a social system where the stream of life is jammed and constricted with very little possibility of free forward movement or spontaneous action. The description also suggests that while the scene is characteristic of an advanced industrial society with its jostling crowds, chimney-pots throwing down smoke and flakes of soot, tiers of shipping and defiled and polluted riverside, the positive things achieved by mankind in the course of historical development have been drained out from the social scene and only a muddy residue of primitive life remains. The decencies, tolerance and mutual regard which mark the behaviour of people in a humane, civilized order have disappeared and what we have is a crowd of “foot passengers jostling one another’s umbrellas in a general infection of ill-temper and losing their foothold at street corners” People do not co-operate with one another or make concerted efforts to arrive at a shared goal. They only push and jostle one another. They do not recognise others in their full humanity but are aware of them only as “umbrellas” that obstruct their path. The images of smoke and soot-flakes indicate not only filth and impurity but also an atmosphere where it is hard to breathe. The image of fog suggests dulled perceptions and hazy understanding. Both light and warmth have been swallowed by the prevailing spirit of jealousy, mistrust and ill-temper. The mud image does not suggest the vitality of primitive life but only languor and exhaustion or degradation.

The functioning of the law courts as we have stressed earlier is not being examined in isolation; it is being given a prominent place in the novel because it exemplifies in an effective and easily demonstrable manner, the logic of the functioning of the society as a whole. As Edgar Johnson has rightly observed, *Bleak House* is “an indictment not merely of the law but of the whole dark muddle of organized society. It regards legal injustice not accidental but as organically related to the very structure of that society.” The Court of Chancery is given the central significance in the novel precisely because the impact of its functioning can be felt almost everywhere in the existing social set-up. It has “its decaying houses and blighted lands in every shire” has “its worn-out lunatic in every mad house and its dead in every churchyard”. Just as the functioning of the court of Chancery illuminates the logic of the working of the society and its institutions, the law-suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce graphically brings out the devastating impact of the slow and complicated procedures employed in the law-courts. The lawyer, Conversation

Kenge aptly describes the case as “a monument of Chancery practice”. The case has dragged on for two or three generations, has become more and more complicated and sucked in a large number of suitors within its ambit. As Dickens tells us in the voice of the shocked omniscient narrator, “This scare crow of a suit has in course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means” and he wonders “How many people out of the suit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce has stretched forth its unwholesome hand to spoil and corrupt would be a very wide question”. When we are told that “in trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts, there are influences that can never come to good”, Dickens draws our attention to the larger implications of what he is demonstrating through the practices employed in this case. It is the logic of the system which “spoils and corrupts”. Trickery, evasion, delay, etc are the characteristic weapons the social system uses in dealing with those who are weak and vulnerable. The “shirking and sharking, in all their many varieties” which have been “shown broadcast” by this case are actually an integral part of the dealings of the powerful sections of society with the under privileged.

The devastating effect the law-suits can have on the life of middle class individuals is shown in its full pathos and tragic waste by the half-crazed figure of Miss Flite whose sanity has been overthrown by prolonged waiting. This poor old lady attends the court daily in the hope that some day her case will be taken up at the Chancery Court and has confused the day on which she will receive the judgment in her case with the Day of Judgement mentioned in the Bible. By bringing in this reference to the Last Day of Judgement through the confusion generated in the mind of Miss Flite, Dickens wants to highlight the serious divergence which exists between the justice which the moral authority of the Supreme power as visualized by Christianity will eventually bring into play and the cruel travesty of justice dispensed under the power-structure of Victorian society where law “gives to monied might, the means abundantly of wearying out the right” and works in such a manner that it “exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope”, and “overthrows the brain and breaks the heart.” The damage done to the personality of Miss Flite comes out sharply when we see her making desperate and half-crazed efforts to preserve her gentility while dwelling in her starved tenement in Krook’s house. She tells Esther Summerson, when she sees her in the Chancery Court along with Richard Carstone and Ada, the two wards of the Jarndyce case, “I was a ward myself, I was not mad at that time I had youth and hope I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of three served or saved me.” This is a forewarning of what is going to happen to Richard Carstone who is going to fall under the spell of the Jarndyce suit and is to be ruined in the process.

We should notice that in *Bleak House* Dickens does not sentimentalise the sufferings of the figure of a victim of the heartless system as he had done earlier in

similar cases like Little Nell in *Old Curiosity Shop* or even Little Ernily in *David Copperfield*. Dickens keeps his firm intellectual control over the situation and wants to understand without indulging in mere pity for the victim, how the desire to become rich through good luck rather than honest and sustained efforts to build a career can send a middle class individual into the clutches of the power-system. He demonstrates this briefly through the instance of Miss Flite and on a more extensive scale through what happens to Richard Carstone. The fatal temptation to garner benefits through a sudden stroke of good luck is indicated in the case of Miss Flite when she admits: “There is a cruel attraction in the place. You *can't* leave it. And you *must* expect.” Miss Flite, Gridley (The Man from Shropshire who haunts the court and is always in a desperate mood to secure justice), Richard Carstone and Lady Dedlock are all victims of the system who aggravate the damage done to their personality by falling into the temptation of getting success and happiness on terms the system permits without realizing the cost it will extract from them. John Lucas rightly points out in this context that “The Dream of breaking out of bondage to the system depends on an escapist notion of great expectations, a purely economic dream of freedom which destroys Gridley, Miss Flite, Rick, Lady Dedlock, and comes near to destroying George.” All these characters have a human potential which gets destroyed or is considerably reduced by the logic of the social system. They are all victims who partly invite the ruthless treatment by harbouring illusions of self-fulfilment in terms of the promises the established social order holds out to them.

In the case of Richard Carstone, this destructive spell of the system on the victim is demonstrated to us stage by stage till his death when the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case on which he had pinned his hopes collapses because the costs have eaten up all the assets under dispute. The promise of the system works like a poison which keeps Richard Carstone restless and ultimately destroys him. As Edgar Johnson rightly points out, he falls a “prey to the infection of an acquisitive society... All Richard's buoyancy and courage, his gentleness and frankness, his quick and brilliant abilities, are not enough to save him. Gradually he becomes entangled in the fatal hope of getting something for nothing, stakes everything on the favourable outcome of the Chancery suit, neglects his capacities, fosters his careless shortcomings, dissipates the little money he has, feverishly drifts into suspicion and distrust of his honourable guardian...” He loses his physical health and youthful energy and looks so worn by wariness and anxiety that his look is ‘like ungrown despair’.” He knows that his whole personality is going to the pots, but he cannot muster courage to offer any resistance to the pressures and blandishments of the system Only towards the end of his career when he is dying, he makes an honest confession to his wife, Ada, of the harm he has done to her and to himself by falling into the snares of the system through his obsession with the

law-suit: “I have done you many wrongs, my own. I have fallen like a poor stray shadow on your way, I have married you to poverty and trouble, I have scattered your means to the winds. You will forgive me all this Ada, before I begin the world.” What Dickens wishes to emphasize in the case of all those middle class characters who fall a victim to the logic of the system is that with all the damage done to their humanity, they still retain a residual goodness. This makes their cases pathetic but as against his earlier practice, Dickens’s primary emphasis in this novel falls on understanding the nature and extent of the victim’s complicity and assessment of the internal damage suffered by him than on suffusing the scene with an emotion that tends to wash away the victim’s complicity.

### *LADY DEDLOCK’S FATE*

The most outstanding case of a character who becomes a victim through her own complicity with the system without knowing the price she will have to pay for this is that of Lady Dedlock. She betrayed her own humanity when, under the allurements of the privileges of aristocratic life and ignoring the obligations of her love for Captain Hawdon, she ditched him, abandoned the child born of their love, and married Sir Leicester Dedlock, twenty years older to her in age. Dickens’s grasp of the essential aspects of Lady Dedlock’s character and position is very firm and clear. He does not have to enter her mind for this, but to demonstrate it through graphic description and use of effective symbolism. On the surface, Lady Dedlock, with her proud aloofness and unruffled, dignified gestures and movements seems to be a person perfectly adjusted to the position she occupies, but she remains innerly restless and bored. She has actually not been able to detach herself from the past of her betrayed love which lies buried beneath her external pose. She does not find any real fulfillment in the life-style and attitudes she has to adopt as a part of a class clinging stiffly to its age-old privileges and remaining totally indifferent to the larger concerns and challenges of contemporary social life or at best showing a gossipy and trivializing interest in them. She does not feel secure on account of the highly vigilant and mistrustful gaze of the trusted servitors of this class like the lawyer, Tlkinghorn, constantly turned towards her. Her general mood and attitude towards life are presented with great resonance in a description of the park at Chesney Wold which acquires a rich symbolic meaning:

The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying grounds for half a mile in breadth, is a stagnant river with melancholy islands in it, and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain .... The view from my Lady Dedlock’s own window is alternatively a lead-coloured view, and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the

rain all day; and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip upon the broad flagged pavement called, from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night. On Sundays, the little church in the park is mouldy; and the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat, and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their grave (9).

The basic features of Lady Dedlock's inner state of mind as she lives in a state of emotional deadlock in the aristocratic position she occupies on the basis of betrayal and suppression of her human impulses of love and affection are very forcefully conveyed by the simple technique of demonstration through description of a scene and picking up the significant physical details for particular attention. The oppressive presence of a vast sheet of accumulated rain water which looks like a "stagnant river" conveys with adequate force the deep feeling of stagnation and blocked instinctual urges which is Lady Dedlock's habitual state of mind. The smooth surface of stretch of water stands for the outward composure she has to maintain through sheer will-power and it is "punctured all over, all daylong" by the falling rain of irritating pressures she has to bear continuously from the vigilant gaze of the faithful instruments of the social system like Mr Tulkinghorn. The feeling of heavy dullness and gloominess which settles on her because of the constraints and pressures she has to bear is conveyed by the view of the scene outside she gets through her window. The constant "drip, drip, drip" of rain drops brings to our mind the tears she has to keep suppressed in the lonely recesses of her heart. The "mouldy" smell in the church is the smell of slow decay of her own humanity invisibly but constantly going on. The "cold sweat" which suddenly breaks out from the "oaken pulpit" indicates the accumulated reaction of anger, revulsion and panic which ordinarily remains suppressed through the hard discipline of rigid and petrified conventions of behaviour imposed by the aristocratic order but which occasionally acquires the intensity of "cold sweat" of hyper-tension in the trapped victims like Lady Dedlock. Q. D. Leavis rightly sums up the total meaning of this passage when she observes that "boredom, depression, the absence of health, vitality and the colour of life are irresistibly imparted here by the use of language."

The regret and anguish over what Lady Dedlock has lost by her co-optation into the aristocratic order is effectively conveyed through another passage where Dickens uses the same technique of relying on physical description as an "objective correlative" of feelings, emotions and states of mind. Lady Dedlock's frustration in a childless marriage after she has separated herself from her lover and her child (about whose survival she is so far unaware) is presented before us in this scene of a happy family life which could have been her own and which she can now look at only from a distance. Her own position in society prevents her from

becoming a part of the stream of life of the common people who live under the oppressive social order without the kind of complicity which has been hers:

My Lady Dedlock (who is childless) looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped up man coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. My Lady Dedlock says she has been "bored to death" (9).

Thus the "victory" gained by Lady Dedlock when she used "her beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve and sense" to attain "wealth and station" through her marriage with Sir Leicester has been hollow. It has brought her not joy and fulfillment but only "exhausted composure", "worn out placidity" and "equanimity of fatigue". Her repressed humanity asserts itself whenever she is reminded of her buried past either by a scene of affection-filled family life viewed from a distance, as in the passage quoted above, or a passing glance at the hand-writing of her lover in a legal document copied by him or a stray glimpse of her lost daughter Esther Summerson. She becomes restless and longs for a release from her present condition and a contact with the world she has left behind. This urge to somehow re-establish a contact with that past drives her to seek the help of the sweeper boy, Jo, to show her the room where her former lover lived and died as "Nemo" (a nobody), the shop from where he used to get the work of copying, the crossing where he exchanged affectionate greetings with Jo himself and the pauper churchyard where he lies buried. That this urge for release cannot produce any significantly positive results beyond sharpening her awareness of the value of what she has lost is also indicted by the unbridgable gulf which now exists between Jo, a symbol of persecuted humanity, and herself as a lady:

"You mean about the man? says" Jo, following. 'Him as wos dead?'

'Hush! Speak in a whisper! Yes. Did he look, when he was living, so very ill and poor?'

'O jist!' says Jo

'Did he look – not like you?' says the woman with abhorrence .....

'I'm fly,' says Jo. 'But fen larks, you know. Stow hooking it.'

'What does the horrible creature mean?' exclaims the servant, recoiling from him...

The servant shrinks into a corner – into a corner of that hideous archway, with its deadly stains contaminating her dress, and putting out her hands, and passionately telling him to keep away from her, for he is loathsome to her, so remains for some moments .....

She drops a piece of money in his hand, without touching it, and shuddering as their hands approach (223-25).



To disguise herself in the dress of a servant and to ask Jo to speak in a low whisper may be seen as justified acts of caution on the part of Lady Dedlock. But being a lady has changed her personality in many important ways. Her attitude towards Jo is of abhorrence. She cannot recognize the warmth of humanity in him on account of which he is ready to help her. She only sees his dirty clothes and his utter poverty. Any recognition of their common humanity has become almost impossible for her. She recoils from him and shrinks into a corner. When she has to pay him for his services, she passionately asks him to keep away from her and shudders when their hands approach. Dickens is making an exact measurement of the damage that has been done to her own humanity by her complicity. She cannot find a release from her present situation because of the impediments and hurdles which are both external and internal. Dickens is seriously grappling here with the problems and challenges created by the over-all character of the society of his times and his mind is sharply focused on how the logic of its functioning presses upon different individuals and what kinds of possibilities and constraints their own responses to the situation create for them. The passage quoted above shows that Lady Dedlock's boredom and restlessness produce in her a strong desire to find a release from her present situation, but they do not leave in her the necessary moral stamina to make a clean break from it. Furthermore, she has not been able to develop a clear understanding of the system of which she has become a part that could show to her the right course of actions for her liberation. The only release from the situation possible for her, when pressed too hard by her fear of exposure, is an escape towards death. When that kind of desperate bid for escape is actually made, her desire for establishing a contact with her buried past would, of course, direct her towards the burial ground where her former lover lies buried. It shows Dickens's somber mood of realism and the insightful understanding of possible human responses that the only meeting point for Lady Dedlock with her former lover and her daughter visualized in the novel is through her death. It is only appropriate that Esther Summerson would find her lying dead outside the gate of the pauper burial ground and wearing the dress of Jenny, the poor and harassed wife of the bricklayer whose dead child Esther Summerson covered with her own handkerchief.

The other middle class victims of the system are those who show passive resistance against the pressures and blandishments of the social system in which they are placed and try to protect their humanity by refusing to be accomplices. This tactic of withdrawal and confinement of one's attention to the limited space of their immediate surroundings and the realm of personal relationships has its limitations, but Dickens gives it the importance it deserves. He recognizes that for most middle class individuals this is the only visible form of resistance and protection of their humanity available to them. That is why Esther Summerson is

accorded the status of heroine in the novel and allowed to tell her own story, viewing people and situations from her own point of view. She refuses to enter into direct confrontation with the logic of the system, but only engages herself in what is basically a salvage operation. This defensive tactic has many limitations and it can also take varied forms in different characters. By placing Esther's narrative in the midst of the omniscient narrator's account of how the social system is operating in its totality, Dickens devised a technique that would show both the strength and limitations of the defensive tactic of passive resistance at its best. Where a tactic of withdrawal doesn't limit the range of one's sympathies and recognizes the need for interdependence among the fellow sufferers and even leaves some scope for limited interventions to provide whatever relief is possible to the worst victims of the oppressive system, it commands Dickens's respect and he accords to it a large amount of legitimacy. Since Esther Summerson has a special status in the novel as heroine and narrator, her case merits a separate and detailed discussion. How she responds to the pressures exerted by the logic of the system at different stages in her own life, what kind of understanding she acquires about the nature of the system and in what way this understanding shapes her attitude towards other characters including the victims and instruments of the social system and makes her adopt the tactic of passive resistance to survive within the system and keep her humanity intact will all be discussed later under a separate item, "Esther Summerson as Heroine and Narrator".

### *THE WRETCHED POOR*

After mentioning that there is a wide range of forms that middle class tactic of saving one's humanity through passive resistance and mutual assistance can take, some of its specific forms being presented in the novel by Mr. Jarndyce, Mr. Woodcourt, George and his friend, Mr. Bagnet and Mrs. Bagnet, Mr Snagsby the law-stationer and even Mr. Boythorn and Dr Bayham Badger, we should look at those victims of the social system who have to bear the brunt of its oppressive functioning. They are harassed, insulted and subjected to gross exploitation simply because they are weak and vulnerable. Orphaned children and those who are poor and destitute fall in this category. Their only fault is that they do not have the necessary qualification of ownership of property without which the existing system accords no human status to anyone. Since the spirit which propels the system is that of relentless pursuit of self-interest, those who are pushed to the bottom in the tough competition are treated with callous indifference and looked down upon as sub-human creatures. In the passage quoted earlier in this Study Material in the context of our discussion of the character and position of Lady Dedlock, we could see how in the eyes of the rich and privileged, Jo and people like him are simply

abhorrent creatures. They shrink away from them in revulsion and can feel no genuine human concern for them. Through the deeply disturbed but measured voice of the omniscient narrator, Dickens expresses his anguish and shock at the treatment meted out to the poor and deprived people. The novelist recognises that there can be no let-up in the rigorous working of the inhuman system, but he wants to expose its real character before readers who have inherited the broader concerns of liberal humanism and have before them for comparison the vision of a society where every human being is accorded respect and is given an opportunity to live a life of dignity and self-respect. How far removed from this vision of a humane society the social order of his times is has been shown by Dickens very forcefully through vivid descriptions of the living conditions in slums like Tom-all-Alone's in the heart of London where Jo lives and the cluster of hovels near St. Albans where the families of brick-layers are housed. Here is a glimpse of life in Tom-all-Alone's:

Jo lives – that is to say, Jo has not yet died – in a ruinous place, known to the likes of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced ..... Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence, that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint (220).

Dickens puts the blame squarely on the social order, if through its apathy and callousness, it compels a large number of poor and houseless people into “a crowd of foul existence that crawls.... and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers” and not on the poor people themselves. The fact that human beings are reduced under the foul conditions of their existence to the level of “maggots” that crawl and coil themselves to sleep in the absence of adequate space is an evidence of the inhumanity of the social order and a damning blot on the face of the power-structure that forces this abject indignity on a section of its own people. Implicit in the imagery is another critique. The power-structure is not only callous to those who are helpless and houseless, it is also purblind and obtuse in not perceiving the risk to the society at large of a fever that these “maggots” are fetching and carrying. This puts in danger the health of all citizens and creates a threat to the stability of the system itself. If people have been reduced to the role of carriers of an epidemic, the blame for this goes to those who control the levers of power and manage the system in a highly irresponsible manner. The writer is so much haunted by this state of degradation of the poor, that he comes back to Tom-all-Alone's again and again in order to understand fully both the nature of degradation

and the threat to the society as a whole that this degradation poses. In the glimpse of Tom-all-Alone's as seen by a respectable citizen, Mr. Snagsby given below, the main emphasis falls on the unsettling effect it produces in the placid sensibility of Snagsby making him realize how precariously his own world of respectability stands on the treacherous base of a Tom-all-Alone's. The realization that the world of rational behaviour, cleanliness and respectability in which the middle class people live, oblivious of the quagmires they are standing on, can tumble down any moment because of the presence of Tom-all-Alone's gives Snagsby creeps:

Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villanous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water – though the roads are dry elsewhere – and reeking with such smells and sights that he..... can scarce believe his senses. Branching from the street and its heaps of ruins, are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf..... As the unseen wretch goes by, the crowd, leavning that object of attraction, hovers round the three visitors, like a dream of horrible faces, and fades away up alleys and into ruins, and behind walls; and with occasional cries and shrill whistles of warning, henceforth flits about them until they leave the place

A fairly large part of the novel is written in a manner where we feel that we have entered the surrealistic world of a haunting nightmare. The power of the novel lies in evoking through the images like those presented above, a state of mind which shatters the complacent rationality of the ordinary middle class readers and makes them see the underlying connection between the degradation of the poor and the comforts and amenities they themselves enjoy. Close proximity of the crowd of famished and hungry people which “hovers round the three visitors like a dream of horrible faces” was necessary to make the readers see the situation in its full dimensions and feel sickened in body and mind as Snagsby does on recognition of the horrifying consequences of their habitual obliviousness and unconcern about what is happening to their fellow human beings who do no form a part of their immediate circle. Dickens uses his art here to administer a shock to the readers in order to persuade them to break the insulation they tend to create around them by restricting their vision and their concerns to the limited space of their personal relations, domestic life and immediate neighbourhood. Of the “three visitors” to Tom-all-Alone's, two are policemen – Sub Inspector Bucket and the constable on rounds in the locality. The fact that for the two policemen, it remains a routine professional visit which leaves them undisturbed and nonchalantly cheerful as against Snagsby's profoundly disturbed state of mind underlines the extraordinary difficulty as well as the urgency of the task Dickens has taken upon himself in this novel.

The novelist gives an account of another ‘visit’ to the quarters of the poor, this time reported through Esther Summerson’s eyes. While she sensitively registers the misery and griminess of the locality, her response is not of angry protest against the system that has created these conditions Dickens gives here an idea of the wrong kind of meddling interest that some middle class elements who have become tools in the hands of the system take in the life of the poor, when, without moving their little finger to help them in improving their wretched material conditions, they patronizingly start delivering sermons to them or distribute pamphlets among them that would elevate their souls; even if they are illiterate and cannot read anything in print. Since it is Esther Summerson who tells us here about what she saw and heard when she accompanied Mrs. Pardiggle on one of her humanitarian errands to the poor, the emphasis will be different from that in the earlier passages where the omniscient narrator was reporting:

I was glad when we came to the brick maker’s house; though it was one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brickfield, with pigsties close to the broken windows, and miserable little gardens before the doors, growing nothing but stagnant pools. Here and there an old tub was put to catch the droppings of rain-water from a roof or they were banked up with mud into a little pond like a large dirt-pie. At the doors and windows, some men and women lounged or prowled about, and took little notice of us, except to laugh to one another, or to say something as we passed, about gentle folks, minding their own business, and not troubling their heads and muddying their shoes with coming to look after other people’s.

Besides ourselves, there was in this damp offensive room - a woman with a black eye, nursing a poor little gasping baby by the fire, a man; all stained with clay and mud, and looking very dissipated, lying at full length on the ground, smoking a pipe....(106)

The description is different from that of Tom-all-Alone’s partly because, the poor people here are regular labourers and not like those assembled in Tom-all-Alones, houseless and jobless. These people are more independent minded and resent interference from outside. But the main difference is in the narrator’s point of view. In Tom-all-Alone’s case, the omniscient narrator’s focus is on the logic of the social system that produces such a blot. The details are metaphorically significant and there is a sense of outrage at what is being observed. In the case of Esther Summerson, the registration is sensitive enough, but there is no sense of outrage. The griminess and the filth are described as things that are unpleasant but they are accepted for what they are. The scene being what it is, it is not shocking and its finality is taken for granted. The narrator’s emphasis unconsciously falls on the degradation and crudity of the individuals and they are held responsible for the coarseness and brutality they have allowed to develop in their personalities. The

narrator's tacit assumption is that the system may be bad, but there could have been a more active attempt to make things better for oneself within its parameters. Esther Summerson is honest and objective; she recognises the offensive and futilitarian character of Mrs Pardiggle's kind of interference in the life of the poor. Esther concedes the legitimacy of the resentful and insolent outburst which comes a little later from the man who has beaten his wife and given her a black eye. Dickens, while conceding the limited positive value of Esther's responses to the condition of the poor, also underlines the serious inadequacy of the quietistic and passive humanitarianism of Esther Summerson or of Mr. Jarndyce, her patron and guardian. He recognises the urgent need for adopting an attitude that would insist on the exposure of the monstrosity of the system on the basis of a sharp awareness of interconnectedness of all that is happening within the social system. See, for example, how this response of the omniscient narrator is in bold contrast to Esther's response:

There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere..... There is not an atom of Tom's slime not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work in retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge

Two things can be noted in the passage above. First, the blame for all the limitations and weaknesses of the poor inhabitants of Tom-all-Alone's including their ignorance, wickedness and brutality is squarely put on the head of those who are powerful and have subjected the poor to humiliation, repression and deprivation. Second, the interconnectedness of the subjugator and subjugated, though denied or unseen by the powerful, certainly exists and not only exists but actively asserts itself through the consequences of subjugation being felt by all sections of society including the proudest of the proud. The degradation which the poor have suffered will travel back like an infection to all those who perpetrated the disease in the first instance. The novelist assumes an interventionist role by adopting the tone of exhortation and forewarning. The interconnectedness of the proudest of the proud and the lowest of the low is graphically illustrated in this novel through the link which exists between the brightest and the lowest through Nemo or Captain Hawdon who is at once the former lover of an aristocratic lady, the father of a girl who is now part of middle class and Jo, one of the poorest of the poor and deprived like him. The three classes come together in close proximity at the pauper's burial ground where Nemo lies buried. Dickens adopts a holistic attitude towards society and is interested in distinguishing the mode of interaction

between different segments of society which is actually taking place from the mode of interaction which should ideally take place.

Another point to be noted about Dickens's treatment of the poor in this novel is that he shows very clearly and emphatically that all the disfigurements and distortions created by the oppressive system in their personalities, are only superficial and do not go deep down. The inner core of their personality remains that of sound humanity. Jo, with all his griminess and ignorance retains his human concerns and a genuine warmth inside him. Jenny, the bricklayer's wife, despite the hardships she has gone through, becomes neither cynical nor pessimistic and responds to all appeals for co-operation and help. Charley, eldest among the three orphaned children left behind by Neckett, the bailif, is a wonderfully mature and responsible person at a tender age and shows no scars on her personality of the hard trials and rebuffs she has had to face at a very young age. The atmosphere of pettiness and wickedness in the Smallweed household where she has to work as a kitchen-maid for sometime does not make any negative impact on her sound humanity. It is true that Dickens visualizes the collective assertion of the poor and deprived with some apprehensions. The images used by him in this regard suggest a violent and vengeful force, but as individuals almost all the victims of the social system living in conditions of grim poverty retain their goodness of heart, generous spirit of co-operation and mutual trust.

### *PORTRAYAL OF INSTRUMENTS OF THE SYSTEM*

The most imaginative and insightful treatment of the theme in *Bleak House*, however, is to be found in Dickens's portrayal of characters who act as instruments in the working of the institutional framework of the society or act as carriers of the values and attitudes fostered by it in different areas of cultural life. A notable feature of Dickens's critique of the Victorian society of his times in *Bleak House* is that he gives special importance here to the scrutiny of what, in the words of Althusser, may be called the ideological apparatuses erected by the ruling set-up. He focuses his attention on different institutions and professions through which the culture fostered by the established social order is formed and nurtured, but gives primary importance in this regard to the study of the judicial processes and the role of lawyers in these processes. We have already discussed the broad character of the legal processes as perceived by Dickens in this novel. For a sharp visualization of the types of personalities which emerge as instruments in the working of the legal processes, we shall take up for brief comments, the characters of three prominent lawyers in the novel, Conversation Kenge, Tulkinghorn and Vholes. The mean and selfish culture of mistrust and cynicism which flourishes in the acquisitive society also receives focused attention from Dickens. The vivid and insightful

demonstration of the human types who act as carriers of this culture will be briefly discussed through the Smallweed family. What kind of impact the governing logic of the social system makes on art and what kind of personality will fit into the model of the artist in such a society will be examined through a brief glance at the character of Skimpole. The distortions and perversions created in the philanthropic activities and the spirit of religion will be shown through a brief discussion of the characters of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle on the one hand and Mr. Chadband on the other. The world of fashion and politics of lobbying which emerge in this kind of society will also receive a brief notice. The role of administrative officers, particularly, the police officers who enforce law and the implications of the conception of duty invoked in this context would be examined through a brief discussion of the character of Inspector Bucket. The main thrust of the probing and assessment in these areas, we should remember, remains on the identification of the chief traits of the human types that will emerge as carriers or instruments of the logic of governance in such a society.

Before we come to a discussion of the individual characters in this category, a common feature which all of them share may be mentioned. Insofar as they act as carriers and instruments of the governing logic of the social system in different areas of cultural life or play a role in the working of different institutions, they are in each case different from what they look and even from what they take themselves to be. There is a significant divergence between the form in which they exist and the real substance of their being. It is not a simple question of hypocrisy or deliberate deception or dishonesty. This divergence is a necessary condition of their ideological role of being carriers and instruments of the governing logic of the social system as it operates in different forms in various processes of cultural life of the society. The function of ideology is to present the interests, ideas, values and attitudes of those who control the power structure of society in a form that makes them look as interests, ideas, values and attitudes of the society as a whole.

Ideology is a mode of legitimizing what is narrow and sectional by making it look broad and inclusive. On account of our attunement to ideology, we see with the eyes of the dominant group and respond to situations in a manner that does not hurt the interests of this group. Whatever the point of view of the dominant group leaves out or does not show will not be visible to us, however important it may be from the point of view of our humanity. Ideology covers up all the gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions which the value-system carries within itself. What is partial looks complete, what is incoherent and irrational looks coherent and reasonable. And these disguises and transformations effected by ideology are always very subtle and deep-grained. The preferences and prejudices, attachments and incriminations of the dominant group become our own to such an extent that they look natural and spontaneous elements in our experience.



Because of his unhappy childhood experiences, Dickens realized with a great shock that this type of deep-grained ideological projection of some callous and inhuman values was taking place in the society of his own times. Dickens had inherited the values of liberal humanism under which the dignity and freedom of every individual was respected by others, each individual felt a sense of responsibility towards his fellow human beings and realized the need for interdependence and sharing of joys and sorrows with them. Under the influence of these values of liberal humanism, a society working on the principles of equity and justice was to be created to ensure through its institutions that every member got adequate opportunities for happiness and self-fulfillment. Those who controlled the power-structure in the actually existing society of Dickens's times subscribed to a much narrower, selfish and harsh value-system. But by invoking the concepts like equity, justice, respectability and duty towards fellow citizens drawn from the values of the earlier liberal humanism, they sought to project an image of their society that would be acceptable to all. On seeing through this ideological jugglery, Dickens felt greatly disturbed and sought to use his imagination and sharply critical comic intelligence to expose this sordid game. It becomes necessary for him in this regard to visualize in very concrete terms the types of personalities who acted as instruments in the accomplishment of the legitimizing transformation of an essentially shabby value-system devoted to acquisition of money and status into an attractive looking value system with a human face.

There are some common traits which all the characters acting as instruments in this legitimizing game share. In agreeing to play this role, they seriously compromise the freedom and independence of their being. They cannot maintain a genuine sense of self-respect or dignity beyond a point. Subservience to the powers-that-be is present here in one form or the other. They also lack the seriousness and sense of responsibility which comes through one's commitment to the cause of humanity at large including the humanity present within one's own self. This irresponsibility or lack of seriousness combined with their essential subservience can take many forms. Dickens sharply brings out the significant variants of these traits in different characters he chooses for special treatment.

The first group of these subservient characters is that of the lawyers. They are both carriers and instruments of the dominant group's ideology. Conversation Kenge of Kenge and Carboy legal establishment represents the role of subservience which takes the form of facilitator who executes the briefs faithfully and also dresses them up with proper dignity. What modern advertising agencies do, Mr. Kenge does for his clients, with his rhetorical gifts and his cautious but genial presentation of the case. The rhetoric is a ceremonial presentation with more form than substance. This style is an index of conservative conformism where you skirt the basic issues and instinctively take a stand against any move intended for a

change in the status quo. Here dignity gets reduced to respectability or credit worthiness. There is no crookedness or cunning here but there is vapidness of a non-aggressive kind of opportunism. That beneath the surface amiability there is the same attitude of relentless pursuit of self-interest or one's own "busness" is indicated by Kenge's defence of Vhole's "respectability" and his opposition to any reform where the vested interests are adversely affected or even inconvenienced. This is what he has to say in favour of Mr. Vholes and in defence of the status quo:

"Alter this law, sir, and what will be the effect of your rash proceeding on a class of practitioners very worthily represented, allow me to say to you, by the opposite attorney in the case, Mr. Vholes? Sir, that class of practitioners would be swept from the face of the earth. Now you cannot afford – I will say the social system cannot afford – to lose an order of men like Mr. Vholes, Diligent, persevering, steady, acute in business. Sir I can understand your present feeling against the existing state of things, which I grant to be a little hard, in your case, but I can never raise my voice for the demolition of a class of men like Mr Vholes(548)."

Dickens captures in the speaking voice here the vapidness of an amiable but smug supporter of the status quo, to whom every small act of reform is indeed a rash proceeding.

A more disturbing and enigmatic personality in this role of subservience to an unjust social order projecting itself as a humane society is that of Tulkinghorn. He acts as a reliable keeper of secrets, a confidential clerk who can have a free access to his master's presence, apparently on terms of equality. But despite this privilege which he holds very dear, he indirectly suggests by his discreet manner and his rusty black suit that he knows his place and does not want to push his claims on the masters attention. In fact, the role of a trusted keeper of secrets involves a kind of self-effacement and suppression of all spontaneous impulses of one's independent personality. That is why, beneath the veneer of subservience and loyalty, such a character often harbours feelings of resentment which are kept under control with a great amount of discreetness. His loyalty is actually functional. He is nobody's friend. He develops the mentality of a bureaucrat who remains in disdainful aloofness from every body and has no genuinely personal relations with any body. His heart becomes as rusty as his black suit because the warmer feelings never come into play there. The consciousness of his indispensability makes this musty and rusty bureaucrat innerly very haughty and power hungry. This obsessive concern for power of control is also intensified by the awareness of the fact, which he knows from his experience as a secret agent that beneath its benign façade of justice and equity, the social order he serves is a power-structure which protects only "wealth and station." His whole personality is

structured on the basis of his recognition and unquestioning acceptance of this fact. Being a lawyer for him means being an expert who knows all the technicalities. He considers this knowledge as a weapon of power. His subtle hostility towards Lady Dedlock is seen as intriguing by many critics. Actually, it can be understood on the basis of his obsessive concern with power. He harbours feelings of jealousy and ill-will towards Lady DedLock because, though an outsider like himself, she has succeeded in being co-opted within the privileged circle as a full-fledged member and can treat him with the haughtiness of a master. He, on the other hand, has remained merely a favoured interloper. Dickens presents Tulkinghorn as a sinister figure because he recognizes the dangerous potential of the negative mentality of mistrust, aloofness and tense discreetness, forced self-denial and continuous repression of normal human impulses. A kind of subservience which provides access to power not only surreptitiously obtained but also surreptitiously exercised may produce an insatiable hunger for power which is not only destructive but also self-destructive. In Tulkinghorn, we have the picture of an instrument of unjust social order who becomes dehumanized and eventually even diabolicalized. A.E. Dyson rightly observes: "In Tulkinghorn, Dickens is presenting a study of highly abnormal psychology .... We feel something wrong in him from his first appearance in Chesney Wold – musty, respectable, almost "retainer-like" to Sir Leicester's admiring perception." P.S.M.Scott observes that "in the sinister lawyer of Dickens's novel we see embodied in one of its deep grained representatives the autonomous malignities of the settled social order and its prudential forms in the contemporary world." Dickens reminds us that the inner lack of a larger purpose in such a character can generate strong suicidal tendencies and refers to the case of "a man of the same mould and a lawyer, too" who "walked leisurely home .... and hanged himself" (306)

In Mr. Vholes, the lawyer of Richard Carstone whose disintegration of personality is aided and abetted by him is Dickens's picture of an instrument who is more directly repulsive. In a system where pursuit of self – interest is the central driving force, the provider of the legal services may himself become a blood-sucking vampire. Through Vholes Dickens wants to show how in the inhuman social order, all the approved middle class ideals like respectability, dedication to duty, perseverance and responsibility towards the family get distorted and acquire a shockingly perverted meaning. His personality is visualized in very vivid terms by highlighting the mannerisms which speak of moral lassitude, all the limited energy this field mouse-like character has in him getting concentrated in an intent look he gives to his prey.

Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow fixed way he had of looking at Richard he was further remarkable for an in

ward manner of speaking ... I never shall forget those two seated side by side in the lantern's light .... Mr. Vholes, quite still, beack gloved and buttoned up, looking at him [Richard] as if he were looking at his prey and charming it. (533-35)

In this kind of servitor of the system, the outward cover of dignity is not required. The man has no commitment to a larger cause, is withdrawn from the larger currents of life and is silently and fixedly engaged in his predatory activity. While Tulkinghorn was sinister in his potentiality explosive but well-controlled destructive energy, Vholes is a degraded, garbage – eating animal who slowly but continuously carries on his activity of eating away the vital energies of healthy human beings. Here is what respectability becomes when it is practiced by Mr. Vholes.

Mr. Vholes is a very respectable man ... he is allowed by the greater attorneys who have made good fortunes, or are making them, to be a most respectable man. He never misses a chance in his practice; which is a mark of respectability. He never takes any pleasure; which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. And he is making hay of the grass which is flesh, for his three daughters. And his father is dependent on him in the vale of Tauton (548).

How respectability of the middle classes, who are hard-working and persevering, remain reserved and serious, and make sacrifices for maintenance of their families in a reasonably decent way, turns into something despicable when pursued by those whose only concern is to make good fortunes by never missing a chance, and by serving a callous system which forces them to make hay not out of grass but out of human flesh. Respectability without any commitment to a noble social cause becomes a travesty of itself.

Mr. Vholes showed the ethos of an acquisitive society with its false dignity stripped off to a considerable extent. The Smallweeds embody this ethos of parasitism and evasion of social responsibility in a much more grotesque form. The distortion and degradation of humanity is present here in full force and is seen at its extreme point. The individual who embody it do so in its pure and naked form. Smallweed is a money lender who makes money not by performing any social service or furthering any social cause but simply by defrauding others of their property or some other well-earned fruits of their labour. He is, therefore, not an instrument through whom the logic of the acquisitive society operates in the cultural field in specifically modulated forms, but a carrier of this society's ethos as it operates directly in the field of economic activity. There is no ideological process of dignifying transformation or indirection here. The mean and waspish character of the culture being produced by this society is shown through the

Smallweed family in a strikingly grotesque form which gets sharply etched in our consciousness. As a money lender living on other people's earnings, Smallweed, as H.M. Daleski points out, "engages in a business which we may regard as the archetype of parasitic activity in the novel." The images used for him underline the waspish aggressiveness and inner desiccation. Phil Squod, a character in the novel who lives by his honest labour and has been badly mauled by the social system in which Smallweeds flourish all around calls him "a leech in his disposition." The father of Smallweed (who is grand father of young Bart Smallweed), we are told, "was a hony-skinned, two-legged, money-getting species of spider, who spun web, to catch unwary flies and retired into holes until they were entrapped. The name of the old pagan's God was Compound Interest. He lived for it, married it, died for it." The family produces "little old men and women, but no child." These complete "little men and women ... have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds". All these images show how for Smallweed life has been reduced to its bare bones but the aggressive and rapacious energy remains as sharp as ever. Mr. Smallweed is in the habit of using strong abusive language against his wife and throwing a cushion at her whenever she mumbles something. After this exercise, he looks like a "broken puppet" or as a "mere clothes bag looks with a skull-cap on the top of it" and he has to be "shaken up like a great bottle, and poked and punched like a great bolster" by his grand daughter, Judy, to bring him back to his normal posture. Dickens's imagination becomes active and gets sharply focused in order to bring before us in a vivid form what kind of mean, denuded, shrunken but malevolently aggressive life the ethos of money-grubbing society produces. There is no family affection here, there is no dignity; there are no elevated thoughts, no joy and no beauty. Even if the Smallweed family of little old men and women presents a vision of the ultimate possibilities of degradation that such an ethos brings about, it does not look exaggerated or abstract. There are concrete details like the ones given in the description of the physical condition of the old couple which stay in our minds. There are characteristic gestures such as the throwing of the cushion which leaves a vivid and unforgettable impression and their attempts to grab and ferret out money through blackmail or whatever dirty tricks come in handy are also shown so that the full meaning of the disposition of "leeches", and spiders is brought home to us. We have to remember that the absence of qualities in Smallweeds that could have made them full-fledged human beings is there in all the characters who act as tools and instruments but this absence is not felt in most of those cases in this direct and brutal form. As it is shown in the case of the Smallweeds. There, the parasitism and predatoriness come before us in modulated and mediated forms, so that it is difficult to recognize the similarities that exist between Mr. Skimpole and Mr. Smallweed or between Mr. Chadband and Mr. Smallweeds. We should,

however, remembers that Dickens deals with the Smallweed as a social phenomenon; he takes them to be the embodiment of the general logic of the society and does not blame them as individuals for what they are. Dickens maintains a superb impersonality in visualizing their looks, gestures and actions. There is concentration and extraordinary seriousness of concern, but no animus or anger against these characters as individuals. This tremendous concentration of attention on the phenomenon can be seen in the vivid images he uses to describe them. These images are concrete and suffused with a triumphant energy of humour. The images like the screeches of Grandmother Smallweed who looks “like a horrible old parrot without any plumage” or the faces of the little old men and women of the Smallweed family that “bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their mind,” can be mentioned as examples of this kind. The grotesque scenes of old Smallweed entering the Shooting Gallery of George lifted up in arms of two persons or his appearance with a full troop of noisy supporters in the quiet and exclusive precincts of Sir Leicester’s room in Chesney Wold are also presented with superb control showing Dickens’s firm grip on the social phenomenon he seeks to define for us. Since the character of Harold Skimpole who represents the spirit of parasitism and evasion of social responsibility in the realm of art is given a special significance by Dickens, we shall discuss his character and his role in the novel separately under the title “Art and Artist in the world of *Bleak House*.” We would wind up this section of the Study Material with brief comments on the characters of Mr. Chadband, Inspector Bucket and the two philanthropists, Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle.

Inspector Bucket is an interesting character as an expert detective who can dig out hidden secrets, solve murder mysteries, nab those who are hiding to avoid being arrested and can locate after hot pursuit any one who has secretly disappeared from home. But this aspect of his character is not important in itself. It is relevant only as part of a larger concern under which Dickens wants to visualize and assess the precise nature of the impact of Bucket’s professional role as an officer in the administrative apparatus on his personality and value system. As an individual he is an honest, large-hearted and energetic person who believes in the discharge of his official duties with great efficiency and deep sense of devotion. Though he wields power as an officer entrusted with the responsibility of enforcement of law, he does not become a sinister person who is power drunk. Bucket seems to be on intimate and friendly terms with those whom he has to tackle as a part of his duties and seems to be well disposed towards them. In fact, he seems to be an admirable embodiment of the middle class ideals of devotion to duty and respectability earned through hard work and approbation of the public at large. His example of dutifulness, respectability and perseverance seems to stand out in bold contrast to the shabby form in which Mr. Vholes represents these

middle class virtues. Dickens, however, goes deeper into the real substance of these ideals as they are practiced by a functionary working with great zeal in an administrative apparatus designed to protect the interests of those who have wealth and privileged positions. Despite his surface bonhomie and geniality, Bucket shows obtuseness and insensitivity in dealing with the weak and vulnerable. He has no respect for their dignity and remains unconcerned and undisturbed by their sufferings and their misery. The way he whisks away Jo in a state of high fever from the room in which Esther had put him in her house in order to take proper care of him during his illness, shows his callous indifference to the poor whose humanity he does not recognize at all. This is also evident in his conduct during the visit to Tom-all-Alone's in search of Jo when, as against Mr. Snagsby who feels sick in mind and body at the horrible conditions in which people have to live there, he remains totally unperturbed and relaxed. He is shockingly incurious and complacent whenever he confronts the situation of the poor. Faced with the brickmakers wife and her baby when he comes to the cluster of dirty hovels at St. Albans, this is the advice he offers to her: "You train him respectable, and h'll be a comfort to you, and look after you in your old age, you know." That the kind of respectability he is recommending is inaccessible to the poor family and ridiculous as a proposition, he cannot understand. The manner in which the constable working under him handles Jo is also an index of the blatant inadequacy and obtuseness of the "instructions" he has received in this regard. Apathy and smug self-sufficiency which the administrative set-up structurally produces in his personality, even though they usually remain hidden in his case behind the shallow friendliness of manner he adopts in his dealings with those he has targeted his show themselves clearly in this interaction of the police constable with Jo in the presence of Mr. Snagsby:

"He won't move on," says the constable, calmly, with a slight professional hitch of his neck, involving its better settlement in his stiff stock ...

"Oh my eye! Where can I move to? cries the boy ...

"Don't you come none of that, or I shall make blessed short work of you!" says the constable, giving him a passionless shake. "My instructions are, that you are to move on. I have told you so five hundred time"

"But where? Cries the boy ...

The stiff body, the professional hitch of the neck, the passionless shake and the bullying voice, all these bring out the dehumanization of the administrative set-up which Bucket keeps covered up beneath his jovial re-assuring voice. This constable does not respond to the boy's cry. Mr. Snagsby has to intervene on his behalf and ask him where the boy is expected to move to. The constable

condescends to reply to Mr. Snagsby and tell him in a tone of finality: “My instructions don’t go to that.” This is precisely the problem. Bucket and the constable under him are only to follow the “instructions” of their masters faithfully and efficiently without raising any question in their minds whether they are justified and proper or not. Enquiries for Bucket, John Lucas rightly observes, “are a matter of mechanical routine” and not about basic questions of what is right and what is wrong. All that is needed is a faithful and efficient implementation of whatever instructions are received from above. Lucas rightly concludes that “in the bulk of *Bleak House* Bucket emerges as a man whose unpleasantness and human inadequacies are intimately bound into his social role.” An authoritarian disregard of the dignity and freedom of all individuals is what is produced in him by his social role. Because of this lack of respect for a person’s dignity or autonomy, as Lucas tells us, “he takes possession of people in a way that denies any deep sense of human responsibility.” His sense of “duty” means only being at the beck and call of powerful persons like Bulkinghorn and being rough and tough with those who are powerless. It is not a question of personal viciousness, but of the viciousness of the role he has to perform. What goes to his credit is not that he maintains a genial sort of friendlessness with those whom he has to hook, but a minimal inner core of humanity he has preserved, despite the large degree of dehumanization he has undergone as an instrument in the hands of an exploitative social system.

This inner core, however, becomes active in him only when he ceases at some rare moments to play his professional game and strikes a personal equation with a fellow human being. We get a glimpse of this when in George’s shooting gallery, he not only delays the arrest of ailing Gridley but also pleads with him not to give up his spirited opposition to the working of Chancery Court. Dickens believed that by keeping a part of one’s self reserved for the distinctive area of personal relations and drawing a sharp line of insulation around it so that the pressures of the professional role do not invade this inner core, a residual humanity can be preserved even among those who act as carriers or instruments of an oppressive or callous social system. Mr. Wemmick in *Great Expectations* is a crystallized instance of a character who keeps a reserve area of private humanity as a sort of fixed deposit which he does not allow to be consumed in his professional activities. Mr. Guppy, a clerk in Kenge and Carboy’s legal establishment in this novel is a character whose humanity is not completely used up in his professional life, but is not adequately insulated even in his personal relations and gets adulterated by the professional idiom and calculativeness of his legal profession. Even Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, who otherwise embodies in his whole petrified and life-strangulating rigidities of an iniquitous feudal order carries a residue of private humanity in the innermost layers of his self which takes the form



of a genuine concern for Lady Dedlock when she is in trouble. It is this belief in residual humanity that can be saved from the pressures of the social system through insulation or through mechanism of passive resistance that enables Dickens to visualize the positive role of characters like Esther Summerson, the heroine of the novel.

### THE SHAPE OF RELIGIOUS FERVOUR AND PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITY IN THE *BLEAK HOUSE* WORLD.

The perspective from which Dickens views the world of *Bleak House* is that of liberal humanism. This perspective, however incorporate within itself the essential spirit of non-doctrinal Christianity which enjoins upon each individual a sacred duty to have a genuine concern for the well-being of all fellow human beings and requires that our dealings with one another be guided by love and charity. In the Victorian society, a good amount of humanitarian work was being done by many philanthropic individuals and charitable organization to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and destitute people around them. Dickens himself sponsored and actively supported many such laudable humanitarian efforts. Recognizing the value of all such efforts, he introduced in this novel such important characters as Mr. John Jarndyce, the benefactor and guardian of the heroine of the novel, who, apart from taking into his own hand the entire responsibility of her education and future career rescues orphaned children like Charley from misery and oppression and extends help to many philanthropist who approach him for support. Esther Summerson herself devoted a good deal of her time and energy to bringing cheerfulness in the harassed life of many individuals, removing their emotional tangles and resolving their domestic problem. What she does for Caddy, Charley and Jo are instances of this positive support to those who need it.

A significant feature of *Bleak House* is that Dickens recognizes here very clearly and firmly that humanitarian work aimed at providing relief to some individuals has only a limited value. His assessment of the work of charity is similar to that of Blake who recognized the inadequacy of "Pity" as a response to Poverty generated by the very logic of a social system. Instead of glorifying the role of benevolent benefactors as he had done in some of his earlier novels, he underlines the insufficiency of such interventions as that of Mr. Snagsby who is in the habit of bringing out half crowns from his pocket to relieve his disturbed conscience. Even more importantly, Dickens recognizes in this novel that gross distortions and perversies creep into the philanthropic schemes and projects when they are pursued by individuals whose personalities have been structured in one way or the other by the logic of the dominant social system. There is a basic lack

of concern in such cases for the genuine needs of fellow human beings on account of which their whole approach suffers from blindness and obtuseness making their schemes of philanthropy woolly and abstract with no connection whatsoever with the actual needs and requirements of victims of oppression in their own society. We have the example of Mrs. Jellyby who has an abstract scheme that would benefit the natives of Borioboola Gha in Africa about whom she doesn't know anything and who are merely statistical items for her in a bureaucratically conceived project. When there is no genuine interest in the supposed beneficiaries, the project becomes for her a mode of evasion of family responsibilities. The children are neglected. The whole house is in a mess. The room where she receives Esther Summerson, Richard and Ada "is strewn with papers and nearly filled by a great writing table covered with similar litter." Children tumble down the staircase without producing even a small ripple of reaction in Mrs. Jellyby. She keeps her elder daughter Caddy incessantly busy with writing letters and has no awareness of the strain she is inflicting on her through this meaningless drudgery.

A similarly false but more determinedly tyrannical instance of this "telescopic philanthropy" is that practiced by Mrs. Pardiggle who forces even her little children to part with their small pocket money for the supposed benefit of Tockahopo Indians. The kind of charity she carries to the poor and the resentment it produces can be seen from the visit she pays to the "wretched hovels" of the bricklayers, a reference to which has already been made earlier in this Study Material. There is a big gulf which separates Mrs. Pardiggle and these poor people. Ignoring this alienation and distance completely, she wants forcibly to impose on them a form of charity that will do them no good. She has brought some pamphlets with her which she wants to leave with them, although none of them can read or would like to read them. Undeterred by the resentful outburst of the bricklayer, she "pulled out a good book, as if it were a constable's staff and took the whole family into custody." This is the impression Esther formed of her manner and the motive which seemed to actuate her moves at the moment. In conducting herself in this way, she is actually acting as an instrument of the existing power-structure, and her philanthropic work becomes a campaign to subdue frighten the ill-treated poor people whose anger she wishes to siphon off through her campaign. Her "mechanical way of taking possession of people", is thus in the name of philanthropy, actually a form of "religious custody" accomplished by her as "an intolerable policeman." This rude and crude philanthropy corresponds to the Puseyism of the conservative Anglican Church which remained unconcerned with the suffering of the poor but wanted to blunt the edge of their awareness by directing their attention towards the chaff of old superstitious and rituals.

Evangelicalism, was a more popular form of emotional relief that was offered to the oppressed sections of society including the lower middle classes,

slum dwellers and factory workers. Through the character of Chadband, Dickens seeks to expose the fake spirituality of this type of Evangelicalism which carried the audience off-tangent and induced in them a state of mind which separated them completely from the harsh realities of life and filled them with a cheep and heady sort of excitement which dulled their minds. This form of spirituality was debased because it was not based on any anguish of the soul caused by a sharp awareness of the outrageous conditions of living of the deprived masses. The foggy sense of spiritual elevation made the harassed and oppressed people feel temporarily that they were being lifted up balloon-like and relieved from the heavy pressure of their actual living conditions. The audience of the Evangelical preachers had only to passively enter this spiritual lift which smoothly took them up and up on its engines of fallacious reasoning and automatized emotional afflatus. The personality which acted as an agent for inducing this mood of spiritual elevation or thrill of excitement had to be a coarse-grained parasite who first filled himself with food and drinks and then set the oil-engine of his sensibility working to ooze out a greasy spirituality which served as a lubricant for smooth movement of the poor men's stuck-up life-cart.

Since Chadbandism was doing a great harm to the people by creating in them a vague emotional ferment which prevented them from understanding the real causes of their deplorable condition and assuaged their anguish, Dickens's attitude towards it is particularly harsh. He launches his attack by highlighting the ignorance and hypocrisy of the preachers who batten on the ordinary people's limited resources and then curdle up and befoul their latent spirituality. John Lucas has rightly observed in this regard. "Chadbandism is created by class distinctions." Dickens demonstrates the heady character of this form of spirituality and mimics the processes by which the ferment was produced: "You are a human boy, my young friend, a human boy. Oglorious to be a human boy!" Despite the humbug and cant being used by Chadband, he is no fool, but a shrewd shamanist. He succeeds because the social context which produces him also needs him. What has been said above about the nature of this need, is confirmed by this comment of Lucas: "Chadbandism aims to provide for its audience a refuge from the truths the narrator forces on our attention." He will give a spurious but self-sustaining explanation of the state in which the poor find themselves. In order to give a proper comic-critical perspective on the kind of emotional afflatus he creates, Dickens draws our attention to the cant phrases and the choppy, fallacious string of statements he builds up on a crude question-answer technique. He also gives a brief but graphic description of his physical appearance so that we can view him from a critical angle and see him as a grotesque phenomenon, disturbing as well as amusing. Before he starts with his characteristic art of speech-making, this description of his looks is given: "Mr. Chadband is a large yellow man, with a fat

smile, and a general appearance of a good deal of train oil in his system ..... Mr Chandband moves softly and cumbrously, not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright.” (203-204)

The essence of Chandband’s method is to isolate a concept from the context of its multiple relations with other concepts and things which constitute a particular social situation, and then through a series of simple questions and answers which keep our mind focused on what the concept is in itself, he builds up a cloudy envelope around it so that we feel absorbed in it with an expanding elatedness and make us see it in its over-all context. His abstracting and chopping method precludes that possibility. Here is Chandband working himself up as well as his audience on the unhappy condition of Jo which must be contemplated in such a manner that we forget all the concrete social circumstances which produced it. Here is his description of Jo which abstracts him from all the filth and dirt of his actual life. “My young friend,” says Chandband, “you are to us a pearl, you are to us a diamond, you are to us a gem, you are to us a jewel.” Then follows the statement already quoted about his being a “human boy”, an abstract category which obliterates all particular distinctions between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the hungry and the well-fed. The physical grossness of the character, acting as an agent who beguiles the unhappy poor into believing that they are floating on a balloon, is nothing in comparison with his spiritual besottedness. The prevented form of Christianity being used by him acts like an intoxicating drug that would make the bruised humanity of the poor forget its pain for as long as it suits the powers who keep them suppressed.

There is another kind of misuse of religion mentioned in the novel. This is called “dandyism” in religion. The essential point of dandyism is not to take an important matter seriously, not to feel deeply concerned about it and bring it down to the level of light gossip and then put it on display as a fashionable thing. Dickens expresses this distortion in Christianity in these words:

There are, at Chesney Word this January week, some ladies and gentlemen of the newest fashion, who have set up a Dandyism – in Religion for instance. Who, in mere lackadaisical want of emotion, have agreed upon a little dandy talk about the Vulgar wanting faith in things in general meaning in the things that have been tried and found wanting, as though a low fellow should unaccountably lose faith in a bad shilling, after finding it out.

This attempt to generate among the poor a blind and unthinking outmoded forms of religion is rightly characterized by the narrator as something that has been discovered to be a false coin.

*Bleak House* also makes a brief mention of the degeneration in the functioning of parliamentary democracy by a similar Dandyism in politics

produced by a lack of deep interest in matters relating to public welfare. Self-centered politicking and lobbying among Doodles, Poodles, and Noodles, Buffy's, Puffy's and Duffy's has replaced enlightened interest in serious minded politics and science of governance. Dickens pours ridicule on it in *Bleak House*

### *ESTHER SUMMERSON: AS HEROINE AND NARRATOR*

Esther Summerson occupies a unique position among the characters in *Bleak house*. She is the only character in the novel who has the privilege to tell her own story as a narrator and give her impressions and assessments of various characters with whom she comes into contact at different points of time in her career. She is the only character in this novel whom we have an opportunity to know from within and whose experiences we share at various crucial points in the growth of her personality right from her childhood to the stage she marries. Wood court and settles down in the new "Bleak House" chosen for her by her benefactor and guardian, Mr. John Jarndyce. Usually Dickens presents his characters at a point when their personalities have already been formed. He does not find it necessary to trace the whole graph of growth and development of a character's personality by stage. Apart from David Copperfield, the central character in his largely autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield* and Pip in *Great Expectations*, Dickens offers this special opportunity to Esther Summerson to give an account of her experiences to the reader directly in her own person and let them have an idea of those crucial points in her career which stand out in her own memory as exceptional moments of crisis and trial which played a decisive role in shaping her personality. Usually, Dickens finds it sufficient to present his character, before us through vivid descriptions of chosen details of their behaviour and physical appearances and then let them speak in their own special idiom. We look at these characters from the outside. But Dickens has such a firm intuitive grasp of the essentials of their moral and emotional make-up and he views them so sharply that he is able to reveal the whole of a character's personality in some characteristic external gesture, trick of behaviour or speech. It is only for some special reasons that Dickens makes a departure from this normal method of character-portrayal. In the case of Esther Summerson, Dickens wanted to see how the pressures exerted by the inhuman logic of the existing social system are resisted by the serious, well-meaning and sensitive middle class individuals who were continuously trying to carve out a private space for themselves in the realm of personal relationships. Since the whole struggle is internal, the achieved positive results as well as limitations of this defensive tactic of resistance can be intimately seen and assessed only by the dramatization of this continuous struggle. A character who has a fair amount of sensitivity, moral grit and intelligence is chosen for this kind of portrayal because the novelist's primary objective here is to give an intimate idea

of “the possibilities of goodness” which existed within the social environment he is presenting in the novel. With all his hard assessment of the war in which the ideals of decency, respectability and duty or commitment to the cause of humanity at large had crumbled within the middle classes under the pressures exerted by the dominant trends of social change, he also knew that it was not a simple case of walk-over and large sections within the middle classes perceived the threat and mustered sufficient resistance against these pressures. Dickens, in his own life, had adopted this path of defending and preserving these positive ideals which were dear to him. He also knew that this trajectory of personality-formation was not confined to some exceptional individuals but represented a large social phenomenon. A number of ordinary, nameless individuals among the large mass of humanity which constituted the lower middle classes were carrying on this struggle in their personal life and in spite of its moderate, low-key nature, it, becomes a significant social force. As pointed out earlier in this Study material, Dickens’s creative energy as a writer is only a concentrated expression of the common people living in towns and cities had displayed in bearing the brunt of the changes taking place in the society of his times.

Esther Summerson is the heroine in the novel not only because of her personal qualities of sensitivity, intelligence and diligence, but because she is a representative figure carrying behind her the collective strength of these sober and obscure people. Dickens knew that a more powerful and radical resistance based on a clear grasp of the working of the system and stronger resentment than displayed by Esther Summerson was needed and he embodies that perspective in the voice of the omniscient narrator but he knew that this moral radical form of this theoretical need had not taken any concrete shape. The only form of angry and resentful responses which he saw within the middle classes were those represented by the “Man from Shropshire” who only tires himself out in an ill-comprehended anger of which the Lord Chancellor does not take any official notice beyond ordering his arrest as a nuisance. He becomes a spectacle for entertainment of the clerks in the Chancery Court. The other form of angry resistance is that of the blustering Boythorn who eccentrically personalizes his protest and wastes his moral energy in trivial quarrels. As against this, the persistent and constructively exercised resistance of Esther Summerson in saving her own humanity from falling into depression or excessive sense of guilt, trying to save those like Richard who have adopted the wrong path of lethargically hoping for a windfall or in extending moral support to those like Caddy who can be rescued from their morose irritation and launched on the path of happiness for themselves. This form of resistance goes beyond the narrow limits of self-preservation. Esther is always ready to extend warm sympathy to those like Jo who are the worst sufferers under the system. Dickens underlines the fact that this model of resistance is quietistic in the sense

that it does not confront the system and remains on the defensive. He is in no mood to overestimate its value and keeps his treatment free from the fussy sentimentality and idealization which surrounds good characters like Agnes in *David Copperfield*. The running comparison with the omniscient narrator's perspective ensures that the limitations of the defensive type of passive resistance shown by Esther remains sharply before us. The principled form of opting out from the system which Jarndyce displays is not tested. It is only a lucky gift from sources which have not been examined. But as we can see from the earliest experiences of Esther, her goodness has been earned and strenuously constructed. The fact of her being an illegitimate child was burnt into her consciousness right from the beginning by her Calvinistic godmother (actually her aunt), Mrs. Barbary. Her cold and stern attitude made Esther feel extremely shy. She could not open her heart to any one except her doll. She was not allowed to meet any children at their homes. Her birthdays were cheerless and she read a clear message in her aunt's face that "it would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday, that you had never been born". The stern Calvinism of her aunt, thus, puts a pressure on her tender emotional being which is as severe and oppressive in its own way as the pressure of the environment of Tom-all-Alone's would be on its inhabitants in physical terms. When she insists on knowing about her mother, she receives this reply from her aunt:

'your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come – and soon enough – when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can.... For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written'

Esther's growth into a sensitive, living and responsible person is a remarkable achievement because the impact of such a stern environment, where she is made to feel that her birthdays are "evil anniversaries," her birth itself a "disgrace," could be chilling. It is quite natural if Esther, as we are told, was "frozen" on hearing these words. It is a marvel that she did not allow herself to be frozen permanently as her aunt seems to have done when she goes on to tell her:

'Submission, self-denial, diligent work are the preparations for life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born like them, in common sinfulness and wrath you are set apart.' (17-18)

The true significance of these words of her aunt has to be properly understood. One obvious meaning of this Calvinistic doctrine is that it imposed on middle class children a pressure which would subdue and discipline them? submissive and unquestioning sufferers of whatever rebuffs they received from the social system,

accepting them as punishments for their own sins. The quietism of Esther Summerson is partly an index of this submissive conditioning. Dickens recognizes this as a constraint that she could not subvert. She was made to feel guilty for what she had not done, in order to induce in her an attitude of “submission” and self-denial. When later on, her mother reveals her true identity to her, Esther feels guilty and wishes to efface her-self completely because her very existence is a standing threat to her mother’s position. After her ill-ness also she feels a similar impulse to hide herself so that Ada may not receive a painful shock on seeing her altered face. This doctrine of “submission and self-denial” is exposed by Dickens at different emotionally charged critical moments in Esther’s life as a kind of ideological conditioning which becomes an obstruction in the growth of her personality. She loves Wood court, but would not acknowledge it fully even to herself. Dickens recognizes it as a remarkable achievement on the part of Esther that she does not allow herself to fall into a morose self-contempt and isolate herself completely from her fellow human beings on account of such moods of depression and defeatism. She breaks the shackles of the dominant ideology in this regard.

Actually, there is also a positive aspect of her aunt’s doctrine of “self-denial” and “diligent work.” This doctrine is chosen by the middle classes as a defensive armour for the preservation of the autonomy of their self and a safeguard against the corrupting temptations and blandishments which the dominant power-structure may offer for co-optation. Mrs. Barbary, we should not forget, has become what she is after her child and marries her sister (Esther’s mother) deserts Sir Leicester Dedlock. Consciously she may think that Lady Dedlock’s sinfulness and disgrace lie in her indulgence in love for Captain Hawdon. But actually, she is able to keep her own humanity intact under the stiff armors of Calvinism so that she may not be guilty of betrayal of her human affections like her sister had been when she chose to enter the aristocratic order through her marriage with Sir Leicester. It is the call of her warm humanity that impels her to accept the responsibility of looking after Esther’ education and later to make proper arrangements and future career by entrusting this responsibility to Mr. Jarndyce. It is significant that for securing this arrangement apart, from Mr. Jarndyce’s well-known generosity, she invokes the sanctity of her old love-relationship with a close friend of Mr. Jarndyce. This positive aspect of the doctrine of self-denial, sacrifice and diligent work as a defensive armour to protect the inner human core of one’s personality is imbibed by Esther and it becomes more prominent in her general outlook on life than its negative side which represents ideological conditioning leading to isolation and a paralyzing sense of guilt. If we find Esther Summerson looking rather dim and colourless, it is only because of this defensive armour under which her warm humanity has been preserved. Q.D. Leavis rightly



takes note of her positive human qualities when she observes that “her individual sensibility is shown in her unusual sensitiveness to her surroundings” and maintains that “she is intelligent through the intensity of her sensibility” and “unlike Pip” she is not “morally timid or weak.” Her sensitiveness to her surroundings is shown whenever she registers her impressions of the characters she meets and is able to recognize both the hidden potential for goodness they have, as in Caddy, or subtle moral corruptions which are not easily discernable on the surface as in the case of Skimpole. Her registration of the main aspects of the places she visits, whether it is Mr. Krook’s “Rags and Bottles Shop” or the “cluster of wretched hovels where the bricklayers live or Mrs Jellyby’s house, is duly emphasized in the novel. Dickens’s treatment of Esther Summerson’s character is really marked by “compassionate understanding” of a great creative artist, as R.D. Leavis rightly claims. He does not sentimentalize Esther and, as P.S.M Scott rightly points out does not endorse, her attitude of “quiescence as the most valid or inspired responses to the rank frustrations and thwartings of the individual life in this society.” This critic rightly observes that Dickens positive assessment of the human sensibility that Esther Summerson has been able to retain through her tactic of passive resistance is an evidence of his “severely responsible and sustained focusing upon consciousness, intelligence and capacity,” which according to this critics, become “no less a burden” in the context of the society of Dickens’s times than “extreme indigence which scars so many lives on all sides.” Despite the scars received by her Esther is able to bear the burden of preserving the integrity of her self through her, intelligence and capacity for extending genuine emotional support to fellow sufferers. This is indeed a remarkable achievement. We may conclude by agreeing with A.E. Dyron that she is “that rare thing in the novel, a convincing depiction of moral goodness.”

### *ART AND ARTIST IN THE WORLD OF BLEAK HOUSE*

Harold Skimpole, a man of exquisite sensibility who does not want to know anything about money or time, may look like a character who has no place in the world of *Bleak House* where moneyed might dominates. The only justification for inclusion of such a character would seem to lie in his offering a vivid contrast to the general spirit of rapacious acquisitiveness which characterizes the world of *Bleak House* and is nakedly represented by Grand father Smallweed. He may also qualify for the role of a victim whose exquisite sensibility is completely neglected by those who dominate the power structure or crushed under the weight of their obtuse and insensitive approach to life. Many readers may feel that the presence of Skimpole in *Bleak House* is a sign of persistence in his later novels of the spirit in which the earlier novels were written. There Dickens presented a vast picture-gallery of colourful and vividly drawn characters who were important in

themselves and had no vital link with any theme in which the novelist may be interested. That Skimpole is only one of Dickens's superbly drawn characters who is in the novel only to entertain and amuse us may look convincing to some readers. Actually, the case is very different. Dickens is seriously trying in *Bleak House* to visualize how the entire spectrum of cultural life is affected by the pressures of the governing logic of a society where pursuit of self-interest in terms of money and status is the dominant concern. It is an index of Dickens's penetrating intelligence that he could discover the essential similarity which exists between Harold Skimpole and Smallweed. Apparently these characters are poles apart from each other. While Smallweed is all greed and is actively engaged in grabbing more and more wealth, Skimpole is contemplative and seemingly not at all eager to have any possessions of his own. Harold Skimpole is light and playful flitting about like a butterfly; Smallweed, on the other hand, is stiff and noisy. Skimpole is sweet and polite, while Smallweed is rough and abusive. Skimpole was "very fond of reading the papers, very fond of nature, very fond of art." Smallweed, on the other hand, "has discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy tales," and yet Dickens establishes, with his penetrating gaze, that the petty selfishness, parasitism and evasion of responsibility we owe to our fellow human beings which marks the essence of Smallweed's character vitiates the personality of the angel-looking artist, Harold Skimpole as well. The only difference is of form; in Skimpole's case, since he represents the realm of culture, this essential parasitism and absence of commitment to the cause of humanity is present here in subtler forms and has undergone an ideological mutation. As H.M. Dalaski points out, his "first words prove ... to be of decided relevance to the larger concerns of the novel." By presenting himself as "a mere child in the world" Skimpole virtually frees himself from all responsibility for his actions. As Dalaski rightly maintains, he is actually claiming for himself "the freedom not only to practice but ... to preach the Drone philosophy." This is how Skimpole's attitude towards life is faithfully reported to us by Esther:

He didn't at all see why the busy bee should be proposed as a model to him ... He must say he thought a Drone the embodiment of a pleasanter and wiser idea. The Drone said, unaffectedly "... I find myself in a world in which there is so much to see, and so short a time to see it in, that I must take the liberty of looking about me and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him."

Art is, thus, being hollowed out of all meaning and purpose. It is merely an idler's of entertaining those busy bodies who do not have the time or the desire to look about them. Since Dickens felt convinced that art gained meaning and significance only when it aimed at exposing all mere busy bodies who remained narrowly

confined to their petty selfish ends and had forgotten the responsibilities they owed to the humanity at large, he wanted to demarcate his own position as a serious artist from mere dilettantism represented by Skimpole. Esther Summerson, tells us that being a Drone was always willing to be on good terms with the powers that be. His opposition as artist to the existing power-structure is actually nominal. The “easy fellow” was always willing to do the bidding of the authorities and never annoyed them. Skimpole is highly insensitive to the larger moral issue for an artist to offer radical resistance to the corrupt and callous social order. The shocking complicity and corrupt conformism of Skimpole comes out very sharply and clearly when he quietly heaps Bucket to take away Jo, by telling him about the room where he was put by Summerson and later justifies his complicity with the agent of authority as a duty he owed to the State. Esther Summerson brings before him the ugly implications of this complicity insofar as he betrayed the trust of his host in doing this surreptitiously and even more disturbingly showed no concern for Jo who, with his complicity, was driven away, in a state of high fever, to face the rigours of bad weather all by himself. It is significant that Skimpole doesn't even take note of the disturbing questions Esther had raised and simply confine himself to justifying what he had done by invoking the idea of duty. The selfishness and corruption present behind his pleasing manner comes out very sharply and clearly when he audaciously justifies the taking of bribe from inspector Bucket for leaking out the information about Jo. This moral insensitivity and corruption which is a natural consequence of his parasitism also comes out when he accepts a bribe from Mr. Wholes for introducing him to Richard Carston. His complicit conformism to the dictates of a corrupt and callous system is exposed by Dickens when he shows Skimpole arguing in favour of an art which is agreeable to the powers-that-be. He frankly admits that “every body's business in the social system is to be agreeable” and shamelessly calls the social system being presented in *Bleak House* as a “system of harmony.” Even “the slaves on the American plantations” are viewed by him as a “pleasant” spectacle; “they people the landscape for me,” he says. We have to agree with Q.D. Leavis, when she observes that Dickens's critical attitude towards Skimpole provides strong proof of his belief that “the artist must be ‘held accountable’ in life and art, that these two are inseparable; sensibility and taste can't exist in a void; indifference to one's fellows means paying the penalty as an artist of sterility; refusal to take a stand on principle is to commit an artist to parasitism; to have no concern for justice is to be condemned to triviality.”

### *THE STRUCTURE OF BLEAK HOUSE*

A superficial reading of the novel would give the impression that, like some earlier novels of Dickens, *Bleak House* is also a loosely structured episodic novel where different streams of events are sought to be artificially joined together through a

sensational plot of intrigue and co-incidences. This type of plot keeps us going on the basis of a continuously aroused sense of mystery and suspense combined with some points of discovery clear the mystery for brief moments. The advantage of such a sensational plot, is that we are prevented from asking deeper questions about the interconnectedness of the various episodes and distinctive strands of action because of the thrill and excitement of repeated cycles of mystery and discovery provided by it. There is no doubt that *Bleak House* presents a panoramic view of a social scene which is crowded by a number of characters who do not constitute any single homogeneous nucleus and parallel narrative streams which are not integrated into a unified dramatic plot. We also find in this novel the presence of the plot-structure of detective fiction based on the hidden past of Lady Dedlock with spies and detective agents trying to dig into her buried secret, the lawyer Tulkinghorn and Inspector Bucket being the leading figures in this detective plot. The uncertainty attending upon the Jarondyce and Jarndyce law suit which has been going on for an unduly long time may also seem to be a part of a structure created to maintain an atmosphere of mystery. Then, there is the additional problem posed by Dickens in taking recourse to a complicated mode of narration involving two distinctive narrators, one of whom, the omniscient narrator. Keeping his narration in the form of historical present tense while the other narrator, Esther Summerson, being allowed to tell the story of her life in a time sequence beginning with a past which is recollected stage by stage and brought up to a point of time ahead of the historical present tense of the omniscient narrator. This may create an impression of disjunction and simultaneous presence of different points of view which do not merge or get unified into a single perspective. So, it may appear that the novel has no real unified structure and a false sense of unity is being produced by manipulating our reactions through a sensational plot of mystery and intrigue and a criss-cross mingling of the narrative blocks associated with the two distinctive mode of narration mentioned above.

Based on this impression of an apparently disjointed structure, an attempt has been made to discover an underlying unity in the novel by using the concept of “pulsation” which is the combined effect of a simultaneous presence of centrifugal and centripetal movements in a novel. The most notable exponent of this kind of structure of *Bleak House* is W.J. Harvey who maintains that the novel gives the impression of “immense and potentially anarchic energy being brought – but only just – under control.” Harvey explains the use of the two narrators indicating that one of them (Esther) provides a point of stability and control while the other (omniscient narrator) provides the full ballast of imaginative energy of Dickens’s creative genius. Harvey also takes note of the two narrative blocks undergoing a process of internal expansion and their convergence towards each other at various points of coincidence or at points where characters in one narrative block meet

those coming under the other narrative block. This description of the structure of the novel helps us in understanding it up to a point, but it doesn't explore the real basis of the underlying concerns of the writer on account of which this kind of fragmentation and unification at selected points becomes necessary. Robert A. Donovan in his article "Structure and Idea in *Bleak House*" tries to go into the nature of the theme which necessitates the creation of this type of structure. His explanation of the structure also shows that the use of detective story type of plot in *Bleak House* is not merely for manipulating the reader's responses to create in him a false sense of unity of the novel, but is essentially functional. "The plot in this case," he explains, "is still woven of "events" but the word now signifies some determinate stage in the growth of awareness of truths which are in existence, potentially knowable, before the novel opens." This type of structure, Donovan further explains, "is ... the typical pattern of the detective story" which, according to him, "consists simply in the discovery withheld, of course, as long as possible – of the one hypothesis which will account for all the disparate facts or events that make up the story." Dickens, as we know, is concerned in this novel with understanding the inter-relatedness of the contemporary society viewed as a whole by identifying the governing logic of its functioning which produces relationships of domination and contradiction. He also wants to understand in full concreteness the impact this governing logic makes on the functioning of various institutions in different areas of cultural life of this society. The "hypothesis" that Donovan talks about is the *inter-relatedness* of different segments and layers of social life which is not visible but which exists and has to be discovered through the identification of the governing logic which gives to the society as a whole its specific objective character. The fragmentation, stratification and isolation of different segments of social life are the result of an underlying governing logic which does not usually show itself directly anywhere on the surface of social life but has to be exposed through a strenuous and concentrated effort of imagination and critical intelligence. The moment we recognize that the governing logic is that of domination, exploitation and neglect, some of the disjunctions present in the social life become immediately intelligible. For example, Esther Summerson recognizes the existence of a gulf or barrier between herself and Mrs. Pardiggle on the one hand and the bricklayers on the other. This disjunction is created by the logic of class-division and the repression of those who are poor by those who have the power of money with them. The existence of Tom-all-Alone's as a festering sore in the heart of London and the pauper burial-ground where Nemo lies buried and the connection of these places with the world of Chesney Wold, the world of Chancery Court and the world of the middle classes is not easily apprehended, but it exists. Dickens creates a structure which can highlight both the fragmentation and the underlying unity of contradiction and conflict which connects them. The

omniscient narrator throws hints of this underlying interconnectedness between different stratified areas of social life, but it can be fully revealed either through the unfolding of the consequences of the contradiction as in the case of Lady Dedlock's ultimate fate or that of other more severely oppressed victims of the system like Nemo and Jo. It may also be revealed by gradual demystification of different segments of cultural life of the society. The hints which prepare us for the discovery through the former mode are given at some points in the emotionally charged outbursts of the omniscient narrator like the following:

What connection can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder and the whereabouts of Jo, the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard step? What connection can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of the world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together (219)

This abrupt and unprepared-for meeting of many people who are curiously brought together from opposite sides of the gulfs which separate them can be identified with the coincidences in the plot. Another set of hints which our growing awareness can catch are conveyed through the metaphors and symbols, for example, that of a pestilent disease or infection that the people of one class may catch from another. A hidden "deadness" they may have in common is also revealed through metaphors which underline this unity or interrelatedness of two separate segments of social life.

The real hurdle in the recognition of this interconnectedness is ideological blindness which prevents us from recognizing it. The structure of the novel posits two broad movements that can produce this awareness. One movement simply points to the ultimate consequences of the repression or suppression suffered by the victims of the dominant logic of the society which may take the forms of death, outbreak of a pestilent disease or internal collapse, the three culminating points identified by Monroe Engel in his article, "*Bleak House: Death and Reality.*" The other movement is more important since it involves construction of conscience. Through a powerful and concentrated imaginative effort to break what Engel calls "ignorance," or through initiatives aimed at the strengthening of a sense of interdependence among people standing on the opposite sides of the gulfs. This latter form of the movement involves what Engel calls the difficult, indirect and gradual process of building up a sense of responsibility.

The use of two narrators in *Bleak House* becomes an important structural element in the novel for accomplishment of the task of gaining awareness of interconnectedness and construction of conscience. While the omniscient narrator represents the first form of the second movement mentioned above, the second

narrator represents the second form of the same movement. A continuous reference to the more comprehensive perspective of the omniscient narrator gives a sharper awareness of the strengths and limitations of the strenuous efforts being made by Esther to build up her conscience and protect her humanity in her role as second narrator. The use of two modes of narration provides a clearer recognition of the boundaries of the space being carved out by Esther for the assertion of her independent identity within the larger territory under the hegemonic control of the dominant ideology. How far Esther succeeds in keeping the liberated zone free from the incursions of the dominant ideology and to what extent the shadow of the dominant ideology continues to fall on this liberated zone despite Esthers efforts can be sharply realized through constant reference to the comparatively more emancipated perspective of the omniscient narrator.

The complicated structure of *Bleak House* underlining the obdurate presence of fragmentation, stratification and isolation in the social fabric on the one hand and the movements towards recognition of the reality of interconnectedness of all parts of the social fabric and the need for construction of conscience in acknowledgement of this interconnectness, on the other, is an impressive achievement of Charles Dickens in this novel.

Topic for Essay Type Questions which can be dealt with on the basis of discussion already covered in the Study Material either in the Critical Summary portion or as topics separately discussed in the later section:

1. Dickens's critique of society in *Bleak House*.
2. Treatment of law-courts and the functioning of the Judiciary in *Bleak House*.
3. Treatment of the problem of poverty and slums in *Bleak House*.
4. Dickens's criticism of the middle class values of duty, respectability and diligence in *Bleak House*.
5. Humanitarian and Philanthropic Initiatives in *Bleak House*.
6. Role and character of Esther Summerson.
7. Treatment of the fate of Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*.
8. Art and artist in *Bleak House*.
9. Structure and plot in *Bleak House*.

The short answer items can be based on various characters discussed in the Study Material or on some of the topics listed for essay type answers. In addition to these topics, the following topics may also be kept in mind for this purpose:

1. Significance of the title of the novel.
2. Images and Symbols in *Bleak House*.
3. Significance of Spontaneous Combustion of Krook.
4. Intrigue and melodrama in *Bleak House*.

5. Treatment of family as a social unit in *Bleak House*.
6. Dickens's Humour in *Bleak House*.

The following books may be useful for reference:

1. Martin Price, ed. *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*,  
Twentieth Century views Series
2. Jacob Korged *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*.
3. A.E. Dyson, ed. *Dickens: Bleak House: A Casebook*
4. Elliot L. Gilbert, ed. *Critical Essays on Charles Dickens's Bleak House*
5. John Lucas *The Melancholy Man*
6. F.R Leavis and Q,D Leavis *Dickens*
7. P.S.M Scott *Reality and Comic Confidence in Charles Dickens*
8. Raymond Williams *English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*
9. Walter Allen *English Novel: A Short Critical History*



## EMILY BRONTE: LIFE AND WORK

Emily Bronte was born on July 30th, 1818, the fifth child of Maria and the Reverend Patrick Bronte, a stern Evangelical curate. When Emily was three years old, her mother died of cancer. Her aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, a strict Calvinist, moved in to help raise the six children. They lived in a parsonage in Haworth with the bleak moors of Yorkshire on one side and the parish graveyard on the other. When Emily was 6 years old she went to a boarding school run by charity, the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. Her older sisters Maria, Elizabeth and Charlotte were already enrolled there. The school was in no sense a material improvement over her home environment: it was run with the intention of punishing the pupils' bodies that their souls might be saved. The students were hungry, cold, tired and often ill.

In 1825 Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis, the disease that was to claim later Emily's own life and that of her younger sister Anne. Following these new bereavements, the surviving sisters Charlotte and Emily were taken home, but they would never forget the terrors and the hardship of their lives at school. Charlotte made it the model for the charity school Lowood, that figures so prominently in the life of her heroine, Jane Eyre.

Life at home was much better for Emily and her siblings. In their isolated childhood on the moors, they developed an extremely close relationship partly based on their mutual participation in a vibrant game of make-believe. In 1826, their father brought Branwell a box of wooden soldiers and each child chose a soldier and gave him a name and character. These were to be the foundation of the creation of a complicated fantasy world, which the Brontes actively worked on for 16 years. They made tiny books containing stories, plays, histories, and poetry written by their imagined heroes and heroines. Unfortunately, only the ones written by Charlotte and Branwell survive.

Out of Emily's work only her poetry survives and indeed, her most passionate and lovely poetry is written from the perspectives of the inhabitants of Gondal. For Emily, it seems that the fantastic adventures in this imaginary Gondal coexisted on an almost equal level of importance and reality along with the lonely, mundane world of household chores and walks on the moor. One would be mistaken, however, to conclude that the poetic beauty of Gondal was essentially different from that which Emily saw in the world around her. This becomes clear in her novel *Wuthering Heights*, in which her familiar Yorkshire surroundings become the setting for a tragedy whose passion and beauty is equal to anything that could be imagined elsewhere. Passion is in no way inconsistent with empty moors, cold winters and brown hills. The Gondal poems throw some light on themes that appear in her novel and also on the author's own beliefs and states of feeling. Several poems show that she was aware of turning away from society and normal human concerns and experiences. In a poem listed as A26 she asks 'Reason' to say:

*Why I have persevered to shun*

*The common paths that others run.*

*And on a strange road journeyed on*

*Heedless alike of Wealth and Power –*

(The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Bronte, pp. 208-9 New York, 1941)

Some of the most powerful emotions that find expression in her poems are aroused by imagination, or, in her own words, ‘fancy’ and Emily’s ‘world within’. This seems to be a combination of her strong sensual bond with nature and the overmastering desire she expresses to enter into ‘visions’ and ‘dreams’; this leads her to yearn for her own death. In her poetry, future death is depicted as simultaneously joining with nature and being set free from physical constraints into a world of visions. Clearly, there is an escapist element to her desire of living in fantasy. Poem A8 expresses a powerful desire for liberty through both life and death and the need for the inner self to be free in all circumstances:

*Yes, as my swift days near their goal*

*'Tis all that I implore---*

*Through life and death, a chainless soul*

*With courage to endure!*

(Ibid. p. 163.)

This combination of desire for death, liberty and imagination seems to be revived in Catherine’s and Heathcliff’s stories in *Wuthering Heights*. Perhaps also, the poet who so consciously chose fantasy above reality is equally able to portray both the untruth and the convincing realism to her, of Catherine’s hallucinations during her delirium.

As might be imagined from her intense emotional and artistic attachment to the country of her childhood, Emily Bronte very rarely spent any time away from home. In 1835, at the age of seventeen she went to school at Roe Head where Charlotte was teaching, but became so pale and thin that her sister was convinced she would die unless she returned home. She left home again to be a governess in 1837 and to study in Belgium in 1842, but both times she found she was unable to bear being away from home and her beloved, wild countryside. She could not adapt to playing the role of a genteel Victorian lady, or deal with the intrusion of strangers into her life. She could never fit in. Emily never made any close friends outside her family circle.

In 1845, Charlotte came across Emily's Gondal poems and read them, which made Emily furious when she found out. However, the discovery led to the publication of a volume of Charlotte, Emily and Anne's poetry under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. They sold only two copies, but did not give up writing: *Wuthering Heights* was probably written in 1845-6, while Charlotte was working on *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*, and Anne wrote *Agnes Grey*. *Wuthering Heights* (by Ellis Bell) was published in 1847. While his sisters were on their way to becoming famous authors, Branwell had failed as a painter and lapsed into alcoholism and drug abuse. He died in September 1848, and his death marked the beginning of Emily's own illness. Tuberculosis killed her rapidly, perhaps because she stoically refused to make any concession to her ill health, continuing to get up early every day to feed her numerous animals even when she could barely walk. She died with heroic fortitude on December 19th, 1848, at the age of 30, and did not have time to appreciate the last

flowering sprig of heather that Charlotte had found on the moors for her wild sister. Emily Brontë's stern self-discipline and passionate creative vision have continued to entrance modern readers through her poetry and especially her masterpiece, *Wuthering Heights*.

*Wuthering Heights* was Emily Brontë's only novel, and is considered the fullest expression of her deeply individual poetic vision. It obviously contains many romantic influences: Heathcliff is a very Byronic character, though he lacks the self-pitying that mars many Byronic characters and is deeply attached to the natural world. When the novel was written, the peak of the Romantic age had passed: Emily Brontë lived an isolated life and was in some sense behind the times. The novel expresses deep criticisms of social conventions, particularly those surrounding issues of gender: notice that the author distributes "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics without regard to sex. Brontë had difficulties living in society while remaining true to the things she considered important: the ideal of women as delicate beings who avoid physical or mental activity and pursue fashions and flirtations was repugnant to her. Class issues are also important: we are bound to respect Ellen, who is educated but of low class, more than Lockwood.

