

9. THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

Robert Browning

Introduction

(See also notes on pp. 29-33 in the text)

A major poet of the Victorian period, Browning was basically a dramatic poet. Though a great admirer of Shelley, he drew more from, the tradition of John Donne. As a dramatic poet his chief interest lay in the drama of the human mind. Obviously in his poetry the stress was on 'incidents in the development of the soul'. Browning perfected the dramatic monologue form, and this remains his distinct Contribution to English poetry. As a poet his supreme achievement lies in his dramatic lyrics and monologues. Browning held a dynamic view of life, based on trust in the love of God and faith in a life after death. Though modern critics view him more as a sceptic, a faith that looks through death informs his entire poetry.

'The Last Ride Together' is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. A dramatic monologue, as you know, is a poem in which an imaginary speaker in a critical situation addresses an imaginary listener or audience. The speaker here is a lover who is rejected by his sweet heart, but is finally, granted a last ride with her.

EXPLICATION

Stanza I.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| at length | : | at last |
| my fate | : | (as a lover) - that he is rejected, is no longer loved by her |
| nothing all my love avails | : | all my love is of no use |
| since all my life seemed meant for, fails | : | all his life seemed meant for winning her love; but now he has lost it |
| this was written ... must be | : | something decided in God's plan and therefore should happen; fated |
| My whole heart rises up to bless | : | A dignified lover, he thanks and blesses his beloved for all the joy her love has given him. He does not mourn or give vent to hysterical demonstrations, like the typical lovers. Instead, he rises above his disappointment, takes pride in the love his lady once showed him, and thanks and blesses her. |
| Take back the hope you gave | : | he releases her from his claims of love |
| Only the memory | : | He asks only for one favour - the right to remember their one time relationship |
| And this beside | : | and this also |
| If.....not blame | : | if you don't mind, if you don't get angry at the request. |
| leave | : | permission |

Stanza II

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| bent that brow | : | lowered her head, face. |
| Those deep dark eyes fixed me | : | (She) fixed those.....eyes on me (those eyes where pride hesitates when pity softens- whenever pity for him softens her, pride makes her hesitate to grant the |

- breathing while or two : request). Shooting suspicious stare, wondering whether the request was a trick to make her change her mind.
- With life or death in the balance : for the time of· a breath or two; for a few moments.
- right : She was weighing her reply - with 'yes' and 'no' in the pans of that balance. 'Yes' would be life to him renewal of the happy past; and 'no' death- the dashing of all his hopes.
- replenished : 'All right', she agrees.
- last thought : blood came back to his cheeks.
- I and my mistress ... breathe and ride, : the request for a last ride together
- One day more am I deified : He is excited to think that they will be riding together, sitting close and feeling each other's breath.
- Who knows but the world may : for one day more I shall be a god.
- : In a moment of exultation, he dreams of the world coming to an end, so that he may ride into eternity in the company of his love. He may be toying with the impossible for his own comfort-even if the world ends tonight he will not have lost her. This may also imply that there will be an end to life coinciding with an end to love.

Stanza III

- Hush : silence; let nothing spoil this solemn moment.
- If you saw some western cloud on my breast : if you saw some western cloud over bowed by many benedictions - the sun's, the moon's and the evening star's-looking at it and loving it you would grow conscious of its loveliness, and then your passion would draw them (the cloud, sunset, moon rise, star shine all) down on you closer and closer - (closer and closer to you)- till heaven would be on you and (so) your flesh should fade away. Thus she leant and lay on my breast for a moment.

The imagery of the cloud approaching the earth gives a cosmic dimension to the lovers' union.

- billowy-bosomed : like a billow or wave rising and falling. The cloud seems like a heaving bosom.
- benedictions : blessings, grace. The lights-setting sun, the rising moon, and the evening star-hang in blessing over the heaving cloud.
- you, looking and loving best : watching such a scene you will be thrilled to the highest pleasure.
- you passion drew : you joy would take in the whole scene till it would seem close to you.
- Till flesh must fade for heaves was here! : till you would feel that your fleshly life had fallen away and that you were in heaven-there was no more heaven to be hoped for-

lingered : remained
 joy and fear : This may mean either she leant on his breast with joy and fear, or she leant on his breast filling in him a fearful joy, like that of a man who, full of admiration for a resplendent cloud gradually draws the heaven on him. She fears whether yielding an inch would break her resolution..

Stanza IV

My soul ... in the wind : my soul which had been a long cramped scroll unfolded and smoothened fresh, and waved gaily in the wind.
 a long - cramped scroll : a roll of paper which was cramped for long, cramped : crushed or squeezed in
 past hopes already lay behind : he had already put the past far behind; past did not matter to him.
 what need to strive with a life awry ? : what is the use of struggling to set right an unlucky turn of fortune?
 a life awry : a life that has gone wrong
 Had I said that ... so might I miss : equally futile are speculations on how he might not have lost her if he had said this or done that. If he had acted differently in the past she might have loved him or hated him, nobody can tell.
 if the worst befell : if the worst had happened, he might not have had even the blessing of a last ride with her He thus puts the best face on his misfortunes.

Stanza V

Fail I alone... : am I the only person in the world who has failed?
 it seemed my spirit flew ... on either side : as he rode on his imagination seemed to take wing and the world with its countless cities on either side rushing past him seemed to be places he had never seen.
 All labour, yet no less bear up beneath their unsuccess : all men labour, nevertheless, they have to endure (bear up) failure (unsuccess), greatly (no less), beneath their unsuccess. they endure beneath the burden of failure.
 end of work : result, out come; when one looks back at the past
 contrast .. the hopeful past : contrast what one might have done and what one has achieved--one's hopeful past and one's present achievement.
 I hoped she would love me : as an instance he points' out his own fate- he had a hopeful past - he hoped to win the lady - but what has he achieved? What has come of it?
 According to Browning life is a persistent struggle for perfection.
 If we are always striving for perfection, it means we are always imperfect. Failure, therefore, is part of our imperfection and so something inevitable. The whole

worth of life, in his view, lies not in perfection, but in the effort to become perfect; not in accomplishment, but in the strife to accomplish.

Stanza VI

- what hand and brain went ever paired? : which hand and brain ever went together? hand: actions, brain: thought, aspirations - whose hand did everything his mind set out to achieve? i. e. whose actions perfectly matched his aspirations?
- what heart alike conceived and dared? : which heart conceived and dared alike? - who could carry out with courage all that his mind conceived? alike: equally. dared : " did boldly. conceived: planned (whose daring equalled his lofty conceptions?)
- what act proved all its thought had been? : proved: effected, accomplished: who could put into effect, accomplish the whole of his idea?
- what act proved all its thought had been? : which will is there that has not felt the fleshly screen? will : determination, aspiration. fleshly screen: frailties of the body which act as a screen between a person and the complete fulfilment of his aims. Every man's will has felt the fleshly screen. Human limitations obstruct us.

The central idea is that human achievement always falls short of its aims.

- crown : reward
- reach : who can reach their goals; achieve their aims. Those with mediocre, accessible goals will have their rewards.
- Ten lines, a state man's life in each! : one -line biography in a history book-this is the reward a statesman gets.
- The flag stuck on a heap of bones : for the soldier who risks his life to win a battle - to plant a flag of
- Abbey stones : victory on a heap of bones -there is the reward of a plaque with an inscription in Westminster Abbey. What atones?: what does he get back? Note the word 'scratch'. Abbey - stones: tomb stones of Westminster Abbey, where people of distinction are buried.
- My riding is better : his achievement-the last ride - is better when compared with those of the statesman and the soldier. His failure is glorious than their success, for they have aimed low and succeeded.

Stanza VII

In stanzas VII & VIII the lover compares his achievement with those of lofty men like the poet,
the sculptor and the composer

- What we felt only; you expressed : the poet has the gift to express in splendid words, what we can only experience.
- You hold things beautiful the best : you consider (hold) beautiful things as the best things in the world

- And pace them in rhyme so, side by side : and make them ride in verse, side by side, (in couplets?)
like us (the lover and his beloved).
- so: thus pace : (make them) move in step. nay 't is much: no, it is a
great thing.
- Have you yourself what's best for men : have you enjoyed for yourself what man values the best,
what the world values the most - health, wealth and
youth?
- old ere your time : prematurely old
- Are you ., nearer one whit your own : are you one bit (whit) nearer accomplishing your
sublime? : lofty aim (your own sublime)?
- turned a rhyme : written a poem

Sing! riding's a joy; in a triumphant mood the lover asks the poet to write a poem (sing) about the joys
of riding.

Stanza VIII

- gave a score of years to Art, her slave : spend his life in the service of art and had become her
slave
- Venus : the Roman goddess of love; (here) masterpiece, creation
perfect in every respect.
- where : from that
- girl that fords the bum : girl that crosses the stream. The girl is more beautiful
than the statue. The implication is that a living woman
is better than a perfect statue. The lines recall the famous
story of Pygmalion, the sculptor-king. He made the
statue of a woman and loved it so much that he prayed
to Aphrodite to give it life. The statue became a living
woman and the king married her.
- You acquiesce : the sculptor seems to accept (acquiesces in) his claim
that a living woman is better than a perfect statue.
- shall I repine? : why should I repine then ?
- repine : to feel sad; regret
- man of music : the composer of operas (a kind of musical drama.)
- grown grey : grown grey in the service of music
- Is this your soul praise ... how : Is this the only praise you get from your friend though
the strains (songs) in the opera are ambitious it will not
be popular for long - ie it will be forgotten (or become
out of date when a new-style becomes popular)

From a worldly standpoint both the poet and the musical composer are failures.

- I gave my youth : I gave my youth to the service of love. The lover boasts
that he has fared better than the composer by dedicating
his youth to the service of love (rather than music) and
by gaining at least this last ride with his beloved. The
composer could gain only a short lived uncertain fame.

Stanza IX

- fit : good
- Had fate proposed bliss... signed the bond : If fate had offered to grant his heart's desire (bliss) and thus to -crown and exalt . (sublimate) his life, and if he had signed the bond (agreed to that) ... ie if fate had granted his bliss ...
- Still one has some life to be lived beyond : the grave, - and what will one have to hope for in that life? ie. If he had his bliss, in this life he would have nothing to be hoped for, fulfilled in the next life. As Browning asks in '*Andrea del Sarto*, then 'what's a Heaven for?'"
- Have a bliss to die with : have a heaven to hope for; have some unfulfilled ambition. The joy of dying consists in having on one's death-bed, some unfulfilled ambition, which one can fulfil in the next life.
- dim-descried : can see only dimly (how God will perfect our imperfections; how he will enable us to achieve in heaven what we failed to achieve here)
- This foot once planted on the goal : if he had planted his foot on the goal, i.e. if he had succeeded in love, won his goal, his lady, outright.
- This glory - garland round my soul : if the victor's garland of glory had been hung round his soul
- Could I descry such? : could I have a bliss to die with? ie. what would he have to look forward to?
- Try and test! : Let me examine, make trial
- I sink back shuddering from the quest : the quest makes him sink back in fear-for he learns that to be a successful lover in heaven he will have to be a loser here i.e. he will have to lose his lady, and he will be glad to lose her.
- Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best? : Earthly success is so good to taste that he does not think that heavenly success should taste better.
- Heaven and she are beyond this ride : Heaven is far away and his lady is already lost, so both are beyond his reach - away from the present moment of bliss (this ride).
- In the stanza we get the core of Browning's philosophy that this life is a preparation for the next, which is essentially the same but a perfected version of this life.

