

Block-2

Unit 1 : The Romantic Themes

Unit 2 : William Wordsworth: “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”

Unit 3 : William Wordsworth: “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” *(Supplementary Unit)*

Unit 4 : John Keats: “Ode on Indolence”, “On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again”

Unit 5 : John Keats: “Ode on Indolence”, “On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again”
(Supplementary Unit)

Unit 1 : The Romantic Themes

Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Foundations of Romanticism
- 1.4 Major Concerns
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1.1 Objectives

This unit is designed to provide you with a grounding in the major Romantic themes. Romanticism as a movement in literature and arts is a complex juxtaposition of several varied and contradictory ideas that develop and accumulate from different ages and traditions of European thought. Reading this unit will enable you to

- *understand* the different tendencies and themes of Romanticism
- *trace* the roots of the major Romantic themes in the philosophy and practice of other ages and traditions
- *locate* the Romantic ideas in the history of western thought and art
- *compare* and *contrast* the ideas and worldviews of different romantic thinkers and poets in English literature

1.2 Introduction

Romanticism as a movement in literature and art can be realized through various tendencies and themes that differ vastly and often contradict one another. The Romantic poets and thinkers in English literature occupy varied positions and points of view with reference to key ideas like nature, the supernatural, self, identity, imagination, beauty, truth, language etc. The foundations of the Romantic themes can be traced back to different traditions of thought like Enlightenment philosophy and German Transcendental Idealism. Besides, the influence of the French Revolution is overwhelming in Romantic philosophy. The following sections will try to acquaint you with the foundations

of Romanticism as well as the basic tendencies and themes that finally constitute the idea of Romanticism. Besides, a few major statements from English Romantic poets and thinkers have been put forward for your understanding of Romanticism in its plurality of ideas.

1.3 Foundations of Romanticism

From the moment “Romanticism” emerged as a critical concept – in the second half of the nineteenth century – it described a period that not only succeeded a previous age of Enlightenment but also opposed it. In his *History of English Literature*, published in 1864, Hippolyte Taine argued that poets like Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth had “violently broken” with eighteenth-century canons of taste and knowledge and had looked past the Enlightenment to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance for their models. Indeed, even before there was such a thing as “Romanticism,” critics like Francis Jeffrey characterized the three poets as dissenters from established systems of poetry and criticism, and as perpetually brooding over the disorders which attended the progress of civilization.

To be sure, Romantic writers themselves had a hand in constructing the myth of a wholly abstract and detached Enlightenment. When friends advised Wordsworth to prefix his poems with a systematic defence of his poetic theory, he rejected the suggestion because, as he explained in his ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), he did not want to be suspected “of reasoning (the reader) into approbation” of his poetry. Poetry is not systematic or reasonable; it is, as Wordsworth famously claimed, the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Preface, 1991, p. 242). Twentieth-century critics and editors of anthologies in large part have continued to stress a decisive break between an Enlightenment characterized by reason and abstraction and a Romanticism that privileged imagination and feeling. M. H. Abrams’ influential book of 1953, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, for instance, uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe the literature of the eighteenth century, which aimed to reflect the world and the underlying laws of nature. Romantic writers, however, strove not so much to reflect the world as to project themselves onto it and create it in their own image. For Abrams, Wordsworth’s ‘Preface’ is a paradigmatic example of the “displacement” of a mimetic theory of art by one that was “expressive” (p. 22).

SAQ

Attempt to highlight the difference between the two metaphors of the mirror as centered on verisimilitude and passive reflection, and the lamp as standing for fresh perspectives on perceived reality. Do you think this helps us to grasp a basic difference between Enlightenment ‘reasonableness’ and a Romantic brand of ‘expressionism’? (50 + 50 words)

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Space for Learner

A significant effect of the “historicist” turn in the 1980s was that it challenged the long-held notion of a Romantic/Enlightenment break. These “new” historicist critics complicated many of the ideas and oppositions taken for granted in earlier accounts. One idea that gained a lot of ground in the upsurge argued that the social pressures exerted on and by literary movements persist across periods in ways that suggest coexistence rather than succession. The ensuing paragraphs will try and show how in spite of the occasional detour, the romantic tendencies trace their influences back to the age that preceded it.

It is a truism, on the one hand, that the Romantics rebelled against their predecessors. To any student interested in the age, it is apparent that Romanticism attacked the Enlightenment’s classicizing, conformist rationalism in place of recognition of unstated emotions and unconscious instincts. The evidence for the Romantic attack on Enlightenment lies everywhere at hand.

Blake assaulted all the canons of eighteenth-century art along with all the preconceptions of the empiricism of given support by John Locke, as Wordsworth vilified the diction of eighteenth-century poetry. Again, supernatural sensationalism, such as Fielding reduces to ridicule in *Tom Jones*, became the norm in the Romantic novel in England, France, Germany, and America, and so as one would expect Enlightenment cosmopolitanism gave way to nationalism and the revival of indigenous mythologies. If we were to look for an explanation here one can understand that classicism is engendered by an urbane culture in which one is ‘reasonable’ and decorous so that cultural exchange is possible. On literary writing, the effect was to sponsor a greater turn towards the mythological and the interior perhaps. So the Eighteenth-century wrote satire in heroic couplets, moral odes, local poetry, and extended didactic poems in Miltonic blank verse; the Romantics wrote sonnets, blank

verse meditative lyrics, ballads, mythological or metaphysical odes, and first-person epics. Eighteenth-century novels were picaresque or epistolary; Romantic novelists satirized the picaresque or else wrote social, historical, or Gothic fictions. Eighteenth-century philosophy was empiricist and materialist; Romantic philosophy, after passing through the inhuman rigors of neo-Spinozism, became transcendental and idealist.

SAQ

We have traced above the more subtle connections between Eighteenth-century philosophy and Romantic philosophy. Do you think Romanticism can be read as the continuation of the Enlightenment ideas of nature, language and history or would you agree with the view that every age is a conscious overturning of older ideas? To what extent, do you think, does this complicate our study of the history of ideas? (40+50 + words)

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Much in this conventional account is true. But inevitably a closer look complicates the picture. Some writers have shown the degree to which Enlightenment values persist despite the changed atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Voltaire’s ideal of tolerance continues in the writings of Schlegel, of Shelley, and of the French Revolutionary thinkers - contemporaries often more different from one another than they were from their common ancestor. Popean satire is not only reborn in Byron, but also strongly colours Blake’s prophecies and leaves traces in some of Shelley’s works and even a few of Keats’s. Neoclassicism, which was a formative element in the Enlightenment, remained a powerful if variable current in Goethe (who translated two of Voltaire’s tragedies), Schiller, the later Schlegels, the artists of the French Revolution, Shelley, Keats, and the later Wordsworth (of “Laodamia”). The mythological works of Keats, Shelley, and Hölderlin in many respects remain faithful to the syncretic (comparatist) and euhemerist (historically rooted) traditions of the Enlightenment, partly because they draw on many now-forgotten seventeenth- and eighteenth- century mythographic compendia.

In this section you will be introduced to another important influence on the Romantic writers. The debts that the period had to pay to classical literature will be studied under three subdivisions. First, the new historical criticism, which had profound impact on the way classical authors were accepted. ‘Romantic Hellenism’, a renewed interest in the study of ancient Greece that

arose during the first decades of the nineteenth century, will follow suit and I will finish by considering how the Romantic century writers transformed the pastoral.

The rise of a new and more precise historical methodology for the understanding of the ancient texts was one of the prominent features of scholarly studies in the eighteenth century. Texts were no longer treated as inspired, but as the specific expression of a group of people writing in a specific socio-historical time period. This methodology was applied to texts like the epics of Homer which revealed that the genius of Homer was not divinely inspired. It was derived from his acute observation of the contemporary society during his forays as a roving minstrel! The Scottish scholar Thomas Blackwell in his *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735) further revealed that Homer composed orally and did so in detachable units rather like ballads, tailored to meet the demands of the evening's performance. The power of Homeric verse was then preserved in the songs of the professional singers which, according to Blackwell, gave the poems their unique appeal.

Space for Learner

SAQ

'Hellenism' is a feature of Romanticism. Can you name some poets of the Romantic age who displayed this concern in various ways in their writings? (30 words)

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These statements laid the foundation for a critical re-evaluation of the British poetic tradition. There came a period of renewed interest in the native ancient folk culture. It is in this context that we need to understand the ballad revival of the late eighteenth century and in 1798, Wordsworth and Coleridge began to assemble a group of original ballads that was published as the *Lyrical Ballads*, an event that marked the beginning of the Romantic movement in England. Along with the rise of historical criticism, the Romantic era was marked by a regeneration of classical art and literature, a movement that was called Hellenism. The re-awakening produced translation of ancient works and was marked by a use of classical myths and symbols in the forms of the period. The attitudes towards the most conventional of all literary genres, pastoral poetry, also clearly bolster the above stated case of reawakening. The

Romantics took it up as a challenge to restore to the pastoral the vigour of the original Virgilian or Theocritean classic. For the writers, the classical inheritance was a well that constantly drew sustenance from and more importantly graduated to provide the model for a programme of cultural reform.

SAQ

We can find instances of this reconsideration of classical literature in several poems by the Romantic writers. Can you give some examples?
(30 words)

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Writers are no more insulated from political events and controversies than are any other class of people. Indeed, they are less so, in that writers work in language, the same medium in which political concepts and demands are formulated, contested, and negotiated. If this is generally true it is of particular relevance in periods of significant historical change, when political issues impress themselves with increased urgency on all sections of society and give rise to vigorous debates concerning fundamental political principles. The period between 1780 and 1830, during which the great Romantic poets came to maturity and produced their most important works, was such a period. The period from the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the passing of the Great Reform Bill in 1832 is inextricably linked to the body of writing that proliferated in that age. Although opinion stands divided, it is hardly ever contested that the French Revolution was the single most significant event of the age. Symbolised by the storming of the Bastille prison on 14 July 1789, the revolution gave rise to intense political debate in Great Britain between the camps of conservative and radical forms of government. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* defended the concept of the natural rights of man and asserted the prerogative of the living to change their forms of government as opposed to Edmund Burke's defense of the organic model of the nation, one that preserved the traditional modes of hierarchy. The ideas thus unleashed into the already charged political atmosphere made way for a rupture in the social order, one that the literary writing of the 1790s mirrored both in content and modes. Writers took historical and political events for their subjects, producing works on the storming of the Bastille, the war with France that began in 1793 and culminated at Waterloo in 1815, the campaign to abolish the slave trade, and the Peterloo massacre of 1819. Moreover, the writers of the age did not

seem to conceive themselves as passive onlookers of the historical upheavals. Rather, writing in a highly politicized climate they understood the importance of their roles as crucial to the ways in which history was understood, and as to how it would be enacted in the future.

