

1. That Time of Year Thou Mayest in me Behold

(Sonnet 73)

William Shakespeare

Introduction

(i) *What is a sonnet?*

The word sonnet is derived from the Italian sonetto meaning "a little sound or strain". Originally, a sonnet was a short poem recited to the accompaniment of music. It is now considered "a lyric poem written in a single stanza, which consists of fourteen iambic pentameter¹ lines linked by an intricate rhyme scheme" (M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*).

(ii) *The origin of the sonnet*

It is still unknown when and where the sonnet as a poetical form originated. Some commentators suggest Sicily and Provence as its birth places. But it was first met with in Italy in the second half of the thirteenth century. Dante is said to have made use of the form. Still it is particularly associated with the great Italian poet, Petrarch, who is generally regarded as the foster-father of the sonnets.

(iii) *The Petrarchan or the Italian sonnet*

The Petrarchan sonnet often identified with the Italian sonnet employs fourteen lines to express one single thought or feeling. The fourteen lines are divided into two parts, the first eight lines called the *octave*, and the next six lines called the *sestet*. The octave is often in the form of two stanzas of four lines each, and each stanza having the rhyme scheme: *abba, abba*. The sestet has three rhymes, sometimes only two, different from those employed in the octave. The rhyme scheme may be *c d e, c d e*; or *c d e, d e d*; or *c d e, d e e*.. Like the octave of two four line stanzas or *quatrains*, the sestet is of two three line stanzas called *tercets*.

After the octave, ie., at the end of the eighth line, there is a *cesura* or well-marked pause or stop (indicated by the punctuation, and often emphasized by a space). The *sestet* begins with a *volta* or turn in the thought, which means that the thought-content in the *octave* is given a new application either in the form of a summary or disputation. But this break is not invariably found in Italian sonnets and in English sonnets.

(iv) *English sonnets before Shakespeare*

It was Wyatt and Surrey who first introduced the sonnet form into England in the first half of the sixteenth century. Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-1547), were two English politicians. Like Chaucer, Wyatt often went to Italy on diplomatic missions. He was deeply fascinated by the poetry of Petrarch and on his return to England he wrote sonnets on the Petrarchan model. But Wyatt only blazed the track on which rode Surrey more majestically and with originality. Surrey was a better artist. He sang in sonnets his entirely imaginative love for Geraldine, or Lady Elizabeth Frizgerald. His originality lay in substituting for the Petrarchan form the less elaborate and easier English model which Shakespeare afterwards adopted. He innovated three quatrains with different rhymes followed by a couplet.

Long after Wyatt and Surrey, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) was the first to make use of the sonnets in his glorious *Astrophel* and *Stella*, published in 1591 (five years after his heroic death at Zutphen fight). Sidney's sonnets ignited the fancy of Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616) to make them their medium to express their real love (Spenser's suit to Elizabeth Boyle) or imaginary or lost love (Shakespeare's sonnets addressed to W.H and the Dark Lady). Spenser's *Amoretti* sonnets (addressed to

1. iambic pentameter: a five feet line in poetry, each foot consisting of two words or syllables, the first being short or unaccented and the second long or accented.

Elizabeth Boyle) stand midway between those of Sidney and Shakespeare, from which they are distinct in form and sentiment. He linked the three quatrains by an artistic arrangement of rhymes: *a b a b: b c b c; c d c d*; ie; the last line of the previous stanza rhymed with the first line of the next stanza. There was also a couplet at the end with a distinct rhyme: *e e*. In sentiment Spenser's sonnets are those of a betrothed lover. They tell a story of love without sin or remorse.

(v) *The Shakespearean sonnet*

Shakespeare was a poet before he became a dramatist. His earliest known works are two poems, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*. Throughout his career he wrote a large number of sonnets - about 154 in all. The bulk of his sonnets was written before 1599 and circulated in manuscript "among his private friends". They were first published in 1609 by one William Thorpe.

Shakespeare's sonnets fall into two groups: the first group of 126 sonnets addressed to a beautiful but wanton youth referred to as W.H.; and the second group consisting of 28 pieces addressed to a 'Dark Lady', the beloved of the poet, the identity of the beautiful youth and the dark lady has been the subject of an endless controversy. According to Sydney Lea, W.H. stands for one Mr. William Hall, who privately secured the copies of the sonnets for Thorpe's edition. But for others it is either William Harte (Shakespeare's nephew), Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton (Shakespeare's young patron), William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, or William himself.

The order in which the sonnets are arranged in Thorpe's edition has never been improved upon. They fall into natural sequence often, twelve or fourteen sonnets closely connected by the sense. They are intensely personal in feeling, and run through many moods.

A Shakespearean or English sonnet does not follow the Petrarchan form, but adopts the pattern of Surrey. It is divided into four parts ie, three quatrains and a concluding couplet. The rhyme scheme of a typical Shakespeare's sonnet is: *ab ab cd cd ef ef, gg*. The couplet is a sort of commentary on the thought or emotion of the whole poem and gives a kind of epigrammatic (= short and witty in expression) close to it. Shakespearean sonnets are in 'sequences', ie, in small groups in which one naturally follows the other.

(vi) *The theme of Shakespeare's: sonnets*

The theme of the sonnets is eternal. They reveal the triumph of Time over human passions like ambition, desire, love and friendship. Time is a tyrant that destroys everything. Rich monuments of stone, the pages on which the poet writes, human civilizations and works of art, are all subject to the ravages of Time². All things decay, even W.H. and his beauty. "That thou among the wastes of time must go", tells Shakespeare to the beautiful W.H. But one thing is eternal and that is Love, Love is not Time's fool and it alone escapes "Time's scythe". This is the poet's comfort, and the first 126 sonnets end with this note of consolation.

The second series of 28 sonnets deal with the shortlived delight of lust. The reward of lust is violence, treachery and torments.

Shakespeare's sonnets contain some of the finest lyrical poetry for all times. The splendour and grandeur of their style, their music, and their sensuous phraseology, have received recognition from critics. George Saintsbury praises them saying "verse and form cannot be better moulded to the melodious suggestion of beauty". Shelley pays them this fine tribute:

If any should be curious to discover
Whether to you I am a friend or lover
Let him read Shakespeare's sonnets, taking thence

2. It is interesting to compare this idea of the sonnets with a similar, but better expressed thought in *The Tempest*: The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces... and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

A whetstone for his dull intelligence
That tears and will not cut.

Keats commented on the sonnets: "They seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally, in the intensity of working out conceits" (ie., poetic ideas). Matthew Arnold, in his sonnet on Shakespeare, wrote:

Others abide our question - thou art free!
We ask and ask - Thou smilest and art still
Out - topping knowledge

That Time of Year Thou Mayest in me Behold

Explication

- Line 1. That time of year : late autumn or early winter.
 thou : you (the young man to whom the poem is addressed).
 mayest : may
 behold : see
2. yellow leaves : typical of autumn; green leaves turn yellow in autumn.
3. boughs : branches, which shake because of the cold.
4. bare ruined choirs : the leafless branches of the trees are referred to as bare ruined choirs. Choir is the chancel or part of the church where the church choir (singers) stand and sing. Shakespeare may have in mind the ruined remains of the chancel with bough-like arches. Birds used to sing on these branches, but now they are deserted. (see the text page 34)
- late : lately.

Lines 1- 4 You may behold in me that time of year - (late autumn or early winter) - when yellow leaves or no leaf or few leaves hang upon those boughs (which shake because of the cold) - those bare (leafless) ruined choirs where lately the sweet birds have sung.

5. twilight : faint light before sun rise or after sun set
6. by and by : soon
7. death's second self: darkness; sleep.
 seals up closes up : shuts up.

Lines 5-8 You may see in me the twilight of the day that fades in the west after sunset, and which the black night - death's second self (sleep) that seals up all in rest - soon takes away.

9. glowing : brightness
10. ashes of his : ashes of its
11. death bed : ashes
 expire : die
12. nourished : fed

Lines 9-12 You may see in me the glowing of that fire which lies on the ashes of its youth, which is its death bed and on which it must also expire, consumed by that by which it was nourished.

13. perceiv'st : notice; know
14. ere long : before long

Lines 13- 14 you see / know all these, still you love well that which you must leave before long. This is which makes your love very strong.

In this sonnet, addressed to his young friend, Shakespeare speaks about the changes the passage of time will bring on him and the strength of his friend's love. The theme of the sonnet like that of sonnets 71, 72 and 74, is human mortality and love.

In a series of metaphors the poet speaks about the changes time will bring on him. His life will be like autumn or early winter, when the trees have yellow leaves or remain leafless, and the boughs - the bare ruined choirs, on which the sweet birds sang shake in the cold. His life will be like the twilight which fades in the west and slowly passes on to black night and sleep, death's second self. His life will also be like the glow of the fire that must die, consuming the very fuel which fed it. His friend is aware of all these changes, still he loves the poet. The fact that his friend love him, knowing fully well that the object of his love will not be there for long, is what makes his love more strong and enduring.

The poet brings out the changes on him by the images of the season of autumn, and of the evening twilight, and the glow of the dying fire. After establishing the fact that his life is drawing to its close, in the couplet, he pays a glowing tribute to his friend and his love.

Assignment

I Annotate the following passages:

1. In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
..... that seals up all in rest.
2. In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
..... that which it was nourish'd by.
3. This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong
..... which thou must leave ere long.

II Answer in a paragraph.

1. What is the poet's preoccupation in the poem?
2. How does the poet bring out the changes on him by time?-

Model Annotation

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

The passage is from Shakespeare's celebrated sonnet, 'That Time of Year Thou Mayest in me Behold'. This is the 73rd sonnet. In the sonnet, which is addressed to his young friend, Shakespeare speaks about the changes the passage of time will bring on him and the strength of his friend's love.

In the first stanza he has observed that his friend may find in him autumn or early winter. In the second stanza, he tells his friend that he may find in him the twilight of that day which fades in the west after sunset, and which the black night and sleep- death's second self that seals up all in rest, may take away. Through the image of the evening twilight the poet is suggesting that his life is drawing to its close. The twilight may slowly pass on to black night and sleep, which is death's second self. Darkness is symbolic of death, and sleep is very often used by poets as an image of death. Sleep like the eternal silence, shuts up all in rest. The metaphor is from the practice of placing a seal on something to prevent unauthorized opening.

In the final couplet the poet pays a glowing tribute to his friend by observing that though he is aware of all these changes, he still loves him. This, in his view, is what makes his love more strong and enduring. The poet here is preoccupied with human mortality and love and the same preoccupation we find in sonnets 71, 72

and 74 also. The images of the season of autumn and of the evening twilight and the glow of fire are richly suggestive and they add to the charm of the sonnet.

2. The Sun Rising

John Donne

Introduction

A British poet - turned - priest, John Donne, is the originator of the Metaphysical School of Poetry. The Metaphysical Poetry, as you know, is a kind of intensely personal poetry, characterized by arresting and original images and conceits' wit, colloquial speech, complex themes and dialectical arguments. Swift and subtle reasoning, intense feeling, fusion of passion and wit, intellectual vigour, yoking of images, and obscurity are features that mark Donne's poetry from the popular Elizabethan verse.

Donne's poems may be divided into secular and religious. The religious poems, which he wrote after taking holy order, convey a deep disturbance of spirit. The secular poems, Songs and Sonnets, which he wrote while he was in his twenties, on the other hand, reveal an astonishing range and variety of moods and tones. Except perhaps Shakespeare, Donne is the only writer of love-poems who achieves a miraculous balance between intellect and emotion. (See also notes in the text)

Paraphrase & Explication

Lines (1-10) Busy old fool, unruly sun, why do you thus call on us through windows and curtains? Should lover's seasons also run according to your motions? You saucy, pedantic wretch, go and chide school boys who are late, and sour apprentices; go and tell court huntsmen that the king is riding, and call ants to harvest offices. For love, which is always the same, knows no season or place or time- hours, days and months are all the rags of time.

- Line 1. unruly : unmanagable
 2. dost : does thou : you
4. must to thy motions lover's seasons run?: Should love be controlled or regulated by the motion of the sun, like every thing else.
5. saucy : impudent, foolish
 pedantic : pompous, showy
 wretch : rogue (playfully)
 chide : scold, rebuke
6. late school boys : school boys who are late for school
 sour prentices : apprentices who are sleepy, not fully awake
7. huntsmen : courtiers who accompany the king when he goes hunting
8. country ants ...
 harvest offices : (literally) urge the ants to harvest offices. harvest offices: barns. Country ants may also be the courtiers. By asking the sun to urge the country ants to harvest offices, the poet may be poking fun at the courtiers who hunt for offices and favours.
9. all alike : always the same
 no season knows
 nor clime : does not know any change of season or place
10. rags : smallest portion of time

1. conceits : juxtaposition of images and comparisons between dissimilar objects.

Lines (11 - 20) Why do you think that your beams are so reverend and strong? I can eclipse and cloud them with a wink. But I don't do it because I don't want to lose sight of her even for so short a time. If her eyes have not blinded yours, look at them and tell me whether both the Indias of spice and gold are where you have left them, or lie here with me. You ask those kings whom you saw yesterday; you shall hear that all those riches are here in one bed.

- I. 11. reverend : worthy of reverence, respect
 13. eclipse : render weak or powerless, cover up, throw into the shade
 wink : (here) closing the eye. wink : close and open the eye quickly.
 15. blinded : cause to lose sight
 17. both the Indias
 of spice and mine : both the India - India and the West Indies- spices come from India' and mine (gold) from the West Indies. Spice and mine stand for the world's riches.
 18-20 lie here with me ...
 in one bed lays : the world's riches lie here with me. The lover finds the wealth of the entire world in his mistress, and in possessing her, he declares, he is the world's king.

Lines (21- 30) She is all states, and I its sole prince, and nothing else is. Princes of the world just imitate us. Compared to our love, all worldly honours are mimics - imitation, and all wealth, alchemy - good and very brilliant, but not of enduring value. You sun, you can be half as happy as we, in that the world has shrunk thus to a room. Your age demands rest. Since your duty is to warm the world, in warming us you do it. When you shine to us here, you are everywhere; this bed is your centre and these walls, your orbit.

- 21-22 She's all states ...
 else is : She is the world and I am its king, and nothing else is.
 23. princes do
 but play us : princes of the world only imitate the lovers. They are not the genuine kings.
 compared to this ...
 mimic : compared to their love
 24. All honor's mimic : all worldly honour is an imitation.
 alchemy: (here) the product of some mysterious art. Something not real or of enduring value. Alchemy is the science of transforming base metals to gold.
 25. half as happy as we: The lovers are in a state of perfect happiness. The sun cannot be as happy as the lovers- may be because he is alone whereas the lovers are together. The sun can be happy because the world has shrunk to a room, and he need not wander about the entire world in his old age, but only warm the lovers in their room.
 26. the world's
 contracted thus : the world has shrunk thus to a room.
 28 that's done in
 warming us : The sun's duty is to warm the world. By warming the lovers, the lover says, the sun is performing his duty to the world.

Appreciation

This is one of the finest love-poems of Donne. Here, a lover, who is in an exalted mood pours scorn upon the morning sun. He calls the sun a 'busy old fool' and asks him why he has entered their room through

the window. The sun is unwanted there. He may be needed to regulate other activities, but he cannot control love, as it is the same always.

The lover does not consider the sun very strong or powerful. He says that by shutting his eyes, he can shut out the beams of the sun. But he does not do it only because he does not want to lose sight of his lady even for a minute. He urges the sun to stay and look at the wealth of the world that is in the room. To the lover, his mistress constitutes the entire world and its riches. In possessing her, he is the world's king.

Finally the lover argues that the sun should stay with them, for love is the supreme reality and everything else is an imitation of it. The princes of the world are just imitation, and all worldly honours, mere mimics, and all wealth, alchemy, when compared to their love. The sun should also feel happy that the world has shrunk to a room where the lovers are. The poor old sun need not wander about any longer and can perform his duty of warming the world by warming the lovers. By shining on the lovers, the sun is shining everywhere, for their bed is his centre and their room, his orbit.

The poem which is in the form of an argument, employs many far-fetched images. The lover's mistress IS both the Indias' 'spice and mine'; she is 'all states'; their bed is the centre of the sun, and the walls of their room, the sun's orbit. Its dialectical form, use of conceits, intellectual robustness, elliptical thoughts and tersely compact expressions make it a typical metaphysical poem.

Assignments

(a) Annotate the following passages:

1. Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
.... which are the rags of time.
2. Thy beams, so reverend and strong
... her sight so long.
3. If her eyes have not blinded thine
... All here in one bed lay,
4. She's all states, and all princes, I
Nothing else is.
5. Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere
...these walls, thy sphere.

b. Answer each in a paragraph

1. Why does the lover say that the sun is unwanted in their room?
2. Why does the lover say that the sun can be half as happy as they?
3. What are the lover's arguments with the sun?
4. What are the poet's views on love?

c. Attempt an appreciation of the poem.

or

Consider 'The Sun Rising', a typical metaphysical poem.

3. LYCIDAS

John. Milton

Introduction

The poet

"Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour!" cried Wordsworth in a moment of crisis, seeking solace from that great champion of liberty in England. Milton lives green in the English mind as an un-compromising protagonist of human liberty. This crusader for liberty was at the same time the greatest scholar poet of England. As a poet he was second only to Shakespeare. In fact, as regards the poetry of Milton the pendulum of public taste has swung violently back and forth over the years. However, his poetry remains intact despite the best attempts by such eminent critics as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot "to scale skies and tople Milton from his place". His poetry is well summed up in the following words: "Milton did not merely use language: he carved it, shaped it with the vigour of a baroque architect and piled it up until it became a monument of words in marble" (Louis Untermeyer).

John Milton (1608-1674) was born on December 9, 1608 in Bread Street, Cheapside, London. When at the age of ten he produced a set of poems, his father could detect the genius in him and thus he was "brought up deliberately to be a man of genius". Young Milton grew up in an atmosphere of music, religion and learning. At the age of sixteen, he entered Cambridge University where he remained till 1632. It was during this period that he wrote some of his best early poetry. He left the University in July 1632 after taking his M.A. degree. During Christmas 1629, soon after his twenty-first birthday, Milton wrote his first great poem, *on the Morning of Christs Nativity. L' Allegro and l' Penseroso*, the most famous of all paired poems. were written probably in the summer of 1631.

From the University Milton went to live at his father's countly residence in Horton where, for the next six years, he devoted himself to the study of the classics and comparative literatures. It was at Horton that he composed the masque entitled *Arcades*, and *Comus*, the best-known of his minor poems. In 1637, just, before his twenty-ninth birthday, he wrote *Lycidas*, oonsidered the greatest classical pastoral elegy in English.

In his thirtieth year (1638-39) Milton went abroad. After spending nearly fifteen months in Europe, he returned to England and settled in London as a private school master. It was tbe time of the Reformation. Inspired by the ideals of the Reformation and its militant leader Cromwell, he flung all his energy into the conflict. He turned from poetry to prose. From 1641 to 1660 he issued a series of prose tracts in support of the Republican cause.

Suddenly, to everyone's surprise, the determined bachelor of 35 married a seventeen-year old girl. Mary Powell. They were soon estranged but later a reconciliation was brought about. Mary bore his children but she died a few days after the death of her fourth child. The pamphlet. *Of Education* came out in 1644. This was followed, five months later, by *Areopagitica*, the greatest of Milton's prose writings. His eyesight grew from badworse. He married Catharine Woodcoclc who, with her child, died fifteen months. later" Mean while Milton had become totally blind.

After the execution of King Chares on January 30, 1649. Milton was appointed Secretary for Foreign Tongues to the Council of State. During 1642-58 he wrote seventeen sonnets in the Petraacha from. After the Restoration of 1660 his life was in danger for a while. He refused to recant; he risked the saffold and, somehow, escaped it. He was arrested and kept in custody for some time. His books were burned by the public hangman. Finally, however, he escaped the wrath of the Restoration avengers. His private life became increasingly lonely and complicated. He had to depend entirely on his three illiterate daughters. In 1663, at the. age of fifty-four, he married his third wife. Elizabeth Minshull, twenty four.

Milton had already begun the composition of *Paradise Lost*, the great epic of man's destiny. He completed it in 1665 and published it in 1667. *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* appeared together in 1670 or 1671.