Stanza X

- What if Heaven be that ... so abide? : what if Heaven be that.... we fixed so ever should so abide? ie. Is Heaven that towards which fair and strong (in handsomeness and vigour as we are now) we can turn our eyes and where we can discover (discern) the flowering of earthly life (the perfection of earthly life) and where we should continue to be thus as we are now (in our present state of love) ? Is heaven a perfection and perpetuation of earthly life?

Life's flower	:	the flowering, perfection of earthly life
fixed so	:	perpetuated thus, as they are on this last ride.
should so abide	:	should continue to be thus; i.e. continue to be happy lovers, for ever
what if we still ride on...but in degree?	:	Will we still ride on in heaven, and there live a life, different from earthly life not in essence but in degree of excellence?
Charged not in kind but in degree	:	life in heaven will be a perfected version of earthly life.
instant made eternity	:	earthly life is the instant, heavenly life eternity. It is also implied that present moment of bliss (of the ride together) will be eternalized in heaven. The instant here will become eternity there.

And Heaven just prove that I and she ride, ride together, for ever ride? : May it no turn out that in heaven she and I will ride together for ever? i.e. It may, and they may ride together in heaven, for ever.

The poem as a dramatic monologue

The Last Ride Together is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. The dramatic monologue as perfected by Browning is a poem in which a speaker other than the poet, speaks to an imaginary audience at a decisive moment in his life. The speech invariably reveals a state of mind or set of beliefs. Since there may be contradiction between the speaker's apprehension and articulation of reality and objective reality irony becomes a key factor in dramatic monologues. The poem is a dramatic monologue in that it is the imaginary utterance of a person, to an imaginary audience at a decisive moment in his life, expressing his state of mind and set of beliefs. The speaker here is a lover. He is in a critical moment of his life—he is rejected by his sweetheart. And, he discloses his mind to a silent audience who is the reader. The lover asks for the only favour of a last ride with his lady and she grants it. In the ride together, he gathers up the rapture of a life time, and with no further heaven to be hoped for, he wishes that the ride may lengthen out into eternity.

The lover is rejected by his sweetheart. But he accepts his fate with dignity. He thanks and blesses her for all the joy her love has given him. Though she hesitates, the ride is finally granted, and he feels deified for one more day, and even imagines the very end of the world. She leans on his bosom and he experiences a joy as that of one who admires a resplendent cloud and gradually feels it upon him. As they ride along he reflects on his lot. His life has been twisted out of shape. But he realizes that it is no use struggling to set it right. Equally futile are speculations on how he might not have lost his love if he had said this or done that. Past is past and what matters is the present. If the worst had happened he might not have had even the present bliss of a last ride.

He is not the only person who has failed. In fact, all strive and only a few succeed. All those who labour have to endure failure. When a person looks back and contrasts his hopeful past with the present he can see that he might have done a great deal, but he has achieved only a little. He too hoped to win his lady, but has failed.

There was, in fact, never a person whose actions matched his aspirations, who could carry out all that his mind conceived. And, there is no will that has not felt the fleshly frailties and fallen short of fulfilment. Those, with realizable goals have their own rewards. For the statesman there is the reward of a one-line biography in a history book, and for the soldier, the reward of a plaque with an inscription, in Westminster Abbey. But their rewards are trifles when compared with the reward of his love - the last ride together.

The poet's achievement is great. His brain throbs with music, and he puts into words what others can only experience. He considers beautiful things as the best things in the world, and makes thoughts ride in

rhyme. All the same, he does not get for himself what the world values most highly in life - health, wealth and youth. Though he risks his health, wealth and youth, he does not come one bit nearer his goal than the lover and his lady. His vocation, the lover thinks, is indisputably superior to that of a poet.

The sculptor devotes his entire time to art and is her slave. After years of toiling, at last he creates his Venus, his masterpiece. But it is still inferior to an ordinary village girl one may see crossing a stream. The lot of the composer is no better. He also grows grey in the service of his art. But after all his labour, when he gives his masterpiece to the world the only praise he gets is that though ambitious, it cannot be popular for long.

If he had succeeded in love, then he would have no 'bliss to die with' nothing to look forward to, after death. Then heaven would have no meaning for him. It is, therefore, inevitable that he should fail here, in order to succeed in heaven. If heaven is a perpetuation and perfection of the earthly conditions - 'the instant made eternity' - then he and his lady will ever be as they are now, riding together in each others company.

In the monologue there is less probing of the self and development of character. The poem is, in fact, a sustained reflection on the role of love, even when rejected, as a maker of happiness, and the meaning of failure. As a maker of happiness love is superior to all the arts - poetry, sculptor and music. And, failure is the token of triumph.

The poem contains the core of Browning's philosophy. Browning is an optimist. He holds that life is a persistent *struggle* for an ideal or perfection. It implies that man is imperfect or imperfection or failure is part of human nature something inevitable in life. Man can attain perfection, not only in the general matter of living, but in his chosen occupation, in heaven. Heaven is where 'life's flower is first discerned.' In other words, Browning believes that there is a life after death for man - a heavenly life. Man can attain perfection in that life. Heavenly life, therefore, is a perfected version of earthly life - 'the instant made eternity'. Heaven will have meaning only if man has 'a bliss to die with', an unrealized ambition. Thus in his view, as he observes in Abt Vogler also, failure is something to be rejoiced, for, it is the very evidence of spiritual triumph, the very basis of heavenly success. The poem conveys this cardinal point of Browning's philosophy.

Assignments

- a. Annotate the following passages
1. Since this was written and needs must be
... pride and thankfulness.
2. Had I said that had / done this,
... where had I been now if the worst befell ?
3. Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?
4. Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast.
5. What hand and brain went ever paired ?
... what will but felt the fleshly screen?
6. There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a stateman's life in each!
7. The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
..... They scratch his name on the Abbey - stones.
8. This something, nay tis much: but then,
..... Than we who never have turned a rhyme?

9. And you, great sculptor - so, you gave
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
 10. What, man of music, you grown grey
... But in music we know how fashions end!
 11. Had fate
... Have a bliss to die with, dim-described.
 12. " What if we still ride on, we two, "
... The instant made eternity
- b. Answer each in a paragraph of 80 words.
1. How does the lover take his rejection by his lady?
Why, in your opinion, does he take it so ?
 2. What are the rewards of a statesman and a soldier ?
How does the lover compare them with his ride?
 3. Why does the lover think that his achievement is better than those of the poet, sculptor and musician ?
 4. What does the lover think of heaven ? Is he so sure that they will ride for ever in heaven?
 5. Browning's philosophy as reflected in the poem.
- c. Attempt an essay
1. Consider the poem as a dramatic monologue.
 2. How does his rejection by his mistress become a ground for spiritual exultation for the lover, in *The Last Ride Together*?

10. THE CIRCUS ANIMALS' DESERTION

W. B. Yeats

Introduction

A renowned poet and playwright, Yeats was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 13 June 1865. His father John B. Yeats was a lawyer turned painter, and the family often had to shuttle between London and Dublin. Yeats had his schooling at the Metropolitan School of Art, Dublin, and spent the early part of his life with his maternal grand parents in Sligo. It was his life in the countryside of Sligo which drew him to the legends and myths of his land. In 1885, Yeats published an Arcadian verse drama, *The Island of Statues*, and in 1886, a short verse drama, *Mosada* and later earned a reputation as an anthologist of Irish Literature and as a poet of the Rhymer's Club. After his meeting with John O'Leary, the Irish patriot, Yeats was fully drawn to the Irish Nationalist cause. In 1889 he met Maud Gonne, with whom he developed a passionate relationship. She became the subject of his early love poetry. In 1899 he formed Irish Literary Society in London and later the National Literary Society in Dublin. The following year he formed another important friendship with Lady Gregory, and her estate, Coole Park, became the setting for several of his poems. For about a decade, Yeats was preoccupied with theatre business. In 1899, he formed the Irish Literary Theatre, and produced his most successful play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902). A few members of this Theatre formed the Irish National Theatre, with Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory as joint Directors. Shattering his romantic dreams, in 1903, Maud Gonne married Mac Bride. At fifty two, in 1917 Yeats married George Hyde-Lees. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. In 1936 he collaborated in a translation of the Upanishads. Following a serious illness, in 1939, he died at the Hotel, Ideal Sejour, in France.

Yeats' work which invariably engages with Ireland's political independence includes poetry, drama, criticism, essays, journalism, novel and occult writings. The central theme of his work is Ireland, its history, folklore and contemporary life. From long allegorical nationalist poems and Arcadian lyrics and verse dramas, his poetry develops and matures into a more passionate condemnation of western civilization. The occult with which he has involved through out his life is another important source of his poetry.

The poem, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' appeared in the posthumous volume, Last Poems (1939) (See also notes in the text pp 150 -156)

Explication

Section I

- Circus animals : the characters and the images Yeats presented in his early poetry.
 desertion : the act of deserting, to desert: leave
 sought : looked for; tried to find (seek - sought)
 broken man : one whose powers (of imagination) have broken up; an old man.
 heart : emotions and feelings (turn to my feelings for inspiration) although winter
 and summer : my circus animals were on show all through winter and summer until old age.
 Stilted boys : bold young men who figured in his poetry.
 burnished chariot : decorated coach (see the text)
 Lion and women : the sphinx, a being with a lion's body and a woman's head

Section II

- enumerate : (lit) count; go through (here) reflect, recall.
 led by the nose : control completely;
 sea-rider Oisín : Oisín is the hero of Yeats' poem, The Wanderings of Oisín. He is led by the fairy Niamh to three islands (See the text)
 allegorical : having symbolic or inner meaning. In an allegory, ideas will be symbolized by characters.
 vain : useless or meaningless.
 repose : rest
 embittered heart : heart that has experienced bitter feelings.
 adorn : decorate
 courtly shows : shows of the court or shows depicting courting.
 But what... ..
 faery bride? : while he set these circus animals on to ride, ie. while he was narrating the story of Oisín, he starved for the bosom of Oisín's faery bride - Maud Gonne - his love. The poet identifies Maud Ganne with Oisín's faery bride.
 And then a counter - truthgave it : Yeats refers to the theme he had used in his first play, *The Countess Cathleen*. Oisín's bride had led Oisín to the three enchanted islands. In Countess Cathleen, there is a reversal--- the countess sells her soul to the devil, in order to save her people.
 She, pity-crazed save it : Out of pity for her people, the Countess sold her soul to the devil. But by the merciful intervention of heaven the Countess' soul was saved from damnation.
 dream : a faint idea, from which characters take shape. His play, *The Counter Cathleen*, was born out of his anxiety about Maud Gonne.

the Fool and Blind man....Sea : the reference is to Yeats' another play, *On Baile's Strand*. In the play, Cuchulain, the hero, kills his son unknowingly. Maddened by this he rushes out to fight the mighty waves. As the people leave their homes and run to the sea-shore, the fool and the blind man steal the bread from their oven.

heart mysteries : mysteries or secrets of the heart.

It was the dream itself that enchanted me : It was the vague ideas, visions, from which characters and events, took shape, or the process of imagining and creating events and characters - the poetic process -that fascinated him.

not those things that they were emblem of : rather than those things the characters embodied or symbolized.

Section III

grew in pure mind : grew in imagination

A mound of refuse the tin:- Those masterful images have come from drab, everyday objects, like a mound of refuse-(waste) sweeping of a street, old kettles, bottles, a broken urn, old iron, bones, rags or the raving slut

raving slut : talkative dirty woman.

keeps the till : holds the cash-drawer, the cash?

ladder : (here) power of imagination

the foul-rag- and bone shop of the heart: the very bottom of my heart, where all the ladders start.

