
UNIT 1 NINETEENTH CENTURY AUSTRALIAN POETRY : AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 A Survey of Nineteenth Century Australian Poetry
 - 1.1.1 Impact of British Poetry
 - 1.1.2 Flora and Fauna of Australia
 - 1.1.3 Colonial Setting and Sentiment
 - 1.1.4 Australian Identity
- 1.2 Major Themes and Stylistic Features
 - 1.2.1 The Land and the People
 - 1.2.2 Estrangement and Alienation
 - 1.2.3 Mateship
 - 1.2.4 Women's Voices
 - 1.2.5 Australian Poetics
- 1.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.4 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will study the development of Australian poetry from its inception to the end of the nineteenth century. To understand the distinctive features of Australian poetry published during the nineteenth century, we will examine its predominant thematic concerns and modes of articulation. This survey of nineteenth century Australian poetry will equip you better for comprehending the significance and the historical context of the individual poets and their poems which will be analysed in the subsequent units.

1.1 A SURVEY OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AUSTRALIAN POETRY

You must remember that though Australia existed as a landmass since the pre-cambrian age, it did not have human population for a considerable period of time. Its earliest inhabitants were nomads who migrated from South-East Asia about forty thousand years ago. They developed an indigenous culture of their own though they did not have any written dialect. They were designated as Aborigines by the white people who discovered the route to the island continent in the late eighteenth century. In 1770, **Captain Cook** (1728 - 79) discovered the route from England to Australia, landed at Botany Bay, named the whole of the east coast of Australia 'New South Wales' and took possession of it for Britain.

On 26 January 1788, **Captain Arthur Phillip** (1738 - 1814) unfurled the Union Jack on the shore of Sydney Cove. The day is celebrated as Australia Day. He was appointed the first Governor-General of the British Settlement which began as a penal colony with convicts and jailers transported from Britain. Hence, in the eighteenth century there was no Australian literature. In this respect **Judith Wright** has observed :

If there were men of a poetic turn among the convicts and soldiers of the first settlement, they had probably no time or inclination to exercise the gift. Mere survival, and a fair share of the rum, perhaps filled the early ambitions of most. (1964: 58)

Ironically as well as perhaps appropriately, the first 'poet - laureate' of Australia is **Michael Massey Robinson** (1744 - 1826), a convict who landed in Australia in 1805. In 1811 he obtained pardon. He composed and published odes in *Sydney Gazette* to celebrate the birthdays of George III and Queen Charlotte (1810 - 21). In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, it is observed :

In 1818 and 1819 he (Robinson) was repaid ' for his services as Poet Laureate ' by a grant of two cows from the government herd, probably the first royalties to a poet in Australia . (595)

Next poet in Australia is **Francis Macnamara** (1811 - ?), another convict who is known ' as a composer of cheeky extempore verse. ' (Wilde : 451)

Along with convicts, some officers also penned verses. Notable among them is **Barron Field** (1786 1846), a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. In 1819, the first book of Australian verse was published. Field chose the title *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* for the book to emphasize its primacy and historical importance. **Wright** points this out :

.... it (*First Fruits*) has the merit of being the first (and for a long time the only) verse produced in Australia which shows any interest in the local productions of flowers and animals. (59)

W.C. Wentworth (1793 - 1872) is ' the first native-born Australian to publish any verse' (Wright : 60) . While at Cambridge in 1823 he composed the poem *Australasia* which was a significant entry for the Chancellor's Prize for that year.

However, the first book of poems to be published in Australia by a poet born in Australia is entitled *Wild Notes, from the Lyre of a Native Minstrel* (1823) . The poet is **Charles Thompson** (1807 - 83) .

The most important of the early versifiers of Australia is **Charles Harpur** (1813 - 68) who was the son of convict parents. He is the first Australian poet to take up the vocation of a poet seriously. He is the first poet who felt the moral compulsion to write Australian poetry. His published works include *Thoughts : A Series of Sonnets* (1845), *The Bushrangers : A Play in Five Acts and other Poems* (1853), *The Tower of the Dream* (1865), and several smaller works, a broadsheet, *Songs of Australia, First Series* (1850), pamphlet containing two poems, entitled *A poet's Home* (1862), and a four-page booklet, *A Rhyme* (1864) . The first Harpur collected edition was the posthumous *Poems*, edited by H.M. Martin in 1883. According to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Harpur's ambition was to be Australia's first authentic poetic voice. (318)

Next important poet is **Henry Kendall** (1839 - 82) . One significant fact about Kendall is that ' he was virtually the only Australian-born poet of his generation ' (Wright : 69) . He signed his poems ' H. Kendall. N.A.P.' - the initials standing for ' Native Australian Poet.' (Wilkes : viii)

Kendall published three volumes of poetry, *Poems and Songs* (1862), *Leaves from Australian Forests* (1869) and *Songs from Mountains* (1880) . His descriptive lyrics made Australia emerge as a tangible landscape in English poetry. **Geoffrey Serle** comments :

It remains to be said that he was probably the best nineteenth century Australian poet, who earned inclusion in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* and *The Oxford Book of English Verse* . (33)

Australian lifestyle is reflected in Australian poetry much more perceptibly by the expatriate poet **Adam Lindsay Gordon** (1833 - 70) . He arrived in Australia in 1853 and remained there till he committed suicide in 1870. In 1864 he published the ballad *The Feud*. In 1867 he published *Astaroth*. His poetic reputation, however, rests on the poems published in two volumes, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867) and *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870) . **Brian Elliott** points out :

Nothing in all Colonial poetry matches in importance Gordon's signal achievement, the fixation of the Australian image. (Serle : 34)

With the launch of the most significant Australian literary journal, *Bulletin* , in 1880, a movement for nationalism in Australian literature was initiated. The impact of this is most felt in the poetry of **A.B. Paterson** (1864 - 1941) . Paterson is also known as 'Banjo ' as he used that pseudonym for his early contributions to the *Bulletin*. His first volume of poems entitled *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* (1895) sold out in the week of its publication, and it went through six editions in six months. His ballads about drovers, teamsters, bushrangers, picnic race meetings and animosity between squatters and drovers made him a very popular poet. His other books of poems appeared in the twentieth century. **H.M.Green** highlights the signal contribution of Paterson :

Paterson more than any other balladist, more indeed than any other Australian writer of verse, conveys to us the atmosphere of the Australian countryside and its inhabitants . (405)

You must know that nineteenth century Australian poetry included feminist voices. The most notable Australian woman poet of the century is **Ada Cambridge** (1844 - 1926) . She published her most important book of poems *Unspoken Thoughts* (1887) anonymously. **Patricia Barton** mentions the themes of her poetry :

Unspoken Thoughts expresses indignation at social and sexual injustice, longings for love and sexual expression, explorations of motherhood, fear of death and the agony of illness, and a challenging of conviction and orthodox beliefs . (139)

The span of one hundred years of the nineteenth century witnessed not only the growth and proliferation of western civilization in the newly found continent of Australia but also the development of poetry in English in a new landscape wherein a new civilization gradually matured. Australian poetry started under marks of inheritance from British poetry but gradually absorbed the Australian themes from the nature and people of Australia and simultaneously developed a matching Australian idiom and poetics. Thus nineteenth-Century Australian poetry offers an interesting scope for studying the growth of a new kind of poetry. The various aspects of the same will be studied in the following sections.

1.1.1 Impact of British Poetry

Judith Wright has rightly commented :

The history of Australian poetry from the First Settlement in 1788 until the end of the first world war is largely a study in the adaptation of the European (and specifically English) poetic consciousness and tradition to entirely new, and apparently hostile, conditions. (58)

The adaptation of English poetic diction of Britain is markedly apparent in the poetry of the early versifiers of Australia. For example, the following lines by **M.M. Robinson** immediately echo the metrical rhythm of the heroic couplets used by Pope and other poets of the eighteenth century in Britain :

While his proud Navies aw'd the Subject Main,
And now Discov'ries mark'd his glorious reign :
Reviews the Smiling Dawn of opening Youth,
When mutual Virtue pledg'd connubial Truth.

(Elliott and Mitchell : 13)

English and Irish ballads also made an impact on Australian poetry. For example, **Frank Macnamara** wrote a ballad about a convict Bold Jack Donahoe which is reminiscent of Robert Burns's ballad style . Many anonymous ballads were composed and later published : they imitated the ballad style prevalent in Britain. The following lines from such a ballad is quoted below for illustration :

you'll have no chance for mischief then;
remember what I say,
They'll flog the poaching out of you,
out there at Botany Bay.

(Inglis More : 3)

At this stage of discussion of the impact of British poetry, it will be in the fitness of things to remember what **Wilkes** has pointed about the early verses of Australia :

For almost fifty years after the arrival of the First Fleet , Australian poetry was under the influence of eighteenth-century modes One did not sit down to write " poetry " ; one sat down to attempt an ode, or an elegy, or a satire, and paid attention to the laws of the genre (thus observing the principle of "decorum "). (i)

Thus we find Wentworth's poem *Australasia* is a ' public poem ' in the eighteenth century manner, and it observes the decorum of the ode. A few lines from the poem will illustrate the point :

Lo! thickly planted o'er the glassy bay,
Where Sydney loves her beauties to survey,
And ev'ry morn delighted sees the gleam
Of some fresh pennant dancing in her stream

(Wilkes : ii)

Thompson's volume *Wild Notes* contains odes and elegies which, being apostrophic, ponderous in tone and ornate in language, was largely influenced by the British poetic tradition of eighteenth century. His poem ' Black Town ' is illustrative of the mode.

Ill - fated Hamlet ! from each tott' ring shed,
The sable inmates perhaps forever fled,
(Poor restless wand'rers of the woody plain !
The skies their covert -nature their domain)

(Wilkes : 9)

Wilkes points out :

" Black Town ", styled an elegy, belongs also to the genre of the " local poem ", like Pope's " Windsor Forest " or Goldsmith's " Deserted Village ". (i - ii)

Through the poetry of **Harpur**, British Romanticism makes its first appearance in Australia. **Wilkes** observes :

In his poem ' The Dream by the Fountain ', Harpur declares his love of motherland Australia through an imaginary encounter with the Muse :

Be then the Bard of thy Country ! O rather
Should such be thy choice Than a monarchy wide !
Lo, 'tis the land of the grave of thy father!
'Tis the cradle of liberty ! - Think and decide.

(Wilkes ; iii - iv)

In the Australian poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century, perceptible marks of the influence of British Romantic poetry are traceable. **Wilkes** further remarks :

If **Harpur's** main affinity among the Romantics is with Wordsworth ,
Gordon is closer in temperament to the melancholic and reckless Byron , and
in literary predilection to Scott as a writer of ballad and narrative verse . (vi)

About Kendall , **Wilkes'** observation is appropriate ;

Kendall is the foremost exemplar of the Romantic treatment of Australian
landscape in nineteenth-century verse ... Like Harpur , he was influenced by
the Romantic conception of the poet as a solitary dreamer ... (ix)

Thus the poetry of Harpur , Kendall and Gordon bears the imprint of the British
Romantic poetry in various ways. This will be illustrated in detail in the subsequent
units.

1.1.2 Flora and Fauna of Australia

However , despite the marks of imitateness , as pointed out in the preceding section,
what redeems the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century is the attempt on the
part of the poets to assimilate into English language the names of the Australian flora
and fauna. The emotional imperative of both the expatriate and native-born poets of
Australia of this period find a literary reflection in the re-oriented vocabulary and
idiom of this innovative poetry . Distinctively , the flora and fauna of Australia as
reflected in the poetry give it an indigenous colour and flavour.

Wer tworth's *Australasia* mentions and depicts the local space , as in the following
lines , but does not incorporate the typical Australian flora and fauna :

Here lowing kine, these bounding courses graze,
Here waves the corn, and there the woody maize ;
Here the tall peach puts forth its pinky bloom
And there the orange scatters its perfume.....

(Wilkes :5)

Barron Field mentions Kangaroo as ' the spirit of Australia '. **Judith Wright** observes:

'Botany Bay Wildflowers' (Field's poem) is appreciatively of the flora of the
sandstone near Sydney, which had sent Banks into professional
ecstasies.....(60)

Harpur's vow to be ' the bard of thy country ' manifests itself in his vivid description
of the land. Though he made efforts in his poetry to recreate the landscape.
Australian solitude and desolation are very sensitively evoked in the following lines :

Not a bird disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere:
Over plains and our woods
what a mighty stillness broods.

(Wilkes :15)

His long poem 'The Creek of the Four Graves' is full of description of the natural landscape. However, he did not try to incorporate any typical Australian flora and fauna. Though 'Lost in the Bush' mentions Kangaroo and bidawongs. About Kendall's poetry, **G.B. Barton** wrote in 1866 :

One striking merit of Mr. Kendall's poetry is, that its colouring is strictly local, and that he has endeavoured to give voice to the majestic scenery of his native land. (Barnes :5)

Kendall's ballads recreate the flora and fauna of Australia. His lyrics and ballads are, however, infused with a note of melancholy that cast on the Australian landscape a cloud of gloom.

Gordon's ballads often recreate the smell of the Australian earth. In his Dedication poem in *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, Gordon gives a vivid picture of eucalyptus :

When the gnarl'd knotted trunks Eucalyptian
Seem'd carved like weird columns Egyptian
With curious device, quaint inscription
And hieroglyph strange.

(Wilkes :62)

His ballad 'The Sick Stockrider' is famous for its vibrant images of the Australian horses and horsemen. Serle writes :

He (Gordon) was the poet of the horse - and the horse was all - important in nineteenth century Australia. (34)

Not only the horses and the horsemen but also the Australian flowers enchanted the poet :

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave,
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

(Wilkes : 86)

In his ballads Paterson immortalized the horsemen, particularly in the poem 'The Man from Snowy River'. Thus phase by phase, the nineteenth century Australian poetry acquired the Australian stamp through the gradual incorporation and ethos and milieu.

1.1.3 Colonial Setting and Sentiment

During the nineteenth century, Australia was a British colony. Hence, the poetry that was written during the century in Australia bears the mark of colonial lifestyle and colonial temperament. The adoration of the British empire, the kings and queens, the British colonial officers, the transplanted culture and the upholding of the white civilization permeate the themes and attitudes expressed in the colonial poetry of Australia.

Wentworth's poem *Australasia* epitomizes the glorification of Britain and the celebration of the colonization of Australia in the following lines :

And Australasia Float, with flag unfurled,
A new Britannia in another world!

(Turner: 19)

Gradually, however, the tendency towards nationalism gathered force, and by the end of the century, Australian poetry got rid of inferiority complex and moved towards a robust sense of pride in the country, her people and their achievements, Paterson's poetry registers this change.

1.1.4 Australian Identity

Homesickness, initial surprise and disgust with the strange and uncouth landscape and seasonal variations of the antipodes (while it is summer in Britain, it is winter in Australia) and sense of alienation and displacement gradually gave way to the development of a growing sense of attachment to the land . People of different states came together , and formed the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. During the whole of nineteenth century, the process of integration and development of Australian identity was under way. The identification of the Australian flora and fauna, the bushlife , mateship, horsemanship and other features that characterised the Australian identity find a continual reflection in the nineteenth - century Australian poetry. The poetry of Harpur, Kendall, Gordon, Paterson and Cambridge reflect the development of Australian identity.

1.2 MAJOR THEMES AND STYLISTIC FEATURES

From our discussion of nineteenth century Australian poetry in the preceeding sections it appears that Australian poetry focuses on certain themes; to get a closer view of the characteristics of nineteenth century Australian poetry , we will identify the recurrent themes in the nineteenth century Australian poetry in the following sections. Since the themes can be embodied only through words and patterns of verbal representations, a brief study of the stylistic features of nineteenth century Australian poetry will be included in this unit. There could be some repetition; but repetition, in distance education, is - you must remember - for reinforcement.

1.2.1 The Land and the People

For the pioneer Australian poets, the land and the people of Australia were a tantalizing subject matter of utmost curiosity and interest. The landscape encountered by the Australian poets appeared strange and uncouth to them. But gradually they accepted the landscape, and made it a recurring theme of their poetry. Of the first poets to encounter the strangeness of the land, **Barron Field** is most articulate and straightforward in his perception as revealed in the first stanza of the poem 'The Kangaroo' :

Kangaroo, Kangaroo !
 Thou Spirit of Australia,
 That redeems from utter failure,
 And warrants the creation
 Of this fifth part of the Earth,
 Which would seem an after-birth,
 Not conceived in the Beginning
 (For GOD bless'd His work at first,
 And saw that it was good),
 But emerg'd at the first sinning,
 When the ground was therefore curst ;
 And hence this barren wood !

(Ackland 1993 : 14)

With the passage of time, a different mode of perception developed. Instead of disgust, a sense of wonder at the manifold grandeur of Australia's natural setting emerged in the poetry of the poets born in the land itself. **Emily Manning** (1845 - 90), born and educated in Sydney contributed many poems under the pseudonym 'Australie'. Her exquisite description of the landscape of Australia is found in most of

her long poems. Her book of poems *The Balance of Pain and Other Poems* was published in 1877. All her poems contain cameos of Australian natural scenery imbued with deep affection for the Australian landscape. I quote below a passage from her poem 'From the Clyde to Braidwood' to illustrate the gradual shift in the perception of Australian landscape from Field to Manning :

Now a barren length
Of tall straight eucalyptus, till again
A babbling voice is heard, and through green banks
Of emerald fern and mossy boulder rocks,
The currawong dances o'er a pebbly bed,
In rippling clearness, or with cresting foam
Splashes and leaps in snowy cascade steps.

(Kramer and Mitchell : 79)

Charles Harpur celebrates Australian landscape in all its minutiae. However, he finds in all the particularities of the Australian scene a universal design and pattern. For example, the concluding lines from the poem 'Dawn and Sunrise in the Snowy Mountains' provide an illustration of the same :

As if the Spirit of Light,
Advancing swiftly thence, and eastward still,
Kept kindling them in quick succession till
The universal company of cones
And pyramidal peaks, standing burning all
With rosy fires, like a wide ranging circ
Of God - great altars, - and even so announce
The Sun that now, with a vast flash, is seen
Pushing his rim above yon central height.

(Ackland 1993 : 22)

In the poetry of Kendall, the sights and sounds of the Australian landscape become a source not only of joy but also of solace. The concluding stanza of his poem 'Bell-Birds' clinches this perception of identification with the Australian flora and fauna:

Often I sit, looking back to a childhood,
Mixt with the sights and the sounds of the wildhood,
Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion,
Lyrics with beats like the heart - beats of Passion ;
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughter
Borrowed from bell - birds in far forest - rafters ;
So I might keep in the city and alleys
The beauty and strength of the deep mountain valleys ;
Charming to slumber the pain of my losses
With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses

(Ackland 1993 : 24)

The white pioneers of Australia have been immortalized by Gordon and Paterson through their ballads which have become a part of Australian national heritage, namely Gordon's poem 'The Sick Stockrider', and Paterson's 'The Man from Snowy River'. Since both the poems will be discussed in the subsequent units, no line from the poems is quoted here. The horsemen, the bush rangers and bushmen permeate the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century. Thus the land and the people of Australia are absorbed in the entire corpus of nineteenth century Australian poetry which presents a poetic chronicle of the history of the land and her people.

1.2.2 Estrangement and Alienation

Parallel to the theme of the assimilation of the landscape in Australian poetry is to be found the theme of estrangement and alienation. Again, the phenomenon of encounter

with the bizarre landscape of Australia, and the reminiscences of the British homeland bred in the first poets a deep sense of estrangement and alienation which the later poets gradually overcame. The agony of estrangement and alienation receives an intense verbal articulation in the lines of the three stanzas quoted from the middle of a poem entitled 'The Female Transport' by an anonymous poet :

To hurt my heart when on a coach I my native town passed by ;
 To see so many I did know, it made me heave a sigh ;
 Then to a ship was sent with speed along with many more,
 Whose aching hearts did grieve to go unto Van Diemen's shore.
 The sea was rough, ran mountains high, with us poor girls 'twas hard,
 No one but God to us came nigh, no one did us regard.
 At length, alas! we reached the land, it grieved us ten times more,
 That wretched place Van Diemen's Land, far from our Native shore
 They chained us two by two , and whipped and lashed along,
 They cut off our provisions if we did the least thing wrong ;
 They march us in the burning sun until our feet are sore,
 So hard's our lot now we got to Van Diemen's shore.