At 66 he died "in a fit of the gout, long troubled with the disease". He was buried in the Church of St. Giles, Cripplegate.

The Poem

The Poem 'Lycidas' is a pastoral elegy in which Milton bewails Edward King (1612-37) who was his fellow-student at King's-College Cambridge and was drowned off the Irish sea. King was the youngest of six sons of the Irish administrator Sir John, King. Though not very intimate friends, King and Milton had marked affinities between them.

King's friends brought out a volume of verses in 1638 to perpetuate his memory. This memorial volume was in two parts. 'Lycidas' is the last of the thirteen poems which make up the second part.

Explication

Title: Lycidas is the name of a shepherd in Theocritus and Virgil.

Head note: Monody is an ode sung by one of the actors in Greek tragedy. Milton is the first to use the word in the specific sense of a poem in which a mourner bewails someone's death. But his use of it may be influenced by his sense that he is in this poem adopting a dramatic role i.e. using a speaker with whom he himself is not fully to be identified. learned friend: Edward King (1612-1637). the youngest son of Sir John King, an Irish administrator.

unfortunately : through misfortune or mishap.

Clergy : Persons ordained as priests or ministers of Christian church

1-7 Milton opens by stressing that he finds himself writing this poem unexpectedly (the berries he plucks are not ripe) since King had died unexpectedly. An elegy for him would have been easier to write if he had died in old age:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | once more | : | a reference to Milton's return to the writing of poetry : (He has already distinguished himself by writing Coms) |
| 1-2 | laurels .. myrtle .. ivy, | : | All these plants, associated with poetry, are sacred to various gods. Milton uses them here to emphasize, the painful nature of his subject. All these plants are named in Virgil and Horace. |
| 2 | never-sere | : | never dry or withered |
| 3 | harsh and crude | : | premature, unripe. The plucking of the berries before they are ripe indicates the poet's feelings that he is not yet mature enough to write great poetry. |
| 4 | forced | : | constrained. Because he is still hesitant. |
| 5 | shatter | : | scatter. Not as violent a word as it now seems. mellowing year: This seems to be an error when used in association with ivy. <i>Since ivy is never sere</i> the mellowing of the year does not affect it. Milton is thinking about King whose life was plucked before it was ripe. |
| 6 | constraints | : | force |
| | occasion | : | an event that happens by chance. |
| | dear | : | dire (Milton is reluctant to write poetry before his faculties are ripe). |
| 7 | season due | : | a reference to Milton's unwillingness to publish poetry before reaching poetic (maturity): |

- 8 ere : before
 prime : the state of highest perfection; the best part.
 Lycidas : here used for Edward King.
- 10-11 he knew to sing : King was the author of a few Latin poems. Milton must have seen some of them, for the practice in that age was to get poems in manuscript form circulated among friends.
- 12 bier : a frame on which the dead body is laid. Here 'watery bier' means the waves on which the dead body of Edward King floated.
- 13 welter : toss about
 parching : drying
- 14 meed : (poet) deserved portion (of praise etc)
 melodious tear : elegy
- 15 Sisters ... well : the Muses. At the foot of Mt. Helicon" was Aganippe, the spring sacred to them
 well : fountain
- 16 Seat of Jove : i. e., the altar on the hill dedicated to Jove. Mt. Helicon is the seat of Jove.
- 17 somewhat : rather
- 18 coy : modest
 Hence : away with !
- 19 So Muse : Some courteous poet may sing of Milton on condition that he mourns for Lycidas.
- 20 With ... urn : be kind enough to sing words wishing me good fortune, over the tomb where am destined to lie. Milton's thoughts pass from King's death to his own; he hopes that when he is dead some other poet will write an elegy on his death as he is commemorating the death of Edward King.
 urn : vase used for holding the ashes of a person whose body has been cremated. Here it means grave. lucky : propitious.
- 22 bid fair peace : be to pray for blessed peace upon
 sable : black
 shroud : cloth wrapped round a corpse
- 23-26 The passage describes, under pastoral imagery, Milton's life at Cambridge in the company of Edward King. Milton tries to establish a personal relationship with Edward King so that the grief expressed may be personal and passionate.
- 23 nursed hill : pastoral way of saying 'We studied at the same college in Cambridge'.
- 24 Fed flock : pursued the same studies
- 25 high lawns : upland pastures
- 27 both together heard : listened to each other's songs
- 28 What time : at the time when
 the grey fly horn : heard the trumpet fly when she buzzes
 winds : blows
- 29 Battening : fattening feeding
- 30-31 the star : Hesperus, the evening star whose appearance is a signal to the shepherd to fold his flocks.

- 31 Towards wheel : towards the downward slope of the sky had directed its westward-boond
ciroular motion.
- westering : proceeding towards the west
- 32 rural ditties : rustic songs
- 33 Tempered to : attuned to
- oaten : the instrument was made of caten straw as befits the pastonll mode of the
poem
- 34 Satyrs : in Greek mythology, deities of the woods represented as men down to
the waist and goats below.
- Fauns : Roman version of Stayrs.
- 36 Damaetas : a conventional name from pastoral poetry, perhaps a reference to a
Cambridge tutor.

(The identity of Damaetas is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps this is a reference to Joseph Meade, the great biblical scholar, who was immensely popular with undergraduates.)

- 37 now ... gone : The mood suddenly, changes to one of gloom
- 38 never must : are destined never to
- 40 wild thyme : kinds of plant with sweet scented leaves, growing wild and in gardens
used in cookeryg more adding : wandering

39-41 In these lines Milton introduces a pastoral convention : the mourning of nature for the dead shephad.
Nature, in different ways, laments the passing of Lycidas. The woods and
caves overgrown with wild thyme and stragglng vine are silent. They are
no longer able each to the song of the young shepherd.

42-44 The willows and the hazel copses shall no longer fan their leaves with joy at the sound of his music

45-49 As the canker kills the rose in bloom, as the worm kills the young lambs, as the frost kills flowers, ugly
death has silenced the singing of Lycidas.

- 45 canker : a maggot that feeds on buds and flowers
- 46 taint-worm : worm that causes disease in sheep and cattle
- weanling : newly weaned

45-49 'The poetical elegy often saw the death of the particular individual who was being mourned as part of
a process of general mutability and decay, and the lament for the
transitoriness of Man's lot was a conventional part of it. It is interesting to
note the absence of this from Milton. He remains concerned with the
particular case, and it should be noticed how these other examples of
disaster in nature (canker etc are compared not to the process by which
Lycidas also died but simply to the way in which) the news of his death
affected the shepherd's ear' (Dennis Burden)

- 47 wardrobe : dress
- 48 When..... blows : when the hawthorn first flowers-ie, in late spring when frost can do the
most damage.
- 49 thy loss..... ear : The poet is so profoundly affected by his sense of loss that the whole
of nature appears unresponsive and dead to him.
- 50 nymphs : deities of hills, fields and streams. The poet pictures them as protectors of
Lycidas.

- remorseless deep : merciless sea
- 50-51 The nymphs, the powers of mountains and rivers, are asked why they were not present in their usual haunts to help their favourite.
- 52 on the steep : the mountain Kerigy - Druidion in Denbighshire, northern Wales, a Druid burial ground. The Welsh Associations are particularly appropriate because of their proximity to the scene of the ship wreck.
- 53 old bards : here Druids are introduced as poets. Bard is specially applied to Celtic Britain.
- 54 Mona : the isle of Anglesey, was regarded as the ancient seat of the Druids, and the stone monuments there, were thought to be Druid burial places.
- shaggy : overgrown. Anglesey, was called 'the shady isle' by the Saxons, and Camden says that in ancient times the island was one vast wood.
- 55 Deva...stream : the river Dee was regarded as a hallowed river the haunt of magicians. It passes through Chester the port from which kings sailed for Ireland. Changes in its course were supposed to foretell the country's fortune hence called wizard. The river is also associated with Merlin, the magician of the Arthurian legends.
- 56 fondly : fondishly
- 56-63 The poet here conjures up the picture of the terrible fate that overtook Orpheus, the very embodiment of poetic genius. Orpheus with his lyre charmed even wild animals, was torn to pieces and thrown into the Hebrus by the enraged Bacchantes. Even the Muse Calliope was powerless to save her son Orpheus from his cruel fate. Lycidas, as a poet, is here tacitly compared with Orpheus. They were both victims of the water.
- 58 the Muse herself : Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry. The chief of the nine Muses, she Presided over eloquence and heroic poetry. Orpheus was her son.
59. enchanting : who worked by enchantment, i.e., of music. Orpheus : traditionally regarded as the father of song, He was the son of Calliope the Muse. He scorned the Thracian women and was torn to pieces by them during one of their Bacchic orgies. His body was dismembered and his head thrown into the river Hebrus whence it floated down into the Aegean.
61. rout : band
62. gory : covered with blood
- visage : face
- the stream : i. e., Hebrus, -the principal river of Thrace
63. Lesbian shore : Orpheus's head floated towards Lesbos. He was buried there.
64. what boots it : what good does it do
- boot : profit
- increasing care : rigorous self-devotion to learning.
65. shepherd's trade : poet's craft
66. strictly ... Muse? : concentrate fully on the profitless cultivation of poetry.
- thankless : profitless
67. as others use : as others do
- others : contemporary poets like Herrick, Suckling and, Lovelace.
- use : are accustomed

68. Amaryllis, Neaera : conventional pastoral names for pretty nymphs.
- 67-69. Were it not. .. hair? : Milton says that it is of ... no benefit to concentrate firmly on the unrewarding cultivation of poetry. In a sceptical vein he asks whether it is not better to pass the time in silly occupations as is the custom of careless young people- occupations like making love and writing love poetry. sporting with Amaryllis or Neaera
- 70-76. This continues the note of protest, arguing that the desire of fame is only the last of many infirmities of .. those who attempt to live virtuously. The argument is then refuted by Phoebus, II-76-84.
70. Clear : pure
 Spur : Stimulus to action.
71. Infirmary : weakness
73. Guerdon : reward
75. the blind Fury : Atropos, one of the three Fates, 'She was often represented in a black veil (hence blind) with a pair of scissors (shears) in her hand with which she cut the thread of Man's life.
76. slits : cuts
76. Fame .. .life : The poet here reveals his attitude to poetry and life in general: What is the motive force that drive's dedicated young men like Edward King and John Milton? Is it for fame that men deny themselves many of the delights of youth and labour hard to achieve their goal? Even noble minds are subject to the desire for fame. But the pity of it all is that at the very moment westrech our hands for the reward of fame, the blind Fury cuts the thread of our life. The untimely death of Edward King vividly impresses upon the mind of the young poet the cruelty of fate in snatching away life before one's goal is accomplished, (Quoted from Lycidas ed. C. T. Thomas).
76. But praise : praise is not cut off with life; praise if not denied.
77. Phoebus : Apollo, god of youth, beauty, music and poetic inspiration.
 touched ears : i.e., as a warning to remember what he said. In VIrgil, Eclogue VI 3-4, Phoebus plucks the poet by the ear. But Milton's statement that his ears were trembling makes the idea more violent. The touching is meant to convey reassurance.
79. glistening : shining
 foil : anything bright and showy
80. broad rumour : wide-spread reputation
81. by : by means of
82. perfect witness : unassailed proof
 all- judging Jove : the task of judging the dead in Greek mythology belongs not to Jove, but to Minos and Rhadamanthus. But Jove is a sovereign figure, so Milton perhaps avoids unnecessary complication by making Jove himself the judge.
83. lastly : conclusively
84. So much : relates back to "us". Your fame will be according to his pronouncement.
 meed : reward
- 76-84 Apollo touches the poet's ears to warn him against impatience. Earthly fame is only a false glitter. True fame is not earthly; it belongs to the life after death.

85. Milton again speaks directly to the Muse of pastoral poetry in the shape of springs and rivers associated with poets.
 Arethuse : a fountain in Sicily associated with the pastoral poems of Theocritus, used here symbolically for Sicilian pastoral poetry. ' .
86. Smooth sliding Mincius : a river in Italy described in one of Virgil's pastorals. Virgil's birth place Mantua stands on the Mincius : As the fountain Arethuse typifies Greek pastoral verse, the river Mincius represents the Latin pastoral verse.
 vocal reed : See Virgil's description of the river Mincius.: where great Mincius wanders on in slow winding curves, fringing the bank with waving reeds, Georgics III, (14-15). By calling the river 'Vocal Milton may be referring indirectly to the eloquence of its poet Virgil.
87. strain I heard : the voice of Apollo
 a higher mood : a loftier style
88. oat : oaten pipe, here song
 my oat proceeds : my pastoral continues
89. herald of the sea : Triton' pleading his master Neptune's innocence in the death of Lycidas.
90. Neptune's plea : to plead the cause of Neptune, he being accused of causing Lycidas' death.
91. felon : wicked
92. swain : shepherd
93. rugged : a pun (i) rough, as winds (ii) hairy, as wings.
94. beaked promontory : jutting headland
 beaked : pointed
95. they ... story : Triton, the herald of the sea. asked the waves and the winds how the misfortune had befallen Edward King ('this gentle swain'). They replied that they knew nothing of his story.
96. Hippotades : Aeolus, son of Hippotes, god of the winds
- 97 -102 'Milton develops the idea that the ship was un sea worthy even though Edward King's brother mentioned in his poem that King was tom away by an unlucky storm.
97. his dungeon : Virgil in his Aeneid describes Aeolus as keeping the winds imprisoned in a cave.
98. The air was calm : the ship had foundered when it struck a rock
 level : smooth water
 brine : salt water; sea
 level brine : calm sea
99. Sleek Panope : Panope is one of the sea-nymphs, often invoked by sailors in a storm. Sleek (=smooth skinned) is also an indirect reference to the calmness of the sea.
 all her sisters : Panope was one of the fifty daughters of Nereus.
- 98-102 Triton, the herald of the sea god, Neptune, and Hippotrades, god of winds, both declare that there was no storm when, the unfortunate ship went down. In fact the sea was so calm that Panope and her sisters played on the waves. The tragedy occurred because the ship had been built during an eclipse, a time of ill -luck.
100. fata l (i) doomed (ii) resulting in death. perfidious bank: treacherous ship

102. eclipse' : eclipses were regarded as omens of evil.
 rigged : made ready for sea.
103. camus i.e., god of the river Cam, representing Cambridge University.
 footing slow: walking slowly. The earn is not a fast flowing river.
104. mantle hairy : bristling with reeds.
 bonnet sedge : cap made of sedge ('sedge' is a grass like plant growing in marshes).
105. Inwrought : decorated, embroidered with. The word is a poetical creation of Milton
106. sanguine flower : the hyacinth. Apollo was so grieved at his accidental killing of Hyacinth that he changed his blood into the hyacinth flower. Certain markings on the flower are said to resemble certain Greek letters which mean "Alas! alas!".
107. reft : snatched away
 quoth : said
 pledge : child
109. Pilot. .lake : St. Peter, who was a fisherman on the Lake Galilee when he was called by Christ. He Was given the power of the keys. i.e., the power to grant or deny men entrance to the kingdom of Heaven. He is traditionally regarded as the founder and the first bishop of the Roman.
110. massy : weighty
111. amain : forcefully. The metal of Peter's keys is not specified in the Bible, but the opposition of gold and iron was traditional enough.
112. Imitred locks : head crowned as bishop
 stern : angrily, in a manner that intended no reconciliation. bespake : spoke
113. for thee : in exchange for you
114. enow : enough : plenty
- 114- 118. St. Peter praises Lycidas (Edward King) as a true shepherd - priest, a model clergyman unlike the clergymen of the day who would creep and intrude, and climb into the fold'. He is highly critical of the false Anglican clergy. The unfaithful shepherds bring discredit on the profession through their greed and ambition. They adopt stealthy and underhand ways; they thrust themselves in proud self-assertion: they enter the church purely for material gain, not for the welfare of the sheep under their charge; they sneak into the fold simply from base motives.
115. creep ... intrude ... climb : refers to different types of persons who enter the church wrongly; they are the sneaking, the pushful and the ambitious ones.
116. care : duties
117. the shearer's feast : the harvest feast which should celebrate the end of labour and effort
 scramble at : climb towards
118. shove away : push away
119. Blind mouths : The corrupt clergy are blind in their spiritual ignorance and they are all mouths in their greed. The phrase 'blind mouths' is a fine example of Milton's power of compression. It sums up "the ignorance, spiritual dulness. and the inordinate greed of the false Anglican clergy";
120. sheep hook : the shepherd's crook and the bishop's pastoral staff; The bishop's staff is made in the form of a shepherd's crook.
 aught. .least : anything else, however easy

121. herdmen : shepherds.
122. What...them? : What does it matter them?
- 123-25 Milton indulges in some violent changes of metaphor in these lines.
123. list: choose (to grate their lean and flashy songs, etc)
- lean and flashy : insubstantial and insipid.
124. Grate : make a harsh noise (their pipes are very unlike the *Oaten Flute* of 1:33
scrannel : shrill and thin. A forceful, possibly dialectical word of which this is the first recorded written use.
126. swoln : swollen
wind : meaningless eloquence
rank mist : false doctrine
draw : breathe
128. the grim wolf : the church of Rome; also supposed to be a reference of Laud, who had been archbishop since 1632
privy : stealthy
129. apace : quickly
nothing said : without opposition
130. two handed engine : an instrument of divine vengeance against those clergy who neglect their responsibilities. It is, a weapon that needs two hands to wield and hence of great striking power; or possibly a two-edged weapon which can thus be wielded with two hands. In the Bible a two-edged sword is a weapon used by God to smite the unrighteous. (Psalm 149 : (6-7; Revelation 1: 16: 19: 1-21) John the Baptist sees Christ's coming as being like an axe that will hew down those trees that do not bear good fruit (Matthew 3:10). That it is the weapon and not the person wielding it that is said to stand at the door is typical of the deliberately harsh, incongruities of this poem; and especially of this section of it.
- 130-31 : in these lines Milton is supposed to have prophesied the execution of Leud who was responsible for many excesses against the Puritans at that time.
- at the door : ready at hand
and smite no more : and there is no need for a second blow.
- 126- 31 'Lycidas' brief but exemplary service is contrasted with the furtive activities of the corrupt clergy whose doom through divine vengeance is foretold. Lycidas will rise again.
- 132-135 Alpheus, lover of the Sicilian-Arethusa, and the Muse of pastoral poetry, are again invoked by the poet.
132. Alpheus : a river god in Arcadia who fell in love with the nymph Arethusa. When she fled to Sicily he pursued her and turned her into a fountain and their waters mingled. Hence Alpheus is identified with the Sicilian (pastoral) Muse.
- 133 That... streams : On hearing the voice of St. Peter the river water gets dried up.
Sicilian Muse : ie, the Muse of pastoral poetry. Theocritus, the first pastoral poet, wrote about Sicilian life.
135. bells : i.e. flowers (of blue bell etc.) A poetical usage.
136. use : haunt, reside.

137. wanton : free, unrestrained.
 138. swart-star : the Dog-star which looks threateningly on vegetation during summer. This is a deliberately paradoxical phrase. 'Swart' means 'dark' which is said oddly of a star. The Dog-star, the brightest of the stars makes the summer solstice the hottest time of the year (hence : 'dog-days'). Milton seems to call the star *swart* because its heat makes the complexion swarthy or dark. But in these valleys all is well since here it looks *sparely* ('not amply').

139-141 Another set of violently incongruous metaphors.

139. quaint : beautiful, skilfully made.
 enamelled : glossy as enamel-work.
 quaint eyes : the flowers, beautiful and multi-coloured.
 140. turf : soil surface with grass roots growing in it.
 honeydew : filled with honey-dew, referring to a sweet substance found on plants and thought to fall like dew.
 141. purple : inpurple; colour richly.
 vernal flowers : flowers of the season of spring.

142-150 This passage seems to have been added later. By adding it 'Milton increases the pastoral beauty of the poem and by so doing heightens the effectiveness of the contrast between this passage and the tragic realization of the horror of King's drowning that follows (l. 154).

It has been observed that this flower passage 'serves as a link between inconsolable grief and final reconciliation. The device of enumerating a number of flowers also belongs to the pastoral style, but here it serves the purpose of toning down the grief and preparing the reader for accepting the idea that Lycidas is not dead'.