This concern with history leads our reading to the other influence on Romantic philosophy – German Transcendental Idealism. It was Kant who provided the Romantic Idealists with the license they needed for new metaphysical explorations; in the realms of ethics, aesthetics, and grand theories of history. It is this decisive shift in emphasis that is emblemized in the first epigraph from *Faust* which celebrated ‘*Becoming*’ over ‘*Being*’.

For these Romantic philosophers the great ideals exist not in any abstract realm of transcendent being, but are immanent in the progress of the individual mind, and in the *history* of mankind. It is from Hegel, however, that we have the Grand Synthesis, the Ring Cycle of Romantic philosophy. Hegel’s vision is primarily historical: for Hegel it is the philosopher of history who is the saviour of humanity. He, however, adds a very important reservation: the philosopher-historian does not *affect* history, he interprets it, after the fact. The World Spirit realizes itself in and determines all of history; it uses (Hegelian) heroes, ‘worldhistorical’ individuals (*Weltgeschichtliche Menschen*), but these heroes know not what they do. The World Spirit becomes conscious of itself in philosophy, but only in retrospect: “The Owl of Minerva,” as Hegel puts it in the preface to *The Philosophy of Right*, “flies only at twilight.”

SAQ

Attempt to underline the diverse ways in which Romantic thinkers began to display a growing concern with a new understanding of history. Do you think a play between regional and national histories was crucial to their understanding of history? (40+50 words)

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1.4 Major Concerns

Romanticism, in terms of one of its major concerns, can be seen as ‘the return to nature’ or more precisely, in English literary history, ‘the revolt against Alexander Pope’. Here Pope must be understood as the representative of the abstractions and artificiality typically characterized as ‘Augustan’ or in

other words that theoretical position that earned him the comment from Hazlitt, “He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art.” Against this theoretical discourse, the Romantics made a harsh protest as we find Robert Southey considering the ‘Augustan’ as ‘the dark age of English poetry’. What we find in the Romantics is a renewed interest in nature or what is ‘natural’. The Romantics shared a common objection against the mechanistic universe of the 18th century. They conceived nature as an organic whole which is not divorced from its authentic values; it is an analogue of man rather than a complex structure of atoms.

SAQ

Attempt to organize the ideas in “organic whole” and “analogue of man”. Do you discern a difference in the status accorded to the anthropomorphic (human) figure in relation to the ‘natural’ world? (40 + 40 words)

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Coleridge’s theory of art is based on the idea of a kind of union between both man and nature: “Art itself might be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing, or, as I have said before, the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human” (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter II). John Keats, in one of his letters to Taylor, wrote “if poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all”. (27 Feb, 1818). William Wordsworth, regarded as the most important spokesperson in this field, declared in his 1802 edition of the ‘Preface’ to the *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry is essentially “the image of man and nature”. For him, it is the world of nature wherein lies the cardinal standard of poetic value. This pervasive interest in nature led Wordsworth to take interest in what is unsophisticated or uncultivated. Wordsworth announces his liking for the world of children, unlettered peasants and the mentally disabled on the grounds that their worlds are built up with elements that are ‘simple, belonging rather to nature than to manners.’ This interest in children and childish experience and the belief that adults are not divorced from their childish-selves but rather the products of their early experiences has remained one of the most pervasive influences of all Romantic tenets throughout the last two centuries.

The Romantics accounted of higher importance the heart rather than the brain. They tried to posit emotions or feelings within a cardinal position in the

process of poetic or artistic creation. Coleridge complained that the works of Pope were confined to the clinical observation of man and manners which, unlike the poetry composed on natural impulses, were not authored with a deeper stirring of the human heart. Keats sought to draw inspiration for his poetic endeavour from the ‘true voice of feeling’ rather than the ‘false beauty preceding from art’. He pined for a life that is filled with ‘sensation’ and not with ‘reasoning’, where sensation, aided with imagination, can be a means to arrive at truth. Wordsworth announced in his ‘Preface’ to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* that “poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feeling.” His oft-quoted phrase “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” is regarded as a defining statement of the Romantic notion of poetry.

Space for Learner

SAQ

Do you find any trace of Enlightenment thinking in Wordsworth’s conception of human nature, as stated here immediately above? Do you think that Wordsworth has disregarded the importance of the role of education and socialization here? (60 + 60 words)

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Among the different kinds of emotions, most of the Romantics tried to emphasise a certain kind of infantilism; a desire to feel and realize the world the way a child experienced it. This tendency tried to recall the experience of ‘childlike wonder’ and establish it as a major and desirable factor in the process of recreating the world through poetic enterprise. The rejection of artifice and the pursuit of what is ‘natural’ also led the Romantics to the renewed interest in the childish experience or the ‘childlike - innocence’. While trying to establish ‘childlike wonder’ as a major element in the creative process of great works of art, Coleridge mentioned in his *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter IV) that the creator of art or poetry should have the faculty to “carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with the appearance, which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar”. Wordsworth too advocated the same attitude but put it in a different way as we find him in the ‘Preface’: that the principal object of the poems is “to choose incidents and situations from common life” and then “to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.” This same idea

of creating wonder and mystery out of the ordinary is reflected in Shelley's mystical voice "Poetry lifts the veils from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar". ("Defense of Poetry", 1821). However it must be acknowledged that it is the faculty called 'imagination' which remained the backbone of all these artistic recreations of the mundane rendered into the extraordinary, wonderful and mysterious.

One of the major concerns of Romantic thinking lay in the choice of language for poetry. The long debate between Wordsworth and Coleridge over the idea of language for poetry can be seen as part of the first Romantic revolt against the established idea of 'poetic diction' in English literature. This debate raised two major questions about the nature of poetic language – among what kind of people originates poetic language and how 'poetic diction' can be distinguished from the valid language of poetry. The Romantic revolt against 'poetic diction' was hostile to pedantry and affectation, but appealing to the primitive, the naïve, the passionate and the natural spoken word.

Stop to Consider

Poetic diction

The term 'poetic diction' refers to the set of words, phrases, figures and the systems of sentence construction used in the process of writing poetry. Throughout the ages, poets have used various poetic diction with distinctive language, words, phrases that did not necessarily belong to the ordinary language of their times. The diction used by poets like Edmund Spenser and G M Hopkins deviated deliberately from the common language of the contemporary poets of their respective times. However with the neo-classic poets and critics, the concern over 'poetic diction' became a serious issue in the field of literary practice in English. Based on the principle of 'decorum', the neo-classic idea of 'poetic diction' necessitated the use of languages that can express the modes and status of the genre they were used in. For reflecting everyday matters, the poet must adopt the language used by the urban, cultivated and the sophisticated people of the age. Besides, for higher genres like epic, tragedy and ode, a refined, elevated language was needed so that the poetic diction could justify the level of the genre. You will notice that the Romantics tended to oppose this neo-classic idea of poetic diction.

Wordsworth's theorization of the language of poetry was part of his adherence to 'primitivism' and revolt against what the aristocratic stance of the neo-classic writers viewed as the right language of poetry. Dryden and

Pope shared the doctrine that the language used for poetry should be the language of the king and the court. The pursuit of the ‘natural’ led the Romantic poet to look forward to the world of the unlettered peasant, the child, the uncultivated or the disabled and farther to the language used by these characters. In his ‘Preface’ to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth states, “I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject, consequently, I hope that there is in these Poems little falsehood or description”. This desire to avoid falsifying called for a poetic language that can faithfully mediate what the poet observes and wants to express. Wordsworth makes a choice of language for this poetic exercise as we read in his ‘Preface’, “I have proposed to myself to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men.” He adopted the language of ‘man speaking to men’ instead of the so-called ‘poetic diction’ just in order ‘to bring my language near to the language of men’. Wordsworth’s idea of ‘the language of man’ as the ideal language for poetry has remained one of the most revered and debated ideas of poetic language among not only the Romantics but also many post-Romantics like Hardy, Hopkins, Eliot, Pound and many more. However this idea is further supplanted by Wordsworth’s emphasis on the all-important kinship between the language of poetry and living speech, as he states, “there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.” However Wordsworth and Coleridge had a basic difference in their attitude towards the language of poetry. Whereas Wordsworth was much concerned about the tension between artifice and nature, Coleridge was concerned about propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity.

The idea of Romantic imagination can be understood as juxtaposition of two major and opposite views regarding the engagement of the ‘self’ in the creative process. Whereas one tendency pleads for the ‘self-effacement’ of the poet, the opposing tendency aims at the poet’s intimate subjectivity and the inwardness of experience.

In his ‘Preface’ to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth comments, “it will be the wish of the poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his feelings with theirs.” This doctrine of the poet’s evading his personality and selfhood has found profound expression in Keats’s formulation of the idea of poetic personality – “it is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – it has no character. . . . A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity.” (27 Oct, 1818) His concept of ‘negative capability’ calls for the

poet's ability to negate his own personality and enter into an aesthetic self constructed by his imagination and art. Coleridge too regarded creativity as the product of a kind of imagination conditioned by the selflessness of the artist (as we find him praising in his *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XV, the invisibility of Shakespeare's own personality among the chaotic voices of his characters). This tendency of the Romantic's 'self-effacement' has remarkable influences on the post-Romantics. We find T. S. Eliot echoing the same sentiment in his formulation of the poet's 'impersonality'.

SAQ:

Try to compare and contrast the ideas in Eliot's concept of 'impersonality' with the Romantic ideas of the poet's engagement in the creative process. (50 words) [It will be a fascinating experience for you to discover that some of the 'modern' or 'postmodern' concepts of literature (eg. formalism) have got Romantic origins. Try to explore this field.]

