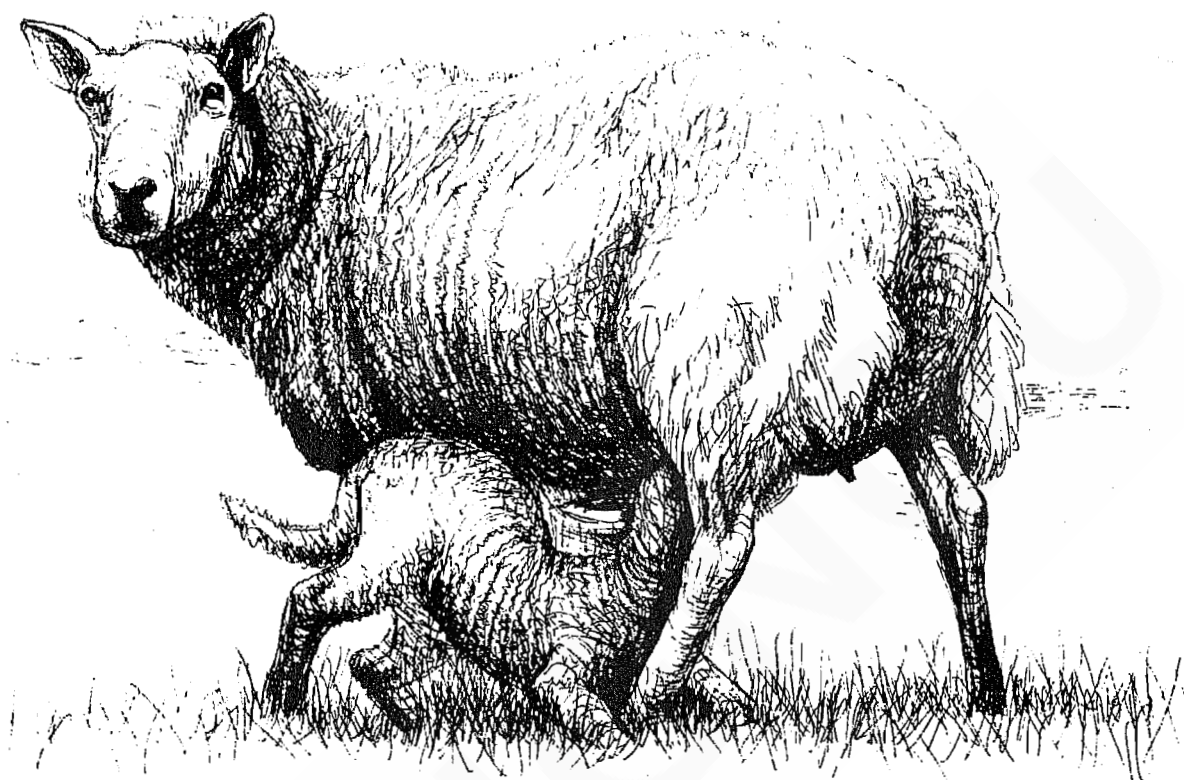




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UNIT 48 DYLAN THOMAS

Structure

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48.0. OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall discuss five poems by Dylan Thomas. After reading this unit you will be able

- a. to appreciate Dylan Thomas as a poet
- b. to enjoy the five poems interpreted for you
- c. to know his proper place in the tradition of 20th Century English Poetry.

48.1 INTRODUCTION

G.M Hopkins was something of a precursor of modern poetry. W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were the major poets of the first quarter of this Century. W.H. Auden represented the thirties. You are acquainted with these poets Dylan Thomas and Philip Larkin represent the Forties and the fifties respectively.

In this unit we are going to learn something about the life and art of Dylan Thomas, read and interpret five of his better known poems, and acquaint ourselves with some critical discussions of his poetry. We shall see that he was in some ways a poet of transition from modernism to post-war poetry,

48.2 DYLAN THOMAS

Modernism in English poetry reflected post-war (1) disillusionment, the impact of science and industrial society and an elite cosmopolitanism. Literary movements like symbolism, imagism, classicism, surrealism, socialism etc. Contributed to its emergence. Traditional verse forms and the paraphrasable content of poetry were rejected. Consequently, new poetry characterised by free verse, missing syntactic links and recondite allusions became obscure and difficult for the common reader. But the cinema, the radio, the television and other new audio-visual means of mass communication posed a challenge to the elite tendency. Class and mass cultures clashed.

Dylan Thomas was a product of this clash or tension. His love for words and language was inspired by nursery-rhymes, folk tales, ballads, hymns, the rhythms of the Bible, Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, and Shakespeare. With his love of rhetoric he played the game of language with a romantic sincerity, a dazzling brilliance, and a baffling theatricality, which just fell short of achieving the vision of the mature poet which is focused on life within and beyond language.

Like Lord Byron and D. H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas had become a legendary figure in his lifetime. He made poetry a performing art. His poetry was lyrical and sometimes enigmatic in a challenging manner about sex, death and religion.

The most conscious craftsman after Eliot, he allowed a dream-like association of Images, many of them taken from childhood memories, to form the connecting thread on which a poem was to be hung. His innovations, like Hopkins's, are verbal and textural more than structural

But his pride in his talent was mitigated by his sense of humour and irony. He loved acting and showing off. A celebrated broadcaster and a fascinating reader of poems, he was a forerunner of the Angry young men of the fifties. He was believed to have led a guerrilla attack on the classicism of Eliot and Auden and on the intellectual dominance of London, Oxford Cambridge and Harvard. His romantic revolt unleashed a coarseness and richness of language, a revelling in comedy and bawdry, an affirmation of the holy myths rather than a snivelling at God, and an orgy of the irrational. He celebrates life in his poetry. In the famous Author's Prologue to his *Collected Poems*, he said that he wrote "for the love of man and in praise of God"

However, his status as a poet remained controversial for about two decades after his death. Donald Davie accused him of abandoning the task of articulation and indulging in pseudo-syntax. C. H. Sisson found the obscurity of his poetry a willed effect and described his supposed lack of development as boring. According to him, Thomas is historically important as the prototype of much of the literary pretensions of the 1940s. David Holbrook also noticed a disabling amorality in his poetry leading towards the trivial and ultimately the inarticulate. His verbal impotence reflected his failure to grow up and accept adult potency. But John Wain argued that the open emotionalism, the large verbal gestures which seemed mere rant, the rapt pleasure in elaborate craftsmanship and above all the bardic tone of Thomas's poetry derived from his Welshness. Louis Simpson preferred this bardic tone to the dry discourse of later Auden. Thomas's physicality, his musical sounds and visual imagery, and his contempt for respectability magnetised American poetry leading to the legendary success of Ginsberg's reading of *Howl* in San Francisco in 1955. C.B.Cox maintained: "Thomas's rhetoric drives forward, often in anguish and rage, in a desperate attempt to overcome the fact of personal extinction. His bardic gestures are deliberate acts of defiance". Dylan Thomas passionately wanted to believe "in the magic of this burning and bewildering universe, in the meaning and the power of symbols, in the miracle of myself and of all mortals, in the divinity that is so near us and so longing to be nearer, in the staggering, bloody, starry wonder of the sky I can see above and the sky I can think of below".

48.2.1 A Brief Life Sketch

Dylan Marlais Thomas (1914-53) was born on 27th October, 1914 at Swansea in South Wales where his father, D. J. Thomas was a teacher of English in Swansea grammar school. *Fern Hill* and *Poem in October*, two of his famous poems, suggest that his childhood was happy. The sea and the woods provided a pastoral setting to his mind and imagination. He wrote:

I was born in a large Welsh industrial town at the beginning of the great war, an ugly, lovely town (or so it was, and is, to me), crawling strawling, slummed, unplanned, jerry villa'd, and smug-suburbed by the side of a long and splendid curving shore where truant boys and anonymous old men, in the tatters and hang

overs of a hundred charity suits, beach -- combed, idled and paddled, watched the dock bound boats, and threw stones into the sea for barking, outcast dogs

Thomas



Dylan Thomas

Notice, incidentally, the infatuation with words, and the stylistic peculiarity of fondness for epithets and compounds.

At the age of 17 he began writing and joined the staff of South Wales Evening Post as a reporter. He wrote mainly on literary subjects and published poems as well. In 1933 he wrote the poem (The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower) which, published in 1934, won him instant fame.

He moved to London in 1934. There he did some reviewing, writing for films, and broadcasting for the BBC. His recitals of poems on the radio or on gramophone records were magical, magnetic and electrifying. His warm, powerful voice, and his bardic intensity, made many poems sound greater than ever before

But in London he felt a stranger and lived a Bohemian life. In 1937 he married Caitlin Macnamara, a niece of Augustus John, the painter, and went to live with his bride in Laugharne. They had no money, but were in complete happiness "I have achieved", he wrote "poverty with distinction, but never poverty with dignity; the best I can manage is dignity with poverty". A weekly allowance from an admirer, James Laughlin of USA, helped him survive. He hated London. It was, to him, an insane city of the restless dead. This seems to echo T. S. Eliot's famous echo of Dante in the Waste Land: "I had not thought death had undone so many". Another admirer, Margaret Taylor, the wife of the famous historian, A. J. P. Taylor, patronised him continually, finally gifting a house at Laugharne to the poet whose last years were divided between the American tours and peace at home.

John Malcolm Brinnin arranged his hectic American lecture tours. In the last three and a half years of his life he made four visits to the USA. His readings of poems by Yeats, Hardy, Auden, Lawrence, Mac Neice, Alan Lewis, Edith Sitwell, and his own poems, received wild ovations. The poet acted the clown in his own tragedy. Finally, he succumbed, "like a mesmerised bait, only in this case a short-legged one to the multitudinous, scavenging pawn of America". He died of excessive drinking and various illnesses in New York on 9th November 1953. Playing the enfant terrible, the playboy of the western world, killed him. He liked snobbishly to believe that he was tubercular like Keats and like him fated to die young.

The attraction of America was irresistible for Dylan Thomas, as it had been for W.H. Auden. Auden had admired its openness and lack of tradition. Thomas's first visit to the U.S.A. was a roaring success, or roaring and a success. He seemed the fat, Rimbaud come again, Villon and more, the romantic poet in his ecstasy and agony. His audience understood him as a mob understands its leader without necessarily taking in his words. They knew "This is poetry and it is for them". The poet was playing to the gallery, but he set his listeners alive by his voice of elation and anguish ringing over their heads. Thomas's love for America was described by Karl Sliapero as 'grisly' for its being the untraditional place, the Romantic country par excellence.

48.2.2 The Poet and His Poetry

Dylan Thomas, like T. S. Eliot, baffled his first readers. While Herbert Read, for example, thought that Dylan Thomas wrote "the most absolute poetry of our time", Geoffrey Grigson described Thomas's poetry as "a meaningless hot sprawl of mud". The poet described himself as "a painstaking conscientious, involved and devious craftsman in words". He said further that he used "everything and anything to make my poems work and move in the direction I want them to: old tricks, new tricks, puns, portmanteau words, paradox, allusion, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, sprung rhythm. Every device there is in language is there to be used if you will. Poets have to enjoy themselves sometimes, and the twistings and convolutions are all part of the joy". His poetry, he believed, "is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light". Regarding the use of images he said: "A poem by myself needs a host of images, because its centre is a host of images. I make an image – though 'make' is not the word, let, perhaps, an image be made emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess – let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make (of the third image bred out of the other two together) a fourth, contradictory image, and let them all within my imposed formal limits, conflict".

During the twenty years of his poetic life (1933-53), the poet kept maturing and developing. He published the first three volumes of *Verses* in five years: *Eighteen*

Poems (1934), Twenty-five poems (1936), and The Map of Love (1939). The poems included in these volumes were more reworked from the original draft preserved later as the four Swansca Notebooks. The themes of the poems of this "womb-tomb" phase are creation, both natural and poetic, and death. "The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives the Flower" is included in the first volume, and "Death Shall Have No Dominion" in the second.

The poet was hailed as a new star on the literary firmament Edith Sitwell praised him, and explained his success as due to "his unique gift for dealing with fundamentals in the lives of most people, with birth and death, with God and the Devil, with love and decay." The second volume had urgent cadences and bardic incantation evoking Biblical memories. The third volume shows the conscious effort of the poet to be simpler, stronger, more real and concrete. Death preoccupied imagination.

With Deaths and Entrances (1946), after a gap of some seven years, and after the war, the mature Dylan Thomas emerged. Poem in October and Fern Hill are included in this volume. In Country Sleep (1952), the last volume of his poems, contains hymns in praise of god. The celebration of man, the poet said, is the celebration of god. Collected Poems (1952) has a famous prologue with a highly ingenious metrical scheme. Under Millwood, a radio play about Laugharne and its people, was published posthumously in 1954.

G.M.Hopkins, T.S.Eliot, W.H.Auden and Dylan Thomas were all struggling to achieve faith in their poetry. Dylan Thomas wanted to believe, "to believe for ever, that heaven is being, a state of being, and that the only hell is the hell of myself. I want to burn hell with its own flames". The spiritual urge was powerful in him. His intense awareness of the unity of man with the processes of Nature, and the identity of all forms of life, is expressed in an early poem, The Force That Through the Green Fuse. In another, later poem, he sees the poles "kissing as they cross". Man and Death are his metaphors. The process of time envelops both life and death, but vision and consciousness strive to achieve eternity. "I advance for as long as forever is." His ecstatic vision of childhood reminded critics of Vaughan, Traherne, Blake, Wordsworth, and Rousseau. The child walking with his mother "Through the parable of sunlight," "and the legends on the green chapels" show that the poet worshipped Nature or through Nature. C.B.Cox called his religious attitude "a kind of celebratory pantheism"

Dylan Thomas wrote..

Not for ambition or bread
Or the strut and trade of charms
On the ivory stages
Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spendthrift pages
Not for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.

Thomas was a lyric poet of the lofty kind who worked by symbols rather than by metaphor, because symbols connect art with life better than do metaphors. In a fine poem, Especially when the October Wind, he described not his "wrestle with words" but his seeking a new language which could become part of the creative process. The search or striving of his secondary imagination to be one with the primary was Shelleyan:

Shut, too, in a tower of words, I mark
on the horizon walking like the trees
The wordy shapes of women, and the rows
of the star-gestured children in the park,
some let me make you of the vowelled beeches
some of the oaken voices, from the roots
Of many a thorny shire tell you notes.
some let me make you of the water's speeches.

Notice, in particular, the phrases "tower of words", "the wordy shapes of women", "the vowelled beeches", "the oaken voices" and "the water's speeches". This is one step ahead of Wordsworth. Thomas's preoccupying idea that language is the house, or prison, of reality or existence, much more than mere dress of thought, is modern and links him with post structuralist discourse analysts like Foucault, Barthes and Derrida. The individuation of the poet was far from complete. But he may be regarded as believing that language speaks, not the poet, and struggling to achieve bardic anonymity and become a voice.

48.3 'THE FORCE THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE DRIVES THE FLOWER' : A DISCUSSION

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Mauls my shroud sail,
And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.
And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

This lyric by the adolescent poet identifies man with nature. The "force" is an ambiguous symbol, at once creative and destructive. The word "dumb" is also ambiguous, meaning (1) inarticulate and (2) foolish. The poem states the irony of impotence and power. Art defies death. Writing the poem is an act of personal freedom and choice for the poet.

The parallelism of the stanzas is striking. The first four begin with the thematic noun phrase. The form may be analysed into three parts (a) the first two stanzas form the first unit. (b) Death is overwhelming in the third stanza and in the concluding couplet.

(c) the fourth stanza asserts the triumph of life, art and spirit. This is suggested by the thematic noun phrases of the third and the fourth stanzas: The hand, the lips... the personification of the force, its humanisation. Notice the ambiguity in "leech". An old sense of the word is "healer". Rhetorical devices like metaphor, ambiguity, paradox, parallelism, are used. Words, phrases and clauses are repeated. The last two lines in all the stanzas form a refrain. The rhythmical pause in the middle of the second line in all the four stanzas is intended to suggest the interval of life between birth and death, life is like a short interval, a pause separating birth from death.

Let us consider diction and imagery. Two epithets "green" and "crooked" – qualify two nouns each. Words seem to prompt ideas and images. Notice "mouthing", "to mouth", "the same mouth sucks". If you notice the epithets, you get an insight into the creative process, "Crooked", for example, links the rose with the worm, life with death, the first stanza with the last, thus fusing form and theme. The word, mouth, used as noun, verb and participial adjective. "leech" as verb, mountain and fountain as adjective. The form and function of word is dynamic. Present participles suggest process.

Notice the association of images (a) mouth, lips, hands, (b) flower, tree, rose, (c) spring, winter, weather, (d) fever, sore (e) mountain, fountain, stream, whirlpool, water, sail, (f) tomb, shroud, sheet, wintry, hangman, etc.

William Empson pointed out that the poem "Centres on comparing the blood stream of the child Dylan to the sea-cloud-river cycle by which water moves round this planet. and he is united with the planet, also personally guilty of murder whenever a murdered is hanged and so forth. The mining term "vein" for a line of ore was naturally a crucial pun for the early Dylan, because of his central desire to identify events inside his own skin with the two main things outside it, the entire physical world and also the relations with that of other men".

The dual function of the poet's language embodies the dual aspects of nature. He avoided the extremes of surrealistic exuberance as well as dry, self-conscious precision, achieving in his best poems like this, a balance between the two, while retaining the separateness of both.

The force is explosive. "fuse" and "blast" suggest that. It is personified in the third and fourth stanzas. Its "hands" creates whirlpools which destroy ships and controls ships by pulling ropes. "Shroud sail" is paradoxical. The reference is to the legend of Theseus, son of the ruler of Athens. He forgot to change the sail of his ship to a white one while returning from Crete, having miraculously survived the ordeal there. The black sail suggested to his father that he had been killed and he threw himself to his death from the high rock of the Acropolis. The hanging man is at once the embryo and the executed criminal. The "sheet" is at once shroud or winding sheet, the bed-sheet covering the phallus, and the sheet of paper on which the poet's finger writes.

The two lines coda catches up the themes – (a) love and death in "lover's Tomb", reminding of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; (b) the crooked worm", a coffin – worm, is associated with death as well as Blake's crooked rose".

W. Y. Tindall described the rhythmic design: "The caesura, marked by a semi-colon, in the second line, the falling cadence of the short third line, and the free running fourth and fifth lines (not a rhymed couplet, but involved by rhyme with the first lines) constitute the very form for falling and rising, a contention of opposites, and an agreement of parallels. The approximate rhymes, except for the feminine ending of the first stanza are regular in their irregularity until the last line of the third stanza, where lime rhymes with time in the first line of the fourth stanza. The pattern of a baba broken by lime becomes a bab in the fourth stanza. Feelings of recurrence, variety and surprise seem effects of this scheme". The cadences and imagery of the

poem are traditional, "fuse" is the only word suggesting the 20th century, and the rhymes show an influence of Wilfred Owen.