142. rathe : early. Here the meaning is: 'early ripening and hence dying forsaken (like Lycidas himself').
 143. tufted : growing in a cluster
 crow-toe : probably corn crow foot or bluebell
 jessamine : jasmine
 144. freaked : spotted; streaked
 147. wan : pale, sad
 148. sad : sober
 149. amaranthus : amaranth, an imaginary flower in Hades that never fades.
 150. daffadillies : daffodils
 151. laureate : laure wreathed
 hearse : bier

134-151 The flower passage describes the lament of nature for the dead shepherd. Alpheus, whose waters had dried up at the dread voice of St. Peter, and the Sicilian Muse are invoked to call upon the pastoral valleys to deck the funeral bier of Lycidas. Nature decks his her with offerings of flowers.

152. to interpose ... ease : to offer a little comfort.
 153. dally surmise : The 'false surmise' is that the body of Lycidas has been recovered and can receive Christian burial. It is false because Lycidas's body was not recovered from the sea. Perhaps the idea of garlanding Lycidas who had a watery grave might have a soothing effect.

From this line onwards there is a dramatic transition.

155. hurled: flung by the force of winds.

156. Hebrides : island off the west coast of Scotland

157. whelming : overpowering

158. monstrous world : the sea, the world of monsters

159. moist vows : tearful prayers. A very concentrated expression

160. Bellerus : the fabulous giant Bellerus is supposed to lie buried in Land's End, Cornwall. The ancient name for the Land's End promontory of Cornwall was Bellerium and from this Milton seems to have developed a mythological invention of his own about 'the fable of Bellerus'.

161. the great vision .. Mount : St Michael's Mount in Mounts Bay, Cornwall. It has a chapel dedicated to St. Micheal the archangel who was supposed to have appeared there. There is some wit in Milton's expression: the *vision* (i.e, the place where the archangel was supposedly seen) itself *looks*.

162. Namancos and Bayona : On the northern coast of Spain, at the point nearest to Land's End. Namancos with its tower, Bayona with its fortress may have figured in Mercator's Atlas first published in England in 1636.

hold : fortress

163. angel : St Michiael

ruth : pity

Look towards England and take pity on drowned Lycidas.

154-164 The body of Lycidas has been carried far away by the tides of the seas. Probably his body has been washed by the waves to the Hebrides. Perhaps he is left in the depths of the ocean full of monsters. Or perhaps he is sleeping near Lands End in Cornwall. From St. Michael's Mount the archangel is looking towards the Spanish coast. The poet prays that St. Michael, the gaurdian angel should Cease to look towards Spain and instead look homewards to Lycidas with pity. And he invokes the dolphins to carry the dead body to shore.

164. dolphins: there are many stories of dolphins, friendly fish to mankind, doing acts of kindness to sailors. Arion the poet was robbed and thrown, overboard from a ship in which he was sailing, but he was carried to safety by dolphins who had been attracted to the ship by the beauty of his singing.

waft : carry, i.e. do not left his body sink into the deep

165-85 This is the concluding passage of the monody, since the last lines are a kind of epilogue. Here the speaker affirms that Lycidas is not really dead and therefore the shepherds must now cease mourning. Thus the poem, true to pastoral convention, ends on a note of reconciliation and consolation.

166. your sorrow : the object of your sorrow

167. watery floor : surface of the sea. This is a paradox since a floor must be defined as a surface that provides support.

168-71 Another passage with some violent changes of metaphor

168. day-star : the sun

169. anon : soon

repairs : restores

170. tricks : decorates

- new ... ore : freshly sparkling gold
173. Though ... waves : Of him over whom the waves of the sea had no power. Here is an allusion to Christ's walking on the waters (See Matthew 14.22.33)
175. nectar : drink of the gods. Applied rather strangely to anointing oil.
- oozy : dripping with sea-water. Here it refers to the sea-water which is washed away by the nectar.
- laves : washes
176. unexpressive : inexpressibly grand and beautiful.
- nuptial song : This is the song in Revelation 14 : 3,4. "which no man could learn but they who were not defiled with women, and were virgins".
177. In the .. love : That is, 'in the best kingdoms of meek joy and love'. a transposition of the adjective.
178. entertain : welcome. Even here, after Lycidas is received into heaven, Milton does not make him an angel. He makes him, indeed, a being of a higher order, "the Genius of the shore".
183. genius : presiding spirit, local god
184. In ... recompense : as full compensation for suffering and reward for virtue.
- 186-193 'Here the pastoral ends. The last eight lines form the Epilogue in which Milton states that he is about to turn to other occupations. The close is ideal, and is often considered to be a reference to Milton's projected tour of Italy'.
186. uncouth swain : unlettered shepherd; unknown poet.
188. various quills : the individual reeds of a shepherd's flute. i.e., the various moods depicted in the poem.
189. Doric lay : He calls it Doric lay because it imitates. Theocritus and other pastoral poets who wrote in the Doric dialect.
- lay : song. A poetical word.
190. stretched out : i.e., in long shadows. Night is approaching.
192. twitched : fastened tightly
- mantle blue : Blue is the colour of the shepherd's dress, and the poet here represents a poetic shepherd, but the traditional colour seems to be grey.
193. Tomorrow new : Three possible explanations have been offered: 1. The shepherd is going to new haunts as the old ones are associated with Lycidas and he can not bear to feed his sheep there alone. 2. This may be a reference to Milton's projected tour of Italy or his shifting from Horton to London 3. It is an indirect way of saying that Milton has finally separated himself from the Anglican and Court party, and means to identify himself with the Puritans. This, however, seems to be very farfetched.

Analysis

'Lycidas' has a remarkable architectural quality. Its perfection of structure contributes to its power and depth of feeling. The poem can be analysed as follows:

I Prologue - Lines 1- 22

The Prologue states the urgency of the situation which prompted the poet to compose this poem.

Lines 1 to 14.

Lycidas, the young shepherd, is dead. This is a sad occasion. The shepherd who survives must sing a lament for the departed one. Lycidas himself knew "to sing, and build the lofty rhyme". He must not die unwept and unsung.

Lines 15 to 22

The poet invokes the Muses to begin the pastoral song. He must lament the loss of Lycidas; perhaps his own death may be lamented by some fellow poet in future after he dies. The prologue thus ends on a note of personal concern.

II Section One- lines 23-84

Here the poet laments for the death of Lycidas and gives a dramatized account of their life together on the hill of learning at Cambridge. The section ends with the poet's realisation that their dedication to poetry will ultimately secure for them heavenly recompense.

Lines 23-36

The two shepherd-boys spent their days together on the self-same hill (Cambridge) feeding the same flock "by fountain, shade, and rill." They were engaged in scholarly pursuits. In the meantime their poetic composition went on unabated.

Lines 37-49

The mood now changes to one of a painful sense of loss. "Now thou art gone and never must return", the shepherd laments. And all nature laments the loss of Lycidas. Death has killed Lycidas as the canker kills the rose, as the worm kills young sheep and as frost kills flowers.

Lines 50-63

The poet now addresses the nymphs and blames them for their absence from the tragic scene. He dreams for a moment that the tragedy would have been averted if only they had been present there. The next moment he realises that it is futile to blame because even Calliope, a Muse herself could not save her son Orpheus when he was torn to pieces and thrown into the Hebrus by the angry Bacchantes.

Lines 64-84

There is no use in giving oneself to serious poetry if one is suddenly cut off by death. Death intervenes before we can taste the fruits of our labour. The poet nursed such fears but Phoebus, the god of song, reassures him by saying that true fame is granted not by men but by God.

III Section Two - Lines 85 -131

The poet describes how the death of Lycidas is lamented by nature, poets, learning and religion.

Lines 85-102

After invoking the Muses, the poet introduces a procession of mourners. Triton, the herald of the sea, and Hippotades, god of the winds, both declare that the air was calm when the tragedy occurred. The ship was wrecked not because there was a storm but because it was a fatal bark built in an inauspicious time.

Lines 103-131

The next in the procession is Camas, god of the river Cam, who represents Cambridge University. The last of the mourners is St. Peter who represents the Universal church. St. Peter praises Lycidas as the true shepherd priest who would have dedicated himself to the welfare of his flock. As a contrast he points out the Anglican clergy- the unfaithful shepherds who sneak into the fold with base motives.

IV Section three - Lines 132 to 184

Here the poet shepherd affirms that Lycidas is not dead. He will rise from beneath the sea like the sun Christ who commands the waves of the sea will render him necessary power.

Lines 132 - 151

The poet invokes Alpheus and the Sicilian Muse. This invocation is followed by a plea to the vales of Sicily to strew all their flowers on the hearse of Lycidas.

Lines 152 - 164

The body of Lycidas has not been recovered, it has been carried far away by the waves of the sea - perhaps towards the Hebrides islands or towards Land's End guarded by St. Michael. The poet - shepherd prays to St. Michael that Lycidas may be restored.

Lines 165 - 185

The speaker here tells the woeful shepherds to weep no more because Lycidas is not really dead. He has only sunk beneath the watery floor and, like the sun, he is sure to rise again, through the power of Christ who commands the waves of the ocean. Lycidas shall be ushered into the blessed kingdom: he is a divine protector of travellers through the perilous seas.

V Epilogue - Lines 186 to 193

The pastoral has ended, the shepherd's song is over. The sun has set. Tomorrow, again, the shepherd must return to the world of routine, he must lead his flock to another pasture.

COMPREHENSION

1. What was the occasion that prompted the poet to write the poem ?
2. How does Milton describe his days with Edward King at Cambridge?
3. How does nature lament the death of Lycidas ?
4. Why does the poet blame the nymphs?
5. How does Phoebus reassure the disappointed poet shepherd?
6. How does Milton criticize the-Anglican clergy in 'Lycidas'?
7. How does the poet regain hope and faith despite the tragedy of Lycidas ?
8. What plea does the poet make to the vales of Sicily ?
9. What does the Epilogue of 'Lycidas' mean ?
10. Do you think the poem 'Lycidas' expresses genuine passion?
11. What is the meaning of the "two-handed engine"?
12. Explain the meaning of the passage on fame in 'Lycidas'. ?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

'Lycidas' as a Pastoral Elegy

Milton's 'Lycidas' is one of the greatest elegies in English literature. It belongs to the pastoral tradition. Milton, in writing this pastoral elegy, did not follow any single classic model. He, however, followed many of the major conventions established through the long course of evolution of pastoral poetry.

The Lament for Bion was the most important pastoral elegy of classical antiquity. The tradition was continued by Theocritus in his *First Idyll* and Virgil in his *Fifth Eclogue*. In pre-Miltonic 'England', the Lament for Basilius in Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Lament for Dido in Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* provided successful examples of pastoral elegy. But it was Milton who perfected the form by completely absorbing and transmuting the various conventions and traditions he accepted. 'Lycidas' thus becomes a

highly original poem - an arche type of pastoral poetry in English literature. Milton employs five important pastoral conventions: the questioning of the guardian nymphs for their heedlessness; the procession of mourners; the list of flowers scattered on the dead shepherd's grave; the change of tone from sadness to joy at the thought of his immortality. The poem becomes unique by virtue of the originality with which Milton uses these conventions.

True to the pastoral convention, Milton makes Nature lament the passing of Lycidas. The woods and caves overgrown with wild thyme and straggling vine are sad and silent. They are no longer able to echo the song of the shepherd. The willows and the hazel, opses shall no longer fan their leaves with joy listening to his soft music. The death of young Lycidas before his prime is like the death of many beautiful things in nature. The canker kills the rose in bloom; the worm kills the young lambs; the frost kills flowers. The whole nature appears dead and unresponsive to the unhappy poet.

Another pastoral tradition followed in the poem is the reproach addressed to the Guardian nymphs for their headlessness. The poet blames the nymphs for their absence when the remorseless deep closed over the head of Lycidas. Perhaps the tragedy could have been averted if only the nymphs had been present there. However, the next moment he realises that it is futile to blame because even Calliope, a Muse herself, could not save her son Orpheus when he was torn to pieces and thrown into the Hebrus.

The procession of the mourners is another characteristic feature of a pastoral elegy. Milton first introduces Triton, the herald of the sea, and Hippotades, god of the winds. They declare that the air was calm when tragedy occurred. The ship was wrecked not because there was a storm but because it was built in an inauspicious time. The next in the procession is Camus, god of the river Cam, who represents Cambridge University. Camus laments the untimely death of Lycidas, his "dearest pledge". The last of the mourners is St. Peter who praises Lycidas as true shepherd-priest who would have dedicated himself to the welfare of his flock. St. Peter turns his ire against the false Anglican clergy.

The poem regains the pastoral tone with the invocation of Alpheus and the Sicilian Muse. They are invoked to call upon the pastoral vales to deck the funeral bier of Lycidas with flowers. Here we have the celebrated catalogue of flowers - another device of pastoral elegy. The flower passage stands for the lament of nature for the dead shepherd.

A pastoral elegy ends on a note of consolation and hope. In 'Lycidas' the pagan lament at the disintegration of the body gives place to the joy and hope of Christianity. The speaker assures that Lycidas is not really dead. He has only sunk beneath the watery floor. He will rise again, like the sun through the power of Christ. Who commands the wave of the ocean.

The two digressions in the poem - the passages on fame and on the corrupt clergy - are well within the Renaissance pastoral tradition. Dr. Johnson remarked that the pastoral form of the poem is 'easy' 'vulgar' and 'disgusting'. This is far from true. In fact Milton not only absorbs and transmutes the pastoral conventions but enlarges the structure and scope of the pastoral genre. 'Lycidas' thus remains "an elaborate literary memorial" for Edward King without which he would long ago have been forgotten.

2. What is the real theme of 'Lycidas' ?

Milton described 'Lycidas' as a monody in which the author "bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas, 1637". The poem is undoubtedly an expression of the poet's grief over the sudden death of this "learned Friend", Edward King. But critics like Tillyard are of the view that the real theme of the poem is not Edward King, but Milton himself. David Daiches goes a step further and suggests that if the subject of the poem is not simply Edward King as man, neither is it simply Milton himself. "It is man in his creative capacity as Christian humanist poet priest". Thus the poem, with its complex strata of meanings, has yielded different interpretations.

'Lycidas' was occasioned by the death of Edward King. Naturally one of the chief concerns of the poem is King's fate. Faced with the premature death of his friend, the poet's first reaction is to sing a lament for him:

He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear ... (l. 1. 12. 14)

The poet then describes in intimate terms his life in the company of Edward King on the hill of learning at Cambridge. Now that King is dead, all Nature weeps for him. Triton, the herald of the sea god Neptune; Hippotades, god of winds; Camus, god of the river Cam; St. Peter representing universal church - all of them come in a procession and mourn for the death of Lycidas. The poet then asks the vales of Sicily to strew all their flowers of the hearse of Lycidas and he prays to St. Michael to restore Lycidas. Finally, however, he affirms that Lycidas is not really dead. He has sunk beneath the sea only to rise again like the sun, through the power of Christ who commands the waves of the sea. And he is received into the kingdom of heaven by the blessed angels.

King and his death are more or less immediately present in every part of the poem. But the poem has been accused of impersonality. Dr. Johnson said the poem is "not to be considered as the effusion of real passion" and that "where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief". This, however is not true because Milton's pastoral and Allegorical description of King and himself as fellow students is remarkably personal. Moreover the function of an elegy is not merely to express grief. As Prof. Wright says, an elegy is not merely a lament for an individual; but an elaborate literary memorial intended to perpetuate his memory". This is precisely the function 'Lycidas' performs. But for 'Lycidas' the name of Edward King would long ago have been forgotten.

But critics like Tillyard consider Edward King as the nominal theme of the poem. They think that fundamentally the poem is about Milton himself. Edward King is only an excuse for one of Milton's most personal poems. The opening lines of 'Lycidas' do not concern King, but his own reluctance to write a poem before his faculties are fully ripe. But the untimely death of his friend compels him to write premature poetry. Moreover, if he writes an elegy for Lycidas, 'some gentle Muse' may write an elegy for him at his death the Prologue of the poem, thus ends on the poet's reflection on his own death. Then there is the description of his life in the company of King on the same hill; feeding the same flock. "by fountain, shade, and rill". The subject is slowly transferred from King to Milton himself. The poet expresses his fears of untimely death before his great mission - to feed the hungry sheep of England through his great writings - could be fulfilled. The poem ends with a description of the resurrection of Lycidas and his entry into heaven. This is at the same time a description of the resurrection of Milton's hopes.

It is true that the poem, is as much about Milton as about King. But the dominant concern is not simply King's fate as man, but his fate as poet. In the words of David Daiches, the "theme of Lycidas" is the fate of the poet-priest in all his aspects, both as individual and as social figure". There is no sense in choosing a life of self-dedication to great art if the artist in his prime is cut off, 'before the full flowering of his Creativity. This is a world in which the good are destroyed while the bad remain. Therefore the poet-priest has no chance to survive and fulfil his promise. It is absolutely unfair that society cuts him off while it allows the drones and the parasites (the corrupt clergy) to remain. The central theme of the poem is therefore the function and status of poetry in a society which is antagonistic to it. Lycidas emerges as an archetype of unfulfilled hope.

Thus, on the thematic level, the poem has three basic concerns; the fate of Edward King, the fate of Milton himself and the fate of man in his creative capacity. Lycidas was drowned before he could fulfil his potentialities as poet-priest. His death is linked to the, inevitable death' of all men, however talented, however great their promise or achievements. "Man is always liable to be cut off before making his contribution; hence the lament, hence the problem, hence the poem".

3. Comment on the two digressions in 'Lycidas'

In Milton's 'Lycidas' there are two- digressions ' which have elicited considerable critical interest. The first (lines 64-84) is where Milton meditates on the self dedication required of genuine poets and on the distinction between terrestrial and celestial fame. The second (lines 108-131) is where he examines Edward King as a poet priest and denounces the false and corrupt clergymen of the day. These two digressions compose 'the doctrinal or didactic element' of the poem, They are sharply distinct from the other parts of the poem which are descriptive.

Let us begin with the first digression. After having referred to Edward King as a poet Milton compares him with the other poets of the day who write amorous verse. He asks: what merits is there in writing serious poetry when the minor poets of the day seem to be popular by writing love poetry? Is it not better to pass the time by sporting with Amaryllis and Neaera, i.e., by making love and writing love poetry? Why should one bother to dedicate oneself to a life of preparation for great poetry? Can man as a Christian humanist achieve anything more than man as mere sensualist?

To the poet it seems that it is for fame that men deny themselves many of the delights of youth and labour . hard to achieve their goal. Even noble minds .are subject to the desire for fame. One pursues fame bit before one has won it, one is liable to be cut off. The very moment one stretches out one's hands for the reward of fame, the blind Fury cuts the thread of one's life. This is what has happened in the case of Edward King. In this situation, is it worth trying to be poet? A reply to this question comes from Phoebus who touches the poet's "Trembling ears" and says that true fame is granted by God, not by men, and that dedicated action will have heavenly recompense. True fame is not earthly; it belongs to heaven: all earthly fame is only a false glitter. This is only a tentative answer; the true answer emerges at the poem's end where Lycidas is received in heaven.

This distinction Milton draws between terrestrial and celestial fame enables us to see how his Christianity influenced his deep devotion to art and literature. In the same way as his Christianity modified his Platonism, it modified his humanism and his passion for literature and arts. According to him, one will certainly obtain the praise of God, if one has deserved it. And this is all that matters in the end.

The second 'digression' occurs where St. Peter, who holds the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, praises Lycidas as the true shepherd- priest who would have devoted his life to the welfare of his flock. The sub-title Milton appended to the poem mentioned that the poem sought "to foretell the ruin of our corrupted clergy then in their height". St. Peter, while praising Lycidas, turns his ire against the false Anglican clergy. He calls them "blind mouths"; they lack spiritual enlightenment. Through their greed and ambition they bring discredit on the profession. They "creep and intrude, and climb into the fold" from base motives. They have no interest in the welfare of the sheep under their charge; their sole concern is their own material welfare. The sheep under them are simply left unfed and uncared for. The hungry wolf lies in wait for these neglected sheep who rot inwardly and spread foul contagion.

Milton's "grim wolf with privy paw" is a reference to the Roman Catholic Church ready to receive the sheep neglected by their Protestant pastors. He warns that the divine sword of Justice is at hand. The "two-handed engine" , symbolic of God's judgement, stands ready at hand "to smite once, and smite no more"- there will be no need for a second blow.