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It is interesting to note that Wordsworth, despite being a major spokesperson of the idea of 'self-effacement', is seen to possess the other and contrasting Romantic sentiment of the artist's intense subjectivity and the inwardness of experience. Hazlitt comments that (*Examiner*, 21 Aug, 1814) the choice of subject-matter in Wordsworth's poetry bears evidence of his blind trust in his own and private experiences and perceptions without the least regard to their external sources. Coleridge's idea of 'imagination' provides important grounds for this exploration of the artist's subjectivity. Coleridge argues that the world of nature and ordinary things remain as stark 'chaos' for human perception; it is the poet's imagination that brings this variant chaos into a homogeneous life. Describing the idea of Secondary Imagination, which is an essential and the most desirable faculty of the artist, Coleridge observes, "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create, . . . yet still, at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify". Keats also considers that imagination is essentially creative and intuitive and its appropriation can lead the artist to 'Truth'. Here, the role of the artist becomes almost like that of God. The product of poetic artistry is, like that of God, a new and autonomous world that exists in the field of art. P.B. Shelley observes the same view of the creativity of poetry, "Poetry makes us inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world

is a chaos”. This idea of the poetic self with regard to imagination has found much currency among the post-Romantics. Eliot follows the same tradition when he observes the working of the poetic mind as ‘constantly amalgamating disparate experiences’. To quote from “The Metaphysical Poets”, “the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular and fragmentary . . . in the mind of the poet, these experiences are always forming new wholes”.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

Here it will be important for you to note that, over the years, the term Romanticism has come to be applied in many newer fields and meanings. Critics like Frank Kermode, Cornwall Bayley have found the Romantic lineage in modernist literary ideas. This is acceptable because, in the last few decades, the idea of what is Romantic has undergone certain mutations within itself. Take one example from Harold Bloom – when he talks about Wordsworth’s ‘revolution in poetry’, he does not mean the return to nature but the evanescence of any subject but subjectivity’. The Romanticism exemplified by this “evanescence of subject” produces, in Bloom’s language, ‘an antinature poetry’. (“The Internalisation of Quest Romance”, (1971)). This critical position projects Blake, not Wordsworth, as an exemplary Romantic, who argued that nature should be rejected by the artist.

1.5 Major Statements

Unlike the philosophical rationalism of the Enlightenment, the Romantic movement in the arts can be best understood in the context of the emergence of an alternative aesthetic of freedom with renewed focus on the individual sensibility and originality, the synthesizing power of imagination, uninhibited self-expression etc. The Romantic themes are best expressed in the writings of the period and this section aims to help you trace the connection between the various themes of Romanticism in terms of the major statements.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience

A collection of poems and etchings by William Blake. The 27 plates of *Songs of Innocence* were published in 1789. In 1794 Blake issued *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Mind*, and since then the two cycles have always appeared together. Dealing with the contrary states of ‘innocence’ and ‘experience’, Blake traces

the connection between the two states and shows how the experience of the adult life corrupts the innocent joys and convivial rupture of childhood. The transition from ‘innocence’ to ‘experience’ is fraught with prohibitions and moral and psychological dilemmas as the paradisaic anarchy of ‘The Echoing Green’ contrasts with the religious prohibitions of ‘The Garden of Love’. This collection also outlines Blake’s concern over the institutionalized coercion, enslavement and the consequent atmosphere of dehumanisation.

Lyrical Ballads with a Few Other Poems

First published in 1798, *Lyrical Ballads with a Few Other Poems* is a collection of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This seminal work is often considered to mark the beginning of English Romantic movement and appears as the manifesto of Romantic concerns. The second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* including a preface by Wordsworth which replaces his original short ‘Advertisement’ is viewed as the most influential document of the Romantic era. The significance of this collection lies in generating critical notions about poetic language, subject matter, and role of the poet. The third edition was published in 1802. The genesis of *Lyrical Ballads* is traced to the time when Wordsworth and Coleridge were living as close neighbours in Somerset. The book is nurtured by their shared sense of the emotional artificiality of the eighteenth century poetry and petrification of its conventions. Of the original 23 anonymous poems, only four are by Coleridge. With the preference for subjects drawn from ‘low and rustic life’, *Lyrical Ballads* paved the way for Wordsworth’s later fame as a poet. The volume opens with Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner” and closes with Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”.

The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind

Written in blank verse, ‘The Prelude’ is an autobiographical poem by William Wordsworth. This poem is basically a poetic reflection on poetry itself and was originally intended to be a ‘sort of portico’ or prologue to ‘The Recluse’, a philosophical poem on ‘Nature, Man and Society’ which Wordsworth began but never completed. ‘The Prelude’ known to his circles as ‘the Poem to Coleridge’ remained unpublished during Wordsworth’s life. It was published after his death in 1850 and the present title was suggested by Mary, his widow. ‘The Prelude’ is often read as the spiritual autobiography of the poet where he outlines his vocation as a poet and chooses mind and imagination as a subject worthy of epic. In the course of the poem, Wordsworth situates imagination as above all other modes of understanding and acting upon man and the world. His desire to distance imagination from other modes

of understanding is apparent as imagination is ‘but another name for absolute strength / And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,/ And Reason in her most exalted mood.’ Commonly categorized as his greatest work, ‘The Prelude’ is replete with the references of a critique of the negativity and dehumanization of the modern civilization in terms of the mechanical and deadening equation of knowledge with book-learning and writing as well as the debased conception of human community. Wordsworth craft extends to the analysis of the streets and buildings of the London metropolis (Book VIII); the abstraction of rationalistic philosophy of Godwin and the catastrophic degeneration of the French Revolution into ‘domestic carnage’ and wars of foreign conquest (IX, X, XI)- factors responsible for the growing sense of estrangement of man from his true purpose and being. In the course of the poem, the poetic imagination emerges as the repository of eternal truths and therefore, is capable of providing aesthetic pleasure as well as moral truth. Imagination, here appears to be the sole factor to humanize the dehumanized world.

Biographia Literaria

Published in 1817, *Biographia Literaria* is a philosophical and autobiographical work by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Although the work lacks the aesthetic and recapitulatory ‘finish’ of conventional autobiography, the underlying philosophical concern of Coleridge, here, is the process of human creativity. Beginning *in medias res*, *Biographia Literaria* is replete with the references to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. The influence of Coleridge’s youthful admiration for the sonnets of Williams Bowels, his early friendship with and domestic proximity to Wordsworth, the ‘associationist’ tradition in philosophy from Aristotle to Hartley etc. can be seen in this work. Here, we find the famous definition of the creative intelligence, or the ‘Imagination’ in terms of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ imagination, the distinction between ‘imagination’ and ‘fancy’ and the origin of the famous critical concept of willing suspension of disbelief, the exploration of the relations between subjectivity and objectivity, self and world etc.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Published in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is the longest major poem written by Coleridge. Coleridge composed this enigmatic poem describing the experience of a Mariner during his voyage in 1797-1798. The poem has been read as a Christian allegory emphasizing the significance of salvation as well as an exploration of Coleridge’s interest in higher criticism. The mysterious figure of the Mariner narrating his

experience to the wedding guest and igniting his response on various issues is often interpreted to offer an autobiographical portrait of the poet himself thereby equating the Mariner's seclusion with Coleridge's expression of isolation.

Kubla Khan

Composed in 1797 and subtitled as 'fragment', the poem is a consequence of an opium induced dream. Coleridge specifies in the Preface to "Kubla Khan" that the poem remains a 'fragment' as the writing was interrupted by a person from Porlock. Written in a stylised language, the poem is unique in its exploration of the creative process of poetic composition, the power of imagination and the harmonious coexistence of nature and creative power.

"Child Harold's Pilgrimage"

Published between 1812 and 1818, "Child Harold's Pilgrimage" is a narrative poem written by Byron in Spenserian stanzas. Byron describes the widespread disillusionment and melancholy characterizing the Post-Napoleonic eras through the aimless wanderings of a young man disillusioned with his pleasure-seeking existence. The poem describes the 'Byronic hero' looking for distraction in foreign senses and travelling through Spain, Portugal, Albania and Greece. "Child Harold's Pilgrimage" has introduced the disillusioned and melancholy 'Byronic hero' as one of the most typical Romantic figures.

Don Juan

Don Juan is Lord Byron's unfinished 'epic satire' in ottava rima. It was published in 16 cantos between 1819 and 1824. The first two cantos appeared in 1819, cantos 3-5 were published in 1821, 6-14 in 1823 and cantos 15 and 16 in 1824. The central character is depicted as a passive, innocent whose learning comes through the variety of his complex international experience and the poem describes Juan's experience of man and nature through Byron's ironic comment on human passions, whims and shortcomings. The loose structure of the poem allows Byron to integrate ironic comments on contemporary English society, politics and literature in Juan's tale of adventure.

Endymion: A Poetic Romance

Beginning with the often quoted line 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever', *Endymion* is a poem in four books by John Keats. Published in the spring of 1818, this poem dedicated to Thomas Chatterton is based on the Greek legend of Endymion. Keats describes how Endymion, a prince of Elis or the

young shepherd falls asleep on the Slopes of Mount Latmos and the moon goddess Selene (Cynthia) takes him away to eternal life. The poem was subject to scathing criticism from various quarters and John Wilson Croker made a notorious attack in *The Quarterly Review*.

“Hyperion”

“Hyperion” and “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” are the two unfinished epic poems written by Keats in 1818-19. The first version called ‘A Fragment’ published in 1820 takes recourse to Greek mythology and concentrates on the story of Hyperion, the sun-god. “Hyperion” traces the trajectory of the fall of the Titans to the Olympians and how the grieving Titans plan to regain their lost power and glory with the help of Hyperion, the sun-god. The second version called ‘The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream’ was published in 1856. Here, Keats recounts a dream. Here, the poet aware of the widespread misery of the world is granted an entry to the shrine where the Titans’ priestess Moneta offers description of the fall of Hyperion and the advent and consequent emergence of Apollo, the god of knowledge, poetry and music.

“The Eve of St Agnes”

“The Eve of St. Agnes” is a narrative poem written by Keats in 1819. Published in 1820, this poem is written in Spenserian stanzas and is replete with the references of popular legend, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, gothic romance. Keats uses motifs from Boccaccio and Chaucer in this richly sensuous poem describing a night of revelry and merriment in a medieval mansion. The title of the poem comes from the day or evening before the feast of Saint Agnes, the patron saint of virgins. Here, Keats tells the story of Madeline who believes that on this night, a virgin is granted a vision of her lover and how Madeline finds her lover Porphyro in the castle and both escape from the castle in the night.

SAQ

Comment on the exploration of the interlinked themes of language, nature and imagination in romantic poetry with reference to the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. How would you read the *Preface* as a political document? (40+40 words)

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1.6 Summing Up

From your reading of the Romantic themes and their foundations, it has been cleared to you that Romanticism marks a deliberate attempt to break from the neoclassical school of thought. Despite its varied and often contradictory tendencies, Romanticism has been a vibrant period in the history of English literature and art that produced enormous body of works in the Europe of its time. It is hoped that after reading this unit, you will have a proper grasp of this era in English literature. It will farther equip you with proper standpoints and insight while you approach the works of literature and other arts like music, drama, painting, sculpture produced in this age. Your understanding of Romanticism will be much richer as you capitalize the information of this booklet and expand your reading on the area with more books. You can follow the texts suggested to you as a kind of guide into the world of Romanticism.