A concert of rhythms and sounds, this poem shows the influence of Hopkins. Images of rope, sand and water support the clue of rhythm.

The themes of the poem is process, natural and creative. Process is an enactment in the immediate present of the dynamic interplay of subject and object. Impersonal nature and man as person is identified in a process or a cycle of creation and destruction. The process in time is lifted above and beyond time in language and verse.

Elder Olson classified Thomas's symbols in his poems as (1) conventional, (2) natural and (3) private. "wax", a symbol for dead flesh, is private symbol. Sores or wounds stand for the pain of life. The heart the navel wound, the sexual parts and the sexual act, Christ, the effects of Time".

Like Keats's Ode to the Grecian Urn, this poem starts the theme that art transcends time or death.

48.4 'AND DEATH SHALL HAVE NO DOMINION'

Critics have observed that Thomas's range of subjects is extremely limited. Love and sex were inseparable in his imagination. As he grew older, sex became a nightmare and love remained a mere slogan. Death, the other important theme, of his poetry preoccupied his imagination from the beginning.

The first line is repeated six times in this poem of three stanzas of nine lines each. The first and the last lines of each stanza are the same. It is a line adapted from St. Paul, Romans VI: 9: Death hath no more dominion. Biblical allusions abound in Dylan Thomas's poems.

The theme of the poem is traditional John Donne, in a sonnet says:

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Shakespeare too had said:

And death once dead, there's no more dying then.

The Christian myth of resurrection on the Last Day of Judgement is implicit in the poems.

Written by the poet at the age of 19. The poem is innovative in form. Not a sonnet, it is a poem of three nine-line stanzas of traditional iambic tetrametres.

Let us first consider the theme. Man for the poet is man from seed to grave, with the emphasis on the grave. The tone of the preacher is adopted or mimicked in this poem. The making of a poem is also the poet's making of his self. His concern with his individual world which he tries to express emotionally, not with objective detachment is remarkable. His God is cosmic energy, not the Old Testament God of judgement. If we look for consistency of ideas or thought in Thomas's poetry, we shall be disappointed. How shall we reconcile "And Death shall have no dominion" with "After the first death, there is no other". He sounds conventional. but he is not serious, The latter line from "A Refusal to Mourn is characteristically ambiguous

The assertion "**And** death shall have no dominion" asks for the impossible, at least to a sceptic or agnostic reader. The irony and pathos is tragic.

In the first stanza, the poet asserts that the dead will be recreated on the Judgement Day. They will be joined to the wind and stars in a united Creation" **Though** lovers be lost love shall **not**" is a line which seems a sort of **an** intrusive, if fine, idea. Or is this imperishable love God's love for **man**'?

In the second stanza, the rise of the martyrs **from** the dead is described. They were tortured in their lifetime and might have lost faith ("Faith in their hands shall snap in two").

The world of the early poetry of Thomas was described by Elder Olson as tragic, not melodramatic. Is this poem serious enough to have a **tragic** tone?. The faith in resurrection **may** not be unwavering, but a line like "**break** in the sun till the sun breaks down" expresses it **forcefully**.

This poem does not have the **textural** density of "The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower". Its diction is less complex, though we have characteristic phrases e.g. "the unicorn evils".

48.5 'POEM IN OCTOBER' : AN ANALYSIS

Notice (1) That the poet celebrates his own **birthday**, (2) That birth, life and death are simultaneously present in his imagination and (3) that the urge to transcend time and defeat death in art or poetry is intense and paramount. The last line of this poem is memorable **and** passes Matthew Arnold's 'touchstone' method of test. The other birthday poems by the poet were written (1) on his twentieth birthday and (2) on his thirty fifth. Thus, in chronological order, the poems are as follows:

1. Especially when The October Wind (20th birthday)
2. "Twenty-Four Years Remind The Tears of My Eyes". (24th B'day)
3. "Poem in October" (30th B'Day)
4. "Poem On His Birthday" (35th B'Day)

The first **poem** shows how the poet views the world **through** language, In terms of words, vowels, voices, notes, and speech, spelling, declaration, signs, tell, meaning **etc**. Phrases like "The wordy shapes of women" "Shut in a tower of words", "Oaken voices", "neural meaning", "the **vowelled** beeches", "the water's speeches" etc. are original.

Gradually, **Thomas** progressed from word as thing to word as sign. "For Thomas, not only is seeing a language, as Coleridge remarked: being is a language **too**", A synesthesia in his poems gave abstract thought and language an overpowering reality. He was "haunted by the indivisibility of mind and matter". In the use of symbols, Thomas achieved energy rather than clarity. **Allen** Tate denounced the belief that "language itself can be reality, or by incantation can create a reality". He regarded **this** a superstition shared by Dylan **Thomas**. Thomas used tropes as concepts in his poetry, though the concepts are elementary.

Let us consider our text, "Poem in October". For this poet, **meaning** was bound up with pattern **and** order. This poem of the third phase of the development of the poet presents a ritual, sacramental picture of nature: "**the** heron **priested** shore" "water praying". The scene is made vivid and concrete, "harbour and neighbour wood" of Laugharne is recalled. What was called "pseudo-syntax" is compact sentence-structure in Thomas's poetry. Some links are snapped to **make** the poem **more** compact or poetic. Remembrance is commemoration **in** the poem, The poet was

described as a child or **an** adolescent unable to face life. The poet of genius unable to face life seems to be a contradiction of terms.

The morning scene is so holy that water seems to be praying and herons priests. The poet walks through the scene which is a beautiful confusion of actuality and memory, of country and sea, of the sun and rain of a sunshine shower.

I, My, myself refer directly to the poet. The repetition of these pronominal forms reflects the subjectivity or egocentricity of the autobiographical poem. The "water-Bird, and the birds of the winged trees flying my name" is a sort of self-projection or identification with nature. The phrase "a shower of all my days" is mixing the past and the present, memory with perception. "Gates closing as the town awakes" imply, according to W.Y. Tindall, rebirth (from a public womb) on his birthday. But this is far-fetched. In the second stanza, "the birds of the winged trees flying my name" may simply mean birds flying above the waves. "Dylan" in English means "High Tide".

Spring and summer impregnate autumn. "A springful of larks" and "the sun of October summery" are fine phrases. Consider, particularly, words like "springful", "summery". Notice the stanza-form contracting and expanding. Sunshine and rain symbolise childhood and youth, past and present. The childhood Jays of Swansea or Fern hill come to mind. "The tall tales beyond the border" "There could I marvel my birthday away but the weather turned around."

The parables of sunlight" and "the legends of the green chapel" remind of the poem written ten years ago (Especially when the October Wind).

The stanza-form is regular. The seven stanzas of ten lines each, the lines of varying length, are all consciously organized. The poet becomes in imagination the child with his mother. The tears of the infant "burned by cheeks" "Summertime of the dead" is past summers. The child is in a sense dead, or the dead people whom the child loved may be the meaning consider the sentence: "And the Truce."

Joy of the long dead child sang burning In the Sun

Notice the paradoxes: joy sang burning in the sun. The true joy of the long dead child. Notice also the rhythmic manipulation of the sentence. The poet wishes to sing next year like this.

O may my heart's truth still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.

Five years later, in his last birthday poem, written only five years before his death, the poet wrote:

The closer I move
To death, one man through his sundered hulks,
The louder the sun blooms
And the tusked, ramshackling sea exults.

In fifteen years the poet developed and matured from the fascination of language to a mastery of it, from the world of words to the world of experience.

"Poem in October" creates a fantasy world where things exist and mingle in twild. lovely confusion, till this rainbow world of fantasy is drowned in the sea of reality. Confusion of seasons suggested a timeless simultaneity in imagination.

Notice the connective "and" dominating syntax in stanza V. The concluding stanza repeats elements of the preceding stanzas. But the vision is static, and the poem ends with a prayer that the poet may continue writing poems.

48.6 "FERN HILL": AN EVALUATION

"Fern Hill", the poem, derives its title from the name of a farm which was the home of the poet's aunt, Anne Jones, whose death he mourned in an earlier poem, "After the Funeral". In "Fern Hill" the poet remembers the happy holidays he spent there away from Swansea, and idealises the excitement and innocence of childhood. He succeeds in communicating the exhilaration which he felt as a child.

Language is used in a very original and eloquent way. There is repetition, "green" is repeated in each stanza. Startling similes like "fire green as grass"; transferred epithets such as

Spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable;

arresting metaphors such as "rode to sleep". "it was Adam and maiden" gains its effect by compression, exaggeration as when the hay fields were "high as the house". are all meant to suggest the child's imagination. The poet is adopting the child's view of the world and life. Phrases like "all the sun long", "all the moon long" show how a child measures time.

The poet has been compared with poets like Vaughan and Wordsworth. This poem celebrates childhood almost in the manner of Wordsworth's immortality ode. But for Thomas, immortality is only that of art, not of religion or the spirit, as it is for Wordsworth. His boy does not come "Trailing clouds of glory... from god, who is our home". Time is his enemy.

The boy hero is the prince, the lord, famous, the shepherd, the Runner and Adam in the poem which opens with a subtle, unemphasized opposition between Time and the boy-hero". "Time let me hail and climb...", That is to say, play like a child. "easy under the apple boughs, "honoured, "prince of the apple town". The poet mimicks the child's babble effectively, creating life through language.

Striking phrases such as "once below a time", the rivers of the windfall light" in the first stanza should be noticed "once upon a time" is adapted or modified. This is not merely unconventional. It emphasizes that man is subject to time, "river of light" is metaphorical: light flowing as in a river; "windfall" suggests that the splendour of these rivers of light is a windfall, an unexpected prize,

Words like green, golden are repeated. "Time let me hail and climb" is echoed in "Time let me play and be".

The second stanza uses words, like Sabbath and holy to give a religious dimension to boyhood experience of vacation on the farm. It reflects the adult nostalgia for and idealisation of childhood.

In the third stanza, "fire green as grass" is a queer expression, "green suggesting intensity and vitality. The boy imagined or fantasized that while he was sleeping at night, the farm was carried away by the owls, and when he woke up, the farm, "like a wanderer white with the dew", came back with "the cock on his shoulder" "Adam and maiden" suggests that the boy thinks of Eve as a maiden. His world was like the garden of Eden before the original sin was committed, or the forbidden fruit ("apple") tasted notice the light abounding and the constant presence of the sun.

"The whinnying green, stable" is an example of transferred epithet. Horses, not stables, whinny or neigh and are green or youthful. "The fields of praise" means the

fields of Fern Hill for which the boy was all praise connect "the sun grew round that very day" and "the sun born over and over".

"Lamb white days" suggests bright, pure, and innocent days or time. It is not the colour of the lamb but its virtue that is meant in this curious phrasing, "riding to sleep" is boyish imagination for falling asleep or going to sleep.

The farm has "forever fled", as the boy has grown a man.

"I sang in my chains like the sea" is at once the boy and the poet singing. The simile of the sea is highly imaginative. The sea is chained to the moon and the sun, and sings in its waves and tides. The poet is like the sea, the image is glorifying. The sea is eternal, and so, the poet seems to suggest, is the art of poetry. Time's slave transcends time in this way.

48.7 READING 'A REFUSAL TO MOURN THE DEATH, BY FIRE, OF A CHILD IN LONDON'

The buoyance of rhythm, alliteration and rhymes in the best poems of Dylan Thomas (such as this) asserts the triumph of life and art. This elegy is on the surface "a refusal to mourn". As William Empson notices. "The poet says he will not say what he says". But, as C.B. Cox pointed out. "Thomas is determined to create, to build his ark on the flood of life". In other words, the poet insists on celebrating life against all odds.

Let us study David Daiches's analysis of the poem:

The poem is ritualistic in tone; its dominant images are sacramental; and the cunningly contrived rise and fall of the cadence of each stanza adds to the note of formal ceremony. There are four stanzas, the first two and one line of the third containing a single sentence which swells art to a magnificent surge of meaning. Then, after a pause, the final stanza makes a concluding ritual statement, an antiphonal chant answering the first three stanzas. The paraphrasable meaning of the poem is simple enough; the poet is saying that never, until the end of the world and the final return of all things to their primal elements, will be distort the meaning of the child's death by mourning. One dies but once, and through that death becomes reunited with the timeless unity of things. But the paraphrasable meaning is not, of course, the meaning of the poem, which is expanded at each point through a deliberately sacramental imagery while at the same time the emotion is controlled and organised by the cadences of the stanza. The first stanza and a half describe the end of the world as a return from differentiated identity to elemental unity... The water bead and the ear of corn (of the second stanza) are symbolic primal elements, to which all return at the end. But why "Zion of the water bead" and "synagogue of the ear of corn"? The answer is that the poet wants to shock the reader into attention to the sacramental meaning. A more everyday religious word might pass by as a conventional poetic image, but "synagogue" attracts our attention at once: it has no meaning other than its literal one, and therefore can be used freshly in a non-literal way. The concluding stanza gives the reason, the counter statement. This echoes, in its own way, the opening stanza; but the tone is new, it is that of liturgical proclamation. We need not wince at the suggestion that "long friends" means (among other things) worms; worms for Thomas were not disgusting, but profoundly symbolical; like maggots they are elements of corruption and thus of reunification, of eternity",

In the second stanza, "Zion" is used. It is the name of a small hill in Jerusalem, the sacred city of the Jews. There is a Jewish temple on the hill from which prayer is

offered to god, "bead" in water bead reminds of beads in a rosary. "Synagogue" is also the Jewish temple or place of worship.

Thomas

"Sow my salt seed" means "shed tears" In the least valley of sackcloth". Sackcloth is worn by ascetics and by repentant sinners. "Valley of sackcloth" is a place of public mourning.

"I shall not murder the mankind of her going with a grave truth". The queer use of "mankind for humanity is characteristic.

The pun on "grave" is evident.

"Stations of the breath" on the analogy of the Biblical "Stations of the cross", places where crosses are fixed as reminder of the suffering and last agony of Christ.

"The riding Thames"-the beautiful epithet ("riding") in the phrase suggests the river's immortality as a pathetic contrast with the child's death. But the pathos is subdued. The river of life may be part of the suggestion.

The question is: Is the poet's faith in the Christian myth of the last Day of Judgement real, personally felt, or merely used as a convention? The last line is ambiguous. It yields conflicting meanings. (a) Death comes only once. This is the view of the man without faith. (b) Death is followed by perpetual life. This is the religious view. Which is the poet's?

David Daiches thought that this poem stated the poet's feeling "of the unity of all creation and all time to serve the purpose of a specific occasion". Does the poem celebrate the unity and identity of all life or creation, or does it mourn the premature death of a child? Doubt and irony or faith-Death or Life-which is more valuable to the poet! Or are they equally important? Karl Shapiro thought: "there are two minds at work in Thomas, the joyous, naturally religious mind, and the disturbed, almost pathological mind of the cultural fugitive or clown".

48.8 TEST YOURSELF : QUESTIONS WITH HINTS FOR ANSWERS

- 1.(a) Discuss Dylan Thomas's view of poetry in the light of the following descriptions:
 - (i) Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. It is emotion recollected in tranquillity. W. Wordsworth
 - (ii) Poetry is, at bottom, a criticism of life. M. Arnold
 - (iii) Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion. T.S. Eliot Comment particularly on Thomas's "individual" struggle from darkness towards "some measure of light". Try to describe the individuality, the uniqueness, the difference. of the struggle.
2. Write a note on Thomas's use of imagery with reference to the poems you have studied. Attempt a classification in terms of the different registers to which they seem to belong:
3. Do you think the process of image formation in his poems is fully controlled by his consciousness or partly prompted by subconscious imagination? Notice that on the one hand he claims that he is a conscious craftsman and on the other admits that he does not make an image, "I.ei. perhaps, an image be made emotionally in me". Would you say that the logical or linguistic inconsistency is imaginative or emotional consistency?

4. Analyse the use of language and verse in the poems under the following heads:
Diction: choice of words or lexical choice and range of vocabulary Syntax
The Noun Phrase, the verb Phrase and conjunctions (e.g. "and" in A Refusal)
The sentence and the clause Consider particularly the first sentence running in thirteen lines in A Refusal. Find the subject and the finite verb of the sentence. Consider the clauses. Attempt a paraphrase of the sentence.

Consider the finite verbs of The Force that... Notice that they are mostly in the present indefinite tense form, Compare this with the present participle form of the verbs in A Refusal, and the past tense of verbs in "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill". Would you accept the suggestion that the tense in The Force that makes it a descriptive poem and in A Refusal... It is an ironic juxtaposition of death and life. Notice also the future ("Shall have") in Death Shall Have No Dominion. Verse- The verse-forms are unconventional in the poems. Discuss if there is any compromise attained by the poet between traditional and personal prosody. Rhyme and rhythm are artfully manipulated. Show how. Consider the figures of speech used. Pun and paradox, in particular. Is irony central to his vision and technique?

5. Discuss the symbolism of Dylan Thomas: natural, conventional and private. Give examples.
6. Would you accept the suggestion that phrases like 'green age', "a grief ago", "once below a time", "colour of saying", "the riding Thames", "aale the sun long", "oaken voices", "the weather of the heart" etc. enrich the language?
7. Attempt an explanation of the following with reference to context: \
 - (a) I advance for as long as forever is,
 - (b) Break in the sun till the sun breaks down..
 - (c) I sang in my chains like the sea

8. Read the following:
Not until doomsday's final call
And all the earth returns once more
To that primaeval home of all.
When on that insubstantial shore
The tumbling primal waters foam
And silence rules her lonely home,

And I return to whence I came,
The sacramental child of earth,
Joining with nature to proclaim
A death that is a second birth-
No, not until that final sleep
Will I for this dead infant weep,

She lies with her ancestral dead.
The child of London, home at last
To earth from whence all life is bred
And present mingles with the past.
The unmourning waters lap her feet.
She has no second death to meet.

Compare this with Refusal to Mourn.... Which is the 'better poem, and why?

9. Discuss a Refusal to Mourn.... as an elegy. Compare it with the other elegies that you have read.
10. Critically examine the description of the language of Thomas's poems as "babble language" and its syntax as "pseudo-syntax. Did he fail to articulate experience or what he felt? Would you accept the suggestion that he played

- with language but did not play the game of language and versification well enough to become a poet of permanent value?
11. Compare Wordsworth and Thomas as poets of childhood or boyhood, particularly Ode on the Intimations of immortality with "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill."

Hints: (a) consider in particular the following lines from Wordsworth's ode:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath and elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar:

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, Who is our home:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy:

But he beholds, the light, and whence it flows,

He sees it in his joy;

The youth, who daily farther from the east

Must travel, still is Nature's priest.

And by the vision splendid

Is on his way attended;

At length the man perceives it die away,

And fade into the light of common day,

Would Thomas agree with Wordsworth's view of God and Soul? Could

Wordsworth write "the heron priested shore

The morning beckon

With water praying and call of seagull and rook...

If not, why not? The celebratory pantheism of Thomas is akin to

Wordsworth's nature-worship. Do you agree?