Any reader of *Wuthering Heights* should recognize immediately that it is not the sort of novel that a gently-bred Victorian lady would be expected to write. Emily Brontë sent it to publishers under the masculine name of Ellis Bell, but even so it took many tries and many months before it was finally accepted. It attracted considerable critical attention, as many people were shocked and horrified by the sheer violence of Emily's novel. This is a sample from the reviews of the book:

*This is a strange book. It is not without evidences of considerable power: but, as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable; and the people who make up the drama are savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer.* (Examiner, January 8, 1848)

Its reviews were almost entirely negative: reviewers implied that the author of such a novel must be insane and obsessed with cruelty. Emily's sister Charlotte's novel *Jane Eyre* was much more successful. Emily was always eager to maintain the secrecy under which the novel was published, understandably. She died soon after the publication and Charlotte felt obliged now that secrecy was no longer necessary to write a preface for the novel defending her sister's character. The preface also made it clear that Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell were, in fact, different people: some readers had speculated that *Wuthering Heights* was an early work by the author of *Jane Eyre*. *Wuthering Heights* does not really belong into any cut-and-dried category, nor did it begin an important literary lineage. None of its imitations can approach its sincerity and poetic power. This does not mean that it has not been an important influence, however.

### **Short Summary:**

*Wuthering Heights* has a narrative frame: it is a novel in a series of narratives that are told to the narrator, a gentleman named Lockwood. Lockwood rents a fine house and park called Thrushcross Grange in Yorkshire, and gradually learns more and more

about the histories of two local families. This is what he learns from a housekeeper, Ellen Dean, who had been with one of the two families all her life:

In around 1760, a gentleman farmer named Earnshaw went from his farm, Wuthering Heights, to Liverpool on a business trip. He found there a little boy who looked like a gypsy who had apparently been abandoned on the streets, and brought the child home with him, to join his own family of his wife, his son Hindley, his daughter Catherine, a manservant named Joseph and the little maid, Ellen. He named the boy Heathcliff after a son of his who had died. All the other members of the household were opposed to the introduction of a strange boy, except for Catherine, who was a little younger than Heathcliff and became fast friends with him. Hindley in particular felt as though Heathcliff had supplanted his place, although he was several years older, and the true son and heir. Hindley bullied Heathcliff when he could and Heathcliff used his influence over Earnshaw to get his way. Heathcliff was a strange, silent boy, who appeared not to mind the blows he received from Hindley, although he was in fact very vindictive. Earnshaw's wife died. Hindley was sent away to college in a last attempt to turn him into a worthy son and to ease pressures at home.

After some years, Earnshaw's health declined and he grew increasingly alienated from his family: in his peevish old age he believed that everyone disliked Heathcliff, because he liked him. He did not like his daughter Catherine's charming and mischievous ways. Finally he died and Catherine and Heathcliff were very grieved, but consoled each other with thoughts of heaven.

Hindley returned, now around twenty years old. Heathcliff was about twelve and Catherine was eleven. He was married to a young woman named Frances, to the surprise of everyone at Wuthering Heights. Hindley used his new power to reduce Heathcliff to the level of a servant, although Heathcliff and Catherine continued their intimacy. Catherine taught Heathcliff a little and would join him in the fields, or they would run away to the moors all day to play, never minding their punishments afterward.

One day they ran down to the Grange, a more civilized house where the Lintons lived with their children Edgar (13) and Isabella (11). They despised the spoiled, delicate Linton children and made faces and yelled at them through the window. The Lintons called for help and the wilder children fled, but a bulldog caught Catherine and they were brought inside. When the Lintons found out that the girl was Miss Earnshaw, they took good care of her and threw Heathcliff out.

Catherine stayed at the Grange for 5 weeks, and came home dressed and acting like a proper young lady, to the delight of Hindley and his wife and to Heathcliff's sorrow (he felt as though she had moved beyond him). In the next few years, Catherine struggled to maintain a balance between her relationship with Heathcliff and her socializing with the elegant Linton children.

Frances gave birth to a son, Hareton and died soon after of tuberculosis. Hindley gave into wild despair and alcoholism and the household fell into chaos. Heathcliff was harshly treated, and came to hate Hindley more and more. Edgar Linton fell in love with Catherine, who was attracted by what he represented, although she loved Heathcliff much more seriously. They became engaged and Heathcliff ran away. Catherine fell ill after looking for Heathcliff all night in a storm and went to the

Grange to get better. The older Lintons caught her fever and died of it. Edgar and Catherine were married soon.

They lived fairly harmoniously together for almost a year then Heathcliff returned. He had mysteriously acquired gentlemanly manners, education and some money. Catherine was overjoyed to see him and Edgar considerably less so. Heathcliff stayed at Wuthering Heights, where he gradually gained financial control by paying Hindley's gambling debts. Heathcliff's relationship with the Linton household became more and more strained as Edgar became extremely unhappy with the situation. Finally there was a violent quarrel: Heathcliff left the Grange to avoid being thrown out by Edgar's servants, Catherine was angry at both of the men and Edgar was furious at Heathcliff and displeased by his wife's behavior. Catherine shut herself in her room for several days. In the mean time, Heathcliff eloped with Isabella (who was struck by his romantic appearance) by way of revenge on Edgar. Edgar could not forgive his sister's betrayal of him, and didn't try to stop the marriage. Catherine became extremely ill, feverish and delirious. She nearly died though Edgar carefully tended her once he found out her condition.

A few months later, Catherine was still very delicate, and looked as though she would probably die. She was pregnant. Heathcliff and Isabella returned to Wuthering Heights, and Isabella wrote to Ellen to describe how brutally her savage husband mistreated her and how much she regretted her marriage. Ellen went to visit them, to see if she could improve Isabella's situation. She told them about Catherine's condition and Heathcliff asked to see her.

A few days later, Heathcliff came to the Grange while Edgar was at church. He had a passionate reunion with Catherine, in which they forgave each other as much as possible for their mutual betrayals. Catherine fainted, Edgar came back and Heathcliff left. Catherine died that night after giving birth to a daughter. Edgar was terribly grieved and Heathcliff wildly, he begged Catherine's ghost to haunt him. A few days later Hindley tried to murder Heathcliff, but Heathcliff almost murdered him instead. Isabella escaped from Wuthering Heights and went to live close to London, where she gave birth to a son, Linton. Hindley died a few months after his sister Catherine.

Catherine and Edgar's daughter, Catherine, grew to be a beloved and charming child. She was brought up entirely within the confines of the Grange and was entirely unaware of the existence of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff or her cousin Hareton there. Once she found the farmhouse while exploring the moors and was upset to think that such an ignorant rustic as Hareton could be related to her. Ellen told her she could not return there.

Isabella died when Linton was about 12 years old and Edgar went to fetch him to the Grange. Linton was a peevish and effeminate boy but Catherine was pleased to have a playmate. That very day, however, Heathcliff sent Joseph to fetch his son to Wuthering Heights, and when Catherine woke up the next morning her cousin was gone. Though sad at first, she soon got over it, and continued her happy childhood.

On her sixteenth birthday, Catherine and Ellen strayed onto Heathcliff's lands and he invited them into Wuthering Heights to see Linton. Catherine was pleased to renew her acquaintance, and Heathcliff was eager to promote a romance between the two cousins, so as to ensure himself of Edgar's land when he died. When they returned

home, Edgar forbade her to continue visiting there and said that Heathcliff was an evil man. Catherine then began a secret correspondence with Linton, which became an exchange of love letters. Ellen found out and put an end to it.

Edgar became ill. Heathcliff asked Catherine to return to Wuthering Heights because Linton was breaking his heart for her. She did so and found Linton to be a bullying invalid, but not without charm. Ellen fell ill as well and was unable to prevent Catherine from visiting Wuthering Heights every day. She felt obliged to help Linton and despised Hareton for being clumsy and illiterate. Ellen told Edgar about the visits when she found out and he forbade Catherine to go any more.

Edgar was in poor health and didn't know about Linton's equally bad health and bad character, so he thought it would be good for Catherine to marry him since Linton and not Catherine would inherit the Grange, most likely. A system was fixed up in which Linton and Catherine met outside. Linton was increasingly ill, and seemed to be terrified of something. His father was forcing him to court Catherine. Heathcliff feared Linton would die before Edgar did, so eventually he all but kidnapped Catherine and Ellen and told them Catherine couldn't go home to see her dying father until she married Linton. Catherine did marry Linton and escaped in time to see Edgar before he died.

After Edgar's funeral (he was buried next to his wife) Heathcliff fetched Catherine to Wuthering Heights to take care of Linton, who was dying and to free up the Grange so he could rent it out (to Lockwood, in fact). He told Ellen that he was still obsessed by his beloved Catherine and had gone to gaze at her long-dead body when her coffin was uncovered by the digging of Edgar's grave.

Catherine had to take care of Linton alone and when he died, she maintained an unfriendly attitude to the household: Heathcliff, Hareton (who was in love with her) and Zillah, the housekeeper. As time passed, however, she became lonely enough to seek Hareton's company and began teaching him to read.

This is around the time of Lockwood's time at the Grange. He left the area for several months, and when he returned, he found out that while he was gone:

Heathcliff began to act more and more strangely, and became incapable of concentrating on the world around him, as though Catherine's ghost wouldn't let him. He all but stopped eating and sleeping, and Ellen found him dead one morning, with a savage smile on his face. He was buried next to Catherine, as he had wished. Hareton grieved for him, but was too happy with the younger Catherine to be inconsolable. When the novel ends, they plan to marry and move to the Grange.

## **Chapter 1, Summary**

In Chapter 1 the narrator, Mr. Lockwood, relates how he has just returned from a visit to his new landlord, Mr. Heathcliff. Lockwood, a self-described misanthropist, is renting Thrushcross Grange in an effort to get away from society following a failure at love. He had fallen in love with a "real goddess," but when she returned his affection he acted so coldly she "persuaded her mamma to decamp." He finds that relative to Heathcliff, however, he is extremely sociable. Heathcliff, "a dark skinned gypsy, in aspect, in dress, and manners a gentleman" treats his visitor with a minimum of friendliness, and the farm, Wuthering Heights, where he lives, is just as foreign and

unfriendly. "Wuthering" means stormy and windy in the local dialect. Dangerous-looking dogs inhabit the bare and old-fashioned rooms and threaten to attack Lockwood: when he calls for help Heathcliff implies that Lockwood had tried to steal something. The only other inhabitants of Wuthering Heights are an old servant named Joseph and a cook. Despite his rudeness, Lockwood finds himself drawn to Heathcliff: he describes him as being intelligent, proud and morose, an unlikely farmer and declares his intention to visit Wuthering Heights again. This visit is set in 1801.

### **Analysis:**

This chapter introduces the reader to the frame of the story: Lockwood will gradually discover the events which led to Heathcliff now about forty years old living all but alone in Wuthering Heights, almost completely separated from society. The casual violence and lack of concern for manners or consideration for other people which characterizes Heathcliff here is only a hint of the atmosphere of the whole novel, in which that violence is contrasted with more genteel and civilized ways of living.

The first mark of the novel, the bald statement of the date '1801' followed by a dash enhances the aura of diary or travelogue. The way Mr. Lockwood expresses himself is important as the story of the novel comes to the reader through the filter of his language. One insistent feature of his speech is the use of speculation and guesswork; his language is sprinkled with expressions such as 'I suppose', 'I conjectured' and 'perhaps'. Right at the outset, the reader is encouraged to observe phenomenon and guess their explanation.

### **Chapter 2, Summary**

Annoyed by the housework being done in the Grange, Lockwood pays a second visit to Wuthering Heights, arriving there just as snow begins to fall. The weather is cold, the ground is frozen and his reception matches the bleak unfriendliness of the moors. After yelling at the old servant Joseph to open the door, he is finally let in by a peasant-like young man. The bare kitchen is warm and Lockwood assumes that the young and beautiful girl there is Mrs. Heathcliff. He tries to make conversation but she is consistently scornful and inhospitable and he only embarrasses himself. There is "a kind of desperation" in her eyes. She refuses to make him tea unless Heathcliff said he could have some. The young man and Heathcliff come in for tea. The young man behaves boorishly and seems to suspect Lockwood of making advances to the girl. Heathcliff demands tea "savagely," and Lockwood decides he doesn't really like him. Trying to make conversation again, Lockwood gets into trouble first assuming that the girl is Heathcliff's wife, and then that she is married to the young man, who he supposes to be Heathcliff's son. He is rudely corrected, and it transpires that the girl is Heathcliff's daughter-in-law but her husband is dead, as is Heathcliff's wife. The young man is Hareton Earnshaw. It is snowing hard and Lockwood requests a guide so he can return home safely, but he is refused: Heathcliff considers it more important that Hareton take care of the horses. Joseph, who is evidently a religious fanatic, argues with the girl, who frightens him by pretending to be a witch. The old servant doesn't like her reading. Lockwood, left stranded and ignored by all, tries to take a lantern, but Joseph offensively accuses him of stealing it and sets dogs on him. Lockwood is humiliated and Heathcliff and Hareton laugh. The cook, Zillah, takes him in and says he can spend the night.

### **Analysis:**

The natural setting of the novel, the moors, moves into the foreground, a snowstorm begins to develop and it becomes clear that the bleak and harsh nature of the Yorkshire hills is not merely a geographical accident. It mirrors the roughness of those who live there: Wuthering Heights is firmly planted in its location and could not exist anywhere else. Knowing Emily Bronte's passionate fondness for her homeland, we can expect the same bleakness (that Lockwood finds so disagreeable) to take on a wild beauty. Its danger cannot be forgotten, though: a stranger to those parts could easily lose his way and die of exposure. Heathcliff and the wind are similar in that they have no pity for weakness. The somewhat menacing presence of the natural world can also be seen in the large number of dogs who inhabit Wuthering Heights: they are not kept as pets.

The power dynamics that Lockwood observes in the household of Wuthering Heights is extremely important. The girl is evidently frightened of Heathcliff and scornful of Hareton, while he himself behaves aggressively because he is sensitive about his status and Heathcliff does not hesitate to use his superior physical strength and impressive personality to bully other members of his household. The different ways in which different characters try to assert themselves reveals a lot about their situation. Most notably, it is evident that sheer force usually wins out over intellectual and humane pretensions. The girl is subversive and intellectual, an unwilling occupant of the house, but she can achieve little by way of freedom or respect.

Lockwood continues to lose face: his conversational grace appears ridiculous in its new setting. Talking to Heathcliff, for example, he refers to the girl as a "beneficent fairy," which is evidently neither true nor welcome flattery. This chapter might be seen, then, as a continuation of the strict division between social ideals (grace, pleasant social interactions, Lockwood) and natural realities (storms, frost, dogs, bluntness, cruelty, Hareton, Heathcliff). If the chapter were taken by itself, out of context, the reader would see that while social ideals are ridiculed, it is clear that the cruel natural world is ugly and hardly bearable.

### **Chapter 3, Summary**

Zillah quietly shows Lockwood to a chamber that, she says, Heathcliff does not like to be occupied. She doesn't know why, having lived there only for a few years. Left alone, Lockwood notices the names "Catherine Earnshaw," "Catherine Linton," and "Catherine Heathcliff" scrawled over the window ledge. He leafs through some old books stacked there, and finds that the margins are covered in handwriting, evidently the child Catherine's diary. He reads some entries that evoke a time in which Catherine and Heathcliff were playmates living together as brother and sister, and bullied by Joseph (who made them listen to sermons) and her older brother Hindley. Apparently Heathcliff was a "vagabond" taken in by Catherine's father, raised as one of the family, but when the father died, Hindley made him a servant and threatened to throw him out, to Catherine's sorrow.

Lockwood then falls asleep over a religious book, and has a nightmare about a fanatical preacher leading a violent mob. Lockwood wakes up, realizes that a sound in his dream had really been a branch rubbing against the window and falls asleep again. This time he dreams that he wanted to open the window to get rid of the branch, but



when he did, a "little, ice-cold hand" grabbed his arm and a voice sobbed, "let me in." He asked who it was, and was answered: "Catherine Linton. I'm come home, I'd lost my way on the moor." He saw a child's face and, afraid, drew the child's wrist back and forth on the broken glass of the window so that blood soaked the sheets. Finally he gets free, and insists that he won't let the creature in, even if it has been lost for twenty years, which it claims it has. He awakes screaming.

Heathcliff comes in, evidently disturbed and confused; unaware that Lockwood is there. Lockwood tells him what happened, mentioning the dream and Catherine Linton's name, which distresses and angers Heathcliff. Lockwood goes to the kitchen, but hears on his way Heathcliff at the window, despairingly begging "Cathy" to come in "at last." Lockwood is embarrassed by his host's obvious agony.

Morning comes: Lockwood witnesses an argument between Heathcliff and the girl, who has been reading. He bullies her, and she resists spiritedly. Heathcliff walks Lockwood most of the way home in the snow.

### **Analysis:**

It is very important that the ghost of Catherine Linton (who is not perhaps simply a figment of Lockwood's imagination) appears as a child. Of course Lockwood thinks of her as a child, since he had just read parts of her early diary, but Heathcliff also seems to find it natural that she appears in the form she had when they were children together. Rather than progressing from childhood on to a mature age with its different values, Heathcliff and Catherine never really "grew up." That is to say, everything emotionally important that ever happened in their lives either took place in childhood or follows directly from commitments made then. They never essentially outgrew their solidarity against the oppressive forces of adult authority and religion, as described in Catherine's diary. Thus the ghost of Catherine Linton (and that is her married name) tries to return to her childhood sanctuary, which Heathcliff has kept in its original state. The dominion of linear time is challenged.

It might be relevant here to remember that Emily Bronte kept up the imaginary world created when she was very young well into her early twenties and hated to leave the home of her childhood.

### **Chapter 4, Summary**

Lockwood is bored and a little weak after his adventures, so he asks his housekeeper, Ellen Dean, to tell him about the history of Heathcliff and the old families of the area. She says he is very rich and a miser, though he has no family, since his son is dead. The girl living at Wuthering Heights was the daughter of Ellen's former employers, the Lintons, and her name was Catherine. She is the daughter of the late Mrs. Catherine Linton, was born an Earnshaw, thus Hareton's aunt. Heathcliff's wife was Mr. Linton's sister. Ellen is fond of the younger Catherine, and worries about her unhappy situation.

The narrative switches to Ellen's voice, whose language is much plainer than Lockwood's. She is a discreet narrator, rarely reminding the listener of her presence in the story, so that the events she recounts appear immediate. She says she had grown up at Wuthering Heights, and one day:

Mr. Earnshaw offered to bring his children Hindley (14 years old) and Catherine (about 6) a present each from Liverpool, where he was going. Hindley asked for a fiddle and Catherine for a whip, because she was already an excellent horsewoman. When Earnshaw returned, however, he brought with him a "dirty, ragged, black-haired child" found starving on the streets. The presents had been lost or broken. The boy was named Heathcliff and taken into the family, though not entirely welcomed by Mrs. Earnshaw, Ellen, and Hindley. He and Catherine became very close, and Heathcliff was Earnshaw's favorite. Hindley felt that his place was usurped, and took it out on Heathcliff, who was hardened and stoical. For example, Earnshaw gave them each a colt, and Heathcliff chose the finest, which went lame. Heathcliff then claimed Hindley's, and when Hindley threw a heavy iron at him, threatened to tell Earnshaw about it if he didn't get the colt.

### **Analysis:**

A movement to the past is made in this chapter: from now on, Lockwood will gradually lose importance as the story of Heathcliff and Catherine's childhood becomes more and more vibrant. However, the role Ellen Dean plays as a narrator cannot be ignored: her personality means that the events she recounts are presented in a particular way. Like Lockwood, she too acts as a filter and highlights three aspects of Brontë's treatment of the narrator: one, the two main narrators are in contrast to the story they tell and the characters involved in that story. Two, the story and the characters repeatedly break the framework of the narrators. This happens because the events and characters exceed the emotional and moral range of the narrators. This emphasizes the power of story and character. Three, both main narrators become characters whose unacknowledged thoughts, limitations and weaknesses are revealed to the reader.

Ellen is practical and like a good housekeeper, tends to incline to the side of order. Even when she was young, she did not really participate in the private lives of the children of Wuthering Heights and has little access to the relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine. Brontë demonstrates versatility in using different points of view, faithfully recording her various characters' distinctive styles of speech, creating several narrative voices within one framework.

Considering character development, it is interesting to know what Heathcliff and Catherine were like as children since, as seen in the previous chapter, their essential nature remains very much the same. Seen from Ellen's point of view, Catherine was willful and mischievous and Heathcliff was uncomplaining but vindictive.

### **Chapter 5, Summary**

Earnshaw grew old and sick. His wife had died some years before and with his illness he became irritable and somewhat obsessed with the idea that people disliked his favorite, Heathcliff. Heathcliff was spoiled. Hindley, who became more and more bitter about the situation, was sent away to college to keep Earnshaw happy. Joseph, already "the wearisome, self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself, and fling the curses to his neighbors," used his religious influence over Earnshaw to distance him from his children. Earnshaw thought Hindley was worthless, and didn't like Cathy's playfulness and high spirits, so in his last days he was irritable and discontented. Cathy was "much too fond" of Heathcliff,

and liked to order people around. Heathcliff would do anything she asked. Her father was harsh to her and she became hardened to his reproofs.

Finally Earnshaw died one evening when Cathy had been resting her head against his knee and Heathcliff was lying on the floor with his head in her lap. When she wanted to kiss her father good night, she discovered he was dead and the two children began to cry. That night Ellen saw that they had managed to comfort each other with "better thoughts than [she] could have hit on," imagining the old man in heaven.

### **Analysis:**

The extremely close and entirely sexless relationship between Heathcliff and Cathy already manifests itself in an opposition to the outside world of parental authority and religion. Cathy is already charming and manipulative, though her love for her father is real.

The false, oppressive religion of Joseph is juxtaposed with the grieving children's pure, selfless thoughts of heaven.

The decline and death of Earnshaw highlights the bond between the physical body and the spirit. The old man had formerly been charitable, loving and open, but his physical weakness made him irritable and peevish: the spirit corrupted by the body's decline. One might remember that Emily Bronte watched her brother die wretchedly of alcohol and drug abuse, having had dreams of glory and gallantry in his youth.

### **Chapter 6, Summary**

Hindley returns home, unexpectedly bringing his wife, a flighty woman with a strange fear of death and symptoms of consumption (although Ellen did not at first recognize them as such). Hindley also brought home new manners and rules and informed the servants that they would have to live in inferior quarters. More important, he treated Heathcliff as a servant, stopping his education and making him work in the fields like any farm boy. Heathcliff did not mind too much at first because Cathy taught him what she learned, and worked and played with him in the fields. They stayed away from Hindley as much as possible and grew up uncivilized and free. "It was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and after that punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at."

One day they ran off after being punished and at night Heathcliff returned. He told them what had happened. He and Cathy ran to the Grange to see how people lived there and they saw the Linton children Edgar and Isabella in a beautiful room, crying after an argument over who could hold the pet dog. Amused and scornful, Heathcliff and Cathy laughed; the Lintons heard them and called for their parents. After making frightening noises, the wilder children tried to escape, but a bulldog bit Cathy's leg and refused to let go. She told Heathcliff to escape but he would not leave her and tried to pry the animal's jaws open. They were captured and brought inside, taken for thieves. When Edgar recognized Cathy as Miss Earnshaw, the Lintons expressed their disgust at the children's wild manners and especially at Heathcliff's being allowed to keep Cathy company. They coddled Cathy and drove Heathcliff out; he left after assuring himself that Cathy was all right.

When Hindley found out, he welcomed the chance to separate Cathy and Heathcliff, so Cathy was to stay for a prolonged visit with the Lintons and Heathcliff was forbidden to speak to her.

### **Analysis:**

In this chapter one first hears Heathcliff speak for a long time, and it is worth noting how his language differs from that of the narrators heard so far. Emily Bronte has created a distinct dramatic voice for Heathcliff. This chapter and the chapters further on reveal a surprisingly wide-ranging voice. It takes and uses the narrators' diction, exposes its hollowness and throws it away with contempt. In contrast, he speaks through the narrative frame in his own forceful, plain style. Through sarcastic pomposity and plain roughness not only does he make direct contact with the reader; like a dramatic character speaking straight to the audience; he also shreds the linguistic pretensions of the narrators. The effect is peculiarly powerful and suggests the idea that the events of the novel are too strong, too powerfully alive, to be contained within the storytellers' frame. The story itself actively breaks through the frame time and again.

He is more expressive and emotional than the other two and his speech is more literary than Ellen's and less artificial than Lockwood's. He tends to speak in extreme and vibrant terms: expressing his scorn for Edgar Linton's cowardice and whiny gentility, he says: "I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange not if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house front with Hindley's blood!" He admires the comparative luxury of the Grange and recognizes its beauty, but he remains entirely devoted to the freedom of his life with Cathy, and cannot understand the selfishness of the spoiled children: "When would you catch me wishing to have what Catherine wanted?" His devotion to Cathy is clear, and appears to him to be completely natural and inescapable: "she is so immeasurably superior to them to everyone one earth; is she not, Nelly?" He admires her for her bravery and he possesses that same kind of bravery.

The image of the two civilized children inside the beautiful room, and the two wild children outside both boy and girl of similar ages makes the glass of the window take on the role of a kind of mirror. However, the "mirror" shows the complete opposite rather than the true images of those who look into it.

### **Chapter 7, Summary**

Ellen resumes the narrative. Cathy stayed at Thrushcross Grange for five weeks, until Christmas. When she returned home she had been transformed into a young lady with that role's attending restrictions: she would no longer kiss Ellen without worrying about getting flour on her dress. She hurt Heathcliff's feelings by comparing his darkness and dirtiness to Edgar and Isabella's fair complexion and clean clothes. The boy had become more and more neglected in her absence and was cruelly put in his place by Hindley and especially by Cathy's new polish. Cathy's affection for him had not really changed, but he did not know this and ran out, refusing to come in for supper. Ellen was sorry for him.

The Linton children were invited for a Christmas party the next day. That morning Heathcliff humbly approached Ellen and asked her to "make him decent" because he was "going to be good." Ellen applauded his resolution and reassured him that Cathy still liked him and that she was grieved by his shyness. When Heathcliff said he wished he could be more like Edgar—fair, rich and well-behaved, Ellen told him that he could be perfectly handsome without being effeminate if he smiled more and was more trustful.

However, when Heathcliff, now "clean and cheerful" tried to join the party, Hindley told him to go away because he wasn't fit to be there. Edgar unwisely made fun of his long hair and Heathcliff threw hot applesauce at him, and was taken away and flogged by Hindley. Cathy was angry with Edgar for mocking Heathcliff and getting him into trouble, but she didn't want to ruin her party. She kept up a good front, but didn't enjoy herself, thinking of Heathcliff alone and beaten. At her first chance, with her guests gone home she crept into the garret where he was confined.

Later Ellen gave Heathcliff dinner, since he hadn't eaten all day, but he ate little and when she asked what was wrong, he said he was thinking of how to avenge himself on Hindley.

At this point Ellen's narrative breaks off and she and Lockwood briefly discuss the merits of the active and contemplative life, with Lockwood defending his lazy habits and Ellen saying she should get things done rather than just telling Lockwood the story. He persuades her to go on.

### **Analysis:**

This chapter marks the end of Cathy and Heathcliff's time of happiness and perfect understanding; Cathy has moved partly into a different sphere, that of the genteel Lintons, and Heathcliff cannot follow her. Although Cathy still cares for the things she did when the two of them ran wild together, she is under a lot of pressure to become a lady and she is vain enough to enjoy the admiration and approval she gets from Edgar, Hindley and his wife. Cathy's desire to inhabit two worlds, the moors with Heathcliff and the parlor with Edgar is a central driving force for the novel and eventually results in tragedy. Emily Bronte had experienced a personal inability to remain true to herself while interacting in conventional social terms and she chose to abandon society as a result. Cathy takes a different route.

Just as the window separated the Wuthering Heights children from the Lintons in the last chapter, a material object separates Cathy from Heathcliff in this one. The fine dress she wears is a very real boundary between the old friends: it must be sacrificed (smudged, crumpled) if the two of them are to be as close as they were before. It is simultaneously valuable for economic reasons (its cost), for social ones (the respect Cathy gets on account of it) and because of its artificial beauty. These same categories will consistently come between Cathy and Heathcliff; he is right to recognize the dress and what it represents as a threat to his happiness.

### **Chapter 8, Summary**

Hindley's wife Frances gave birth to a child, Hareton, but did not survive long afterwards: she had consumption. Despite the doctor's warnings, Hindley persisted in believing that she would recover and she seemed to think so too, always saying she

felt better, but she died a few weeks after Hareton's birth. Ellen was happy to take care of the baby. Hindley "grew desperate; his sorrow was of a kind that will not lament, he neither wept nor prayed he cursed and defied execrated God and man, and gave himself up to reckless dissipation." The household more or less collapsed into violent confusion, respectable neighbors ceased to visit, except for Edgar, entranced by Catherine. Heathcliff's ill treatment and the bad example posed by Hindley made him "daily more notable for savage sullenness and ferocity." Catherine disliked having Edgar visit Wuthering Heights because she had a hard time behaving consistently when Edgar and Heathcliff met, or when they talked about each other. Edgar's presence made her feel as though she had to behave like a Linton, which was not natural for her.

One day when Hindley was away, Heathcliff was offended to find Catherine putting on a "silly frock," getting ready for Edgar's visit. He asked her to turn Edgar away and spend the time with him instead, but she refused. Edgar was by this time a gentle, sweet young man. He came and Heathcliff left, but Ellen stayed as chaperone, much to Catherine's annoyance. She revealed her bad character by pinching Ellen, who was glad to have a chance to show Edgar what Catherine was like, and cried out. Catherine denied having pinched her, blushing with rage, and slapped her, then slapped Edgar for reproving her. He said he would go; she, recovering her senses, asked him to stay, and he was too weak and enchanted by her stronger will to leave. Brought closer by the quarrel, the two "confessed themselves lovers."

Ellen heard Hindley come home drunk, and out of precaution unloaded his gun.

### **Analysis:**

Hindley's dissipation and moral degradation are further evidence that only a strong character can survive defeat or bereavement without becoming distorted. His desperation is a result of his lack of firm foundation: Ellen says that he "had room in his heart for only two idols his wife and himself he doted on both and adored one." Evidently it is impossible to live well when only caring about one's self, as Hindley does following his wife's death. It would be interesting to compare Hindley's behavior and Heathcliff's in the opening chapters: both survive after the deaths of their beloveds, both live in a chaotic and cheerless Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff, however, has not entirely lost contact with Cathy: their closer relationship rules out a complete separation, even with death.

Emily Bronte's obvious model for Hindley is her brother Branwell, who was sinking into dissipation when she was writing the novel.

This is the first time we really see Cathy behaving badly, showing that her temper makes the gentle and repressed life led by Edgar Linton unsuitable for her. Here she blushes with rage and in a later chapter she refers to her blood being much hotter than Edgar's: heat and coolness of blood are markers of different personalities. The physical differences between Cathy and Edgar are linked to their moral differences, not only in their appearances but also in their blood and bones.

### **Chapter 9, Summary**

Hindley came in raging drunk and swearing, and caught Ellen in the act of trying to hide Hareton in a cupboard for safety. He threatened to make Nelly swallow a carving

knife and even tried to force it between her teeth, but she bravely said she'd rather be shot and spat it out. Then he took up Hareton and said he would crop his ears like a dog, to make him look fiercer, then held the toddler over the banister. Hearing Heathcliff walking below, Hindley accidentally dropped the child, but fortunately Heathcliff caught him. Looking up to see what had happened, he showed "the intensest anguish at having made himself the instrument of thwarting his own revenge." In other words, he hated Hindley so much that he would have liked to have him to kill his own son by mistake. If it had been dark, Ellen said, "he would have tried to remedy the mistake by smashing Hareton's skull on the steps." Hindley was somewhat shaken, and began to drink more. Heathcliff told Nelly he wished he would drink himself to death, but he had a strong constitution.

In the kitchen Cathy came to talk to Nelly (neither of them knew Heathcliff was in the room, sitting behind the settle). Cathy said she was unhappy, that Edgar had asked her to marry him and she had accepted. She asked Nelly what she should have answered. Nelly asked her if and why she loved Edgar; she said she did for a variety of material reasons: "he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman in the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of such a husband." Nelly disapproved, and Cathy admitted that she was sure she was wrong: she had had a dream in which she went to heaven and was unhappy there because she missed Wuthering Heights. She said:

"I have no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightening, or frost from fire."

Heathcliff left after hearing that it would degrade her to marry him.

Nelly told Cathy that Heathcliff would be deserted if she married Linton, and she indignantly said that she had no intention of deserting him, but would use her influence to raise him up. Nelly said Edgar wouldn't like that, to which Cathy replied: "Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing, before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff!"

Later that night it turned out that no one knew where Heathcliff was. Cathy went out in the storm looking for him, unsuccessfully; he had run away. The next morning she was sick. After some time she went to stay with the Lintons, a healthier environment and she got better, while Edgar and Isabella's parents caught the fever and died. She returned to Wuthering Heights "saucier, and more passionate, and haughtier than ever." When Nelly said that Heathcliff's disappearance was her fault, Cathy stopped speaking to her. She married Edgar three years later, and Ellen unwillingly went to live with her at the Grange, leaving Hareton to live with his wretched father.

### **Analysis:**

The atmosphere of careless violence, despair, and hatred of the first part of the chapter is almost suffocating. Heathcliff's willingness to kill an innocent child out of revenge is the first real indication of his lack of morality. It is not altogether clear whether that lack is a partly a result of his hard childhood and miserable circumstances, or whether

he was always like that. Certainly he appears quite changed from the sensitive boy who wanted to look nice so Cathy wouldn't reject him for Edgar, and who relied trustfully on Ellen, but he had spoken of wanting to paint the house with Hindley's blood much earlier.

The definition of love for Cathy and Heathcliff is perhaps Emily Brontë's original creation. It is not based on appearances, material considerations, sexual attraction, or even virtue, but rather a shared being. Cathy says: "I am Heathcliff he's always, always in my mind not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself but as my own being." In this sense, her decision to marry Edgar is a terrible mistake: she will be abandoning the essence of herself. Apparently the sexual aspect of love is so meaningless for her that she believes marriage to Edgar will not come between her and Heathcliff: she would not consciously abandon her soul. Heathcliff thinks otherwise, since he runs away.

### **Chapter 10, Summary**

Catherine got along surprisingly well with her husband and Isabella, mostly because they never opposed her. She had "seasons of gloom and silence" though. Edgar took these for the results of her serious illness.

When they had been married almost a year, Heathcliff came back. Nelly was outside that evening and he asked her to tell Catherine someone wanted to see her. He was quite changed: a tall and athletic man who looked as though he might have been in the army, with gentlemanly manners and educated speech though his eyes contained a "half-civilized ferocity." Catherine was overjoyed and didn't understand why Edgar didn't share her happiness. Heathcliff stayed for tea, to Edgar's peevish irritation. It transpired that Heathcliff was staying at Wuthering Heights, paying Hindley generously, but winning his host's money at cards. Catherine wouldn't let Heathcliff actually hurt her brother.

In the following weeks, Heathcliff often visited the Grange. Isabella, a "charming young lady of eighteen" became infatuated with him, to her brother's dismay. Isabella became angry with Catherine for keeping Heathcliff to herself, and Catherine warned her that Heathcliff was a very bad person to fall in love with and that Isabella was no match for him:

"I never say to him to let this or that enemy alone, because it would be ungenerous or cruel to harm them, I say "Let them alone, because I should hate them to be wronged"; and he'd crush you, like a sparrow's egg, Isabella, if he found you a troublesome charge."

Catherine teased Isabella by telling Heathcliff in her presence that she loved him, holding her so she couldn't run away. Isabella scratched Catherine's arm and managed to escape, and Heathcliff, alone with Catherine, expressed interest in marrying Isabella for her money and to enrage Edgar. He said he would beat Isabella if they were married because of her "mawkish, waxen face."

### **Analysis:**

Catherine's belief that Edgar should not be jealous of her relationship with Heathcliff emphasizes the difference in her mind between their relationship and ordinary love



affairs. She says that she does not envy Isabella's yellow hair, so Edgar shouldn't hate to hear her praise Heathcliff, he should be glad for her sake. The comparison with Isabella suggests that she and Heathcliff are sister and brother, which is evidently not the case but it is a comparison that makes sense to her.

Catherine uses natural analogies: Heathcliff would crush Isabella "like a sparrow's egg," he is "an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone." Isabella uses what seems to be a natural metaphor, but is in fact a literary one: Catherine is "a dog in the manger" for keeping Heathcliff to herself. They speak and think quite differently.

There are also important differences between the ways Edgar and Catherine view class. Edgar thinks that Heathcliff, "a runaway servant," should be entertained in the kitchen, not the parlor. Catherine jokes that she will have two tables laid, one for the gentry (Edgar and Isabella) and one for the lower classes (herself and Heathcliff). She and Heathcliff both call the narrator Nelly, while Edgar coldly calls her Ellen.

### **Chapter 11, Summary**

Nelly went to visit Wuthering Heights to see how Hindley and Hareton were doing. She saw Hareton outside; he didn't recognize his nurse, threw a rock at her and cursed. She found that his father had taught him how to curse, and that he liked Heathcliff because he wouldn't let his father curse him, and let him do what he liked. Nelly was going to go in when she saw Heathcliff there; frightened, she ran back home.

The next time Heathcliff came to visit Nelly saw him kiss Isabella in the courtyard. She told Catherine what had happened, and when Heathcliff came in the two had an argument. Heathcliff said he had a right to do as he pleased, since Catherine was married to someone else. He said: "You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only, allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style."

Nelly found Edgar, who came in while Catherine was scolding Heathcliff. He scolded her for talking to "that blackguard," which made her very angry, since she had been defending the Lintons. Edgar ordered Heathcliff to leave, who scornfully ignored him. Edgar motioned for Nelly to fetch reinforcements, but Catherine angrily locked the door and threw the key into the fire when Edgar tried to get it from her. Humiliated and furious, Edgar was mocked by Catherine and Heathcliff, but he hit Heathcliff and went out by the back door to get help. Nelly told Heathcliff that the male servants would throw him out if he stayed, so he chose to leave.

Left with Nelly, Catherine expressed her anger at her husband and her friend: " Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own." Edgar came in and demanded to know whether she would drop Heathcliff's acquaintance, and she had a temper tantrum, ending with a faked "fit of frenzy." When Nelly revealed that the fit was faked, she ran to her room and refused to come out or to eat for several days.

### **Analysis:**

Nelly may seem to be rather unfeeling in her unsympathetic descriptions of Catherine and Heathcliff, but her behavior to Hareton and Hindley (who was her foster-brother) reveals her to be extremely tenderhearted and maternal at the same time. She is,

however, independent and spirited, and doesn't like to be imposed on or bullied by Catherine, so she has no qualms about siding with Edgar when her mistress is being temperamental.

The strain imposed on the three characters, Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff, has finally resulted in outright violence: it is no longer possible to conceal the strength of the emotions involved. Edgar in particular is put into a difficult situation: the other two are used to violent expressions of feeling, but he is not, and hates having to adjust to their modes of communication. He is more committed to gentility of behavior than the others, although they now appear as well dressed and cultivated as he does.

The contrast between two lifestyles and modes of thought is out in the open and presents itself in the language of the characters. Heathcliff and Catherine call Edgar a "lamb," a "sucking leverett," and a "milk-blooded coward." The first two insults are natural images that might easily come to mind for people who grew up on the moors; the third again uses the "blood" imagery which appears to be central to the way they think about personality.

### **Chapter 12, Summary**

After three days in which Catherine stayed alone in her room, Edgar sat in the library and Isabella moped in the garden, Catherine called Nelly for some food and water because she thought she was dying. She ate some toast, and was indignant to hear that Edgar wasn't frantic about her; she said: "How strange! I thought, though everybody hated and despised each other, they could not avoid loving me and they have all turned to enemies in a few hours." It became clear to Ellen that she was delirious, and thought she was back in her room at Wuthering Heights: she was frightened of her face in the mirror because she thought there was no mirror there. She opened the window and talked to Heathcliff (who was not there) as though they were children again. Edgar came in and was much concerned for Catherine, and angry with Ellen for not having told him what was going on.

Going to fetch a doctor, Ellen notices Isabella's little dog almost dead, hanging by a handkerchief on the gate. She released it, and found Dr. Kenneth, who told her that he had seen Isabella walking for hours in the park with Heathcliff. Ellen found that Isabella had indeed disappeared and a little boy told her he had seen the girl riding away with Heathcliff. Ellen told Edgar, hoping he would rescue his sister from her ill-considered elopement, but he coldly refused to do so.

### **Analysis:**

In her delirium, Catherine reveals that her true emotional identity has not altered since she was twelve, just before she stayed with the Lintons for some weeks. Everything that happened to her since then ceases to have any importance when she is irrational:

"...supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and been converted, at a stroke, into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger; an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world You may fancy a glimpse at the abyss where I groveled!"

Time is unimportant: it has no effect on true, deep emotions in Bronte's world.

Edgar's coldness to Isabella seems to result from pique at having his sister desert him for his greatest enemy. His willingness to abandon her because of hurt pride is perhaps his greatest moral flaw. The emphasis he places on personal dignity differentiates him from the other characters, who certainly have many faults, though not that one.

### **Chapter 13, Summary**

In the next two months Catherine "encountered and conquered the worst shock of what was denominated a brain fever," but it was realized that she would never really recover. She was pregnant. Heathcliff and Isabella returned to Wuthering Heights and Isabella wrote Edgar an apology and a plea for forgiveness, to which he gave no reply. She later sent Ellen a longer letter asking whether Heathcliff were a demon or crazy, and recounting her experiences. She found Wuthering Heights dirty, uncivilized and unwelcoming: Joseph was rude to her, Hareton was disobedient, Hindley was a half-demented mere wreck of a man and Heathcliff treated her cruelly. He refused to let her sleep in his room, which meant she had to stay in a tiny garret. Hindley had a pistol with a blade on it, with which he dreamed of killing Heathcliff and Isabella coveted it for the power it would have given her. She was miserable and regretted her marriage heartily.

#### **Analysis:**

Isabella's reactions to her new home reveal her character to be lacking in moral strength: although she tries at first to stand up to Joseph and Hareton, her ladylike education has in no way prepared her for her married life, so when she loses her pride she has little else to fall back on. Her envy upon seeing Hindley's pistol is a little disconcerting and she herself is horrified by the realization of it.

It is worth noting the unfortunate position of women who depend on men: Isabella cannot escape from Heathcliff without the help of her brother, who does not want to help her. Surrounded by hatred and indifference, she can only fall back on Ellen's pity.

### **Chapter 14, Summary**

Ellen, distressed by Edgar's refusal to console Isabella, went to visit her. She told Isabella and Heathcliff that Catherine would "never be what she was" and that Heathcliff should not bother her anymore. Heathcliff asserted that he would not leave her to Edgar's lukewarm care and that she loved him much more than her husband. He said that if he had been in Edgar's place he would never have interfered with Catherine's friendships, although he would kill the friend the moment she no longer cared about him.

Nelly told Heathcliff to treat Isabella better, and he expressed his scorn and hatred for her (in her presence, of course). He said she knew what he was when she married him: she had seen him hanging her pet dog. Isabella told Nelly that she hated him, and Heathcliff ordered her upstairs so he could talk to Nelly.

Alone with her, he told her that if she did not arrange an interview for him with Catherine, he would force his way in armed and she agreed to give Catherine a letter from him.

### **Analysis:**

This chapter includes a great deal of criticism for the Lintons: Edgar is called proud and unfeeling and Heathcliff says that Isabella was actually attracted by his brutality until she herself suffered from it. Edgar's explanation of his refusal to write to Isabella is extremely unconvincing: "I am not angry, but sorry to have lost her: especially as I can never think she'll be happy. It is out of the question my going to see her, however; we are eternally divided." He is angry, of course, because he hates Heathcliff: presumably he is jealous of him. Heathcliff considers Edgar's version of love to be selfish, as though Edgar thought he owned his wife, and had a right to restrict her behavior: "Had he been in my place, and I in his, though I hated him with a hatred that turned my life to gall, I never would have raised a hand against him... I never would have banished him from her society, as long as she desired his." Correspondingly, he imagines Catherine's affection for Edgar in terms of property: "He is scarcely a degree dearer to her than her dog, or her horse. It is not in him to be loved like me." Material wealth has always been associated with the Lintons, so Heathcliff extends ideas of property and ownership to their emotions as well.

The case of Isabella is somewhat different. Heathcliff despises her because she, knowing what he is, loves him. This is an interesting point: Heathcliff is an obviously romantic figure, with his mysterious past, dark looks and so on. But Brontë makes it very clear that although he exerts a certain amount of fascination, he should in no way be considered a "hero of romance." For doing so, Isabella is called a "pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach." In this very romantic novel, one can never rely on conventional notions of romance: brutality should never be considered attractive. Even Catherine does not find Heathcliff attractive; she simply finds him inescapable, a part of herself.

### **Chapter 15, Summary**

The Sunday after Ellen's visit to Wuthering Heights, while most people were at church, she gave Catherine Heathcliff's letter. Catherine was changed by her sickness: she was beautiful in an unearthly way and her eyes "appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond." Ellen had left the door open, so Heathcliff walked in and Catherine eagerly waited for him to find the right room. Their reunion was bitter-sweet: though passionately glad to be reunited, Catherine accused Heathcliff of having killed her and Heathcliff warned her not to say such things, he would be tortured by them after her death, besides, she had been at fault by abandoning him. She asked him to forgive her, since she would not "be at peace" after death, and he answered: "It is hard to forgive, and to look at those eyes, and feel those wasted hands... I love my murderer, but yours! How can I?" They held each other closely and wept until Ellen warned them that Linton was returning. Heathcliff wanted to leave, but Catherine insisted that he stay, since she was dying and would never see him again. He consented to stay, and "in the midst of the agitation, [Ellen] was sincerely glad to observe that Catherine's arms had fallen relaxed... She's fainted or dead, so much the better..." Linton came in, Heathcliff handed him Catherine's body and told him to take care of her: "Unless you be a fiend, help her first then you shall speak to me!" He told Nelly he would wait outside for news of Catherine's welfare and left.

### **Analysis:**

The passionate scene between Catherine and Heathcliff in this chapter is probably the emotional climax of the novel, though it only marks the middle of the book. It reveals how little their love relies on pleasure: they can hardly be said to be fond of one another, or to enjoy each other's company, yet they are absolutely necessary to each other. It is as though they were members of a different species from other humans, who belonged together. Ellen says: "The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearsome picture." Catherine tore Heathcliff's hair, and he left bruises on her arm. Later, he "foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. [Ellen] did not feel as though [she] were in the company of a member of [her] own species." Love appears to be a form of madness.

Their emotional reunion is counteracted by Ellen's cool and rather unsympathetic narration: their passionate conversation is interspersed with dry commentary on her part.

### **Chapter 16, Summary**

Around midnight Catherine gave birth to a daughter (also named Catherine, the girl Lockwood saw at Wuthering Heights) and died two hours later without recovering consciousness. No one cared for the infant at first and Ellen wished it had been a boy: as it was, Edgar's heir was Isabella, Heathcliff's wife. Catherine's corpse looked peaceful and beautiful. Ellen decided that she had found heaven at last.

She went outside to tell Heathcliff and found him leaning motionless against an ash tree. He knew she was dead, and asked Ellen how it had happened, attempting to conceal his anguish. Ellen was not fooled and told him that she had died peacefully, like a girl falling asleep. He cursed Catherine and begged her to haunt him so he would not be left in "this abyss, where I cannot find you... I cannot live without my soul!" He dashed his head against the tree and howled "like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears." Ellen was appalled.

On Tuesday, when Catherine's body was still lying, strewn with flowers, in the Grange, Heathcliff took advantage of Edgar's short absence from the chamber of death to see her again, and to replace Edgar's hair in her locket with some of his own. Ellen noticed the change, and enclosed both locks of hair together.

Catherine was buried on Friday in a green slope in a corner of the Kirk yard, where, Ellen said, her husband lies now as well.

### **Analysis:**

The question of what happens after death is important in this chapter and throughout the novel; though no firm answer is ever given. Ellen is fairly sure Catherine went to heaven, "where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fullness." But Heathcliff cannot conceive of Catherine finding peace when they are still separated, or of his living without her. In the chapter before, Catherine said: "I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart, but really with it, and in it." It is as though she had in mind a heaven that was like the moors in every way but the constraints of physicality: the spirit of natural freedom.

These thoughts echo the ideas Bronte had expressed in her poems. Another interesting question that comes up in this chapter is that of the value of self-control and reserve: Heathcliff tries to conceal his weakness and grief, holding "a silent combat with his inward agony," but Ellen considers it to be worse than useless, since he only tempts God to wring his "heart and nerves." Bronte herself was almost incredibly self-disciplined, refusing to alter her everyday life even when suffering a mortal illness.

### **Chapter 17, Summary**

The next day, while Ellen was rocking the baby, Isabella came in laughing giddily. She was pale and her face was cut; briars tore her thin silk dress. She asked Ellen to call the carriage for the nearest town, Gimmerton, since she was escaping from her husband and to have a maid get some clothes ready. Then she allowed Ellen to give her dry clothes and bind up the wound. Isabella tried to destroy her wedding ring, and told what had happened to her in the last days:

She said that she hated Heathcliff so much that she could feel no compassion for him even when he was in agony following Catherine's death. He hadn't eaten for days, and spent his time at Wuthering Heights in his room, "praying like a methodist; only the deity he implored was senseless dust and ashes." The evening before, Isabella sat reading while Hindley drank morosely. When they heard Heathcliff returning from his watch over Catherine's grave, Hindley told Isabella he would lock Heathcliff out and try to kill him with his bladed pistol if he came in. Isabella would have liked Heathcliff to die, but refused to help in the scheme, so when Heathcliff knocked she refused to let him in, saying: "If I were you, I'd go stretch myself over her grave, and die like a faithful dog... The world is not worth living in now, is it?" Hindley came close to the window to kill Heathcliff, but the latter grabbed the weapon so the blade shut on Hindley's wrist; then he forced his way in. He kicked and trampled Hindley, who had fainted from the loss of blood, then roughly bound up the wound and told Joseph and Isabella to clean up the blood.

The next morning when Isabella came down, Hindley "was sitting by the fire, deadly sick; his evil genius, almost as gaunt and ghastly, leant by the chimney." After eating breakfast by herself, she told Hindley how he had been kicked when he was down and mocked Heathcliff for having so mistreated his beloved's brother, saying to Hindley: "everyone knows your sister would have been living now, had it not been for Mr. Heathcliff." Heathcliff was so miserable that he could hardly retaliate, so Isabella went on and said that if Catherine had married him, he would have beaten her the way he beat Hindley. Heathcliff threw a knife at her, and she fled, knocking down Hareton, "who was hanging a litter of puppies from a chairback in the doorway." She ran to the Grange.

That morning, she left, never to return to the neighborhood again. Later, in her new home, in the south, she gave birth to a son named Linton, "an ailing, peevish creature".

Edgar grew resigned to Catherine's death and loved his daughter, who he called Cathy, very much. Ellen points out the difference between his behavior and Hindley's in a similar situation.

Hindley died, "drunk as a lord," about six months after Catherine. He was just 27, meaning that Catherine had been 19, Heathcliff was 20 and Edgar was 21. Ellen grieved deeply for him, they had been the same age and were brought up together. She made sure he was decently buried. She wanted to take Hareton back to the Grange, but Heathcliff said he would keep him, to degrade him as much as he himself had been degraded. If Edgar insisted on taking Hareton, Heathcliff said he would claim his own son Linton, so Ellen gave the idea up.

### **Analysis:**

Isabella's tendency toward impotent cruelty shows up again in the character of her son Linton. The question of how cruelty operates in powerful versus weak characters was evidently of great interest to Bronte. One obvious point is that weakness is not simply equated with goodness, as is often the case in the Christian tradition. Although the weak are unable to physically express their hatred, they can, like Isabella, use verbal taunts to hurt their enemies emotionally.

Ellen's particular grief for Hindley emphasizes the way character is paired in the novel: Ellen and Hindley, Heathcliff and Catherine, Edgar and Isabella. These pairs all grew up together (Ellen's mother was Hindley's wet-nurse, so they literally shared mother's milk) under somewhat fraternal conditions. Bronte's careful structure and concern with symmetry are important presences throughout the novel, and form an interesting contrast with what might be considered the chaotic emotions that seem to prevail.

### **Chapter 18, Summary**

In the next twelve years, Cathy Linton grew up to be "the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house." She was fair like a Linton, except for her mother's dark eyes. High spirited but gentle, she seemed to combine the good qualities of both the Lintons and the Earnshaws, though she was a little saucy and was used to getting her way. Her father kept her within the park of the Grange, but she dreamed of going to see some cliffs, Penistone Crag, not too far away, on the moor.

When Isabella fell ill, she wrote to Edgar to come visit her, so he was gone for three weeks. One day Cathy asked Ellen to give her some food for a ramble around the grounds; she was pretending to be an Arabian merchant going across the desert with her caravan of a pony and three dogs. She left the grounds, however and later Ellen went after her on the road to Penistone Crag, which passed Wuthering Heights. She found Cathy safe and sound there. Heathcliff wasn't home, and the housekeeper had taken her in, chattering to Hareton, now 18 years old. She offended Hareton though by asking whether he was the master's son and when he said he wasn't, saying he was a servant. The housekeeper told her he was her cousin, which made her cry. Hareton offered her a puppy to console her, which she refused. Ellen told her that her father didn't want her to go to Wuthering Heights and asked her not to tell him of her negligence, to which she agreed.

### **Analysis:**

The violent and discordant world of adulthood has receded into the background, showing the way, back to harmonious childhood. The abrupt contrast between the hellish last chapters and this relatively serene and innocent one could hardly be

clearer. One might even suppose that a second chance is being witnessed: the story of the first Catherine ended in grief and bloodshed, but perhaps that of her daughter will be more serene. Indeed, there are many similarities between the first Catherine and her daughter, although the mother's bad qualities are minimized in the younger Cathy.

Although Cathy appears to display more Linton characteristics than Earnshaw ones, her desire to explore the wilderness outside of the Grange's park links her strongly to the wild, Wuthering Heights clan. Her sauciness also reminds the reader of her mother, as does her aristocratic unwillingness to be related to Hareton (just as Catherine thought it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff, who was at the time very much like Hareton).

### **Chapter 19, Summary**

Isabella died, and Edgar returned home with his half-orphaned nephew, Linton, a "pale, delicate, effeminate, boy," with a "sickly peevishness" in his appearance. Cathy was excited to see her cousin, and took to babying him when she saw that he was sickly and childish. That very evening, Joseph came and demanded the child for Heathcliff he was, after all, his son. Ellen told him Edgar was asleep, but he went into his room and insisted on being given Linton. Edgar wished to keep Linton at the Grange, but could not legally claim him, so he could only put it off till the next morning.

#### **Analysis:**

The contrast between Cathy and her cousin Linton is very strong: she is energetic and warm-hearted, whereas he is limp and parasitic. It is interesting to see how Bronte distributes conventionally masculine and feminine characteristics among her characters without regard for gender. Linton is pointedly described as being delicate, with fine flaxen hair even lighter than Cathy's: he is the helpless "lady" of the two, who cries when he doesn't get his way, and allows himself to be "courted" by his female cousin.

### **Chapter 20, Summary**

The next morning, Ellen woke Linton early and took him over to Wuthering Heights, promising dishonestly that it was only for a little while. He was surprised to hear he had a father, since Isabella had never spoken of Heathcliff. When they arrived there, Heathcliff and Joseph expressed their contempt for the delicate boy. Heathcliff told him that his mother was a "wicked slut" not to tell him about his father. Ellen asked Heathcliff to be kind to the boy and he said that he would indeed have him carefully tended, mostly because Linton was heir to the Grange, so he wanted him to live at least until Edgar was dead and he inherited. So when Linton refused to eat the homely oatmeal Joseph offered him, Heathcliff ordered that he be given some toast or something instead. When Ellen left, Linton cried for her not to leave him there.

#### **Analysis:**

Bronte's novel is full of innocent children who are abandoned into a cold and unfriendly world: Heathcliff as an orphan in Liverpool, Hindley sent away to college,



Heathcliff and Cathy again at Earnshaw's death, Hareton, Linton, Cathy Linton at her father's death. The effect of this is that each character, no matter how ruthless and cruel he or she may be, contains at their core the same wish for love and the same loneliness as their former childlike selves. The reader is never able to judge any character entirely objectively because of this fact. Linton is a particularly interesting example of this because he is unpleasant, even as a child, yet one can only pity him for being abruptly introduced to an unloving father and a home where everyone despises him.

### **Chapter 21, Summary**

Cathy missed her cousin when she woke up that morning, but time made her forget him. Linton grew up to be a selfish and disagreeable boy, continually complaining about his health. On Cathy's sixteenth birthday she and Ellen went out on the moors, and strayed onto Heathcliff's land, where he found them. He invited them to come to Wuthering Heights, telling Ellen that he wanted Linton and Cathy to marry so he would be doubly sure of inheriting the Grange. Cathy was glad to see her cousin, though she was somewhat taken back by his invalid-like behavior. Hareton, at Heathcliff's request, showed her around the farm, though he was shy of her and she teased him unkindly. Linton mocked his ignorance also, showing himself to be mean-spirited.

Later Cathy told her father where she had been, and asked him why he had not allowed the cousins to see each other (Heathcliff had told her that Edgar was still angry at him because he thought him too poor to marry Isabella). Edgar told her of Heathcliff's wickedness and forbade her to return to Wuthering Heights. She was unhappy and began a secret correspondence with Linton. By the time Ellen discovered it, they were writing love letters; affected ones on Linton's part. Ellen confronted Cathy and burned the letters, saying she would tell her father if she continued.

### **Analysis:**

The issue of trespassing is important in this chapter, and recalls the scene in chapter 6, where Cathy Earnshaw and Heathcliff are caught on the Lintons' land. This chapter is almost an inversion of the other one, especially considering that this Cathy will marry Linton, just as the earlier Cathy married Edgar. In a static world, everyone stays on their own property and the marriages that result from trespassing would not take place. The emphasis on land and privacy might be taken for a metaphor for more emotional intimacy: for two people to become close, one must in some way trespass. On the other hand, the marriages that result from trespassing are unhappy, while that which results from exploration (see Cathy Linton's first meeting with Hareton in chapter 18) are happy. The essential point, of course, is that the definition of trespassing versus innocent exploration depends entirely on the attitude taken by the people whose lands are being entered.

### **Chapter 22, Summary**

That fall, Edgar caught a cold that confined him to the house all winter. Cathy grew sadder after the end of her little romance and told Ellen that she was afraid of being

alone when her father and Ellen were dead. Taking a walk, Cathy ended up briefly stranded outside of the wall of the park, when Heathcliff rode by. He told her that Linton was dying of a broken heart, and that she would visit him if she were kind. Ellen told her that Heathcliff was probably lying and couldn't be trusted, but the next day she was persuaded to accompany Cathy to Wuthering Heights.

### **Analysis:**

See the analysis of chapter 20 for a discussion of children left alone in the world. Cathy Linton is not the only one to fear a parent's death, nor is her fear unjustified. In her case, she is particularly vulnerable because, as a girl, she will not inherit her father's estate: her father's nephew Linton will. This is a result not of Edgar's lack of regard for his daughter, but of legal conventions.

Emily Bronte had good reasons to be especially conscious of the position of orphaned children: although her father outlived her, her mother died when she was very young (like Cathy's) and her older sister Maria who took the place of the mother died in childhood of tuberculosis. See chapter 12 for further evidence of the importance of abandoned children: in her delirium Catherine remembers a nest of baby birds that died of starvation ("little skeletons") after Heathcliff caught their mother. She had been greatly grieved by the sight and made Heathcliff promise never to kill a mother bird again. This may actually be the key to Emily Bronte's continual emphasis on that theme: she was deeply familiar with the natural world, in which orphaned baby animals stand next to no chance of survival.

### **Chapter 23, Summary**

Cathy and Ellen heard "a peevish voice" calling Joseph for more hot coals for the fire; they went in to see Linton, who greeted them rather ungraciously: "No don't kiss me. It takes my breath dear me!" He complained that writing to her had been very tiring and that the servants didn't take care of him as they ought, and that he hated them. He said that he wished she would marry him, because wives always loved their husbands, upon which she answered that they did not always do so. Her father had told her that Isabella had not loved Heathcliff. Linton was angry and answered that Catherine's mother hadn't loved her father, but Heathcliff. She pushed his chair and he coughed for a long time, for which she was very sorry. He took advantage of her regret and bullied her like a true hypochondriac and made her promise to return the next day.

When Cathy and Ellen were on their way home, Ellen expressed her disapproval of Linton and said he would die young "small loss." Cathy should on no account marry him. Cathy was not so sure he would die and was much more friendly toward him.

Ellen caught a cold and was confined to her room. Cathy spent almost all her time taking care of her and Edgar, but she was free in the evenings: then, as Ellen later found out, she visited Linton.

### **Analysis:**

In this chapter Bronte explores the intersections between love and power: to what extent does Linton want Cathy to love him freely and to what extent does he want to have husbandly control over her? It would appear that for him, love is just another form of control: he uses Cathy's love for him to make her do whatever he likes,

without any consideration for her own happiness. Is this form of love/control essentially linked to marriage? That might well be the case: the relationship between the older Catherine and her husband Edgar breaks down when he tries to control her friendships. However, Edgar unmistakably loved Catherine, whereas Linton seems to care for no one but himself. Marriage in *Wuthering Heights* is not an unqualified good: it must be accompanied by unselfish love on both sides in order to work.

### **Chapter 24, Summary**

Three weeks later, Ellen was much better, and discovered Cathy's evening visits to *Wuthering Heights*. Cathy told her what had happened:

She had bribed a servant with her books, to take care of saddling her pony and not telling about her escapades. On her second visit, she and Linton had had an argument about the best way of spending a summer afternoon: he wanted to lie in the heather and dream it away, and she wanted to rock in a treetop among the birds: "He wanted to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee." They made up and played ball until Linton was unhappy because he always lost, but she consoled him for that.

She looked forward to her next visit, but that day when she arrived she met Hareton, who showed her how he had learned to read his name. She mocked him for it. (Here Ellen rebuked Cathy for having been so rude to her cousin. Cathy was surprised, and went on.) When she was reading to Linton, Hareton came in angrily and ordered them into the kitchen. Shut out of his favorite room, Linton staged a frightening temper tantrum, wearing an expression of "frantic, powerless fury" and shrieking that he would kill Hareton. Joseph pointed out that he was showing his father's character. Linton coughed blood and fainted; Cathy fetched Zillah. Hareton carried the boy upstairs but wouldn't let Cathy follow; she cried and he was sorry for it. She struck him with her whip and rode home.

On the third day Linton refused to speak to her except to blame her for the events of the preceding day and she left, resolving not to return.

She did, however and took Linton to task for being so rude. He admitted that he was worthless, but said that she was much happier than he and should make allowances. Heathcliff hated him and he was very unhappy. He loved her however.

Cathy was sorry Linton had such a distorted nature and felt she had an obligation to be a friend to him. She had noticed that Heathcliff avoided her and rebuked Linton when he did not behave well with her.

Ellen told Edgar about the visits and he forbade Cathy to return to *Wuthering Heights*, but wrote to Linton that he could come to the Grange if he liked.

### **Analysis:**

The contrast between Linton and Cathy's ideas of how to spend an afternoon sums up the difference in their characters. The juxtaposition of Linton's peaceful ideal afternoon with his furious temper tantrum is somewhat disconcerting, however. Are passivity and laziness essentially related to hatred and fury in the novel? This hardly

seems possible, considering Edgar's peaceful and generally loving character. However, the juxtaposition serves as a reminder that weakness and goodness are not to be carelessly equated.

### **Chapter 25, Summary**

Ellen points out to Lockwood that these events only happened the year before and she hints that Lockwood might become interested in Cathy, who is not happy at Wuthering Heights. Then she goes on with the narrative:

Edgar asked Ellen what Linton was like, and she told him that he was delicate and had little of his father in him. Cathy would probably be able to control him if they married. Edgar admitted that he was worried about what would happen to Cathy if he were to die. As spring advanced, Edgar resumed his walks, but although Cathy took his flushed cheeks and bright eyes for health, Ellen was not so sure. He wrote again to Linton, asking to see him. Linton answered that his father refused to let him visit the Grange, but that he hoped to meet Edgar outside sometime. He also wrote that he would like to see Cathy again, and that his health was improved.

Edgar could not consent, because he could not walk very far, but the two began a correspondence. Linton wrote well, without complaining (since Heathcliff carefully censured his letters) and eventually Edgar agreed to Cathy's going to meet Linton on the moors, with Ellen's supervision. Edgar wished Cathy to marry Linton so she would not have to leave the Grange when he died, but he would not have wished it if he knew that Linton was dying as fast as he was.

#### **Analysis:**

The presence of tuberculosis in such a prominent way in the novel is rather disturbing, considering that the illness was soon to be the cause of Brontë's own death. Cathy fools herself into thinking that Edgar is getting better, just as Emily (and Frances, Hindley's wife) tried hard to pretend that she was not sick.

Death is a mysterious and yet unavoidable presence: one cannot simply expect people to live until they are old. A cold can turn into a fever, which can turn into consumption, ending in the grave. Life is not predictable in Wuthering Heights, just as it was not in Emily Brontë's own world.

### **Chapter 26, Summary**

When Ellen and Cathy rode to meet Linton they had to go quite close to Wuthering Heights to find him. He was evidently very ill, though he said he was better: "his large blue eyes wandered timidly over her; the hollowness round them, transforming to haggard wildness, the languid expression they once possessed." Linton had a hard time making conversation with Cathy, and was clearly not enjoying their talk, so she said she would leave. Surprisingly Linton then looked frightenedly towards Wuthering Heights and begged her to stay longer, and to tell her father he was in "tolerable health." She half-heartedly agreed, and he soon fell into some kind of slumber. He woke suddenly and seemed to be terrified that his father might come. Cathy and Ellen returned home, perplexed by his strange behavior.

#### **Analysis:**

This chapter reveals an extent of cruelty in Heathcliff that has not been seen before: he has no reason to hate his son beyond the fact that he is a Linton, yet he is perfectly willing to fill his last moments with terror and despair. Linton's life is singularly hopeless, and the mere fact that Bronte invented it testifies to the real darkness of her vision. Linton is unlikable and dislikes everyone; he will die without ever achieving anything worthwhile or good, and probably without ever having been happy. A more pointless, bitter existence could hardly be imagined. Heathcliff's appears energetic and joyful by contrast.

### **Chapter 27, Summary**

A week later, they were to visit Linton again. Edgar was much sicker, and Cathy didn't want to leave him, but he encouraged her relationship with Linton, thinking to ensure his daughter's welfare thereby. Linton "received us with greater animation on this occasion; not the animation of high spirits though, nor yet of joy; it looked more like fear." Cathy was angry that she had had to leave her father and she was disgusted by Linton's abject admissions of terror. Heathcliff came upon them, and asked Ellen how much longer Edgar had to live: he was worried that Linton would die before him. He then ordered Linton to get up and take Cathy into the house, which he did, against Cathy's will: "Linton... implored her to accompany him, with a frantic importunity that admitted no denial." Heathcliff pushed Ellen into the house as well and locked the door behind them. When Cathy protested that she must get home to her father he slapped her brutally and made it clear that she wouldn't leave Wuthering Heights until she married Linton. Linton showed his true character: as Heathcliff said, "He'll undertake to torture any number of cats if their teeth be drawn, and their claws pared." Cathy and Heathcliff declared their mutual hatred. Ellen remained imprisoned for five days with Hareton as her jailer: he gave her food but refused to speak to her beyond what was necessary. She did not know what was happening to Cathy.

### **Analysis:**

Here is further evidence of Linton's bad character. Cathy's pity and kindness are the causes of her misfortunes here: in the presence of Heathcliff's intelligent hatred, her good qualities only serve to leave her vulnerable to his plans.

### **Chapter 28, Summary**

On the fifth afternoon of the captivity, Zillah released Ellen, and said that Heathcliff said she could go home and that Catherine would follow in time to attend her father's funeral. He was not dead yet, but soon would be. Ellen asked Linton where Catherine was. He answered that she was shut upstairs, that they were married and that he was glad she was being treated harshly. Apparently he was piqued that she hadn't wished to marry him. He was annoyed by her crying, and was glad when Heathcliff struck her.

Ellen rebuked him for his selfishness and unkindness and went to the Grange to get help. Edgar was glad to hear his daughter was safe, and would be home soon: he was almost dead, at the age of 39. The men sent to Wuthering Heights to rescue Catherine returned without her, having believed Heathcliff's tale that she was too sick to travel. Very early the next morning, however, Catherine came back by herself, joyful to hear that her father was still alive. She had forced Linton to help her escape. Ellen asked

her to say she would be happy with Linton, for Edgar's sake, to which she agreed. Edgar died "blissfully." Catherine was stony-eyed with grief. Heathcliff's lawyer gave all the servants but Ellen notice to quit and hurried the funeral.

### **Analysis:**

Part of Heathcliff's revenge fails: Catherine manages to escape in time to see her father again, and Edgar dies happy. Given the great importance attached to last words and dying moments, this is a notable victory for Catherine and an essential one if all of Heathcliff's evil work is to be undone in the end. If Edgar had died miserably, no amount of happy endings could ever have undone that tragedy.

### **Chapter 29, Summary**

Heathcliff came to the Grange to fetch Catherine to Wuthering Heights to take care of Linton, who was dying in terror of his father, and because he wanted to get a tenant for the Grange (Mr. Lockwood, as it turned out). Catherine agreed to go, because Linton was all she had to love, and left the room.

Heathcliff, in a strange mood, told Ellen what he had done the night before. He had bribed the sexton who was digging Edgar's grave to uncover his Catherine's coffin, so he could see her face again; he said it was hers yet. The sexton told him that the face would change if air blew on it, so he tore himself away from contemplating it and struck one side of the coffin loose and bribed the sexton to put his body in with Catherine's when he was dead. Ellen was shocked, and scolded him for disturbing the dead, at which he replied that on the contrary she had haunted him night and day for eighteen years, and "yester night, I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping my last sleep, by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers."

Then Heathcliff told Ellen what he had done the night after Catherine's burial (the night he beat up Hindley). He had gone to the Kirk yard and dug up the coffin "to have her in his arms again," but while he was wrenching at the screws he suddenly felt sure of her living presence. He was consoled, but tortured as well: from that night for 18 years he constantly felt as though he could almost see her, but not quite. He tried sleeping in her room, but constantly opened his eyes to see if she were there, he felt so sure she was.

Heathcliff finished his narrative, and Catherine sadly bade farewell to Ellen.

### **Analysis:**

Heathcliff's continued love for Catherine's dead body after 18 years emphasizes the physical, yet non-physical nature of their relationship. It would appear to be physical in a way that transcends conventional ideas about sexuality: Heathcliff was pleased to see that Catherine still looked like herself after 18 years, but claimed that if she had been "dissolved into earth, or worse," he would have been no less comforted by the proximity to her body. His idea of heaven is to be utterly and completely unified with Catherine in body, as in spirit and this could just as well mean to disintegrate into dust together as to be joined in the act of love. The difference between these two forms of union is that while people are joined during sexual intercourse, their separate bodies and identities remain clear. But in Heathcliff and Catherine's corporeal and

spiritual unity, as envisaged by him, an observer would not be able to tell, "which is which." This is like Catherine's statement in chapter 9 that she was Heathcliff.

### **Chapter 30, Summary**

Ellen has now more or less reached the present time in her narrative and tells Lockwood what Zillah told her about Catherine's reception at Wuthering Heights. She spent all her time in Linton's room, and when she came out she asked Heathcliff to call a doctor, because Linton was very sick. Heathcliff replied: "We know that! But his life is not worth a farthing." Catherine was thus left to care for her dying cousin all alone (Zillah, Hareton and Joseph would not help her) and became haggard and bewildered from lack of sleep. Finally Linton died, and when Heathcliff asked Catherine how she felt, she said: "He's safe and I'm free. I should feel very well but you have left me so long to struggle against death, alone, that I feel and see only death! I feel like death!" Hareton was sorry for her. Catherine was ill for the next two weeks.

Heathcliff informed her that Linton had left all of his and his wife's property to himself. One day when Heathcliff was out, Catherine came downstairs. Hareton made shy, friendly advances, which she angrily rejected. He asked Zillah to ask her to read for them (he was illiterate, but wished to learn) but she refused on the grounds that she had been forsaken during Linton's illness and had no reason to care for Hareton or Zillah. Hareton said that he had in fact asked Heathcliff to be allowed to relieve her of some of her duties, but was denied. She was in no mood to forgive, however, and thus became the unfriendly Catherine Lockwood had seen at Wuthering Heights. According to Zillah: "She'll snap at the master himself, and as good dares him to thrash her; and the more hurt she gets, the more venomous she grows." Ellen wanted to get a cottage and live there with Catherine, but Heathcliff would not permit it.

### **Analysis:**

It is generally considered that difficult and painful experiences are also, in a way, valuable as "growing experiences." If this is the case, Catherine's short marriage to Linton should have caused her to grow a great deal from the happy and innocent girl she had formerly been. Instead, it appears to make her venomous and permanently angry. However, one might make the argument that the humbling she undergoes is necessary because, without it, she never would have bothered to see the good in Hareton. Is the time Catherine spends caring for Linton a complete loss, or does she learn anything valuable from it? This is related to the question of whether Wuthering Heights is a Christian novel: in Christian theology, suffering is usually considered ennobling.

### **Chapter 31, Summary**

Lockwood went to Wuthering Heights to see Heathcliff and tell him he didn't want to stay at the Grange any longer. He noticed that Hareton was "as handsome a rustic as need be seen." He gave Catherine a note from Ellen; she thought it was from him at first and when he made it clear that it wasn't, Hareton snatched it away, saying that Heathcliff should look at it first (he wasn't home yet). Catherine tried to hide her tears, but Hareton noticed and let the letter drop beside her seat. She read it and expressed her longing for freedom, telling Lockwood that she couldn't even reply to Ellen

because Heathcliff had destroyed her books. Hareton had all the other books in the house: he had been trying to read. Catherine mocked him for his clumsy attempts at self-education: "Those books, both prose and verse, were consecrated to me by other associations, and I hate to hear them debased and profaned in his mouth!" Poor Hareton fetched the books and threw them into her lap, saying he didn't want to think about them any longer. She persisted in her mockery, reading aloud in "the drawling tone of a beginner," following which he slapped her and threw the books into the fire. Lockwood "read in his countenance what anguish it was to offer that sacrifice to spleen."

Heathcliff came in and Hareton left, "to enjoy his grief and anger in solitude." Heathcliff moodily confided to Lockwood that Hareton reminded him much more of Catherine, than of Hindley. He also told Lockwood that he would still have to pay his full rent even if he left the Grange, to which Lockwood, insulted, agreed. Heathcliff invited Lockwood to dinner, and informed Catherine that she could eat with Joseph in the kitchen. Lockwood ate the cheerless meal and left, contemplating the possibility of his courting Catherine and going together "into the stirring atmosphere of the town."

### **Analysis:**

Books take on an important role in the relationship between Hareton and Catherine: Hareton's illiteracy is the most glaring result of Heathcliff's treatment of him, designed to reduce him to rustic ignorance. Hareton never rebels against Heathcliff, but his contact with Catherine, who was carefully educated by her father, makes him extremely conscious of his shortcomings. One might wonder how great the value of book-learning is, in the novel: Linton, who can read, is obviously inferior to his more vigorous cousin Hareton, which might lead one to think that Bronte is championing native energy over imposed refinement. However, for Catherine and Hareton to become close it is absolutely necessary for Hareton to wish to educate himself, and in the last chapter their love will be symbolized in the joint reading of a book. Similarly, Heathcliff's youthful degradation really takes place when he ceases to follow Catherine's lessons. It appears that book learning is not enough to make a person good, but that the lack of it is enough to make someone ridiculous. It is, in short, an essential quality.

### **Chapter 32, Summary**

In the fall of 1802, later that year, Lockwood returned to the Grange because he was passing through the area on a hunting trip. He found the Grange more or less empty: Ellen was at Wuthering Heights, and an old woman had replaced her. Lockwood visited Wuthering Heights to see what had changed. He noticed flowers growing around the old farmhouse, and overheard a pleasant lesson from indoors. Catherine, sounding "sweet as a silver bell," was teaching Hareton, now respectably dressed. The lesson was interspersed with kisses and very kind words. Lockwood did not want to disturb them, and went around to the kitchen to find Nelly singing and Joseph complaining as usual. She was glad to see Lockwood and told them that he would have to settle the rent with her, since she was acting for Catherine. Heathcliff had been dead for three months. She told him what had happened.



A fortnight after Lockwood left the Grange the previous spring, Nelly was summoned to Wuthering Heights, where she gladly went; her job was to keep Catherine out of Heathcliff's way. She was pleased to see Catherine, but sorry at the way she had changed.

One day when they and Hareton were sitting in the kitchen, Catherine grew tired of the animosity between her and the young man and offered him a book, which he refused. She left it close to him, but he never touched it. Hareton was injured in a shooting accident in March and since Heathcliff didn't like to see him, he spent a lot of time sitting in the kitchen, where Catherine found many reasons to go. Finally her efforts at reconciliation succeeded and they became loving friends, much to Joseph's indignation.

### **Analysis:**

The union of Hareton and Catherine should not surprise the reader, who has been following the symmetrical unfolding of the novel. At the beginning of the story, following the symmetrical unfolding of the novel. At the beginning, Hindley and Catherine inhabited Wuthering Heights and Edgar and Isabella inhabited the Grange. The obvious symmetrical plot would have been: Hindley married Isabella producing "Hareton," while Catherine married Edgar, producing Cathy. Then Cathy and "Hareton" would marry, unifying the two houses completely, and Cathy Linton would become Catherine Earnshaw, taking on her mother's maiden name. The harmony of this plot was disrupted by the introduction of Heathcliff, an alien figure who destroyed the potential marital balance.

By the end of the novel, however, Heathcliff and his issue will be eliminated and the unifying marriage between the families of Linton and Earnshaw will take place after all, as though Heathcliff had never existed. Hindley, sent away to college because of the outsider; Heathcliff, married an outsider, Frances, producing Hareton Earnshaw. Catherine Earnshaw married Edgar Linton, producing Cathy Linton and Isabella Linton married Heathcliff, producing Linton Heathcliff. The union between Isabella and Heathcliff should not have taken place, so naturally Linton Heathcliff was a mistake, an unlikable and weakly being. Cathy Linton's marriage to Linton Heathcliff was likewise a mistake, forced by Heathcliff and in order to preserve the integrity of the pattern, their marriage was childless. No descendants of Heathcliff must remain by the end of the novel, for harmony to be reinstated. Linton's death eliminated a character that should never have existed, and freed Catherine to marry again. In fact, the nature of their marriage made it particularly easy to forget: it seems unthinkable that the marriage could have been consummated. When Cathy Heathcliff marries Hareton, thus becoming Cathy Earnshaw, she will be a virgin. With the death of Heathcliff and his offspring, and the unifying marriage of the Linton and Earnshaw heirs, it is almost as though Heathcliff had never existed.

Emotional integrity would have been preserved in the unification of Catherine and Heathcliff. As it is, that unification is finally attained when Heathcliff's body merges with Catherine's as they disintegrate into dust, and their spirits roam the moors together.

Another beauty of Bronte's plot is that the three names that Lockwood reads when he stays at Wuthering Heights in chapter 3 Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff

and Catherine Linton are all taken on at one point or another by the two Catherines. The first Catherine is named Earnshaw, then Linton when she marries Edgar, then perhaps Heathcliff when she and Heathcliff are finally united in the grave. Her daughter is first Catherine Linton, then Heathcliff and then Earnshaw.

### **Chapter 33, Summary**

The next morning Ellen found Catherine with Hareton in the garden, planning a flower garden in the middle of Joseph's cherished currant bushes. She warned them that they would be punished, but Hareton said he would take the blame. At tea, Catherine was careful not to talk to Hareton too much, but she put flowers into his porridge, which made him laugh, which made Heathcliff angry. He assumed Catherine had laughed, but Hareton quietly admitted his fault. Joseph came in and incoherently bewailed the fate of his bushes. Hareton said he had uprooted some, but would plant them again, and Catherine said it had been at her instigation. Heathcliff called her an "insolent slut," and she accused him of having stolen her land and Hareton's. Heathcliff commanded Hareton to throw her out. The poor boy was torn between two loyalties and tried to persuade Catherine to leave. Heathcliff seemed "ready to tear Catherine to pieces" when he suddenly calmed down and told everyone to leave. Later, Hareton asked Catherine not to accuse Heathcliff in front of him; she understood his position and refrained from insulting her oppressor from then on. Ellen was glad to see her two "children" happy together; Hareton quickly shook off his ignorance and boorishness and Catherine became sweet again.

When Heathcliff saw them together he was struck by their resemblances to his Catherine and told Ellen that he had lost his motivation for destruction. He no longer took any interest in everyday life; Catherine and Hareton didn't appear to him to be distinct characters of their own, but sources of past associations to his beloved. He also felt Hareton to be very much like himself as a youth. But most importantly, his Catherine haunted him completely: "The most ordinary faces of men, and women my own features mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" He told Nelly that he felt a change coming that he could no longer exist in the living world when he felt so close to that of the dead, or the immortal. Nelly wondered whether he was ill, but decided that he was in fine health and mind, except for his unworldly obsession.

#### **Analysis:**

An extraordinary window opens into Heathcliff's mind in the chapter. Whenever he looks at something, he sees Catherine in it. He hears her voice in every sound. This is Bronte's conception of true haunting, which seems to bear far more resemblance to madness than to scary noises in the dark. It is mainly an interior phenomenon: if the ghost of Catherine is at work, she has found her home in Heathcliff's mind and her vocation in distorting his perception and his ability to communicate with the outside world.

### **Chapter 34, Summary**

In the next few days Heathcliff all but stopped eating, and spent the nights walking outside. Catherine, happily working on her garden, came across him and was surprised to see him looking "very much excited, and wild, and glad." Ellen told him he should eat and indeed at dinner he took a heaped plate, but abruptly lost interest in food, seemed to be watching something by the window and went outside. Hareton followed to ask him what was wrong, and Heathcliff told him to go back to Catherine and not bother him. He came back an hour or two later, with the same "unnatural appearance of joy," shivering the way a "tight-stretched cord vibrates a strong thrilling, rather than trembling." Ellen asked him what was going on, and he answered that he was within sight of his heaven, hardly three feet away. Later that evening, Ellen found him sitting in the dark with the windows all-open. The pallor of his face and his black eyes frightened her. Ellen half-wondered if he were a vampire, but told herself that she was foolish, since she had watched him grow up. The next day he was even more restless and could hardly speak coherently, and stared fascinated at nothing with an "anguished, yet raptured expression." Early the next morning, having spent the night outside or pacing in his room, he declared he wanted to settle things with his lawyer. Ellen said he should eat, and get some sleep, but he replied that he could do neither: "My soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself." Ellen told him to repent for his sins and he thanked her for the reminder and asked her to make sure he was buried next to Catherine: "I have nearly attained my heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued, and uncoveted by me." He behaved more and more strangely, talking openly of his Catherine. Ellen called the doctor, but Heathcliff wouldn't see him. The next morning she found him dead in his room, by the open window, wet from the rain and cut by the broken windowpane, with his eyes fiercely open and wearing a savage smile. Hareton mourned deeply for him. The doctor wondered what could have killed him. He was buried as he had asked. People said that his ghost roamed the moors with Catherine: Ellen once came across a little boy crying amid his panicked lambs, and he said that Heathcliff was "yonder" with a woman and that he didn't dare pass them.

Catherine and Hareton were to be married, and they would move to the Grange, leaving Wuthering Heights to Joseph and the ghosts. Lockwood noticed on his walk home that the Kirk was falling apart from neglect, and he found the three headstones, Catherine's, Edgar's and Heathcliff's, covered by varying degrees of heather. He "wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for sleepers in that quiet earth."

**Analysis:**

An essential question for thinking about this novel is: does it end happily or not, and why? Is the novel on the side of the Grange and civilization, since Catherine and Hareton move there after Heathcliff dies? Or should we miss the intensity of the passion in Wuthering Heights? Who wins? It seems at first that the Grange wins, and yet it should be remembered that Heathcliff achieves his version of heaven as well. Several film versions of Wuthering Heights prefer to delete the whole second half of the novel, ending dramatically with Catherine's death, they find that the stabilizing second half detracts from the romance and the power of the first part. Is this the case? Did Emily add the second half because society would not have accepted the first half alone?

The answer to the last question must be negative: the symmetrical structure of the novel is too carefully designed and too deeply imbedded to be the product of outside social pressures. This might lead to the conclusion that civilization really does win, since the marriage of Catherine and Hareton is the final and necessary conclusion to two generations of unrest and all traces of Heathcliff disappear, at least in genetic terms. In another sense, however, Catherine and Hareton resemble the earlier Catherine and Heathcliff, purified of their wilder and more antisocial elements: so one might assume that their marriage is an echo of the marriage that never took place between Catherine and Heathcliff. This is supported by the fact that the story begins and ends with a Catherine Earnshaw, and that the name Hareton is very similar to Heathcliff.

In another reading, one might remember that the first Catherine and Heathcliff belonged above all to the natural and immaterial world, whereas the Lintons belonged to a material society. Then the reunion in death of the two lovers constitutes their achievement of complete freedom and it hardly matters what happens on earth.

One might also conclude that Emily Bronte was really more drawn to her wild characters Catherine and Heathcliff but realized that they posed a great threat to the existence of peaceful life on earth. Perhaps she eliminated them because she was unwilling to sacrifice the rest of the world for such a wild ideal but with Heathcliff's death, the novel ultimately had to end because it no longer captured her interest. In this case, the ambiguous conclusion of the novel represents an inner conflict in the author herself.

#### **WAYS OF READING THE NOVEL**

1. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* in a way reverses the classic fairytale "Beauty and the Beast" -- the father goes abroad promising presents to his children (Cathy requests a whip -- hardly Beauty's rose!) and returns with the beast, a shaggy-haired foundling boy who is first made part of, then expelled from the family. This novel is a good introduction to the genre. It has an interesting storytelling structure and a compelling narrative that is at once gritty realism and Gothic symbolism. The characters are all recognizably "real" yet some, particularly Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, are at the same time elemental types, forcing the representation of passion to its limits. *Wuthering Heights* weaves an intricate pattern of contrasts suggesting its thematic preoccupations with division and reconciliation: passion/reason, dark/light, discord/harmony, chaos/order, barbarity/civilization, ignorance/education; love/romantic love; individuality/society; nature/culture; instinct/reason; labour/leisure; health/fragility; selfishness/selflessness; hell/heaven
2. Ghosts, the opening of graves, visions and decaying, overgrown churchyards, peasants and gentry, horror, violence and obsession, the dramatic backdrop of Penistone crags, a dark stranger of mysterious origin, a powerful demon-like character: all these features are found in the novel. The same features can also be found in the Gothic novels of Mrs. Radcliffe and others, that were so popular in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, as well as in Mary Shelley's classic of the genre, *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, the year of Bronte's birth. Many of the elements of Bronte's novel are, indeed, Gothic. However, her treatment of these elements differs from that of her predecessors.