(Ackland 1993 : 87)

To the first white occupiers of Australia , who were mostly convicts, the land represented punishment , hence it became a symbol of torture and penalty. So the mental associations of the country were gloomy and forbidding . **Francis Macnamara's** poem 'A Convict's Lament on the Death of Captain Logan' embodies a deep sense of estrangement and alienation. Two stanzas from the poem are reproduced below :

I am a native of Erin's island
 But banished now from my native shore ;
 They tore me from my aged parents,
 And from the maiden I adore.
 In transient storms as I set sailing,
 Like mariner bold my course did steer,
 Sydney Harbour was my destination --
 That cursed place at length drew near.
 He said : ' I've been a prisoner at Port Macquarie,
 At Norfolk Island and Emu plains ;
 At Castle Hill and cursed Toongabbee --
 At all those places I've worked in chains :
 But of all the places of condemnation,
 In each penal station of New South Wales,
 To Moreten Bay I found no equal,
 For excessive tyranny each day prevails

(Ackland 1993 : 89)

1.2.3 Mateship

After the penal colony came to exist as a reality, with more and more shipments of convicts from British shores, Australia witnessed the emerging phenomenon of bushmen and bushrangers -- in the early phase, mostly escaped convicts ranging in the bush. After lonely travels in the daytime through the dry land, the bushrangers settled for the evening and met the fellow - travellers, camped in the bush, and gradually developed a sense of mateship among themselves .

The mateship gradually became a cult phenomenon in the nineteenth century Australia. It acquired the mark of national identity of Australians. Particularly the ballads of Australia celebrated this mateship among bushrangers and horsemen. The sense of mateship permeates the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century : and perhaps this accounts for sympathy and admiration for the escaped convicts who later

were idolized as cult figures. One example is the ballad 'The Wild Colonial Boy' which will be discussed in detail in the next unit. The 'Chorus' stanza of the ballad indicated the first hint of mateship :

Come, all my hearties, we'll roam the mountains high,
Together we will plunder, together we will die.
We'll wander over valleys, and gallop over plains
And we'll scorn to live in slavery, bound down with iron chains.

(Davis : 17)

Mateship is further associated with the identification with the Australian flora and fauna, as illustrated by the first two stanzas of the ballad, 'The Dying Stockman' :

A strapping young stockman lay dying,
His saddle supporting his head ;
His two mates around him were crying,
As he rose on his elbow and said :

Chorus : ' Wrap me up with my stockwhip and blanket,
And bury me deep down below,
Where the dingoes and crows can't molest me,
In the shade where the coolibahs grow.

(Davis : 18)

The concept of mateship gradually enlarged itself into the sense of solidarity among people of the community. The commitment to the community gradually developed into a comprehensive craving for national identity among Australians. This gave birth to the publication of the *Bulletin* whose editors gave a clarion call for writing about Australia. Hence the concept of mateship is important and relevant to the growth of Australian poetry in the nineteenth century.

1.2.4 Women's Voices

Mateship, as it developed among the bushrangers, was a masculine phenomenon. But the nineteenth century Australian poetry has a history of women's participation as well. This was not recognized earlier but with recent scholarship in the women's literature in Australia, more facts about women's contribution to the growth of Australian poetry during the nineteenth century has come to light.

Louisa Lawson (1848 - 1920) articulates women's sufferings. Her poem 'Lines Written During a Night Spent in a Bush Inn' not only expresses women's exclusive sufferings but also exhibits women's attachment to the countryside of Australia, as in the last three stanzas quoted below :

And some one among them, with grief in his breast,
Might register roughly the place of my rest
By carving in letters cut deep on its bole
These plain words ' A Woman, May God rest her soul.
In ground that is hallowed let happy folk lie,
But give me a grave in the bush when I die.
For have I not lived, loved and suffered alone ?
Thus making it meet that my grave be unknown
The sound of the stockwhip away on the hill.
Ah, God ! It is day, and I'm suffering still

(Ackland 1993 : 173)

Ada Cambridge's book of poems *Unspoken Thoughts*, as pointed out in an earlier section, articulates woman's protest against male domination in the Australian society. Her poetry will be discussed in a subsequent unit. However, as an

illustration of Cambridge's forthright and daring style which projects the spirit of rebellion in woman, the following four lines of her poem 'An Answer' are quoted below :

Thy love I am. Thy wife I cannot be,
 To wear the yoke of servitude - to take
 Strange, unknown fetters that I cannot break
 On Soul and flesh that should be mine, and free.

(Ackland 1993 : 209)

1.2.5 Australian Poetics

As pointed out earlier, Australian poetry in its initial phase depended on the poetics of the British poetry of the eighteenth century. The narrative style, the ornamental rhetoric, rigidity in verse pattern and heroic couplets of the eighteenth century British poetry left their indelible stamp on the poetics of early Australian poetry. But at the same time, the simplicity and colloquial diction of British ballads, many of which reached Australia with the convicts and other settlers who came from England, Scotland and Ireland, found its way into the evolution of the Australian poetic diction of the nineteenth century. With the passage of time, a traceable impact of the style of Romantic and Victorian poetry is also discernible in the later evolution of Australian poetic style. The poetry of Harpur, Kendall, Gordon, Paterson and Cambridge exhibits a fusion of all the strands mentioned above. However, what transformed the poetic style of Australia during the nineteenth century is the infusion of the images and metaphors culled from Australian flora and fauna, local place-names and the gradual evolution of the ethos of the Australia milieu. The poets gradually adapted the British poetic style to the local situation, and a new distinctive style indigenous to Australia gradually evolved, and gave to Australian poetry a distinctive mode of articulation reflecting the Australian temper.

The specific aspects of the Australian poetic style will be noticed and commented upon in the subsequent units where the texts of several Australian poems of the nineteenth century will be analysed in detail.

The above sections of this unit give you a general overview of the nineteenth century Australian poetry, and draw your attention to certain singular features that characterize this poetry. However, while reading the specific poems, analysed in the subsequent sections, and the reference books mentioned in the Bibliography, you may draw your own conclusions, thus making your new acquaintance with the nineteenth century Australian poetry more interesting and rewarding.

1.3 LET US SUM UP

Australian poetry is a literary offshoot of the British colonization of Australia which began in the late eighteenth century. During the one hundred years of the nineteenth century, there developed a new kind of poetry in English in the new environs of Australia. The white convicts and jailers and other settlers who kept on coming to Australia as well as their offsprings dwelt in Australia and built a new western civilization in Australia. As a part of the cultural life that developed among the new generations of white people living in Australia, Australian poetry gradually took a new definitive shape and colour. The smell of the Australian earth, water and sky and the flavour of life lived in the Australian landscape found a palpable embodiment in the Australian poetry that was written over the period of one hundred years during the nineteenth century.

Gradually, the Australian poetry shed its marks and features of imitation of the British poetic mode and style, and developed an indigenous tradition incorporating

local mores. During the nineteenth century there have been numerous poets starting with convicts and jailers, and concluding with a list of illustrious native-born Australians like Harpur, Kendall and Paterson. One interesting feature of the nineteenth century Australian poetry is that some poets who came from Britain and settled in Australia also contributed a great deal to the growth of nineteenth century Australian poetry. Among those, the most outstanding are Gordon and Cambridge. The growth of Australian poetry is not only a literary phenomenon but also a historical and cultural phenomenon of Australia as it chronicles the historical events and cultural aspects of Australia and Australians of that period of time. You must have realized by now that the study of nineteenth century Australian poetry is rewarding as you have come to know more about Australia and her people and their culture.

1.4 QUESTIONS

Some questions are given at the end of each unit. By attempting these questions, you will be able to clarify your understanding about the various aspects of nineteenth century Australian poetry.

1. When did the colonization of Australia begin? What impact did it have on the country and her culture and civilization?
2. Did Australian poetry begin as a freak? Or was it an offshoot of the historical and social events taking place in Australia during the nineteenth century?
3. Are there marks of distinction between the verses of the early versifiers and the poetry of the later poets writing in Australia during the nineteenth century? Attempt identifying those marks of distinction.
4. Mention the poets who, according to you, built the basis of Australian poetry during the nineteenth century. Attempt this question with illustrations from the poems by those poets.
5. Do you think that the nineteenth century Australian poetry has certain distinctive themes? Classify them with illustrations.
6. Is the nineteenth century Australian poetry, in your opinion, entirely masculine as the Australian poetry society of that period was patriarchal? Substantiate your answer if you discover women's voices in Australian poetry during the nineteenth century.

UNIT 2 W.C. WENTWORTH

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 W.C. Wentworth : His Life and Works
 - 2.1.1 Characteristic Features of Wentworth's Poetry
- 2.2 *Australasia* : Text
 - 2.2.1 Discussion
- 2.3 Ballads and Folk Songs of Australia : A Bird's Eye View
- 2.4 'The Wild Colonial Boy': Text
 - 2.4.1 Discussion
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After you are acquainted with a general survey of the nineteenth century Australian poetry and its characteristic features through your reading of unit 1, I'd like to make you more closely familiar with the details of some of the important poets and some of their representative poems. While Unit 1 took you through a macrocosmic study of the nineteenth century Australian poetry, the rest of the units in this Block will make you acquainted with a microcosmic study of the same.

Through this unit, you'll know, at first, the characteristic features of an early versifier W.C. Wentworth's verses, and thereafter analyse a long poem *Australasia* by him.

In the second section of this unit, you'll be introduced to the ballads and folk songs that were first orally transmitted, and then written down, which, obviously, are mostly anonymous. The folk ballad that will be presented to you as a representative ballad of the time is 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. The ballad gives you the flavour of the colonial life led in the nineteenth century Australia.

2.1 W.C. WENTWORTH : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

He was born in 1793, five years after the Australian Settlement. Being born in Australia, he was the first native Australian to have written poetry about Australia. He was the son of a surgeon and magistrate D'Arcy Wentworth and Catherine Crowley. He was born while his parents were en route from Sydney to Norfolk Island. He was sent to England for education. He came back to Australia in 1810. Thereafter he was appointed acting provost - marshal by Governor Lachlan Macquarie in 1811.

He developed a passion for trekking in Australia. He crossed to Blue Mountains with Blaxland and Lawson in 1813.

He returned to England to study law during 1817-20. He was deeply interested in Australian landscape and Australian political affairs. In 1819 he published *A Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales*.

While at Cambridge in 1823, he wrote the poem *Australasia* which was awarded the second position in the Chancellor's poetry competition for that year.

Wentworth returned to Australia in 1824, and began publishing, with Robert Wardell, the *Australian*, a newspaper which gave expression to the radical political reforms supported by himself and his emancipist followers.

Wentworth took a leading role in the creation of the Australian Patriotic Association in 1835. In 1843 he became an elected member of the Legislative Council. In 1852, under Wentworth's leadership, the Legislative Council demanded and received approval for self-government for New South Wales. Wentworth was the chairman of the committee which was formed to draft the constitution. After his active political career came to an end in 1861, he returned to England in 1862, and lived there until his death in 1872.

As we mentioned above, Wentworth was a significant figure in colonial, cultural and political life: the member for Sydney in the government of New South Wales from 1843, a political rhetorician, poet and prose writer. In his important and widely read early prose work, the *Statistical, Historical and Political Description of the Colonies of New South Wales and its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen's Land* (1819), Wentworth proposes radical reforms and states his aim, which is 'to promote the welfare and prosperity of the country which gave him birth. (Preface, vii)' (30)

2.1.1 Characteristic Features of Wentworth's Poetry

Wentworth's poetic craftsmanship is of a better quality than that of his predecessors in Australia, namely, M.M. Robinson, F. Macnamara and Barron Field. He is not only a more skilled craftsman but also a greater pioneer in focussing attention on the depiction of the new country. Prior to Harpur, Wentworth is the most noteworthy Australian poet who had shown commitment to the new country where he was born. As a result, the place-names and names of typical flora and fauna of Australia endow his otherwise British poetic style with Australian flavour. Wentworth rightly deserves to be regarded as a creditable Australian pioneer-poet.

2.2 AUSTRALASIA : TEXT

From AUSTRALASIA

Illustrious Cook! Columbus of our shore,
To whom was left this unknown world t' expore;
Its untraced bounds on faithful chart to mark,
And leave a light where all before was dark:
And thou, the foremost in fair learning's ranks,
Patron of every art, departed Banks!
Who wealth disdaining, and inglorious ease,
The rocks and quicksands dar'd of unknown seas;
Immortal Pair! when in yon spacious bay!
Ye moor'd awhile its wonders to survey,
How little thought ye, that the name, from you
Its graceful shrubs, and beauteous wild-flowers drew,
Would serve, in after times, with lasting brand
To stamp the soil, and designate the land,
And to ungenial climes reluctant scare
Full many a hive, that else had settled there!
Ah, why, Britannia's pride, Britannia's boast,
Searcher of ev'ry sea, and ev'ry coast,
Lamented Cook! Thou bravest, gentlest heart,
Why didst thou fall beneath a savage dart?
Why were thy mangled relic doom'd to grace
The midnight orgies of a barb'rous race?

Why could'st thou not, thy weary wand'rings past,
 At home in honor'd ease recline at last,
 And, like the happier partner of thy way,
 In cloudless glory close life's setting day?
 And thou, famed Gallic Captain La Prouse!
 When from this Bay thou led'st thy fated crews,
 Did thy twin vessels sink beneath the shock
 Of furious hurricane, or hidden rock?
 Fell ye o'erpower'd on some barbarian strand,
 As fell before, De Langles' butcher'd band?
 Linger'd the remnants of thy shipwreck'd host
 On some parch'd coral isle, some torrid coast,
 Where no green tree, no cooling brook is seen,
 Nought living is, or e'er before has been,
 Save some lone mew blown from her rocky nest
 Had lit perchance her homeward wing to rest;
 Till gnaw'd by want with joy a comrade dead
 They saw, and rav'nous on his body fed,
 And soon his bones pick'd bare, with famished eye
 Each glar'd around, then drew who first should die;
 Till of thy ghastly band the most unblest
 Surviv'd, - sad sepulchre of all the rest;
 And now his last meal gorg'd, with phrenzy fir'd,
 And raging thirst the last lorn wretch expired?
 Whate'er thy fate, thou saw'st the floating arks,
 That peopled this new world, the teeming barks
 That ardent Phillip led to this far shore,
 And seeing them, alas! Wert seen no more.
 Ah! Couldst thou behold what man has done,
 Tho' sev'n revolving lustres scarce have run,
 How wouldst thou joy to see the savage earth
 The smiling parent of so fair a birth!
 Lo! thickly planted o'er the glassy bay,
 Where Sydney loves her beauties to survey,
 And ev'ry morn delighted seen the gleam
 Of some fresh pennant dancing in her stream,
 A masty forest, stranger vessels moor,
 Charg'd with the fruits of ev'ry foreign shore;
 While, landward, - the throng'd quay, the creaking crane,
 The noisy workman, and the loaded wain,
 The lengthen'd street, wide square, and column'd front
 Of stately mansions, and the gushing font,
 The solem church, and busy market throng,
 And idle loungers saunt'ring slow among,
 The lofty windmills, that with outspread sail
 Thick line the hills, and court the rising gale,
 Shew that the mournful genius of the plain
 Driv'n from his primal solitary reign
 Has backward fled, and fix'd his drowsy throne
 In untrod wilds, to muse and brood alone.
 And thou, fair Port! whose trite sister coves
 Peninsulate these walls; whose ancient groves
 High tow'ring southward, rear their giant form,
 And break the fury of the polar storm;
 Fairest of Ocean's daughter! who dost bend
 Thy mournful steps to seek thy absent friend,
 Whence she, - coy wild rose on her virgin couch
 Fled loath from Paramatta's am'rous touch;
 Skirting thy wat'ry path, lo! frequent stand

The cheerful villas'midst their well-cropp'd land;
Here lowing kine, there bounding coursers graze,
Here waves the corn, and there the woody maize,
Here the tall peach puts forth its pinky bloom,
And there the orange scatters its perfume,
While, as the merry boatmen row along,
The woods are quicken'd with their lusty song.
Nor here alone hath labour's victor band
Subdued the glebe, and fertiliz'd the land;
For lo! from where at rocky Portland's head,
Reluctant Hawkesbury quits his sluggard bed
Merging in ocean,-to young Windsor's tow'rs,
And Richmond's high green hills, and native bow'rs-
Thence far along Nepean's pebbled way,
To those rich pastures, where the wild herds stray,
The crowded farmhouse lines the winding stream
On either side, and many a plodding team
With shining ploughshare turns the neighb'ring soil,
Which crowns with double crop the lab'rer's toil.

(Wilkes : 3-6)

2.2.1 Discussion

William Charles Wentworth's long poem *Australasia* was an entry in the Chancellor's gold Medal poetry competition at Cambridge in 1823 on the subject of Australasia.

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, it is rightly observed:

With his opening apostrophe, 'Land of my birth', Wentworth made clear his special position in relation to the topic. The poem attempts to project a distinctively Australian viewpoint and, with its prophecy of future greatness, is one of the first outbursts in Australian literature of nationalistic pride. (44)

So far as the prophecy is concerned, Wentworth had exhibited exemplary farsightedness, particularly at a time when modern civilization in Australia was in its most nascent stage. Whereas in 1819, Barron Field described Australia as 'curst ground' and 'barren wood' in his poem 'The Kangaroo', Wentworth, in 1823, projected a broad view of several towns and country sides which had developed around Sydney, and made a forecast of further growth. Wentworth struck a positive and constructive note in his poem as far as the development and progress of Australia were concerned.

Bruce Bennett avers in this regard:

The poet proclaims himself a 'native bard', and predicts the glorious potential of Australasia, 'last-born infant' of the empire, to take up its national inheritance as 'a new Britannia in another world if that great power should weaken.' (30)

Ian Turner points out the pride of the colonizers in the growth and evolution of the new colony in Australia with illustrations from Wentworth's poem *Australasia*. His observation together with the lines from Wentworth quoted by him are reproduced below:

These, the established landowners and merchants, contrived to make the land their own, but they were not yet of it. With pride born of pioneering achievement, they asserted its claims:

Where Sydney's infant turrets proudly rise,
The newborn glory of the Southern skies...

W.C. Wentworth

but they saw themselves as colonizers, the bearers of an old civilization rather
than the creators of a new;

And, oh, Britannia! shouldst thou cease to ride
Despotic Empress of old Ocean's tide-...
May this, thy last-born infant then arise,
To glad thy heart, and greet thy parent eyes;
And Australasia float, with flag unfurled,
A new Britannia in another world!

(W. C. Wentworth: *Australasia*, 1823) (19)

Green's observations on Wentworth and *Australasia* are revealing and illuminating:

Nobody could have had a deeper love of his country than Wentworth....
Wentworth's poem (*Australasia*), though far superior to anything of
Robinson's or Field's has some historical, if minor poetic, importance. In the
first place it is a proud affirmation of Australian birth and breeding at a time
when polite society and academic circles in England might have been
surprised to read it ... it is a poem which commands respect : it gives a
charming picture of the environs of Sydney which Wentworth knew well, and
of the mountains which he had crossed ... the whole (of the poem) is
instinct with Wentworth's vital and compelling personality, and if it rarely
kindles into high poetry, it is shot through with his ardour and imagination. It
ends with the prophetic vision of the new Britannia that may arise in the
South , if the old one is extinguished; and eloquent expression of a sentiment
which many of Wentworth's countrymen were to inherit. (120 - 1)

Some critics have found fault with Wentworth's poetic idiom and style, alleging that
often his style is stiff and wooden. On the other hand, the twentieth century
Australian poet and critic **A. D. Hope** has found commendable merit in Wentworth's
pioneering style ! In his assessment of Wentworth's position as an early Australian
versifier, Hope highlights the rare features of Wentworth's theme and style :

But anyone who has the taste for eighteenth-century poetry will find it
(*Australasia*) anything but a dull poem. It is beautifully planned, it is plain,
vigorous, passionate and vivid and eloquent, and if its verse is a little rough,
the rugged touch is in keeping with its theme. And it is , in the best
eighteenth - century sense , a public poem, one in which the author whose
purpose was to devote himself to his country and who had taken the trouble
to know it thoroughly, celebrates it in terms which reflect his own patriotic
fervour but in terms that all could share ... (107)

Constructed of rough - hewn couplets *Australasia* is an ode celebrating the
development of a new Britannia in another world. The descriptions of an Aboriginal
corroboree, of the fate of La Perouse, the French explorer, and his expedition, as well
as of Sydney and its surroundings, are among its most admirable sections. In the
poem there are parts which, as an evocation of the Australian past and history, are
comparable with more recent attempts to celebrate Australia, like the ' Last Vision '
section of James McAuley's *Captain Quiros*.