- (b) Other English poets, e.g. Henry Vaughan and William Blake, have sung of childhood. Read "The Retreat" by the former, and Songs of Innocence by the latter.
- (c) Wordsworth's desire for immortality contrasts with Thomas's.. preoccupation with death. Do you agree? Elaborate your idea. Time as creator and destroyer, evanescent and eternal: the poets view it from different angles. Bring out the difference.

12. Do you accept the view that Thomas is a poet of transition from modernism to the Movement of the fifties?
13. He is regarded as the most important English poet of the forties. What are the characteristics of the poetry of the decade reflected in his poems?
14. Discuss Dylan Thomas as a poet of the 20th century. His themes are limited but primary, elemental human experience. If you were to select ten British poets of the century, will you include Thomas among them?
15. Would you accept that he wrote "for the love of man and in praise

48.9 LET'S SUM UP

"Drunk with melody, and what the words were he cared about Dylan Thomas in 1955. Another critic (David developed his imagery of wombs and tombs, sex, protecting himself against adult reality". But celebration of life. The obscurity of his dict few major themes make him a controversial

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 From God, Who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy:
 But he beholds, the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 The youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest.
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended:
 At length the man perceives it die away,
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 Would Thomas agree with Wordsworth's view of God and Soul? Could Wordsworth write "the heron priested shore
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 With water praying and call of seagull and rook...
 If not, why not? The celebratory pantheism of Thomas is akin to Wordsworth's nature-worship. Do you agree?

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15. Would you accept that he wrote "for the love of man and in praise of God"?

48.9 LET'S SUM UP

"Drunk with melody, and what the words were he cared not", said Robert Graves about Dylan Thomas in 1955. Another critic (David Holbrook) argued that "Thomas developed his imagery of wombs and tombs, sex and corpses, as a means of protecting himself against adult reality". But David Daiches admired Thomas's celebration of life. The obscurity of his diction and syntax and the ambiguity of his few major themes make him a controversial poet.

But some of his poems illustrate 20th century English poetry at its best. His love for words and language was exceptional. Some of his lines and phrases are memorable and form a part of current English. "I advance for as long as forever is". "I sang in my chains like the sea", "Do not go gentle into that good night", and "The hand that signed the paper felled a city" "neural meaning", "colour of saying". "a grief ago". "all the sun long", "once below a time", "the lamb white days" "a process in the weather of the heart", "the riding Thames" etc. Show his originality. He realised his ambition of making his poems "a watertight section" of the stream of life and consciousness. His symbolism has three aspects: natural, conventional and private. He was a poet for whom meaning was bound up with pattern and order. He makes his language a part of the stream of consciousness.

Except for "Poem in October", the other four poems we have studied show that the poet was preoccupied with the interinvolvement of creation and destruction. But his love for childhood or boyhood and his sacramental feeling for the unity of man and nature are no less important.

His world was "an enclosed one, a world of intuitions about the imprisoned self which could be shared between writer and reader but is not capable of demonstration in terms of the communal nature of man". If he had lived longer, "he would have seen Man, as he had seen himself, "up to his head in his blood, and –for that very reason-also up to his head in a world of poetry" (John Bayley 1957).

48.10 FURTHER READING

11.

POEMS

1. *Eighteen Poems* (1934)
2. *Twenty five poems* (1936)
3. *The Map of Love* (1939)
4. *New Poems* (1943)
5. *Deaths and Entrances* (1946)
6. *In Country Sleep* (1952)
7. *Collected Poems* (1934-1952) (1952)

VERSE PLAY

1. *Under Milk Wood* (1954)

STORIES

1. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940)
2. *Adventures in the Skin trade* (1955)
3. (with J. Davenport) *The Death of the king's canary* (1976)

OTHER WRITINGS

1. *A Child's Christmas in Wales* (1954 rev. 1959)
2. *A Prospect of the Sea* (1955) ed. D. Jones
3. *Miscellany* (1963)

LETTERS

1. *Letters to Vernon Watkins* (1957)
2. *Selected Letters* (ed. C. Fitzgibbon) (1966)

1. *Dylan Thomas: A Bibliography* (1956) J.A. Rolph
2. *The Life of Dylan Thomas* (1966) C. Fitzgildon)
3. *Llareggub Revisited* (1962) G.Holbrook
4. *Dylan Thomas: the Code of'Night* (1972) G.Holbrook ,
5. *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas* (1966) W.J.Moynihan
6. *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas* (1954) E. Olson
7. *A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas* (1962) W. Y. Tindall
8. *A Casebook on Dylan Thomas* (1960) Birnmin (ed)
9. *Dylan Thomas: Zoth Century Views* (1966) C.B. Cox (ed)
10. *Dylan Thomas* (1963) T.H. Jones
11. *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet*, (1960) E.W. Tedlock (ed)
12. *Dylan Thomas and Poetic Dissociation* (1964) David Holbrook.

UNIT 49 PHILIP LARKIN AND MOVEMENT POETRY

Structure

- 49.0 Objectives
- 49.1 Introduction
- 49.2 Poetry of the 'Fifties
 - 49.2.1 Who were the Movement Poets?
 - 49.2.2 Origins of Movement Poetry
 - 49.2.3 The Movement Progresses
 - 49.2.4 As a Reactionary Movement
 - Reaction to Eliot and Pound
 - Reaction to the Poetry of the 'Thirties
 - Reaction to Dylan Thomas
 - 49.2.5 The New Manifesto
 - The Role of the Poet
 - Discarding Tradition
- 49.3 Philip Larkin
 - The Poet as an ordinary man
- 49.4 The Poems
 - 49.4.1 "I Remember, I Remember"
 - 49.4.2 "Toads"
 - 49.4.3 "Toads Revisited"
 - 49.4.4 "Mr. Bleaney"
 - 49.4.5 "Church Going"
 - 49.4.6 "The Whitsun Weddings"
 - 49.4.7 "At Grass"
- 49.5 Exercises in Comprehension
- 49.6 Summing Up
- 49.7 Select Bibliography

49.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to **make** you aware of the **new** trend that crept into English poetry in the 1950s, and to **introduce** you to the **work** of Philip **Larkin**. **After reading this unit** you should be able to

- Understand the **main** characteristics of **Movement** Poetry which **emerged** as a **reaction** to the poetry of Eliot, Auden and others:
- Be **familiar** with the poetry of Philip **Larkin**; and
- Assess **Larkin's** place in the English poetic tradition.

49.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first place, this unit will discuss the reaction to the clever **intellectual** poetry of the first half of the twentieth-century **which** came with the Movement **poets** of the 1950s.

Then we will move **on** to the most important **of the** Movement Poets, Philip **Larkin**. **Larkin's work**, with special reference to a few selected **poems**, will be **introduced** and analyzed.

Now I will give you a step-by-step account of English poetry of the fifties.

49.2.1 Who were the Movement Poets?

You have already read about Dylan Thomas and are aware of the immense popularity he enjoyed. Because of this popularity Dylan Thomas provoked the ire and envy of many of his contemporaries. As a reaction to his "excesses", there began in England a new school of poetry that came to be called the Movement, the main spokesmen of which were Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest who voiced their resentment against Thomas. Kingsley Amis had strong objections against the poet who always seemed drunk with words: in his opinion, Thomas "should have stuck to spewing beer, not ink". Robert Conquest, who edited the anthology *New Lines* in 1956, was equally vehement against Thomas. He objected to his style as "diffuse and sentimental verbiage or hollow pirouettes" and themes as "naivetes and nostalgias of childhood," strongly advocating the cause of pedestrian decency. What came as an immediate reaction to Dylan Thomas was the **Movement Poetry** of the 1950s.

49.2.2 The origins of Movement Poetry

The origins of Movement Poetry may be traced to a series of events in the years that followed the death of Dylan Thomas. To begin with, on the 1st of October 1954, there appeared an anonymous article in *The Spectator*, the purpose of which was apparently to ring out the current poetic norms and usher in a new era in poetic fashion. With this aim, the article spoke at length about the changing times and how, change being the law of life, it is but desirable that literature, too, should change accordingly. Literary tastes keep changing, and a new age has its own brand of sensibility which must be expressed in a new language. The "approved names" of the previous decades no longer fitted the bill: they were simply relics from a bygone age. The way must now be cleared for a younger generation with different ideas on poetry. The *Spectator* article was simply a harbinger of what was to follow. It prepared a suitable background and suggested that a new generation of writers had now emerged on the literary scene, more suited to the changed world of the 'fifties. These writers of the new "Movement" thus emerged as a reaction to the older generation of poets. They were described as taking on a stance antithetical to that of T. S. Eliot in that they were "skeptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in a wicked, commercial, threatened world". The disagreement, thus, is not with the milieu, not with the perception of the world: the group of poets that emerge in the 'fifties see the world as materialistic, evil, and banal as that visualized by Eliot. The difference with the older poet lies in the individual reaction to it. Eliot, as Tiresias, would sit by the Thames and weep for the horror, the boredom and the glory, but the younger generation of poets remains undisturbed; in fact they are even robust in the face of despair.

49.2.3 The Movement Progresses

Two other events in the following years are important landmarks in the evolution of the new poetic movement. The first was the publication of *Poets of the Nineteen-Fifties* by D. J. Enright in 1955, and the other was *New Lines*, published by Robert Conquest in 1956. These two anthologies together published the work of nine new poets who were considered *avant garde*, heralding a change in literary taste. Apart from D. J. Enright and Robert Conquest, the poets were Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings, John Wain, Thom Gunn, and Philip Larkin. Today when we speak of the "Movement," we generally refer to this group of loosely linked poets. It is a reactionary movement in the sense that these poets share a mutual dislike for their immediate predecessors in poetry. Their resistance to existing poetic norms holds this assorted group together. If we take the poets individually, we see that they have little else in common. In fact, several of them did not even wish to be identified with a group. Others seemed unaware of its existence. Besides, most of them outgrew their

community of interests, developed in diverse directions, and moved on. Philip Larkin was an exception who remained consistent in his themes and attitude.

49.2.4 A Reactionary Movement

Reaction to Eliot and Pound

John Wain's autobiography, *Sprightly Running*, speaks of Oxford in the early 'forties when a group of friends with a community of interests clustered together for mutual encouragement and support. They tried to give a new direction to literature. The key figures in this band were Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin whose views were strongly influenced by their tutor, Gavin Bone. This, incidentally, was a period when the influence of T. S. Eliot was at its zenith, but the tutor and his two students were unaffected by it. For them, Eliot's was a negative influence on literature and something had to be done to counter it. If the modernist movement advocated a new way of looking at life, a new form and mode through which to express the sensibility of the age, Larkin and his friends disputed each tenet of modernism. In fact, Philip Larkin went to the extent of saying that Ezra Pound, Pablo Picasso, and Charlie Parker were three villains of the age. What Pound (who was undoubtedly the most influential figure on the literary horizon in the first quarter of the twentieth century), the unconventional painter Picasso, and the controversial modern jazz saxophonist, Parker, had in common was the spirit of innovation. Ezra Pound, with Eliot, weary of hackneyed poetic modes, advocated a new way of approaching poetry directly, with the minimum possible words, creating images striking for their clarity and appropriateness. Pound was unconventional, flamboyant and loud. He wielded authority on the literary scene like a dictator and got away with it. Inevitably, his attitude caused resentment for there were those, supposedly lesser talents, who were not sponsored by him whereas Eliot was. A reactionary group was bound to come into existence sooner or later. Up to the second world war it was the modernist wind that blew strong and could not be withstood. But in the nineteen-fifties, when the strength of the wind began to abate, the time was ripe for the authority of Pound and Eliot to be challenged. And this is exactly what Larkin and his friends did.

The Movement poets were antagonistic towards Eliot because much of his work is too clever and too allusive to be understood by the common man. His poetry makes far too many assumptions, too many demands on the reader. It is not meant for relaxation, not suited to leisurely reading. It needs a special kind of audience: not only familiar with the collective mind of Europe, but also aware of the entire history of humankind from ancient times to the contemporary scene. The mythic mode practiced by Eliot involves a broad frame of reference, an expansive vision on the reader's part. Larkin disapproves of Eliot's style: "...first of all you have to be terribly educated, you have to read everything to know these things, and secondly you've got somehow to work them in to show you are working them in...."

Besides being too learned, Eliot's poetry voices a discontentment with things as they are. It does not lull the reader into a hushed acceptance of reality. Visualizing the present-day world as a barren waste to be contrasted with a rich but and productive distant past when social and moral values had not yet fallen, it attempts to incite the reader into an awareness of the spiritual drought of the times, pointing towards the need for rising out of all complacencies to work a way towards at least personal salvation. The appeal of such poetry is inevitably to the minority of readers who are aware of needs other than the physical. Eliot, certainly, is unsuited to the ordinary man whose concerns are generally limited to daily routine and the mundane aspects of existence. A new kind of poetry was the need of the day, so Larkin and his friends were convinced.

Reaction to the Poetry of the 'thirties

If Eliot was out, so was Auden, and for almost the same reasons. Auden's work, again, is intellectually demanding, although in a manner different from Eliot's. It is political in the sense that it speaks of the conditions between the two wars, the insecurity, the

hardships, and the growing mechanization of life. It goes beyond mere superficialities, trying to trace the malady of the age to its roots. Doing so, Auden often resorts to Freud, and sees the cause of most ailments to be psychological. At the same time, Auden's views were influenced by Marx and by the educator, Homer Lane, a disciple of Jung. As a result of these shaping forces, Auden develops a breadth of vision that encompasses vast vistas of human civilization, and at a glance takes a bird's eye view of life in all its multifarious aspect. Inevitably, such a panorama visualized by a hawk or an airman will not be a simplistic one. It will include the good and the ugly, the high and the low facets of life. And such is Auden's perspective in his poems. It can be appreciated only if the reader has the intellectual background, flexibility and receptivity of mind to keep pace with his thought. But for the Movement poets of the fifties, he was just too clever!

Reaction to Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas, too, went out of favour with the Movement, but for entirely different reasons. If Eliot and Auden offended them by being too clever, Dylan Thomas's naivete also irked them:

Poets like 'Mr. Donald Davie or Mr. Thom Gunn are only less hostile to the political preoccupations of the Thirties than to the lush, loose fashionable writing of the Forties and the Fifties.

This is how an anonymous article in *The Spectator* (1, Oct, 1954) summed it up. There was a protest against Thomas's excesses. His poems were too spontaneous, too full of emotion to be considered mature. Kingsley Amis stated his objections in "A Poet's Epitaph," that Thomas was guilty of being "drunk with words." Robert Conquest, in *New Lines*, strongly attacked Thomas, voicing the opinion of all the Movement poets. He disapproved of Thomas's poetics, calling him the exponent of "the debilitating theory that poetry must be metaphorical". Even though Donald Davie partly defended Thomas, the general opinion remained critical of his verbal calisthenics. Dylan Thomas went out of fashion.

49.2.5 The New Manifesto

The Hole of the Poet

In particular, the new generation of poets was averse to the romantic concept of the poet being a special person in any way. In the nineteenth century, the poet was regarded as a seer of sorts, a mystic who could see into the heart of things. He was believed to have powers that were denied to the ordinary human being and was on a plane far above the normal. His vision extended much beyond the frontiers of the terrestrial world. "Hear the voice of the Bard!/Who present, past, and future sees," said William Blake, in his Introduction to *Songs Of Experience*, anticipating the thoughts of the poets who followed in his footsteps. The poet as a special person: this is also the idea behind Wordsworth's *The Prelude* which traces the evolution of a mere child into a poet groomed by the beauty and the fear of Nature. This is also the feeling the reader gets on reading Coleridge's extraordinary poems like "Kubla Khan," "Christabel," and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," partly because of the strange atmosphere of the poems and partly because our reading is coloured by our awareness of the poet's addiction to opium and the resultant fantasies which inspired his muse. Our impression of the nineteenth-century poet, thus, is that of a man possessed by divine powers in the twentieth century, for T.S. Eliot, too, the poet remains a gifted person. In Eliot's opinion, he must have a Tiresias-like vision and, though blind, should be able to see the squalor and depravity in all walks of life. He is different from the rest of mankind which remains blissfully unaware of the spiritual sterility they suffer from. The poet is an exception among the "dull roots" for he alone has been stirred by the "spring rain" into an awareness of the drought condition. He can comprehend the fragmentation and complexity of life and searches for a way towards redemption.

With Dylan Thomas, the image of the poet is no longer a rational, controlled one. Thomas's is once again the romantic concept of the poet as an inspired soul who, in a kind of frenzy, composes his poems. He is aloof from his fellowmen. "Shut, too, in a tower of words..." the poet is the inspired bard again, composing verse when overcome by the powerful overflow of spontaneous feeling. He is especially vulnerable to external influence; like the aeolian harp, he is played upon by the natural elements, the wind and the diverse sounds of the natural world. He is unique in that he is aware of the various forces that work on him and can sing about them, even in praise of them, "[e]specially when the October wind / With frosty fingers punishes (his) hair..."

For the Movement poets, however, the poet is an ordinary man, like the man next-door, a common man who lives a commonplace life. Moving away from the romantic vision of the bard, the Movement poets take up an anti-romantic stance. There is nothing special about a poet, nothing heroic about his deeds. He lives a humdrum existence which is special because of its ordinariness. If life comprises mainly "toad work" (as Larkin calls it) then it is toad work that even the poet must be engaged in throughout his life. For the Movement poets there are no heroes and no heroic acts; it is the commonplace that is exalted. [This point will be discussed again with reference to Larkin's poems.]

Discarding Tradition

The sense of tradition which was greatly valued by T. S. Eliot, is completely dismissed by the Movement poets. There is a statement to this effect by Philip Larkin in D. J. Enright's anthology:

As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must be its own freshly-created universe, and therefore have no belief in "tradition" or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets, which last I find unpleasantly like the talk of literary understrappers letting you see they know the right people. (Enright)

This is a direct attack on Eliot, his mythopoeic method, and his theory of tradition and the individual talent. Rather than the intellectual, academic poetry of Eliot and Auden, the Movement poets prefer to write of non-intellectual matters. Instead of the joyous exuberance of Dylan Thomas, they advocate a restraint on emotion. This anti-Thomas attitude should logically bring them, close to the "classicist" tradition of Eliot, but they choose to look back to the eighteenth century and find a model in the neo-classical stance of Pope and Dryden. Thus, values from the Age of Reason are revived in the poetry of the middle decades of the twentieth century. A subtle wit, for instance, coupled with irony; and a strong focus on the syntactical and stylistic aspects of the poem, particularly the rhythm, the iambic pentameter, and the stanzaic forms. The emphasis is on the right manner of expression, as it was stated by Pope: "What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." The finesse of the final poem, rather than its emotional content, is once more of great significance. The movement claimed to be "anti-phoney, anti-wet" (Spectator article). It had a strong distrust of all display of emotion.