Here's an extract from *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, a gothic novel published in 1795. In this passage, Ambrosio has conjured up the devil:

*He beheld a figure more beautiful than fancy's pencil ever drew. It was a Youth seemingly scarce eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked. A bright Star sparkled upon his fore-head: two crimson wings extended themselves from his shoulders; and his silken locks were confined by a band of many-coloured fires, which played around his head, formed themselves into a variety of figures, and shone with a brilliance far surpassing that of precious Stones.*

(Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (OUP, World's Classics, 1980), pp. 276-7.)

This powerfully dramatic passage displays all the efforts of the writer to convince the reader that the supernatural figure did appear and it was no illusion. In fact, this is the endeavour of all the Gothic novelists. But, on looking back at Chapter 2 of *Wuthering Heights*, the passages in which Brontë writes of Catherine's and Heathcliff's hallucinations, she is careful to remain uncommitted in her attitude to their visions. In this novel, these 'gothic' features are ambiguously entwined with questions of psychology and obsession: they typically occur at moments of violent emotion, or when characters are in a heightened state of emotion, or during starvation or illness.

There is no debate or discussion of a moral nature in Brontë as is found in, for instance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Whereas Shelley explores the rights and duties of creation and the creator's obligations to his creature and society, Brontë never develops morality in connection with the marvelous. The visions are raw, and not subjected to rational analysis. They are, as it were, pure emotion made physical, in the mind of the character that perceives them.

Suggestions of the supernatural appear in *Wuthering Heights* in a most ambiguous and modern manner. Like the occasional, disturbing mention of ghosts in E.M.Forster's *A Passage to India*, the visions in the novel suggest an opposition to the accepted priorities of life. It is as if Catherine's and Heathcliff's passions are elemental and suppressed and can live only through the power of subjective perceptions. So, her supernaturalism is better described as something that exists beyond the range of what conventional society can understand or tolerate. It does not seem to be something that exists outside nature; these visions are actually closer to nature than the conventional minds that cannot comprehend them, such as Edgar Linton's and Lockwood's. This aspect of the novel harks forward to E.M.Forster, or maybe even Camus or Kafka, rather than back to the Gothic writers of Fifty years before.

3. In the novel the most prominent and lasting impression is made by the passionate emotions of Catherine and Heathcliff, the whole novel is dominated by their passions. Yet, their love cuts across all the conventional elements of the plot and in terms of the events of the plot, the love affair has no existence. Further, the second half of the novel follows the upbringing and courtship of Hareton and the younger Cathy. On the surface, the conventional courtship structure of uniting two feuding families; but, Heathcliff's unresolved passion remains the focus, the resolution of the novel focuses on his state of mind and his death, eighteen long years after Catherine's. Hence, it is safe to state that here is a level of life that does not cause or depend upon the plot and it is this level that evokes and sustains the readers' interest.

The effect is similar to that created by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man*, Forster in *A Passage to India* and Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Just as these works subvert the concept of life as a progress with a purpose and focus the readers' mind on perennial and fundamental questions of existence, *Wuthering Heights* highlights the unchanging parameters of existence rather than the many external events that occur during the lovers' lives.

4. Lockwood as the framing narrator is sufficiently ordinary and commonplace to engage the readers' confidence and identification, but aspects of his character put the reader on guard. He's an upper-class twit, pretentious and yet so anxious to please that he tries too hard, and misjudges frequently (seeing a pile of dead rabbits as kittens; guessing incorrectly the relationships at the Heights), perhaps implying a narrowness of experience or even a fear of it (there is the history of his failed relationship). Does he learn or grow in the course of the novel? Nelly as the framed narrator is a servant, so close in body but distanced in station from the events she relates, and while she is affectionate she is also judgmental, thus inviting one to participate in or reject her opinions; the ambiguities in Lockwood's character invite the same response. How might the story differ in emphasis and effect if told from the perspective of one of the principal characters: Heathcliff, Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, Hareton Earnshaw, or Edgar Linton?
5. The setting, two properties on England's Yorkshire Moors in the late 18th/early 19th century, is almost peculiar in its isolation, forcing consideration of their contrast. This contrast extends to landscape (the wild windy moors versus the orderly parks), the architecture of the dwellings, and the nature of the people in their households. The Earnshaws at *Wuthering Heights* are farmers and landholders but are not as sophisticated as the Lintons at *Thrushcross Grange*, who are professionals (lawyers, etc.). Both families have servants (Nelly Dean, Joseph, Zillah), and so are not the lower classes of the novel (note the representation of the laborers -- Heathcliff, then Hareton, is belittled by being treated as a laborer). The Lintons are socially superior to the Earnshaws. Are they superior in all ways? Do you think Bronte exaggerates the conditions of these families? Where would you rather live and why? What is the appeal of each place? What are its drawbacks? Why isn't the novel called *Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange*?
6. As a social novel treating class: the educated and cultured professional middle class, the rough yet propertied farming class and the workers (maids, farmhands, etc.). Elements of religious influence, ranging from Nelly's didactic yet humane Christianity to Joseph's hellfire evangelism, are present, as well as the suspicion accorded the "outsider" in an enclosed society.
7. As a psychological novel tracing the development of consciousness, the sense of self and others, through experience and dreams (hence the placement of Lockwood).
8. As a symbolic novel, in which the extraordinary/Romantic/Gothic forces of Nature oppose the day-to-day, tangible forces of Culture, yet connect through the cycles of life.

9. The love story of Heathcliff and Catherine is one of the few pairings in the novel that is not of opposites (unlike Catherine and Edgar, Heathcliff and Isabella, Cathy Linton and first Linton Heathcliff then Hareton Earnshaw). Heathcliff and Catherine are paired by age, by physical appearance, and by their wild and wilful behavior; they are brought up from mid-childhood to early adolescence as brother and sister. Is their age at Hindley's forced parting of them significant? Does their love remain the love of children? Is it at all sexual? Why are such apparently strong people so thwarted? Why can they find no allies? Why is Catherine apparently more susceptible to the Lintons than Heathcliff? Why does Hindley strive to keep Heathcliff and Catherine apart yet also thwart Catherine's relationship with Edgar Linton? How do you read Lockwood's bizarre dream of the ghostly child Catherine's return to Wuthering Heights in the light of what you learn about her relationship with Heathcliff? If Heathcliff is any sort of hero, he's Byronic: an isolated, wild figure, self-exiled and shut out from ordinary laws. This is a novel full of violent or at least nasty people: do you in any way admire Heathcliff and/or Catherine? Why or why not?

### **HEATHCLIFF'S OBSESSIONS**

Throughout *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff's personality could be defined as dark, menacing, and brooding. He is a dangerous character, with rapidly changing moods, capable of deep-seeded hatred, and incapable; it seems, of any kind of forgiveness or compromise. In the first 33 chapters, the text clearly establishes Heathcliff as an untamed, volatile, wild man and establishes his great love of Catherine and her behavior towards him as the source of his ill humor and resentment towards many other characters. However, there are certain tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities present in Chapter 34 that establish the true intensity of Heathcliff's feelings towards Catherine; feelings so intense that they border on a jealous obsession.

Chapter 34 begins with a tension in regard to Heathcliff's disposition. Since Heathcliff's countenance has seldom expressed anything but a sullen disposition, certainly nothing even remotely resembling joy, it comes as somewhat of a surprise when in the last chapter, young Cathy, upon seeing Heathcliff, reports that he looks, "almost bright and cheerful -- No, almost nothing -- very much excited, and wild and glad!" This is entirely unlike the Heathcliff of earlier chapters.

Even Nelly, who is well-accustomed to Heathcliff's personality and dark moods is taken aback by the sudden change, so uncharacteristic of his usual temper -- "...anxious to ascertain the truth of her statement, for to see the master looking glad would not be an everyday spectacle, I framed an excuse to go in." Since Catherine has previously almost always been the cause of such wild mood fluctuations, it stands to reason that she has somehow inspired this wild and frightening joy in him as well.

During the final days of his life, Heathcliff's curious behavior continues. He refuses to eat, absents himself from the company of Cathy, Hareton, or Nelly, disappears inexplicably for long intervals of time and refuses to explain his absences. Most disturbing, his strange excitement continues, causing discomfort to all those around him, especially Nelly. When Nelly asks him where he was the night before, he began to exhibit this odd elation, he tells her, "Last night, I was on the threshold of hell. To-day I am within sight of my heaven -- I have my eyes on it -- hardly three feet to sever

me!" His statement is ambiguous--it does little to explain his sudden change of humor and little to satisfy Nelly's curiosity and wonder at his state. Joy in most characters in *Wuthering Heights* is an uplifting state associated with happiness and delighted exhilaration. However in Heathcliff, as Nelly observes, it is a horrible, frightening thing. In Heathcliff, the mood arouses wariness and fear in others and indicates some inner change so dramatic that its cause is almost unthinkable.

Heathcliff offers no coherent explanation for his sudden change of state and the text does not offer concrete solution as to what could have caused his dark exhilaration. Thus, the question of his condition is left largely unanswered as Heathcliff continues to exhibit such uncharacteristic behavior, inspiring all the more uneasiness in Nelly, especially. He frightens her greatly several times with his agitated state. Once, upon encountering him in his room, Nelly tells Mr. Lockwood, "I cannot express what a terrible start I got, by the momentary view! Those deep black eyes! That smile, and ghastly paleness! It appeared to me, not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin; and, in my terror, I let the candle bend towards the wall, and it left me in darkness".

Even Nelly, who has never before, even after many, many years of acquaintance to Heathcliff, shown any intimidation or fear of him despite his blatant displays of brutality, is shaken and haunted by his strange appearance and his agitated condition. So shocking is his countenance that she even asks herself if he is a ghoul or a vampire. Since he is not willing to divulge entirely what it is that is causing him such excitement, Nelly and all of Bronte's readers are left to ponder what could effect such a change.

Of course, the only thing previously that has caused Heathcliff to fluctuate so wildly in his moods and to hover between such dramatically varying temperaments is Catherine. Nelly, having been witness to Heathcliff's fits of passion and rages in regard to Catherine before, is shrewd enough to credit his appearance and strange condition to her former mistress, even though she has been dead for many years. Heathcliff has previously professed the misery Catherine's death has caused him and stated his desire to be close to her -- his anticipation to meet her when he dies.

When Nelly attempts to serve Heathcliff food in the last chapter she finds Heathcliff watching some invisible apparition with rapt attention. Though Nelly admonishes him for his refusal to eat and his poor condition, he never moves his eyes from whatever it is he sees -- one may assume it is the vision of Catherine, since his expression is a conflicting one of "both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes..." Little else could arouse such extreme emotion in Heathcliff, and nothing else, it seems, could make them apparent on his face. Apparently Heathcliff, seeing himself near death and despite their present separation, feels himself as near to Catherine as he can possibly be, given the fact that he is still alive. And given this relative proximity, his mood has been heightened to a delirious agitation at the prospect of seeing her again.

With this anticipation, the text introduces another contradiction. Heathcliff assumes that he will be united again with Catherine in eternal bliss when he dies. Given this belief, Heathcliff apparently believes that Catherine is in heaven. He has admitted to Nelly numerous times that he is an evil man, merciless, and bent on revenge towards his enemies, even if it means hurting those who have never wronged him--young Edgar Linton and young Cathy, in particular. Heathcliff realizes that he is filled with hate and vengeance and makes no excuse for his behavior. Yet, since he imagines



himself being reunited with Catherine after his death, he apparently feels that he will go to heaven when he dies. This is a curious contradiction coming from a man who recognizes his evil and makes no attempt to reform himself. Maybe Heathcliff holds no beliefs concerning heaven or hell, but in the last chapter, he tells Nelly how close his soul is to bliss, which seems to indicate that he does believe in something following death.

When Heathcliff does finally die, the cause of his death is never really ascertained. His countenance in death is almost a smile, at the same time a sneer, according to Nelly--a look of life-like exultation. His countenance doesn't suggest which end he met--the sneer he wears in death is close to his normal expression in life. It must be assumed that his obsession with Catherine, his desperate yearning to be with her, and his longing for death was what ultimately killed him.

That such a longing could actually kill Heathcliff suggests that perhaps what he was experiencing was more than love. It seems unlikely that love would inspire in Heathcliff such rage and anger as consumed his life for the many years following Catherine's death. That love alone could cause his physical decline and death seems unlikely as well. Heathcliff's condition indicates that what he felt towards Catherine was more than love--it was more like a violent obsession, fueled by a mad jealousy and hatred of anyone who dared to stand between him and her.

The text in the last chapter introduces several contradictions and tensions, but also resolves them, in a subtle way. Heathcliff's strange behavior and mysterious death, according to the text, seem ultimately to be the result of his mad obsession with Catherine and his inability to function rationally without her. The text implicates Heathcliff as nearly a madman--seeing apparitions, rambling almost incoherently about his approaching death, shunning food or anything else that might keep him alive. Heathcliff went beyond what was reasonable and rational in his love for Catherine--his behavior, as illustrated in the last chapter was erratic and his death disturbing--all indications that Heathcliff was wildly obsessed with Catherine, a premise which does much to resolve many of the complexities in Chapter 34. Bronte does an excellent job of introducing complexities and tensions within the text and then resolving them subtly and exquisitely through Nelly's narration and observations and through Heathcliff's wild moods and unpredictable actions.

### **TOP TEN QUOTES FROM THE NOVEL**

1) I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am (86). Catherine admits to Ellen that she loves Heathcliff but cannot think of marrying him because Hindley has degraded him. Heathcliff hears this speech, and he leaves Wuthering Heights, not to return for three years.

2) Nelly, I see now, you think me a selfish wretch; but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married we should be beggars? whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power? (87). Catherine tells Ellen what she believes will happen with her marriage and her relationship to Heathcliff. She really believes that her marriage to Linton will end up helping

Heathcliff, which of course it does not.

3) My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods; time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath--a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind--not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being (88). The extent of the love between Catherine and Heathcliff is shown here. Heathcliff says similar things throughout the novel.

4) I'd as soon put that little canary into the park on a winter's day, as recommend you to bestow your heart on him!...He's not a rough diamond--a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man (109). Although she loves Heathcliff, Catherine realizes the man he has become and strongly advises Isabella against getting involved with him. Isabella thinks Catherine is only jealous, and does not heed her advice.

5) You teach me how cruel you've been - cruel and false. Why do you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry, and wring out my kisses and tears; they'll blight you - they'll damn you. You loved me--then what right had you to leave me? What right--answer me--for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart--you have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine (170). As Catherine is ill and dying she blames Heathcliff for her suffering, but he tells her that it was she that left him and that all blame for their sorrow is hers.

6) ...Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! You said I killed you--haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers. I believe--I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always--take any form--drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul! (176). Heathcliff passionately pleads for Catherine not to leave him after she has died.

7) I recovered from my first desire to be killed by him—I'd rather he'd kill himself! He has extinguished my love effectually, and so I'm at my ease (182). Isabella has finally escaped from Heathcliff and from her love for him. She says this to Ellen as she is about to leave for another part of England.

8) The task was done, not free from further blunders, but the pupil claimed a reward, and received at least five kisses which, however, he generously returned. Then, they came to the door, and from their conversation, I judged they were about to issue out and have a walk on the moors (321). In the end of the novel Catherine has given up on being an enemy of Hareton, and instead teaches him to read. The two are friends and are engaged to be married.

9) My old enemies have not beaten me; now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives—I could do it, and none could hinder me. But where is the use? I don't care for striking, I can't take the trouble to raise my hand. (336) Heathcliff has given up on revenge, as no longer has the will for it. It is only

because of this that he is able to see Catherine again.

10) But the country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their Bible that he walks. There are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house. Idle tales, you'll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on 'em looking out of his chamber window, on every rainy night since his death... (349). Ellen tells Lockwood about the how the country people and Joseph have seen the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine walking on the moors.

**Catherine (or Cathy) Earnshaw:** is Mr. Earnshaw's daughter and Hindley's sister. She is also Heathcliff's foster sister and beloved. She marries Edgar Linton and has a daughter, also named Catherine. Catherine is beautiful and charming, but she is never as civilized as she pretends to be. In her heart she is always a wild girl playing on the moors with Heathcliff. She regards it as her right to be loved by all, and has an unruly temper. Heathcliff usually calls her Cathy; Edgar usually calls her Catherine.

**Catherine (or Cathy) Linton:** (who marries Linton Heathcliff to become Catherine Heathcliff, and then marries Hareton to be Catherine Earnshaw) is the daughter of the older Catherine and Edgar Linton. She has all her mother's charm without her wildness, although she is by no means submissive and spiritless. Edgar calls her Cathy.

**Mr. Earnshaw:** is the father of Catherine and Hindley, a plain, fairly well-off farmer with few pretensions but a kind heart. He is a stern sort of father. He takes in Heathcliff despite his family's protests.

**Edgar Linton:** is Isabella's older brother, who marries Catherine Earnshaw and fathers Catherine Linton. In contrast to Heathcliff, he is a gently bred, refined man, a patient husband and a loving father. His faults are a certain effeminacy, and a tendency to be cold and unforgiving when his dignity is hurt.

**Ellen (or Nelly) Dean:** is one of the main narrators. She has been a servant with the Earnshaws and the Lintons for all her life, and knows them better than anyone else. She is independently minded and high spirited, and retains an objective viewpoint on those she serves. She is called Nelly by those who are on the most egalitarian terms with her: Mr. Earnshaw, the older Catherine, Heathcliff.

**Frances Earnshaw:** is Hindley's wife, a young woman of unknown background. She seems rather flighty and giddy to Ellen, and displays an irrational fear of death, which is explained when she dies of tuberculosis.

**Hareton Earnshaw:** is the son of Hindley and Frances; he marries the younger Catherine. For most of the novel, he is rough and rustic and uncultured, having been carefully kept from all civilizing influences by Heathcliff. He grows up to be superficially like Heathcliff, but is really much more sweet-tempered and forgiving. He never blames Heathcliff for having disinherited him, for example, and remains his oppressor's staunchest ally.

**Hindley Earnshaw:** is the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw, and Catherine's older brother. He is a bullying, discontented boy who grows up to be a violent alcoholic when his beloved wife, Frances, dies. He hates Heathcliff because he felt supplanted

in his father's affections by the other boy, and Heathcliff hates him even more in return.

**Heathcliff:** is a foundling taken in by Mr. Earnshaw and raised with his children. Of unknown descent, he seems to represent wild and natural forces which often seem amoral and dangerous for society. His almost inhuman devotion to Catherine is the moving force in his life, seconded by his vindictive hatred for all those who stand between him and his beloved. He is cruel but magnificent in his consistency, and the reader can never forget that at the heart of the grown man lies the abandoned, hungry child of the streets of Liverpool.

**Isabella Linton:** is Edgar's younger sister, and marries Heathcliff to become Isabella Heathcliff; her son is named Linton Heathcliff. Before she marries Heathcliff, she is a rather shallow-minded young lady, pretty and quick-witted but a little foolish (as can be seen by her choice of husbands). Her unhappy marriage brings out an element of cruelty in her character: when her husband treats her brutally, she rapidly grows to hate him with all her heart.

**Joseph:** is an old fanatic, a household servant at Wuthering Heights who outlives all his masters. His brand of religion is unforgiving for others and self-serving for himself. His heavy Yorkshire accent gives flavor to the novel.

**Dr. Kenneth:** is a minor character, the local doctor who appears when people are sick or dying. He is a sympathetic and intelligent man, whose main concern is the health of his patients.

**Mr. and Mrs. Linton:** are Edgar and Isabella's parents, minor characters. They spoil their children and turn the older Catherine into a little lady, being above all concerned about good manners and behavior. They are unsympathetic to Heathcliff when he is a child.

**Linton Heathcliff:** is the son of Heathcliff and Isabella. He combines the worst characteristics of both parents, and is effeminate, weakly, and cruel. He uses his status as an invalid to manipulate the tender-hearted younger Catherine. His father despises him. Linton marries Catherine and dies soon after.

**Lockwood:** is the narrator of the novel. He is a gentleman from London, in distinct contrast to the other rural characters. He is not particularly sympathetic and tends to patronize his subjects.

**Zillah:** is the housekeeper at Wuthering Heights after Hindley's death and before Heathcliff's. She doesn't particularly understand the people she lives with, and stands in marked contrast to Ellen, who is deeply invested in them. She is an impatient but capable woman.

## **IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM**

**Wind** - The home of the Earnshaws and then Heathcliff is called 'Wuthering Heights,' and in the first chapter Mr. Lockwood says that 'wuthering' is a significant adjective, as it is "descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed; one

may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun” (6). Indeed,, the wind is an important symbol for change in the novel. It is present during many of the significant events in the lives of the characters. When Mr. Earnshaw dies there is a 'high wind,' and the weather is described as 'wild and stormy.' On the night that Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights there is a great storm with wind and rain. And on the morning that Ellen finds Heathcliff dead, the rain and wind are coming in through his window and beating his lattice back and forth.

**Windows and Doors** - Throughout the novel there are instances of locked or open windows and doors symbolizing imprisonment or freedom. In the very beginning, Lockwood encounters locked doors and gates at Wuthering Heights, and he sees the ghost of Catherine trying to get in a window. Ellen leaves a window open for Heathcliff to come in and see Catherine in her coffin. Most of the examples come later in the novel when Heathcliff has Isabella and then Catherine locked up in Wuthering Heights. Catherine cannot leave the house or her room because of locked doors and Ellen cannot leave either because she has been locked in. It is only when Zillah lets her out of the room that she is able to leave. Catherine is only able to leave the house when Linton unlocks the door for her, and she escapes through the window in her mother's old room. By the end of the novel when everyone is free of revenge, Lockwood goes to Wuthering Heights to find the gate unlocked and the doors open.

**The hair in the locket** - A symbol that shows up only once in the novel stands for the intertwined lives and destinies of Edgar and Heathcliff because they both love Catherine. When Heathcliff comes in to view Catherine in her coffin, he takes the lock of Edgar's hair out of her locket and throws it to the ground, replacing it with his own. Ellen takes both locks, winds the yellow and black locks together, and puts them both in the locket.

## **THEMES**

**Race/Class/Education** - throughout the novel their race, class or education prejudices characters. When Heathcliff is first introduced he is described as a dark skinned boy with dark hair, and because of this people are prejudiced against him. He is called a 'gypsy' numerous times, and the Lintons treat him badly and send him away from their house because of his appearance. Heathcliff also quickly dislikes his son because of his light skin and hair.

Class is also an issue. There was a class hierarchy in Bronte's England, and this can be seen in the novel as well. The residents of Wuthering Heights seem to be of a lower class than the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange. Even though she loves him, Catherine will not marry Heathcliff after he has been degraded and instead marries into the rich Linton family, causing all the major conflict in the novel. The Lintons are of a higher class both because they have more money and don't seem to have to work, and because they are better educated.

Catherine tries to better her station both by marrying Edgar Linton and by her constant reading. She laughs at Hareton because of his lack of education. Heathcliff

admits that Hareton is smarter than Linton, yet because of how they are raised and what they will inherit, Linton will be the more upgraded while Hareton will remain a servant. It is only when Catherine and Hareton become friends and she begins to educate him that Hareton turns into a gentleman and loses his crude behavior.

**Revenge** - Revenge is a major theme of the novel. Early in the novel Heathcliff is described as plotting revenge and Heathcliff's revenge against Hindley and his descendants for his mistreatment of him and against Edgar and his descendants for Catherine's death dominate the second half of the novel. Heathcliff's revenge affects everyone in the novel, and he seems to think that if he can revenge Catherine's death, he can be with her. He has been looking for her since her death, as he has been sensing her near him. However, it is only at the end of the novel, when he has given up his plans for revenge, that he is able to see Catherine and that he is reunited with her.

**Supernatural** - Supernatural events happen in the very beginning of the novel and continue until the very end. In chapter three, Lockwood is grabbed and pleaded to by Catherine's ghost through a window, and in the last chapter Ellen talks about people seeing the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine walking on the moors. In between Heathcliff tells Ellen about hearing Catherine sighing in the graveyard and sensing her nearby and when he gives up his plans of revenge he even seems to see her ghost. Ellen also once sees Heathcliff as a goblin, and wonders if he is a vampire or a ghoul, although she realizes she is being silly. These themes and instances are tied to a spirituality and life-after-death theme in the novel. Edgar and Heathcliff both want to be with Catherine after she has died. Edgar does not want her to haunt him, but he does look forward to a time when they can be together again. Heathcliff does want Catherine to haunt him, and she indeed seems to and he also looks forward to spending eternity with her after death. ( See the section on W.H. as a gothic novel)

### ***Wuthering Heights as a dramatic work***

Several features of Bronte's technique are reminiscent of the techniques used by dramatists. The most prominent are listed below:

1. **Set Scenes.** The story of the novel revolves around a series of scenes that take place in static settings. Some scenes are viewed in the way an audience might view a play. For example, Heathcliff and Cathy view the quarrel about the dog between the Linton children, through a lighted window of Thrushcross Grange. Ellen and Cathy view Heathcliff embracing Isabella through another window. More significant, several crucial scenes take place within a single setting, where the characters enter or leave while the narrative, like the audience's attention at a play, remains continuously in the same place.
2. **Self-revealing speeches.** These are a frequent device, similar to monologues or soliloquies on stage. For instance, Cathy gives a deeply personal account of her delirious dreams on page 123 and 124, beginning 'Well, it seems a weary number of hours'. She is speaking to Ellen, but clearly, the feelings she communicates are beyond Mrs. Dean's understanding. This is emphasized by Cathy towards the end of the speech, when she says, 'Shake your head, as you will, Nelly', knowing that her listener cannot 'fancy a glimpse of the abyss where (she) groveled.' The effect of this

speech, then, is like that of a soliloquy on stage – it is as if Cathy is speaking her innermost feelings aloud. There are many other examples of the same effect, including Heathcliff's description of his state of mind that begins on page 319. Here, the effect of soliloquy is even more openly defined. In the middle of his speech, Heathcliff observes: 'But you'll not talk of what I tell you, and my mind is so eternally secluded in itself, it is tempting, at last, to turn it out to another'. Heathcliff has no purpose in talking of these things to Mrs. Dean, then, except to relieve his innermost feelings. Again, the feeling is that the character is simply relieving his innermost emotions for his own purpose, as if talking to himself, the supposed audience is irrelevant; the readers share the soliloquy.

3. Direct speech narrative of 'offstage' events. Narrators are regularly brought in to the set scene; in order to narrate events that have taken place elsewhere, enhancing the effect of theatrical drama. Many of the scenes described are static, interior settings that are just like the constant location of a scene in a play. Plays often suggest that the limited stage is only a visible focus for events that extend through an apparent wider world, around and outside that limited stage. Notable among these is the younger Cathy's narrative of her visits to Wuthering Heights (pp.244-51).
4. Bronte observes somewhat Aristotle's 'unity of place' by preserving the sense that the two poles of the novel's world are the two houses and their two related attitudes to life. The characters that travel away simply disappear for the time of their absence and the narrative makes no attempt to follow them or relate anything about their life. A vast amount of speculation has gone into Heathcliff's three years away, but all that the text reveals is that he was not there, on the 'limited' stage of the novel. It is as if, for the author, his life while he was away was not relevant – it is not part of the single complete action of his passion for Cathy and its products, his revenge and death. In these areas, the novel can be likened to a play, as its narrative devices create the sense of a limited area within which all vital actions can occur, as on a stage. Messengers and characters run off and on the stage, bringing news and stories from other places and characters often speak straight to the reader, without the intervention of the writer.

### **WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND SUICIDE**

*Wuthering Heights*, set in 1771-1803 but published in 1847, alludes both to pre-1823 burial customs and to those of 1823. Bronte seems to have felt free to use both the laws in effect during the time of her story and those governing early Victorian times. In narrating the details surrounding Hindley Earnshaw's death (1784), for example, she draws upon the earlier statutes. Although the exact cause of Hindley's death is never determined, all who saw him at the end claim that he died in a state of drunkenness. Mr. Kenneth, who tells Nelly about the death, says that he "died true to his character, drunk as a lord" (p. 153). When Nelly asks if she may proceed with suitable arrangements for Hindley's funeral, Heathcliff retorts that "correctly . . . that fool's body should be buried at the cross-roads, without ceremony of any kind. I happened to leave him ten minutes, yesterday afternoon; and, in that

interval, he fastened the two doors of the house against me, and he has spent the night in drinking himself to death deliberately!" (p. 153)

The precise circumstances of Hindley's death, which are reported in considerable detail, have important implications for the course of Brontë's novel. For if Hindley did die drunk and debauched, as both Kenneth and Heathcliff indicate he did, in the eighteenth century he would automatically have been considered a suicide, exactly as Heathcliff suggests. Even more important, in that case his property could legally have been forfeited to the Crown, with nothing left for Hareton, hence nothing left for Heathcliff to employ as a tool in his revenge. It is probably for this reason that Heathcliff allows Nelly to perform proper burial rights for Hindley, thus relinquishing a more immediate revenge upon Hindley's dead body while gaining a long-term hold on the entire Earnshaw family.

Earlier, just before coming to the Heights, Nelly had consulted Linton's lawyer about Hindley's death and had requested that the lawyer come to the Heights with her. His refusal is telling, for he advises that "Heathcliff be let alone, affirming that if the truth were known, Hareton would be found little else than a beggar"(p 153). The "truth" here may be that Heathcliff is Hareton's only hope because he is Hindley's creditor; or that the lawyer, probably Mr. Green, is already under Heathcliff's influence. But it may also be that Hindley's death as a suicide is better left ignored, primarily because of the possibility of forfeiture.

Catherine Earnshaw's death precedes her brother's by only half a year, and it too can be considered suicidal. There is little doubt that Catherine knows how to induce her own ill health, even though she does not intend suicide when she first embarks upon her fast in Chapter 2. At this point, totally breaking her own body and heart is, for Catherine, still "a deed to be reserved for a forlorn hope" (p 101). What happens, however, is that Catherine's body only partially cooperates with her will and Nelly's assumption that Catherine is in total control of her situation is a tragic miscalculation. After only three days' fasting, Catherine is already past saving. When she realizes that neither Linton nor Heathcliff has become genuinely alarmed and then chooses not to die, she cannot reverse her headlong journey toward destruction.

The important scene before her mirror (p 106) already spells this doom for Catherine. She is shocked when she sees her own reflection because she seems to understand what Yorkshire folklore dictates: that sick people should never look at themselves in a mirror. If they do, their souls may take flight from their weak bodies by being projected into the mirror and this can cause their death. In accordance with this belief, immediately after she sees her reflection in the mirror, Catherine is convinced that she really will die. This realization replaces Catherine's fear of ghosts, anxiously expressed just before: "I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted!" (p106). The realization and the fear are even more closely related, for Catherine actually seems to consider herself to be the ghost once she recognizes that the face in the mirror is her own. " 'Myself,' she gasped, 'and the clock is striking twelve! It's true then; that's dreadful!' " (p 106). Catherine's utter horror here stems from her superstitious belief that suicides become restless ghosts. She now assumes herself to be a suicide and it is this aspect of Catherine's unnerving realization before the mirror that incites her subsequent raving about the ghosts at Gimmerton Kirk yard.



After this scene, there is only one more meeting between Catherine and Heathcliff before her actual death. On that occasion their dialogue is filled with allusions to Catherine's suicide and her would-be haunting of Heathcliff. Catherine now feels that she will never be at peace; while Heathcliff repeatedly expresses regret over what he feels is Catherine's self-murder and his relationship to it. In desperation, Heathcliff can forgive Catherine her murder of him but not her own willed death, which she in turn blames on him. All this seemingly metaphorical talk of murder reflects suicide law. Any accomplice of a suicide was legally considered his/her murderer, so that, ironically, the protagonists' accusations of one another could, were they true, carry the weight of law, as well as of guilt.

Catherine is not, however, buried as a suicide. Nelly wonders "after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last" (pp 137-38), but after looking at her in death, decides that she probably does. Instead, Catherine is interred in the corner of the Kirk yard under the wall, "to the surprise of the villagers" (p 140). Because the local people did not know of the means of Catherine's death, they might have expected that she would lie either in the chapel with the Lintons or by the tombs of the Earnshaws. Their wonderment is understandable when one recalls another folk belief about suicides. Particularly after the 1823 law, when suicides could legally be buried in churchyards, it became customary in parts of northern Britain for their bodies to be laid below the churchyard wall, so that no one would be likely to walk over their graves. The place of Catherine's burial would thus have had particular significance for the folk of Gimmerton, who would no doubt have inferred the nature of her death from the location of her grave.

Unquestionably, the place of Catherine's burial determines Heathcliff's own choice of a burial site and consequently his own need not to become discovered as a suicide. Because of his reputation and his doubtful place in the Gimmerton community, it is far less likely that Heathcliff would be extended the kind of pity that had allowed for the churchyard burials of Hindley and Catherine. He knows this and knows too of the possibility of entombment in the public highway and is therefore scrupulous about not appearing suicidal. This accounts for the long delay before his death.

Unfortunately for Heathcliff's union with Catherine, Linton dies before Heathcliff does and is the one to be buried in the grave next to hers. Lawyer Green, now the tool of Heathcliff, does suggest that Linton be buried appropriately in the chapel. Linton's death is of natural causes and his family all lay there. But Green, though under Heathcliff's influence, must abide by the stipulations of Linton's will, which states Linton's desire to be buried with Catherine. Nelly, for one, issues "loud protestations against any infringement of its directions". (p 226).

Less than a year elapses between Linton's death and Heathcliff's, the year in which Heathcliff and *Wuthering Heights* are so intensely haunted by Catherine that even the prosaic Lockwood is influenced to dream of her. Toward the end of this time, Nelly observes how isolated and peculiar Heathcliff has become and warns him against taking his own life. As she notes, he undergoes his most dramatic set of changes from the time of his curious hunting accident, when "his gun burst" while he was "out on the hills by himself" (p 246). Finding himself still alive after the accident, Heathcliff forces himself to reach home, despite heavy loss of blood. Detained by this accident, he is brought into closer contact with Cathy and Hareton. Now, however, as his

tormenting of them only serve to remind him of Catherine, he becomes affected by the strange tedium vitae that was considered the cause of so many nineteenth-century suicides. "I cannot continue in this condition," he tells Nelly. "I have to remind myself to breathe -- almost to remind my heart to beat!" (p 256). He also forgets to eat but makes the attempt when Nelly urges him and then takes great care to tell her that "It is not my fault, that I cannot eat or rest. I assure you it is through no settled designs" (p262).

As he begins to fail, the one thing uppermost in Heathcliff's mind is his burial. To Nelly he gives detailed instructions for its procedures: "...you remind me of the manner that I desire to be buried in. It is to be carried to the churchyard, in the evening. No minister need come; nor need anything be said over me" (p 263). Each of Heathcliff's requests is in accord with the 1823 statute governing the burial of suicides: the hour, the place, and the lack of a Christian burial service. Nelly seems to realize their significance. In a moment of insight she brings up the fear that has haunted Heathcliff ever since the day of Catherine's death: "And supposing you persevered in your obstinate fast, and died by that means, and they refused to bury you in the precinct of the Kirk?" (p 263)

Heathcliff's only means of recourse now is to charge Nelly with the business of moving his body, so that he can be with Catherine and directly to threaten Nelly with haunting should she fail to comply. The threat seems sufficient to frighten the superstitious servant and the next evening when Heathcliff does die, Nelly conceals her suspicions about his death from Kenneth: "Kenneth was perplexed to pronounce of what disorder the master died, I concealed the fact of his having swallowed nothing for four days, fearing it might lead to trouble, and then, I am persuaded he did not abstain on purpose; it was the consequence of his strange illness, not the cause" (p264). Her actions now free Nelly to carry out Heathcliff's instructions to the letter and "to the scandal of the whole neighbourhood" (p 265) Shocked by Heathcliff's burial side by side with the married Lintons, the people also appear to know the meaning of Heathcliff's burial without Christian rites. It is not long afterward that under the Nab the local shepherd boy sees the ghosts of what he must now consider as two suicides, Heathcliff and Catherine. In the end, Lockwood's final words in *Wuthering Heights* take on added irony in the light of the folklore of suicide. Referring to the gravesites of Catherine, Linton, and Heathcliff, Lockwood wonders "how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (p 266). But anyone knowing the customs surrounding suicide in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain -- as Emily Bronte did -- could, on the contrary, hardly imagine quiet slumbers for them. The Victorian reader aware of suicide law and lore might have judged its first generation of characters quite differently from the way they are regarded now. The legal and moral implications of suicide and the folklore they generated took deep hold in Victorian Britain. As late as 1886, suicides and crossroads continued to sell stories. *Tinsley's Magazine* of that year published an awkward one by Philippa Prittie Jephson, called "The Cross Roads." In this story, mares shy and mysterious lights appear and vanish in an Irish glen when two men approach a crossroads. From a local cottager they later hear that a suicide walks in that haunted spot.

## **WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND ITS CLOSED FAMILIES**

The moment Lockwood asks Nellie to relate the story of the two families; the novel becomes the history of family systems and all the characters in the systems, male and female, living and dead. Focusing on the family as a unit at Wuthering Heights gives one of the best illustrations of a closed system. They are not merely extremely isolated from others, they are actively hostile: instead of welcoming the protoreader, Lockwood, they refuse to come to his aid as dogs attack him inside the house. Even the reader is excluded from some of the activity at the Heights, for at times it is presented in a dialect almost unintelligible to all but those raised in the neighborhood. Even members of the family at times find Joseph's "speech difficult to understand" when he got excited and "his jaws worked like those of a cow chewing its cud."

When Lockwood does manage to get past some of the rigid boundaries, Hareton Earnshaw is instantly angry with him and "Mrs. Heathcliff" at first won't even speak to him. Many readers no doubt identify with Lockwood's sarcastic understatement, "I began to feel unmistakably out of place in that pleasant family circle." When Lockwood tries to escape from the system, a dog prevents him. Two dogs attack and pin him to the ground and a servant asks, "Are we going to murder folk on our very door-stones?" The family motto, "Every man's hand was against his neighbor," appears to Lockwood in a dream and he adopts it as his own. When Cathy, recently dead, comes to him as a child in the dream, crying "Let me in .... I'm come home," Lockwood, already imitating the others, slashes her wrists on the broken window and replies, as the blood stains his bed, "I'll never let you in."

Lockwood proclaims to the family, "I'm not going to endure the persecutions of your hospitable ancestors," but as soon as one enters a family system of any age one is in the presence of ancestors. "Before passing the threshold" for the first time" Lockwood looked up and "detected the date `1500' and the name `Hareton Earnshaw'." He then confronted the latest incarnation of that name who, when he was learning to read, began by reading his own name carved on the door. This is an example of transgenerational repetition in the same house for centuries. At Wuthering Heights names are simply repeated, as if there were little difference between the generations, as if they kept adopting the same roles and following the same script century after century. When is added to name repetition the habit of cousins marrying cousins in a complicated genealogy, one can see why readers of the novel are as confused as Lockwood was when he first entered the family. Readers get to feel exclusion from a closed system as they wonder which Catherine, for example, is being discussed. Because of "the thousand forms of past associations, and ideas" a family member "awakens, or embodies," even the inmates become bewildered: Heathcliff, for example, at times believed that Catherine II was Catherine I and often "Hareton seemed a personification of my youth, not a human being; I felt to him in such a variety of ways, that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally."

Thus, as Lockwood put it, "Time stagnates here," not only in choice of names but also in repetition of abuse and addiction. After Hindley's funeral Heathcliff went to Hareton, "lifted the unfortunate child on to the table and muttered, with peculiar gusto -- 'Now, my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it.'" Heathcliff says later, "I can sympathize with all his feelings, having felt them myself. I know what he suffers now, for instance, exactly -- it is a mere beginning of what he shall suffer, though. And he'll

never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance. I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father served me, and lower.... And the best of it is, Hareton is damnably fond of me! You'll own I've outmatched Hindley there." As family histories document so often, the habit of abuse binds the victim to the abuser: Hareton "took the master's reputation home to himself, and was attached by ties stronger than reason could break -- chains, forged by habit." One of those habits was patrolling the boundaries of the closed system like a guard dog: Hareton stones even his old nurse Nelly when she tries to return to the Heights. The law of repetition compulsion in this kind of a patriarchal family system is, in Heathcliff's words, that "The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them." When Heathcliff elopes with Isabella he hangs her dog to prevent its barking; when Isabella finally escapes from him she passed by "Hareton, who was hanging a litter of puppies." Heathcliff's next student of sadism, Linton, learns the same lesson: "He'll undertake to torture any number of cats." Sadism infects all who enter that system, whether or not they come under Heathcliff's direct tutelage. The second Catherine, for example, comes from a different family system but soon "seemed to have made up her mind to enter into the spirit of her future family, and draw pleasure from the griefs of her enemies."

Hindley emerges as an important father figure. He has a process addiction – gambling, and eventually mortgages all of his land, but his drug of choice is alcohol. In the habit of coming "home rabid drunk," he is often in a murderous rage. Nelly tries to control his drinking, but Heathcliff exclaims "It is a pity [Hindley] cannot kill himself with drink ... He' s doing his very utmost but his constitution defies him." Hindley is a true alcoholic, unable to stop even when he wants to. For example, "he kept himself sober" in order to attend his sister's funeral but he "rose in suicidal low spirits, as fit for the church as for a dance; and instead, he sat down by the fire and swallowed gin or brandy by the tumblerful." Like many alcoholics, he was apparently trying to medicate depression with alcohol. Alcohol is his way out of a depressing family system. When he dies at the age of 27 the reader learns that "he has spent the night in drinking himself to death deliberately."

This novel demonstrates that in such family systems, women are not the only victims of split loyalties, triangulation, invalidism and anorexia. The story proper begins with one of the patriarchs named Earnshaw bringing Heathcliff into the system. He named him after a child, who died in childhood, but like Jane Eyre he is an outsider and the tension is intense. Absorbing that tension, Mr. Earnshaw soon succumbs to invalidism and death. Nelly says, "It hurt me to think the master should be made uncomfortable by his own good deed. I fancied the discontent of age and disease arose from his family disagreements, as he would have it that it did." Nor are women the only ones who manipulate illness to control others: Linton Heathcliff does so even more consistently than Catherine does and, like her, ends up a victim of the family dynamics he tries to control.

Catherine's personality is addictive before she succumbs to anorexia. Catherine tries to enlist Nelly in her means of control, asking her to communicate to others the peril of provoking her, reminding them "of my passionate temper, verging, when kindled, on frenzy." When Nelly calls her bluff Catherine turns to anorexia. Nor is rage and fasting the only ways we see her control others: "I have such faith in Linton's love, that I believe I might kill him, and he wouldn't wish to retaliate."

Of course, the most obvious process addiction in the novel is the "love" of Heathcliff and Catherine, one of the most famous examples in literature of pure enmeshment, a total loss of boundaries that seems to triumph over death, sustaining the myth that romantic love is a viable form of spirituality. Catherine is not the only character to choose anorexia as a means of self-destruction. Early in their relationship, like an aspiring saint in the courtly school of love, "fasting and reflection seemed to have brought" Heathcliff to the point where he could ask Catherine to "make me decent." After he loses Catherine to anorexia, Heathcliff finds himself also unable to eat until finally, after swallowing nothing for four days, he manages to die. Despite, or perhaps because of, this conclusion to their relationship, this half of the novel remains popular, often the only half made into movies.

The longing for a healthier family is better satisfied by the second generation. Closed family systems change usually only in response to their almost complete disintegration and/or intervention from the outside. In this case, the influence of Catherine Earnshaw's husband, Edgar Linton, seems to be the key. His daughter, Catherine Linton, seems much "healthier" than her mother and thus some readers may perceive that transgenerational repetition is not inevitable. After a considerable struggle she manages to transplant some flowers from Thrushcross Grange to Wuthering Heights. They become the symbol of the change. She makes amends to Hareton for her sadistic behavior and helps him to read. Hareton is then able to give the lie to Heathcliff's assertion, "I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father served me, and lower." Ultimately, they transform Wuthering Heights into an open system. The protoreader, Lockwood, recounts, "I had neither to climb the gate, nor to knock -- it yielded to my hand. That is an improvement! I thought.... Both doors and lattices were open."

### **Reading & Discussion Questions**

1. What sort of person is Lockwood? How does his own experience color his account? Is his illness related to his visits to Wuthering Heights?
2. How do Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange differ as physical places? What do these differences suggest about their symbolic role in the novel? Is it reasonable to characterize them as opposites?
3. Characterize Nelly Dean. Why do you think Bronte chose her to narrate the story? Is Dean a reliable narrator? Does she misrepresent or omit information in her account? Does she cause any significant events to happen? What is the purpose of having two narrators—Lockwood and Dean—as the "narrative frame" of *Wuthering Heights*?
4. What mysteries are there about Heathcliff and his origins? What possible explanations might there be for Mr. Earnshaw's fondness for Heathcliff? What attracts Catherine to Heathcliff? Why does Hindley hate him?
5. Why does Catherine marry Edgar Linton? Does Catherine's explanation to Nelly Dean of her different feelings for Linton and Heathcliff suggest she knows that she is making a mistake in marrying Linton?

6. Many critics view Catherine and Heathcliff as "Byronic heroes"—e.g. like the heroes in the poems of George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), the celebrated and notorious English Romantic poet. The typical Byronic hero is contemptuous and rebellious against conventional morality and/or defies fate; is proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow and misery on his brow—usually a secret misery; he is passionate: capable of strong and deep affection, implacable in revenge. Do you think this description fits the character of Catherine and/or Heathcliff?
7. Analyze the characters of Edgar and Isabella Linton. Why does Heathcliff marry Isabella? Describe Heathcliff's relationships with Hindley and Hareton.
8. Does *Wuthering Heights* seem to be Catherine's story or Heathcliff's? Or would you argue that the novel has two protagonists? Do you sympathize with either or both? What motives and desires drive these two characters?
9. Some critics consider Catherine a Faustian character. Both Catherine and Faust are divided souls, at conflict within themselves. Are their divisions and conflicts similar? Consider also the destructive choices that Catherine and Faust make—these female and male versions of the Romantic quest to overcome self-division. Compare/contrast Catherine and Faust.
10. What are some of the realistic aspects of the novel? Consider, for example, Joseph. He is a difficult character in the novel, difficult to get along with and his dialect difficult for most readers to understand. What is his role in the novel? What would be missing if he were left out?
11. *Wuthering Heights* covers a long period of time and three generations of the families involved. How does Bronte try to unify her story? What are the roles of Hareton and young Cathy, and the effect of carrying the story of the Earnshaws and Lintons into a third generation? Compare/contrast them with Heathcliff and the original Cathy. Would the novel have been more or less effective if it had stopped with the story of Catherine and Heathcliff's generation? Compare Catherine and Heathcliff's end to that of Hareton and young Cathy. Do they redeem the excesses of the original pair?
12. Describe the social class of the Earnshaws, the Lintons, and Heathcliff. Which are of a higher social class? Why is this significant?
13. How does social class motivate Catherine's actions? How does she try to change her class?
14. How does Heathcliff's social class influence the way he is treated and his own actions? How does Heathcliff's class change?
15. What is the role of class in the novel? How do tensions in the book result from class struggles?
16. What role do the servants Nelly, Joseph, and Zillah play in the novel?
17. Describe the setting of the Yorkshire moors.
18. Describe the houses Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Include descriptions of architecture and the surrounding landscape.

19. How do the houses reflect their inhabitants?
20. Do the houses symbolize their inhabitants? Give examples.
21. How do the settings influence the novel's characters?

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## **Walter Pater**

### **The Victorian Age (1837-1901)**

The period in which Queen Victoria ruled England and the British Empire is known as the Victorian period. Except the first three decades of the nineteenth century (which in literary history are known as the Romantic period) the rest of the nineteenth century is Victorian. It gave to English Literature poets like Tennyson, Browning and Arnold; novelists like Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, the Bronte sisters and Hardy; critics like Arnold, Pater and Ruskin and prose-writers-cum-thinkers like Carlyle, Newman, Macauley and J S Mill. Charles Darwin was a notable scientific thinker. The age was remarkable for the spirit of reform, for industrial progress and consolidation, for relative peace and prosperity, for scepticism, for its spirit of compromise and for its hypocrisy.

The scientific temper of the age and visible changes like the introduction of railways were important factors. Upward mobility in society came in the wake of greater democratization. Rigid class structures started getting loosened. Those who felt insecure with these changes wanted a kind of status quo.

Culture was seen under threat by many including Arnold who wrote a book called *Culture and Anarchy*. We shall come back to Arnold in a moment. Let us briefly look at a group of artists known as pre-Raphaelites. D.G.Rossetti was a leading member of the group. For this group, poetry, music and painting all



became part of an all-embracing activity that created an autonomous realm of the imagination in an inhospitable world.

To come back to Arnold, he saw culture as the great help out of our present difficulties. Culture was a pursuit of perfection through knowing 'the best which has been thought and said in the world.' Poetry was seen as 'a criticism of life' a way of helping us to live better.

Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice were a big presence for Victorian critics like Arnold and Pater. Like Wordsworth Arnold ran down poets like Dryden and Pope as being no poets at all. However, there was a continuity from the Augustan period in thinking that poetry should also delight as it instructs us.

Augustans attached greater value to form than to content. Wordsworth almost reversed that. Arnold was closer to Wordsworth in this respect. Pater was more concerned with form. Imagination as a faculty mattered to all three (Wordsworth, Arnold and Pater). The continued interest in 'fancy' being a different kind of faculty (*vis-à-vis* the imagination) continued into the Victorian period and had its germs in the Augustan age itself. Samuel Johnson's kind concern with the moral aspect of literature was inherited by Arnold. Arnold described the Victorian age as 'mechanical and external' ruled by an over-valuation of machinery. He described a large number of Englishmen as 'philistines.' He saw culture as amounting to turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon stock notions and habits which people follow staunchly but mechanically.

## Essays from *Appreciations*

### 1. Style

Pater's essay 'Style' was an expansion of a review of Flaubert's *Correspondence*. The structure of the essay is interesting. There are in it two rather abruptly joined parts. The first part is a defence of 'imaginative' prose. Such a prose is seen as 'the special art of the modern world.' The second part is a discussion of the Frenchman Gustave Flaubert's views on style.

Pater begins by remarking that the distinction between poetry and prose has been pushed too far. He stresses that poetry should possess the virtues of good prose. Pater points out that prose has greater flexibility enabling it to deal better with complexities of life. The literature of knowledge has as its criterion truth of fact only. Imaginative prose is to be judged for its fineness of truth, the writer's personal sense of fact. The exactness of transposition of the inner vision is an important element of such prose. The problem of style is, essentially, one of self-transparency, of supple self-reflection. For Pater, style essentially mirrors the uniqueness of temperament. Style, in fact, "is the man."

'Fact' needs to be dealt with in its infinite variety as experienced by a specific personality. The writer must have a scholar's tact. The artist-scholar needs to be acutely aware both of the root meanings of words and of the constant shifts

of their actual meanings in changing contexts. He needs to aspire to a purged yet extensive vocabulary.

All such requisites of style, however, are subdued to the architectonic quality that reveals the shaping presence of 'mind'. Confluence of matter and form is important. But even if the architectonic ideal of 'mind' in style is satisfied, this will not guarantee that 'great' as opposed to 'good' literature will result. Greatness in literature depends not on form, but matter, not on handling, but substance. It depends on the range and depth of the human interest of its theme. Literature is great through the dignity of its broad human interest.

Pater is an aesthetic critic. That trend goes as far back as Longinus ( first century). He makes a distinction between 'good' and 'great' art. He attaches value to the mental and imaginative ability in a writer's work as the 'mind' in style. 'Unity' in style comes from a logical coherence in the choice of words suited to the subject. Beauty is necessary both in thought and form. The function of style is to reveal the writer's sense of 'fact' or his taste.

The business of criticism is to estimate the qualities of both prose and poetry that make them good and great literature. Beauty comes from truthfulness in writing, the writing being an expression of the inner vision. This is reminiscent of Keat's line:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty

In the case of a good prose writer, self-restraint is the key and surplussage in language has got to be avoided. Great art should present universal

truths capable of ennobling and morally strengthening the lives of men. Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy* belong here.

The artist's vision must express both 'a sense of fact,' truth as well as beauty of life. Style is the reflection of the author's personality. All this appears more to be literature of the imaginative sense of fact. Literary art is the representation of 'fact' connected with the soul, of a specific personality, in its preferences, its volition and power. It is the transcript, not of mere fact but of fact in its infinite variety, as modified by human preference in all infinitely varied forms.

Pater sees imaginative prose as the special art of the modern world. Such prose is likely to be as varied in its excellence as humanity itself reflecting on the facts of its latest experience — an instrument of many stops, meditative, observant, descriptive, eloquent, analytic, plaintive, fervid. It will exert, in due measure, all the varied charms of poetry.

Pater concludes the essay with the following words:

Given the conditions I have tried to explain as constituting good art; — then if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here... It has something of the sole of humanity in it and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life.

This almost amounts to renouncing aestheticism and embracing a kind of religiosity.

## 2. Wordsworth

Pater, like Arnold, is an admirer of Wordsworth's poetry. He is fully alive to Wordsworth's inferior output also. Pater's essay on Wordsworth first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* (April 1874).

Pater says that for most of us thinking in terms of ends and means reduce life to a form of machinery. Wordsworth's poetry, like all great art, represents a protest against this habit. Wordsworth's philosophical contemplation of nature is seen by Pater as a fine example of the intuitive ability of the poet to understand the universe. Its 'pantheism' gives great value to Wordsworth's poetry. Pantheism meant investing the natural world with an intelligent soul.

Pater says that Fancy and Imagination are useful terms to deal with Wordsworth's poetry because they help reader (and critic) to divide Wordsworth's own poetic output into distinct categories in the matter of quality. Wordsworth's own poetry can be tedious and prosaic at times after the revolutionary excesses of 1795 in France.

Wordsworth is the master of impassioned contemplation. To witness the human spectacles with appropriate emotions is the aim of all culture and of these emotions poetry like Wordsworth's is a great nourisher and stimulant.

Pater significantly says that the office of the poet is not the office of the moralist, and the first aim of Wordsworth's poetry is to give the reader a peculiar kind of pleasure. But through his poetry, and through our pleasure in it, he does actually convey to the reader an extraordinary wisdom in the things of practice. He conveys the supreme significance of contemplation in the conduct of life.

Pater says that there is a perplexing mixture in Wordsworth's poetry, of work touched with intense and individual power and work of almost no character at all. In the latter category comes his work where he is a mere declaimer on moral and social topics. There is an alien element in his poetry, which never got merged with what is really delightful in it, nor underwent his special power. There is a constant suggestion of a duality between higher and lower moods. Pater says that it is imperative that we distinguish in art between that which is organic, animated and expressive from that which is only conventional, derivative, inexpressive.

Pater says that Wordsworth had an innate sensibility with regards to the sights and sounds of the natural world. He has a placidity and a mobility both of which are suitable for great poetry. His imagery is remarkable. He has a power of realizing and conveying to the consciousness of the reader, abstract and elementary impressions.

One weakness of Pater's essay on Wordsworth is its failure to see that what Pater calls the 'alien element' in Wordsworth is not only inseparable from, but often serves to heighten, Wordsworth's moments of grand concentration and artistic vision.

In *The Renaissance* Pater had already strikingly isolated what was for him, Wordsworth's latest virtue i.e. meditative pathos. In dealing with Wordsworth's technical mastery also, Pater is quite perceptive. He is also aware of the importance of 'spots of time' in Wordsworth's poetry. About Wordsworth's handling of sounds, Pater states:

Clear and delicate at once, as he is in the outlining of visible imagery, he is more clear and delicate still, and finely scrupulous, in the noting of sound...

A few pages later, Pater states:

Religious sentiment consecrating the affections and natural regrets of the human heart...has always had much to do with localities, with the thoughts which attach themselves to actual scenes and places...

Here the main point being made by Pater is that Wordsworth's 'religious placidity' invested his poetry with moral and spiritual elements and revealed nature's tranquilising effects on the mind of man, which gave man dignity of a certain kind.

### 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti



In 1850 the Pre-Raphaelite School or Brotherhood was started by a group of young painters and poets. Their chief aspiration was to make a return to artistic forms as they existed before the time Raphael, a pre Renaissance painter, who died in 1520. D.G.Rossetti ( 1828-1882) was one of the leading painter-poets of the new school. The group wanted to return to a deep moral seriousness of intent, a medieval simplicity and a closeness to nature in a representational clarity.

Pater found in Rossetti's poetry a quality of 'mystic isolation'. His poems and paintings shared a number of qualities. The structure, metre and vocabulary were unconventional. The poetry was full of unconventional expressions.

Pater states that poetry has two functions to perform. It could reveal the ideal or perfect aspect of common everyday life to the reader. Secondly, it could add a fresh and poetic colour to life through an imaginative rendering of it.

Rossetti's ideal of beauty combined spirit and matter similar to that found in Dante's literary work. *The House of Life*, a grouping of sonnets has this quality that the many emotions of love are depicted here with a rich imagination combined with a deep philosophic awareness. These are an allegorical interpretation of Rossetti's experience of life. *Ballads and Sonnets* testified to his mastery of the song, the sonnet and the ballad form. As for the archaic elements in his poetry, these show his preference for earlier poetry such as that of Chaucer.

Poetry as a sort of 'divine mania' (Plato's view of it), with an element of insanity in it, is also characteristic of Rossetti's poetry. His poetry also has a mythopoeic quality which is evocative of natural phenomenon with its sensuous

and picturesque aspects. Pater gives special praise to Rosseti's poem *The Blessed Damozel* (1870) on account of its minute imagery.

Rossetti was the son of an Italian refugee in England. One reason for Pater's choosing to write on his poetry was the attempt made by some of Pater's contemporaries to focus more on his status as painter, than as a poet. Ruskin, for example, had taken away something from Rossetti's powers of personification. Pater tries to mend that by giving Rossetti's poetry more dimensions than Ruskin does.

*The Blessed Damozel* for which Pater shows such admiration has a number of characteristic features. What we have here is the languorous ardor which some of Keats's poetry has. There is that kind of medievalism also (part of Keats's poetry has that too). There is also eroticism and sensuously realised detail. In this poem Dante's Beatrice gets metamorphosed into a woman longing to be reunited with her earthly lover.

Pater says about Rossetti:

Here was one , who had a matter to present to his readers... so valuable, so real and definite, that his primary aim as regards form and expression in his verse would be but its exact equivalence to those data within.

A little later, Pater states:

And this delight in concrete definition is allied with another of his conformities to Dante, the really imaginative vividness... of his personifications.

One more quality which Pater finds in Rossetti is his ability to powerfully realise a special kind of shadowy world. He says:

For Rossetti then, the great affections of persons to each other, swayed and determined... the solid resisting substance, in a world where all beside might be but shadow

In the concluding part of his essay Pater praises Rossetti's poem *The King's Tragedy* as greatly moving and lifelike. He concludes that Rossetti added to poetry fresh poetic material and a new order of phenomenon. Rossetti almost created a new ideal. There is extraordinary sincerity in his poetry and that sincerity distinguished the whole pre-Raphaelite school as a grouping of poets and painters.

#### **4. Postscript**

This piece was earlier called 'Romanticism and Classicism'. A point Pater makes in the essay is that like most other critical labels, the terms 'classic' and

‘romantic’ are relative. In all perfect art, both the tendencies are, in a sense, united. Dante and Goethe are two examples of this.

What constitutes the romantic character is the element of strangeness added to beauty. The other element is curiosity. The essence of romanticism is to combine the ever-changing spirit of the present with the flavour of the past. The term ‘classic’ on the other hand has been often reserved for the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Pater refers to Stendhal as standing between the earlier and later growths of the romantic spirit. His novels are seen by Pater as rich in romantic quality.

Classicists are concerned with the ‘form’ of the literary work. Romanticists give importance to the matter which is still untried. Rousseau introduced a disturbing element into French literature. That literature, at that time, was extremely trim and formal, like the literature of the age of Queen Anne in England. Rousseau’s ‘Confessions’ helped romanticism in France. Rousseau’s profound subjectivity, his passion and the strangeness of his material – all contributed to his appeal.

Pater adds that the true business of all criticism is to discriminate one school of art or literature from another. Both the substance and the form of art and literature must be carefully examined. Equal importance should be given to both.

Pater’s belief is that both the tendencies (represented respectively by the classical impulse and the romantic impulse) go hand-in-hand most of the time. He states:

However falsely these two tendencies may be opposed by critics, or exaggerated by artists themselves, they are really tendencies at work at all times in art, moulding it, with the balance sometimes a little on one side, sometimes a little on the other.

This kind of a balancing of the two impulses is a big contribution of Pater to criticism. A major contemporary critic Frank Kermode attempts something similar in his book *Romantic Image* where he tries to see a common ground in between Romanticism, Symbolism and Modernism.

Pater himself was an aesthetic critic with a pronounced romantic sensibility. But his romanticism was of an eclectic kind. He quotes Stendhal to the effect that romanticism is the art of presenting to people the literary works which are capable of giving them the greatest possible pleasure in the actual states of their habits and beliefs. He adds that 'classic' came to us out of the cool and quiet of other times. He says that the essentially classical element is the quality of order in beauty.

In Pater's scheme of things, the critical expression of observation is the disengagement of the virtue by which a work of art or a life produces a distinct impression of beauty or pleasure. Yet, since aesthetic criticism depends upon knowing one's own impression and what produced it, the critical process is not objective but essentially subjective.

## **A Brief Look at Some Aspects of Pater's Criticism**

### **1. Art For Art's Sake**

The notion 'art for art's sake' needs to be seen in the context of an aesthetic movement whose pioneers in France were partly Baudelaire, Flaubert and Gautier. Then there is Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) whose stance is also associated

with the aesthetic movement. By and large the stance is that the function of art is to please through form. The pleasant sensation that comes in its wake should be enjoyed unapologetically. In such a stance there is an element of hedonism also but that is quite fine with these writers and critics. The Victorian poet Swinburne also subscribed to similar views.

The pleasure which one derives from the beauty of a work of art needs to be relished. Pater wants this to be done preferably on largely a moment to moment basis. He is more interested in the concrete and specific manifestations of beauty. The immediate impression has great value in such an approach. The highest quality needs to be given to ones moments as they pass and that too simply for those moments' sake. This is what his phrase 'the hard gem-like flame' points towards. There should be a pleasure-giving radiance in art. All else can take secondary place. Abstractions have to be avoided. Pater's procedure was seen by many as that of one who moves like a bee from flower to flower gathering drops of honey. In another (Arnoldian) context this honey comes to be 'touchstones' which give shape to and sustain the critical function. Pater's distinction between 'good art and great art' helps him to accommodate the normal side of art which was so dear to Matthew Arnold.

Pater's predecessors in the matter of extolling 'beauty' were writers like Keats ('Beauty is truth, truth beauty'). Among people from his own age the poet A.C.Swinburne 1837-1909) was an aesthete. The same is true of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). As compared to Pater (who is a theorist) Swinburne was only an

enthusiastic reader. Wilde thought that it is not that art imitates life. He said that life imitates art. To him life was the mirror and art the reality.

Most formalists of the twentieth century have been affected by Pater's stress on the primacy of form and on aesthetic pleasure. The Stanley Fish variety of Reader-Response Criticism (Fish practises affective stylistics) and (partly) Roland Barthes's notion of 'pleasure of the text' also show traces of Pater's influence.

When towards the end of the essay on style, Pater brings in the distinction between good and great art, there is a hint of renouncing aestheticism but that is only partial. The overall stance remains rooted in aestheticism.

In the essay on style Pater states:

...not only scholars, but all disinterested lovers of books, will always look to it (literature), as to all other fine art, for a refuge... from a certain vulgarity in the actual world.

Art is a kind of moral object intrinsically superior to everyday reality. And yet, it is important to remember that Pater is not an aesthetic hedonist. His theory of criticism stresses not only personal impressions but the idea that it is the duty of the critic to grasp the individuality, the unique quality of a work of art. In Wordsworth's case, Pater does this by putting him in a framework of intellectual history and the charm of his local colour.



## **2. Pater's view of the Function of Criticism**

Three functions of criticism are presented by Pater in the 'Preface' to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. These are :

To feel the virtue of the poet or the painter,  
to disengage it, and to set it forth —  
these are the three stages of the critic's duty.

Pater believed that beauty must be defined through its concrete manifestations and not in the abstract. In his view 'seeing the object as it really is'

amounts to 'knowing one's own impression as it really is.' Moral and metaphysical questions do not have much of a role in this kind of an approach. He thought that making the most of intense moments of emotional or intellectual excitement in the face of life's 'awful brevity' gives us hardly any time to fashion 'theories about the things we see and touch.' Pleasurable experience should not be sacrificed on the altar of "abstract morality." The impressions made by works of art on the critic are the primary data for aesthetic criticism.

All this made Pater a great admirer of the Romantic essayist Charles Lamb. Pater said about Lamb:

To feel strongly the charm of an old poet or moralist...  
and then to interpret that charm, to convey it to others...  
this is the way of his criticism.

A.C.Swinburne is another Victorian figure who is of help in understanding Pater's criticism. Swinburne was an enthusiastic reader. His enthusiasm overflowed and became appreciative commentary on what he read. The phrase "art for art's sake," was appropriated from the Frenchman Theophile Gautier (1811-72) by Swinburne. Pater also used it and then it was taken up by Oscar Wilde. The American writer Edgar Allen Poe and the French poet Charles Baudelaire also contributed to aestheticism, each in his own way.

Pater's critical method remains largely personal and subjective. Arnold stated that the aim of true criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is. In Pater's scheme of things, seeing the object as in itself it really is can only mean

knowing 'one's own impression' as it really is. For aesthetic criticism the primary data comes from the impressions made by works of art on the experiencing subject. A necessary qualification for the critic then comes to be the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful subjects. This, in certain senses, amounts to asking for an 'informed reader'.

In his conclusion to *Studies in the History of the Romanticism* Pater notes:

To burn always with the hard gem –like  
flame, to maintain ecstasy is success in life.

By this he means that in every moment of aesthetic pleasure some beauty of a person or a scene, some emotional or intellectual excitement, is realised. Such a realisation is an end in itself.

### **3. Pater's Influence and a Comparison With Arnold**

Pater's influence has come to be marked in recent times than it was when T.S.Eliot's critical ideas and the New Criticism reigned supreme. This is a little surprising because in a sense he had influenced their formalism. In more recent times he has influenced 'criticism of consciousness,' Reader – response criticism

of the Stanley Fish variety and those who talk of 'the pleasure of a text' as something hedonistic and not something to be apologetic about.

Pater is in a long line of criticism from Longinus onwards and his more immediate influence was on writer-critics like Oscar Wilde. He is a culture critic also in his own way. He does not have the moralistic stance of an Arnold or a Leavis but the concern with culture is there.

Pater shows a sounder general taste than Arnold. He wishes to see a work of literature or art as vividly as possible. In this respect he has influenced critics like T.S.Eliot.

By his emphasis on moment- to- moment relishing of beauty in literature and art, Pater has influenced at least one variety of Reader- Response criticism — the one whose representative is Stanley Fish. Fish proposed a critical approach called 'affective stylistics.' In works like *Surprised by Sin* Fish sees the process of reading as dynamic and sequential.

Then there is the notion 'pleasure of the text' which is offered by Roland Barthes. This notion is quite complex but part of it has been influenced by Pater's pleasure-locating general approach.

In comparison to Arnold, Pater's view of poetry is more accommodating and more future-oriented. Arnold is largely struck on 'content' whereas Pater brings in form in a big way. Both Russian Formalists and new critics benefited from Pater's concern with the formal side of poetry. Roman

Jakobson talks of a 'poetic' function of language. The formalist notion of foregrounding also owes something to Pater.

In going in for formal excellence, Pater came to share with Arnold the idea of 'touchstones.' Both wanted some yardstick by which to differentiate better poetry from poetry which is not so good.

Pater showed a way forward by accommodating the vocabulary of art-criticism. A lot of art-literature give and take, which makes early twentieth century modernist experimentation, benefited from that move. In certain ways, he anticipated poststructuralism also in underlining the fluid and unstable nature of signification and the fluidity of our own responses to signification.

#### **4. Pater and the Neo-Classical School**

Between Pater and Samuel Johnson, there are some broad similarities. Johnson brought to the forefront some tendencies inherent in the critical work of John Dryden and Alexander Pope. *The Lives of the Poets* by him is a unique achievement and Pater's approach to writers and artists comes close to Johnson's portraits of poets. His pronouncements on poets like Gray and Pope are representative. About Gray's *Elegy* he says:

*The Churchyard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo.

In his 'Life of Pope' Johnson says:

New things are made familiar and familiar things are made new....

In At the level of being impressionistic Johnson and Pater share some common ground. What differentiates Pater from Johnson is the absence of that moralism which weighed down Johnson's criticism.

Pater retained neo-classicist criticism's stress on the pleasure to be derived from aesthetic form. From romantic criticism he took their preoccupation with the value of imagination. He had an acute understanding of the historical imagination. He also had an insight into the role of myth in literature. He focused on what actually happens in reading and saw that as the proper sphere of criticism. His view was that each person should concentrate full attention on each moment as it passes. That moment is all there is and all anyone has. Time is a flux, an endless stream of impressions. The person experiencing the unique moment comes to have the quality we associate with a 'hard, gem-like flame.' The critic's effort should be to identify precisely the unique virtue of a single impression as he 'experiences' a painting by Leonardo da Vinci or a poem by Wordsworth or Rossetti.

These various orientations put Pater way ahead of Augustans, romantics and his own contemporaries in the field of literary criticism. He is a great anticipator and direction-giver. He may not offer us a developed, systematic literary theory but a certain protocol of reading does emerge from his brilliant insights and his attempt to evolve critical touchstones.

### **5. Pater's Own Prose Style**

Walter Pater's prose style is close to that of Charles Lamb (1775-1834) a romantic essayist known for *The Essays of Elia*. Before Lamb, the two major essayists in English prose are Francis Bacon and Joseph Addison. The former wrote very terse essays which were essentially 'middle style.' His essays were known for polish and urbanity.

Bacon perfected the essay form in English on the French model of Montaigne. His style was declarative. One example is 'Revenge is a kind of wild justice'.

Addison maintained from his subjects a bit of a distance which is tolerant and amused. His sentences are balanced and polished. Wit is the main ingredient of his style. His irony is mild as compared to that of Jonathan Swift.

Pater's style is free from 'surplusage' but his sentences are mostly longish with parenthetical (or near parenthetical) embeddings. The quality which marks his critical prose is scholarly introspection. His is an impressionistic method of criticism and there is mostly a preparatory remark or two before he comes to the poet or poem he is handling. He can be very appreciative as in the essay on Lamb. He is knowledgeable without being condescending.

Pater brings the trained sensitivity of a keenly alert mind into contact with the work of an author or an artist. There is a delicacy and a fineness about his judgement and taste which, in the twentieth century, gets reflected in the work of fine readers of poetry like F.R. Leavis, R.P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks and Helen Vendler.

In the matter of prose-style, Pater prefers using longish sentences involving subordination. He likes to have a lot of modification mainly achieved through clauses. A good example of this is the last paragraph of his essay on Wordsworth which is (in effect) a single long sentence. It reads:



Such is the figure of the more powerful and original poet, hidden away, in part, under those weaker elements in Wordsworth's poetry, which for some minds determine their entire character; a poet somewhat bolder and more passionate poetical taste; an unimpassioned writer, you might sometimes fancy, yet thinking the chief aim, in life and art alike, to be a certain deep emotion; seeking most often the great elementary passions in lowly places; having at least this condition of all impassioned work, that he aims always at an absolute sincerity of feeling and diction, so that he is the true forerunner of the deepest and most passionate poetry of our own day; yet going back also, with something of a protest against the conventional fervor of much of the poetry popular in his own time to those older English poets, whose unconscious likeness comes out in him.

This sentence is an unusually long-drawn-out sentence. On the face of it, Pater's style is packed with modifications of various kinds. So, the style looks cluttered but actually his mind works with great clarity and that clarity also gets reflected in the style. There is remarkable crystallisation most of the time. He stays

focussed on the subject but his extensive range of reference sometimes, is, a bit of an obstacle. On the whole, the style is economical and communicative.

### **Walter Pater, A Short Biographical Note**

Walter Pater was born in London in 1839. He studied at King's School, Canterbury and at Queen's College, Oxford. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) and *Appreciations* (1889) are among his famous collections of

essays. He also wrote a novel called *Marius the Epicurean*. (1885). Pater was elected a Fellow of Brasenose College at Oxford. This fellowship he held until his death in 1894.

Pater's life was the life of a scholar: Tutoring, lecturing, reading, writing and travelling. A bachelor, he lived in Oxford with his sister. An intensely private person, Pater achieved quiet fame in Oxford and London.

### **Further Reading**

- Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* (1750-1950)  
Vol.4. The Later Nineteenth Century (London, Jonathan Cape, 1966)

- Harry Blemires, *A History of Literary Criticism*  
(Delhi, Macmillan, 2000)
- Inna Walter (ed.) *Appreciations Madras* (McMillan, 1991)

**LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1798-1914**  
**Paper-III**  
**Section C & D**

**M.A. English (Previous)**

**Directorate of Distance Education**  
**Maharshi Dayanand University**  
**ROHTAK – 124 001**

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**LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 1798-1914****PAPER-III****Max. Marks : 100****Time : 3 Hours**

*Note: Students will be required to attempt five questions in all. Question 1 will be compulsory. This question shall be framed to test students' comprehension of the texts prescribed for **Close Study**. There will be one question on each of the Units in all the four Sections. The students will be required to attempt four questions (in about 200 words each) one from each section.*

*The other four questions will be based on the texts for **Close Study** with internal choice i.e. one question with internal choice on each of the nine units. The students will be required to attempt **One** question from each of the **Four** Sections.*

**Section C & D****Unit 6:** Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady**Unit 7:** Walt Whitman; Song of Myself: 1, 5, 6, 20, 21, 32, 50 & 52.

Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Rocking.

**Unit 8:** Flaubert: Madame Bovary**Unit 9:** J.M. Synge: The Playboy of the Western World



**HENRY JAMES**  
**The Portrait of a Lady**

## Unit-6

### I. Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady

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#### A Brief Account of the Author's Life

We can begin by looking very briefly at those aspects of life of the author which may be relevant to our study of this novel. Henry James was born on April 15, 1843 in Washington Place in New York City, U.S.A. His grand father, William James, who came as an immigrant from Ireland established himself in trade, prospered very quickly and soon became a millionaire. When he died in 1832, he left a fortune of three million dollars to his family. On the strength of his share of his inherited fortune, his son, Henry James Sr, father of our novelist decided to keep himself away from the rough and tumble of the world of business and chose to lead a leisured life devoted chiefly to the cultivation of his mind and sensibility. The personality of Henry James Sr, particularly his distaste for expending his energies in making money and amassing wealth when he already had enough exerted a powerful influence on the impressionable mind of his son.

Henry James Sr, had a philosophical bent of mind and was a man of letters in his own right. He moved in the literary and intellectual circles of his times and had friendly relation with eminent figures like Emerson in America and Carlyle in England. He had imbibed in his personality the idealistic fervour of the American Transcendentalist Movement as represented by Emerson and carried within him a utopian zeal for picturing a society which would be more congenial than any society hitherto existing to an individual interested in the cultivation of his mind and sensibility. He had also had an active interest in spiritual experiences without being attached to any Church or institutionalized religion. Although he did not share some of the illusions and abstractions which characterized the thinking of his father, Henry James always carried with him as a vital reference point for his creative endeavours, the spirit of utopian idealism and deep involvement in non-doctrinal form of spirituality which formed an integral part of his father's personality. A strong ethical sense based on instinctual urges of the deeper self and unsupported by any specific religious practices, is usually a salient feature of the central character James chooses for his novels. The novelist's elder brother, William James, who was later to become an eminent philosopher as the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* inherited the philosophical and spiritual bent of mind of their father in a much stronger form.

Another aspect of his father's personality which left an indelible mark on the creative sensibility of Henry James was a strong sense of the hidden presence of evil. Both father and son, in their different ways, felt the presence of evil as a baleful and sinister force in their memorable trance like experiences. James's novels, despite the presence of urbane comedy and sparkle of wit, basically convey the impression of a world where evil powerfully lurks beneath the surface threatening to disintegrate or corrupt the whole edifice of civilized amenities and decencies which constitute its benign and attractive face. He frankly acknowledges in a letter to one of his friends that he had the imagination of disaster. This sensitive awareness of the sinister character of what may outwardly look very attractive and charming made it possible for Henry James to register the phenomenon of disintegration and hollowness which, as we shall see later, had overtaken the dominant culture of the moneyed and privileged sections of society among whom he moved and lived in his times.

Henry James spent the first twelve years of his childhood mostly at New York and Albany. Since his father felt that school education usually led to standardization and kept the thinking of young pupil stuck up in conventional grooves and since he wanted his children to be kept away from the shocking bad manners of a heavily commercialized culture, he did not get them enrolled in any schools in America. Henry James, therefore, did not have a formal schooling during this period and his education was looked after by private tutors. In 1855 the entire family moved to Europe and lived there for three years in different countries

including England, France Switzerland and Germany. After a gap of one year they went to Europe again in 1859 and came back to New Port in 1860. This early exposure to the old world atmosphere created a strong fascination for Europe in Henry James's mind which lasted throughout his life and made him leave America in 1870 to live first in Paris and then to settle permanently in England.

This personal fascination for Europe happened to coincide with a larger development under which an encounter with European civilization came to be viewed by many Americans as something necessary and fruitful. This is the reason behind the presence of the International Theme in many novels of Henry James. The frequent movement of the family from one place to another compelled Henry James to look upon himself as one of the hotel children. Thus while the pattern of life decided by Henry James Sr for his family enabled them to enrich their minds with different kinds of impressions and develop a cosmopolitan outlook, it also tended to create in some of them a feeling of alienation. Henry James, in particular because of his contemplative bent of mind, remained a partial outsider in any society where he lived.

Between 1860 and 1869 Henry James first tried to study painting along with his elder brother and then went to Harvard Law School at Cambridge for studying Law but gave it up after a while and decided to become a writer. While at Cambridge with his family, he had opportunities to come in contact with literary men like Charles Eliot Norton, James Russell Lowell and William Dean Howells, under their encouragement he began to publish short stories and articles in journals like *North American Review* and *Atlantic Monthly*. In about ten years' time, his first collection of short stories was ready for publication. His contact with the Boston Circle also enabled him to have an intimate feel of the moral rigour of New England Puritanism which formed an important component of American culture as he saw it.

During his stay in Paris he formed friendships with important writers like Flaubert, Renan, Zola and Daudet. James's familiarity with their writings intensified his awareness of the major issues of contemporary life in the Western World which disturbed creative writers of the time and also firmed up his commitment to art as a severe discipline. Since by now he had come into his own as a serious novelist, the influence of these writers was in the form of a critical appropriation of those aspects of their themes and techniques which resonated with his own creative concerns. In 1876 he settled in London and he continued to live there and in Sussex for the rest of his life. Of course, travels to different countries in Europe continued to take place even after he had settled in England. He visited his home country only thrice, once when his mother, and then his father died in 1882, in 1904 on a long tour of different parts of U.S.A and finally in 1910 with his ailing brother, William James, who died that year.

Before we proceed further it would be necessary to mention two important events which made strong impact on his mind and sensibility and haunted his imagination. In 1861 at a crucial juncture in national life when the Civil War had started, Henry James received an injury in an accident with a hand pump, which filled him with a sense of guilt, since it prevented his participation in war activity in any form. He does not specify the exact nature of this 'obscure hurt', but it intensified his complex of not being fit enough for normal participation in any kind of robust activity in social life. If we find sensitive invalids who are filled with a desire to live but are prevented by their illness to do so as characters in his novels, this 'obscure hurt' is certainly a relevant factor behind this. Ralph Touchett in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Theale in *Wings of the Dove* are obvious examples of such characters. The other incident which made lasting impression on his mind was the tragic death at a very young age of his cousin, Minny Temple in 1870. This young girl who, for James, was an embodiment of youthful enthusiasm and hopefulness, was denied her chance for a full life by her early death. This left a deep sense of anguish and heartache in James. In his letter to his brother, William James he said that 'her image will preside on my intellect' and wrote to his mother that 'she will survive in the unspeakably tender memory of her friends.' The character of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and of Milly Theale in *Wings of the Dove* are based on this poignant memory of Minny Temple James carried in his mind. Two of James's novels, *Daisy Miller* (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) turned out to be very popular and made him a celebrity. But the novels which came out later gradually fell into public and critical

disfavour. This impelled James to try to gain popularity and raise his income by writing plays for the theatre. However, this experiment which lasted from 1890 to 1895 also ended in utter failure and humiliation. He returned to fiction writing and the novels and short stories he wrote from this time onwards showed his determination not to make any compromise with the popular taste. His writings of this period carried a complexity and subtlety of presentation which flouted all the established conventions of popular fiction. Some critics have praised him for the courage he displayed in maintaining the integrity of his artistic vision and have showered high praise on some of the novels which belong to this phase of his career. His isolation and anguished awareness of obtuseness of the general public towards the finer values of art made him choose for some of his short stories the theme of the fate of the artist in his times.

In 1906 he started writing Prefaces to the New York edition of his collected works. He took this opportunity to elaborate his theory of the novel and showed what kind of intellectual rigour and concentration is required from a novelist who wanted to raise fiction to the status of serious art and achieve perfection in it. Just a few years before his death he wrote his autobiography in three parts the last of which remained incomplete. Here he spelled out the specific experiences which contributed to his growth as a novelist. When the First World War broke out in 1914 his reaction was of great shock and anguish as he saw in this event eruption of an ugliness which lay hidden beneath the affable exterior of Western civilization. He became a British citizen in 1915, only a year before his death. He was conferred England's Order of Merit while he was lying on his death bed. He died in 1916 at the age of seventy three.

### **James's Place in the English Novel**

Henry James is a major novelist who occupies a prominent position in what F. R. Leavis has identified as the Great Tradition of English Novel. The other novelist included by Leavis in this tradition are Jane Austen, George Eliot and Joseph Conrad. D. H. Lawrence as a novelist is supposed to have inherited this tradition in the twentieth century. The novel had emerged in the eighteenth century as a new kind of narrative in which our ordinary concerns, interests, aspirations and desires as individual members of a society are portrayed through our interaction with other members of society both as individuals and as groups. This portrayal is marked by realism which means both detailed description and rational understanding of the mentalities and actions of the characters. The actions of the characters have to be made intelligible in terms of motives which are supposed to constitute recognizable traits of what is accepted as basic human nature and consequences of these actions have to be made convincing in terms of the impact made by the larger social environment in which the characters are placed. This social environment includes both the specific circumstances coming up in the life of individual characters and the over-all working of the institutional framework of the society within which the action of the novel is taking place. The two basic features of the novel, therefore, are (1) a focus on the dialectic of individual and society and (2) a rational perspective for understanding motives behind actions as well as the consequences of these actions.

The Great Tradition of which James forms a part is distinguished by a heavy concentration on the polarity of the individual in the presentation of this dialectic. The primary interest of the novelist here remains in the study of the personality of the character as it is formed and revealed through his or her interaction with the society at large. A good deal of attention is devoted to the presentation and analysis of crucial decisions taken by a particular character, the motives which impel him towards those decisions and the responses he gives to the challenges coming up before him on account of the mode of his interaction with other characters as well as the logic of the working of the society as a whole. The depth of understanding and vividness and intensity with which the whole process of formation of the personality is rendered before us becomes the hallmark of the novelists in this tradition. In other words, a novelist is respected here on the basis of the psychological realism he achieves in his major works. Henry James has been widely acclaimed for the intensity and perceptiveness with which he portrays the mind and sensibility of the characters he chooses as protagonists. Both the inner psychology of the characters and the moral quality of choices made by them in confronting the

dilemmas coming up before them from time to time are projected before us with adequate imaginative sympathy and a fair amount of impartial understanding.

James is greatly admired by critics like T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, Lionel Trilling and the New Critics who played a major role in moulding critical opinion during the forties and fifties of the twentieth century for the fine intelligence he displays in rendering the complexities and subtleties of the consciousness and moral make-up of his character. R. P. Blackmur in his Introduction to *The Art of the Novel*, a collection of James's Prefaces to the New York edition of his collected works, affirms that this writer's intention and all his labour was to represent dramatically intelligence at its most difficult, its most lucid, its most beautiful point. F. R. Leavis also praised James for 'His registration of sophisticated human consciousness' and maintains that he 'creates an ideal civilized sensibility; a humanity capable of communicating by the finest shades of inflexion and implication. When we come to a detailed discussion of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the later sections of this Study-Material, we shall examine how far James actually succeeds in achieving the distinction attributed to him by these critics.

### **Significant Changes in The tradition of English Novel Under the Impact of Social Change**

It may be useful at this point to take note of the fact that during the period from the end of the eighteenth century when Jane Austen was writing her novels to the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Henry James became active as a writer, English Novel, particularly its variant with which Henry James has been identified, did not remain static. As society changed under the impact of industrialization and urbanization and later as a consequence of the expansion and consolidation of the British Empire, the issues and problems taken up by the novelists as a central preoccupation in their works also changed in many significant ways. New experiments in methods and techniques of narration had also to be made at different points of time for an effective presentation of these changing concerns and problems. The two basic features of the novel which we have identified earlier, that is, portrayal of the conflict between individual and society and rationality of the governing perspective were still there, but in forms that were quite significantly different from what we noticed in the earlier phases of the novel. In order to understand these changes, it would be necessary for us to see how these two recognizable features of the novel had come into existence at the original point of the novel's emergence as a new kind of narrative.

The rise of the novel, is closely linked with the emergence of the values of liberal humanism representing the ideals and aspiration as well as the general outlook of the middle classes who became an ascendant force during the eighteenth century and played a key role in shaping the thinking and attitudes prevalent in the whole society. This liberal humanism of the middle classes has two core elements in it which become potent factors behind the two basic features of the novel mentioned above. The first core element is the emphasis on an individual's freedom to think for himself and his right to act according to his will to find happiness and fulfillment in life. This gets crystallized into the prized notion of the dignity and integrity of the self which cannot be allowed to be hurt or compromised by pressures and blandishments coming from outside or on account of weaknesses within. The other core element of liberal humanism is a belief in progress emphasizing continuous expansion in production of material goods and reforms in the laws and institutions of society so that more and more individuals can get opportunities for prosperity and happiness. An insistence on rational methods of analysis and understanding is also necessarily present here. There is a large common ground in these two core elements of liberalism on account of which it becomes possible to see the process of self-affirmation and fulfillment of the individual as a part of the larger developmental project of the society. However, despite this common ground, the two core elements carry a number of contradictions and tensions within and between them. Through its projection of the dialectic of individual and society, the novel seeks to embody as lived experience both the unity and contradictions which exist in the inter-relationship of the two core elements of liberal humanism.