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Unit 2 : William Wordsworth: Lines Written a Few

Miles above Tintern Abbey

Unit Structure :

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 His Works
- 2.4 Critical Reception
- 2.5 Contexts of the Poem
- 2.6 Reading the Poem
- 2.7 Summing Up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is one of the most admired poets of the Romantic era. For his brilliant ideas on various aspects of poetic creation and social life he is widely admired throughout the century. The unit will help in

- *reading* the poem in their proper context
- *understanding* the poet's ideas of Nature
- *celebrating* the simplicity found in his poetry as has been shown in the poems
- *focusing* on the basic philosophical and ideological issues of his time

2.2 Introduction

Effective grasp of rural communal relationships, objections to over-stylised poetic diction, nostalgic yearning to represent the essence of Nature, radical desire to break with the artificial traditions and false sophistication, and acute sensitivity towards the mutual interdependence of man and nature, are some of the characteristic features which distinguish William Wordsworth (1770-1850), the man who changed the concept of Romantic poetry. Poetry for him is the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and the poet is a 'man

speaking to man'. The rare emotional vitality of a poet unites the physicality of nature with the perception of mankind and the end-product is a unique blending of the two. Wordsworth is unique in the realm of English poetry for the sheer brilliance of his verse and his views on the nature of poetic creation, poetic diction, role of the poet, add to his reputation as literary critic.

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, one of the five children of John and Ann Wordsworth. He was educated at primary schools in Cockermouth and Hawkshead and St. John's College Cambridge from where he got a B.A. degree. The death of his parents caused William to be separated from his beloved sister Dorothy.

The time spent by Wordsworth in France from 1790 till about 1793 had a profound impact on his poetic career. His friendship with Michel de Beaupuy, an aristocratic supporter of the Revolution inspired a passionate faith in revolutionary zeal. Meanwhile, his relationship with Annette Vallon and the birth of a daughter, Anne Caroline in December 1792 are events considered to have deeply affected him. Wordsworth's convictions with reference to the French Revolution underwent disillusionment as the regime changed to one of terror. His relationship was simultaneously disrupted by the hostilities which began in early 1793 and lasted until 1815.

The period 1793-95 was full of great personal unhappiness, uncertainty about professional future and moral and intellectual confusion. Despite his dismay at the drift of the Revolution into the realm of political terror, Wordsworth moved to higher realization especially with his association with William Godwin and his circle. He finally became disenchanted with France with her occupation of Switzerland in 1798.

Wordsworth's friendship with Coleridge began with the move to Dorset and then to Somerset in 1795. In the year 1798 came the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, to which were contributions both by Coleridge and Wordsworth.

Wordsworth, along with Dorothy, traveled to Germany in the autumn of 1799. Back in England after the bitterness and depression of the winter of 1799 which they passed in Germany and during which he began work on *The Prelude*, they settled in Dove Cottage in Grasmere close to his birthplace in the heart of his beloved Lake District with Robert Southey nearby. "Lake Poets" is the name given to the association between Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. Dorothy's influence on her brother is considered to have diminished after 1802 when he married Mary Hutchinson.

Between 1798 and 1805 Wordsworth completed the first draft of his long autobiographical poem, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*. This version of the poem underwent many revisions yet it is considered to be different from the version published in 1850 after his death. The fact remains that the poem was not published during his life.

In 1813, Wordsworth was appointed to the sinecure of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland and moved to Rydal Mount, Ambleside where he remained for the rest of his life. He was honoured by the Universities of Durham and Oxford and succeeded Southey as a Poet Laureate in 1843. Wordsworth's old age was marked by loneliness and the decline of his poetic powers. He died on April 23, 1850.

The social and political consequences of the French Revolution, the eighteenth-century development of psychological views implicit in Locke's idea of knowledge and perception, humanitarian impulse of the Enlightenment, his walking tour in France and Switzerland, among other factors have influenced his poetry.

Space for Learner

SAQ

What was the effect of the French Revolution on English society? (30 words)

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When did the Revolution begin and what happened subsequently ? (20 words)

.....
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Which facts of Wordsworth's life should be considered to have profoundly influenced his poetry? Can you identify the references? (30 words)

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What kind of connections can we find between the French Revolution and his artistic beliefs? (40 words)

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.....

2.3 His works

The best known works of William Wordsworth include *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), *The Prelude* (1850), *The Excursion* (1814), and *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1822-45). Poems like ‘Michael’, ‘The old Cumberland Beggar’, ‘The Solitary Reaper’, ‘Tintern Abbey’, and ‘Resolution and Independence’ are still read and admired widely. Elegance, purity and simple poetic expressions are the qualities of Wordsworth’s poetry and some of his works contain autobiographical accounts of his own development.

Wordsworth’s *Descriptive Sketches* contains the experience of a walking tour in France, Germany and Switzerland and should be seen in the tradition of the late eighteenth-century meditative poems about nature. *Lyrical Ballads* is one of the most important documents of English Romanticism which asserts two roles of language, of conversation in the middle and lower stratas of society in creating poetic pleasure along with the changing motions of poetic decorum, and the nature of poetry and the role of the poet. The Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was occasioned by the republication of the revised and altered volume of 1798, remaining Wordsworth’s most significant statement of the purposes of his poetic art.

Wordsworth’s poetic themes are often to be seen in connection with the predominantly Romantic idea of the growth and change of the self. ‘The Excursion’ is a poem in nine books containing views of man, nature and society. Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* is an autobiographical poem in blank verse which focuses on the growth of the poet’s mind and a poetic reflection on poetry itself. *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) contain poems like the *Ode to Duty*, *Miscellaneous Sonnets* and *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*. *Peter Bell: A Tale in Verse and The Waggoner* was published in 1819. ‘The Borders’ is a blank-verse tragedy written by him and most of his later works commemorate his travels. For example, *The River Duddon: A Series of Sonnets* (1820), *Memorials of a Tour On the Continent* (1822), *Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems* (1835). Wordsworth’s prose works include *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), an essay criticizing the agreement of Britain and Portugal to allow the French army to return home during the Peninsular War. *A Description of the Scenery of Lakes in the North of England* (1810) and *Essay on Epitaphs* was published in Coleridge’s Journal ‘The Friend’.

2.4 Critical Reception

Wordsworth's works have been received differently by critics throughout the ages. The twentieth-century critic Northrop Frye draws a connection between Wordsworth's innovative descriptions and social and political critique. Harold Bloom says that Wordsworth has made the 'poet's own subjectivity' the prevalent subject of poetry while dramatising the argument of the individual consciousness. In his defence of his literary practice Wordsworth is akin to authors like Dryden, Henry James, or T. S. Eliot, but W. J. B. Owen notes that Wordsworth is less original as his ideas about figurative language, poetic diction, relationship between prose and poetry draw heavily on ideas of the 18th century. Wordsworth, in his active concern about the pressures impinging on the lives of the inhabitants of industrial cities, looks forward to the opposition between high and mass cultures in the writings of modern critics like Raymond Williams. His opinions about the poet and his states, for instance, are also part of the the issues which are dealt with differently by different critics like Matthew Arnold, and I. A. Richards throughout the century.

Space for Learner

Check Your Progress

1. Compare the dates of Blake and Wordsworth. How long were they contemporaries?
(Hint: A straightforward answer is required!)
2. What is the 'Romanticism' shared alike by the two poets?
(Hint: Look at their similarities.)
3. Note the differences in the critical reception given to the two poets.
(Hint: Read the relevant sections.)

Stop to Consider

Nature in Romantic poetry

In Romantic poetry Man and Nature are emblematic of each other. Contrastingly, the neo-classical view of nature was formed through the restrictive frame of 'perfection'. Thus for the eighteenth-century writer's aesthetic standards, art fulfills its role not by imitating nature irregular and ordinary, but as the embodiment of perfection. But this was also a confirmation of an Enlightenment conception of a mechanistic universe that nature must be idealised and taken in its perfection.

The Romantic ideal contested the eighteenth-century norm; as René Wellek remarks, “All Romantic poets conceived of nature as an organic whole, on the analogue of man rather than a concourse of atoms - a nature that is not divorced from aesthetic values, which are just as real (or rather more real) than the abstractions of science.” If, for the neoclassical writer, the norm was to “Follow Nature!”, for the Romantic poet, the defining principle was the “return to nature”. This return, however, was formulated differently by the different poets.

For Blake, nature appears differently from Wordsworth’s sense of it as an animated divine force. In Blake’s conception, nature and man seem destined for a sense of renewal challenging eighteenth century deism, cosmology and ideas of natural religion. Shelley’s apprehension of nature consists of the sense of its vitality aligning it with man’s progression towards self-consciousness.

Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime* proposes the idea of delightful horror in terms of the depiction of the natural world and its vastness and immensity. The ‘Simplon Pass’ passage in Book VI of his *Prelude* (1805) where the poet’s memory of a daunting physical landscape is surpassed by his realization of imaginative potential also echoes the sense of sublime horror and grandeur of natural scenery. The dialectic of nature with memory and consciousness aiming towards a cosmic vision dominates the poetry of the period and helps to dramatize the idea of the self. Wordsworth’s celebration of nature in ‘Tintern Abbey’:

“Therefore am I still/ A lover of the meadows and the woods,/ And mountains, and of all that we behold/ From this green earth; of all the mighty world/ Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create, / And what perceive; well pleased to recognize/ In nature and the language of the sense,/ The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being”

shows that nature is as mutable an idea as the self and its holy redemptive power is found in the physical world.

Nature occupies Romantic horizons as a criterion, the cardinal standard of poetic value. In recent years, the new approach known as ecological literary criticism ponders over Romantic poetry addressing perennial questions concerning the relationship between humankind and the natural world.