G.A. Wilkes points out another trait in Wentworth's mode of depiction. He observes:

Wentworth selects rather the features that would appear to general
observation, and indicates the pattern that they formed. In his description of
the activity of Sydney Harbour, he follows the same method. Particularity of

observation is not lacking ; it is rather that the particulars are directed to a general effect :

Lo! thickly planted o'er the glassy bay,
Where Sydney loves her beauties to survey,
And ev'ry morn delighted sees the gleam.
Of some fresh pennant dancing in her stream,
A masty forest, stranger vessels moor,
Charg'd with the fruits of ev'ry foreign shore ;
While, landward, -- the throng'd quay, the creaking crane,
The noisy workman, and the loaded wain,
The lengthen'd street, wide square, and column'd front
Of stately mansions, and the gushing font,
The solemn church, and busy market throng,
And idle loungers saunt 'ring slow among (ii - iii)

Finally, Hope's tribute to Wentworth as a poet of Australia in the following lines may be quoted as a balanced assessment of a pioneer - poet of Australia during the first quarter of the nineteenth century :

The oft - quoted description of Sydney is first - rare depiction and the language shows that ability to combine elevated thoughts and down - to - earth description in the same poem, to mingle classical allusions, new terms like kangaroo and emu and new names like Paramatta and the Warragamba without incongruity. It suggests how much easier the assimilation of the Australian scene and life to the language of poetry might have been had the country been settled a century earlier. (107)

The study of Wentworth's *Australasia* puts us in a position to assess how difficult it was for the pioneer- poets of Australia to start a poetic tradition where no tradition had existed. In the early nineteenth century, the Indian English poetry was in a similar situation. But in India, Indian tradition and culture existed when poets like H.L.V. Derozio, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, and Michael Madhusudan Dutt started writing in the first half of the nineteenth century. In Australia, the white people had no local tradition to fall back upon. In this perspective, Wentworth deserves to be reassessed for his contribution as a pioneer- poet of Australia.

2.3 BALLADS AND FOLK SONGS OF AUSTRALIA : A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

The English word 'ballad' is used in a number of different ways, as you can see by looking it up in a dictionary. When it is used in connection with literature it nearly always means (in the words of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*) 'a simple, spirited poem in short stanzas narrating some popular story'. The old English ballads include some of the best and most exciting poetry in the language.

Parallel to the Augustan heritage, in the nineteenth century Australian poetry, as exemplified by the poetry of Wentworth and other educated poets of Australia of the time, there came to Australia a different strand of verse-making, namely, folk- songs and ballads. They came orally with the convicts from Ireland and England. The earthy, colloquial flavour of the orally transmitted folk - songs and ballads infused into Australian poetry racy colloquialism, down-to-earth images, and a flair for common outback life.

The popularity of ballads in Australia increased considerably throughout the century, In the first half of the century, the ballads that appeared were mostly orally

transmitted. But in the second half of the century, poets of considerable merit took up writing the literary ballads in order to project the national life of Australia, and evolve certain characteristic images, metaphors and symbols that specify the features of Australia and Australian lifestyle. Poets like Gordon and Paterson immortalized the ballad form for the Australian nation through literary ballads like 'The Sick Stockrider', and 'The Man from Snowy River' which will be analysed in the subsequent units

Judith Wright makes a fine distinction between the ballads that evolved in Australia and the poetry that was composed in the Augustan mode by the educated Australians in the nineteenth century. Wright comments :

A few ballads achieved print in various newspapers, but in general this was considerably later than the period of their first circulation : on the whole this earthy and constant undercurrent of song, which of course continued far beyond the days of transportation, was orally transmitted. Most of the ballads appear to have been adaptation of English and Irish originals ; but these early songs and recitations had about them an atmosphere of reality which was in general sadly lacking in the productions of literary - minded men such as W.C. Wentworth. (56)

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, reference is made to the times when he ballads in Australia were composed :

In Australia the terms 'folk - song' and 'ballad' describe a body of songs, often but by no means always of anonymous authorship, which tell stories of or depict Australian life and which have had currency among ordinary Australian people as a result of oral performance, particularly between the early days of European settlement and the advent of recordings and the radio. (267)

Edgar Waters throws new light on the character of Australian balladry and show, through illustrations how they relate to Australian life :

The ballads which are fairly certainly convict - made can be numbered off on the fingers of one hand. Perhaps it is surprising that so many have survived for us. All but one of them are in Irish street ballad styles. Before the gold rushes, something like half the population was Irish, if not by birth, then in great degree by cultural background. The Irish street ballad was to remain probably the strongest of all influences on bush song making until near the end of the nineteenth century.

None of the surviving convict-made ballads could have been written earlier than the 1820s. Gentlemanly observers noted that convicts were making ballads before this time, but did not think their words worth the trouble of recording. We need not be in any doubt that they made a powerful appeal to the people who sang them. The most widely sung of them all was the ballad of the convict bushranger Jack Donahoe; it survived in oral tradition into our own day (in North America as well as in Australia). It has been said that the government banned the singing of 'Bold Jack Donahoe'. A formal interdict is undocumented and unlikely, but a Riverina bushman recalled that as late as the 1890s the police took their own steps at least to discourage the singing of ballads of convicts and bushrangers in public places. One of his mates spent the night in the lock - up after singing 'The Wild Colonial Boy' (which, apparently in the 1870s, took the place of 'Bold Jack Donahoe' as the chief of bushranger ballads). Ballads of convicts and bushrangers, this bushman said, were known as *treason songs*; this is the name the Irish gave to some of their songs in the Penal days. Folk song adds a good deal to our knowledge of parts of history which are not well documented in the printed record. (260-1)

'The Wild Colonial boy', which is discussed in the next section, is a striking example of the anonymous ballads of nineteenth century Australia.

2.4 'THE WILD COLONIAL BOY' : TEXT

'Tis of a wild Colonial boy, Jack Doolan was his name
Of poor but honest parents he was born in Castlemaine.
He was his father's only hope, his mother's only joy,
And dearly did his parents love this wild Colonial boy
Chorus
Come, all my hearties, we'll roam the mountains high,
Together we will plunder, together we will die.
We'll wander over valleys, and gallop over plains,
And we'll scorn to live in slavery, bound down with iron chains.
He was scarcely sixteen years of age when he left his father's home,
And through Australia's sunny clime a bushranger did roam.
He robbed those wealthy squatters, their stock he did destroy,
And a terror to Australia was the wild Colonial boy.
In sixty-one this daring youth commenced his wild career,
With a heart that knew no danger, no foeman did he fear.
He stuck up the Beechworth mail coach, and robbed Judge MacEvoy,
Who trembled, and gave up his gold to the wild Colonial boy.
He bade the Judge 'Good Morning', and told him to beware,
That he'd never rob a hearty chap that acted on the square,
And never to rob a mother of her son and only joy,
Or else you may turn outlaw, like the wild Colonial boy.
One day as he was riding the mountain side along,
A - listening to the little birds, their pleasant laughing song,
Three mounted troopers rode along -- Kelly, Davis and FitzRoy.
They thought that they would capture him -- the wild Colonial boy.
'Surrender now, Jack Doolan, you see there's three to one.
Surrender now, Jack Doolan, you daring highwayman'.
He drew a pistol from his belt, and shook the little toy.
'I'll fight but not surrender', said the wild Colonial boy.
He fired a Trooper Kelly, and brought him to the ground
And in return from Davis received a mortal wound.
All shattered through the jaws he lay still firing at FitzRoy
And that's the way they captured him -- the wild Colonial boy.

2.4.1 Discussion

This is a haunting ballad, cast in a cluster of simple words, rhythm and images embodying the heroism of the wild colonial boy. It presents a saga of bravery. Through its rhythm, rhyme and music it reproduces the ethos of the colonial days when bushrangers roamed and galloped through the wide valley in order to remain far away from the iron chains.

The wild colonial boy of the ballad represents the spirit of freedom in Australia, and the sense of heroic independence of the outlawed bushrangers who stood for bravery, and who laid the foundation of future Australia. Hence the ballad in an epitome of Australian bravery and uprightness of character. Therefore, the ballad gained currency among a wide section of Australians; and even now it is read and heard with love, admiration and attachment by all Australians.

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, a summary of the ballad is presented in the following words :

Wild Colonial Boy, The, one of Australia's best known folk-songs, tells the story of an Irish-born bushranger, named Jack Doolan, who terrorizes the squatters, holds up the Beechworth mail coach in the 1860 s and robs Jodge MacEvoy, and is eventually killed when surrounded by three troopers, Kelly, Davis and Fitzroy , to whom he refuses to surrender, (745 - 6)

W.C. Wentworth

In Australia, the popularity of the ballad is such that ' wild colonial boys' became a phrase describing the bushrangers in general, as in Frank Clune's book *Wild Colonial Boys* , and even any Australian sharing their bravado and daring.

A ballad like 'The Wild Colonial Boy' represents the infusion of simplicity and bravery into the composition of Australian poetry. In the subsequent units, you'll find even educated poets like Gordon and Paterson adopted the ballad form for some of their most well known poems.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In the early poetry of Australia, we find an impact of the eighteenth century heroic couplets of British poetry as well as a continuity of ballad tradition from Britain. Thus both literary and popular styles of poetry of Britain may be said to have influenced the poetics of Australian poetry.

W. C. Wentworth represents the best example of the eighteenth century poetic mode practised at the early stage in the development of Australian poetry. Wentworth's poetry is important from another point of view, namely, the Australian orientation in the thematic aspects of evolving the poetic tradition of nineteenth century Australia.

'The Wild Colonial Boy' is an Australian ballad that represents the early history of Australia. It chronicles the story of the escaped convicts who braved the wild bushes of Australia, and laid their lives out of courage and bravado . The outdoor life of the early white Australians and their indomitable spirit to confront the challenges of life in a newly discovered country are typified by the bush hero depicted in the ballads. Thus the ballads and folk songs play an important part in the development of indigenous Australian poetry that depicts the Australian outback and the Australian lifestyle in the nineteenth century. Australian poetry of the nineteenth century thus provides a mirror to the nineteenth century Australia.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that Wentworth has been able to project a vivid picture of Sydney in *Australasia*?
2. Do you think *Australasia* can still be read with pleasure and curiosity? What are the most attractive features of *Australasia*?
3. What is the significance of ballads and folksongs in the development of nineteenth century Australian poetry?
4. Do you think ' The Wild Colonial Boy ' still can hold interest for readers outside Australia?
5. Does ' The Wild colonial Boy ' appeal to you? On what account does the ballad appeal to you?

UNIT 3 CHARLES HARPUR

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Charles Harpur : His Life and Works
- 3.2 Characteristic Features of Harpur's Poetry
- 3.3 'The Bush Fire' : Text
 - 3.3.1 Discussion
- 3.4 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest' : Text
 - 3.4.1 Discussion
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After discussing the growth of Australian poetry in its first phase and the poetry of W.C. Wentworth, let us now turn to the poetry of **Charles Harpur**, who, for the first time on the Australian soil, professed to be known as the *Australian* poet. Though he was underestimated as a poet during his lifetime, he is now recognized as the first Australian poet to write about Australia with a genuine sense of belonging to the country. You will study two of his poems in this unit.

3.1 Charles Harpur: His Life and Works

Charles Harpur was born in 1813 in the valley of Hawkesbury River in New South Wales. Both his parents, Joseph and Sara, were convicts transported to Australia. However, when Charles was born as their third child, they were emancipists. Charles lived his early life at Windsor.

In the little town of Windsor with its central square, its Greenway church and the bridge across the river, Charles discovered his love for poetry and determined on his vocation. Later, in 'The Dream By the Fountain', he wrote of those days, making the Australian Muse address him :

For I felt thee - even then, wildly, wondrously musing
Of glory and grace by old Hawkesbury's side,
Scenes that then spread recordless around those suffusing
With the purple of love - I behold thee, and sighed.
Sighed - for the fire - robe of thought had enwound thee,
Betokening so much that the happy must dread,
And whence there should follow, howe'er it renowned thee,
What sorrows of heart, and what labours of head

(Gifford : 41)

In a manuscript book dated 1851, Harpur gives a self - portrait :

I was earnestly imaginative, simple of mind, and single of heart, I could greatly venerate whatever I could believe in, as being righteous and true. I was affectionate to all -- forgiveness -- perhaps to weakness I was (as I am still) an enthusiast in the cause of human liberty and progress: liberty in all directions and progress infinite. (Wright 1963 : 6)

In 1829, when Harpur was sixteen, his family broke up. He went away to work on the Hunter River, inland from Newcastle, probably as a farm - labourer.

When he was twenty years old . Harpur's verses began to appear in various issues of the colony's newspapers, and thereafter he wrote, and was published, fairly continuously. He was at this time in Sydney where he found occasional employment.

In 1859 he was appointed assistant gold commissioner at Araluen. But a few years after, he was beset with misfortune after misfortune. In 1866 his goldfield position was retrenched. In 1867 his farm at Nerrigundah was ruined by floods. The greatest blow came when his son Charles was killed in a shooting accident. Together with these personal setback, the lack of recognition of his literary efforts made the final years of his life bitter and frustrated. He died in 1868.

Harpur's poetic works are fairly representative of the transition in Australian society during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. In his poetry, he undertook the novel task of adapting English language to communicate the local flavour of Australia, and inculcate a sense of pride in the local scenario and habitation. Harpur's poetry is important in this respect. **Wright** aptly observes :

It seems fairly clear that the young native-born Australians, the ' Currency Lads ' of the early nineteenth century, felt a certain solidarity among themselves, and a pride and independence that may have been a reaction against the earlier days of the settlement, when authority and the heavy hand of English officialdom ruled. Whether Thompson's example decided him or not, Charles Harpur seems to have chosen his calling early. His life from his youth onward was to be remarkable for the tenacity and dedication with which he clung to the almost impossible task of laying the foundation for an Australian poetry, under conditions that would have discouraged most writers. (Wright 1964 : 57)

Harpur's poetical works that were published during his lifetime have already been mentioned in Unit 1. He wrote various types of poetry, from lyric to ode to sonnet to long narrative verses. **Wright** may be quoted again to specify Harpur's commitment to poetry and politics of equality and liberty :

He (Harpur) produced throughout his life not only lyrical and narrative verses by a few of which, of convenient length for reprinting in anthologies, he is generally known, but a flood of polemical and political verse, lampoons and topical epigrams, of fierce sincerity and wit not wholly obscured by the ponderous diction of early nineteenth century verse - journalism. He remained throughout his life (as could not be said of all his early contemporaries) a radical reformist in politics and a believer in Australia's future as a country where equality and liberty might flourish ; but his political aims were always subsidiary to his self-dedication to poetry and the search for philosophic and religious truth. (1964: 58 - 59)

When *The Bushrangers and Other Poems* was published in 1853 , forty poems were included in the volume. The rigidity of augustan mode was relaxed in Harpur's poetry which, however, indicated a broader assimilation of the influence of Milton, Wordsworth and Shelley, Thus Harpur's poetry brought about a change in the evolution of Australian poetry.

His poem ' The Creek of the Four Graves ' is a long poem, narrating the story of settlers murdered by Aborigines, that has remained as his best - known longer work . This work indicates the particular quality of Harpur's observation of Australian landscape and his indebtedness to Wordsworth. 'The Bush Fire' is an excellent piece of local description. The same will be analysed in a subsequent section.

The following observation by **Wright** on the relation of Harpur and Kendall as poets throws into sharp relief Harpur's essential concerns and achievement as an Australian poet of the nineteenth century :

What took Kendall's imagination in Harpur's poetry was probably less the elder man's method and manner than his dedication to the ' Australian Muse ' and his treatment of Australian subjects. (1964 . 64)

Also, the following assessment of **Bruce Bennett** is noteworthy:

Charles Harpur, Australian-born son of emigrant parents, is, however, the only poet of this period, who achieves an original 'Australian Voice: Harpur successfully adopted English poetic forms as well as classical cultural traditions to the conditions of Australian colonial life, and his poetry conveys his delight in the Hawkesbury River country side in which he grew up; his passionate republican beliefs and political reformism; his religious mysticism; and his condemnation of tyranny. His work often radical in tone and he was an accomplished satirist. (28)

3.2 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF HARPUR'S POETRY

After knowing Harpur's importance as an Australian poet, and his contribution to the growth of Australian poetry, you'll be familiarized with certain distinctive features of his poetry.

The first change that Harpur introduced into Australian poetry is the assimilation of the Wordsworthian concept of the poet as one ' endowed with a more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness ... and a more comprehensive soul ' (Wordsworth : 737). **Wilkes** observes :

The theory of poetry as primarily a form of self - expression, and of the poet himself as a special kind of being ... becomes firmly established in Australian verse with Charles Harpur. (iii)

Thus Harpur's poetry endowed Australian poetry with a new dimension. From stiff Augustan poetic mode, Australian poetry was released ; it came under the impact of Romantic poetry through Harpur's poetic efforts

Through Harpur's poetry, the impact of both Milton and Wordsworth was transmitted to Australian poetry. In Harpur's imagination, poetry assumed the persona of an inspiring Muse. In one of his early poems, ' The Dream by the Fountain', Harpur expresses his dedication to poetry and in particular to the Australian Muse, the poetic genius of his own country. The poem is illustrative of the characteristics of Harpur's poetry both in terms of his thematic preoccupations and stylistic attainment:

I am the Muse of the Evergreen Forest,
I am the spouse of thy spirit, lone Bard !
Ev'n in the days when thy boyhood there worst
Thy pastimes drew on thee my dearest regard.
For I felt thee - ev'n wildly, wondrously musing
Of glory and grace by old Hawkesbury's side,
Scenes that then spread recordless around thee suffusing
With the purple of love -- I beheld thee, and sighed ...
Then would I prompt in the still hour of dreaming
Some thought of thy beautiful country again,

Of her yet to be famed streams, through dark woods far - gleaming,
 Of her bold shores that throb to the beat of the main ...
 Be then the Bard of thy Country ! O rather
 Should such be thy choice than a monarchy wide!
 Lo, 'tis the land of the grave of thy father!
 'Tis the cradle of Liberty ! Think, and decide ...

Charles Harpur

(Wright 1964 : 62)

Harpur's experiences in the environs of the Hawkesbury River during his early youth cast a profound influence on his choice of the subject matter of his poetry. His love of the mountains and valleys that he roamed through in the Hawkesbury countryside manifests itself again and again in his verses. He particularly highlights the effects of light of dawn, noon, sunset and moonlight as well as 'the light that never was on sea or land, (Wordsworth : 452) on the Australian landscape so dear to him.

However, though Harpur had to struggle to make the prevailing verse style of the Australian poets adaptable and pliant enough for the depiction of the strange landscape of Australia, some of the best lines in 'The Creek of Four Graves', as quoted below, cannot claim to be entirely free from the impact of the eighteenth century English poetic diction :

Out extending , lo,

The heights rose crowding, with their summits all
 Dissolving, as it seemed, and partly lost
 In the exceeding radiancy aloft ;
 And thus transfigured, for a while they stood
 Like a great Company of Archeons, crowned
 With burning diadems, and tented o'er
 With canopies of purple and of gold!

(Wilkes : 17)

The theme of Nature became a dominant subject in Australian poetry with the advent of Harpur. Perhaps it was also timely, as there was a need to project the Australian landscape in the poetry of the time in order to make it Australian, which was the avowed aim and mission of Harpur as a poet. Harpur represents Nature in his poetry in its larger movements -- as seen in a bushfire or a storm in the mountains, or in the darkness enveloping those lost in the bush. Wilkes observes :

Indeed what identifies the scenery as Australian for Harpur is not the presence of the dingo or bidawong, the wattle or the eucalypt but this sense of immensity ... Among the " large effect " which he captures most strikingly are the effects of light in Australian forest and mountain , sometimes shimmering, sometimes dazzling, or flooding the view :

Before them, thus extended, wilder grew
 The scene each moment - and more beautiful!
 For when the sun was all but sunk below
 Those barrier mountains , - in the breeze that o'er
 Their rough enormous backs deep fleeced with wood
 Came whispering down, the wide upslanting sea
 Of fanning leaves in the descending rays
 Danced interdazzlingly, as if the trees
 That bore them were all thrilling -- tingling all
 Even to the roots for very happiness :
 So prompted from within, so sentient, seemed
 The bright quick motion - wildly beautiful.

("The Creek of the Four Graves")

Here again nature is made to seem sentient, as though sharing the consciousness of the beholder, and the emphasis falls on the "wildly beautiful" quality of the scene. (Wilkes: v)

Finally, the two features that mark out Harpur as the progenitor of serious indigenous Australian poetry are his appreciation of the landscape of his country, its mountains and 'yet-to-be found streams', and his faith in his own mission as a poet.