49.3 PHILIP LARKIN (1922-1985)

Philip Larkin spent his early years in Coventry, Warwickshire, where he was born on 9 August 1922 and later went to Oxford for higher education. At Oxford, in the 1950s he made friends with Kingsley Amis, a fellow student, and came into contact with other writers like John Wain, D. J. Enright, Robert Conquest, Donald Davie, and others. Together they brought out their poems in two anthologies of the 'fifties: *Poets of the*

1950s, ed. D. J. **Enright**, and *New Lines*, ed. Robert Conquest. This was the beginning of a reactionary movement against the Eliot-Auden school. It heralded the beginning of the "Movement," the new wave in the English poetic tradition.

Larkin



Philip Larkin

The Poet as an Ordinary Man:

With Philip Larkin and the Movement poets, the identity of the poet is stripped of its glamour and the poet becomes an ordinary man talking about ordinary things in a language that -- though versified -- sounds quite prosaic. As a human being, the poet is in no way special, nor is there any reason to glorify his life. This is Philip Larkin's attitude in poem after poem. Even childhood, which is traditionally depicted as an ideal, golden period, is portrayed as dull and uninteresting. Larkin is not like the

49.4 THE POEMS

Now we will discuss seven poems of Philip Larkin. You will find the test of the poem in the appendix to these units.

49.4.1 "I Remember, I Remember"

Larkin's reminiscence of childhood, which is generally believed a golden period, has no halo of divinity about it. He does not embark on lengthy accounts of his "Fair seedtime," the way Wordsworth does; nor does he grow nostalgic about "lamb-white days" in the manner of Dylan Thomas. The account he gives of his childhood in "I Remember, I Remember" stands out for its **anaemia**. The poem has been given in the appendix of this block.

Childhood is remembered as one bleak period when nothing, just nothing, seems to have happened. The title of the poem is an ironic reference to Thomas Hood's poem, "Past and Present," which describes an ideal childhood, beginning "I remember, I remember...." Larkin, unlike Hood, remembers his childhood for all the interesting things that *did* not happen. The focus in Larkin's poetry remains on ordinary things. His point of view is that life, for a majority of people, is ordinary, without any surprises. Why then, shouldn't the poet write about the **commonplaceness** of life? Keeping this in mind, Larkin presents life without any "spots of time" in the Wordsworthian sense. There are no **epiphanic moments**; the graph of life follows a straight line, never rising to a crest or falling into a trough.

The protagonist in Larkin's poetry, thus, is a plain, average, ordinary man who lives an **uneventful**, often monotonous life, engaged in the routine chores of everyday existence. For the adventurous who would prefer a more full and varied life; this would be a rather uninteresting reality, it would be **toad-work**, but Larkin sees it as an honest, sincere existence. Perhaps we may see in this attitude a defense of the quiet, **humdrum** working life Larkin himself spent as a **librarian**, but the poet is quite convinced that this is the sanest form of existence. And this is how reality **actually** is, even if some criticize it as dull and boring.

49.4.2 "Toads"

The common man, according to Philip Larkin, does not go about killing dragons: he leads a quiet, **uneventful** life. Time and again he presents himself as a workaday, **middle-class** man who has few interesting experiences to either recall or anticipate. His is an anti-romantic stance, looking reality **square** in the face, stripped of all dream or illusion. Real life **comprises not dreams and fancies** but hard work which brings in money and the physical comforts of life. So, there is no escape from "toad work," as he emphasizes in his poems "Toads," and "Toads Revisited." The first poem voices a fleeting resentment against routine, **only** to conclude that one **cannot possibly** escape it:

One has to work for a living and there is no dodging toad work. This is an anti-escapist outlook which requires even more courage than killing dragons in private fantasies

For Larkin, toad work has its uses: it keeps one usefully occupied, and somewhat allays the fear of death. Thus, it is a solution to many problems that confront human beings

49.4.3 "Toads Revisited"

"Toads Revisited" reiterates this theme of hard labour, Here again the speaker confronts the necessity and value of work. Even if work is tedious, it is essential as it

makes life bearable and helps one pass time which otherwise would hang heavy. Larkin strongly disapproves of idlers, louts, and wasters -- the "Losels, loblolly-men, louts" of "Toads" -- who simply drift through life lazily, loitering around with little to do. As for himself, given a choice, he would any day opt for a regular, routine life, plod along industriously until his time is up. Such is the subject of "Toads Revisited"

The idea that Larkin tries to present is that life can be meaningful even if it is not spectacular. Besides, there is more beyond the superficialities than meets the eye: there is an internal wealth that is more than adequate compensation for the obvious dreariness

49.4.4 "Mr Bleaney"

The same theme continues in "Mr Bleaney" whose life is viewed from more than a single perspective. A first reading of the poem gives the feel of an uncharitable epitaph, almost to the tune of "Here lies Mr Bleaney....":

Mr Bleaney (his name seems to suggest both, bleak and mean, epithets appropriate to his lifestyle) is judged by the room in which he lived and the traces he leaves behind in his room. He apparently had fixed habits and cared little for frills and fancies. Mr Bleaney (the "Mi" is an ironic emphasis on the orthodox respectability of the man) has led an uncontroversial life, living in a small town, content with his job, right up to the time "They" moved him. Who moved him? The employers or the undertakers? It does not matter. What matters is that he was contented enough to stay put, moving only when there was pressure from "them."

To the narrator of the poem, Mr Bleaney's life has apparently been unbearably dull, judging from the paraphernalia left behind. How could one possibly be contented in a bare, monk-like cell with no decor, no interesting view from the window, and no means of entertainment except for the landlady's radio! This is the first perspective on Mr Bleaney, the viewpoint of all unsympathetic outsiders who can see little beyond the facade. The focus is on the monotony of his life. Clearly, there are no revelatory moments in Mr Bleaney's life. But, at the same time, Bleaney has another face that his acquaintances are familiar with. His landlady, for instance, his sister and his Frinton friends have had a special, personal relationship with him. There is the second perspective on Bleaney which differs from the narrator's. With them Bleaney seems on easy terms: he can have his way with the landlady, but he, in turn, attends to her garden; the Frinton folk welcome him every summer; he is on cordial terms with his sister with whom he spends Christmas every year. So, even though Bleaney seems to have led an uninteresting life, it has been a very well-planned, organized, and satisfying one for him, which is more than the narrator is likely to have.

The third view of Bleaney contrasts him with the narrator in the last two stanzas:

But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
Tousling the clouds.

.....
I don't know.

In the worldly sense, Mr Bleaney could be called a failure -- this is how he appears to the materialistic new occupant of his room -- but he is spiritually better fortified for life. He has a rich inner life which sustains him, so his drab surroundings do not depress him the way they depress the narrator. This is the difference between the two men.

49.4.5 "Church Going"

An everyday concern of the common man is religion: This is the subject Larkin takes up in "Church Going." However, there is no direct treatment of the subject. Larkin

himself says that in the poem lie is concerned with "going to church, not religion." But the church becomes a representative institution, and when Larkin speaks of it, he is at the same time concerned with religion. The point of view presented in the poem is not a unilateral one. It is comparable to "Mr Bleaney" where the attempt is first to paint a humdrum picture and then to highlight its positive aspects which are not noticeable at the first glance. The tone conceals a subtle irony. In "Church Going," again, the narrator wears the mask of a disinterested observer, this time commenting not on the lifestyle of an individual he has never met (as in "Mr Bleaney"), but on the importance that the church and religion have for the common man. In the persona of the common man, the poet begins the poem:

The opening lines of the poem are important for what they imply: "Once I am sure there's nothing going on / I step inside: letting the door thud shut." The narrator probably would not have entered if some religious activity *had* been going on inside. He would have felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, ill at ease. He belongs to an age that is in ferment, the old being obsolete and the new not yet fit to take its place. Hence values that were believed in earlier no longer provide spiritual support.

The dilemma of the twentieth-century man, as Larkin sees it, is what to believe in if not religion. "Church Going" has been described by G. S. Fraser as "the Movement's prize poem." It presents a true picture of the post-war Welfare State Englishman: "shabby and not concerned with his appearance; poor -- he has a bike, not a car: gauche but full of agnostic piety: underfed, underpaid, overtaxed, hopeless, bored, wry" (Alvarcz). In other words, the protagonist of "Church Going" is another variation (peculiar to the 'fifties decade) of the "unknown" citizen that Auden spoke of in the thirties.

49.4.6 "The Whitsun Weddings"

Another representative Larkin poem is "The Whitsun Weddings." Whereas "Church Going" is concerned with rituals conducted in church -- rituals accompanying birth, death and marriage -- the subject of "the Whitsun Weddings" is specifically the marriage ritual and the significance it has in human life.

It is the wedding season and the poet, travelling by train, has the chance to witness a number of men and women who have recently participated in marriage parties and are on different platforms to see off the bridal couples. The poet's view of marriage is apparently a cynical one. The participants of the ritual are comic figures, beginning with the brides: the "grinning and pomaded, girls" and the equally ludicrous older generation,

The fathers with broad belts under their suits
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;
And uncle shouting smut....

To Larkin, it is all quite "farical," the more experienced women sharing their secret "like a happy funeral," and marriage being little more than a green signal for "a religious wounding." However, the main thrust of the poem is not on the absurdity of the entire situation. The concluding note is what matters the most to Larkin: that on one particular day an assorted number of different characters involved in different situations come together briefly, sharing a few moments of their lives together. They may never meet again, and even on that particular day, they may not have met but for the "frail / Travelling coincidence." It is this strangeness of everyday life that Larkin muses on. This is a thought that does not strike the young couples who are too engrossed in the present to heed their future:

-- and none
Thought of the others they would never meet
Or how their lives would all contain this hour.

At the moment there is a closed, self-contained world that the poet is excluded from. If there are "Long shadows over major roads," they are unaware of them.

Larkin

You may note that Larkin is not associated actively with the marriage ceremonies he speaks of. He is simply a casual onlooker, a chance passenger in a train; looking out through the window, observing all that happens detachedly. This is the perspective in most of his poems: he is usually the commentator, an observer and not an actor in the scene, whether he writes of "Love Songs in Age," or of a night storm in "Wedding-Wind."

49.4.7 "At Grass"

When he speaks of superannuated race-horses in "At Grass," the idea that Larkin tries to get across is that old age, like youth, is a necessary part of life and one must accept it calmly when it comes. This is a point of view antithetical to Dylan Thomas's who passionately begs his father not to "go gentle into that good night," instead, to "Rage, rage, against the dying of the light." "At Grass" is a serene picture of old age, the heyday of youth having gone by and the shadows gradually lengthening in the sunset of life. We are told that the poem was probably inspired by a newsreel film on Brown Jack, the racehorse in his retirement (Timms). The horses that Larkin speaks of have enjoyed glorious times, but now have slipped into oblivion:

Unlike human beings, these horses are not nostalgic about the world of glory left behind. They do not resent the passing of time; there are no "memories (that) plague their ears like flies." They "Have slipped their names... in the evening conic." These lines bring to mind the concluding note of "Toads Revisited" where the speaker, at the end of the day, would like other "toads" to help him down Cemetery Road. In the case of the horses, it is the stable boys who lead them home, but the idea is the same -- that when the time comes, one should be ready to move on without a fuss.

Blake Morrison reads the poem as a political allegory, the race horses in old age symbolizing England's loss of power and glory. It is a "post-imperial" poem and uses the "language of imperial achievement" and "imperial loss". Alvarez considers it a 'pastoral' poem. "At Grass" is an apparently simple poem that is open to several interpretations. Perhaps it would be best read as a poem that reiterates the main concern of Larkin, for instance, that expressed in "Toads," or "Toads Revisited." It advocates a harmony with nature, an agreement with the pace of time, and also a preparedness for the approach of death. This, according to Larkin, would be the sensible attitude towards life.

Larkin is not immersed in life the way Dylan Thomas is; nor is he as distanced as the helmeted airman in Auden's poems. His is a halfway position, between objectivity and subjectivity. It is a middle path.

It is the middle path that Larkin insists on sticking to all the time. He upholds mediocrity in that it is uncontroversial. In poem after poem he points out that even the ordinary, mundane aspects of life have their charm, if only we have eyes to see. In a way, he is saying what Wallace Stevens says in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird": that if you look at it carefully, even the ordinary will seem extraordinary. The difference is that whereas in Stevens's point of view it is the colouring light of the imagination that makes reality seem special, in Larkin's scheme of thought the imagination does not seem to have much importance because he believes in coming face to face with the plainness, the hard realities of life. His poems are not meant for an elitist group, nor are they meant for dreamers or lovers who have "the griefs of the ages" in their arms. Larkin caters to the common man on the street who, though ordinary, is intelligent and literate. He is an anti-intellectual, "middle-brow" poet for whom "the aim of poetry is... simply 'to keep the child from its TV set and the old man from his pub'" (Timms)

The Movement was **not** held together by any positive programme. On the **contrary**, the Movement poets shared "a negative **determination** to avoid bad principles" (Conquest). Perhaps one could say that The **Movement** was basically an anti-Ellot effort, an accidental event in the history of literature that owed its **existence** to a few like-minded persons coming together at Oxford in the 1940s. If **Philip Larkin**, **Kingsley Amis**, **Bruce Montgomery**, and John Wain had not chanced to meet on common grounds, their shared **animosity** towards precursor poets would probably not have crystallized into a more or less organized movement **against** what they were convinced were outdated poetic **mores**.

49.5 EXERCISES IN COMPREHENSION

1. In what way were the Movement Poets reacting **a** **inst** the "excesses" of the poetry of the first half of the twentieth century? Were they, in your opinion, **successful** in **undermining** the **influence** of the older poets?

[You will find an **answer** to the first part of **this** question in **Section III** of this unit ("The Poetry of the **Fifties**"). For the second part of the question you will have to **think** on your own and decide whether the **Movenient Poets** were indeed **successful** in overshadowing the achievements of their predecessors. Hint: Whose achievements would you consider greater? Those of Eliot, Pound, Auden, and Dylan Thomas? Or those of **Larkin**, D. J. Enright, Tomlinson, and their contemporaries? Give reasons for your **answer**.] ga

2. Write a note **on** the anti-romantic stance adopted by Philip **Larkin** in his poems.

[In order to answer this question you will have to look closely at some of Larkin's poems, e.g., "I Remember, I Remember," "Mr. Bleaney," and "Toads"/"Toads Revisited." Note how, in the first poem, he undermines the **romantic notion** of childhood **being** a glorious period when one has "**intimations** of immortality" (in Wordsworth's language) by recounting his early years as a **drab**, insignificant period, when nothing, absolutely **nothing** happened. In the other **three** poems, bring out how **Larkin** glorifies not a **superman** or an **extraordinary** personality but an ordinary, **nondescript** individual of no distinction, holding perhaps a clerical post, leading an unexceptional life of utter boredom. Why, in your opinion, does **Larking** choose to write about such a theme? Is it a reaction? And to what?]

3. Larkin has been called an "**uncommon** poet for the **common** man." Would you agree? How does he glorify the **common man** in his poems?

[You will refer to Larkin's preference for the ordinary rather than the special. This would be related to the reaction against the kind of poetry that existed earlier: the nineteenth-century romanticism, and the modernist intellectualism of Eliot, Pound, and Auden. You may illustrate your answer with the help of all the poems included in this unit.]

49.6 LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have talked about the poetry of the 1950s, in particular the Movement Poetry, and how it came as a reaction to the school of Eliot, Pound, and Auden. Philip Larkin's role in giving shape and impetus to the new movement in poetry was emphasized. The main themes and concerns of his poetry have been highlighted with reference to selected poems by him.

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UNIT 50 SYLVIA PLATH AND CONFESSIONAL POETRY

Structure

- 50.0 Objectives
- 50.1 Introduction
- 50.2 Confessional Poetry
 - 50.2.1 The Beginnings
 - 50.2.2 The waste Land Within
 - 50.2.3 The Origins of "Confession"
 - 50.2.4 Personal Themes
 - 50.2.5 Failed Relationships
 - 50.2.6 Father Complex
 - 50.2.7 Nervous Breakdowns
 - 50.2.8 Suicide, Death, and Disease
 - 50.2.9 The Desire to Shock
 - 50.2.10 The Question of Authenticity
 - 50.2.11 Going Beyond the Personal
 - 50.2.12 Influence of Psychoanalysis
- 50.3 Sylvia Plath
 - 50.3.1 Her Life and Works
 - 50.3.2 The Poems
- 50.4 Exercises in Comprehension
- 50.5 Let's Sum Up
- 50.6 Select Bibliography

50.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be aware of the kind of poetry that was written in the 'sixties of the twentieth century. You will understand the work of Sylvia Plath and be familiar with some of her representative poems which will be critically analyzed.

50.1 INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath's work will be placed in the context of the Confessional Poetry of the 'sixties. As her work is heavily autobiographical, there will be an outline of the major events of her life: and how they influenced her poetic sensibility. This will be followed by a discussion of some of her representative poems.

50.2 CONFESSIONAL POETRY

The Unit on Philip Larkin told you something about the poetry of the 'fifties in England which came as a reaction to the dictates of Pound and Eliot and the "excesses" of Dylan Thomas. This reaction against the established, intellectual, academic poetry took another form in the U.S. A, and from there travelled to England with Sylvia Plath. The poets involved in this reactionary movement came to be called the Confessional Poets. Heading the group were Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke. Younger poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, who studied with Lowell, learned to write in the same anti-intellectual, subjective style. So did John Berryman. Together, these poets initiated a new trend in poetry, glorifying the personal and the private, expressing their innermost secrets aloud for all to hear. When Sylvia Plath married the English poet

Ted Hughes and chose to make her home in the United Kingdom, the Confessional movement no longer remained confined to the American boundaries.

Plath

50.2.1 The Beginnings

Around mid-century in the U.S.A., a lot of changes were imperceptibly taking place. There was no single, sudden, radical change; the changes that were gradually working their way into the very vitals of literature were slow but steady. The beginnings of the change may be discerned in the works of poets like Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, and Theodore Roethke. Eliot's theory of impersonality no longer seemed to be the divine word poets were required to follow. It fell into its proper place and came to be regarded as just a theory and no more. From the impersonal mode there came a shift towards the personal mode; from the outer waste land to the waste land within; from global themes relating to Jerusalem, Athens, Vienna, London,, to themes related to the heart and soul of the poet.

The year 1959 may be regarded as a watershed in the history of literature for it was in this year that two important events took place which shaped the nature of poetry to be written subsequently. The first of these events was the publication of *Life Studies* by Robert Lowell which heralded a new kind of poetry, marking a significant departure from the complex symbolism and the formal language and style of T. S. Eliot. Focusing attention on his own self, Lowell chose to look inward rather than outward. Consequently, his work moved away from the classical stance, becoming more personal, more private. Lowell became an important influence on the poets of the 'sixties, bringing about an "intense breakthrough into very serious, very personal, emotional experience" which had until then been partly taboo, as Sylvia Plath saw it, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton came under his direct influence when they attended Lowell's poetry classes in Boston, They looked upon Lowell as a mentor.