These two passages, though generally referred to as digressions, are not really digressions in the organic frame work of the poem. As David Daiches points out, the second passage develops the theme that the good are destroyed while the bad remain. This theme in turn emerges from his earlier point that mere sensualists triumph in this world whereas the dedicated man fails. The poet-priest who would have done good to society is defeated whereas the evil men who do harm to society triumph. Is it fair to society to cut him off and let the drones and the parasites remain?, the poet asks. Thus the two passages complement each other and speak of "the fate of the poet-priest in all his aspects both as individual and as social figure".

Model Annotations

Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw,
Daily devours apace, and nothing said,
But that two handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smile once, and smite no more.

Milton, in his poem "Lycidas" examines Edward King as a poet-priest and contrasts him with the false clergymen of his day who would "creep and intrude, and climb into the fold". He presents St. Peter as one of the mourners who turns his ire against the false Anglican clergy who have neither spiritual enlightenment nor responsibility to the sheep under their charge. The neglected sheep are left unfed and uncared for; they rot inwardly and spread foul contagion. The "grim wolf" with its stealthy paws lies in wait for them. But, the poet warns; the divine sword of Justice is at hand. The "two handed engine" symbolic of God's judgement stands ready at hand "to smite once, and smite no more" -there will be no need for a second blow.

In this passage the "grim wolf" refers to the Roman Catholic Church whose agents operated in secret to engulf the sheep neglected by their Protestant pastors. Perhaps it is also a reference to Land, who had been archbishop since 1632. The "two handed engine" is a two edged weapon that needs two hands to wield it and hence of great striking power. In the Bible a two edged sword is a weapon used by God to smite the unrighteous.

This passage, considered to be a digression, throws light on Milton's personality, especially on his approach to religion.

- 2 Where the great vision of the guarded mount
 Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;
 Look homeward, angel, now, and melt with ruth
 And, o ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.

This passage occurs in Milton's *Lycidas*. The poet invokes the vales of Sicily to strew all their flowers on the hearse of Lycidas. But he realizes that it is impossible because the body of Lycidas could not be recovered. Probably the body of Lycidas has been washed by the waves to the Hebrides or towards Land's Land guarded by St. Michael, the place where the story of Bellerus is supposed to have taken place. From St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall the archangel is guarding England while looking towards the Spanish coast. The poet suggests that St. Michael, the guardian angel, should turn his eyes away from the Spanish coast and look homewards so that he can see the tragic end of Lycidas with sympathy. He then invokes the dolphins to carry the body of Lycidas to the shore.

Here "the great vision of the guarded mount", refers to St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall which has a chapel dedicated to St. Michael. 'Namancos' and 'Bayona' are places on the north west of Scotland. 'Dolphins' are music-loving fish.

The image of St. Michael looking towards the Spanish coast reminds us of the entire episode of the Anglo Spanish confrontation of the Elizabethan period. This passage has its link with the earlier image of "grim wolf". Thus the suggestion is that St. Michael is guarding England against the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Spanish Inquisition.

PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

1. The "two-handed engine at the door" What is it?

In *Lycidas* Milton presents St. Peter, the pilot of the Galilean lake, who turns his ire against the Anglican clergy. The false clergymen who are interested in their own material welfare neglect the sheep under their charge who are left unfed and uncared for. The poet says that the "two-handed engine" of God's justice will

strike at last and set things right at one blow. The "two handed engine" is variously interpreted as (1) the sword of Justice wielded by God, (2) the axe that will hew down those trees that do not bear good fruit, in St. Mathew (3) the two edged sword of the Revelation, (4) the axe with which Archbishop Land was beheaded, (5) the sword of St. Michael, and (6) the two Houses of Parliament. The interpretation that the engine is the divine sword of Justice, however, appeals to us the most convincing.

2. Water Imagery in 'Lycidas'

Lycidas has been described as "a water poem", full of images associated with water. Since the poem was occasioned by the drowning of Edward King while crossing from England to Ireland, the sea remains a background in the poem and water images are used in abundance. The poem itself is summarized in a single water - image - "some melodious tear". The poet uses images like a dead body swept to and fro on the ocean, the "sacred well" "Deva's wizard- stream" the tragedy of Orpheus on the river Hebrus, the calm sea on which the nymph Panope and her sisters played, etc The personification of the river Carn, "the representation of St. Peter as the 'Pilot of the Galilean lake", the description of King's body being washed away by the sounding waves are all telling images associated with water. The picture of Christ as walking mightily over the waves, at the end of the poem, is an equally memorable water image.

COMPOSITION

I Annotate the Following Passages:-

- 1 He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear. (I.12-15)
- 2 So may some gentle Muse .
With lucky words favour my destined turn,
And as he passes turp,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud. (II. 19-22)
- 3 For we were mused upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill. (II.23-24)
4. Rough satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel,
From the glad Sound would not be absent long
And old Damaetas loved to hear our song. (II. 35-37)
5. As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their: gay wardrobe wear
When first the white thorn blows. (II. 45 - 48)
6. What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son
Whom universal nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore? (II.58-63)
7. To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade'
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done' as other use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tringles of Neaera's hair? (II.64-69)

8. Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth rise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days. (II.70-72)
9. "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistening foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove,
As he pronounces lastly on each deed .
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed". (II.78-84)
10. The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters played,
It was that fatal and perfidious bark
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine. (II.98-102)
11. Last came, and last did go,
The pilot of the Galilean lake;
Two massy keys- he bore of metals twain
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain) (II.98-102)
12. Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep hook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdmen's art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped (II.119-122)
13. Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw,
Daily devours apace, and nothing said,
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more (II.128-131)
14. Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold,
Look homeward, angel, now, and melt with ruth.
And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth. (II. 161-164)
15. So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams and with new spangled ore,
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky. (II.168-171)
16. So Lycidas sunk - low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of him that walked the waves
Where, other groves and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks the laves'
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song.
In the blest singdoms meek of joy and love. (II.172-176)
17. At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue
Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new. (192-193)

II Answer the following (Essay questions)

1. Consider Lycidas as a pastoral elegy.
2. "Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief". said Dr. Johnson of Lycidas. Has the pastoral framework of the poem affected its quality as an expression of grief?
3. Comment on the significance of the digressions in Lycidas.
4. What is the real theme of Lycidas ?

III Write notes on the following topics, each in a paragraph of about 80 words

1. Milton's tirade against the corrupt clergy in Lycidas.
2. Milton's observations on the office of a poet in Lycidas.
3. Milton and Edward King.
4. The autobiographical element in Lycidas.
5. Water imagery in Lycidas.
6. The "two-handed engine at the door".
7. Milton's approach to religion as revealed in Lycidas.

4. Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Thomas Gray

Introduction

An elegy is a poem of mourning for an individual or a lament for some tragic event. Thomas Gray's Elegy celebrates "the short and simple annals of the poor", the virtues of the common people of his native village of Stoke Poges. One of the supreme achievements in English poetry, the Elegy is a humanistic assertion of the dignity of the poor, of the pristine innocence and earthly grandeur of the common villagers.

Gray was born in London on 26th December 1716, the son of a scrivener of comfortable means. He was sent to Eton and Cambridge, where he made friends with Horace Walpole. After spending a number of years in careful reading and wide travels, he finally settled at Cambridge in 1741. In 1768 he became Professor of History at Pembroke College, but never delivered any lectures. After a short illness he died on 30th July 1771, in his fifty fifth year.

His was a lifetime devoted to reading and reflection, with little creative study and research, but occasionally he was impelled to write poetry. Surprisingly, the whole of the poetry he published in his lifetime amounted to less than one thousand lines. In fact there is no other English poet of his stature who has produced so small a body of work. In addition to verse, Gray wrote some thoughtful essays and proved to be a highly imaginative letter-writer.

Among the poems, the Elegy stands out as a "representative poem of its age". At a time when majority of Britain were still country dwellers, the Elegy translates into art "the tranquil continuity of village life". The poet observes the simple life of the poor villagers of Stoke Poges and contrasts their fate with that of the wealthy and the ambitious. Denied of opportunities, they never rose to power. Ultimately when death comes, it comes alike to the rich and the poor and makes no distinction whatever of worldly status.

The poem, deeply influenced by the death of his close friend West, is, as Tennyson remarked, full of "divine truisms that make us weep". Its appeal transcends time. Dr. Johnson rightly observes: "The Churchyard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo".

Analysis

To dissect a poem into themes, style etc. goes against our grasping it as an organic whole. Yet for the sake of convenience, we shall examine the *Elegy* under various titles conforming to the development of thought in the poem:

1. The slow advance of dusk over the countryside (St. 1-3). The three opening stanzas dramatise the mystery of evening, the slow advance of darkness over the countryside.

2. Description of the forefathers of the village who sleep in their graves (St. 4-7).

These stanzas conjure up the picture of the illiterate ancestors of the village laid in eternal rest in their graves under the shade of elms and yews.

3. The inevitability of death for the rich and the poor alike (St. 8-11).

Let not men of power look down upon the simple events in the day-today life of the poor. Whether rich or poor, all have to meet the ultimate moment of death; worldly power or glory has no effect whatsoever on the cold ears of death.

4. The fate of the poor; their life of anonymity owing to lack of opportunities (St. 12-15).

Perhaps, among the village forefathers in their graves, there may be men with extraordinary talent, but they were compelled to lead a life of anonymity because they never had opportunities to develop their talent.

5. A fate that limits not only their achievements but their crimes (St. 16-19).

The poor villagers' fate not only cut short their opportunities for achievements but prevented them from committing crimes in pursuit of power and glory.

6. The frail memorials of the village forefathers (St. 20-23).

Life in the world is invaluable for all human beings. No one leaves this world without a heavy heart. Even the village forefathers, buried in their graves, have their frail memorials imploring the sympathy of the passers-by.

7. Reflections on the poet's own impending fate (St. 24-29).

Perhaps, when later "some kindred spirit" inquires about the poet's fate, "some hoary-headed swain" may tell him about the simple, forlorn life of the poet and his sudden death and burial under the shade of an aged tree.

Explication

Stanzas 1-3

The poem opens with an exquisite twilight scene. The curfew tolls; the day is over. The bellowing herd slowly move along the meadow. The ploughman returns home after a tireless day. The poet stands alone in the churchyard when darkness gradually envelops the scene. The landscape fades away from sight. And there is a solemn stillness in the air, disturbed occasionally by the humming of the beetle or the tinklings from distant sheep-enclosures or the hootings of the owl from her secret bower.

1. curfew : orders to put out lights and fires in houses at eight o'clock in the night. Here Gray seems to refer to the evening bells associated with St. Mary's church near King's College, Cambridge. knell: sound of a bell (esp. for a death or at a funeral) tolls : rings parting: departing.
2. lowing : bellowing, wind: go, move, lea: stretch of open grassland
3. Plowman : ploughman. plod (one's way): make one's way laboriously.

4. To me : to the contemplating poet
5. Glimmering : weak, faint on : from
6. Solemn stillness : grave silence
7. Save where : except when. droning flight: while making a low humming sound.
8. Drowsy tinklings : ringing sounds (of the small bell tied round the neck of a sheep in some distant enclosure) that induce sleep folds: sheep- enclosures.
9. Yonder : over there. ivy -mantled tower: church - tower covered with ivy. Perhaps this is a reference to the Stock Poges church.
10. Moping : in low spirits, sad
11. Bower : boudoir, a women's private sitting room.
12. Molest : trouble, disturb. The owl is imagined to be a woman who, while in her solitary bower, is disturbed by lovers who wander around.

Stanzas 4-7

These four stanzas describe tile, life, of the illiterate ancestors of the village who are laid to rest in the churchyard. They sleep eternally in their graves beneath the village elms and the yew tree. Neither the morning-breezes nor the twittering of the swallows, the cock's loud crowing nor the shepherd's call to sheep will wake them any more from their humble graves. For them the heart will not burn again and the house wife will not do her household work; children will not run to lisp on their return home and climb on their knees for the envied kiss . While they were alive they used to reap the harvest with their sickle and the hard soil often broke their ploughshare. They used to drive their team of cattle to the field and fell the trees through their sturdy strokes.

13. rugged : This perhaps refers to the wrinkled bark of the elm. yew tree: associated with grief and death.
14. heaves : rises turf : grass-root
- mouldering : ruined passage of time
15. narrow cell : grave laid: buried
16. rude : uneducated. The poor were buried in the churchyard the rich inside the church. Forefathers: ancestors. hamlet : small village. sleep: lie buried.
17. breezyMorn : morning perfumes from flowers. Morn : Here Gray effects a nice transition from evening to mornings, from death to life.
19. Shrill clarion : the loud crowing of a barn rooster. horn : the shepherd's call to sheep.
20. Lowly bed : ie, both the humble couch on which they have slept , and the grave.
21. hearth : fire-place. The blazing hearth is a symbol of a domestic warmth.
22. ply..care : be busted at her household duties.
23. Lips : speak in a lisping way sire: father.
24. the...share : to share the much sought-after paternal kiss.
25. stubbrn glebe : the hard soil which often broke the ploughshare,
26. jocund : cheerully , lightheartedly their team: their cattle (for ploughing) 27.
- bow'd : were felled

Stanzas 8-11

These four stanzas reveal the poet's. profound democratic sympathy and introduce the idea that even the paths of power and glory lead only to the grave. The poet says : Let not ambitious people make. fun of the

useful toil, the domestic joys and the obscure fate of the illiterate villagers. Let not vain people listen to the simple chronicles of their eventless lives with a contemptuous smile. Men of aristocratic pride, political power, wealth and beauty have no claim to ridicule the poor and useful people. Death strikes the mockers and the mocked alike, Let not men of pride "and power blame the poor for not having splendid memorials for their dead inside the church. Neither urns inscribed with the history of the dead nor busts which took life-like can bring back to life those who are already dead. The call to honourable actions cannot resurrect the dead; words of flattery will have no effect on the cold ears of death.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|---|---|
| 29. | Ambition | : | i.e. ambitious people (example for personification) |
| 31. | Gradeur | : | i.e. those who are vain (instance of personification) disdainful: contemptuous |
| 32. | annals | : | chronicles: historical accounts |
| 33. | The boast of heraldry | : | those who can boast of lineage and titles; men of aristocratic pride. pomp of power: those who enjoy the pomp of position of power. |
| 35. | inevitable hour | : | unavoidable hour of death. The subject in the stanza is 'th'inevitable hour |
| 36. | but | : | only |
| 37. | proud | : | proud people (instance of personification). impute: accuse. These: the poor and the humble folk buried in the graveyard. Memory: (instance of personification) |
| 38. | trophies | : | memorials. |
| 39. | long-drawn aisle | : | Aisle is the passage in the church, esp, one that is divided by a row of column: from the nave. (Here is perhaps a reference to King's College Chapel, Cambridge) |
| | fretted | : | decorated with patterns. vault: arched roof. |
| 40. | anthem | : | musical composition to be sung in church. pealing: ringing out loudly. |
| 41. | storied urn | : | urn inscribed with the history of the deceased (urn is a vase used for holding the ashes of a person whose body has been cremated). animated busts : busts which look lifelike. |
| 42. | mansion | : | the body fleeting: passing quickly |
| 43. | Honour's voice | : | i.e. the call to 'honourable actions, to which they responded in life (instance of personification) provoke: coax back to life, resurrect. |
| 44. | Flattery | : | i.e. words of flattery. Both 'Honours' voice and Flattery refer to the contents of the epitaphs on the tombs of the great (instance of personification) |

Stanzas 12-15

The poet says that among those who lie buried in the churchyard there may be men with the potential talents of great heroes. Perhaps in this graveyard lies some man full of heaven-sent inspiration who, under other and favourable circumstances, might have been a great statesman or a great poet, but who lived out his life in anonymity for want of opportunities. The poor villagers never had glimpses of the ever-increasing frontiers of knowledge; acute poverty crushed their urge to learn and impeded the flow of genius in them. Talent remained suppressed in hostile circumstances. In fact, the dark, unexplored depths of the sea carry many a gem of purest ray, and in the deserts there blossom beautiful flowers that 'blush' unseen by admirers and waste their fragrance in the desert air. Perhaps among the forefathers buried in the graveyard there may be some man with the courage of Hampden or some with the poetic talent of Milton or some who possessed the military genius of Cromwell with none of his brutality, but who never became great owing to lack of opportunities.

Comment : The central theme of the poem is in fact the condition of the ordinary man : how his extraordinary talents are eclipsed by hostile social circumstances. Even the admirers of Gray consider the Elegy a poem of common place thought. They do not see anything original in its thought-content. But this is far from true. It is indeed “the true originality of Gray’s democratic sympathy’ that is central to the poem, says a modern critic. He declares : “Gray’s unprecedented and courageous act lay in his addressing his elegy to the memory, not of “princes”, but of humble workmen, buried in now-neglected graves after living lives of hard-handed toil... Thomas Gray is the pioneer literary spokesman for the Ordinary Man, the patron saint of the Unknown Soldier, and the year 1751, in which Gray put his finger on ignorance and “chill penury” as the two great foes of the common man, is the literary landmark from which we can date and measure modern literature with far greater justice than we exhibit when we date it all from 1798, the year in which Wordsworth published his Lyrical Ballads. Gray’s “rude forefathers of the hamlet “were also the forefathers of Wordsworth’s Wagoner and of his Michael, and of his Peter Bell”. (“The Bicentenary of Gray’s Elegy” by Carl. J. Weber. Quoted from *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray’s Elegy*.ed. H. W. Starrpp.111-112).

- | | | | |
|-------|---------------------------|---|--|
| 45. | neglected spot | : | uncared-for churchyard |
| 46. | pregnant...fire | : | full of heaven-sent inspiration. |
| 47. | the road of empire | : | the sceptre |
| 48. | Or...lyre | : | Or who, given opportunities, might have enraptured the ear with soulful music played on a lyre. |
| 49. | knowledge | : | (instance of personification) |
| 50. | Unroll | : | Gray is thinking of the unrolling of a scroll. |
| | Rich...time: | : | enriched by the added wisdom of the new ages. |
| 51. | Chill Penury | : | acute poverty. rage : used of poetic inspiration and of material enthusiasm |
| 52. | genial current | : | flow of genius |
| 53. | serene | : | clear |
| 54. | unfathomed caves | : | unexplored depths |
| 55. | blush | : | become red (in the face) from shame or confusion. It has been suggested that the word ‘blush has “a sexual suggestion” which “brings in the Christian idea that virginity is good in itself, and so that any renunciation is good; this may trick us into feeling it is lucky for the poor man that society keeps him unspotted from the World. Moreover, “a gem does not mind being in a cave and a flower prefers not to be picked. We feel that man is like the flower, as short- lived, natural, and valuable, and this tricks us into feeling that he is better off without opportunities (William Empson). |
| 57-60 | Hampden, Milton, Cromwell | : | See the text |
| 57. | dauntless breast | : | fearless mind |
| 58. | little tyrant | : | Charles I |
| 59. | mute | : | dump inglorious : obscure, unknown |
| 60. | Some...blood | : | some man who possessed the military genius of Cromwell with none of his brutal tendencies. |

Stanzas 16-19

Their fate forbade them to command the reverent attention of senators cheering them with approval and admiration and to challenge the threats of destruction from rulers. It also prevented them from creating prosperity

for the people of the land and making themselves heroes of the nation. This fate, at the same time, kept them away from the path of crimes. It forbade them to conquer kingdoms through slaughter and bloodshed and to perpetrate merciless acts on mankind. It forbade them to suppress the painful struggling into the open of truths of which they were inwardly aware and to extinguish the blushes of shame at ignoble behaviour. Nor did their fate give them the chance to prostitute their poetic gifts by burning incense hallowed by the flame of the Muses of the altars devoted to Luxury and Pride.