For him, the important qualities of Australian scenery were its light (his mountains appear again and again, but always transfigured by different qualities of light) and its solitude. Wright has rightly pointed out:

Human figures are always part of his landscapes ('The Creek of the Four Graves', 'A storm in the Mountains', 'A Storm in the Mountains', 'The Kangaroo Hunt', etc.) -- but they often seem dwarfed by the sky and the surroundings. His poems on people and events, conversely, ('Ned Connor', 'To an Echo on the Banks of the Hunter', 'Lost in the Bush') often contain sudden glimpses of the surroundings that act as a counter-point to the story. This vision, of landscape emphasized as it were by human occupation of humanity against a background of landscape (usually a solitary and strange landscape of trees and hills) is characteristic of Harpur. (1964: 63-64)

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Harpur's accent on Australian landscape as well as his handling of traditional verse forms for projecting the Australian scenery are highlighted:

In the early years of settlement, when colonial poetry was largely ignored or derided, Harpur's ambition was to be Australia's first authentic poetic voice. He believed that Australian poetry should be modeled upon traditional English verse before seeking its own individuality. Thus his own poetry relies heavily on traditional poetic techniques such as ornamental diction, wide use of personification and metaphor, solemnity of tone and ponderous movement, while attempting on some occasions at least to describe and interpret the colonial Australian scene, such attempts include his nature poems, 'A Mid-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest', 'Dawn and Sunrise in the Snowy Mountains', 'The Bush Fire' and 'A Storm in the Mountains', which describe some of the typical though more dramatic components of the Australian landscape, and convey a sense of vast distance and wide horizons. (318-319)

Thus the significance of Harpur's position as a pioneer-poet of Australia during the nineteenth century may be perceived when we take into account his initiative and sustained efforts at enlarging the thematic range and stylistic variety of Australian poetry. Marks of the influence of some British poets on Harpur's poetry, however, only accentuate the depth and range of his endeavour to broaden the parameters of Australian poetics for the purpose of verbalizing the patriotic and national concerns of the Australians, in general, as their nation was gradually heading towards her own identity. Harpur is a representative poet embodying the Australians' reach for identity within the framework of a transplanted culture.

3.3 'THE BUSH FIRE': TEXT

I

'Tis nine o'clock -- to bed! cried Egremont,
Who, with his youthful household, long ago,
(The sturdy father of seven sturdy boys)
Dwelt in a lone home nested far within

Our virgin Forest, that, scarce broken then,
As with an unshorn fleece of gloomy wood
Robed the vast bulk of all the mighty Isle
But ere retiring finally, he went
Forth as his wont was to survey the night.

'Twas clear and silent; and the stirless woods
Looked dreaming in the witch-light of the Moon,
As, like a boat of stained pearl, she rode
Dipping, as 'twere, with a propendent motion
Amid the ridges of a wavy cloud -- --
The only cloud in heaven : round which afar,
The larger stars out of the depths of space
Swelled pendulous, trembling with a glow globose --
So keenly clear the night. And while our Friend
Looked thus observingly abroad, he marked
All round him, listing the horizon's verge,
Save where against the starry aether, one
Enormous ridge drew its black line along,
A broad unusual upward glaring gleam --
Such a drear radiance as the setting sun
Diffuses when the atmosphere is stormy.
Nor long was he in doubt whence this arose --
Divining soon the cause -- a vast Bush Fire !
But deeming it too distant yet for harm,
During the night betiding, to repose
With his bed-faring household he retired.
Sound was their sleep ; for honesty of life
Is somewhat lumpish when 'tis once a -bed.
And now the darkness of the night was past
When with the dreams of Egremont , a strange
And momentarily approaching roar began
To mingle, and insinuate through them more
And more of its own import -- till a Fire
Huge in imagination as the world,
Was there sole theme : then, as arising wild,
His spirit fled before its visioned fear,
He started from his sleep -- to find indeed
The hardly (it seemed) exaggerated type's
Conflagrant hugeness, from abroad derived
In warning! For what else, however terrible,
Save ocean snoring to a midnight storm,
Might breathe with a vitality at once
So universal, so immense, and fierce,
As that which now reigned roarily without.
Upleaping from his couch, scarce did he wait
To clothe himself, ere forth he rushed, -- and, lo,
Within the circling forest he beheld
A vast and billowy belt of writhing fire,
That shed a wild and lurid splendour up
Against the whitening dawn, come raging on !
Raging and roaring as with ten thousand tongues
That prophesied destruction ! On it came !
Devouring with a lapping hungriness
Whatever shrivelled in its scorching breath --
A dreadful Apparition ! -- such as Fear
Conceives when dreaming of the front of Hell !
No time was there to lose. "Up -- Up !" he cried
To all the house ! instantly all within
Was haste and wonder, and in briefest space

The whole roused family was staring out
In speechless admiration ! Yea, in that
Wild sympathetic union with the Terrible,
Which in the sudden and unlooked for midst
Of a tremendous danger, oft ensues,
And, for a time, through its own extreme,
Keeps terror dormant ! But more urgently,
The voice of Egremont again was heard ; --
" Lose not a moment ! Follow me at once !
Each with whatever he can grasp of use,
And carry unencumbered as he flies ! "
Out from the doorway, right before them,--lo,
A narrow strip of clearing, like a glade,
Stretched on tow'rds a bald summit. Thitherward
The periled people now were hurrying all;
While in their front, beneath the ridge, a dense
Extent of brushwood into which the Fire's
Bright teeth were ravening, -near, and nearer, brought
The rapid danger! Shall they reach that hill
Unscathed, their only refuge? Well they speed
Past the red-rushing fronts of fire! and see,
As thus they hurry on, how more and more
Disclosing spectre-like from the red gloom,
And brushing through them with long whizzing bounds,
The kangaroos string forth in Indian file
Across that strip of clear; with here and there
A wild dog slinking rapidly along
Amid the general rout, human and brute!
And all, for once, unharried as they go
By those keen foes of theirs, the household dogs,
That whining hang upon their master's flight
As it strains onward, so bewildered seem they ! -
Thus passingly involved, yet pauseless rush
Our people - urged into a desperate pace
By the glare that now comes sweltering round,
And the loud roar that loudens all along
The line of their wild flight, as if the flames
Were wrathful at their prospect of escape
And hurried also - hurried with a swoop,
And raged more ruinously while they weaved
To intercept and blast them! - But at length,
The brush-bald border of the summit's gained,
Even as the Fire, upon the left hand, breaks
Against the hill's base like a ruddy surge;
And halting, they look back - in safety all,
Though scorched and blistered by the cinders, blown
Like burning sleet against them as they ran.
But see, no sooner had they crowding passed
Out from the brush, where into a broad dell
It dipped on all hands round a sullen pool,
And where the rank and withered runners lay
In tangled heaps, - than a vast swath of flame
Lifted and hurried forward by the wind
Over their very passage track, was pitched
Sheer into it, with a loud thud like thunder!
With such a thud as the sea-swell gives up
From under the ledges of some hanging cliff;
And, in an instant, all the wide sere depth
Was as a lake of Hell! And hark! As then,

Even like a ghastly pyramid the mass
 Of surging flames, inlapping as they rose,
 And welding as it were all into one
 Dense pile, rushed lancing up, - up with them still
 A long mad shriek of mortal agony went
 Writhing aloft! - so terrible indeed
 That those who heard it, never, until then,
 Might deem a voice so earnest in its fear,
 So strenuous in its anguish, could have being,
 In the live bosom of the suffering world!
 But soon did they divine, even to their loss,
 Its import; there a giant Steed, their best,
 Had taken cover, and had perished so.

II

Tented with heaven only, but all grouped
 In safety now upon that hill's bare top-
 Egremont and his household looked abroad
 Astonished at the terrors of the time!
 Down sunk their roof-tree in the fiery surge:
 Which entering next a high-grassed bottom, thick
 With axe ringed trees all standing bleak and leafless,
 Tenfold more terrible in its ravage grew,
 Upclimbing to their tops! And soon, as when
 Upon some day of national festival,
 From the tall spars of the ship-crowded port,
 Innumerable flags, in one direction all,
 Tongue outward, writhing in the wind; even so,
 From those dry boles where still the dead bark clings
 Hanging in ragged strips half shelled away,
 And from their intermingled mass above
 Of withered boughs, myriads of flaming tongues
 Lick upward, or aloft in narrowing flakes
 Stream quivering out upon the tortured blast-
 Quivering and flapping and committing all
 Into one wide and multifarious blaze!
 Scared ever onward, in successive starts
 By the fast following roarings of the Fire,
 A flight of parrots o'er the upper ridge
 Comes whizzing, and then circling low, alights
 In a gay colored crowd amid the oaks
 That skirt as with a feathery fringe the base
 Of yon steep terrace, being, as it seems,
 Deterred from still proceeding by the smoke
 Uprolled in front, heap ridging over heap,
 Like a dim moving range of spectral mountains.
 There they abide, and listen in their fear
 To the tremendous riot of the flames
 That out beyond the range comes billowing fast,
 Though yet unseen from thence, - till, with a hoarse
 And pouncing swoop, as of a hurricane,
 Furiously seizing on the drouth-sered brakes
 That shag the terrace, all their serpent shapes
 Rush upward, glaring into sudden view,
 And ghastly prominence; then quick as thought,
 All culminating in the blast, they bend
 Sheer o'er the oaks wherein the birds abide!
 At once are these in flight! But from above,

As suddenly, a mightier burst of flame
Outsheeteth o'er them: down they dip-but it
Keeps swooping with them even to the ground,
(Drawn thither by leaf-drifts, layer on layer
There lodged, as rain swept from the heights above)
And writhe convulsed - blasted and plumeless all!
Out through the Forest looming through the smoke
Where dim and mist-like, farthest forth it rolls,
Behold how furiously a horseman rides,
Hitherward tending. 'Tis a Messenger,
Sent from the nearest Station, though thus late,
To warn our people of the mighty Fire
Ere haply it reach them :-- telling them in time
How there, so lately, its red waves had brought
Sudden destruction, and wide loss --and then
Surged on illimitably through the woods,
Bearing right hitherward. Bravely on he steers
To where the fronting flames from either hand
Are closing to a gap! No other way,
All round, is open ; and he nears it -- But
Too late, alas ! or so to those it seems
Who watch him from the clear. Too late, for lo,
The lines of fire (ere't seemed they would) have met,
And man and horse are swallowed out of sight
In one red gloom of mingled flame and smoke!
But for a moment only. Bursting forth,
As if developed from that lurid mass,
The noble hackney brings his rider through,
All but unsinged. Our friends hurrah; and he
Soon joins them -- welcome, though too late for help.

Thus through the day the conflagration raged :
And when the sings of night o'erspread the scene,
Not even they with all their world - wide pomp
Of starry blazonries , wore such a live
And aggregate glory to the eye,
As did the blazing dead wood of the Forest --
On all hands blazing ! Yet , for off , the dells
Lay like black gouts amid the general view
Of glimmering height, which through the red light showed
Like some imaginary waste of Hell,
Painted in blood.

But nearer , all the view
Was frightfully brilliant ! From vast hollow trunks
Whose ponderous heads, in some great hurricane,
Where the bole narrowed had been snapt away,
The wild fire, with a sudden roar , would burst
In quivering columns chapitered with smoke
Half turned itself into a lurid glow,
As out of craters; or some carious bough,
The white heat seething from its spouty flaws,
Would, with a dread crash , from the hill-top trees
(Massing aloft over the gleamy dark
That shut in under some o'erjutting steep)
Swoop flaming , like an unsphered group of stars,
Torn and disfeatured in their ruinous fall,
And run together ,-- a swift dropping mass
Of luminous points, and flaring limbs, that met

All in one fiery train, back streaming, -- all
 It shattered as it struck the blackened vale
 Into a cloud of quick resulting sparks,
 And igneous dust! Or down the flickery glades
 Ghastfully glaring, huge dry-mouldered gums
 Stood 'mid their living kin as barked throughout
 With eating fire expelling arrowy jets
 Or blue -- lipt, intermitting, gaseous flame,
 Boles, branches, -- all ! like vivid ghosts of trees,
 Frightful to see ! -- the immemorial wood's
 First hoary Fathers wrapt in burning shrouds,
 Come from the past, within the Whiteman's pale,
 To typify their doom. Such was the prospect !
 Illuminated cities were but jests
 Compared with it for splendor. But enough !
 Where are the words to paint the million shapes
 And unimaginable freaks of Fire,
 When holding thus its monster carnival
 In the primeval Forest all night long ?

(Wilkes: 28-35)

3.3.1 Discussion

The above poem was published in the volume entitled *The Bushrangers and Other Poems* in 1853. The various features of Harpur's poetry that have been discussed in the preceding section are well illustrated in the long narrative-cum-descriptive poem 'The Bush Fire'. The poem is outstanding on various counts.

First of all, this is the first poem in English on a typically Australian natural phenomenon. Harpur is a pioneer-poet in this respect. He presents a vividly graphic portrait of the bush fire that used to rage in Australia during those days. That Harpur utilized the language of Britain to portray a nature-phenomenon of Australia, and that too, he succeeded superbly in his poetic effort, at a time when he did not have any outstanding predecessor in the field, corroborates the creative originality of Harpur as an Australian poet.

The poem is outstanding in another respect. It has been able to create and preserve the portrait of the Australian bush fire of the nineteenth century. The bush fire was a wild ferocious occurrence of nature at a time when the bush was an all-pervasive phenomenon in colonial Australia. Thus the poem is not only a pioneer effort in the description in verse of the bush fire but also remains a historical document of the ecosystem of Australia of the nineteenth century. Therefore, Harpur's poem is significant also on the historical ground.

Though Harpur was influenced by Wordsworth, Harpur's distinctiveness as a poet of Australian landscape lies in the fact that he did not minimise the horrific and destructive aspects of Australian landscape of that time. 'The Bush Fire' offers a record of nineteenth century Australian landscape in its tooth and claw.

Another significant aspect of Harpur's nature-poem is that he always places human beings against the natural setting to establish the relation between mankind and nature. It is pertinent to note that the poem starts with a man, Egremont by name, who is the father of seven sturdy boys. Egremont mentions human time ('Tis nine o'clock') and affirms discipline in the house by asking all the inmates of the house to go to bed by then ('-- to bed ! cried Egremont').

Another point to notice is that the poet is level-headed and down-to-earth in his description of nature without the diffuseness and vague romanticism of Shelley's

poetry. The horror and destructive power of advancing Bushfire are presented with vivid accuracy and telling effects in the following line:

Within the circling forest he beheld
A vast and billowy belt of writhing fire
That shed a wild and lurid splendor up
Against the whitening dawn, come raging on!
Raging and roaring as with ten thousand tongues
That prophesied destruction! On it came!
Devouring with a lapping hungriness
Whatever shrivelled in its scorching
A dreadful Apparition!-Such as fear
Conceives when dreaming of the front of Hell !

In the poem, the description of the flight of humanity followed by animals from the advancing bushfire becomes a dramatic and spectacular, almost cinematic, representation of a large movement of living beings against a sentient natural phenomenon. Brilliant passages after passages fill the poem with a rich tapestry of memorable poetic effects.

The dramatic scenario becomes much more humanly interesting when the poet introduces a horseman, a messenger from the nearest station (which, in Australia, at that time meant a ranch for raising sheep) hurrying towards the mountain top where Egremont along with the members of his family and neighbours have taken shelter from the bush. The messenger on the horse seems for a moment to be swallowed by the fire but the horse carries him out from the fire !

Bursting forth,
As if developed from that lurid mass.
The noble hackney brings his rider through,
All but unsinged. Our friends hurrah; and he
Soon joins them-welcome, though too late for help.

Thus nature and man, together with the animal, at the time of a crisis phenomenon like the bushfire are portrayed movingly by Harpur. The event was so vast and engulfing, and the bushfire so rampant throughout arid Australia of that time that Harpur felt the inadequacy of words for portraying the savagery of bushfire raging through the continent. He is an honest poet who confessed the difficulties of a pioneer poet when he concluded the poem with the following words:

Where are the words to paint the million
And unimaginable freaks of Fire,
When holding thus its monster carnival
In the primeval Forest all night long?

However, despite Harpur's perception of his limitations, the poem 'The Bush Fire' proves the creative ability of Harpur in making memorable poetry out of the newly discovered country of Australia

3.4 'A MID-SUMMER NOON IN THE AUSTRALIAN FOREST': TEXT

Not a bird disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere;
Over plains and over woods
What a mighty stillness broods.
Even the grasshoppers keep

Where the coolest shadows sleep;
 Even the busy ants are found
 Resting in their pebbled mound;
 Even the locust clingeth now
 In silence to the barky bough;
 And over hills and over plains
 Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.

Only there's a drowsy humming
 From yon warm lagoon slow coming:
 'Tis the dragon-hornet-see!
 All bedaubed resplendently
 With yellow on a tawny ground-
 Each rich spot nor square nor round,
 But rudely heart-shaped, as it were
 The blurred and hasty impress there,
 Of a vermeil-cruet seal
 Dusted o'er with golden meal:
 Only there's a droning flight
 With a slanting track of light,
 Till rising in the sunshine higher,
 Its shared flame out like gems on fire.
 Every other thing is still,
 Save the ever wakeful rill,
 Whose cool murmur only throws
 A cooler comfort found repose:
 Or some ripple in the sea
 Of leafy boughs, where lazily,
 Tired summer in her forest bower
 Turning with the noontide hour,
 Heaves a slumbrous breath, ere she
 Once more slumbers peacefully.
 O'tis easeful here to lie
 Hidden from Noon's scorching eye,
 In this grassy cool recess
 Musing thus of Quietness.

(Wilkes : 1 - 16)

3.4.1 Discussion

That Harpur was capable of writing poetry on a variety of the natural scenery of Australia of the nineteenth century becomes evident in ample measure when we turn from 'The Bush Fire' in the preceding section to 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest' in this section. In the last poem, he encountered the ravaging aspect of Australian nature; in the poem 'A Mid-Summer Noon' which was first published in the newspaper *Empire* in 1858, Harpur presents a soothing picture of Australian midday in summertime when all sounds are hushed into 'Quietness'.

'A Mid-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest' is perhaps the best-known and most anthologized poem. It has been appreciated and praised for 'its creation of the hushed somnolent atmosphere of the summer noonday in the Australian bush' (OCAL : 480).

The most striking feature of the poem is its soothing, lulling lyricism. Whereas 'The Bush Fire' is written in blank verse, Harpur uses trimeter rhyming couplets in 'A Mid-Summer Noon'. This exhibits the wide range of Harpur's command over a variety of metrical patterns. In 'A Mid-Summer Noon', the poet uses a tripping rhythm with several metrical variations in order to convey and impress the lyrical atmosphere and mood on the reader's mind. Harpur's art has been so effective that the reader's response is immediate. The poet's insistence on the pervading mood of quietness that

he observes in the entire range of the landscape at that particular point of time in the Australian forest, results in the production of one sustained lulling rhythm. At that period of time in Australian poetry, such a poetic phenomenon was unique.

The loneliness of the Australian landscape is accentuated when the poet concludes the four-line first stanza with the following words:

What a mighty stillness broods.

The picture that is evoked is entirely in contrast to the one evoked in 'The Bush Fire'. 'A Mid-Summer Noon' is not only a lyric in form but also a romantic lyric as it expresses the poet's personal perception. What, however, redeems the poem is the fact that the private perception is communicated through a set of images that record and perpetuate the impression of loneliness in the quiet landscape of Australia.

The grasshopper, ants, locust, all the small insects accentuate the loneliness of the Australian forest where

Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.

Word upon word, image upon image evolve the atmosphere of the quiet and vast Australia. All sights and sounds of nature, marshalled into the poem, emphasize the quietude of the place, the novel place, the just-discovered continent.

The influences of the poetry of England may be there but all have been harnessed to portray Australia. Thus the Muse of the Forest that exhorted Harpur to 'Be then the Bard of thy country' finds fulfilment of her prophecy through the poetry of Harpur. Harpur may be regarded as the originator of Australian poetry, and 'A Mid-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest' may be said to have begun Australian lyricism in the nineteenth century.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Harpur's position in the nineteenth century Australian poetry is unique. He is the first Australian poet who seriously took upon himself the task of developing Australian poetry. For Harpur, poetry was not a mere amateurish pastime. He gave Australian poetry a mission and a goal. He harnessed the resources of British poetry for portraying the various aspects of Australian landscape and Australian people. Chaucer is said to be the father of English poetry, you may say Harpur is the father of Australian poetry.

Australians find themselves and their country reflected in Harpur's poetry. Thus for them as well as for us as the students of Australian poetry, Harpur is one of the most remarkable poets who deserve a thorough study. Hence, two of his significant poems have been studied in detail in this unit.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Harpur should be regarded as the father of Australian poetry? State the reasons in defence of your answer.
2. What are the specific aspects of Harpur's contribution to the growth and development of Australian poetry?

3. Do you think 'The Bush Fire' is representative of Harpur's poetic achievement? Give reasons with illustrations in defence of your answer.
4. In what aspects is 'A Mis-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest' typical of Harpur's nature poetry?
5. Can you trace any influence of British Romantic poetry in Harpur's poetic works?