The second important event that took place in 1959 relates to Allen Ginsberg, a poet very different from Lowell, who also undermined the established poetic norms of the time, but in his own manner. A poetry reading by him, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky at Columbia University became a controversial public affair, "emblematic of a whole era," as Morris Dickstein put it. With his reading of *Howl*, Ginsberg changed the very concept of poetry. Hitherto, if poetry was treated as a literary construct, with Ginsberg, it came to be regarded as a performance, a ritualistic gesture accompanied by music and dance. Discarding conventional forms and themes Ginsberg imparted to poetry a new sense of freedom and spiritual intensity, taking it out of stuffy classrooms on to the open stage. The work of Eliot and Pound required a vast body of critical annotations and interpretations to be comprehended fully. Besides, it had emerged as an answer to the needs of a particular hour in history: the second decade of the twentieth century when, as a result of global wars, civilizations seemed to be breaking apart. By the late 'fifties the situation had changed.

50.2.2 The Waste Land Within

It was Robert Lowell who first saw the horror, the boredom, and the glory of Eliot's waste land paralleled within the mind. *Life Studies* connects the meaninglessness and hollowness of the outer world to the existing despair within. Unable to find order and security in the post-war world, Lowell looks for stability and reassurance in his family, his background, and the New England tradition represented by his ancestors. His poetry: thus is a regressive movement, away from the broad canvas of the world to a narrower, familial canvas. But at all times Lowell retains his commonsense attitude and keeps his feet firmly rooted in the reality of everyday life,

With Theodore Roethke there is more of an escapist movement. *The Lost Son and Other Poems* was published in 1948 but its full impact was felt only after the publication of Lowell's *Life Studies*. The difference between Lowell and Roethke lies in that whereas Lowell regresses into history -- family history and also autobiography

-- Roethke's escape is into the world of nature. It may be said that Roethke's is a return to Wordsworthian ideals. But so, in a different way, is Lowell's. If *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's spiritual autobiography, *Life Studies* is a record of Lowell's emotional history. As in Wordsworth, in Lowell's work, too, one may easily detect the presence of an "egotistical sublime." But not so in the case of Roethke where the poet's personality, more Keatsian, remains in the background while the plants, roots, and creatures of the greenhouse speak on his behalf. The personal voice, unlike that of Lowell, speaks occasionally but without asserting itself in too obtrusive a manner.

50.2.3 The Origins of "Confession"

The work of Lowell and Roethke, and other poets like Sylvia Plath, John Berryman and Anne Sexton, has come to be called "Confessional Poetry," a nomenclature that is more a label of convenience for critics. M. L. Rosenthal defined this form of poetry as that in which "the private life of the poet, especially under stress of psychological crisis, becomes a major theme" (as M.L. Rosenthal says. The word "confession" has a host of connotations of which two may be cited for their relevance to the present contest: the act of "confessing" and the intimacy of experience. "Confessional" is related to confessions made in church in order to obtain absolution. Thus, it is a private utterance, an admission of lapses, wrong-doings, and feelings one would not normally express in public. But, at the same time, it remains an utterance made before an audience, in this case the father confessor. Confessional poetry should thus have all the ingredients of confession: it would pertain to private errors and omissions, fears and phobias. Above all, it must have its roots firmly in the poet's biography. It deals with personal themes. The poet's self is the pivot around which his world revolves. It is an expression of personality, believing the poet's individuality to be the first reality that must be reckoned with. Only after one has come to terms with one's true self can one turn to look at the outside world. So the first task of the confessional poets is to look at the turbulence within the self, analyze the chaotic mass of thoughts and feelings, and come to terms with them.

50.2.4 Personal Themes

The themes, thus, are invariably related to the poet's growth and childhood. A comparison may be drawn with the autobiographical mode of Wordsworth. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth presents a long, chronological account of his evolution from an ordinary boy to a sensitive poet. He takes up selected "spots of time," key moments that stand out in his memory, analyses their importance and contribution towards the making of the poet he grew up to be. The work of the confessional poets is similar in the sense that they, too, look back at the past, picking out significant moments in their experience. But, unlike Wordsworth, their main concern is not with the road taken to fame and glory. Rather, it is the paths taken to neuroses and emotional breakdowns that fascinate them. They all seem to look back totally mesmerized, examining every hurdle encountered, every landmark on the way. There is total self-absorption, not just a commemoration of the flattering moments of personal history but also the ignoble, humiliating and demeaning experiences.

50.2.5 Failed Relationships

The Confessional Poets speak of personal failures: failure, for instance, in establishing meaningful relationships with others, Robert Lowell, in "Man and Wife" (*Life Studies*) speaks of the failure of marriage. The fault lies somewhere in the inability to communicate with his wife. Another poem in *Life Studies* is significantly entitled "To Speak of Woe That Is in Marriage" where the husband

drops his home disputes,
and hits the streets to cruise for prostitutes,
free-lancing along the razor's edge.

Lowell locates the causes of the breakdown of **communication** within the psyche: it is a **certain** inadequacy in an individual that prevents **him from** reaching out to others and establishing a meaningful relationship with the world outside. Lowell is **concerned** with pinpointing the exact nature of such an inadequacy.



Sylvia Plath

Lowell speaks of failure not only in marriage and sexual relationships but also in filial duties. In "Home After **Three** Months Away" he mentions his daughter. Again, **there** is a **failure** in communication: Lowell is aware that he has failed somewhere as a father. And once again, the reasons lie within: the mental collapse that he suffered is the invisible **divider**, keeping him away from the child. There is 'desire, there is love, but there is at the same time a crippling force that nullifies all positive efforts towards establishing a rapport with others. Lowell's technique is the reverse of Eliot's: he does not objectify experience. On the contrary, he portrays it as it is, naked, **raw**, and elemental. This is style that Eliot would have criticized the way **he criticized Hamlet** and its problems for lacking **an** "objective correlative", **Emotion**, as Eliot sees it, must be expressed through a suitable objective correlative, an **external** object that **becomes**

symbolic of the emotion to be conveyed. But Robert Lowell would rather speak of his experience directly.

50.2.6 Father Complex



Ted Hughes

Failed filial relationships in confessional poetry take on another form, this time the poet in the role not of parent but offspring: the child mourning for a lost father. The theme is not new. Eliot often makes a reference to Ferdinand of *The Tempest*: weeping over the supposed demise of his father and Ariel's consoling dirge is repeatedly invoked: "Full fathom five thy father lies...." Robert Lowell speaks of a strained relationship with his father, and so does Theodore Roethke. Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, and Anne Sexton, all seem to suffer from a father complex. Their attitude vacillates between adoration and abhorrence. It is, no doubt, a part of the natural process that they, as members of the younger generation, should outlive their parents. But their response to their bereavement is unnaturally intense. There is an inability to accept the

loss of the father, a failure to cope with a world removed from his benign influence. In fact, so deep is the sense of loss that the poet is left at a breaking point, teetering between sanity and a total loss of emotional balance.

Plath

50.2.7 Nervous Breakdowns

The theme of mental collapse, which is partly the result of parental loss, is dealt with by Anne Sexton who remembers her father with pangs of a guilty conscience. She considers herself a failure not simply as a daughter, but also as a mother. The mother of two daughters, Sexton could never forgive herself for being a failed parent, as she thought. At the same time, she irrationally blamed herself for the death of her parents. Such feelings of guilt are recounted in the poems of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*. Lowell speaks of his mental breakdown in "Home After Three Months Away" and "Waking in the Blue." Roethke and Berryman, too, frequently refer to their nervous breakdowns unabashedly. In fact, Roethke even seems to glorify madness: "What's madness but nobility of soul / At odds with circumstance."

50.2.8 Suicide, Death, and Disease

When these Confessional Poets speak of their breakdowns and personal failures, they seem to be drawn more and more deep into sorrow and despair. Not surprisingly, their thoughts often turn to self-destruction. Self-annihilation or suicide forms a major theme in their poems. In their personal lives, too, most of them remained suicidal. Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and John Berryman died self-inflicted deaths. In the works of the other confessional poets, too, suicide and death are always around the corner.

It is not simply death that their poetry speaks of. It also deals with physical sickness, disease and decay. Consequently, a lot of unromantic element creeps into poetry. As Robert Phillips puts it, there is no longer any "poetic" or unpoetic" material, nothing is taboo in confessional poetry. Lowell speaks of myopia, Roethke of hydrotherapy. Sexton of the personal, private experiences of being a woman, of topics as controversial as masturbation or menstruation. The ugly and the grotesque inspire poetry in the same manner as the beautiful and the good.

50.2.9 The Desire to Shock

The desire behind such poetry is the urge to shock. This desire to shock is manifested in the use of unconventional themes, outspoken language, and expressions of uncontained fury. All this requires courage and it is courage that the confessional poets lay claim to: the courage to come face to face with reality, no matter what the consequences, no matter how painful the experience. In this connection a reference may be made to Sexton's epigraph to *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* which is a quotation from a letter to Goethe from Schopenhauer:

It is the courage to make a clean breast of it in the face of every question that makes a philosopher. He must be like Sophocles' Oedipus who, seeking enlightenment concerning his terrible fate, pursues his indefatigable inquiry, even when he divines that appalling horror awaits him in the answer. But most of us carry in our hearts the Jocasta who begs Oedipus for God's sake not to inquire further.

The poet is forever seeking answers to questions that plague him on matters pertaining to his identity and situation in a larger scheme of things.

50.2.10 The Question of Authenticity

However, after reading the work of Lowell, or Sexton, or the other confessional poets, the question that arises is: how much of their work is related to authentic experience?

How much of it is fiction? "Confession," after all, is assumed to be true. But not so in the case of these poets. It is not always first-hand experience that the poets write of. "There is a good deal of tinkering with fact," as Robert Lowell explained in an interview. Such a statement, combining fact with fiction, answers many other doubts that may arise regarding the nature of confessional poetry. It should simply *sound* as if it were true, says Lowell. Sexton, for instance, brings in a lot of fictitious events and experiences into her work and yet her work reads like an authentic account.

50.2.11 Going Beyond the Personal

If confessional poetry were simply "confession," the admission of private guilt, sorrow, and loss, it would have a very limited appeal. For one wearies of hearing the private whining and moaning of individuals dissatisfied with their lot. But, the work of the poets of the 'sixties has a wide appeal for several reasons. Because of the 'I', the first-person singular orientation, the poetry conveys a sense of immediacy and urgency. Confessional poetry has a lot in common with the dramatic monologue, exploring as it does the labyrinths of the mind, diving into motives and intentions. In the use of the first person singular there is another advantage: it is like one person talking to another. a sharing of confidences, an "I" engaged in a conversation with "you." It also encourages the imaginative identification of the reader with the writer, so that it is easier to understand and respond to the sufferings of the poet / narrator. At the same time, despite the personal themes, there are certain devices by which an attempt is made to impart some kind of universality to the poetry. "Cries of the heart," as Sylvia Plath calls them, would have a limited audience. So, the poet sometimes uses a persona that is universally recognized and accepted. In Sylvia Plath's case, for example, the poet often evokes the figure of Electra, borrowed from Greek mythology. The poem "Daddy," she says, is spoken by "a girl with an Electra complex." Other confessional poets adopt different devices. John Berryman creates a private persona for the same effect and makes use of the third person singular. His *Dream Songs* are the rambling thoughts of a certain Henry who is a device that provides an aesthetic distance between the poet and the experience he writes of. In the guise of Henry, Berryman feels free to speak of experiences that would otherwise be hard to recount in the first person. Lowell tries to ensure a wider appeal for his poetry by establishing a link between private experience and public. Events from history and politics are brought into the poems and related to individual experience. This linking of the personal with the public helps to situate the experience in a particular locale and time. The poet is thus seen not as an independent entity detached from the rest of the world, but, paradoxically, as a private individual in a public milieu. So Confessional poetry is not simply confession: it seeks to establish connections between the outer and the inner world of man.

50.2.12 Influence of Psychoanalysis

Dealing with the innermost recesses of the mind, it is but natural that these poets show the influence of psychoanalytical theories that have come to stay in the twentieth century. Anne Sexton's work is a good illustration of this point. As the critic Robert Phillips points out, there is a strong Jungian influence in her work. In her *Transformations* of the innocuous fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers, Sexton resorts to psychoanalysis to interpret, in an adult way, stories that were originally meant for children. Psychoanalysis may also be applied to the strong sexual imagery that is found in the work of Plath, Berryman, Lowell and Roethke.

50.3 SYLVIA PLATH : HER LIFE AND WORKS

In order to understand the poetry of Sylvia Plath (1933 - 63), we need to be aware of at least three crucial biographical facts which cast their shadow on her work: one, the premature death of her father when she was barely eight; two, the separation from her husband, Ted Hughes, who took on the role of a father surrogate; and, three, her

suicide attempts, the first unsuccessful one at the age of twenty-one, and the final successful attempt in her thirtieth year. On these three events is based the major poetry of Sylvia Plath, its cries of helpless rage alternating with gloomy despair, its narcissistic concern with the individual self colouring all themes and subjects she chooses to write of

Plath's first collection of poems, *The Colossus*, published in 1956, comprises poems that may best be described as "apprentice poems" because they seem docile, well-behaved, and contain no innovations and surprises. True, they give some evidence of her poetic talent, but are too self-consciously thesaurus-oriented to be treated as much more than clever exercises in verse that one would perhaps write to please an exacting mentor. It was the poetry of the last months of her life in which Plath let go of all restraints and, without bothering about irrelevant concerns, spoke in a highly individualized voice. These powerful poems are collected in *Arid*, published posthumously. The poems in between these two volumes belong to a transitory phase and are collected in *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees*. There is also a fictionalized autobiography entitled *The Bell Jar*, that Plath published under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas in 1963, and a collection of short stories and prose pieces, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. It is on these few volumes that Sylvia Plath's fame rests today. The Plath cult flourished in the 'sixties, after her suicide, and fanned the feminist movement. It has cooled since then and we may now make an objective assessment of the merits of Sylvia Plath's achievements.

50.3.1 The Poems

"The Colossus"

Sylvia Plath's first volume of verse is appropriately called *The Colossus*. Although Plath does not refer to it, the title brings to mind the well-known lines from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, describing the eponymous hero of the play: "...Why, man, he doth bestride this narrow world / Like a colossus." The reference is to the legendary bronze statue of Apollo at Rhodes. It is such a gigantic figure that towers over the landscape of Sylvia Plath's early work, representing none other than the poet's dead father, much missed, much grieved for. It is the absence of the father that shapes much of Plath's work. Her poems record her reaction to this irreparable personal loss. The reaction takes on many forms: sometimes the poet seems to accept it with resignation whereas on other occasions she rages against the injustice of having to lose a parent. There is a sense of shock and betrayal, an occasional refusal to come to terms with the reality of death.

The father's absence is one that grows like a tree, as a later poem puts it. It grows to the towering height of a colossus, sometimes seen as a "Man in Black," or as a cruel tyrant. Thus he is not just a benevolent father-figure, but also a malevolent force portending doom and destruction. The poet's attitude towards this colossus is an ambiguous one. In the first place, because it is modelled on her father, there is a filial attachment and love. But, at the same time, because the father, by dying, has deserted his child, there is a resentment against him. Such are the dichotomous feelings that Plath expresses in relation to her father through the colossus image.

This title poem of *The Colossus* (CPP 129-30) speaks of a dilapidated fallen statue of gigantic proportions, with weeds and wild grass growing all over it. Plath establishes a contrast between past glory and present downfall, and also between the big and the small. Presented in the same framework as the fallen god, is a diminutive persona, who, in contrast with the massive statue, is "an ant in mourning," and must tend it as best as she can. In the contrast between the statue's bulk and the attendant's puniness one is reminded of Swift's portrayal of Gulliver in the land of Lilliputians. The relationship between the statue and the attendant is akin to that between a master and his slave, the latter in servile obedience to the former: "Thirty years now I have laboured / To dredge the silt from your throat." There is an acceptance by the speaker

of her inferior role. Engaged in a thankless job, with no hope of ever being free of it, she resigns herself to fate:

My hours are married to shadow.
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing.

It is a private experience that Plath speaks of but she takes it beyond personal history and gives it universal dimensions by employing the Electra myth with the reference to the Oresteia.

It may be noted that Plath is here dealing with the lost father theme. Loss of the father is one of the many autobiographical subjects that Plath writes her poetry on. But she tries to impart a universal applicability to the experience through the use of myth. For this reason, the father is visualized as a Greek God as in "Full Fathom Five." Elsewhere, for the same effect, she evokes the Electra myth to describe the relationship between herself and her father.

"Daddy"

"Daddy," a late poem, is one such example. In a note to the poem, Plath herself draws our attention to the connection with the story of Electra:

[The poem] is spoken by a girl with an Electra Complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyse each other -- she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it. (CPP 293)

This statement is important for several reasons that may apply to the other poems of Plath as well. In the first place, we may note the deliberate effort to go beyond the self by employing on the one hand Greek myth and, on the other, events from world history (the Nazi-Jew animosity). Secondly, it is easy to discern the awareness of psychoanalytical theories and their application to personal relationships. This poem speaks of the father-daughter relationship but in another poem ("Medusa," for instance) it is the relationship with the mother that the poet is concerned with. In yet another poem, it may be the ambiguous mother-child bond that she focuses on (as in "Lesbos"). Third, the poem takes a close look at not just the relationships, but the emotional complexities of a person, the existence of opposing forces within one's psyche, the good and the bad, the gentle and the harsh, the Jew and the Nazi. And finally, Plath's note puts forward a subtle suggestion that poetry, in its most powerful form, is a ritualistic gesture. It is an exorcism of the demons that haunt the poet. It is therapeutic: it has a cathartic effect. In such poems there is generally an inner, psychological conflict the persona is engaged in.

"Daddy," speaking of the two conflicting strains within the girl which marry and paralyse each other, deals with such a conflict. Plath is here dealing with the influence of heredity on an individual as these psychological tensions are hereditary: a legacy from the Electra-like girl's mixed parental background, part Nazi, part Jewish. Given such a parentage, the girl cannot help being a victim of clashing characteristics. But often, the opposing forces within the self do not owe their origin to family history: they are ingrained in human nature. It may be noted, however, that, the lines of "Daddy," though they storm and curse against one who has betrayed the persona, could only be uttered by one who cares, one who has loved deeply and truly, and who has been hurt because her love has come to nothing. Such are the ambivalent feelings that "Daddy" expresses against the dead father.