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|---|---|
| 63. | To....Land | : | to promote the prosperity of a country already prosperous. |
| 64. | read | : | discern |
| 65. | forbade | : | prevented lot : fat circumscribed : restricted |
| 66. | growing | : | struggling |
| 72. | Muse | : | spirit that inspires a poet |
| 73. | madding...strife | : | the hectic conflicts of the city-breds (The new ending to the poem begins here) |
| 74. | learned | : | knew |
| 75. | sequestered | : | quiet, secluded vale : valley |
| 76. | noiseless | : | silent tenor : general routine |

Stanzas 20-23

Even the poor have tombs erected over the graves of their dead. These frail, shapeless memorials also, with strange inscriptions on them, implore the tribute of a sigh from the passers-by. Though the inscriptions on the graves of the poor are faulty in language and style they brace the dying to recover faith. In fact no one leaves this life without a heavy heart; has any one parted from the joys of life without casting a 'longing, lingering look behind'? Even from the tomb arises the 'voice of Nature' - the desire to be remembered by some loving friend. This desire is indeed the "fire:" that lives even after death.

These stanzas remind us of the following words of Swift in his 'Thoughts in Various Subjects': "There is in most people a reluctance to be forgotten. We observe even among the vulgar, how fond they are to have an inscription over their grave....there is no intrinsic value in all this; however, if it be founded in our Nature, as an incitement to virtue, it ought not to be ridiculed".

On these stanzas Dr. Johnson made the following comment : "The four stanzas beginning 'Yet even these bones' are to me original. I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise his".

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------------|---|---|
| 79. | uncouth | : | uncultured |
| 80. | implores | : | requests earnestly |
| 81. | unlettered Muse | : | The inscriptions on the grave of the poor were faulty in style. |
| 82. | elegy | : | epitaph |
| 83. | dump Forgetfulness | : | the silence of oblivion a prey : the destined prey |
| 86. | pleasing anxious being | : | life, which is a mixture of pleasure and distress |
| 88. | longing | : | full of desire |
| 89. | Parting soul | : | dying man |
| 90. | pico's drops | : | tears of religious comfort shed for the dying man |
| 91. | voice of Nature | : | i.e. the desire to be remembered by some loving friend |
| 92. | Even ... Ashes | : | Even after death wonted: usual, customary |

Stanzas 24-29

The poem concludes on an autobiographical note. Gray conceives an imaginary situation here. After his death, perhaps a 'kindred spirit' will inquire about his fate and an old farmer may give the following reply: 'We have seen him often in the mornings moving' hastily towards the upland lawn. He used to lie down at the foot of that beech tree in the afternoon, looking at the brook babbling by, Tost in his own contemplations. He used to wander in the forest, smiling in scorn and muttering to himself, looking forlorn, sad, wonied or troubled with disappointment in love. And then he disappeared-all on a sudden; he was not seen in any of the favourite haunts. At last we saw his dead body being carried through the church-way path to his grave. You can see his tomb beneath that old tree and read the lines engraved on his grave.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 93. thee | : | i.e. Gray himself |
| 94. If chance | : | If by chance |
| 96. kindred spirit | : | one who, like the melancholy poet, prefers solitude and obscurity. |
| 97. Haply | : | perhaps. hoary-headed : very old Swain: villager, rustic man may: shall |
| 98. Oft | : | Often peep of dawn :earlymorning |
| 99. Brushing ... away | : | Removing the dew drops with the hasty steps. |
| 100. upland lawn | : | the smooth grassy slopes of the hillside. |
| 101. nodding | : | hoary, very old |
| 102. fantastic | : | wild and strange |
| 103. listless length | : | tired body |
| 104. pore upon | : | give his close attention to brook : small stream babble : munnur |
| 105. smiling ... soon | : | frown |
| 106. wayward fancies | : | unbalanced, fond desires rove: wander |
| 107. woeful wan | : | sad and pale |
| 109. customed | : | accustomed |
| 111. Another | : | Another morning rill :brook |
| 113. dirges | : | songs sung for a dead person |
| 115. and read ... lay | : | Gray's suggestion is that reading is not one of the swain's accomplishments. The effect is to direct attention to the 'kindred spirit' by directly addressing him. |
| 116. Graved | : | Engraved |

The Epitaph

The Epitaph appended to the poem throws light on the poet's personality. The word 'epitaph' means an inscription commemorating a dead person. Gray's Epitaph characterises him as a person unknown to Fame and Fortune, a person of humble birth and melancholy disposition. 'Since he was sincere and generous, God sent him a compensation in the form of a friend. He gave all he had to Misery, and he gained from heaven a friend.

This is the epitaph that Gray wished to see inscribed on his own tomb. It reveals the poet's own nature and his aspirations.

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|
| 118. Youth | : | The poet was only thirty-four when he completed the poem. |
| to Fortune.....unknown | : | he was poor and obscure. |
| 119. Science | : | knowledge. The line means that though Gray was of humble birth, he was able to acquire knowledge. (Gray was one of the greatest scholar-poets of England). |

120. Melancholy : depression of spirits. 'Gray actually suffered from fits of melancholy. He called it 'luecocholy' (i.e. white melancholy).
121. bounty : generosity
122. recompense : compensation or reward
123. a tear : a tear of sympathy
124. a friend : This is perhaps a reference to Richard West, who had died shortly before this poem was written. West's death further deepened the poet's habitual melancholy.
125. 'Do not seek any farther to disclose his merits or reveal his weaknesses that rest with him in God's bosom'.
126. frailties : weaknesses dread abode: awe-inspiring resting place i.e., the bosom of God.
127. they alike : i.e. both his merits and his weaknesses hope : hope that the merits will be recognized and that the frailties will be forgiven.

Critical Appreciation

Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is a supreme achievement in English poetry. Its appeal transcends time. As Dr. Johnson observes, the poem "abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo". However, the true originality of the poem lies in its deep democratic sympathy. Celebrating the "short and simple annals of the poor", the poet addresses his elegy to the memory of humble workmen, not of princes. He thus emerges as the pioneer literary spokesman for the common people.

The poem opens with an exquisite twilight scene. The poet stands alone in a country churchyard. With the slow advance of darkness over the countryside, the poet's thoughts turn to the forefathers of the village who lie buried in the churchyard. These illiterate ancestors of the village sleep eternally in their humble graves. Neither the morning breezes nor the twittering of the swallows, the clock's loud crowing nor the shepherd's call to sheep, will make them any more. For them the hearth will not burn again and the housewife will not do her domestic work. On their return home, children will no more run to lisp and climb on their knees for the envied kiss. While alive, they were able workmen. They used to reap the harvest with their sickle, and the hard soil often broke their ploughshare. They used to drive their team of cattle to the field and fell the trees by means of sturdy strokes.

The poet reproves the rich for mocking the useful toil, the democratic joy and the obscure fate of the poor villagers. He reminds them that the paths of power and glory lead only to the grave. Death strikes the mockers and the mocked alike. Men of power and pelf should not ridicule the poor for not having splendid memorials erected for their dead inside the church. Neither "storied urns" nor life like busts can bring back to life those who are already dead; words of flattery will have no effect on the dull cold ears of death.

It now occurs to the poet that among the villagers who lie buried in the graveyard there may be men with extraordinary talent. Perhaps there lies some man full of heaven-sent inspiration pwho, under other and favourable circumstances, might have been a great poet, but who lived out his life in anonymity for want of opportunities. Perhaps there is one with the courage of Hampden or the poetic talent of Milton or the military genius of Cromwell but he never rose to fame because of lack of opportunities. Ignorance and poverty impeded the flow of genius in the villagers. They remained unknown and unnoticed like the glittering gems in the dark, unexplored depths of the ocean or the beautiful flowers that 'blush' unseen by admirers and waste their fragrance in the desert air.

Their fate forbade them to command cheering senates or challenge the threats of destruction. It prevented them from emerging as the heroes of the nation by creating prosperity for the people. But at the same time

their fate kept them off the path of crimes. It forbade them to conquer kingdoms through bloodshed and perpetrate cruelties on innocent men. It forbade them, suppress truths of which they were inwardly aware and to prostitute their poetic gifts in shameless praise of those who are proud and luxurious.

The poet now realises that even the poor have tombs erected over the graves of their dead. These frail memorials also implore the tribute of a sigh from the passers-by. Though the inscription on them are faulty in style, they brace the dying to recover faith. But who has parted from the joys of life without casting a longing lingering' look behind? Even from the tomb arises the "voice of nature" -the desire to be remembered by some loving friend. This desire is indeed the "fire" that lives even after death.

The poem concludes on an autobiographical note. The poet here imagines a probable future situation. Some kindred spirit may inquire about his fate and some villager may tell him how the foriorn and meiancnol poet led a solitary life in the forest and how he died all on a sudden and was buried in the churchyard.

The Elegy is a poem with a splendid history. Its fame has spread to all countries. Its incomparable felicity, subtle melody and moral persuasiveness appeal to every generation. Its material skill is masterly. More than anything else, it is a poetic statement on the dignity of the common man. Every line in it bears the imprint of the poet's humanistic fervour.

Passages to Remember

It is not meant here that only the passages suggested below are worth remembering, but come of the strikingly brilliant stanzas are cited for you to make a careful study. These stanzas deal with the maintains the poem and contribute, among other factors of poetic composition, to its universal appeal.

1. Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obsoure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor (11.29-32)
2. The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power
And all that beauty; all the wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the gave (11.33-36)
3. Can stories urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of earth? (11.41-44)
4. Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rode of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre. (11.45-48)
5. 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 (11.53-56)
6. Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorius Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood (11.57-60)

7. Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life.
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. (11.73-76)
8. For who to dump Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned.
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day.
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind? (11.85-88)
9. Fair science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy marked him for her own.
10. He gave to Misery all he had, a tear;
He gained from Heaven't was all he wished, a friend:

See for your guidance how passage no. 3 (11.41-44) is annotated below :

In his 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' Thomas Gray celebrates "the short and simple annals of the poor". He tells those who are rich and powerful not to mock the useful toll, the domestic joys and the obscure fate of the poor villagers. Death strikes the mockers and the mocked alike. If the poor do not raise splendid monuments for their dead inside the church, men of glory should not ridicule them. In fact, neither urns inscribed with the history of the dead nor life-like statues can bring back to life those already dead; words of flattery will have no effect on the dull cold ears of death.

The passage bears testimony to the tremendous sympathy Gray had for the common man and points to the central theme of the poem.

'Honour and Flattery' are examples of personification frequently used in the poem. Both 'Honoured voice' and 'Flattery' refer to the contents of the epitaphs on the tombs of the great. 'Storied urn' means urn with the story of the dead man inscribed on it; 'animated bust' means bust which appears life-like; and 'mansion' refers to the body.

Composition

1. Write an essay on each of the following :

- a) How does Gray celebrate "the short and simple annals of the poor" in his Elegy?
- b) Attempt an appreciation of Gray's Elegy.

2. Answer the following in about 80 words each :

- a) How does Gray depict the quiet, tranquil life of the village in his Elegy?
- b) Explain Gray's reflections on life and death in the Elegy.
- c) What, according to you, is the central theme of the poem?
- d) How did the villagers' fate circumscribe their 'growing virtues' as well as crimes?
- e) Comment on the autobiographical element in the Elegy.

3. Annotate the following passages

- a) Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

- b) Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death?
- c) The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave.
Awaits alike the inevitable hour
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

5. TINTERN ABBEY

William Wordsworth

Introduction : The Poet

William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850) was born at Cockermouth in Cumberland, son of an attorney. His mother died when he was seven, and his father when he was thirteen. He studied at Hawkshead School and St. John's College, Cambridge, and took his degree in 1791. During a visit to France he fell in love with Annette Villon, who bore him a child, Caroline. Wordsworth acknowledged the child at her christening though he did not marry Annette. For a time he embraced the nationalist philosophy of Godwin. In 1793 appeared his first published works, *The Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches of a Pedestrian Tour in the Alps*. His intimate friendship with Coleridge proved to be very fruitful. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) authored by the two poets became a landmark in English literature. The second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in 1800, with Wordsworth's revolutionary *Preface* on the principles of poetry.

In 1802 Wordsworth married his cousin, Mary Hutchinson who, like his sister Dorothy, gave him lifelong devotion and affection. In 1805 he completed the *Prelude*, a poem descriptive of the development of his own mind. Two years later he published a further collection of *Poems*, which contains some of his best work, including the 'Ode to Duty', 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality'. 'The Solitary Reaper' etc. In 1814 he published *The Excursion*.

Wordsworth succeeded Southey as Poet Laureate in, 1843. But his poet power had declined after his forties. He ceased to be a radical. He became increasingly conservative. From 1829 onwards his sister's health had been impaired and in 1847 he lost his daughter Dora and never recovered from the blow. He passed away on 23 April 1850. He was buried in Grasmere churchyard.

One of the greatest English poets, Wordsworth occupies a supreme place in the development of English literature. The *Lyrical Ballads* ushered in the Romantic revival and brought about a revolutionary change in the whole conception of poetic values in England. His philosophy of return to nature and his theory that poetry should use the language of ordinary speech were a radical departure from the current practice. With his nature poetry he established a new tradition which has lasted over a century.

The Poem

"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" was included in the *Lyrical Ballads*. 1798. Regarding the composition of this poem, Wordsworth wrote : "No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days (10th-13th July) with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol". (Wordsworth, note dictated to Miss Fenwick).

The poem opens with a recollection of his previous visit to the Abbey in 1793. He recalls the beloved sights on the banks of the river, Wye. These recollections lead him to an affirmation of the mysterious unity between man and Nature.

The 'one life' is revealed as the core of Wordsworth's thought in the poem.

This magnificent soliloquy is a poetic statement on the influence of Nature on the boy, the growing youth and the man.

Explication

Lines 1-22

The poem opens with an invocation of past time. The poet recreates his previous visit to the Abbey in 1793. Thus we have a quiet description of a revisited landscape, a wordpicture of a remembered scene

- | | | | |
|-------|-----------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Five ... past | : | The poet had visited Tintern Abbey in 1793. Five years have elapsed since then. (The poem was written in July 1798). |
| 1-2. | Five ... five .. five | : | "The three-fold repetition of five" combined with the dragging rhythm, creates a false sense of the weight of time as man experiences it". (Geoffrey Durrant). |
| 4. | With ... murmur | : | i. e. with a soft murmuring sound as it flows through the inland, after its descent from the mountains where it arose. Here there is a suggestion of harmony and of seclusion. Wordsworth wrote : "The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern". |
| 5. | behold | : | see |
| 6-8. | That .. sky | : | The 'steep and lofty cliffs' impress on the mind 'thoughts of more deep seclusion'. At the same time they connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky. Thus the peace of the landscape is linked with the more profound peace of the heavens. |
| 10. | Sycamore | : | a large tree, allied to the maple tree. Wordsworth's description of the Abbey is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. In this Eden there is a Tree, the 'dark sycamore'. It is under this tree that the poet reposes. And from there he views the human situation. |
| 1 | these tufts | : | rows of fruit-trees |
| 13 | class...hue | : | "the association with greenness here, although of course unripeness is involved, is with spring time freshness, and with peace and rest". (Durrant) and lose themselves: ie, the fruits are lost to sight among the leaves (because the unripe fruits and the foliage are of the same colour) |
| 14 | copses | : | green woods. |
| 15 | hedge-rows | : | of trees or shrubs separating farms. |
| 15-16 | little lines ... wild | : | little lines formed of abundant growth of trees. The hedge-rows are not mere neat divisions, they have abundant growth of trees. Thus there is the untamed wildness of nature' as well as the 'orderly patterns of civilization'. Thus there is at once 'the desire for order' as well as the 'reluctance to be over organized'. |
| | pastoral farms | : | grazing land |
| 17 | wreaths | : | wisps |
| 20 | vagrant dwellers | : | gipsy-like wanderers . |

- houseless woods : In describing the valley of the Wye the poet creates the image of an Eden of peace. The expression 'houseless woods' adds to the paradisaical quality of life in the valley.
- 21 Hermit's cave : This late intrusion of man into the natural landscape sets a pattern "which recurs throughout the poem". (Albert S Gerard).

Lines 23-57

The passage deals with the interval between the poet's two visits to the place. How did the beautiful forms of the River Wye influence him while he was in the loneliness of the city? The memory of the scenes, even in the noise of the city and in his loneliness, gave him 'sweet sensations' which passed into his mind "with tranquil restoration; creating a state of joy in which a man is more likely to be a kindly and moral person. Again, the recollection of the 'forms' of the valley created in him a serene and blessed mood; a state of physical harmony and mental peace which made his mind unusually contemplative and active and gave him a mystical insight into the life of things. In the fret and fever of the world he often turned for relief to his memory of the beautiful scenes in the Wye valley when he felt relieved of the worries of the world.

23. long absence : period between 1793 and 1798.
- 22-25 These ... man's eye : These beautiful forms have preserved him in the loneliness of the city. The landscape remained green in his memory just as the daffodils remained in his memory and gave him boundless joy in his moments of solitude:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils

(Daffodils)

- 27 sensations sweet : The memory of the 'beautiful forms of the Wye gave him sweet sensations. These sensations passed into his mind and calmed his agitated heart. They created in him a state of joy in which a man is more likely to be a kindly and moral person.
- 28-30 feelings : Besides providing 'sensations sweet', the memory of the Wye landscape kindled in him feelings of "kindness and of love". Thus the memory has had influence on him on different planes - the sensory ("sensations sweet"), the psychological ("tranquil restoration") And the ethical ("acts of kindness and of love"). But in the third case the poet is not quite certain; he uses the word "perhaps" (1.31) and hence the comment: "There is thus a gradual ascent from the sensory to the psychological and the moral; on the other hand, slight undertones of doubt are introduced in the passage from the psychological to the ethical". (Albert S. Gerard)
- 29 purer mind : mind made purer by the influence of the scenes of the Wye.
- 30 tranquil restoration : restoration of the agitated mind into a state of peace.
- 36 another gift : Recollections of the beautiful scenes of the Wye gave him another gift, i.e., a blessed mood.
- 37 Of sublime : of a more refined nature.
- blessed mood : this is interpreted as a mystical insight into the life of things. Thus here the influence of the Wye passes from the ethical to the mystical. In this blessed

mood he became oblivious of his own physical existence; the veil of the mystery of existence was slowly lifted; he became "a living soul" and achieved an intuitive insight into the life of things.

It has, however, been pointed out that Wordsworth does not actually mean here any kind of insight or knowledge. He only means that the recollection of the lovely scenes of the Wye created in him a mood and a physical condition in which it was possible for the mind to become unusually contemplative and active.

- 40 unintelligible world : The world is 'unintelligible' because it is full of confusion and complication. The ordering power of the human mind cannot make it intelligible. On the other hand, the beautiful scene of nature before the poet is intelligible. The ordering power of human imagination can control and define it.
- 41 serene : c alm
- 42 corporeal frame : the physical body
- 45 supended : It is a mood in which the pulse of all physical activity gets suspended.
- 47-48 the power of
 harmony : the state of physical harmony and mental peace induced by the recollections of Wye landscape.
- 49 If this : What is 'this'? 'This' refers to what immediately precedes i.e. the suggestion that 'we see into the life of things'.

49-57 In these lines Wordsworth asserts that he has turned to the Wye very often for consolation in the midst of the deadening experiences of town-life. The memory of the Wye offered a hope of a life that was neither a brutish isolation nor the confusion and loneliness, of towns and cities.

- 52-53 fretful...world : The phrase vividly reveals the physical state of restlessness and disturbance. This is reminiscent of Shakespeare's Macbeth
 "Duncan is in his grave,
 After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well".
- 56 Sylvan Wye : The Wye flows through wooded hills. The word 'Sylvan' means, 'of trees and wood land' .

Lines-58-111

Wordsworth compares his present impressions with those of the past. The beautiful forms at the Wye valley gave him coarser pleasures in his boyhood. But as he grew mature, he could discern in Nature the still sad music of humanity. His pleasures were thus tempered by thought. And, later he sensed in Nature the presence of the Universal Spirit, a divine presence that interpenetrated both the material world and the human mind. He thus came to accept Nature as his supreme inspiration and moral guide.

- 58 gleams : soft light comes and goes
 half .. thought : i.e., thoughts which have almost faded. Here the poet refers to the thoughts that rose in his mind during his first visit to the Wye; these thoughts have almost faded from his memory now.
- 60 sad perplexity : His inability to feel the same rapturous joy during the present visit makes him sad; and the loss of appeal in the scenes of nature makes him perplexed or confused.
- 61 The again : The present visit brings back to his mind all those faded thoughts once again.
- 64-65 That. .. years : The poet confidently expects that the Wye valley that has given so much pleasure and reassurance to him in the past will provide the same source of strength and reassurance to him in the future too.