Appreciation

In the poem, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' Yeats reflects on his waning poetic imagination. An old man, he learns that the circus animals which he long put on show in his poetry are no longer at his command, and regrets their desertion. The poem may be considered a retrospective judgement on the vision of Ireland in his work.

The poet painfully confesses, that though he sought a theme for poetry for about six weeks, he could not find one. Being a 'broken man' it may be that he must be satisfied with what he can find in his own heart. All through winter and summer, until his old age, all his circus animals were on show in his poetry. But the boastful lovers, the gilded chariot, the sphinx and a host of others - all have gone.

The poet realizes that he can only recall some of his old themes and characters. First he thinks of Oisín, the great hero of his allegorical poem, who was led by Niamh the fairy, to three enchanted islands. The allegorical dreams, gaiety, battle, rest-all themes of the embittered heart which have adorned old songs and courtly shows flash on his mind, The poet remembers how his own heart pined for Maud Gonne, while he sang about Oisín and his love. The thoughts of Countess Cathleen now invade him. The Countess had sold her soul to the devil, for her people, but she was mercifully saved by God. He was afraid that her soul was being destroyed by fanaticism and hatred. The anxiety had stirred his imagination and led to the creation of the play, Countess Cathleen. The poet next recalls the Fool and Blind Man who figured in his play, *On Baile's Strand*. When people left their homes and rushed to the shore to see Cuchulain's enraged fight with the waves, the Fool and Blind man stole the bread from the ovens of these people. In fact, it is the dream itself-the poetic process - the faint vision from which characters take shape - that has fascinated him, rather than the things the characters embody.

All those masterful images which grew in his imagination had come from the drab, everyday objects of life, such as a mound of refuse, the sweeping of a street, old kettles, old bottles, a broken can, old iron, old bones, old rags or the raving slut that keeps the till. He could transform them into rich poetic material' by the

splendour of his imagination. But now he has lost his ladder. He must, therefore, get to the bottom of his heart where all the ladders start and from there work his way up. Expressing sorrow at the desertion of his circus animals. Yeats seems to suggest that only the deeply felt emotions can trigger poetic imagination.

Composition

(a) Annotate the following passages

1. But what cared I that set him on to ride,
I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride?
2. She, pity - crazed, had given her soul away,
But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.
3. And, when the Fool and Blind man stole the bread
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea.
4. Players and painted stage took all my love,
And not those things that they were emblems of.
5. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag - and - bone shop of the heart.

(b) Answer each of the following in a paragraph

1. What does Yeats mean by 'circus animals' and what animals does he enumerate in the poem ?
2. Who is the faery bride in the poem ?
3. What does Yeats say about the creation of Countess Cathleen?
4. Who was Cuchulain ? Why did he fight the sea ?
5. What does the ladder stand for in the poem? What does Yeats say about the source of his masterful images ?
6. What does Yeats say about poetic imagination?

(c) Write an essay

1. Attempt an appreciation of the poem.
2. Consider Yeats's poem 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' as a retrospective judgement on the vision of Ireland in his work.

11. JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

T. S. Eliot

1. Life and Works of T. S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot, the leading poet of the English speaking world during the first half of the 20th century, was born in 1888 at St. Louis, Missouri, in the United States. He descended from a family that had long ago resided at East Coker in Somerset, England, from where in 1670 his Puritan ancestors emigrated to Massachusetts U.S. A. As a student of philosophy at Harvard, Eliot came under the influence of his teacher, Irving Babbitt, who instilled in him a taste for classicism and for nineteenth-century French literature. This taste profoundly influenced his poetic talent. To study French literature he went to Sorbonne, Paris. Then he entered Merton College, Oxford. He settled down in England in 1915 on his own choice. His acquaintance with Bertrand Russell was perhaps one of the incentives, to choose England as his home. After working in Lloyd's

Bank for a brief period, he became a director of the publishing firm of Faber and Faber and held that office till his death. He became a naturalised British citizen in 1927, the year in which he made his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. He had often declared himself the champion of all kinds of conservatism royalist in politics, anglo-catholic in religion, and classicist in literature.

Eliot began writing poetry since his school days. But he gained attention only in 1917 with the publication of his first collection of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*. These poems shocked the readers by ushering in a kind of modern poetry, with its significant characteristics of ironic vision, deliberate incongruities and conversational style. In *Poems* (1920) he continued the same method and technique. With the publication of *The Waste Land* (1922) he found himself in the front rank of American and British poets. The poem, Eliot's masterpiece, presented a disturbing vision of the state of Europe destroyed and demoralized by the First World War and threatened by a second one which was in the offing¹. It was written in free verse interspersed with a variety of literary allusions and quotations. The theme of the poem is the poet's vision of the world as a arid² desert filled with lust, greed, destruction and death. In the quest for regeneration, consolation lies not in the Christian faith, but in the three commandments of the Brahadaranyak Upanishad, viz. Datta (=giving), Dayadhvam (=mercy) and Demyata (=self-control). The poem, very little understood even with the help of Eliot's notes was shocking not only in its subject matter, but also in its manner and style. In the bitter and terrifying *Hollow Men* (1925) too, Eliot's angry disillusionment of the contemporary world can be seen. But the diction and style of the poem is not so terse, disjointed and therefore unintelligible as those of 'The Waste Land'.

Since his conversion to Catholicism, a change set in both in his theme and in his style and manner of writing. The change is visible in the four *Ariel Poems* published between 1927 and 1930, *Ash Wednesday* (1930), and in the *Four Quartets* written in four separate parts between 1935 and 1942. The "Ariel Poems" convey the poet's spiritual struggle; *Ash Wednesday* represents his explicit Christian commitment, and the *Four Quartets* contain one of the finest meditations on the eternal moral and spiritual values of life. All of them assume a lyrical form, but their style of writing is as new as the emotion they evoke.

Eliot was also a critic and dramatist. He was editor of the *Criterion*, a critical review, from 1922 to 1939. *The Sacred Wood* (1920) is a collection of Eliot's critical essays and reviews on the nature of artistic emotion, the concept of tradition, critical sensibility and poetic impersonality. His *Selected Essays* (1932) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1975) contain many of his most important critical writings. As a playwright he experimented with verse and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) is described as "the drama of the Church struggling against society toward God". *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954) and the *Elder Statesman* (1959) are other poetic plays.

In 1948 Britain conferred upon him the Order of Merit. In the same year he was also awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

ii. Journey of the Magi

Magi pronounced *Majai*, *Magi* (plural); *Magus* (singular)

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1. in the offing : ready or likely to appear near,
 2. arid : dry, barren.

The Context of the Poem

'Journey of the Magi', is one of the *four Ariel Poems* written by Eliot during 1927 and 1930. It is in the form of a monologue in which a magus, one of the three Wise Men who came from the East to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus, narrates their journey long after the event and analyses its impact on their imagination. The Magi were leading the pagan way of life which Christ came to destroy. Without understanding the import³ of the Incarnation⁴ the Magi accept the new faith. But they are reluctant to cut off their affinities with the pagan

life. To them the journey, which is “such a long journey”, is symbolic of the death of the old faith and the birth of a new one. The situation of the Magi told in the New Testament story (Mathew ii. 1-2)⁵ is similar to the situation of the poet who, a born Protestant, has converted himself to Anglo-Catholicism. The poem is therefore apparently traditional, but intensely personal inwardly. Eliot became an Anglo-Catholic in 1927. The conversion shocked his friends and readers. However, his early poems and essays had shown hints of the direction in which his spiritual interests were moving. ‘The Journey of the Magi’ and *the Ariel Poems* confirmed his religious transition.

The poem is also symbolic of the predicament⁶ of the human soul unable to relinquish the past and receive the present, which it intuitively accepts. The struggle, confusion and uneasiness in the mind of the Magus are part of Eliot’s spiritual quest ending in the conversion of his religious faith. Like the Magi, the poet also passed through “a painful rather than a joyful transformation”.

The poem also illustrates Eliot’s theory of poetic composition. He makes use of images drawn from his own experience as part of the Magus’s prophetic narration of the crucifixion. The combination is strange and, according to Eliot, such strange combination of images-traditional as well as personal-increases the depth of feeling. In the essay, “The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism”: he explains:

“Why for all of us, out of all that we have heard, felt, in a life time, do certain images recur, charged with emotion rather than others? The song of the bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path, six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling in which we cannot peer”.

The Content of the Poem

The Magi were the three wise men from the East who brought gifts for the infant Christ. One of the Magi describes the hardships of their journey to the birth-place of Jesus. The way and the weather were unwholesome. The biting cold of the winter in December (Christ was born in December) stood in direct

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|----|-------------|---|---|
| 3. | import | : | meaning, significance. |
| 4. | Incarnation | : | the act of taking on human flesh by Christ. |
| 5. | Mathew | : | 1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem
2. Saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him. |
| 6. | Predicament | : | a dangerous, awkward or unpleasant situation. |

contrast with the pleasing warmth of the summer in the East from where they came. The cities, towns and villages through which they travelled were dirty, costly, hostile and unfriendly. They got little shelter and had less sleep. Reaching a temperate valley they smelt vegetation, heard the sound of a running stream and a water-mill, and saw three trees like three crosses and a white horse galloping away. In a tavern at an open door six men were dicing for pieces of silver. They were drunk and they kicked the empty wineskins with their feet.

The hardships of the journey, the hostility of the place and the moral degeneration of the people led the wise men to regret for leaving behind their pleasure palaces with the silken girls bringing sherbet. Their mind’s tongue also whispered that their endeavour was all folly-At evening they reached the place of birth. It was a satisfactory experience. For, they got undoubtedly the evidence of a Birth. But it was not a revelation. When they returned to their former kingdoms, they found themselves alien among people who still clung to their old gods. The birth of Christ was the death of the Magi. They had experienced the bitter agony of a new faith.

They would be glad of another death as an escape from that “hard and bitter agony”, the dilemma of spiritual transformation.

Reading through the poem

Magi: (an Arabic word) wise men. They were identified as kings. They were three in number. Names were also given to them.

11.1-5. A cold coming....dead of winter:see notes in the text. These opening lines set the key-note of the poem. They are borrowed from the sermon on Christ’s birth preached before James I by Bishop Lancelot Andrews (1555-1626) on Christmas Day in 1622. The sermon is:- ‘A cold coming they [the Magi] had of it at this time of year Just the worst time of year to take a journey, and especially a long journey. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun furthest off, in solstite, brumali, “the very dead of winter”. The quotation shows Eliot’s acknowledgement. The speaker is one of the Magi. He is recalling what happened to them a long time ago-the arduous nature of their journey to the birth place of Christ, and the shock and of their experience.

1.1 cold-because of the winter in December

1.3 a long journey: the Magi were coming from the far of Eastern kingdoms.

1.5 The very dead of winter: The terribly cold period of the winter season.

1.6 gailed: see notes in the text. sore-footed:: with painful feet; hurt feet, refractory: difficult to manage.

1.8 we regretted :we (the Magi) felt sorry for leaving their kingdoms to undertake this long and painful journey.

11.9-10. The summer sherbet; see notes in the text.

1.9 slopes:on hill sides.

terraces: straces of palaces when they enjoyed the air.

1.10 silken girls: beautiful girls.

And the silken.....sherbet: A reference to the luxurious life of the Magi who were kings of the East. The mention of the silken girls does not indicate sexual desire, one of the two evils (sex and unbelief) ridiculed by Eliot in his early poems.

1.11. grumbling:complaining. The camel men cursed and complained because they did not get liquor and women.

1.14. hostile:behaving as an enemy; unfriendly

1.18. sleeping in snatches: see notes in the text.