"Lady Lazarus":

In "Lady Lazarus" Plath speaks of her previous suicide attempts. Biographical accounts of Sylvia Plath tell us how the poet was fascinated with the idea of dying and

attempted suicide more than once. This is a passion she shared with her friend, the poet Anne Sexton who admits that they often talked about dying: "We talked death with burnt-up intensity, both of us drawn to it like moths to an electric light bulb. Sucking on it!" Sexton has immortalized their camaraderie in her famous poem, "Wanting to Die" which explains the morbid attraction of death:

Since you ask, most days I cannot remember.
I walk in my clothing, unmarked by that voyage.
Then the most unnameable lust returns...
: (Anne Sexton)

The lust is the self-destructive passion, the desire to annihilate oneself, to return to an inanimate state. This is a passion that Sexton shared with Sylvia Plath. Plath's first suicide attempt was almost successful, but she was discovered in the nick of time, hospitalized and saved. The scars, physical and psychological, were to remain forever. "Lady Lazarus," written almost a decade after the abortive suicide attempt, recounts the experience with all its intensity:

It is a personal experience Plath speaks of but again it is given a wider applicability. This time she invokes an Egyptian myth: the legendary Phoenix who periodically destroys herself and then is reborn from the ashes.

It is easy to see that Plath is inspired by her own experience: striving for death time and again, and then being symbolically reborn. But the Phoenix myth places it at an aesthetic distance. And again, private suffering is equated with events of public importance: the suffering of the Jews, for instance: "my skin / Bright as a Nazi lampshade," "My face a featureless, fine / Jew linen." When parallels are thus drawn with the sufferings of a section of humanity discriminated against, there is some attempt at universality. However, the autobiographical element in the poem is strong and Sylvia Plath's poems remain, despite her attempts to camouflage them, a record of scars gathered over the years in her short life span. "Lady Lazarus," like "Daddy," speaks of an autobiographical experience even though there is an attempt to go beyond autobiography.

What "Daddy" and "The Colossus" have in common is the underlying theme of bondage and slavery. It is without exception, a woman who is made to take on a subservient role in Plath's poems. The victim expresses a resentment against the patriarchal authority that the father or the husband represents. Between the victim and the oppressor there is an uneasy power relationship. At first hers is an attitude of passive acceptance of the inferior role, as in "The Colossus." The woman in Plath's poems, who is more a slave than a companion, strongly resents having to adhere to rules, to rules, to rules" laid down by the master / husband. In the later stages of the relationship, however, there is a change and the woman, having decided not to let herself be tyrannized any more, emerges as a fury to wreak vengeance on the men who have victimized her. In "Daddy" it is the father whose memory holds her in thrall and which must be shaken off if the protagonist is to breathe freely again. The struggle in Plath's poems is against the phallogocentric point of view which sees women as marginal characters and the relationship of the sexes as one of power and denial. But such a relationship cannot be a permanent one for a time comes when the victim must rise in revolt.

"Purdah":

The transformation of woman from weakling to superwoman is best charted in Plath's poem entitled "Purdah" where the female protagonist, throwing off all shackles, tries to shake off the hegemonic centre of male dominance:

The doll-like bride is metamorphosed into a lioness that brings about the death of her oppressor. In the Bee poems of Plath, the militant woman is represented by the flying

queen bee. and in "Ariel" by the shooting arrow and the "dew that flies." Flying is woman's gesture of defiance, her bid for total emancipation.

Sylvia Plath. no matter what her subject, a cut thumb (in "Cut"), deformed babies (in "Thalidomide"), a fever (in "Fever 103°"), an adventure on a runaway horse (in "Ariel"), or a morbid fascination with death (in "Edge"). always writes as a woman. She writes of personal experiences but she has a place in poetic tradition. She makes use of myth but she breaks with the mythic tradition of Eliot. She does try to move from the personal to the impersonal/public stance. but the autobiographical element in her work is so strong that she is unable to rise much above the self. Emotion is presented directly most of the time in her work, or sometimes through the flimsy veil of a persona. There is no objective correlative in Eliot's sense. True, we may take the flying bee or the horse as symbolic figures, but they are not objective correlatives as Eliot would have them. "I must fly around," "I must shriek," says the poet. This is closer to the passionate intensity of romantic poetry that goes "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed".... The work of Sylvia Plath, thus, picks up stray strands of earlier traditions and weaves out of them a distinctive fabric.

"ARIEL":

Ariel was the name of the horse on which Plath went riding. Ted Hughes, in his "Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems," tells us that on one occasion the horse bolted and the poet was almost thrown off the saddle. It is such an experience of being astride a runaway horse that the poem "Ariel" describes.

What Plath writes is not straightforward, uncomplicated verse. It has many dimensions. There is an attempt to relate private experience to public experience. So, personal experience, injury and hurt are viewed in a much larger contest. The starting point of a Plath poem may be a personal event, but it is related to an event of global significance in such a way that it grows rapidly to bigger proportions and finally has a common application. This is a technique Plath learned from Robert Lowell.

50.4 EXERCISES IN COMPREHENSION

1. How did Confessional Poetry differ from the kind of poetry that was written in the early decades or the twentieth century?

[In order to answer this question you should refer to that section of the unit that speaks of how the Confessional poets focus on personal themes rather than public ones. This was against the theory of impersonality advocated by T. S. Eliot.]

2. Analyze critically the role played by Sylvia Plath's father in her poems.

[Refer in particular to "The Colossus" and "Daddy." Relate it to the father fixation found in the work of other confessional poets.]

3. With reference to the poems you have read, trace the development of Sylvia Plath's persona from a docile, submissive woman into a fury raging for revenge.

[Beginning with "The Colossus," you will discuss "Daddy," "Ariel," and "Purdah." You may also wish to read up "The Applicant," the Bee Poems and "Pursuit."]

4. Show how death and suicide are important themes in Sylvia Plath's poems.

[First you will speak of the tendency among Confessional Poets to speak of these subjects. Then you will refer to Sylvia Plath's morbid fascination with death, her obsession with self-annihilation, and her suicide attempts. Then you will focus on "Lady Lazarus" in particular. You may also wish to focus on the concluding lines of "Ariel." Other poems you may read are "Death and Co.," "The Arrival of the Bee Box," and "Pursuit."]

50.5 LET'S SUM UP

Now that you have read this unit, you should be able to

- Understand what is meant by Confessional Poetry.
- Write about the main themes that inspired the Confessional Poets.
- Assess the importance of Sylvia Plath in the twentieth-century poetic tradition.
- Be familiar with some of her important poems.

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Some more poems for further reading

UNIT 51 SO ! NOW ! WHAT IS POETRY ? ONCE AGAIN: A SYMPOSIUM

Structure

51.0	Objectives
51.1	Introduction
51.2	The Symposium
51.2.1	Pleasure and truth, imagination and reason in poetry
51.2.2	A poet as a critic
51.2.3	Subject and its treatment in poetry
51.2.4	Literature and literary standards
51.2.5	Beauty and distortion in poetry
51.2.6	Poetry as a holistic activity
51.2.7	Poetry and music
51.2.8	The poet and his/her poem
51.2.9	Poetry as emotive activity
51.3	Let's sum up
51.4	Further reading

51.0 OBJECTIVES

There are mainly three results that we wish to achieve through this unit. They are given below

- having completed this course on British poetry we wish to understand : What is this thing called a poem ? How does it influence us ? Why do we need it ? in an abstract manner.
- record the proceedings of a students symposium on the subject 'What is Poetry ?'
- induce you to arrange such symposia on your own at the study centers or elsewhere and if possible prepare a collection of your articles.

51.1 INTRODUCTION

Some students like you assembled at a private study circle and having arranged it before hand decided to exchange ideas on the subject of poetry. This unit is a collection of their presentations, i.e. articles, in which each student had taken a definition of poetry and examined it in detail. If *you* feel interested in reading their essays you may read them in this unit. I have made very few changes in their texts. For instance a student had written, '... the beat of a trumpet' which I changed to ' the blowing of a trumpet, the beat of a drum ... '

My reasons for collecting them here are twofold : In the first place learning is not always handed down by a teacher to his/her student. A teacher learns nearly as much as s/he teaches. This method of learning through discussions goes back to the hoary past, to Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. Probably what was later codified in our country as the Upanishads were also discussions between teachers and students. In our units also, you must have found us talking to you rather than preparing a written record

Some of you may read part of this unit soon after the receipt of the study material. In that case I wonder if it would be desirable and possible for you to arrange a discussion session on each block. If you did that once a month you could exchange

views and clarify your ideas on each important age in a systematic fashion in about ten months.

The sections that follow record the definitions in the italics. At the end of the paper the paper presenter's name is given. These presentations were made at Hehal and were privately arranged by the students themselves some of whom did not present a paper but took part in the discussions. Their questions and the answers given by the presenters of papers are, however, not recorded here.

52.2 THE SYMPOSIUM

Does the title ring a bell in your mind ? One of Plato's books is called *The Symposium* (A symposium in Ancient Greece was a drinking party or a convivial meeting for drinking, conversation and entertainment. Today it means a meeting or conference on a special subject, It also means a collection of articles delivered at a meeting on a special topic.) In Plato's *Symposium* Socrates, Aristophanes and others meet and propound their views on three forms of emotion : the sensual, the altruistic and true wisdom. Aristophanes holds that originally everyone was a hermaphrodite and a man looks for a woman and a woman for man because each seeks its own lost half. You must read the book some day. In the meantime let's proceed with our symposium.

51.2.1 Pleasure and truth, imagination and reason in poetry

'Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help reason.'

This definition of Dr. Johnson may be examined in the light of his own interpretation. Pleasure and truth are the two elements, or better say two standards to which good poetry must come up to. 'Pleasure' is the artistic pleasure peculiar to literature and 'truth' is the message that the work of art should give. Virgil's *Georgics* are a work of art and they tell us something about agriculture. A work of art must at least give a message. It may try to elevate mankind. In Matthew Arnold's words it should try to give a 'criticism of life'. T. S. Eliot approves of this fact. All good poetry cannot be just a pleasurable mixture of sounds. It will have a message.

But to say this is to leave the issue undecided. Eliot's *The Waste Land* may have different meanings for different persons. For some it may carry a message for sacrifice and demand from the present generation a greater degree of participation in nature rather than be led by the artificiality of modern life which only aims at a prolongation of life. Besides, it may also recommend for its readers a life of faith, shunning of passions and inculcation of greater meaning in the daily monotony of our routine.

Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs short and infrequent, were exhaled.
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Here the pleasure comes from a reminder from Dante's Limbo which is connected powerfully with the traffic of human beings in vehicles or otherwise for the daily work in a factory or office. The 'truth' or the message is that we must live closer to nature and treat it as our friend rather than enemy.

We cannot say whether Dr. Johnson the Great Cham, would have approved of such a message. He found Shakespeare deficient in morality. His *Vanity of Human Wishes* he must have written on his own standard and there various types of objects of vanity are taken and in various verse paragraphs are shown as futile. For instance

The needy Traveller, serene and gay,
Walks the wild Heath, and sings his Toil away,

As against that a rich traveller has to fear both light and darkness since 'One shews the Plunder, and one hides the Thief.'

This type of moralizing has been found uncongenial for a work of art.

But 'pleasure' and 'truth' need not necessarily be interpreted in Dr. Johnson's way. The definition may mean that the pleasure may be evoked through a combination of pleasure with some sort of truth not necessarily mundane or logical. In the following lines from 'Dover Beach',

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Truths of feeling, of armies clashing wantonly, of loss of certainty are experiences which cannot be meaningful in the mundane and strictly prosaic sense. Still they are 'truths'. We find something in our own hearts to echo those feelings.

But then, this has to be achieved by tethering imagination with reason. Dr. Johnson found this lacking in Milton's 'Lycidas' where Christian and pagan images were mixed. Ben Jonson found Shakespeare missing this point in *Julius Caesar* and said of him as Augustus said of Haterius 'sufflaminandus erat.' Shakespeare according to him '... had an excellent Phantasie brave notions gentle expression wherein hee flowed with that facility that sometime it was necessary he should he stop'd.'

We in our times, however, have found Johnson's opinion narrow and parochial. Still the statement holds its validity and we do approve of artistic pieces in which the elements do not go against the central spirit of the work of art. Modern poetry brings not only Christian and Pagan traditions but also traditions of different cultures and races together and knowledge and wisdom of the past are all also strained through a sieve of relevance and this relevance we may call reason.

Ram Rahim
Thethaitangar

51.2.2 A Poet as a Critic

'The peculiar qualifications and peculiar limitations of a poet when he is a critic of other men's poetry.'

Sir Philip Sidney, Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot have all been poets who have also exercised their critical faculties over other men's poetry. Generally, their criticism is written from the stand-point of their own standards which goes into the making of their poetry. Dr. Johnson's disapproval of the metaphysicals, 'Lycidas' or Gray was because his ear was so attuned to the music of the poetry of his own time and critical faculties so sharply oriented to the standards of the taste of the Augustans that he found in the Metaphysicals a 'yoking' by 'violence' of disparate and far fetched sentiments; in 'Lycidns' an unhappy mixture

of imagery from two irreconcilable traditions, or in Gray an unworthy successor to an age of great poets. Similarly Arnóld, who wished to load his poetry with a 'criticism of life' found Shelley an 'ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in void.' Eliot was so much of a classicist, a conscious and dedicated artist that he seems to pass by Shakespeare, paying him little more than a lip service and praises Ben Jonson for his portrayal of the superficialities, the facade. In his characters of humour – Volpone, Mosca, Epicoene – are presented a particular humour or type in essence and his characters are more well fitted in the life of the play than those of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's characters may give pleasure even out of their context but Johnson's characters' words are fitted in the corpus of the play so well that they do not carry much meaning outside the context. Thus in Eliot's estimate Jonson has an edge over Shakespeare as an artist.

When a writer is not outside the range of his sympathies the poet-critic turns out to be of the first rank. Then he shows his acumen, his critical sense, his incisiveness of observation and his penetrating judgment in a measure that a critic who is not a poet cannot show.

But, if a poet falls out of his sympathy then such critics fail to make just observations. Eliot held Milton to be responsible for the 'dissociation of sensibility' that took place in the seventeenth century and Dryden and Pope falling unfortunately in the train that resulted from this unhappy event. Here it may be relevant to state that Milton incurred Eliot's ire because he had a bad influence on later poets who attempted to follow his style. The same was observed by Keats – 'What is life to Milton is death to me.' But this, in no way hindered Milton's greatness as a poet or reduces the amount of pleasure that Milton gives through his sublimity, his ornate, even artificial style. These, Eliot could not appreciate. But as a poet he was better able to see the absence of the visual images in Milton's *Paradise Lost* which were there in *Comus*.

Thus, a poet when he is a critic of other men's poetry is better able to examine the artistic process from conception to creation and is better able to see the artist's pursuit and aim which he tries to achieve than a critic who is not a poet.

But if a poet falls out of the range of the poet-critic's interest he may suffer at his hands. Besides this, sometimes poets are so conditioned in their own world that they can approve of little that is outside their ken. Sophocles said of Aeschylus: 'Even if he does the right thing, he does it without knowing it.' Greene called Shakespeare 'an upstart crow beautified with our feathers.' Milton must have had poets like Herrick and Suckling in mind when he spoke of those 'libidinous and ignorant poetasters.' Byron made fun of Keats as 'spoilt by cockneyfying and suburbaning' and Keats called *Don Juan* 'Lord Byron's last flash poem.' So in the interest of art it is better to have both types of criticism i.e. of the poet-critics and the scholar-critics.

Surinder Singh Sandhu
Piska Mor

"And this most important qualification which I have been able to find, which accounts for the peculiar importance of the criticism of practitioners is that a critic must have a very highly developed sense of fact."

Criticism has been described as a 'soul's adventure among masterpieces' As such it tells us about this adventure and for the account to be an honest and sensitive one, there can be no denying the fact that first of all there must be an adventure and in the second place, the adventurer must be sensitive, intelligent and wide awake to be able to record all facts in the course of his journey. In short, the critic must have a sense of fact.

A reader of *Tom Jones*, in the first place must go through the book and thus be aware of the work of art and in the second he must have a knowledge of the literary development preceding Fielding, the peculiar importance of his use of a new medium for a new type of work, the social condition and the political events, the Jacobite

uprising of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 (coming within a hundred thirty miles from London), etc. may add a dimension to his piece of criticism on the book. Why after all, did Dickens write those lengthy passages in *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Dombey and Sons*. Perhaps because he was writing for the periodicals.

Hence, we can definitely say with confidence that a critic must have a sense of fact but there is something more which he must have and that is inspiration and insight. No matter how much is written about Shakespeare and the statements and observation well explained with the help of quotations they will not replace Shakespeare's plays, sonnets and long poems. Much of what Shakespeare did, was done also by his contemporaries. But why was he unique. All stood before this cedar like viburnum bushes -

Quantum lenta solent inter vibzina cupressi.

This is because he had that creative imagination which has been called by different names by different people. The concept of the Muses or Saraswati shows the awareness by our ancestors of this element of art. The learned critic must be conscious of the element of inspiration in art.

Is it proper for a critic to take inspiration under examination? One cannot at our stage of civilization leave anything aside as sacrosanct but one must have the modesty to admit that it cannot be understood fully. How it has gone in making the parts cling to the whole is of course subject of examination. And it is with this that a critic has to deal. Shakespeare is such a great writer that one cannot say the last word about him. But then a fresh effort at a right statement which may not wholly be true is still welcome. A critic must have a highly developed sense of fact but in the same breath it will have to be said that something still will be fleeting, inexplicable and puzzling and that will be the spirit of the work of art, an ally of critical imagination.

Johnson Kandulna
Gumla

51.2.3 Subject and its treatment in poetry

'Nothing depends upon the subject; all upon the treatment of the subject.'

'Nothing' of the given statement is rather confusing. We are prompted to ask - Does the metre of a poem not depend on the subject? Does the medium - prose or verse - not matter to the subject? Does the style not matter to the subject? Perhaps an answer to these questions gives us the required answer.

The Cherry Orchard perhaps could best be conveyed in the prose medium. Shakespeare's tragedies find their full effect only in verse and a prose translation of *Macbeth's* 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' speech or his words after the murder of Duncan,

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast, -

would appear childish and sentimental. Similarly, Shakespeare wrote his own comedies in prose although he was a master of metrical composition. Wit and raillery and sharp exchanges of words go better in scintillating dialogue in prose.

But when a writer wishes to examine and explore something and write a treatise or a book of history he is also always constrained to choose prose rather than verse. Herodotus or Thucydides gave better history since they had written in prose. Virgil's *Georgics* gives us some account of farming but our modern agricultural scientist

could hardly attempt the same with the amount of information they have to convey. in verse. Sir James Jeans, or Arthur Eddington, give the pleasure of music in their discussions of scientific subjects ; in verse it would have been utterly prosaic and monotonous.

Similarly, when Keats wished to write an epic on some mythological subject he chose the style of Milton. These lines from *Hyperion*;

Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
Regal his shape majestic, a vast shade
In midst of his own 'brightness, like the bulk
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun
To one who travels from the dusking East:
Sighs, too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp
He uttered, while his hands contemplative
He press'd together, and in silence stood.

Or

... the God of the Sea,
Sophist and sage, from no Athenian grove,
But cogitation in his watery shades,
Arose, with locks not oozy, and began,
In murmurs, which his first -'endeavouring tongue
Caught infant-like from the far-foamed sands.