It is a distinguishing feature of the novels, of the eighteenth century including the works of Jane Austen (which, technically fall outside the limits of this century) that these tensions and contradictions are viewed as resolvable or containable. It is assumed here that a vantage point of good sense can be discovered where the rights of the individual and the claims of society get reconciled without any serious detrimental effect on either. Jane Austen, for example, seeks to explore in her novels the optimum possibilities for an achieved sense of self-fulfillment by the heroine within the parameters which govern the functioning of the larger social order. The novelist's effort here takes the form of educating the heroine, that is, making her aware of the weaknesses within her own personality which obstruct the proper growth of her personality and the constraints of the external situation that have to be reckoned with and cannot be wished out of existence. It is also a part of the novelist's endeavour to highlight the removable narrownesses and obtusenesses present in the rational perspective dominant in society. It is this confidence and assurance about the resolvability of the inner contradictions of liberal humanism being projected through the dialectic of individual and society which provides lucidity and verve to Jane Austen's vision of life. The heroine in her novels is securely an insider and occupies a position of centrality in the social world around her.

The disturbance and dislocations caused by the kind of industrialization and urbanization which actually took place during the nineteenth century in England and other countries of the Western world undermined the possibility of resolving the internal contradictions of liberal humanism in the manner visualized in Jane Austen's novels. The broad unity between the process of realization of the full human potential of an autonomous individual and the developmental project of the society was seriously disturbed. Actually, the onward march of the forces of industrialism tended to ruthlessly suppress, distort and twist the humanity of most of the individuals, particularly poor and underprivileged. Women, children and those living in the slums had to bear the brunt of the dehumanizing pressures exerted by industrialization and urbanization. The version of liberal humanism imposed on society by the dominant power groups recognized only the legitimacy of economic freedom and attainment of higher position in society through property and wealth. Those who failed in this race were dismissed as non-persons. There was hardly any scope here for accommodating the concerns and aspirations of the more sensitive individuals which constituted the very core of the ideal of human dignity and was earlier considered an integral part of liberal humanism.

A powerful and vivid picture of this new problematic working out of the dialectic of individual and society is to be found in the novels of Charles Dickens. But in the tradition of the novel with which James was identified, this dialectic was presented in a somewhat different form. Here the emphasis was not on showing the spread and sweep of the dehumanizing processes of industrialism on a broad social canvas; the main focus in this tradition remained on those rare individuals who carried within them in a concentrated form, the idealistic aspirations and concerns of liberal humanism which did not find any space in the actual goings on of the society and certainly not in its developmental project. This made these sensitive individuals feel alienated and frustrated. They tried to seek fulfillment through establishment of deep personal relationships with some exceptional individuals who looked kindred souls and were alienated and marginalized in the society in a manner similar to theirs. But even here they often felt betrayed and disappointed. Their ideal usually took the form of cultural pursuits defined in terms of artistic and literary activities and some graces of leisured existence. Culture in this sense was separated from the totality of actual social life around them and became something to be tasted, enjoyed and absorbed by the individual in a pure form. It was also used as a sanctuary or as a standard of judgement for assessing the human substance of the larger activities and practices like politics and the business of money-making in the society around them. The novelists of the great tradition project the dialectic of individual and society in terms of the lived experience of these inner exiles. In the fiction of writers like George Eliot and Henry James the pitfalls and hazards that such exceptional characters have to face in their efforts to carve out a private space for themselves within the existing social order, the sufferings and disappointments they have to undergo and the courage and resistance they show in the preservation of their dignity have been dramatized with varying degrees of intensity and imaginative force. Since Henry

James was born in America and lived there in the early formative period of his life, he carried in his mind, as a vital reference point, the greater possibilities in America of the Pre-Civil War period, of the emergence of sensitive individuals embodying the idealistic fervour of liberal humanism and deeper commitments to the preservation of dignity and freedom of their self. This made it possible for him to project the dilemmas of such sensitive individuals with a great amount of poignance. The contrast that the Post-Civil War society in America offered to the kind of social order he had seen in his early youth gave him a particularly acute awareness of the coarsening and vulgarization of the values of liberal humanism that had taken place with the triumphant march of industrial capitalism. As an outsider, he could also perceive with greater anguish the corruption and decay engendered in the social life of the upper middle classes in England by the institution of British Empire. The special features and resonances James's fiction acquires on this account will be spelled out in greater detail in our discussion of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the later sections of this Study-Material.

### Themes and Techniques

The primary and most persistent theme found in one form or the other in many novels of James is the presentation of dilemma of a sensitive individual who wants to affirm the freedom of his being and is keen to enlarge the bounds of his knowledge and gain new experiences for enrichment of his sensibility but finds that this exercise brings him only suffering and knowledge of evil. In some novels this drama of self-affirmation takes the form of a journey of exploration which brings the character to a dead-end and the only option left to him for protecting the dignity and integrity of his self is to adopt a stance of self-abnegation and passive resignation. *The American* (1877), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Ambassadors* (1903) can be cited as examples in this regard. In some other novels, this type of character is in a trapped situation right from the beginning. The focus in the treatment of theme here is on the character's deepening awareness of the value of amenities and opportunities necessary for enrichment of his sensibility and self-fulfillment and also his realization that these amenities and opportunities are inextricably combined with corruption, opportunism and decadence in the current situation. The only honourable course left to the free spirits – as James calls these characters, is to evolve, through their sharp intelligence and moral resilience, strategies of staving off the corrupting influences of the surrounding environment and protect the integrity of his self through an extraordinary gesture of renunciation. *Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *Awkward Age* (1899) fall in this category. This theme of dramatization of the ordeal of consciousness of an individual endowed with fine intelligence and responsive sensibility is also sometimes described as the theme of movement from innocence to experience.

There are two other themes which are intimately connected with the primary theme mentioned above. James often takes his sensitive central characters who are American by birth to Europe and their encounter with the cultural climate of Europe is seen as a necessary part of the process of their self-affirmation. This is the essence of what is known as the International Theme in his novels. This theme involves a comparison and contrast of manners and distinctive traits which distinguish the products of one national culture from those of another. The figures of Henrietta Stackpole and Lord Warburton's sisters in *The Portrait of a Lady* will come to our mind in this regard. But the significance of the International Theme is much deeper than this comedy of manners based on registration of traits, prejudices and preferences, tastes and habits which mark off the nationalities of one country from those of another. Henry James was actually interested in envisioning an ideal civilization which would provide a congenial environment for the self-affirmation of a character of refined sensibility and cosmopolitan outlook. America and Europe are presented in the novels primarily in terms of the challenges and opportunities as well as hazards and constraints each one of them carries for the sensitive individuals who are in search of an ideal civilization.

The other closely linked theme could be identified as the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. A moral sense which is not enlivened with a finely discriminating appreciation of the graces of leisured existence and the quality of treasures of art is considered narrow and oppressive by Henry James, but he also feels that a

highly developed and refined taste not deriving its sensitivity and purity from moral uprightness and warm humanity will be sterile. The contrasting cases of Ralph Truchett on the one hand and Gilbert Osmond on the other are relevant examples from the point of view of this theme. The theme of the complex relationship between ethics and aesthetics has been explored by Henry James with a great amount of seriousness as a necessary part of the intricacies and hazards involved in the process of self-affirmation of a truly sensitive individual. A specific form that this theme takes in James's fictional work is that of the fate of the artist and the meaning of his work in modern society. James wrote a number of short stories centred on the problems of the artists in order to explore some of the more important aspects of this dialectic of ethics and aesthetics. It seems that James was influenced by Matthew Arnold's insistence on the moral purpose of art to be achieved without violating the law of beauty as he called them.

### Techniques

James used the traditional methods and techniques of novel writing as they had been developed by writers like George Eliot and Hawthorne who specialized in dramatizing and analyzing the developing consciousness of intelligent and sensitive characters. He also used the methods of detailed description of the background, a plot moving forward in a complex manner on the basis of decisive actions of characters and pressures exerted by social environment. But he wanted to achieve a greater rigour and perfection in his art than that attained by the earlier novelists. He did not like the looseness and bagginess of some of the Victorian classics like Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. He initiated the trend of writing the well-made novel. Moreover, since the theatre of action in his novels was the growth and development of the consciousness of characters, he used what has been called the point-of-view technique of narration. Here the events, characters and situations are not presented directly but through the impact they make on the consciousness of a particular character who replaces the omniscient narrator. We are made to share the blindnesses and prejudices as well as the intensity of perceptions of this character through whose point of view every thing comes to us. As the story gets filtered through the consciousness of the narrator, it acquires the colouring of his sensibility. In the early phase of his career as a novelist usually considered to last till the publication of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James combined the use of point-of-view technique with traditional methods of narration including authorial commentary. In the second or middle phase of his career, James partly moved away from his habit of focusing attention on the predicament of a central character and wrote novels of social realism in the tradition of Dickens and Balzac. Here, too, he made only a limited use of the point-of-view technique and gave extensive descriptions of the broader social scene in which the characters were placed. This phase covers *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) and *The Tragic Muse* (1890). In his last phase he elaborated his point of view technique and supported it by some other poetic devices like the use of symbols and metaphors and even some mythic patterns. This became necessary for the kind of novel he was writing. However, many readers feel that there is too much of 'doing' or conscious artistry in these later novels and this makes them very different from the eminently readable novels like *The Portrait of a Lady* of the early phase where the usual strength of James's art is combined with wit and humour and suspense making it more interesting to the common reader.

### Critical Summary of the Novel

Before we discuss the themes and techniques in *The Portrait of a Lady*, it will be useful to present a critical summary of the novel. The writer gives here the story of Isabel Archer, who is a young, intelligent and charming American girl of modest means. On account of her spirit of independence and eager enthusiasm for seeing the world and enriching her personality through experiences and impressions to be gathered from different situations and places, she feels dissatisfied with the humdrum life she is leading in Albany. Unlike most other women in her situation, she does not want to lead a conventional life of ordinary routine and is desirous of taking bold decisions in pursuit of the elevated vision of self fulfillment she has formed in her mind. In the absence of real opportunities for leading such a strikingly original life, she has to content herself



with reading books in the privacy of a lonely and deserted room of her ancestral home. She gives free reins to her fantasies and in this way secures protection for herself from intrusions of the ordinary set of people from whom she wants to distinguish herself. We can see that she is imagined by Henry James as a character who embodies the ideal of the dignity and integrity of the self which had got separated from the dominant version of liberal humanism propelling the onward march of industrial capitalism during the nineteenth century in the entire Western world including America.

Novelists like Henry James believed that only selected individuals in western societies were left as repositories of the finer version of liberal humanism. James felt that on account of its heritage of New England Puritanism and the democratic freedoms available to most its citizens, the American society threw up such repositories of liberal humanistic ideals in larger numbers. However, because of heavier emphasis on commercialism and lack of rich historical traditions, the real potential of such individuals remained largely unmaterialized in this society.

James feels that an encounter with Europe was essential for meeting the moral and intellectual requirements of these finer products of American civilization. Such a rescue operation needed by Isabel Archer takes place in the novel when her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, comes to Albany to meet her nieces after their father's death. Mrs. Touchett is an outspoken and self-willed lady who is very fond of doing as she likes without paying much attention to what opinion others may form of her behaviour. She is an expatriate American living most of the time in Florence. When she comes to Albany, she finds Isabel Archer alone in the house and is greatly impressed by her frankness, her spirit of independence and her intelligence which become evident to her in her brief conversation with her. She immediately decides to take Isabel away from Albany and give her an opportunity to see Europe.

The novel opens with a scene at the charming house, Gardencourt, which stands on the Thames some forty miles from London. Mrs. Touchett's husband, Mr. Daniel Touchett, a retired American banker and her son, Ralph, live here. Mrs. Touchett, as is the habit with her, abruptly informs her husband and son through a telegram that she is coming back from America and will bring her independent-minded niece with her. The afternoon tea ceremony, with the sophisticated and witty conversation which takes place among father, son and a visitor, Lord Warburton, who lives in the neighbourhood and is a close friend of Ralph Touchett, gives us some idea of the positive accomplishments of European civilization which are usually missing in America. A more easily perceptible symbol of these accomplishments, however, is Gardencourt itself, with its beautiful lawns, its old architectural beauty and the rich fund of experiences and associations that it carries with it. It has a picture gallery where the paintings of many master painters have been hung. When Isabel Archer arrives here with her crazy aunt Mrs. Touchett, she makes a powerful impact on the minds of the three persons assembled in the lawns including Lord Warburton who is particularly struck by the vivacity and charm of her personality. Isabel finds everything and everybody at Gardencourt enchanting and she herself in turn enchants them all. Lord Warburton declares to Ralph that she perfectly meets his ideas of an interesting woman. Her old uncle likes her immensely and Ralph himself starts adoring her. Ralph is a very clever, imaginative and passionate young man, but because he is consumptive, he keeps his passion concealed from Isabel and contents himself with making her career an object of his apparently detached but innerly deeply involved contemplation. Ralph's attitude to Isabel plays an important part in the story. We can see here that the theme of Isabel's adventurous exploration of the freedom of her being and the international theme involving a comparison and contrast between American civilization and the European civilization are launched simultaneously. In fact, the two remain inextricably mingled with each other all through this story.

The first dramatic extension in Isabel's search for new experiences and the exploration of her self comes when Lord Warburton proposes to her and she rejects this proposal. Lord Warburton is offered to us as the perfect specimen of the uppermost section of English society. A rejection of his proposal gives us some idea of the vision of self-affirmation that Isabel Archer carries in her mind. It also indicates her critical evaluation of one aspect of European civilization which holds great charm for her. As Mr. Touchett tells Isabel with

some amount of gentle humour, Lord Warburton is a very amiable young man who has elegant tastes cares for literature, for art, for science, for charming young ladies. The most elegant of his tastes, according to Mr. Touchett, is his taste for the new views. The gentle irony which plays in these remarks, brings out the comparative superficiality of the intellectual and literary inclinations of Lord Warburton whose taste for science and for radical views is at par with his taste for charming young ladies indicating that these inclinations are at best a harmless flirtation. Isabel Archer's rejection of his proposal has two implications, one relating to the character of European civilization as represented by his personality and the other relating to the ideal of self-affirmation Isabel carries in her mind.

In Lord Warburton, a thoroughly honest and sincere temperament has acquired, through perfect breeding, a delicacy and courtesy of address which looks completely natural and unforced. He is the product of a culture which when compared with the simplicity, bareness and crudity of American culture, looks very complex and full of subtle variety. But the perfect breeding which has rubbed off all the rough edges of his personality has also seriously reduced his originality and individuality. This makes him touchingly simple-hearted, but also very simple-minded. He looks too much cast in the mould of a well-defined tradition. His intelligence remains a mere smartness and has not had opportunities of full development through independent decisions taken without caring for his position in society. His interest in larger human concerns is inhibited by the privileged position he occupies in a well-settled order. This lack of independence of personality becomes even more clear in the case of his sisters whom Isabel meets during a visit to Lockleigh, Lord Warburton's stately home. Their round, quiet and contented eyes and the sweetness and shyness of their manners indicate that though charmingly perfect they have lost their individuality almost completely.

While Isabel warmly appreciates the wholesome charm of Lord Warburton's personality and is duly conscious of the privileges and worldly advantages that will come to her if she marries him, she cannot accept this position because it would amount to a betrayal of the conception of her own true self she carries in her mind. As an embodiment of the finer version of liberal humanism, she couldn't have compromised with the dominant value-system of which Lord Warburton formed a part in spite of the candidness of his temperament and amiability and charm of his personality. She felt that her freedom of being will not find an adequate space in the position into which she would place herself through this kind of marriage. She felt that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived a design of drawing her into a system where her sublime soul would feel choked. We can thus see that because of the gulf which had been created in the nineteenth century between the liberal humanism which valued the dignity and integrity of an autonomous self and the more obtuse form of it which was represented by the dominant classes, with some important interval variations, both in American and European societies, Isabel marriage with Lord Warburton would be a compromise with the fate she was trying her best to escape.

The next important point in the story comes with the appearance on the scene of Caspar Goodwood, a suitor of Isabel from America who had been making earnest efforts to gain her consent for marriage and now follows her to Europe in order to make a fervent appeal to her once again for acceptance of her suit. Goodwood, in fact, represents the best fate that awaits Isabel Archer in America if she can reconcile herself to an ideal of happiness permissible within the dominant form of liberal humanism shaped by industrial capitalism. There are aspects of the personality of Caspar Goodwood which Isabel Archer cannot but appreciate as she is a product of the same American culture as it was in the pre-industrial phase of its history. The two positive features of American culture which James appreciated were the moral rigour and uprightness bequeathed to it by New England Puritanism and the love of independence and freedom that had been fostered by the democratic set-up in the country. However, with a heavy emphasis on commercialism and industrial enterprises and the thrust towards commonality and public sharing characteristic of a democratic polity, these values of moral uprightness and respect for autonomy and privacy of the individual took a distorted form and the original sensitivity and idealism disappeared from the dominant liberal humanism which pervaded contemporary social life, in the Post Civil War period. There was a certain obtuseness, a rigidity and a utilitarian practicality

here which were repugnant to the repositories of the finer version of liberal humanism like Isabel Archer.

Caspar Goodwood, a Bostonian and the son of a prosperous cotton industrialist, has, though still young, been running the family business for some years with great success. He is a man of resolute will and concentrated energy who single-mindedly pursues his practical ends. He has leadership qualities and can efficiently direct the wills of those working with him to accomplish big results in practical enterprises. He has a force of personality whose impact has to be felt by those who come into contact with him because he insists on his claims with his whole weight and force. We can easily see that he represents for James the strength and weaknesses of New England Puritanism after it had been transformed into an earnest kind of business ethos. James inherited from Hawthorne his uneasiness with a Puritanism which made people excessively narrow, tense and humourless. Now that Puritanism had lost its earlier spiritual edge and had been converted into an earnest minded worldliness, it had acquired a crudity and drabness which made it even less pleasant to live with than was the case earlier. No wonder that with all her respect for the concentrated and manly force of Caspar Goodwood's personality, Isabel cannot think of accepting him as her future husband. She feels that his jaw was too square and set and his figure too straight and stiff. These things, to Isabel's mind, suggested a want of easy consonance with the deeper rhythms of life. She also feels that he showed his appetites and designs too simply and artlessly and was too obsessively self-absorbed. Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood seem to be at opposite poles in terms of the impressions they leave on the mind of Isabel Archer; one is very amiable and urbane while the other is stiff, humourless and crude. But deep down both represent versions of a worldly and dominating form of liberal humanism with which the finer version of liberal humanism represented by Isabel Archer can find accommodation. She realizes that Caspar Goodwood represents the stubbornest fact of her life with which she will have to come to terms one day. But she instinctively feels that he is the destiny she must try her best to evade. She cannot find happiness and affirmation of her being in becoming a part of the system represented either by Lord Warburton or Caspar Goodwood. She tells Caspar Goodwood that she wants to choose her fate and judge things for herself and would not fall an easy prey to the ordinary kind of suitors who would come forward to propose to her. Caspar Goodwood does not find any solace in this declaration and tells her that he will come to meet her again to see if she would accept him after she had travelled around in Europe for a while.

Before we come to the next significant point in Isabel Archer's story we may mention the entry of Henrietta Stackpole who is a close friend of Isabel Archer, but very different from her in sensibility and personality structure. Henrietta is a journalist and has come to Europe with an assignment to send reports about the peculiarities of European society and European men and women to *Interviewer*, the journal which has assigned this duty to her. With her arrival at Gardencourt the lighter side of the international theme, consisting of comedy of manners arising out of differences in national traits comes into prominence. Henrietta represents the impact of democratic processes on human personality. She is very frank and forthright but has no respect for privacy. She is a generous and sensible person with no animus or ill-will against any one, but she has no patience with idlers and has the guts to express her opinions boldly and emphatically without complexity or depth. With her self-confidence and work ethic, she offers a contrast to a person like Ralph Touchett. Madame Merle, a cultivated lady, who appears on the scene when, as a friend of Mrs. Touchett, she comes to stay at Gardencourt, also offers a vivid contrast to Henrietta Stackpole since as a Europeanized American she has developed an exquisite aesthetic taste and acquired all the graces of leisured existence, qualities to which Henrietta attaches very little importance.

Madame Merle is presented in the novel as she is perceived by Isabel Archer who, being inexperienced, may not be able to detect duplicities or failures hidden under the surface. Through our acquaintance with Madame Merle, we come into touch in a preliminary way with the special features of the point-of-view technique used in this novel and also with the dialectic of moral sense and aesthetic taste which forms an important aspect of the major theme of the expansion of self undertaken by Isabel Archer and the undetected pitfalls involved in

it. Madame Merle first appeals to Isabel's admiration by her capacity for having an accurate feel of things, particularly a feel for the arts, a sensuous perceptivity which gives us an unerring taste for judging the quality of art objects and makes us adept in acquiring the graces of leisured existence. Her exquisite aesthetic sense comes out in the skill and facility with which she plays music or does painting and embroidery work. Her exquisite accomplishments are also reflected in the manner in which she maintains her personality. She is described in the novel as a tall, fair, smooth woman. Her features, we are told, were thick but in perfect proportion and harmony and her complexion had a healthy clearness. Her manner, we are told, expressed the repose and confidence which come from a large experience. Isabel Archer is greatly impressed by her accomplishments. Although Ralph tries to alert Isabel to her weaknesses by adopting a mildly teasing ironical tone she does not gain adequate awareness of this fact. Since Madame Merle plays an important role in Isabel Archer's life, it would be necessary to keep in mind basic flow in her character which Isabel herself couldn't detect. Despite her exquisitely educated sensitivity, Madame Merle is morally insensible because she is extremely selfish and devious in her dealings with people. Her aesthetic sense is actually of a debased type because she treats human beings as things and does not hesitate to use them as means to her own ends.

Crucial point in Isabel Archer's life comes when on Ralph's persuasion, Mr. Touchett agrees to modify his will and make a provision in it for half of Ralph's share in the fortune going to Isabel Archer. Mr. Touchett has some reservations about the advisability and ethical rightness of making such a provision. He does not fully share Ralph's trust in the rare kind of goodness of Isabel Archer's personality. Ralph, however, is interested in bringing Isabel into a position where she can be free to act according to the requirements of her imagination so that he can see what she would make of her life. Ralph is the most intelligent, and morally sensitive character in the novel but he also misjudges the impact that possession of a big fortune might have on the fate of Isabel Archer. Also, he does not see very clearly the difference between receiving money as a gift and earning it through one's own efforts. When his father expresses some reservations about making things too easy for a person, before he agrees to his proposal of making the desired change in the will, he brushes aside the whole issue rather summarily. Since the matter is kept a secret, Isabel has no idea of the fortune she is going to inherit on her uncle's death nor does she know about the role played by Ralph in this matter. When the matter becomes public after Mr. Touchett's death, Madame Merle very shrewdly guesses the role played by Ralph in making Isabel an heiress of a big fortune of sixty or seventy thousand pounds. She does not, however, let Isabel know about it immediately and starts scheming about how Isabel's fortune could be used to suit her own interests.

When Isabel travels with her aunt to Europe and ultimately starts living with her in Florence, the next crucial test of Isabel Archer comes up before her. Her choice in this matter seals her fate once for all and her life takes a course which she could not have anticipated. At Florence she meets Gilbert Osmond who seems to her the kind of person fully according with her ideal of a truly civilized and cultivated gentleman. In bringing about this meeting between the two, Madame Merle's discreet machinations have played a vital role.

Gilbert Osmond is an American by birth, but one who is thoroughly Europeanized. He is in fact a classic case of the Jamesian expatriate who gets deracinated and hollowed out. Being a person of a sophisticated sensibility and refined tastes he may very well appear to be a product of a fruitful encounter between American civilization and European civilization which leading to a blending of the best qualities derived from both; the dignity and integrity of the self derived from American heritage having undergone a mellowing and refinement of taste and demeanour as a consequence of absorption of the best elements of the rich and well-formed cultural tradition of Europe. Actually, Osmond is a travesty of such a blending, because he represents not a true integrity of the self but merely egotism and not an enriched sensibility resulting from absorption of refined feelings and sentiments but merely an aesthetic keenness of sensuous perceptivity. In stead of intrinsic worth, he merely represents the aloofness of a snob; instead of a mellowed and humane sensibility, he represents only sterile aestheticism which does not go beyond cultivation of empty forms. Instead of separating his autonomous self from worldliness, he is merely a slave of the world of status and wealth because he

envies it even when he professes to detest it. He is certainly not a repository of the values of finer liberal humanism but a decadent and hardened version of that ideal as perverted by his parasitic aloofness and haughty contempt for ordinary humanity engaged in productive activity.

Ralph Touchett offers a marked contrast to Gilbert Osmond. While Ralph Touchett represents a free and inquiring mind who has a live curiosity and loving imagination capable of appreciating every thing that is new and out of the ordinary, Gilbert Osmond is a mechanical slave to conventions. His life style, in spite of its apparent distinctiveness and individuality, is marked by derivativeness and fixity. If Isabel Archer looks upon him as an outstanding example of a free spirit, it is largely because she does not recognize that he does not have the generosity and creativity of such a character. His love of the arts is merely an expression of his distended egotism. He is a mere collector and not a creator or a genuine appreciator of beauty. Indicating his perceptive awareness of the real nature of Gilbert Osmond, Ralph Touchett calls him a sterile dilettant and is pained to see that, with all her fine intelligence and imaginative sensibility, Isabel Archer couldn't recognize that he is a mere travesty of the ideal of liberal humanism she has in her own mind and allows herself to be ground in the mill of the conventional by marrying him.

What makes Isabel Archer's decision to marry Gilbert Osmond tragic is this failure of perception. This blindness, we should keep in mind, is intimately linked with the positive qualities of her personality. It is her abstract idealism which makes her ignorant of the finer guises which the spirit of worldliness she abhors can assume. It is her romantic glorification of what looks exceptional and rare that makes Gilbert Osmond so fascinating to her. Moreover, the very conception of self-affirmation through enrichment and refinement of sensibility she carries in her mind and which the novelist himself endorsed to a considerable extent suffers from the weakness of an inherent aestheticism. It is this hidden dimension of aestheticism in the liberal humanism embodied in Isabel Archer and endorsed by James which creates a tendency in Isabel Archer to admire and over-value a character like Gilbert Osmond and create a disability in her which prevents her from perceiving his negative traits. The idea of progress and change in social order had become suspect in the eyes of writers like Henry James because of its identification in their mind with industrial development and commercial enterprises. Therefore, they tended to define the process of development of the self in terms of a passive cultivation of the sensibility by absorbing more and more impressions and enlargement of capacity for imaginative participation in experiences rather than an involvement in any programme of action for social transformation.

James's visualization of the inherent dangers in this ideal of self-affirmation as projected through the character of Isabel Archer indicates a candid and critical awareness of the limitations of a value-system he himself endorsed as a novelist. This intimate linkage between Isabel Archer's high valuation of the character of Gilbert Osmond and James's own ideological predilections enables us to understand how, after her rejection of Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood for reasons mentioned in the two cases, she can choose a sterile aesthete like Osmond as her husband. When Isabel Archer is in Florence with her aunt, Madame Merle makes efforts to produce a favourable impression of Gilbert Osmond on her mind and then persuades her to visit him at his house along with her aunt she has also secretly persuaded Gilbert Osmond to fall in line with her scheme to charm Isabel Archer into a marriage with him so that the great fortune she has inherited from her uncle comes to him. Madame Merle is doing all these manipulations for the sake of Gilbert Osmond's daughter Pansy who is actually her own child through an illicit relationship with him.

Gilbert Osmond lives with his young daughter in a charming villa on a hill outside Florence. The villa is not only exquisitely situated, it is also full of beautiful art-objects which are a proof of Osmond's highly cultivated aesthetic taste. This creates quite a favourable impression on the mind of Isabel Archer. But she feels attracted towards him for other reasons as well. He is poor, he is solitary and he is handsome he is grave and speaks in a low key. He seems to have suffered in life and this suffering seems to have had a mellowing effect on his personality. His primary attraction for Isabel Archer, however, is that he has a personal distinction which she has not found to the same degree in any one of her earlier acquaintances. This personal distinction is present in every detail of his bearing, his manners, his conversation and his conduct. This makes him a

really interesting man to Isabel Archer. He seems to her to combine all the positive qualities of Ralph Touchett, Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood without any one of their faults or limitations. He seems to find Isabel Archer's company highly agreeable, but he expresses his interest in her in a way that a man of cultivated mind and developed sensibility should express his interest in a woman. In other words Gilbert Osmond is the man who seems to meet the requirements of Isabel Archer's imagination. The friendship between them gradually develops and Osmond tells her the story of his life. He very briefly referred to his wife's death and this Isabel thinks is because of his habitual restraint about matters that had moved him deeply. He talks about his daughter very affectionately but says very little about his poverty. What touches Isabel most is his noble contentment in the pursuit of his cultivated tastes.

In Isabel's deepening interest in Osmond two factors play the most important part. First, it is her ardent desire to enlarge and enrich her experience of life, to grow in wisdom and virtue under the guidance of this most superior of men, as she takes him to be at that point of time. James tells us in the Preface to the novel in the New York edition that he was mainly interested in knowing what would happen to a young girl who dared to affront her destiny. This ambition to go beyond the limits of ordinary humanity in her pursuit of knowledge, virtue and experience is precisely what constitutes an affront to her destiny and it is in pursuit of this ambition that she feels attracted towards Osmond. Her second reason is that she wanted to do something with the money she had inherited from her uncle. She wanted it to be used for something that was imaginative and rare. To be of service to Osmond in this way seemed to her a most appropriate gesture. The reasons which impelled Isabel towards marriage with Osmond were thus rooted in her superior values of liberal humanism as also in some of her weaknesses. These weaknesses, too, were ultimately linked with her ardent humanism. Her tendency to romanticize what attracts her and her excessive self-regard, for example, are both rooted in her idealistic fervour. As she comes closer to Osmond, her aunt who disliked Osmond for very sound reasons feels disturbed and tries to dissuade her. Her cousin, Ralph Touchett, and her friend, Henrietta, also come over to meet her specifically to dissuade her from making such a choice. However, she remains adamant and insists on taking her own independent decision, ignoring the advice of all her well-meaning friends. She feels convinced that she has sound reasons in support of this important decision in her life. However, Isabel Archer discovers soon after her marriage that she was disastrously wrong in the impression she had formed about the personality of Gilbert Osmond.

When we see Isabel Archer again, three years have already passed after her marriage. She is an entirely changed person. As she lives with her husband in Rome, she puts on a brave front and hides her disappointment from all those who loved her. Ralph Touchett visits her and is pained to see the grim reality of her married life behind the facade of cheerfulness she bravely tries to maintain in his presence. We have our preliminary glimpse of the snobbishness and egotism of Osmond when he treats Edmund Rosier, a young man who loves Pansy, with dry contempt. This gives us some idea of the situation in which Isabel Archer is trapped. In the treatment he gives to Rosier, we see an Osmond whose fine polish has disappeared and he comes, out before us in his real character.

What has happened to Isabel and how it happened forms a major part of the story as it is unfolded in the second volume of the novel. James does not depend here so much on a series of events directly narrated as on the impression these events leave on Isabel Archer's mind. Much of the change that has taken place in Isabel's married life is revealed indirectly through her great midnight meditation in the 42<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the novel. Here Isabel sits before a dying fire in her sitting room and reviews her whole relationship with her husband. No outward movement takes place and yet the real action of the novel is dramatized through this midnight vigil in a manner that combines the intensity of a scene with the economy of a picture. The point of view technique is used almost throughout the novel, but here it shows itself to its greatest advantage. The theatre of action remains the mind of Isabel and the currents and eddies in the flow of her consciousness are conveyed to us with their original intensity and force. Apart from the use of the point of view technique which captures the shock waves experienced by Isabel Archer as she discovers how mistaken she was in her understanding of the character of Gilbert Osmond,

James also relies in this part of the novel on the impact of images and metaphors which he uses at crucial points rather prominently. The very house in which she lives with Osmond becomes an extended metaphor of his personality and the suffocating effect it produces on Isabel Archer's mind:

She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation.

Later in the novel, the ruins of Rome among which Isabel Archer wanders in her desolate state are used as a potent metaphor. As the discovery that Gilbert Osmond is cold-hearted and appallingly egotistical is presented through Isabel's consciousness the analysis of his personality is accommodated to her capacities, allowing for all the pain, bewilderment and confusion she experiences as she learns more and more about his real nature.

Osmond's aestheticism turns out to be a kind of exclusionism based on sheer vanity. Instead of the freedom of spirit, he represents a shabby conventionality which affects to despise the world but in fact submits before it and conforms to its standards in letter and spirit. This comes out very sharply when he tries to prevent Isabel from going to meet Ralph Touchett lying on his death bed in London. Osmond coldly invokes the issue of marital propriety which for him only means sticking to the forms of conventional behaviour even though the genuine spirit which can infuse real life into these conventions is totally absent. The shabby worldliness of Gilbert Osmond becomes visible to Isabel when he tries to secure Lord Warburton's interest in his daughter Pansy, and goes to the extent of making an effort to coerce Isabel into furthering this design by exploiting his old regard for her. Her glimpse of Madame Merle standing in their drawing room while Osmond keeps sitting, also gives her an inkling of the secret intimacy of their relationship.

When Ralph Touchett is dying, she musters courage to defy Osmond's prohibition and goes to London to see him. It is a touching scene where she puts away the mask she had been wearing earlier and confesses to him how much she has suffered by ignoring his advice. Ralph also tells her that he holds himself responsible for what has happened to her. But the two sensitive and humane characters muster sufficient moral courage to overcome their regrets and accept the grim realities of their situation with stoical composure.

Caspar Goodwood appears on the scene for the last time in the novel and makes a strong appeal to her to release herself from the bondage of a life with Osmond. He passionately kisses her to make his appeal more fervent and forceful. Isabel experiences for the first time the force and attraction of passionate love, but she extricates herself from his embrace and takes a firm decision to go back to Rome. She feels that she has to go back even if it means permanent incarceration. She wants to face the consequences of her choice, howsoever hard it may be for her to do so. To seek an escape from these consequences, she feels, would not be consistent with her dignity and self-respect.

The ending of the novel has left many readers dissatisfied. Isabel Archer herself is not very clear in her mind why she chooses to go back to Rome. Many different reasons are offered by her. Some of these reasons look mere rationalizations of a decision which has been taken at a deeper level on account of factors other than those offered to justify it. When asked by Henrietta Stockpole at an earlier point in the novel she cannot free herself from Osmond, she gives two different reasons. One of them is that she must face the consequences of her choice. She married him before all the world and cannot annul this relationship in a light manner. The second reason given is that she considers marriage a sacrament which has to be honoured at all costs. This view of marriage is in partial contradiction to her earlier position that it should be a mutually chosen relationship by two individuals and this is its only justification. She also puts forward the argument that she owes a responsibility to Pansy to whom she has given a promise to come back to Rome. James mentions in his Preface that the ending of the novel remains partly an open question. What Isabel Archer could do in future remains outside the purview of the action chosen for this work. The portrait he wanted to draw gets completed by the time the story comes to an end here.

## II. Some Major Topics in Terms of Which the Portrait of a Lady Can Profitably be Discussed

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### The Character of the Heroine

The cornerstone of this novel, James tells us in the Preface, was the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny. This shows that the primary intention of the novelist was to bring out the character of Isabel Archer, the heroine of the novel, through the events and happenings rooted in the deeper urges and aspirations of her self. The title of the novel also indicates that the chief purpose of the novelist is to give a full picture of the personality of Isabel Archer. Before we take note of the basic features of the personality which emerge from the portrait painted by the writer, some points about the process through which this portrait is developed may be made. First of all, the term *portrait* may give us the impression that James places before us a personality which has been fully formed. Actually, it is not so. What James shows is a process of personality formation rather than a finished portrait to be unfolded before the readers. The young girl whom we see in the ancestral house at Albany is a bundle of vague aspirations constituting a potential self which is yet to be realized. The character of Isabel Archer gets known to us only as we see her in relation to different characters and in various situations she has to face in the course of the action. The character takes a concrete form only gradually under the impact of the experiences she goes through in consequence of the crucial decisions she has to take at different points in the story. This fluidity of Isabel's personality is emphasized by James himself in the earlier chapters of the novel. We cannot separate her character from the entire series of happenings which constitute the plot. The novelist does, on some occasions, make some illuminating comments about the kind of person Isabel Archer is, but these comments refer mainly to possibilities, or latent tendencies which get concretized in the course of the action of the novel. Secondly, the character of Isabel is not done from the outside. The writer depicts her personality from within.

The main emphasis in the novel remains not on what happens, but the impressions external happenings leave on the mind of Isabel Archer. James does not use the point of view technique in this novel as a window or frame beyond which we cannot move at all; the primary aspect of this technique here lies in the use of a consciousness as an intensifying reflector. Most of the characters are presented in the novel in terms of the vivid impressions Isabel forms of them, although occasionally we have a direct view of them as well and come to know about them what Isabel herself doesn't know. Moreover, Isabel Archer is also occasionally seen from the outside either through the authorial comments (as in chapters 4, 6 and 12) or in terms of what other characters perceive or think about her. The consciousness of Ralph Touchett, for example, is used to put before us a view of Isabel Archer which is in some respects different from and wiser than her own. His loving imagination hovers very fondly over her personality and reveals to us some aspects of her character which she gets to know only toward the end of the novel.

The third point about James's portrayal of Isabel's character is that while she is treated with adequate imaginative sympathy and the reader is put in a position where he can share her responses, perceptions and confusions (as in chapter 42) there is also an attempt on the part of the writer to achieve some distancing and detachment. The writer's portrayal of Isabel's character is marked by a gentle irony present either in the form of witty comments or a critical perspective underlining the elements of illusion, over-excitement and confusion in her responses. Some critics, however, feel that James's attitude towards the heroine is not sufficiently detached and objective. F. R. Leavis, for example, feels that James's attitude toward Isabel Archer is partial both in the sense that it is selective and in the sense that it reflects an indulgent and protective attitude towards her. A fourth point about James's portrayal of Isabel's character which in a way



is related to the selectiveness of his vision, is that, in spite of the emphasis on rendering the consciousness of the heroine with immediacy and force, the primary purpose here is not the projection of her psychology as such but the dramatization of her ethical sensibility or moral sense. He wants to show the working of this moral sense in a manner where it is not abstracted by factors like pressures of convention or any financial constraints. Since for Henry James, as he tells us in the Preface, the moral sense in a work of art is measured in terms of the amount of felt life that lies behind it, his portrayal of the working of the ethical sensibility of Isabel Archer does involve presentation of her experiences with a good deal of intensity and inwardness. Those aspects of the experiences which do not directly form a part of her moral sense are, however, left out in the portrait.

So far as the conception of the character is concerned, Isabel Archer basically represents the ideal of freedom of being or full individuality and independence of the self. This emphasis on individuality and liberty of action was an essential part of the values of liberal humanism which had emerged with the growth of market economy in Europe and America. However, with the advance of capitalism, this ideal came to be defined in very narrow terms. The dominant version of liberal humanism which emerged in the society did not provide any space for those idealistic aspirations and vital needs, of our humanity which could not be reduced to the level of commodity exchange. These finer aspects of liberal humanism had, therefore, to be counterposed against the dominant version as aspirations embedded in some exceptional individuals who asserted their individuality and freedom of being by their refusal to conform to the conventional norms and sought self-affirmation outside the range of the usual roles available to them in society. These individuals, like the character of Isabel Archer, may not know very clearly the ultimate objectives they sought to achieve, but their self-affirmation necessarily involved rejection of all conventional restraints and it went beyond the pursuit of wealth or ownership of property. The real meaning of life lay for them in engagement of cultural pursuits and enrichment of sensibility by a continuous process of enlargement of experience, absorption of varied impressions and ceaseless exercise of curiosity. It signified, in other words, maintenance of an openness before life and a moral purity which remained uncontaminated by worldly considerations of wealth and status. It also meant a continuous broadening of sympathies and breaking the barriers of narrow prejudices.

James saw the manifestation of this superior kind of liberal humanism in American Transcendentalist Movement of the early nineteenth century. He felt that here the rigours of New England Puritanism had been softened to produce a new kind of spirituality implying a greater respect for the autonomy of the individual self, a warmer and more genial fellow-feeling and a greater confidence and trust in the goodness of all mankind. Isabel Archer is conceived as a character who embodies the idealistic fervour of this finer version of liberal humanism. Although there is an element of idealization in James's portrayal of Isabel, he tries to provide it realism and convincingness by referring to some of her weaknesses, in his general comments. The fact that the character of Isabel Archer is based on the writer's loving memory of his cousin, Minny Temple, lends an additional concreteness and resonance to the portrayal. Eventually, she emerges in the novel as a well-realized figure with a sufficiently well-defined individuality. Of course, the portrayal gains in complexity as the character develops through the action of the novel.

James explicitly tells us in chapter 4 of the novel that Isabel Archer had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering. Apart from this live curiosity and openness before life, she also had a youthful zest. She carried within herself, we are told, a great fund of life and her deeper enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world. Her favourable disposition towards the world, her active interest in knowing and understanding other people and her youthful charm and innocence make even a dry character like Mrs. Touchett declare that she is as good as a summer rain, any day. In chapter 6 of the novel James emphasizes the natural charm of her optimism and good faith, to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action. He also points to some weaknesses which would eventually prove costly to her. She is over-confident and over-optimistic. Summing up these weaknesses which do not amount to much when compared with her positive

qualities, James says: Altogether, with her meager knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better, her determination to see, to try, to know, her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame like spirit and the eager and personal creature of conditions; she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant.

Her most important strength which also proves to be her most costly weakness is what James calls her presumptuousness. She has an ardent desire and the courage to be some one extraordinary who aspires to do something noble and heroic. It is her determination to be independent, to act strictly in accordance with her own exalted notion of being an individual with intrinsic worth that brings about her tragedy. It is her aspiration to be a lady, in other words, which impels her to affront her destiny. She has the audacity to defy the limitations imposed on her by the necessity of her social environment. She refuses to be bound by any system and wants to maintain her freedom of being without being tied to a role defined for her from the outside. This is what makes her reject the offers of marriage coming from a distinguished personage like Lord Warburton and a personality of considerable weight such as Caspar Goodwood.

In her search for freedom and a superior mode of existence she can easily forego all the amenities of life that would be hers only if she could dilute her idealistic aspirations. Lord Warburton is a charming and urbane personality, but he is deficient in intellectual zeal. He tells Isabel Archer that he is afraid of her active, thinking mind. Moreover, marriage with him would bind Isabel to a system and her individuality would be grievously curbed. Similarly, Caspar Goodwood is too tense, too rigid and lacks the openness and equipoise which can ensure a full consonance with the deeper rhythms of life. It is this presumptuousness, this temerity to pursue the goal of being a distinctive personality with an exquisite and cultivated sensibility supported by moral purity and active intelligence which brings disaster upon her. This, as all tragic writers emphasize, is a kind of presumptuousness which puts her in confrontation with the forces that determine our fate. She attributes to Gilbert Osmond the qualities, she is herself aspiring for and fails to recognize that he is a cold and callous egotist with only a veneer of culture and sophistication. If she is presumptuous enough to ignore the well-meant advice offered to her in this regard by her well-wishers, it is only because she wants to face all the risks involved in the affirmation of her freedom of being.

There are some weaknesses in her ideal of freedom which land her in tragedy. Through the action of the novel, James wants to underline these weaknesses. The first point James wants to make is that Isabel Archer's concept of freedom is based on a romantic assumption that there was a natural harmony between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world. She is a naive optimist who too easily regards the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action. She does not recognize that there can be a gap between appearances and reality and there are empty forms without much substance. This leads to a mistaken assessment of personalities like those of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond who are both embodiments in different ways of a decadent and hardened spirit of worldliness. Isabel Archer learns through her suffering and comes to recognize that evil may exist in this world beneath genial and attractive appearances. The chapter 42 of the novel brings this mature recognition of the true character of the world in which she has to affirm the freedom of her being.

The maturing process of Isabel Archer makes her realize that since the world is not a place of free expansion and irresistible action, she can affirm her freedom of being only through a dignified stance of stoicism and self-abnegation. She can be a lady only by asserting her dignity through such a gesture. The freedom of being in the world of the late nineteenth century capitalism, James felt, can be affirmed only by making it something purely internal, a state of mind rather than a project of action. Isabel's maturing process also gives her a sharper awareness of accountability or the need for accepting the consequences of the choices she has made in the past. If her marriage with Osmond has gone sour, she recognizes that she cannot repudiate it outright. It was the result of a deliberate choice. Another point of wisdom which the action of the novel brings

home to the readers but which Isabel Archer herself does not fully recognize is that it is wrong to reduce ownership of wealth to the status of mere means for the exercise of freedom of being. How money is acquired and how much importance is to be given to it should be viewed as a necessary part of the process of self-affirmation. We cannot separate the issue of freedom of being from the economic reality of making a living. There is a partial recognition of the fact in Ralph when he admits before Isabel Archer during their last meeting that it was he who ruined her by being instrumental in making her the heiress of a large fortune. Since James himself is not prepared to recognize the weaknesses of an abstract notion of freedom of being which has been separated from the problem of making a living for oneself, he surrounds the whole issue with an air of sentimentality. This indicates a reluctance on his part to fully accept the logic of the tragic action of the novel. Like the heroine he, too, shows signs of clinging to a notion of freedom which has been shown to be woefully inadequate. The adoption of the cult of renunciation and self-abnegation by Isabel Archer and her decision to go back to Rome to live with Osmond even when it means living in a house of darkness, suffocation and slow death are indications of this reluctance to modify a view of life whose inadequacy stands exposed. Even though Isabel Archer has the courage, dignity and wisdom of a tragic heroine, we have a feeling that there is a partial lapse from this courage in her sentimental clinging to an abstract ideal. Arnold Kettle rightly points out that when Isabel Archer decides to go back to Rome, she is paying a final sacrificial tribute to her own ruined conception of freedom.

The novel can, in fact, be discussed in terms of Arnold Kettle's statement that *The Portrait of a Lady* is a novel about freedom where the freedom Isabel Archer seeks turns out to be an idealized freedom. It ends, as Arnold Kettle points out, can only end, in a desire not merely to be free *in* this world but to be free *of* this world.

Isabel Archer's failure to recognize that Gilbert Osmond's sterile aestheticism signifies not the cultivation of a genuinely humane sensibility but a mere travesty of it is linked with her reduction of the concept of freedom of being to a passive and merely contemplative mode of existence without active involvement in any project of building up a humane and civilized social order.

### **The International Theme in the Portrait of a Lady**

In many important novels of Henry James the story takes the central character to Europe and the experiences this character gathers there take on a special significance in the development of his personality. Many other characters in the novels are also usually American expatriates, living in Europe and moving about to different cities like Paris, London, Florence or Rome. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, too, we find that the heroine's arrival in Europe from Albany with her aunt carries the special significance of a pilgrimage. The experiences she goes through and the impressions she forms of people and places in Europe are loaded with meaning. Her aunt is an American who has permanently settled in Florence. Her uncle, Mr. Daniel Touchett, is an American banker settled in England. Her cousin, Ralph Touchett, is a Europeanized American. Madame Merle who seems to be a fully Europeanized lady and Gilbert Osmond who is equally Europeanized are both American expatriates. Then, there are the American tourists Isabel Archer meets in Paris. They look like a permanent fixture in the social environment of that city. This encounter of Americans with Europe which figures in James's novels so frequently is usually called the International theme in Henry James. Whatever larger implications this movement of the story across the Atlantic may have in particular novels, it came very naturally to James to present his characters in this international light. In the formation of his artistic sensibility, both America and Europe had played a decisive role. As we have already observed in the brief introductory remarks, about his personal life, his exposure to Europe began in his childhood itself. When he was twelve years old, his father moved the entire family for a visit to different places in Europe and they remained there for three years. At that impressionable age, James was fascinated by what he saw at different places in Europe. These impressions were enriched later by his visits as a grown-up. In fact, he eventually decided to settle in Europe and lived in England for the rest of his life.

Apart from this biographical factor on account of which he chose stories where characters and situations are taken from both American and European societies there were some other special reasons at that particular historical juncture which made an encounter with Europe a significant experience for a large number of Americans, particularly those unhappy with the main thrust of changes taking place in the society in the Post Civil War period. These Americans felt attracted towards Europe partly because they wanted to find a relief from the irritants pressing upon them at home. But a more important reason was their belief that by moving to Europe, they will gain a clearer understanding of the deficiencies which irked them in American society of their times.

Henry James had another reason related to his art as a novelist for bringing in the international situation in his novels. He felt that for achieving realism in his portrayal of social life, use of Europe as a point of reference was necessary. In his book on Hawthorne, he gives a long list of social institutions which were absent in America, but which, according to him, served as forms for a proper articulation of the social realities. The European social scene was richly encrusted with social formations which had been evolved over a long period of history and helped in giving a concrete shape to social reality. The American social scene, on the other hand, looked rather bald and bare to James. It is on account of this absence of adequate forms that the American novelists, according to James, had hitherto failed to capture the texture of day-to-day life in all its concreteness and had to content themselves with writing romances rather than novels. One account of all these factors, the international theme acquires different layers of meaning in James's novels. We can discuss some of these layers separately as we find them in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

The most obvious layer is that of comedy of manners. As a novelist James was a close observer of manners and could sharply identify those traits of a character which distinguished him from the other crystallized types. His intimate knowledge of the details of behaviour including idiosyncrasies of speech and idiom as also of preferences and prejudices and tastes which distinguished the typical products of American society from those of the Europeans enabled him to extend the field of the comedy of manners to the international plane. Being a close observer with a sharp eye for the traits which differentiated the members of one nation from those of another, he could produce a witty comedy of manners by playing off one national type against another. The character of Daniel Touchett is distinguished from that of a European, for example, by those habits and manners which this American banker carried with him and retained over the years despite his long stay in England. In the opening scene of the novel, his Yankee shrewdness and forthrightness as well as his poor regard for mere formalities are played off against the urbanity, sophistication and ease of a character like Lord Warburton. He drinks tea from a large cup, does not put on airs of ennui and boredom and he talks in a crisp and business like manner.

This comparison and contrast at the level of national types comes out even more sharply when Henrietta Stackpole is introduced in the novel as a typical American young woman who in her frankness, self-confidence and unabashed volubility is seen as different from the quiet, shy and mild mannered sisters of Lord Warburton. James's direct acquaintance with different national environments had given him a sharp awareness of all kinds of provincialisms which go undetected in the absence of a cosmopolitan outlook which transcends all national barriers. Ralph Touchett indulges in banter with Henrietta Stackpole and pretends to take her rather over-emphatic statements with a playful nonchalance and mock chivalry. The comedy of manners created on the basis of the international theme touches a point of brilliance here. The humour relating to Mrs. Lydia Touchett's eccentricities—her habit of communicating with her family through telegrams, her annoyance with the impudence of the hotel clerk in New York, her dislike of England on the simple ground that her maid servants here consumed too much beer and the laundress did not do her job properly is produced by an interplay of national habits and manners and this is continued at other places in the novel as well. Treatment of minor characters like Ned Rosier, Countess Gemini and Mr. Bantling (a Britisher who marries Henrietta Stackpole) generates a lot of humour of this variety. However, as James himself mentions in the Preface, this aspect of the international theme does not carry much weight in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

The more important dimension of the international theme is related to James's search for an ideal civilization which did not exist in any particular society, but could be imagined as an attainable ideal. The possibilities of an ideal civilization are explored through a critical examination of the strengths and limitations of the existing civilizations in different parts of the world. James's pre-occupation with the international theme in this sense forms an integral part of his central creative concerns. The two basic polarities he uses in his search for an ideal civilization are American civilization and European civilization. His interest at this level does not lie in registering differences of manners but in identifying the basic aspects of each civilization and exploring how a fruitful synthesis between the best aspects of the two civilizations could be achieved. An important part of this imaginative exercise is to measure the hazards of distortion and miscarriage involved in the whole process. It may be pointed out here that this synthesis is visualized by James as taking place in the form of influences being absorbed by a responsive individual. The civilizations do not come together at the institutional level. No new structures or institutions come up as a consequence of the fruitful interaction posited by James. It has also to be admitted that in the treatment of the international theme at this level, the exploration and examination of the polarity of American civilization is much more thorough than that of Europe which often functions merely as a symbol of what is lacking in America. That is why there is such a heavy emphasis on American characters in the treatment of the international theme. There are American characters who cannot learn anything from Europe. There are others who are qualified for a fruitful interaction with Europe but are too innocent to be aware of the hazards and pitfalls and hence experience betrayal in the process of their interaction. There are some Americans who get Europeanized but in a wrong way. They do not represent a fruitful synthesis between the positives of the two polarities. Some rare individuals among the American succeed in developing a truly refined and humane sensibility backed by a superbly critical intelligence. These characters usually gain wisdom through suffering and come to understand the evil which lurks beneath the attractive surface of Europe.

The three basic tendencies of American civilization which are identified by James in his search for an ideal civilization are New England Puritanism, Democracy and commercialism. These tendencies produce some positive results which get embodied in one type of characters and some negative traits which become visible in a different type of characters. Puritanism, according to James, produces among Americans a high sense of moral seriousness and responsibility, a strong will-power and self-control. It makes them feel concerned about the spiritual dimension of all that they are doing in this world. It also produces some negative results like tenseness, rigidity, humourlessness and concentration of all one's energies within narrow limits. The impact of New England Puritanism has not been shown in *The Portrait of a Lady* in its original form in any one of the characters. But Puritanism as modified by commercialism is embodied in the character of Caspar Goodwood. Isabel Archer typifies a Puritanism which has been softened and humanized by the spirit of democracy. Isabel Archer, according to James, represents a good blending of Puritan moral seriousness and democratic optimism and faith in humanity at large. Henrietta Stackpole, too, represents the impact of democracy on human personality. There is a common ground between her and Isabel on this account, even though their personalities differ in many vital respects. As against Isabel, Henrietta actually represents most of the negative aspects of a democratic polity, although she carries some of its good points, too. Democracy, according to James, can pose a real threat to privacy. Every thing becomes a topic of interest for public discussion. It also tends to flatten out and simplify complex issues so that they can be put in journalistic terms intelligible to the common people. There is also a danger, according to James, of the blunting of that bold curiosity which can question everything proposed by public opinion or social consensus. With all her warm humanity and soundness of heart, Henrietta has been shown as incapable of learning any thing new from Europe. Her visit to Europe is not a pilgrimage at all. She is too superficial, too impersonal, too abstract, too assertive to qualify for a fruitful encounter with Europe. She is there in the novel to highlight by contrast the qualities of Isabel Archer which make it possible for her to move towards a really refined and humane sensibility. Puritan stiffness as aggravated by the practicality of commercialism and democratic enthusiasm unbacked by intellectual curiosity are traits of American civilization which produce an environment which could constrict the growth of an

individual's personality and prevent him from growing into an ideally civilized sensibility. The most irksome aspect of American civilization for James is that because of the preponderant influence of commercialization, it tends to make an average American a philistine for whom nothing matters except that which can immediately pay in the market. He becomes obtuse to the finer things and higher activities such as the works of art, philosophical thinking and graces of leisured existence. The over-all atmosphere of social life in America, James felt, did not allow those rare individuals who were gifted with intelligence, imagination and sympathy to develop their finer sensibility. They had to be exposed to the social atmosphere of Europe to realize their full potential.

Europe figures in James's search for ideal civilization mainly for two things which are closely linked but are opposite in character. Europe, first and foremost, signifies the refinement and taste associated with aristocratic style of living. It also represents on its positive side outstanding achievements in the field of higher culture—arts, literature and intellectual activity. Isabel Archer's first contact with Europe is through Gardencourt, a Tudor house with extensive lawns, magnificent rooms and an art-gallery where the best paintings of great masters can be seen. The healthy and urbane personality of Lord Warburton and the gentle and smooth behaviour of his sisters actually symbolize the advantages that a civilization with long and well established traditions can provide to a duly receptive individual like Isabel Archer. The ideal civilization that would emerge from a fruitful blending of the positive elements of American and European civilizations would produce a genuine lady or a genuine gentleman. Ralph Touchett is seen by James as having all the qualities of a gentleman who typifies the achievements of an ideal civilization. Isabel Archer will mature into a lady who could be described as another genuine example of that ideal civilization. While Lord Warburton represents the positive side of Europe to a certain extent, he also carries within him some of its limitations. He is intellectually not ambitious and he does not have a highly developed individuality of his own. He does not, however, represent the negative weaknesses of Europe in very pronounced form. The negative side of Europe is its decadent and parasitical worldliness. There is a lack of genuine respect for the integrity of the self here and a corrupt and cynical hedonism which amounts to an obtuseness which is much more callous than the crude but enterprising commercialism of America. While Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond apparently stand for the amenities, graces and refinements of taste characteristic of European civilization, they actually carry within their personalities the decadence, corruption and sterility of Europe in their full force. The Europeanization of these two American expatriates has been of the wrong kind. James shows through them the possibilities of a total miscarriage of the whole attempt to evolve an ideal civilization through a blending of what America and Europe have to offer.

James's projection of the international theme in terms of a search for an ideal civilization is very serious and insightful in this novel but there are some limitations as well. These limitations are related to his reduction of the whole process of interaction between two civilizations to the cultivation of an individual's sensibility through a passive stance of absorbing impressions from outside. This reduces culture to something like an extract which can be separated from the whole institutional framework of the society which actually produces it. It separates culture from the whole historical process through which it has been evolved and makes it something that can be absorbed in its fullness in an instant. This visualization of culture as something that can be instantaneously appropriated leads to an aestheticization of culture. Apart from the damage done to its total meaning, this aestheticisation of culture also makes it very difficult to recognize the qualitative difference which exists between a Ralph Touchett and a Gilbert Osmond or between an Isabel Archer and a Madame Merle.

### **The Use of Point of View Technique in the Portrait of a Lady**

Henry James took the art of writing novels very seriously and tried to develop new methods and techniques of telling the story in order to achieve maximum intensity of effect on the mind of the reader. The governing principle behind these experiments was to convert telling into showing or to give to the narrative the

immediacy, vividness and suspense of dramatic presentation. Earlier, a third person narrator who knew everything about the characters and situations was used to report the action after it had already become a thing of the past. James sought to replace the omniscient author as narrator by a narrator who was himself a participant in the action of the novel. Such a narrator reported the action in terms of the impressions formed by him. His reporting was, therefore, not neutral or objective, but coloured by his own attachments, preferences, like and dislikes. It was also partial in the sense that some aspects of the situations and characters being reported were bound to remain either unperceived or wrongly perceived. A technique of telling the story from the point of view of a character who is placed inside the action of the story, would thus lend to the narrative some qualities of drama. The objective reality will be coloured by the emotions and excitements of the narrator and the report will also incorporate his confusions and blindnesses as he cannot know, before hand, what turn the events may take in the future and what new aspects of the characters with whom he is interacting may be revealed later through their actions. As against the report by an omniscient author the presentation of the story through the impressions formed in the mind of a fallible or unreliable narrator as Wayne Booth calls him in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, acquires the suspense and uncertainty of a dramatic presentation.

In the novel everything cannot be presented as it happens; many of the events have to be summarized. This reduces the immediacy of their effect. When the point of view technique is used, the original immediacy of effect in the impression formed in the narrator's mind is retained. James claims that the use of the point of view technique in *The Portrait of a Lady*, lends vivacity and force to the story. Most of the characters are presented to us through the consciousness of Isabel Archer. We have to look at things from her point of view and share her blindnesses, confusions and excitements. Madame Merle, for example, is introduced to us in terms of the impression she leaves on Isabel Archer's mind as she finds her in Gardencourt, playing on a piano. All the graces and accomplishments of Madame Merle are registered through the strongly favourable impression she produces on Isabel Archer's mind. Her selfishness and cleverness are allowed to be discovered through the shocked recognition Isabel gains at a much later point in the story. This lends dramatic intensity as well as uncertainty to the presentation of the character of Madame Merle. Similarly, we share Isabel Archer's admiration as well as her blindness with regard to the characters of Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond.

James maximized the advantage of the point of view technique of narration by using a narrator who was very sensitive and intelligent. Had he used a character like Henrietta Stackpole or Mrs. Lydia Touchett as a medium for telling the story, the effect would not have been as vivid and emotionally charged as it becomes when the story is presented through the consciousness of a character like Isabel Archer or Ralph Touchett. The point of view technique, therefore, becomes most effective, when the reflector being used gives intensity and concentration to the characters and situations being reflected in his consciousness. These advantages of the point of view technique are visible in *The Portrait of a Lady* in the presentation of characters like Lord Warburton, his sisters, Caspar Goodwood, Madame Merle, Countess Gemini and Gilbert Osmond. Since Isabel Archer acts like a sensitive plate, these characters come out very sharply and vividly before us when we perceive them through the intensified impressions they leave on her mind. Ralph Touchett is even more intelligent and sensitive than Isabel Archer and his point of view is used to perceive some aspects of Isabel Archer's character and situation of which she herself is not properly aware.

Actually, the most important use of the point of view technique lies in its efficacy in capturing the thoughts, emotions, dreams and excitements, or the entire inner turmoil being experienced by the character. Henry James, a novelist in the tradition of psychological realism, was writing at a time when it had become imperative for writers in this tradition to concentrate on characters who fell outside the dominant trends in social life. He had to evolve methods of portraying the inner life of the characters which seldom came out directly in what they did and said as members of society. Isabel Archer is an exceptional individual whose process of self-affirmation cannot be identified with her routine behaviour within the framework of activities assigned to her

by society. For an intimate knowledge of such characters, we have to identify ourselves with them and look within their minds and hearts and share their thought processes, anxieties and excitements. Since to know what it means to be a character like Isabel Archer is the major pre-occupation of Henry James in this novel, he has to carry the theatre of action within her consciousness and dramatize the contents of this consciousness. The eddies and crosscurrent the elations and disappointment she experiences when she is not outwardly engaged in any action and not even doing any talking have to be brought out before us. In this case, the consciousness of the character is not being used as a reflector, but becomes the centre, or the theatre, where the actors are the movements and disturbances which determine the direction and flow of this consciousness itself. Henry James specifically refers in the Preface to this aspect of the method used in the novel:

Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness. Stick to that for the centre; put the heaviest weight in that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself.

For dramatizing Isabel Archer's relation to herself, it was necessary to depict the complexities of her inner life as they were experienced by her.

The point of view technique is used at its best in this regard in chapter 42, where James records, without any intervention from outside or any authorial comments, the shock-waves experienced by Isabel Archer as she takes stock of her married life during what James calls in the Preface, her extraordinary meditative vigil and thinks about the impact on her mind of her discovery of the ugly reality of her husband's personality. There is no external action here, Isabel Archer sits in her chair silently and James records the spell of her recognitions as her mind grasps the full implications of her situation. James rightly says that this method of capturing inward life of Isabel Archer throws the action further forward than twenty incidents might have done. He rightly claims that the use of the point of view technique here produces an effect where all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture get combined.

Apart from providing an intensifying reflector and a centre for exploration of inward life, James saw in the use of the point of view technique another advantage. Since the consciousness being used for the purpose of this technique acts as a window on the scene, it also automatically provides a frame which cuts out all that is not relevant to the theme being explored in the novel. Life, according to James, involves a lot of splendid waste while art makes for economy. The use of the point of view technique helps in achieving this economy and tightness of structure which were so dear to James as an artist. But this necessitates use of a single consciousness for registration of impressions from the beginning to the end of the story. Henry James uses this symmetry of structure by restricting himself to the registering consciousness of Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors*. However, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, he uses the point of view of Isabel Archer as well as of Ralph Touchett and he also brings in at some crucial points in the story the comments of the omniscient author. He also introduces some scenes where neither Isabel Archer nor Ralph Touchett is present as a registering consciousness. The meeting between Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond where she discusses with him the impression he has formed of Isabel Archer's character can be cited as an example. This combination of traditional methods of narration and the point of view technique in *The Portrait of a Lady* helps James in presenting Isabel's character and situation more comprehensively and enables him to avoid the ambiguities which creep into his art in the novels of the last phase where the traditional methods of narration are consistently excluded by him. This also makes the novel more easily readable and interesting to the common readers.

### **Relationship between Ethics and Aesthetics in the Portrait of a Lady**

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, critics like Ivor Winters and F.R. Leavis have argued, Henry James shows the working of ethical sensibility in a pure form. The moral sense of the heroine, we are told, operates in full freedom without external constraints of a code of manners or of poverty. The moral sense here becomes an



index of the integrity of the self. The ethical concern of the heroine demands from her a determination on her part to act fully in accordance with her own notion of the freedom of her being. When the heroine faces challenges and temptations from the social world around her, she must resist them with courage and intelligence and thus maintain the integrity of her self. Her rejection of the offers of marriage coming from Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood are seen as examples of this kind of exercise of her moral sense. The essence of this moral sense lies in uncompromisingly upholding one's human dignity. The moral sense is tested in the novel in two ways. The first type of test requires courage to resist the pressure of social conventions and the temptations coming in the form of status and power. In this test, Isabel comes out successful. The second form of the test demands an exercise of intelligence through which a wrong mode of self-affirmation can be distinguished from the right one. In this test she fails when she decides to marry Gilbert Osmond. This, we are told, makes *The Portrait of a Lady* a tragic novel. Like any other tragic figure, Isabel Archer, also retrieves her dignity when, in her difficult and painful situation, she does not seek an easy escape from the consequences of her own actions and stoically lives through her suffering.

This reading, however, overlooks an important dimension of the theme which comes under focus in all the crucial decisions of Isabel Archer. James is not showing here merely the operations of an ethical sensibility in its pure form. He is actually exploring the possibility of evolving a sensibility where moral sense is enlivened by a finely discriminating aesthetic taste. He also wants to show that the hazard of a wrong type of blending of the two always exists. There are many reasons on account of which this attempt to combine moral values with aesthetic appreciation acquires a central significance in James's novels.

First of all, in his immediate cultural heritage in America, Puritanism had been recognized as too crude and unimaginative in its rejection of the fine arts and its suspicions about sensuous beauty. Hawthorne had already shown his concern for the removal of this narrowness in Puritanism. A more urbane and refined kind of spirituality where respect for virtue and keen appreciation of beauty do not contradict each other was what Hawthorne and Henry James strove very hard to visualize. There were many vacant spaces left by Hawthorne in his exploration of this theme. James sought to carry this exploration forward in his fiction. Isabel Archer's sensibility, accordingly, represents a moral idealism where both the ethical and the beautiful carry weight and are viewed as different aspects of the same spirituality. Isabel Archer's blindness to the weaknesses of Gilbert Osmond's personality is linked with the fact that the freedom of being, she is exploring seems to converge along the lines where Gilbert Osmond is pursuing a distinctiveness for himself through an ardent devotion to art-objects. She fails to perceive the vital difference which exists between an aesthetic taste which is an index of a humane sensibility and the lazy connoisseurship which is rooted in vanity and cynicism.

The second reason for relating ethics and aesthetics as two aspects of a single whole in James's novels is a more general one linked with the turn social developments had taken during the nineteenth century both in America and Europe. Because of a decline in faith in religion and degradation of most human activities to the level of commodification under pressures of the market, the only way in which many thought they could save their humanity was to preserve an area of activity which was not governed by market laws and was considered important in itself. The unique status given to the arts was a way of valuing them as something whose worth could not be measured in terms of exchange value. The integrity of art and the integrity of the human self were thus notions that got super-imposed on each other in this type of thinking. Matthew Arnold's conception of the role of literature as an activity where we really confront in experiential terms the moral question of 'how to live' is a good example of this thinking under which the moral was super-imposed on the artistic in order to meet a special need of the times. This emphasis on the moral aspect of a work of art depending on the amount of 'felt life' that has gone into it is also emphasized by James in his Preface.

The best achievements in the field of art were thus seen as a triumph of the human spirit or an uncompromising affirmation of the integrity of the self. The moral and the artistic tended to become identical and a devotion to art could automatically be viewed as an index of one's concern for preserving the best elements in our

humanity. The tradition of perceiving the real moral quality of a human being in terms of culture and sensibility tended to produce the assumption that the only true morality was one which could be embodied in art where our innermost and authentic humanity found expression. Morality and aesthetics were thus imagined as intimately connected with each other as content and form. Since there could be no content without form there could be no morals which were not reflected in manners and taste. The only danger here was that of an aestheticism, which would worship forms without taking into account what kind of content and how much of it was embodied in these forms. Dilettantism of Gilbert Osmond is actually an excessive concern for mere forms. This aestheticism was reflection of a callous disregard for creativity and authenticity of spirit. Through *The Portrait of a Lady*, James projects this complex interrelationship between morality and aesthetic taste. When morality is to be perceived through form, there is always a risk of taking mere appearances for substance and truth. *The Portrait of a Lady* powerfully brings before us the problematic character of the whole dialectics of ethics and aesthetics and shows its operation in specific instances.

There is a third reason which impels James towards a position where ethics and aesthetics are seen as inseparably connected with each other. Liberal humanism during the nineteenth century split into two separate components. The ideal of creating a richer humanity through free expansion of the self was now detached from the ideal of progress or transformation of the social order through a programme of reforms. The process of self-affirmation of exceptional individuals who were capable of attaining enriched humanity in their personal life was now seen as something passive and purely contemplative. It is the inner space of being rather the external interventions in society where the enriched humanity was now to be seen as being affirmed. A reader's response to art and a free spirit's response to life, assumed an identical shape. This conservative turn in liberal humanism thus led to aestheticization of the whole idea of freedom of being. There is a piece of dialogue between Ralph Touchett and Isabel Archer which brings out this aestheticized character of her search for more and more experience and free exploration of life. When Ralph observes to her, 'you want to drain the cup of experience', she promptly replies, 'No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself.' Richard Pourier rightly interprets this reply of Isabel Archer to mean that she can feel about something she sees without taking a more active participation in it. The passive and contemplative stance enforced on the liberal humanists like James by the pressures of their times made them visualize the free exploration of life only through an imaginative participation in the usual chances and opportunities of life. This inevitably links morality as an index of the quality of human life with aesthetics. James knows that Gilbert Osmond's sterile dilettantism is a possibility here, but even in Isabel's concept of becoming a lady, there is this merging of the idea of superior human quality with the idea of refinement of taste. She rejects whatever is vulgar in appearance as something inferior in terms of its moral quality. This tends to weaken moral substance of a sensitive person's life-style to something less than what it apparently looks. Thus, even in Ralph Touchett's habitual stance of irony and adventure, the adventure part is restricted merely to intellectual speculation. It does not involve any hazardous intervention in social life. His role remains that of a mere spectator and not an active participant. This may certainly represent a successful blending of ethics and aesthetics, but the ethical aspect would get reduced in substance when it is confined within the limits of aesthetic appreciation.

### **The Character of Ralph Touchett**

Ralph Touchett occupies a special position in the scheme of the novel. All the essential attributes of a genuinely civilized sensibility visualized by Henry James are present in his personality. He is intelligent, he is generous and humane and he has the detachment and self-control which comes after acceptance of the limitations of one's situation. More than any other character in the novel he understands the relentless logic which governs our life in society. Although he is an invalid suffering from tuberculosis, this has not soured or embittered him. He can look upon his own situation good humouredly and maintain an attitude of amused tolerance towards those characters like Henrietta Stackpole who have some sharp edges and angularities, but are otherwise good hearted.

His urbanity and his intelligence become evident in the opening chapter of the novel with his conversation with his father and his friend Lord Warburton. It shows itself even more sharply in his understanding of the underlying worldliness and cynicism of characters like Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond who outwardly present themselves as very sophisticated and civilized persons. It is Ralph who tries to alert Isabel Archer about Madame Merle's capabilities of mischief. He understands that her culture and artistic pretensions are only empty forms and she lacks that independence of spirit which gives to a person a sense of integrity and self-respect. Isabel Archer is fascinated by the personality of Gilbert Osmond on account of his pretensions of being a person who has intrinsic worth and disdaining all worldly considerations of status and wealth, has dedicated his energies to the world of art. Ralph Touchett forewarns her and very perceptively sums him up as a sterile dilettante. Osmond's pose of ignoring the world is also exposed by him through his remark that he envies the world and is obsessed by it because he needs it in order to look down upon it. Ralph Touchett correctly grasps the ugly reality of Gilbert Osmond's suffocating conventionality. Instead of being independent minded, Osmond is actually a slave of conventions, particularly those conventions which have become empty forms. That is why, in an agonized tone, he can point out to Isabel Archer that in her married life with Gilbert Osmond she has been ground in the mill of the conventional.

Ralph Touchett truly represents the ideal which inspires Isabel Archer in all her activities. Apart from fine intelligence which enables him to see through the pretensions and disguises which different characters consciously or unconsciously adopt, he has a very humane and warmly sympathetic attitude towards others. He has actually what James calls the "imagination of loving" on account of which he gives full respect to the autonomy and distinctiveness of other characters. Because of this genuine appreciation of the plurality of human life, he does not make any hasty judgements about what the other characters say and do. This generosity of spirit gives him a compassionate understanding of the weaknesses of the other characters in the novel. It also prevents him from making any over-confident and emphatic statements. Because of this blend of fine intelligence and generosity of spirit, he is the only character who is capable of that kind of irony which, as Henry James tells us, is produced by our awareness of the "possible other case." This also prevents him from falling into narrow nationalistic grooves. He is neither an American nor a European and yet has fruitfully combined in himself the positive aspects of both these cultures. In fact his is the only genuinely cosmopolitan outlook in the novel.

His generosity of spirit makes him deeply interested in the well-being of Isabel Archer. It is out of this generous love for his cousin that he persuades his father to change his will and make Isabel Archer an inheritor of half of the fortune that would come to him on his father's death. Since it is a gesture of genuine love, it is kept a secret from Isabel herself as well as the other characters in the novel including his mother. The only failure of intelligence which Ralph Touchett shows in the novel is his misjudgment about the hazards he is creating for Isabel Archer by becoming instrumental in making her the heiress of a great fortune of seventy thousand pounds. He cannot fore-see that while this money will make Isabel free to meet the requirements of her imagination, it will also make her a prey to clever manipulations of fortune hunters. He bitterly rues this oversight and when Isabel Archer comes to meet him on his deathbed, he tells her with poignant sorrow that he is responsible for bringing misery to her life. This is extremely painful to him because he is sure that Isabel Archer was made for happiness and not for suffering. His humane and generous attitude towards life enables him to adopt an attitude of loving contemplation and amusement which prevents him from falling into bitterness or gloominess.

Ralph Touchett has the third essential component of the ideal of excellence Isabel Archer was pursuing. He has genuine refinement and aesthetic taste. There is nothing of vulgarity or crudity in his statements or his appreciation of the positive qualities in the life-style of others. He is perhaps the most urbane and sophisticated character in the novel. As compared to his sensitive appreciation of the beauty of conduct and of art objects, characters like Lord Warburton look very simple and limited and those like Gilbert Osmond pompous snobs. It is Ralph Touchett who makes us realize that genuine refinement and cultivation of taste is something more

than a mere sharpness of sensuous apprehension and requires a sensitiveness which comes only to those who have genuine respect for the humanity and autonomy of others. The limitations of both Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond come out most sharply and vividly before us when we compare them with the personality of Ralph Touchett. He is, in fact, used in the novel as a touchstone and his consciousness comes closest to that of the novelist himself. Although his role in the novel is mainly that of a spectator, it is his consciousness, apart from that of Isabel Archer, which is used as an intensifying reflector and as a normative perspective for understanding what is beyond the powers of a sensitive and imaginative character like Isabel Archer. He is in a way a surrogate of the author in this novel.

### **The Character of Gilbert Osmond**

Gilbert Osmond is an important character in *The Portrait of a Lady*. He attracts our attention particularly because, after rejecting the offers of marriage from Lord Warburton and Casper Goodwood, the heroine, Isabel Archer, chooses to get married to him. We feel interested in knowing the special qualities in Osmond's character which make him so attractive to her. There are three factors which look significant to Isabel Archer. We are told from the very beginning that she is a very independent minded person. She wants to affirm the freedom of her being by doing any thing she likes on her own without giving much thought to the rules and guidelines laid down by the society. She does not want to tie herself down to any fixed role defined from the outside by the society at large. She rejects Lord Warburton's offer chiefly because he is an important personage with fixed responsibilities as a territorial magnate. Isabel feels that in marrying a man like Lord Warburton, she will become a part of his system and her independence would be restricted. Gilbert Osmond seems to her to be an equally independent minded person who keeps himself outside all fixed roles defined by the society. He seems to her to have risen above all socially defined systems of conduct. He seems to have adopted a life-style in which the surrounding world cannot dictate any thing to him and he can go entirely by his own preferences and tastes. This aloofness of Gilbert Osmond, this preference of his to attain a distinction under which his intrinsic worth alone counts and is in no way supplemented or supported by external advantages of being a socially important person attracts Isabel to him. When asked to comment on Gilbert Osmond's social standing, Mrs. Touchett, Isabel's aunt, tersely sums him up in these words. "An obscure American dilettante. There is nothing of him. He has no money, he has no name, he has no importance. His being a social non-entity is confirmed by his sister, Countess Gemini, who underlines this fact by asking the rhetorical question: 'Who is he, if you please? What has he ever done?' Isabel Archer is however impressed by him precisely because he does not allow the course of his actions to be governed by any considerations of gaining social recognition. His desire to remain an obscure figure makes Isabel Archer feel that he is a person who loves his own freedom of being and has the courage to ignore what the ordinary citizens of society accept uncritically as standards of conduct.

The second reason for which Isabel Archer likes and admires Osmond is his apparent unconcern for matters pertaining to money and power. He admits to Isabel that he is delighted to find that she is rich, but wealth in itself is something which he has never cared to pursue: "I won't pretend I am sorry you're rich: I'm delighted. I delight in every thing that's yours whether it be money or virtue. Money's a horrid thing to follow, but a charming thing to meet. It seems to me, however, I've sufficiently proved the limits of my itch for it. I never in my life tried to earn a penny, and ought to be less subject to suspicion than most of the people one sees grubbing and grabbing." In fact his refined and exclusive style of life away from the world of wealth and fashion and his seemingly noble contentedness with his moderate style of living is what makes Isabel think of him as a worthy object of her generous desire to bestow her wealth on a person who doesn't live for it but who can use it as a means for noble pursuits.

The third reason for Isabel's singling out Osmond for her admiration is his devotion to the world of art and the graces of leisured existence. He is the only person she has met who seems to be absorbed almost completely in the higher pursuits which result in the cultivation and refinement of sensibility. His aesthetic taste seems to

be highly developed. His life-style, his manners, the way he talks and behaves all seem to be perfect. This urbanity, refinement and cultivation of sensibility raises him above every one else Isabel has met in her life. Although Ralph Tuchett had even a better level of refinement and urbanity, he hadn't made it a conscious ideal to be pursued seriously. It is this superiority of taste which, Isabel Archer feels, makes him a kindred soul for herself. His larger experience and maturity, she feels, will remove whatever rough edges and vaguenesses there were in her own personality. A significant dimension of this third factor in Isabel Archer's attraction for Gilbert Osmond's personality is the importance he gives to intellectual pursuits. His concern for cultivation of his sensibility seems to include cultivation of the mind as well. Isabel Archer is greatly impressed by his sober outlook and the seriousness of his tone and manner which seem to be tokens of a deeply intellectual bent of mind. When she is challenged by her well-wishers like Ralph Tuchett to tell them what she sees in his personality that distinguishes him and puts him above all others, she has no hesitation in saying with majesty of tone: In every thing that makes one care for people, Mr. Osmond is preeminent. There may be nobler natures, but I've never had the pleasure of meeting one. Although Isabel Archer's ignorance of the world plays some part in her inability to detect the negative aspects of Gilbert Osmond's personality which after her marriage would produce tremors of a great shock in her, we have to recognize that her admiration for Gilbert Osmond indicates that at a deeper level, she shares some of the traits which when carried too far and combined with other negative qualities she herself does not possess, could eventually end up in being a person like him. The pursuit of exclusiveness and refinement, dread of being common or common place she shares with Osmond and the emphasis on refinement we see behind her pursuit of an ideal of aristocratic distinction could eventually produce snobbishness of the variety we find in Osmond. The dangers inherent in aestheticization of the ideal of excellence to which James himself was committed are revealed through his portrayal of Gilbert Osmond. Such an awareness on the part of a novelist of the negative implications of his own personal value system is not very common.

The underlying ugly reality which reduces to nullity all the positive qualities which seem to be present on the surface of Gilbert Osmond's personality is his egotism. He is extremely self-centred and has no generosity of heart without which, James believes, a really civilized sensibility is not possible. Ralph Touchett has that generosity and humaneness and becomes, on the strength of this humanity, a genuinely civilized person. Osmond's vanity makes him callous and indifferent towards others and his artistic taste gets reduced to mere sensitivity of sensory perceptions instead of a genuine delicacy of feelings. Actually, he does not have the spirit of independence without which real individuality and nobility of being are not possible. His contempt of the world is that of a person who is himself a slave of worldliness and he dislikes the world only out of an impotent envy. This selfishness and vanity, this absence of a genuine respect for independent thinking, makes him at bottom a degenerate and corrupt individual who adheres to the standards of worldliness he pretends to disdain. Instead of idealistic aspirations, which can make a person think of all mankind as capable of noble achievements, he becomes utterly cynical attributing mean motives to every one with whom he comes into contact. When Isabel Archer sees this ugly reality beneath the veneer of culture and refinement he has put on, she is deeply shocked. This shocked recognition of what Gilbert Osmond's real nature is conveyed to us in chapter 42 of the novel through Isabel Archer's long night vigil: Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers. His cultivation and refinement, therefore, is an empty form without any substance in it. It does not go with generous appreciation but contempt for others. She was to think of him as he thought of himself as the first gentleman in Europe. So it was that she had thought of at first. But when she began to see what it implied she drew back. It implied a sovereign contempt for everyone but some three or four very exalted people whom he envied and for everything in the world but half a dozen ideas of his own.

Apart from this abject surrender to the standards of the corrupt worldly set, what appalls Isabel Archer is his total negation of real freedom of being and independence to others. He is not only cynical, but also despotic. She discovered that their notions of what was excellent or what was aristocratic were so different: her

notion of the aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a calculated attitude. There is no humanity, no genuine creativity, no moral sensitiveness in Osmond's ideal as against the one Isabel Archer had been pursuing. He cannot tolerate Isabel's commitment to think for himself: The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. He turns out to be a tyrant who uses others as mere tools to satisfy his own ego. Isabel Archer feels like a Hung up tool. Gilbert Osmond, does not embody real human refinement, but a mere glitter of forms, he does not represent real intelligence, but a cynical cleverness; he does not represent real freedom of being but the very absence of it. In the name of distaste for vulgarity, he does not react against the corrupt and the decadent but disdainfully rejects the common humanity of the ordinary people.

James's portrayal of Gilbert Osmond is very perceptive. Instead of a fruitful blending of the positive qualities which James found in American and European civilizations, he represents a lethal combination of the worst elements in both. He is an expatriate American whose pilgrimage to Europe went wrong. While Isabel attains the ideal of a true lady, he becomes a cruel travesty of a gentleman.

### **The Ending of the Portrait of a Lady**

Henry James was very conscious of the need for achieving artistic perfection in all his novels. In his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, he claims that every thing that goes into the story has become an integral part of a beautiful architectural design. This would mean that the ending of *The Portrait of a Lady* is fully in harmony with what has gone before it and is not flawed or unsatisfactory from the artistic point of view. However, many readers of the novel have felt uneasy about Isabel Archer's decision to go back to Rome to live with Gilbert Osmond even after her realization that to do so is like choosing to be buried alive.

Responding to this view of the ending of the novel, James defended it in terms of the requirements of art. He wanted to make a distinction between what was appropriate in art and what one would rightly expect to happen in real life. James's concern in the novel, he maintained, was to conceive of a situation which accords with the geometry of art and not to go by what one would legitimately want to happen in real life. Had Isabel Archer been a living individual, she could very well take a different position in future and could be imagined as making a clean break with the situation presented as a finality at the end of this novel. But that, he maintains, would be another theme to be taken up in a separate novel. So far as the present novel is concerned, it receives, according to him, an appropriate ending at the point where Isabel Archer, immediately after she frees herself from the passionate embrace of Caspar Goodwood, darts away from the spot with this feeling in her mind: She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path. He took up this question of ending in his notebooks and made his position clear in these words: The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation. This is both true and false. The whole of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. What I have done has that unity it groups together. It is complete in itself and the rest may be taken up or not, later.

We can examine the ending of the novel in terms of two distinct criteria (1) internal consistency and coherence as proposed by Henry James in the statement quoted above and (2) our assessment of the value-system this ending seems to support, the primary consideration here being not of internal consistency and harmonization of parts, but of the validity for us of the attitudes and values being endorsed through this ending. According to the first criterion, we have to agree that the ending completes the process of tragic revelation that in the social world as it is constituted, there is no space for self-fulfillment for a character like Isabel Archer who wants to live strictly according to her own sense of freedom of being and does not want to make any compromises and adjustments that would go against her sense of dignity or undermine the integrity of her self. Her pilgrimage to Europe in search of appropriate conditions that would be congenial to her for the exercise of her civilized sensibility was bound to end in failure. A person who started with the illusion that the

world was a place of infinite expansion was bound to discover with a shock that it is, in fact, a house of darkness, a house of dumbness, a house of suffocation. Since she had wrongly assumed that the actual murky world around her could permit her to enter an infinite vista of a multiplied life, she was bound to awaken to the reality that her search eventually brought her to a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Her going back to Rome only confirms her acceptance of the finality of this realization. She has now to live with a sharp awareness of this harsh reality.