11.19-20 with the voices.... all folly: The Magi undertook the arduous journey because of a mysterious force which they could not control or avoid. So they did not attend to their voice of reason which repeatedly reminded them that their action was foolish.

11.21-31. Then at drawn..... Finding the place: The Magi were wise men. In their wisdom they were able to see the symbols of certain significant events which were to happen on in the life of Jesus. The symbols were of the crucifixion (“three trees”), Christ the conqueror riding on a white horse “an old white horse galoped away in the meadow”, the Roman soldiers dicing for the robes of the crucified Christ, and the betrayal of Christ by Judas (“Seven hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver”). But the three men could not decipher the meaning of these symbols because they were spiritually incapable. They were till then pagans. These lines are examples of Eliot’s poetic practice of combining personal images with those of tradition, as explained in his essay;

“The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism”.

- 1.21. temperate valley: valley where the weather is temperate, ie, not hard winter.
- 1.22. below the snow line; see notes in the text.
- 1.22-3 vegetation, running stream, water-mill: symbolic of a place of human habitations opposed to places where the ways were deep (line 4).
- 1.23 water mill beating the darkness: probably; an allusion to the birth of Christ which drove away darkness from human minds.
- 1.24 three trees: (see notes in the text) The three trees were the symbols of three crosses. “And there were also two other, male factors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the male factors, one the right hand, and the other on the left”. (St. Luke, xxiii. 32-33).
- 1.25 white horse-see notes in the text
In Revelation vi, 2 is said: “And I saw, and behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer”.
- 1.26. tavern : an inn; a place where liquor is sold and drunk.
lintel : the horizontal piece of stone or wood over a door or window.
with vine-leaves over the lintel: probably an allusion to Exodus where the Lord God smites the first born of the Egyptians with plague, but spares the houses of his children of Israel where lintels were smeared with the blood of the paschal lamb. “For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the side posts, the Lord will pass over door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you”. (Moses to the elders of Israel, Exodus xii, 23),
- 1.27. Six hands.... silver-see notes in the text.
- 1.28. And feet-And their (of the six men) feet, wine-skins: wine bottles made of animal skin. And feet.... wine skins-an allusion to the physical suffering of Christ when he was forced by his enemies to carry his own cross to Calvary.
- 1.30. not a moment too soon: just in time ie, just before Joseph and Mary carry away from Bethlehem infant Jesus fearing the wrath of King Herod.
- 1.31. It was (you may say) satisfactory: The Magi were not fully convinced of the birth of Christ because they saw only satisfactory evidence and had no revelation of the divine Birth. They were still under the influence of pagan pleasures and had not the spiritual purification to realize divinity. *The line is an understatement characteristic of Eliot.*
- 11.33-5 but set down.... This.... This: The story of their journey is narrated by one of the Magi for the benefit of a listener who is requested to record their experience. The repetition of “This” and “set down” show that their experience is so intense and deep.
- 11..35-9 were we led.... like Death, our death. The wise men see the birth of Christ. But they do not understand its full significance. That is a kind of death to them. Christ is born to die on the cross to redeem mankind. The similarity between birth and death which they have seen agonises and mystifies them.
- 11.40-2 We returned.... clutching their goods. See notes in the text. The birth of a new faith and the death of their old way of life (pagan belief) have left them in a dilemma. They are spiritually incapable to accept the new revelation.

- 1.41. at ease here: comfortable in their kingdoms, ie., they cannot reconcile with their surroundings. Old dispensation: old faith alien people: Their own people appeared alien because they clung to their old faith (clutching their gods).
- 1.43.1 Should.....death: As an escape from his spiritual dilemma, the speaker, the magus, welcomes another death, ie., the death of the faith which means the birth of the new

SUMMARY

‘The Journey of the Magi’ is one among the four ‘Ariel Poems’ written by Eliot soon after his conversion to Catholicism. The agony of parting with one faith and embracing another is therefore the theme of the poem. In order to express this feeling, Eliot, according to his poetic practice, chooses the biblical alibi⁷ of the journey of the three Wise Men from the East to Bethlehem to see the Incarnation. Eliot believes that “poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality”⁸. So to escape from his emotion of agony and his personality, he dissolves himself in the emotion and personality of the Magi placed in a similar situation.

7. alibi: the fact or statement that a person accused of a crime was somewhere else when it was committed; an excuse.
8. T.S. Eliot in his essay, ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’.

The poem is in the form of a monologue. One of the Magi, long after their journey, narrates the event in the end he analyses with uneasiness the impact of the journey on their imagination. He accepts the birth of the new faith. But he does not understand its significance. He is also unwilling to relinquish his pagan way of life which Christ has come to destroy. His “hard and bitter agony is as painful as that of the poet who is enchained to the past and unable to submit to a transition.

The Magi began journey during the worst time of the year. It was the very dead of winter. The journey was long and the ways were deep and hard. The camels on which they travelled were galled, sore-footed and refractory. They often lay down in the melting snow. The Wise Men felt sorry for leaving their summer palaces and the silken girls bringing sherbet. The camel men cursed complained and ran far away for want of liquor and women. They had no nightfires or shelter. The cities were hostile and the towns unfriendly. The villages were dirty and changed his prices. At last they decided to travel by night sleeping only in snatches. All along, their voice of reason was reminding them that their action was foolish.

In the morning they reached a temperate valley where there were vegetation, a running stream and a water mill beating the darkness. Away on the low sky they saw three trees. An old white horse was seen galloping away in the meadow, then they came to a tavern with vineleaves over the lintel. At the open door of the tavern six men were dicing for pieces of silver. They were kicking with their feet the wine skins they had emptied.

Still they did not get any information about the Divine Child. So they continued their journey. At evening they found the place. They arrived just in time. And it was a satisfactory experience.

All this happened a long time ago. But one of the Magi remembers everything afresh he is doubtful whether such a long journey ended in Birth or Death. He is confident of a new Birth, the birth of Christ. He is witness to the event. But unlike other births, this Birth is agonizing. For when they returned to their old kingdoms, they found their people alien with their old gods. To escape from the “hard and bitter agony” the magus wishes another death to come, the death of the old faith.

Thus the poem is impersonal with an intensely personal note. It symbolizes the spiritual revolution caused by the advent of Christ. It also signifies the poet’s agony of converting himself from Protestant belief to Catholic faith. The impersonality of the poem rests upon the choice of the biblical theme and the use of personal images in such a way as to evoke symbolic significance. Allusions to past events and common images with symbolic value are so blended as to produce an emotion which is general as well as personal.

EXERCISES**A. Answer in a sentence or two the following questions**

1. From where are the opening lines of the poem borrowed? What effect do they convey?
2. Why did not the Magi regret the life of comfort they left behind?
3. What picture of the cities, towns and villages do the Magi give?
4. Explain the meaning of the line. "A hard time we had of it?"
5. What did the voices sing in the ears of the Magi?
6. What is the significance of the things the magi saw at dawn?
7. What is the significance of the thing they saw at the tavern?
8. What does the magus mean when he says. "It was (you may say) satisfactory?"
9. What is meant by the magus when he asks:
"Were we led all that way for Birth or Death?"
10. The Magi found the birth of Christ hard and bitter agony for them Why?
11. Why does the Magus say that he welcomes another death?
12. In what poetic form is the Journey of the Magi written? Who is the speaker and who is the listener?

B. Annotate the following passages:

1. There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces.
And, the silken girls bringing sherbet.
2. At the end we preferred to travel all night
Sleeping in snatches,
.....That this was all folly
3. Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver.
And feet kicking the empty wine skins.
4. This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth of Death?
5. We returned to our places these kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching, their gods.

C. Write a paragraph on each of the following:

1. Briefly narrate the journey of the Magi during daytime.
2. Describe the things the Magi saw in a temperate valley and in a tavern bringing out their symbolic significance, if there is any.
3. Examine the impact of the journey on the minds of the Magi.
4. Pick up the images used in the poem and bring out the symbolic significance of each
5. Pick up passages with allusions and references and explain them.

D. Write an essay on each of the following:

1. The journey of the Magi ended in agony and spiritual confusion. Examine this statement in the light of the poem 'Journey of the Magi'

2. Consider 'Journey of the Magi' as a monologue
3. The 'Journey of the Magi' is an impersonal poem with an intensely personal note. Examine.
4. The poem 'Journey of the Magi' is built around images drawn from the poet's own experience, but charged with emotion. Examine.

E. Model Annotation

There were times we regretted.
The summer palace on slopes, the terraces
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.

T.S. Eliot's poem, 'Journey of the Magi', is based on the biblical story of the three Wise Men of the East travelling towards Bethlehem to see infant Jesus. They began their journey just at the worst time of the year, in the very dead of winter. The ways being deep and the weather being sharp, the camels which carried them became galled, sore-footed and refractory. Often the animals fell down in the melting snow. The hazardous nature of the journey enabled the Magi to recall the ease and comfort they enjoyed in their own kingdoms. They regretted leaving their summer palaces on hill-sides. From the terraces of those palaces they aired themselves while beautiful girls refreshed them with the sweet drink of sherbet. They often felt sorry for sacrificing their pleasures for the sake of a painful journey.

The magi or Wise Men were traditionally kings or advisers of kings. These lines attest to this fact while indicating the luxurious life they led. In Eliot's reference to 'the silken girls', there is no implication of sexual desire, which he, in his other poems, condemns. Here the words symbolize a way of life which belonged to the past of the old men.

12. BIRCHES

Robert Frost

Introduction

Robert Frost is the "most penetrating interpreter of modern New England". He was born in the Far West, in San Francisco on 26 March 1875. With the publication of *North of Boston* in his fortieth year he shot to fame as a dramatic poet. His poetic works include *A Boy's Will*, *Mountain Interval*, *New Hampshire*, *A Witness Tree* etc. Poems like 'Birches', 'The Death of the Hired Man', 'Two Tramps in Mud Time' etc are common anthology pieces. Frost died in 1963.

The poem 'Birches' begins with pure observation: observation gives way to imagination; and the poem develops into something which is both a phantasy and a philosophy. The poet describes how the birches bend down, loaded with ice, as a result of ice-storms, and how they shed crystal shells as sunlight falls on them, and how, being bowed for long, their trunks in due course arch in the woods trailing their leaves on the ground. All this is simple observation. But the poet would prefer to have some boy bend them, and he imagines such a situation. Some boy too far from the town comes to the woods where he climbs up the birches, bends them and conquers them all. The poet now says that he himself was once a swinger of birches and passes on to more significant reflections. Life, he says, is a pathless wood, and whenever he feels fed up here, he wants to get away from earth for a while and then return to it. He wants to return because he knows that earth is the right place for love. He would like to go by climbing a birch tree upto the top till the tree would bend its top and set him down again. One could do worse than be a swinger of birches', he comments.

The poem thus vindicates Frost's definition: "A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love".

ANALYSIS

1. Observed scene in the woods (II.1-20)

Description of the birch trees, loaded with ice, bending down, and their trunks, bowed low for long, arching in the woods in course of time.

2. Imaginary scene of the boy bending the birches (II.21-40)
Description of a boy bending the birches by climbing carefully to the top branches, flinging outward, with a swish, and kicking his way down through the air to the ground
3. The poet's reflections (II.41-59)
The poet's reflections on man's life on earth' and how, when haunted by failures, he would like to get away from earth for a while by climbing a birch tree which would bend and set him down to earth again.