- 67 When like a roe : i.e : when he visited the Wye first
roe : deer
- 68 bounded : jumped
- 70-72 more like...loved : To the younger Wordsworth, the scenes of the Wye suggested the terror of the world, the awfulness of the unknown and the mysterious. He, therefore, bounded over the mountains like one fleeing from something out of fear. Nature then evoked in him a mysterious sense of fear rather than love.
- 74 coarser pleasures : rapturous delights.
- 75 glad...movements : the sheer joy of running about, thrilled by the enchanting scenes of the valley.
- 75-83 I cannot...
from the eye : Here the poet describes the first stage in the development of his appreciation of Nature-the intense but purely sensuous pleasure he felt in his youth, i. e., the rapturous delights he had at the sight of the beautiful forms of the Wye in his youth.
- 75 cataract : waterfall
- 77 like a passion : i. e., he felt a deep and intense love for the sounding cataract.
- 80 An appetite : i. e., those scenes of the valley had such an irresistible fascination for the young Wordsworth that he felt he needed them for his very existence.
- 82-83 By thought..the eye : The wild pleasures of his boyhood had no need to be supported by thoughts. These thoughtless pleasures arose directly from the sights of nature as they appeared to the naked eye of the young poet.
- 83-93 That time...subdue : Later, when he grew mature, he learnt to temper his raptures by associating human sorrow with Nature.
- 84 aching joys : intensely - felt joys
- 85 dizzy raptures : wild pleasures of physical enjoyment.
- 86 other gifts : The thoughtless raptures of the boyhood days are no more there. He has acquired through experience a profound understanding of what Nature means. Experience has extended his vision and has deepened his comprehension of Nature.
- 83 Abundant recompense : Though he has lost the dizzy raptures of his boyhood days, this loss has been well compensated by his newly gained understanding of what Nature signifies.
- 91 The still...humanity : In Nature Wordsworth listened to the still, sad music of human suffering. This was in contrast to the thoughtless pleasures of his younger days.
- 92 grating : annoying
to chasten and subdue : to make one pause and think.
- 93-103 And I have felt...all things : Here the poet describes the third stage in the development of his attitude to Nature. In Nature he now discerns the presence of the Universal Spirit. He has now grown to be a pantheist.
- 94 presence : a divine presence, a presence that interpenetrates both the material world and the human mind
- 95 interfused : bound together.

- 102 And ... thing : Wordsworth has now attained a sense of the ultimate unity of the universe, and of the one life that interpenetrates all things and all beings.
- 102-111 Therefore.. moral being: Thus Nature became his supreme inspiration and moral guide.
- 106-107 both perceive : The 'mighty world of eye and ear' is half created and half perceived by the mind. Beauty is partly the creation of the mind, and only partly given by the senses. Here the poet affirm the belief that all may be ordered and harmonized by the human mind, which itself is a part of the pervading spirit. This indeed is an affirmation by the poet of his faith ultimately in his own powers of imagination.
- 106 perceive : recognize
- 109 anchor : source and support

Analysis

Lines 1 to 22 : The poet recreates his previous visit to the Abbey. The beautiful landscape of the Wye valley is described as a remembered scene.

Lines 23 to 57 : Here the poet describes how, during the interval between the two visits, the recollections of the Wye passed into his mind in his moments of loneliness and created in his mind a 'state of joy' and a 'serene and blessed mood' which gave him a mystical insight into the life of things. These recollections relieved him of the worries of day-to-day life.

Lines 58 to 111 : The poet describes the three stages in the development of his attitude to nature (a) the thoughtless raptures of the younger days, (b) a more mature response: listening to the still sad music of humankind in Nature (c) discerning a divine presence in everything in Nature. The poet thus comes to accept Nature as his moral guide and the guardian of his heart.

Critical appreciation

Wordsworth's poem 'Tintern Abbey Lines' is a deeply philosophical and unified expression of his attitude to Nature as it crystallised itself from early childhood to mature manhood. It is a magnificent soliloquy in which the poet reveals the growth of his mind from the thoughtless joys of his childhood to the spiritual comprehension of Nature in his manhood. As a statement of his central doctrines 'Tintern Abbey' is thought of as an epitome of *The Prelude*. The poem opens with a vivid word picture of a remembered scene. Wordsworth is visiting the Wye valley again after a period of five years. His return leads him to reflect on the landscape seen years ago, on the landscape before him today, and on the landscape which remained in his heart during the years of absence.

Reflection on the Landscape before him

As the poet stands before the familiar scene, he realises that the scene is outwardly unchanged. His own position is "here, under this sycamore" from where he viewed the landscape earlier. Once again he listens to the "soft inland murmur" of the Wye and sees those "steep and lofty cliffs" that connect the peace of the landscape with the more profound peace of the sky. There are rows of fruit-trees standing in their spring time freshness. Their unripe fruits are lost to sight in the midst of the green foliage. The hedge - rows have now abundant growth of trees. Pastoral forms are fully green. And wreaths of smoke are sent up in silence from the dwelling places of wandering-gypsies or from some hermit's cave. The valley of the Wye, with its paradisaical quality thus evokes the image of an Eden of peace.

The scenes of the Wye recollected in tranquillity

During the long years of absence, these 'beauteous forms of the Wye valley have returned to him often. They have preserved him in the loneliness of the city. They have given him "sweet sensations" which passed

into his mind and calmed his agitated heart. The memory of the scenes created in him a state of joy which kindled in him feelings of kindness and of love. They gave him a "blessed mood" in which he became oblivious of his own physical existence, in which the "heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" was lightened. It was a "serene and blessed mood" in which the pulse of all physical activity was suspended, a state of physical harmony and mental peace was induced, and he became "a living soul" who could 'see into the life of things'. In his moments of weariness, amid the fret and fever of day-to-day life, he has often turned to the Sylvan Wye for consolation and hope. Recollections of the valley always gave him strength and solace.

Three stages in his attitude to Nature

The poet now describes the three stages in his experiences with Nature. He speaks of pleasure in the natural objects of earth, of regard for man, and of the noumenal sense of God. As a small boy when he first came among the hills, he bounded over the mountains like a roe wherever nature led. Nature was then all in all to him. It was a world of "the sounding cataract", "the tall rock", "the mountain" and "the deep and gloomy wood" - a world that suggested the awfulness of the unknown and the mysterious. This world was to him "a passion" an "appetite". Gradually the thoughtless pleasure, the 'aching joys' and 'dizzy raptures' of his boyhood days were over. But the loss was well compensated. He began to see the harmony between the world of nature and the world of human beings. He began to discern in nature "the still sad music of humanity". Nature opened his eyes to the tragedy of the human condition. This was indeed in contrast to the coarser pleasures of his boyhood days. And this led him finally to a full realisation of the spiritual essence of Nature. He became a pantheist; he began to discern the presence of the Universal Spirit in Nature. He could recognize a divine presence, a presence that interpenetrates both the material world and the Universe and of the one life present in all things and all beings. Thus Nature became the nurse, the moral guide and guardian of all, his being.

Tintern; Abbey' in short, traces the Poet's own spiritual evolution from boyhood to maturity. It is built on a pattern of ascent and descent - ascent towards the heights of mystical speculation and descent towards the firm ground of observed facts. It asserts the poet's organic touch with the traditions of an agricultural society. At the same time it expresses his perplexity over the baffling confusions of the new industrial age. It suggests the poet's confident belief that, in spite of superficial appearances of disharmony and terror, the universe is essentially harmonious, essentially rational, and essentially orderly.

COMPREHENSION

- 1 ... again I hear/These waters'- What does 'water' refer to?
When does he bear ?
- 2 What does the Hermit represent?
- 3 When does the poet 'become a living soul'?
- 4 How does Wordsworth get a mystical insight into the life of things?
- 5 What does Wordsworth owe to the Sylvan Wye ?
- 6 '... in this moment there is life and food/For future years'.
What does the poet express here?
- 7 How did Wordsworth enjoy Nature as a small boy?
- 8 'Other gifts / Have followed' - What are they?
- 9 'Abundant recompense' - What was the loss?
- 10 What is the 'presence that disturbs' Wordsworth ?
- 11 What is Wordsworth's central doctrine in the poem?

Model paragraph

Explain Wordsworth's serene and blessed mood described in Tintern Abbey Lines.

Recollections of the beautiful scenes of the Wye valley preserved the poet in the loneliness of the city. They gave him sweet sensations which passed into his mind and calmed his agitated heart. They gave him a state of joy which made him a kindly and moral person. They created in him 'a serene and blessed mood' in which he felt relieved of the tumult and confusion of 'this unintelligible world'. All physical activity seemed suspended in that mood. The poet was in a state of physical harmony and mental peace. He became contemplative and was oblivious of all material life. The very breath of his corporal frame and the motion of his human blood was almost suspended. He achieved mystical insight into the life of things.

Model Annotation

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing often times
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

Tracing the development in his attitude to Nature, Wordsworth in his 'Tintern Abbey Lines' describes how in his childhood he had aching joys and dizzy raptures in the company of Nature. These thoughtless joys were gradually replaced as he grew older. He learnt in his mature manhood to temper his raptures by associating human sorrow with Nature. He could listen to the still sad music of humanity in Nature.

The passage shows that Wordsworth at this stage could see the world in its relationship to human needs. He began to comprehend the ultimate unity of the universe; he learnt to get reconciled to the suffering of man by the realization that human suffering too is part of the divine law.

Composition

I. Essay

- 1 Consider 'Tintern Abbey Lines' as an expression of Wordsworth's philosophy.
- 2 How does Wordsworth trace the stages in the development of his attitude to Nature?

II Write notes on the following, each in a paragraph of about 80 words:

- 1 The influence of Nature on Wordsworth as revealed in 'Tintern Abbey'.
- 2 'The serene and blessed mood' as described by Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey'.
- 3 Wordsworth's attitude to Nature as revealed in 'Tintern Abbey'.
- 4 The landscape of Tintern Abbey as described by Wordsworth.

III Annotate the following passage

How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O Sylvan Wye ! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to-thee!

- 2 Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed! for such loss I would believe
Adundant recompense.

- 3 With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone
- 4 that blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened.
- 5 That serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of their corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.
- 6 While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony; and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things.
- 7 more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads than one
Who sought the thing he loved.
- 8 That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.
- 9 For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing often times
The still, sad music of humanity.
- 10 And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused.
- 11 Well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the gurdian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

6. Kubla Khan

S.T. Coleridge

Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was educated at the- Charity School of Christ's Hospital, London and at Cambridge. In 1797, he met Wordsworth with whom he established a life-long friendship. In 1798, he

travelled to Germany. He became interested in German philosophy and poetry and published a translation of the poems of the famous German poet Schiller. He became addicted to opium which he took at first as a pain-killer. Though this drug often gave him imaginative inspiration, it weakened his power of concentration. He became mentally depressed. In his 'Ode to Dejection', he describes the miserable and wretched state his mind at this time. 1816 were published his 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christable'. He also started several literary periodicals at various times. His literary biography, 'Biographia Literaria' published in 1817, contains much valuable criticism of Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Milton and others.

As has already been mentioned, the name of Coleridge is associated with that of Wordsworth as one of the leaders of the 'Romantic Revolt' in the history of English poetry. Both these poets, together, produced in 1798, a volume of poems called *Lyrical Ballads* containing poems written in a new, natural and simple manner. Coleridge's contribution to it was 'The Ancient Mariner' a supernatural poem.

'Kubla Khan' also has a supernatural touch. It is a fragmentary poem describing a vision that the poet saw in a dream. Perhaps the dream was caused by opium. In 1797, Coleridge was living in a lonely farmhouse. One night he fell asleep over an old book of travels by Purchas, in which there was a description of a palace built by 'the Khan Kubla' in Xanadu. In this sleep, without any effort, images and expressions combined in his mind to form a poem on this theme of Kubla Khan's palace. When he woke up, he remembered this poem and wrote down the lines that form this piece. Then he was interrupted by someone. When the poet returned to his writing after an hour, he found that he could not recollect the remainder of the poem. Thus all that remains of Coleridge's dream-vision is this short poem in which he describes the wild scene in the midst of which Kubla Khan built his palace.

The opening lines give us a description of a lovely landscape through which the sacred river Alph ran. This was the place where Kubla Khan, the mighty oriental-king, ordered his pleasure-palace to be built. The palace, situated over an area of ten square miles surrounded by wall and towers, was set in the midst of gardens, bright streams, trees bearing fragrant flowers, ancient forests and green spots thickly covered with vegetation. In this place, there was also a horrible chasm from which a mighty fountain was forced upward. It was a savage place associated with enchantment and witchcraft and haunted by demons. The stream-the sacred river Alph-took its origin in this chasm. It flowed five miles through the forest and then sank noisily into a lifeless ocean.

The pleasure-dome was so high that its shadow fell far into the middle of the sea. From where it was situated, one could hear the rhythmic sound of the falling waters of the fountain and of the river flowing through the caverns.

The poet, next, describes his vision of an Abyssinian maid who played on a dulcimer and sang of Mount Abora. If he could revive within him the sweet melody of that maid, he would feel so deeply delighted that with his art of poetry he would build that wonderful sunny dome of Kubla Khan, in the air. Those who heard his music would look upon him with awe. He would look like a divinely inspired, immortal poet, with magical power, from the evil effects of which people would try to protect themselves by drawing a circle round him thrice.

Thus, in this poem, Coleridge creates an atmosphere of supernatural mystery and fear.

Lines I-II

Analysis and Explication

Kubla Khan ordered a grand pleasure palace to be built in Xanadu, on the banks of the sacred river Alph which flowed down to a dark sea after passing through caverns, the depth of which no man could measure. For this purpose, ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with walls and towers. In this area there

were gardens shining with winding streams and trees bearing fragrant flowers. Here were also forests as old as the hills containing bright spots full of green vegetation.

In these lines, we get a description of a beautiful landscape (natural) which provides a suitable background for Kubla Khan's pleasure-palace.

stately	:	impressive, dignified
dome	:	a rounded roof with a circular base
pleasure dome	:	pleasure palace, a domed building
decree	:	order (to be built)
measurless to man	:	which cannot be measured by man
girdled round	:	enclosed or surrounded by
sinuous rills	:	winding rivulets (small rivers)
blossomed	:	grew
incence-bearing	:	bearing sweet smelling flowers
enfolding	:	containing
greenery	:	green vegetation

Lines 12-24

The poet now describes a strange sight a wonderful, deep crack in the ground (chasm) which sloped down the hill across a wood of cedar trees. It was a frightening place full of enchantment, haunted by women crying for her demon-lover in the dim light of a waning moon. A big fountain was forced up every moment from this chasm, foaming with endless agitation as if the earth itself were taking short, quick breaths. Every time water burst out of the fountain, it threw up huge pieces of rock which went up and came down in a curve, like frozen rain-drops rebounding after striking the earth, or grain covered with chaff thrown up when beaten by the thresher with a flail. In the midst of these pieces of rock which were flying about, the sacred river Alph was thrown up from the chasm.

In these lines, the poet graphically describes the origin of the sacred river, Alph.

slanted	:	sloped
cedar cover	:	thick growth of cedar trees
savage	:	strange and frightening
waning	:	becoming less bright
turmoil	:	agitation
seething	:	foaming
momently	:	quickly
half-intermitted	:	occurring at irregular intervals
burst	:	violent forcing out of water
fragments	:	pieces of rock
vaulted	:	jumped up
rebounding	:	jumping up (after hitting the earth)
hail	:	frozen dew-drops
chaffy grain	:	grain with outer covering
thresher	:	one who threshes (separates grain from chaff by beating)

Lines 25-30

The river (Alph) flowed five miles through the forest and the valley, in a zig-zag (Winding) and confused manner. Then it reached the caverns the depth of which no man had measured and finally, with a lot of noise,

it joined a quiet ocean. In the midst of all this noise, Kubla Khan heard the distant voices of his ancestors predicting war.

mazy	:	confused, complicated
tumult	:	noise
prophesying	:	predicting

Lines 31-36

The shadow of the domed pleasure-palace fell far into the middle of the sea. From this domed building could be heard the rhythmic sound of the falling waters of the fountain of the river flowing through the caverns. This sun-lit pleasure - palace with caves of ice was a miraculous work of rare skill.

The poet's description of the pleasure-dome reaches its highest point here. The strange and romantic background of the pleasure-dome adds to its structural wonder.

mingled	:	combined
miracle	:	remarkable work
device	:	skill

Lines 37 - 47

In a dream, the poet once saw a girl with a dulcimer (a musical instrument). She was an Abyssinian girl and she played on her musical instrument, singing of Mount Abora. If the poet could recapture her sweet music in his mind, he would feel so delighted that, with loud and prolonged music, he would build in air Kubla Khan's bright dome with its caves of ice. With his poetic music he would build a structure as grand as the pleasure palace built by Kubla Khan.

The 'Abyssinian maid's sweet music would give Coleridge poetic inspiration and make him attempt a miracle, similar to Kubla Khan's pleasure-dome in the field of poetry.

Mount Abora	:	imaginary name of a mountain
revive	:	get back, recall to mind
symphony	:	musical composition

Lines 48- 54

All those who heard Coleridge's poetic music would vividly see in their imagination the grand pleasure dome and caves of ice created by the poet. They would take him for a magician. Seeing the flashing eyes and floating hair, they would be filled with awe. They would think that he had fed on honey-dew and drunk nectar, the drink of the gods. Their holy fear of the evil effects, of his magical power would make them close their eyes, . after weaving a circle round him thrice so as to ward off (avoid) those effects.

Here we get a vivid picture of a poet in a state of wild excitement.

flashing	:	bright
floating	:	falling over his face
dread	:	fear
milk of paradise	:	drink of Heaven (nectar)

Comprehension

- "A savage place!" - which is that place and why is it savage?
- What does the poet say about the sacred river Alph?
- In what connection does the poet refer to the 'Abyssinian maid'?

Critical Appreciation

This short poem is part of a vision that Coleridge saw in a dream when he was living in a lonely farmhouse. He fell asleep while he was reading an old book of travels by Purchas which contained a description of a palace built by Kubla Khan (the grandson of Genghis Khan and the founder of the Mongol dynasty, who established a vast empire in the thirteenth century) in Xandu. The poem thus, has a strange dream-like quality. It has an equally strange theme.

At the beginning of the poem, we get a beautiful description of the place where Kubla Khan ordered his grand pleasure-palace to be built in Xandu. It was the place where the sacred river Alph ran through very deep caverns down into a dark sea. For the purpose of constructing the building ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed by walls and towers. In that area, there were gardens which shone with many rivers that flowed in a zig zag manner. Many trees bearing fragrant flowers also grew there. Ancient forests containing bright spot of green vegetation added to the beauty of that landscape. Here we get a charming picture of the background which Nature provided to Kubla Khan's palace. The 'caverns measureless' and 'sunless sea' provide a touch of mystery to this perfectly natural picture of a fine garden and a wooded and hilly landscape. Though this enchanting scene belongs to a dream with the help of his imagination and his pictorial power Coleridge gives it a touch of reality.

Coleridge now gives a supernatural touch to the poem. Across the hillside covered with cedar trees, there was a deep and strange chasm. It was an awe-inspiring place, full of enchantment. It was like a place, haunted, on a dimly moonlit night, by woman crying out in distress for her lover who was a demon (a supernatural being). There is a reference here to classical mythology which is full of stories of love between mortals and immortals. Here Coleridge, creates a romantic scene, associated with enchantment and witchcraft and haunted by mortal women and their unearthly lovers.

Next Coleridge describes the origin of the sacred river, Alph, which came up from this chasm, foaming with endless agitation. It was as if the earth itself was agitated and taking short, quick breaths. The water of the big fountain came out in intermittent (stopping at intervals) bursts. With every burst, huge pieces of rock were thrown up. They went up and came down in a curve, like frozen rain-drops rebounding after striking the earth or like chaffy grain jumping up when the thresher beats it with a flail (This is a vivid comparison). The river took a winding and complicated course. After flowing five miles through forest and valley, it reached the deep caverns and then sank noisily into a calm ocean. In the midst of all this noise, Kubla Khan heard the distant voices of his ancestors predicting war.

The origin and the course of the sacred river Alph are pictured beautifully here. The scene is made more supernatural by the reference to the mysterious voice of Kubla Khan's ancestors prophesying that a war was about to take place.