Charles Harpur

UNIT 4 HENRY KENDALL

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Henry Kendall: His Life and Works
- 4.3 Characteristic Features of Kendall's Poetry
- 4.4 'Bell Birds': Text
 - 4.4.1 Discussion
- 4.5 'After Many Years': Text
 - 4.5.1 Discussion
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the last unit, you've learnt how Harpur contributed to the growth of Australian poetry by writing verses on Australian landscape and people, and by modulating English language for projecting the Australian images and reflecting an urgent commitment to the development of the Australian nation. Harpur was followed by Henry Kendall. In this unit, you will study two poems of Kendall.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Kendall was born when Charles Harpur was twenty six years old. In 1862 Kendall's first volume of poems *Poems and Songs* was published. Kendall confesses in a letter to Harpur:

I feel already deeply indebted to you for the great good and large comfort. I have derived from your writings. There is no living author to whom I could turn and say as much. This may be a necessary result of my Australian birth and education. But, strangely fascinated by almost everything you have published, I have always looked upon you as the man who alone could express what I had so often dimly thought. (Harpur: 159)

The relation between Harpur and Kendall enshrines a phenomenon of succession in the field of Australian poetry during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Kendall strengthens the position of Harpur through his admiration of Harpur's poetry.

In this unit, we'll examine the nature and quality of Kendall's poetic efforts, and the contribution of the same towards the growth and development of nineteenth century Australian poetry. Kendall continues with the love and admiration of Australian landscape, and enhances the commitment to the projection of Australian lifestyle. However, it may be noted that Kendall developed much more fluency and command over English metrics and rhythm but the enchantment created by his verbal music sometimes reduces the depth and profundity of his poetic portraits. Still Kendall is quite notable for perpetuating the Harpurian tradition till Gordon and Paterson appear on the Australian poetic scenario.

By the time Kendall had attained maturity of youth and met Harpur and got acquainted with his works, Australia, as a country of white settlers, was more than sixty years old. Australia started producing quality wool, gold and other minerals, its population had increased, and people's sense of isolation diminished. Australia was on her way to nationhood, as Harpur had hoped. But still the country was in her transitional phase. Kendall's poetry reflects this stage of transition through his portrayal of the landscape, the people and the society. Even his poetic craftsmanship involving a manipulation of the British poetic tradition for projecting the land of emus, peacocks and kangaroos reflects the phase of transition in Australia. Kendall is an important Australian poet since his poetry mirrors the transition period in Australia.

It is Kendall who recognized and celebrated the importance of the poetic talent of Harpur, and valued his supremacy among the poets following in his footsteps. A few lines from his poem addressed to C.H. are quoted follow:

I would sit at your feet, for I feel
I am one of a glorious band
That ever will own you and hold you their chief
And a monarch of song in the land!

(Wright 1966:21)

In his poem on the death of Harpur, Kendall pinpoints how the Australian landscape has found a permanent image in Harpur's poetry:

Strange words of wind, and rhymes of rain,
And whispers from the inland fountains,
Are mingled in his various strain
With leafy breaths of piny mountains.

(Wilkes:88)

Through his admiration of Harpur's poetry, and his emphasis on certain features of Harpur's poetry, Kendall betrays his own predilections. Kendall too was a poet of Australian landscape and had assimilated the influence of the Romantic and British Victorian poetry of Britain.

Kendall spent his impressionable boyhood in the coastal districts of Illawara in the South and the Clarence river in the north. Their cool moist rainforests, deep shadowed gullies and lush pastures are evocatively portrayed in Kendall's best-known poems, the landscape lyrics such as 'Bell-Birds', 'September in Australia', 'Araluen', and 'Narrara Creek'.

Kendall spent his childhood among the mountains. The death of his father brought misfortune to his family but, while it seems to have made a lonely wanderer of him, it brought him into contact with a landscape which was to dwell with him all his life. At the age of fifteen he went to sea for two years on a whaling cruise, as cabin boy in a ship owned by his uncle.

Returning to Sydney, he found commonplace employment and began to write verse. The fluency of his verses at once brought him to the notice of a small circle of literary personalities in Sydney. Henry Parkes published some of his verses in *The Empire*, and by 1861 there were proposals for the publication of a volume. *Poems and songs* appeared in 1862. Although generously received by local and some British critics, the volume failed to sell its first edition of 500 copies. Beset by debts and personal problems, including a growing dependence on both literacy patronage and alcohol, Kendall sought a new life in Melbourne after his marriage in 1868.

Kendall's second volume *Leaves from Australian Forests* was published in Melbourne in 1869. The failure of the Melbourne venture which led to increasing poverty, alcoholism and the death of his daughter Araluen, brought him back to Sydney in 1870, where the rapid disintegration of his personal and literary life continued.

This painful period, described by him as 'The shadow of 1872', brought alienation from his wife and periods of treatment for addiction in the Gladesville asylum. He was restored to health and sanity, and cured of alcoholism, by the extraordinary kindness of the Fagan family, timber merchants of Gosford and Sydney, who for two years 1872 - 75, looked after his rehabilitation in their home near Gosford.

In 1876 Kendall was reunited with his wife and family when he began a new life at the Fagan timber mill at Camden Haven on the north coast of New South Wales. His return to writing was signalled by his winning the *Sydney Morning Herald's* International Exhibition poetry competition in 1879, and by the publication of his final volume *Songs from the Mountains* in 1880.

In 1881 he was appointed Inspector of Forests by Sir Henry Parkes, his long - time patron. But Kendall's health deteriorated under the strain of the travelling and work associated with his new position. He died in 1882 in Sydney of phthisis when he was only forty - three.

Henry Kendall, like most of the other Australian colonial poets, fell into partial eclipse from the 1920s until the 1950s when the revival of interest in the colonial phase started. But like Harpur he can now be seen quite clearly as an important and impressive poet in his own right. There is still perhaps a slight tendency to underestimate his work and his value but there can be no doubt that *Leaves from the Australian Forests* and *Songs from the Mountains* are two of the most important books of the Australian colonial poetry, books which, whatever the merits of the individual poems, have a total impact greater than their parts.

Green has made an accurate estimate of Kendall's position as an Australian poet. It will be most appropriate if we conclude this section with an excerpt from Green's assessment of Kendall :

Kendall is much more than merely a landmark in Australian poetry ; Harpur was that and a little more as well, but Kendall is one of Australia's leading poets, and a landmark besides : his limitations are as evident as his qualities, but his position is unassailable, in its own kind, has not been surpassed here, and in the poetry of the English-speaking peoples also he has a definite place, if not a high one. The two strands that have come together to form Australian literature were for the first time interwoven in Kendall's second book of poems, *Leaves from Australian Forests* ; in 1869, eighty years after its beginnings, the young literature has produced a book that was Australian in a sense in which no other book has been: with this, therefore, Australian literature, in the narrower sense of the word, may be said to have begun; the rootlet had not merely struck, it had produced a bud. This fact was early recognized in England as well as Australia; besides the *Athenaeum's* praise, Wilde in a by no means favourable review of Sladen's *Century of Australian Song*, which contained some of Kendall's best work, spoke of his marvellous music and said that his poetry was " full of beautiful things"; and some of Kendall's poems were included by Palgrave in his *Golden Treasury* and by Quiller-Couch in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*.

Then, in the words of **Bruce Bennett**, 'Kendall's work has had substantial critical support from scholars. (60)

4.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF KENDALL'S POETRY

Henry Kendall

Kendall will be remembered for presenting the images of Australian landscape in lilting rhythm. His pictures of the natural sights and sounds of Australia are suffused with a sadness emanating from his heart that was often burdened with a sense of melancholy. Some critics regard his melancholy as a mark of weakness that even affects his craftsmanship. Perhaps it is the colonial environment in which he had to live and write poetry that led to the sadness and listlessness in his character and poetry.

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, it is rightly pointed out :

Kendall's literary reputation, extraordinarily high in his own lifetime and immediately after his death but never at the same peak in this century, still rests chiefly on his lyric poetry. 'Bell - Birds', 'September in Australia', and 'The Song of Cattle Hunters', with their elaborate word pictures, extravagant melody and haunting melancholy, endeared themselves to succeeding generations of Australian readers and established Kendall as a favourite school room poet. (384)

The *Companion* mentions other types of poetry written by Kendall as well:

Kendall's affectionate though tart commentaries on the colonial outback types, e.g. 'Bill the Bullock Driver' and 'Jim the Splitter' are now seen to have anticipated Henry Lawson's and A.B. Paterson's portraits of similar bush characters His love poetry, especially 'Rose Lorraine' and 'At Nightfall', which tell of his lost love for Rose Benett, and the poignant 'Araluen' and 'On a Street', which reflect his guilt over the years 1869 - 72, are powerful statements of the problems of his troubled life. His patriotic verse, such as 'The Fair Future', which attempts to create new loyalties and new hopes ; his public poems, written for important occasions such as the 1879 International Exhibition in Sydney ; his memorial verses for Charles Harpur, James Lionel Michael and Adam Lindsay Gordon, and his attempt in the fragmentary 'The Australian Shepherd' to begin the first Australian rural epic, all support the claim that Kendall was the most substantial poet of the Colonial period. (385)

The importance of Kendall's contribution to the growth of Australian poetry is now established beyond doubt. Despite certain blemishes that are detectable in his treatment of his themes and general craftsmanship, Kendall's poetry is memorable and significant. Green points out the salient features of his poetry :

Kendall's verses are filled with the music of falling water : he was possessed by the rich soft shapes and colours of the coastal foliage, the smooth curves of the coastal boys and hills, their rainy mists, their glimmering woods , the delicate dew - dropping ferns, of their " deep green gracious glens", the bright voices of their birds, their golden blossom, the murmur of their waves and falling streams, by their " great dark hills of wonder " , and by the " silver sleeping seas " , the " lights and thunders " of the waves along their shores and the storms that come from the Pole. The best of his work is possessed by this sort of loveliness and by that of the smooth-sounding native names, Araluen, Mooni, Orara, which he knew well how to weave into his verse : drawn outward by sympathy with the explorers or the pioneers, he could tell of " swarthy wastelands , wide and woodless " , of " stark desolation and a waste of plain " , and of the desert " glaring like a sea of brass " ; but one feels that these are for him excursions, in which except for a

few lines, he is not near his best . And his talent was almost wholly lyrical and descriptive, not so much of the objects he observed but of the moods they evoked in him . (162)

The points of strength and weakness in Kendall's poetry in general, and in workmanship as well as the obvious marks of influence of Romantic and Victorian poets on his choice of themes and his stylistic devices are dwelt upon in great detail by Green. **Green's** relevant comments are quoted below :

Kendall was a " nature poet " only in the sense that he found in natural scenery moods of the human spirit, using woods and mountains, streams and birds and trees as symbols of the emotions that he wished to express : Wordsworth reinforced his reverence towards the most solemn of these moods, but here is something of Shelley in his " aerial perspectives " and in the intensity rather than the serenity of his connection with the natural world; and in such lines as " the light that is love to the flowers " there is an obvious Shelleyan reminiscence . Shelley meant much more to Kendall than to Harpur, but unfortunately encouraged in him a tendency to wordiness that he possessed already ; still his verses are suffused with very human emotions even when they stay closest to the natural features that are their symbols, and these emotions, which are intense if gentle, are always ready to flow out in sympathy with men and women, even if he cannot enter into their personalities sufficiently to enable him to characterize them individually. The influence of Tennyson also is everywhere in Kendall, but especially in his blank verse; there are occasional Swinburnian phrases, and the influence of Swinburne shows markedly in his alliteration and in some of his rhythms ... (163 - 164)

Our concluding observation on Kendall's workmanship and our final impression of his poetry may best be put in the words of Green :

The general effect of Kendall's rhythms is of flowing music that is sweet rather than strong, full rather than concise : the frequency of light syllables makes for wordiness, and now and in the longer lines it is obvious that something has been added to fill up the measure. This is perhaps the worst fault in Kendall's workmanship, though there are also other faults, the result of imperfect taste or sheer carelessness; his fondness for pairs of adjectives such as " rose red " , " soft sweet " , " grave mute " (see the "Ode on the Sydney International Exhibition") and the alliteration of which he makes such effective use are overdone sometimes ; he takes queer liberties with phrase and rhyme ; and sometimes his lack of humour betrays him : he has no marked power of self - criticism. Kendall's images are as characteristic as his rhythms. The best of them are not merely beautiful ; they show how he, as well as greater poets, was able some times by intuitive contemplation to work upon what he observed, to saturate it with his mood, to marry the two and translate them into sound and rhythm, until the result conveys, in drops of light and music, something that one feels is not only beautiful but true, because it could not have been different : something that is of the essence of poetry. (165)

4.4 'BELL - BIRDS' : TEXT

By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling :
It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges.
Through breaks of the cedar and sycamore bowers

Struggles the light that is love to the flowers ;
 And , softer than slumber , and sweeter than singing ,
 The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.
 The silver - voiced bell-birds, the darlings of daytime!
 They sing in September their songs of the May - time;
 When shadows wax strong, and the thunder - bolts hurtle,
 They hide with their fear in the leaves of the myrtle;
 When rain and the sunbeams shine mingled together,
 They start up like fairies that follow fair weather;
 And straightway the hues of their feathers unfold
 Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.
 October , the maiden of bright yellow tresses,
 Loiters for love in these cool wildernesses;
 Loiters , knee-deep, in the grasses, to listen,
 Where dripping rocks gleam and the leafy pools glisten :
 Then is the time when the water-moons splendid
 Break with their gold , and are scattered or blended
 Over the creeks, till the woodlands have warning
 Of song of the bell-birds and wings of the Morning.
 Welcome as waters unvisited by the summers
 Are the voices of bell-birds to thirsty far-comers.
 When fiery December sets foot in the forest,
 And the need of the wayfarer presses the sorest,
 Pent in the ridges for ever and ever
 The bell-birds direct him to spring and to river,
 With ring and with ripple, like runnels whose torrents
 And toned by the pebbles and leaves in the currents.

Often I sit , looking back to a childhood,
 Mixt with the sight and the sounds of the wildwood,
 Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion.
 Lyrics with beats like the heart -beats of passion;-
 Songs interwoven of lights and of laughter
 Borrowed from bell-birds in far forest-rafters;
 So, I might keep in the city and alleys
 The beauty and strength of the deep mountain valleys :
 Charming to slumber the pain of my losses
 With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses.

(Wilkes : 102 - 103)

4.4.1 Discussion

The poem 'Bell-Bird' is illustrative of **Wilkes'** general appreciation of Kendall's landscape poetry :

Kendall is the foremost exemplar of the Romantic treatment of landscape in nineteenth century verse ... Landscape suffused with feeling is the characteristic of Kendall's poetry : nature for him is a source of consolation to the human spirit. (viii - ix)

Kendall's treatment of nature in this poem is extremely evocative. The writers of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* attach great importance to this poem by Kendall when they observe: ' The bell - bird and its bell - like notes have been immortalized in Henry Kendall's poem ' Bell-Birds'. (Wilde : 84)

In 'Bell - Birds', one of his most characteristic poems , Kendall creates an enchantment with rhyme, rhythm and word music that reproduces the spellbinding harmony generated by the bell-birds, the Australian birds who keep on singing during the Australian spring in the months of September and October. The typical Australian

mossy arbours and woodlands where bell-birds' music echoes incessantly are recreated by Kendall in a series of words, images and rhythms that perpetuate the poet's perception of the Australian landscape suffused with his memories of his childhood and adolescence. Nature and man are fused into the poem that attains the position of a landmark in the evolution of Australian poetry during the nineteenth century. This poem is representative of the stage of progress achieved in the development of Australian poetry by the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

In parts, the poem may appear alliterative more than once, and thus forced and artificial to some extent but when read as a whole, the poem's strength manifests itself in the poet's ability to recreate the Australian landscape echoing with the music of birds. But this does not appear to be an imitation of Wordsworth. The poem bears Kendall's distinctive stamp. Its mellifluous arrangement of words and images heightens the effect of evocation. Does the music of the following two lines mark the beauty of the image?

And straightway the hues of their feather unfolden
Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.

Not at all. Maybe crisp and concise phrasing found in Wordsworth's or Shelley's poetry is not noticeable in the quoted lines. But we must remember Wordsworth's or Shelley's poetry was written in England as a part of the British poetic tradition which was more than twelve centuries old. Kendall's poem belongs to an Australian poetic tradition which was only about sixty years old. The flaws in the poem, therefore, need not be attributed exclusively to Kendall the individual poet but rather to the infancy and weakness of the poetic tradition in Australia.

Certain phrases leap out of the text of Kendall's poetry as outstanding, and sometimes they appear quite unexpected in the context of a nascent literature. For example, an expression like 'the leafy pools glisten' lends to the whole poem an aura of bright natural beauty. Hence, whatever weaknesses there may be, the brighter aspects of Kendall's poetry definitely enhanced the growth of Australian poetry. And this poetry may not be stigmatized as colonial poetry alone. It might have been written during the period which is called colonial in the historical context but what redeems this poetry is the poet's effort to advance the Australian poetry beyond the limitations of the colonizer's culture. The shadow of the colonizer may be there but the verbal embodiment of the indigenous phenomenon of Australia speaks of Kendall's poetic progress towards the formulation of the Australian culture:

The silver-voice bell-birds, the darlings of daytime;
They sing in September their songs of the May-time.....

The context of Australia with all her own peculiarities is set and evoked in the fourth stanza. December is the hottest month in Australia, and the bell-birds, with their music, take the 'far-comers' and 'wayfarers' to spring and river:

With ring and with ripple, like runnels whose torrents
Are toned by the pebbles and leaves in the currents

The last line wouldn't be found in an anthology of British poetry. It is Kendall's poetic lines that enhance the beauty of blossoming Australian poetry.

The last stanza further individualizes the poem. The poet spent his childhood in the countryside but later during his youth, he went to Sydney and Melbourne in search of livelihood. While studying his life which is given in an earlier section, you'll notice that Kendall spent an unhappy life in the urban setup. In the cities, however, the memories of the songs of the bell-birds, as mentioned in the last stanza, reduce 'the pain of my losses/ with glimpses of creeks and the vision of mosses'. Thus the appeal of the poem is on both the levels of the personal and the universal. The charge of

generalization against Kendall's poetry does not always hold good. 'Bell-birds' epitomises Kendall's remarkable achievement as a poet in the context of nineteenth-century Australian poetry, and it also indicates the magnitude of his contribution to the growth of the same.

Henry Kendall

4.5 'AFTER MANY YEARS' : TEXT

The song that once I dreamed about,
 The tender , touching thing,
As radiant as the rose without--
 The love of wind and wing--
The perfect verses to the tune
 Of woodland music set,
As beautiful as afternoon,
 Remain unwritten yet.
It is too late to write them now,
 The ancient fire is cold :
No ardent lights illumine the brow
 As in the days of old .
I cannot dream the dream again;
 But when the happy birds
Are singing in the sunny rain ,
 I think I hear its words.
I think I hear the echo still
 Of long forgotten tones,
When evening winds are on the hill,
 And sunset fires the cones.
But only in the hours supreme
 With songs of land and sea,
The lyrics of the leaf and stream,
 This echo comes to me.
No longer doth the earth reveal
 Her gracious green and gold:
I sit where youth was once , and feel
 That , I am growing old.
The lustre from the face of things
 Is wearing all away:
Like one who halts with tired wings,
 I rest and muse today.
There is a river in the range
 I love to think about :
Perhaps the searching feet of change
 Have never found it out.
Ah ! Oftentimes I used to look
 Upon its banks, and long
To steal the beauty of that brook
 And put it in a song.
I wonder if the slopes of moss
 In dreams so dear to me --
The falls of flower and flower - like floss -
 Are as they use to be!
I wonder if the waterfalls,
 The singers far and fair
That gleamed between the wet green walls,
 Are still the marvels there!
Ah ! let me hope that in that place
 The old familiar things

To which I turn a wistful face ,
Have never taken wings.
Let me retain the fancy still
That , past the lordly range,
There always shines, in folds of hill,
One spot secure from change !
I trust that yet the tender screen
That shades a certain nook
Remains , with all its gold and green,
The glory of the brook!
It hides a secret , to the birds
And waters only known --
The letters of two lovely words :
A poem on a stone.
Perhaps the lady of the past
Upon these lines may light :
The purest verses and the last
That I may ever write.
She need not fear a word of blame ;
Her tale the flowers keep;
The wind that heard me breathe her name
Has been for years asleep.
But in the night , and when the rain
The troubled torrent fills,
I often think I see again
The river in the hills.
And when the day is very near,
And birds are on the wing ,
My sprit fancies it can hear
The song I cannot sing.

(Wilkes 124-126)

4.5.1 Discussion

Kendall is to be remembered for his lilting lyricism, haunting vignettes of Australian landscape, description of nostalgic memories of passing time and burden of unfulfilled dreams. Full of the above-mentioned qualities, 'After Many Years' is a poem from his last volume of poetry , *Songs from the Mountains* . The lyric exhibits a maturity in craftsmanship and a rare restraint on Kendall's natural verbosity. The poem is important as it discloses with superb verbal restraint and suggestiveness the inner world of Kendall's poetic dreams and aspirations. It also hints at the inadequacy of the then Australian poetic idioms for verbalizing the dreams and aspirations of Australia and her people. When Kendall speaks of his as-yet unwritten poetry, he actually articulates the vision of the poetic activities that would take place in future in Australia.