, remind one of Milton's sublime style. These lines from Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* may fitly be quoted :

.., he, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower : his form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured -

The same elevated style Matthew Arnold tried to have for his 'Sohrab and Rustum'. Besides the postures all epic poets have brought in epic similes and invocation and gods and goddesses or human being raised to that standard as in 'Sohrab and Rustam'. Since the epic has its oral tradition and this is compatible with certain human longing for the grand which can be achieved through some familiar devices. Pope introduced these, may be in a mocking way, for his mock-epic *The Rape of the Lock*.

But to say all this does not mean that there is nothing like originality of inspiration and diversity of treatment. Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats all wrote on birds but their reactions were as distinct as that of any two persons can be. Shelley's is 'Bird, thou never wert that from heaven or near it.' Wordsworth's sky-lark is 'true to the kindred points of heaven and earth.' Keats's nightingale was 'not born for death, ... immortal Bird!'

No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:

The voice that Coleridge heard that 'passing night' of a raven 'belonged. they did say, to the witch Melancholy!'

As against all these Yeats imagines a bird which is

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork
More miracle than bird or handiwork,

Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire and blood. '

Thus we find that the form demands something from the content and content as well conditions the form but unconditioned to a certain extent remains inspiration.

Prabhat Sharma
 Pandra

51.2.4 Literature and literary Standards

The greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards.

Literature, like all other human activities is produced by human beings and must bear the stamp of life. The impressions, however, have been of myriads of types. From the time of the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead' to the short stories coming in the periodicals today bear the mark of humanity. Art in this sense has no autonomy. It is dependent upon life. Wherever there has been an attempt to free art from the problems of life the product has been a none too happy one. Walter Pater, Lionel Johnson, Earnest Dowson and Oscar Wilde, i.e. the late nineteenth century Aesthetes and the decadents have been victims of the ideal of 'art for art's sake' movement in literature. And if 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' or 'De Profundis' have made an impact on our minds it is because they express the impact of life. Similarly, the pleasure that we derive from *Oedipus Rex*, *Macbeth* or *King Lear* is not because they conform to literary standards but because we find in them an echo of our ideals and aspirations, desires and dreams which we cannot relinquish.

Literary values and norms are established and followed because they are made on the basis of literary works produced and not *vice versa*. Aristotle or Plato started discussing art because the great age of literature had passed. Dryden wrote his *An Essay of Dramatick Poesy* during his days of retirement from London that had been stricken by fire and plague. But he took this pastime because a great age had passed and he could survey from a vantage point all that had passed, in the light of contemporary opinion. The two following passages from *An Essay* show the subtle demands of 'Nature' and art in Shakespeare :

Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd ; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature ; he look'd inwards, and found her there.

Shakespeare was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets ;
Johnson was the *Virgil*, the pattern of elaborate writing ; I admire him, but I love *Shakespeare*.

This opinion Dryden kept on repeating all his life in his various prefaces to his plays. In the prologue to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* he compared Jonson with Shakespeare. While Jonson was praised for art, Shakespeare for 'Nature' or life.

In imitation *Johnsons* wit was shown,
 Heaven made his men but Shakespeare made his own.

* * * * *

But *Shakespeare* like a master did design
Johnson with skill dissected humane kind,

The same appeal to life was made by Dr. Johnson in setting aside the charge against Shakespeare for having not observed the Aristotelian unities of time and place or for mixing up comedy and tragedy as in the drunken porter scene in *Macbeth*. Johnson opined,

There is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.

Dr. Johnson praised Shakespeare for being able to read 'human sentiments in human language ; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passion.' 'This therefore', he continues, 'is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life' As against these examples, if we take the case of *Jerusalemme Liberata* by Tasso and the adverse effect that critics had on the poet, in the failure of *Jerusalemme Conquistata* would confirm the belief that art requires not only literary standards but a certain degree of experience of life in the critic who aims at evaluating or judging works of art.

However, to say all this is not to deny the existence of purely literary values. We may speak against Aristotle's three unities but some of the great plays of seventeenth century France – of Racine, Corneille and Moliere – were written in observance of these Aristotelian unities. Pope's dictum:

Those Rules of old discovered, not devis'd,
Are Nature still but Nature methodiz'd;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd
By the same law which first herself ordain'd.

holds ample validity since rules of art are or were formed on the experience of art itself. So, to quote Pope again,

Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem ;
To copy nature is to copy them.

To create works of art of true greatness, hence, may depend on the mastering of a craft, accomplishing oneself by hard work and perpetual application.

Hence, true greatness in literature can be achieved through reconciling art with Nature, inspiration with rules and imagination with craft. An adequate evaluation or appreciation would depend on a more catholic and tolerant taste and a judgment of the whole rather than parts, and an application of not only literary standards, since every great and new work of art is not repetition but a new thing.

Arun Thakur
Morabadi

51.2.5 Beauty and distortion in poetry

'A story of particular facts is a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful ; poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted '

Stories and poems are different forms of literary expressions. Literature always gives a distinct type of pleasure. Hence it would be incorrect to say that stories obscure and distort and poetry does not. In any artistic expression rearrangement is involved and thus comes in a measure of distortion, because art inflicts order on things that run away from the unity the artist tries to impose on disparate facts. What could be more satisfying than the pleasure of 'The Diamond Necklace' by the French short story writer Maupassant, 'The Doll's House' by Katherine Mansfield, 'The Voice' by H. E. Bates and 'Maria' by Elizabeth Bowen. A reading of those stories or some of the personal essays of Lamb, viz. 'Dream Children' or 'The Superannuated Man' give us the pleasure of passing into eternity as do the plays of Shakespeare.

And yet, to times in hope, my verse shall stand
Praising Thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Symposium

But the stuff of poetry and of stories while being life itself is in essence different. While a story sums up the experience of a longer period, a lyric or a sonnet sets to art the experience of a moment, it is a moment's monument. Perhaps Richard Lovelace's feelings in *Lucasta* cannot be expressed through a short-story.

Stone Walls doe not a Prison make
Nor I'ron bars a Cage;
Mindes innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage;
If I have freedome in my Love
And in my soul; am free:
Angels alone that soar above,
Injoy such Liberty,

And again :

I could not love thee Deare so much,
Love'd I not Honour more.

The same spirit of valour mixed with love could not be achieved through Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Launcelot's love takes a more deep and more profound and rather more profane sublimity in the character of the devotee and the debauchee that Launcelot is. In Lovelace it is a pining for the lady love in the confines of a prison-cell.

It is said, the Anglo-saxons heard poems after the day's tempestuous routine. Their poetry was thus more rugged than ours. Our poetry is more polished, more closely knit and the parts are more closely fitted into the general scheme. A poet sacrifices more in the interest of his art than a story-teller does. In this sense a harmony is created out of the disturbed life and complicated goings on of life. A prose writer moves up and down the peaks and abysses of life and may be more comprehensive but not more balanced and reconciled to the central symbol of the work of art. In this way perhaps the statement is correct.

Surendra Prasad Singh
Dhanbad

51.2.6 Poetry as a holistic activity

'The poet described in ideal perfection brings the whole soul of man into activity with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity.'

The given statement means that great poetry has concentration, which is achieved by a master artist by subordination of some of our faculties to others. An examination of a few pieces would allow us a better understanding of this fact.

In the following lyric of some fourteenth century poet the simple grandeur of summer is conveyed :

Sumer is icumen in.
Lhude sing cuccu.
Groweth sed and bloweth med,
And springth the wde nu.
Sing cuccu.

There is no suggestion of disturbance or any threat that may be imminent. This same feeling is conveyed by the opening of *The Canterbury Tales*:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred in the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Rain his halfe cours y-ronne
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen all the night with open ye:

Against the background of melody and fowles asleep with open eyes is introduced the merry pilgrimage to Canterbury from Southark inn.

But then the month of April need not always be a sign of happiness. The opening of *The Waste Land* suggests uneasiness at the advent of the very season which had brought Chaucer and his pilgrims to life :

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Here a glimmer of joy is given but it is suppressed by man's desire to maintain his immobility despite the change of season which suggests a change in our life as well. This spirit is maintained throughout the poem. Allusions of happy association are taken from different periods and are shown getting corrupted by the modern man's greed and ambition, fears and frustrations.

Hopkins brings the whole soul into activity just like Eliot and invites the entire range of human desires but subordinates them to the love and glory, grandeur and terror of God:

With an anvil-ding
And with fire in him forge thy will
Or rather, rather then, stealing as Spring
Through him; melt him but master him still :
Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,
Or as Austin, a lingering-out sweet skill,
Make mercy in all of us, out of us all
Mastery, but be adored, but he adored King.

God is here like an eastern monarch mercilessly securing his subject's submission. Hopkins wants Him to secure his submission either in the manner of St Paul, abruptly or like the gradual conversion of St. Augustine.

W. B. Yeats secures a concentration of effect by bringing our impulses of pictorial art, magic, devotion and love into harmony. These lines from 'Sailing to Byzantium' demonstrate this fact :

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing - masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away ; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is ; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

And this 'artifice of eternity' is a work of art, a golden bird :

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Yeats brings into play a multitude of impulses and all these are used to heighten one impulse of his which is his love of a work of art.

Love of human beings has fired human works of art no less. From Yeats's aspiration for the 'Cloths of Heaven' –

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet :
But I being poor have only my dreams ;
I have spread my dreams under your feet ;
Tread softly because your tread on my dreams.

to the simple feelings of a Lovelace from prison :

Stone Walls do not a Prison make,
Nor Iron bars a Cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage ;
If I have freedom in my Love,
And in my soul am free;
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such Liberty.

Or a Herrick on the *carpe diem* theme :

Then be not coy, but use your time ;
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.

can be presented a range of feelings and emotions which have been brought to express the feeling of love. Hence the statement observes a fact and is an important comment on the nature of poetic creation.

Jaiprakash
Harmu

Moderator's Comment: The last sentence is too long and may confuse the listener/reader.

51.2.7 Poetry and music

'Poetry is 'speech framed' ... to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning.

Our interest in poetry has much to do with the effect of sound. Poetry without its sound appeal loses much of its charm. The sound suggests the passion that has gone into the making of the poem. The opening of *Paradise Lost*:

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us and regain the blissful seat,

sounds like the rolling of the sea, the blowing of trumpet, the beat of a drum and the clap of thunder in the sky. It is the sound that suggests the force of imagination of Milton. A prose rendering of *Paradise Lost* would make an insipid reading if we do not have behind our mind that that is what *Paradise Lost* has to say in plain words.

By no means this sound is meant only to suggest force. Sheer helplessness in the face of death and destruction can equally admirably be conveyed with the help of appropriate rhythm and the sound effects of well chosen words. *Macbeth's* cry in anguish:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps on this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools,
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life? but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon stage,
And then is heard no more;

'Heard no more' coming, as it does, at the end of a speech which started with the endless stretch of time suggested by the repetition of 'tomorrow' makes us think about the hopes of Macbeth, his hope against all odds also to head a line of kings and his ultimate failure in this effort is made palpable not with the words that are said but with their arrangement which is a product of powerful imagination. No wonder life appears 'full of sound and fury signifying nothing.'

Much of the force of the verse of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century poets comes from their use of the heroic couplet. How well has Atticus been laughed upon with the help of music:

Like Cato, give his little Senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;

The same thing if said of so many persons in simple prose would appear offensive. A Lytton Strachey may compare Pope with a monkey pouring down hot oil from an arch on all those who are going below but to his most other readers he appears sublime even in his anger.

The attraction of the psalms or other books of the Bible is not only of the content but also of the style. The style, of course, is not an attraction in itself, as in Swinburne, but a necessary concomitant of meaning which gets the message conveyed even before we understand the word,

The attraction of the nonsense verse of Lear, lies not in seriousness but in the casualness, the impression of light heartedness that one gets while mocking at seriousness. Children are taught nursery rhymes because the sound makes itself felt by the children so powerfully that they can learn the letters and words after they have memorized the poem with the help of their teacher.

The effect of sound is so powerful that when eras in literature change the music of poetry also changes. The music of the poetry of the Elizabethans is different from that of the neo-classical poets and of the neo-classicals different from the Romantic poets and of the Romantics from that of the Victorians and of the Victorians from that of the Modernists. The **more** mature the poet, the better he understands his tradition and his times and the more sensitive his ears are to the expression of his impression. In this respect his task is more difficult, if more interesting and rewarding as well than that of a writer of prose. The appeal of poetry can be for many things – for the expression of grandeur, oddity, humour, light heartedness, sorrow, frustration, futility, faith and a change of time - but this appeal is conveyed in a far more sensitive way through the medium of verse than of prose.

Henry Barla
Torpa

51.2.8 The poet and his poem

'Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.'

Modern Criticism, - Cambridge or Chicago school or whatever we may call it has directed our attention very profoundly to a close observation of objects on which a statement has to be made. Criticism has been seen as a report on a piece of art just as a doctor's report on a disease, an engineer's statements about a particular machine or its working or a psychiatrist's report on a man are statements of facts,

- It must be said that this attitude has given a particular orientation to literary criticism. The choice of words, the auditory effect of their combination, their repetition, are all studied nearly as precisely as scientists observe and record the progress of an experiment in a laboratory. Seen from this point of view, Hamlet becomes an 'artistic failure' because it does not provide us with the 'objective correlative' of the idea. Similarly Ben Jonson is a greater playwright from the point of view that his words derive haunting force from their context. The speeches in *The Alchemist*, *Volpone* or *Every Man in his Humor* derive from their proper context. As against this, the speeches in Shakespeare's plays appear profound even if they are read in an anthology of English poetry. The poorer poetry of eighteenth century is so, because Milton subjected the language to a deprivation by not allowing the 'unified sensibility' to remain in operation. All such comments of Eliot do wake us up to a greater understanding of the works of art. He says, 'Each generation must bring to the contemplation of past its own categories of appreciation, make its own demands upon art and has its uses of art,' Eliot's criticism no doubt helps us in seeing our poetry from the point of view of a scientific age, But is it the whole truth? Are we not made to overlook a few things, the understanding of which, would have heightened our appreciation of poetry?

How are we to feel the force of 'O mistress mine where are you roaming?' 'Youth's a stuff shall not endure' is an eternal problem but the simple information about the age of Shakespeare, its social condition, its fears and certainties, fears of disease and death and invasion and certainties of exploration and wealth and the breaking of the bonds of religion and traditions do heighten our understanding of the lines :

In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Most of the force of these lines is derived from the permanent problems of our existence. They gain an added meaning by an understanding of the writer's milieu.

Perhaps a far better understanding and appreciation of a work of art will result from an understanding of the man, the milieu and the moment. Morris's prologue to *The*

Earthly Paradise will be better understood by an understanding of Victorian ugliness. its smugness and industrialism :

Forget six counties overhung with smoke
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke
Forget the spreading of the hideous town
Think rather of the packhorse on the down
And dream of London, small and white and clean
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

A foreigner's understanding and appreciation of these lines becomes more powerful when he knows the age, the society, the past and even other works of art of the same literature. Even if criticism is treated as a 'report' we must say that it must tell us not only about the work of art in isolation but about other facts not only about the poet's life and times but about his tradition. Such a criticism will be no less honest and far more sensitive than the other type of criticism for which the given lines speak.

Kamal Kumar Singh
Itki

51.2.9 Poetry as emotive activity

Poetry is language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said otherwise.

Emotion and passion find genuine vent in metre. Pope's response to his father's stick. if the legend is true, brought out an immortal couplet of English poetry :

Father, father, pity take;
No more verses shall I make.

Pope was a poet who 'lisp'd in numbers' as they came to him. Pope's was an instantaneous response to a hard fact. Wordsworth conveyed in his poetry. if his criticism is to be taken as the most authentic account of his own poetry: 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' Perhaps poets sit down in loneliness, think about a past powerful experience and try to be emotional once again and then write poetry. A memory of an unending line of daffodils seen in Scotland comes back to his mind when he is all alone or in pain and then his heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils. 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' is a nostalgic account of the joys of Childhood – 'the land of sleep.' In the following lines, Wordsworth communicates his sense of grief and his spirit of revolt typical of the first generation of the romantics, over the lot of the poor and the depressed :

Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales
The generations are prepared;
The pangs, the internal pangs are ready
The dread – strife of poor humanity's afflicted will
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

But if we read the prose of Cobbett in *Rural* Ride or his *Political* Register, an account of his journeys on horse back in rural England, we do get the emotional flavour that we find here, Wordsworth's poetry is known far more widely than Cobbett's prose because the former is more terse, more concentrated than the prose which is a long drawn affair. Similarly the *Age of Bronze* of Byron can be compared with Byron's speech in the House of Lords in support of the frame breakers and so far as the emotional content of the two goes it is not far different.

Hence, it will not be very apt to say that emotion can be conveyed only in poetry. It can be conveyed not less powerfully in prose.

- a Happiness is but only an occasional episode in the general drama of pain
 b Alas ! it is not meat of which the refusal is cruelest or to which the claim is
 validest The life is more than the meat The rich not only refuse food to the poor.
 they refuse wisdom . they refuse virtue, they refuse salvation Ye sheep without
 shepherds, it is not the pasture that has been shut from you but the presence
 Ruskin, *Unto this Last*
 c Is not a patron my lord one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for
 life in the waters and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help "
 The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early
 had been kind

The sources of the three poetic passages cited above are in that order from above

- a *Far from the Madding Crowd*
 b *Unto this Last* and
 c Dr. Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield.

They are taken haphazardly from different genres of English prose and they convey emotion of grief, pity and hurt feelings in no way less acutely than would poetry have done the work. Wherever one goes in English prose – Dryden or Dr. Johnson's criticism, Dr. Johnson's or Keats's letters, the novels of Emily Bronte or Graham Greene, the essays of Lamb or Forster one can find emotions expressed in prose that is in no way less powerful than the same in poetry. Verse need not always be good poetry and prose unpoetic.

Patrika Singh
 Ashok Nagar

51.3 LET'S SUM UP

Dear student, I hope you enjoyed reading the views of some of your friends. As I had begun this course with a fairly long discussion on the subject of poetry and its appreciation i.e. in the first block I would not proffer my views on the papers of the presenters or on poetry in general once again.

Nonetheless, it may be proper to point out that the students have a good habit of illustrating their points with the help of quotations. However, profuse quotations drown the voices of the presenters themselves and often it was not clear what they themselves thought on the subjects they spoke. Would you yourself like to examine the views of some poet on poetry in a seminar? I hope you would. Wish you good luck in your term-end examination.

51.4 FURTHER READING

It would be a good idea to read essays by W. K. Wimsatt, Donald Davie, Dylan Thomas, Ernest Fenollosa, Murray Schaffer and William Empson printed in this block. They will enrich your own ideas on poetry in general.

UNIT 52 ESSAYS AND EVALUATIONS

Structure

52.0	Objectives
52.1	Introduction
52.2	Sessional Essays
52.2.1	The First Essay
52.2.2	The Second Essay
52.2.3	The Third Essay
52.3.	Term-end examination
52.3.1	Model Question Paper
52.3.2	The Craft of Writing a reference to context question
52.4	Let's sum up

52.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to,

- Write your sessional essays better;
- Take the term-end examination satisfactorily; and
- Score high marks by knowing about the usual pitfalls and the marking system in advance.