2.5 Context of the Poem “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”

Space for Learner

The poem, *Lines Written (or Composed) a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798*, or often simply referred to as *Tintern Abbey*, was written by William Wordsworth, one of the most celebrated and renowned poets of the Romantic Era. He was inspired to compose the literary piece after a walking tour with his sister, Dorothy, on the banks of river Wye on the Welsh Borders. It is generally considered a topographical poem that praises the countryside landscape on the banks of the River Wye. The poem comprises of verse paragraphs, written in decasyllabic blank verse and contains elements of both an ode as well as a dramatic monologue. Written in the form of a dramatic monologue, the poet is the only speaking entity in the poem. However, we are made aware of the presence of a listener, who is considered by literary critics and scholars to be his sister, Dorothy. The poem is composed in iambic pentameter but it does not follow a rigid rhyme scheme. This might be because the poet wanted to structure the poem as a conversation, where he was addressing another person, an active listener, rather than some kind of a declaration. However, it does follow a particular beat where each verse consists of five sets of beats per line that begins with an unstressed, then followed by a stressed beat. The poem opens with the reminiscence of a prior visit to Tintern Abbey, five years back. He describes the tranquil, rustic scenery with the sweet murmuring of the river Wye that has had a lasting effect on him. The long gone days invokes nostalgia for the woods and cottages, bringing “tranquil restoration” in his “hours of weariness” in the city. The poem was composed at the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution when rural areas were gradually undergoing urban transformation, culminating into centers of merchandise production and commercial manoeuvres. The poem eulogizes a place that is yet untouched and unaltered by industrialization. The poem can be read as an implicit response to the effects of industrialization that somehow have left the city dwellers lonely and depleting. The poem celebrates the restoring capacity of nature as healer that can nourish and replenish the human soul. The speaker amplifies his description as he says that not only the physical presence but also memories of time spent in a pristine landscape can be healing. The structure of the poem is a dynamic oscillation between imagination and the tangible natural world. It constantly shifts back and forth between describing the natural landscape and the speaker’s inner psyche.

Stop to Consider

Topographical poetry, also known as loco-descriptive poetry, is a poetic genre that describes, usually praises or celebrates a specific place or a landscape. The form was established by John Denham in 1642 with the publication of his poem, *Cooper's Hill*. Topographical poems usually focus on the aesthetic aspects of a place, usually in a sublime and a picturesque setting. Common imageries usually included are rivers, ruins, caves, meadows, orchards, moonlight, birdsongs, shepherds and peasants, etc. Apart from Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1713), John Dyer's *Grongar Hill* (1726-7), Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar Gipsy* (1853) are some of the most celebrated topographical poems.

2.6 Reading the Poem “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”

“Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” is the last poem in Wordsworth's collection of poems, entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, written in collaboration with his contemporary, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The poem celebrates nature and its healing capabilities as the poet rejoices returning back to the lap of nature, away from the hustles of urban life. It begins with the poet returning to Tintern Abbey after five long years as he reminisces the bygone days he had spent in the place, mesmerized by its tranquility and the pristine landscape. The poem begins with a twenty-two lines stanza, where the poet announces his return to Tintern Abbey after “five years” or “five summers”. However, the years seemed so excruciatingly prolonged that he felt as if it comprised of “five long winters”. He was so exultant to be back that he declares it as “The day is come” when he can relax and repose himself again under the “dark sycamore” tree and enjoy the scenic beauty of the “plots of cottage-ground”, the “orchard-tuffs . . . with their unripe fruits”, and the “pastoral farms”. He personifies the water of the nearby stream to be “rolling from their mountain-springs \With a soft inland murmur”. The “lofty cliffs” invokes in him a deep sense of seclusion that is gratifying and peaceful. The orchard trees are filled with “unripe fruits”, camouflaged amongst the “groves and copses”, covered in “one green hue”. He speaks of human habitation in the surrounding areas who lived in the cottages in the pastoral farms as well as amidst the orchards as he sees “wreaths of smoke” rising

from the woodland floor. He further speaks of “vagrant dwellers” or those who roamed homeless and lived in the woods and “hermit’s caves”. The concept of peaceful seclusion had been a recurrent theme in Wordsworth’s works.

The second stanza consists of twenty-eight lines in which the poet speaks of his city life where the only form of solace was the reminiscence of his previous visit to Tintern Abbey. Unlike a “landscape to a blind man’s eye”, the “beauteous forms” had always been fresh in his mind and his heart even when he was far away for five long years. Often in his “hours of weariness” when he lived alone in the “lonely rooms” of the “towns and cities”, the recollections and the reminiscences would provide him solace and invoke sweet sensations in his heart. He speaks of nature’s healing capacity, a “tranquil restoration” that he experiences from the memories of the bygone days in Tintern Abbey, when the dreariness of the city would wear him down. The memories brings back to him “unremembered pleasures” of some “unremembered acts of kindness and of love” that guides him to be a good human being and follow the path of truth and righteousness.

The third stanza comprises of only nine lines in which he addresses the possibility of the world he inhabit to be “a vain belief”. However, he immediately shifts from this fleeting conception as he realizes that the memories of the “sylvan Wye” flowing through the woods had been his constant healer when he was tormented by chaos and frenzy and the “fever of the world”.

In the fourth stanza, the poet recalls how he felt on his former visit to Tintern Abbey. He describes how his mind is filled with “gleams of half-extinguished thought” and “dim and faint” memories of his prior visit. As he recollects the bygone days, he is also filled with hope and a “sense of present pleasure” for the future years. He believed that the present memories of Tintern Abbey would serve as “life and food for future years” towards healing and positivity even amidst the chaos and hustles of city life. He describes how in the earlier days he was “like a roe”, roaming wild over the mountains, by the river-sides, the streams, and “wherever nature led” him. He was so enamored by “the tall rock, the mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood”, and “their colours and their forms” that it felt to him like “an appetite”; a feeling, a love, that did not need a more “remoter charm” to enchant him. Sadly, that period is over now and “all its aching joys” are now things of the past. However, he ends the stanza with a hopeful note that the bygone days invokes “dizzy raptures” in him and he do not mourn it because other “other gifts have followed” to recompense his loss. The poet contemplates and realizes the

presence of nature in everything and everywhere, from “the light of setting suns”, “the round ocean”, “the living air”, and “the blue sky”, to “the mind of man”. He firmly profess that he would always be “a lover of the meadows and the woods \And mountains” and everything that the “green earth” beholds. The poet regards Mother Nature to be “the anchor” of his thoughts, “the nurse”, “the guide”, “the guardian” of his heart, and the “soul” of all his moral being.

The speaker introduces the readers to a listener in the fifth and the final stanza of the poem and addresses her as “thou my dearest Friend, \My dear, dear Friend . . . My dear, dear Sister”. As mentioned earlier, the silent listener is widely speculated by the literary critics and scholars to be Wordsworth’s sister, Dorothy. This stanza contains one of the most famous and widely quoted lines by Wordsworth—

Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her;

He tries to instill in her the faith that nature never betrays a loving heart. He believes that nature triumphs above all and neither “evil tongues” nor “rash judgments”, neither the “sneers of selfish men” nor any unkind “greetings” or gesture can prevail over a kind, blessed heart. He tries to convince her to let herself be engulfed in nature, to let the moon shine on her, the mountain winds to blow against her. He confides in her that these memories, these “wild ecstasies”, and “all sweet sounds and harmonies” shall dwell in her mind in “all lovely forms” in the years to come and shall fill her with a kind of “sober pleasure”, joy and gratification. In times of chaos and adversity, if she experiences “solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief”, the tender, joyful thoughts of Tintern Abbey shall console and heal her. The speaker want her to always hold the moments they have spent together in Tintern Abbey close to her heart, for the time when he will be gone, somewhere he can no more hear her voice or see her. The moment when they “stood together” on the banks of the beautiful river Wye should serve as a souvenir to the warm love they shared while they enjoyed the beautiful moment together. He calls himself “A worshipper of Nature”, and considers the love he have for Mother Nature to be a “holier love”. He ends the poem with the confession that even after “many wanderings” and “many years of absence”, Tintern Abbey and its surroundings, the “steep woods”, the “lofty cliffs”, and the “green pastoral landscape”, are all equally dear to him, both for himself as well as for her.

Check Your Progress:

Can the poem be interpreted as a celebration of nature and the natural world? Justify your answer. (About 350 words)

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Space for Learner

2.7 Summing Up

The poem “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” by William Wordsworth is a nature poem that celebrates the restorative and healing capacity of nature. Commonly known as “Tintern Abbey”, the poem reflects on the poet’s belief in the natural world and its therapeutic impact and influence on the human soul. The poem constitutes a duality between a dramatic monologue and a lyrical ballad. Tintern Abbey is an ecclesiastical ruin situated in Monmouthshire, Wales, in the West Bank of the river Wye, which gained popularity through Wordsworth’s poem. “Tintern Abbey” is the closing poem in his poetry collection, *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798. The poem is about memory of pure communion with the natural world amidst the chaos of urban life. The poem is a vehement illustration of Wordsworth’s love of nature and his concept of poetry as emotions recollected in tranquillity as the poem justifies his said poetic theory.

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Unit 3 :William Wordsworth : “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 How to read William Wordsworth
 - 3.3.1 Wordsworth’s poetic theory
 - 3.3.2 Wordsworth’s stages of poetic creation
- 3.4 Some basic features of Wordsworth’s poetry
- 3.5 A few significant poems by William Wordsworth—An Overview.
- 3.6 Summing Up
- 3.7 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to—

- *learn* how to read and approach William Wordsworth’s poetry.
- *understand* the content and style of Wordsworth’s poems.
- *analyze* the poems from different critical lenses.
- *learn* different aspects and the diverse themes of his poetry.
- *speculate* the mechanism of his poetic compositions.

3.2 Introduction

William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850) was one of the most celebrated English poets, widely regarded as the founder of English Romanticism. He is considered to have launched the Romantic Era of English Literature, with his collaborative publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (originally published in 1798), with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth discusses why he is more inclined towards the use of ordinary language of the common men as the elemental source of his

poetic creations unlike the highly ornamental diction of the preceding age. He calls his own poems “experimental” as he gives his famous definition of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (13). In 1798, Wordsworth, accompanied by his sister, Dorothy, and Coleridge travelled to Germany, that caused in him an extreme sense of homesickness and stress, until they returned to England in 1799, eventually settling at Dove Cottage in Grasmere in the Lake District of England. It was a melancholic period for Wordsworth as is reflected in his poems which revolved mostly around themes of death, grief, and separation. It was during this time that he wrote some of his most disconsolate poems such as the “Lucy Poems” and “Elegiac Stanzas” along with an early draft of *The Prelude*. He usually wrote nature poetry and was mostly concerned with human relationship to nature. His love for the natural world and sympathy for the common men were some of the major concerns of his literary works. He was a fierce advocate of using the vocabulary and speech of the common men and intended to create characters such that the reading public experiences a subtle nostalgic surge of belonging to a distant place and time. Most of his poems carry a persistent conversational tone that positions him as a common man of the contemporary society addressing his counterparts belonging to the same social setting. Many of his poems also meditate on the power of nature to heal and prevail against the dreary and superficial city life, especially literary life in London. Wordsworth was Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death on 23 April 1850.