The shadow of the pleasure-palace fell in the middle of the sea. From where the pleasure-dome was situated, one could hear the combined melody of the falling waters of the fountain and of the river flowing through the caverns. This sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice was a miraculous (highly remarkable) construction involving superior skill.

Here Coleridge gives the finishing touch to his picture of the pleasure-palace. It was so high in all its majesty that its shadow fell far into the middle of the sea. The musical atmosphere surrounding it gave it extra charm. It was indeed a marvellous feat of building skill. Thus, with his powerful imagination and great pictorial power, Coleridge paints a fascinating picture of Kubla Khan's pleasure-dome.

Coleridge now describes a vision that he saw on one occasion. He saw a young Abyssinian girl playing on her dulcimer, (a musical instrument) singing of Mount Abora. He feels that if he could recapture in his mind that girl's melodious song, he would be filled with such extreme delight that, with his own loud and long poetic

music he would build in the air a sunny dome with caves of ice, similar to that of Kubla Khan. The rapturous (extremely joyful) pleasure that he would get on recalling that sweet tune would inspire him into creating a poetic pleasure-dome as the one built by Kubla Khan.

There is a reference here to poetic inspiration which enables the poet to write great poems.

This dome built by Coleridge. would be vividly seen by all those who heard his poetic music. They would feel frightened of the poet in this inspired mood of his. They would shout to one another to beware of the poet who had flashing eyes and floating hair. The poet's glittering eyes and dishevelled hair would frighten them into believing that he was one possessed by a spirit. They would look upon him as a magician with mysterious power, who had fed on honey-dew and drunk nectar, the drink of the gods. So they would try to protect themselves from the poet's evil influence by drawing a circle round him three times.

Here we get a vivid picture of the poet in a fine poetic frenzy; (wild enthusiasm) at the time of composing a great poem. There was an ancient belief that the evil influence of a magician could be restricted by drawing a circle round him. 'Three' is a mystic number associated with magic.

Thus different elements like pictorial splendour, awesome supernaturalism and mysterious strangeness, combine to make this dream-fragment one of the most memorable poetic pieces in the English language.

Composition

1. Annotate the following passages:-

- a. And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.
- b. A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
- c. It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!
- d. It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora
- e. And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread;

2. Answer the following questions in two or three pages :

- a) Though Kubla Khan is a dream-fragment, we get a beautiful full picture in it - Explain.
- b) How does Coleridge build up an atmosphere of supernatural mystery and fear in the poem?
- c) How does Coleridge mingle the natural with the supernatural in the poem?

3. Answer the following in a paragraph of about eight words each:-

- a) How does Coleridge describe the natural background of Kubla Khan's pleasure-dome?
- b) How does Coleridge portray the poet in Kubla Khan?
- c) Bring out the element of mystery in Kubla Khan.

7. Ode to the West Wind

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley, son of a conservative country gentleman, was born on 4 August 1792 at Field Place near Horsham in Sussex, England. His father was Sir Timothy and his mother Lady Elizabeth Shelley. At the age of ten he was sent to a private school, Syon House Academy. At the Academy he, for the first time sensed the existence of the exploited and the exploiting classes. When he entered Eton later, he was convinced that authority and individual rights could not co-exist. Before he left Eton he became a confirmed rebel against kings, priests and school masters who wielded power to the detriment of individual freedom. Others called him mad Shelley and 'Shelley the Atheist'.

He joined University College; Oxford, in 1810. There he acquired the friendship of one Thomas Hogg. Both of them read the rationalist thinker *William Godwin's Political Justice* (1793). The reading resulted in their publication of a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811). A theistic English society could not tolerate the necessity of atheism, and Shelley and Hogg were expelled from Oxford. The incident estranged Shelley from his father. He moved to London subsisting on the money which his sisters secretly sent to him. Soon he met and married Harriet Westbrook, his sister's schoolmate, and eloped to Scotland. His life with Harriet lasted only till 1814 when he came across Mary Godwin, the daughter of William Godwin. They together eloped to the Continent in 1814 and Shelley married Mary in 1815 after Harriet's suicide.

Shelley's atheistic beliefs, his ideas of freedom and free love, and his treatment of Harriet and her tragic death caused the English people to regard him as an immoral and cruel person. England denied him the right to keep with him his two children. Considering himself a martyr of his own convictions and an outcast, he with Mary left England in 1818, never to return to his motherland again. At the end of 1819 the Shelleys were at Pisa. In 1821 they moved to Larici on the shores of the bay of Spezia. He was drowned on 8 July 1822 in his thirtieth year while he was sailing near Spezia. His body was cremated in the presence of Leigh Hunt and Byron. His ashes were buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome.

Shelley was a poet, dramatist and prose-writer. Among all the Romantic poets he was the most ardent in temperament and revolutionary in outlook. He championed the cause of liberty and democratic values and placed love at the apex of all human affairs. He was one of the great English lyrical poets who, with intense, passionate imagination, poured forth like Shelley's own skylark, their full "heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

His literary works include :

Poems

Queen Mab (1813), Alastor (1816), The Revolt of Islam (1817), Epipsychidion (1819), Adonais (1821).

Lyrics

Ode to the West Wind (1819), the Cloud (1820), To a Skylark (1821) Swellfood the Tyrant, The Masque of Anarchy, Peter Bell the third, The Sensitive Plant, The Witch of All as, Rosalind and Helen, Julian and Maddalo, and Aretusa. .

Dramas

Promethues Unbound (1820) Hellas (1821) The Cenci (1821).

Prose : A Defence of Poetry (1821)

Ode to the West Wind

Introduction

Shelley's poem 'Ode to the west Wind's is one of the finest lyrics in English language. It is a fine example of the two voices in Shelley - that of the passionate seeker after truth and that of the enthusiastic (idealist "a

beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his lumious wings in vain", as Matthew Arnold described him).

Shelley tells us how the poem was written. "This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions".

The Ode, composed in 1819, is considered the most prophetic of Shelley's shorter poems. The first three stanzas, all addressed to the Wind, describe the effect of the Wind on land, sky and sea through leaves, clouds and waves. To the poet the Wind is a fierce, personified power and in the fourth and fifth stanzas, he invokes it like a God and prays. He requests the Wind to lift him up as a leaf, a cloud or a wave and wants its fierce spirit to become his spirit. He wants it to scatter his poems about the world like sparks of fire; he wants it to blow a trumpet through his mouth, prophesying a happy, future - a spring time that will succeed the present winter. And in the vision of a world transformed, he loses himself and his sorrows.

The Ode thus embodies the three characteristic qualities of Shelley's lyrics: (1) a very high degree of imaginative quality, (2) personal despondency - he faints and falls like a dead leaf, and (3) prophetic passion - he prophesies the birth of a grand future.

Critics have pointed out the 'rigid exactness' of the construction of the poem. Each stanza has fourteen lines, twelve lines of terza rima closed in a couplet. Each stanza is a "self contained whole" but at the same time it rushes on to the stanza immediately following. The poet's passion communicates itself to the very metre, Which 'sweeps along with the elemental rush of the wind it celebrates'.

Analysis

Stanza 1 : The opening stanza. describes the West Wind as a wild spirit - a destroyer and preserver. It deals with the action of the Wind on the earth. The Wind both destroys and preserves- it is an enchanter before whom the dead leaves flee to their own destruction and the live seeds are "charioted" to the bed where they sleep out the winter, when the spring arrives.

stanza 2 : This stanza describes the action of the Wind in its second sphere of operation, that is, the sky. The poet sees in the sky something very like the scene in the forest. The Wind scatters the clouds like dead leaves and then gathers them like a vault over the dying year to pelt it with black rain and fire and hail.

Stanza 3: The theme of the third stanza is the sea's response to the Wind. The Wind stirs up even the beautiful, blue calm of the Mediterranean. In the Atlantic it cleaves the flatness of the water into chasms, and frightens the under water vegetation into tearing off its leaves. '

Stanza 4: Here the three facets of the Wind's power are linked in an intensely personal way. The poet, in his weakness asks the West Wind to bear him up as if he were a leaf a cloud or a wave. He both invokes it like a god and prays. He asks it to inspire and possess him, to lift him out of a state of impotent dejection. Though now bowed down, he is essentially like his god - 'tameless, and swift and proud".

Stanza 5 : In the last stanza, prayer passes beyond the level of selfish supplication. The poet wants the great winds of change in the world to possess him, to speak through him, to scatter his dead thoughts like leaves or sparks, and fertilize a grand future. He prophesies that if it is Winter today, Spring cannot be far behind.

This poem is considered the "most symmetrically perfect" of Shelley's shorter poems. The pattern of thought development in the poem can be outlined as below:

The Wind's action on the earth (stanza I); the Wind's action in the sky (stanza 2); the Wind's action in the sea (stanza 3); the poet's prayer to the Wind (stanza 4); the poet's passionate prophecy of a new world (stanza 5)

Explication

Stanza I

1. O wild ... wind .. a notorious piece of alliteration.

breath being : Here the use of alliteration establishes the wind as the agent of seasonal change. In order to account for the presence of the Wind, a human metaphor is introduced. The 'breath' or 'spiritus' does not refer to an empty figure, it refers to a real being.

2. unseen presence : The first visible image for this unseen presence is "an enchanter" in line 3.
3. like ... fleeing : A typical Shelleyan simile. The formless. Wind is compared to the enchanter, and the leaves are compared to the formless ghosts.
4. Yellow ... red : "One of the joys of Europe's autumn is to watch the trees, whose leaves slowly turn colour and eventually fall as the sap dries. A wood will offer a most astonishing colour pattern, and the fallen leaves, before they become quite dry, are just as colourful".

The chief weakness here is that ghosts have not been visualised. They are essentially colourless according to popular superstition. But it can be argued that superstitions are not always true : We have so many reference to ghosts which are coloured.

hectic red : an unhealthy red, as though the leaves were afflicted with fever.

5. Pestilence-stricken : afflicted with epidemic diseases
- 6-7 who ... seeds : The West Wind carries the winged seeds in a chariot to their dark beds. It has been suggested that the metaphors here are hopelessly mixed: how can a 'chariot' containing 'winged seeds' proceed to a 'bed'. But the point is that the image serves to add to the associations around the central symbol - the minor defects are immaterial. winged seeds : seeds with wing like growths which enable them to be carried short distance by the wind. The winged seeds point to the central theme of the first stanza: death and rebirth in vegetation.
8. Corpse dead body
9. azure ... spring : The Spring Wind, sister of the West Wind is 'azure' (=sky blue) because (1) it brings azure skies and (2) throughout Shelley's poetry azure or blue is the colour of happiness and redemption. The Spring Wind is indeed the feminine complement to the masculine West Wind.
- 9 -10 Shall. .. clarion : like the angel blowing his trumpet to wake the dead on the day of judgement.

The Spring's clarion suggests an end not only to the temporal, annual winter but also to the eternal Winter.

- 10-11 and fill. . .in air : The "sweet buds" gathered by the Spring. Wind suggest the gathering of the flocks as if to feed in air. Here the exactness of the simile is not what is important. It has been pointed out that to compare the shoots of the spring flora to a shepherd driving his sheep is inexact because the one is a vertical process whereas the other is a horizontal process. But actually the point is not that of comparison. The image successfully serves to enrich the idea of the Wind.
- 12 hues and odours : colours and smells
- 13-14 The final couplet "binds the close form of the first stanza together ... " It binds the two aspects of the Wind as destroyer and preserver. The Wind destroys the leaves and drives them like an enchanter driving away the ghosts; at the same time, it preserves the seeds so that they may come to life again in spring.

Stanza 2

15. On whose stream : How is the Wind a 'stream' when we look up it, the Wind is like a great river rushing down the sky.

Steep sky : The sky is steep because Shelley thinks of it as a surface curving down from the zenith to the horizon

mild ... commotion : The commotion in the sky has caused the loose clouds to be shed like leaves from trees. The tree metaphor employed in stanza I is continued here.

- 16 Loose clouds ... shed : How are the loose clouds' like 'decaying leaves'? There is actually no correspondence in shape, colour or way of moving. Yet the clouds are like leaves not because they look like leaves, but because the Wind pushes them out and away as it does leaves. It has been pointed out that Shelley does not compare clouds and leaves, but he does compare the process of shedding. In fact the clouds and leaves are carried in precisely the same fashion by the Wind. Moreover, swift-flying clouds present the same angularities as leaves.

- 17 Shook..... Ocean : 'tangled', Because Heaven and Ocean intermingle; 'boughs' because the clouds derive from the sky and the sea in an organic process similar to the way in which leaves grow on the tree. Clouds are formed of vapour that rises from the sea and rivers, and in rain, is returned to them. The 'boughs of Heaven and Ocean' refers to the upper stationary cloud formation; it consists of condensed water-vapour drawn up from the ocean by the heat of the sun.

18. Angels : messengers.

- 18-21 there Maenad : cloud formations which appear like dozens of horses' tails, streaming into a strong wind. These clouds called the cirrus) stretch from the horizon to the zenith.

aery surge : ie. the sky. Maenad : Here is the picture of a fierce Maenad flying through the air with the clouds streaming out behind her like wild hair. Maenad is a human-shaped spirit of Greek mythology, dedicated to feasting. The Maenads were frenzied votaries of Dionysus. They strangely attired and indulged in wild dances.

The simile is appropriate because Maenads had the strange habit of rushing around with hair streaming. Shelley had recently seen Maenad figures in an art gallery at Florence.

- 21 dim verge : dim because obscured by the loose clouds.

- 22 zenith : point of the sky directly above the observer.

The ... storn : The spreading cirrus clouds indicate a depression and thus announce an approaching storm. locks : long hair that hangs together.

1. 15 -23 A wrong understanding of the cloudscape in the stanza has led to its misinterpretation even by admired critics. The stanza presents the action of the Wind in the sky. The poet's eye goes up, and he sees there something very like the scene in the forest. The loose clouds described in the first 32/3 lines of the stanza are the fractostratus clouds seen low in the West; they "are the harbingers of rain. The 'bright hair' like clouds in the remaining 5 lines, stretching from the horizon to the zenith, are the cirrus clouds, the upper stationary cloud formations.

- 23 - 24 dirge.... year ; The sound of the Wind is the funeral chant for the expiring year. "It is like a dirge commemorating the death of the year.

- 24 - 28 to which ... will burst : The Wind gathers the clouds like a vault over the dying year, to pelt it with black rain and fire and hail. The dark clouds are here transformed into the dark solid dome of a sepulchre from which rain and fire and hail pelt purposefully down. .

dome : rounded vault sepulchre: tomb vaulted with : roofed by
 congregated ... vapours : terrifying mass of clouds solid atmosphere : compact mass

Stanza 3

31. coil: The word suggests (1) the wavy movements of the waters or (2) the murmur of the streams. It has been pointed out that in this stanza "all that is disturbed and destroyed is at peace and is beautiful. This stanza is in effect a cry that Nature makes against Grace" - (Harold Bloom).
32. Pumice : a kind of lava
 Baiae's bay: north - west of the Bay of Naples. Baiae was a fashionable pleasure resort of the Romans in ancient times.
- 34 Quivering: trembling, intenser day: brighter light. Here the poet refers to the many partly submerged foundations of palaces and towers beside the bay; these seem to quiver in the movement and brilliance of the sunlit water. During his stay at Naples Shelley himself had witnessed a similar sight. In a letter he refers to "the ruins of its antique grandeur standing like rocks in the transparent sea under our boat... The sea ... was so translucent that you could see the hollow caverns clothed with the glaucous sea - moss, and the leaves and branches of those delicate weeds that pave the unequal bottom of the water".
35. Azure : The colour 'blue' was Shelley's favourite. To him it meant a heavenly state, so that he used it to mean "clear, or delicate, or light, with no reference to colour".
37. Notice the shift to the North Atlantic west wind in the final six lines of the stanza.
 level powers : normally smooth water
38. cleave chasms : split into deep openings
- 38 - 42 while... depoil themselves : vegetation under the sea is affected by the seasons even as that on land; it changes colour and falls off as leaves from trees above ground do in stanza I.
 Shelley himself explains this in a note, "The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes sympathies with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it".
 sea blooms : sea - flowers. ooze : soft. liquid mud at the bottom. sapless foliage : Sea plants take in their water through their skins; while on land, plants absorb it from the earth through roots and send it up to their leaves. foliage : all the leaves of a plant. gray : (ash - coloured). despoil : plunder, destroy.

Stanza - 4

In this stanza the three facets of the Wind's power (i.e. on land, sea and sky) are linked in an intensely personal way. Shelley picks up the image of the previous stanza (the leaf, the cloud and the wave) and applies them to himself.

- 43-45 if.. power : The conditional mood here means : If I were only an object of nature carried along by you in the mutable cycle of decay, death, rebirth, then I would not utter this prayer now.
 pant : gasp
46. impulse : thrust
- 48 -53 If even .. sore need: Even if I still possessed the imaginative powers of my boyhood (when I seemed to have as much freedom and strength of impulse as you had), then also I would not be uttering this prayer now.
50. outstrip: pass (sb) in a race Skiey speed: your speed through the skies

- 51 . vision : dream
52. my sore need: my hour of severe distress. See the note of self - pity here and in the following lines.
- 53 - 54 Oh ... bleed; There is a critical view that the note of self-pity is overplayed in the last two stanzas of the poem - a blemish in what is otherwise a faultless poem. But actually Shelley seemed to have been prompted by (1) the taste of his age and (2) the circumstances of his private life. At the time the poem was written, the Shelley had been childless for four months and were anxiously awaiting the birth of a new baby - an event to which he later refers as a new birth.
- "Finally, Shelley seeks to identify himself with the wind so that he can achieve his poet's purpose, his compelling purpose, to write great verse so that he can 'quicken anew birth' in the heart of men. Man must have hope, and the poem ends on the hope, that all experience has taught us that though winter follows autumnal West Wind, spring in its turn always follows the winter darkness. In all these great lyrics of Shelley. there is an impetuous argument from things seen, to the unseen life of the spirit". (L. Brander)
58. What. . . its own: The self - surrender of this line takes us back to the image with which the Ode opens, and connects to the "dead thoughts" (1.63) to be driven "like withered leaves" (1.64) to quicken a rebirth. The difference of the prayer here is in "my dead thoughts ... Like .. .leaves" in contrast with the prayer in the previous stanza "lift me as ... a leaf".
- 61 - 62 Be ... one : The prayer is : Let your spirit be my spirit; your impetuosity, your energy and life may also be mine; your message may be my message. The need here is mutual : the poet needs the Spirit just as the Spirit desperately needs the poet.
63. dead thoughts : The thoughts are "dead" because they are poems already written.'
64. withered leaves : like the leaves of the autumn forest. a new birth : the birth of a new world
- 65 incantation : the magic spell of those words
66. unextinguished : not put out. hearth : floor of a fire place.
- 68-69 Be through ... prophecy : "Let me as your trumpet announce to as sleepy, indifferent world the certainty of a glorious future. Succeeding the present era of gloom" . The poem, thus, concludes on an apocalyptic note. ,
- 60-70 O Wind ... behind Shelley wants the Wind to blow a trumpet through his mouth, prophesying a better time, a spring time of history that will succeed the present winter.

Critical Appreption

Shelley's Ode to the West Wind is one of the finest lyrics in English poetry. It expresses the two voices in Shelley : that of the passionate seeker after truth and that of the enthusiastic idealist. The poet's ardent desire for change informs every line of the poem. To him the Wind is a natural power that destroys and creates. It has a symbolic dimension; it stands for the death of the present order and the birth of a happy future.

The poet first describes the West Wind as a "wild spirit" moving everywhere, a "destroyer and preserver". At the approach of the Wind, the autumnal leaves flee to their destruction like ghosts that flee from an enchanter. But the Wind has its creative role too. It carries the "winged seeds" as if in a chariot and deposits them in their "wintry bed" from where they sprout up when the spring wind begins to blow. Thus the Wind is an agent of the cycle of change, of death and rebirth, of destruction and creation.

The raging Wind affects the seas too. It wakes up the blue Mediterranean in his summer snooze, dreaming of old palaces and towers. In the Atlantic, it cleaves the flatness of the water into chasms. The vegetation under the sea, listening to the voice of the Wind, grows panicky, trembles, and destroys itself.