Another dimension of the criterion of internal consistency is to see whether the decision to go back to Rome is in keeping with the character and personality of Isabel Archer as we have known it from the earlier parts of the novel. On this basis, too, the ending seems to be appropriate although it may appear at first glance that Isabel's decision to go back to Rome is in contradiction to her ideal of free exploration of life. She seems to be choosing deliberately a life of imprisonment where she couldn't act according to her own preferences but follow the dictates of a husband whom she does not like and who detests her. The fact that she offers a variety of reasons in justification of her decision to go back to Rome may also create some uncertainty in our minds about the real basis of her decision. The most important reason mentioned by her is that she acted in full freedom when she chose to marry him and now she must accept the consequences of that choice. Any other course of action would not be in keeping with her sense of dignity of her own self. She tells Henrietta that she married Osmond before all the world and it will be an insult to her ideal of freedom if she now tries to evade the consequences of that choice through a cowardly escape. This type of clinging to one's cherished ideal, even if the ideal has been proved to be unsatisfactory, is very much consistent with the character of Isabel Archer as we know it. Her discovery that she was not as free as she thought in choosing Gilbert Osmond as her husband does not alter the situation materially for her. The second argument given by her is that marriage is not an ordinary relationship; it is a sacrament. This imposes obligations on her which she cannot ignore. This need for sticking to a relationship as a matter of form and respect for conventions does not seem to go with her self-declared love of liberty on account of which she does not care for any forms or conventions of society and acts strictly according to her own intelligence. However the form in which she pursues the ideal of freedom does not necessarily demand a flouting of conventions. It, in fact, requires a genuine respect for those conventions which become a proper embodiment of an exalted spirit of freedom. One reason why she chose to marry Gilbert Osmond was his seemingly deep respect for traditions and conventions. This is what Isabel Archer herself feels when she is looking at different aspects of her marriage with Gilbert Osmond: He had told her he loved the conventional; but there was a sense in which this seemed a noble declaration. In that sense, that of the love of harmony and order and decency and of all the stately offices of life, she went with him freely. Isabel's ideal of freedom of being requires attainment of an aristocratic distinction of spirit, a nobility of being which includes due respect for decencies and giving proper importance to all the stately offices of life. When she says that marriage is a special type of relationship or a sacrament which cannot be annulled like an ordinary contractual obligation if it does not suit your convenience, she is in a way being consistent with the noble ideal of freedom she has been pursuing. She gives a third argument when she says that she will have to go back to Rome because she has given a solemn promise to Pansy. Pansy does, of course, need emotional support from Isabel in the pathetic condition created for her by her father. But this, in itself, can at best be only a supportive argument not a primary one for the decision Isabel Archer has taken.

The real reason for Isabel Archer's decision is a deeper one, which neither she nor the novelist fully understands. All the arguments she offers in justification flow from this deeper reason. The concept of freedom of being which Isabel Archer is pursuing is an abstract one which, as Arnold Kettle points out, is divorced from social reality. It is more a state of mind than a programme of action. Actually, as Isabel Archer's experience has demonstrated, it can be preserved and maintained only by interiorizing it completely. A free spirit of James's conception like Isabel Archer, can assert her freedom by surrendering all the rights of participation in the objective activities of a world dominated by corrupt elements, be they aristocrats,

businessmen or parasitical socialites. They can preserve their dignity only by renouncing happiness and fulfillment in such a world. This stance of stoicism and self-abnegation is the only form of authentic affirmation of the character of Isabel Archer that she can see for herself. The more trapped such a character feels, the greater the asset of heroism in the form of suffering in the mind. When freedom is purely an internal matter of this kind, it can be asserted triumphantly even in a house of darkness and suffocation. This compulsive stance of renunciation for affirmation of her dignity is certainly in Isabel's character. The ending, therefore looks convincing from the point of view of internal consistency.

There is another compelling reason rooted in Isabel Archer's personality as conceived by James which drives her back towards Rome. The novelist brings it in, but is not fully aware of its implications. This reason is Isabel Archer's fear of passionate commitment. Whenever there is a strong sexual pull, Isabel Archer feels jittery and pulls back on one pretext or the other. She tells very frankly that she does not want to taste the cup of experience because it is a poisoned drink. When Caspar Goodwood offers her an opportunity of deep passionate involvement, towards the end of the novel, she feels the pull and is shaken by the prospects of such a passionate life. That becomes decisive and she knows what she has to do. When we take into account the hidden presence of this fearful self in Isabel Archer behind her rhetoric of free experimentation and infinite expansion, we can very well understand the logic of her decision of going back to Rome.

But what we can understand, we may not be able to justify. When we examine the ending of the novel on the basis of the second criterion mentioned above, we feel very uneasy. We fail to see in the gesture of renunciation the kind of nobility James seems to attribute to it. Instead of moral stamina and courage, we see morbid fear and evasiveness in this gesture. It seems that in the name of more life, James glorified distrust and fear of life. Arnold Kettle makes a correct assessment of the ending of this novel when he says: It seems to me inescapable that what Isabel finally chooses is something represented by a high cold word like duty or resignation, the duty of an empty vow, the resignation of the defeated, and that in making her choice she is paying a final sacrificial tribute to her own ruined conception of freedom.

### **The Significance of the Title**

The title of *The Portrait of a Lady* is quite apt. It draws our attention to the fact that the centre of interest in the novel is the character of Isabel Archer. The whole novel is focused primarily on a full portrayal of her character. Furthermore, the word portrait in the title indicates that this is not a neutral presentation but a subjective impression formed by the writer. The portrait of a personality is different from a photograph. The portrait is distinguishable in some respects from factual representation. There is always a colouring of imagination and a focal point of attention to highlight and foreground certain aspects of the personality of the character and push other aspects to the background. A portrait is to a certain extent, an idealized and selective representation. James's attitude towards Isabel Archer is of someone who has emotional stakes in the character portrayed. There is another implication of the word portrait which is also relevant. Since James wanted to give to the novel, the perfection of a fine art like painting, the word portrait draws our attention to this concern of the writer; his desire for achieving artistic perfection and a unity of impression which does not leave any detail that has not been integrated into a vision. Through the depiction of the character of Isabel Archer, James wants to project a vision in the same way as famous painters make use of the portraits painted by them for the projection of their total understanding of life.

The word lady in the title also has its own significance. James has before him an ideal of human excellence which would make a lady distinct from an ordinary woman. This conception of human excellence includes moral idealism and refinement of manners and taste. Isabel Archer is an example of James's idea of a civilized and humane sensibility marked by qualities of moral seriousness, fine intelligence and cultivated taste.

The word portrait also introduces an undertone of irony which is a kind of self-criticism on the part of Henry James. He wants to draw attention to a possible negative aspect of his tendency to see meaning in life



through the rigorous discipline of art. His emphatic statement that it is art that *makes* life carries a risk of aestheticization. An aesthete treats living human being as if they are art-objects. The word *portrait* suggests that the living-throbbing reality of Isabel Archer has a tendency here of being reduced to a mere static portrait. The title thus alerts us to the dangers of aestheticism inherent in the ideal being explored and ultimately endorsed through the portrayal of Isabel Archer's character. It is Gilbert Osmond who looks upon Isabel Archer as a *rare piece* in his collection of art-objects. But the title subsumes within its meanings the ironical undertone which suggests that Gilbert Osmond represents an extreme crystallization of a tendency implicit to a certain extent in Isabel Archer's pursuit of excellence and in the writer's treatment of the subject.

### **The Theme of Renunciation and Self-abnegation in the Portrait of a Lady**

An attitude of renunciation of worldly pleasures is seen as a part of virtue in Christianity, particularly in New England Puritanism. In almost all his novels, James shows this distrust of worldly pleasures and of all that is agreeable to the senses as an integral part of the characters who represent Puritanism in one form or the other. But James is himself opposed to this attitude of excessive distrust of the general amenities of life in this world. His attitude towards the Puritan characters like the Wentworths in *The Europeans* and Olive Chancellor in *The Bostonians* clearly indicates that he did not approve of this type of renunciatory outlook. Even Caspar Goodwood in *The Portrait of a Lady* who represents a secularized version of New England Puritanism is seen as lacking in something which is desirable as well as humanly positive. He takes his business activity as a *calling* to be performed with a full sense of responsibility but no joy. As against this distrust and rejection of a large part of human experience in this world, James seems to project through his heroine in *The Portrait of a Lady* an attitude of openness before life, of a willingness to see and feel and take in different types of experiences without any constraints or inhibitions. Lambert Strether's famous exhortation to Little Billian in *The Ambassadors*, *Live all you can* supports the view that James does not subscribe to the Puritan ethic of renunciation of the worldly pleasures, sensuous beauty and amenities of leisured existence.

And yet, we find characters like Milly Theale in *Wings of the Dove* and Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* who eventually turn away from life and renounce all happiness and active participation in this world. Strether in *The Ambassadors*, Fleeda Vetch in *Spoils of Poynton* and many other characters in James's novels, makes a gesture of renunciation and self-abnegation as a necessary part of affirmation of their dignity. It may be argued that this type of renunciation and self-abnegation is actually an assertion of moral courage and stamina that enables these characters to preserve their humanity. Any other option they feel would be highly compromising and degrading to them. This type of renunciation and self-abnegation, it may be argued, is only a particular instance of the grit and stamina we find in all tragic heroes in one form or the other. It is an indication of intense commitment to preservation of their dignity. However, the protective air of sentimentality surrounding the characters who make these gestures of renunciation creates some uneasiness among us. We start feeling that the writer is attributing a nobility to these gestures which look highly exaggerated and unconvincing. We find it difficult to accept the view that Isabel Archer's decision to go back to Rome and live with Gilbert Osmond in the house of darkness, suffocation and death is an act of moral courage. Actually these gestures of renunciation and self-abnegation of characters like Isabel Archer are linked with an ideological predilection of the writer. The suffering of a tragic hero should be justified as a necessary price for enhancing life. But the suffering embraced by characters like Isabel Archer is gratuitous suffering of a scapegoat. Here suffering becomes an effective screen which prevents the character and the author from recognizing the truth. It is an index of the writer's refusal or inability to discard ideological blinkers.

In the case of Henry James there were two factors which impelled him to glorify and sentimentalise passivity and renunciation. The first factor relates to his own *obscure hurt* which created a complex in him about having been incapacitated for full and robust participation in social life. It created an inhibition and fear of all challenging experiences. In James's novels we frequently see figures like Ralph Touchett who are reduced,

because of their illness, to the role of mere spectatorship in life. The renunciation imposed by this kind of passivity can have only a limited nobility. Even Isabel Archer, despite her rhetoric of openness before life has a streak of fear which makes her evade any situation which demands full and passionate engagement. Caspar Goodwood may not be a congenial personality but his passionate kiss throws Isabel Archer into tremors because of the possibilities of passionate love it opens up before her and which she evades because of what Tonny Tanner calls her 'fearful self'.

The second reason for this exaggerated glorification of renunciation is ideological. The kind of social order which emerged through development of industrial capitalism during the nineteenth century created a feeling of alienation among many sensitive liberals who had inherited the idealistic fervour of an earlier liberal humanism, particularly its deep concern for human dignity and freedom of being. Writers like Henry James whose world outlook was that of this type of liberal humanism, were sharply aware of the crudities and obtusenesses of the dominant value-system of the contemporary society, but they did not properly understand the logic of this social change. Their critique of the social reality was vitiated by perplexities, evasions and blindness. Because they looked at the social reality from a perspective which was in many ways similar to that of the ruling sections of society, they couldn't often perceive the inadequacies of their own perspective and clung to it even when it had been shown to be inappropriate. Moreover, they could not visualize the possibilities of active resistance and struggle for a better social order. All they could do was to endorse the stance of passive resistance and stoicism of an inner exile who prefers to 'suffer in the mind' to 'taking up arms against a sea of troubles' and 'by opposing end them'. About the attitude of renunciation and self-abnegation which comes out of this predicament, Arnold Kettle has rightly stated: 'For Henry James, though he sees the tragedy implicit in the Victorian ruling class view of freedom, is himself so deeply involved in that illusion that he cannot escape from it'. His 'innocent' persons have therefore always the characters of victims; they are at the mercy of the vulgar and the corrupt, and the more finely conscious they become of their situation the more unable are they to cope with it in positive terms. No wonder it leads characters like Isabel Archer to 'reject life in favour of death'. The gesture of renunciation and self-abnegation made by her towards the end of the story looks suspect for this reason and we don't see in it the kind of nobility that the writer seems to attribute to it.

### **Use of Houses and Social Backgrounds as Symbols and Metaphors**

Henry James's art of the novel incorporates many features of the poetic art. An effective use of symbols and metaphors is a part of this appropriation of the methods of poetry in his fictional writings. In his portrayal of characters, he makes frequent use of metaphors and symbols. Even minor characters like Countess Gemini stand out before us because of James's use of effective symbols. There are two metaphors used in his brief comments on the character of the Countess which reveal the basic traits of her personality, one of a bird and the other of a flag. Her features we are told, 'suggested some tropical bird', her attire 'had the look of shimmering plumage' and her attitudes 'were as light and sudden as those of a creature who perched upon twigs'. Her demonstrations, we are told 'suggested the violent wavings of some flag of general truce' 'white silk with fluttering streamers'. These metaphors convey more than what could be said through detailed expository comments. Similarly effective metaphors have been used to place before us the essential features of the characters of Isabel Archer, Ralph Touchett, Gilbert Osmond, Henrietta Stackpole, the two sisters of Lord Warburton and even Pansy. The more important use of metaphors is, however, of houses and scenic backgrounds. Isabel Archer's ancestral houses in Albany, the Gardencourt residence of Mr. Touchett, the house in which Gilbert Osmond lives at Florence and the one in which he lives with Isabel Archer in Rome all express some essential qualities which form an integral part of the theme. The ruins of Rome where Isabel Archer goes on some occasions for emotional relief have a similar function. Writing on Hawthorne, James had commended him for securing an exquisite correspondence between the external details of description in a scene and the spiritual facts of the moral and emotional make-up of the characters. We can notice a similar exquisite correspondence between the details given in the description of Gardencourt and the positive

qualities of European civilization James wants to emphasize in the novel. A brief quotation would illustrate how this particular house brings before us, the graces of leisured existence, the privacy, the refinement and ease and exquisite harmony of all the components which constitute the whole: Privacy here reigned supreme, and the wide carpet of turf that covered the level hill-top seemed but an extension of a luxurious interior. The great still oaks and beeches flung down a shade as dense as that of velvet curtains, and the place was furnished like a room, with books and papers that lay upon the grass. The exquisite and luxurious style of living indicated here is a positive aspect of European civilization which James wants to be integrated into the spiritual earnestness of New England Puritanism. Gardencourt, therefore has not been presented with objective veracity, but for the metaphoric significance it carries in the theme. Similarly, the secretive and constrictive exclusiveness of Gilbert Osmond's personality and the suffocating effect his presence has on Isabel Archer are effectively brought out by the kind of house in which they live together. It is a domestic fortress where Isabel Archer has to live in a state of dumbness and suffocation. Similarly, the ruins of Rome act as a kind of objective correlative for Isabel Archer's mood of dejection in the midst of which she also tries to maintain her dignity or uprightness. We are told that she rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet were still upright. Through this scene, James defines the nature of uprightness possible for Isabel in the midst of her ruined hopes. Elizabeth Drew has rightly observed that it comes as a shock to the reader that to the former high-spirited, independent Isabel, being upright means the passive acceptance of her fate.

Most of the topics on which essay type questions can be framed have already been covered in this Study Material. Some of short-answer items have also been discussed. The short notes on the characters of Madame Merle, Henrietta Stackpole, Countess Gemini and Caspar Goodwood which figure in the Critical Summary of the novel and in the context of other topics discussed in the Study Material can be used for short answer questions on *The Portrait of a Lady*. Some other short answer items can be;

1. A short note on the comic sense of Henry James.
2. A note on Henry James's prose style
3. Scenes and Pictures in Henry James
4. A brief comment on the opening scene
5. Significance of Gardencourt in *The Portrait of a Lady*
6. You want to see but not to feel comment on the significance of this statement of Ralph Touchett about Isabel Archer's mission to Europe
7. The Last meeting between Ralph Touchett and Isabel Archer
8. The scene where Isabel Archer runs away from Caspar Goodwood's passionate kiss.

Some of the books which can be consulted for understanding different aspects of Henry James's art as a novelist as exemplified by *The Portrait of a Lady* are given below:

1. Peter Buitenhuis (Ed.) *The Portrait of a Lady : Twentieth Century Interpretations* (Prentice-Hall, 1968)
2. Leon Edel (Ed) *Henry James : Twentieth Century Views* (Prentice-Hall, 1953)
3. Tony Tanner (Ed) *Henry James : Modern Judgment* (Macmillan, 1968)
4. Boris Ford (Ed) *The Modern Age*, Vol 7 of Pelican Guide to English Literature (Penguin, 1961)
5. Boris Ford (Ed) *American Literature*, Vol 9 of The New Pelican Guide to English Literature (Penguin, 1988)
6. Darshan Singh Maini *Henry James: The Indirect Version* (Tata McGraw-Hill, 1973)
7. Dorothea Krook *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge University Press, 1967)

8. Arnold Kettle *An introduction to the English Novel*, Vol. II Henry James to the Present (Harper, 1960)
9. Richard Poirier *The Comic Sense of Henry James* (Oxford University Press, 1967)
10. F.R. Leavis *The Great Tradition* (Penguin, 1966)
11. Elizabeth Hrew *The Novel: A modern Guide to Fifteen English Master Pieces* (Dell Publications)
12. R.E Spiller and W. Thorp. et al (Eds) *Literary History of the United States*, (1953)
13. J.A. Ward *The Search for Form* (The University of North Carolina: Press, 1961)
14. Alexander Cowie, *The Rise of the American Novel* (American Book Company, 1948)

## CHRONOLOGY OF WALT WHITMAN

- 1819 Born May 31 at West Hills, near Huntington, Long Island.
- 1823 May 27, Whitman family moves to Brooklyn.
- 1825-30 Attends public school in Brooklyn.
- 1830 Office boy for doctor, lawyer.
- 1830-34 Learns printing trade.
- 1835 Printer in New York City until great fire August 12.
- 1836-38 Summer of 1836, begins teaching at East Norwich, Long Island; by winter 1837-38 has taught at Hempstead, Babylon, Long Swamp, and Smithtown.
- 1838-39 Edits weekly newspaper, the *Long Islander*, at Huntington.
- 1840-41 Autumn, 1840, campaigns for Van Buren; then teaches school at Trimming Square, Woodbury, Dix Hills and Whitestone.
- 1841 May, goes to New York City to work as printer in *New World* office; begins writing for the *Democratic Review*.
- 1842 Spring, edits a daily newspaper in New York City, the *Aurora*; edits Evening Tattler for short time.
- 1845-46 August, returns to Brooklyn, writes for *Long Island Star* from September until March.
- 1846-48 From March, 1846, until January, 1848, edits Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*; February 1848 goes to New Orleans to work on the *Crescent*; leaves May 27 and returns via Mississippi and Great Lakes.
- 1848-49 September 9, 1848 to September 11, 1849, edits a "free soil" newspaper, the Brooklyn *Freeman*.

- 1850-54 Operates printing office and stationery store; does free-lance journalism; builds and speculates in houses.
- 1855 Early July, *Leaves of Grass* is printed by Rome Brothers in Brooklyn; father dies July 11; Emerson writes to poet on July 21.
- 1856 Writes for *Life Illustrated*; publishes second edition of *Leaves of Grass* in summer and writes “The Eighteenth Presidency!”
- 1857-59 From spring of 1857 until about summer of 1859 edits the Brooklyn *Times*; unemployed winter of 1859-60; frequents Pfaff’s bohemian restaurant.
- 1860 March, goes to Boston to see third edition of *Leaves of Grass* through the press.
- 1861 April 12, Civil War begins; George Whitman enlists.
- 1862 December, goes to Fredericksburg, Virginia, scene of recent battle in which George was wounded, stays in camp two weeks.
- 1863 Remains in Washington, D.C., working part-time in Army paymaster’s office; visits soldiers in hospitals.
- 1864 June 22, returns to Brooklyn because of illness.
- 1865 January 24, appointed clerk in Department of Interior, returns to Washington; meets Peter Doyle; witnesses Lincoln’s second inauguration; Lincoln assassinated, April 14; May, *Drum-Taps* is printed; June 30, is discharged from position by Secretary James Harlan but re-employed next day in Attorney General’s office; autumn, prints *Drum-Taps and Sequel*, containing “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”
- 1866 William D. O’Connor publishes *The Good Gray Poet*.

- 1867 John Burroughs publishes Notes on *Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*; July 6, William Michael Rossetti publishes article on Whitman's poetry in *London Chronicle*; "Democracy" (part of *Democratic Vistas*) published in December *Galaxy*.
- 1868 Rossetti's *Poems of Walt Whitman* (selected and expurgated) published in England; "Personalism" (second part of *Democratic Vistas*) in May *Galaxy*; second issue of fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, with *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel* added.
- 1869 Mrs. Anne Gilchrist reads Rossetti edition and falls in love with the poet.
- 1870 July, is very depressed for unknown reasons; prints fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and *Democratic Vistas* and *Passage to India*, all dated 1871.
- 1871 September 3, Mrs. Gilchrist's first love letter; September 7, reads "After All Not to Create Only" at opening of American Institute Exhibition in New York.
- 1872 June 26, read "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free" at Dartmouth College commencement.
- 1873 January 23, suffers paralytic stroke; mother dies May 23; unable to work, stays with brother George in Camden, New Jersey.
- 1874 "Song of the Redwood-Tree" and "Prayer of Columbus."
- 1875 Prepares Centennial Edition of *Leaves of Grass* and *Two Rivulets* (dated 1876).
- 1876 Controversy in British and American press over America's neglect of Whitman; spring, meets Harry Stafford, and begins

- recuperation at Stafford farm, at Timber Creek; September, Mrs. Gilchrist arrives and rents house in Philadelphia.
- 1877 January 28, gives lecture on Tom Paine in Philadelphia; goes to New York in March and is painted by George W. Waters; during summer gains strength by sun-bathing at Timber Creek.
- 1878 Spring, too weak to give projected Lincoln lecture, but in June visits J. H. Johnston and John Burroughs in New York.
- 1879 April to June, in New York, where he gives first Lincoln lecture, and says farewell to Mrs. Gilchrist, who returns to England; September, goes to the West for the first time and visits Colorado; because of illness remains in St. Louis with his brother Jeff from October to January.
- 1880 Gives Lincoln lecture in Philadelphia; summer, visits Dr. R.M. Bucke in London, Ontario.
- 1881 April 15, gives Lincoln lecture in Boston; returns to Boston in August to read proof of *Leaves of Grass*, being published by James R. Osgood; poems receive final arrangement in this edition.
- 1882 Meets Oscar Wilde; Osgood ceases to distribute *Leaves of Grass* because District Attorney threatens prosecution unless the book is expurgated; publication is resumed in June by Rees Welsh in Philadelphia, who also publishes *Specimen Days and Collect*; both books transferred to David McKey, Philadelphia.
- 1883 Dr. Bucke publishes *Walt Whitman*, a critical study closely “edited” by the poet.
- 1884 Buys House on Mickle Street, Camden, New Jersey.
- 1885 In poor health; friends buy a horse and phaeton so that the poet will not be “house-tied”; November 29, Mrs. Gilchrist dies.



- 1886 Gives Lincoln lecture four times in Elkton, Maryland, Camden, Philadelphia, and Haddonfield, New Jersey; is painted by John White Alexander.
- 1887 Gives Lincoln lecture in New York; is painted by Thomas Eakins.
- 1888 Horace Traubel raises funds for doctors and nurses; *November Boughs* printed; money sent from England.
- 1889 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, proceedings published in *Camden's Compliments*.
- 1890 Writes angry letter to J.A. Symonds, dated August 19, denouncing Symonds's interpretation of "Calamus" poems, claims six illegitimate children.
- 1891 *Good-Bye My Fancy* is printed, and the "death-bad edition" of *Leaves of Grass* (dated 1891-2).
- 1892 Dies March 26, buried in Harleigh Cemetery, Camden, New Jersey.

## **Walt Whitman (1819-1892)**

The United States- in which Whitman spent his formative years- was a group of commonwealths, loosely joined together in spite of the constitution, which was supposed to have made them one country. He saw America growing. It is indeed a rare event that the nation and its Bard, Walt Whitman, shared the conditions of their growth and their shaping influences happened to be the same forces. Hence, it is almost essential to study first and foremost the characteristic features of his age to appreciate the poet.

### **The Age of Walt-Whitman**

Walt-Whitman is known for leading a life of extreme unconventionality and Bohemianism in his appearances, attitudes and expressions. It shocked a nation that was mainly, determinedly middle class and Victorian and ironically he became its representative poet. The period in which he lived was full of turbulence. America witnessed a Civil War and seminal social changes. The country was divided into two ideological camps vis-a vis the problem of slavery. In the northern part, the Abolitionists wanted the end of the institution of slavery; in the south the people wanted to perpetuate the practice of slavery. The conflict prevailed because of two life-styles. North was democratic and its economic structure was based on industry while South was aristocratic and its economy was chiefly agrarian. However, the Nationalists were keen to preserve the union at any cost.

### **Causes of American Civil War**

Though the nation was facing certain conflicts earlier, in 1861 America witnessed the Civil War. In 1850 the famous 'Fugitive Slave Law',

which forced the run- away slaves to return to their owners, became the first powerful salvo of this war. The law irritated the Abolitionists and many intellectuals like Emerson and Thoreau who not only challenged the law but also declared openly to disobey it. Thoreau actually helped a runaway slave to migrate to Canada. Whitman shared the Anti-slavery sentiment and made the similar attempt to assist the slaves. He declared that he would help all such “fugitives” if such a chance occurs. In 1858 the Bostonians raised their voice against the slave-trade and attempted to rescue a runaway slave , Anthony Burns. In 1855 a fierce strife took place in Kansas where both the Northerners and the Southerners thought of deciding the issue of slavery by a popular vote. The Senators and supporters on either side made fiery speeches. The clash led to the emergence of the Republican Party, whose main political agenda was the abolition of slavery.

Another significant event occurred when the United States Supreme Court pronounced its historical decision in the case of Dred Scott according to which the Negroes were denied the right of Citizenship. Abraham Lincoln raised his voice against this decision. It encouraged men like John Brown , a committed Abolitionist , who incited Negroes in Virginia. Later on he was arrested and executed. Obviously, the north defended Brown, while the south was shaken and even horrified by the threat of Negro revolt.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected the President of America in 1860 under the banner of Republican Party, he was bound to carry on his commitment to free the slaves. The Southern extremists were left with no choice. They were forced to choose between abolition or secession. One after another the States took its decision in terms of either to be with the Government or to part from it. South Carolina was the first to accept secession from the United States of

America in December 1860. In the coming years Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas seceded from the Union. The conflict aggravated when the Confederate States organized themselves and elected Jefferson Davis as their President. On 12<sup>th</sup> April 1861, the Confederate Army stationed in Charleston harbour fired on the Federal Forces stationed in Fort Sumter. This event marked the formal breaking out of the American Civil War. Other States like Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina also joined the Confederate side soon.

The South also tried to inflict an economic disaster on the North by depriving it of their cotton, but their scheme did not work out. So the issue was to be decided by the arms alone. The superiority of North in number and the resources created the desired effect. The turning point in the war occurred in July 1863, when General Lee was defeated at Gettysburg. It is a pity that Abraham Lincoln did not live long to carry out further reforms. No doubt the anti-slavery thought held a permanent place in the mind and the heart of the Northerners and became a powerful voice in the literary writings of the time as well. Who can forget Stephan Crane's Red Badge of Courage as the most influential cry against the war? Though Whitman's dream of the equality of man was yet to be fulfilled, his Drum -Taps became the richest account of the Civil War in American poetry.

### **Other Social Changes and Religious Beliefs:**

Any social revolution is not complete in itself if it does not bring changes in the inner life of man by prompting philosophical and religious thoughts. It is visibly so in America after the Civil War. In the field of

religious thought America faced a great turmoil that forced it to break away with its existing religious practices of Calvinism. It was not an easy task as most of the migrants to this new land were European Puritans sharing with other Protestants and Catholics the fundamental beliefs in medieval Christianity, a common holy book, and a common “epic” with its symbols and allegory. The epic begins with God’s creation of the world. Then God is disobeyed by the first man--Adam whose Original Sin is inherited by all human beings. The only hope of man—inherently evil and undeserving – is salvation through the grace of God. Though Satan keeps attempting to corrupt as many souls as possible, it is through Jesus Christ - son of God, whose suffering and crucifixion and resurrection on the third day after His death on the cross atoned for man’s sins manifesting God’s infinite love and mercy. Finally , according to the Christian epic , at some unpredictable time , history will end , and God will return to preside over the Last Judgment of souls.

Thus, in Christianity, the Puritans and Calvinists emphasized, the inherent sinfulness of all men and the need for a complete dedication to God at every moment. The significant change in the religions thought of America was two fold: (a) the breaking away with Calvinism and (b) the ascendancy of the other sect known as Unitarianism that made a lasting impact on the American public. The chief points of difference between Calvinism and Unitarianism are related to the concept of man and his duties and, of course, to the concept of Christ. The Calvinism believed in the inexorable justice of God, while Unitarianism emphasized God’s benevolence. The Unitarians could not agree with such dictate of God that “I do save none but my own elect”, like the Calvinists. They firmly stressed that God could not be so arbitrary, unpredictable and even capricious. The Puritans believed that they

were very few chosen souls-- “the Elect”- who were predestined to be saved by God’s grace because they have found the truth as revealed in the Bible while the vast majority were doomed to damnation. They assumed that deservingness in the eyes of God was the first and the only condition for salvation. There were certainly ways to improve man’s condition, that is, by simplicity, staunch religious observance and education as they develop the habit of introspection and a proper spiritual climate for salvation. In other words, the Puritan code of conduct called for a “severe and unremitting discipline”. However, with the development and the ideas of Enlightenment, which spread from Europe to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century ,weakened the hold of Puritanism on the people of America, specially in New England. The concept of man propounded by Unitarianism as inherently good ascertained that man has the potential to improve through his own natural powers and could enjoy life. This view gave America a distinctive, optimistic character. It filled the nation with a new hope and the people felt the need to follow the new religion, the Unitarian church, which had its roots in the spirit of Enlightenment. These optimistic men rejected in the name of common sense and reason the Puritan notion of innate depravity of man as well as the idea of predestined salvation meant for an elected few. The Unitarians, unlike the Calvinists, created a theology based on man’s goodness and his spiritual freedom in a universe presided over by a benevolent God. Through out these changes one aspect of Puritanism persisted even in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, an intense moral earnestness, a heightened sense of duty but with a difference; it was attached not to a religion but to the virtue of zeal and righteousness of man. The Unitarian concept of man was ingrained to seek out truth and goodness, habit of industriousness, thrift and total commitment to one’s vocation and all other undertakings. Man’s ultimate

source of authority is himself, his own consciousness as it is reflected in the poetry of Walt Whitman also. America's unique political achievement in form of democracy and Unitarian belief in optimistic rationalism and benevolent God established a harmonious world after a powerful social and political revolution.

The Unitarians' belief regarding Christ also differed radically from that of the Calvinists who said that Christ is literally the son of God, the second member of the Christian Trinity, while the Unitarians maintained that Christ is divine only the sense in which all man are divine. They believed that man has his share of divinity; therefore the only difference between and Christ and an ordinary person is not "of kind but of degree" to borrow a phrase from Robert Browning. It not only projects a concept of man as essentially good, but also asserts that the belief in the innate depravity of the man, his predestination and the necessity of salvation through atonement was totally unnecessary and redundant.

Another important religious belief that dominated the American scene was that of Quakers. Whitman's mother, who left an indelible impression on the mind of her son, was a Quaker. Like the Calvinists, the Quakers believed in the divinity of Christ and considered the Bible to be the inspired and revealed word of God. They also emphasized the essential sinfulness of man, but they strongly stressed that God has given to all human beings the "inner light," which is man's infallible strength and guide to his righteous life. Thus, when compared to Calvinists, Quakers are more benevolent. But, Quakerism was more pietistic than Unitarianism. Whitman not only shared Quaker religious sect whose doctrine is that true worship of the divinity must be experienced as an "inner light" within the individual worshipper. He also idolized the independent – spirited man of his sect. Later on he used

Quaker terms and references in his poems and expressed a mystical individualism resembling the Quaker approach in his poetry.

### **Major Literary Trends**

Though early American writers began by copying European models and did not display any distinctively national quality, but gradually with the emergence of new national consciousness, they started becoming genuinely American in their thought and style. They learnt their craft from the Europeans before they could handle native themes and could express them in an idiom 'native to the grain'. The writers of the revolutionary period adopted the standards of eighteenth century classicism but the dominating European influence was that of romanticism which was the main force in the intellectual life of the western civilization.

### **Impact of Romanticism**

Romanticism, which deeply impressed the American psyche, was such a varied and complex movement that it became almost impossible to capture its spirit in the straight jacket of any definition. Developing in England, France and Germany in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism was actually a reaction against rather narrow rationalism of the Enlightenment. Writers like Rousseau in France, Wordsworth and Coleridge in England emphasized the emotional, intuitional and instinctive elements in human personality believing that spiritual intuition had a higher validity than reason which defined the universe as a vast machine.

It made a special appeal to the American psyche because of a highly individualistic conception of man in American faith. The philosophy of the



Unitarianism and other religious sects had already prepared the way to imbibe the new confidence in man's personality and his fundamental goodness. This sort of ideological resemblance with Romanticism makes the critics designate Whitman's age also as American Renaissance. While using this term they obviously had in mind English Renaissance that preceded it by almost two hundred and fifty years. Actually they do share some similarities but the most glaring resemblance lies in the fact that they carry native and foreign influences that make them similar and yet different. They share the common source of the same inheritance of the ancient and classical authors and they tend to be different because of their native experiences. If England could boast of its cultural richness and literary tradition of the centuries, America had its own strength in its democratic system and spirit on the one hand and a vast and varied landscape of its nation on the other.

The optimistic doctrine of Romantic individualism, which asserted that man should be guided by his own intuition rather than intellect to be a vehicle for the divine spirit pervading the universe, was developed by a number of American writers like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. They insisted that a freethinking individual could only be called a man as he has the potential to transmute "life in to truth" as Emerson put it in his essay, "The American Scholar". It finally cultivated "the doctrine of identity" based on "self-trust" which is the soul of American character and culture. Emerson stated:

"..... the instinct is sure that prompts him to tell his brother What he thinks. He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds."

These thoughts were prompted in Emerson by the study of the Classics, the Romantics and the Oriental writers. Emerson observed: “Each philosopher, each bard, each actor has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself.” In other words, these influences when amalgamated with the experiences of the new land generated a new “self-culture” and a sense of “self-reliance.” Its contribution in an individual’s life is so blissful that Emerson confessed in his essay entitled “Self –Reliance”: “ Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles. ”The same spirit worked in Thoreau who recommended even “the civil disobedience” for the revolution without even emphasizing that only the right and the just should prevail. In the case of Walt Whitman also the same romantic spirit persisted in the most unconventional manner. He imbibed it as an ever- expanding notion that “embraced the manly tenderness and the native elegance of the soul.” He stated in the Preface of the first edition of Leaves of Grass:

“ The Americans of all nations any times upon earth have probably the fullest poetic nature The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”

It is after hearing America singing as he puts it in a poem of the same title that Whitman celebrates and sings for himself. It confirms two important factors of American literature in general and of Whitman’s poetry in particular: (i) That the optimistic aspects of Romanticism had an obvious appeal for these writers as it gave a literary expression to the American faith in an individual and (ii) That it liberated literature from the restraints

imposed by 18<sup>th</sup> century classicism and made it more spontaneous, philosophical and imaginative.

However, depending on their presentation of the Romantic ideas and individualism of American society in bright or dark colours, the writers of the period could be classified as optimistic or pessimistic. If writers like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman belonged to the former category and they were optimistic, the others like Poe, Hawthorne and Melville came from the latter category and they were pessimistic simply because they were influenced by the negative traits of Romanticism. As a result, in their writing they focused on the morbid emotional forces and a sense of alienation in an individual. It opened up entirely different vistas of themes and thoughts in their writings. These writers show a little faith in the possibilities of any great social reform or in man's capacity to change his fate drastically. As expected these writers invited extremely contradictory critical response or they were not "accepted" in their life –time at all. Hawthorne and Melville's belief in the innate depravity of man and thus his inherently flawed life leads to a tragic struggle between the good and the evil in himself as well as with the society which is his creation. Melville also highlights his concern for the fundamental problem of human destiny. As he reveals in his great novel, Moby Dick the loneliness is one of the essential aspects of man's place in the scheme of things; man is doomed to fight against implacable cosmic forces and be defeated in the end. For these writers "an awareness of evil is essential to maturity, essential to a realistic knowledge of the whole life." This sort of the realization of the "great power of blackness" is a testimony of the two ideological groups among the American Romantics. The works of

these writers also have a “solidity” and “permanence” associated with the great art as T.S. Eliot observed.

### **Transcendentalism**

A group of writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Whitman and others were primarily engaged in exploring the implications of the American doctrine of individualism in the light of Romantic concepts of human personality, specially the emotional and spiritual personality, perhaps with the view to judging man's place among the “infinities” and to establishing man's relationship with the society and the universe all over again. Ironically, it was in New England, where the iron rule of Calvinist orthodoxy had been broken by the Unitarianism, that the writers rejected the stagnant past and accepted the bolder implications of Romanticism., for illustration, take “the infinitude of the private man” and a “spiritual reaffirmation of the democratic ideal.” It gave birth to a literary movement known as Transcendentalism. Defining it a critic has observed that “when the seed of Romanticism was transplanted from Europe on the puritan soil of New England it turned out to be Transcendentalism.”. It will not be an exaggeration to state that Unitarianism had already prepared the way for Transcendentalism by insisting that man is essentially good and his perceptions of religious truth are trustworthy. The New England writers of this period fall clearly into two groups: (i) the radicals who broke away completely with their past and (ii) the conservatives who remained closer to the “Brahmin” tradition and were mostly men of scholarship rather than of creative originality. Those who represented the radical aspects of Renaissance were called “Transcendentalists” This is the name given to the

intellectual attitude developed by a number of young men and women in the Boston area in 1830s. In 1838 they organized a club for the philosophical discussions and between 1840 and 1844 they issued a magazine called The Dial. Among the members of this group were Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Ripley, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau and the Unitarian minister Theodore Parker. If the Unitarian preachers could be drawn toward this literary movement there should be some very sound reasons for it. There are many common ideas but there are two basic points of difference between the Unitarians and the Transcendentalists. First, the former group expressed their confidence in the “rational faculties” of man, while the latter drew a sharp distinction between the “understanding” by which they meant the rational faculty, and the “reason” by which they meant the intuitive faculty. The transcendentalists believed that “reason” was much more authoritative in spiritual matter than “understanding”. Second, they relied upon the intuitive perception of a man much heavily than the conventional Unitarians would. Respecting the individual perception, the transcendentalists would set aside even the authority of the Bible. Emerson, the exponent of transcendental philosophy, said:

“Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the sentences that in all your reading have been to you like the blast of a trumpet, out of Shakespeare, Seneca, Moses, John Paul.”

Briefly, Emerson exhorted the renunciation of all authority, standards or laws imposed from outside. He asserted, “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind.”

The word “transcendentalism” was derived from German Romantic philosophy. Systematizing the Romantic distrust of the intellect and exaltation of intuition, philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Fichte and Schelling had affirmed that man could apprehend reality by direct spiritual insight. In their phraseology, the “reason” could know truths that “transcended” those accessible to the “understanding.” Emerson and other New Englanders acquired this attitude from post-Kant idealists and partly from their English interpreters such as Coleridge and Carlyle. It appealed to them largely because it provided a metaphysical justification for the ideal of individual freedom and affirmed the superiority of intuition over reason and conscious over prescribed morality. They found it agreeable to think in those terms because of the traditional emphasis of New England Puritanism on Man’s capacity for direct spiritual insight. If the Puritans had believed in the original sin, they also believed in the divine grace. Once the Holy Spirit enlightened the man, he knew the truth by immediate revelation. God, as the transcendentalists believed, revealed Himself in every individual, especially through the communication with nature. In other words, they believed that all intimations of the Divine are intuitive observations of the natural phenomenon. Transcendentalism, essentially a philosophical and literary movement, was also committed to social reforms. The champions of Anti-slavery Abolitionists and of women’s rights got the chief advocates among the transcendentalists. To them, the possibilities of human progress seemed limitless and, therefore, they worked for the good of mankind. They were the critics of American life and its mercantile culture; they offered insights into human psychology and advocated “ free thought, tolerance, and reforms.” Their sole suggestion was: “Let us explore the possibilities of our own new

world” by rejecting the “dead cultures”. Whitman, who is a supremely realized Emersonian poet is regarded as the culminating figure in the literary development of this period. He became the symbol of American expansiveness though the art and literature of his nation still looked toward the old world for the pattern of thoughts, ideas and language.

### **The Genteel Tradition**

If the period of literary writings after the Civil War can be termed as the new beginning of American Literature which had a profound influence on American cultural life during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a group of writers such as H.W. Longfellow, and O.W. Holme adhered to the convention and conservatism in life and literary writings. Their tough-minded rationalism hardened into what is commonly known as “the Genteel Tradition”. These writers turned their backs to the post-war scenario because they found the American society hopelessly vulgar and materialistic. Hence they escaped into an ideal world of romantic fantasy. The tendency to segregate art from the daily life had already been manifested in the conservative New England writers like Longfellow and Lowell but their disciples of the 1860s and 1870s like Bayard Taylor, Thomas Bailey, Aldrich Richard, Henry Stoddard, Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Henry Booker, to name a few, started cultivating art more consciously for certain effects like picturesque, landscape painting. They failed to realize that all great writings, including that of the Romantics, had always been a transmutation of elements derived from the actual experiences. For a while they were treated as the leading spokesman of American society but their reputation was short lived. Once they rejected the American society and its literature as an inferior off shoot

of England and English literature, today they themselves are usually dismissed as the exponent of an outdated tradition known as “The Genteel Tradition.”

### **Other Regional Trends**

Other characteristic features that prevailed the literary scene of America were to emphasize the quaint local colour of some special region of the country. The writers like Sarah Orne Jewett, the author of the classic *Country of Pointed Firs* (1896) and Mary E. Wilkin were the pioneers of the regionalism in literature. If the poet like Emily Dickinson could make poetry out the contemporary life of New England, many southerner novelists known as regionalists formed a whole school. The regional peculiarities and popular humour from rural New England or the Southern frontiers highlighted the regional features and the regional affairs as the most significant characteristics in literary writings.

### **Walt Whitman: His Life and Works**

Walt Whitman was born on 31st May 1819, in a farming community near Huntington, Long Island with Dutch and Yankee, Quaker and Calvinist in his ancestry. His mother Louisa Van Velsor and his father Walter were semi literate parents with a large family of nine children. Walt was the second son. Just before his fifth birthday, his family moved to Brooklyn. It was a small town then of about 7,000 persons, and it grew into a large city during his lifetime. Walt Whitman spent his formative years here but for the next thirty years he returned again and again to Long island for visiting his grand



parents and becoming familiar with the countryside and the shores of the Atlantic nearby. From his childhood his patriotic family taught him to regard men within the boundaries of the republic as American like himself, differing only in their labours, fortunes, and separate traits of personalities. This made him a true American and an “Expansionist” on a new model less concerned with the class and region unlike Emerson, Thoreau and Melville. Whitman saw America as a whole. The jumble mixture of country and city scenes, where the poet spent his youth in alternation between the farms on Long Island and the streets of Brooklyn, impinged on his imagination and the mature poet denied neither but exultingly embraced both.

In Brooklyn Walt Whitman went to elementary school and after only six years of formal education left the school at the age of eleven to go to work as an apprentice printer. He worked as a printer until 1835 in Brooklyn and later in New York. From 1836 to 1838 he taught in various schools in Long Island. It was in 1838 that he began his career in journalism, which he pursued intermittently for over twenty years. In other words, he grew from printer or reporter and editor with a special interest in politics as well as poetry. This “cleavage in self-interests” in his youth gave him a temperament of New World men and women. His imagination was dominated by the idea of expansion, by “the dream of a continental cosmopolitan state, a true New World.”

Walt Whitman was at home in Brooklyn, a respectable man, member of a growing American small town, but the great bay of New York lay just beyond Brooklyn Ferry which took him to Manhattan Island and New York – a great metropolis, cosmopolitan, turbulent, rich and incredibly expanding. It became for the young man a great source of his passionate relationship



The portraits of the parents are realistically drawn and the gradual shift from the concrete and palpable to the metaphysical speculation and ultimate thought about the nature of everyday reality of life is extra-ordinarily convincing.

As Whitman's education was partly self –education and partly vocational education, it lent him a voice of the common sense. So far as the self-education is concerned, it came by his personal reading. He was deeply influenced by the political essays of Tom Paine, which were the guiding spirit behind the American Revolution and his democratic ideas. Besides, the novelists like Walter Scott, the thinkers like Hegel, Carlyle, Emerson, George Sand and hundred such writers, whom he read with a great fervor, added something of a mystic and dreamer to his personality. Whitman's vocational education was the by-product of his occupation as a journalist. He found nothing irrelevant or alien to his purpose, which was

“To articulate faithfully, to express in literary and poetic form , and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral , intellectual and aesthetic Personality in the midst of, and tallying , the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America—and to exploit that personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hither to poem or book.”

Thus, Whitman defined his goal as a poet very early in his life. He captured this “Personality” and cherished this epic ambition” in Leaves of Grass, which is an archetypal poem, a national epic. On the one hand, he represented the voice of American people, on the other he himself became the symbol of American expansiveness even in his journalistic writings.

As he himself admitted in 1846 Whitman was given what he calls his “best sit” by which he meant the situation as an editor on the Daily Eagle, the leading Brooklyn Newspaper of the day. It was a successful and respected paper of Democrats, and was growing at an enormous pace. For nearly two years he worked with this paper as an Editor. This is the period when he rounded up the news of the town, of America and the world for the local readers as the most responsible and public-spirited citizen. Whitman was very keen to take part in active politics and see to it that the benefits of American democracy reach every individual. However Whitman came into conflict with the political opinions of the owners of this newspaper and in January 1848, he was made to resign from his position. He was on the open road “leading wherever/ I choose.” Fortunately, he did not live without a job for long. Soon he took the Editorship of the paper called Daily Crescent. Though he stayed there for three months only, but this brief span of time brought great changed in his outlook and attitude toward many seminal issues, especially about sex- an area which in the case of Whitman is full of supreme contradictions. His journalistic writings through the 1840s and 1850s provide a very fertile ground for his poetry. . These newspaper writings, however, have all been collected and published including even a journalistic novel, Franklin Evans; or The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times (1842), which was not an impressive piece of fiction. These writings are of great bulk filling many volumes but they have nothing to match the greatness of his master - work-- Leaves of Grass. When the first edition of the remarkable book Leaves of Grass published in 1855, it made the readers feel as if a poet was born overnight.

Whitman carefully planned his career as a poet and cultivated his proper physical appearance for his roles as a writer, editor and poet. If as an editor he was living the full life of the city man – son of Manhattan, as a writer and poet there were two different voices- - of a Romantic poet and a Social Reformer. Even as a poet both the voices combine in one note to fulfill his aim which was to bring about a revolution in American Poetry and also in American life. His moods and “masks”-- as a Dandy, a Vagabond on the open road or a Bohemian or an Opera goer who was delighted to feel and share the pulse of the masses or as a Carpenter Christ, “ the divine worker , the humble carpenter filled with a boundless love for mankind” -- are analyzed so effectively by James Miller Jr. in his book on Whitman On the one hand it established the connection between poetry and life which is the core of his theory of poetry , and on the other it extended the relationship between the poet and his poetry and makes it actually and emotionally autobiographical. This literal identification between the poet and his poetry is confirmed when Whitman says about his book, Leaves of Grass:

Camerado, this is no book,  
Who touches this touches a man.

Whitman told his friend Dr. Bucke: “Remember , the book (Leaves of Grass) arose out of my life in Brooklyn and New York from 1838 to 1853, absorbing a million people, for fifteen years , with an intimacy, an eagerness, an abandon, probably never equaled. Whitman actually furnished his imagination with facts, which he used as tools, and poetic symbols. The change of his inner life became articulate when his maturing imagination began to draw upon experiences lying at deeper levels.

## The Development of Various Editions of Leaves of Grass

Before one studies comprehensively the details of each of its nine editions, it is necessary to note two things: (a) The book grew thematically as well as technically with each new edition and (b) It shows Whitman's development as the greatest American poet of the New World. As he himself stated in the Prefaces, he wrote a new kind of poetry "new in every way—in subject matter, in form, in spirit, in its message, and in its style and diction". His main ambition was to break away from the European tradition as he wrote in his letter to Emerson:

“ Walking freely out from the old tradition, as our politics has walked out, American poets and literats recognize nothing behind them superior to what is present with them...”

Whitman tried hard to create the new taste and succeeded to a large extent in his effort. Poetry for him is not a *pure* art, but an art with a purpose, a use. According to him poetry should be as eclectic as possible and should express all the needs and aspirations of Modern Man—political, social , material and spiritual. Hence he retains his “two voices” the voice of an inspired singer to enhance the spiritual development and the voice of a utilitarian to be the instrument of social and political reform.

The remarkable event of publishing the first edition of Leaves of Grass occurred on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1855 when he was thirty-six years old. It was a slender volume of 93 pages containing 12 untitled poems and a Preface. Whitman

used only one general title for all the poems, Leaves of Grass. In the Preface he gives almost all of his main approaches and aims of poetry. Though there are echoes of many well known pronouncements on poetry made by English poets and critics like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and American poet and critic like Emerson, Whitman made a clear distinction how the new poetry must differ from the old. Whitman emphasized through out the Preface that an ideal poet must maintain the connection with everyday life:

“Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted and shall be done with perfect candor. Upon this basis philosophy speculates ever looking to the poet, ever regarding the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness never inconsistent with what is clear to the senses and to the soul. For the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness make the only point of sane philosophy .... Sanity and ensemble characterise the great master...The great master has nothing to do with miracles.”

However, Whitman made it absolutely clear that as a poet serious office to perform keeping in mind two things: (a) The “sense” and the “soul” are equal partners in search for happiness and (b) the great poets must take interest in “political liberty” to “cheer up the slaves and horrify despots”. In his earliest Preface(1855) he wrote: “The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity.”

Whitman , on the whole, kept this ideal of simplicity even in his eloquence. As Whitman was intimately acquainted with the art of printing, it was easy

for him to prove his originality by giving a rather unusual appearance to his book. He chose for his *Leaves of Grass* a large format, a green cover with an intricate leafy design on it, gold lettering on the back-strip and gilt edge. He also included a portrait of himself in workmen's clothes.

The poet obviously expected that the rich appearance of the book without the author's name on the title page would arouse the curiosity but the book, unfortunately, failed to catch the attention of the reading public. Instead, the external appearance of the book and the eccentricities in printing were adversely criticized.

In 1856 Whitman brought out the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* which was considerably larger as it was of 385 pages and contained 32 poems including the original 12. In fact Whitman was encouraged by the famous literary figure, Emerson who responded with enthusiasm to the first edition stating in a letter to the author that he found the book to be "the extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed... I find the courage of treatment, which so delights me, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career..." Whitman was so much excited and encouraged by this praise from the eminent writers and philosopher like Emerson that he prophetically declared in his reply to him: "the work of my life is making poems." From this excellent testimonial he used one line on the back-strip of the second edition of his book. Leaves of Grass grew in quantity with almost every new edition. Its third edition was published in 1860. It was a large volume of 546 pages containing 124 new poems and the old ones were extensively revised and were given many new titles. This volume grouped one set of poems in praise of the American nation, while another group entitled "Children of Adam" were about love which registers his rebellion against the conventional



attitudes toward sex, admiration of all natural physiological functions and hope that a new race would be procreated in the future restoring to man his original strength and vitality. Another group called “Calamus” poems were about with “manly love”- a subject which Walt Whitman deals with frequently in his poetry. Drum- Taps and Sequel to Drum –Taps, 1865, are two pamphlets of poems about the Civil War and President Lincoln. He was oppressed by the horrors and depredations of war, and by the division of the nation in whose progress and increasing unity he had such a great faith. The poems of this volume reveal a darkening mood and nowhere are his treatment of death more profound than in the elegy “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”

The fourth edition of Leaves of Grass appeared in 1867 with only eight new poems but a great deal of revision of the previous work. The revision of his own poems, even changing the titles of some of his poems or arranging and rearranging the “groups” of poems has been associated with the “evolution” of Whitman which has been carefully and critically traced out by some of the critics.

Meanwhile in 1871 Whitman brought his prose work, Democratic Vistas, which carries his essays on “Democracy” and “Personalism”. The former was written in response to Carlyle’s views on Democracy and expressed his belief in the soundness of the common people and their capacity to rectify their shortcomings, the latter was about his theory based on his conviction that political progress was dependent on the spiritual health and development of each individual in the society.

Next edition of Leaves of Grass, that was the fifth edition, appeared in 1871 and was reissued in 1872 to include “Passage to India.” The title piece of this collection was suggested by the engineering feats of the Suez Canal, the

trans-Atlantic cable and the railway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. These engineering triumphs filled him with optimism. Through these poems Whitman once again proves two things: (i) Whitman's appreciation for Science as a source to solve the problems of modern man and (b) His faith that topical is as significant as the eternal. As his letters to his friends convey, he believed in a thoroughly integrated personality of Man as well as Woman is a necessary ideal for poetry and for the progress of mankind. For illustration, take his letter to a Danish poet and editor, Rudolf Schmidt where he clearly states:

“The main object of my poetry is simply to present – sometimes by directions, but oftener by indirections- the portraiture or model of a sound, large, complete, physiological, emotional, moral, intellectual & spiritual *Man*, a good son, brother, husband, father, friend & practical citizen-- & *Woman* also, a good wife, mother, practical citizen too—adjusted to the modern, to the New World, to Democracy, to Science. My verse strains its every nerve to arouse, brace, dilate, excite to the love & realization of health, friendship, perfection, freedom, amplitude. There are other objects but these are the main ones....”

In the seventh edition of Leaves of Grass, 1881, the poems appeared in their final arrangement. Whitman has made it absolutely clear that his poetry is the poetry of “everyday life” and written for the “common reader,” that man's normal activities are far more important than his exceptional ones. For him “nothing is useless or low.” Whitman deserves all praise for his strong championship of the “democratic man” as against the “hero.” He frankly speaks of the ordinary life of the ordinary people as the most befitting subject for poetry. Describing the nature of “identity” of man he writes in his Preface of 1876:

“ Then I meant Leaves of Grass, as published, to be the Poem of Identity, (of *Yours*, whoever you are, now reading these lines) For genius must realize that, precious as it may be, there is something far more precious , namely, simple Identity, One’s –self..... Yourself, your own Identity, body and soul.”

Though in innumerable poems Whitman has referred to his own “intention” of speaking in his poetry of the ordinary life of ordinary people even though it would make his poetry sound drab and prosaic. In one of his short poems, the emphasis on the “average” man is combined with other principles which the poet consciously followed:

I was looking a long while for the Intentions,  
 For a clew to the history of the past for myself, and for  
       these chants – and now I have found it,  
 It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (them I  
       neither accept not reject,)  
 It is no more in the legends than in all else,  
 It is in the present—it is this earth today,  
 It is in Democracy—(the purport and aim of all the past,)  
 It is the life of one man or one woman to-day—the average  
       man of to-day,  
 It is in languages, social customs, literatures, arts,  
 It is in the broad show of artificial things, ships, machinery,  
       Politics, creed, modern improvements, and the  
       Interchange of nations,

All for the modern – all for the average man of to-day.

Here it is pertinent to note that subject alone does not make a poem; it is an all-pervasive point of view, a subtle poetic atmosphere that adds an organic unity to it. In Whitman's case, who was a conscious artist casting and recasting his lines, it was really true.

Since 1869 Whitman had been keeping indifferent health and at the age of 54 in 1873. he suffered a paralytic stroke which affected his left arm and leg. The same year in May his mother, whom he loved deeply, died. But, nothing daunted his spirit; he was still writing poetry and delivering lectures. His only regrets were that he had not intended to stay in Camden but his last days passed here only and secondly that he was not favourably treated by the publishers. Whitman's friends like William Rossetti and Mrs Stafford rendered him valuable service and it raised his spirit and restored his health to some extent though he never fully recovered from his paralytic stroke. However, the royalties from the 1881 edition of his Leaves of Grass and the financial assistance from his English and American friends in Boston and a benefit lecture organized by Colonel Robert Ingersol made his life somewhat comfortable. He brought out a volume of prose, reminiscences, personal notes and records entitled Specimen Days and Collect in 1882-83, and November Boughs, seventy-five poems of "Sands at Seventy" full of reminiscences were published in 1888. The same year the eighth edition of Complete Poems and Prose of Walt Whitman, 1855-1888, appeared. It was in 1892 that the ninth edition, which is known as "Death-Bed Edition" of Leaves of Grass, appeared under the supervision of Whitman during the last days of his life. He realized that there was to be no more shifting but there would be addition. Therefore the poems published in November Boughs and

the thirty-one poems of “Goodbye My Fancy” written after 1891 were added in appendixes.

It is not, therefore, justifiable to say that Whitman’s Leaves of Grass is only a literary attempt; it should be taken as a spiritual autobiography or as a record of the “growth of a poet’s mind” Actually, the successive nine editions of the poet’s life time grew out of his vivid sense of endless materials, a creative pressure welling from the profound depths, and a boundless acceptance, which expressed itself in an urgent inclusiveness rather than in the artful limits of a deliberate design. Therefore Whitman was surely justified in insisting upon identifying the growth of his Leaves of Grass with himself and with the growth of his country. He had new things to say, new approaches, insights and shift of moods to recommend as he and his land developed.

### **Walt Whitman’s Theory of Poetry And Art of versification**

As a conscious artist Whitman had certain definite views on the nature and function of poetry. He believed that poetry has a function to perform, a mission to pursue. He repeatedly explained in the Prefaces and in other prose writings that his primary aim was to write “a New American Poetry” for the New World. He pleaded for “American Imaginative Literature” which must be based on the value of democracy and greater personalism so that it could reveal “grand and archetypal models.” He not only disliked the other “feudal” poets of Europe including Shakespeare but also did not want anything from Europe, from the Mediterranean to be repeated in America According to Whitman, poetry must represent reality. However, it does not mean that poetry merely copies or reflects life, because in the poem we have

the poet's "mirror", that is, his point of view. It is this mirror that reveals the inner life or realities or meaning of things or experiences and thereby offers "the true realities, eidolons." Whitman believed that modern poet's frame of reference has to be different. Within the frame of science and democracy, the poet must mirror the "inferior or spiritual life". This was "the religious purpose" which Whitman set out to accomplish.

Whitman, like Wordsworth, defines the function of a true poet stating that he reveals the hidden possibilities and potentialities. He brings to the surface the experiences buried in the racial memory in the collective consciousness. He refers to the poet as the "common referee", as "the arbiter of the diverse" and as "the equalizer of his age and land." Whitman stated that "the known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet... He is the seer; he alone sees. He is also the priest as he put in "Passage of India" and is viewed as "the true son of God"

Nature and man shall be disjointed and diffused no more,  
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

A poet is, thus, a Bard rather a bardic prophet who chants and sings. Whitman knows that it is neither the experiences of an average man nor the inner vision would create a poem.. In his Specimen Days he remarked:

"The play of imagination, with the sensuous objects of nature for symbols and faith- with love and Pride as the unseen impetus and morning -power of all, make up the curious chess- game of a poem."

It needs a conscious poetic technique to suggest because according to Whitman "The indirect is always as great and real as the direct. The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body". The individual

being the basis of his poetry becomes at every step indirectly the suggestive of the universe.

Form in verse means, as a rule, metre. Whitman felt rightly that no metre or combination of metres could serve the peculiar purpose he had in view. At the same time he was not averse to metre . He introduces metrical fragments here and there, and even shows a partiality for jingling, musical effects. As the primary requisite for form of Leaves of Grass was its spaciousness, its gigantic mould should be duly recognized, he was justified in staying away from the common forms. Basil De Selincourt has resolved the issue of excluding the metre thus: "... if he rather transcends than refuses metre, it is not the less true that recognizably metrically lines are out of keeping with the spirit of his poetry ..... The identity of the lines in metrical poetry is an identity of pattern, The identity of the lines in Leaves of Grass is an identity of substance. This is in effect by far the subtler and more exacting condition of the two."

Whitman believed in the theory of the organic form. Like Emerson he believed that "the poem is the meter- making argument." It is a natural deduction from his determining constructive principles. He looked upon each of his poems as the leaf or branch of a tree .The line is to his poem what the poem is to the work as a whole. Therefore, certain forms are to be excluded and certain kind of lines and other poetic devices like metaphors, symbols and images should not work as they "hang between me and the rest". They should be functional and not ornamental.

When Whitman remarked to Horace Traubel, "I sometimes think the Leaves is only a language experiment-- that is, an attempt to give the spirit, the body, the man, new words, new potentialities of speech--an American, a cosmopolitan range of self –expression," he was expressing his confidence

in one of the fundamental aspects of poetry. Emerson seemed to be pointing to this aspect of Whitman's poetry when he stated in his letter written in 1855 that "I find the Leaves the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." Whitman's wit inheres in his language; in his indiscriminate mixture of levels of usage; in his comic and even grotesque use of foreign words representing a multitude of mingled voices. James Miller Jr. has aptly observed that "His language is America's linguistic melting-pot; In it all the languages of all the people are mixed and stirred into one heady, hearty stew."

Whitman said that if there is anything, which describes the quality of Leaves of Grass fully, is the word "Suggestiveness." Whitman could achieve this effect by the sublet use of language, by putting himself in the poem as the typical human being using the first and second person and not the third person on record. Like Shelley, he believed that it is the use of first person "I" which could add intensity and precision to a poem. When he wrote in "Song of Myself",

I know perfectly well my own egotism,

Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less

he was conducting one of the experiments in his poetic theory and practice. The connotations of the slightly bizarre word "omnivorous" which begins with a sense of wonder mixed with terror or even sinister note leave the line crammed with meaning. This sort of use of diction make Whitman's individual line an independent entity. Such independence in lines could not encourage the poet to be confined by metrical pattern or rhyme. In other words, each true line of Walt Whitman comes to us floated separately on an independent breath. Hence he employs the idea of the free verse which has the influence of the Bible, the dramatic rhetoric of the Elizabethan stage and



even the rhythms of the rolling waves of the sea- the major symbol in his poetry Like the sea-waves to which he himself often compared them , his lines are of variable shapes and sizes. The lines are independent and even discontinuous. They leap up from the page as if they have independent life of their own but the richness of metaphor, which makes a fresh use of the familiar and unfamiliar words and ideas, create other seemingly incompatible qualities of continuity and independence. Whitman's craftsmanship confirms that "The line is a personality, the poem is battalion, the book is an army."

When he says "The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul" he expresses his emotional state metaphorically. Sometimes the brilliance of the line seems to derive its strength from the use of metaphor, for example , take the closing line from Section 41 of "Song of Myself": "Putting myself here and now to the ambush'd womb of the shadows." The startling image of "ambush'd womb" suggests that the moment of fruition is about to arrive and "womb of shadow" indicates the uncertainty of the future. The juxtaposing the words connotes a potency, which he realizes as a creator. Thus, through the metaphor of procreation he makes the line carry the meaning effectively. Similarly, towards the end of Section 26 of "Song of Myself" he speaks about the power of music through the finest metaphorical structure. Within the five lines he renders the impact of the sensuous ecstasy, violent fear, stasis of death and the sense of being haunted by music. In Section 39 the following lines

Behavior lawless as snow- flakes, words simple as grass,

Uncombed head, laughter, and naivete

Slow- stepping feet, common features, common modes and emanations

They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers,

Two metaphors are joined to simple detail to evoke the impression of an individual filled with a wild and refreshing freedom. The vivid metaphors brilliantly describe the complex emotional states.

Another constructive principles of Whitman's theory of poetry is to evoke the vivid and sharply drawn pictures solely from the simplicity of detail, for illustration, take the line "Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty". The transference of *swelling* from the basket to the house is curiously effective. If many lines of Whitman seem to succeed through the very simplicity of the detail or metaphor, others acquire the desired effect through the fusion of a series of related details. For example take the line: "The blab of the pave, tires of the carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders" which is unsurpassable in evoking in the fewest possible words, the hectic chaos of a busy street scene. In "The shape of the sly settee, and the adulterous unwholesome couple" two details are sufficient to suggest an entire world of guilt and deceit.

Frequently, the effect in Whitman's line derives from a distortion of language, or from incongruous combinations whose very incongruity offers fresh insight. For illustration ,consider the following line known for such an ingenious concoction:

No dainty dolce affettuoso I,  
 Bearded, sunburnt, gray-necked, forbidding I have  
 arrived.....

One need not be bothered much about the meaning of “dolce affettuoso” which is a gross misjudgment of a foreign word. Its very placement in the line and sound are enough to convey its meaning and justify it. Similarly, the “irrelevant” tone becomes the whole basis for “Song of Exposition” in which the invocation to the muse is made in a chatty and intimate style.

If the blending of the levels of language creates a kind of discord in Whitman’s style, he also has a careful ear attuned to the melody of words and cadence of lines. De Selincourt aptly observed that “The progress of Whitman’s verse has much in common with that of a musical composition...There we have a *diminuendo*; its point lies in the *crescendo* that preceded it; and behold, while the sound lessens, the meaning grows.” Through the magic of incantation, Whitman achieves the desired effect in his lines.

The use of parenthesis is a recurring feature of Whitman’s technique. He frequently begins a paragraph or ends one with a bracketed sentence, or begins or ends some section of a poem with a bracketed paragraph; some – times he even begins or ends a poem parenthetically. For example, the “Song of Exposition” which opens with the beautiful aside:

(Ah little recks the laborer,  
How near his work is holding him to God.  
The loving Laborer through space and time.)

The bracket serves two purposes, (a) it secures a peculiar detachment for its contents and (b) that it enhances the flow of meaning by breaking it for the time being. “We have thus as it were a poem within a poem.... A double stream of poetry.” De Selincourt makes an insightful observation in this context: “Continuity and independence being Whitman’s opposing principles of composition, independence emerges in the bracket into relative

prominence. The disjunctive spirit of language asserts itself; literature contemplates music.” In other words, Whitman uses words and phrases as if they were notes of music.

For Whitman the meaning of repetition lies in the fact that it is impossible to have the same experience twice. When words are repeated, they convey varying contexts being partly vehicles of truth and partly vehicles of emotion. At each repetition the words in a poem acquire different dimensions of meaning. Gradually, “the poem becomes less and less a form of words and more and more a key to life.”

It is relevant to note that the absence of “recognized formalities” in Whitman’s theory of poetry, which is characteristic of Leaves of Grass also, robs the language of the high-pitched associations and suggests us to interpret it in accordance with the dictates of mere common sense. As in the content of his poetry in his language too he guides us not to lose sight of these everyday simplicities. Whitman’s instrument for carrying these simplicities to the profundities was repetition- repetition of forms, of phrases, of themes. He manages to communicate not merely a poem, an example of poetry, but the spiritual attitude. Whitman through these determining principles could discover and elaborate a form, which other poets seem to have been searching in vain. If “modernity is a question not of date but of outlook” as Sir Richard Livingstone remarked, “Whitman is a modern poet in his outlook and the constructive principles of his poetry. “He makes an original contribution to the poetic craft in that he discovers and exhibits new standard, new basis for variation.” Precisely, these poetics of Walt Whitman are adapted for his purposes. Hence, as Saintsbury rightly it observes:

“the rhythm is many-centred, it takes fresh departures as it goes on. The poet uses freely alliteration, chiasmus, antithesis, and specially the retention of the same word or words to begin or end successive lines, but none of these so freely as to render it characteristic. The result, though perhaps uncouth art first sight and hearing, is a medium of expression by no means wanting in excellence....”

The rhythm in Whitman has at least three plausible sources. First, he assimilated the rhythm of the rolling waves of the sea which has given the sonorous music of the flowing lines in his poetry; Second, he absorbed the hectic noises of the city to such extent that he was delighted to introduce the frantic moment of the hustle and bustle of the city life in his poetry by skipping, skimming and overflowing lists of catalogues and finally, the Bible taught him the art of balance and parallelism, that resolved the paradoxes, repetitions, inversions and other anomalies into rhythmic patterns. Besides, he imbibed the rhythm of the Hebrew prophets and the recitative opera music, which he called “heart music” as against the “art Music.” These devices enabled him to balance long phrases and to suspend the meaning to the final word of the paragraph. Indeed, Whitman realized it from the beginning that writing poetry was largely a technical matter. In his case it had to be free verse or nothing and he seldom varied from that practice.

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### **Whitman As a poet of Democracy**

Whitman had clearly stated that a poet should have special attributes of assimilating in him the existing reality of the world around him. In 1855 Preface of Leaves of Grass, he commented, “The proof of a poet is that

his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.” In 23<sup>rd</sup> song of “Song of Myself” he says:

I accept Reality and dare not question it,  
Materialism first and last imbuing.

What makes his poetry truly democratic in themes and poetics is that he employs ‘reality’ in the ordinary or external sense of the term . Combining it with the creative power he manages to disengage it from the surface of reality and transforms it into a powerful instrument to change the “unchanging” in the human society. In other words, through his poetry the poet attempts to create a new social and political order-“a brave new world,” which would break through the sterile existential conditions and would accept “the normality of change.” To achieve this end he practises two important ideals which can not be dispensed away: (a) Faith in individual and individuals ,i.e., “En-masse” and (b) Full commitment to freedom.. Whitman firmly established both the ideals in his poetry. He promises in the poem “I Hear It Was Charge Against Me” that

Only I will establish in Manhattan and in every city of these  
States inland and seaboard,

.....

The institution of the dear love of Comrades.

and in the 10<sup>th</sup> song of “Starting from Paumanok” he invites his “Comrade”

“to share with me two greatneses; and a third one rising

.....

The greatness of Love and Democracy, the greatness of Religion.

Whitman's ideas and ideals were sponsored by two great Revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century- the French and the American. It was actually the French Revolution that shook the foundation of feudalism and erected in its place the edifice of democracy. In a self-posed question in a "Salut A Monde" Whitman asks:

"What do you hear Walt Whitman?"

And then replies:

"I hear fierce Franch Liberty songs."

In another song entitled "For You Democracy" from "Calamus" poems Whitman greets Democracy saying:

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme

For you, for you I am thrilling these songs.

His interest in democracy had its roots in his transcendental view of the Self and he fully believed that democracy was not only a political doctrine. Rather, it was a dynamic process in which human beings were continually tested and stimulated to grow from strength to strength.

Whitman absorbed the total spirit of the French Revolution, i.e., faith in individual and distinctive , national identity, faith in its doctrine of liberty, equality and fraternity, faith and full reliance on "movement" as an exclusive means for 'Rebuilding' the society which maintains the *Status quo* of man.. No doubt, in different countries, different ages and in the case of different poets the implication and association with these three magic words has been different but Whitman is perhaps the only major poet of the world, who advocated these ideals to which he adhered in real life, and who spoke about them among his audience and readers in both his prose and poetry from his sincere conviction and not from merely theoretical adoration of them as slogans. It has been openly acknowledged that in Whitman the

prophecy of the famous French author, Alexis de Tocqueville, came true. Prof. Dowden , one of the earliest critics to recognize Whitman’s greatness, appreciated his “poetry of democracy”.

Whitman strongly believed that to claim the status of “perfect and free individual” man must develop his natural propensities -- for which he urgently needs liberty, equality and fraternity—the Trinitarian slogan popularized by the French Revolution. Among the numberless pieces that reveal the cry for liberty is the 10<sup>th</sup> poem of “ By Blue Ontario’s Shore” where he says ,

For the great idea of perfect and free individuals,  
For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,  
The attitude of him cheers up the slaves and horrifies foreign despots,  
Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality  
They live in the feelings of young men and the best women  
(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth  
been always ready to fall for Liberty.)

The sense of liberty promotes in an individual an idea of ‘selfhood’ as Whitman presents in “A Song of Joys”—

O the joy of manly selfhood,  
To be servile to none, to defer to none, not to any tyrant  
Known or unknown.

A man just can not be fitted into a straight jacket of monistic thought. Whitman values even man’s complexity and says:

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself  
( I am large , and I contain multitudes.)

What sounds like a careless rejection of all commitment to thought is



actually a process of growing which tends to be the right of all individuals.

Whitman includes the idea of equality in his concept of Democracy and regards the average man as an asset to every country in the world. He believed that “The average man of a land at last only is important” His celebration of the common man is based on the conviction that the glorification of all normal and basic occupations and activities of man is the primary duty of a poet. Whitman’s belief in equality is not merely a political belief it is his noble faith:

In all people I see myself, none more and none a  
Barleycorn less and the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

Whitman gave these rights not only to men but to women as well. In “Song of Myself” he says:

I am the poet of the women the same as the man,  
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man.

Henry Alonzo Myers aptly points out that Whitman’s concept of equality has its origin in American Democracy: “ But with Whitman equality is much more than a political idea; it is an eternal fact in the real world of unlimited personalities; it is the great first principle”. If Whitman’s writings have a special significance for the social thinkers, it is because they have the conviction that once the gaps caused by the inequality are bridged, the new society would emerge where

Neither a servant nor a master I,

.....

I will be with you and you shall be even with me.

In his Democratic Vista, which is obviously his most significant discussion on Democracy, he repeatedly pointed out that the bond of friendship is far

more relevant in the world of today than mere “individualism” and the “romantic love.” It is true that without the bonds of friendship, which need not always have sexual implications, “sympathy” or affection and Democracy will merely be an academic concept. In other words, the self discovers itself truly in the company of the masses or Comradeship. He says:

One’s self I sing, a simple separate person,

Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-masse.

Whitman realized that the course of a revolutionary is uncharted and hence uncertain, but his faith in the infinite worth of the individual makes his aim clear, that is, to change, develop and progress. Hence he prefers to call himself an “evolutionist” while the critic like Middleton Murry calls him a “mystic” because his concept of democracy is essentially spiritual. It is indeed a tribute to Whitman’s genius that despite knowing the limitations of American democracy, and cruelties of the Civil War, he never gave up hope and strives to reshape the human existence and human society, and always dreamt of achieving the universal peace, and brotherhood through democracy. D.H.Lawrence makes a very perceptive remark about Whitman when he observes: “Whitman is drunk with the strange wine of infinitude... Item by item he identifies himself with the universe, and this accumulative identity he calls Democracy, En Masse, One Identity and so on.”

### **Whitman’s Treatment of the Theme of Love and Death**

Whitman, who has always been a kind of rebel and revolutionary, impressed and shocked his readers by his unconventional and unorthodox presentation of these complex themes of love and death. He never separated the body from the soul, or ‘sense’ from ‘spirituality’ and the social from the spiritual. It naturally added two important dimensions to his poetry (a)It revealed the

poet's point of view on love and the relationship of sexes and (b) It gave new angles –moral, psychological and sociological – to Whitman love - poems. His poems of love make him one of the greatest love poets of the world, and a prophet of sexual love. Though in his own days it made him face neglect and even rejection as he was called “the indecent poet”, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century he was hailed as a pioneer love poet who spoke about love and sex in astonishing terms. D.H. Lawrence, paying a tribute to the genius of Whitman, remarked: “ Ahead of Whitman, nothing; Ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wilderness of unopened life, Whitman.”

Whitman's love poems celebrate “normal” love and “abnormal” love or homosexuality. He borrowed terms from the popular science and according to many modern scholars, only a pseudo-science, of phrenology for describing the two types of love. It is also believed that the study of phrenology gave him the necessary confidence for the development of his own personality and poetry. Whitman used two words frequently which are based on the study of this science -- “amative” and “adhesive” to define two kinds of love. Whereas the term “amative love” refers to normal love between man and woman as expressed in the string of poems in “Children of Adam”, “adhesive love” is used to describe ‘manly love’ as celebrated in a group of poems in “Calamus”. The critics have not taken a favourable stand on these two sections of Leaves of Grass, for the former because of its frankness and obsession with the physical form of the male and the female, and for the latter because of its unnatural and illegal preposition. Glorification of human body is one of the basic tenets of Whitman's approach to love. Without any inhibitions he speaks of the “magnetism and deliciousness” of the human body and asserted, “If anything is sacred, the

human body is sacred.” In this context E.L. Masters observed, “ He was a great influence in inaugurating this better respect for the body which we know today.” Whitman speaks about love and sex with such a great tenderness and rapture that it ceases to be vulgar or obscene and becomes the most sophisticated and beautiful utterances about love. He avoids any mention of the physical “beauty” but reveals in details his admiration for the perfection of physical “form”. He also detects a delicate sympathy and harmony between the lovers and between man and Nature. Whitman firmly asserts,

“If marriage is sacred, the ultimate comradeship is utterly sacred since it has no ulterior motive whatever, like procreation... It is a relation between fearless, honorable, self-responsible men, a balance of perfect polarity... Marriage must never be wantonly attacked. True marriage is eternal; in it we have consummation and being. But the final consummation lies in what is beyond marriage.”

For Whitman “ Sex contains all, bodies, souls, Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies...” Thus, he extends the meaning of sex in and through his complex vision and intense feelings as, for example in the “Children of Adams” and in “Calamus” groups of poems. Though in Democratic Vista he had already provided a theoretical base for “manly love” stating that ‘fraternity’ might include the love of ‘man’ for persons of his own sex. Whitman tells in “Drum Taps” that “This comradeship is to be the final cohering principal of the new world, the new Democracy “ If it was only for the bond of ‘friendship’ or fellow-feeling so necessary for democracy, none

would have challenged his view. But, he suggests in some of his poems and prose writings that homosexuality was commonly known form of love in America and elsewhere, though the writers were, for the obvious reasons, reticent on this issue. Whitman wanted the new poets to write about it without any fear or conventional standards of respectability.

Henry Adams in his book The Education of Henry Adams puts an important question to himself thus: “Whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done; but he could think only of Walt Whitman..... All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force..” He actually treated it as ‘Life Force’ because of its procreational aspect of experience.. He wrote in “A Backward Glance O’ver Travel’d Roads”, “ ‘Leaves of Grass’ is avowedly the song of sex....” Whitman juxtaposes the two kinds of love-- man-woman and man-man --in order to dramatize the difference as well as to dramatize the successive states of sexual consciousness of the poetic hero. Here he anticipates the modern psychologists and is, to use the words of D.H. Lawrence, “a great beginner and pioneer. He is like a forerunner of Freud.” In its ultimate meaning, then, the poet’s sexual vision connects with his mystic vision, for the first leads to the universal identification while the second attempts to achieving the spiritual Union. This sort of co-relation between the dissimilar experiences makes Romain Rolland describe Whitman as “ the ridiculous mixture of the *New York Herald* and the *Bhagwad Gita*. Whitman’s Absolute being all-inclusive and comprehensive, the poet cannot be expected to exclude the physical from the concept of Reality in totality. Hence he transforms the physical into the spiritual. “ It is man’s maximum state of consciousness.... It is reached through embracing love” to use the

expression of Lawrence. In this context Whitman adds: “And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral dressed in his own shroud.”

When D.H. Lawrence called Whitman “a great post mortem poet”, he hinted at the central concern in his poetry. George Saintbury made a candid observation about Whitman that

“There are two subjects on which he is especially eloquent , which seem indeed to intoxicate and inspire him the moment he approaches them. These are Death and the sea. In the latter respect he is not, indeed peculiar...and in his special devotion to death, he is more singular. Death is viewed as the one event of great solemnity and importance which is common to all—the one inevitable, yet not common place incident in every life, however commonplace; and, further, it must not be overlooked that Death is pre-eminently valuable in such a system as this, in the capacity of reconciler, ready to accommodate all difficulties, to sweep away all rubbish. The cheeriest of optimists with the lowest of standards cannot pretend to assert or expect that everyone will live the ideal life—but Death pays all scores and obliterates all mistakes.”

A survey of Whitman’s poetry clearly surmises that he had “a very great understanding of death and even a great devotion to death.” In his poem “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” Whitman traces the moment of his birth as a poetic moment leading to his mystic communion with the sea who whispered in his ear “the low and delicious word death”. It shows how death

experience is associated with him deeply and thoroughly right from his birth. It was a mystery, which he wishes to solve in his life. In Whitman's poetry death is viewed as a general phenomenon, which affected every aspect of life. This event is of great solemnity and importance, and is common to all – the one inevitable and yet not commonplace incident in every life. Whitman's awareness of the mysterious role of death had its roots in his own family experiences of disease, poverty, neurosis, ill luck and death. The American Civil War, which broke out in 1861, was the greatest shock of his life. He found himself suddenly thrown amidst the cruel realities of the aftermath of war, face to face with the wounded, the dying and the death. It was highly disturbing to see "man thus reduced to a futility, a meaningless nothing, a living absurdity, born only to die" as Horace M. Kallen stated. It is point of no return makes human life so lonely and hopeless. Here a true poet has a task to perform that is to prepare him face death boldly and at the same time to invite and spur him on the living of life. Horace M. Kallen rightly points out that

"This conviction of Whitman's that the true poet's vocation is a summons and a challenge answering to all human challenges and answers is, of course, of Whitman's essence." In his poetry he presented the 'singularities of death' which like all singularities clash among themselves. Their contradictions are natural events of "the ongoing flux of diversifications and contradictions which is existence and why should the moments of death be otherwise?"

So, in one place Whitman declares:

The smallest sprouts shows that there is really no death

And if ever there was, it led forward life, and does not wait at  
the end to arrest it,

And ceased the moment life appeared.

He realizes that death and life operate simultaneously, one following the other. Hence, he says:

And I know that I am deathless.

I know this orbid of mine can not be swept by a carpenter's  
compass,

I know that I shall not pass like a child's carlicue cut with a  
burnt stick at night...

My foothold is tenoned and mortised in granite

I laugh at what you call dissolution,

And I know the amplitude of time.

I am the poet of common sense and of the demonstrable  
and of immortality.

Once he develops this faith in the possibility of the immortality of man death attains new roles. It becomes pre-eminently valuable in the capacity of a deliverer, a liberator as he says in "When the Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"

When it is so, thou hast taken them I joyously singing the dead,  
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee, laved in the flood  
Of thy bliss O Death.

In another poem he says:

And I say to mankind, be not curious about God

For I who am curious about each am not curious about God

( No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God  
and about death).



Whitman deals with the reality of death at two levels –the conceptual and the experiential. Prof. G.S. Amur states: “The duality does not disturb Whitman’s transcendental vision of death because there is no real conflict between the conceptual and the experiential mode that Whitman adopts to realize it. On the contrary they affirm and reinforce each other.”

Whitman’s vision of death finds an elaborate expression in the Preface to his two volume Centennial edition of Leaves of Grass where he speaks about his aim of writing poems, “estimating death, not at all as the cessation but as somehow what I feel must be the entrance upon by the greatest part of existence, and something that life is as much, for as it is for life itself.” He says:

And as to you, death, and your bitter hug of mortality, it is idle  
to try to alarm me  
.....

And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths  
No doubt I have died myself many tens of thousands times  
before.....

Whitman’s vision of death is outlined in the poem called “Death’s Valley” where he welcomes death:

.... Holiest minister of heaven- envoy, usherer, guide at last  
of all.  
Rich, florid, loosener of the stricture-knot call’d life,  
Sweet, peaceful, welcome death..

Even in the face of suffering, pain and anguish of uncertainty as in the poems like “Of the Terrible Doubt of Experiences” or “Scented Herbage of My Breast,” Whitman never gave in completely. His serene acceptance, as

in “To Think of Time”, always added the tone of philosophical and prophetic stance to his attitude towards death and immortality at the conceptual level. However, there are more noteworthy poems like “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” and “When the Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”, which are the poem about the experiences during the Civil War and the personal losses. They are the poet’s final envisionment of the place of death in life, its final expression. He says that he would lay that first bloom of spring on very death itself:

For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O  
Sane and sacred death.

One of the celebrated critics said about this poem. “In the great Lincoln elegy the theme of death reaches its lyrical climax in Whitman’s poetry and to some extent its conclusion.” He tries to bridge the way between the life and the death but would never believe that death is the end of life. He would never be convinced that death can annihilate life, for instance, take “Song of the Open Road”. It can only bring some change, which is another beginning, “something to make a greater struggle necessary”. “There is no cure for birth or death, George Santayana advises, save to enjoy the interval of existing. . To enjoy it, Walt Whitman declares, is to die living and live dying, by loving.” as Horace M. Kallen sums up. .

Whitman had such a strong faith in immortality that he remarked “ if there is no immortality then the universe is a fraud.”

All, all, for immortality: Love like the light, silently  
wrapping all

Death for Whitman is a period of transition and not an end of life, for instance take the following lines from “Song of Myself”:

I depart as air, I shape my white locks at the runaway sun,. .  
 I effuse my flesh in eddies,  
 And drift it in lacy jags.  
 I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love  
 If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles....

This may sound like his belief in the transmigration of the human soul. Whitman in one of his anonymous reviews about Leaves of Grass, which he himself published, said:

“He is a true spiritualist. He recognizes no annihilation, no death or loss of identity. Thus we can conclude that Whitman must have at the back of his mind the theory of transmigration of soul. Whitman’s works do suggest his knowledge of it.”

Many critics have dealt with in detail that Whitman had the knowledge of Indian, particularly Hindu Scriptures like the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagwad Gita* before he wrote Leaves of Grass. To enter into this debate may or may not change these facts: (a) that Whitman was acquainted with these oriental or Hindu texts through Emerson and (b) that his vision of death and immortality is exclusively his own which developed gradually due to the external circumstances and some inner awakening. His poem “Death-Carol” does confirm his belief that death is a part of this progressive universe, a renewal and a part of the evolutionary movement in creation:

The poem opens with the lines:

Come lovely and soothing Death,  
 Undulate round the world serene arriving, arriving  
 In the day, in the night, to all, to each,



essentially discovering within himself, through his awakened senses, the intimate relationship of the body and soul, the second half of the poem reveals that the poet is liberated from the bonds, which held him being endowed with his new knowledge of his link with a “supreme power.” He immediately realizes that “I am afoot with my vision”. In his essay “Over Soul” Emerson said: “Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descended into us from we know not whence.” Like Emerson, Whitman believed in the “hidden source” but unlike him, he had the urge to actively discover it. He gave himself up to the uninhibited explorations of the self. It has made Whitman a great modern poet though many critics disagree with the idea to

call him a mystic poet because he did not have a coherent philosophy of life.

F.O. Matthiessen asserts:

“No arrangement or rearrangement of Whitman’s thoughts can resolve the paradoxes or discover in them a fully coherent pattern. He was incapable of sustained logic, but that should not blind the reader into impatient rejection of the ebb and flow of his antithesis. They possess a loose dialectic of their own. ...”

It is interesting to note that as it happened in the case of Whitman, the mysterious nature of ‘mysticism’ has invited so many discussions but before they begin in the real sense. they get derailed because it is such a vague and disputable term. James Miller jr. has offered an acceptable answer to this problem when he suggests that

“Without becoming tied up in knots distinguishing among religious, psychological, or philosophical concepts, I propose that we define mysticism, along with William James in Varieties of Religious Experience,

as a state of consciousness characterized by the *noetic* ( states of transcendent, non-intellectual insight, revelation) and the *ineffable*( the “knowledge” can not be imparted; to be known it must be experienced). Without being skeptical like the psychologists or being committed to an Official definition like the orthodox thinkers, the dimensions of Whitman’s mysticism can be studied.”