Stop to Consider

- William Wordsworth wrote his only play, *The Borderers*, (1795- 97) a verse tragedy set during the reign of King Henry III of England. However, it was rejected for the stage by Thomas Harris, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, and it was only published in 1842 after multiple revision
- Wordsworth also attempted a prose-piece, known as “Essay on Morals” (1798) which explored ideas on justice and morality.

3.3 How to read William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was one of the central figures in the English Romantic revolution in poetry. As discussed above, he formulated a new outlook and attitude towards nature and the natural world in his poems. This goes far

beyond than merely introducing nature imageries in his poetry. To have a better grasp of his poems, we need to indulge in a close reading of the text to view the organic relation he tries to uphold between man and nature as well as its impact on the human psyche. One significant trait of Wordsworth's poetry is that he writes in a profusely simple diction and uses language of the common men. Apparently, this must give us some reassurance and it might be comparatively easier to analyse and understand the denotative meaning of his poetic lines. In his works like *The Prelude*, Wordsworth involves a deep self-exploration, working towards a more psychological dimension of human nature which is less tangible as compared to the outside natural world of mountains and forest, etc. As such, while dealing with such themes or subjects, we need to be very observant and heedful in our interpretations of the literal as well as the metaphorical meanings that the poet or the poem tries to imply. One way to delve into Wordsworth's poetry is to feel in close proximity with nature oneself. Often, in his poems, one can perceive a very thin line between the literal and the metaphorical elements he deals with. He often blurs the line of distinction between that of the connotative and the denotative meaning in his poetry. For instance, in his poetry series, *Lucy Poems*, the protagonist or the muse that inspired him to compose the poems was speculated by many to be a personification of nature itself rather than a human maiden or a lover. However, it still remains shrouded in mystery and ambiguity as many ponder Lucy to be an actual lover, Wordsworth was involved with.

Another way of reading Wordsworth's poems is to start with paraphrasing the text one is studying, after reading it. A simple paraphrasing might help one capture the quintessence of the text, after which the reader may move to a more detailed close reading and figure out the denotative as well as the connotative meanings of the text. While one is involved in reading between the lines, it becomes convenient to understand the various elements such as the form, structure, genre, plot, etc that were adopted while constructing the poem. Suppose, let's consider the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by Wordsworth. A simple reading of the poem can convey the idea that it is a nature poem that invokes in the poet a sense of nostalgia for a past where he experienced a sublime beauty of the natural world. Paraphrasing the poem can give us some simplified idea of the literal meaning of the text. However, it is not enough to study the various imageries of the poem or capture the inherent beauty as experienced by the poet. After getting the gist of the poem, we can go for a close reading of the text. Through a close reading of the text, we can observe meticulous details such as the genre, rhyme scheme, meter, literary

devices, etc. For instance, the poem “I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud” is a short lyric (genre), composed in iambic tetrameter (meter). It follows the rhyme scheme ABABCC. The poem is replete with similes and metaphors. Often the poet compares the daffodils to the stars and himself to a cloud. One significant literary device the poet employs is personification as he addresses the daffodils as a crowd or host of people, fluttering and dancing and cheerfully tossing their heads as the wind blows. Thus, a close reading of the text or reading between the lines is necessary to have a better and a more refined understanding of his poetry.

3.3.1 Wordsworth’s poetic theory

William Wordsworth propounded his views on poetry and its nature, as well as the characteristics of a true poet in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballad*. In order to understand Wordsworth’s poetry, we must first understand his poetic theory. He believed poetry to be a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that evolves from the poet’s mind after he/she experience or encounter certain object, image or event. However, though Wordsworth stresses on spontaneity, he nevertheless, do not advocate a haphazard or chaotic outburst of emotions or an uncontrolled emotional outpouring. He upholds this spontaneity with recollecting the previously felt emotions in a later period, in a peaceful and tranquil setting. He often wrote about human emotions in his literary works. Many poems by Wordsworth portrayed a wide array of emotions like fear and love, grief and joy, loss and contentment, etc. According to him, powerful feelings and emotions are fundamental in poetic creation, without which no great poetry can be written.

Wordsworth’s conception of a poet, as presented in his *Preface*, can be defined as- “*He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to common among mankind*” (8). According to him, a poet is a simple man who identifies himself with the common men of the society. This concept stands in stark contrast to the eighteenth century glorification of the poet as an extraordinary being of unusual intellect displaying a multifaceted show of reason and rationale. However, he does delineate that a poet has to be endowed with more sensibility and enthusiasm, along with a

greater knowledge and insight of human nature than any common man. Wordsworth in a letter to his friend, Sir George Beaumont, in 1808, expressed his view that every great poet is a teacher and he wishes either to be considered as a teacher or as nothing. According to Wordsworth, a poet must aim to give pleasure as well as enlighten his readers through his/her poetic endeavors as a poet is also a teacher. He considered pleasure to be an essential component of poetic teaching.

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SAQ:

1. According to William Wordsworth, what should be the ideal qualities of a poet? (about 75 words)

Ans:
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2. Discuss Wordsworth's poetic theory in brief? (About 150 words)

Ans:
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3.3.2 Wordsworth's stages of poetic creation

As mentioned above, Wordsworth's definition of poetry upholds the idea of a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings that originates in the emotions recollected in tranquility. He opines that the art of composing poetry should not be bound by strict rules as laid down by the classicists but rather must flow spontaneously from the poet's soul. However, it should not be confused with an immediate outburst or expression of the poet's feelings. Rather, he focuses on a deep evaluation and pondering over those feelings at length, recollecting them in stages. He formulates that the process of poetic creation is expanded over four stages, each crucial in the experience of composing poetry. It begins with the observation of some event or phenomenon, followed by its recollection later, and ends in the expression of those feelings and emotions experienced previously in words.

The four stages of Wordsworth's poetic creation are— observation,

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recollection or contemplation, filtration or re-evaluation, and composition.

- **Observation:** The first phase of poetic creation is observation. The poetic endeavor starts with observation or perception of some image, object or phenomena that evoke powerful emotions in the poet's mind. However, the poet does not react immediately but rather let the entire experience sink in for later contemplation.
- **Recollection:** The perception or the observation phase is followed by recollection. This is the contemplation phase where the emotions associated with the event or object is recollected in tranquility, later in the mind of the poet. Memory plays a crucial role in this phase as it assists the poet to reflect and recollect a phenomenon that occurred a long time back but is still intact in the subconscious mind of the poet.
- **Filtration:** This is the filtration or the re-evaluation phase where the poet filters or re-evaluates as to what is essential for the poetic creation and removes the non-essentials from the experience that he wish to express in his poem.
- **Composition:** This is the final phase of the poetic creation. In this phase, the poet seeks to express his feelings and emotions through the medium of words, such that it reaches out to all men who can experience similar emotions from reading it. The poet's function here is to communicate his feelings precisely such as to impart pleasure to the readers, which, according to Wordsworth, is the end of poetry.

Check Your Progress:

What are the stages of poetic creations, according to Wordsworth?
(About 250 words)

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3.4 Some basic features of Wordsworth's poetry

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Romanticism, as often considered to be initiated by William Wordsworth, was a literary movement which was preoccupied with human emotion, the beauty and power of nature, skepticism towards science and industrialization, a glorification of the bygone past, and a return to rural innocence over urban developments. It was a contradictory period to that of its preceding era which emphasized logic, reason, science and technological development over human emotions and imaginations. As a reactionary measure, Wordsworth often wrote about nature and reflected on the natural world for the subject of his poetry. Unlike their predecessors, the Romantic poets were more inclined and interested in the overwhelming awe and wonders of the boundless universe and the natural world. They often experienced what is called 'sublime', a sense of infinity and vastness that exceeds the statistics and rationality of the mechanized world.

A huge collection of Wordsworth's poems deals with objects of nature and natural phenomenon. Nature served as a muse in composing some of his best literary pieces such as "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", "Lucy Poems", "The Daffodils", etc. He believed in the healing properties of nature that eventually became a source of inspiration and renewal for him. He turned to the world of nature for solace in the era of mechanical reasoning and materialistic sciences. On the contrary, in poems such as "The World Is Too Much with Us" (1807) and "London, 1802" (1807) people were portrayed as corrupt and immoral as they moved to the cities as the nobility of their spirit becomes corrupted by the metropolitan social conventions as well as by the squalor of urban life. He also wrote against corrupt social practices. Wordsworth, to a certain extent, shared similar perception with Rousseau that humanity was essentially good but was corrupted by the influence of the modern civilized society.

Another important feature of Wordsworth's poetry is the inherent power of the imagination. Wordsworth and his contemporaries greatly concentrated on the faculty of imagination, especially poetic imagination, or the ability to compose and create poetry. He believed that the imagination worked miraculously and can serve as a powerful tool for understanding the world better as well as connecting with others. For instance, in his poem, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", he is not only inspired by the landscape or scenic beauty of the place but also encompasses a sense of poetic imagination to express his experience, working dynamically in relation to the natural world.

Wordsworth's poetry was often characterized by its use of simple, everyday language of the common men. He often wrote in a conversational tone to address the reader, thus establishing a sense of intimacy and companionship that enabled his readers to feel and experience a common poetic bliss. Often considered a deviation from the prescribed norms of composing poetry that it should only be composed in a high elevated style following the poetic decorum, he tried to use a more simple and common language to make poetry accessible to the average reading public. Wordsworth tried to adopt a more simple form of poetic composition, with the rustic, uneducated countrymen as the subject of his poetry. One of the main themes of his poems in *Lyrical Ballads* is concerned with the return to the original state of nature, in which people led purer and more innocent lives, usually portrayed in a picturesque, rural setting.

Alike emotions, memory too formed an integral component of many of his poems such as memory of the bygone days or a moment, memory of loved ones, memory of a distant past, etc. One of his most celebrated poems, "I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud", reflects on the memory of a scene he experienced that had a significant impact on him. The poem in a way celebrates the healing capacity of nature as he describes that whenever he feels "lonely", the memory of the golden daffodils, dancing in the breeze, fills him with pleasure. A memory of the past allows Wordsworth's speakers to overcome the dread and harshness of the present they live in. The past memories of bygone childhood days or memories of lost friendships and love most often work as an antidote to the present sadness, loneliness and despair of his poetic persona in his works.