The three opening stanzas thus describe the effect of the Wind on land, sky and sea in terms of three images: the leaf, the cloud and the wave. The poet now links these three facets of the Wind's power in an intensely personal way. If he were a leaf or waver cloud, he would not stand in need to pray now. Or if he were still as imaginative as in his boyhood, he would not be uttering this prayer in this moment of misery. Life is a bed of thorns for him; he falls upon the thorns of life, he bleeds. He makes a poignant prayer to the Wind to lift him as a wave or leaf or cloud so that he can escape from this life of bondage.

In the final stanza the poet's prayer becomes universal. He wants the spirit of the impetuous Wind to become his own spirit. He wants the Wind to scatter his "dead thoughts" all over the world to quicken the fertilization of a new future. His words, like ashes and sparks from a hearth, should be scattered everywhere. And the wind should blow a trumpet through his mouth, prophesying a better time, a spring time of history that will succeed the present winter.

The poem thus ends on an apocalyptic note: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" The lyrical intensity of the poem is a testimony to the poet's passionate belief in the inevitability of change. That is why the defeatist tone of the fourth stanza gives way to the optimistic note of the last. Further, there is in this poem a perfect blending of theme and form. Its structure is faultless. The musical rush of its lines parallels the raging speed of the Wind. As Tillyard remarks, the Ode is "the most powerful" of Shelley's lyrics because it is the most "masterfully shaped".

Passages to Remember

Here are some of the striking passages:

- I . Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes!
2. O thou
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth
- 3 There are spread
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad,
- 4 Thou dirge.
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst;
5. The blue Mediterranean, where "he lay"
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams
Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in "sleep" old palaces and towers

6. Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
Thy voice and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves.
7. Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
8. Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
9. Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

See how passage No. 9 cited above is annotated as a model:

The passage is quoted from the final stanza of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind. In the previous stanza the poet makes a poignant prayer to the Wind to lift him as a wave, a leaf or a cloud. But the prayer acquires a universal character in the final stanza. Shelley wants that the spirit of the Wind should be scattered everywhere to quicken a new birth. His words should be scattered all over the world like sparks and ashes from an unextinguished hearth. He wants the Wind to blow through his mouth the trumpet of a great prediction that the Winter of misery will certainly be followed by the Spring of prosperity, that the present order will certainly be replaced by a new order.

The passage thus expresses the poet's own prophetic passion. Here the voice of the poet blends with the voice of the Wind in a unique harmony of man and nature.

Composition:

1. Attempt an essay on each of the following:-

- a) How does Shelley describe the effect of the West Wind on land, sky and sea?
- b) Discuss the Ode to the West Wind as an expression of Shelley's prophetic passion.
- c) Attempt a critical appreciation of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind.

Write a short note on each of the following:-

- a) Why does Shelley call the Wind a 'destroyer and preserver'?
- b) How does the West Wind affect the sky?
- c) How does the sea respond to the Wind?
- d) What is the poet's personal prayer to the Wind?
- e) Why does Shelley say "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"
- f) Do you think the Ode to the West Wind is more about the poet himself than about the Wind?
- g) Comment on the form of Shelley's Ode.

3. Annotate the following passages:-

- a) There are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad

- b) The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,
Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay.
- c) O, Wind
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

For Further Reading:

Stephen Spender, *Shelley, London* : The British Council, 1952
Desmond King-Hele Shelley : *His Thoughts, and Work*
London : Macmillan, 1960

Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, New York
Cornell University Press, 1969.

8. Ode on a Grecian Urn

John Keats

John Keats : Life and works

Perhaps the most conscious artist among the Romantic poets, John Keats was born in London in 1795 as the eldest son of a livery stable - keeper. He began his education at the age of eight in a private but good school at Enfield kept by John Clarke. John's son, Charles Cowden Clarke, not only taught Keats but also inspired his passion for reading by introducing him to the great English poets like Spenser. Keats became an orphan in 1810 when he was only 15 years old. His guardian, Richard Abbey, an insensitive and unimaginative merchant withdrew him from school to apprentice him to Dr. Thomas Hammond, an apothecary at Edmonton. Keats received his apothecary's licence in 1816. But soon he abandoned the medical profession to devote himself entirely to poetry which was his first love. Cowden Clarke introduced him to Leigh Hunt, the famous essayist and the editor of *The Examiner*. Through Leigh Hunt, he got acquainted with other men of letters like Hazlitt, Lamb and Shelley.

By 1816 the 'demon' of poetry, as Keats himself admitted, possessed him and in 1817 his first volume of poems containing his great sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' appeared. A year later he completed *Endymion* a long romantic poem running to 4000 lines. The year 1818 saw the most tragic days in his domestic as well as his literary life. His brother Tom died of tuberculosis. His marriage with Fanny Brawne, a girl whom he loved desperately, proved impossible because of his poverty. Critics harshly reviewed his *Endymion* in spite of its many poetic beauties.

But strangely a year later his poetic powers consummated to produce some of the best poems in the English language. *The Eve of St. Agnes, the Eve of St. Mark, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Lamia, Isabella or The Post of Basil, Hyperion*, the six great odes, and a few sonnets belonged to this period. The 1820 volume containing these poems established his poetic reputation.

In 1820 he found himself a victim of the same disease which took off the life of his mother and brother. In search of a warmer climate conducive to the health of a tubercular patient, he went to Italy. Death overtook him there on 23 February 1821.

Keats Artistry

Keats' poetic career lasted for only five years (1816 - 1821). Yet, during this very short period, he wrote poems as wonderful as, but more enduring than those of Shelley, his contemporary and friend. While Shelley was a visionary always dreaming of the heaven, heavenly, Keats was more earth - bound. Both of

them loved the art and mythology of ancient Greece. But they appealed to them in widely different ways. For Shelley Greek myths symbolised heroic freedom. Keats on the other hand, took them as perfect specimens of beauty. He regarded poetry as the embodiment of beauty, and not as a medium to propagate social or political theories, as did Shelley. His philosophy of art and life was :

Beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Keats conceived beauty as that which appealed to the five senses - taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing. While other poets confined themselves largely to the beauty of sight and hearing, Keats concentrated on the pleasures of all the senses. This sensuousness rather than of thoughts", he wrote in one of his letters. Thought was painful to him as it disturbed the simple enjoyment of the beauty in art, Nature myth and romance. His poems are therefore the rendering in words of the sensations which beautiful objects create on the five senses. They are not allegoric, symbolic, nor thought - provoking.

The result is that his poems are made up of a series of pictures or word paintings of scenes of sensuous beauty. But the pictures are concrete and lively with a wealth of detail and a language as rich and colourful as only Keats can make it. Every line, every stanza, he wrote, is replete with beauty. No other poet except Shakespeare shows such a mastery of language and felicity of phrase.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

(i) What is an Ode

An Ode is a rhymed lyric (very rarely unrhymed), often in the form of an address, serious in subject, elevated in style and elaborate in its stanzaic structure.

There are different types of odes; (a) the *regular or Pindaric Ode* established by the Greek poet Pindar and written in stanzas patterned in sets of three : the strophe, the anti strophe, and the epose; (b) the *irregular Ode* introduced by Abraham Cowley which disregarded the uniform three set structural pattern of Pindar; (c) the Horatian Ode written in a single repeated stanza form; and (d) the Personal Ode perfected by the Romantic poets. These odes are descriptive and meditative, and are stimulated by an aspect of the outer scene and turns on the attempt to solve either a private problem or a generally human one.

(ii) What is an urn?

An urn is a large container or vase with handles in which the ashes of the burnt dead body are kept. In ancient times the container was often ornamental.

(iii) The context of the poem

Critics say that the inspiration for the poem came from the engravings on the Elgin Marbles acquired by Lord Elgin from Greece and displayed in the British Museum since 1816. But the engravings represented only cavalcades of men on horse, driving chariots and cattle being brought for the sacrifice. No urn had anything to do with them. Then where from Keats get the title 'Grecian Urn'? Keats might have seen Grecian urns in fact and figure. The word 'urn' is an attractive one and full of artistic significance. His imagination therefore turned upon an engraved Grecian urn. It was not any particular urn, as the indefinite article 'a' indicates but a Grecian urn of any kind whatsoever, an urn of the ideal type.

(iv) Substance of the Poem

The beauty of the urn so enchants and excites the poet that he comes to the realization that beauty is truth, truth beauty. Through imagination Keats recaptures the past as preserved by the Greek artist in the figures of the urn. This recollection helps him to think of the permanence of art as opposed to the transitory nature of human life and sensuous beauty. Human life and happiness are brief and short. But Art can enshrine

them with an idea beauty that outlives their time. The figures on the urn and all that they symbolized are gone. But Art has given them longevity and has linked the ages together. Art distils the beauty; of a fleeting moment and gives it immortality. What is immortal is true and the beauty of art which brings immortality is therefore true. Hence the conclusion : beauty is truth, truth beauty.

Stanza I

(The sight of the urn sets to work the poet's mind. The urn is as beautiful and pure as a quiet unravished bride. It lives like the foster - child of time. It is a living historian of the Greek rural life haunted by gods and men ever singing pipes in wild ecstasy).

The stanza conjures up the ancient life and worship suggested by the sculptured images and speculates on the abstract relationship of art and life.

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1.1 | Thou | : | The Grecian urn |
| | unravished | : | not violated, virgin pure |
| | unravished bride of quietness: | | The inviolate beauty of the urn is emphasized. It is as pure as a virgin maid. The idea is, its mystery is not uncovered so far (The poet is here trying to uncover the mystery). |
| 1.2 | Foster child | : | one brought up by foster parents. ie, those who act as parents. |
| | Foster child | : | Time, which is a great destroyer, has preserved it like a foster - child. A work of art is the child of its foster-parents. Here the foster-parent is time. |
| 1.3 | Sylvan | : | connected with woods or trees. |
| | Sylvan historian | : | The urn is so called because the scene engraved on it is a woodland scene from a rustic festival. The sculptured scene is a permanent record of Greek rural life as the work of a historian is a permanent record of the life and manners of the people dealt with. |
| 1.4 | A flowery tale | : | a tale of the woodlands bright; an interesting tale. |
| | rhyme | : | verse or verses |
| 1.5 | leaf fringed legend | : | the scene of the story is depicted with an ornamental border (fringe) of leaves. |
| | haunts | : | here fills. |
| | about | : | around |
| 1.6 | deities | : | gods |
| | mortals | : | human beings |
| 1.7 | Tempe Arcady? | : | see notes in the next |
| | dale | : | valley |
| 1.8 | What maidens loth? | : | Who are these women pretending shyness? The men and gods are chasing the maidens who, pretending modesty, escape from the grasp of their pursuers. |
| 1.10 | pipes and timbrels | : | musical instruments. A timbrel is a tambourine, a small, shallow drum with metal discs fastened in the rim. |
| 1.8-10 | What men wild ecstasy? | : | The scene is one of exquisite rapture. The series of questions imply the beautiful suggestiveness of plastic art. |

Stanza II

Art can make permanent a beautiful moment. In real life every moment and its beauty vanish for ever. But imaginative art preserves moments of beauty for all times to come. This truth is elaborated in this stanza.

The picture on the urn, which is art, captures the beauty of a moment in reality. The flutes are singing; The youth standing under the trees is making love with the girl at a distance. He does not reach her, nor do the trees shed their leaves. All these have happened in a moment of the past and all of them have vanished from real life. But art has made the moment permanent. The song continues as if singing the harmonies of eternity. Love continues since the lovers never meet together nor disappear. The trees are ever green with leaves, for there is no change of seasons. The superiority of art over life is thus emphasized. . , '

Heard melodies ... are sweeter; : a line very often quoted. Songs which we hear in reality are sweet. but those which exist in the realm of the ideal are unheard by us and are still more sweet. Keats is here making a distinction between the real and the ideal. The ideal is more permanent, and the artist, through imagination, captures the ideal. Here, the poet takes us through three stages of existence. (1) the world of reality; (2) the world of art; (3) the pure realm of imagination. The last state is the realm where the pipes play on "to the spirit ditties of no tone". The allusion is to the aphorism of St. Paul The things that are seen are, temporal : but the things that are unseen eternal".

pipes	:	flutes
sensual ear	:	physical ear (of the world of reality)
more endear's	:	more precious than the sensual ear
Pipe to the spirit	:	sing to the soul
ditties of no tone	:	songs which are only imaginary
fair youth	:	addressing the sculptured figure of a beautiful youth on the urn.
thou canst not.. thy song	:	because he has been transmuted from the stage of reality to that of the ideal through art. He has to go on singing for ever.
be bare	:	became leafless. In reality trees must shed their leaves in autumn and become bare. But in the art on the urn they have become eternal without the necessity of becoming bare.

Bold Lover, ...near the goal The Lover (the fair youth) is bold because of the intensity of his passion. But he cannot at all kiss his beloved, though he has come near his goal or aim (ie, his lady-love), because the artist has arrested his movement. He can only stand where he has come.

do not grieve	:	do not feel sorry for. The poet is consoling the bold lover who is unable to kiss his beloved.
cannot fade	:	cannot lose her beauty. Youth and beauty decay in real life. But they remain permanent in art. The impermanence of beauty and youth in real life is grievously portrayed by Keats himself in the lines:

"Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despair,

Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow

(Ode to a Nightingale)

thy bliss	:	your happiness in embracing and kissing your beloved.
-----------	---	---

For ever wilt... be fair!	:	you have the same degree of love and she will have the same beauty (as art has made life and beauty permanent).
---------------------------	---	---

Stanza III

The idea in the above stanza is given greater emphasis here.

Safe within art, the trees need not bid goodbye to the season of spring : the happy piper under the tree need not be tired of singing newer and newer songs, and the lover need not be cloyed with his intense passion which, in real life, would have brought pain and suffering.

boughts	:	branches of trees
bid the spring adieu	:	that is the trees will always be in bloom as in the season of Spring
up wearied	:	untired. Mortal melodists (singers) feel tired. But the melodist on the urn is immortal and so untired.
for ever new	:	always fresh songs.
panting	:	in an uncertain state between hope and despair.
All breathing far above	:	The ever younger lover on the urn will not suffer from the passion in real life, which is always changing.
That leaves a heart	:	parching tongue : the depressing effects of human passions in real life are described in these two lines. Keat's own experience of his lost love with Fanny Brownie is found here.
cloy'd	:	made weary or dissatisfied by too much of something.
burning	:	due to excessive passion.
parching tongue	:	tongue becoming dry because of unquenched

Stanza IV

The poet now looks at another scene engraved, perhaps, on the other side of the urn. The scene is that of a sacrifice about to take place. A mysterious priest is leading a heifer to the sacrificial altar. People, whose identity is unknown are coming in crowds to witness the religious ceremony. The place from where these people have come in the morning is also unknown. If it is a little town, it has become desolate by now, and will remain desolate forever because these people can never more return home. Art, as in the case of the lover and his beloved, has made the people permanent spectators of the religious festival.

green altar	:	a turf used as a place of sacrifice. The setting of the scene is still pastoral, as in the case of the earlier scene.
mysterious	:	veiled
heifer	:	a young
lowing	:	crying (of a cow)
flanks	:	dressed, ie., adorned as symbols of consecrating the animal for sacrifice.
citadel	:	a fortress; a place of refuge.
pious morn	:	morning devoted to religious duties.
desolate	:	without living beings.

Stanza V

The beautiful shape and attitude of the figures carved on the urn raised in the mind of the poet the belief that ideal Beauty is equivalent to truth. Art has made Beauty eternal. When the present generation perishes through old age, it remains as a friend to the future. Truth is a moral value eternal as the beauty of art, and so Beauty is Truth and Truth Beauty.

O Attic shape! The Grecian urn is addressed. Athens, in Attica was the centre of Greek art and sculpture and so this address to the urn

fair attitude	:	beautiful shape
brede	:	embroidery. The figures on the urn appear to present an embroidered pattern.
Overwrought	:	weeds over which foot-steps have made a path
tread	:	walk; trod : walked
weed	:	useless plants or shrubs.
dost	:	do

tease us out of thought : make us think until thought is lost in mystery and wonder.
 As doth eternity : as does the state of eternity where thought is non-existent.
 waste : destroy. When men of this age are crippled by old age, the urn would
 whisper words of comfort to men of succeeding generations.

In midst of other woe / Than ours, : woes (sufferings) of future generations will be different from those of the present generation.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty" : "Any beauty which is not truthful (if any such there is) and any truth which is not beautiful (if any such there is) are of no practical importance to mankind in their mundane condition: but in fact there are none such, for, to the human mind beauty and truth are one and the same thing".

Ye : you

Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Ode on a Grecian Urn is one of the most famous poems of Keats. It is primarily a lyric celebrating the carved beauties seen on an ancient Grecian urn. But, more significantly it is an imaginative rendering of the poet's own theory of art and life. Enchanted by the engraved scenes, the poet felt himself transported to the good old days when Greece lived a pastoral life with its own customs and manners. The urn is therefore, to the poet, a "sylvan historian" which with its artistic representation to a life that has, in reality, been lost. Actual life is ephemeral and fleeting. Art alone can make it permanent with all its beauty.

The pictures of gods and men making themselves merry in the valleys of Arcady or in Tempe are so lively as to recall their legendary tale. The picture of the musicians playing on their musical instruments seems to "pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone". Their melodies when heard were sweet. Now they are singing to the soul unheard melodies which are sweeter still. The youth standing under the trees and singing on his pipe, is trying in vain to reach his lady love. But he need not feel sorry, as in real life, for his inability to win her. For, art has kept him and his beloved, young and fair, and has made their love eternal, just as the trees need not bid adieu to the season of Spring. He can continue to make love with her and she will always be fair. And the trees will not at all shed their leaves.

Another picture, perhaps on the other side of the urn, evokes permanent curiosity. A religious sacrifice is about to take place in the little town. It is the morning of a holy day. A mysterious priest is leading a heifer to the green altar. The entire people of the town are coming to participate in the sacred ceremony. Whatever town it is, it has become desolate because all its people have come to the sacrifice. The artist has so truthfully depicted the whole scene that the poet feels that the town is now empty and silent.

The portraits sculptured on the urn are beautiful and attractive because they are truthful representations of life's valid moments. Art has captured these fleeting moments and has given them permanence through their faithful portrayal. Though the urn is silent and cold, its marble men, maidens; forest branches and trodden weed convey to posterity the true picture of Attic life. The urn is beautiful because of this fact. The ultimate message of the urn then becomes this: what is beautiful is true and what is true will always be beautiful.

Keats was a worshipper of beauty. A thing of beauty was for him joy for ever. His master passion was the yearning for the Beautiful. He believed that truth can be known only through the heart's affections and imagination, and not through reasoning. In his letter to Bailey he declared :

"I am certain of nothing, but of the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth".

To such a believer, the beautiful urn cannot convey any other message than "Beauty is truth, truth beauty".

Assignments

A. Annotate the following passage :

1. Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter.
2. All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue..
3. Ah, little town; thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate can d'er return.
4. 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". '

B. Write a paragraph on each of the following:-

1. What are the two pictures on the urn ?
2. Keats's conception of Beauty and Truth.
3. Keats's ideas, on the permanence of Art over Nature.

C. Write a paragraph on each of the following:-

1. Trace the evolution of thought in the poem.
2. How does Keats arrive at the conclusion that the message of the urn is 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'?
3. Attempt a critical appreciation of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

School of Distance Education

UNIVERSITY OF KERALA PALAYAM CAMPUS THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 034

THE EXPERIENCE OF POETRY

Unit - I

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

School of Distance Education
University of Kerala,
Palayam
Thiruvananthapuram - 695 034

First Year B. A. English Language and Literature

Part III English Main Paper - I

Poetry: The Experience of Poetry

Unit - I

Lesson: 1 to 8

Lessons 1, 6, & 8

Prepared by

(Late) Dr. N. Bhaskara Panicker
Lecturer in English, SDE

Lessons 2

Prepared by:

Dr. K. Gopakumar
Sel. Gr. Lecturer, SDE

Lessons 3, 4, 5 & 7

Prepared by:

(Late) Dr. P. K. Rajan
Professor of English, SDE

Edited by

Dr. K. Gopakumar

Copies : 600 Bks. (kup. 791/2013-'14)

Copyright

Director, S.D.E.

University of Kerala.

All rights reserved

Printed at : Kerala University Press, Thiruvananthapuram