EXPLICATION

- | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|---|---|
| 1 | birches | : | See the text |
| 11 | avalanching | : | See the text |
| 10-13 | Soon.....fallen | : | As sunlight falls on them, the trees would shed ice like crystal shells shattering down. These would appear like heaps of broken glass giving the impression that the inner dome of heaven had fallen. |
| 14 | bracken | : | See the text |
| 16 | they...themselves | : | they never return to the original position |
| 19-20 | Like.....sun | : | The trunks of the birch 'trees', arching in the woods, trailing their leaves on the ground, would appear like girls who stand on hands and knees and dry their hair in the sun by throwing it before them over their heads. |
| 25 | baseball | : | game played with a bat and ball, by two teams of nine players each, on a field with four bases. National game of the U.S.A |
| 26. | only play | : | because he is so far from town that he does not know to play baseball |
| 39. | swish | : | a hissing sound while moving through the air |
| 45-47 | Where.....open | : | a reference to the disgusting experiences of day to day life. |
| 50 | wilfully | : | intentionally |

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Robert Frost once remarked that “poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom”. His own short poem ‘Birches’ bears testimony to this. The poem begins with pure observation of reality. Observation, then, gives way to imagination and the poem develops into something which is both a phantasy and a philosophy.

The poet first describes the sight of birches bending to left and right in the woods. Exposed to severe ice storms, they get loaded with ice and bend down. As the sun gets warmer, they shed ice like crystal shells shattering down. These get collected like heaps of broken glass as though the inner dome of heaven had fallen. When the trees, under the weight of ice are bowed for long time they never return to the original position. In course of time their trunks may be found arching in the woods trailing their leaves on the ground. They may appear like girls on hands and knees throwing their hair before them over their heads to dry in the sun.

From this description of actuality, the poet passes on to an imaginary situation. He would prefer to have some boy, rather than the ice-storm, bend the trees. Living far away from town, the boy has had no chance to learn baseball. The only game he knows is what he finds himself. He plays alone, and subdues his father's trees by bridling them down one by one. He climbs carefully to the top branches, flings outward, feet first, with a swish, and kicks his way down through the air to the ground.

The poet now reveals that he himself was once a swinger of birches and he would love to be one again. Life, he says, is like a pathless wood. The heavy and weary weight of daily life makes him depressed often. Anxieties and sorrows haunt him. He then would like to get away from earth for a while and then come back to it. He positively wants to come back because he knows earth is the right place for love and he does not know a better place. He would like to climb to the snow-white trunk of a birch tree until it dips its top and sets him down again. He cannot but return to the earth. "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches," he says.

The message of the poem, therefore, is the message of earth-bound love and happiness. Robert Frost conveys this in a language of prose enlivened with the intensity of poetry. The landscape of the poem is the mindscape of the poet too. The poem is indeed an assertion of what is positive in life.

PASSAGES TO REMEMBER

1. Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust-
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen. (II.10-13)
2. You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. (II. 17-20)
3. So was I once myself a swinger of birches
And so I dream of going back to be. (II.41-42)
4. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better. (II.52-53)
5. That would be good both going and coming back-
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches. (II. 53-59)

COMPOSITION

1. Write an essay on the following.
Comment on 'Birches' as a nature poem.
2. Answer each of the following in a paragraph.
 - a) How does Robert Frost describe the birches bent down by icestorms?
 - b) How does the boy subdue the trees as a swinger?
 - c) Why does Frost dream of becoming a swinger of birches again?
3. Annotate the following passages:
 - a) Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better
 - b) Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
 - c) One could do worse than be a swinger of birches
 - d) So was I once myself a swinger of birches And so I dream of going back to be

13. A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA

Derek Walcott

Introduction

(See notes on pp. 179-182 in the text)

A leading poet and playwright of the West Indies, Derek Walcott's poetry is the outcome of a multicultural commitment. As one committed to both the European and the African cultures, the poet finds himself in a paradoxical situation. He rebates British rule in South Africa, at the same time loves the English language. The poem is the anguished cry of every African writer caught between two loyalties.

Explication

A far cry from Africa: A cry, far away from Africa. A 'far cry' may also mean a different cry, or a distant cry.

Lines 1-10 (The frightening situation of colonization has brought about)

ruffling	:	disturbing the peace
tawny	:	brownish yellow
pelt	:	skin of a dead animal
kikuyu	:	a kind of grass in Africa
batten	:	grow fat
veldt	:	veld; stretch of grassland of the South African plateau
a paradise	:	a place which was once a paradise
carrion	:	dead and decaying flesh
separate dead	:	the dead people of different races.
statistics justify	:	statistical figures about the white rule in Africa, which justify colonial oppression.
scholars seize	:	scholars highlight the salient features or advantages of colonialism.
what is that...?	:	it cannot undo, cancel
hacked	:	murdered
savages	:	the term used by the white to describe the Africans.
expendable	:	dispensed with; treated; exterminated
Jews	:	a reference to the extermination of six million Jews by Hitler. Also an indirect reference to the global use of violence to exterminate or subjugate race.

Lines 11-35 (The nature of violence)

threshed out	:	driven or beaten out
beaters	:	persons employed to rouse or drive away birds.
ibises	:	large, long legged stork like birds.
rushes	:	marshy plants or stems of plants.
white dust	:	ibises flying together as a cloud of white dust—a metaphor.
cries have wheeled	:	moved or circled round, as the birds flew around in circles
Parched	:	dry
beast-teeming plain	:	plain full of or teeming with animals.
threshed out. . plain	:	Since the dawn of civilization, the cries of ibises, threshed out by beaters (breaking the long rushes), flying around in circles as a cloud of white dust. have wheeled from the parched river or beast-teeming plains of Africa. violence of beast on best is read

	as natural law: animals killing other animals is considered natural law. upright man :man who walks upright or is upright - straight forward and honest in dealings.
seeks his divinity	: man who is superior to all other creatures and call himself the god of all created by inflicting pain beings tries to establish his divinity by inflicting pain and by taking away life.
carcass	: (here) outer structure
calls courage....	
native dread	: he considers courage nothing more than a natural fear of death.
white peace	: the peace of the dead. The reference may be to the white cloth-the shroud-with which the dead body is covered.

Appreciation

This is one of the highly introspective poems of Walcott, in which he voice the anguish and dilemma of every African writer, who hates the British rule,. but at the same time loves the English language.

In the first section of the poem, the poet brings out through vivid images. the frightening situation in Africa, brought about by- colonization. A wind ruffles its tawny pelt. Kikuyu grass batten upon the blood streams of its veldt. Corpses lie scattered through the place which was once a paradise. The worm that eats all the carrion alike, seems to cry out not to waste any compassion on the dead people of the white and African races. Impressive statistical figures about the white rule justify the colonial oppression and scholars highlight the advantages of colonialism. But those things cannot undo the terrible violence there - the murder of an innocent white child or the cruelties to the so called 'savages' who are. expendable as Jews.

In the second section, the poet reflects on the nature of the violence. Since the dawn of civilization, the cries of ibises, threshed out by beaters, have wheeled from the parched river or beast - teeming plains of Africa The violence of beast on beast may be considered natural law .But, man who walks upright and is upright in his dealings, and calls him the god of all created things tries to establish his superiority by inflicting pain on others. As delirious as the wild animals, his was dance to the drums. To him courage is nothing more than a natural feat of death.

In the final section, the poet reflects on himself. As one who is poisoned with the blood of his mother land and England, his loyalties are divided, and he does not know where to turn. Being one who has cursed the British rule, he cannot choose between his motherland and the English language he loves. Is he to betray them both or to return what both have given him? How can he remain cool in the face of atrocities on his race and turn, away from his mother land and live ill peace? These questions are the genuine expression of a predicament to which answers do not come easily. The anguish and dilemma voiced in the poem are the anguish and dilemma of the colonized the world over.

Assignments

- (a) Annotate the following passages:
1. Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead !""
 2. What is that to the white-child hacked in bed ?
To savages, expendable as Jews ?
 3. The violence of beast is read
As natural law, but upright man... inflicting pain.
 4. I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein ?

5. Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool ?
- (b) Answer each of the following, in a paragraph .
1. How does Derek Walcott bring out the horrors of colonization in the poem ?
 2. How does Walcott contrast the violence of beast and man ?
 3. What is the poet's dilemma ?
 4. What does the title, 'A Far Cry from Africa' mean ?
- (c) Attempt an essay.
1. What issues of colonization does Derek Walcott bring out in the poem, A Far cry from Africa' ?
 2. An appreciation of the poem.

14. TONIGHT LEAN WRITE

Pablo Neruda

Introduction

(See notes in the text p. 189-194)

Pablo Neruda is one of the most popular poets of the world A Communist senator, diplomat and activist, Neruda's poetry is remarkable for its rich variety and striking originality. This is the last poem in the volume, Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924). The poem is a monologue on love.

Explication

- shattered : scattered; dashed into pieces (like the mind of the lover)
- blue stars : (here) sad and lonely stars. 'Blue' is the colour of loneliness and sadness.
- for example
- 'The night, distance' : he way the lover of conventional love poetry may write-depicting nature matching his mood.
- revolves : moves in a circle
- endless sky : may suggest the vastness of the sky, in contrast to the smallness of human being and the brevity of their love.
- same night whitening
the same trees : the same moonlit nights that whiten the same trees; the moonlit nights and the trees that are whitened are the same.
- we.....no longer
the same : They are no longer the same; They have changed
- My voice turned to
find the wind : the lover could not make his love heard by his lady, but had to seek the help of the wind.
- I no longer love her, but
may be I love her : the poet emphasizes the uncertainty and the mysterious nature of love.

Appreciation

In this love poem, 'Tonight I can write', Neruda probes the complex feeling of love, by singing about the loss of his lady and his attempt to give poetic utterance to the loss.

The lady whom he has loved is going to be another's and the poet thinks that he can voice his loss in the most poignant terms. He can express it in the conventional way, that the night is shattered and the blue stars shiver in the distance. The wind revolves in the sky and sings. He remembers that he loved his lady. Perhaps she also loved him, but he is not sure. He held her, his arms, through night like the present one and kissed her under the endless sky. She certainly loved him., may be he also loved her, for no one could have missed her great still eyes. Perhaps he can write the saddest lines when he thinks that he does not have her and feels that he has lost her for ever, and the night is more fierce with out her. His verse may fall to the soul like dew drops to the green pasture.

It is no use thinking that his love could not keep her. The night is shattered and she is no longer with him. Someone is singing in the distance, and his soul is not at all happy that it has lost her. His sight searches for her, and his heart looks for her. The same moonlit nights whiten the same trees. But they are no longer the same. It is certain that he no longer loves her; but he loved her once very much. His voice could not reach her. She is going to be another's, her voice, bright body and infinite eyes - all will be another's. It is true that he no longer loves her, but he may love her. His love was so short but forgetting may take longer time. This may be the last pain she makes him suffer, and this the last verse he writes for her.

Though there is much in the poem that is in line with the conventional romantic lyrics, Neruda's love poem strikes a new note in that it is not addressed to the loved one and that it probes the complexit of love. The poem also challenges the convention of traditional love poetry and the very conception of romantic love. Mutability is presented as a reality in love relationship and it is suggested that the grief caused will soon be forgotten and will lead to a revival of love.

Assignments

(a) Annotate the following passages

1. She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.
How could one that have loved her great still eyes.
2. What does it matter that my love could not keep her.
The night is shattered and she is not with me.
3. The same night whitening the same trees.
We, of that time, are no longer the same.
4. I no longer love her, that's certain but may be I love her
Love-is so short, forgetting is so long.
5. Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer
And these the last verses that I write for her.

(b) Answer each of the following in a pragraph.