Check Your Progress:

Why do you think feelings and emotions were pivotal in creating poetry in the Romantic period? (About 350 words)

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3.5 A few significant poems by William Wordsworth— An Overview

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One of most widely acclaimed works by William Wordsworth is *Lyrical Ballads*. The original edition, entitled *Lyrical Ballads, and Few Other Poems* was published in 1798 in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The main intention of this series was to overturn the previously used conventional poetic language, which both Wordsworth and Coleridge considered priggish and somewhat highly sculpted, not meant for the ordinary crowd. The first edition (1798) contained nineteen poems by Wordsworth and four poems by Coleridge. This collection contains some of the best poems composed by Wordsworth like “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey”, “The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem”, “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways”, “We are Seven”, “Anecdote for Fathers”, “Lucy Gray”, “Ruth”, “Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower”, “A Fragment”, and many more.

Wordsworth published another collection, entitled, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, in 1807. This collection also contains some of his major poems such as “Resolution and Independence”, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” (Also known as “The Daffodils”), “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”, “The Solitary Reaper”, “Composed upon Westminster Bridge”, “September 3, 1802”, “London, 1802”, and “The World Is Too Much with Us”.

Other notable works by Wordsworth include “French Revolution” (1810), “Guide to the Lakes” (1810), “The Excursion” (1814), “Laodamia” (1815, 1845), “The White Doe of Rylstone” (1815), “Ecclesiastical Sonnets” (1822) and “The Prelude” (1850).

Here are some literary analyses of a few Wordsworth’s poems—

“The Prelude” (1850)

“The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind; An Autobiographical Poem”, as the title suggests, is an autobiographical poem by William Wordsworth that reflects on many aspects of the poet’s personal life, as well as his poetic vocations. Usually considered his magnum opus, it was published posthumously, after three months of his death in 1850. The poem was written in blank verse, unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter and was originally referred to as “Poem to Coleridge”. According to Wordsworth, the original idea was inspired by his dear friend, Coleridge, which was to compose a philosophical poem, entitled “The Recluse”, as having for its principal subject, the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. According to Monique R. Morgan, “much of the

poem consists of Wordsworth's interactions with nature". The poem reflects on the growth of the poet's mind through mutual consciousness and the spiritual communion between the world of nature and man. The poem is replete with imageries reflecting the natural world, especially the wilderness and the beauty of the countryside landscape, in and around England. The poem captures three different stages of Wordsworth's life. The first section reflects on his life as a child and the environment he dwelt in, showcasing great admiration and affection for nature and the joy it can bring to people who want to experience it. The second section is an account of some of his travels and his perception of the French Revolution. It depicts the violence of the Revolution and its aftermath as well as the counter-revolutions. In the initial stage, he was emotionally attached to the Revolution but was soon disillusioned by the havoc it wrecked and the corruption of the leaders and was left spiritually broken. The third part focuses more on the philosophical aspects of art and poetry. One noteworthy aspect of the poem is that while a large portion of the poem is rooted in the past, in the lost and bygone days, it is regarded as one of the greatest modern poems, concerned with themes such as consciousness, human nature and the being, that bear tremendous relevance to our modern interests and predicaments. The poem also reflects on the culmination of a wide array of thoughts and culture.

The Lucy Poems (1798-1801)

The Lucy Poems is a series of five poems composed by William Wordsworth. The first four poems of the series were published in *Lyrical Ballads*, whereas the fifth one is contained in his collection *Two Volumes*. Each poem individually deals with a variety of themes such as beauty, nature, love, longing and death. However, the idea of Lucy's death is prevalent in all the poems, weighing heavily on the poet, endowing the poems with a melancholic, elegiac tone. Whether Lucy was a real woman or just a mere figment of the poet's imagination had long been a topic of speculation and debate among scholars as well as literary historians. The series deals with the emotional conflicts of love and loss as the poet loses his lover Lucy because of her untimely demise. The poem operates at a more subconscious level as many scholars also argue Lucy to be a personification of nature rather than an actual human figure. The five poems include "Strange Fits of Passion have I Known", "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways", "I Travelled Among Unknown Men", "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower", and "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal". In "Strange Fits of Passion have I Known", the poet experiences a strange fit of panic as he wonders about Lucy's death, which

was invoked by the sudden disappearance of the moon behind Lucy's cottage. He compares the disappearance of the moon with Lucy's disappearance from this world and his life, and thus experiences a strange fit of passion by the sudden thought of losing Lucy forever. In "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways", he portrays Lucy as a beautiful, solitary maiden who resided in an isolated English countryside near the river Dove. She was tended by Mother Nature herself as she lived away from the human society. She lived unnoticed by the world and died the same. However, Lucy's death had a deep melancholic impact on the poet. In "I Travelled Among Unknown Men", the poet celebrates his love for his country that he realises only when he had to travel to unknown, faraway lands, outside of England. He compares his love for his country to that of his love for Lucy, whom he loved equally, and resolves never to leave them again. In "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower", the speaker depicts Lucy's transformation from a child to a woman within a time period of three years. Lucy is carefully tended to by Mother Nature herself and is perfectly molded into an ideal woman. The poem ends on a mournful note as nature takes her away through death. The poem "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal" is a short eight lines poem. It is a rather objective rumination of Lucy's death, lacking any overwhelming portrayal of emotion over her loss. It can be contemplated as a form of resignation to the inescapable realities of life and death as experienced by the poet.

"Michael: A Pastoral Poem" (1800)

"Michael" is a quintessential pastoral poem composed by William Wordsworth, published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. An approximately 484-lines poem, recounted from an omniscient perspective, it is primarily written in blank verse or unrhymed iambic pentameter. The poem narrates the story of Michael, an old shepherd who lived a simple rustic life with his wife, Isabel, and their only beloved son, Luke, and two brave sheep-dogs, in Greenhead Ghyll, a solitary abode among high mountains. It was Wordsworth's visit to Greenhead Ghyll, a lonely, desolate valley in Grasmere as a young boy where he learned many folktales and stories about shepherds that served as his muse in writing the poem. The poem depicts the life and struggles of Michael who worked tirelessly all day as he tries to keep intact the values and the teachings of his forefathers as well as pass them on to his son, Luke. The poem portrays a tale of fervid inclination and love of one's land and family. Wordsworth pays conscientious attention to different aspects of rural family life and the rustic, bucolic landscape. He invokes a subtle nostalgia for a distant past in the readers as he describes the oak tree, the brook, the

lamp, the unfinished sheepfold, etc, that were lost in the process of embracing modern industrial and urbanised lifestyle. The poem, though composed in the light of a simple pastoral setting of rural existence, also highlights certain crucial socio-historical significance of the time. One significant event of the time was the Industrial revolution which brought about various social changes, one being the changes in ownership of land and property. The poem also portrays a vivid picture of loss and abandonment. Michael and Isabel were reluctant to send away Luke, their only son and their hope for old age for the fear of losing him forever. Eventually, their fear manifests into reality as Luke never returns and the old parents are left to tend to themselves. The poem explores familial affections and tenderness while displaying the beauty and serenity of rural life which served as a legitimate subject matter for the contemporary poetic forms of the romantic period. Wordsworth's use of the language of the common men along with his skillful metrical arrangement enables him to effortlessly convey the rustic people's affinity with nature and rural living. He often adopts a conversational tone such as one narrates by the fireside while reminiscing some bygone days. Though a melancholic tone pervades throughout the poem, it ends on a somewhat hopeful note in that even after ages, the silent sheepfold and the oak tree shall bear testimony of Michael and his family's presence in Greenhead Ghyll and the love they once shared. It is the last work Wordsworth added to the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” (1807)

The poem, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, (also commonly known as “The Daffodils”) is a lyric poem by William Wordsworth, published in 1807 in the collection, *Poems, in Two Volumes*. On 15 April, 1802, on a long walk by the meadows with his sister, Dorothy, around Glencoyne Bay, Ullswater, in the Lake District, Wordsworth encountered a blissful scenario of a “long belt” of daffodils that served as an inspiration in writing the poem. Prompted by Dorothy's journal entry describing the walk alongside the pristine landscape, Wordsworth began composing the poem in 1804. The poem begins with the speaker recalling his solitary wandering across the beautiful landscape. Treading across the meadows like a lonely cloud floating over the hills and the valleys, he encounters the bustling host of “golden daffodils” beside the lake, dancing and fluttering as they are blown by the breeze. To Wordsworth, the sight of the daffodils seemed like the constellations in the sky, like the stars twinkling in never-ending lines. The speaker could not help but be gay and cheerful in such a beautiful, happy company of the daffodils. The speaker recalls the beautiful sight and ponders over the kind of joy and

gratification it brought to him, which he was unable to speculate at the time he actually beheld the sight. However, it was later when he often sat absent-mindedly on the couch that the sight of the daffodils flashes back in his mind and fills him with joy as he enjoys his blissful solitude. The poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” basically explores the relationship between natural and the human world. The speaker celebrates the kind of joy and happiness one may derive from a healthy interaction with nature if only they have the heart to appreciate the natural majesty surrounding them. It is presently considered one of the most significant poems by Wordsworth and a prime example of Romantic poetry. However, initially the poem received largely negative reviews. Lord Byron even described it as ‘puerile’. A revised version of the poem was published in 1815.

“London, 1802” (1807)

The poem, “London, 1802”, composed by William Wordsworth in 1802, begins with a eulogy of the seventeenth century poet, John Milton, wishing the poet was still alive for “England hath need of thee”. The poem was published for the first time in his collection of poetry, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, in the year 1807. He composed it shortly after returning to London from France, where he witnessed the aftermath of the French Revolution. Comparing France’s austere social landscape to England’s romping, clamorous atmosphere, Wordsworth composed “London, 1802”, usually interpreted as a critique of his country during that era. The poem, “London, 1802”, is a Petrarchan sonnet with a rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA CDD ECE. The speaker address the problems of the English urban society of that time as he describes modern England as a lowly, degraded place, where people are corrupt and selfish. The speaker wishes Milton to rise up and return again and teach the fallen people moral values like good “manners, virtue, freedom”, and “power”. According to the speaker, England was once a rich, happy place of religion and chivalry, art and literature. However, it has lost its vigour and glory and has become “a fen of stagnant waters”. He depicts the various facets of the English society, the “altar” representing religious affairs, the “sword” representing the military administration, the “pen” representing literature, and the “fireside” being a metaphorical representation of the home and laments that all has lost its “inward happiness”. The speaker compares the present day England that have become morally stagnated to that of Milton’s period. He praises Milton saying that his ”soul was like a Star”, bright and noble. The speaker affirms that the societal decline and the persisting waywardness of the English society can only be restored by a noble soul like Milton’s. His voice was as powerful and influential as the sea itself, and though

he possessed a kind of moral perfection, he never ceased to act humbly. These virtues are precisely what Wordsworth saw as lacking in the English men and women of his day that led to their self-sabotage and moral downfall.