'After Many Years ' projects the vision of the future. Though tinged with sadness, the poem indicates the poet's relation with the land , how the land kindles in him a hope for the future:

I cannot dream the dream again;
But, when the happy birds
Are singing in the sunny rain,
I think I hear its words.

The relation between the land and the poet is not only a romantic lyrical infatuation but also represents at that point of time the close bond developing between the land of Australia and the white settlers. The relationship is, however, embodied in a very

moving manner through a few words only. Kendall's mastery over the medium of poetic communication expressed itself in a very effective manner :

Henry Kendall

Ah! oftentimes I used to look
Upon its banks, and long
To steal the beauty of that brook
And put it in a song.

The last stanza of the poem marks a new beginning in Australian poetry. The art of economy in verbal expression reaches a climax in the stanza quoted above. Kendall holds the hope for the future poets of Australia, and indicates that what could not be achieved by him would be attained by the future generations of poets in Australia :

And when the day is very near,
And birds are on the wing,
My spirit fancies it can hear
The song I cannot sing.

Kendall might have been a derivative poet on certain occasions but in his most remarkable poems like the two poems discussed in this unit, he strikes a note of originality. Along with Harpur, Kendall introduced Romantic lyricism into Australian poetry but he also struck a new path to be followed by the future poets appearing on the Australian poetic scenario.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Harpur's poetic innovation and practice in Australia in the middle of the nineteenth century was followed by Kendall who regarded Harpur as his master. Kendall perpetuated the Romantic strain of Harpur's poetry. Kendall's signal contribution is, however, to be traced in his love and admiration of Australian landscape. He also brought in more flexibility in versification and metrical patterns. His nature lyrics are soothing but tinged with a touching sadness. Hence Kendall's poetry is to be admired, and his poetic efforts appreciated for their signal contribution to the growth of Australian poetry. You must have read and analysed the poems of Kendall. Do you agree with us on the conclusions we are arrived at?

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Kendall furthered the progress of nineteenth century Australian poetry? How did he do it?
2. Do you think the romantic strain brought in by Kendall into Australian poetry during the third and fourth quarters of nineteenth century did have any salutary impact on the progress of Australian poetry?
3. Analyse and comment on two poems of Kendall of your choice, indicating why you prefer them.
4. Can you make a comparative study of nineteenth century Indian English poetry and Australian poetry, and identify some Indian English poets whose poetry may be compared with Kendall's poetry?

UNIT 5 A.L. GORDON AND A.B. PATERSON

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 A.L. Gordon : His Life and Works
- 5.3 Characteristic Features of Gordon's Poetry
- 5.4 'The Sick Stockrider' : Text
 - 5.4.1 Discussion
- 5.5 A.B. Paterson : His Life and Works
- 5.6 Characteristic Features of Paterson's Poetry
- 5.7 'The Man from Snowy River' : Text
 - 5.7.1 Discussion
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

With the publication of the poetry of A. L. Gordon and A. B. Paterson in Australia, the pace of progress in the growth of Australian poetry was hastened. While Wentworth, Harpur and Kendall laid the foundation of Australian poetry, Gordon and Paterson built the base of the structure of Australian poetry. For first Gordon and then Paterson made poetry entirely out of Australian lifestyle that had evolved in Australia; diggers, bushrangers and other personae and properties of outback life of Australia found a permanent place in Australian poetry through the pens of Gordon and Paterson. In this unit, you will study two poems each of Gordon and Paterson.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A.L. Gordon was born in Scotland, and had his education in England but after he migrated to Australia in 1853, Gordon engaged himself in the adventures of life in Australia - horse riding, steeple chasing, politics and publishing and created lively ballads out of them. It is Gordon who first made the horse an Australian poetic image and metaphor standing for energy and speed of people in Australia. The sheepstations, bushmates, the open fields and blue sky of Australia found a mirror in Gordon's poetry which replaced the eighteenth century poetic diction and Romantic - Victorian wistful poeticisms with vigorous Australian colloquy. Hence Gordon deserves the lionization which, however, was accorded to him only after his suicide.

The last volume of Gordon's poetry, published a day before his suicide, is entitled *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870). In a way, Gordon is a progenitor of the literary ballad in Australia.

With the publication of the *Bulletin* from 1880 onwards, a wave of nationalism developed in Australian literature. You should remember that at the historical and political levels too, Australia was on the move towards nationalism and attained freedom from colonialism in 1901.

A.B. Paterson (1864 - 1941) is the chief balladist of Australia. His early ballads kept on appearing in the *Bulletin* from 1886 onwards. The first ballad from Paterson published in the *Bulletin* was 'A Dream of the Melbourne Cup : a long way after Gordon'. Paterson signed the ballad with a pseudonym, 'The Banjo', the name of a

racehorse of Paterson's fancy. The verses which he published regularly in the *Bulletin* from 1886 onwards were collected in 1895 in a book entitled *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*. Its success was outstanding : no later collection of bush ballads can compare with it. The first edition sold out in a fortnight, ten thousand copies were sold in the first year. The succeeding volumes of Paterson's poetry were published in the first half of the twentieth century. Hence they fall outside the purview of this Block.

A.L. Gordon and
A.B. Paterson

In this unit, we will discuss the life and works of Gordon and Paterson, the characteristic features of their poetry, and make extensive commentary on the most well-known and representative poem by Gordon and then by Paterson, which will illustrate the two poets' identity as writers of ballads that embody the national character of Australians of that period.

5.2 A. L. GORDON : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833 - 70) was born at Fayal in the Azores in Scotland. He had his education in England. In 1853, he was banished by his parents to South Australia. In a poem entitled 'To a Sister', which he wrote three days before he sailed for Australia, he confessed:

My parents bid me cross the flood,
My kindred frowned at me;
They say I have belied my blood,
And stained my pedigree.
But I must turn from those who chide,
And laugh at those who frown;
I cannot quench my stubborn pride,
Not keep my spirits down.

(Wilkes : 58)

In South Australia, he enlisted in the mounted police. After two years he resigned from the constabulary service, and drifted about South Australia dealing in horses and riding in steeplechases. He received a legacy from his parents' estate, and then purchased several properties, married and lived in Dingley Dell, a small stone cottage still lovingly preserved near the seaside settlement of Port MacDonnell. From those years come many stories of Gordon's daring feats of horsemanship.

Gordon had a brief and unspectacular parliamentary career in 1864-66, an abortive grazing venture in the Western Australia in 1866-67, and then conducted a livery stable in Ballaratt in 1867-68.

After a severe head injury in a riding accident, followed by bankruptcy which was caused by a fire in the livery stable, and the death of his infant daughter, Gordon left Ballarat for Melbourne.

In Melbourne, Gordon led an unhappy and aimless life, worked intermittently at his writing, and suffered from depression, insomnia and pain from numerous riding injuries. When he failed to obtain heirship to the ancestral Gordon Land in Scotland, he faced financial disaster. On 24th June, 1870, the day following the publication of his last book of poems, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, he committed suicide on Brighton Beach in Melbourne.

In 1864 Gordon published *The Feud*, a ballad inspired by Noel Paton's engravings of scenes from the ballad, 'The Dourie Dens O' Yarrow'.

His second publication is *Ashtaroath* (1867). It is a long dramatic poem indebted to the Faust theme, but it has not produced any critical response.

Gordon's poetic reputation depends on his third and fourth publications, entitled *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867) and *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870).

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, a concise estimate of Gordon's reputation is made:

In 1934 a bust of Gordon was unveiled in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, making him the only Australian poet to have been thus honoured. That mark of recognition reflects the adulation for him after his death and through the first decades of the twentieth century. His popularity sprang partly from the romantic aura of his life, his aristocratic background, his exile in the colony, his reckless riding exploits, and the pathos of his death. It sprang, too, from the gratitude of Australian nationalists for Gordon's acclaim in his poetry of the outback way of life. His verses were loved and recited around camp fires and in the homesteads and shearing sheds of the back blocks. (302)

In a nutshell, as **Bruce Bennett** says:

Gordon's reputation continues to fluctuate but he remains today an even more popular poet than Kendall and also a focus of critical attention, although his status, as an 'authentic recorder of Australian bush life was eventually usurped by Lawson and Paterson. (60)

5.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF GORDON'S POETRY

Judith Wright has drawn a comparison between Kendall and Gordon, pointing out what Gordon contributed to Australian poetry:

But he did Australian writing a service at a crucial time, by indicating a new direction of interest. Kendall had been attempting to write much the same kind of verse as might have been written by an English contemporary poet; in spite of a certain success with character pieces such as 'Jim the Splitter' he had not taken much interest in local event and character, and he knew, and he knew little of the active life of the country as it then was. It was to this life of the 'back-blockers', the nomad workers, drovers and overlanders, that Gordon's rhymes drew attention. (1964 : 68)

Australian poetry was being nourished mostly on romantic wistfulness and landscape painting through the poetry of Wentworth, Harpur and Kendall. Gordon brought into Australian poetry the real lifestyle of the Australians in the outback, and to portray the picture accurately, Gordon introduced the colloquial style that could reflect the life as it was lived in the bush. **Wright** further observes:

Gordon became an idol because of his adopting of Australian balladry and because he was himself a legendary horseman and man of action. The two currents of feeling (which, however contradictory, could exist almost side by side in certain people) once they were united, added force to the impulse towards a new kind of popular poetry. This allowed the acceptance of the more articulate of the 'bush-balladists', and injected a new vigour into Australian poetry, which had hitherto imitated the subjects and style of late-Victorian English verse.

Gordon's popularity, then, represented a turning point in the growth of Australian poetry far more decisive than his actual work (which, properly examined, is of very minor value) seems to justify. It is rather as a national figure than as a poet that he is important; but his work gave a remarkable impetus and a new self-confidence to the popular poets, who now saw their hard inarticulate independence (1964 : 69).

A.L. Gordon and
A.B. Paterson

Brian Elliott assesses Gordon's poetic talent from another point of view:

Gordon made two striking but indispensable discoveries: first, he discovered the colonial audience itself, the heart of Colonial moral and aesthetic awareness, and words (however rough) through which to reach it; and second, the warmth and vitality of the Australian light, especially the archetypal of the summer sky and the long horizon: 'the sky-line's blue furnished resistance...'

Nothing in all Colonial poetry matches in importance Gordon's signal achievement, the fixation of the Australian image. Emotionally, he simply spoke as he felt: the mood of his best work is conversational; its philosophy stoically grim, but spontaneously articulate; its visionary content based upon a broad impressionism; the keynote brightness and sunlight, starlight, a high luminosity in the air. (241)

Wilkes too makes very pertinent comments on the characteristic features of Gordon's poetry :

Like A.B. Paterson after him, Gordon saw Australia from the back of a horse. The terrain is not to him as mysterious and intimidating as it appeared to Harpur...

Nevertheless there is more of a sense of the outdoors in Gordon than in any other colonial poet, perhaps because he is so much a poet of action. The world of the stockrider, the squatter and the mounted trooper comes to life in his verse, always with a feeling of his relish for the open air. (vi-vii)

Kendall pays a tribute to Gordon in his poem 'The Late Mr. A. L. Gordon', the opening lines of which are quoted below as an epitome of our final estimate of Gordon's poetry:

At rest! Hard by the margin of that sea
Whose sounds are mingled with his noble verse,
Now lies the shell that never more will house.
The fine, strong spirit of my gifted friend.
Yea, he who flashed upon us suddenly,
A shining soul with syllables of fire,
Who sang the first great songs these lands can claim
To be their own; the one who did not seem
To know what royal place awaited him
Within the Temple of the Beautiful,
Has passed away...

(Wilkes: 89)

5.4. 'THE SICK STOCKRIDER' : TEXT

Hold hard, Ned ! Lift me down once more, and lay me in the shade ;
Old man, you've had your work cut out to guide
Both horses, and to hold me in the saddle when I sway'd,

All through the hot , slow , sleepy , silent ride ;
The dawn at "Moorabinda" was a mist rack dull and dense
The sunrise was a sullen sluggish lamp :
I was dozing in the gateway at Arbuthnot's bound'ry fence ,
I was dreaming on the Limestone cattle camp ;
We crossed the creek at Carricksford , and sharply through the haze ,
And suddenly the sun shot flaming forth ;
To southward lay "Katawa" with the sandpeaks all ablaze ,
And the flush'd fields of Glen Lomond lay to north
Now westward winds the bridle path that leads to Lindisfarm ,
And yonder looms the double-headed Bluff ;
From the far side of the first hill , when the skies are clear and calm ,
You can see Sylvester's woolshed fair enough .
Five miles we used to call it from our homestead to the place
Where the big tree spans the roadway like an arch ;
'Twas here we ran the dingo down that gave us such a chase
Eight years ago---or was it nine ?---last March .
'Twas merry in the glowing morn , among the gleaming grass ,
To wonder as we've wander'd many a mile ,
And blow the cool tobacco cloud , and watch the white wreaths pass ,
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while ;
'Twas merry 'mid the blackwoods when we spide the station roofs ,
To wheel the wild scrub cattle at the yard ,
With a running fire of stockwhips and a fiery run of hoofs ,
Oh ! the hardest day was never then too hard !
Ay ! we had a glorious gallop after "Starlight" and his gang ,
When they bolted from Sylvester's on the flat ;
How the sun-dried reed -beds crackled , how the flintstrewn ranges rang
To the strokes of "Mountaineer" and "Acrobat" ;
Hard behind them in the timber , harder still across the heath ,
Close beside them through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd ;
And the golden-tinted fern leaves , how they rustled underneath !
And the honeysuckle osiers , how they crash'd !
We led the hunt throughout , Ned , on the chestnut and the grey ,
And the troopers were three hundred yards behind ,
While we emptied our six-shooters on the bushrangers at bay ,
In the creek with stunted box-tree for a blind !
There you grappled with the ladder , man to man , and horse to horse ,
And you rolled together when the chestnut rear'd ;
He blaz'd away and miss'd you in that shallow water- course --
A narrow shave -- his power singed your beard !
In these hours when life is ebbing , how those days when life was young
Come back to us -- how clearly I recall
Even the yarns Jack Hall invented , and the songs Jem Roper sung ;
And where are now Jem Roper and Jack Hall ?
Ay ! nearly all our comrades of the old colonial school ,
Our ancient boon companions , Ned , are gone ;
Hard livers for the most part , some what reckless as a rule ,
It seems that you and I are left alone .
There was Hughes , who got in trouble through that business with the cards ,
It matters little what became of him ,
But a steer ripp'd up MacPherson in the Cooraminta yards ,
And Sullivan was drown'd at Sink - or - swim ,
And Mostyn -- poor Frank Mostyn -- died at last a fearful wreck ,
In " the horrors " at the Upper Wandinong ;
And Carisbrooke the rider at the Horsefall broke his neck ,
Faith ! the wonder was he saved his neck so long !
Ah ! those days and nights we squandered at the Logans in the glen --
The Logans , man and wife , have long been dead ,

Elsie's tallest girl seems taller than your little Elsie then ,
 And Ethel is a woman grown and wed .
 I 've had my share of pastime , and I 've done my share of toil ,
 And life is short -- the longest life a span --
 I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil ,
 Or for the wine that maketh glad of man ;
 For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain ,
 'Tis somewhat late to trouble -- This I know ,
 I should live the same life over , If I had to live again ;
 And the change are I go where most men go .
 The deep blue skies wax dusky and the tall green trees grow dim,
 The sword beneath me seems to heave and fall ,
 And sickly shadows through the sleeply sunlight swim
 And on the very sun's face weave their pall .
 Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave ,
 With never stone or rail to my bed ;
 Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave ,
 I may chance to hear them romping overhead .

A.L. Gordon and
 A.B. Paterson

(Wilkes: 83-86)

5.4.1 Discussion

The best way to throw into relief the characteristic features of Gordon's poetry is to analyse the poem 'The Sick Stockrider'. The poem is the best-known of all the poems written by Gordon. Before the poem is analysed, it will be interesting for you to know what different critics have said about the poem.

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian literature*, the poem is commented upon under different entries :

'The Sick Stockrider', in particular, is recognized as the poem which sketched in broad outline the territory which later balladists filled with profuse and picturesque detail; it thus pointed literature in a new and more characteristically Australian direction. (302)

'Sick Stockrider, The', a popular and well-known poem of Adam Lindsay Gordon, was written in 1869 and published in *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870). The ballad of the dying stockman, with its creed of mateship, its laconic acceptance in true bush style of whatever life and death may offer, led Marcus Clarke to assert that in Gordon's work lay the beginning of a national school of Australian poetry. 'The Sick Stockrider' is accepted as the progenitor of the Australian literary ballad. (630)

Brian Elliott pinpoints the chief characteristics and the contribution of 'The Sick Stockrider' :

In its day 'The Sick Stockrider' seemed to epitomize the mood and atmosphere of colonial experience. Essentially a bush poem, it is impressionistic, reminiscent, relaxed, familiar; its great significance, however, lay not in what it was, but what it did. This poem alone captured, defined and established for its period the local image and fixed the hitherto hesitant, wavering local nostalgias. Henceforward no Colonial poet could write without remembering it; it represented an emotional point of rest, an end to lost poetical causes and a new creative beginning. (240 - 241)

Wilkes highlights certain aspects of the ballad in his brief, concise comments:

Absorbed into the folk tradition behind 'The sick stockrider', it (the element of fatalism) makes that poem the classical pastoral elegy of its period. (viii)

Some of the sentiments expressed in the poem came to be important to the nationalist writers. Chief among them is the creed of mateship. The comradeship of the stockman and his mate Ned is recalled :

'Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming grass,
To wander as we've wandered many a mile,
And blow the cool tobacco cloud, and watch the white wreaths pass,
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.

His dying thoughts also recall other friends, the 'ancient boon companions' of the 'old colonial school', some of them have fatal accidents in the bush environs :

...a steer ripp'd up MacPherson in the Cooraminta yards,
And Sullivan was drown'd at Sink-or-Swim.

When we analyse the poem, we discover a summary of what came to be accepted as the **philosophy of the bush**. It may be said that Gordon is the first poet who has been able to put across this philosophy in the syntax of poetry. In the following lines we come across a verbal representation of the laconic acceptance of one's lot, a refusal to brood over life's disappointments and lost chances, and a shrug of the shoulders over the question mark of a future beyond the grave.

I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
And life is short - the longest life a span;
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.

The poem concludes with a pleasantly sentimental picture of the bushman's grave :

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave,
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

'The Sick Stockrider' is one of the most popular poems of Gordon. The Australian public held it very close to their hearts. It was recited in the shearing sheds and station homesteads around the campfires in the outback. It has usually been included in almost all anthologies of Australian poetry.

An anonymous correspondent in a letter to *The Age*, dt. 4 February 1903, put it succinctly:

In 1878 I was first introduced to Gordon's poetry when I heard a man in a shearing shed recite 'The Sick Stockrider'. From that day I have been a lover of Gordon. Fortunately in those far-off-days, I met not academic gentlemen who told me Gordon was not a great poet. (Quoted, Wilde 1972 : 38)

'The Sick Stockrider' will survive as a haunting glimpse of a picturesque period of Australian folk history and, as Marcus Clarke suggested, fore-runner of a whole school of poetry dealing with life in the bush.

For the modern reader, what is noticeable and striking in the poem is the ease with which the poem moves, how matter-of-fact reminiscences are arranged in matter-of-fact words and phrases, and how still a sense of pathos is generated by the tone of the speaker who is sick, and feels he is on the verge of death, and this touching sense of pathos suffuses the whole poem, endearing it to readers of all times and all places. Thus a stamp of the timelessness is put on the poem, despite its contemporaneity in terms of its historical, geographical and local references. It is not only the pathos but

a very genuine feeling of compassion for man, men and mankind, in general, that gradually develops and permeates the whole ballad.

A.L. Gordon and
A.B. Paterson

Finally, what redeems the ballad from being dated is the freshness of its style. The style of the ballad never palls. It remains as fresh as ever. 'The Sick Stockrider' will, therefore, never lose its position or appeal, nor will it be replaced from any anthology of representative Australian poetry in times to come.

5.5 A.B. PATERSON : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

A. B. Paterson's life and works span over both nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But since, in this block we'll focus our attention on the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century only, in this unit we'll restrict our discussion to Paterson's life and works that fall within the perimeters of the nineteenth century.

Andrew Banjo Paterson (1864 - 1941) is widely known as 'Banjo' Paterson from the pseudonym 'The Banjo' that he adopted for his early contributions to the *Bulletin*, the Australian magazine, published from 1880 onwards.

He was born at Narambla Station, near Orange in New South Wales. He spent his childhood in the bush on Illalong Station near Yass in New South Wales. In his early childhood with his innocence and inquisitiveness, Paterson delighted in watching the bullock teams with the 'bullockies' and their families and gold diggers who passed by that way. Thus he got acquainted with the great bush characters. He took his preparatory education in a little bush school at Binalong, riding there on horseback, ten miles each day.