1. What does Neruda say about love and the loss of love iii his poem, Tonight I can write?
2. What elements of conventional love poetry do you find in the poem ?
3. How does Neruda's poem differ from the traditional love lyrics?

(c) Write an essay

1. Attempt an appreciation of the poem.
2. Consider Neruda's 'Tonight I can write' as a love poem.

15. IN THE SECULAR NIGHT

Margaret Atwood

Introduction

Margaret Atwood is a reputed Canadian novelist, essayist, activist and poet. A prolific writer, all her writings reveal a deep concern for the wider issues of the world, in addition to the dilemmas of individual existence. In the present poem, which appeared in the volume, *Morning in the Burned House*, Atwood reflects on the alarming decline of religious feelings and the spread of secularism in the world.

(See also notes in the text pp. 197-203)

Explication

Lines 1-15. The poet recalls a night she spent when sixteen.

secular night	:	a night free from religious or spiritual feelings.
deserted	:	left alone
this is your story	:	this is what you say.
scoop	:	(lit) a ladle shaped tool (here) measure
Glenn Miller	:	a popular American musician
purple	:	violet colour (of the grape juice)

Lines 16-14. Another night after-forty years.

lima beans	:	a kind of beans eaten as a vegetable
a secret vice	:	a bad habit not known to others (Her fondness for eating lima beans at odd hours)
simmer	:	boil; keep at boiling point
drain	:	remove water
amble	:	walk at a slow pace

Lines 25-39 God - consciousness and the present day world.

got an answer	:	could experience the existence of God.
Amount to much the same thing	:	sensing the presence of God and sensing his absence - did not appear very different to the poet. By this she may mean that even in his absence she could sense God's presence or that even when she sensed God's presence there were times when God appeared far away or simply not there.
have too much white clothing	:	'white clothing' symbolic of spirituality; have a spiritual look.
hum	:	(here) chant; sing with closed lips, produce sounds like those of bees.
mysticism	:	a religious practice of realizing God directly through meditation and prayer.
heresy	:	a belief contrary to the usual or established one.
outside	:	the poet draws our attention to the world outside.
sirens	:	warning sounds
grinds on	:	moves on oppressively

Appreciation

In this well-known poem, Margaret Atwood reflects on herself and her religious convictions from the persona of a woman, and observes that the secular feelings which have invaded her nights have now invaded the entire world and, the age.

The poet remembers how she spent a secular night in her house, when she was sixteen. It was two - thirty at night and she wandered alone in the house. Others had gone out leaving her alone to baby sit. . She took a large scoop of vanilla ice-cream with grape juice and ginger ale. She lighted a cigarette, put on a record and after some tears of self pity, danced by herself.

Forty years later, things have 'changed. The fondness for vanilla ice-cream has now changed to a fondness for baby lima beans. A person should have a secret vice. She very often forgot to eat meals at the stated time, and this has taken her to the lima beans. She simmers the beans, drains them, adds cream and pepper and scoops them with finger right out of the bowl, while walks up and down the stairs at night, talking aloud to herself.

She would be surprised if she got an answer and could sense the presence of God, but she finds only silence between the words she says; In fact, sensing the absence of God and sensing his presence don't appear very different to her. The only thing is that the state when she sensed the presence of God preceded the state when she sensed his absence. She has a spiritual look and hums God's prayers. Along time ago, her god-consciousness would have been regarded as mysticism~ or heresy. But it does not excite any interest in a secular world, where religious convictions are nobody's concern. In the world outside the, sirens signal an accident - that a person has been run over. The world and the century thus move on.

The secular night of the poem is a symbol. When the secular night of the teenager extends to the world outside and the age, the poet's concern widens from an individual to a universal plain. The poem which underscores at once, the decline of religious feelings and the boredom and loneliness of contemporary life, also points to the fact that the world is the poorer for its secular nature. The poem validates Atwood's view that poetry is a serious business, a means of reflecting on serious thoughts and expressing them with beauty and form.

Assignments

(a) Annotate the following passages.

1. You took a large scoop of vanilla and ice-cream .
... your mouth circled with purple.
2. Now, forty years later, things have changed,
and it's baby lima beans.
3. It is necessary to reserve a secret vice.
This is what at the stated meal time.
4. The sensed absence of
.... only in reverse.
5. Several hundred years ago
.. , or heresy. It isn't now.
6. Outside there are sirens .
..... The century grinds on.

(b) Write a paragraph on each of the following.

1. How did the poet spend her secular night when she was sixteen?
2. Now, forty years later, things have changed, What, according to Atwood, are the changes that have taken place?
3. What do you know about Atwood's, religious convictions, as given in the poem 'In the Secular Night'?

(c) Attempt an essay.

Substantiate the view that poetry is a serious business, a means of reflecting on serious thoughts, to Atwood, in the light of the poem, 'In the Secular Night'.

16. HOME IS A CONCEPT

Kamala Das

Introduction

A gifted Indian writer in English, Kamala Das's writings are noted for their astounding candour and fearlessness. A poet who has made daring explorations into the female psyche, Das's greatest preoccupation is love. No wonder, loneliness and hunger for love, are the recurring motifs in her poetry. In this poem, which appeared in the volume, *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing*, Kamala Das voices the cravings of career persons for familial love.

Explication

(See also notes in the text pp. 205-209)

the unwanted	:	People who are unwanted, not needed by those whom they love; career persons.
clutching at	:	holding
photographs of laughing children	:	It is difficult to say what the poet actually means by this. May be that the children of these unwanted persons, whose photos they carry, have grown up now and no longer love them. Anyhow, the photos of their children laughing, which these persons carry, add to their pathos.
tote	:	carry around
group prepared to love	:	home a group of people who love each other.
strident	:	shrill; loud and harsh
silence holds horrors	:	silence is horrifying to them; they are frightened by silence.
nuclear holocaust	:	massive destruction of life by nuclear weapon.

Appreciation

In the poem, 'Home is a Concept', Kamala Das voices one of her favourite preoccupations, namely the cravings of the soul for familial love.

In the poet's view, those who feel that they are not wanted by their dear ones, travel from place to place carrying heavy brief cases containing seminar papers or passports or visas or the photographs of their laughing children. These career people build up a facade of success by their frequent international travels, seminar presentations and speeches. They carry around very heavy bags and over coats, but the heaviest luggage they carry is pain. Home as an idea is unknown to them. They have not known and shall never know that home is a group of people who love each other. They are frightened by silence and their sense of insecurity makes them talk in strident voices. When they speak of the need for a centre to promote common wealth Literature or of the Nuclear holocaust, they are just pleading others to love them, and reminding them that they are not different from the ones they love. While expressing the yearning for home and familial love, in the poem, the poet also pulls down the facade of success of the career people.

Composition

(a) Annotate the following passages

1. The unwanted carry heavy bags
.....they tote is pain.
 2. The unwanted speak in
strident voices. Silence holds terrors for them.
 3. When they speak of the need for a centre
.... different from the once you seem to love.
- (b) Write a paragraph on each of the following
1. What is the central theme of the poem, 'Home is a Concept'?
 2. What observations does the poet make about career people in the poem 'Home is a Concept'?

17. WOMAN'S SONG

Judith Wright

Introduction

Judith Wright who passed away in 2000, was a famous Australian poet, critic, essayist and environmentalist. Love of the natural environments of Australia and concern for its aborigines inform much of her work. She was a very sensitive writer of Women's feelings and experiences. In the poem, she addresses an unborn child in the persona of a mother and brings out the paradox of her life. (See also notes in the text pp. 211-214)

Explication

woman's song	:	a lullaby to a child that is yet to be born
move in me	:	the poet urges the child, who is in the womb, to move,
the knife of day	:	day which is to cut the umbilical cord 'like the knife.
thread that binds you	:	the umbilical cord that binds the child to its mother.
lose and find	:	the birth of the child will be a physical separation or loss. However, she can look at the child and find him.
death and a maiden	:	death and before that marriage --the experience of love.
who wait for you alone	:	death and a maiden wait for the child and nobody has any part in it. These are experiences the child will have to go through in life.
whose debt I cannot pay	:	everyone born into this world has a debt to pay - i.e. he or she has to die. It is not anything one can do for another.
pain and the dark	:	sorrow and grief 'the dark' may also mean death.
passion and the day	:	love and joy

Appreciation

Judith Wright's 'Woman's Song' is a lullaby sung to an unborn child. The poet, in the persona of a mother, addresses the child in her womb and brings out the paradox of her existence in relation to, the child's, once it is born.

She urges the child to move in her womb and get ready for the 'sun-rise, as it is time for the sun to rise and draw open the lids upon his eyes. The child has to wake up as the knife of day is bright enough to cut the thread that binds him within the flesh of night. Paradoxically, with his birth she will lose him, but she can find him. However, it is her blood that will keep him, weave the spells around him and sing for him the songs of sleep. The child has a maiden and death to experience, and both wait for him. Though she is his mother, she

cannot do anything about it; the child has to go through both, alone. Like, everyone born into this world, the child has a debt to pay. She cannot pay that debt either. In fact, it is not anything one can do for another. Sorrow and grief will make their claim on the child, as love and joy.

It is a paradox that the mother who is the bearer and protector of the child has to set him free to the world and lose him, and the child has to go through the entire course of his life all by himself. The simplicity of diction and tenderness of feeling of the poem lend it a unique charm.

Composition

(a) Annotate the following passages

1. O wake in me, my darling
..... the flesh of night
2. None but I shall know you
..... for you alone
3. So move in me, my darling
..... passion and the day.

(b) Answer each of the following in a paragraph

1. How does 'Woman's Song' differ from a lullaby - a song of sleep?
2. What paradox of the mother's life in relation to the child's is brought out in Judith Wright's poem 'Woman's Song'?

18. HATRED

Wisława Szymborska

Introduction

A Polish poet, who has lived through the horrors of Nazi and Soviet rules, Wisława's greatest concern was human destiny and the dark forces that play with it. Though not a crusader, she wrote and spoke for the people of her nation with conviction and commitment. With savage irony, here, she dwells on the dominant passion of our century, namely, hatred.

(See also notes in the text pp. 218-222)

Explication

keeps itself in shape	: preserves itself in good condition
vaults	: jumps over
obstacles	: hurdles
pounces	: jumps at; pounce: make a sudden attack. Hatred is personified - it vaults and pounces like a beast of prey
tracks	: follows, chases
at once older and younger	: hatred is a very old feeling, but it renews itself that it is at once older and younger.
gives birth itself to	
give it life	: hatred perpetuates itself; It creates the very reasons that gave birth to it.
it's never eternal rest	: hatred does not sleep for ever or die
sap	: weaken, drain

one religion or another	: hatred is generated by religious issues
what ever gets it ready in position	: once kindled, hatred can proceed on its own momentum (force) one fatherland or another : one nation or another (Religious or national issues can generate hatred)
justice outset	: justice can also give hatred a good start; provide initial momentum.
Its face twisted in ecstasy	: its face showing an intense passion like that of a human being gripped by sexual passion. (Hatred is an intense passion like that of sexual desire) grimace: expression (on the face);
erotic: of sexual desire ecstasy	: extreme joy. listless feeble, not worth mentioning.
ever finished first	: has ever won a race; i.e. achieved anything? rabble: mob, disorderly crowd. Doubt cannot incite a mob; only hatred can, and hatred can have at its command, the gifted, diligent and harworking.
human carpets	: carpets of human bodies; human beings shot dead and trampled under the feet
Let's face it	: let us admit the truth
It knows how to make beauty	: (note the irony). Hatred can create beauty; the beauty the poet speaks of is the glow of tire caused by bombs.
fire-glow	: glow of tire caused by the bursting of bombs.
inspiring pathos	: the pathos - pain that can inspire or induce poetry; the sad feeling out of which poetry is created.
bawdy humour	: ugly humour, humour that has sexual overtones.
sturdy column	: strong pillar rising out of the ruins can suggest ~ phallic image.
Hatred..... master of contrast	: hatred is the master creator of contrast - deadening bomb explosions on the one hand and on the other, dead quiet; red-blood suggestive of war and life and white snow suggestive of absence of life and barrenness.
leitmotif	: term from music; a tune or phrase that is repeated several times.
impeccable	: faultless
soiled	: dirty
sniper	: a person who fires shots from a hiding place.
unflinchingly	: resolutely; fearlessly

Appreciation

In the poem 'Hatred', Wislawa, with savage irony and apprehension dwells on the ruling passion of our century.