Check Your Progress:

1. Why do you think the natural world played a crucial role in William Wordsworth’s poetry? Discuss with examples. (About 350 words)

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2. One significant aspect of Romanticism was the glorification of the bygone past or return to the original state of human innocence and simplicity. Justify the given statement with reference to Wordsworth’s poetry. (About 350 words)

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3. Do you think the societal changes such as industrialization and urbanisation that the English society underwent during the period led to the moral decline of the society? Discuss. (About 350 words)

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3.6 Summing Up

William Wordsworth was the central figure in the Romantic revolution in English literature and his contribution in the poetic genre is immense. Firstly, he formulated a new attitude toward nature in his works, upholding a new view of the organic relation between human and the natural world. Secondly, he engages in a process of self-exploration. As discussed previously, in one of his finest literary works, *The Prelude*, he ponders over the growth of the poet’s mind. *It* was the first long autobiographical poem, where the poet delves into a modern psychological understanding of the human nature. Thirdly, Wordsworth placed poetry at the centre of human experience, wrote in the language of the common man, and went on to create some of the greatest English poetry of his century. He did not write for one particular class of people or on one particular topic but rather encompassed and explored a

diversified realm of topics and themes for his literary works. His writings dealt with subjects ranging from a single flower to the different seasons, from kings and queens to peasants and reapers, from human relationships to God. He wrote in the simplest language that could be understood by the common masses and hence had a greater reading public. He is one of the greatest of the English poets, recognized for his intense interest in spiritual and cognitive exploration, and his fascination with the human nature and its connection to the environment, and as a strong proponent of incorporating common people's terminology and voice in his poetic endeavours.

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Unit 4 : John Keats: “Ode on Indolence”, “On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again”

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 John Keats: His life
- 4.4 Keats’s Poetic Career
- 4.5 John Keats as Poet
- 4.6 “Ode on Indolence”
 - 4.6.1 Context of the Poem
 - 4.6.2 Reading the Poem
- 4.7 “On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again”
 - 4.7.1 Context of the Poem
 - 4.7.2 Reading the Poem
- 4.8 Summing Up
- 4.9 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 Objectives:

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Learn about the life of the poet
- obtain a general idea of the works of John Keats
- situate Keats in the context of the British Romantic Movement and assess his contributions
- Read “Ode on Indolence” and “On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again” in terms of the themes and ideas.

4.2 Introduction:

The notion of literature as self-expression is a basic tenet of Romanticism. From the later eighteenth century the importance of poet as creator endowed with the power of imagination gradually came to be established, later codified

in Coleridge's critical discourse and shared by the Romantics. Literature, especially poetic literature, affected a shift from dependence on the act of imitation of preexisting forms to one of expression of self. It does not mean that the Romantics did not use existing forms or genres of poetry, but the thrust is more expressive than mere technical craftsmanship. Keats was the last major Romantic poet and one widely anthologized and taught language departments in various academies of higher education across the globe till date. In this unit, we will discuss Keats as a poet focusing on his two poems, "Ode on Indolence" and "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again". His "great odes" are a proud harvest of his mature years, though he lived not much longer after that. The 'King Lear' poem was written in the early part of his career, but it will demonstrate an important mark in the trajectory of Keats's development as a poet. As you will learn, it will not suffice to read Keats not as a Romantic poet like other major preceding Romantics such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is important to see that Keats has a distinctive voice, a style that he evolved through painstaking, self-critical efforts throughout his poetic trajectory.

Stop to Consider

The 'great odes': Also known as '1819 odes', the group includes 'Ode on Melancholy', 'Ode to Autumn', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode to Psyche', and 'Ode on Indolence'. An Ode, according to *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, is a "long lyric poem that is serious in subject and treatment, elevated in style, and elaborate in its stanzaic structure."(262)

4.3 John Keats: His life

Keats had a brief life-span: born in 1795, he breathed his last on 23 February, 1821 due to tuberculosis. A twenty six year old poet struggling to survive amid exigencies of financial trouble and tragic family incidents with such untimely death also buried immense potential as a poet. Still harvest of this short life is no less amazing, and they sustained the poet's afterlife amid lovers of literature down the ages.

Son of Thomas Keats and Frances Jennings, Keats had a humble origin and suffered financial hardship throughout his life. Unlike other romantic predecessors of his time from Wordsworth to Byron or his contemporary Shelley, Keats could not enjoy material privilege or secure literary patronage.

Thomas Keats, a stableman at livery stable in London, died a by falling from a horse a couple of years after marriage with Frances. Keats's mother remarried immediately after, leaving her children to the care of their maternal grandmother. Keats was sent to Clerk's school where he learnt science and other practical subjects besides Latin and French. While at school, he was known to be 'noisy' and 'high-spirited' (878, Norton Anthology). At Clerke's school, he had as his mentor Charles Cowden Clerke, son of the school's headmaster. Cowden opened him up to reading, music, and theatre. From Clarke's later account, as mentioned in Douglas Bush's book *John Keats*, we know about his reading as a boy which included William Robertson's *History of America*, Andrew Tooke's old *Pantheon*, John Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, Joseph Spenser's *Polymetis*, John Bonnycastle's *Introduction to Astronomy* etc. (20). Keats's mother, after years of separation and now ill, returned to her family before she died of Tuberculosis. Keats's grandmother chose one J. N. Sandell as the guardian of the orphaned children. At the behest of Mr. Randell, Keats left school in 1811 and was apprenticed to the apothecary Thomas Hammond with whom he stayed three years amid resentment and boredom. Weekly visits with Clarke to Enfield were a breath of fresh air in this claustrophobic time. In 1815, Keats joined Guy's Hospital of London as a student. Though he was increasingly distracted by the poetic impulse, he completed his study of medicine. Meanwhile, Keats and Clarke subscribed to Leigh Hunt's paper *The Examiner*. Leigh Hunt, as you know, was a prolific writer of the time, and a radical thinker. Keats eventually met Hunt and their friendship remained immensely fruitful (though Keats later struggled to rid himself of the influence of Hunt). But it is primarily his friendship with Hunt that propelled Keats to abandon medicine in order to pursue poetry. Hunt introduced the poet to William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, P. B. Shelley while Keats also gained from his contact with John Hamilton Reynold, Charles Wentworth Dilke, Charles Brown and so on.

Keats saw trials and tribulations in his personal life. Orphaned, and subjected to the care of an indifferent guardian, he had to shoulder familial responsibilities at a time when money was scarce. His brother George and his bride immigrated to America and fell into financial distress. Keats had to make money by resorting to journalism and writing plays. He also faced deaths: his mother and also his brother died of Tuberculosis. The poet himself began to suffer from continuous cold. It is conjectured that he had a premonition of his death which probably intensified his poetic engagements. After his death, he was buried in a protestant cemetery in Rome, and there is evidence in his writing of his contracting the ominous disease of tuberculosis. As already

mentioned, Keats died at the age of 26, on 23 February, 1821 in a Protestant Cemetery in Rome. In accordance with his last wishes he was buried under an unnamed tombstone containing only these words: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.'

Stop to Consider:

- Keats was an extraordinary person in that to write poetry was his vocation amid all suffered financial constraints. His study of medicine did not prompt him to take up that profession in but he earned his living by writing. To have a better view of his student life and his intense poetic affairs, you may read *John Keats* by Douglas Bush, especially the second chapter. Bush maintains that Keats Medical work at Guy's Hospital in London was presumably good and efficient, but "unlike his fellow students, he was increasingly distracted by the seductive and imperative claims of poetry." (27)
- Biography of writers is discredited by new criticism as a decisive instrument to study literature. However, to figure out the range of meanings evoked by poetry, and biography of the poet can be usefully studied in order to understand his/her peculiar thought and sensibility. The same applies to Keats. To better understand Keats's intimate feelings and thoughts as a person, you may read his letters.

4.4 Keats's Poetic Career:

Keats's life was brief, and his poetic career even briefer. He started writing when he was eighteen years of age, when he resorted to conventional versification. Probably the first poem, composed in 1814 is 'Imitation of Spenser', set in four Spenserian stanza, speaks of Spenser's influence but lacks in any fresh and moving idiom. Other poems written in that year include the sonnet 'On Peace', 'To Lord Byron', and 'As from the Darkening Gloom' that mourns the death of his mother. 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', the first poem written in 1816 that registers Keats's distinctive poetic voice, was a fervid response to a shared reading with Clarke of a few passages from Chapman's translation of Homer. The poem displays Keats maturity in form, style and imagery. Keats's first Volume of verse *Poems*, published in 1817, speaks of the pervasive influence of Spenser as in poems like 'Sleep and Beauty' and 'I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill'.

In 1817 he started composing *Endymion*, a poem of more than 4000 lines. As for P. B. Shelley, he had a poetic career of 10 years, while Keats wrote all his poems in less than five years, and hence his engagement with poetry can be said to be more intense. Unlike Shelley, however, Keats does not articulate any philosophical or political conviction or reformist zeal; all he wanted to be is a poet. As one historian of literature says, he “lived for poetry and for nothing else.” (416-17, History, Franco) However, *Endymion*, as assessed by David Daiches, was where the abundant imagery and setting overpowers the storyline where the poet could hardly display the maturity of his later years. But Keats is a remarkable poet also in the sense that his development was rapid, and he could manage to attain his mature style an extraordinary pace. Daiches opines that event of death and an inkling of his own imminent misfortune gave him a sense of urgency(917). To explore such elements of his speculations, you can have a look at his famous Letters. It is important to note here that Keats revised *Endymion* in 1920. A man of acute critical judgment, the poet was not happy with *Endymion* and saw it basically as an experiment, not an achievement.

Late in 1818, Keats planned to write an epic poem *Hyperion* on the model of Milton’s *Paradise lost*. He abandoned the undertaking half-way through in April, 1819. In the same year he reworked the same material for the renewed title *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, modeled now on *The Divine Comedy*. But Keats abandoned the attempt all the same. One reason why he did so was his urge to acquire an independent idiom and style and his occupation with fresh poetic sensation.

Keats wrote long narrative poems with often mythical, classical or medieval background, such as *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. They explore relationship of emotions to reality, notions of beauty, love and its impermanence, and so on. As for the ‘odes’, they are now regarded as Keats’s best poems. For more on the odes, you may refer to the relevant section in the supplementary unit after this unit.

SAQ

Write an introductory note on Keats’s poetic works.(100 words)

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