It is perhaps easiest to trace the mysticism of Whitman to Emersonian transcendentalism, and envision Walt Whitman as merely fulfilling. Emerson’s doctrine of self-trust, the doctrine which asserts that every man should commune with the divinity (or the animating over-soul) within himself. There can be no doubt that in the mystical insights of his poems Whitman resembles Emerson who declared: “ In self –trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be, -- free and brave.” Emerson used the similar expression in his famous letter to Whitman in 1855 and knew that Whitman was not imitating the transcendental doctrine superficially. He said, ” I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.” Thoreau found him more than merely imitating transcendentalism and said that he is “so wonderfully like the Orientals” whom Whitman had not read till then but showed the curiosity to know them. Whatever the source of his mystical insights Whitman was conscious of the immanence of the divine in the universe. Rabindranath Tagore said he was “the highest name” in American literature and exclaimed, ”No American poet has such an extraordinary grasp of the oriental tone of mysticism as Whitman.” W.D.O Connor and John Burroughs find in Whitman’s Leaves of Grass the qualities that could make it “ the Bibles of

the nations” because of the “long train of revelations.” However, it was the Canadian psychiatrist, Richard M. Bucke, who first tried to describe with some precision the essential distinctiveness of Whitman’s mysticism in his book, Cosmic Consciousness. He expounded the theory of three levels of consciousness-- Simple, an attribute of animals; Self, an attribute of man and Cosmic, a rare power of prophet, seer, mystic—including Gautam the Buddha, Jesus the Christ and (among others) Walt Whitman. James agreed with Bucke and cited Whitman as an example because he had the “sporadic type of mystical experience.” They believed that Whitman had some specific spiritual experience in his life underlying the mystical elements of his poetry.

Moreover, there are two significant attempts to define the essence of Whitman’s mysticism. First, A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass by James E. Miller Jr., which shows the relevance of the Mystic way, as defined by Evelyn Underhill in a study of Christian mystics in Mysticism, According to it Whitman’s poetry dramatizes all the steps of the true mystic: (a) ‘the Awakening of Self ’ as in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, (b) ‘the Purification of Self ’ (Whitman inverts this step), (c) the Illumination as in “Out of Cradle Endlessly Rocking”, (d) the Dark Night of Soul and (e) the Union as in “Passage of India.” Malcolm Cowley, in Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition, has contended that Whitman’s sources are not literary and he is more oriental than Christian mystic because he includes such non-Christian concepts as metempsychosis and *karma* like the Bhagwad Gita. Miller rightly points out that,

“Perhaps the critical task that lies ahead is not so much the identification of Whitman’s mysticism as Eastern or Western, but rather the reconciliation of his mysticism

with his strong materialism, his assertion of self, his restless vagabondage, his celebrated sexuality... Whitman's temperament seems eminently unsuited to the selflessness of the Christian mystic and to the passivity of the Oriental. It is possible that Whitman ....created a unique mysticism designed for America, a "democratic" mysticism available to every man on equal terms, embracing both the body and the soul, science and myth, life and death, the active and passive, material and spiritual, But whatever the ultimate nature of his mysticism, it must be granted a central role in the meaning of his greatest poetry in Leaves of Grass."

Whitman essentially dramatizes his mystical experiences and does not give an orderly and systematic view of these revelations. There is a narrative thread which informs and makes meaningful the "lyricism" and the "philosophy" of the poems. First of all, we do not find in his poetry the major issues and ideas dramatized in the third person. Even the second person is given a limited space. All the thoughts and experiences, beliefs and convictions are dramatized in first person through the 'self.' He totally identifies himself with the unwashed, struggling and suffering masses and says:

Agonies are one of my changes of garments.  
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,  
I myself become the wounded person,  
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cave and observe.



He becomes a spectator of the world and projects himself in the image of Christ “who walked silent among disputes and assertions” He does not yield to sorrow and disillusionment in the evolution of this world which must progress. His

Call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion

He going with me must go well armed.

These bitter facts of life are to be transmuted by “the travelling souls” on “the grand road of the Universe”. The metaphor of journey is befittingly used to convey how step by step he is heading towards his goal. A traditional mystic purged and mortified his senses in order to purify himself, Whitman transfigures and celebrates the senses, purging not the senses but the notion of the senses as evil, as the means to achieve purification. He admits that

I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul,

The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell

are with me,

The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I

translate into a new tongue.

In elevation the body with the soul, in “translating” “the pains of hell” into a “new tongue”, Whitman departs markedly from the traditional mystic. Indeed, in Whitman there is far too much assertion of self as in “Song of Myself,” and too much of wanderlust and involvement as in “Song of the Open Road”, to identify him explicitly with Christian or Oriental mysticism. Still, the mystical elements dramatized in his poetry extend down into his deepest meanings. The vital relationship of the body to the mystical experience is strongly suggested in the key Section 5 of “Song of Myself” in



Whitman postulates that a democratic society of free individuals can flourish only in a free city so that man becomes aware of his true identity, which is divine. He says,

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?

I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four and  
each moment then.

In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own  
Face in the glass.

Whitman creates this awareness in all and seeks to transform our attitudes and quality of life.

You know not what you are, you have slumbered  
upon yourself all your life,

Your eyelids have been the same as close most of the  
time.

Again he insists:

You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect  
to be your sole and exclusive standard,

Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,

The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to  
the lives around you would have to be abandoned.

Whitman fulfills his duty of guiding the stray mankind to the mystic way. His love for the common men prompts him to take them to “the regions infinite” so that they could achieve their knowledge of the supreme power independent of him. It gives him the freedom to “escape from us”, to discover the still further ranges of the mystical experiences. In “Inscriptions” Whitman writes:

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,

I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the  
darkness.

Like the entire mystic, Whitman asserted through out Leaves of Grass that these experiences are untranslatable and whatever he could say was inadequate. Hence the reader must follow his own discoveries through his own efforts and experiences. He says:

When you read these I that was visible am become  
Invisible  
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems,  
seeking me.

One quality of all kinds of the mysticism, whether Christian or Oriental or Secular, is their apprehension of the unity pervading all the universe. The ultimate stage of their experience is the Union with an Other, which is All. Whitman's poetry constantly proceeds in that direction from diversity to unity. His technique of giving endless catalogue of things, persons and experiences, that has irritated some of his critics as indiscriminate inventories, always move toward some kind of unity either in the imagination of the poet or in the spiritual world it constructs. For illustration take "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," which derives its main impulse from this point of view; all the "dumb, beautiful ministers" of the poem—the river, the "scallop-edg'd waves" the clouds, the "masts of Manhatta" and "beautiful hills of Brooklyn" and more –are transfigured into spiritual unity within the beholders of all ages and flow into the grand spiritual Union of All: " We plant you permanently within us, /... You furnish your parts toward eternity, / Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul."



“democratic mysticism” plays a central role in the meaning of his greatest poetry in Leaves of Grass.

## **The Structural Design And Recurring Images, Symbols In Whitman’s Leaves of Grass**

Whitman’s epic, Leaves of Grass’ explores the possibilities in free verse that gives it seemingly “ an elusive structure”, but there is a rare compatibility between his form and his themes. It comprises a double structural design: (i) A systematic outline of the themes and (ii) A technical logic in the ordering of its parts. Both the levels are duly supported by such standard devices as assonance, alliteration, repetition, inverse word order, parallelism etc. on the one hand and images, symbols and metaphors on the other. Collectively, they carry on successfully the complex structure of meaning and make it one of the greatest literary achievements of America.

Though there are many proposals for the structure of Leaves of Grass, for example, of William Sloane Kennedy in Reminiscences of Walt Whitman who finds three major groups of poems – “Poems of Life and the Body”, “Poems of Democracy,” and “Poems of Religion”, or of Irving C. Story in “The Structural Pattern of *Leaves of Grass*” which appeared in *Pacific University Bulletin*, who expostulates the there are fifteen “groups” of poems which he rearranges in six larger clusters. James E. Miller’s approach in A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass is really useful. For the purpose of analysis we can say that in Leaves of Grass there are at least five thematic groups of poems which form three basic parts of the book . However, it is the last or death-bed edition which represented his book as he wanted it.

First, the introductory portion of the book opens with “Inscriptions” and it is followed by a long poem, “Starting from Paumanok” which begins in autobiographical form but it soon embraces the whole range of its major themes, “The greatness of Love and Democracy, and the greatness of Religion.” It is by far the bulkiest section of the book and include such significant clusters of the poems as “Song of Myself”, “Children of Adams” and “Calamus” etc. These poems define a New World Personality. The personality may be linked to the hero of the old world epics but unlike him, the New Personality is one of the masses full of emotional complexity and intellectual questionings. Whitman provided here the outlines of the epic hero of democracy. Celebrating “Myself” and “Comradeship”, the poems combine in them the quality of lyricism, observation and objectivity. The section can be suitably called “The Modern Man I Sing”. In the second section, the self-celebration serves the most purpose, that is, to discover the divine self of man. “Song of Myself” represents the self-awakening which dives deep within and discovers the secret, the undiscovered mysteries of the self. The poet magnifies himself thus;

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

The new consciousness born in “Song of Myself “ and reborn in “Children of Adams” continues to create another kind of garden of Eden , with its own kind of innocence as in “Calamus” poems in which the male replaces the female in the central role. Here Whitman projects a new kind of society where “the soul of man I speak for rejoices in comrades”. The image of earth dominates the entire song section as in “Salut au Monde!” The New

Personality is launched on his journey. If “Song of the Answerer”, “our Old Feuilleage” and “Song of Joys” form a kind of interlude, the cluster of poems like “Birds of Passage”, “Sea –Drift” and “By the Roadside” together form the final part of this section. The dominant image is not of space but time which suggests movement, first by air then by water and last on land ; they are a series of images of decreasing speed. The poet is no longer taking the sweeping and spiraling philosophical view of the passing events both of joy and sorrow, he is evolving his all –healing mystical personality. He is at this stage impersonal and disengaged. Another section introduces a particular historical moment of Civil war and national crisis. “Drum – Taps,” and “Memories of President Lincoln” forms the greatest body of war poetry, “By Blue Ontario’s Shore’ and “Autumn Rivulets” shows America at the threshold of her future and the task of rehabilitation. Whitman projects his personal and public sentiment on a high public occasion., specially about the “Throes of Democracy.”

The forth major theme is “The Way from Life to Death” to borrow the phrase of Miller. The poems like “Whispers of Heaven;y Death” and “Proud Music of the Storm” represent a dream vision of the poet who invites his soul with a “ new rhythms” – “Come forward O my soul, and let the rest retire” to share with him the mystery of death and its meaning in the context of life. The cluster of poems such as “Passage to India”, “Prayer of Columbus”, “The Sleepers” and “To Think of Time” reveal his venturing to peer into eternity. “The Sleepers” – a symbolic drama of dreams-derives its meaning from its placement in this thematic grouping. Whitman walks out to move toward the unknown region. In the last section, he suggests that the time has come for him to go; the cluster of poems like “From Noon to Starry Night”, “Thou Orb Aloft Full-Dazzling” and “Song of Parting” deal



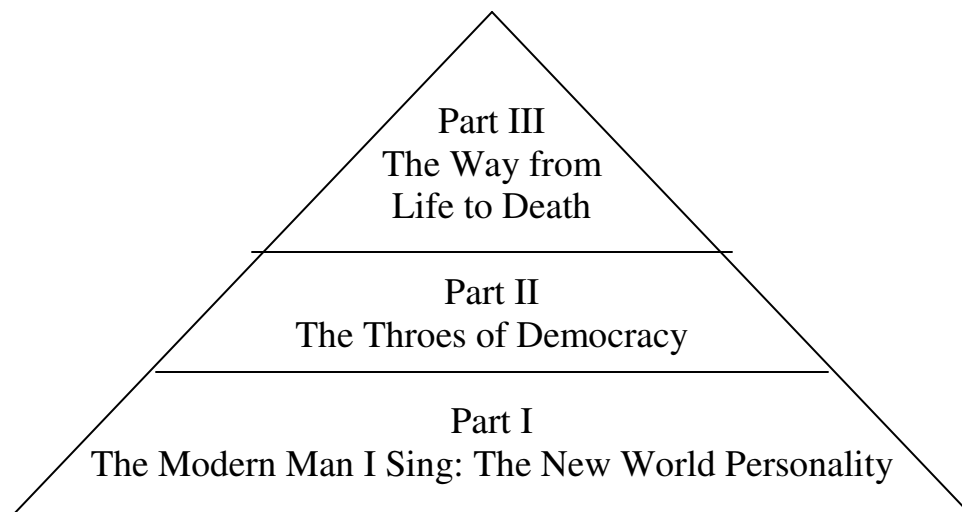
with death after the real fulfillment of democratic promise. The poet departs saying:

Remember my words, I may again return,  
I love you, I depart from materials,  
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.

This last section is aptly named as “Special Songs before I go.”

The annexes that follow are just the additions essentially superfluous to the main structure. They are the afterthought though some poems like “Sands at Seventy”, “Good-bye My Fancy”, and “Old Age Echoes” are vivid and vigorous poems.

James Miller insightfully observes: “In effect the structure of Leaves of Grass is pyramidal, a metaphor that seems especially apt when the comparative bulk of the three basic parts is taken into account. Part I is a bit over twice the length of Part II, Part II double the size of Part III.




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The pyramid not only suggests the relative dependence of the various parts but also suggests the proportionate preoccupations of the Modern Man:

mostly personal and involved with identity of self in life, but maturely concerned for society and the state, and with profound moments of spiritual meditation on the bridges leading from Life to Death.”

As Whitman’s Leaves of Grass is a complex and intricate poem, its meanings and wealth of suggestions is carried on by a number of recurring images. Every time an image is repeated, it gathers more meanings till at last it acquires a new dimension of meaning and becomes a symbol. The dominant images and symbols of Leaves of Grass are as follows:

**Grass:** The central image-symbol of Whitman’s book is the simple and separate leaf of grass. It not only had a significant place in the title of the book in 1855 edition, but also served as a cluster-title in several subsequent editions. How did Whitman choose to use the term ‘leaves’ instead of the usual term ‘blades’ of the grass? No body knows about it. May be it is so because both are the common products of nature; and because they grow in plenty like common masses and remain unnoticed. However two things are absolutely clear (i) He is fully aware of the novelty of this fusion of images of the blades of grass and leaves of the tree. (ii) He could realize that this image-symbol could successfully carry the weight of his concept of democracy where the individuality stands in balance with the mass, “distinguished singleness in harmony with massive grouping.” Whitman felt that “a spear of summer grass” symbolizes in its simplicity the miracle of the universe. Hence it is an object of contemplation and can provide a key to exploring further ranges: “ I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey –work of the stars.” To Whitman the grass seems to mean many things. It may be the “flag” of his disposition; the “handkerchief of the Lord” of “a uniform hieroglyphic,” and its adhesiveness, that is, “manly attachment” is

symbolic of comradeship. Indeed, the grass may have as many meanings as there are the blades /leaves of grass but each one is significant in its own right. It is pertinent to remember that the symbols of Whitman play the same role as the characters in a drama. They carry the meaning and action of the plot (which here means the poetic idea and execution) effectively.

**The Sea:** The image of the sea and related water images such as rivers, lakes and ponds are established almost from the beginning as the major symbols. The third poem in “Inscriptions” introduces “The boundless blue on every side expanding” with its “large and imperious waves” In this poem entitled “In Cabin’d Ships at Sea,” the land-ocean dichotomy, which functions through out Leaves of Grass symbolically as the point of union, plays an important role The land and the sea are contraries, their meeting ground being the seashore makes it a poem of both the body and the soul..

The sea becomes the dominant image in the “Sea –Drift” cluster. Here the emphasis is placed on one attribute of the sea, that is, of throwing up the refuse by the waves on the shore of what it does not want. Besides, the poet wants

to highlight all the connotations of the word “drift”. First of all the word suggests the inner restlessness, irresistible questioning and endless repetition of the word “Death, death, death, death, death,” The poet through the association of images, links birth with death and death with birth. Consequently, the death is not an end but a beginning; it becomes “word of sweet song. ”Although the sea is described as “the fierce old mother” in “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life”, it offers to the poet a clear insight as in “By Blue Ontario’s Shore”. Its charm was upon the poet “till the tissues that held me parted their ties.” The mystic ocean is the realm of the spirit. Whitman leaves the rest to his readers to do their part of finding the meanings but one

specific sense is always there as Miller pointed out: “Throughout Leaves, water is associated with death; but in Whitman’s view, death is birth, a rebirth, an entry into the spiritual world comparable to the previous entry into the physical world.” Thus, the sea itself becomes the symbol and source of eternity.

**The Bird:** Whitman writes most frequently about the three birds- the mocking bird, the thrush, and the hawk. They are first introduced in “Starting from Paumanok” and they play the dramatic roles later on in Whitman’s poetry as the adjectives associated with their names mocking, mountain and hermit convey .It is not until the “Birds of Passage” section that the bird-image comes into prominence and attains specific symbolic meanings The mocking- bird is for the first time given the significant role in “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” where the “two feathered guests from Alabama” suffers the loss of his blissful existence by the disappearance of the she-bird. The mocking bird symbolizes the creative transfiguration brought by consuming but unfulfilled love. The bird hawk, with which the poet identifies himself and his primitive nature, is introduced In “Song of Myself”, “Children of Adams” and then in “We Two, How Long We Were Fool’d”. In these poems, the hawks symbolizes the realization of the transcendent fulfillment of primitive, natural and uninhibited sexuality. The hermit thrush first appears in “When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom’d” and the poet makes full use of the attributes of the bird chosen to play a major role in the poem:

Solitary thrush,  
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,  
Sings by himself a song.

The bird sings in the “secluded recesses” and consoles the lamented death.

Whitman's three birds seem clearly to relate to three themes:

Mockingbird—Love

Mountain Hawk—Democracy

Hermit—thrush---Religion

Near the end of Leaves of Grass in "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood" the poet envisions the nation itself as a bird in flight. Here America is like the hovering "uncaught bird". Thus, there are various symbolic functions, which the bird images perform systematically.

**Celestial Bodies:** The earth, sun, moon and stars appear separately or frequently in various groups of poems wherever celestial destiny is cited as a proof of the existence of the spiritual. For instance, in "Eidolons"- the very title presents the images as symbols of ideas or reality. The most impressive scene of this kind is presented graphically in "Song of Myself":

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,  
Outward and outward and forever outward.

My sun has his sun and round him obediently wheels,  
He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,  
And greater sets follow, making specks on the greatest  
inside them.

The circuits and "superior circuits" serve to imply to man that beyond the disorder lies a greater harmony. In other words, "the balance and rhythm of an infinite universe are the basis for a faith in a cosmic plan in which man serves his purpose" as Miller suggests. The star is the perhaps the best known of the celestial images in Whitman. The drama of the dark cloud obscuring the bright star is a recurring symbolic event as, for example, in "On the Beach at Night." This simple but vivid celestial image signifies for



“Calamus” poems under the title “Live Oak, with Moss” Whitman’s New World has a lot to show to his readers. He says “See, pastures and forests in my poems – see animals wild and tame—see, beyond the Kew, countless herds of buffalo feeding on short curly grass.” In “Song of Myself” when he refers to “Earth of slumbering and liquid trees,” the image of earth and tree acquire a symbolic function of the feminine earth waiting for her lover, the poet. Briefly, the tree has become identified with the procreative processes of life. “I saw in Louisiana a Live Oak rowing” indicates that the tree has become the symbol of ‘manly- love’ and at the same time it represents the spiritual love, which transcends the earthly love of man and woman.. The trees are, of course, in the cast of characters in “Song of the Broad-Axe” where they appear as the symbols of wilderness , while in “Song of the Redwood Tree,” the tree is personified and becomes the protagonist. In the description of the life experienced by the dying tree, the poem becomes clearly symbolic.

Whenever Whitman sketches the city image in a few brief strokes, it invokes a sense of excitement, awe and pleasure. Whitman saw both country and city with equality being himself a composite American belonging to both the city and the country .He himself has been the “lover of populous pavements,” and the “Dweller in Mannahatta” and “the clank of crowds.”

Whitman succeeds admirably in evoking in the fewest possible words the busy, noisy and peopled city, and the entire complex and exciting life of a city by rapid listing, one after another, of evocative details of those images that are designed for the ear, for instance take the lines:

“The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,  
 What groans of over –fed or half-starv’d who fall sunstuck  
 or in fits.

In “First O Songs for a Prelude,” the opening song of “Drum-Taps,” Manhattan is personified in a dramatic scene. Companionship, friendship, comradeship or other such relationship, all the strong attractions of the city of a million people form a part of his emotional causes of celebrating the city. Precisely, through the poetic images and symbols repeatedly employed by the poet, the dramatic tension between the self and the other selves that is the society and nature or the self and not- self enters into the lyrical harmony with the whole universe. And these images and symbols add sensibility and sensuality to his poetic experiences and a cosmic vision to his masterpiece—Leaves of Grass.



## Assignments

Note: Attempt the following questions.

1. What are the major formative influences on Walt Whitman?
2. “ The age of Walt Whitman is the period American Renaissance.”  
Justify the statement defining its major literary trends.
3. Give an account of Whitman’s theory of poetry.
4. Write an essay on Whitman’s major themes in his poetry.
5. Discuss Whitman’s recurrent images and symbols showing how they are functional and not ornamental.
6. Consider Whitman as a mystic poet.
7. Write an essay on Whitman as a “Bard of Democracy”.
8. Discuss Whitman as a poet of Death and Immortality.
9. What are the characteristic features of Whitman as a poet of love?
10. “Whitman is essentially an autobiographical poet” Elucidate the statement and give a reasoned answer.
11. “Whitman is a supremely realized Emersonian poet”. Justify the statement and illustrate your answer.
12. Discuss Walt Whitman as a poet of ‘identity’ who ‘sings and celebrates’ himself.
13. Evaluate Whitman’s contribution to modern American poetry.
14. Write an essay on Walt Whitman as a poet.
15. Give a critical appreciation of any one poem prescribed in your course.

Note: Answer the following questions in about *two hundred words*.

1. Define the causes of American Civil War.
2. Write a note on Whitman's experiences as a journalist.
3. What is Quakerism? How did it influence Walt Whitman?
4. Discuss any three characteristics of Whitman's poetry.
5. What is the significance of the title, Leaves of Grass?
6. How many editions of Leaves of Grass appeared in Whitman's life?
7. Discuss the impact of the French Revolution on Whitman's poetry
8. Write a note on the theme of 'equality' in Whitman's poetry.
9. Give a brief account of Whitman's Americanness.
10. Write a note on Transcendentalism.
11. What is the significance of 'manly- love' in Whitman's poetry'.
12. Discuss the 'sea' as a symbol in Whitman's poetry.
13. What do you understand by Whitman's statement "Modern Man I Sing"?
14. Write a note on Whitman as a Social Reformer.
15. What is the significance of the term 'liberty' in Whitman's new poetics?

### Works Useful For The Students of Whitman

- Allen, Gay Wilson. *The Solitary Singer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955). The most detailed and probably the definitive biography.
- . *Walt Whitman: As Man, Poet, and Legend* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961). Brings Allen's 1946 Handbook up to date.
- . *Walt Whitman Handbook* (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1946). A valuable reference work.
- Allen, Gay Wilson, ed. *Walt Whitman Abroad* (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1955). Translations of Criticism from Germany, France, Scandinavia, Russia, Italy, Spain and Latin America, Israel, Japan, and India
- Asselineau, Roger. *The Evolution of Walt Whitman: The Creation of a Personality* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960). A useful and interesting treatment from the French perspective.
- Arvin, Newton. *Whitman* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938). Stresses political, economic views of Whitman.
- Bailey, John Cann. *Walt Whitman* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926). An early treatment that is brief and general; still useful.
- Barrus Clara. *Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931). Valuable as a source for many documents.

- Barton, William Eleazar. Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1928). Exhausts the possibilities on this interesting topic.
- Bazalgette, Leon. Walt Whitman, the Man and His Work (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1920). An early French view; still useful.
- Beaver, Joseph. Walt Whitman-Poet of Science (New York: Ding's Crown Press, 1951). A valuable critical study.
- Blodgett, Harold. Walt Whitman in England (London: Oxford University Press, 1934). Comprehensive treatment of Whitman's reputation in England.
- Briggs, Arthur E. Walt Whitman: Thinker and Artist (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952). Emphasizes Whitman's philosophy.
- Broderick, John C., ed. Whitman the Poet (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1962). A useful collection of critical essays.
- Bucke, R.M. Cosmic consciousness (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1951). Brilliant, erratic, perhaps wild-but provocative: a study of Whitman and other mystics.
- Canby, Henry Seidel. Walt Whitman, an American (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943). Stresses democratic element in Whitman.
- Chase, Richard. Walt Whitman Reconsidered (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1955). An unusual and stimulating

approach, particularly in its analysis of “Song of Myself” as a comic poem.

Coyle, William, ed., *The Poet and the President: Whitman’s Lincoln Poems* (New York: the Odyssey Press, 1962). Contains the poems and large number of commentaries.

De Selincourt, Basil. *Walt Whitman: A Critical Study* (New York: Mitchell Eennerley, 1914). A pioneer critical study still of value.

Eby, Edwin Harold. *A Concordance of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose Writings* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1949-54). An invaluable research aid.

Faner, Robert D. *Walt Whitman and Opera* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951). An excellent demonstration of how opera shaped Whitman’s poetry.

Forester, Norman. *American Criticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928). A review of critical principles of major American writers, including Whitman.

Hinsus, Milton, ed., *Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1955). Includes important essays by Hindus, William Carlos Williams, Richard Chase, Leslie Fiedler, Kenneth Burke, David Daiches, John M. Murray.

Holloway, Emory. *Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1926). A thoroughly informed study that remains eminently readable.

- Jarrell, Randall. "Some Lines from Whitman," *Poetry and the Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953). An important, perceptive criticism by a poet.
- Johnson, Maurice O. *Walt Whitman as a Critic of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1938). Summarizes Whitman's critical opinions.
- Kennedy, William Sloane. *The Fight of a Book for the World* (West Yarmouth, Mass.: The Stonecroft Press, 1926). An early handbook of historical interest.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Albert Boni, 1923). Offbeat, daring, and brilliant.
- Masters, Edgar Lee. *Whitman* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937). A pedestrian but competent biography.
- Matthiessen, Francis Otto. *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941). A pioneer study of America's mid-nineteenth century writers, including Whitman.
- Miller, James E., Jr. *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). Critical-analyses of the important poems and analysis of the structure of the whole *Leaves*.
- Miller, James E., Jr., Bernice Slotte, and Karl Shapiro. *Start with the Sun* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960). A study of the Whitman tradition with emphasis on Hart Crane, D.H. Lawrence, and Dylan Thomas.

- Musgrove, S.T.S. *Eliot and Walt Whitman* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1952). A persuasive argument that the relationship is deeper than usually believed.
- Noyes, Carleton Eldredge. *An Approach to Walt Whitman* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910). An enthusiastic early appraisal.
- Pearce, Roy Harvey, ed. *Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962). Emphasizes new perspectives on the poet.
- Perry, Bliss. *Walt Whitman: His Life and Work* (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1906). A perceptive, highly readable brief work.
- Santayana, George. "The Poetry of Barbarism," *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1900). Whitman's primitivism stressed.
- Schyberg, Frederik. *Walt Whitman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951; first published 1933), tr. By Evie Allison Allen. Valuable detailed treatment of the various editions.
- Shepherd, Esther. *Walt Whitman's Pose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938). An eccentric but stimulating study.
- Symonds, John Addington. *Walt Whitman: A Study* (London: John C Nimms, 1893). A personal testimonial valuable as sensitive, impressionistic criticism.
- Traubel, Horace. *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (Vol. I: March 28-July 14, 1888, Boston: Small Maynard and Co., 1906; Vol. II: July

16-October 31, 1888, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1908; Vol. III: March 28-july 14, 1888, New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1914; Vol. IV: January 21-April 7, 1889, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953, ed. By Sculley Bradley). An invaluable if sometimes unreliable source of Whitman's opinions and attitudes as recorded by Traubel during his many long visits with the poet.

Willard, Charles B. *Whitman's American Fame* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1950). Excellent reference work tracing Whitman's reputation after his death in 1892.



**M. A. English (Previous)**  
**Paper III; Section C; Item 8**  
**Flaubert: *Madame Bovary***

***FLAUBERT'S LIFE AND WORK:***

Gustave Flaubert, a French novelist of great reputation, was born in 1821 in the city of Rouen. He was the second son of a noted physician. In 1842 he went to Paris to study law. Both these factors – his father being a doctor and he himself being a student of law – play an important part in the shaping of Flaubert's style and technique as novelist. This we shall discuss at an appropriate stage in our essay on his art; especially its best-known piece, *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert's first published novel was this famous piece itself, which came out in the year 1857. Written about the adulteries and suicide of a doctor's wife in the provincial region of Normandy, the novel became a representative work of its author, the reason being its manifestation of all those qualities that mark the entire work of his mature years. Chief qualities among these are authenticity of detail, impersonal narrative method, precise and harmonious prose style. The novel raised a public furor. Certain passages of the novel, *Madame Bovary*, were called offensive to public morals. As a result, the author, printer and publisher were all charged under the law. Flaubert had to face a trial in Paris. But fortunately, all were acquitted by the law.

Flaubert's next novel was *Solammbó*, which was published in 1862. This work re-creates amply and minutely the ancient Carthage, an ancient North African city established in the ninth century B.C. (814) by the Phoenicians, traders of the Mediterranean. Carthage colonized new lands, and became the prominent centre of the Phoenician world. Similarly, we need to know about the town of Normandy where the story of *Madame Bovary* is located. The northwestern region of France, facing the English channel, is known by the name of Normandy. The region is noted for dairy products, fruit, brandy and flax. It has within its territory the famous ports of Le Havre, Dieppe, and Cherbourg. Rouen and Caen are historic cathedral and university cities. The former, we need to remember, is the city where Flaubert was born. Shipbuilding, steel, iron, and textiles are the main industries of the region of Normandy. Home of the Normans, Normandy definitively became part of France in 1450. For writing his second novel, *Solammbó*, Flaubert undertook detailed researches in the history and culture of the ancient city of Carthage.

Flaubert's next work, *L' Education Sentimentale*, came out in 1869. In this work, the novelist wrote "the moral history of the men of my generation." It charts out the progress and decline of the successive amours, enthusiasms, and ambitions

of Frederic Moreau and his circle of friends, against the background of Paris in 1840's. Flaubert's last work, which remained unfinished, was *Bourvard et Pecuchet*. It was posthumously published in 1881. Flaubert, we should remember, died in 1880. It relates to the various projects and experiments of two retired copying clerks, meant to form "a sort of farcical critical encyclopaedia." Flaubert's other publications include *Trois Contes* (1877), consisting of short stories, each narrating an accomplished example of a different narrative mode. He remained preoccupied for more than twenty five years, writing intermittently, the fantastic vision of *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, which was finally published in 1874. Flaubert's *Correspondance*, which is marked by searching reflections on the art of fiction and the life of the novelist, has earned him the reputation of the exemplary artist.

### *REPUTATION AS NOVELIST:*

Flaubert has had the highest reputation enjoyed by a novelist ever since the birth of the novel. The common reader encountering his novels for the first time may feel rather puzzled, just as Madame Emma Bovary does a few days after her marriage. She begins to suspect that she has been deceived, and wonders what exactly in her brief experience is supposed to correspond to those grand words, "bliss", "passion", "ecstasy", which she has heard so often repeated. The common reader develops a similar feeling of disillusion on first reading Flaubert, because he does not see there any of these grand features of art attributed to Flaubert as an artist. He only realizes a gap between what he has been hearing about the novelist and what he actually experiences in his work. This reader is likely to side with the cynic who said that "no one would think of admiring Flaubert if he had not read about him in books." But these books are by those who are, for sure, more knowledgeable than we the common readers about the works of literature. Maybe we miss, like Emma does, many vital points that lie hidden under the surface narratives of Flaubert's various compositions. Art, like any science, involves craft or technique, and only those that are trained in that craft or technique would comprehend the working and functioning of that art, craft, or science. Let us, therefore, first hear those who are known experts of the art of the novel, so that we can shed our ignorance and learn to pick up proper keys for unfolding the hidden treasures in the artistic creations of Flaubert. Let us not get lost like Emma in the maze out of ignorance, or get misled, as she does, by the notions heard but never examined.

When we think of expert commentators on the art of the novel, Henry James comes to mind first of all, since he himself was a great novelist and a great artist of the novel. He spent time detailing various faults in the novels of Flaubert. He even

had a personal animosity with the French novelist. And yet, it was he who described Flaubert “the novelist’s novelist,” just as Dryden called Spenser the “poet’s poet.” James also said that Flaubert was “for many of our tribe at large *the* novelist.” A still more difficult artist, although of poetry, Ezra Pound, considered Flaubert’s *Un Coeur Simple* to embody “all that anyone knows about writing.” In his famous poem *Hugh Salwyn Mauberly*, Mauberly is the artist who “strove to resuscitate the dead art of poetry.” Mauberly takes Flaubert as his ideal: “His true Penelope was Flaubert.” And why does he choose this novelist as his ideal? Because “He fished by obstinate isles.” Obviously, it is Flaubert the craftsman, the perfectionist, who appeals to Mauberly for a model. Percy Lubbock, the writer of *The Craft of Fiction*, a book of criticism devoted to an exposition of James’s point-of-view technique of the novel, calls *Madame Bovary*, that tale of provincial adultery, “the novel of all novels that the criticism of fiction cannot overlook.” Such a reputation is decidedly prodigious, and enviable. There must be some solid basis for earning such a reputation, and from all those who have been known as the most fastidious among the artists and critics.

One thing about Flaubert, well-known to all those who have read his letters, is that he considered artistic creation, an obstinate process. He set for himself such high standards that writing became not less than sacramental penance. He developed, like his contemporary Marx, a labour theory of value but applied it to literature. Hence forth production of a literary text must cost its author a great deal of agony. The *Sprezzatura* of the aristocrat who would dash off a sonnet in his spare time had already been displaced as an ideal. Now no one could play any longer the inspired Romantic bard who would in a fit of frenzy transcribe an illumination. In other words, art, after Flaubert, ceased to be “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” coming forth uninterrupted and “as naturally as leaves to a tree.” Also, to be as enormously productive as a Balzac or a Dickens, producing a novel a year, or less than a year, would be to give up any pretensions of calling oneself an artist. At the same time, Flaubert’s model of the artist was not that of the classical craftsman, such as Pope, who knew how to imitate the old masters and construct an epic or an ode after a given model. For him, the artistic process was interminable and the work, by definition, imperfect. But its being imperfect was not reason enough for the artist to accept its limitations. The struggling author must consider the conjunction of a compulsion to write, and an inability to compose as proof of his vocation. It is precisely at such a moment when one finds it difficult to write anything that one really enters the artistic condition.

The Romantic artist was often in agony. He seemed to feel it the necessary accompaniment of his condition. We know how Shelley, Keats, and Arnold described life as the place where one “falls upon the thorns of life and bleeds,”

“where men sit and hear each other groan,” where there is “neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.” But this agony belonged to the emotional life of the artist. It belonged to the difficulty of living, not to the difficulty of composing or creating. Flaubert’s contribution is that he transferred this agony to the act of creation itself. Thus he called into question the notion that made literature a communication between author and reader. One can recall here Wordsworth’s famous definition of the poet as “man speaking to men.” Flaubert made the work a set of sentences referring to a shared experience they did not express. Here, the agony becomes a property of the act of writing. It does not figure in a communicative process.

This agony has been an extremely important feature of modern literature. Here, Flaubert becomes a source and inspiration for the moderns, even though chronologically he was a contemporary of early Victorians such as Dickens and Thackeray. He initiates, or is the precursor of, the modern writer’s battle with language and his obsessive exploration of its possibilities. Part of Flaubert’s reputation also rests on this very factor; he exercised great influence on the English writers of the modern period. In his own age, understandably, he occupied neither a dominant nor a strategically decisive position. In the post-Victorian development of the novel Flaubert occupies a pivotal place. It was he who established the autonomy of the novel by freeing it from various social functions which had determined its possibilities. At the same time, by so doing, he also rendered the novel most problematic.

Flaubert as a novelist was more radical than any other of his contemporaries in entire Europe. He tried to ensure that the novel was truly *written*. It meant, in the first place, a devaluation of content. He made it more difficult than ever before to read a given novel as a statement “about” something in particular. Secondly, he also tried to make the novel an aesthetic object rather than an act of communication. The novel must become what Kant called a purposive whole without purpose, which would be more easily admired than assimilated as message. Finally, he sought to invalidate the communicative contract by purging references to it, by refusing to make assumptions to be shared, by shifting narrative points of view so that no authorial source of messages might be identified. This attempt to escape the circuit of communication gave the novel a new autonomy and artistic status, but it also created problems of interpretation, since it remained no longer clear as to why it was produced. Once the novel ceased to be a means to external ends, it became increasingly problematic. Also, the ideal by which Flaubert sustained his activity, the ideal that “one must aim at beauty”, was too ill defined to carry any explanatory power. To write in order to convey something is one thing, but to write only for writing sake quite another.

In approaching Flaubert's work, then, an important question to bear in mind is why write a novel at all. Whatever one may say about novelists like Dickens or Lawrence, who pursued particular communicate projects with determination, their novels are easy to understand, their messages clear to comprehend. But once the novel becomes an end in itself, as it does in the case of Flaubert, it becomes fundamentally gratuitous; that the writing of novels is not a natural and spontaneous activity; that therefore we must attempt to make the text answer for its own existence. In the earlier stage, for some time, his works proved resistant to recuperation, except in an abstract sort, because he was labeled a "realist". Therefore, anything that the text described was justified by that representational project. But after the High Modernist period of the 1920's a more active critical recuperation come to dominate the approach to Flaubert. Inspired by his reputation as the meticulous craftsman whose every detail served a purpose, the two main strategies that came to the fore were impressionism and symbolism. Of these the first attempted a justification of all that it could as a description of what the characters observe, think, or feel, and hence as a device of characterization which contributes to meaning. The second attempted a justification of details by extracting from them semantic features, opposing these features to produce contrasts, and organizing the contrasts in symbolic patterns. But making such approaches to Flaubert placed critics in a paradoxical situation. For we are looking for meaning or message as the novel's centre. But Flaubert's novels defy such attempts because meaning or message does not constitute the centre of interest in them. These novels slip away, in ironic evasion, if an attempt is made to graft elaborate and revolutionary theories to them. That remains the real problem. In Flaubert, the novel is conceived as an ironic form, which is born of the discrepancy between meaning and experience, whose source of value lies in the interest of exploring that gap and filling it, while knowing, at the same time, that any claim to have filled it derives from blindness.

### *BEYOND ROMANTICISM:*

Contemplating the question of roads to artistic glory, Flaubert, in a letter of 1846, classifies writers into two categories. One category is of those, the greatest and the true masters who "encompass all humanity; without concentrating on themselves or their own passions they reproduce the universe." The second category is of those who can be harmonious when crying out in pain and remain eternal when writing about themselves. Flaubert considers Byron of the second category. He himself started writing fiction in the romantic mode. He had no patience to create, as the conventional novelist of the Victorian period did, a temporal history which would gradually reveal truths about the universe, because he knew those truths already. Consequently, when he adopted the romantic

confessional mode or prophetic mode, which, too, required for success temporal development, he found himself impatient with their demands. He felt then inclined to move too quickly towards explicit thematic statements which devalue the proposed illustrations and expose the narrator to judgement as an object. Flaubert's own self-consciousness, which is linked with a knowledge of earlier literature, led him to shun the romantic modes as a form of self-display. He felt that the romantic mode of self-display made one much too vulnerable now that it lacked originality. He must therefore face what, as Geoffrey Hartman says, was a basic problem of Romantic literature: whether the mind can find an unselfconscious medium for itself. The romantic writer as seer cherishes the individuality of his vision, for it defines his own soul. But he is always aware that its value lies precisely in the extent to which it can be made to transcend the solipsistic and subjective. And yet to make large claims for that vision is to expose himself to the irony of his own and the readers' reflective gaze. What is to be done?

For Flaubert, in the later nineteenth century, a return to innocence was not possible, not even in the form in which Blake terms it second or "organized innocence." Moving through knowledge to a recovery of a new kind of innocence and freedom would mean for Flaubert a passage through a sense of the negative determination of everything in the universe to a consciousness which does not define itself by describing it. In his later novels, Flaubert decidedly seems to move towards an overcoming of self-conscious alienation. He achieves this by incorporating the problems of self-consciousness in the writing itself rather than in a persona. Thus, his attempt to go beyond romanticism is, in a way, an aspiration to an earlier condition. He does it by striving to achieve a combination of distance and potential sympathy. And this he achieves by relating details which in their very emptiness and irrelevance suggest absent depths. An example of this method or technique in Flaubert is Emma Bovary's funeral, which shows the writer's willingness to allow irrelevance, as if the impossibility of having funerals, which are properly summed up in eight words, adds to the tragedy. Note the following piece from the description of Emma's funeral:

The black pall, decorated with white tears, rose from time to time uncovering the bier. The tired bearers slowed down, and it moved forwards in continuous jerks, like a launch pitching over the waves.

They arrived... while the priest spoke, the red earth, piled up on the sides, ran down at the corners, continually, silently.

The funeral passages clearly reject sentimentality. There is an evident refusal on the part of the narrator to do anything more than give an account of the facts. No doubt, there are too many irrelevant details incorporated in these passages. But they are just stated in a manner that they suggest behind them the presence of a silence of emptiness. No one speaks here; it is just written. Sartre has suggested that this

nostalgia for lost innocence is one of the basic determinants of Flaubert's project: the establishment of a diabolical order as revenge for the loss of the divine. Flaubert's method of creating it is that instead of saying, "the world is hell," which is too abstract to have an effect, he must make the proposition haunt each word through his style. Here one may recall Buffon's dictum that style is the subject. What Eliot calls "objective correlative", in fact, can be said to be a principle derived from the technique that Flaubert adopted.

Flaubert as novelist is quite like the original Snow Man, who denies misery and, by the rejection of this simple pathetic fallacy, allows a far more comprehensive version of misery to enter his novel. In recording the scrupulous bareness the listener is nothing himself, not the purveyor of Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, nor even the source of a theme that he casts in symbolic form, but only the space in which is inscribed nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. This nothingness cannot be articulated, not because it is so profound an experience, but because it is defined precisely in those formal and dialectical terms: as the emptiness of any presence. Nothingness, in short, is the absence every presence supposes. To call it Hell would already be a positive determination. It would mean that rather than place a saint on the mountain and have demons torture him, it would be far better to take as his subject, as Flaubert does, a country doctor and his adulterous wife or two autodidacts. In this method of Flaubert, readers are required to recognize the scenes he presents, to find them natural, so that the malice of any destructive project may be concealed behind the fatality of the real. Thus, the novelist can blow through the world like that hail-storm which descended on Rouen on Saturday, destroying crops and breaking windows. Although Flaubert suffered a damage of one hundred francs, it was not without pleasure, that he saw his espaliers destroyed, his flowers cut to pieces, the vegetable garden overturned. In other words, there is a strong temptation to go through the world destroying melon covers, establishing, as the negation of what exists, the true order. "This order, the law of existence," as Jonathan Culler explains, "is not a necessary evil, not the manifestation of a firm diabolical synthesis, but only contingent evil, which is the more demoralizing for its arbitrariness. In displaying this order has one become a vengeful God who plays tricks or is one merely a youthful vandal? It is in any case a criminal role, for which Flaubert was well-suited by temperament and situation."

### *BEYOND BURGEOIS VALUES:*

Whatever the narrative technique a writer may choose to adopt, and in whatever style he may choose to write his work, no one can escape implying, explicitly or implicitly, a set of values. These values emerge as a pattern from his entire work. The pattern would be made of sympathies and antipathies, favours and

disfavours, likings and dislikings, which no technique or style can conceal or obliterate. Flaubert cannot be any exception to this general trait of the literary work, including the novel. It may sound strange, but in Flaubert's world stupidity is one of the values. Both as a category of his own thought and as a component of his literary practice, it remains at the centre of Flaubert's world. In his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, which is an obvious guide to stupidity, Flaubert places an epigraph from Chamfort, which offers one explanation of the category he calls stupidity. In the epigraph's view, received ideas are stupid because, in their ignorance most people accept ideas that are untrue. Since most people have intellectual laxity, they tend to distort and simplify whatever ideas come their way. Another form of stupidity that Flaubert includes in the category is the facile generalization. We tend to generalize to content ourselves with the most rudimentary knowledge without caring to pursue the subject any further. Flaubert gives examples of such stupidities as the following generalizations, or false impressions we carry in our minds: *Architectes*- all fools, always forget the stairways in houses; *Estomac*- all illnesses come from the stomach; *Koran*- Book by Mohammed which talks only of women; *Serpents*- all poisonous; *Peru*- country where everything is made of gold; *Paris*- where all roads are made of rubber, etc. That such ideas are stupid, there can be very little doubt. Flaubert's *Dictionnaire* is an extensive collection of such generalizations which assume the character first of belief and then of value.

Flaubert's arduous exercise in identifying the various stupidities by which a society lives strengthens one's growing conviction that it does not depend on one's ability to formulate the "correct" alternative view. Stupid ideas are not of the middle class or bourgeoisie alone, as opposed to other, preferable opinions. Thus, these entries in Flaubert's book neither represent a coherent view of the world, nor are they rendered stupid by being set against another coherent ideology. His enterprise actually is very much that of a mythologist, as Roland Barthes has more recently defined it. In his view, to analyse contemporary myths of bourgeois culture is not to claim that they are necessarily false but only that their historical and conventional character has been obscured by a society which attempts to transform its particular culture into a universal nature. For example, Rolls-Royce as car has great many properties which make it a prize specimen, but it is still a mythical name, a symbol of excellence and status. This habit of myth-making attacks a kind of fetishism which takes various associations, however sound their factual basis, and makes them "natural" meanings of or responses to an object or concept. Flaubert's choice of the format of Dictionary is important, because that is what we do with objects and concepts, people and places, individuals and groups – reduce them to items of dictionary. *Basques* (a community in Spain) – are the best runners. This may be true, although there must be many among them not interested in running at all. Even if it is true, to make it, as it were, the meaning of *Basques*, the



socially–required response, is to limit freedom and curiosity in ways which obliterate reality..

Flaubert makes entries in this *Dictionnaire* mostly of this type. They are stupid, not because the facts on which they are based are false, but because the particular meanings they are made to offer do not exhaust all the possible meanings of the object or concept. They are stupid also because they place the object or concept in a self-enclosed system of social discourse which comes to serve as reality for those who allow themselves to be caught up in it. If stupidity were ignorance, one can take a position on the side of knowledge. Also, if stupidity were bourgeois, one can range oneself with the aristocracy or the people. But if stupidity were cultural language made nature, how does one combat it? How does one fight against clichés, which are grounded in truth but have been made the constituents of a world? Flaubert's first attempt to define a posture in which he could rail against stupidity was his invention of that curious giant, *le Garçon*. The Garçon is not the archetypal bourgeois. He utters *idees recues* on the appropriate occasions but with such conceit and bellowing that interlocutors who are not in on the joke become annoyed. And he can take up any other position sufficiently gross and ridiculous for him to make a spectacle of himself. If one were playing the Garçon one could display self-satisfaction and unmask one's relations with others. But the Garçon, we are told, would not simply present a bill. For that would put him into the situation of professional men whose time we buy but with whom we expect to strike human relations during the period we have bought. The Garçon, on the other hand, details his fees, like a doctor charging extra for each reassuring word, adding a supplement for a delicacy. Every moment of his behaviour is an object to be weighted and paid for. He is, thus, making, quite literally, a spectacle of himself, not merely revealing the sordid truth of a human relationship but making it worse.

The Garçon's mode of existence is laughter. The man who laughs is strong among the strong, especially if his laughter be outrageous. One must either join in the laughter, which makes one feel self-conscious and foolish, so excessive it is, or one must allow bourgeois indignation to mount and become a spectacle oneself. Either way, the Garçon disconcerts; he pulls the strings. And if one experience this paradoxical duality one might try, as experiment, what Flaubert often did to avoid boredom: look at oneself in the mirror and laugh one's most outrageous laugh. Here, one becomes both subject and object of ridicule and can experience in one of its purest forms the stupidity of the human species. Now, how can one prick stupidity without claiming supreme intelligence? The Garçon's solution is to display one's stupidity with a blatant and provocative self-confidence. The Garçon has no positive position. In him, materialism can make fun of romanticism, and romanticism can make fun of materialism. Everything is grist to his mill, or at least any position that takes itself seriously. Thus, the stupidity of the Garçon is both a

mode of comprehension and a property of all that he comprehends. But the Garçon was an attempt at a lived rather than a written solution. It is significant that he does not appear in any of Flaubert's books.

Flaubert's purpose in a book is not to present intelligence to mock at stupidity; rather, it is stupidity both as object and as mode of comprehension. To write the book, according to him, is itself an act of stupidity. Representation of the world in sentences is only a particularly pointless and gratuitous activity. Indeed, it can be said that as an incarnation of stupidity the Garçon leaves out the stupidity of language.

### *CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE:*

Flaubert's concept of language, or his attitude to it, is amply exemplified by his *Dictionnaire*. The book makes the point very clear. He makes entries alphabetically. His order is purely arbitrary or linguistic only. It is different from those medieval and renaissance compendiums which attempted to reproduce in their arrangement the order of the world. In Flaubert, sentences are simply juxtaposed, as isolated bits of linguistic matter. Thus, his basic attitude to language is: one does not speak, one does not construct sentences to express one's relation to the world and to others; one is only spoken. Social discourse is already there, which each individual absorbs and imbibes. He only picks out of the stock the response which the system of discourse provides. The novelist's attitude towards language is well documented from the novels themselves. They offer a sense of "the grotesque stupidity of things said, whatever they may be." In Flaubert's view, anything one says is a linguistic object placed on display. And if one looks at it long enough, its stupidity will come out clearly; just as when one repeats a word until it becomes meaningless. Cutting speech off from its origins in practical life, Flaubert treats it as a set of phrases rather than the accomplishment of human intentions. Here is an example from *Madame Bovary*: "It's going to rain," says Emma to Leon, who is taking his leave. "I have a raincoat," he replies. "Ah!" Here nothing is said. Sentences stand, empty and detached. Thus, language lifted away from the world becomes a self-contained system of empty-phrases which we exchange and transmit but which we neither invent nor investigate.

At the same time, Flaubert does not believe that man has a rich inner and outer life prior to language, a treasure so particular that no social discourse can capture it. In his novels, there is, in fact, much evidence to the contrary. In *Madame Bovary*, for example, Emma's desires are created by a language of romance (so are of Cohn in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*) in her life to fulfill the promise of those words which had seemed so splendid in books. His attitude to science also reveals Flaubert's commitment to facts rather than to knowledge. Language, too, is living when it relates to facts, dead when it relates to knowledge. He is attracted to

Positivism precisely because it seems to have abandoned a search for causes (knowledge) and contented itself with exhaustive scientific descriptions (facts). In his view, explanation lies outside the province of science and any attempt to attain it is a step into the abyss of stupidity. Flaubert's view is: "Note that the sciences began to make progress only when they set aside the notion of cause;" "Try to hold firm to science, to pure science: love facts for themselves." Thus, for Flaubert the only kind of knowledge worthy of respect is that which presents and classifies facts. Scientific knowledge, offering no conclusions and explanations, cannot be translated into action. In his view, therefore, any attempt to relate knowledge and activity is an instance of presumptuous stupidity. As a general denigration of synthesis, Flaubert's view is particularly inimical to the pursuit, in novels, of thematic conclusions. Nor does it promote a desire for organization.

#### *ATTACHMENT TO BINARIES:*

Critics have come up with the strange fact of Flaubert's ambiguous attachment to what (after Derrida) are known binaries. His predilection for pairs had been noted much earlier. Of course, not all his oppositions are profound; some are quite factitious. Binary opposition, we should know, is a metaphor for all thought in its ability to bring order into any disorder. It presumes to isolate crucial features in simple antitheses and hence moves towards conclusions with a minimum of intellectual effort. One can recall here a passage from Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale*, in which the newly arrived provincial in Paris, Henry, watches the faces of passengers in the omnibus, "establishing between them similarities and antitheses." That, according to Flaubert, is stupid both as an attempt to grasp and comprehend the world and as an intellectual construction which takes place in a language lifted away from the world which does not submit itself to any organization so easily. Strangely, the same Flaubert is also wedded very much to the binary principle, especially when drawing up plans. For instance, the project of a novel related to Napoleon III's era is rigidly symmetrical. "Madame catches Monsieur deceiving her; then Monsieur catches Madame deceiving him – jealousy. She wishes she had married a true lover who had become a great man; he wishes he had married a tart who had become very rich." And opposed to the couple, "in the background his sister and her husband, a respectable and perfectly egotistical household." Writing such a novel would obviously involve the task of struggling with the stupidity of his symmetrical plan.

As we have it in Flaubert, the problem of binarism serves a useful pivot on which we can turn from the stupidity of knowledge to the stupidity of the world. Flaubert had great dislike of facile antitheses. He had a tendency also to make oppositions unproductive. So, he can use binarism in his descriptions as a device of antithesis: doubling objects without allowing this to produce meaning. In Flaubert,

the stupidity of the world is always the coefficient of a rudimentary order, whether that of syntax which pretends to compose items into a coherent proposition, or that of the more elaborate objects described at some length. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma's wedding cake and the elaborate toy which, destined for the Homais children but did not find its way into the final text due to the insistence of Bouilhet, are excellent instances of stupidity as a coefficient of organization. The former, of course, is ridiculous in its mixture of styles and in the contrast between its elements and what they represent. The cake is doubly alienated and fetishistic; first, because its form is so divorced from its practical purposes (it will, after all, be eaten), and secondly, because its ingredients are made to serve functions which are not their own. However, the toy serves as a significant example of stupidity and its attractions. It is a scale model of a town and all the activities taking place within it; it is also nonfunctional and purely representational.

The traditional defence of representation is that art takes pleasure in discovering the closeness of representation to the object represented. Such objects, with their high degree of organization, though perfectly useless, are directly and abashedly mimetic, presenting us with a whole and allowing us to explore its parts. In Flaubert, however, the objects only illustrate the stupidity of this kind of intelligibility. Blocking the discourse of the text, they offer a high degree of organization which leads nowhere. They figure the absurdity of representational art itself. Divorced from its human context, it is language free from origins and goals. It only retains a high degree of organization as it accedes to the condition of the practico-inert. We must not have any doubt that for Flaubert the attraction of such objects lie in their stupidity. One stands fascinated before them because they have no function, prove nothing. The mind is released from any commitment to practical life and can simply explore. Stupidity of this kind is a property of a tranquil appearance, like the very objects of nature, like mountains or large animals. The masterpiece does not display intelligence. It also does not reach towards any conclusion. It only offers itself with no ostensible purpose. The *betise* of novels is even more than a version of negative capability. They command attention, as a mountain does when it rises before us. They are not subsumed by any human project. One may play around them, but does not exhaust them. In fact, inexhaustibility is a compelling property of both art and stupidity. Stupidity as a refusal to understand negates ordinary meaning and replace it with an open and exploratory reverie. To see how this was done in the novel, we must consider the style which was to make the world stupid while remaining itself an object of admiration. To comprehend the world without understanding it was the task of Flaubertian irony.

### *FLAUBERTIAN IRONY:*

Kierkegaard said that the true ironist does not wish to be understood. We can decidedly say that irony always involves the possibility of misunderstanding. As such it offers the critic or analyst the opportunity to display his own perspicacity. The most basic feature of irony is its dual structure. It presupposes two orders which are in contrast with one another and in whose contrast lies whatever value the form can generate. Since our most pervasive dualism is one of appearance and reality, we tend to cast suspected ironies into that mould. An ironic statement has a literal meaning, but that meaning is only semblance and true proposition is hidden and must be reconstructed. In fact, it is the incongruity of the literal meaning, the perception of it as semblance, which leads us to identify a possible irony and seek the hidden reality. Situational irony, as opposed to verbal irony, relies even more obviously on this particular structure. Situational or dramatic irony is thus a device of cohesion in Flaubert, which knits together incidents and gives them a meaning by relating them to a law of the world. In *Madame Bovary*, the irony of Charles encouraging Emma's relationships with Rodolphe and Leon gives more shape to the plot than it might otherwise have had. Also, the irony of the Blind Man's appearance at three crucial moments in Emma's life and the implicit commentary provided by his songs and actions gives a metaphorical neatness to her fate. However, generally such gross dramatic ironies play only a minor role in Flaubert's novels.

We can understand why it is so in Flaubert's novels. Situational irony is rather neat. It implies a fundamentally predictable and orderly world. It is a mode of existential recuperation, and is often used in daily life to overcome disappointment: "that's just what would happen," we say when rain starts just as we begin a picnic, just to suggest that nature is not wholly indifferent but acts in accordance with an order which can be grasped. Verbal irony is more fascinating than the situational. It is so because no sentence is ironic *per se*. For a sentence to be properly ironic it must be possible to imagine some group of readers taking it quite literally. Otherwise there would be no contrast between apparent and assumed meaning and no space for ironic play. When Flaubert writes that during her illness Emma had a vision of heavenly bliss and purity to which she resolved to aspire, his language itself does not offer decisive indications of irony. In such a case, our perception of irony depends on a series of cultural norms which we assume we share with the narrator. Her vision dwells not on the piety and self-sacrifice of a convent life but on the embroidered train of the long gown in which she might majestically move along corridors. Such analogues help to confirm our perception of irony.

The clearest ironies in the novels of Flaubert are those that deflate the pretensions of characters, either by signal departures from our models of human

conduct or else by the description of illusions which contrast with realities announced by the text. Slightly different cultural models make Leon's opinion about the best name for Emma's child an object of irony: "M. Leon... is surprised that you don't choose Madeleine, which is exceedingly fashionable just now." Our notions of human behaviour also enable us to identify irony when Fredric "wished for a serious illness, hoping in that way to interest her." Sentences which juxtapose and pretend to knit together items which our notions of appropriate human responses and behaviour render incongruous are perhaps the most frequent devices of Flaubert's irony. *Madame Bovary* is exceptional among Flaubert's novels in that an early chapter in the novel sketches for us the main features of the principal code. The chapter is devoted to Emma's convent education and its extracurricular accompaniments. She is attracted to the concrete expressions of vague sentimentality. She accepts religion only insofar as its metaphors are sexual or pathetic and peoples her mind with particularized novelistic images of amorous adventures. Very naturally, these images mingle with historical melodrama, the cult of Mary Queen of Scots and other noble and unfortunate ladies. The experience which this code expresses is either socially exotic – noble ladies reclining on sofas or in carriages, contemplating the moon, a flower, or a plumed rider – or culturally exotic – mountains, waterfalls, ruins, palm trees. When we recognize later passages as instances of this code, we thereby enter the domain of irony. Emma's own exotic ironies of countries with sensuous names, where one travels in a post-chaise over mountain roads to the sounds of cow-bells, water-falls, and songs, stopping at night beside a gulf beneath lemon trees, not only are distant from possible experience but dwell on concrete and surface details which would not satisfy if they were experienced. Our acquaintance with this code confirms our ironic view of Emma's own behaviour. Her affairs with Rodolphe and Leon are presented as attempts to produce in her own life events which might serve as refractions for the language of this code. The language that Emma and Leon exchange in their early conversations is precisely a language of sentimental clichés. The way she wants Leon to look like Louis XIII. All these things on the part of Emma enumerate that code and the writer's irony accompanying its presentation.

Flaubert uses this type of irony as a polemical device. For the most part, it is directed against particular characters and their views of the world. It suggests that the implied author of the text holds other views. In Flaubert, the function of the various types of irony is not to convey to the reader a particular view of the world or to make out a definable case. Their function is to set in motion the negative operations of irony so that they may be constantly present as possible modes of processing other sentences in the text. If we are once accustomed to undertaking ironic readings of sentences which refer explicitly to the thoughts and behaviours of characters, on the assumption that alternative positions may always be

constructed, then we will at least be attuned to treating in like manner sentences where polemical intent would be difficult to locate but where detachment still seems the safest posture.

### *THE STORY OF MADAME BOVARY:*

Being the first type of novel that came out of France, *Madame Bovary* shocked the contemporary readers. It was condemned for picturing the life of a romantic adulteress. But it was also acclaimed for the honesty and skill with which it handles the subject. Flaubert does not permit Emma to escape the tragedy she brings upon herself. She finds diversion from the monotony of life, but she does so at the cost of her self-respect. The truth of Emma's struggle has had universal appeal. The detailed summary of the novel's narrative can be put as under:

Charles Bovary, a student of medicine, marries for his own advancement a woman much older than himself. She makes his life miserable with her nagging and groundless suspicions. One day Charles is called to the bedside of M. Rouault, who has a broken leg, where he meets the farmer's daughter named Emma. She is a beautiful but restless girl whose early education in a French convent gives her an overwhelming thirst for broader experience of life. Charles finds his patient an excellent excuse to see the girl. He is captivated by the charm and grace of Emma. But the doctor is soon suspected by his wife, Heloise, who disbelieves that her husband could be so devoted to the patient as to be very keen to see him everyday. She has heard rumours about Emma as to how, despite her peasant background, she conducts herself like a gentlewoman. Angry as well as tearful Charles's wife, Heloise, makes him swear that he would no longer visit the Rouault farm. Meanwhile it comes to be discovered that Heloise's fortune is non-existent, that in reality she is not a woman of means or fortune. This makes the young doctor furious, because he had married this woman, although much senior to him in age, just because she was known to be a woman of means or fortune. The discovery is followed by a violent quarrel between the two. The stormy scene between her and the parents of Charles brings on her an attack of an old illness. She dies quickly and quietly.

Charles feels guilty because he had so few regrets at his wife's death. Once he gets an invitation from old Rouault, and in response goes to the farm only to fall under the influence of Emma's charms. As old Rouault finds Charles fall more deeply in love with his daughter, he decides that the young doctor is dependable and quite respectable. This leads him to force his daughter to accept the young widower's hand. Thus Emma gets married to the widower doctor with blessings from her father. During the early weeks of their marriage Emma occupies herself with changing their new homes. She busies herself with every household task she can think of to keep herself from being utterly disillusioned. She, however, soon

realizes that even though she thinks she is in love with Charles, the rapture which should have followed their marriage does not actually arrive. All the romantic books she had read during her early years had led her to expect more from marriage than she actually receives. The dead calm of her feeling only expresses now a bitter disappointment. The intimacy of marriage only disgusts her. Instead of a perfumed, handsome lover in velvet and lace, she finds herself tied to a rather dull-witted husband who reeks of medicines and drugs.

As Emma is about to give up all hopes of finding any joy in her married life, a noble patient of Charles invites them to a ball at his chateau. At the ball Emma gets a chance to dance with a dozen partners, tastes champagne, and receives fabulous compliments on her extraordinary beauty. The sharp contrast between the life of Bovarys' and that of this nobleman comes to her consciousness with an anguish. As a result, she becomes more and more discontented with her husband. His futile and clumsy efforts to please her only make things worse; they make her despair at his lack of understanding. She now only sits by her window, dreams of Paris, becomes listless, and falls ill. Hoping that change of place would improve her condition, Charles takes Emma to Yonville, where he sets up a new practice. Here, Emma prepares herself for the birth of a child. When her daughter is born, her interest in the child is confined only to laces and ribbons for her dresses. The child is sent to a wet nurse, where Emma visits her, and where, accidentally, she meets Leon Dupuis. Leon is a law clerk bored with the town and is out to seek diversion. Charmed with youthful Emma, he walks home with her in the twilight. Emma finds her sympathetic to her romantic ideas about life. Later, Leon visits the Bovarys in company with one Homais, the town chemist. Homais holds little soirees at the local inn, to which he invites the townsfolk. Here Emma's acquaintance with Leon develops and finally ripens. The townspeople start gossiping about the couple, but Charles Bovary is not acute enough to sense the nature of interest his wife shows in Leon.

Bored with Yonville and tired of loving in vain, Leon leaves for Paris to complete his studies. This makes Emma broken-hearted. She deplores her weakness in not giving herself to Leon. She frets in her bedroom, and once again makes herself ill. However, before she can have enough time to become as melancholy as she was earlier, there appears a new arrival. A stranger, Rodolphe Boulanger, comes to town. One day he brings his farm tenant to Charles for bloodletting. Rodolphe, an accomplished lover, sees in Emma a promise of future pleasure. When he begins his suit, Emma realizes that if she gives herself to him her surrender would be immoral. But she rationalizes her doubts by convincing herself that nothing as romantic and beautiful as love could be sinful. Therefore, she starts deceiving Charles, her husband, and begins meeting Rodolphe. She rides with him over the countryside to his persuasive appeals. At first, she feels guilty.



But she soon identifies herself with adulterous heroines of fiction, believing that very much like them she has experienced true romance. Now feeling assured of Emma's love, Rodolphe no longer considers it necessary to continue with his gentle lover's tricks. He no longer bothers to maintain punctuality in his meetings with Emma. Noticing this cooling of passion, Emma begins to suspect him of gradual withdrawal from her. She starts feeling that she is losing him as a lover.

Meanwhile, Charles, Emma's husband, gets involved in Homais's attempt to cure a boy of a clubfoot with a machine Charles has designed. Both Homais and Charles are convinced that the success of their operation will raise their future standing in the community. But after weeks of torment, the boy contracts gangrene. As a result, his leg has to be amputated. This damages the reputation of Homais, as he is by profession a chemist. As for Charles, as a doctor, he comes to be viewed with suspicion. His practice begins to fall away. Disgusted with her husband's failure as a practicing doctor, Emma starts scorning her past virtue. She now starts spending lavishly on jewelry and clothes. Consequently, her husband goes under heavy debts. The case of Emma's gradual sliding into the life of vice brings to mind the following lines from Pope:

Vice is a master of so frightful mien,  
As to be hated needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Precisely these very steps form the fall of Emma into the abyss of vice. In her desperate attempt to escape the miserable life of debt and enjoy better life of riches she finally secures from Rodolphe his word that he would take her away. But on the very eve of what was to be her escape she receives from her lover a letter so hypocritically repentant of their sin of adultery, that she reads it with sneers. Now, realizing the horror of having lost her dream of living with a lover like Rodolphe, she almost throws herself from the window. But she is saved when Charles calls to her. However, as usual with her, she become gravely ill with brain fever. She remains in bed for several months, expecting death to release her from the pain of living.

Emma's convalescence is slow, but she finally gets well enough to go to Rouen to the theatre. The tender love scenes behind the footlights make Emma breathless with envy. Once again, she starts dreaming of life of romance. In Rouen she meets Leon Dupuis again. This time Leon is very much determined to possess Emma. He listens to her complaints with sympathy, soothes her, and takes her driving. Still consumed by her thirst for romance, she soon yields herself to Leon with regret that she had not done it before. Charles Bovary grows concerned about his debts. In addition to his own financial worries, his father dies, leaving his mother in ignorance about the family estate. Emma uses the excuse of procuring a

lawyer for her mother-in-law to visit Leon in Rouen, where he has set up a practice. At Leon's suggestion Emma procures a power of attorney from Charles. This document leaves her free to spend Charles's money without his knowledge of her purchases. Finally, in great despair over his debts, the extent of which Emma only partly reveals, Charles takes his mother into confidence and promises to destroy Emma's power of attorney. Thus, deprived of her hold over her husband's finances and unable to repay her debts, Emma throws herself upon Leon's mercy with all disregard for caution. By now her corruption becomes so complete that she has to seek release and pleasure or go out of her mind.

In her growing degradation, Emma begins to realize that she has brought her lover down with her. She no longer respects him. She even scorns her faithfulness when he is unable to give her money which she needs to pay her bills. When her name is posted publicly for a debt of several thousand francs, the bailiff prepares to sell Charles's property to settle her creditors' claims. Charles is out of town when the debt is posted. Emma, in one final act of self-abasement, appeals to Rodolphe for help. But he, too, refuses to oblige her. He does not even lend her money. Fully aware now that the framework of lies with which she has deceived Charles is about to collapse, she resolves to die a heroine's death. She swallows the poison of arsenic bought from Homais's shop. Charles, returning from his trip, arrives too late to save her from a slow and painful death. Pitiful in his grief, he can barely endure the sounds of the hammer as her coffin is being nailed shut. Later, when his pain over his wife's death grows less, he opens her desk only to find the carefully collected love letters of Leon and Rodolphe. Heart broken with the knowledge of Emma's infidelity, scourged with debt, and helpless in his disillusionment, Charles, too, dies soon after his wife. He leaves behind only a legacy of twelve francs for the support of his orphaned daughter. Thus the Bovary tragedy is completed.

### *THE SOURCES OF MADAME BOVARY;*

We are told that nothing demonstrates the continuity of Flaubert's effort better than the writing of *Madame Bovary*. Maxime DuCamp's account has been accepted as true, which runs thus: when Flaubert read his first version of *The Vision of Saint Anthony* to Bouilhert and DuCamp, *Madame Bovary* came into being from Bouilhert's suggestion. He said, "Why don't you write the Delaunay story?" Flaubert is supposed to have thrown back his head and exclaimed: "What an idea!" Delaunay was actually called Delamare, but that makes little difference. Bouilhert and DuCamp in their verdict are reported to have said, "It is our opinion that the manuscript of *Saint Anthony* must be thrown into the fire and the subject never brought up again." There is now available whole archive of works on the actual personages on whom are cast the characters of *Madame Bovary*. Most of this archive relates to the character of Emma Bovary. The very day Flaubert's novel

came out, people started demanding to know the identity of Madame Bovary. However, when Flaubert, feeling persecuted by the demand, answered, “I am Madame Bovary!,” everyone assumed he was only joking. All the very many articles and books that have been written on Emma Rouault, Charles Bovary, and Yonville—I’ Abbey, in real life supposedly Delphine Courturier, the wife of an *officer de Sante* named Dalamare who practiced medicine at a place called Ry – offer little but anecdotal interest. Besides, they have been much disputed and are often dubious. Also, they are of little importance to the real critic seeking to penetrate the psychological motivations of the writer. Flaubert himself found the subject so banal that, using it as a point of departure, he felt he could write a book with no subject at all.

The only authentic “source” of the novel, if we must look for one, comes from the novelist himself. As a schoolboy of only seventeen Flaubert had written a “Philosophical Tale: *Passion and Virtue*,” which is dated December 10, 1837. This tale is the story of a young woman named Mazza. She already embodies everything that Emma Bovary would later have. From the very opening lines we find Mazza dreaming of a man she has only seen two times: “the first time was at a dance given at the ministry, the second time at the Comedie Francaise, and although he was neither a man of extraordinary talents nor very handsome, she had often thought of him. In the evening, after the lamp had been blown out, she would remain a few instants dreaming, her heavy hair covering her bare breasts, her head turned toward the window where the night threw forth a pale light, her arms hanging over the edge of the couch, and her soul floating between emotions at once vague and repellent, like those confused sounds which rise from the fields on autumn evenings.” Here, we can see that in the space of just ten lines there is, in sum, the story of *Emma Bovary*. Mazza’s portrait is very much similar to that of Emma’s. They both have the same dreamy character combined with the same thirst to possess the absolute.

There are also further similarities between *Passion and Virtue* and *Madame Bovary*. Just as Charles is by nature the exact opposite of Emma, M. Willer, a financier totally absorbed in the fluctuations of the stock market, knows nothing of Mazza’s reveries. Evil fortune brings it that she encounters her Rodolphe, a certain Ernest: “Far from being one of those men of exceptional feeling whom one meets in books and plays, he was a man with a dry heart, a precise mind, and on top of all that, a chemical engineer. But he was an expert seducer: he knew by heart the devices, the tricks, the *chic* (to use a vulgar word) by which an adroit man arrives at his ends.” We can see that page by page, the parallels and analogies between the novel of the sixteen-year-old and the masterpiece of the mature man become more numerous and apparent. As Rene’ Dumesnil puts it, “the one is already the other, only in an embryonic state; it will take gestation period of fifteen years for this

subject, reluctantly reconsidered and laboriously executed, like a schoolboy's exercise, to grow into the masterpiece we know." In *Passion and Virtue*, Ernest is adroit. He enters into Mazza's household in this fashion: "he lends her novels, takes her to the theatre, making sure always to do something startling and different; and then, day by day, he is freer in his visits to her house and manages to become a friend of the family, of her husband, of the servants...." As we see later in *Madame Bovary*, Rodolphe behaves in the same manner, who diabolically manages to have Emma's own husband suggest that for reasons of health she should go out riding in the forest with this rascal who has been waiting all along for such an opportunity. So Mazza gives herself to Ernest, just as Emma gives herself to Rodolphe. Both surrender themselves to these subtle men body and soul. Also like Rodolphe, Ernest, we are told, "begins to love her a little more than a little shop-girl or a bit-part actress." He becomes frightened of this love, "like children who run away from the sea saying it is too large." Again like Rodolphe, Ernest invents excuses to withdraw from the affair when it no longer remains interesting to him. Even the letter he writes to Mazza is very much similar to the one Rodolphe writes to Emma: "Farewell, Mazza! I will never see you again. I have been sent by the Minister of the Interior on an important mission to analyze the products and the soil of Mexico. Farewell! I embark at Le Havre. If you wish to be happy, cease to love me. Love Virtue and Duty instead. This is my final word to you. Farewell again! I embrace you. Ernest." Mazza runs all the way to Le Havre, arriving only in time to see "a white sail sinking beneath the horizon." She has no choice but to return home, which she does stunned and wounded. "She sees life as one long cry of pain." She "writhes in agony in the embrace of her husband, weeping at the memory." She becomes a widow. After a long wait, she finally receives a cold and indifferent letter in which Ernest announces his marriage to the only daughter of his superior. Mazza drinks poison and dies.

Of course, there are so many elements of the 1857 work (*Madame Bovary*) which are not there in the 1837 sketch (*Passion and Virtue*). Emma's gradual degeneration, her slow and fatal progress which leads her implacably from fall to fall till she finally takes the poison, etc., are the details missing in the former sketch of the "tale". But the relevance of the earlier piece remains for an understanding of the latter. Besides, Flaubert did draw, for sure, several details of his masterpiece from reality or real life. Decidedly, they are not of much importance in themselves. Nevertheless, they do constitute the material of a work of art. The very logic of their being there in the book proves their relevance. No doubt, every detail in the novel is true, and has been observed and measured by the novelist. But it is all these details from real life, taken from various times and different places and meticulously manipulated by the artist, which made the novel whose life came only from him. A long process of maturation always takes place in the writer's mind. In

this case, it took twenty years. It was carried out in silence. And in this process, the subconscious mind of the artist plays as important a part as does the conscious. Memory registers may impressions which precipitate only when they amalgamate and form a new compound. It is in this process of alchemy that life gets transformed into a work of art. Conscious and careful craftsman as Flaubert was, he worked hard on his project and perfected the narration into a piece of art.

### *FLAUBERT AND MADAME BOVARY:*

In the histories of literature, Flaubert used to be presented as the “father of realism.” He had also been alleged of having “feminine” temperament; his physicians dubbed him a nervous old woman. Responding to these statements, Jean-Paul Sartre calls *Madame Bovary* a “dry and objective” work. At the same time he believes that the work is “the objectification of the person.” In his view, the work is, “in fact, more complete, more total than the life. It has its roots in the life, to be sure; it illuminates the life, but it does not find its total explanation in the life alone.... Thus the work – when one has examined it – becomes a hypothesis and a research tool to clarify the biography.” Sartre, therefore, recommends that the reader “can and must catch sight of the movement of landowners and capitalists, the evolution of the rising classes, the slow maturation of the Proletariat: everything is there” across *Madame Bovary*. The work also reflects existing contradictions in contemporary petit bourgeoisie, the evolution of the family, of property, as well as Flaubert’s “femininity,” his childhood in a hospital building, etc. Each of these significations clarifies the other, with each serving as an encompassing framework for the preceding. However, the included signification in the work is richer or greater than the including signification. In a word, what we have is only the outline for the dialectical movement, and not the movement itself. In Sartre’s view, our “project” as readers should be the one “by which Flaubert, in order to escape from the petit bourgeoisie, will launch himself across the various fields of possibles towards the alienated objectification of himself and will constitute himself inevitably and indissolubly as the author of *Madame Bovary* and as that petit bourgeois which he refused to be.” Sartre considers such a project as meaningful. It is not any way the simple negativity of flight. By so doing a man aims at the production of himself in the world as a “certain objective totality.” In Sartre’s view, it is not the simple abstraction to write which makes up the peculiar quality of Flaubert; rather, it is the decision to write in a certain manner in order to manifest himself in the world in a particular way. In a way, it is the particular signification – within the framework of the contemporary ideology – which gives to literature as the negation of his original condition and as the objective solution to his contradictions.

Making an application of his theory about the relationship of the author with his work, Sartre concludes that *Saint Anthony* “expresses the whole Flaubert in his purity and in all the contradictions of his original project, but *Saint Anthony* is a failure.” In comparison to this work, Sartre considers *Madame Bovary* a success. But he sees a relevance of *Saint Anthony* to the creation of *Madame Bovary*. In his view, “the monstrous, splendid work which results from it, that in which he is objectified and alienated, is *Madame Bovary*.” Thus, our return to the biography shows us the hiatuses, the fissures, the accidents. At the same time, it confirms the hypothesis of the work’s original project by revealing the direction and continuity of the life. Sartre being a philosopher of existentialism, thus makes an application of the philosophy to the interpretation of literary works. As he defines, the existentialist critical approach adopts “a regressive-progressive and analytic-synthetic method.” In this approach there is an enrichment of cross-reference between the work and the period. As he himself concludes, “In short, the simple inert juxtaposition of the epoch and the object gives way abruptly to a living conflict.”

Sartre leads us through this approach to question and then reject the conventional notion of Flaubert as a realist or an author of feminine sensibility or temperament. In his view, “If one has lazily defined Flaubert as a realist and if one has decided that realism suited the public in the second Empire (which will permit us to develop a brilliant, completely false theory about the evolution of realism between 1857 and 1957), one will never succeed in comprehending either that strange monster which is *Madame Bovary* or the author or the public. Once more one will be playing with shadows. But if one has taken the trouble, in a study which is going to be long and difficult, to demonstrate within this novel the objectification of the subjective and its alienation – in short, if one grasps it in the concrete sense which it still holds at the moment when it escapes from its author and *at the same time* from the outside as an object which is allowed to develop freely then the book abruptly comes to oppose the objective reality which it will hold for public opinion, for the magistrates, for contemporary writers.” In Sartre’s view, Flaubert despised realism and said so so many times in his life. He loved only the absolute purity of art. It is interesting to note that Flaubert saw his book stolen away from him the moment it was declared a success. The period viewed it as a supreme work of realism, a sharp critique of romantic attitudes which Emma represents. Flaubert reacted against this attitude to his book, and no longer recognized it. It was foreign to him. Suddenly he lost his own objective existence. The opposite way of looking at *Madame Bovary*, which critics like Sartre adopt, is to see it as a comment as much on the so-called realism or naturalism of our attitudes and beliefs, precepts and practices, as on the romantic attitudes and beliefs, precepts and practices. Viewed from this angle, the novel throws a new light upon the period itself to

which it belongs, or of which it is a product. It enables us, as Sartre says, to pose a new question to History: just what must that period have been in order that it should demand *this* book and mendaciously find there its own image? Sartre issues the statement that “It is enough to say by way of conclusion that the man and his time will be integrated into the dialectical totalization when we have shown how History surpasses this contradiction”.

Hence the relationship between the writer and his work is as intimate as is the relationship between the work. Further, the relationship between the work and its times is also as intimate as the one between the work and its author. Hence, for a proper understanding of any literary work it is necessary to go into these relationships and work out the equations that connect one with another. Of course, the equations may not answer to the principles of realism adopted by every work, just as Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* does not. These equations and the principles underlying them are always determined by the individual writer and his purpose behind the project which is his work. As the later twentieth-century or postmodern critics have pointed out, Flaubert’s novel is more a critique of realism than a realistic work. It attempts the creation of a completely objective or pure art which draws attention not so much to the subject it is about but to the manner in which that subject has been treated. Here, it is the style and technique that gain priority with the author rather than the subject and plot or incidents and characters.

### *MADAME BOVARY AS BIOGRAPHY:*

Just like Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* is based on the life history of a “real” woman. It is now accepted as an established fact that an authentic Madame Bovary existed. Her name was Madame Delmare, born Couturier. She died on 7 March, 1848, at Ry. Certain other characters have also been drawn after known real personages. Local pride, of course, tends to exaggerate these resemblances or links. Flaubert has been lost in the legend created about the book. Fantastic details have been added, a legend has been created, so much so that the entire background of *Madame Bovary* is now available on postcards in the town of Ry. Whatever be the truth of such claims and counter claims, the fact remains that the narration of Flaubert’s novel is in the form of a biography. It is made the story of Madame Emma Bovary. Her life history constitutes the subject matter of the novel.

However, before we discuss the novel’s biographical form it seems pertinent to know what Flaubert thought of the novel and what he intended to do when he chose to compose a book like *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert’s relevant statement runs as under:

I would like to write books in which I have only to write sentences,  
if I may say so, just as I have only to breath in order to remain alive;

I am bored by the subtleties of composition, by combinations aimed at effect, by all the calculations involved in the design, but which, nevertheless, are art, for style depends on these and these alone.

With cold detachment, Flaubert performs the machinations of his craft which quite often sent him to tears. For Balzac, on the other hand, they would have been an internal part of the novel from the very opening, a part of the original organic idea. The technique of *Madame Bovary* has come to be considered a model for all novels, just as Racine's *Andromache* has come to be considered a model for all tragedies. It is generally used as an illustration of all new theories. Any discussion of the art of the novel among critics as well as novelists inevitably turns to *Madame Bovary*.

Interestingly, Flaubert himself seems to have entertained misgivings about his novel's organization. He seems to have been as unhappy with it, on that count, as with his *Salambo* and *Sentimental Education*. In the case of *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, he was still more dissatisfied with its organizational part: "I think that the book will have a serious weakness, namely the relative length of the parts." When it comes to putting up a defence for it, he states that the book is "a biography, rather than a developed dramatic situation.... Moreover, it seems to me that life itself is a little like that." Like *David Copperfield* or *The Mill on The Floss*, most Flaubert's novels, including *Madame Bovary*, are in the form of a biography. However, it is not the biography of one individual. It is, in fact, a sequence of interrelated life histories. From a certain point of view, the individual biography which measures the novel's dimension in time, is that of Charles Bovary, not Emma's. The novel opens with his entrance into the college – with his cap – and it ends with his death. In the opinion of Albert Thibaudt, "To be more accurate, *Madame Bovary* seems to be a biography of human life in general rather than of a particular person." Both these extremes – considering the novel in chronological terms as the biographical narration of Charles Bovary and considering it a kind of biography of everyone – are untenable. Whatever be the technique employed by the author, the fact remains that the novel is about Emma, and it is her biography which constitutes the subject matter of the work. As Percy Lubbock has rightly observed, "As for his subject, it is of course Emma Bovary in the first place; the book is the portrait of a foolish woman, romantically inclined, in small and prosaic conditions. She is the centre of it all, certainly; there is no doubt of her position in the book."

We must, however, remember that the novel is not just the "biography" of Emma. She by herself, in other words, is not the subject of the novel. As Lubbock rightly remarks, "What he [Flaubert] proposes to exhibit is the history of a woman like her in just such a world as hers, a foolish woman in narrow circumstances; so that the provincial scene, acting upon her, making her what she becomes, is as essential as she is herself. Not a portrait, therefore, not a study of character for its



own sake, but something in the nature of a drama, where the two chief players are a woman on one side and her whole environment on the other – that is *Madame Bovary*.” That is why the narrative is not in the first person as most narratives in biographical form are. Here, it is the third person narrator who tells us all about Emma and her affairs with various men. Had the narrative been in the first person, Flaubert would not have been able to treat his subject as he does now, with irony from a distance in complete objectivity. That is why right from the beginning he makes it perfectly clear that his view is not centred upon the actual outcome of Emma’s predicament. It may issue either way. What she does or fails to do is of very small moment. Her affairs with Leon and Rodolphe are pictures that pass. They solve nothing. They lead to no climax. Her final rejection by Rodolphe, for example, is no scene of drama in the novel. It is just one of the many mischances of her life. It does not stand out as a turning point in the novel’s action, although it has an effect on the character and fortune of Emma. In fact, in *Madame Bovary*, none of the events really matter for their own sake. Not one of them is indispensable as it is. All these events in Emma’s life are only the author’s way of telling his subject, of making it count to the eye. In themselves, they are not what he has to say; they only illustrate it. As Lubbock has summed up the case:

To Flaubert the situation out of which he made his novel appeared in another light. It was not as dramatic as it was pictorial; there was not the stuff in Emma, more especially, that could make her the main figure of a drama; she is small and futile, she could not well uphold an interest that would depend directly on her behaviour. But for a picture, where the interest depends only on what she is – that is quite different. Her futility then is a real value; it can be made amusing and vivid to the last degree, so long as no other weight is thrown on it; she can make a perfect impression of life, though she cannot create much of a story. Let Emma and her plight therefore appear as a picture; let her be shown in the act of living her life, entangled as it is with her past and her present; that is how the final fact at the heart of Flaubert’s subject will be best displayed.

Here then is the clue to the treatment of theme by Flaubert. As the quotation above makes clear, it is pictorial. Its clear object is to make Emma’s life as intelligible and visible as possible. The readers must share her sense of life without any uncertainty. They have to comprehend her experience, and to *see her* while she undergoes her experience of joy or sorrow. Thus the author places the readers inside her world so that they can feel the immediate taste of it. They are also to get the full effect, more of it than she herself could see. Flaubert’s subject demands all this, and no less, if the picture of Emma is to be complete. She herself has to be known and understood thoroughly.

The question of the right point of view of the tale of *Madame Bovary* seems considerably perplexing. The question is where is Flaubert to locate his centre of vision? From which point inside or outside the tale can the unfolding of the subject be commanded most effectively? Certainly not from within. Otherwise the tale would have been narrated in the standard biographical form having the first person narrator, which is not the case. But the point of view has to be located inside as well as outside the centre of the story. Hence it is allowed to shift from Emma to the author. One aspect of the author's subject can only be seen from within, through the eyes of Emma. But another must inevitably be seen from without, through the author. Therefore, a shift of the vision or point of view is essential in the otherwise biographical tale of Emma. Hence the author's wit shows us what we fail to see through the eyes of Emma. The *fact* of Emma is taken by the author with complete seriousness. She is placed at the centre of the tale to be studied and explored. Flaubert does not allow us to neglect any means of understanding her point of view. Her value is, of course, another matter. As to that Flaubert never has an instant's illusion. He always knows her to be worthless. He shows this knowledge about her without any assertion. His valuation of her is only implied. It can be felt in his tone – seldom in his words, which invariably respect her own estimate of herself. Flaubert's irony, all the same, is close at hand and indispensable. Irony is the chief aspect of his style. He knows its definite use, and he cannot forego it. It is through the use of his irony that the author transcends Emma's limited vision whenever he pleases, to abandon her way of looking at the world, and to cross over to his own more informed, more commanding position. Her manner does remain convincing while she displays it. But we are always aware that a finer mind than hers is watching her display with a touch of disdain. From time to time the finer mind leaves her and begins to create the world of Homais and Binet and Lheureux and the rest. He does it in a fashion that remains far beyond any possible conception of hers. At the same time, it shows the author's mastery of his craft that there is absolutely no dislocation, no awkward substitution of one set of values for another. Very discretely Flaubert allows the same standard to reign throughout. It is in this manner that Flaubert's famous impersonality artfully operates.