Wislawa notes that hatred is the ablest performer even today. It keeps itself in good condition, and jumps over the tallest hurdles easily, and pounces and tracks us down rapidly. Hatred, she observes, is not like other feelings. Though it is very old, it renews itself and so is younger and older at once Hatred is self-perpetuating. It creates the reasons that gave birth to it. When it sleeps, it is never eternal rest and sleeplessness doesn't weaken its strength. rather feeds it. Religious or national issues may generate hatred, but once kindled, it will make a running start and proceed on its own momentum. Justice can also provide initial momentum to hatred. Hatred is as intense a passion as erotic ecstasy. When compared with hatred, feelings like brotherhood, compassion and doubt are feeble and listless. Brotherhood could not draw crowds; compassion has never won a race, and doubt has never roused a rabble, as hatred. Only hatred has at its command, the gifted,

diligent and hard working. The poet notes with irony that it is better we don't mention all the songs composed by hatred or all the pages it has added to our history books, or the countless human carpets it has spread over the world. Hatred can also create beauty by causing splendid fire-glow in the midnight skies or bomb - bursts in the rosy dawns. These bombed ruins may provide material for poetry or a certain ugly humour. Hatred is the master creator of contrasts like deadening explosions and dead quiet, and red-blood and white-snow. It is never tired of repeating itself. It is the impeccable executioner that can tower over its dirty victim. Hatred is ever ready to take up new challenges. It is long considered blind.. But the poet notes with apprehension that hatred is never blind. It has a sniper's keen insight and keeps gazing resolutely at the future.

The poem testifies to Wislawa's skeptical views of the human motives and the human condition. Though unpoetic the theme of hatred has great relevance in a world that is marred by terrorism ~d violence born out of hatred.

Composition

(a) Annotate the following passages

1. It's not like other feelings
..... give it life. "
2. When it sleeps, it's never eternal rest
..... sap its strength; it feeds it.
3. One religion or another
..... helps it get a running start"
4. Since when does brother hood
..... finished first?
5. It knows how to make beauty .
..... bursting bombs in rosy dawns
6. You can't deny the inspiring pathos of rains
..... jutting from their midst
7. Above all it never tires
..... ready for new challenges.
8. They say it's blind. Blind?
..... only it can.

(b) Answer each of the following in a paragraph

1. How, in Wislawa's view is hatred generated and how does it perpetuate itself?
2. How according to Wislawa does hatred create beauty?
3. Pessimistic note in the poem "Hatred".

(c) Attempt an essay

1. What are Wislawa's views and apprehensions about hatred?

THE STUDY OF POETRY

W. H. Hudson

1. The Nature and Elements of Poetry

Introduction

All of us have a certain instinctive sense- of what poetry is. But it is difficult to put our idea into precise terms. Literary critics have offered numerous definitions of poetry and they are of help to us in analyzing the nature and elements of poetry. Poetry is a distinctive form of literary art and, as such, it has its own fundamental characteristics. Imagination, feeling and rhythm are the most common characteristics of poetry.

Some Definitions of Poetry

Dr. Johnson had defined poetry as "metrical composition". For him poetry is "the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason". Carlyle has declared that poetry is "musical thought" .. Poetry says Shelley, "in a general sense may be defined as the expression of the imagination". Coleridge regards poetry as the antithesis of science in that its immediate object is pleasure not truth. In Wordsworth's view, poetry "is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge". Matthew Arnold has defined it as "simply the most delightful and perfect form of utterance that human words can reach". It is "criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.

These definitions indicate a variety of approaches to Some of them might appear contradictory too. But taken as a whole, they throw a good deal of light on those characteristics of poetry which are fairly general and constant.

The Essential Elements of poetry

The essential elements of poetry are imagination, feeling and rhythm. By the 'poetical' women, in the first place, the emotional and the imaginative. The poetical interpretation of life, therefore, means the treatment of the filets and experiences of life, focussing on the emotional and imaginative elements. These fundamental elements distinguish poetry from science. However, poetry achieves its distinctive character as poetry only when they are expressed in regularly rhythmical language or metre".

Is Metre Essential to poetry?

Whether metre is essential to poetry or not is a widely debated question. There are many prose works like Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* which are full of superb poetry. On the other hand, there are metrical compositions like Wordsworth's "The Excursion", which are devoid of poetical power. So it is sometimes maintained that metre is not an integral part of poetry. But a close look at the nature of metre shows that it is a fundamental characteristic of poetry, when poetry is considered as a distinctive form of art. The relation between metre and poetry is not accidental but organic. Metre is the chief point of distinction between poetry and prose. Dr. Johnson, Wordsworth, Carlyle and Matthew . Arnold have upheld this position. They hold that metre is part of the perfection of poetry.

The Importance of Rhythm in Poetry

Metrical language creates a "definitely regulated music which We call the rhythm of poetry. Rhythmic form and poetical substance are organically connected with each other. Rhythm is one of the elements which yield aesthetic satisfaction to the reader. It also makes a profound appeal to the feelings and helps to create a poetic world which is quite different. from the world of prose or~ of everyday experience. Rhythm or metre is thus not a "conventional ornament of poetry, but a vital product of poetic spirit."

EXERCISE

Write a paragraph of about eighty words on each of the following topics :

1. The elements of poetry.
2. Poetry as a distinctive literary form.
3. Metre as an organic part of poetry.
4. The function of rhythm in poetry .

The function of rhythm in poetry

MODEL ANSWER

The function of rhythm in poetry

Rhythm is "regulated music" created by the use of metre in poetry. It is not something superimposed on poetry, but is of the very nature of poetic language and substance. It has many vital functions of which the most important is that it heightens the aesthetic pleasure provided by poetry. It also serves to create a poetic world which is quite different from the world of prose or that of everyday experience. As the German poet Schiller has said rhythm has the power to stimulate the poetic spirit and thus to give poetry its distinctive character as an art form.

II Poetry as an Interpretation of life

Introduction

We have already noted that poetry is an interpretation of life through the imagination and the feelings. This leads us to the idea of poetic truth which is in fundamental ways different from the truth of science. The truth of poetry is at least as important as that of science and in some ways more important. We will now briefly examine the difference between science and poetry so that we can have a clearer grasp of the nature and implications of poetic truth.

The Difference between Poetry and Science

The difference between poetry and science is fundamental. Science deals with the world of facts, that is, with the world of physical actuality. It examines external phenomena in a purely-objective way. It aims at offering a systematic and rational explanation of things. Poetry deals with things not as they are in themselves, but as they appear to the emotions and the imagination. The poet is concerned with their mystery and beauty. In this sense, poetry is "at once the antithesis and the complement of science".

The Nature and Meaning of Poetic Truth

Poetic truth means fidelity to our emotional apprehension of facts. In other words, it is fidelity to the feelings that things and objects arouse in us and to the impressions that they make upon us. The first test of poetic truth is accuracy in expressing the beauty, the mystery and the inner meaning of things and of human life. Another test is the poet's first-hand knowledge of the things dealt with; for notice truth cannot be achieved by ignoring the wider issues of knowledge poetic truth has in it "the essential quality of sanity", as it presents the truth of things seen through reason and the feeling.

The "Pathetic Fallacy"

In "Modern Painters" Vol. III, Ruskin has defined the pathetic fallacy. He calls it a "subjective way of dealing with nature, that is, the habit of transferring the poet's mental and emotional states to the objects of nature. Ruskin regards this as a defect as it might lead to a misrepresentation of truth. But in fact the pathetic fallacy is a way of truth fully representing the poet's exact mood or feeling evoked by external objects or nature. It does not show scientific adherence to facts; it conveys poetic truth.

Poetry as the Complement of Science

It is true that there is certain degree of antagonism between science and poetry. Science is the pursuit of objective reality. Poetry interprets reality as seen through the imagination and the feeling. To know things in

their entirety we must know them in their poetic as well as in their scientific aspects. Therefore the truth of poetry is not ultimately opposed to that of science, but complementary to it.

EXERCISE

Write a paragraph of about eighty words on each of the following topics.

1. Poetry as an interpretation of life.
2. The relation between science and poetry.
3. Poetic truth.
4. The pathetic fallacy.

III. Poetry as Revelation

Introduction

Poetry derives substantial value from the fact that it deals with life. The really great poets of the world have recognized that poetry is "made out knife, belongs to life, exists for life". "One abiding characteristic of poetry is its revealing power. It reveals to us the sensuous beauty and the spiritual meaning of the world and nature. It educates us to look at life with a poet's insight, vision and understanding.

The Ultimate Standard of Greatness in Poetry

Since poetry is an art, artistic and technical criteria have to be used in estimating its excellence. But poetry cannot be judged solely by technical standards alone. The genuine greatness of poetry lies in the power with which it handles life's greatest and most abiding issues. The ultimate standard of greatness in poetry derives from the greatness of the poet's subject matter and the power of his thought. The clarity and strength of the poet's moral vision provides another ground for greatness of poetry.

Didacticism in Poetry

The strength of the poet's moral vision is an important factor deciding the greatness of poetry. Still we often think that there is an inevitable antagonism between the didactic, and the poetical. In fact, our real objection to didactic poetry is not that it is didactic, but that it is not true poetry. If the didactic poet succeeds in shaping his material into true poetry then we have no just ground for objecting to his didacticism. Wordsworth has said that he wished to be "considered as a teacher or as nothing"¹. A poet is perfectly within his legitimate province in being an amoral teacher; the only condition being that he should give his ideas "a poetic form and setting".

EXERCISE

Write a paragraph on

1. The ultimate standard of greatness in poetry.
2. The place of didacticism in poetry.

IV The Classification of Poetry

Introduction

From the study of poetry in relation to life we now pass on to the study of poetic forms. Poetry can be broadly divided into two classes - subjective or personal poetry and objective or impersonal poetry. This is not a rigorously logical classification, but every important species of poetry generally comes under one or the other of these divisions. In subjective poetry the poet turns to himself, to his own thoughts and feelings for his inspiration and subject-matter. It is the poetry of self-delineation and self-expression. But in objective or impersonal poetry the poet goes out of himself and deals with the outside world with little reference to his own individuality. It is the poetry of "representation of creation".

Subjective Poetry consists of the lyric, the ode, the elegy, the epistle, the satire and the sonnet. We will consider some of them in detail.

(1) *THE LYRIC*

The lyric is a form of subjective poetry. Originally it was a song, sung to the accompaniment of a lyre or harp. A pure lyric expresses a single mood or feeling in a language which is moving, vivid and appropriate. Any experience, feeling or state of mind can form the subject matter of the lyric. The more important of these themes are love, patriotism, religious sentiments and the common feelings of joy and sorrow, hope and longing. Although the lyric is essentially personal it often expresses feelings and experiences which are typically human rather than merely individual or particular.