In 1874 at the age of ten he was sent to Sydney Grammar School near Gladesville, a pretty waterside suburb of Sydney on the Paramatta River. There he congenially lived with his grand mother who too wrote verse. Thus he got literary inspiration from his grand mother. He used to spend his vacations at Illalong station enjoying the activities and associations of bush life. At the age of sixteen he matriculated and was articled to a firm of solicitors. After being himself enrolled as a solicitor, he became a managing clerk for another law firm and later practised in a partnership with the name of Street and Paterson.

Official work seemed dull, boring and irksome to him. So he wanted to get away from the tedious bondage by spending some time in the bush at Illalong. In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, it is observed:

... these early experiences provided him (Paterson) with a fund of incidents, character and scenes which his later writing turned into legend. (549)

In the 1980s, Sydney was progressing towards self-sufficiency in socioeconomic conditions. Side by side there was a cultural upheaval with the upsurge of theatre companies and musical orchestra and the emergence of an Australian School of Art. With the cultural upheaval, the nation was thirsting for its own literature. Leon Cantrell opines:

The legend of the nineties has insisted that their triumph was to throw off the shackles of an imported vision, which had recoiled from the strangeness of the local scene, to show us ourselves and our land, whole and clear. (xv)

Clemment Semmler comments:

Everything Australian suddenly became worth writing about: the slums, the outback, the diggings, the seaports, the selections, the stock-routes, the wheat fields. (1967:1)

In 1880, under the enthusiastic editorship of Mr. J. F. Archibald, *The Bulletin* came out with the intention of publishing the writing of the major as well as minor writers of Australia, Paterson, who was then well-known as a promising lawyer, attracted the personal attention of Archibald, who encouraged him to write about the bush and the people.

In 1890s Paterson adopted the pseudonym of 'Banjo' which was the name of 'a so called race-horse' in his station. Under this name he started contributing his verses. When his 'Clancy of the Overflow' (1889) appeared in *The Bulletin*, Rolf Boldrewood hailed it as 'the best bush ballad since Gordon' Paterson wrote in this period 'Old Pardon, the son of Reprieve', 'The Man from Ironbank', and a number of other verses which aroused the interest among the readers who were curious about the identity of the poet.

According to Clement Semmler, ' he (Paterson) became a celebrity overnight ' (1967:9), as his identity is revealed in the publication of *The Man from Snowy River & Other Verses*. The success of this book was described in London Literary Year-book as ' without parallel in colonial literary annals ' and as giving its author a public larger than that of any other living writers in the language except Kipling. The first edition sold out like a hot cake in a fortnight. Their total sales exceeded one lakh copies .

At the beginning of 1895 while visiting Dagworth, a Queensland sheep station during holiday he wrote his next famous ballad 'Waltzing Matilda' for which he is known not only in Australia but all over the world .

For the next few years he wrote some prose pieces for *The Bulletin* reflecting the life of the bush for which he had an irresistible attraction. Towards the end of 1899, he decided to build up his career as a journalist and sailed for South Africa as war correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Angus* in the Boer war.

5.6 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF PATERSON'S POETRY

Since our focus is on the nineteenth century Australian poetry, we limit our discussion to the first volume of the Paterson's poems which was published in 1895. However, in this section we will study in general certain outstanding stylistic features of Paterson's poetry.

The first few lines from 'Prelude' to his first volume of poems are quoted below:

I have gathered these stories afar
In the wind and the rain,
In the land where the cattle camps are,
On the edge of the plain,
On the overland routes of the west,
When the watches were long,
I have fashioned in earnest and jest
These fragments of song.

The lines from the 'Prelude' indicate the poet's preoccupation with the outdoor life lived in the wind and the rain and life in the cattle camps and the far areas of the land. His purpose is to write songs about this kind of life. And his presentation of that life will be both serious and funny.

The title -poem of the first volume 'The Man from Snowy River' will be discussed in detail in the next section. The prime images of the poem are the horse and the horsemen. His other well-known poems like 'Rio Grande's Last Race', 'Father Riley's Horse', 'The Old Timer's Steeplechase', 'Mulligan's Mare' and 'In the Droving Days' are notable stories of the horse. No doubt, horse riding is the staple theme of Paterson's poems but through this theme Paterson conveys an image of the life lived then, the character of the people who were involved with the horse-riding and makes certain characters stand out on account of their courage, sacrifice and determination.

The horse provided a pivotal image in Paterson's poetry. The following observation by **Geoffrey Dutton** pinpoints the dominance of the horse as a theme in Paterson's poetry:

The seemingly untroubled success of the third major figure of the 1890s, Banjo Paterson, is exactly right both for the man and the time and place. He is as confident as a good horseman in the saddle of a good horse, with the added pleasure that he knows he has an audience of horse-lovers.(9)

Not only of the horses and the horse-riders but also of other kinds of people from the bush and the countryside, Paterson is the inspired singer. He peoples his poetry with a host of characters from the bush. *Paterson is the chief folk-poet of Australia.* 'Waltzing Matilda', Australia's national song, and 'The Man from Snowy River', Australia's national narrative poem, substantiate that claim. Let us add such folk figures as 'Clancy of the Overflow', 'Saltbush Bill', 'The Man from Ironbark' and 'Mulga Bill', and set them 'On Kiley's Run' at 'Conroy's Gap', along 'The Road to Gundagai' or 'By the Grey Gulf Water', and have them sing 'A Bushman's Song', dream 'A Dream of the Melbourne Cup', swap old yarns of 'Father Riley's Horse' and 'The Geebung Polo Club', or ruefully recount 'How the Favourite Beat Us' — and the outlines of the map of Australian folklore are broadly drawn.

'Clancy of the Overflow' is included in Paterson's first volume of verse. The poem expresses an intense love of the countryside. The attraction of the drover's life are found mostly in the natural background of his landscape and his free movement across that vast landscape. The other attraction of the drover's life is the enjoyment of his mates. The appeal of the natural landscape and the enjoyment of mateship are evident in the following lines :

And the bush has friends to meet him and their kindly voices greet him
In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,
And at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars .

At the beginning of 1895, while visiting Dagworth, a Queensland sheep station, he wrote the now - famous 'Waltzing Matilda' verses to a tune which, though an inherent part of band march published in 1893, seems to be that of an old marching song of Marlborough's soldiers. 'Waltzing Matilda' became enormously popular particularly among Australian troops and has assumed the status of an unofficial national anthem (and remains the song most closely identified with Australia) among overseas people, though its sympathy for the underdog is seen as characteristically Australian and is significant reason for its continuing appeal.

In 'Waltzing Matilda' Paterson immortalises the character of a swagman. Another important character in Paterson's poetry is Saltbush Bill. Through him, the character of a drover is immortalised. 'Saltbush Bill' appears in *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*.

The bushman is a predominant figure in Paterson's poetry. He is presented as crude as he is, but the valour, the courage and dauntlessness of the bushmen are thrown into relief in his poems. Paterson's sense of fun and humour adds colour and vivacity to its presentation of the bushmen. His poem 'The Man from Ironbark' is one notable example.

Many of Paterson's ballads are, of course, humorous and comic in tone. But he has also seen tragedies befalling life in the sheep - station. And he has presented poignant pen-portraits of the tragedies of station life in many a poem. In its opening verses, 'On Kiley's Run' presents an attractive glimpse, in the usual Paterson manner, of the carefree existence and camaraderie of bush life. But with droughts and unpaid overdrafts, Kiley's Run is eventually lost and passes through the bank to an absentee landlord in England. 'On Kiley's Run' is an attack on the evils of the land grant system, made more personal by its echoes of a situation that had occurred in the poet's own family years earlier.

The pastoral map of Australia during the latter part of the nineteenth century provides all the themes of Paterson's poetry. The countryside and the remote outback of the nineteenth century and the inhabitants of those places — the drovers, the swagmen, the horsemen, the troopers, the squatters, the bushmen and the bushrangers— find permanent literary recognition in the verses of Australia through the ballads of Paterson. The simple stories told about them in Paterson's ballads enshrine for posterity the now-extinct nineteenth century ethos of Australia.

The themes of Paterson's poetry encompass the pastoral figures of Australia before civilization and industry changed the country into a modern one. The life portrayed in Paterson's poetry is simple and spirited. And Paterson has been able to embody the spirit of the place and the spirit of the people through a style that reflects the themes and their aura.

Paterson has chosen the form of the ballad to give a concrete shape to his vision of the Australian Arcadia in which drovers, swagmen, horsemen, bushmen and bushrangers communicate among themselves in a dialogue that is colloquial, earthy and informal. Even when it is not a dialogue, the poet's pen puts the poem in the language of the people whose life he portrays. His style matches his themes and becomes a fit vehicle of his vision. In this respect Paterson is one of the most successful poets who have developed right mediums for their poetry.

As Paterson chooses to tell a story to the common folk, he writes not about the internal working of the mind but about incidents which proved to be exciting or moving to the common people in the language common to them.

Perhaps it will not be out of place to remember that Wordsworth avoided the use of ornamental language and chose the language really used by men to bring back vitality into English poetry. Though Paterson does not refer to Wordsworth, you may reflect that to some extent Paterson proves himself a true follower of Wordsworth in choosing to exploit the possibilities of the language really spoken by people of the time in that particular period of history. The vitality of his poetry emanates from the language that he has used.

The study of Paterson's poetry is very important for it educates us about Australia and her people. Of course, the appeal of Paterson will be underestimated if we think of his significance as a poet only for the Australians. The artistry of his poetry appeals to us as well. Though we live outside Australia and outside the ambit of the cultural heritage of Australia, the breadth of Paterson's humanity and generosity towards the under privileged and the persecuted appeals to us or any body else outside Australia.

5.7 'THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER' : TEXT

There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around
That the colt from old Regret had got away,
And had joined the wild bush horses— he was worth a thousand pound,
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.

All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.
There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,
The old man with his hair as white as snow,
But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up —
He would go wherever horse and man could go.
And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,
No better horseman ever held the reins;
For never horse could throw him while the saddle-girths would stand —
He learnt to ride while droving on the plains.
And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy beast;
He was something like a racehorse undersized,
With a touch of Timor pony — three parts thoroughbred at least --
And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.
He was hard and tough and wiry — just the sort that won't say die --
There was courage in his quick impatient tread;
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.
But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power to stay,
And the old man said, "That horse will never do
For a long and tiring gallop— only Clancy stood his friend--
"I think we ought to let him come," he said ;
"I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,
For both his horse and he are mountain bred.
"He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,
Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough;
Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride,
The man that holds his own is good enough.
And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,
Where the river runs those giant hills between;
I have seen full many horesmen since I first commenced to roam,
But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen."
So he went; they found the horses by the big mimosa clump,
They raced away towards the mountain's brow,
And the old man gave his orders, "Boys, go at them from the jump,
No use to try for fancy riding now.
And, Clancy, you must wheel them, try and wheel them to the right .
Ride boldly, lad, and never fear the spills,
For never yet was rider that could keep the mob in sight,
If once they gain the shelter of those hills."
So Clancy rode to wheel them-- he was racing on the wing
Where the best and boldest riders take their place,
And he raced his stock-horse past them, and he made the ranges ring
With the stockwhip, as he met them face to face.
Then they halted for a moment, while he swung he dreaded lash,
But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view,
And they charged beneath the stockwhip with a sharp and sudden dash,
And off into the mountain scrub they flew.
Then fast the horsemen followed, where the gorges deep and black
Resounded to the thunder of their tread,
And the stockwhips woke the echoes, and they fiercely answered back
From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.
And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their way,
Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;
And the old man muttered fiercely, "We may bid the mob good day,
No man can hold them down the other side."
When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull —

It well might make the boldest hold their breath;
The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed :
While the others stood and watched in very fear.
He sent the flint-stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat --
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride .
Through the stringy barks and saplings on the rough and broken ground,
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound
At the bottom of that terrible descent
He was right among the horses as they climbed the farther hill,
And the watchers on the mountain, standing mute,
Saw him ply the stockwhip fiercely; he was right among them still,
As he raced across the clearing in pursuit.
Then they lost him for a moment, where two mountain gullies met
In the ranges -- but a final glimpse reveals
On a dim and distant hillside the wild horses racing yet,
With the man from Snowy River at their heels.
And he ran them single-handed till their sides were white with foam;
He followed like a bloodhound on their track,
Till they halted, cowed and beaten; then he turned their heads for home,
And alone and unassisted brought them back.
But his hardy mountain pony he could scarcely raise a trot,
He was blood from hip to shoulder from the spur;
But his pluck was still undaunted, and his courage fiery hot,
For never yet was mountain horse a cur
And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise
Their torn and rugged battlements on high,
Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze
At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,
And where around the Overflow the reed-beds sweep and sway
To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,
The Man from Snowy River is a household word today,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.

(Semmlar 1978 : 2 - 4)

5.7.1 Discussion

Paterson's most outstanding poem ' The Man from Snowy River ' is the title-poem of his first volume of poetry. It is outstanding for many a reason . It has been turned into a successful film. This fact indicates the immense popularity of the poem. That the poem is very dear to Australians is confirmed by the following remarks by **Edgar Water** :

Thousands of Australians who would be scared stiff of climbing onto a horse's back can recite from memory Paterson's long ballad of that reckless horseman, ' The Man from Snowy River ' . (303)

Water's observation is further corroborated by the fact that the sale of this particular volume of poetry has exceeded one lakh copies.

The poem tells the story of a horseman coming from the Snowy River region. The story of his bravery is recounted in the poem. The story is not extraordinary, but it gripped the imagination of the Australians because the life lived by the Australians in

the pioneering days is portrayed in the poem with authenticity. The life of the early Australians, their dare-devilry, extraordinary feats of their courage and their readiness to face the challenges of life are all portrayed vividly in the ballad. The ballad recaptures the indomitable spirit of the early Australians fighting for survival on a heroic scale.

The poem is about horses and horsemen. In the days when the poem was written, horses were very important to the Australians. In the rugged countryside of Australia during 1890s the accomplished horseman enjoyed unlimited hero-worship. In this respect the comment of **Russel Ward** on the importance of the horseman may be quoted :

he (horesman) had more influence on the manners and mores of the city-dwellers than the latter had on his . (5)

In the poem the horseman symbolises the courage of the Australian hero, hence the horseman becomes a myth. The Man from the Snowy River turns out to be a legendary figure like young Lochinvar, John Gilpin and Ancient Mariner.

About the background of the poem it is said that Paterson, with a companion, some time in 1890, on a visit to the Snowy Mountain area, camped in the hut of one Jack Riley at his lonely outpost on a cattle station bordering Mount Kosciusko. Riley, whose reputation as a fearless rider and stockman was almost legendary in the district, is said to have told Paterson a story of a colt that got away in the mountains. After the ballad was published a couple of years later, it was claimed that Riley was the original Man from Snowy River. However, Semmlar comments:

Paterson, we can be sure, identifies with his young hero, because Paterson himself was known, when he wrote the poem, as one of the best horsemen in New South Wales perhaps that is one of the reasons why this ballad is so memorable and real — that Paterson wrote it with the sincerity and feeling of one who imagined that it was he who was the mysterious, rider, the Man from Snowy River. (1978 : 7 - 8)

The first stanza of the ballad introduces the subject : a colt has run away, and to find out the colt, all the skilled horsemen from the neighbouring areas gathered with their speedy horses. In the stanza of eight lines, the word ' horse ' has been mentioned thrice, and words associated with the horse like ' riding ' and ' colt ' have been used. The stanza evokes the image of horse and horsemen against a mountainous background.

In the second stanza as well, the word ' horse ' and words associated with it are repeated as if they were all in a march. Stanza after stanza re-emphasize the evocation of the image of the horse and the horsemen. They appear not only to evoke but also to invoke the horse.

The third stanza introduces the particular horseman who is the hero of this ballad. Though ' a stripling on a small and weedy beast ',

he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.

While other riders stopped short at the summit of the mountain because of the bad road after it, it was only the Man from Snowy River who made bold to ride on. Ultimately the Man from Snowy River made all the horses complete the chase.

Besides the theme of the horse, one striking thematic feature of the poem is the poet's descriptions of nature. In this poem the poet gives a memorable pen-portrait of the rugged mountainous region. The poet keeps the image of the mountains in the

background, never concentrating his descriptive focus on any particular aspect of it till he reaches the last stanza of the poem. In the last stanza, after the story of the Man from Snowy River is told, the poet paints graphically a cool, placid mountain side.

Paterson is the supreme balladist of the horse. In bushman fashion he viewed the horse as an animal trained for and useful in specific tasks and he admired it for its excellence in those tasks, one of which is racing. Racing involves feats of speed, courage and endurance, and there is plenty of human drama associated with it. 'The Man from Snowy River' is the undisputed classic of Paterson's stories of the horse.

When we consider Paterson's style in 'The Man from Snowy River', we find that he has not only chosen the language really spoken by people but also he has exercised an artistic control and verbal restraint to give the ballad an artistic finish. Hence, it is more a literary ballad than an ordinary bush song. Of course, there is no denying the fact that the poem despite its artistic control and finish has the flavour of the colloquial language which makes its appeal piquant and popular.

Right from the beginning of the poem, the story-element is pre-dominant. The style is simple and colloquial. The episode is introduced and it provides a pivot round which all the actions take place. The art of presentation of the story makes it dramatic. There is dialogue to punctuate the drama. There is a wealth of imagery which, however, lends colour and clarity to the evocation of high-drama associated with the events and action.

However, the ballad ends on a quiet tone, as if the high drama after its climax passes through different stages. Though a refrain is not used, the poet concludes the poem with a hint that this moving story continues to be told and retold by common people year after year :

The Man from Snowy River is a household word to day,
And the stockman tell the story of his ride.

Clement Semmler has rightly pointed out :

The phenomenon of this ballad is that it is still a "household word" nearly ninety years after it was written. If we reflect on its success, we see that Paterson combined several elements in its writing that have marked the most successful Australian ballads — excitement; a genuine feeling, indeed love, for its bush setting; and a statement of the dominant Australian characteristic, to "give it a go" and take a risk ... "The Man from Snowy River" has never lost its popularity, and this is primarily because, like other great ballads in our literature, it sustains these images still admired in the present day of adventure, courage and the determination to triumph over seemingly overwhelming odds. (1978 : 9 - 10)

5.8 LET US SUM UP

After Wentworth, Harpur and Kendall had built the foundation of Australian poetry, Gordon and Paterson started building the base of the superstructure of Australian poetry. It is really a wonderful phenomenon of stylistic variety and thematic width that the two latter poets brought into Australian poetry through their ballads that put accent on the lives of the Australian commoners like bushrangers and stockmen, and replaced the stiff eighteenth-century poetic diction and Romantic-Victorian wistful lyricism with robust and matter-of-fact colloquial style that smacked of real-life style of conversation among the Australians.

Gordon and Paterson transformed the character of Australian poetry. They created the poetry of the public at large. Australian poetry acquired its own colour and flavour. By the end of the nineteenth century, Australian poetry travelled a long way from convicts' verses in borrowed idiom to the pulsating rhythm of literary ballads which reflect the pathos and philosophy of life in the outback through a new Australian idiom which grew out of the Australian soil. Gordon and Paterson deserved to be recognized for their exemplary role in making Australian poetry truly Australian in both spirit and tone.

**A.L. Gordon and
A.B. Paterson**

5.9 QUESTIONS

1. Can you draw a pen - portrait of Australian poetry during the end of the nineteenth century?
2. From a study of Gordon's poetry, do you feel Gordon had accepted the lifestyle of the Australians though he migrated from Australia?
3. What constitutes Paterson's signal contribution to the growth of Australian poetry? Include references to his poetry published within the nineteenth century.
4. Analyse 'The Man from Snowy River' to find out what features of the national character of an Australian of the end-of-the nineteenth century are revealed and celebrated in the ballad.
5. Do you think the poetry of Gordon and Paterson may hold interest for readers outside Australia? And for what reasons?
6. 'If Harpur's main affinity among the Romantics is with Wordsworth, Gordon is closer in temperament to the melancholic and reckless Byron, and in literary predilection to Scott as a writer of ballad and narrative verse'. Discuss with appropriate examples.