#### *NATURE OF REALISM IN MADAME BOVARY:*

Realism as a critical term has been highly elastic. It has often been used in ambivalent and equivocal terms. In fact, over the years, through long and varied use, it has gathered far too many qualifying adjectives, which have not been of much use in clarifying the term as such. A stage has reached that many critics now feel that we could as well do without such a term. Quite a few, the present writer included, still feel that the term realism, like several others, such as classicism,

romanticism, modernism, expressionism, etc., does serve a useful purpose in defining and understanding many a work of narrative fiction. Any style of writing, when in use for a long time, would gain richness and complexity. It is, for sure, a function of criticism to follow the growth of literary styles and find ways of drawing as many distinctions as the growth of any particular style has necessitated. Let us therefore not get scared of the complexity or variety that the style of realism has acquired in narrative fiction, and engage ourselves instead in gaining a clear understanding of the various nuances it has come out with!

In literature, realism fundamentally is the depiction of life with fidelity and objectivity. Thus, it is not concerned with exaggeration or idealization. It does not attempt to render things, incidents and characters, more beautiful than they actually are. The attempt is to keep the bare bones without adding any padding or ornament. It also confines itself to the everyday world, avoiding the twilight world of the supernatural, and the higher world of heroes and heroines, of exceptional incidents and characters. In the last hundred years or so a large number of theories about realism have developed. What is to be regarded realistic has been a problem provoking different answers from different schools of criticism. Of course, the term has not lost currency. We cannot avoid its use when it comes to talking about literature of verisimilitude, or possessing authenticity of lived experience. The issue has been made technical after the French novel of the nineteenth century which was based on a conscious and deliberate theory of realism and naturalism. The movement began in the 1830's and gathered momentum by the 1850's. *Madame Bovary* is a product of the same period, if not a deliberate specimen of that movement. This movement started in reaction against romanticism, but it also rejected classicism. The reasons for these rejections were different. Romanticism was rejected for its search for the uncommon, unusual, fantastic, other-worldly, magical, supernatural, etc. Classicism was rejected because it depicted, in the name of realism, books rather than nature. Also, its imitation of nature was methodized, standardized, classified, categorized, typified, etc. Realism recommended an imitation directly of nature, of the life of common man in all its minute mundane details.

In the view of a realist, literature has to concern itself with the here and now, with everyday events, with the writer's own environment and with the movements (political, social, etc.) of his time. Balzac gave the lead in France. Zola came out with his theory of naturalism, which was a more scientific version of realism. It focused, like the science, on the case studies of individuals in terms of heredity and environment. The density of detail, of documentation, of observation, of analysis – all these became a necessary apparatus of realism and naturalism as practiced by the later nineteenth century French novelists. Theory combined with practice in the nineteenth century to produce a large body of literature which presented an

altogether a different view of the *condition humaine*. The movement was decidedly influenced by contemporary philosophical thought, especially by Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830). Comte's positivism insisted on making sociology a prime science. Later, Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1857) and the writings of other evolutionists induced many writers to re-appraise assumptions about their origin and to take a very different view of the environment. An equally powerful influence seems to have been the invention of photography in 1839, which made people look at literature as a mirror image of nature. The photographic precision demanded much greater care for accuracy in depiction and delineation than ever before. Courbet emerged as one of the great champions of realism. He expressed opposition to all kinds of idealization of life in art. Rejecting both romanticism and classicism, he maintained that realism alone was democratic. He also insisted that the hero of the novel should be a common man. Thus, in realism can be said to have begun the shaping of the anti-hero in fiction.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, too, was greeted in 1857 as a great work of realism. Later it was greeted as a great work of naturalism. Flaubert did not like the label. Balzac alone, before Flaubert, was the proper realist. He regarded man, and analysed character, as a zoologist might. He also expressed his intention to follow Buffon's work on zoology in order to write a natural history of man. Flaubert did not aspire to use any such scientific method in his novels. Only as an artist he wanted to treat his subject. And in so doing, he made realism impartial, impersonal, and objective. That realism in Flaubert is different from the realism Balzac and Stendhal practiced can be illustrated by any paragraph of crucial importance in *Madame Bovary*. Note, for instance, the following:

But it was above all at mealtimes that she could bear it no longer, in that little room on the ground floor, with the smoking stove, the creaking door, the oozing walls, the damp floor-tiles: all the bitterness of life seemed to be served to her on her plate, and, with the steam from the boiled beef, there rose from the depths of her soul other exhalations as it were of disgust. Charles was a slow eater; she would nibble a few hazel-nuts or else, leaning on her elbow, would amuse herself making marks on the oilcloth with the point of her table knife.

This paragraph forms the climax of a presentation whose subject is Emma Bovary's dissatisfaction with her life in Tostes. The occasion is that she has been waiting for a long time for some sudden event which would give a new turn to her bored life. She feels that her life here is without elegance, adventure, and love, in the depths of the provinces, beside a mediocre and boring husband. But that moment has not yet come, nor seems to be coming. Hence the present scene when she is seized with disgust and despair. Flaubert does not present the situation simply as a picture. He first gives Emma and then the situation through her. It is not a matter of a simple

representation of the content of Emma's consciousness, of what she feels as she feels it. Although the light which illuminates the picture flows from her, she herself also remains a part of that picture. She remains situated within it.

If we compare this paragraph with one from Balzac or Stendhal, we shall observe that, in the first place, all the three share the two distinguishing characteristics of modern or French realism. One of these is that real everyday occurrences in a low social stratum, the provincial petty bourgeoisie, are taken very seriously. Another is that the everyday occurrences are accurately and profoundly set in a definite period of contemporary history. In these two basic characteristics all the three French writers are at one, in contradistinction to all earlier realism. However, beyond these two features, there is nothing common between Flaubert and the other two. In the other two we constantly hear what the writer thinks of his characters and events. In the case of Flaubert, no such running commentary is found in the narrative. We also hear in the other two what the characters think and feel. In the case of Flaubert, this, too, is altogether absent in the narrative. Flaubert's opinion of his characters and events remains unspoken. Also, whenever the characters express themselves, it is never in the manner of Balzac and Stendhal where the writer identifies himself with their opinion, or seeks to make the reader identify himself with it. In Flaubert we do hear, at times, the author speak, but he neither expresses any opinion nor makes any comment. Flaubert as narrator limits his role to selecting the events and translating them into language. His conviction is, and he proves it practically, that every event, if the writer is able to express it purely and completely, interprets itself and the persons involved in it better and more completely than any commentary appended to it could do. Flaubert's artistic practice, and its excellence, solely rests on this.

Returning to the paragraph in particular we cited above, we see a scene in which a man and his wife are at dining table, which is the most everyday situation imaginable. It is a picture of discomfort, and not a momentary or passing one, but a chronic discomfort, which completely rules an entire life, Emma Bovary's. The beauty of the passage is that an interpretation of the situation is contained within the description itself. The two are sitting together at a table. The husband senses nothing of his wife's inner state. They have so little communication between them that things do not even come to a quarrel. There is not even an argument between them. Conflict seems an altogether a distant possibility. Each of the two is so absorbed in their respective worlds that they are both entirely alone. She is lost in her despair and day-dreaming. He is lost in his philistine self-complacency. They have nothing in common. And yet they have nothing of their own, for the sake of which it could be worthwhile to be lonely. Privately, each of the two has a silly world of his/her own, which cannot be reconciled with the realities of the situation. Hence both of them miss the possibilities life offers them. As Erich Auerbach has

so well said, “What is true of these two, applies to almost all the other characters in the novel; each of the many mediocre people who act in it has his own world of mediocre and silly stupidity, a world of illusions, habits, instincts, and slogans; each is alone, none can understand another, or help another to insight; there is no common world of men, because it could only come into existence if many should find their way to their own proper reality, the reality which is given to the individual – which then would be also the true common reality. Though men come together for business and pleasure, their coming together has no note of united activity; it becomes one-sided, ridiculous, painful, and it is charged with misunderstanding, vanity, futility, falsehood, and stupid hatred. But what the world would really be, the world of the ‘intelligent,’ Flaubert never tells us; in his book the world consists of pure stupidity, which completely misses true reality, so that the latter should properly not be discoverable in it at all; yet it is there; it is in the writer’s language, which unmask the stupidity by pure statement; language, then, has criteria for stupidity and thus also has a part in that reality of the ‘intelligent’ which otherwise never appears in the book.”

#### *STYLE AS MORALITY:*

Matthew Arnold described art or literature as criticism of life; of course, criticism of life made under the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth. For Arnold, the question ‘how to live’, with which literature deals, is itself a moral question. Thus, in his own way, Arnold asserts that art and morality are intimately linked together. Notwithstanding occasional reactions, such as Oscar Wilde’s saying that all art is immoral, no one has ever denied, and everyone has always implied, this intimate relationship between the two. The only debate, and a very long debate, running right from Plato to the present, has been about the manner or method of embodying morality in art. Explicit or implicit, didactic or satiric, allegoric or symbolic, all modes are only experiments in the manner or method of embodying morality in the material body, narrative or dramatic, lyrical or reflective. Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* is not an exception to this general principle of art. However, it is one of those works of art that lean towards and concentrate upon the excellence of art, upon the perfection of style and technique, to reduce, in the process, the subject of the work to the status of an object, an object for the style and technique to work upon. As Henry James has rightly remarked, “a work of art may be markedly open to objection and at the same time be rare in its kind, and that when it is perfect to this point nothing else particularly matters. *Madame Bovary* has a perfection that not only stamps it, but that makes it stand almost alone; it holds itself with such a supreme unapproachable assurance as both excites and defies judgement. For it deals not in the least, as to inapproachability, with things exalted or refined; it only confers on its sufficiently vulgar elements of exhibition a final unsurpassable form.

The form is in *itself* as interesting, as active, as much of the essence of the subject as the idea, and yet so close is its fib and so inseparable its life that we catch it at no moment or any errand of its own. That verily is to be interesting – all round; that is to be genuine and whole. The work is a classic because the thing, such as it is, is ideally *done*, and because it shows that in such doing eternal beauty may dwell.”

Although Eliot ridiculed Arnold’s assertion that poetry (or art) is a criticism of life, properly understood (not deliberately misunderstood as Eliot does), poetic or artistic criticism of life has to flow from form rather than content, from style rather than subject. It is significant to note that the criticism that Arnold ascribes to poetry is to be made, as he insists, under the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth. Here, both beauty and truth relate to the artist’s handling of the subject, not the subject as such. Hence, the morality of art is the morality of life, but morality that gets conveyed through the “treatment”, not through the story or theme. Even Aristotle, when he calls plot the soul of tragedy, means to emphasize the primacy of art over subject or theme, for plot construction is an act of arrangement of parts, and their relation to the whole. What we mean by form in fiction, Aristotle means by plot in drama. Both Aristotle and Arnold, in other words, lay stress on the formal aspect of art, not on its subject or theme. And the morality that the artwork yields comes from the form rather than the subject.

As for the subject, the story of Emma that the novel of Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, narrates can easily be characterized immoral. And yet the novel conveys, through its form, the highest level of morality. Let us see how the artist does it. He gives us the story of a pretty young woman who lives, speaking socially and morally, in a hole. She is ignorant, foolish, flimsy, and disgusted with the boredom of a monotonous life. In order to add colour and jest to her dull life she takes a pair of lovers. But they desert her one by one. In the midst of her bewilderment she sinks deeper and deeper into duplicity, debt and despair. For pursuing her glamorous dreams she even gives up her husband and her child. Finally, she reaches the dead end under debt and despair, left with no choice except swallowing a dose of poison. Her end is pitifully tragic. It gains greater intensity owing to the ironic contrast between her glorious dreams and amorous pursuits and her inglorious and ignoble circumstances. It is rather horrifying that she remains absorbed in her romantic dreams and expectations even while rolling all the time in dust. And herein lies the triumph of Flaubert’s book as the triumph stands. Emma interests us by the nature of her consciousness and the play of her mind, thanks to the “beauty” and “truth” with which the writer invests those sources. To quote James again, “it is not only that they represent *her* state; they are so true, so observed and felt, and especially so shown, that they represent the state, actual or potential, of all persons like her, persons romantically determined. Then her setting, the medium in which she struggles, becomes in its way as important, becomes

eminent with the eminence of art; the tiny world in which she revolves, the contracted cage in which she flutters, is hung out in space for her, and her companions in captivity there are as “true” and “beautiful” as herself.

The restraint and control that Flaubert brings to bear on language is as perfect as in the case of form. And his style, therefore, yields the same message of morality that his form does. Style is the man, and style is the morality. In the case of Flaubert, both are true. And his *Madame Bovary* is an illustration of these dicta. Flaubert is known for having no patience with the distance that has come about between the emotion and its expression, between the object and the word. It is the development of civilization that has caused this separation between the thing and the word, emotion and its expression. As is said in *Madame Bovary* itself, “no one ever has been able to give the exact measure of his needs or his concepts or his sorrows. The human tongue is like a cracked cauldron on which we beat out tunes to set a bear dancing when we would make the stars weep with our melodies.” This assertion shows how strongly Flaubert was committed to the purity of form. His entire life work is said to have been aimed at bridging this distance between object and word, emotion and expression. He demands a new discipline, which he first of all forces upon himself. He wishes to create a style unlike any other known before.

While writing, Flaubert always goes after the accurate expression, examining every shade of meaning available, choosing the right one, placing it at the proper place in the structure of a sentence or a clause, and every word, phrase, and sentence must make use of the full aesthetic, rhythmical, descriptive, and auditive resources of the language. As often quoted, his own definition of style demands a high price from the writer: “I think of a style that would be beautiful... rhythmical like poetry, precise like the language of science, capable of the sustained melody of a violincello and scintillating like fire. A style that would enter the mind like a stiletto and on which our thought could travel as over smooth water, like a boat with a favourable breeze. We must realize that prose has only just begun to discover its possibilities.” Flaubert believes that there is an inner unity between word, thing, and concept, between sentence and thought. He is never satisfied with the view of words as mere symbols to signify objects. As he asserts, “Style is by itself an absolute way of perceiving things.” This intimate union between the word and the thing it names finds its equivalence in the relationship between the sentence and its enunciatory function. The choice and the order of words reveal the state of mind of the characters.

As Flaubert himself stated in one of his letters, “Those fellows still stick to the old notion that form is like a garment. But no! form is the very flesh of thought, as thought is the soul of life.” No wonder that he devoted his life’s work to the inner unity between words and things. Before Flaubert, the best writers had made use of some of the resources of the language, but they had done so mostly



unconsciously. Most had written by instinct, not with full knowledge of the expressive power of words. Flaubert was the first to cast the light of human consciousness on what had remained in darkness. It can be said that he did for language what Descartes did for the Self when it made the foundation of human consciousness. His language sheds a sudden light on the inner life of his characters. We soon discover, in *Madame Bovary*, that Mr. Homais's style is double-faced: his writing style is altogether different from his speaking style, and nothing could be more revealing for the character of this pseudo-literate pharmacist.

Thus, the moral perception as well as moral judgement that Flaubert brings to bear on characters and their feelings and ideas, actions and reactions, are embodied in the style and form he creates and constructs. He picks up each word, places it in its proper place, creates a sentence, and then piles sentence upon sentence to erect the structure of his narrative, submitting in the process his characters as well as their actions under the strict discipline of his style and form. The chastity and purity of both form and style is what constitutes his morality. It is this purity and chastity that brings to the fore, separates for our sight, all the impurities we perceive in his men and women and their movements of mind and body.

### *STRUCTURE OF SYMBOLISM:*

Perfectionist as Flaubert was, he sought to effect unity of structure in his novels, not through incident alone, nor through imagery alone, but through each and every element of the novel. Symbolism is also one of the devices of structure in his work. Derived from the Greek word *symbolon*, meaning mark or emblem, token or sign, symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else. As Coleridge has said, "a symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual." Scales, for example, symbolize justice; the orb and scepter, monarchy and rule; a dove, peace; goat, lust; the lion, strength and courage; the rose, beauty; the lily, purity; the cross, Christianity; etc. Actions and gestures can also be symbolic. The clenched fist symbolizes aggression; beating of the breasts, remorse; raised arms, surrender; etc. A literary symbol combines an image with a concept, words themselves being symbols. It may be public or private, universal or local. Journey, for instance, is symbolic of life. The blood image comes to symbolize guilt in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; storm symbolizes mental disturbance in *King Lear*; weeds symbolize corruption in *Hamlet*. Symbols can also be abstract words, such as facts standing for utilitarianism in *Hard Times*; immobility standing for paralysis of will in *End of the Road*.

Among the novelists Hawthorne and Melville in America, Joyce and Woolf in England, Proust and Kafka in Europe are well-known symbolists. Although Flaubert has not been known as a regular symbolist, committed to this particular

mode of expression, he made use of every possible literary device he found useful in effecting perfect unity in his work. *Madame Bovary* shows how profoundly Flaubert could use symbol as a device of structure in his fictional narratives. As in other novels of his, in this novel also, he has used, for instance, symbols of water and fluidity for the expression of love. He sets up a structure of such symbols to effect the unity of his novel. There are similar structures through imagery, not necessarily symbolic, raised to support the same unity. Let us study here the structure of symbolism. The symbol of water or fluidity for love seems to express the essential truth, that in its nature as well as structure, love is a dissolution of the human personality. The truth of love here is, of course, the one that Flaubert seems to hold. Elsewhere, say in Shelley, love may mean the source of all good that comes out of human personality, something ennobling. In Shakespeare's comedies, love is a cementing force, effecting harmony, refining individual self, almost a symbol of purity.

In Flaubert's novels, including *Madame Bovary*, there is an almost obsessive concern with water, which appears as a dissolving and diluting force. An allied symbol is that of boat. If water dissolves, embraces and fuses, boat defies and conquers the water, even while being carried by it. The boat rides, for instance near the end of *Madame Bovary*, suit the moment when love checks itself rather than overflows. Lost in the happy emptiness of their sensations, the two lovers allow themselves to be carried together by the languid movement of the moment. They do not lose themselves into each other. The flow of the river gives direction to the amorous effusion and orients its slow languor. Water makes them live with each other. It makes them realize that, carried by the universal flux, they nevertheless exist and travel together. A famous passage in *Madame Bovary* describes the refraction of a ray of moonlight in the river as follows: "and the silvery light seemed to spiral to the very bottom, like a headless serpent covered with scales." The serpent is like a river in the river.

In Flaubert, running waters seem to occupy only a minor part of his dreams. They tear apart before they absorb. He seems to respond more spontaneously to the slow *oozing* of one element into another. The contiguity that wraps all things into one single entity fascinates him. The most fascinating is, of course, the movement of water as it originates, its apparition at the surface of a solid object. Certain solids perspire in his work. It is not by chance that *Madame Bovary* takes place in an atmosphere of saturated humidity in which all things, sensations, feelings, houses, and landscapes make up a world of oozing waters. Since it was to be the novel of "lascivious dampness," of "poor hidden souls, damp with melancholy, closed in like the courtyards in the provinces whose walls are covered with moss." As Flaubert himself said, he set out to produce "the musty colour that surrounds the lives of lower insects. Charles Bovary, for example, literally oozes with boredom

and greyness: “the long thin hairs that covered his cheeks like a blond moisture... covered his expressionless face with a pale fuzz.” It is an effective image, showing stupidity grown visible, like a mushroom. Quite often, this mildew does not coagulate enough to become moss or fungus. Instead, the surfaces of things are shown slowly swelling and growing heavy, until a liquid drop comes into being and falls to the ground. This obscure operation of the drop arouses all kinds of dark thoughts in Flaubert’s soul. He never ceases to meditate upon it. The drop, therefore, becomes as recurring a symbol as that of river, or pool, or bath tub.

The drop is indeed the most mysterious entity. It seems to pose a difficulty in accounting for the apparition of a drop on the flat surface of a wall or a rock. Everything on this flat plane seems to prohibit its formation. And yet, there it is, alive, born elsewhere. It seems to become a sign or symbol of the fact that one has to penetrate either beyond the wall or into the drop itself to capture the obscure power that brought it into existence. When Charles falls in love with Emma, he is shown watching the drops of a springlike rain fall on the young woman’s umbrella:

One day, during a thaw, the bark of the trees in the yard was oozing, the snow melted on the roofs of the buildings.... She stood on the threshold; went to fetch her sunshade.... Beneath it, she smiled at the gentle warmth; drops of water fell one by one on the taut silk.

Another time, in a scene of satisfied sensuality, Emma looks at the moonlight which is like “a monstrous candlestick, from which fell drops of melting diamond....” These are the overflowings of a satisfied ripeness, echoing the manifestations of her tenderness. Also, there is the fall, in the night, “of a ripe peach that fell all by itself from the espalier.” The same movement of saturation followed by falling is present in the ripening fruit and the melting snow. During the horseback ride with Rodolphe, for example, immediately prior to her undoing, Emma’s and Rodolphe’s horses “kicked with their hooves fallen pinecones.” Also, at the end of the novel, when Emma runs to Rodolphe’s house to borrow money, “a warm wind blew in her face; melting snow fell drop by drop from the brave buds onto the grass.” Then, the first draft added: “a weakening odor emanated from the damp tree-trunks, and she was about to faint with desire and apprehension.” One can go a step further still: ripeness turns into its own excess, the person bursts open like a rotten fruit, losing himself among all things. Emma, when dead, does not quite disappear for ever: it seemed to Charles that “she slowly expanded beyond her own limits and diffused into all surrounding things, into the silence, into the night... and into the liquid drops that oozed from the walls....” Death and life come together in the same oozing drop.

The symbolism of water in Flaubert’s novel does not stop here. It goes even further. Instead of merely imitating the movement of desire, it can represent its very consciousness. Rather than concentrate on the beginning and end of desire,

imagination will focus on its renewal, its repetition. It is so because any individual drop is only a part of a series of drops. It necessarily lives within the continuity of this successive movement. It does cause, when it drops, a moment of discontinuity, a momentary disruption that suspends the persistent flow of desire. It awakens us from a state of torpor into a semiconsciousness. Letting oneself live, as it were, drop by drop, one feels satisfied. For consciousness gains brief moments of relief while waiting for the next drop of desire to come into being. Thus it does not altogether lose touch with the feeling of satisfaction. This process allows it to recover its strength and self-awareness. When Emma and Leon, for example, are frozen into mutual contemplation, they are shown listening to the running water of a fountain:

The water running in the courtyard, dripping from the pump into the watering can, kept time and created a palpitation.

Here, the regularity of the successive drops gives a semblance of life to feelings numbed by the monotony of desire. The drops at least awaken the consciousness of an inward palpitation and create an obscure feeling of duration. Thus, the pattern of desire, which is rhythmical in its movement of rise and fall, gives shape to the continuously expanding movement of their love. Little shocks of self-awareness, too, keep shaking them, like the movements of the oars that shake a boat on a river:

The heavy boat advanced slowly, shaken by regular movements.... The square oars tinkled against the irons, and, with the breathing of the oarsman, this created an even, regular rhythm into the silence.

Thus desire at last finds its deeper rhythm, its proper beat. Also, water is not merely the element that absorbs and slides; it can also symbolize an inner balance within the human personality. For examples, after having given in to Rodolphe, Emma felt “her heart beginning to beat again, and her blood circulating within her like a river of milk.” At such a moment as this the happy rhythm of the body coincides with the powerful flow of free and life-giving rivers.

The water symbolism in *Madame Bovary* also includes the metaphor of the sea. When Emma finds herself betrayed by Rodolphe and wants to throw herself out of the window of her attic, she feels terribly attracted by the void. She feels possessed as by a liquid form of dizziness: “the ground of the village square seemed to tilt over and climb up the walls....” She was “right at the edge, almost hanging, surrounded by vast space.... She had but to yield, to let herself be taken.” Death for her appears as a passive giving in to this liquid tide which has never ceased to be there, sustaining and absorbing life all along.

What satisfaction she felt, when she leaned at last on something solid, something sturdier than love....

Emma, at this occasion, desperately looks for the rescuing pavement underneath that will stop her from drowning. “She tried naively to find support in something,

in the love of her little girl, the cares of her household.” But these efforts are futile. She knows it, too. If one is unable to find support within oneself, how to find it outside? All that Emma finds within herself are floating masses of feeling, like the ceaseless motion of dark waters, nothing solid or pure. She has no feelings which she can take hold of.

Flaubert, required to explain how feeling can originate, live and die, would say something like the following from *Madame Bovary*:

Literary reminiscences, mystical impulses, carnal ecstasies and ephemeral caresses, all were confused in the immensity of this passion. A heap of experiences, great and small, some ordinary some exotic, some insipid some succulent, reappeared there, giving the passion variety, like those Spanish salads where one finds fruits and vegetables, chunks of goat meat and slices of citron floating about in pale-blond oil.

Here, the flow of inner duration draws together elements of the most diverse origin. It gathers them into a heterogeneous mass. In this case feeling has no synthetic power. It is only the result of a group of impulses which continue living side by side; although they do not assimilate, they continue as long as the feeling lasts. And when the flow of feeling subsides, they get back into their independent existence. At other moments, when the driving force of passion is lacking, psychological changes take place by a kind of fermentation, the reason being the excessively stagnant state of each separate feeling as it remains locked up within itself: “All was mixed together, all these frustrations, all these fermentations turned into bitterness....” “Love burned into melancholy.”

At such moments, one lives passively as if carried by the current: “I am driven from thought to thought, like a piece of dry grass on a river, carried down the stream wave by wave....” Emma’s imagination wanders from page to page of the keepsake albums. No strong tie links together the different images. The present is nowhere enriched by the imagination of the future. At other moments, however, especially when it is directed towards the past, this same coagulating power of dreams can lead to valid and stable combinations. The stream of memory brings together experience of different times and places. This leads to a drowsy state of mind in which time and space are blurred. At times, this may happen before falling asleep. For example, just before dropping off, Emma dreams that she falls asleep in some other place, in a luxurious house that quickly grows into a reality:

For, in a double and simultaneous perception, her thoughts mixed with the things that surrounded her, the cotton curtains became silk, the candlesticks on the chimney became silver, etc.

In this confusion of places and settings, the illusion is successful for an instant. More often, it is some exterior motion that causes the necessary drowsiness. For

instance, the rocking motion of a carriage in which a character is traveling. Charles Bovary, seated in the cart that takes him, in the early hours of the morning, to the farm of old Rouault. Or, when Emma, in the carriage taking her home, after the dance at Vaulyessard. Or when Emma in the Yonville coach after her days of lovemaking with Leon. In the case of Charles Bovary, the sensations that are tightly fused together are more specific than in other cases:

He would fall again into a tepid drowsiness, in which his most recent sensation came back to him. He saw himself *at the same time*, both husband and student, lying on his own bed beside his wife as he had just left it, and walking busily about in an operating room. He felt under his elbow the sensation of a desk in an amphitheatre which was also his pillow at home.... He smelled the odor of cataplasms and of his wife's hair.... And it all mingled into one whole seeking for something with an uneasy longing, unable to lift its lead-weighted wings, while the confused memory turned round and round in place below.

What is actually being conveyed here is that Charles no longer feels any desire towards his first wife, who is constantly complaining of being ill. Elsewhere, in a more awake state of consciousness, subterranean relationships of the same type will be expressed by metaphors. But, in the present instance, we are in an area preceding that of metaphor, on the level where all substance is experienced as identical.

Thus, most characters in *Madame Bovary* seem to exist in a state of drugged semi-awareness. They “stagger around like people suffering from ex-haustain,” overcome by some “irresistible torper like that of someone who has drunk a deadly beverage.” They are bewitched “with a kind of mist in their head,” which “neither the priest nor the doctor are able to dispel.” All these dazed characters end by devouring themselves out of sheer sloth. They collapse for good when they achieve their own deaths. For example, Emma is not a victim of the mechanical power of money. She is defeated by weakness, by passivity, and most of all by lies, lies that are “like quicksand: one single step taken in that direction, and the heart-itself is conquered.” Her death is like a pathological drowning in quicksand: “it seemed to her that the stairs [of Rodolphe's house] gave way under her feet;” the furrows of the field look “like gigantic waves that broke all around her. The earth under her feet was weaker than water, and she was surprised not to be sinking away in it...” “She felt her soul escape.” Death is the final dissolution, prefigured in sleep, sensation, and love. One says farewell, relinquishes all possessions. The characters in *Madame Bovary* have been engaged in dying: their lives have been like a succession of fainting spells. As for death, it is called “a continuous fainting.”

Thus, the entire narrative moves through a series of metaphors, symbolizing the inner world of the novel's characters. All descriptions of events, places, movements, scenes, get converted into symbolic settings, states, and perceptions of things. We see being raised in the narrative a massive structure of symbols which provides us insight into the mental states, moral condition, spiritual states of the characters reflected through the concrete depiction of everyday reality. Hence, nothing in the novel can be read in the manner of realistic fiction. Flaubert takes us always beyond concrete surfaces into the plasmatic world of the mind.

### *PATTERN OF IMAGERY:*

Linked with the structure of symbolism in *Madame Bovary* is the pattern of imagery, which again serves the purpose of providing the novel a unity through a structure of images. At times, there is also an overlapping, because some images are symbolic, but not all images are symbols. At places, even passages without images act as symbolic descriptions. Other places, there is a cluster of images suggesting, by association, subtle movements of a character's mind. It is, therefore, important that we look beyond the symbols we have just traced, into images that abound in the novel's narrative, to make a collective sense of their contribution to the unity of the work. It will show how, through images, characters and incidents, themes and motives are woven together in a texture, which coordinates with the structure of events and relations of characters. All elements of the novel, thus, are woven together into one unified whole. Unfolding the texture, thread by thread, image by image, symbol by symbol, shows how rich the whole fabric of the novel is. The movement of the narrative is accompanied by a density of imagistic texture which carries several ingredients in the solution of the narrative stream.

As D. L. Demorest has rightly observed, "Flaubert's images are chosen to convey a precise impression of a character, a situation, a moment, or a mood." Many images in *Madame Bovary* are associated with the psychological analysis of the characters. For instance, days resemble one another like waves, making the monotony of life – like Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." Love is described as unquenchable like thirst; happiness dries up like water does. Emma's love diminishes beneath her "like the water of a river which is absorbed by its bed." Images also carry subjective values, related to individual characters. For example, when Leon looks at Emma, he feels that his soul "fleeing toward her, broke like a wave against the contours of her head, and was drawn irresistibly down into the whiteness of her breast." There are also images of the objective world. For example, we see Emma's glance drowned in lassitude. Also, as she goes toward her downfall in the forest: "through her veil... her face appeared in a bluish transparency as if she were swimming through azure waves." When Emma gives herself to Rodolphe she feels "her blood flow through her flesh like a river of milk"

and “love so long pent up, erupted in joyous outbursts.” Further, as she rides towards the forest, her imagination transforms the mist in the valley into one of those La martinian lake of which she dreams:

From the height on which they were the whole valley seemed an immense pale lake sending off its vapour into the air. Clumps of trees here and there stood out like black rocks, and the tall lines of poplars that rose above the mist were like a beach stirred by the wind.

Several of such images from the objective world express the progress of love that Emma undergoes, rising and falling like the waves, striking against the rocks of reality, withdrawing and dying down into the calm sea. The mist and fog and similar images reveal the uncertain and vague affairs that she has as well as her vague and tentative emotions. In fact, Flaubert makes such an abundant use of imagery that perhaps nothing moves in the novel, and nothing gets revealed, without the most expressive medium of imagery. Analogies abound, comparisons cluster, metaphors manipulate, symbols suggest, all deployed to lay bare the entangled emotions and distracted dreams of the novel’s characters as they are caught up in the mist and fog of their falling fortunes.

One of the powerful sets of images relates to shipwreck, which reveals Emma’s situation in love with Leon. The bed on which the lovers drift unconsciously toward shipwreck is a “large mahogany bed shaped like a boat.” The inevitable shipwreck takes place. As Emma leaves Rouen for the last time she passes in front of the cathedral just when people are leaving after the Vespers service. The mystic verger appears to her at the end of her affair like a rock of retribution upon which all her hopes lie shattered:

People were coming out after vespers; the crowd flowed out through the three portal like a river through the three arches of a bridge, and in the middle, more immobile than a rock, stood the verger.

We are at once reminded here of the majestic verger, who had appeared to Emma at the beginning of her affair with Leon like a sort of life preserver, to which her honour should have clung. The same image of verger serves two different functions as metaphor in keeping with the two different situations of Emma’s love affair. Desperate as she is now at the end of the affair, “swept away in her memories as in a raging tempest,” she suddenly thinks of Rodolphe. She rushes to him. “She was irresistible, with a tear trembling in her eye, like a raindrop in a blue flowercup, after the storm.” But when her supreme effort with him does not succeed, Emma, now stunned, crosses the fields and “the earth seemed to her immense brown waves breaking into foam.” These lines immediately bring to mind the image of the pitching ship with huge black waves cited above. It already prefigures the following image of her last terrestrial voyage: “the black cloth decorated with silver



tears, flapped from time to time in the wind, revealing the coffin underneath. The tired bearers walked more slowly, and the bier advanced jerkily, like a boat that pitches with every wave.”

These images make us see more clearly why Emma’s “journey to Vaubyessard had made a gap in her life, like the huge crevasses that thunderstorm will sometimes carve in the mountains, in the course of a single night.” We can also see now more clearly why love is spoken of as overflowing in a raging torrent, or falling on life like a tempest from heaven. We are told peace is more vague than the ocean, and Emma’s room becomes a dark ocean. Finally, there is the passage describing Emma’s life after Vaubyessard. It ironically fuses the present and future in showing her scanning the solitude of her life with desperate eyes like a sailor in distress. Thus, sea, ship, and storm images reveal it all about Emma’s journey of life.

Another set of images borrowed from the insect world in Flaubert’s novel play an important role in revealing things to us in a clearer light. Note, for instance, the following:

One day when, in view of her departure, she was trying a drawer, something pricked her finger. It was a wire of her wedding bouquet; the orange blossoms were yellow with dust and the silver-bordered satin ribbons frayed at the edges. She threw it into the fire. It flared up more quickly than dry straw. Then it was like a red bush in the cinders, slowly shrinking away. She watched it burn. The little pasteboard berries burst, the wire twisted, the gold lace melted and the shriveled paper petals, fluttering like black butterflies at the back of the stove, at last flew up the chimneys.

Here is expressed through images the end of her feeling of duty or affection towards Charles, at the moment of their departure from Tostes. Similarly, the following passage marks the end of all vestiges of conjugal fidelity as Emma embarks on her ultimate love affair with Leon. After having conveyed to him through a letter that her duty stands between them, she listens to another voice, and goes off with him in the closed carriage:

One time... in the open country... a bare hand appeared under the yellow canvas curtain, and threw out some scraps of paper that scattered in the wind, alighting further off like white butterflies on a field of red clover all in bloom.

Putting these passages together one can appreciate the writer’s skill at valorizing purely realistic details, so that even the slightest notation gets charged with significance and suggestion. Once again, the image does it all, the butterflies change from black to white, as the end of the marriage changes to the blooming of a love affair.

Flaubert's narration does not move without images. In fact, every small item of nature, every wear one uses, every piece of landscape one walks upon or even looks at, nothing goes without carrying one or another symbolic significance. Reading *Madame Bovary* one cannot follow anything without working through the maze of images spread over the tracks that carry the carriage of Emma's affairs. Only a refraction through these images can make clear the inner journey that the characters cover from one end to another. To cite a small example, we can note how Emma's dancing slippers, soiled by wax and dust after the ball at Vaubyessard, become symbolic. We recall here how, before her fall, she was afraid to dirty them in the pools of water left in the hoof prints of the cattle. Later on we see Justin dreaming as he wipes off the mud left from her meetings with Leon. One can see the significance of soiling here: her soul is soiled now after the fall just as her shoes are. Another time, when Emma has the audacity of going to Rodolphe's house in broad daylight: "but when the cow plank was taken up, she had to follow the stone wall alongside the river: the bank was slippery and to keep from falling, she had to catch hold of the tufts of faded wallflowers. She went across the ploughed fields, stumbling, her thin shoes sinking in the heavy mud". The same faded flowers appear again on latter occasions. Faded flowers or dead leaves, they convey the same message. Finally on fleeing from Rodolphe the day she poisons herself, "she passed back through the long alley, stumbling against the heap of dead leaves scattered by the wind."

Cactus is another important image which appears several times conveying the significance it carries in the affairs of Emma's life. In the course of their first idyll, Leon brings Emma a cactus, which causes her to prick her finger. It reminds us of her wedding bouquet which, too, pricks her finger when she is about to leave Tostes. Emma tells Leon about these plants when she finds him again after a long period of separation from him: "the cold killed them last winter". A similarly significant image is that of the barometre on the wall. When Rodolphe comes into the room to set in motion his plan of seduction: "the gilding of the barometre, on which the rays of the sun fell, shone in the looking-glass." But after the disastrous conclusion of the operation on the club-footed boy, Charles is disheartened and asks his wife to kiss him: "'stop it!' she cried with a terrible look. And rushing from the room, Emma closed the door so violently that the barometre fell from the wall and smashed on the floor."

As imagery reveals the states of mind of various characters in different situations at different points of time, so does it also create the mood and the atmosphere in the novel. The dominant mood of the novel being that of doom, several images are used at different times to generate and reinforce that sense of doom. For instance, there are images of waves and ships, wrecks and tempests, which contribute to the general atmosphere of doom in the novel. Then, there is the

image of desolate garden at Tostes. Emma sees that garden on a fine winter day, the grape vine “like a great sick serpent under the coping of the wall, along which, on drawing near, one saw the many-footed wood-lick crawling. Under the spruce by the hedgerow the cure in the three-cornered that reading his breviary had lost his right foot, and the vary plaster, scaling off with the frost, had left white scabs on his face.” During the move from Tostes to Yonville, “the plaster cure..., thrown out of the carriage by a particularly severe joust, had broken into the thousand pieces on the pavement of Quincampoix!” In the outskirts of Tostes, where Emma walks to assuage her lassitude, the empty plains become symbolic of her life: “occasionally there came gusts of wind, breezes from the sea rolling in one sweep over the plateau of Caux country, which brought to these fields a salt freshness.”

The same is true of the sky after Leon’s departure, which is empty except in the direction of the setting sun. A symmetrical parallel to the breaking of the little plaster cure is the escape of Emma’s little greyhound, Djali, who accompanies her on her monotonous walks across the sterile plateau. Often, “noting the melancholy face of the graceful animal, who yawned slowly, she softened, and comparing her to herself, spoke to her aloud as to somebody in pain whom one is consoling;” “her thoughts... wandered at random, like the greyhound, who ran round and round in the fields, yelping after the yellow butterflies, chasing the field mice and nibbling the poppies on the edge of a wheat field.” Then the same fate which overtakes the plaster cure catches the romantically named greyhound: it leaps out of the coach and flees across the fields. Emma is furious to see her dog flee. She weeps. They search for the dog everywhere, but he is lost for ever. Something like this would hardly be probable in real life, and would decidedly not have been included by the novelist, had he not wished to give it a symbolic value. The plaster cure certainly represents Emma’s virtue, and the greyhound, the monotonous but nevertheless free, foot-loose and relatively happy period of Emma’s life at Tostes.

Thus, imagery in *Madame Bovary* performs multiple functions. It serves local function of illuminating a situation, a state of mind, or an event. It also serves the larger purpose of creating the mood and atmosphere appropriate for the novel’s plot. In other words, Flaubert uses it as a device of characterization as well as of plot or structure. Similarly, he also uses imagery as a major device for controlling the mood and atmosphere necessary for putting across the impression of life that the narrative embodies. In this overriding role assigned to imagery Flaubert’s work is more of a prose poem than a conventional novel of adventure or of morals and manners, which relies mainly on incident and character, not on style and structure, much less on a device like imagery. For a proper understanding of this work, therefore, it is very important to keep track of the images and their immediate significance for the unfolding of characters and incidents in terms of the novel’s express purpose.

### EMMA AS CHARACTER

Flaubert's heroine, Emma Bovary, is, by general consensus, considered one of the most masterful portraits of a woman in literature. It is known to be the most living and the truest to life. Notwithstanding Eliot's pronouncement on Hamlet, she may be rightfully designated as the Monolisa of literature. In terms of art, the same can be said of the novel in which she appears. As Dupanloup told Dumas, her portrait is "a masterpiece, yes, a true masterpiece, for those who have been confessors in the provinces." Of course, Flaubert replaced the confessor's experience by his artistic conscience. Perhaps the creation of this masterpiece would not have been possible, had Flaubert not identified himself with Emma Bovary and shared her existence. He must have relied for her creation, not merely on the recollections of his soul, but also on the recollections of his own flesh. Although no character in *Madame Bovary*, Emma included, is drawn without the sharp tinge of irony, she still receives a special treatment from Flaubert, not without an element of indulgence.

Like Don Quixote, Emma is a true heroine. As Brunetiere said. "Emma's character represents something "strong and more refined than the commonplace" without which great novel is not possible. "In the nature of this woman, commonplace as she is, there is something extreme and, for that reason, rare. It is the refinement of her senses." Another critic, Faguet, remarks, "Mme. Bovary is not exactly a sensuous person; she is above all a 'romantic', a mental type, as the psychologists would call it; her first fault seems from an unbridled imagination rather than from a lack of control over the senses. The reason for the first downfall is her desire to know love; in her second downfall, she is moved by the desire to give herself to the man she loves." Thibaudet considers Brunetiere right, Faguet wrong. In his view, "Emma is first and foremost a person of sensuous nature; she is like the artist in that she is endowed with an unusual degree of sensuality. This is why, as an artist, Flaubert can identify with her and assert: I myself am Mme. Bovary." Whenever Emma is seen in purely sensuous terms, Flaubert speaks of her with a delicate, almost religious feeling, the way Milton speaks of Eve. He relinquishes his cold and detached tone and shifts to a lyrical voice, indicating that the author is using the character as a substitute for himself. As an example of this lyrical identification between Emma and the author, Thibaudet refers to the scene when Emma has first given herself to Rodolphe:

The shades of night were falling: the horizontal sun passing between the branches dazzled the eyes. Here and there around her in the leaves or on the ground, trembled luminous patches, as if humming-birds flying about had scattered their feathers. Silence was every where; something seemed to come forth from the trees. She felt her

heartbeat return, and the blood coursing through her flesh like a river of milk. Then, far away, beyond the wood, on the other hills, she heard a vague prolonged cry, a voice which lingered, and in silence she heard it mingling like music with the last pulsations of her throbbing nerves. Rodolphe, a cigar between his lips, was mending with his penknife one of the two broken bridles.

The passage does not seem to prove to everyone that the author identifies himself here with the heroine of the novel. The passage runs smooth, but only as a description, evoking a scene, also a sensation in Emma, but also showing the man with the cigar. It seems objective but not subjective; evocative but not emotional; imagistic but not impressionistic. Flaubert's statement about his being himself Bovary seems to have inspired Thibaudet and several other critics to insist the identification between the author and the character.

Thibaudet seems to make better sense when he observes: "Mme. Bovary is not simple. Her sensuality is combined with a vulgar imagination and a considerable degree of naiveté – or, in other words, of stupidity. Flaubert needed a character of this kind to satisfy his poetical as well as his critical instinct, his sense of beauty as well as his taste for a sad, grotesque incongruity." Thibaudet makes a comparison between Emma Bovary and Don Quixote. Both the characters, in his view, are similar; and so are the attitudes of the two writers towards their classic creations. The comparison that he makes deserves complete citation:

Emma, like Don Quixote, doesn't place her desires and the things she desires on the same plane. Emma's sensuous desires, like Don Quixote's generous fantasies, are in themselves magnificent realities in which Flaubert and Cervantes project the best part of themselves. They admire desire and abandonment, but they have contempt for the things desired, the miserable bottle that comes out of a ridiculous pharmacy. Neither have any illusions about the value of the object desired by the imagination, and one half of their artistic nature – the realist half – mercilessly paints these mediocre and derisive objects.

Except for her sensuous desire, which is very much poetic, Emma is just mediocre in everything else. Flaubert makes it clear more than once: "she was incapable of understanding what she did not experience, or of believing anything that did not take on a conventional form." At heart, she still remains a Norman peasant, "callous, not very responsive to the emotions of others, like most people of peasant stock whose souls always retain some of the coarseness of their father's hands."

Emma is more ardent than passionate. She loves life, its pleasures. She likes love itself much more than she loves a man. In other words, she is made to have lovers rather than a lover. No doubt she loves Rodolphe with all the fervour of her

body. She always experiences with him a sense of self-fulfillment. However, after Rodolphe deserts her, her illness is enough to cure her of this love. Also, she does not die from love, but from weakness and a serious inability to look ahead. She is rather naïve both in love and business; it makes her an easy prey to deceit in love as well as business. She is given to living in the present and is never able to resist the slightest impulse. Even when she tries to resist her temptations, it is only an outward effort, never touching her inner drives, which actually rule her. In Hamlet's terminology, she is decidedly "a passions' slave", as Flaubert depicts some of the essential traits of Emma's character,

The housewives admired her thrift, the patients her politeness, the poor her charity. But she was eaten up with desires, with rage, with hate. The rigid folds of her dress covered tormented heart of which her chaste lips never spoke. She was in love with Leon, and sought solitude that she might more easily delight in his image. His physical presence troubled voluptuousness of this meditation. Emma thrilled at the sound of his step; then in his presence the emotion subsided, and afterwards there remained in her only an immense astonishment that ended in sorrow."

It is generally asserted in critical writings that Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, subjects himself to the most scathing self-criticism. In this critical view, Emma is said to symbolize the double illusion which the writer had only recently overcome. First, the illusion that things change for the better in time, an illusion as necessary to life as water is to plants: "She did not believe that things could remain the same in different places, and since the portion of her life that lay behind her had been bad, no doubt that which remained to be lived would be better." Then, the same illusion in spatial terms: "The closer things were to her, the more her thoughts turned away from them. All her immediate surroundings, the boring countryside, the stupid petty bourgeois, the mediocrity of existence, seemed to her to be exceptions in the world, the particular fate of which she was the victim, while an immense domain of passion and happiness stretched out beyond, as far as the eye could reach." She marries Charles just because he represents for her the outside world, which she wanted to see, to experience. Rightly, when she is married to him, she dreams of other places. It is true then that she is a sensuous woman as well as a woman of imagination. But she is also something else besides.

Emma is also the person without luck. From one point of view, *Madame Bovary* can be considered the novel of failure and bad luck, of a particularly unfortunate confluence of circumstances. When Charles Bovary, Emma's husband, says at the time of his wife's death, "Fate willed it that way," the reader acquiesces, and feels he has been reading the story of an ill-starred woman. Thibaudet asserts, "*Madame Bovary*, like *Manon Lescaut*, is a novel of love; like *Don Quixote*, it is a novel of the fictional imagination – but, aside from this, it is

also, like Voltaire's *Candide*, a novel of fate." By its very logic, a novel of fate or destiny can only exist in the absence of a strong will power. This seems true in Emma's case. She may not be a victim of circumstances like Hardy's *Tess*, but she is certainly driven into situations which dominate her life rather than her will. She did not seem to be sustained by any will power, either from within herself, or from her husband. She seems to be surrounded by the wills of others. First of all, we see the will to seduce her in the person of Rodolphe. We also see the will to despoil her in Lheureux. In place of will power, she has plenty of passion, plenty of excitement, and plenty of selfishness to drive a person to criminal deeds.

She may be a creature of passion, she does not kill herself out of love but for money. Also, she is not punished as an adulterous woman, but as an untidy housekeeper. Such an ending has surprised several critics. In their view, the two parts – the early and the later – of the novel are not consistent with each other. But there are others, such as Thibaudet, who do not agree to this view. For them, "logical consistency in fiction is a certain road to disaster; there is no need for the two parts to be logically connected. In the flesh and the blood of a living creature, they are perfectly coherent. For woman, beauty is first of all a matter of décor and, for the bourgeois daughter of a farmer, the substance of life is likely to consist of a rather showy kind of cheap silverware....In the nineteenth century this was a fundamental theme of the realistic novel. In the bourgeois world (as well as the other), love and money go together just as closely as love goes together with ambition, pride and the affairs of the king in classical tragedy. In the final part of the novel, Leon and Lheureux are the two extremities of the candle, that Emma is burning at both ends." One can, of course, see an immediate link between love and lucre in Emma's life. The novel makes it clear quite early in the narrative. It can be seen prefigured in the evening at Vaubeysard.

At this occasion the roles of Emma's satin shoes "were yellowed with the slippery wax of the dancing floor. Her heart resembled them, in its contact with wealth, something had rubbed off on it that could not be removed." Also, in her schoolgirl dreams, Emma had dreamt of love as an almost otherworldly experience. The ball at the chateau convinces her that the world of the keepsakes and the novels really exists, which she identifies with the world of wealth. She is left with the empty cigar case which she has picked up and by means of which, as with an archeological piece, she reconstructs a world of love and luxury, joined like body and soul in the dream of an ideal life. "In her desire, she would confuse the sensuous pleasure with the delicacy of sentiments." Emma's life would follow, therefore, a parallel course on the financial and on the sentimental plane. The disappointments of the one coincide with troubles of the other. Rodolphe and Lheureux are placed on either side of her life to exploit and destroy her. They destroy her, not out of any malice, but because they act in accordance with the law

of nature and society. They act according to the “right” of the seducer, which in France is always backed by established custom, and by the “right” of the usurer which is mistaken for law. After Rodolphe’s letter, Emma falls ill and almost dies; after Lheureux’s restraint, she dies in fact. Thus, the two faces of her destiny are symmetrical. This destiny is all of a piece. “The desires, the longing for money, and the melancholy of passion all blended into one suffering, and instead of putting it out of her mind, she made her thoughts cling to it, urging herself to pain and seeking everywhere the opportunity to revive it. A poorly served dish, a half open door would aggravate her; she bewailed the clothes she did not have, the happiness she had missed, her overexalted dreams, her too cramped home.”

It can be concluded that like Sancho Panza, Mme. Bovary is so real that she transcends reality and becomes a type. The victim of love and the victim of usury may not seem a harmonious combination in the view of certain critics. It is not improbable, however, that a creature of fiction should become a type when it exhibits such anomalies of character. It is perhaps precisely for these anomalies that Emma becomes a type, just as Hamlet does, or Lear does, or Isabel does, or Hester does. In fact, it is only when we see these two images of Emma, as if through a binocular, that a perspective of real depth of her characters is achieved. She remains one of the most memorable and most artistically drawn characters in fiction. There must be something in this character that keeps drawing to it, generation after generation, the mass of readers in so many languages. That something has to be essentially human which remains unaffected by the vicissitudes of time and place. The credit for this immortality of Emma goes to none else but her creator, Flaubert.

### *CHARLES BOVARY AS CHARACTER*

Next to Emma Bovary, the most important character in *Madame Bovary* is, of course, Emma’s husband, Charles Bovary. We meet the young Charles Bovary, as the novel opens with a description of his life at school; he is a docile and well-behaved but awkward boy, a hopelessly mediocre nonentity, rather stupid, thoroughly undistinguished, tame, passive, submissively destined to follow step by step a previously mapped out path or to walk in the footsteps of his guides. Charles is the son of a somewhat rakish army surgeon. But he does not show any of his father’s dash or vices. It is only because of his mother’s savings that he is able to undertake his rather pale studies at Rouen, leading to a painfully earned medical degree. Faced with the task of choosing a town for setting-up his practice as a doctor, he selects Tostes, a smallish place not far from Dieppe. He gets married to a much older widow rumoured to have a small yearly income. He allows himself to be pushed into such a marriage without even seeming to realize how remote he remains from happiness.



As a stroke of luck (or ill luck), one day he finds himself summoned to Les Bertaux, a farm located at a good six miles' distance from his home. Here, the job to be done is to fix a broken leg of a wealthy farmer, a widowed father of a single daughter. On first seeing the farmer's daughter, Charles gets into the habit of returning to the Bertaux farm more often than his attendance on his patient required. In fact, even after his patient is cured, his visits to the farm continue to be as regular as before. The practice of visiting the farm grows into a habit which he finds to be a delightful distraction from his dull routine. Not unwelcome to an enamoured and infatuated Charles, who finds himself to have fallen for Emma, the death of his first wife does not cause much of a shock. Emma soon becomes the second and only Madame Bovary. Bewitched by Emma's beauty, who lends elegance to his crammed house, Charles buys her a second-hand carriage which will allow her to travel on the neighbouring roads whenever she so wished. For the first time in his life he feels really happy. After long day's work with the patients, he finds joy and peace on return home. He feels truly in love with Emma and only wishes this bourgeois and tranquil happiness to continue forever. Emma, however, has known headier dreams. She had dreamt of happiness, but she discovers it was not the one that Charles could ever provide. She realizes that right in their honeymoon days.

From the very opening descriptions of Charles and his family, it becomes clear to the reader that Flaubert means to target mediocrity and foolishness as the key objects of his irony. A single trivial but typical example can illustrate the involuted and anxious nature of Flaubert's ironic treatment of Charles and others. Having failed his first medical exam, Charles set to work, learned all the questions by heart, and passed on the second attempt with a reasonable mark. That full stop ends the paragraph; the next passes on to Charles's future. Here, the irony of the very first sentence is easily identified. The irony becomes all the more clear when we compare the presumed elaborateness of the festivities and Charles's mediocre success. An outstanding example of Flaubert's ironic handling of Charles is the final scene between Rodolphe and Charles. As Anthony Thoreby has observed:

When the husband acknowledges as a kind of death sentence the fatality which the lover has glibly used as a convenient cliché of love, Even the traditional resolution which man finds in the all – forgiving acceptance of his destiny is sacrificed to the still in-inexorable demands of Flaubert's realism, and reduced to the level of Charles' mediocre intelligence and Rodolphe's cheap sensitivity.

Thus, Flaubert, through his subtle use of irony, prevents the reader from accepting as such either Charles' pronouncement (it's the fault of fate) or Rodolphe's assumption that Emma's fate was his own doing. Also, it once again confirms that Charles is a conventional type of a mediocre person who has measured his "life

with coffee spoons.” Charles’ easy use of cliché at a time when he should have been more serious, the time of the death of his wife whom, despite all her failings, he said he loved. We have not been accustomed from the very opening of the novel to grant Charles any profundity of mind. Hence we can not accept his cliché as the truth of the novel, as some critics have tended to do, considering *Madame Bovary* a novel of fate or destiny. Had we been tempted to think of Emma’s as a tragic fate, we are made to question, through Flaubert’s irony, our reactions by the very fact that Charles says so. Thus, the novel poses at every step a resistance to the easy step of perceiving in every failure (of Emma or Charles) the hand of fate.

### *MADAME BOVARY AS AN ANTI-NOVEL*

About half a century ago, there came up a lot of talk about the “anti-novel”, especially in America, although the expression was already in use as early as the seventeenth century. Charles Sorel (1600-1674), considered to be one of the founders of the realist novel in France, applied the term to the novels in the tradition of the Spanish novel, *Don Quixote*, by Cervantes. Since the novels in this tradition were written in reaction against the Romanesque excesses of current fiction, they came to be known as “anti-novel” novels. In the twentieth century, the term was brought back into fashion by Jean-Paul Sartre, a French writer and philosopher of existentialism. The occasion for this was Sartre’s remarks on Nathalie Sarraute’s *Portrait of a Man Unknown*: “the anti-novels keep the appearance and outline of ordinary novels....But they do so in order to undermine the genre all the more effectively; they set out to undo the novel on its own terms; while seemingly constructing one, they destroy it before our eyes....” This, he adds, indicates the “the novel is reflecting upon its own nature.” Extending the meaning of the term somewhat further, Jean Rousset says that “the anti-novel occurs whenever the novel loses faith in itself, becomes critical and self-critical, wishes to break with the established norms of the medium. A ‘crisis’ of the novel then takes place; today we have a crisis of the fictional character, of its ‘psychology’, even of the subject-matter. If by ‘subject’ we mean the narrative, the plot, the sum of events that take place in the novel, it becomes clear that this ‘subject’ tends increasingly to stand apart from the actual work, or even to disappear altogether.”

In the context of the anti-novel no one can ignore the importance of Flaubert. Brought up from his childhood on the greatest ancestor of anti-novels, *Don Quixote*, Flaubert became the purest of novelist critics. As he expressed his ambition as novelist at the start of *Madame Bovary*, “What I deem beautiful, what I would want to do, is a book about nothing, a book without reference outside itself..., a book that would be almost without a subject, or in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible.” Also, a little later he argues,

“if the book on which I am working with such difficulty can be brought to a successful conclusion, its existence will at least have proven the following two truths which I consider to be self-evident: first, that poetry is entirely subjective, that in literature, there is no such thing as a beautiful subject – hence, that Yvetot will do just as well as Constantinople; and that, consequently, it makes no difference what one writes about.” Thus, Flaubert can be legitimately called the first in date of the non-figurative novelists. In the case of *Madame Bovary*, the subject and the psychology of the novel do play their part, although a muted one, in the concert of the novel, which could not exist without them. And yet, they are meant to be ignored and follow what Flaubert has intended to be followed: “As for the story, the plot of a novel – I could not care less.” More follows on the subject: “The works of art that I admire above all others are those in which there is an *excess* of Art. In a picture, it is Painting that I like; in a poem, Poetry.” Flaubert’s articles of faith could be completed with another statement: “What shocks me in my friends Saint-Beuve and Taine is that they do not pay sufficient attention to Art, to the work in itself, to its construction, its style, all that makes up its beauty.” Obviously, when it comes to the novel, Flaubert would prefer technique and style to character and plot. He himself seemed to invite us to read *Madame Bovary* as a sort of sonata.

No wonder then that when Flaubert came to write *Madame Bovary*, he tried, as he tells us, to make it as impersonal and objective as possible. Here, the point of view and the subjective vision of the characters play a considerable part at the expense of straightforward factual reporting. We can recall how in the opening and closing chapters Charles Bovary is used as a reflector to show one side of Emma, and how in the middle chapters Emma is placed at the centre to give a shift to the point of view in the novel. As a result of Flaubert’s new technique, the importance of the slower movements increase as the outside impartial observer relinquishes his privileges, to a greater or lesser degree. In *Madame Bovary*, this slowness of tempo combined with the use of inner perspective constitute the novelty and the originality of Flaubert’s fictional work. He is rightly called the novelist of the inner vision and of a slow, almost stagnant action. As he reveals in his letters, there is no action; no movement; there are “fifty pages without a single event.” Flaubert’s overriding concern with the shape of his novel, rather than with its subject, stems from his awareness of the difference between him and his predecessors. He generally has Balzac in mind, for whom all is action, drama, and suspense. He never forgets the difference there is between his art and that of Balzac: “One must sing in one’s own voice: and mine will never be dramatic or seductive. Besides, I am growing more and more convinced that all this is a matter of style, or, rather, of appearance, a way of presenting things.” Therefore, the best he can do is to try to maintain a balance between action and inaction, between facts and dreams: “It will

be a difficult task to make an almost equal division between adventure and thought”.

It is interesting to note that the dreamy nature of his heroine in *Madame Bovary* and the natural bent of his literary talent pull in the same direction. The nature of Flaubert’s genius is such that he prefers the reflected consciousness of an event to the event itself. Similarly, he prefers the dream of passion to the actual expression, and look of action to its presence. This is precisely where Flaubert’s art really comes into its own. The most beautiful aspect of his work bears little resemblance to ordinary fiction. It is found not in the incidents, but in what lies between incidents, those wide empty regions, the vast areas of stagnation in which no movement takes place. To be able to charge emptiness with so much of substance, to conjure up such fullness out of nothing, is the miraculous art of the novelist. Thus, Flaubert reserves the conventional form of the fictional narrative, and makes his novel, in that process, the anti-novel. Another important consequence that follows this reversal: in an objective narrative written in the third person, it magnifies the importance of the character’s point of view and stresses the optics of his “thought” – the stage on which everything that matters takes place. Thus, Flaubert is rightly called the greatest novelist of inaction, of envy, of stagnation. Any significant innovation in art (or science) has to set aside, even reverse, what has been there before. Flaubert does it with the novel. He rejects the idea of novel as entertainment. He also rejects the idea of novel as social protest. Finally, he also rejects the idea of novel as a moral fable. All these forms of the novel had one thing in common: to be committed to something outside of itself. Flaubert reversed it. He made the novel self-conscious. He committed the novel to itself. He made it critical and self-critical. He stands for art in the novel in the same manner in which the votaries of art for art’s sake stand in poetry. He is thus the prose counterpart of the aesthetes in poetry.

### **BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING**

1. Erich Auerbach. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. by Willard R. Trask. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953.
2. Henry James. *Madame Bovary*, with critical introduction. London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902.
3. Harry Levin. *The Gates of Horn: a study of Five French Realists*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963.
4. Percy Lubbock. *The Craft of Fiction*. New York: The Viking Press, 1924.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre. *Search for a Method*. Trans. by Hazel A. Barnes. New York: Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1963.

6. Stephen Ullmann. *Style in the French Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.

### *QUESTION BANK*

1. Examine the case of Flaubert as a realist in the context of the novel.
2. Discuss Flaubert as Novelist's Novelist.
3. Write a note on the narrative technique of *Madame Bovary*.
4. Examine *Madame Bovary* as a symbolist novel.
5. write a note on the character of Emma Bovary.
6. Highlight the role of imagery in *Madame Bovary*.

**J.M. SYNGE**  
**The Playboy of**  
**the Western World**

## Unit-9

### J M Synge and His Age

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Born on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1871 at Rathfarnham near Dublin, Synge came from an Anglo-Irish Protestant family. The class in which he was born was peculiar for its complexities. The Synge family belonged to the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, which were not in any sense the celebrated country gentlemen. Some of the income of the Synge family did come from the land but they were essentially middle class professional people. In the 1880s when Synge was growing up, the two main political issues in Ireland were the home rule and land reform. They were threatened by both as also with the growing power of the Catholic Nationalists. With the disestablishment of the Protestant church and the establishment of unions, political issues were inextricably mixed with religious fanaticism. The papers were singing praises of Daniel O'Connell whom the home rule supporters considered their liberator and champion. O'Connell was being glorified after he had been dead for forty years. It was at such a time that Synge was growing into manhood, in a family that was essentially Protestant. Johnnie's mother was the daughter of a Northern Irish Clergyman and was herself a member of the Church of Ireland. The slogan of Catholic emancipation was evidently seditious to Mrs Synge.

Nicholas Grene says, Synge's announcement of his loss of faith when he was eighteen produced a family crisis. He was given serious talks by his brother Samuel, who was training to be a medical missionary, his mother prayed for his recovery but it was of no use and by degrees he was established as Poor Johnnie. Synge himself regarded this as crucial in his estrangement from his own background.

Synge himself records this in his prose works: "By it I laid a chasm between my present and my past and between myself and my kindred and friends. Till I was twenty-three I never met a man or woman who shared my opinions."

Synge was the odd man out in his family and Trinity where he studied. He was the odd man out in more than one way. He was casual in dress as compared to the more austere and formal manner of his family and class. In one of the photographs taken in 1900 at castle Kevin in county Wicklow, where the family usually spent their summers, the incongruity of his style is obvious. Whereas his mother is dressed in formal blacks and two other young ladies are decorously dressed, Synge is conspicuous in his country clothes with a tramp like hat tilted back from his forehead.

The family never went to see any of his plays when they were performed. Mrs Synge strongly disapproved of the theatre in the typically puritan style. Synge's nephew and biographer, Edward Stephens, tells us that at his uncle's funeral he did not know, even by appearance, Synge's colleagues from the Abbey. Synge was living a split-life while he stayed with his mother after his return from the Continent. Completely absorbed in theatre, in the company of theatre icons like W B Yeats at the Abbey in Dublin, he had at home made a tacit understanding with his mother of mutual toleration. Theatre was taboo at home.

Synge must have, in 1893, left for Germany to study music, in order to escape the uncongenial atmosphere at home; but it was in a way essential for him; as for every other writer from Ireland to free himself from the provincial atmosphere of the place of his birth and growth. G.B. Shaw stresses the signal importance of the emigration from Ireland in his own autobiographical references: "Every Irishman who felt that his business in life was on the higher planes of cultural professions felt that he must have a metropolitan domicile and an international culture; that is, he felt that his first business was to get out of Ireland." Shaw, Yeats and Synge as many other writers came away from Ireland for sometime at least for an international education and exposure. G.B Shaw stayed back in London for a whole lifetime, Yeats went back to establish Abbey Theatre, Synge to experience life in the most far removed places, to live and study the Irish life as it is lived and Irish English as it is spoken. His visits to Aran Islands yielded rich fruit in the form of "*Riders to the Sea*".

Synge was born on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1871 at Rathfarnham near Dublin to a barrister father. He was christened Edward John Millington Synge. His father died a year later and the responsibility of bringing up five children was left on his mother.

Synge lived a short life and his creative life was even shorter. He lived only for 38 years from 1871-1909 and wrote barely for 7-8 years producing six plays and an account of his visit to the Aran Islands, some translations and poems. Two of these plays *The Riders to the Sea* (1903) and *The Playboy of the Western World* are amongst the best plays of the twentieth century.

### His Works

The revolt against a society and system that had tried to stifle and bottle up Synge's feelings and faith is apparent in his very first play, *When the Moon has Set* written around 1900-1901. According to Yeats dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself; *When the Moon has Set* smoulders dismally around the unflammable chinker of Synge's personal feelings and ideas. The emotional impetus for the play comes from the unhappy end of his relationship with Cherrie Mattheson, the girl with whom he had been in love for many years and who had refused to marry him on the grounds that he was a *non-believer*. The play is very autobiographical. Colin Sweeney is, on behalf of the author, defying the standards and attitudes, which he detested and abhorred. In one version of the play, Colin comments in a letter to a friend: The old fashioned Irish conservatism and morality seemed to have evolved a melancholy degeneration worse than anything in Paris. Synge felt that everyone in Ireland was bound up with a tragedy, the farmers and fisherman with the tragedy of survival and death, the Anglo Irish with that of degeneracy. Synge remarked (the remark was not included for publication in his essays), still this class with its many genuine qualities, has little patriotism, in the right sense, few ideas and no seed for future life, so it has gone to the wall. Synge turned for a spark to those parts of the Irish life where he still saw vitality. Though sympathetic to the question of home-rule and land-reform, the writers of that time were uncertain about their ultimate and absolute feelings. They failed to look at the Irish question dispassionately and steadily. George Moore, for example, is satirical of the decadent ascendancy of the 1880s, yet fails to free himself from his vision as a part of it. He derides the Irish race in *Parnell and his Island* and questions the crumbling world of Dublin in *A Drama in Muslin* (1880). Whereas Synge does not pour out venom in his accounts of the Irish, George Moore is hysterically abusive in his vignettes of Irish life. Even Shaw, in his characteristically quizzical look at Ireland, in *John Bull's other Island* betrays the uncertainty of his feelings. There are suggestions of self-portrait in Larry Doyle, the Irish exile, the professed admirer of England who is emotionally crippled by his bitter reaction against the background of his youth. Synge's reaction to his Anglo-Irish background enabled him to escape the problems of cultural identity which we find in Moore or even in Shaw, with his European base, he bypassed the alternative of allegiance to England or Ireland which was the traditional Anglo-Irish dilemma.

Though living in an age rife with political unrest, Synge lacked the aptitude for politics. Yeats very rightly said, Synge seemed by nature unfitted to think a political thought. He was unlike most of his contemporaries, he rarely draws political implications either in his polemical writing or plays. Yeats was deeply immersed in the question of home-rule and G B Shaw in the wider political-economic questions concerning the world. Synge's sympathy for the Irish was more a sympathy for the oppressed or dispossessed. He hoped and vaguely believed in a slow automatic reformation in the future. His mother reported about Synge's views on politics to Greene and Stephens who questioned her on the issue. Synge had told her in a letter that he should not be thought of as a rebel but he thought that Ireland would come to its own in years to come when socialistic ideas spread in England, but he did not at all approve of fighting for freedom. He thought that things will change by degrees in the world and there will be equality and no more grinding down of the poor. This sounds very close to Shaw who also believed in a slow-change by the socialist methods of removal of poverty.

Synge failed to shed completely his identity as a Mr Synge or Your Honour of Wicklow though at Aran Islands he was more anonymous and could mix up with people on equal terms. Synge's way of learning about



the life of lower strata as a gentleman eavesdropper caused indignation amongst the Nationalists. The following is the picture he gave about how he learnt about this class. He says in the preface to the *Playboy of the Western World*, When I was writing *The Shadow of the Glen*, some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could give me, from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. The three major Irish writers Shaw, Synge and Yeats had another thing in common, they had a sense of disapproval bordering on a feeling of disgust for the middle classes whose chief interest in life was money and who were wholly impoverished of a cultural, intellectual or spiritual life. Synge's reaction to this class is recorded in *The landscape of Ireland*. This is what he says, In one respect Synge's attitude was unmistakably of his class. There can be no doubt of the animus behind his remarks on the catholic middle classes shortly after the Playboy riots. He remarked in a letter to Mackenna (April 1907)

The scurrility and ignorance and treachery of some of the attacks upon me have rather disgusted me with the middle class Irish Catholic. As you know I have the wildest admiration for the Irish peasants and for Irishmen of known or unknown genius but between the two there's an ungodly ruck of fat-faced, sweaty-headed swine.

The physical nature of the abuse is also frequently common in Yeats. In *Under Ben Bulbin* says Yeats

*Scorn the sort now growing up  
All out of shape from toe to top  
Their unremembering hearts and heads  
Base-born products of base deeds*

Yeats wanted to lodge a distilled and purified Irish tradition, Synge just wanted to write about the Irish. Though a part of the Abbey theatre, Synge was by no means supportive of the petty provincialism of their concept of National Drama. Synge was like Shaw impatient of the people who protest loudly the mention of sex in drama and yet maintain a prurient interest in chorus girls. Gasping for a drink and a glimpse of the female body, they strike a posture of complete Puritanism in principle. Yeats, in the later years, was also disillusioned with the Nationalists whom he had supported earlier. Synge loved Ireland in a different vein. To Synge the Gaelic league was a standardizing, urbanizing influence, which was a threat to the tradition of native Irish speaking of the remote districts. Synge prided himself in the knowledge of these people and refused to carry out suggested changes in the play, *The Well of the Saints* when Whillie Fay was directing it for production. What I write of Irish country life I know to be true and I most emphatically will not change a syllable of it because A, B or C might think they know better than I do. His love for the dialect and the people in the remote country areas was genuine. He valued their values. His love for this class as against his aversion for the common urban class is clear in the following letter he wrote to Mackenna. In a way it is all heart-rending, in place the people are starving but wonderfully attractive and charming, and in another place where things are going well one has a rampant double-chinned vulgarity I haven't seen the like of.

Synge spent quite some time in Aran Islands and mixed up with the people while establishing remarkably effortless relationships with them, attending their festivals, funerals and fires without making them the least self-conscious. Yet the chasm between their minds and his own remained. He was fully conscious of the fact that though they liked him they never knew what he was doing. Daniel Cookery in his book *Synge and the Anglo-Irish Literature* makes a point reverse. He contends that in spite of Synge's sympathy with these people and his complete familiarity with the features of their physical life, he made some acquaintance with their emotional life but of their spiritual environment he did not even do the same.

Irish landscape with its mountains and glens had an intense appeal for Synge. He loved not only the people but also the beauty of the countryside. Throughout his travel essays Synge uses the counterpoint between narration and description combining natural landscape with social observation and turning to specific anecdotes for illustration. Greene has summed up, most accurately, Synge's relations with the Irish countryside. All

through his life Synge spent alternate periods in urban and rural environments. In the years between 1895 to 1902, he spent his winters in Paris and returned to Ireland for the summer, while he was the Director of the Abbey he used to take off two or three months a year in Kerry, Connemara or Wicklow. He was right to claim that he knew the Irish country-side but he did not know it as Irish countryman .

*Riders to the Sea* was written in the summer of 1902, at the very beginning of his career. Too perfect, it sets one thinking as to how such an accomplished work could have been produced by a man who was just a novice in the trade. It is one of the plays by which Synge's name is known and which has been performed even more frequently than *The Playboy of the Western World* . Though so much emphasis is laid on Synge's experience of the Aran Islands, it is rarely mentioned that this was the only play set in Aran. Never after *Riders to the Sea* did Synge return to the one-act form he so fabulously employed in this play. The *Riders* was followed by four comedies – the bitter comedies which have no parallel in the world theatre. In a sense Synge seemed to have innovated his own genre of theme as well style. He never returned to Aran after writing this play though his sojourns to Kerry, Connemara and Wicklow continued.

The Aran Islands are a group of three rocky Islands on the west coast of Ireland where Irish was still spoken in Synge's days and where the old Irish way of life has been preserved.

### Non-dramatic Work

Aran Islands was written in 1902 and published in 1907.

Yeats' advice to Synge at their meeting in Paris in 1898 is one of the best-publicized facts of modern literary history. Give up Paris – go to Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves – express a life that has never found expression .

A visit to the Aran Islands after this advice led to the flowering of Synge into a genius. Synge's essays of the Aran Islands, Wicklow and other places he visited for long stays are curious travelogues, full of Synge's experience with nature and man in these lands of myth, superstition, death and suffering. Synge's love for nature also finds expression in the essays, which are a better vehicle for his feelings than the plays. Synge expressed his vision of the Irish folk life in prose that was intensely poetic and used a peasant dialect that was English in form but Irish in thought and feeling. His style is marked by vigour, ironic humour and dramatic pathos. In the period of writing the Aran Islands, Synge was honing his skills in the use of the peasant dialect. That he used this dialect in his later plays, Synge himself admits in the prefaces to his plays.

### Synge's Works

Five of his plays were published during his lifetime. These were:

*The Tinkers Wedding* wr 1902-1907 pb 1908

*In the Shadow of the Glen* (one act) pre 1903 pb 1904

*Riders to the Sea* (one act) pb 1903

The Well of the Saints pr pp 1905

*The Playboy of the Western World* pr pb 1907

*Deirdre of the Sorrows* pb pr posthumously 1910

#### **Riders to the Sea**

The play is about the tragic death of two sons of Maurya namely Michael and Bartley. The action of the play is compressed into half an hour and we meet during this short duration the two daughters of Maurya, Cathleen and Nora. Set in Aran Islands, the play depicts typically the life of the people whose existence depends on cattle and fish. Maurya has already lost all her sons and there is a suggestion that she is about to lose the last surviving, Bartley. Maurya's vision of Michael riding on a Grey pony behind Bartley is at once the climax and the catastrophe.

The play ends with the long threnody and in her final speech she asks a blessing not only for Michael and Bartley and her other dead sons but for everyone who is left living in the world. Maurya is now a visionary, thinking not only of her sons but facing death as a factor in human life, which is terrifying but invincible and unpredictable. It is the fate of humans to resign to it. The play, in spite of being alien and peripheral to the experience of the majority of readers, is engaging for its profound sense of tragedy.

### **The Tinkers Wedding (1903)**

Like some of his other plays, *The Tinkers Wedding* is based on an incident which is recorded by Synge in his Wicklow memoirs. The comic mainspring of the *Tinkers Wedding* is the clash between two mutually uncomprehending worlds of the Priest and the Tinkers, who are ignorant of each other's way of life and thinking. The physical vitality of the Tinkers verging on violence stands in contrast to the sacred position of the priest, which is violated by the Tinkers without any qualms. Sara Casey has been living with Michael Byrne for many years. She wishes to marry him; it seems just to gain a little respectability. The priest is requested to solemnize their marriage in the church, which he refuses to do. The confrontation between the priest and the Tinkers leads to much knockabout farce. The priest is beaten and thrown into a sack. The plan of marriage is ultimately foiled by Mary Byrne because of her fear of old age without the support of her son. The star part of the play is Mary Tinker, a splendid mixture of *naivete* and cunning, wisdom and ignorance. She has the range of time and mood, which makes her a well-rounded character. The treatment meted out to the priest in the play made it impossible for the play to be staged for many years after its publication.

### **The Shadow of the Glen**

The play is based on a story Synge had heard on the Aran Islands. As in *The Tinkers Wedding* so in *The Shadow of the Glen*, Synge remains impartial to his characters, neither taking sides nor showing any prejudices. The story of Nora Burke leaves her cantankerous husband, the old Dan, for a younger man. The old man, suspicious of Nora's fidelity, feigns dead and catches Nora and Michael Dara, whom she brings to the house. There is not much love talk between the two and it emerges during the conversation that Darcy Patch had occupied the position of Michael before he died. Nora Burke's special feelings for Darcy first and Michael later seem to be just a reaction to the personality of old Dan and her own boredom with life. The rising of the dead Dan and the subsequent scenes provide a comedy designed after the fashion of Synge. Mike, who was cast for the role of the lover, turns out to be a poor-spirited creature, and there is already a closer understanding between Nora and the tramp. Dan, a comic figure in the scene where he leaps from the bed, is transformed into a real and deadly old man when he turns Nora out of the house. The tramp tries to reconcile Nora with her husband and asks Michael if he would take her before taking her along to the world of freedom. The anti-climax of the play comes at the end with Dan drinking and talking to Michael, the erstwhile lover of Nora.

The play dramatizes Synge's characteristic themes of human loneliness. Surrounded by nature and society he seeks freedom. Nora, in this play, seeks freedom from the oppressive cottage in which she lives and from the marriage, with an old man, which has neither love nor dreams. The pity of the situation is that her feelings for Dan are so dead that she does not even hate him passionately.

### **The Well of the Saints**

Synge was experimenting with an unusual theme in *The Well of the Saints*. He based the play on the parable-like story of the blind couple who regain sight and then willfully choose blindness after being disillusioned with each other's ugliness. The fable changed considerably in Synge's hands. Martin and Mary, the weather-beaten, blind couple are living happily. Both have their illusions about themselves and about each other. Mary's beauty is most important to both of them. Martin is the lover she is the beloved. They imagine her beautiful skin and Martin longs to have at least one look at himself and Mary. He is sure that he were the finest man, she the finest woman. Mary is comfortably placed in her glory, in the gloating vanity of her beauty, Martin needs reassurance from the people who see but they seem to be jeering at their looks all the time.

They are a bad lot, the people who have sight are telling bad lies, this is how Mary and Martin console themselves. The comedy of the scene after sight has been restored to Martin and Mary has tragic overtones. Mary is abashed to see Martin, Martin disconcerted on seeing Mary. Their sense of mortification is heightened by the mockery of the people who attack them with their cruel jokes. Synge intended the scene to be tragic in a way.

Martin has to bear the hardship of labour after his sight has been restored and he resents it. He resents the grey clouds driving on the hill and the people with noses red and their eyes weeping and watering. Molly is the only redeeming feature in the entire creation of God. Martin's proposal of love to Molly and her rebuff is the final blow for him. The scene of his suffering is poignant in spite of its comic ingredient. Martin, with the wearing of the effect of the holy water, goes blind again and so does Mary. Both accept the re-gaining of blindness with a measure of happiness. (Mark the words regaining of blindness). Absurd, as it may seem, both of them refuse to be cured of their blindness by the saint again. The play is important in that it was Synge's first attempt at a full-length play. The theme closely resembles that of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, namely Man's need for illusions that can sustain him in life.

### **Deirdre of the Sorrows**

No words could have paid a better homage to Synge as a dramatist for his last unfinished play than Yeats did in the following words;

*Deirdre of the Sorrows* would have been his master work, so much beauty is there in its course and such wild nobleness in its end, and so poignant an emotion and wisdom that were his own preparation of death.

Synge was breaking new ground in this play in dealing with a kind of theme he hadn't hitherto touched, the epic story of Deirdre and the sons of Usna. The Deirdre legend had already been employed by W B Yeats and Russell. Synge was attracted by the saga of the love between Deirdre and Naoise for its poetic possibilities.

Deirdre is the betrothed of King Conchubar of Emain. She leaves the kingdom with her lover and returns after seven years of exile. Naoisi is killed and Deirdre follows him in sorrow after the traditional keening.

Deirdre, the main character, is portrayed by Synge, with a sure touch of elegance and beauty. She has dignity and pride and the makings of a woman who could deservedly be the queen of Emain. The prophetic foreboding of death is in the vein of some of the Greek tragedies and Synge's own *Riders to the Sea*. The last scene of Deirdre is similar to the end of the Riders. Deirdre mourns her dead with the same complete absorption that we saw in Maurya; resignation to death and sorrow is complete in both. The play was published posthumously in 1910 and produced in the same year with Synge's beloved Molly Allgood in the lead.

### **Reception: The *Playboy* Riots in Dublin the *Playboy of the Western World***

The *Playboy* has been played to crowds who were angry and hostile as well as admiring and exhilarated. Whereas most of the people had jeered at what to them seemed to be only a knock-about farce, others saw deeper meaning in it. The first audience to the *Playboy* broke into riots, which is enough indication of how it was first received the play was in the center of a fierce controversy when it was first staged in Dublin. *It raised much storm*. Eyewitness accounts by Lady Gregory and John Holloway as well as others are available. Apprehensions about the play which was first performed on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1907 were felt by those connected with Abbey Theatre. Some attacks, by the press, had been made when *The Shadow of the Glen* was first produced in 1903. The story of a young wife who goes away with a stranger had evoked the charge, on Synge, of casting aspersions on Irish womanhood.

The danger of opposition to the *Playboy* was much more. Some, like Joseph Holloway, felt that there was an organized opposition present to Synge's play. Lady Gregory made a few cuts after the first production and Yeats conceded that there was far too much of 'bad language' but it was only after much rioting was done. A full account of the reception of the *Playboy* in our Irish Theatre 1913 records the following observation :

The most objectionable thing in the play was the reference by Christy to the drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself may be from this place to the eastern world the feeling was that Synge had slandered Ireland.

The press was, by and large, hostile. The *Freeman's Journals* reported: The play is an unmitigated, protracted libel on Irish peasant men and worse still upon Irish peasant girlhood. The blood boils with indignation as one recalls the incidents, expressions, ideas of this squalid, offensive production, in congruously styled a comedy in three acts no adequate idea can be given of the barbarous jargon, the elaborate and incessant cursings of these repulsive creatures.

Synge was unapologetic in an interview he gave to the *The Evening Mail*; I never bother whether my plots are typically Irish or not, but my methods are typical. He defended his method which he said was typically Irish but denied that his portrayal of Irish life has been typically or truly faithful.

Yeats, who returned to Dublin when the controversy was at the peak, defended the play on the ground of a writer's freedom of expression. He also stressed the freedom of the audience to the play and judge it for themselves. Lady Gregory, Yeats and Fay decided not to take the play off stage. The staunch Nationalist like Arthur Griffith, editor of *The United Irish Man* continued to denounce the play. Griffith describe the play as a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform. Synge and admitted Molly Allgood who played Pegeen himself that a few cuts would make the play thoroughly sound but preferred that the play be played to an angrily exited audience than a cold one. Synge was prothetic about the possible positive outcome of the negative criticism he shared it with Molly it is better any day to have the row we had last night, than to have your play fizzling out in half-hearted applause. Now we will be talked about. We're an event in the history of the Irish drama.

An event, in the history of Irish drama, Synge remains.

### **Preface to the *Playboy of the Western World* by Synge**

Synge's preface should be read as the most reliable statement of his intention and method in writing of his plays. He acknowledges his debt to the country people in the use of language. He claims to have used exactly the language which he had heard in places like Giesala, Carraroe or Dingle Day. Apart from one or two words, the entire speech was borrowed from Irish peasantry, the fishermen and the herds along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, he said his language was the language of the beggar women, the tramps and tinkers and the ballad singers.

These rustic people were to Synge the finest people and their language instead of being crude as most people think, was enriched by the folk imagination. Their language and life had a richness of its own kind. The way these people spoke and conversed was so abundantly furnished with ideas and sayings and proverbs that Synge admits to having been able to use only a part of them.

Synge compares the richness of Irish folk language to the language which the playwrights and storytellers of the Elizabethan age found at hand, in the way the older or the younger people spoke it. They wrote the language they heard, the language they wrote, therefore, was not invented and artificial, but natural and authentic. The writer in using the language of the people collaborates with them, in the sense that the author takes and transforms what they offer into art. Synge discloses his source of the language he used in his plays,

When I was writing *The Shadow of the Glen* I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. He compliments the Irish people for their language which is rich and living. The writer by reproducing their words and life makes his writing natural and comprehensive. He rejects writers who write elaborate books that are far-removed from the profound and common interests of life as also the writers who write about the reality of life but in pallid, joyless words. Profound to Synge means natural and full of joy. Modern drama, also according to Synge failed because it lacked joy or reality. The intellect is not natural and therefore lacks the exuberance of what is wild and superb in reality. The speech

should not be crafty and artificial. It should neither be bland. The language in a play, according to Synge, should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry . Synge denounces the writers who write of life that is far removed from the spring of local life and therefore divested of popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent and tender. That is the pre-eminence of local Irish imagination.

Mention must be made of the reply Synge sent to a letter written by a young man after the production of the play, *The Playboy of the Western World* .. The letter re-instates the same views. He says, I wrote *the Playboy* directly as a piece of life, without thinking or caring to think whether it was a comedy, tragedy or extravaganza, or whether it would be held or not to have purpose . Synge says in the letter that Christy Mahon, being a very subtle character, will be found gradually at the top and much more interesting in the later performances, since, the actor playing the role will grow and develop an identity with the character. J M Synge refused to specify the meaning of the play. He says I follow Goethes rule, to tell no one what one means in one s writing .

## Summary and Analysis

### ACT I

The atmosphere created by Synge in the first Act, by its setting and character, is of the typical countryside life of the peasant class. The scene opens at a public house known as Shebeen. Semblance to the primitive way of life of the people is created by the untidiness of the place with jugs and bottles placed in a sort of counter . There is, in the room itself, an open fireplace and fuel provided by the burning turf.

Pegeen is described as a wild looking but fine girl, of about twenty . She is in a usual peasant dress. Pegeen holds the responsibility of the establishment, she is seen writing a list of the things to be sent to a Mister Michael James Flaherty on the evening of the coming fair. Shawn Keogh is the second character to enter. Betrothed to Pegeen, he is fat, fair and awkward. Self-conscious and hesitant to enter the house in the absence of Pegeen s father, he betrays a lack of confidence, diffidence, which is his chief attribute throughout the play.

I stood a while outside wondering would I have a right to pass on or to walk in and see you, Pegeen Mike . His way of addressing Pegeen with her full name also shows his basic diffidence.

The quietness of the place which is sometimes oppressive to the people living in the country side is suggested by the stillness of the place, where even the breathing and sighing of the cows could be heard. The consciousness of the isolation of the place is suggested by phrases like not a step moving any place from this gate to the bridge . Pegeen repeatedly complains and accuses her father, Michael, of leaving her alone in the dark hours of the night to attend the wake of Kate Cassidy. Attending wakes and weddings is the only entertainment for people, occasions to meet their neighbours, friends and kinsmen. Starved of human company, the celebrations, rituals and fairs are their only source of human company. The atmosphere of loneliness is sustained throughout the play.