(2) *THE ODE*

The ode is a long lyric poem which is serious in subject and elevated in style, manner and tone. It is often in the form of an address and is marked by a logical evolution of thought expressed through a complex stanzaic structure. The structure of the ode may be regular like that of Shelley's *West Wind* or Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* or it may be irregular like Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* and Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. Two kinds of classical odes that have often been imitated by English poets are the Pindaric ode and the Horatian ode. The Pindaric ode follows a complex stanza form divided into strophe, anti strophe and the epode, and it has, an intricate rhyme scheme. Horatian ode has a less complex stanza form and it expresses meditative thought rather than powerful emotion. Ben Jonson's *Ode to Himself* and Keats's ode *To Autumn* are memorable examples of the Horatian ode. The best examples of the Pindaric ode in English are Thomas Gray's *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*.

(3) *THE ELEGY*

The elegy is one of the most important forms of personal poetry. In its pure form it is a brief lyric mourning the death of a person who is dear to the poet. It is marked by absolute sincerity of emotion and expression: The elegy has expanded in many directions in the course of the evolution of literature. It has taken the form of a memorial poem in which the poet pays his tribute to some great man, making appreciative comments on his life and character. Spenser's *Astrophel*, Ben Jonson's *To the Memory of My Beloved Mr. William Shakespeare* and Arnold's *Rugby Chapel* are examples of this type of elegy. Sometimes it takes on a philosophical or speculative tone as in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. The tenn elegy is now broadly used for any reflective or meditative poem with a marked strain of melancholy in it. Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* is a classical instance of this.

The pastoral elegy deserves mention as one of the important species of the elegy. In this type of poem the poet expresses his grief in the guise of a shepherd mourning for a companion. The conventional! pastoral elegy follows a set pattern derived from the elegies of the Sicilian poet Theocritus. The best known examples of this form in English poetry are Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais* and Arnold's *Thyrsis*.

(4) *THE SONNET*

The sonnet is a lyric poem of fourteen lines usually written in iambic pentameter and following an intricate rhyme scheme. There are two types of sonnets in English the Petrarchan (or the regular) and the Shakespearean (or the irregular). Structurally, the Petrarchan sonnet falls into two main parts: an octave (8 lines) and sestet (6 lines), marked by a particular pattern of rhyme. In English this form was effectively used by Milton, Wordsworth and D. G. Rossetti. The Shakespearean form of sonnet consists of three quatrains and a concluding couplet. It follows a rhyme scheme which is less difficult than that of the Petrarchan sonnet: The usual subjects of sonnets are the hope and agony of the lover, the poet's varying states of mind, particular incidents or thoughts and sometimes as in Donne, religious reflections and speculations. Because of its brevity and compactness of structure, the sonnet is a standing challenge to the poet's artistry and workmanship.

OBJECTIVE POETRY

We have examined the different forms of subjective poetry. We will now pass on to objective or impersonal poetry. In objective poetry the poet deals with the other world of passion and action "with the least admixture of his own individuality". Such impersonal poetry is mainly of two kinds - the narrative and the dramatic. The ballad, the epic and the Metrical Romance are subdivisions of narrative poetry. We will briefly deal with each of these forms.

(1) THE BALLAD

The ballad is one of the popular forms of impersonal narrative poetry. It arose spontaneously almost all literatures expressing the vigour of folk culture and the taste of popular audiences. The ballad can be described as a "short story in verse" or a story-poem which was originally meant to be sung and was orally transmitted. Its subjects are deeds and not thoughts and they are of the simplest kind such as fighting, adventure, family, disaster, love and hatred. Frequently there is an infusion of supernaturalism in the tales. The narrative style and method of the traditional ballads are simple and straightforward, but they have a vigorous energy, dramatic power and wonderful metrical beauty. The most common stanza form of the ballad is a quatrain in iambic lines in which the second and the fourth lines rhyme.

The ballads are primarily of two kinds - the popular (or traditional) ballad and the literary ballad. *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Chevy Chase* and *Lord Randal* are some of the best known examples of the popular ballad. Among the most successful literary ballads are Scott's *Eve of St. John*, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Keat's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Literary ballads are not mere imitations of the popular ballad. While preserving what is best in the earlier traditions, they show greater descriptive power, psychological interest and a more finished style of art.

(2) THE EPIC

The epic is a long narrative poem usually dealing with the great deeds of legendary heroes in an elevated style. Epics are primarily of two kinds - the primitive epic or the "epic of growth" and the secondary epic or the "epic of art". The epic of growth has grown out of legends and old-poems over a long period of time although a single literary artist has given final shape to it. To this category belongs the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the Anglo Saxon epic *Beowulf*. The epics of art are the works of learned poets who deliberately imitate the traditional epic form. Of this kind the best-known examples are Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The literary epic or the epic of art resembles the primitive epic in subject matter, in structure, in the use of the supernatural and in stylistic fatness. But they are on the whole learned and derivative, and not fresh, spontaneous and racy. The primitive epics are the expression or the imaginative reconstruction of past ages and their culture and they form the bulk of impersonal poetry in any language.

(3) THE METRICAL ROMANCE

The metrical romance is another form of impersonal narrative poetry. Originally it meant a story in verse told in one of the romance languages, and dealing with chivalry, knight-errantry; fighting, adventure, enchantment and love. There are similar narratives in English developed from the French and Italian forms. Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* and Spenser's *Faery Queen* can be classed as romances. The numerous narrative poems produced in the period of romantic revival can be regarded as another subdivision of verse romance. The most typical verse narratives of this kind are Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. The last of these exemplifies in particular the extensive use of allegorical narrative, which is a characteristic of the metrical romance.

(4) THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

In theory, the dramatic monologue belongs to the class of objective poetry. But in practice, it embodies the spirit of subjective poetry too. It presents a character in a critical situation in his life and the whole poem is

presumably uttered by him in the form of self-revelations dramatic monologue is thus essentially a study of character, of mental and moral crisis, made from the inside; It is psychological, argumentative and analytical in content. Although it is centred on a dramatic situation its main focus is on the character and temperament of the supposed speaker. But in practice, it is a medium for expressing the poet's own views and states of mind through a character who may very well become his mouthpiece. Browning is the greatest master of the dramatic monologue in English. His poems *My Last Duchess*, *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Bishop Blougram's Apology* illustrate the different characteristics of this poetic form. The more important of the modern poets who have effectively used this form are Robert Frost, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.

Model Answer

Write a paragraph of about eighty words on the lyric.

The lyric is one of the simpler forms of subjective poetry. Originally it was a poem composed to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre or harp. Now it means any short non-narrative poem in which the poet expresses his state of mind or personal feelings. The common feelings of joy and sorrow, love, patriotism and religious sentiments are among the recurrent themes of lyric poetry. A good lyric is marked by complete sincerity of utterance and its language is generally vivid, grateful, moving and appropriate. Some of the world's best lyrics embody feelings which are not merely personal, but are characteristic of the community or the human race as a whole.

EXERCISE

Write a paragraph of about eighty words on each of the following topics

(1) The lyric (2) the ode (3) the elegy (4) the sonnet (5) The ballad (6) the epic (7) the metrical romance (8) the dramatic monologue (9) the characteristics of subjective poetry.

V. The Study of Poetic Forms

Introduction

The formal and technical aspects of poetry deserve as much attention as the content of poetry. Of the technical elements of poetry metre is one of the vital connections between poetic feeling and rhythmic expression. Besides, it gives us insight into the art of versification and the technical and aesthetic problems involved in it.

The Elements of English Metre

By metre we mean ordered rhythm which results from a regulated alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. In English the basis of metre is stress or accent. In a foot one stressed syllable may be combined with one or two unstressed syllables. There are five principal metrical feet in English. They are

- (1) *The iambic*: an unstressed or light syllable followed by stressed syllable (o/) as in 'begin'.
- (2) *The trochaic* : a stressed syllable is followed by a light syllable (oo/) as in 'mercy'
- (3) *The anapaest*: a stressed syllable follows two light syllables (oo /) as in 'colonnade'
- (4) *The dactylic*: a stressed syllable is followed by two light syllables (/oo):as in 'merciful':
- (5) *The amphibrachic* : a stressed syllable comes between two light syllables (oo) as in 'eternal'. A metrical line is named according to the number of feet composing it.

monometer : one foot
dimeter : two feet
trimeter : three feet
tetrameter : four feet

- pentameter* : five feet
hexameter : six feet (a line of six iambic feet is called an Alexandrine)
heptameter : seven feet
octometer : eight feet

Metrical variations are quite common in English verse. For instance, in an iambic line one foot may be a spondee (/ /) or an anapaest (oo).

Each metrical form has its distinctive quality and its special fitness for particular purposes. The iambic measure is "smooth, dignified and stately whereas the trochaic is energetic and abrupt".

Blank Verse

Blank verse is the most frequently and most widely used metrical form in English. It consists of unrhymed iambic pentameter lines. It is closer to the natural rhythms of English speech than most other verse forms. It became the standard metre for Elizabethan dramatists and for later verse dynamists too. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Thomson's *Seasons* and Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *Prelude* are written in blank verse. It is the favourite metrical form of many of the modern poets, too. T.S. Eliot for instance used it for much of *The Waste Land*.

Model Question Paper

First Year B.A. Degree Examination 2007 March-April

Part III - Group VIII (a) - English Language and Literature

Main Paper 1- Poetry (2006 Admission onwards)

Time : 3 hours

Max. Marks : 100

- I. Annotate any five of the following.
 1. This thou perceiv'st which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
 2. Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
 3. Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear,
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
 4. Of thoughtless youth; but hearing often times
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.
 5. The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?
 6. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
 7. The unwanted carry heavy bags and overcoats
but the heaviest luggage they tote is pain.

8. It has a sniper's keen sight
And gazes unflinchingly at the future
As only it can.

(5x4=20 marks)

II. Read through the lines below and answer the questions that follow :

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral !
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

1. Why is the Urn referred to as 'O Attic shape'?
2. Why does it tease us out of thought?
3. Significance of the usage - Cold Pastoral.
4. Why is the Urn a friend to man ?
5. What is the message of the Urn to humanity?

(5x2=10 marks)

Answer any five of the following, each in about 80 words.

1. What are the features of Metaphysical poetry ?
2. Milton's criticism of the church.
3. The importance of memory in Tintern Abbey.
4. Comment on Kubla Khan as a highly suggestive poem.
5. What do the 'ladder' and 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart' represent?
6. Why is In The Secular Night a reflective poem ?
7. Language and Imagery in the poem A Far Cry from Africa.
8. Relevance of the subject of the poem Hatred in the contemporary world (5x4=20 marks)

IV. Lycidas as a pastoral elegy.

or

Why would you consider Tintern Abbey one of the finest poems of Wordsworth? .

(1 x 20 = 2 marks)

V. Write a critical appreciation of the poem Birches.

or

Discuss Pablo Neruda's Tonight I can write the saddest lines as a poem on the age old subject of love.

(1 x 20 = 2 marks)

VI. *Answer any two of the following, each in about 80 words.*

1. The Dramatic Monologue.
2. Fidelity to fact in poetry.
3. Significance of rhythm in poetry.

(2 x 5 = 10 marks)

School of Distance Education

UNIVERSITY OF KERALA PALAYAM CAMPUS THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 034

THE EXPERIENCE OF POETRY

Unit - II

**First Year B. A. English Language and Literature
Part III English Main Paper - I Poetry**

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First Year B. A. English Language and Literature

Part III English Main Paper - I Poetry

The Experience of Poetry

Unit - II, Lessons 9 - 18 &

The Study of Poetry

Lessons 9, 10, 13-18

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