52.1 INTRODUCTION

While welcoming you to the present course on *British Poetry* I had told you that we expected you to write three essays or term-papers for your counsellors on this course. Besides these you will be required to write an examination after you have completed your study of this course. In this unit we will discuss these in some detail.

52.2 SESSIONAL ESSAYS

I assume that you would want to know why we have decided to ask you to write long essays in 2500–3000 words and not the sort of questions that you answered at the B.A. level on your EEG courses. You may recall that we asked you to write a critical appreciation of a poem on a course such as *Understanding Poetry* (EEGO6) or asked questions critical.

Partly the reason is that we don't want to ask the same type of questions once again. Different types of questions make different kinds of demands on our study and understanding. To say this does not mean that we could ask students at the undergraduate level to write long essays and you to appreciate a poem in about 1200 words. On this course quite a few poems are long or are excerpts from long poems. Hence there would not be any point in pretending to 'critically appreciate' an excerpt.

Critical questions of the type you met in units 35 and 36 are asked at your level and you are encouraged to remain prepared to answer such questions also. However, if you combine broad study with close critical explication of texts then you would be able to answer any critical question effectively. The *vice versa*, I am afraid, is not true.

So we've planned three essays (each in 2500–3000 words) for you on three different types of topics. They are as below :

- 1) an essay on an age or a movement or a literary group;
- 2) an essay on a British poet; and
- 3) a critical appreciation of a poem.

Now we will discuss each type in some detail separately.

52.2.1 The First essay

The first essay that you have to write will be on a literary movement or a group or some period. A few topics are given below :

1. Old English Poetry
2. Medieval English Poetry
3. The Scottish Chaucerians

Now if you decide to write on the first topic you will be required to show your awareness of works such as *Andreas*, *Guthlac A and B*, *The Phoenix* and *The Dream of the Rood* and the four poems of Cynewulf (a Northumbrian or Mercian poet of the late 8th or 9th century) - *Juliana*, *Elene*, *The Fates of the Apostles* and *Christ II*. You would get a few more tips for this period from the introduction to the first block of this course.

The third unit of block I gives you a good background of the age i. e. Medieval English poetry. However, if you are writing on the third topic above you will be required to gain some familiarity with the life and times and works of William Dunbar (?1456-?1513), Robert Henryson (?1424-? 1506) and James I (1394–1437) king of Scotland and author of *The Kingis Quair* ('The King's Book').

Now if you want to write your term paper on any of the above you will have to have access to some good history of English literature books as well as some of the better known poems of each poet.

If you don't like this idea look for some topic on the Renaissance

1. Earl! Renaissance English Poetry
2. The Metaphysical poets
3. The Cavalier Poets

The first topic above can be a really interesting. If you decide to write on it you will gain knowledge of not only Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney but many of their contemporaries such as Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard Surrey (? 1517-47), Michael Drayton (1563–1631), Thomas Campion (1567–1620) and of course Ben Jonson (1572/3–1637). You will find several of their poems in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* which should be available at your study center also.

At this point I may tell you an important fact. You must show your sensitiveness to the title of your essay. If you are writing, for instance, on the second topic you may focus your attention on the poets such as Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Vaughan, Crashaw and Traherne but if you are writing on the 'Salient Features of Metaphysical Poetry' then the focus should shift to the features rather than the poets. The following essays should illustrate my point :

Salient Features of Metaphysical Poetry Deb Ratna

The Metaphysical poets were writing mainly during the reign of James I and Charles I. This was an age of drama and this particular genre influenced other branches of literature as well.

The poetry of the metaphysical poets such as Donne, Herbert and Marvell is dramatic. Donne's following lines will exhibit this fact :

Goe. and catch a falling starve,
Get with child a mandrake roote,
Tell me, where all past yeares are,
Or who cleft the devils foot,
Teach me to heare Mermaides singing,
Or to keep off envies stinging,
And finde
What wind
Serves to advance an honest minde.

Never before, not since Chaucer, do we find this predominance of drama on poetry in the same measure. The same can be observed in Herbert's 'The Pulley' :

When God at first made Man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by;
Let us (said He) pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

God stands like a scientist in a chemistry laboratory with a beaker containing a solution. In Marvell's 'Thoughts in a Garden' we notice the same dramatic spirit in gods chasing one another and even in the tone of the opening lines :

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the oke, or Bayes;

Vaughan unlike Marvell, possessed some other qualities but not a dramatic spirit.

For the translation of action into the simple flow of lines it is necessary either to have the Dramatic Monologue as we have in Browning's 'My Last Duchess' or an introduction of far fetched ideas which give a startling quality, which has been called the metaphysical conceit. Marvell in 'To The Coy Mistress' wonders what he did till he met his beloved. Donne did not like to kill a mosquito that had sucked the blood of both lovers and thus became their bridal-bed. In another poem he sees a drop of tear picturing both lovers on its spherical surface and thus creating a world constituting only of these two lovers. Somewhere else lovers are compared with a pair of compasses which incline towards each other more as they are pulled apart. In another poem this is how he addresses the person who comes to put the shroud over him :

Who ever comes to shroud me, do not harme
Nor question much
That subtle wreath of haire, which crowns my rme;
The mystery, the signe you must not touch,
For'tis outward Soule,
Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
Will leave this to controule,
And keepe these limbes, her Provinces, from dissolution.

The beloved's hair is to be her viceroy over the lover's limbs and prevent them from dissolution. It is **this** quality which made Eliot say

Donne, I suppose, was such another
Who found no substitute for sense,
To sieze and clutch and penetrate;
Expert beyond experience,

A thought to the Metaphysicals was an experience. They felt their ideas. They present an undissociated sensibility. This was what Dr Johnson could not appreciate with his bias for clarity and classical simplicity. These things give an intellectual quality to the poems of the Metaphysicals. Donne addressed Death in a purely novel manner :

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so.
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor death. nor yet canst thou kill me.

Death will harm itself by killing someone because it cannot kill twice. The intellectual quality is still more pronounced in 'Riding Westward'

There I should see a sunne by rising set,
And by that setting endless day beget:
But that Christ on this crosse did rise and fall,
Sinne had eternally benighted all.

Good Friday is a symbol of a setting of a sun ; but this setting is to rise by its fall because it would spread the Christian faith. It was this quality which influenced the sensibility of modern poets. Eliot's 'The Journey of the Magi' bears a proof of this influence :

This: were we led all that way for
Birth or death ? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

Christ's birth was a hard and bitter agony for the wise men because It was a herald of the death of the old order and the old gods.

In Vaughan as in Herbert this metaphysical sensibility appears most profoundly in their expressions of devotion. In Vaughan it sometimes gets combined with Platonic ideas. This was a dimension of the intellectuality of the poetry of the Metaphysical poets. In 'The Retreat' Vaughan expresses his desire to retreat his steps to that stage of 'angel infancy' when his home was in that 'shady city of palm trees'. Herbert expressed this intellectual quality in 'Virtue' and 'The Altar'.

Thus we find that the intellectual quality found expression in different ways in different poets. In Donne it was in the combination of the devotee and the debauchee; in Herbert in his unrestricted submission to God ; and in Vaughan in his hybrid of pagan and Christian faith. All intellectual quality, a prejudice for metaphysical conceits, an inclination for the dramatic spirit and a capacity for an undissociated expression of experience are some of the qualities of the metaphysical poets,

The above essay would illustrate the point that the writer's focus was on the salient features rather than the poets.

The essay above, however, can be a note not an essay such as we want you to write for us. A good term paper or sessional essay that we want you to write should have footnotes or endnotes. etc. as shown in unit 36 (in block 8).

We may not linger on with the Caroline poets much longer because you have learnt about them in block 3, already.

Some other topics on later poetry you could write upon are:

1. The Great Augustan Poets
2. The Neo-classical Poets
3. The late Eighteenth-Century poets (or poetry)
4. The Graveyard School of poetry
5. Poetry of the Romantic Revival
6. The Medieval Element in Romantic poetry
7. The Wonder of the Romantics
8. The Great Victorian Poets
9. The Minor Victorian Poets
10. Late Victorian Poetry
11. Georgian Poetry
12. Poets of the First World War
13. Poets of the Second World War
14. The Great Modernists
15. The Movement
16. The Poets of the fifties

The list above is only illustrative and not exhaustive and ideally you should be free to write on a topic you consider proper. For example the essay on 'The Religious Temper of the Victorian Age' that you read earlier (in unit 36) would fall into the first category of essays that you would be required to write upon

Before we move on I should like to suggest just one point more. When you are writing this essay you will be required to show your awareness of certain cultural, historical, political, economic facts about the period. This may be clear from the essay that follows.

The Left Wingers of the Twentieth Century Poets **Deb Ratna**

Wars change life, They change economic conditions. But they change values more than anything else. The poets of the thirties – W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice specially – present one aspect of this changed outlook. The destruction during the First World war and the needs produced by it, engendered, frustration, bewilderment, faith in God and the value of sacrifice on the one hand and on the other a desire to rally with the cause of the most prominent section – the proletariat – of the society. The left wingers, or 'New Country' poets as they were also called, chose the latter line.

They were influenced by Marx and they were admittedly propagandists but they were also influenced by Freud. Thus they took to explore simultaneously in two directions – 'without' and 'within'. Paralleling these two intellectual influences were the artistic influences of Donne and the Romantics. The social consciousness was expressed in bold, concrete and startling images and moods *à la* Donne. The 'within' was explored in the evocative, dim, remote and vague imageries reminding us of the Romantic poets.

Their social consciousness made them respond to the Spanish crisis of 1937. Auden, Spender and MacNeice went to Spain together with Ralph Fox, Julian Bell, Christopher Caudwell and John Cornford. The latter four died in the turmoil and the former three returned to England with deep indignation. Auden's 'Spain', Day Lewis's 'Nabarra', Spender's 'The Still Centre' and MacNeice's 'Autumn Journal' are some of the best poems of the thirties.

Auden in 'The Dance of Death' put 'Marxism in rhythm'. It was called propagandist, and the change was accepted by Auden with the remark that he wished to create the society in which the ideal poet could write. In his poetry of this period we find

constant references to Abyssinia and Poland, where, as in Spain, humanity was being uprooted. But before the Second World War he left England, to live in America and with this he left his leftist views also. The persons who influenced his later poetry were Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Kafka and Rilke; the values which he wished to preserve were those of capitalist democracies. The people themselves were to be blamed for their hapless lot. So according to his new creed the poet should aspire for humility and faith and 'privacy and isolation' instead of fighting against the 'exploiters' and the corrupt.

His later poetry shows a mystic quality, as in 'Musée Des Beaux Arts':

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters : how well they understood
Its human position : how it takes place
While some one else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully
along :

Auden, later in his meditations upon the permanent aspects of human nature and endeavours conformed more to the literary culture of the times.

Stephen Spender published his poems along with others of his group in *New Signatures* 1932 and *New Country* 1933 and in one of those poems exulted in the approaching triumph of communism :

They speak of the world state
With its towns like brain centers and its pulsing arteries.

He tries to have faith in the future and takes pride in man's mastery of machines. In 'Ultima Ratio Regum', it is the gun; in 'The Landscape Near An Aerodrome' it is the aerodrome. in 'The Express' it is the night train which are expressed like the soft sweet harmonious dreamed objects of the romantics. But in each one of these poems Spender was striving against the grain in him. His optimism sounds contrived and his best poems are those in which he expresses sad compassion for the lot of those who must live surrounded by the ugliness of modern towns. Spender has been compared with the 'stricken romantic deer' which sounds correct when we examine his nostalgia for the romantic past, when things were beautiful.

Cecil Day Lewis voiced his early enthusiasm for the Spanish cause in 'The Volunteer' but obviously it was not sufficient as a creed to keep the poet involved all his life. *From Feather to Iron* is a series of Lyrics in which a single growing experience of marriage and parentage is viewed from several points of view. In the *Magnetic Mountain* he was under the twin influences of Auden and Hopkins.

Louis MacNeice was more eclectic and his social consciousness was not to be subdued by his pride in his intellectual attainments. He had translated Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* into English and was a brilliant critic of *Modern Poetry* (1938). In this book, he expressed his preference for poets who read newspapers, were interested in politics, economics and social relationships, were appreciative of women and were capable of laughter. These interests came out in *Plant and Phartom* (1941) and *The Spring Board* (1944) where we see the 'hard cold fire of the Northerner' (MacNeice was from Belfast).

Thus we find that these left wingers expressed their social consciousness very powerfully in times of crisis but as the conditions changed, they dissolved into their various colours and currents more true to their inherent natures.

If you contrast the presentations in the two essays in this unit by Deb Ratna you will be able to understand the difference in treatment going with the subject. While the earlier essay was about certain features the present one is about four poets who came together for certain reasons and were similar in certain ways. Much of what has been said above regarding your first essay is applicable to the second and third essays as well.

52.2.2 The Second Essay

The second essay has to be written on a single *British poet* from any period in English literature. Your essay on Robert Frost or A. K. Ramanujam or Derek Walcott would not be evaluated as they are American, Indian and Caribbean poets respectively. You could write on any aspect of any poet discussed on this course. For instance :

1. The Three Influences on Chaucer's Poetry
2. Donne as a Metaphysical Poet
3. Milton as a Religious poet
4. Dryden as a Political Satyrist
5. Browning's Love Poetry

However, you could write alternatively, on any aspect of a poet not discussed on this course. For example,

1. Robert Burns as a people's poet
2. G. M. Hopkins's technical innovations'
3. R. S. Thomas as a Welsh Poet or a Religious Poet
4. Siegfried Sassoon, the War Poet
5. The Poetry of Donald Davie.

In either case you may be required to read poems and critical essays not necessarily provided in the blocks. However, you could also base your essays on the readings provided in the blocks.

52.2.3 The Third Essay

Finally, you have to write an essay on a poem. It does not matter whether the poem is long or short but you must have enough to say on it in about 2500–3000 words. We have not discussed *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, *Crow* or *The Haw Lantern* but you could discuss one of them in your third essay.

This does not mean that you cannot discuss some of the poems that have been examined on this course such as 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' or 'Fra Lippo Lippi' or *The Waste Land*. However don't copy chunks of the text provided as lessons in the units because your examiners may penalize you for doing so and reward you for your answer in your own words to the extent possible.

Submit your essay well before the deadline given to you by the university and in the manner you are asked to do so. Follow the instructions carefully lest your essays should get lost. Perhaps it may be a good idea to send the **first essay in April, second in June** and the **third one in August**.

52.3 TERM-END EXAMINATION

In this section we will give you a model question paper for the term-end examination and then tell you about the craft of writing a reference to contest question and how to score highly on it.

Term End Examination
British Poetry
MEGOI

Full marks : 100

Time : 3 hours

Attempt all the 10 questions below. Each question carries 10 marks.

Explain the passages below with reference to their contexts supplying brief critical comments where necessary :

- 1 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre.
And thereto hadde he ridden (no man ferre)
As wel in Cristendom as hethenesse,
And ever honoured for his worthinesse.

Or

For trewely ye have as merry a stevenc
As any aungel hath, that is in hevenc :
Therewith ye han in musik more felinge
Than hadde Boëce, or any that can singe.

2. Ye tradefull Merchants, that with weary toyle,
do seek most pretious things to make your gain ;
and both the Indias of their treasures spoile,
What needeth you to seek so farre in vaine ?

Or

And whylaest she doth her dight,
Doc ye to her of ioy and solace sing,
That all the woods may answer and your eccho ring.

- 3 And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other fat doth rove,
It leaves, and hearkens after it.
And growes erect, at it comes home.

Or

But at my back I always hear
Times winged Chariot hurrying near :
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.

4. The broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening from the top of Fesole,
Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
Rivers or mountains, in her spotty globe.

Or

Advise if this be worth
Attempting, or to sit in darkness here
Hatching vain empires.

5. The lovely Thais by his side
Sate like a blooming Eastern bride
In flow'r of youth and beauty's pride

Or

Nine years I cries lie, who high in Drury-lane,
Lull'd by soft zephyrous thro' the broken pane,
Rhymes ere he wakes and prints before term ends,
Oblig'd by hunger, and request of friends.

6. But most tliro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new born infant's tear,
And blights with plagues tlic Marriage hearse

Or

Thus for, O Friend ! did I, not used to make
A presnt joy tlic matter of a song
Pour forth that day my soul in measured strains
That would not be forgotten, and arc here
Recorded :

Or

Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For lie on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

7. The World can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers –
A wonder worthy of his rhyme.

Or

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me

8. The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount.

Or

Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece ... Herodias, I would say –
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off !

9. The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call :
Minute by minute they live :
The stone's in the midst of all.

Or

Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and took to windward
Consider Phelbas, Who was once handsome and tall as you.

10. And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

Or

When the lights come on at four
At the end of another year ?
Give me your arm, old toad ;
Help me down Cemetery Road.

52.3.2 The craft of writing reference to context questions

Now you know that you would be expected to explain in the final examination the meanings of ten passages - one from each block on this course with reference to their contexts. You would also supply critical comments on those passages. Each of the six activities given below will carry marks as indicated against them.

- (a) State the reference briefly i. e. the title of the work from which the extract has been taken and the name of the author. ($\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$)
- (b) Give the context in some detail. (2)
- (c) Explain the meaning of the passage within that context. (2)
- (d) Show how it refers back and /or ahead to certain other matters in the poem'. (2)
- (e) State the literary devices made use of and their relevance or otherwise. (1)
- (f) Make any other observation that you consider relevant - in reference to the poet's life or period or the history of the genre to which the poem belongs, that may help us appreciate the given passage better. (2)

Above you have the various aspects of a reference to context question indicated explicitly. Now a simple formula would be to remember that the first three activities and the succeeding three activities are both equally important. However, the latter three will depend on how well you perform the former three activities.

Finally, you might like to know, as some of our prospective students did, about the rationale for our method of examination. Some of them had, several years ago, taken 3 part of their M. A. (English) examination. Others had done their B. A. with English as one of their subjects. They told me that they had written their answers of critical questions on Chaucer and Milton's 'Lycidas' without ever going through their tests. This would not be possible when you have to explain a passage from a poem with reference to its context. This was what the course writers had also said when we met to plan the outline syllabus of the course and the ways and means of transacting the curriculum planned by us. A first hand reading of the poems selected for you thus becomes very important. With this kind of preparation you may even, if required, be able to answer critical questions in an original manner.

52.4 LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the three types of essays you would be writing for your counsellors. We also told you about our reason for giving you a set of three such assignments. We also told you about the frequent pitfalls and the ways of overcoming them and pursuing your study of British Poetry most fruitfully and doing well.

Now you should be familiar with the type of question paper you should expect at the final examination and the ways and means of scoring high marks on it. Wish you success in everything you do in your life.