The difference in the attitude of Shawn and Pegeen towards the clergy strikes the reader; whereas Shawn is solemnly waiting for Father Reilly s dispensation from Rome, Pegeen disdainfully brushes aside Shawn s seriousness of concern. It is with a sense of regret that she recounts the loss of the men like Daneen Sullivan or Marcus Quin. The men of Ireland have lost the spirit and the valour. It shows her impatience with people like Shawn, stuck to the conventional norms of morality. Her boredom with the lot of effeminate men sets the tone for the reception of an unconventional man, who has ventured into some kind of action at least, the murder of his own father though it be. Shawn has already heard the groaning of a fellow in the furzy ditch. To Pegeen s question whether he saw the person who was groaning, Shawn replies that he did not go near the man for fear of three things, the dark and lonesome place, the peelers and the blabbing of the people. The three things mentioned in the conversation are the most common in the remote parts of Ireland. The speech, in its use of words, is also typical of these parts, Synge was particularly careful about using the speech of the peasants he had recorded during his visits to the Aran Islands, Wicklow, Connemara etc.

The following scene is important for the light it throws on Michael James and his relationship with his daughter. The altercation between the father and the daughter is in the nature of a harmless wrangle, rather than a serious accusation. He calls her a queer daughter; she calls him a queer father. Michael is supposed to speak good-humouredly. Jimmy Parrell who accompanies Michael to the Shebeen indicates and evokes suggestions about the boldness and hardihood of Pegeen. She could knock the head of any two men in the place. Pegeen is adamant that she will not stay alone. With the militia, the harvest boys and the tinkers in close vicinity, she dare not stay alone, she says. She is being coquettish; her ability to strike a pose is at once evident. Michael's suggestion that Shawn stay back with her causes confusion and fear in the mind of Shawn. Though engaged to Pegeen he will not stay for fear of what father Reilly would say. He dare not go against the Cardinals of Rome. Philly's suggestion that Shawn be locked in a room so that he does nothing to break the law shows Synges contempt for Shawn; people like Shawn evoke laughter and contempt for their assiduous, yet mindless following of the norms established by the Church and society.

And sin in matters of sex shows Synges amusement at the *naivety* of the people who believe in the dictum of religion blindly. Shawn's outburst when Michael tries to keep him back forcibly is one of the most hilarious scenes. Shawn who had requested Michael not to tempt him to stay with Pegeen alone, he might succumb to it, he is afraid, escapes leaving his coat in the hands of Michael. He is scared of losing his virtue: his appeal to father Reilly and all other Saints, with Michael, his companions and the audience laughing at his fear of transgression in burlesque. Shawn calls Michael a pagan, a man who has the audacity to break the Christian norms of modesty and in spite of his laughter at Shawn, Michael betrays the Christian in his heart.

There's the coat of a Christian man, there's sainted glory this day in the lonesome west; and by the will of God, I've you a decent man Pegeen. That Pegeen has some feeling of compassion for Shawn is evident from her words poor boy for him. They suggest sympathy and concern but Shawn is unable to inspire admiration in the heart of Pegeen.

It may be noted that Pegeen has already suggested that a pot-boy be hired for the Shebeen when Christy Mahon enters. Shawn has referred to him and he is expected any moment, tired, dirty and frightened. It is clear that Christy's main fear is that of the Polis (Police). Michael's credentials as a bona fide citizen of the place are spoken of proudly by him and mention of a widow, the single person who does not have that status, made. It occurs to Michael, then, that the stranger may himself be one of those wanted by the Polis. Michael's remark that many young people are wanted by the Polis due to the small crimes they commit, because of the bad harvest and the war, throws light on the economic situation of the country at that time. There is a dig at the police in Pegeen's description of them the police who do not touch even a cur dog and give no warnings at night.

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that Christy is still unsure of his guts to face the police, is seen by the people in the Shebben, as somebody who can keep danger away from the house. There is also irony in Jimmy's remark that Pegeen would be safe in the hands of Christy, the murderer, since he will keep all dangerous elements at bay. And everything will be, by the grace of God.

Leaving Pegeen under the care of Christy all the men prepare to leave for the wake where they will have the best stuff to drink. Pegeen's words to Shawn, who now wants to stay back, are full of mockery. She derides him for his fear of Father Reilly, which, to her, is a sign of cowardice.

Christy is the rebel, the fearless man who can kill his own father. Christy has moreover, a class, which Shawn lacks, he has small feet, a sign of the more cultured classes and a quality name which means a good family background. Christy is handsome to Pegeen and she wonders as to how many girls would have admired him before her.

The reader must not miss small suggestions of what prevailed in the Ireland of those times. Michael refers to the method used to teach children in schools, were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed, he tells Christy who fumbles for words to explicitly state the nature of his crime.

Christy is trying to gauge the situation before telling the truth. He will have people think that he had committed the petty crime of stealing. He boasts of his father's ability to buy the whole of Michael's old house without feeling the slightest loss to his pocket. Christy's father was a strong farmer. Christy continues to dally with words slowly realizing the magnitude but not the importance of the crime. His crime is neither ordinary nor mean. The dialogue between Jimmy, Michael and Philly with their conjectures and suppositions, urging and egging Christy on, is humorous. The deeds, which come to their minds, are trespasses that ordinary people make in every-day life – marrying thrice, chasing women or robbing a soldier.

The scene is important to understand Synge's working as a dramatist. Christy's pain at being absolved of all crime, instead of bringing relief to him, brings words of anguish. There may be, on closer study of the text, drawn a contrast between the cruel way in which Jimmy Parrell had hung his dog and had it screeching and wriggling for three hours and the unplanned and on the spur attack by Christy who let the loy fall on his father's skull. The first shows cruelty, the second spontaneous and unintended attack.

Christy is now on his way to inventing stories and ploys. On being asked whether he had buried his dead father, he replies in the affirmative. Christy is hailed with epithets like 'lad with the sense of Solomon' etc and Jimmy agrees with Pegeen that he could be hired for the house as a pot-boy. Moreover, Christy can be an asset in a lonesome place like there.

Braver's a treasure in a lonesome place, and a lad would kill his father, I'm thinking would face a foxy devil with a pitch pike on the flags of hell. Christy's triumph is complete. Michael's tone of deference is indicative of the complete victory of Christy as a 'mister honey'.

Shawn who has been watching the ongoings quietly feels threatened at the prospect of Christy staying in the household but he is over-ruled. That's an unkind thing to be saying to a poor orphaned traveller, who, has a prison behind him and a hanging before and hell's gaping gap below.

Christy's consciousness of the enormity of his deed is itself ambiguous to him. He has killed his father, with the help of God, says he. He killed him because he was dirty and was getting old and crusty. He was cruel to Christy. Christy exults in the bigness of his deed for the applause he gets, but is also concerned for the soul of the father he has killed. To be forgiven and to assign everything to the will of God is the typical Christian way of looking at life, men and the deeds they do. Jimmy, Philly and Michael continue to postulate and presume the probabilities of Christy's way of murder.

Philly at once exclaims that Christy is a daring fellow. They come out with suggestions of the weapon that Christy might have used. The conversation is important in two ways. It establishes Christy's acceptance in Mayo and also exposes the vulnerability of the people of this place, to be enamoured by 'big deeds' committed by weapons and knives.

Michael's awe of the stories he has heard of, Christy's lack of confidence and Pegeen's growing interest in him are a source of amusement in the play, the intended irony obvious. Pegeen is impressed with his name that sounds like the names of potentates of France and Spain. She immediately compares his manner of speech to that of the great poets like Owen Roe Sullivan, since she has heard that 'it's the poets are you like, fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused'.

The absurdity of her comparisons brings not a few bemused smiles. Christy now assumes a tone of more confidence, draws closer to her and starts asking personal questions, the first and most important, whether she was 'single now'.

It is a matter of great disappointment to Pegeen that though he deserved to be king of Norway or the Eastern world, nobody had ever paid any heed to him. *Christy himself* confesses that he was a simple fellow, drinking, walking, eating and sleeping, a quiet simple fellow with no one giving him heed.

Christy's description of his life back home, his pastime of killing rabbits and geese and his description of his father, reveals Synge's feelings for youth, who he thought were oppressed by the tyranny of their family,



especially the father. Christy's father turned crusty whenever he met a woman setting him on. His presence was to Christy wholly offensive. Whenever Christy returned home in the small hours of the morning, he heard him snorting out hideously, later he would be raging, cursing and damning and swearing oaths.

Christy's description of him going out into the yard as naked as an ash-tree in the moon of May, brings an obnoxious picture to the mind. Pegeen's shock at Christy's curses on his father brings an element of realism to the play. She had never cursed her father the way he did. But Christy justifies himself, saying, his father never let him live in peace. Peace came to him only when he got two or three months confinement. Overcome by her emotion for Christy, Pegeen assures the peace he deserves at their house.

The entrance of Widow Quin marks a change in the atmosphere. She has heard from Father Reilly and Shawn about the curiosity man, whom she must immediately see. Widow Quin establishes a fellow feeling for him on impulse, she can speak to him on equal terms, she the murderer of her husband, he of his father. Widow Quin would take Christy away for the sake of Pegeen's safety, she says. She is also lured by him.

There's great temptation in man did slay his da'. The tussle between Widow Quin and Pegeen for Christy makes for another scene of hilarity. Pegeen talks contemptuously of Widow Quin's house with its leaky thatch and of her raising a ram at her own breast. Widow Quin would not budge and Pegeen would not let her either take Christy along or stay at the Shebeen. Pegeen shuts the door after Widow Quin and offers Christy a quilt, which she had made with her own hands. For Christy it is hard to believe that two women are fighting over him. The last words of Christy, thinking that wasn't he foolish not to have killed his father in the years gone by, if it meant so much of admiration, set the time for Christy engaging in the glory of his deed.

Pegeen, perceiving that Christy's conversation is becoming too intimate, tactfully reminds of his position as a potboy. She feigns that their relationship is absolutely innocent. The situation is most alarming for Shawn. Widow Quin can also be a gainer if Shawn is. Shawn will not loose Pegeen to Christy, Widow Quin will not loose Christy to her.

Shawn describes himself fittingly as a man of middling faculties. Unable to coin a lie, he beseeches Christy to leave. He is no match to the clever, fearless Christy and doesn't think well of him dwelling there. Hopeless in his situation, he offers Christy the best that he possesses, his breeches and his coat. Widow Quin comes to his aid. She implores Christy to stay away from Pegeen and not to wreck Shawn's life. Pegeen has the temper of a devil and would not suit a man like Christy, she argues. The docile Shawn would make a better match for her, but nothing prevails on Pegeen and Christy is made to sleep on the bed she has made for him.

Word has already spread that Pegeen would now, not marry Shawn. The dark night followed by a brilliant morning. Christy is cheerful and happily absorbed in work. He is trying to assess the properties of the place, glasses, cups and jugs. Everything in county Clare seems to boost up his spirits. The prospect of living with the swearing Christians, instead of the dogs and cat back home, doing light chores instead of the tiring work on the land, drinking to his fill, in short, drinking all the wealth and wisdom that the place has to offer. He suddenly realizes the precious looks he has which, he reflects happily, are bound to improve since he would not be, ploughing all times in the earth and dung.

## **Summary and Analysis**

### ***Act II***

Christy is at once aware of the great sensation he has become but not yet acquires the boldness to face the overtures of the local girls. He hides himself in the inner room the moment he sees Susan, Sara and the other girls coming. He finds the girls strange and mumbles to himself his uneasiness with them. Stranger Girls he calls them. The conversation amongst the girls shows what thrill means to these girls. Living in an isolated place where nothing happens, hungry for adventure and romance, they undertake the hazards of walking miles to see a man who has murdered his father. The accepted and the customary have no novelty for the girls. What is sanctioned is run of the mill. Unconventionality speaks of spontaneity and uniqueness. and Christy is unique in this sense. Nothing worthwhile happens in this place. Sara would not mind stealing

Pegeen's shoes just to create a sensation. Later she would make a confession to the priest and create yet another sensation. Honor saves them from the humiliation of going empty handed, without meeting the novelty that Christy is, being fooled by discovering Christy in the inner room. The first question from the girls is whether he was the man who had murdered his father and with Christy affirming that he was, Sara immediately offers him the duck-eggs she had brought. She does not incidentally forget to mention that her eggs were better than Pegeen's duck-eggs. Pat comes Susan to offer butter. Honor has brought him a piece of cake and Nelly a laying pullet. That the girls are naive and unaffected to the degree of being ridiculous, implies the use of extreme subtlety in Synge's irony, generating mirth and amusement. Sara's infatuation with Christy simply because he is hiding with the looking mirror behind his back is all the more ridiculous. Christy's slyness and embarrassment add to his charm. Sara exclaims; 'Well I never seen to this day, a man with a looking glass held to his back. Them that kills their fathers is a vain lot surely'. Christy's unordinariness is established by degrees. It is the daring and the vain that the girls are looking for rather than the fearful and the docile. Widow Quin joins them and orders them to bring Christy his breakfast. She being older, reprimands them for coming out of their houses so early and settles herself with Christy to hear his story entirely. She would like to take advantage of Pegeen's absence, who has already become possessive about Christy.

Widow Quin's use of epithets like Christy being 'treacherous and gamey' along with his being a 'fine fellow', suggest the jumbled up opinions and words of her class. Christy's outbursts as he recounts his life, digging spuds in his cold, sloping, stony, devil's patch of land and his father calling him a squinting idiot, speak of the pain he has suffered. The story of Christy is tragic, the way he relates it comic. The oppression of the children at the hands of their fathers is a theme for tragedy not comedy and it is the suffering of Christy, which brings to the play the title of 'black comedy'.

Synge's descriptions of some of the characters betrays his strong feeling about their ugliness, though not bearing any ill will, they do show his hidden detestation of their looks. The descriptions however were more out of a sense of laughter than aversion.

The woman Mahon wanted Christy to marry is described by him with horror. 'A walking terror from beyond the hills and she two score and five years and two hundred weights and five pounds on the weighing scales, with a limping leg on her, and a blinded eye and she a woman of noted misbehavior, with the old and the young'. The physical deformities of the woman whom Mahon wanted Christy to marry for a hut and gold are exaggerated in the style of the folk tales prevalent in the country people. This very woman had suckled him for six weeks when he was born. Subtlety and finish belong to the realm of the cultured, overstatement is what can engage the naive. The curiosity of the women in his tale excites and prepares Christy to narrate his story, to embellish it with whatever power of invention he has at his command. He gathers all his art of histrionics and relates the climatic part of his encounter with his father. He then brandishes his mug to re-enact the scene. Flattered and absolutely confident, Christy raises the bone he has been chewing and waving it describes his final victory.

'He gave a drive with the Scythe and I gave a leap to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out and he split to the knob of his gullet'. Christy's raising his bone to his Adam's apple suggests his consciousness of masculine power, which he recently seems to have gained. The applause comes in unison from the girls.

Christy is the celebrity of the hour, by establishing himself as an outlaw he has won the right to be on an equal footing with Widow Quin. Susan considers him a suitable match for Widow Quin. Sara's speech is an evidence of the people's love for spirited action and the poetic rendering of heroic men and their deeds. Sara bursts out singing the glory and distinction of the western world. This passage is important to understand the title of the play, Christy is to become the playboy of the western world, where Widow Quin and Christy are a glorious pair by virtue of their being the sole murderers. Sara links their arms and gives them the glasses, she urges them to drink a health to the wonders of the western world, the pirates, preachers, poteen-makers and other sundry good-for-nothings. It is this western world that Christy becomes the playboy of.

The celebrations of the toast to Widow Quin and Christy abruptly end when Pegeen enters. All the women sneak away and Christy, conscious of this lapse in his conduct, tries to please Pegeen. Pegeen's treatment of Christy shows her tenderness for him. Yet she does not want him to forget that she is the master, he the potboy. Christy tries to bring her around by reminding her that he was the boy who murdered his father, she tries to keep him in place by reminding him that his life was still in jeopardy.

Pegeen's insecurity and fear of losing Christy to the other women can already be apprehended. Pegeen plays on Christy's fear of death by warning him of the weird powers of the girls. The girls had the evil power to make the green stones cry, itself to think of you swaying and swigging at the butt of a rope. The conversation between Pegeen and Christy is the best example of Synge's command over scenes of love and romance. Christy's pretensions and excuses are matched by Pegeen's complaints and coquettish speech. Christy's description of his desolate future when he a lonesome fellow will be looking at women and girls the way the needy spirits do be looking on the Lords, is an honest confession. He was enjoying the company of girls when Pegeen intercepted. He enumerates the miseries of his future life to win Pegeen's sympathy. He also tries to win her over by counting to her the hazards of walking in the small towns and passing through strange places. He uses other weapons, besides rousing her feelings of compassion; he flatters her for her beauty. Pegeen will not forget and forgive Christy for his trespass in the morning. He must know that she has seen through him. A coaxing fellow she calls him and a coaxing fellow he proves to be. He describes his sorrow at the prospect of separation from Pegeen. My heart is scalded this day he says for the distance he will be away from her. Pegeen in a reconciled mood assures Christy of his safety. Christy complains that she is making a game of him and Pegeen reassures him again. Christy dreams his dream of future in the words:

And I'll have your words from this day filling my ears and that look is come upon you meeting my two eyes and I watching you loafing around in the warm sun .

Widow Quin does not wait for an answer from Christy and coaxes him into trying Shawn's clothes for the races. She still wants to rely on the chances of Christy taking Shawn's clothes and bartering them for Pegeen. The situation with Christy going to put on the clothes simply to please Pegeen and Shawn hoping that Christy would be lured into accepting them, with his heart sinking every moment with anxiety is dramatically significant. Shawn's worst fears of losing Pegeen to Christy are full of despair, it's well nigh certain he will wed Pegeen .

Widow Quin rebuffs him saying that all girls prefer courageous men. Desperate, Shawn says that it is for the fear of God that he cannot kill Christy and bemoans his ill-luck in that being an orphan, he has lost the opportunity to kill his father and win the admiration of the people.

Widow Quin has another trick up her sleeve. She can still save Shawn but there is a price he will have to pay for it. Just as Shawn had offered Christy the price to free Pegeen so will he pay Widow Quin a price for her plan. She will marry Christy, leaving Pegeen available for Shawn. Widow Quin is completely charmed by Christy's looks in Shawn's clothes, she exclaims in admiration. If Christy knew how good he looked in these clothes, he would be too proud to speak to any one. He is so grand that it would be a pity if he sailed from Mayo to the Western world. Widow Quin sends Shawn away and starts wooing Christy as discretely as would become a woman.

It is at this juncture with Christy full of himself, swaggering and strutting that the play reaches the anti climax. Old Mahon walks in. Christy hides in the inner room and Widow Quin is left to face Mahon. Mahon starts his query about Christy whom he describes as rough in appearance, gruffy in speech. The real Christy, the Christy who trembled and shuddered at a word from his father re-emerges now. The relapse is complete. Mahon's description of Christy as an ugly young steeler comes in sharp contrast to the description by the young girls.

Widow Quin's rejection of Mahon as a hardened father is suggestive of Synge's regretting the treatment of the youth. Mahon's description of Christy as an idler who had no aptitude for work is also typical of a father

of those times and place. Describing his son Christy as a waster, a boy that could just play with the herds and bask in the sun. Christy had no guts, he was afraid of even passing by a girl. The virtues of a decent man are the vices of the western world. Christy was not bold enough to approach women, not bold enough to drink like a man. He got contortions if he took three pulls from the pipe. He was so effeminate in short that when sick he was taken to the female nurses. He was so ridiculous that the girls called him Looney of Mahons. And yet the looney had the audacity and vanity to look himself in the broken glass that they hung on the wall.

The Playboy of the Western World is cowering in dread of his father he claimed to have killed. Christy's image is broken, what will Pegeen say when she hears the truth. How would Pegeen hate him for scheming and lying, how she would be shattered to know that he was not the real playboy she had taken him to be.

Christy's surging anger and frustration with the power of his father forms the tragedy, the tragedy of his helplessness. He curses him for letting him believe that he was dead and undoing his entire luck and glory by following him, Like an old weasel tracing a rat, and laying desolation between him and the women of Ireland. Christy has lost his glory; he has lost the adoration of the fine women.

When Widow Quin reminds him that he is his father's son only, he pours out the anguish and venom of his heart in curses.

May I meet him with my tooth and it aching an one eye to be seeing seven and seventy devils in the twists of the roads, and one old timber leg on him to limp into the scaling grain.

He wishes that Mahon may perish from the world to save him from suffering. Widow Quin is scandalized but Christy explains the enormity of his sorrow in losing Pegeen who was for him the star of knowledge and who would now despise him.

Widow Quin does not as yet realize Christy's desperation for Pegeen. Christy's desperation is complete. He would pray for Widow Quin, pray to the lord to give her a peaceful death and a place in heaven but she must help him win Pegeen. Widow Quin is at once businesslike, ready to exchange the greatest gift of love for small properties of the earth. Just as she had bargained to help Shawn win Pegeen for a small stock of animals, similarly she would now keep Christy's secret for a mountain ram and a load of dung. Needs of Widow Quin are small but not her feelings. After Christy is taken away by the girls to participate in the races, Widow Quin pledges her support to Christy.

Well if the worst comes in the end of all. It'll be a great game to see there's none to pity him but a widow woman, the like of who has buried her children and destroyed her man.

Widow Quin can take the false oaths readily but can also swear the oaths of fidelity.

### ***Summary and Analysis Act III***

In the third Act, Jimmy and Philly report the proceedings of the day. Michael has returned from the wake, dead drunk and needs to be brought on a cart (an ass-cart is supposedly being arranged by Shawn). Pegeen is not at home and everything in the Shebeen is locked. To the dismay of the two boys, Christy has won all the sports, racing lepping and dancing. They envy his luck. And the Lord knows what! He's right lucky, they say.

The tone of the boys is generally deprecative; they denounce Michael for coming back drunk, Pegeen for being so fussy after that young gaffer. Running down people, counting their weaknesses and deformities is the prevailing way of conversation. A feeling of envy can be discerned in their talk about Christy. He has routed the roulette man and the other contestants. He has beaten everyone and is hobbling for exhaustion. His complete victory has made him boastful and vain. He boasts not only of his victory in sports but forgets not to brag about how he killed his father with a loy. The infatuation of the young boys for the unseen and the weird is obvious from the conversation that follows. Imagining how the old Mahon's skull may be dug up by somebody digging with a spade, they make their guess as to how it would be interpreted and investigated. The reference to skulls ranged out in the city of Dublin offers an insight into the minds of the ignorant people

of Mayo, who are enamoured by whatever is unfamiliar to them. Their range of experience is limited to Mayo. The big, the unnatural or the supernatural all catch their fancy. Philly recalls how on Sundays he used to put together the shiny bones of a dead man, just for the fun of it. The large bones of the horrible man were fascinating for him.

Mahon who has been hiding himself and listening to their story of Christy, which so much resembles his own suddenly confronts them to ascertain the facts about Christy.

It must be noted in this scene that Jimmy and Philly are both slightly drunk, a state in which most of the people commonly are. Mahon is as boastful of being hit by his son as Christy is of killing his father. Philly gets a little suspicious to know the story inside out, since it somewhere matches the story of Christy himself. Just as Mahon's conversation with Philly and Jimmy begins to cause anxiety, for the sake of Christy, Widow Quin enters lending some moments of respite. Aghast at seeing Philly and Jimmy with Mahon she gathers her wits to save the situation. Clever at contriving and making up stories, she convinces the boys of how Mahon is a loony who had lost his mind. Widow Quin tells them strange stories about Mahon. Jimmy is entirely convinced of Quin's tale and comes up with an equally bizarre story of a man who was kicked in the head by a red-mare and went on killing horses till he ate the insides of a clock and died. The eating of the insides of a clock makes the story all the more grotesque.

Mahon has his own story of woe. His account of Christy is as defamatory as Christy's account of his father. He laments having a son like Christy who was a miserable failure at school; he never reached his second book. The story of Christy with his legs lamed under him and he blackened with the beatings like a tinker's ass, create an image which is just the opposite of the impression he has very recently created. Widow Quin continues to baffle and beguile Mahon as well as Jimmy and Philly. She asks Mahon if he was the same man she had met in the morning since he had a different story to tell at that time. He also resents the behaviour of his sons who had turned against him. The children one has reared and tended from the hour of their birth are the ones who leave you in ruin when they grow older, is his philosophical reflection on the sadness of old age.

Widow Quin cleverly handles Mahon's statements. When Philly and Jimmy insist to pursue the matter, Widow Quin tries to puzzle them too. She questions Mahon whether his son was a great hand at racing and lepping and whether he was somebody who could vanquish all, who could lick the world, Mahon replies impatiently that, on the contrary, he was such a demented fool that all old as well as young made a game of him. His son was docile to a fault and took all kicking and raging without hitting back.

The description of Christy as a faint-hearted coward by Mahon stands in sharp contrast to the impression that people in Mayo have formed of him. The situation is interesting for the description Widow Quin gives of him immediately afterwards on hearing the burst of the cheering outside. Christy is, she exclaims, adding another superlative the champion play boy of the western world.

The last race is about to begin, the race in which Christy will ride a wrinkled mule. They are all watching the proceedings. Philly and Jimmy are sure that Christy is going to win again, Mahon totally non-plussed and unable to believe his own eyes.

This scene is especially important. Christy is being cheered not only by the crowds watching the events at the grounds but also being applauded by all the four characters watching him from the Shebeen. Mahon watches him ride, overcoming the hurdles and giving defeat to his rivals in the neck-to-neck fight. He exclaims, in admiration of his son look at the mule he has, kicking the stars.

Mahon's excitement, however, turns into a roar of surprise and rage when he recognizes the rider to be his own son, Christy. Mahon makes a run for Christy but Widow Quin tries to stop him. Widow Quin tries her best to avert the bloodshed that may take place. She makes Jimmy hold Mahon by instilling the fear of being involved in the fight that is likely to ensue. Widow Quin warns him of getting implicated in the manslaughter that is likely to take place if Mahon succeeds in taking his vengeance on Christy. Widow Quin is seen

fighting desolately for Christy's safety. She tells Mahon that the boy he thinks to be his son is a respectable lad who is going to marry the daughter of the house. The status of the house is established by three things which are a mark of respectability in Mayo, a trade, a license and poteen too. Mahon cannot believe that a decent moneyed woman could marry a dunce like Christy. The sight is unbelievable for Mahon, of all the wonders he has seen in the world, this surely is the strangest. Christy is the playboy with the women of Mayo clamouring for his attention. Mahon bursts out into a kind of soliloquy. He seems to be addressing himself to the wonder that he has witnessed – oh I am raving with madness that would fright the world (he sits down with his hand in his head.) There was one time I seen ten scarlet devils letting on they'd cork my spirit in a gallon can. And one time I seen rats as big as badgers sucking the lifeblood from the butt of my leg. But I never till day confused that dribbling idiot with a likely man. I am destroyed surely. Widow Quin persists in her effort to confirm Mahon as a maniac to the crowds to save Christy. She does not hesitate in convincing Mahon about the instability of his own mind. Mahon's question to Widow Quin whether the visage was astray describes his desperation at being called a maniac when never in his life, never even in the most drunken state, had he lost his senses.

Widow Quin has got her pet prescription of frightening and goading people. Mahon is ready to leave, he will go to the union behind where his utterances were once recorded by seven doctors and printed in a book. The union here may be taken as the part of Ireland united with England and serving as a land of metamorphosis and recognition for many Irish writers. There is also a hint that the Irish humorous sayings of many writers became the most popular books/ literature.

Widow Quin, however, urges Mahon to leave immediately. In a similar situation the boys had caught a maniac once, pelted stones at him, till he ran out raving and foaming and was drowned in the sea.

Mahon shows the philosophical side of his mind in his comments on old age, parenthood and human nature. On the cruelty of man to man, he says, Men themselves turned into devils when they ill treat their fellow creatures whose head has turned astray.

Philly seems, in the meantime, to have seen through Widow Quin's game as he calls it and insists on going after Mahon, giving him dinner and time to rest. He remarks that he will only then be able to see whether Mahon is raving or as sane as Widow Quin herself. Widow Quin's mounting uneasiness and fear is interrupted for the time being by the cheering crowd, which has followed Christy. Christy is loaded with prizes and praise and has become habitual of accepting it graciously, not forgetting to repeat his ability to show unique feats of strength.

The last event is announced by the town crier but Christy is too tired to participate now. The tug of war will be contested without Christy, Pegeen announces, wiping his face with her shawl and happily thinking of the promises that the future holds for him after the laurels he has won.

Christy is now the lover boy, the wooer, and solicits Pegeen to keep her promise of marrying him within a fortnight of their declaration to do so. Pegeen is the coquette beloved, feigning disbelief in him, telling him that back home he will marry some girl of his town land.

The affair between Christy and Pegeen is romantic, poetic and imaginative by nature. Christy paints an idyllic picture of their future life together. They would both be pacing in the dews of Neifin at night, smelling the sweet fragrance rising in the dark, and the little shiny moon sinking behind the hills.

Pegeen's playful jests show as much love for Christy as Christy's for her in his dreams of squeezing kisses on her plucked lips with his hands stretched around her. Christy's words describe the power in which, love can hold the lovers.

Its little you'll think if my love's a poachers or an earls' itself – till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord-God in all ages sitting lonesome in the golden chair – The bliss of the lovers will make the Lord God himself jealous of them.

The sweet and melodious talk goes on with Pegeen becoming the Helen of Troy, pacing abroad with a bunch of flowers in her Golden shawl. Christy is the dream man of every woman, he has the two qualities, the poets talking and bravery of heart. Pegeen joins Christy in the reverie of their future life. Christy spearing salmon and Pegeen coaxing officials and nicknaming the stars in their nightly errands. Christy cannot fancy Pegeen partaking in his risky life. Their love is perfect with each adoring and worshipping the other. Both profess undying love to each other and Pegeen exclaims radiantly, If that s the truth, I ll be burning candles from this out to the miracles of God that have brought you from the South today and I with my gowns bought ready, the way that I can wed you and not wait at all .

Both pegeen and Christy are celebrating their unexpected luck. Pegeen had sometimes dreamt of marrying a rich Jew-man, Christy of girls talking nicely to him. The miracle of love has changed Pegeen from a woman whom seven townstands feared for her biting tongue into a girl talking sweetly. Both Pegeen and Christy revel in their love which according to Pegeen shall be unique in Mayo for there would not be another pair of gallant lovers to match .

Just as the lovers are in the trance of their love, drunken singing is heard outside and Michael and Shawn arrive. Michael is in high spirits having had his fill at Kate Cassidy s wake, Shawn is light in heart singing a popular song of the prisoners who try to escape but are brought back to the prison by the jailer. Michael praises the bountiful serving of liquor, the drink was flowing so freely that some of the men lay stretched out nauseated by drinks. Having attended a proper funeral recently, Michael reprimands Christy for having left his father without a proper burial. He should have brought him westwards, where they could all have given him a decent burial. He reproaches Christy for letting his father s body rot without a single Christian drinking a drop to the glory of his soul. Michael s comparison between Christy and Shawn begins to turn the table in favour of Shawn. Christy is a hardened slayer and a little frisky rascal , Shawn a shy and decent Christian . Shawn is the right match for Pegeen, for her security, for her life.

The credentials of Christy are already being doubted. Father Reilly has got the gilded dispensation to wed Shawn and Pegeen and he has announced his intention of wedding them fast since he is dreading that young gaffer who d capsize the stars themselves .

Michael s assessment of Christy and Shawn stands in sharp contrast to Pegeen s feelings for both. Shawn is to her a middling kind of scarecrow, having neither the savagery nor the fine words of Christy. Pegeen s assertion of marrying Christy comes as a shock to Michael and he wants Shawn to fight it out with Christy. But Shawn is scared of picking up a row with Christy, since he is the same man who had the courage to kill his own father. There is an altercation between Christy and Shawn. Shawn is afraid of fighting Christy in spite of Michael continuously prompting him to strike Christy. It is Christy instead who takes the loy to strike Shawn. Christy s over confidence and pride raise fears in the mind of the reader, high on the tide of luck, he is likely to come down with the receding tide. Christy and Pegeen almost Coerce Michael to bless them in marriage. Michael s speech to them is a philosophical discourse on the life of man. Man procreates and nurtures large families, for that is the joy of man s life. He would much rather have the joy of grandchildren playing around him and rejoice in the fullness of the house than live a single man. A single man is like a braying jackass with no place to call his own. He would, therefore, give his consent to Pegeen and Christy for marriage. Michael contradicts his own stance of a while ago and takes pride in giving his daughter to a man who is the equal of ten in strength. Everything seems to have been resolved for Pegeen and Christy when Mahon enters with Widow Quin and the crowd and straight away rushes at Christy. Had Christy been lying, had he made up the story to impress the people. Pegeen s remorse at having given Christy the coaxing glory for doing nothing apart from killing his father softly with a loy is ironical. Christy is not the champion, the playboy, the savage who is the equal of ten, simply because he had not killed his father. The crowd is now jeering at Christy and cheering Mahon, disparagement of Christy has begun. Christy is no more the man with the killer spirit.

Christy pleads with Mahon to have mercy on him for God's sake. He pleads with Widow Quin to intervene and save him but he still has some pride left, shall not plead to Pegeen for safety, not even for his life.

Pegeen is delirious with rage and with humiliation of being cheated asks Mahon to take Christy away else she will have to resort to the help of the boys to thrash the ugly liar who was playing off the hero.

The mob psychology is at its worst in this scene. The crowd coaxes both father and son, to witness the fight between the two will be a great treat indeed.

If Pegeen is disillusioned with Christy, Christy is disillusioned with the crowd of fools he had befriended.

Christy is in the worst mental state, of disorder, and anguish. He fears living under the fear of his father again, he fears that Pegeen hates him. His winning of all the races and the words he spoke have all been forgotten by Pegeen, by all the others.

Widow Quin is the only one who, apprehending danger to his life, advises him to escape the hostile crowd. But Christy persists in his folly, he still believes that Pegeen will wed him and he will ultimately be her hero, her lover. He fails to understand the danger to his life, the hostility of the people who have seen him striking Mahon, his own father. Even Pegeen has realized that the fantastic story is ugly to look at. The gallous story of a murderer, when witnessed looks like a dirty deed.

The scene of Christy tied up with a rope, handled by the crowd is the most tragic scene in the play. Christy's bewilderment turns into lament. His outburst of disbelief at Pegeen's warning to scorch his shins and then doing so turns him completely. Christy is a man who has gained wisdom through suffering. Loneliness is accepted by Christy as a part of his destiny.

Christy is menacing in his tone as he realizes his helplessness. But his tragedy is also exclusive and grand in a sense. His tragedy is the tragedy of the poet, of the hero who shall be mourned by the ladies in their silks and satins, rhyming songs and ballads on the terror of fate.

Mahon's coming to Christy's rescue, asking Michael to look after his daughter the way he would, brings the story to a more unexpected turn. Mahon will take his son away and both of them will have great times together, telling stories of Mayo's villainy and of the fools who live there. But Christy will accompany Mahon on his own terms. He shall from now onwards be the gallant Captain and Mahon his heathen slave. He has vanquished all, he has won his freedom. He has ultimately vanquished Pegeen too. Singing blessings upon the place which has transformed him into a man who can now go romancing and romping through life-time, he is risen above bonds and bondages. He leaves Pegeen mourning the loss of the playboy, whom she has lost forever.

### **Major Issues – Placing Synge in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Drama**

Katherine Worth observes in *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (The Athlone Press 1986) At first sight Synge might well look the odd man out among the innovatory Irish playwrights there is nothing strikingly modernist in his technique, no radical experiments with music, no self-conscious play with the theatrical illusion. It is rather easy to see him as an essentially nineteenth century figure, looking back to the romantic and rhetorical style of a Rostand rather than forward to the anti-rhetorical drama of the Beckettian era.

Synge is a queer combination of romanticism and realism, the romantic strain is sometimes combined with heroism and at other times with the absurdity of life, with its meaninglessness. Played accurately, Synge's drama of the romantic and absurd has to be as realistic as possible. The romantic strain is never completely absent from his plays, even in so darkly ironical and unheroic a play as *The Well of the Saints*. Synge's care to get things done accurately and life like typified in his presentation of real pampooties from Aran to his actors is as much a part of him and his flamboyant romanticism.

Katherine Worth points out the assets as well as disadvantages of this feature of Synge's writing, his incorporating the romantic in the real, the absurd in the heroic.



Both the realistic detail and the lush rhetoric of Synge can distract at times from the qualities that should make him most interesting to a modern audience. The austere vision of life seen so disconcertingly through the humourous grotesque, has violent laughter, in Yeats good phrase.

Synge felt and experienced the loneliness of man's heart. All his characters suffer, from this sense of loneliness. All the characters, if we look deeply, express this feeling in *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Christy was lonesome before he came to Mayo. Old Mahon is lonely for all his sons have forsaken him. Pegeen is lonely in spite of the company of Shawn, who is her prospective husband and Widow Quin, failing to fulfill her dream of sailing to a far-away land in the company of a grand sailor, is lonely too. Even Michael who seems pragmatic and seemingly more pragmatic bursts into a speech on the joys of togetherness. In the hope of having a family he agrees to the Pegeen-Christy wedding. Synge's characters resemble the Beckettian characters, like them they are the solitary wanderers who take their frighteningly freeway by hitch and highway cracking their Rabelaisian jokes, telling their endless tales. They create and recreate an inner self, a new landscape and live it ever creating a new self and world. Synge is closer to Maeterlinck in his stress on loneliness. It asserts itself even in the midst of his crowded scenes: through them all runs the terrible realization that 'I was born lonesome, and I'll be lonesome always'. In the Shebeen or at the village cross-roads the focus is on the characters who are alien to the world around them. In the plays *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, the protagonists, Nora as well as Christy, step into an unknown future: the present surroundings and people having failed them. In this sense, Synge falls in line with the Modern Irish dramatists.

The French influence on Synge stands next only to that of the Irish; Synge had a strong feeling for French authors and particularly admired Rabelais. The French influence is noticeable in Synge's sense of humour which he defended, it was Rabelais, Synge invoked, when he was driven to defend the mixed reaction of the *Playboy*.

The romantic note and a Rabelaisian note are working to a climax through a great part of the play and the Rabelaisian note, the gross note if you will, must have its climax no matter who may be shocked.

Synge spoke and wrote in French with enough ease to be called bilingual. He had a command over French which enabled him to write reviews and articles for French journals. He came back to France every year and praised some of the old French folk writers. His play, *The Well of the Saints* was based on a French morality play of the medieval times.

Synge has another thing in common with the avant-garde theatre, a musical ear, which enabled him to construct an intensely musical dialogue, which shall be discussed in Synge's use of language and music.

### Characterization

Synge's characters have an amazing fluidity. They are static in no sense of the word, though they neither grow nor change in the usual sense of the character transformation during the course of the play. Synge watches with interest his characters making use of the fluidity of their sensibilities. Within the shadow of what cannot be changed (age will come and death is certain) they assiduously change themselves, improvising their self dramas out of the materials they have at hand, sometimes finding ready collaborators, as in the case of Christy, sometimes having to battle to establish their private view, as in the case of Nora. In the case of Christy, the collaborators who had worked to create the new Christy turn hostile and then only the real self of Christy emerges.

Catherine comments, on this very important aspect of Synge's characters 'It could never be said of Synge's characters as Eliot said of Maeterlinck's that they take no conscious delight in their role'. On the contrary, an intensely dramatic sense of themselves is what marks out his leading characters: it is their greatest asset and also their doom, committing them to the endless story telling through which they communicate their dangerous landscapes and amazingly impose them on the given world of actuality. Their inner drama needs a stage

audience, even an audience of one to establish itself. We are not yet in the world of Beckett where a single character can hold the stage with his story of himself, but we are getting very near it. The technique of self-dramatization makes Synge's drama forward looking in this sense.

Synge kept his stage bare and austere, the Shebeen in the *Playboy of the Western World* was portrayed pathetically narrow in one of the productions, surrounded only by a mystical darkness. Bareness and emptiness dominate, with just a few objects in focus, Pegeen's shoes and the mirror that Christy is holding. He is the predecessor of Beckett in the sense that the world, which interests him, is peopled by lonely men, a world essentially without God. Synge's theatre of bareness and austerity where Yeats pointed out, time runs slowly and there is little outer movement to distract attention from the powerful beings at the centre, who amuse and appall and impose on us with enormous *Øan* and strength of personality, their interior drama.

Self-conscious theatricality comes naturally to Synge's characters.

### Musical Speech in Synge's Plays

Synge couldn't think of either life or art without music. He thought of life and the artists' compulsion to express it as a kind of musical process. Every life is a symphony, and the translation of this life into music and from music back to literature or sculpture or painting is the real effort of the artist. (Collected works Allan Price) Synge's unique form and use of dialogue is described by Katherine Worth:

This is how he approached the dramatic art. He constructed a dialogue so intricately musical that his actors had to learn to rend their text like scores orchestrating cadences that by no means came naturally to them. Yeats commented 'I can't imagine anyone getting this peculiar rhythm without being instructed in it', and William Fay endorsed the remark from hard experience: 'They took a cruel lot of practice before we could get them spoken at a reasonable pace and without at the same time losing the lovely lilt of his idiom'. The special atmosphere created by this elaborately rhythmical, living dialogue is obviously a crucial means of bringing us to accept the reality of the inner world. The characters project out of the bare, plain or prosaic scenes they factually inhabit. To a great extent Synge depends on making words function like music.

Charmed by the dialogue of *The Well of the Saints*, George Moore made the same point. He said 'one listens as one listens to music, charmed by the inevitableness of the words'. Synge never felt satisfied with the way the speech in his plays was rendered. It grieved him that a poet's subtle and individual intention should be lost in the delivery of the dialogue. Music was important as it lent certain spirituality to art, and spirituality was essential, Synge felt for that 'pure and perfect conception'. Not only did Synge have perfect sense of music but an excellent visual sense too. Synge was very clear of how he wanted the stage to be set for a particular visual effect that would suit the mood of the characters and the theme. 'No Drama', Synge wrote to Stephen, 'can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life', and he had himself quite a literal sense of authenticity. His cottages and Shebeens are precisely transferred to the stage, nets, oilskins and spinning wheels. Bottles and jugs, a settee, a table, a large open fire-place with turf fire, these are some of the things Synge wanted on the stage to make *The Playboy of the Western World* authentic.

Synge was fussy in his selection of the peasant speech, not strictly sticking to the regional differences of speech in use at Wicklow, Mayo or Kerry. While setting his plays in these respective regions, he varied his style in the usage of Irish, Gaelic, English or archaic words in order to achieve rhythmical, musical and dramatic decorum.

Pure Art, according to Synge could not dally with problems. Synge had no regard for writers like Ibsen and Zola. 'Analysts with their problems', he wrote in the preface to the Tinkers wedding and teachers with their systems are seen 'as old fashioned as the pharmacopocia of Galen'. In the preface to the *Playboy of the Western World* he argued that the intellectual modern drama of Ibsen and Zola failed because its urban speech starved the reality of life into 'joyless and pallid words'. For Synge the peasant drama was the only one, which could sustain the beauty of language. It should be recorded in an English that is perfectly Irish in essence.

Yet Synge's art was not spontaneous in the literal sense of the word.

## Thoughts and Concerns

An anxiety about old age and death is felt in all the plays of Synge. Whereas it is most predominant in the *The Riders to the Sea*, it is at the back of Nora's mind all the time in *The Shadow of the Glen*. Death is heavy in *Deirdre* from start to finish. Even in the *Playboy of the Western World*, so bursting with life, death does come in. Did you never tell her about the skulls they have in the city of Dublin and the white skulls and the black skulls and the yellow skulls, and some full teeth and some haven't only but one. Katherine Worth commented in the same context about Synge when she said 'Death fills all the spheres of the poem'.

Only one of Synge's plays *Riders to the Sea* could be placed in the category of tragedy. In all the others, Synge strikes a knife-edge balance between the comical and the sombre. He himself said that he was writing farce in the style of Boucicault, farce with a grim edge, violent laughter, tragic gaiety. It is exhilarating in the traditional way for its sheer zestful sense of life's eccentricities and incongruities, but it has another function, which gives it a more modern look. It becomes a way of confronting without despair the really bad jokes of life, physical afflictions, ugliness, old age, and death. Synge's vision of the world is multi-faceted and dynamic. Afraid of death and old age his characters are but they would not like to dwell on them to demolish life. To Synge, Squeamishness was a disease and he blasted debilitations. Drawing his characters from the most unpromising places, characters who were the most deprived and afflicted tramps, nomads, old people, people with deformities, he clothed them in the springs of humour and imagination. For all their deprivations they have a passion for life.

Synge's plays did not come, in his own phrase, like 'the blackberries on the hedge'. There over-flowing life is not as spontaneous as it seems. His final composition came after drafts he revised to the year of his death. The work was very intimately a part of him, the more consuming because it was a miraculously objectified transmuting of his own haunted personality.

## Ireland and its People

A study of Ireland from the books written by the Irish is helpful to get a full view of life as they live it. Ambiguities and paradoxes are a part of Irish people as well as their lives: Conor Cruise O'Brien introduces Ireland with the following words

An Irishman invited to introduce Ireland is faced with an odd kind of challenge. The lady (Ireland) is of venerable age and already of wide though mixed reputation. To the introducer she means as they say 'a lot'. Though what exactly he does mean he cannot be quite sure. To those to whom she is introduced, she means, perhaps, a holiday, a retreat from modernity, a reservation, a version of pastoral, an empty road, a laugh. The writer continues to describe Ireland, the motherland, enumerating its features, hinting at its anomalies and contradictions.

The Allegory of the Mother: That is Ireland is described as :

I should ask you to meet Mother. She is quite an ignorant woman, I'm afraid and very superstitious, in fact that has been her most marked characteristic, apart from the bottle to which, she is also as you can see, much given. Luckily she still goes to mass in the morning and the pub in the evening, if she didn't we'd hardly know it was still Mother.

Conor Cruise O'Brien talks of the mixed reaction of the Irish people to its past and present. Most of the Irish people are nostalgic about the language (Gaelic) they have forgotten and the 'old days of ranting and roaring and Up the Republic'.

The observations made above are particularly important to strike a balance between the myth of Ireland created by the writers and the country as it is. Irish writers are writing about Ireland but for a public mainly composed of foreigners and about a mainly catholic community for a public mainly composed of ex-Protestant agnostics. In these conditions, reader and writer are unwittingly drawn into a kind of collusion in the invention of a special country; the Ireland of literature. This is a distilled essence of Irish peculiarity. Now in literature.

Ireland's peculiarity emerges as an oppressive quality. Synge, like many other Irish writers, has helped to establish this.

The strange and intensely felt history of the country marked the people and produced a recognizable Irish mind discernible in Shaw, Joyce and Yeats and last but not the least Synge. Synge, writes about the Irish situation and predicament of a particular class and areas only. The Ireland of all these writers differs from the others, sometimes more than in contours only.

### Use of Irony

Irony and Satire, in Irish literature, goes back centuries, to the days of folk-poetry. A truly Irish satire reads like a paean of praise in honour of the main theme. Synge, whose sources included material available only in the peasant's tongue, restricted himself to what he called a god-natured, compassionate irony, never making use of the harder art of lampoon. Synge is never denunciatory in the literal sense of the word.

C. C. O'Brien talks of the Irish traditions of the pre-Christian, Catholic and Protestant periods. An observation, he makes, is particularly important to understand the characterization in Synge's plays, particularly *The Playboy of the Western World*

The only other point which I have time to make now is the antiquity of the hero and the anti-hero, in Irish history. Both cults account for part of the Irish predilection for mixing intense enthusiasm with intense irony, cynicism and self-mockery. The hero and the anti-hero votaries are often to be distinguished but many Irishmen are both.

Synge fuses many characteristics of the past, heroic and anti-heroic traditions in his characters. The bard and the buffoon are present in the same person, in abundance in Christy and in a lesser measure in others.

### Christy's Character

Christy's has been looked at variously by the audience as well as the critics: if not loved by all, he has not been hated even by Synge's most obdurate critics. Comparisons have been made sometimes as far fetched as with Jesus Christ and Oedipus. He has sometimes been considered a sacrificial goat, at other times the hater of patriarchal authority, since the play revolves around the theme of patricide. Christy is typically Irish, he loves blather and barney, he loves to talk, as most of the Irish do. One must strike a balance between the romantic, poetic, the amusing, ironical comedy in the play to understand not only Christy but the other characters too. The romantic vision of Christy is qualified by irony by the dramatist to make us aware of the poetic extravagance of Christy.

Christy's vision is excessively romantic; Synge makes it a point to expose the disparity between Christy's images and the reality. To Christy's description of Pegeen as 'the love light of the star of knowledge shining from her brow', Widow Quin's speech comes an anticlimax.

Widow Quin: That's poetry talk for a girl you'd see itching and scratching, and she with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the shop. Widow Quin's description of Pegeen, does not, however, nullify Christy's picture of her, Christy's description of his emotion is vivid and genuine.

Christy's character has been approached variously by critics. Grene warns of the dangers of seeing Christy only as a poet. He says, 'those who emphasize the progress of Christy through the play often press home an identification of the playboy as a poet'. It has been argued by J.F. Kilroy that the *Playboy of the Western World* dramatizes the gradual development of the poet's craft from its first uncertain expression to the full display of mature art. Other critics, Stephen for one, draw close parallels between Christy and Synge himself. Synge considers that it was his own growth as an artist, which he symbolized in the play. Ronald Peacock makes the same point from a different angle. He considers the play a delicate self-mockery in which the author parodied his own love of gaudy and outrageous language. It would, however, be restricting rather than enriching the character of Christy to see him as a poet only. Accordingly Greene rejects an

assessment of Christy's character entirely based on this aspect. He takes a wider approach to Christy's distinctive character. He says, 'Christy Mahon is not a poet, in the literal sense, nor can he be said to symbolize the artist as such. He is rather like the tramps of Wicklow, a temperament of distinction, a man capable of imaginative reflection'. One of the sources of Christy's attraction is that he is not a writer of prose poems but a far more basic and complete representative of the imagination. That Christy Mahon grows and discovers a new self in the course of the play is obvious. Una Ellis Ferner compares him to a 'Japanese flower dropped into a bowl of water'. The end of the play is seen as the full flowering of Christy. The dominance over his father and the dismissal of the crowd as 'fools of earth' signifies his complete victory of what stands outside him.

To interpret Christy's character, one has to look at the dimension of his thought, his feelings, and response to the people of Mayo. Christy's memories of his life at County Clair, Munster are frightening. The recollections of his father and his work at the land are almost nightmarish. Christy is a shy lad to begin with. Providence brings him to Mayo where Synge uses what Bergam called the 'snowball', the preposterous growth of a misconception, comically, for the creation of Christy. As so often with farce, it depends on a simple mechanism, Christy is led on to claim that he 'cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt'. The powers of Christy's fantasy grow with each succeeding version that he gives of the deed. In the first Act when he was just beginning to swell with his new sense of pride— and I a seemly fellow with great strength in me and bravery of — a knock at the door sends him running to Pegeen in terror: 'Oh Glory! Its late for knocking and this last while I'm in terror of the peelers and the walking dead. Similarly, just before the actual arrival of the father, he is boasting of his deed to Widow Quin.

And Yet Christy is not a conscious liar, his lies are unintended and come with a sense of growing esteem in himself. Christy is something beyond and more than a 'comic boastful liar'. He is led on by the Mayo men as well as women. Christy is of course more vulnerable when it comes to women and comes out with his most poetic and eloquent words when coaxed by women. He has experienced the elation felt by the attention of women, which he himself admits is new to him, his exultation is obvious. He makes no bones about the fact that he has not received ever, even a second look from a girl and old Mahon confirms Christy's shyness of girls in his taunting deprecating account of him.

As the play gathers momentum, the mechanism of reversal, from inflation to deflation comes into play. The successive deflation of Christy the boaster provide a glimpse into what is going on in his mind, the pattern helping to express the growth and development of his character. At the end of Act 1, Christy sums up his position, 'It's great luck and company I have won'. By the second Act, it is Pegeen only that he is seeking. Christy's love for Pegeen wins our sympathy and we are from now onwards concerned about his happiness, and his fortunes. Our sympathy for Christy is stirred in the beginning by his account of the treatment he received at the hands of his father. Though Mahon paints him as a good for nothing idler, we feel that there is substance in what Christy says. Mahon has failed to perceive the finer qualities of his son.

We are concerned for him throughout the play. And finally even as Christy's pretensions to glory are debunked our sympathy for Christy remains.

In the final Act when Christy is deserted by all, Widow Quin excepting, there is complete change in his personality. Despoiled of all his glory and betrayed even by Pegeen, he gains a new fortitude, to live by himself, and to dream his dreams alone. The springs of imagination lie within himself. Rejected by all, he rejects them all too and moves towards a mature self-sufficiency. Christy, an artist at heart, forges his way through the world, which will not understand him. He has learnt another truth that love is mutable and Christy shall remain an alien and a fugitive in a world peopled with ugly fathers and pragmatic communities. The hypothetical Patricide has taught him much. Christy is both the artist and the creation of his own art. Christy, in spite of the Mayo debacle, will make a self-willed alliance with destiny, he will not submit humbly or mutely. Christy will create poetry of his own key.

A triumphant defiance of his father and his shattered dreams of Pegeen give his life a new meaning. Before going away, Christy blesses the Mayo people for turning him into a likely gaffer .

### Pegeen s Character

The two characters we meet in the first scene of the play are Pegeen and Shawn Keogh. Pegeen is described as a wild-looking but fine girl of about twenty. Her business-like manners show her to be a woman who has full control over the place. Though not stylized, she has a way of doing things and treating people. She deals with Shawn in an off hand manner, she is scornful of him and takes pleasure in teasing him. She ridicules him and talks disparagingly of the men of Mayo who have lost the quality, the manhood of the men of the ancient times in Ireland. That she does not think much of Shawn is clear from remarks like, it s a wonder, Shebeen, the Holy Father betaking notice of the likes of you . Pegeen is impatient of Shawn, weary of him for his inherent fear of everything; he is afraid of the man he has heard groaning, afraid of the lonesome darkness, afraid of the peelers, afraid of Michael James. Most of all, he is Fearful of Father reilly. She is equally curt to her father. Her sentences are short and she makes her point directly. When Michael is leaving to attend the wake she tell him. Have you no shame, Michael James, to be quitting off for the whole night . To his remark that she is queer daughter, she retorts immediately, that if she was a queer daughter he was a queer father.

Pegeen is possessive about her people. Though herself contemptuous of Shawn, she takes defence of him after the coat episode and chides her father for making game of a poor fellow .

Pegeen s first conversation with Christy is in the nature of an enquiry, puzzle-the-world .

Pegeen emerges as a woman of nerve, who succeeds in taking out from Christy when the men had failed to do so to Michael, Jimmy and Philly, Christy was a puzzle-the-world. She persuades Christy to stay and shuts Shawn up when he objects to it. Her treatment of Shawn ( she hustles him out of the Shebeen and bolts the door) shows her contempt for Shawn s lack of spirit. She taunts him for having refused to stay when she needed him and settles her attention on the young lad whose small feet and quality name have already started impressing her. Pegeen watches him with delight as she showers praises on him. He is to her a fine handsome young fellow with a noble brow and also a fine and fiery poet. Pegeen is the lover, Christy the recipient of her adoration. Christy would have been the heartthrob of many girls before her, thinks Pegeen and finds it strange that none had ever-paid heed to him. Pegeen s softness of manner towards Christy shows the change in her feelings: from a sharp-tongued girl, she suddenly changes into a girl who soothes and reassures Christy with comforting words. She promises him peace in that place. She conceives false ideas about Christy s past, life he must have been living like a king etc. and follows them blindly inspite of Christy s very honest statements of how common place his life was. It is Pegeen who takes the initiative to ensure that Christy got a good share of the earth which to her he fully deserves.

Pegeen has a patronizing tone only for Christy. To Widow Quin she is as blatant as she is to Shawn and others. She is Widow Quin s equal when it comes to letting Christy go with her. She seizes Christy s arm and claims her right on him. Emphatic in her dealings, she will not let Widow Quin take him. He ll not stir. He s potboy in this place, and I ll not have him stolen-off and kidnapped - .

She can be petty as all peasant girls are supposed to be in a comedy of this nature and does not feel shy in hitting below the belt when required. She does not allow Widow Quin to take credit of her husband s murder, calling it a sneaky kind of murder , which deserved small glory. She assails the Widow s character and poverty outrageously. Her impatience with adversaries as well as those she cares for comes out in her anger at Christy for not protesting against Widow Quin, Are you dumb, young fellow , she asks him. Sure of her intentions she asks Widow Quin to pack up. She accuses Widow Quin of speaking lies about Shawn s engagement to her and has no qualms about it. She will not wed Shawn if a Bishop came walking to join them, she tells Christy. Pegeen s role in building hopes in the heart of Christy need little more proof, Pegeen more than anyone else germinates the hope and confidence in Christy.

A streak of jealousy is apparent in the behaviour of Pegeen when she sees Christy surrounded by girls, drinking with his arms linked with Widow Quin. Pegeen's reaction to each one present is different. Whereas she is angry but brief with Sara, with Widow Quin her tone is more deadly and defying. Seeing the only formidable rival in Widow Quin, she spares no opportunity to remind her of her status. Widow Quin, in turn, is the only one who has the audacity to face her, her manner is equally insolent and fearless. To Christy she is kind and sharp by turns. She is very sore with him after the scene with the girls and orders him as a mistress would order a potboy, she would have none of his boasting and shuts him up when he is about to repeat the story of his father's murder. She can be common and imperial as per the demand of the hour. She betrays no emotion or weakness while dealing with people.

Pegeen has great versatility in devising methods and stories to secure what she wants. She makes up the story about the newspaper report about the murder of a father by his son on the spot to scare Christy and put him back in his position. She warns him 'you will be shut of jeopardy no place if you go on talking with a pack of wild girls'.

Pegeen is playful with Christy, angry, loving, and coquettish by turns. She has the good sense to time her attitude with her speech. When Christy complains of loneliness, she immediately taunts him about the thousand girls who are walking in Mayo, reminding him of his earlier remark about Mayo being a fine country for young lovely girls.

Bold and capable of apt words, Pegeen is not Christy's equal in comprehending the beauties of life, the poetry of words. Christy has an edge over her. She does not fully identify with the places and things Christy talks of. Christy is for her, 'the oddest walking fellow I ever set my eyes on to this hour today'. Christy casts his charisma on Pegeen, she is not exposed to outside life having lived her whole life with her father. Pegeen is completely defenceless, failing to understand the working of Christy's mind, she feels bewildered and afraid of losing him to Widow Quin and the other girls. Pegeen is more subtle, endowed with strong impulses to judge the propriety of her own behaviour. She restrains herself in her relationship with Christy, never forgetting either her status or modesty.

Pegeen becomes, through the play, increasingly tender towards Christy. After Christy has won all the races, Pegeen is full of joy. She wipes his face with her shawl and chaperons him in the love scene that follows. Pegeen fully surrenders herself to Christy. Christy fills her mind with the dreams of the future, touched by his eloquence, she, for the first time, admires him unreservedly. She has nothing which makes her fit for a man like Christy, she says. She is docile and gentle for the first time, pledging her heart to a man of her dreams, full of physical strength and verbal magic. It is not surprising then, that Pegeen falls into a rage when she realizes that the entire story of murder was a hoax. She is full of remorse at having been cheated by the one she had laced in her heartstrings. Full of hatred, she asks Mahon to take his son away. Pegeen is inconsolable and choked with emotion, 'half laughing', through her tears, calls Christy an ugly liar, playing off the hero. The last effort of Christy to win her over, when he attacks his father, also fails. She hates him so much that she burns his leg. Seen deeply, Pegeen does not hate Christy, she fails to reconcile herself with Shawn as also to forget Christy. T R Henn's label for Pegeen as the 'victim heroine' is true only to the extent that she loses the man she has won and turned into a hero. She has, she laments, lost him for ever.

### **Widow Quin's Character**

Widow Quin is developed with extraordinary skill for the second woman that she plays in the play. She is almost a rival of Pegeen in her relationship with Christy. Widow Quin was in Synge's earliest drafts the boldest of the hero-worshipping girls, making her appearance in Act II only. She was supposed to be Pegeen's contemporary playing a minor role, it was only in the final draft that she became Quin from Sally, which was Synge's original name for her, and assumed much larger importance. She seems, sometimes to dominate the play, though playing the supporting character she is never overshadowed by any other character in the play, she has remained, over the years, one of the most favourite of Synge's characters.

She is in a sense, closer to Christy than Pegeen. She is Christy's confidant, helping him to get Pegeen and contriving to elude old Mahon. She is, besides being a murderer like Christy, also lonesome like him. She shares with him her feelings of loneliness, while describing her feeling on seeing the gallant hairy fellows are drifting beyond and myself long years living alone .

Widow Quin who comes to see the curiosity man of Pegeen takes no time in identifying herself with him. She tells Christy, you'll find we are great company, young fellow, when it's the like of you and me you'll hear the penny poets singing in an August Fair . She tries to justify her claim of being a more suitable comrade for a young lad, than Pegeen, who'd go helter-skeltering after any man would let you a wink upon the road . It was to make her role and character strikingly different from Pegeen's that Synge drew her as an older and more experienced Widow.

Synge, Nicholas Grene observes, deliberately limited Widow Quin's attractiveness . Synge restricted her influence; he never let her become tragic and serious and gain our concern, though she is present throughout playing a significant role. There is great temptation in Christy for her and she does remain devoted to him. But once Christy decides in favour of Pegeen against her, she at once returns to her role, as the comic Widow bargaining for what she can get. Christy (with agitation) will you swear to aid and save me for the love of Christ? Widow Quin (looks at him for a moment) If I aid you, will you swear to give me a right of way I want and a mountain ram and a load of dung .

She is completely reinstated in her comic role. She bargains with Christy just as she had bargained with Shawn. Forgetting the episode of the girls joining their arms and drinking to their future as husband and wife, Widow Quin promises to help Christy. Widow Quin is saved from falling into pathos, by her approach to life, she lets go Christy without much pain. She draws a cynical pleasure from the things gone wrong, but has nothing of a sadist in her.

Well, she says, if the worst comes in the end of all, it'll be great game to see there's none to pity him but a widow woman, the like of one has buried her children and destroyed her man .

Nicholas Grene ascribes a functional role to Widow Quin. Emphasizing her role in the structure and growth of the plot, he says, Widow Quin has a very functional part in the play. She is the stage manager of the piece, contriving action, supplying information, providing links between one scene and another. She is also something like the comic *raisonneur*, giving us a clear-sighted and realistic commentary. Her view of Christy, for example, from the start, is nearer truth than the others: I'd soften my heart to see you sitting so simple with your cup and cake and you fitter to the saying your catechism than slaying your da . She comments about Pegeen as itching and scratching when Christy describes her as the star of knowledge etc. She fully understands Pegeen's temperament and warns Christy she'll knock the head of you, she says, and can apprehend what awaits Christy. He had been taken as a great wonder by Pegeen and had turned out to be just a little schemer. Much earlier, Widow Quin had warned Christy the same way about how Pegeen would be raving at him much before a week was by.

Widow Quin tries to win Christy over in her own way. She has taken a fancy to him. She identifies herself with him as they are alike. She even promises to tend him in her little house, giving him the security and protection that he needed. It's only after Christy entreats her in his helplessness that Widow Quin promises to aid him. In exchange she asks for small things that sound petty and sordid. Widow Quin promises to keep his story from Pegeen, to save Christy. She would even swear that Old Mahon was a maniac and that she had seen him raving in the sand.

Widow Quin plays Christy's friend till the end. She tells him to leave, she knows the mob-psychology and has no doubt about the treatment Christy is going to get from the people of Mayo, Pegeen not excluded.

She implores him to leave. She gets impatient with him for his folly and yet coaxes him like an older person, trying to save him from the impending peril that she can see too clearly. The words that she desperately utters at Christy's stubbornness, bring us back to her thought, so naive and so funny. She promises to find him new sweethearts, better than Pegeen at each waning moon.



At the end, when Widow Quin has failed to make Christy realize the extent of the danger, she claims him fit to be taken to a madhouse instead of a jail and walks out to bring a doctor to treat him. Her attempts to pin petticoats on the recalcitrant Christy are seen by some as grotesque, by others farcical. Whatever, they do reveal the simplicity of her intentions and establish her as a genial and comic character. When she can no longer help Christy, she is made to exit before the final scene.

Agreed that Widow Quin lacks the sparkle and romance of Christy, the scorn and the temper of Pegeen who has the impulse to strike with words as with the hands, yet she wins us over by something quite inexplicable.

### Shawn Keogh's Character

Shawn is the antithesis to Christy Mahon. Fat and Fair, Shawn stands in contrast to the slight young man that Christy is. He is awkward and ill-at-ease in the company of girls, even that of Pegeen. In the morally topsy-turvy world of the *Playboy*, Shawn's conservative morals are in sharp contrast to Christy's amorality. His obsession with morality and fear of breaking its norms is a source of constant amusement to the reader. When he senses danger to his morals, he invokes the aid of Father Reilly and all the saints of God. The scene where Michael tries to hold him back is one of the funniest in the play, calling Michael an old pagan for want of morals, he threatens to get the curse of the priests on him if he doesn't let him go. He ultimately escapes leaving the coat in Michael James' hands with the audience splitting with laughter. Timid to the core, he is afraid of Christy when he hears him groaning in the furzy ditch, he is equally scared of him when he sees him walking towards the Shebeen. Running for shelter, he utters, 'the queer dying fellow beyond looking over the ditch.

He's come up God help me, he is following me now (he runs into the room) and if he's heard what I said, he'll be having my life and I going lonesome in the darkness of the night. Apprehensive of Christy from the beginning, he objects to his staying in the decent household of Michael James. He tries to bribe Christy with his new coat and double breeches. In a pitiable tone he pleads to him, 'I'll give you the whole of them, and my blessings, and the blessing of Father Reilly if you'll quit from this land and leave us in peace we had till last night at the fall of dark. He knows his limitations, he admits not only of being a poor scholar but confesses his fear of having a clever and fearless man like Christy dwelling in Pegeen's house. He cautions Christy of Pegeen's temper, discouraging him from marrying her. She shall be more suited to a man like himself, 'a quiet simple fellow wouldn't raise a hand upon herself if she scratched itself', is his plea. Pegeen bullies him throughout the play shutting him up whenever he tries to open his mouth. Even when, at the end, she is down with grief she hits him a box in the ear and orders him to quit her sight.

Shawn Keogh is a decent man and a Christian man as Michael calls him. But he fails to win people over because he does not generate any interest. Utterly unromantic, he lacks in vigour as well as imagination. He makes his cowardice obvious every time he is confronted by Christy. He refuses to fight him even when his marriage is in danger. 'I'll not fight him Michael James. I'd liefer live a bachelor than face a lepping savage. Shawn is a trader who deals with people as if they were all mercenaries. He tempts Christy as well as Widow Quin with gifts, alludes to what he has promised Michael for marriage with Pegeen and reminds him of what he might lose if he does not mind Christy. 'Strike him yourself', he tells Michael, 'or you'll lose my drift of leifers and my blue bell from Sheem.

Though a decent man and a Christian man, he is no match for Pegeen. Pegeen's marriage to him would be for her a bigger tragedy than her loss of the *Playboy*. Pegeen may not be able to avert her marriage to Shawn, whom she describes as a middling kind of scarecrow, with no savagery or fine words in him at all.

### Old Mahon Character

Old Mahon is in a way responsible for turning his boy into a man. It is Old Mahon who fills the heart of the young boy with hatred and turns him into a rebel. Old Mahon stands for patriarchal authority and absolute tyranny, of a father.

Christy describes his father as a man who was raging all the time. That he was waking and snoring out loud while he was sleeping. Walking naked into the yard in the Moon of May, he looked like an ash-tree to him. Old Mahon is a man who produces fear not only in the heart of his son, but into the lambs and sows as well. Christy's desperation with the man who never gave peace to anyone and gave Christy the bitter life he led is so brimful that he has no feeling of remorse for having hit him.

Old Mahon's abuse of Christy had no end. He made him labor the whole day, insulting and humiliating him with words like 'you squinting idiot' etc- and coerced him to marry Widow Casey, who was fat, limping on her leg and blinded in one eye. This was just because Old Mahon wanted to acquire Widow Casey's hut and gold.

Old Mahon is not described by Synge as far as his looks are concerned, but the abrupt manner in which he barges into the Shebeen reflects the kind of man he is. He talks to Widow Quin gruffly and starts his enquiry without salutation or apology.

He describes his son Christy in a tone as disparaging as Christy had described him. Old Mahon, a coarse peasant, rough in speech as well as thought, does not understand the nature of his son whose pursuit of birds, talks of folly and making mugs of himself in the looking glass are a puzzle to him. Mahon fails to comprehend how he could have tormented Christy, who to him is an 'idler' and a 'loony'. It is he who had suffered his son with 'the patience of a martyred Saint'; it is he who had a reason to complain of being destroyed by his son, is his belief.

Mahon does not have the keen sensibility of understanding Christy's frustration with him. He does however invoke a feeling of sympathy for a while when he recounts his story of being deserted by his sons, the very sons he had tended for all these years. He also philosophizes on the misery and terror of old age, its lonesomeness and proximity to death. Mahon's acclaim of the boy while watching the races, whom he had been denouncing 'as good for nothing', is ironical. Mahon's applause of Christy, who seemed to be 'kicking the stars', suddenly turns into hatred and disgust the moment he recognizes him. He cannot believe the luck of Christy in the races, he cannot even believe that a decent girl like Pegeen was going to marry him. Utterly confused, Mahon bursts out into his most famous speech, 'Oh, I'm raving with a madness that would fright the world'. 'I never till this day confused that dribbling idiot with a likely man. I'm destroyed surely'. Defeated and forsaken Mahon prepares for the union beyond which he will not be haunted by his misfortunes. He verges on being tragic in his words, where he mourns human nature: man's treatment of a fellow being whose head's astray.

His behaviour, when he confronts Christy, confirms what Christy had said of him. He knocks him down and starts beating him. He orders Christy to prepare himself for retribution. He grabs and commands him to follow. He fails to understand Christy till the end forcing Christy to attack him with a loy. He is hard on Christy, angry with him but would not have him tied by these strangers. He cares little for them and rejoices his getting back his son, 'my son and myself our own way, and we'll have great times from this out telling stories of the villainy of Mayo and the fools is here'.

Reconciled with Christy, he is happy to be his heathen slave. He sings the glory of God and with a smile returns home with his son. By far he remains the most eccentric character of the play.

### **Michael James Character**

Michael James loves company, drinks and revelry. Synge describes him as a fat jovial publican. When we meet him first in the play, he is about to leave to attend Kate Cassidy's wake, leaving Pegeen alone in the Shebeen. He is prepared to leave Pegeen in the care of Shawn, to whom she is not wedded as yet, which shows that he is, unlike Shawn, not very particular about the norms set by Father Reilly or the authorities in Rome. After Shawn escapes leaving his coat in his hands, he breaks into a sentimental speech about his satisfaction of having found an honest husband for his daughter.

He is no more mature than the younger crowd and joins them in urging Christy on and glorifying his big deed. Ignorant and unexposed to the life outside Mayo, he wants to believe that Christy had murdered his father with a knife. Since, I m told , he says, in the big world, it s bloody knives they use .

Michael is curious to know all the details about the manner of the murder, the burial and whether Christy had been able to evade the peelers. After Christy s credentials as a murderer have been established he proposes to him with deference would you think well to stop here and be pot-boy, mister honey, if we gave you good wages, and didn t destroy you with the weight of work?

He remains respectful in his tone to Christy and leaves Pegeen under his care without the least bit of anxiety. Michael James is the coolest of all, neither giving nor taking much anxiety on himself.

Michael James is relaxed. He enjoys drinking and sings in abandonment, when he is tipsy. His pagan joy in drinking comes out in the scene where he returns after Kate Cassidy s wake. He regrets not having taken a fine and stout lad like Christy to the wake where the flow of drinks was so plentiful that a few men lay stretched and retching speechless on the holy stones . He reprimands Christy for having buried his father ingloriously, to him a proper burial means the Christians drinking to the glory of the dead man s soul. He becomes concerned about his daughters future and wants to save her from Christy as suddenly as he had entrusted her to his care.

Father Reilly has received the long awaited gilded dispensation from Rome and is ready to wed Pageen and Shawn. Michael s statement, in the intoxicated condition he is in, about the his worry about Pegeen, is ironical again. Drawing himself up he tells Christy; Aye, Are you thinking, If I m drunk of self, I d leave my daughter living single with a little frisky rascal is the like of you?

He feels helpless when Pegeen asserts that she will now marry Christy and not Shawn. He tries to prompt Shawn to fight for her. Disappointed in Shawn and still in a state of drunkenness, he gears up to bless Christy and Pegeen. Celebrating life and virility, he discourses on the joy of family and children and exalts marriage.

Michael is a law-abiding citizen and would like nothing in the nature of crime to take place in his premises. He apologizes to Mahon for Christy having been tied but explains his fear of the treachery of the law. He also justifies himself as a responsible father, on grounds of concern for his daughter.

After Christy and Old Mahon are gone, he prepares to celebrate the return of peace by asking Pegeen to draw the porter.

### **Important Questions (Essay Type 400 Words)**

1. Synge stuck to the Irish roots for his themes. Discuss, with special reference to the *Playboy of the Western World* .
2. Can the *Playboy* be called a dark comedy? If so, in what manner?
3. The *Playboy of the Western World* is an extravagant comedy with elements of farce predominating in it . Do you agree? Give reasons
4. The language of the *Playboy of the Western World* is the language of the Irish countryside. It enhances the charm of the play while making it realistic at the same time. Discuss.
5. Is the epithet, The Playboy used for Christy so frequently in the play, appropriate? Give reasons for your answer.
6. How are the traditional attitudes reversed in the *Playboy of the Western World* ? Discuss with reference to the virtues that are glorified in Christy.
7. Christy s treatment in Mayo makes him confident of himself. How does he make the story of Patricide more spectacular each time he relates it? What effect does his reaction to his fathers arrival have on the complexion of the Play?

8. The diversity and richness of the *Playboy of the Western World* defy a strict categorization. How would you classify the play as a comedy?
9. Christy is a master storyteller. Discuss.
10. Discuss the folk-elements in the play *Playboy of the Western World* . What makes the play so close to human nature and folly? Discuss with reference to pastoral element in the play.
11. Can you describe the *Playboy of the Western World* as completely farcical? Pick out the farcical situations in the play that amuse you most.
12. Discuss Synge's use of irony in the *Playboy of the Western World* . How would you categorize it?
13. Character sketch of
  - a. Christy
  - b. Mahon
  - c. Widow Quin

### Short Answer-questions (200 Words)

1. Title of the Play.
2. Do you know that there were riots on the first performance of *The Playboy of the Western World* ? What do you think, in the play, could have offended the audience?
3. Attempt a portrayal of the people of Mayo on the bases of the *playboy of the Western World* .
4. What purpose is served by the scene involving Jimmy, Philly, Mahon and Widow Quin in the third Act? How does this further the action of the play?
5. What stratagem does Widow Quin use to put Mahon off the scent of his son? Does she succeed in dismissing him?
6. Trace the surges and setbacks in Christy's reputation through the play. Who would you hold responsible for these?
7. Character sketch of
  - a. Old Mahon
  - b. Michael James
  - c. Shawn Keogh

### Important References

#### *Act I*

*shebeen*: a house selling alcoholic liquor in Ireland. *ct*

*settle*: a bench with a high back and arms and often with a box fitted below the seat.

*Turf fire* :Fire fed with grass.

*creel cart* : cart that has high movable sides, used for carrying turf, pigs, sheep, etc.

*Kate Cassidy's Wake* : *Wake* is the watch beside a corpse before burial. TR Henn gives this description of the ceremony of it wake: The body, dressed in its shroud and tidied -usually by some women, not of the family, who has known skill in this is laid on a table in a corner of the room, candles burning at head and feet. As each visitor enters he lifts the cloth from the face of the dead to make his farewell. The visitor kneels down to say a prayer. At one time it was customary to place a conical mound of snuff on the navel of the corpse, from which each took a pinch as he went by. Then, one by one, the callers pass to the group round the fire. Each is given a new clay pipe, ready loaded with tobacco. There is whisky and stout in whatever quantity the means of the relatives allow, and tea for the women.

The talk round the fire develops, first, as a series of praises of the deceased, reminiscences and anecdotes (always favourable) about his or her life; and finally might develop into something like an orgy. The whole ceremony is pagan, down to the symbolism of the new claypipes, overlaid.

*Scruff of the hill* : slope below the summit, peak, pinnacle.

*Aren't we after making a good bargain*: Apparently dowry was prevalent.

*Father Reilly's dispensation* : It is necessary because Pegeen and Shawn are marrying in the month of Lent, i.e. the period of fasting and penitence. The dispensation finally arrives in Act 3.

Queer lot: the word queer recurs in the play several times. Odd, strange, eccentric.

*The like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler* : who knocked ... shows similarity.

*Peeler* a policeman; originally a nickname given to the Royal Irish Constabulary, instituted under the Secretaryship (1812-1818) of Sir Robert Peel.

*Maiming ewes*: disabling ewes; a favourite way to settle grudges against one's neighbours. Or landlord.

*He a great warrant to tell* : he is highly skilled and famous for telling. *Father Reilly has small conceit*: would not have allowed.

*Is it the like of that murderer?* Pegeen's objection to Widow Quin is because she is a murderer. But ironically later she is to urge her father to employ Christy as a potboy *because* he is a murderer and brave!

Use respectfully

*Himself*: Master of the house, i.e. Pegeen's father.

*I don't let on*: don't reveal this secret.

*I whisht* : (Scot and Irish dialect) be quiet, hush. .

*God bless you! The blessing of God on this place* : A customary greeting used by an Irish peasant, a neighbour or a stranger, on entering a cottage. The Irish peasant of the time used these blessings almost without thought of their significance.

*The Playboy of the Stooks of the Dead Women* : rocks on the sea-shore; a stook is a conical cluster of sheaves of *Western JV(rh)* oats set up to dry. Do you see that sandy head, he said, pointing out to the east that is called the Stooks of the Dead Women; for one time a boat came ashore there with twelve dead women on board her. big ladies with green dresses and gold rings.

*Bad cess to them*: bad luck to them.

*Gripe of the ditch*: hollow of the ditch.

*old Pagan*: Shawn uses the phrase for Michael probably because what he wants him to do is just something so unlike a Christian. Heathen, one has no religion, one who serves.

*Penny pot-boy* : a serving man in a cheap public home. !

*A bona fide*: Il bonafide traveller, so exempted from licensing hours ; here genuine. Enjoying faith.

*You're wanted, maybe?* : you are probably wanted (by the police)? This question by Michael is the beginning of the snowballing the lie.

*Divil a one*: (colloq.) not even one or not at all. :

*gentle, simple*: Gentle here means of good social position as against common people.

*He'd beat Dan Davies circus!* : The exaggeration suggested is typical of the people here. Note the vivid imagination of the people. The Irish have a tendency to exaggerate.

*Boer.*, : South African of Dutch origin.

*Kruger*: Full name -Stephanus .Tohannes Paulus K1"llger (1825-1904). South African soldier and statesman.

He led the Afrikaners i.e. the whites esp. the whites of Dutch origin to victory against the British in the First Boer War in 1881. He died in exile in 1904.

*Crusty* : irritable, insolent, harsh.

*Spuds*: Potatoes.

*The sense of Solomon* : wisdom of Solomon. Solomon was the king of Israel c. 970-930 B.C. known for his wisdom and magnificence.

*Poteen* : (Irish) illicit liquor made from potatoes, oats or rye. Its manufacture was once a major industry in the West of Ireland, and the search for .stored whisky a major preoccupation of the police.

*Loosed khaki cut throats*: This is one of the reminiscences of the Boer War.

*drouthy* : thirsty.

*I m tired surely. ..waking fearful in the night*: This is the real Christy.

*a kind of quality name*: (aristocratic name). One can distinguish the gentle by their very names. Christy promptly accepts this suggestion that he

belongs to the landed gentry. The Mahons were a famous military family.

*Streelen* : chat.

*Poaching*: catch (game) illegally.

*I was a divil to poach*: I was

*St. Martin s Day* : 11 November, St. Martin s summer, means a period of mild weather about this date.

*Gaudy officer*: wearing the striking Edwardian uniform of the militia. *Banbhs* : young pigs.

*Stringing gabble*: continuous talking.

*Priesteen* : little priest.

*penny poets* : selling ballads at fairs.

*Houseen* : little house. The Irish suffix -een is used to form diminutive nouns. Make a list of such diminutives.

*Without a tramp: It s ttle the Lord God formed you to contrive indeed*: This match of abuse between women is highly comic.

*A sop of grass obacco* : dried but uncured tobacco leaf .

*I liefer stay* : I would prefer to stay.

*County Clare*: in the province of Munster in the Republic of Ireland.

*Cnuceen* (or knockeen) : little hill.

*Gamy*: sensational.

*He was letting on. ...*: he wanted to give the impression.

*Under a dray* : *dray* is a low, strong flat four-wheeled cart without sides, used for carrying heavy loads.

*Supeen* : a little sup.

*a white shift* : a white undergarment.

*huffy* : 1 Udely proud.

*Lepping the stones*: crossing by stepping stones.

*It s not three perches*: *perch* is a measure of length of land of 51/2 yards.

*Frish-fresh* : froth-like substance like beaten egg.

*Shut of jeopardy* : safe from danger.

*Lonesome*: keyword for Christy.

*Coaxing fellow*: flattering, persuasive.

*Esau*: the elder son of Isaac and Rebecca in the Bible.

*Cain and Abel*: sons of Adam.

*Neifin*: the name of a mountain west of Loch Conn, between Newspoint and Bollina.

*Erris plain*: Erris is a barony in northwest Mayo.

*I'm thinking you're an odd man*: Pegeen is truly puzzled and also affected by the talk of Christy.

*Wattle*: thin stick.

*mitch off*: sneak away, play truant.

*Inveigle you off*: to trick you away from.

*thraneen*: bit of thread, shred.

*Cleeve*: basket

*Kilmainham*: a notorious jail in Dublin.

*Rye path*: path by the side of a small rye field.

*Turbary*: right of cutting turf on a stretch of bog.

*The long car*: a kind of small wagon once popular in the West for postal services.

*Streeler*: rugged youth. The word is used mainly by city boys.

*Gob*: mouth, hence the whole face.

*Mortified scalp*: wounded head.

*Finches and felts*: birds.

*Baronies*: In Ireland a barony is a division of a county.

*The spit of you*: Your exact likeness.

*Civil warrior*: because he is not in the military.

*Weasel tracing a rat*: weasel is a type of small thin fur animal with a pointed face which can kill other small animals. A weasel works quickly weaving from side to side to pick up the scent.

*He a kind of carcass*: dead sheep and cattle were not buried but pushed over cliffs into the Atlantic.

*Spavindyass*: lame with spavin, disease of the hock-joint.

*Boreen*: lane.

*Gaffer*: boss or man in charge.

*Roulette man*: roulette is a gambling game.

*Cockshot man*: who allows sticks to be thrown at him, for money at fairs.

*Hobbled yet*: hobble is to cause a person to limp.

*There was a graveyard*. ...: Synge had heard the story in Kerry.

*Isn't madness a fright*: isn't madness frightful?

*Skelping them*: slapping them.

*Mangy cue*: diseased dog.

*Winkered mule*: mule with blinkers on the bridle.

*There isn't a ha porth* : *ha p orth* is a contraction of half penny worth; a small amount. There is nothing that he isn't winning.

*Mitred bishops*: mitre is a type of tall pointed hat worn by priests of high rank.

*If the mitred bishop* : Christy has been truly transformed and is at his eloquent best in these lines.

*Paters* : the Lord's prayer.

*For you'd never see the match of it for flow of drinks* .: Wakes were occasions for heavy drinking.

*Throw him on the crupper*: the opportunity for drinks at a wake is not to be missed. *Crupper* is a leather belt passing under a horse's tail and tied to the saddle to prevent it from slipping forward.

*Gilded desperation*: dispensation is the Roman Catholic permission to disobey a general rule. cf. p 177.

*The plains of Meath* : the more fertile lands of the midlands and south-east are proverbial in the west for their wealth.

*Munster liar*: Christy who belongs to Munster.

*Rule the roost in Mayo* : be the leader in Mayo.

*State him now*: attack him now.

*The old hen*: influenza.

*Cholera morbus*: the peasantry love to pick up bits of medical knowledge.

*Gallows story*: gallows is from gallows.

*Picking cockles*: According to TR Henn, the coldest, wettest and most ill-paid of work.

*I'm master of all fights from now*: There is a new Christy now.

*Romping lifetime*: lively years of life.

### Questions The Playboy : A Discussion

Discuss the characteristic features of Synge's language in *The Playboy*.

Write an essay on imagery in *The Playboy*. **SUGGESTED READINGS**

*Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* by J.A. Cuddon (Third Edition). Penguin Books, 1992.

Yeats, WB The Death of Synge in *Autobiographies*. London Macmillan, 1955.

Greene, David H And Edward M Stephens. *JM Synge: 1871-1909*. New York: Macmillan, 1959,p.321.

Biography of Synge interspersed with criticism of his work. The authors include a discussion of the riots over *The Playboy* and critical reception and reviews of his plays both from Dublin and abroad.

Synge, JM *Four Plays and the Aran Islands*. Ed. With an Introduction by Robin Sklton. London: Oxford University Press, 1962, Pages 155-327 contain the introduction and four parts of the book *The Aran Islands*.,.

Henn, TR Ed. *The Plays and Poems of JM Synge* with an Introduction and Notes. London. Methuen,1963;rpt.1968. Contains General Introduction which has three sections: The Playwright, the Language of the plays, Rhythm; a separate introduction to *The Playboy*. Contains annotations to each play and a bibliography also. Essential reading.

Whitaker, Thomas R. Ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Playboy of the Western World: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, 1969. Contains essays by WB Yeats, Una Ellis-Fermor, TR Henn, Norman Podhoretz, David H Greene, and several others. Highly desirable. Whitaker's 20-page long introduction should be essential reading.



Frye, Northrop. The Mythos of Spring: Comedy in *Anatomy of Criticism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 163-86.

Also available in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*. Ed. Robert W Corrigan. Second Edition. New York: Harper & Row, 1981, pp. 84-99.

Contains an analysis of the structure of comedy, a category that transcends drama, Frye's aim is to establish universal structures of all literature. Essential reading.

Williams, Raymond. JM Synge in *Drama: From Ibsen to Brecht*. Penguin Books, 1973; rpt. 1978, pp. 139-52. Section four of the essay deals with *The Playboy*. Useful.

Greene, Nicholas. *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*. London: Macmillan, 1975 rpt. 1979.

Detailed discussion of each play, viewing the prose work as source material. Three chapters are particularly useful: The Development of Dialect dealing with Synge's language Approaches to *The Playboy* and Unhappy Comedies. Essential reading.

Benson, Eugene J.M. *Synge*. London Macmillan, 1982, p. 167.

Contains a useful essay on *The Playboy*. Also contains several pictures including those of the productions of plays.

Alying, Ronald Ed. *JM Synge: Four Plays: A Selection of Critical Essays*. A Casebook. London: Macmillan, 1922, pp. 137-87.

There are three essays on Synge's dramatic art. The portion on *The Playboy* includes contemporary comments, reviews and nine critical studies.

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