UNIT 6 ADA CAMBRIDGE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Works
- 6.3 Characteristic Features of Cambridge's Poetry
- 6.4 'An Answer': Text
 - 6.4.1 Discussion
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Questions

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we'll discuss Cambridge's life and poetical works published within the nineteenth century and make a detailed analysis of one of her most significant and characteristic poems as illustration. This will complete our survey of Australian poetry published within the span of the nineteenth century. In this unit, you will study one of the important poems of Ada Cambridge.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit in the Block. Upto Unit 5, we've discussed the history of Australian poetry right from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century, and highlighted the significant works of the most important Australian poets of the century who played the most remarkable roles in the development of Australian poetry. One aspect of the phenomenon of Australian poetry discussed so far is that all the poets mentioned are male poets. Australian society that developed during the nineteenth century right from its beginning at the end of the eighteenth century had been dominated by men. The concept of mateship that characterized the Australian society of the century was also a masculine concept.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, many women scholars and critics of Australia made investigations into the past of Australian literature, and discovered the works of women writers of the nineteenth century. In this Block devoted to the study of the nineteenth century Australian poetry, our survey and assessment will remain incomplete without assigning one unit to the study of the poetry of Ada Cambridge (1844 - 1926), the most important Australian woman poet of the century. Besides being a poet, she is well - known as a novelist. Like Paterson's, Cambridge's life and works also extend to the first quarter of the twentieth century. But we confine our discussion to the poetry of Cambridge published within the nineteenth century.

There were a few other women poets who published poems during the nineteenth century but none of their works registered women's protest against male values, or the male subjugation of women in the society as articulately and pronouncedly as Cambridge's poems, published mainly in her controversial book of poems, *Unspoken Thoughts* (1887).

Ada Cambridge was born and raised in Norfolk, England. During her youth she published moral tales and verses which reflected her strong religious feelings. In 1870 she married a young curate George Frederic Cross.

After marriage, the couple left for Victoria in Australia where Cross served as an Anglican minister at Wangaratta, Yackandandah, Ballan, Coleraine, Sandhurst (Bendigo) and Beechworth before moving to Willamson town in 1893.

Cambridge's colonial experience is chronicled in her perceptive autobiography, *Thirty years in Australia* which was published in 1903.

Since in this unit we are interested in the poetry of Cambridge published in the nineteenth century, we'll discuss her poetry books that were published within the nineteenth century.

Cambridge's first book of poems, *The Manor House and Other Poems*, was published in 1875. In a letter to Bertram Stevens (5 October 1904, Mitchell Library) Cambridge, however, refers to the poems of the volume as 'the effusions of my extreme youth' (quoted by Bradstock and Wakeling : 235). Beilby and Hadgraft describe the collection as 'fairly mixed bag of religious, narrative and descriptive verse of little consequence, showing in parts the influence of Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites.' (4)

Her second book of poems, *Unspoken Thoughts*, published by Kegan Paul of London in 1887, is a major event in the annals of women's poetry of Australia. However, because of its controversial nature, the book was withdrawn from circulation by Cambridge herself.

The book was published anonymously. Several of the poems of the book contained extremely controversial ideas. Bradstock and Wakeling comment :

Was she (Cambridge) hoping that these poems, many of them extremely controversial, would be more objectively received if the name of a female author was suppressed? Given the fact that she carefully avoided reference to the collection in either of her two books of memoirs, her motivation must remain a matter of speculation. Perhaps, like so many women writers before and since, she needed to distance herself from her private thoughts once they had entered the public domain. Such self-suppression could be paralleled to the attitudes of those earlier 'mothers of the novel' who were torn between the need to write and the norms of invisibility required of them as ladies. This 'denial of agency' - this time by the woman writer herself - might have occurred because Cambridge already felt considerable ambivalence about how her unorthodox thoughts might be received. (94)

The two critics continue their pertinent comment :

Unspoken Thoughts is a volume of polemical poetry. It is the 'radical' nature of the arguments pursued that is the greatest surprise. According to A.G. Stephens, when the collection was first published 'the shock to the Rev. George Cross was overwhelming, and, if so, we can assume that it was not the quality of the rhyme which disturbed him.'

At the time of writing *Unspoken Thoughts*, Cambridge apparently entertained some quite uncontroversial attitudes and felt the need to give voice to them. (94)

Unspoken Thoughts was withdrawn from circulation. However, Cambridge published another volume of poems entitled *The Hand In the Dark and Other Poems* (1913) in which she re-published some poems from *Unspoken Thoughts* but she removed the anti-establishment ideas from them. With such an act of suppression by Cambridge herself under compelling circumstances 'the most outspoken, and perhaps the most honest, comments on love, religion and social reform' (Bradstock and Wakeling :118) by a woman were withdrawn from public circulation in nineteenth-century Australia.

6.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CAMBRIDGE'S POETRY

Cambridge did not receive adequate recognition for her poetry during her lifetime. Her poetry has been reassessed much later, and the importance of her feminist protest against patriarchal domination has been recognized only towards the end of the twentieth century. H.M. Green accords her a high status as a woman poet:

...she (Cambridge) is not merely the first Australian woman poet who matters at all, but remains today among the best of Australia's woman poets.....she was the first Australian writer, of prose or verse, to whom social problems really mattered; indeed they mattered to her so intensely that they aroused in her a passion of resentment : she was the first of the Australian "poets of revolt". (186)

Cambridge came to Australia with her husband in 1870, after having published in England a couple of books of hymns that are, however, of no literary importance. The poems of *The Manor House*, already mentioned in the preceding section, are conventional in outlook and not yet perfect in versecraft. As a specimen, the lines describing a woman in the title piece, are quoted below :

Tall, with a slow, proud step and air, with skin half marble and half milk;
With twisted coils of raven hair, blue-tinged and fine and soft as silk;
With haughty, clear-cut chin and cheek and broad brow exquisitely Greek.
(Green: 167)

In 1887, fifteen years after, appeared *Unspoken Thoughts*, the most challenging of the nineteenth-century Australian books of poetry. Green's comments are very illuminating:

But during the next twelve years Ada Cambridge's whole mental and emotional outlook seem to have suffered a complete change: it may have been that the stimulus of the new life and the new country brought about a reaction from the attitude reflected in her previous books; they probably helped to bring an underlying stratum to the surface; at any rate in her second Australian book, *Unspoken Thoughts* (London,1887), from the rather conventional young clergyman's life, who has begun however to feel her way as a poet, she has now become an outspoken reformer in all spheres. It is true that she withdrew this book from publication, either because when she saw herself in print she thought she had gone too far for that conventional day and country, or perhaps because of a reference or two that might have been considered personal...(187)

According to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, '*Unspoken Thoughts*', which reveals religious uncertainty, deals frankly with sexuality and marriage, and expresses strong concern for the socially disadvantaged' (137). It further notes that 'the poems which discuss religious uncertainty, e.g. the long opening poem 'The Shadow'; Sexuality, e.g. 'The Physical Conscience', 'A Wife's Protest'; and marriage,

e.g. 'An Answer', 'The Fallen', might have embarrassed or offended her clergyman husband George Cross.' (702)

Ada Cambridge

Unspoken Thoughts, as its name suggests, offers poems in which Cambridge has expressed her original radical anti-establishment ideas which could not be expressed in public life in those days. Hence the poems in the volume affirm Cambridge's literary and intellectual courage. When, in the next section, one of her poems, in fact, the last poem of the volume, is analysed, it will be shown how radical her thoughts were, and how forthright she was in her expression.

There is no doubt that there is a Victorian mould of poetic expression in her poetry but iconoclastic ideas find a direct hand-hitting projection that must have shocked the patriarchal society of the day. **Patricia Barton** finds out the themes dealt with by Cambridge and the tone in which she articulates the themes:

Unspoken Thoughts expresses indignation at social and sexual injustice, longings for love and sexual expression, explorations of motherhood, fear of death and the agony of illness, and a challenging of convention and orthodox beliefs. Emphasis on the physical, especially bodily effects of injustice and oppression serves to earth the more abstract musings in many of the verses, particularly in the poetry of sexual protest. This feature of her work coupled with the prevalent custom of reading women's writing autobiographically may have led to unwarranted and/or unwelcome assumptions being made about Cambridge's private life, especially in poems such as 'A Wife's Protest' and 'Vows' which cry out against the 'relentless bonds' of loveless marriage. (139)

Bradstock and Wakeling present in lucid details a list of the themes dealt with by Cambridge in her poetry. Cambridge's subversive approach is manifest in all the themes as listed below:

Among the themes she explores are doubts about the consolations of religion and the nature of god, and elevation, instead, of the values of this world, especially earthly love; hypocrisy connected with the observance of many of the tenets of organised religion; the viability of vows of fidelity in marriage; the emergence of a strong and compassionate social conscience in connection with such issues as drunkenness, prostitution, free love, poverty, euthanasia and suicide. Cambridge sees wives in loveless marriages as prostitutes, commiserates with the plight of the Old Maid (without, however, recognising this state as valid alternative), and champions the cause and originality of those who stand outside the rest of their society—the seekers, the strivers, the questioners. (94-95)

Cambridge expresses her perception of the anti-establishment nature of her thoughts and themes in the poem 'Influence':

So do our brooding thoughts and deep desires
Grow in our souls, we know not how or why;
Grove for we know not what, all blind and dumb.
When the time is ripe, and one aspires
To free his thought in speech, ours hears the cry,
And to full birth and instant knowledge come.

(Bradstock and Wakeling: 95)

Thus the unspoken thoughts find articulation through the poems of Cambridge. Cambridge becomes outspoken in asserting the demands of flesh, the urgencies of the earth, and primacy of the here and human above the piety of the imagined heaven in the poem entitled 'The Shadow':

No tale of alms and crowns my dull heart stirs,
That only hungers for a woman's kiss
And asks no life that is not one with hers.
Not such Hereafter can I wish to see;
Not this pale hope my seeking soul exalts;
I want no sexless angel -only thee,
My human love, with all thy human faults.

(Bradstock and Wakeling: 96)

Bradstock and Wakeling point out with illustrations how Cambridge protested against moral impositions from above :

Not only does Cambridge express fears about the possibility of heaven and the nature of god, but she is forthright in her exposure of the pitfalls of organised religion. 'The physical Conscience', a brief poem of two stanzas, suggests that the word of god, 'the moral conscience', 'has lost its sacred fire...has become the slave/of all-compelling custom and desire'. That is, it observes the letter and not the spirit. By contrast, 'the conscience of the body' admits true passion and rejects the merely legal. Here, Cambridge would appear to be talking about marriage, which legitimates the sexual exchange whether love is present or not. This is a topic she picks up on again later in the collection. (101)

Cambridge put a challenging question in a poem entitled 'Fallen', where she commiserates with the prostitutes, while critiquing the socially accepted marital relationship :

And who condemns? She who, for vulgar gain
And in cold blood, and for love or need,
Has sold her body to more vile disgrace—
The prosperous matron with her comely face—
Wife by the law, but prostitute in deed,
In whose gross wedlock womanhood is slain.

(Bradstock and Wakeling : 107)

Cambridge questions all hypocrisies that are practised through the institution of marriage. **Bradstock and Wakeling** analyse two poems on this topic:

The following poem, of twenty four stanzas, 'A Wife's Protest', is the tale of a young woman enslaved in an arranged and loveless marriage. She wants no child to validate this unholy union, and sees the 'love child' as more blessed by nature. In particular, the poem is quite explicit about the physical side of such an unwanted union :

I lay me down upon my bed,
A prisoner on the rack,
And suffer dumbly, as I must,
Till the kind day comes back.
Listening from heavy hour to hour
To hear the church-clock toll—
A guiltless prostitute in flesh,
A murderess in soul.

The wife points out that she did not feel this way at first but that, as her husband's 'slave', victim of his loveless lust, she has been shamed. Yet society will not recognise this :

I go to church ; I go to court ;
No breath of scandal flaws
The lustre of my fair repute ;
For I obey the laws.

The theme of marriage as prostitution is continued in 'London', which is worth quoting in full:

Ada Cambridge

The gorgeous stream of England's wealth goes by,
Mixed with the mud and refuse, as of old—
The hungry, homeless, naked, sick and cold;
Want mocked by waste and greedy luxury.
There, in their downy carriage-cushions, lie
Proud women whose fair bodies have been sold
And brought for coronet or merchant gold
For whose base splendours envious maidens sigh.
Some day the social ban will fall on them—
On wanton rich who taunt their starving kin;
Some day the social judgement will condemn
These 'wedded harlots' in their shame and sin.
A juster world shall separate them then
From all pure women and honoured men.

This poem also incorporates the notion that riches are sinful, and that the rich have no moral right to any superiority they may feel over the poor. (107-108)

Cambridge's concern for the poor and outcaste finds eloquent expression in many a poem by her. **Bradstock and Wakeling** make a fine observation on this aspect of Cambridge's poetry :

'A Street Riot' is a justification of the uprising of the poorer classes and, at the same time, a suggestion that there is a humanitarian solution to social unrest :

Must brute force rise and social order fall
Ere these starved millions can be clothed and fed?

The 1870s and 1880s were, it should be remembered, a boomtime for Australia's affluent, but at the other end of the social scale the male and female factory workers, whose grossly underpaid labour helped the rich to prosper, did not share in the general prosperity. Women, of course, fared much worse than men, so that they were often forced to resort to prostitution as a means of supplementing poor incomes. There is a recurrent concern in Cambridge's poetry for such victims and outcasts of society. (109)

Thus we find Cambridge added a new dimension to nineteenth century Australian poetry by dwelling on issues and concerns involving the poor and the women who suffered ignominy in the Australian society during that period of time.

Cambridge's style is a curious mixture of formal Victorian idiom and conversational questioning and answering informality. Her style might not have made much impact but surely her themes and her challenging treatment of the same contributed a great deal to the growth of women's poetry in Australia.

6.4 'AN ANSWER' : TEXT

Thy love I am. Thy wife I cannot be.
To wear the yoke of servitude - to take
Strange, unknown fetters that I cannot break
On soul and flesh that should be mine, and free.
Better the woman's old disgrace for me
Than this old sin - this deep and dire mistake;

Better for truth and honour and thy sake—
For the pure faith I give and take from thee.
I know thy love, and love thee all I can—
I fain would love thee only till I die ;
But I may some day love a better man,
And thou may'st find a fitter mate than I ;
Some want, some chill, may steal 'twixt heart and heart
And then we must be free to kiss and part.

(Ackland 1993 : 209)

6.4.1 Discussion

'An Answer' is the last poem of the volume. It is not only a representative poem of Cambridge as a feminist rebel but also being placed at the last page of the volume, it seems to represent the climax of Cambridge's feminist rebellion.

The extreme position of woman advocated by the poem was shocking even for the female social reformer of the day. The leading suffragist and social reformer of the time, **Rose Scott** wrote about this poem: 'This poem is the one I am sorry is in this book' (Bradstock and Wakeling:105).

The poem espouses the freedom of woman in a male-dominated society where the wife is often treated as a legitimatised prostitute. Cambridge gave voice to the woman whose spirit is rebellious, and wants to uphold her own freedom of choice. The poem strikes us because of the force of the statements, the intensity of subjective expression, and the directness with which the woman states whatever she wants to state. In this poem, the feminist poetry of Australia finds a universal articulation. The poem is striking not only because it has transcended the formality of Victorian rhetoric and idiom found often in Cambridge's poetry.

What strikes us now is Cambridge's extreme courage in articulating a woman's assertion of individual independence in a society which was predominantly patriarchal. She never falters in her statement throughout the poem. The poem has the formal structure of a sonnet but the manner of speaking by a woman gives a new flexibility and dynamism to the whole structure and makes it lively and exciting. The reader is drawn into the network of questions raised by the woman projected in the poem.

Cambridge not only allows the woman to talk out her heart but also gives her the words to assert and affirm her point of view which is given a clinching expression in the last two lines which assume the shape of a couplet in order to unflinchingly champion and proclaim woman's independence :

Some want, some chill, may steal 'twixt heart and heart
And then we must be free to kiss and part.

The analysis of the poem shows how Cambridge developed a new mode of poetic communication for feminist causes in the context of a male-dominated Australian poetic scenario. Here is an original contribution to the diversification of the various strands of nineteenth-century Australian poetry. With the projection of feminist issues by a woman poet during the nineteenth century, Australian poetry acquired a new dimension. With Cambridge's feminist poetry, Australian poetry of the nineteenth century presents a wide panorama of poetic progression in the right direction in a country which was discovered and developed only a hundred years ago. Thus nineteenth century Australian poetry is not exclusively masculine poetry, it also includes feminist poetry thus making Australian poetry complete in more sense than one.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

Ada Cambridge

During the nineteenth century the history of Australian poetry presents several landmarks in its progress. Cambridge's poetry published during the last quarter of the nineteenth century added a new dimension to Australian poetry. Thus Australian poetry became representative of the wide variety achieved in the spectrum of Australian culture over a hundred years of the nineteenth century. That women registered their protest in books of poetry speaks of the latitude of the Australian society and culture that found a true reflection in the nineteenth century Australian poetry.

6.6 QUESTIONS

1. What is your impression of Australian poetry by the end of the nineteenth century? Is it totally masculine?
2. Attempt an analysis of the social situation that might have led to the emergence of woman's poetry in Australia during the nineteenth century.
3. Do you find Cambridge's poetry is capable of handling and projecting anti-establishment ideas on poverty and woman's subjugation? Answer with illustrations.
4. Analyse some of Cambridge's poems to study the contribution made by them to the development of Australian poetry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A bibliography is a list of relevant books on a subject. In this bibliography, a select reading list on nineteenth century Australian poetry is given. The list is not comprehensive. You may find more books in a good library. But definitely a reading of the following books will give you a fair idea about nineteenth century Australian poetry. Excerpts and quotations from many of these books have been incorporated in the units. The page numbers of those extracts as they appear in the books quoted from are given in brackets.

Ackland, Michael, ed. 1993. *The Penguin Book of 19th Century Australian Literature*. Ringwood : Penguin Books.

Ackland, Michael. 1994. *That Shining Band*. St. Lucia : University of Queensland Press.

Barnes, John, ed. 1969. *The Writer in Australia*. Melbourne : Oxford University Press.

Barton, Patricia. 1988. 'Ada Cambridge : Writing for Her Life'. *A Bright and Fiery Troops*, ed. Debra Adelaide. Ringwood : Penguin Books.

Beilby, Raymond and Cecil Hadgraft. 1979. *Ada Cambridge, Tasma and Rosa Praed*. Melbourne : Oxford University Press.

Bennett, Bruce and Strauss, Jennifer, ed. 1998. *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Bradstock, Margaret and Louise Wakeling . 1991. *Battling the Orthodoxies*. Ringwood : Penguin Books.

Cantrell, Leon, ed. 1974 (Rpt.). 'Introduction'. *Writings of 1890s*. St. Lucia : University of Queensland Press.

Clarke, Manning 1980. *A Short History of Australia*. Melbourne : Macmillan.

Davis, Beatrice, ed. 1984. *The Illustrated Treasury of Australian Verse*. Melbourne : Nelson.

Elliott, Brian. 1964. 'The Colonial Poets'. *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton. Ringwood : Penguin Books.

Elliot and Mitchell, ed. 1970. *Bards in the Wilderness*. Melbourne.

Gifford and Hall, ed. 1948. *Selected Poems of Charles Harpur*. Melbourne.

Green, H.M. 1984. *A History of Australian Literature*. Vol I . Sydney : Angus and Robertson.

Harpur, Charles. 1986. *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Michael Ackland. Ringwood : Penguin Books.

Hergenhan, Laurie, ed. 1988 *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*. Ringwod : Penguin Books.

Hope, A.D. 1974. *Native Companions*. Sydney : Angus and Robertson.

- Kelly, William 1984. *Heritage of Australian Art*. Melbourne : Macmilan.
- Kramer, Leonie and Adrian Mitchell, ed. 1985. *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature*. Melbourne : Oxford University Press.
- Moore, T. Inglis, ed. 1968. *Poetry in Australia*. Sydney.
- Paterson, A.B 1993. *Collected Verse*. selected and introduced by Clement Semmler. Ringwood : Penguin Books.
- Semmler, Clement. 1967. *A.B. Paterson*. Melbourne : Oxford University Press.
- Semmler, Clement. 1974. *The Banjo of the Bush : The Life and Times of A.B. Paterson*. Melbourne : Oxford University Press.
- Semmler, Clement. 1978. , 'The Man from Snowy River'. *Australian Poems in Perspective*, ed. P.K. Elkin. St. Lucia : University of Queensland Press.
- Turner, Ian, 1964. 'The Social Setting'. *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton.
- Ward, Russel. 1974 (Rpt.) . *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne : Oxford University Press.
- Waters, Edgar, 1964. 'Ballads and Popular Vese'. *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton.
- Wilde, W. H. 1972. *Adam Lindsay Gordon*. Melbourne : OUP.
- Wilde, William, Joy Hooton and Barry Andrews . 1985. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*. Melbourne : OUP.
- Wilkes, G.A., ed : 1974. *The Colonial Poets*. Sydney : Angus and Robertson.
- Wordsworth, William. 1950, *The Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson. London : OUP.
- Wright, Judith. 1963. *Charles Harpur*. Melbourne : OUP.
- Wright, Judith. 1964. 'Australian Poetry to 1920'. *The Literature of Australian Literature*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton.
- Wright, Judith, 1966. *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*. Melbourne: OUP.